



WAKAMATSU FARM NEWS

INFORMATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE

AMERICAN RIVER CONSERVANCY

AMERICAN RIVER
CONSERVANCY



Preserving Rivers and Land for Life

Spring 2018

Preserving the Wakamatsu Farm Legacy

By Alan Ehrgott

Over the past twenty-nine years, the American River Conservancy (ARC) has protected 24,500 acres of natural history including wild and scenic rivers, ancient forests, and rare wildlife habitats from the ravages of residential development. More unique is ARC's work to protect cultural history, namely the 272-acre Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony, widely recognized as the first Japanese colony established in North America on June 8, 1869.

While Wakamatsu farm has outstanding natural features and scenic landscapes, it is the history of its people that makes the Farm so tantalizingly unique. It is the story of the Wakamatsu colonists, including Okei-san and the farmers, craftsmen and samurai that came to America with mulberry saplings, silkworms, tea and rice seed, citrus, and oil producing plants, to create an independent colony and a better life. It is here where Japan met America and where the Japanese-American culture began. Even today, we are collectively still reaping the benefits.

Each year, more and more visitors from around the globe "step back in time" to appreciate the unfolding story of this landmark Farm that is uniquely significant to Japanese-Americans and their immigration story. For now, ARC is this land's keeper, rolling back time to restore and protect the property while moving forward into the 21st century with the responsibility for this national heritage site. To this end, ARC continues to repair and improve the Farm's structures, conserve and steward the land, and educate and welcome visitors and volunteers of all ages from around the world.

It takes more than good intentions and sincere sentiment to save an historic property. It takes currency, construction, and communication. The collaboration to purchase and protect Wakamatsu Farm began in the mid-1990's when Gene Itogawa of the Sacramento Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and I, as the ARC's Executive Director, agreed to work together, monitor the ownership of the farm, and seize the opportunity when it became available

for sale. That day came in 2007 when the Veerkamp family approached our partnership with an offer to sell the farm at a fair-market value. An appraisal was commissioned, and a purchase agreement was made to acquire the property for its appraised value of \$3.2 million. Over the following two years, \$1.9 million in purchase funding was raised,

and ARC closed escrow and purchased the land in October, 2010 with \$1.3 million in mortgage loans.

Since 2010, a lot has happened. When ARC acquired the property, the farmhouse and its other structures were literally falling apart. Our partnership secured the placement of Wakamatsu Farm on the National Register of Historic Places at a level of national significance. We secured a \$483,000 grant from the California Cultural and Historical Endowment, and we completed the structural stabilization of the 1850's farmhouse, which was the colonists' home in 1869. Later, \$200,000 in private donations and ARC general funds were used to restore the two farm residences, the dairy, the large barn, and the farm sales barn.

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Graner House after renovation

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Today Wakamatsu Farm is a working farm with two resident farming operations that supply the community with organic produce, eggs, milk, and meat. We look forward to the day when Wakamatsu Farm may host a Japanese farm family from Fukushima Prefecture. For now, the resident farmers provide \$25,000 per year in income to help maintain farm infrastructure and pay down the mortgage. ARC has also raised an additional \$100,000 for the purpose of developing a Visitor and Event Center within the Farm House and the Keyaki garden. ARC also recently installed central heating and air within the Farm House. The balance on the property loan is down to \$666,500.

Given all the progress, however, Wakamatsu Farm does not yet sustain itself, and it remains a financial drain on ARC's resources. ARC most needs help with infrastructure improvements. To meet the demands of stewarding and managing the property, several projects have been evaluated and approved to increase the Farm's potential. These include an outdoor classroom complex, bathroom facilities throughout the farm with running water, and a fully functioning commercial kitchen.

Early this year, ARC plans to submit architectural plans created by historical architects, Page and Turnbull, to El Dorado County for a permit that will allow a commercial kitchen to be constructed within the historic kitchen in the Farm House. This commercial kitchen will be instrumental in future fundraising by supporting farm dinners and other fundraisers.

