

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED
DEC 30 1977
MAY 22 1978

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Nippon Kan

AND/OR COMMON
Astor Hotel

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
622 South Washington Street

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN Seattle VICINITY OF 7th - Hon. E. John Cunningham
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE Washington CODE 53 COUNTY King CODE 033

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Burke

STREET & NUMBER
5131 South Mead Street

CITY, TOWN Seattle VICINITY OF Washington 98118
STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. King County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN Seattle STATE Washington 98104

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None

DATE
___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
CITY, TOWN STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Nippon Kan is a large three and a half story brick building occupying a prominent elevation overlooking much of Seattle's urban core. It sits on the northern edge of the present International District, several blocks east of the Pioneer Square-Skid Road Historic District (National Register). The building is bounded immediately on the east by Interstate Five, the major north-south route through the state, which also serves to separate the structure from housing areas on the opposite side of the freeway with which Nippon Kan had an historical relationship. To the north and west are parking lots. Kobe Park, a triangular green space; and a plot of vegetable gardens tended by the residents of an adjacent senior citizens home, occupy the steeply sloping land to the south.

The land falls away sharply to the southwest; the pitch is so pronounced that the ground level of the northeast corner is some 25 feet higher than the southwest corner. Three storefronts, triangular in elevation, occupy the ground floor facing Washington Street. The original glazing and openings have been largely replaced by plywood panels although the proportions of the storefronts appear to be unchanged. Three additional storefronts occupy the groundfloor of the east facade, facing which once was Maynard Avenue, but because of the change of elevation, the floor level of the eastern bays is approximately that of the ceiling level of the storefronts of Washington Street. The centermost of the east-facing storefronts contains the entrance to a flat-floor theatre, flanked by the former location of a grocery store on the south and the hotel entrance on the north.

The theatre forms the main floor. It is a rectangular space 60 by 80 feet with a 20 foot ceiling. A stepped balcony 20 feet deep occupies the rear of the hall. The simple proscenium stage is built directly upon the floor and seems to indicate that the hall was originally designed without the stage. A heavy curtain, dating from about 1912 and used until about 1925, hangs at the rear of the stage. Japanese characters decorate the curtain and advertise several local businesses (two of which survive today). Several other features identify the special uses of the hall. The front of the stage at far right has a shallow notch about four feet wide; the notch received a small extension called a "hanamichi", or runway, an adaptation from the traditional Japanese theatre. On stage left is a special platform which was used by musicians at certain performances. The rear of the proscenium walls, the areas that would have been occupied by the waiting actors, are covered with the names of Japanese-Americans dating to 1918. Lighting in the hall was provided by rosette bulb holders framing the proscenium and set in a large oval pattern on the ceiling above the audience area.

The upper floors were originally developed for use by Japanese immigrant men. Small rooms, most about 10 feet square, were arranged around two light wells; common toilet and bath facilities were located close to the entrance. The upper floor has been gutted in preparation for adaptive use and the second floor is scheduled for similar treatment.

On the exterior, only the north and east facades of the masonry bearing walls are articulated. A major feature is the large, round-arched window openings of the theatre level, the effect heightened by brickwork defining the extrados. Hotel window openings are rectangular and flat arched. Several small intermediate cornices appear on the south and east but the major cornice at the parapet level and a large decorative cornice above the Maynard Avenue storefronts are missing. The north wall is a plain and unpenetrated party wall, once abutted by frame buildings. The roof outline of a former neighbor is clearly visible on the Nippon Kan's north wall. The west or alley facade features simple window openings and fire escapes, and was no doubt meant to be hidden by another commercial structure on the west. The building is in good condition and, beyond the changes made in the storefronts, is little altered on the exterior.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1909 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Thompson & Thompson

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Nippon Kan, also known as the Astor Hotel, is a noteworthy remnant of the once large and active Japanese community within the city of Seattle. It served as both a social focus and a temporary residence for many immigrant Japanese men prior to World War II, and within recent years it has been the subject of renewed interest because of its early associations.

Seattle's Nihonmachi (Japantown) once occupied an area of 27 city blocks. It began with a small population (only 125 Japanese lived in Seattle at the time of the 1890 census) but by 1910, it had grown to 6,127. Most of the Japanese immigrants were young men. They came for reasons that sound familiar today: for adventure; to dodge military service or to escape the domination of families; or because, as soldiers coming home from the Russo-Japanese War, they found inflation and few jobs at home.

