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The Tashiro Kaplan Building: A Case Study

Madeline Berkman

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Cultural Infrastructure and Facilities

March 19, 2021

Abstract

The opening of the Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts in Pioneer Square marked a pivotal point in the fight for artist live/work spaces in Seattle, Washington. Pioneer Square had been an arts enclave for over a century, where artists advocated for their own place in the infrastructure of the city. The Tashiro and Kaplan buildings were built in the early 1900's and were home to prominent businesses in the area for decades. In the 1980's, King County purchased the Tashiro Kaplan lot as part of the Third Avenue bus tunnel project. The Pioneer Square Community Development Organization, founded and led by Cathryn Vandenbrink, conducted a study in the 1990's to document how space was being used, lost and sold; and how those changes affected the residents of Pioneer Square. The study identified artists as an at-risk population in the neighborhood and led to a grant from the Neighborhood Planning Office to study the feasibility of an artist live/work project in Pioneer Square. In 1997, a symposium titled "Pioneer Square: A Place for Artists" identified the Tashiro Kaplan lot for redevelopment by Artspace Projects Inc. The Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts (The TK) opened in 2004, providing live/work space for fifty artists and their families, as well as space for 15 independent galleries. The TK is a well-known destination on the Pioneer Square Art Walk and its success led to the development of four other properties in greater King County.

Tashiro Kaplan Building: A Case Study

The historic Pioneer Square neighborhood at the south end of downtown Seattle is home to many artists' studios, galleries, boutiques, and restaurants occupying buildings that date back to the early 1900's. The history of Seattle as a city began in this colorful neighborhood.

Seattle's "Skid Road"

Following the Great Seattle Fire of 1889, Pioneer Square "rose like a phoenix from the ashes" (Andrews, 2002; Keniston-Longrie, 2009). Stone and brick buildings were built over the remains of the old city in a Romanesque Revival style characteristic of the architecture of the Chicago School (Link, 2002). As the city of Seattle tripled in population between 1900 and 1920, Pioneer Square transformed from boomtown to metropolis (Andrews, 2002). The road that the ox teams took to Yesler's Mill, skidding logs with them along the way, was nicknamed Skid Road. Formally named Yesler Way, the muddy downhill track divided the "respectable precincts" from the "dark underbelly" of the city, (Gwinn, 2018).

Seattle's first Chinatown was south of Yesler Way between First and Third Avenues. Following the adoption of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1883, the population of Chinatown plateaued at around 1,000. Companies instead began to recruit Japanese immigrants as contract laborers (Andrews, 2002). A rich and vibrant Japantown took root adjacent to Chinatown and many Japanese families established businesses in the neighborhood. In addition to immigrants from Asia, many Eastern Europeans Jews fleeing anti-Semitism opened shops that became an important part of the culture of the neighborhood (Andrews, 2002).

At the turn of the century, the triangular block south of Yesler Way, between Prefontaine Place South, South Washington Street, and Third Avenue South was the site of Seattle's first

Catholic Church, Our Lady of Good Help¹, founded by an early pioneer of Seattle, Father Francis X. Prefontaine (Sherrard, 2017). The church was torn down in 1904 and the land was purchased for redevelopment by Charles D. Stimson (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, n.d.; Sherrard, 2017). Stimson owned Hollywood Farm² just outside of Seattle and wanted the building to serve as a marketplace in the city center (Blecha, 2017). Stimson designed the building as a wholesale house, known at the time as the Market Center Building, the Exchange Building, or the South End Public Market. Built on a steep incline along Third Avenue South, it included a series of stalls that opened up to the street where individual vendors could conduct business.

Former Washington Governor, John McGraw purchased the adjoining lot from the Great Northern Railroad to develop as warehouse space (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, n.d.). Construction was finished on McGraw's building in 1908. In 1919, Kanjiro Tashiro founded the Tashiro Hardware Company taking up residence on the ground floor and becoming an important focus in the neighborhood for the next six decades (Andrews, 2002).