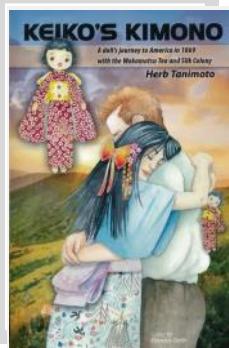
To further the educational and outreach goals at the Farm, work is underway to fund and construct an outdoor classroom complex, including restrooms, near the main parking lot. An outdoor classroom is needed to support students and ongoing outdoor education programs at the Giving Garden and the native plant nursery. The outdoor classroom will also provide a much-needed reprieve from the weather and serve as a gathering space for tours, events, and general guest services.

To support long-term sustainability, ARC has established the Wakamatsu Legacy Fund so supporters can directly benefit large-scale maintenance and restoration projects at Wakamatsu Farm. As promised to prior donors, donations of \$1000 or more will secure an engraved plate on the Wakamatsu Wall of Honor. Prior donors will be interested to know the construction on the Wakamatsu Wall of Honor is planned for completion in time for Wakamatsu's 149th Anniversary Observance the first weekend of June, 2018.

Finally, ARC is beginning an aggressive campaign to secure major sponsors for WakamatsuFest150, the sesquicentennial celebration at the Farm. Honoring the legacy of the Wakamatsu colony on its 150th anniversary is not only a chance to attract attention, it is an honorable obligation and a spectacular excuse to have fun. Please plan to give generously to WakamatsuFest150, however you are able, and plan to join and celebrate Wakamatsu Farm during the festival on June 6, 7, 8 and 9 of 2019. We hope to see you there.



Graner House before renovation



Wakamatsu Novel Released

Keiko's Kimono is a historic fiction novel written by docent and historian, Herb Tanimoto. He uses information gathered from historical resources, and many hours spent at the historic Wakamatsu Farm, to weave a compelling and heartfelt vision of what life might have been like for the first Japanese settlers in North America. The book is available at the ARC Nature Center, at the Coloma museum gift shop, and will soon be available at Placerville bookstores. Herb is donating all profits to the Wakamatsu Farm project.

The ARC extends a very special thanks to author Herb Tanimoto for his ongoing generosity, and for his editorial and organizational help with this newsletter.



Help Save the Natural Beauty of Wakamatsu's Oaks

Susan Morioka Bertram, Wakamatsu Docent

Walking from the historic buildings of Wakamatsu Farm or the parking area toward Okei-san's gravesite you notice the green fields, stands of dry grass, and the native oak trees. However, as you get closer to the gravesite, there is one tree close to the trail that seems to guard the trail with its commanding form.

In my mind's eye I see a young teenage girl, who dutifully followed orders and left her family; hiking to this place, surrounded by nature, thinking quietly about the home she would never see again. This large tree, with its gnarly, twisted branches holds not only Okei-san's dreams and secrets, but

those of many others who came before her and those who stopped here after her. It has shared with animals its shade and food for possibly over 300 years.

This majestic old oak, together with its offspring enclosing Okei-san's gravesite, truly qualifies as a "Tree of Life." A frog croaks its song as it lies hidden under a fallen piece of bark by the base of the tree. Patches of bright green moss and light green lichen decorate the bark and create a home for the insects that feed the flocks of birds that land on tree branches. The knocking of a red-headed woodpecker can be heard as it creates caches of food in the bark. This tree is the home for animal life, and as its leaves fall and compost into the ground it also helps to create rich soil for the plant life.

It is important to care for these heritage oaks and now we will be able to do this thanks to the generous contributions made by you. These trees, the farm and land are all an important landmark that is part of the history and story of the Wakamatsu farm and also a part of the natural history of the area. There is much to be done and kept up on this farm and we hope you will always keep us in mind as you look toward making future contributions.

Update: Early in 2018, supporters helped the American River Conservancy raise enough funds to care for the historic oak trees near Okei-san's grave. These funds allowed the ARC to hire a professional tree service to trim dead and dangerous limbs from these oak trees. This long-overdue care will help the trees health and make the trees safer for visitors to enjoy. Thank you all who contributed to the "Help Save Okei-san's Trees" fundraiser. Supporters like these help ARC keep the Wakamatsu story alive and thriving.

