



Mrs. Taft Plants a Tree

HOW THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS CAME TO WASHINGTON

by Ambassador John R. Malott
The Japan-America Society of Washington D.C.





*Samazama na
mono omoidasu,
sakura ka na.*

*Ah, the cherry
blossoms! I recall
so many things...*

A HAIKU BY THE FAMOUS BASHO

Mrs. Taft Plants a Tree

That was the headline in the *Washington Post* on March 28, 1912. Just a short, one-paragraph article. Only five people were there. No photographers, and no reporters.

The Post said "the planting was unofficial," whatever that means.

Over the years, we've all heard the story about how the trees came to Washington. "In 1912 the Mayor of Tokyo, Yukio Ozaki, in a gesture of friendship, gave 3,000 Japanese cherry trees to Washington."

End of story.

But the truth, like all stories, is a lot more complicated — and it's also a lot more interesting. It involves some very fascinating people, whose lives and interests all connected in some way to bring the trees here.

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The Past of Cherries

PART ONE

THE ADVOCATES. SO WHO WAS INVOLVED?

There's **Eliza Scidmore** (pronounced sid-more), the first woman writer for the National Geographic Society, and also their first female trustee. Eliza Scidmore visited Japan in 1885 and fell in love with the cherry blossoms. When she returned to Washington, she waged a one-woman campaign to get the trees planted somewhere, anywhere in Washington, and she never gave up — for 24 years.

There's **David Fairchild**, the head of the Department of Agriculture's global plant exploration office. He was sort of the "Indiana Jones" of the plant kingdom. He scoured the world for plants that could strengthen American agriculture. Fairchild was the first person to plant Japanese cherry trees in the Washington area — at his own home in Chevy Chase — and he proved that they could grow here.

Then there's **Helen Herron Taft** — Nellie Taft — the First Lady of the United States. Now, you might think that the tree-planting on March 27 was just a typical First Lady "show up and smile" activity. No way. Nellie Taft was the "decision-maker" — the decider — at every step of the way. In fact, her husband President William Howard Taft used to refer to her as "the real President" and "the Commander-in-Chief," even though in those days she couldn't vote because she was a woman.

And here's an interesting fact: Nellie Taft had visited Japan a number of times before she became First Lady, and she was fascinated by the place!

So let me group these three people together and call them the "advocates" — the people who wanted to see cherry trees planted in Washington.



Eliza Scidmore



David Fairchild



Helen Herron Taft

There's another group that's important to this story. But before I describe them, consider this: There are 300,000 Japanese cherry trees in Macon, Georgia, but only 4,000 here in Washington. There are cherry trees all over the world, so why are ours so well-known?

The answer is the site, the location. It's the beauty of the entire picture — the white of the memorials, the pinkish-white of the trees, the blue of the sky and water, the green of the grass and surrounding trees. It's the openness of the entire place. To be able to see this many trees — all at once — with such an unobstructed and magnificent view. I don't think there is anywhere in the world where you can see a site that compares.

But all this didn't just happen.



In 1897, Congress passed a bill establishing the area of the Tidal Basin as a public park.



The B&O railroad station, now the site of the National Gallery of Art



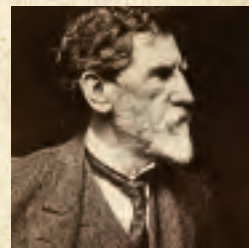
Frederick Law Olmsted



Daniel Burnham



Charles McKim



Augustus Saint-Gaudens

CITY BEAUTIFUL

In 1892, just 20 years before the planting, there was no Jefferson Memorial, there was no Lincoln Memorial. In fact, there was no land for them either. Just the **Potomac River**, which comes up almost all the way to the Washington Monument.

And the National Mall? It was filled with woods and railroad tracks, and even a train station. The **B&O railroad station** stood where the National Gallery of Art is today.

The change from that to what we see today is thanks to the leaders of what was called the "City Beautiful Movement." They were some of the most famous names in American architecture and design. They were determined to realize the original vision of President George Washington and **Pierre L'Enfant** to make our city one of the most beautiful, magnificent capital cities in the world. When we talk about the cherry blossoms, the role that the City Beautiful movement played in Washington is seldom discussed. However, the leaders played an important role.

