

**Preserving the Legacy of Jens Jensen Landscapes:  
A Historical Assessment of  
his Knoxville Van Deventer Garden**

A thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Science  
Degree  
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## Abstract

The former Van Deventer garden (1924) in Knoxville, Tennessee is one of the rare masterpieces designed by the landscape artist Jens Jensen (1860-1951), who was a distinctive pioneer in the history of American landscape architecture. Very few of his major works survive in the Midwest which was the center of his career, and his residential designs are especially threatened by urban sprawl and land development in modern society. This historic Knoxville garden has been quietly surviving over 80 years through a few private ownerships, and Jensen's landscape is slowly diminishing as invasive species are fast to colonize in the native woodland where Jensen saw an abundance of native plants in the early 1920s. The purpose of this research was to document the existing condition of the garden and to assess its historical significance, which can be used for a future nomination to the National Register for Historic Places. There are ten signature design elements that Jensen used in the majority of his work, defined by the Jensen scholar, Robert Grese in his book *Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens* (1992): (1) Use of Native Plants, (2) Spaces, (3) Light and Shadow, (4) Movement, (5) Water, (6) Stonework, (7) Council Ring, (8) Players' Greens, (9) Formal Gardens, and (10) Time and Change. Data collected from historical research and site survey revealed that seven of his signature design elements are evident in the garden today. From a comparison of an existing plant survey and the original plantings indicated on Jensen's 1924 design, approximately 90 percent of the plants sited by Jensen on the original 1924 planting design have disappeared. This change in plant palette was expected to happen in Jensen's intention for the landscape. However, the basic landscape

features, which have strong historic significance, remain intact with minor deteriorations. Preservation recommendations for this Jensen garden are (1) the preservation treatment option as outlined by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, (2) eradication of the dominate invasive species, (3) plant pest control, (4) removal of fallen trees and plant debris from the significant landscape features, and (5) an easement option for future land protection.

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Terumi Watson entitled "Preserving the Legacy of Jens Jensen Landscapes: A Historical Assessment of his Knoxville Van Deventer Garden." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Plant Sciences.

Susan L. Hamilton  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis  
And recommend its acceptance:

Mary Lewnes Albrecht

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Vice Provost and Dean of the  
Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)