A Hike Around the Lake

Walking along the path,
On a sunny winter's day
Hearing sounds from all directions
A raven cawing along the way
Calling out to the world.
It is such a special place
I'm sure he was telling me
To be thankful and full of grace.
A gentle breeze and bird calls.
Green trees and grass all about.
A wondrous way to connect
And release all fears and doubts.
Geese flying above in a V
Deer hoof prints all around.
Squirrels and little creatures
Can always be found.
If we just are here and now,
Open up and get out of our boxes
We might even possibly see
A coyote or perhaps red foxes.
- Gail Crawford



ARC INVITATION TO THE EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY

On December 5, 2017, ARC representatives were invited to the home of the Consul General of Japan in San Francisco to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan. In attendance were Wendy Guglieri and Herb Tanimoto, both docents at the Wakamatsu Farm.

In the photo are Wendy, Consul General Jun Yamada, and Herb.

Docent Spotlight: Carl Allyn

By Satomi Edelhofer

Carl was one of the original docents trained at Wakamatsu in 2011. He has always been fascinated with the outdoors, from hiking to his own enthusiastic gardening ventures. Participating in and teaching some of the environmental education programs at Wakamatsu was one of his earlier volunteer projects. One of the highlights of that early volunteer work experience was with a group of students from Houston, Texas, when he worked on watershed issues. He also worked on the hedgerows of native plants at the current organic farm. He continued his own learning by completing the first UC California Naturalist Course offered by ARC in the spring of each year.

Carl has also led tours and has especially enjoyed the many private tour groups that come to the Wakamatsu Farm. He is currently the lead Graner House gardener, and you will reliably find him working there every Tuesday, which is the designated Garden work day. His eyes lit up as he talked about the easy camaraderie that develops amongst the Graner gardeners as they work on various maintenance issues and new projects throughout the year. Snack time is an important part of their shared time together, yum yum. If you haven't had a chance to look around the beautifully maintained grounds, you may want to do so the next time you visit Wakamatsu.

There are beautiful white lilacs and hollyhocks. There is a nice mix of plants, including some tea plants that were gifted to Wakamatsu by tea grower, Mike Fritts that might even be traced back to the original tea plants that were planted at Wakamatsu. Carl has been working hard to get the pH down to the acidic level that tea plants prefer. He was excited about attending the UC Davis Global Tea Initiative in February. Some people have likened tea to how wine grapes were in the 1950s. It is predicted to be a big crop in the future of California because the climate is a good fit since tea is fairly drought-tolerant. He'd love to have more tea plants at the farm. Maybe one day the Wakamatsu Farm might even have its own tea to drink and sell.

Other highlights in the Graner Garden are the Japanese fruiting plums planted a couple of years ago and a flowering Japanese variety of quince that is used in Ikebana flower arrangements. There is also the old wisteria that the gardeners take care of. The Japanese Consul donated a flowering cherry tree, and there are also the colorful Japanese maples to enjoy. Japanese blood grass, Mondo grass and Japanese boxwood are also in the garden as well as the Mugo pine in the center of the lawn area. Of course we have the Champion Keyaki tree, which is the only surviving vegetation planted by the Colonists. Carl delights in talking about all the plants and trees that he has taken care of for the last few years.

A fascinating bit of Wakamatsu history that Carl would love to know more about is how arms dealer Herr Schnell and Lord Matsudaira, who was defeated in the Bosh-in War, came up with the idea of starting a farm in America. In a sense, they decided to turn swords into plowshares. There are still many mysteries that remain here at Wakamatsu. Please consider becoming one of the many dedicated volunteers at Wakamatsu like Carl. He loves nothing better than to collaborate with others.



Carl with docents tending to the Wakamatsu tea plants

Fields of Wakamatsu

By Melissa Tregilgas, Wakamatsu Farmer



Tregilgas family, farmers on the Wakamatsu land

When I look out on these fields, history is a living thing, along with all the other creatures crawling in the grass, moving like the shadow of a hawk over the trees.

Once, these fields were tended by the Nisenan. Using grassfires to maintain the fertile and open oak savannahs, they tended landscapes specifically for feeding game animals and propagating edible and useful plants. Much of the “wilderness” beauty in our state can be attributed to the attention of indigenous humans.

The Gold Rush and subsequent mass migration changed all this. When the Wakamatsu colonists arrived in 1869, the great oak meadows of the Nisenan were disappearing along with their caretakers.

