

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Nihon Go Gakko

and/or common Seattle Japanese Language School

2. Location

street & number 1414 South Weller Street ___ not for publication

city, town Seattle ___ vicinity of congressional district 7th-Mike Lowry

state Washington code 053 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 type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	n/a <input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input 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 Japanese Language School, Inc.

street & number 1414 South Weller

city, town Seattle ___ vicinity of state Washington

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. King County Courthouse

street & number 3rd and James

city, town Seattle state Washington

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title none has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date n/a federal state county local

depository for survey records n/a

city, town n/a state n/a

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Seattle Japanese Language School is a complex of three buildings located on the outskirts of the city's formerly extensive Japantown. The austere frame buildings have been slightly altered over the years, but for the most part they are unchanged.

The school occupies approximately the eastern half of the block bounded by King and Weller Streets to the north and south, and by 14th and 15th Avenues to the west and east. The first structure was erected in 1913. It is a simple two story building originally clad in rustic siding and marked by a pedimented entry facing south along Weller Street. It is square in plan and capped by a plain cornice and parapet surrounding the flat roof. Windows on both stories are double hung with two over two lights. The interior is simple, and finished with plaster walls and fir trim in the halls and classrooms. In 1917, a second building was added to the east and north of the structure, with a corridor joining the two structures. The new building is identical to the first in its interior and exterior architectural treatment.

Both buildings have been covered with asbestos siding. The application constitutes the only appreciable modification of the structures, although a fire led to the replacement of several windows on the south and west facades of the 1913 building with aluminum sash. The original proportions are retained by the replacements, and the impact of the change is slight.

The third building was completed in 1920, and is placed to the rear of the earlier buildings and is separated from them by an alley which runs from east to west. It is a single story frame structure clad in rustic siding and with a hipped roof covered by asphalt shingles. Tall rectangular windows, fitted with nine over nine double hung sash, appear in groups on all four elevations. The primary approach is from King Street, and a flight of concrete steps leads down to a walkway and raised entry on the west elevation; the steps and walkway are framed by a decorative iron railing. A similar elevated concrete walk leads to a doorway on the east elevation. The interior is divided into three classrooms. This building has no apparent alterations.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1913 **Builder/Architect** Seattle Japanese Language School

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Seattle Nihon Go Gakko, or Seattle Japanese Language School, is the oldest functioning Japanese language school in the continental United States. Established in 1902, the Seattle Japanese Language School became a major vehicle for the transmission of language and culture to the Nisei and Sansei, the American-born children and grandchildren of native Japanese, or Issei.

Japanese immigrants to the United States brought with them traditions and a way of life that were both ancient and indelible. They were physically remote from the land of their birth, and they were anxious that their descendants retain those qualities of being Japanese that gave them distinction. It was essential that Nisei and Sansei retain cultural consciousness, despite their own lack of familiarity with Japan itself. Issei established an extensive series of Japanese language schools in the Pacific states and British Columbia to provide a formal method of instructing Japanese-Americans in the native language and cultural traditions.

Schools in Seattle and San Francisco were the earliest. The Seattle School began in 1902, located on the second floor of the Furuya Company Building at 216 Second Avenue South (Masajiro Furuya was one of the most prominent Japanese businessmen in the Pacific Northwest). In 1910, the school moved to the basement of the Buddhist Church, but no satisfactory facilities were had until a new building was erected on Weller Street in 1913. The community raised a little over \$10,000 to finance the construction. Issei donated what they could afford, and Japanese nobels, officials, military leaders, and businessmen passing through Seattle contributed according to their status. Moving to the new school building were 98 students in the eight primary grades as well as additional students in first and second year refresher courses.

The school expanded, both in the number of students enrolled and in the number of classrooms constructed to accommodate them. New buildings were added in 1917 and 1920, and enrollment rose in the 1920s and 30s to about 1800 in day time classes. Class began at 3 p.m. after the conclusion of public school and lasted for about two hours. In the winter when the days were short, the class length was abbreviated to one hour. School was held Monday through Friday; on Saturday and Sunday, teachers from the Seattle school went out as visiting teachers to Japanese language schools in nearby communities such as Sunnysdale, Bellevue, Green Lake, Vashon, and Sumner. There were about 25 instructors, trained in teachers schools in Japan.

Some special mention should be made of the teachers since it was they who received the charge of cultural education. They worked diligently to live up to their vocation, and instruction of Nisei and Sansei was not always easy. Japanese born in the United States tended to see little importance in the study of what they regarded as a foreign language, and life in a large city provided ample distractions. The students typically had a better command of English than their native Japanese instructors, and some used that knowledge to make the job more difficult.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Ito, Kazuo. Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants to North America.
 Seattle: Executive Committee of the Japanese Community Service, 1973.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one

Quadrangle name Seattle South

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	10	5	5	11	8	12	10	5	12	7	11	6	14	10
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 6,7,8,11,12,14,15,16, Block 29 of Hill Tract Addition, Suppl Blocks 28,29 & 36, city of Seattle, King County, Washington.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code

state	n/a	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Based on information supplied by Genji Mihara and Charles T. Kato
Japanese Language School Inc./ Seattle Chapter,

organization Japanese American Citizens League date

street & number 1414 South Weller

telephone

city or town Seattle

state Washington

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Paul E. Thorne date 3/31/82

For HCRS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

Keeper of the National Register

date 6/23/82

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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The Seattle Japanese Language School was closed and the property confiscated following the Exclusion Orders of 1942. During the war, the Federal government used the school facilities for training Army Air Force personnel. Some Japanese-American graduates of the school served with the armed forces, and helped interrogate prisoners and translate captured documents. After the war, the Issei, Nisei, and Sansei returned to Seattle, but housing was scarce. For three years, 27 families lived in the classrooms of the language school, using the community kitchen.

The school is still in use, and serves about 100 secondary school students. It has been recognized by the Seattle school system, although in some ways public schools have displaced the private Japanese language school. Instruction in Japanese is available at six Seattle high schools, the result of a program begun in 1966. While adding language instruction to the public school curriculum has reduced the financial burden of teaching Japanese, it has at the same time lessened the original goal of the now diminished Issei, that of passing on traditional values and attitudes. The Seattle Japanese Language School remains as a reflection of that major effort to maintain cultural continuity in a new land.