

Narte (9255 Miller Rd.NE)

Historical Overview

Filipino strawberry farmer Felix Narte (1906-1996) built this house in 1946. Born in Luna, La Union, Philippines, Narte came from a family who made their livelihood on farming rice and vegetables and fishing. At a young age he was recruited by a contractor to work in Hawaii on a pineapple plantation. He later traveled by ship to Seattle in 1926. Like many Filipinos, he worked seasonally in Alaska fishing and as a farm laborer migrating throughout the West. By the early 1940s he began working on Bainbridge Island where he first came to pick strawberries. Narte worked for Frank and Shigeko Kitamoto who operated a farm on the north side of Fletcher Bay (6099 Battle Point Rd.NE). The Kitamoto's hired Narte as their "top hand" before World War II (Woodward 2008: 94-95).

In an interview, Narte recalled living on the Kitamoto property as a laborer when the War broke out. In his living quarters, Narte had dynamite he used for removing stumps in farming fields. When the FBI visited the Kitamotos and found the explosives, they believed this along with Frank's Japanese heritage made him a threat and arrested him (Narte 1975:22). During WWII, Narte oversaw the Kitamoto farm and stayed in contact with the Kitamotos, even making a visit to see them in the relocation camp.

After the war, the Kitamotos sold Felix this property for one dollar. County records indicate the house was built in 1946 and remains in the Narte family today. When Felix married Asuncion "Cion" in December 1949, she reportedly became the second Filipino bride on this Island (Washington Naturalization Records 1904-1991). Beginning in 1949 immigration restrictions eased and more Filipino women came to the U.S. (Woodward 2008:95).

Physical Description

This .56 acre parcel of land is located on the west side of Miller Rd. NE. Evidence of a historical farming field is still visible north of the house. The one-story house has a simple floor plan 30 feet by 34 feet that encloses 965 square feet of space. The gable roof has an 8:12 slope with an intersecting cross gable at the southwest corner of the house and is covered with asphalt shingles. The house has a concrete block footing and is clad with horizontal shiplap painted wood boards. The windows used throughout are horizontal sliders with anodized aluminum frames.

Statement of Significance

Constructed in 1946, this is one of the early properties owned by a Filipino farmer on Bainbridge Island. During the years after WWII many Filipinos transitioned from being laborers working on other people's farms to owning farms. This house has retained its original plan though some windows have been replaced. A neighboring parcel north of the house includes an old berry field. Overall the building retains integrity and possesses significance with broad patterns of history, because with the nearby Kitamoto house, it depicts the interconnections between the Japanese and Filipino farmers, who were the driving force behind the island's berry farming industry.