Many of the crops that were brought from Japan with the colonists might have flourished had fate allowed the Japanese colony to establish. Persimmon, sesame, bamboo, tea, white mulberry, and citrus grow well here. There was great potential. In many other places,

Japanese families went on to build successful California farms.

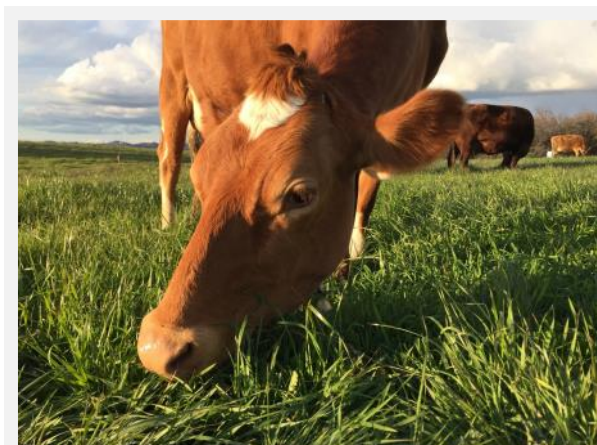
In Edo period Japan, farms brought in forest soil, manure, and mulch to amend their cultivated fields each year. Horses and oxen were highly valued for farm labor. Crop diversity in hill farms protected them from disease and ensured an income even if one crop failed. When the Veerkamps took over this farm, they would have used many of the same practices — animals for labor, manure and mulch for fertility, and crop diversity as insurance against disaster.

The Industrial Revolution and the subsequent “green revolution” (when chemical use skyrocketed on farms) have changed agriculture since that time. Cheap fuel and subsequent world trade have destabilized farming communities around the globe. Pesticide, herbicide, and fungicide use continue to increase, and we lose a football field worth of soil every minute due to poor farming practices. While crop production soars, nutrient content and monetary value have dropped precipitously.

Still, there is hope. In the 1970’s, farmer Masanobu Fukuoka inspired a return to soil fertility not only in Japan, but in the USA. Using no plowing or chemicals of any kind, instead growing cover crops and using mulch, his yields kept up with, and sometimes surpassed, the most productive conventional farms in Japan. In the U.S., farmers like Gabe Brown, Joel Salatin, J.M. Fortier, Elizabeth and Paul Kaiser, and organizations like the Rodale Institute and the Savory Institute, pioneer techniques and planning that restore soil health and sustain farming communities.

On our own leased acreage, **Free Hand Farm** utilizes holistically managed grazing to increase biodiversity and soil health, and produce nourishing animal products. We will begin in-depth testing on our fields this year, but our initial testing last year with UC Davis was promising. After two years of planned grazing, both soil organic matter and soil carbon have shown small but significant increases compared to ungrazed areas.

History moves through the grass here. She presses hope into the soil and plants it there, to tantalize another generation of farmers.



A CUP OF CHA (TEA)

By Herb Tanimoto

One of John Henry Schnell's most important plans for the newly established Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm was to grow and sell tea. Tea and silk production were to be the mainstays of the Colony's success in America. He brought six million tea seeds aboard the SS China and in the following year had 140,000 living plants shipped from Japan.

The colonists immediately planted about 400,000 seeds on their new land at the Farm. That same year, Schnell displayed tea along with silk cocoons and oil plants at the Sacramento State Fair. In 1870 he went to San Francisco's Horticultural Fair and displayed 2-year-old tea shrubs, 1-year-old seedlings, oil plants, and rice. Schnell was awarded \$20 and a medal for the best specimen of tea. Also at the fair, he sold up to 10,000 tea plants that he had in excess. Sam Brannan and Anthony Chabot may have been among the purchasers.

The ultimate failure of the Wakamatsu endeavor is well known. The climate here was drier than that of Japan. Funding also ceased when their daimyo in Japan surrendered his power and wealth after being defeated in the Boshin War. When the Japanese moved away, the Veerkamp family, who bought the land, began to grow fruits and vegetables instead. However, some tea plants were still reported to be flourishing many years later in 1886.

