



Saint Paul Pioneer Press, October 27, 1993 "Sorrows Past, Shadows Cast, St. Paul's New Cultural Garden," by Ann Baker, 1-2.



Artist Cliff Garten looks up from the mosaic cone he and Ta-coumba T. Alken created in the St. Paul Cultural Garden.

# Sorrows Past, Shadows Cast

*Ethnic artists' thoughts flow to their (and our) ancestors in St. Paul's new Cultural Garden, overlooking the Mississippi River*

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**W**ords etched in stone benches and steel railings surround visitors to the new St. Paul Cultural Garden downtown on Kellogg Boulevard next to the Robert Street Bridge and the American Center building.

*From I-mni-za ska, the white cliffs across the river, our singing still rises toward the stars.*

*Before you the river pulses in many voices.*

*Watch it carefully. What you dream can become real.*

The garden was designed with granite benches and sculptures on a bluff overlooking river, railroads, barges and more bluffs. It is intended as a public place for meditation and will be dedicated on Monday from noon to 1 p.m.

It is the fruit of two years' work by six poets and three artists, who were commissioned by the St. Paul Foundation to reflect on the naming of St. Paul on Nov. 1, 1841.

The words also reflect the Mississippi River as seen from the perspective of the poets' six different ethnic heritages.

"Some people see the river as recreation, industry. It's all that and it's more," said St. Paul poet Soyini Guyton. As an African American, she said, "I also know it was used to haul contraband slaves, being sold down the river."

"... Sorrows too deep for even the Mississippi to fathom," she wrote for the garden, her lines carved on a green, blue and

GARDEN CONTINUED ON 2 ►



JOE ROSSI/ PIONEER PRESS

Work on the St. Paul Cultural Garden should be completed in time for Monday's dedication. This view was taken from a window in the American Center Building, overlooking the bluff at Robert Street and Kellogg Boulevard.

## GARDEN/Reflecting city's past

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tan, mosaic cone by artists Ta-coumha T. Aiken and Cliff Garten.

Other sorrows are recounted in a ground-level spiral of words in stone by Native American poet Roberta Hill Whiteman: "This river remembers its ancient name, Ha-ha wa-kpa. Where young and old danced in harmony before trade became more valuable than lives."

European immigrants also faced hardships here, as recounted on a stone bench by poet John Miczeski: "Our grandparents found these streets paved with sweat and dirt, not gold."

And recent immigrants, arriving by jet, faced drastic change from the remote mountains of Laos.

*"To cross a river I shall take off my shoes. To cross a country I shall take off my head,"* wrote Hmong poet Xeng Sue Yang, vividly expressing the culture shock his countrymen have faced.

*"Once north we learned a sober truth,"* are the words of author Sandra Benitez inscribed in a niche, a traditional Latin American-style shrine built by artist Armando Gutierrez. *"The true border is not the river. It is the long shadow our ancestors cast. They beckon again and again."*

Writer David Mura evoked his own Japanese roots and linked them to the heritages of other Asians now citizens of St. Paul: "Nakamura Neutong Li Nguyen: the names unfold like an American rose."

The six distinct areas of the park were laid out by Garten, art professor at Hamline University, and Xiaowei Ma, former Minnesotan now a landscape architect in Boston.

"The designs came from the poetry in response to the landscape," Garten said last week.

"It just kind of happened that our poetry had overlapping themes and quality," said Guyton. "It's not contrived. It just kind of happened. When we did our first and second drafts, some of us were feeling the same things, and it developed a flow on its own."

"We got to the point where we were able to look beyond the boundaries of the things that are familiar to us. We listened to each other."