The creation of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) by President Roosevelt during the Great Depression had many lasting effects on the economic climate of Pioneer Square (Morgan, 1982). In 1935, under the WPA, Federal One was established, allocating \$27 million to four organizations: the Federal Art Project, the Federal Theatre Project, the Federal Music Project, and the Federal Writers' Project (Kidd, 2004). The Roosevelt administration "believed that the economic recovery depended upon restoration of employment for all workers - including those who made their living in the arts" (Horowitz, 2008, p. 320). Artists of all disciplines were

¹ Most sources refer to the church as Our Lady of Good Help, but the city's records regard the sale of the land as being from Our Lady of Good Hope to Charles Stimson.

² Hollywood Farm is now Chateau Ste. Michelle Winery, one of the most popular wineries in the area.

drawn to Skid Road's culture and documented their time living and working in the area, establishing their roots in the neighborhood.

World War II had a drastic effect on the culture of Seattle, including Pioneer Square. In 1942, 7,000 Japanese residents of Seattle were ordered into concentration camps by President Roosevelt, leaving their homes and businesses behind. Kanjiro Tashiro put the entire stock of his hardware store into storage while he and his family were forced out of the city (Andrews, 2002). Though many Japanese residents returned after the war ended, the lasting effects of the displacement during the war were felt for generations.

The end of the war brought much of the industry in the Pioneer Square district to a halt. The Market Center Building operated as a public market until its popularity dwindled in the 1940's. Dozens of the individual vendors in the building closed their doors as "Pioneer Square deteriorated into a down-at-the-heels district of boarded-up buildings, warehouses and outerwear factories, small businesses, flophouses and missions" (Andrews, 2002, p. 135). The building was put to use for general warehousing, restaurants and printing companies. In 1945, Jacob Kaplan purchased the building to establish a paper products company and gave it his name (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, n.d.). In 1949 an earthquake shook the entire region, requiring many of the buildings in the historic district to be renovated or condemned, deemed structurally unsound after the seismic activity.

These changes opened the door for creatives to live and work in the area, establishing Pioneer Square's reputation as an arts district through the fifties and sixties. Seattle hosted the World's Fair in 1962, "a tribute to the optimism and perseverance of its promoters and legislative skill" (Morgan, 1982, p. 274). Though there was a wealth of opportunity for artists to contribute

to the city's infrastructure for the Seattle World's Fair, the growing need for artist housing was not yet recognized.

In the early 1980s, Jay Mohammed, an ex-government minister from Kenya, living in Vancouver, B.C., purchased the block occupied by the Tashiro and Kaplan buildings. The two buildings underwent slight renovations before King County Metro purchased both buildings in 1985, for use during the construction of the Third Avenue bus tunnel (Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, n.d.).

During this period, Sam Israel was the largest private property owner in Pioneer Square, with 40 total properties in downtown Seattle (Henry, 2010). Israel earned himself a fortune, and the title of slumlord, by renting his buildings for less than market value and informing tenants that they were responsible for any and all repairs.

Sam Israel was a hoarder of buildings. He rented cheap space, with high ceilings, good light and few partitions - good space for making art. It was affordable space, but you knew that Sam wasn't going to put a dime into it. That attitude spawned Pioneer Square as an arts district. (Jim Kelly, as cited in Gadwa & Muessig, 2011, p. 19)

When Israel died in 1994, his holdings were transitioned to the Samis Foundation, which renovated the spaces and priced out the working artists, forcing them to relocate to other parts of Seattle (Gadwa & Muessig, 2011).

Creating Space for Creatives

In 1971, the Seattle Arts Commission was established "to promote and encourage public programs to further the development and public awareness of and interest in the fine and performing arts" (City of Seattle Clerk's Office, 1971). The commission recognized the need for safe and affordable space for artists in the city and conducted an inventory of unused city owned

buildings that could be repurposed (Caldbeck, 2013). Budget limitations and other setbacks prevented the commission from acting on the results of the inventory.

The first copy of *Seattle Artists Housing Handbook* was published by the Seattle Arts Commission and the Department of Community Development in 1980 (City of Seattle et al., 2002). The introduction to the original handbook poignantly describes the needs and the challenges that artists face in maintaining affordable housing in the city.