Tea has substantial cultural and religious significance in Japan. The Tea Ceremony harmonizes both aspects, and is a showcase of precision, elegance, and Zen discipline. High-grade matcha tea powder is used. Matcha is made from the youngest stems of the tea plant. As a green tea, it is dried and processed to allow little oxidation, leaving most of the anti-oxidant properties intact. Black tea is heavily oxidized to give it a rich dark color and flavor. White tea is the least oxidized of them all.

To obtain information for this article, I visited tea master Mike Fritts at his Golden Feather Tea® farm near Oroville. He had graciously given American River Conservancy ten tea plants to grow at Wakamatsu. According to Mike, his are not ordinary tea plants. They were purchased from Nuccio's Nursery in Southern California in 2010. They had originated from Toichi Domoto's Nursery in the East Bay hills. The Domoto brothers had obtained their specimens from Anthony Chabot, who may have purchased his from John Henry Schnell himself. It is fascinating to realize that growing in the back of the Graner farmhouse today might be descendants of Schnell's own tea. Mike is planning DNA analysis to try to confirm this. He wants to see if, as he believes, his tea plants are descendants of the Shogun's finest specimens that Schnell carried with him to America.

Relaxing on his farm and sharing some well-steeped tea, Mike said that he practices an old-school approach to tea growing. His processing methods are old-world, hand picking and processing. He believes less modern intervention is best. He doesn't use gas machinery because the petroleum vapors could be absorbed by the tea leaves. He limits his irrigation as much as possible, letting nature be the guide. The finest tea in the world, he said, is from ancient tea trees in Yunnan, China, that are basically allowed to grow wild.

Mike is dedicated to producing the finest tea for several upscale restaurants in the San Francisco area. His other passion is historical research to locate every pioneer tea-growing endeavor in California. As I was preparing to leave, he told me that he was off on one of his expeditions. He was planning to hike into the Feather River Canyon to find a lost Chinese gold mining camp that he had heard stories about. There were likely to be old tea plants still surviving there, and perhaps he could bring back some leaves to brew some wonderful and historic tea.



Mike Fritz at his Golden Feather Tea Farm



Tea Ceremony photo by Toru Ota, courtesy Nao Magami

STARGAZING AT WAKAMATSU

By Herb Tanimoto



Photo courtesy of Doug Parks

The first ever public Stargazing at Wakamatsu event was hosted by American River Conservancy on October 21, 2017. A rainstorm the day before brought some anxiety to the organizers, but fortunately the skies cleared by that Saturday evening.

On a wonderful open field at Wakamatsu, two ARC members, Tim Jackson and Herb Tanimoto, helped guests see through the telescope lenses. Tim ran a 9.25" guided Schmidt Cassegrain telescope and Herb was at the control of a 12" Dobsonian mounted reflecting telescope. Another 8" Cassegrain was also available to skywatchers, as well as several large aperture binoculars on tripod mounts.

David Girard Winery graciously set up a table with a selection of their fine wines, including the coveted Okei San Syrah. Other light refreshments and foods were provided. Glow sticks provided a welcoming path up to the telescopes.

The highlight of the night was, of course, the night sky. Low on the still-glowing western horizon, Saturn was the first to dazzle viewers with its wondrous ring system. The globular clusters M-22 and M-13 were then resolved into swarms of thousands of congregated stars. Other objects seen were the fabulous Ring Nebula, the gorgeous gold and blue star pair Albireo, the famous Perseus Double Cluster, the great Andromeda Galaxy, and the glittering Seven Sister grouping the Pleiades. With the help of modern go-to technology, two other planets, Neptune and Uranus, were coaxed out from the myriad of background stars. These giant planets showed themselves as tiny blue and green disks, orbiting out in the fringes of our solar system.

More than forty guests enjoyed the evening and nightfall. The success of this event ensures more "Stargazing at Wakamatsu" in the future.

Find upcoming event at the farm by checking ARC's calendar at ARConservancy.org/events.

Wakamatsu Open Farm Days

Visit the Farm at your leisure.

1st Saturdays of Spring & Fall, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Don't miss Wakamatsu's 149th Anniversary Observance
and donor wall tribute on June 2nd, 2018



Photo by Betty Sederquist

On-site interpreters can share information and answer questions about Wakamatsu Farm's human and natural history. Suitable for all ages and capabilities, points of interest are mainly outdoors reached by dirt trail or unpaved road over generally flat terrain.