There was **Frederick Law Olmsted**, the father of American landscape architecture. He was the man who designed Central Park in New York and laid out the grounds of Capitol Hill. The master planner was **Daniel Burnham**, the author of the Plan of Chicago, which preserved the lakefront and created one of America's most beautiful cities. He also created Union Station. Another famous architect who got involved was **Charles McKim**, of the famous

architectural firm McKim, Mead and White. McKim added the West and East Wings to the White House in 1902. The sculptor in the group was **Augustus Saint-Gaudens**. Perhaps his most famous work is not a sculpture, but a coin — the \$20 gold piece, the Double Eagle, which is still considered the most beautiful American coin ever minted.

These men are legends. And they were all involved in creating the city and the National Mall area that we know today.

But it was a little known figure, an Alexandria, Virginia architect named **Glenn Brown**, who made it all happen. He brought these giants together to Washington. He was the catalyst. Glenn Brown became the Executive Secretary of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) after the Institute moved its national headquarters from New York to Washington in 1898. Glenn Brown built the public and the political support to reclaim L'Enfant's vision of a majestic capital, a city that Americans could proudly showcase to the world.

So that is the City Beautiful group.



Glenn Brown



Pierre L'Enfant

THE CONNECTION TO JAPAN

We know that there were at least three Americans who wanted the trees. But why would the Japanese want to give them to us?

When Mrs. Taft said she wanted the trees planted, she told the Army officer in charge to scour the country and find every Japanese cherry tree he could. He found 90 Japanese trees in a nursery — in Pennsylvania! So the first cherry trees that Mrs. Taft had planted came from West Chester, Pennsylvania, not from Tokyo.

So how did the Japanese get involved? What was Japan's interest in all this?

Enter **Mayor Yukio Ozaki**, and one of the fathers of modern chemistry, **Dr. Jokichi Takamine**.



Dr. Takamine was the first person in history to isolate a human hormone — adrenaline (epinephrine). He also developed a digestive enzyme called taka-diestase. He lived and worked in the U.S. for a number of years and was the founder and first chairman of The Nippon Club, which was established in New York to strengthen the Japanese community in the U.S.

His forward-thinking approach to other cultures and his entrepreneurship set him apart from others. He was married to an American from New Orleans, a very unusual marriage in those days. Many people say it was the first-ever marriage between a Japanese and an American.



Left: Mayor Yukio Ozaki.
Above: Dr. Jokichi Takamine, Photo Courtesy of the Great People of Kanazawa Memorial Museum

So there they are - the cast of characters, the three groups - the cherry blossom advocates, the City Beautiful movement, and two visionary Japanese who cared deeply about their country's relationship with America.

The original idea to give thousands of cherry trees to Washington actually came from Dr. Takamine. And so, according to most sources, did the funding to pay for them. When Dr. Takamine learned that First Lady Helen Herron Taft planned to plant cherry trees in a park along the Potomac, he proposed a gift of 2,000 cherry trees. But, as a private businessman, scientist and goodwill ambassador, Dr. Takamine didn't think he should be "out front" on this, so he and Japan's Consul General in New York agreed that the gift should be made through official channels, with the trees given to the City of Washington by the City of Tokyo — from one capital city to another. Mayor Ozaki agreed and the rest, as they say, is history.

So there they are — the cast of characters, the three groups — the cherry blossom advocates, the City Beautiful movement, and two visionary Japanese who cared deeply about their country's relationship with America. And looming behind them, touching the actions of all three groups, was the larger than life leader of a new and progressive America, President Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt.

Roosevelt strongly supported the City Beautiful movement and the AIA. He encouraged them in what they were trying to do: transform Washington into a capital city that was worthy of a new global power.

Without Teddy Roosevelt, there would have been no First Lady Helen Taft, and therefore no cherry trees. That's because in 1908 Roosevelt threw his support to William Howard Taft, his Secretary of War, to replace him as President.

As for the Japanese, while more liberal officials were grateful to Roosevelt for mediating an end to Japan's war with Russia in 1906, others in Japan were not. There was growing anti-American sentiment in Japan, including anger about the treatment of Japanese immigrants in California.

Roosevelt was concerned about Japan's growing military power in Asia. In 1907, just two years before Mayor Ozaki and Dr. Takamine made their offer, there was a war scare between the U.S. and Japan. So Roosevelt sent the Navy's Atlantic Fleet, called the "Great White Fleet," which at that time was

most of our Navy, all the way to Japan, and then around the world. It was a 14-month journey, and its purpose was to show that America could protect its interests in the Philippines, China, and elsewhere.

So as this tale of the beautiful cherry blossoms unfolds, there is this larger geopolitical backdrop of mounting tensions between the United States and Japan.