Traditionally, artists have managed to find space in the less desirable nooks and crannies of the world's cities. In all too many cases, however, the artist who finds inexpensive space in an out-of-the-way neighborhood has been the harbinger of a phenomenon called "gentrification." The pattern is a familiar one—first come the artists, then the galleries, shops, restaurants and higher-priced housing. And all too soon the artist—the urban pioneer—is forced to look for a new wilderness. (Kahn et al., 1980, p. 9)

The seventies and eighties were marked by good intentions but little progress in providing space for artists in the city (Andrews, 2002). As property values continued to rise and vacancy rates fell through the booming nineties, the buildings in Pioneer Square that provided artists with housing and studio space were at risk of being developed into office buildings and multi-family housing (Pioneer Square Community Development Organization, 1997).

Pioneer Square: A Place for Artists

In the early 1990's, the Pioneer Square Community Development Organization, founded and led by artist Cathryn Vandenbrink, conducted a survey of Pioneer Square to document how space was being used, lost and sold, and how those changes affected the residents of the neighborhood (C. Vandenbrink, personal communication, March 11, 2021). The survey estimated that between 300 and 500 artists worked and lived in Pioneer Square, and the

responses clearly communicated the community's need and desire for more artist live/work housing. During the survey period, the Polson Building, home to "one of the largest art colonies on the west coast" was severely damaged by a fire, forcing artists to vacate their studios (Whitely, 1996). Following the fire, artists were identified as an at-risk population in the neighborhood (Pioneer Square Community Development Organization, 1997). Based on the survey, the Pioneer Square Community Development Organization obtained a grant from the Neighborhood Planning Office to study the feasibility of developing an artist live/work project.

"Pioneer Square: A Place for Artists, an Artist Live/Work Symposium", was held by the Pioneer Square Community Development Organization, the Seattle Arts Commission, the King County Arts Commission and the Pioneer Square Planning Committee on November 7th, 1997. The one-day symposium, "brought together artists, developers, funders, architects and representatives from various city agencies to work through the development process from acquisition to occupancy of selected properties" (Pioneer Square Community Development Organization, 1997). Participants at the symposium were divided into teams that were assigned one of three properties to analyze: the Tashiro and Kaplan buildings, the Alaska Building or the North Kingdome parking lot. The goal of the symposium was to generate a working model for artist live/work projects that could be applied to other neighborhoods and buildings throughout Seattle. It was clear following the presentations of the feasibility reports that the Tashiro Kaplan block was the best candidate for development.

Artspace Projects, Inc.

The Pioneer Square Community Development Association contacted Kelley Lindquist, Executive Director of Artspace Projects Inc., to present at the 1997 "Pioneer Square: A Place For Artists" symposium. Artspace, a Minneapolis-based nonprofit, specializes in the creation,

ownership and operation of affordable space for artists and creative businesses. Guided by their mission “to create, foster, and preserve affordable and sustainable space for artists and arts organizations” (Artspace, n.d., para. 2), Artspace works in three main areas: Consulting Services, Property Development and Asset Management.

Artspace was founded in 1979 to advocate for artists’ space needs in the Minneapolis - St Paul metropolitan area. In the late 1980’s Artspace restructured their mission and took a more proactive approach, becoming the leading developer of affordable space for artists through “a mix of historic renovation and new construction” (Artspace, n.d., para. 2). The early 1990’s marked the opening of the first three Artspace live/work projects in the Twin Cities, attracting national attention. Vandenbrink recalls hearing about the success of the first three Artspace projects and their specialization in the reuse of historic buildings, which prompted her to invite them to the symposium (personal communication, March 11, 2021).

Fully Funded Prior to Breaking Ground

The partnership with Artspace provided the Pioneer Square Community Development Organization with the financial expertise and technical support to turn the Tashiro Kaplan block, now called The TK, into a reality. Vandenbrink described the symposium as the “genesis of everything that followed” in the success of the Tashiro Kaplan project (personal communication, March 11, 2021). With the Pioneer Square Community Development Organization as a local silent partner, Artspace submitted a proposal to King County to develop the Tashiro and Kaplan buildings into artists’ live/work space. King County accepted the proposal and sold the buildings for \$1.2 million, less than half their appraised value of \$3 million (Gadwa & Muessig, 2011). The proposal included an agreement by Artspace to a 30-year lease-back of space to the King County Arts Commission (now 4Culture). Vandenbrink says that securing the lease saved the

County enough money to justify reducing the cost of the building (personal communication, March 11, 2021).