See ARC's website for schedule of Open Farm Days and Public Tours.

ARConservancy.org/events or call 530-621-1224 for private tours

Open Farm Day Prices: \$10/car (additional for vans & buses)

Public Tour Prices: \$10/person, \$5/child 10-17

HISTORIC WAKAMATSU COLONIST PORTRAITS DONATED TO CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

By Herb Tanimoto



Gilbert portrait believed to be of John Henry Schnell (on right) and two colony men

At a public gathering at the Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park on June 9th, 2017, eleven original historic photographs of the pioneers of the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony were donated to California Department of Parks and Recreation.

The benefactors, the Veerkamp family, had previously donated a historic Matsudaira banner and tanto sword from the Colony in 2001. The portraits were handed down through generations of Veerkamp family members in the 147 years since pioneer photographer George Gilbert made them in his Placerville studio. The Egbert Veerkamp descendants gave them to Martha and Merv deHaas, who made the presentation to Barry Smith, Superintendent of the Gold Field District State Parks.

The photographs themselves are a testament to the skills of the early pioneer photographers. Only 2 ½ X 4 inches in size, their quality has allowed us to make large poster sized enlargements with little loss of definition. With

no names associated with the portraits, we can only speculate as to who the people were. One is probably John Henry Schnell himself, matching some images from Japan. Another colonist, Kuninosuke Masumizu, was identified by descendants living in the Sacramento area. A portrait of one family matches the description given by a Tokyo student who learned she was a Wakamatsu Colonist's descendant.

Ai Hiyama from the Japanese Consul General's Office in San Francisco, Janice Luszczak, President of the Sacramento Japanese American Citizens League, Martha and Merv deHaas, Herb Tanimoto, and Barry Smith were among the speakers.

A great mystery is why the colonists decided to have their portraits taken in 1870. Did they go to Placerville feeling empowered from their success in America, needing to record and save their images for posterity? Optimism and determination seem to show on some of their faces, one year before the Colony came to an end.



Gilbert portrait of a young Wakamatsu Colony couple, identity unknown

American River Conservancy welcomes groups and individuals excited to participate in WakamatsuFest150!

June 6, 7, 8, 9, 2019 — Japanese-inspired participation is most welcome!

Examples of WakamatsuFest150 Festival Participants:

food vendors, food trucks, food demonstrations and contests,

beverage producers and vendors (alcoholic and non-),

Japanese art, books, writing, film-making, performance arts, dance, music,

informational booths, costumes, contests, pageant/parade, and what else?

ARC welcomes other ideas for WakamatsuFest150.

Contact Melissa@ARConservancy.org or 530-61-1224



There's always something happening at the Farm! See our website for updates, details, and to sign up. ARConservancy.org/events

MARCH

Sunday the 18th	10am-12pm	Intro. To Permaculture
Saturday the 31st	9am-12pm	Inside Dirt on Soils

APRIL

Saturday the 7th	10am-2pm	Wakamatsu Open Farm Day
Sunday the 15th	10am-2pm	Vermicomposting-Worms
Saturday the 21st	10am-12pm	Wakamatsu Public Tour
Saturday the 28th	10am-12pm	Beginning Bird Walk
Sunday the 29th	9am-1pm	Art on the Farm

MAY

Wednesday the 2nd	5pm-dark	Fishing on the Farm
Saturday the 5th	10am-2pm	Wakamatsu Open Farm Day
Sunday the 6th	2-4pm	Wakamatsu Poetry Workshop
Saturday the 12th	8am-11am	Wakamatsu Bird Walk
Saturday the 19th	10am-12pm	Wakamatsu Public Tour
Sunday the 20th	2-4pm	Thermophilic Composting

Garden Variety

Leave it to a garden full of poets and bird-watchers to come up with so many different perspectives on the same place.

Some of us focused on the inward journey of the settlers, some of us observed the shadows of bare trees against the outdoor wall with the window.

Some of us listened to our hearts (or tried to), while some of us composed narratives on ravens, in verse.

Walking the land, hearing the frogs and the various birds, we each let in something to touch us.

What if we are the ghosts of this place?

- Loch Henson

Photo by Tim Jackson



Okei's Gravesite



Fishing on the Farm

Did Fish say what Heron saw?

