

Hello my name is Ben Brown and I'm the director & curator of the Clarke Historical Museum. Ever wonder how local Native American baskets are made and what your collection is worth? This Saturday, the museum is hosting a talk on local Native American baskets with an appraisal day from 1-3pm.

Today I will be talking about the current exhibit in the Community Case by the Morris Graves Museum of Art on Romano Gabriel, which will be on exhibit until May 27th. This piece was written by Kathy Dillon for the Times Standard.

Italian immigrant Romano Gabriel once said Eureka was "a bad place for flowers." If his fog-hampered horticultural skills were lacking, Gabriel's nonconforming artistic talent made up for it in a big way. The Romano Gabriel Wooden Sculpture Garden is known worldwide.

A folk art triumph, Gabriel's flower garden consists of flowers, trees, carousels and faces carved from wooden fruit crates and continues to garner attention well after its artist's passing. Born in Italy in 1887, he immigrated to America in 1913. After serving in World War I, he settled in Eureka and worked as a carpenter and gardener.

The seeds of Gabriel's wooden garden were planted in the 1930s in the front yard of his Pine Street home. He reportedly said he "wanted to do something different." Gabriel obviously also wanted people to take notice. His work always faced the street, and as the years went by, the yard overflowed with artwork. At one point the small house was completely obscured by the exuberant jumble of fanciful objects.

Gabriel's garden proved to be much more than just different, architectural historian John Beech said in 1975. While many of the items are purely decorative works of fantasy, "others embody their creator's attitude about society and its institutions and his reactions to public events," he said. Gabriel was a reclusive man and did not want the spotlight on himself -- just his garden. Appropriately, on the day he died in 1977, the California State Arts Council designated his garden as an important piece of folk art.

Yet it all might have been lost. For several months, the garden sat abandoned and deteriorating until the Ray Vellutini family purchased it from the estate. Then 20-year-old Vince Vellutini and a group of his friends spent almost a year restoring it before the family donated the garden to the city. After a combined community effort, a custom-built storefront structure was erected at 315 Second St., where Gabriel's garden was transplanted behind protective glass. The opening dedication was held April 3, 1982.

Over the years, photographs of the sculptures have been exhibited at Harvard and M.I.T., and have been published in a variety of national and international magazines and books. Selected pieces from the garden have also been exhibited at the SF MOMA and have toured Europe.

Eureka has proven an ideal place for Romano Gabriel's garden. As Beech said, it continues to offer Eurekaans "a joyful moment in the daily life of their city."

Please visit the museum to see the exhibit and take part in appraisal day on Saturday May 20<sup>th</sup> from 1-3pm, check our website for more information.

This is Ben Brown with Community Comment.