

## Profile of Yonehachi Muto, Landscape Architect

Yonehachi Muto (1861 – ) was a Japanese landscape architect known for creating Japanese gardens in the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1905 and 1912, Muto’s services were in high demand.<sup>1</sup> More than one client had to wait their turn for him to design a garden for them, including John T. Morris of Philadelphia, James H. Dooley of Richmond and Alexander Tison of New York City.

Prior to arriving in the U.S., Muto had gained a reputation as an “expert” and “famous Tokio gardener” according to an 1899 auction catalogue of Japanese plants. One of Muto’s plants on auction was described as the “grandest of all the Bon Kei” and another was the “largest and best made Bon Kei in this collection.”<sup>2</sup>

Later, Muto’s reputation as a landscape designer was cited in an article in a Buffalo newspaper, which referred to him as a “noted man in his country.”<sup>3</sup>

### Life and Work

Yonehachi Muto was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1861. His training in horticulture and landscaping has not been determined. In addition to professional training, Muto studied English in Japan. Evidence that he was fluent in English comes from several invoices for construction of a garden in N.Y., a letter written to the owner of the garden and a brief note explaining the Japanese inscription on stonework.<sup>4</sup>

Muto came to the United States on the *RMS Empress of China*, arriving at Vancouver, Canada in April 1899. His final destination in the U.S. was New York.<sup>5</sup>

By late 1899, Muto was in Atlantic City, New Jersey at the Japanese Tea Garden and Village on the Boardwalk between Massachusetts and Connecticut Avenues. He was employed as a Head Gardener.<sup>6</sup> The three-acre tea garden, village and nursery was operated by concessionaires Yumeto Kushibiki (1859-1924) and Saburo Arai (1867-1951) who had managed Japanese exhibits at World’s Fairs in Chicago and Atlanta.

Muto’s location and employment between 1900 and 1904 has not been confirmed.

In 1904, Muto was in St. Louis, Missouri, working for Kushibiki and Arai at “Fair Japan,” an all-inclusive concession at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition. That December, *The St. Louis Republic* reported that Muto suffered burns as a result of a fire in the concession building. He was rescued by a police officer and taken to the hospital.<sup>7</sup>

The following spring, Muto accompanied Kushibiki on a trip to Niagara Falls, New York to inspect potential property for a year-round Japanese amusement park near the falls whirlpool. Muto was in charge of laying out the park and supervising construction of the buildings, according to *The Buffalo News*.<sup>8</sup> The main features planned for the park were a tea house, 1000-seat theater and reproduction of an ancient Kyoto temple. Although 200 workers began clearing land along the gorge in May 1905 and one of the buildings had already been shipped from Japan, the park was never completed. No blueprints or plans have been located.

## Muto's Gardens on the East Coast

Hill and Water Garden at Compton (now Morris Arboretum & Gardens) in Philadelphia, PA for John T. and Lydia T. Morris. Muto designed this garden in *Tsukiyama* style as a diminutive mountain and water landscape, extending from a *Tasōtō* pagoda on the highest hill to a rustic stone lantern on the island in Swan Pond. A water-course ran through the center and emptied into a small pool with bronze cranes. The miniature landscape was planted with Japanese maples, conifers and azaleas. Meandering paths led to prized features such as a *Hokyointo* pagoda and sitting Buddha. Created in 1905.

Promenade Garden at Grey Lodge in Claryville, N.Y. for Alexander Tison. This *Kaiyū-shiki-teien* style garden is one of Muto's largest extant gardens, with features spread out along an east to west water-course, traversed by stepping stones and bridges. A small tea house with great moon window and rustic stone lanterns complete the garden. Created between 1906 and 1911.

Temple Gate Garden at Fairmount Park in Philadelphia, PA for John T. Morris and John H. Converse. Muto designed a stroll garden around a pre-existing pond that may have been built for the 1876 Centennial Exposition.<sup>9</sup> He restored the pond, constructed a waterfall and stone-bordered islands linked by a moon bridge. Created in 1908.

Cascade Garden at Maymont in Richmond, VA for James H. and Sallie Dooley. Muto's garden at Maymont is at the base of a 45-foot waterfall that drops into a deep pool. The main features are an *Azumaya* (viewing pavilion), island, moon bridge and stone lanterns. Created between 1909 and 1911.

Overlook Garden at Compton in Philadelphia, PA for John T. Morris. Muto's overlook incorporated extensive stonework with named, specifically-placed stones and lanterns along a zig-zag path to a circular viewing platform. A pair of *Sando Komainu* (foo dogs) held prominent positions near the platform. Muto incorporated John Morris's ideas in the design of this garden.<sup>10</sup> Created in 1912.

In August 1913, Muto returned to Japan. According to passenger records, Muto came back to the U.S. in November 1914 with Torataro Yasuda, an employee of the Yokohama Nursery Company.<sup>11</sup>

Muto and Yasuda were listed in records as Japanese exhibitors at the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition. They were likely employed by Kushibiki, who organized the "Japan Beautiful" exhibit, assisted by a \$50,000 subsidy from the Japanese government.<sup>12</sup>

Muto's whereabouts at the conclusion of the Exposition in December 1915 are not known.

## Family

Muto's spouse has not been identified. His son Sataro was born around 1884 in Tokyo, Japan. In 1914, Sataro lived in Nakamura, Yokohama, Japan, according to Muto's passenger record. Sataro may have worked for the Yokohama Nursery on the extensive grounds and greenhouses in Nakamura.

## Sources

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## Images

Morris Arboretum Japanese Gardens, <https://morrisarboretum.pastperfectonline.com/>

Compiled for Morris Arboretum & Gardens by Joyce H. Munro

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to the Fairmount Park Art Association dated February 15, 1909, John T. Morris stated "we succeeded after an effort of three years in securing the services of G [sic] Muto to lay out and supervise the work." Fairmount Park Art Association records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Box 70-96.

<sup>2</sup> *Catalogue of Japanese Floral and Arboreal Plants*, December 1899, 10, 16. <https://archive.org/details/Catalogue00Clea/mode/2up>

<sup>3</sup> *Niagara Falls Gazette*, April 17, 1905, NYShistoricnewspapers.org. Accessed October 31, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Muto's invoices and letter are in a private collection in New York; the note is in the Morris Arboretum & Gardens Archives.

<sup>5</sup> British Columbia, Canada, Border Entries and Passenger Lists, 1894-1905, [www.ancestry.ca/family-tree/person/tree/87387332/person/320046297381/facts](http://www.ancestry.ca/family-tree/person/tree/87387332/person/320046297381/facts)

<sup>6</sup> *Catalogue of Japanese Floral and Arboreal Plants*, December 1899, 10, 16. <https://archive.org/details/Catalogue00Clea/mode/2up>

<sup>7</sup> *The St. Louis Republic*, December 3, 1904, 1, Newspapers.com.

<sup>8</sup> *The Buffalo News*, April 17, 1905, 9, Newspapers.com

<sup>9</sup> Shofuso Japanese House and Garden Nomination Report, Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, 2012, 8. Accessed October 1, 2018 at <https://preservationalliance.com>.

<sup>10</sup> "Recollections Associated with the Happy Home of John T. Morris and his sister, Lydia T. Morris," typewritten copy by W.H.R., Morris Arboretum & Gardens Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Washington, U.S., Arriving and Departing Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1965, [www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/87387332/person/320046297381/facts](http://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/87387332/person/320046297381/facts)

<sup>12</sup> "Japan Beautiful," *California's Magazine*, Vol. II, 1916, 344, Hathitrust.org.