Wakamatsu ponds
Seasons wandering around
Heron and Fish speak

Summer acorns sweet
The Ancient Ones sit grinding
Blue Heron watches

Fall grapes in oaks
Ranchers cart milk, beef, and hides
Blue Heron watches

Winter whites make tea
Japanese sow and harvest
Blue Heron watches

Spring grass softly blows
Children run and shout out loud
Blue Heron watches

Rings, Words, and Flowers
Blue Heron stands in water
Waiting for the Poets

Summer Fish seek deeps
Wakamatsu Poets wander
Blue Heron watches

Fall Fish hide afraid
Wakamatsu Poets wander
Blue Heron watches

Winter Fish sleep deep
Wakamatsu Poets wander
Blue Heron watches

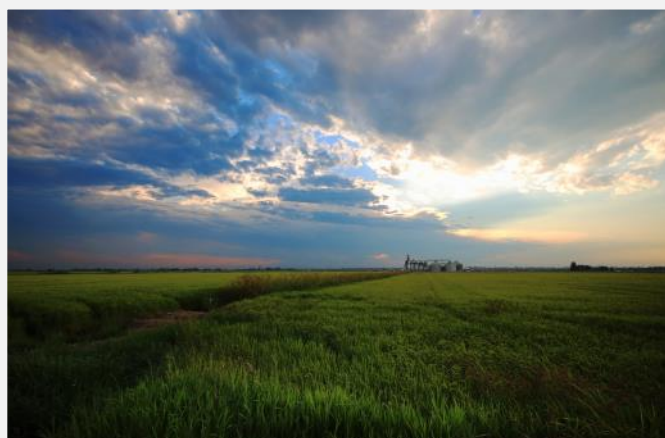
Spring Fish speak in rings
Wakamatsu Poets wander
Blue Heron watches

Fish, bird, flowers wait
The season of words comes round
Wakamatsu Poets

- Catherine Ciofalo

Rice in California – the Japanese Connection

By Tim Johnson



Japanese have been pioneers in California's rice industry

Francisco Bay, with thousands of bags destined for the Chinese immigrants and miners toiling in the gold fields and later the railroads.

As so often happens, those that were unsuccessful at mining returned to their roots. The grand idea was that if you couldn't find gold, you could loosen that precious metal from the miner pockets by growing food. Such was the case for rice.

Early records reaching back as far as 1856 indicate an impressive effort to grow rice in California. Attempts were made to grow it in the water-rich San Joaquin Delta. Failing there, rice paddies were tried as far afield as Redding and Los Angeles. While those early farmers could get the plant to grow, the grain never formed.

For fifty years California farmers tried to grow rice, as the demand increased and ships continued to unload their grain from other countries, sack by sack.

Finally, in 1908, seeds from a different place were tried, a short grain rice from Japan called Kiushu. Planted at the Crane farm in the northern Sacramento Valley town of Biggs, it thrived where the long grain rice, previously planted up and down the state, had failed. California had its first crop of rice. Scientists later learned that the long grain *indica* rice failed to flourish because of California's dry Mediterranean climate. Conversely, the *japonica* short grain rice was ideally suited to our climate.

In the 1960s rice received another boost from Japan, in the form of sushi. In Little Tokyo, Japanese and gaijin alike could try this traditional cuisine made with fresh local ingredients and high quality rice from the Sacramento Valley. To say that it caught fire may be the culinary understatement of the century, as sushi came to define our state.

From those beginnings, the kernel of an industry began. Today's rice industry is one that encompasses half a million acres in the Sacramento Valley and dozens of rice mills. California's rice is now shipped to over forty countries. What's more, nearly every piece of sushi in the United States is made from rice grown in California – rice that traces its roots directly back to that first Japanese variety.

While records of rice farming at the Wakamatsu Colony are scant, I certainly believe an effort was made to grow this most important food crop. How could it be otherwise? More successful with mulberry for silk production and wax trees and tea seedlings, the colony showcased these unique crops and made them the focus of their farm. However, without the colonist expeditionary spirit and contributions to the pioneering of California, that first fateful rice seed from Japan may never have been planted in the soils of the Sacramento Valley.