There were many complications based on the location of the TK that added to the cost of the redevelopment. Artspace secured the entire \$16.5 million development budget for the project prior to breaking ground on construction. In addition to \$272,000 in donations from foundations and individuals, Artspace secured debt financing through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, commercial loans with low interest rates and bond sales (Gadwa & Muessig, 2011). The primary parties that financed and funded the TK Artist Lofts and Tashiro Arts Building can be found in appendix A.

Partnerships & Renovations

Stickney Murphy Romine Architects (SMR) and Marpac Construction came forward at the 1997 symposium, both enthusiastic about the project, and prepared to be patient and understanding about its complexities (C. Vandenbrink, personal communication, March 11, 2021). SMR Architects is known in the Seattle area for projects that enhance a community's quality of life, and as advocates for the design and preservation of affordable housing. Their use of eco-friendly materials, transit-centered approach to design, and experience reimagining the use of historic buildings made SMR the right partner for the TK project (SMR Architects, n.d.). Marpac Construction offered the expertise with historic structures and innovative solutions needed to turn the TK project into a reality (Marpac Construction, n.d.).

Three stories were added to the Kaplan Building, the Tashiro Building was renovated, and the two were physically integrated to form one complete structure, the Tashiro Kaplan Building. The newly constructed floors were designed as live/work space, providing fifty artists and their families with housing. On the street level, the original aesthetic of the buildings' wood

storefronts were replicated with modern materials. Upgrades to ADA accessibility, seismic and life safety systems were added to meet the needs of the 15 independent galleries that rent space in the building (SMR Architects, n.d.; Marpac Construction, n.d.). Because of Pioneer Square Historic District preservation requirements, special measures had to be taken to replicate the bronze pivot windows and the stucco beams and columns of the building's original facade (Marpac Construction, n.d.).

The TK: Context and Community

The Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts opened in June of 2004 with full occupancy and a waiting list of 1,000 people. Artspace was impressed with the hard work, dedication and creativity Cathryn Vandenbrink brought to the project and offered her a job as Regional Director (C. Vandenbrink, personal communication, March 11, 2021). Artspace now has offices in the Twin Cities, New York, Los Angeles, Denver, Seattle, New Orleans and Washington DC. Their projects span the nation in more than 20 states, providing nearly 2,000 live/work units for artists and millions of square feet of non-residential community and commercial space (Artspace, n.d.). The success of The TK project, combined with the number of artists on the waiting list, led to the redevelopment of four other properties in the greater King County area. The TK has become a well-known destination on the First Thursday Pioneer Square Art Walk, the first official art walk in the nation. The TK draws crowds of hundreds to visual art and cultural events every month (TK Lofts, n.d.).

Pioneer Square has been a creative home for artists for over one hundred years. Prominent authors of 20th century Asian American literature detailed their experiences living and working in Pioneer Square. Many other artists have come out of the neighborhood to gain national and international recognition for their poetry, music, culinary and visual arts (Andrews,

2002; Stone, 2014). The redevelopment of the Tashiro Kaplan buildings into the TK Artists Lofts was a huge victory in the fight for affordable space for artists in Seattle. The creative community of multi-disciplinary artists that inhabit The TK is a testament to the vibrancy that accessible and affordable artist live/work space can bring to a neighborhood and city.

Method Note:

This case study was developed by Madeline Berkman, MFA 2022 for Seattle University's MFA in Arts Leadership course Cultural Infrastructure and Facilities taught by faculty Katie Oman. An interview was conducted with Cathryn Vandenbrink, former Regional Director of Artspace.

Primary research was conducted during Spring Quarter, 2021. Susan Kanimatsu provided editing. Citations and references may not conform to APA standards.