Booming Seattle and other West Coast ports wanted cheap labor to work in canneries and sawmills, build railroads, clear land and work as low paid cooks, waiters, servants and bathroom helpers. Immigration officials seem to have winked at visas that called the newcomers (medicine salesmen" or "businessmen". Many were smuggled in.

Seattle's International District, headquarters for all this activity, was much more international then. Besides nearly 6,000 Japanese and almost 1,000 Chinese, it was crowded with Greeks, Italians, Russian Jews, Negroes and various other not-yet-integrated minorities, most with their own small ethnic shops. The International District also was geographically much larger than it is today. The Nippon Kan was in the center, not at its edge. Businesses began about Second Avenue and ran roughly to the present freeway. Beyond that, mostly Japanese residences ran to about 15th Avenue South. It was a far livelier district than today's. There was folk dancing in the streets for the Japanese Bon Odori festival. Paper fish hung from doorways on Boys Day, May 5. Besides the Nippon Kan, people gathered at dozens of restaurants or more than a dozen each of pool halls and Japanese baths.

The Nippon Kan is one example of how the immigrants managed to do business despite discrimination. The hall and the Astor Hotel that houses it were built in 1909 for \$40,000 by the Cascade Investment Company, a group of Seattle's Japanese businessmen who used a Caucasian "front man" to avoid laws that restricted business and land dealings by non-citizens. Seattle sporadically tried to deny business licenses to Japanese nationals, bar Japanese farmers from the Pike Place Market, or otherwise curb the immigrant businessmen. Nevertheless, the Japanese made many contributions to the state. Enterprising Japanese imported the oysters that started Puget Sound's oyster industry. Japanese farmers stooped and grubbed to clear and drain swampy but rich farmland that had been scorned by whites. The Japanese turned it into some of the most fertile farms on Vashon Island and in the Green, White and Puyallup River Valleys.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

FUKEI, Budd. The Japanese American Story. Minneapolis; Dillon Press 1976.

ITO, Kazuo. Issei, A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America. Japan: Japan Publications, 1973.

SCHMID, Calvin F. Social Trends in Seattle. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1944.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	0	5	5	0	8	2	0	5	2	7	2	0	0	0
ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING								

B

ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING							

C

ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING							

D

ZONE		EASTING				NORTHING							

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Washington Street and Maynard Avenue; a portion of the D.S. Maynard D.L.C. in Section 5; Township 24N, Range 4E, Willamette Meridian.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Edward M. Burke

ORGANIZATION

The Burke Associates, Architects

DATE

2/1/77

STREET & NUMBER

622 South Washington Street

TELEPHONE

(206) 624-6220

CITY OR TOWN

Seattle

STATE

Washington 98104

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Jeanne M. Welch

TITLE

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

December 15, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Matthew Cole

DATE

5-22-78

SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

5-12-78

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The Japanese-American community prospered in World War I while labor was scarce. But the dominant Caucasians turned against them again in the inflation and unemployment that followed the war. The federal government cut off Japanese immigration. Many lonely immigrant workers were stranded without the hope of getting even a "picture bride" - a woman married by proxy and sent to this country on no more acquaintance than a photograph. Federal law barred the Japanese immigrants from becoming citizens. And about the same time, in the early 1920's Washington State made it illegal for Japanese citizens to own, lease or operate farms. Most Japanese farmers managed to evade the law by deeding their land to their children or to dummy out-of-state firms. But the King County prosecutor filed lawsuits zealously and confiscated a few Japanese farms. Others left the business in fear.

These anti-Japanese moves of the 1920's were a blow to Seattle's Nihonmachi. Its economy depended heavily on the steady stream of new immigrants and on the Japanese farmers who came to town to spend their money in its restaurants and stores. Nihonmachi's decline became obvious in the Depression of the 1930's. Seattle's Japanese population dropped from 8,448 in 1930 to 6,975 in 1940. Many went back to Japan in the struggle to survive. Many of the once-bustling little storefronts of the International District were deserted. The dilapidated hotels and boarding houses above them stood dark and empty.