(Editor's note: Tim Johnson is President and CEO of the California Rice Commission)

Historians agree that the saga of the Gold Rush in California is a story of struggle – a great labor to extract precious metal from the streams and rock of the Sierra. They also subscribe to the story of a rich milieu of cultures coming together by way of fortune – many with names that still speak to the places they mined and settled. In our region, we have Chili Bar and Mormon Island, named after the immigrants so closely associated with these places.

The chronicle of rice in the Sacramento Valley is linked inextricably with this state-defining event and the cultures which rely on this unassuming grain that feeds half of the world's population every day.

The first rice arrived in California on schooners into San



Rice Field Grain courtesy Jim Morris, California Rice Commission

Volunteering at Wakamatsu Farm

By Melissa Lobach

Ask any volunteer at Wakamatsu Farm, “Why do you volunteer here?”. While their answers may vary, the results are the same. Volunteers deeply enjoy their part of the Wakamatsu Farm experience. They appreciate their own unique connections to the history and land. They believe in their work to preserve, restore, and build a place where others join them to appreciate natural resources, sustainable agriculture, and cultural history. No place in the world is like the site of the first Japanese farm colony in America, which happens to attract the best volunteers around. Volunteers get the best of Wakamatsu Farm because they spend the most time there. So can you!

One of the best things about volunteering at Wakamatsu Farm is that you can find volunteer experiences that match your interests, skills, knowledge, or ambitions. The Farm abounds with a variety of exciting and challenging opportunities. You can learn about the rich history of the Gold Hill property while enjoying a natural playground. You can join a supportive community of like-minded people, including other docents, naturalists, land stewards, and more. You can lead tours to share a unique history with the world. You can support agricultural, natural, historical, and cultural resources. You might assist with construction, maintenance, and monitoring. You can help with events and access the property when it is closed to the public. Maybe best of all, you can enjoy the camaraderie of other amazing volunteers in a safe, social, and inspirational environment. You can even suggest new ideas aligned with Wakamatsu Farm goals and then make your projects a new reality.

Now is the best time to become a Wakamatsu Farm docent. Soon you can be leading tours, discussions, and presentations to share a profound cultural, historical, and natural history with other enthusiastic people. Being a Wakamatsu docent also means you’ll enjoy special access to the Farm, private events, and public outreach opportunities. Wakamatsu needs more trained and eager docents for the upcoming **WakamatsuFest150** in June of 2019. Please consider volunteering soon to help us prepare for our one-and-only sesquicentennial event.

Also consider volunteering for one or more scheduled events or work dates at Wakamatsu Farm. Find scheduled dates at ARConservancy.org/events. No previous experience is necessary to volunteer at Wakamatsu Farm. Minors 13 years and older can volunteer with their parents’ consent and supervision.

To build the Farm’s regular volunteer base, the Conservancy offers **Wakamatsu Volunteer Orientation** at least once each year. If you want to regularly participate in any Wakamatsu program or project, volunteer orientation is the right first step. Orientation is also best if you want to lead a group of Farm volunteers, including youth groups, or if you want to lead a Farm project of your own.

In 2018, volunteer orientation is scheduled during spring on Saturday, June 9, and then again during the Fall on Saturday, November 10. Space is limited, so please do not wait to reserve your place in Wakamatsu Volunteer Orientation if you are ready to make a regular commitment at the Farm.

To find out more about volunteering at Wakamatsu Farm, please email wakamatsu@ARConservancy.org or call 530-621-1224.



Above: Docents being trained at Okei’s gravesite
Below: Docent-led public tour of Wakamatsu Farm



Docents discuss rare features of the Veerkamp barn.



Save the Date
June 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th in 2019
WakamatsuFest150

Celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Wakamatsu Tea & Silk Farm Colony establishment and Japanese-American heritage.

Featuring Japanese agriculture, cuisine, performing and studio arts, music, dance, and history.

ARC is currently seeking festival sponsors, participants, and volunteer commitments.

Email: wakamatsu@ARConservancy.org - Phone: 530-621-1224

Or visit the new page at ARConservancy.org/WakaFest150



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By donating to the Conservancy you will join in a vision of tomorrow which so many people share: a healthy, vital environment that supports protecting, preserving and reconstructing a historical area with impact to Japan and California.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.