



PRESS RELEASE

215 Sycamore Street
Muscatine, IA 52761
Ph. (563) 264-1550

MUSCATINE ART CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Melanie Alexander
Muscatine Art Center Director
Public Art Advisory Commission Staff Liaison
563-263-8282
malalexander@muscatineiowa.gov

PUBLIC INVITED TO LEARN ABOUT HISTORIC JAPANESE GARDEN

Muscatine Art Center to host two programs as rehabilitation of the garden is set to begin

MUSCATINE, Iowa – The historic Japanese Garden located at the Muscatine Art Center will be featured in two programs this spring. An informational session on the rehabilitation of the garden will be held at 5:30 p.m. on April 7 while a more in-depth look at the history of the garden will be held at 1:30 p.m. May 22.



Muscatine Art Center Director Melanie Alexander will speak about the decision-making process, the scope of the project, the roles of those involved in the project, and the project's funding sources during the information session on April 7.

Beth Cody, author of *Iowa Gardens of the Past*, will present during the second program as she dives into the history of the 1930 Japanese Garden and places the garden into historical



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context. Cody was contracted through a grant from Humanities Iowa to explore the influences behind the creation of the garden, research landscape designers of Japanese-style gardens in the Midwest, investigate the fates of other Japanese-style gardens from the time period, and follow loose ends pertaining to the specifics of Laura Musser McColm's garden.

When Laura Musser McColm had the Japanese-style garden installed at her home at 1314 Mulberry Avenue, it became an occasional gathering space for Laura's clubs such as the Twentieth Century Club and the Muscatine Garden Club. When the property was gifted to the City of Muscatine in 1965, it became a public space maintained by the Muscatine Art Center and the Muscatine Parks and Recreation Department.

During McColm's lifetime, the garden underwent relatively few major changes. However, as the Muscatine Art Center added the Stanley Gallery and then a building to connect the gallery to the historic house, the ornamental sumacs original to the garden were lost and replaced with white pine trees. The Japanese yews, a fixture in the garden for many decades, are not original to the garden. There is not adequate documentation to determine if they were planted late in McColm's lifetime or in the early years of the museum.

"Gardens grow and evolve," Alexander said. "For years, the Muscatine Art Center staff sought professional guidance for addressing concerns related to the health and size of the yew trees. The staff also looked into options for returning the water feature to regular operations."

However, issues in the garden were more complex and decisions made decades ago led to damage of the underground piping for the water feature and to shading out the types of plants original to the garden.

After speaking with Muscatine Art Center staff in 2020, Heidi Hohmann, Associate Professor in the Landscape Architecture Department at Iowa State University, examined archival materials held by the Muscatine Art Center, documented existing conditions in the garden, and prepared the Historic Landscape Preservation Plan. The plan included recommendations and presented options for returning historic features to the garden.



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Hohmann's photographic comparisons showing images taken in the early 1930s to those in 2020 underscored the need to address concerns in the garden. Fortunately, many of the changes can be mitigated, while some of the most prominent features, such as the streams and ponds, remain intact.

The Muscatine Art Center staff used Hohmann's Preservation Plan to secure a \$122,402 historic preservation grant from the nationally funded Paul Bruhn Historic Revitalization Program. In Iowa, this grant is administered by the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, and project reporting goes through the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office and then through the National Parks Service. The staff also secured a \$100,000 grant from the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust. The two grants, along with a few private donations, will cover all costs associated with the project.

The active phase of the project will begin in the coming weeks with archaeological work conducted by Tallgrass Archaeology, LLC. Many trees will be removed as part of the project with tree removal expected to begin as early as April. There will be periods of time when work on the site will make it necessary to close the walkway between the Muscatine Art Center's parking lot off of Cedar Street and the main entrance on the Mulberry Avenue side of the property. The walkway closure is not expected to impact the sidewalk along Mulberry Avenue.

"While visitors have enjoyed the environment created by yews for many decades, they have caused significant problems that take away from the historic character of the garden," Alexander said. "New plantings will be based on historic photographs and follow the Department of the Interior's Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes. For a project like this, it is important to focus on what will be gained."



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Among the gains will be the return of the historic look and feel of the garden including the return of running water on a regular basis. The historic character of the garden will also be enhanced by the return of sumac trees, other trees and shrubs found in historic photographs, the emphasis on rockwork, the reintroduction of smaller plantings that have been shaded out, and the installation of a Torii gate reproduction and other built features.

Both the April 7 and May 22 programs are scheduled for one hour and will take place in the Muscatine Art Center's Music Room. The programs are free of charge, and there is no advance registration. A booklet about the garden is currently in development and expected to be available by summer 2022.

Visitors to the Muscatine Art Center encounter paintings made by artists recognized around the world, fascinating objects connected to Muscatine's past, beautifully crafted decorative arts, charming period rooms, and a Japanese Garden installed nearly a century ago. Learners of all ages can pique their curiosity through changing exhibitions, classes, and events. The Art Center is located at 1314 Mulberry Avenue in Muscatine, Iowa. Hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Thursday evenings until 7 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday from 1-5 p.m. Admission is free. Donations are appreciated. For more information, visit [Muscatine Art Center](#), visit the [Art Center Page](#) on the City of Muscatine website, or follow the Art Center on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#),

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Kevin Jenison
Communication Manager
Public Information Officer
Muscatine City Hall
(563) 264-1550
kjenison@muscatineiowa.gov