The collapse of Nihonmachi and the end of the Nippon Kan as part of the Japanese-American experience came with World War II. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Department of Justice took a series of steps originally designed to curb the activities of enemy aliens. Beginning with the confiscation of radios in January 1942, the various promulgations froze the assets of the Japanese, then quickly escalated in February to the transportation of Japanese, citizen and non-citizen alike, to internment camps in various parts of the country. After the war, many returning Japanese located in other parts of the city, leaving old Nihonmachi to redevelopment, and alteration by the freeway in the 1950's. Nippon Kan survives as a remnant of the most active days of Nihonmachi.

From the time it was built in 1909 until the Japanese-Americans were relocated at the beginning of World War II, the Nippon Kan was a center for the lively Japanese community that was Seattle's largest minority.

The Nippon Kan saw political meetings where immigrants of the "red" and "white" parties debated issues of Japanese politics. Like many immigrants, most of Seattle's Japanese came hoping to make their fortunes and go home. Some did - former residents of Seattle's Japantown even were elected to the Japanese parliament. Artists and speakers from Japan used the hall - even a Japanese women's-rights speaker who once had been a prostitute in Seattle's International District. Early in the century, Seattle was known to have the most intellectual of the West Coast's Japanese communities. Several of its immigrants were idealists fleeing repression in Japan. A bevy of Japanese-American groups put on fund raising events in the hall. It was used by groups that ranged from Japanese churches, Japanese university students and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce through schools that taught aspects of classical Japanese culture from music to karate and fencing.

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Especially important were the shows and meetings of more than 20 Kenjin Kai, or prefectural societies. These groups of people from the same parts of the mother land were the immigrants main ways of helping each other in the strange new land. They housed new immigrants, helped them find jobs, aided the sick and destitute and rebuilt barns of burned-out farmers.

The use of the theatre had been recalled by an early observer:

While the performances were not free, instead of buying a ticket, one made a donation. Each "hana" (donation) was sealed in an envelope and handed to the receivers who jotted down the contribution. The donation was duly recorded in a book, and the name of the donor and the amount contributed were posted on a huge wall inside the hall. The contribution was normally doubled on paper to make an impression on other potential donors, but everyone knew that the figures were incorrect and made little sense.

An affair at Nippon Kan was a "night out" for families. While the children enjoyed themselves by racing up and down stairs from the main floor to the balcony, the adults met friends, exchanged pleasantries, and experienced in Nippon Kan a sense of belonging.

When the curtain rose to the rhythmic clap-clap of flat wooden sticks, Japanese eyes focused on Japanese performers. Audience-performer closeness was never more pronounced. Many of the entertainers were next-door neighbors.

The performances of these amateur entertainers ranged from mediocre to poor, falling far short of the skill displayed by their professional counterparts. The performers often forgot their lines, particularly when they stumbled onto words or phrases strange to their ordinary speech. They would then quickly improvise, sometimes with ingenious ease, but more often with ridiculous discomfort. Here, too, the unpaid amateur Hayakawas, Kamiyamas, and Aokis performed under considerable strain to the accompaniment of such uninspiring remarks as "Hey, isn't that so-and-so?" "Yeah, sure it is." "Gee, she looks funny." No one apologized or took the mistakes seriously. These home-grown entertainers had spent part of their spare time at work, at school, or at home rehearsing their lines, and a shortage of talent was more than offset by an abundance of spirit.

The traditional portion of the program was extremely popular with the Issei. Ancient Japanese plays, shamisen and shakuhachi (bamboo flute) players, and the classical odori pleased them most. The •

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theme of many Japanese presentations was filial piety and the accompanying morality, and these were staged to impress the younger people. To the Issei, this was a time to recall Japan and recapture glimpses of that country's glorious past. For the younger set, there were entertainers such as harmonica players, vocalists, violinists, pianists, and comedians.

Nippon Kan is noteworthy as an example of a community sponsored hall which served the Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Americans who made such a significant contribution to the development of the western United States. The building was a unique response of a proud people who rejected their segregation in other Seattle Theatres and built their own. Early Issei immigrants celebrated their heritage in the theatre. The Nisei, born in America, held activities in the hall which bridged their parents' heritage and their own American experience. It remains a symbol of the third generation (Sansei) and their renewed interest in a heritage to be treasured.