

# “I never knew this was here”

story: JANE VAN CAMP

photography: SHELLY THORENE & AMERICAN RIVER CONSERVANCY



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WAKAMATSU

That's a comment frequently heard by docent tour guides at the historical Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Farm on the venerable Veerkamp Family Ranch now owned by the American River Conservancy. Even people who are local to El Dorado County are surprised to learn about it.

Spring is nearly here, so this is an ideal time to look for outdoor activities. It's especially good when new places to see are close to home. The Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Farm is located only 6 miles north of Placerville at 941 Cold Springs Road and is a 270-acre site of deep history and natural beauty.

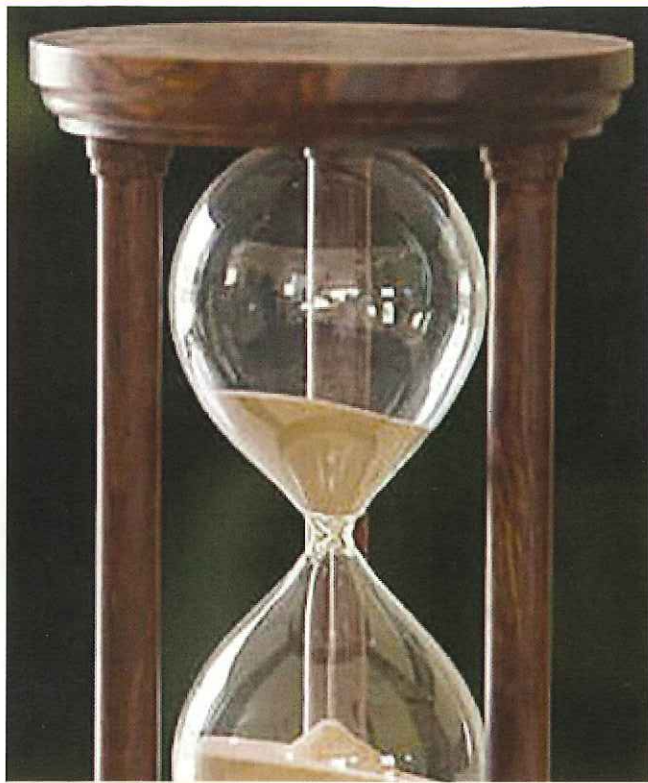
The American River Conservancy has been working since 2010 to restore and maintain the property to make it a desirable destination for events and for lovers of local history, hiking and foothill nature. Adding to that, it's the site of the first Japanese colony in the United States and holds the revered gravesite of the first Japanese woman to die on American soil.



## Sesquicentennial

June 6-9 of 2019, a little over a year from now, will be a banner time at the farm. Those who wish to know more about the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Farm of 1869-1871 will want to join in the sesquicentennial celebration currently in the planning stages. Marking 150 years since the arrival of the Japanese colonists, the celebration will be an especially momentous occasion and an opportunity to be part of a once in a lifetime event. There will be four days of music, great food, wine, fun tours and a lot of interesting history and entertainment depicting the native Nisenan time, the Gold Rush era, the nationally historical Japanese colony time and more than 100 years of Veerkamp family farming and ranching.

There are plenty of opportunities to enjoy the farm before the sesquicentennial celebration in 2019. There will be several Open Farm Days in 2018, when visitors can roam the site and get to know what is there. Open Farm Days



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will be held the first Saturday of each spring month through June 2. Open Farm Days will also happen on first Saturdays in the fall including Sept. 1, Oct. 6 and Nov. 3.




Another way to enjoy the farm is through a guided public tour. Tours are held on third Saturdays in spring through June 16 and in fall on Sept. 15, Oct. 20 and Nov. 17.

To register for a volunteer-docent guided tour, call the American River Conservancy office at (530) 621-1224. There will be a \$10 per person donation requested upon arrival. The donation fee goes directly to support the enhancement and maintenance of the site. Be sure to wear sturdy shoes and long pants and be prepared to walk on hilly trails.

For those of Japanese descent, visiting the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Farm is a glimpse into a positive moment in history that was newsworthy and respected at the time.






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## Fascinating story to tell

Escaping civil war in Japan, the more than 20 colonists who sailed across the Pacific to start a new life have a fascinating story to tell.

Though the colony's time at the farm was brief (1869-1871) it made an impact that reverberates today. Most visitors leave astounded by the intricate and surprisingly little-known story behind the colony and the events of the time.

Those interested in organic and sustainable farming will enjoy learning about the two resident groups that live on the farm. A small family raises livestock and poultry that dot the fields and add to the pastoral atmosphere. The family also restored the historical Veerkamp dairy.



Three other farmers living on the property manage the organic farm and vegetable stand that operates on part of the property across the road from the historical farmhouse. A native plant nursery and demonstration

garden is also in full swing and is open to visitors and volunteers.

The old 1856 farmhouse, known as the Graner House, is being restored as a museum, which has rooms containing many artifacts and photos showing who was on the farm and how they might have lived.

## Opportunity to take part

After visiting the farm, those who want to be more actively involved in the progress of enhancing and maintaining the site have several choices. Volunteers are needed to be docents, gardeners and hiking guides. Also needed are people interested in helping with the 150-year anniversary celebration, including



vendors, performers, artists, photographers and guides.

Fundraising is a critical piece for the future of the farm, so donations, sponsorships, endowments and other financial support are always welcome.

There are three pillars to the significance of the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony/ Veerkamp Farm: 1) the natural beauty, ancient oaks, native plants and integrity of the land itself; 2) the deep and many faceted cultural history; and 3) the historical and contemporary agricultural practices from the early days to today. In many ways, this 270-acre microcosm encapsulates the history of El Dorado County.

If you are interested joining a tour, call the American River Conservancy office at (530) 621-1224 and ask for Melissa Lobach. She will also give you information on opportunities to be involved as a volunteer, a sponsor or a participant in the 150-year anniversary in 2019. Visit [ARConservancy.org/wakafest150](http://ARConservancy.org/wakafest150) for more information.



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