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Photo Gallery

Kanjiro Tashiro in his hardware store, Tashiro Hardware Company, 1929. Left: Andrews, M. T., & Link, K. (2005). Pioneer Square: Seattle's oldest neighborhood. University of Washington Press. Right: Fiset, Louis. Nikkei Life in the Northwest: Photographic Impressions, 1912-1954. The Pacific Northwest Quarterly 91(1): p.25-41. Courtesy University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections

Appendix

A. *How Art Spaces Matter II*, Gadwa & Muessig via Metris Consulting, 2011

Tashiro Kaplan Artist Lofts / Tashiro Arts Building Financing and Funders

Financing	TK Artists Lofts	Tashiro Arts Building
Artspace	444,000	
City of Seattle	3,240,000	
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development & MMA Financial (revenue bond financed)	5,290,000	
U.S. Bancorp		1,200,000
Washington State Housing Finance Commission, Paramount Financial Group, Inc. & Impact Capital (LIHTC)	3,560,000	
Washington State Housing Trust Fund	1,000,000	
Funders/Other Capital Sources		
4Culture	100,000	
Allen Foundation for the Arts	30,000	
Ken Alhadeff	2,500	
King County (purchase price credit, below market lease)		1,500,000
Raynier Institute & Foundation	15,000	
Seattle Foundation	40,000	
Cathryn & David Skinner	25,000	
William True	10,000	
U.S. Bancorp Foundation	10,000	
Washington Mutual	40,000	

- B. Berkman, M., & Vandenbrink, C. (2021, March 11). Tashiro Kaplan Building. Obtained through personal correspondence.

PIONEER SQUARE

Community Development Organization

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Pioneer Square: A Place for Artists

Artist Live/Work Symposium

Friday November 7, 1997

8:30 AM to 5 PM

It is estimated that between 300 and 500 artists are working in Pioneer Square. The Pioneer Square Community Development Organization (PSCDO) has identified artists as the at-risk population needing assistance to continue living and working in our community. In a survey conducted by the Pioneer Square Planning Committee, artist live/work housing was determined to be the most needed form of housing. The PSCDO applied for and received a grant from the Neighborhood Planning Office to study the feasibility of developing an artist live/work project. Several major developments, including new baseball and football stadiums to be built in and adjacent to the historic district, create an emergency situation for this community. The low rents in these undeveloped buildings have traditionally supported a large and healthy arts industry in Pioneer Square, but as property values continue to rise and vacancy rates fall, these buildings are likely to be developed into offices or traditional multi-family housing units. The costs of renovation will not allow the current occupants to remain as tenants.

A one-day symposium, jointly sponsored by the Seattle Arts Commission, the King County Arts Commission, Pioneer Square Planning Committee and the PSCDO will bring together artists, developers, funders, architects, and representatives from various city agencies to work through the development process from acquisition to occupancy of selected properties. Experts from the different interest groups will be presented with models from other cities, followed by a brainstorming session to address the challenges associated with funding, building code compliance, live/work design issues, and ownership structures. The goal is not only to create an action plan for these properties, but also to generate a working model for live/work projects to be applied to other buildings and neighborhoods throughout the City.

We would greatly appreciate your participation in this effort to provide a permanent place for artists in Pioneer Square. Prior to the symposium each participant will receive information about Pioneer Square, the properties to be explored and existing models of artist live/work housing to draw from in our work sessions. The day will begin with coffee and pastries at 8:30 AM, followed at 9 with a presentation by Kelly Lindquist, Executive Director of Artspace in Minneapolis, developers of low-income artist live/work housing. We conclude the morning session with an analysis of the chosen properties. Participants will be invited on a brief walking tour to acquaint them with existing buildings currently used by artists. At 1 PM we reconvene to begin work on the challenges these properties present. What obstacles must be overcome? We ask you to bring your expertise, your suggestions, solutions and creative ideas to contribute to the realization of an artist live/work project in Pioneer Square.

Please notify Cathryn Vandenbrink, PSCDO Programs Manager, by October 10th, of the person or persons in your organization who will be attending. Thank you for your continued support in our planning process.

Sincerely,

John Chaney, Historic Seattle and Chair of Pioneer Square Planning Committee
Barbara Goldstein, Seattle Arts Commission
Jim Kelly, King County Arts Commission
Cathryn Vandenbrink, Pioneer Square Community Development Organization