One of four photographs of cherry trees in Japan sent by David Fairchild to Helen Herron Taft

*How it all
came together*

PART TWO

HOW IT ALL CAME TOGETHER

In 1789, the new U.S. Government came into being, and New York City was our first capital. Our first Capitol building, called Federal Hall in New York, was designed by Pierre L'Enfant, a French engineer who had served in the Continental Army during the American Revolution.

Two years later President George Washington announced that a permanent capital city would be built on the land where the Potomac and Eastern Rivers come together. Washington asked L'Enfant to produce a plan for the new capital city.

Washington and L'Enfant saw eye to eye — they both wanted something magnificent, something huge. America's capital city would be situated on a 100-square mile tract of land. For a new country with few people and little money, the audacity was staggering. L'Enfant envisioned putting the Congress on top of the highest hill in the area in a building that would be the biggest ever built in the Western Hemisphere. The President's mansion would be one mile away, down an avenue that would be 400 feet wide.

L'Enfant produced his plan in just five months. But L'Enfant's artistic temperament was not suited for a democratic government, and it didn't take long

for him to run afoul of Thomas Jefferson and the officials who were overseeing his work. George Washington fired him less than a year after he was hired. L'Enfant never got paid for his work. He died with only \$46 to his name.

Washington, D.C. became the Nation's Capital in 1800. But L'Enfant's vision remained unfulfilled. As a city, Washington was still a backwater.



L'Enfant's Plan for the City of Washington

When Charles Dickens came here for a lecture tour in 1842, he described what he saw this way:

- Spacious avenues that begin in nothing, and lead nowhere
- Streets a mile-long, that need houses and inhabitants
- Public buildings — that need a public

He called Washington,

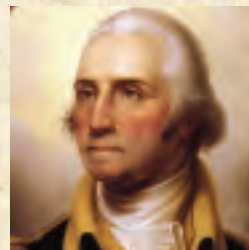
- The City of Magnificent Distances
- The City of Magnificent Intentions

As the year 1900 approached, the AIA and Glenn Brown began preparing to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Washington, D.C.

The leaders of the City Beautiful movement had worked together on the Chicago World's Fair, officially called the World's Columbian Exposition, in 1893, and they created something the world had never seen — a beautiful city of 630 acres, with gardens, waterways, and over 200 buildings, mostly temporary buildings meant to be torn down afterwards, and all built in a classical architecture style.

The "White City" at the Chicago World's Fair was a make-believe city — the Disneyland of its day. But Glenn Brown, the AIA and the giants of the City Beautiful movement wanted to achieve their vision in a real city, and what better place than Washington, D.C., Charles Dickens's "City of Magnificent Intentions."

The City Beautiful movement believed that great buildings, open spaces, beautiful parks, cultural attractions, and so on would raise the social and moral virtues of its residents and also attract residents back to the City.



George Washington



Charles Dickens

The City Beautiful movement wasn't just about architecture. It had a political and social agenda. By 1900 our cities had seen explosive growth, not just in population, but also in crime, poverty, and all kinds of social ills. The City Beautiful movement believed that a beautiful city could be an uplifting experience — that great buildings, open spaces, beautiful parks, cultural attractions, and so on would raise the social and moral virtues of its residents and also attract residents back to the City.



The McMillan Plan of 1901 for Washington, D.C.

The result of their effort was the McMillan Plan, the "1901 Plan for Washington," whose goal was to finally make Washington, D.C. the magnificent city envisioned by L'Enfant. The National Mall would be restored and lined with museums. The railroad tracks and train station would be removed (and so Union Station was created). The swamp lands of

the Potomac would be reclaimed. A memorial would be created to honor President Abraham Lincoln, and another memorial would be placed at the Tidal Basin, which had just been reclaimed.

So now the site — the land — was ready for something to happen.

ENTER THE ADVOCATES, AGAIN

Eliza Scidmore had been writing to just about anyone who could read since 1885, promoting the idea of planting the Japanese cherry trees. She said they listened politely, but nothing happened.

In 1902, David Fairchild traveled to Japan, where he learned about the wide variety of Japanese cherry trees. He had some sent to the U.S., but the Agriculture Department put them in their garden in

Chico, California, where they died in the summer sun. The next year Fairchild shipped some to Washington, D.C. In 1905, he and his wife purchased a home in Chevy Chase, in part, he wrote, so he would have a place to plant the flowering Japanese cherry trees.

Fairchild said it was all an experiment in those days. And it worked. Not only did his trees thrive, but he also started getting trees for his neighbors, and soon they were lining the streets of Chevy Chase. Then he began to donate cherry trees to schools in Washington D.C., one per school, on Arbor Day. At one Arbor Day ceremony in 1908, he suggested that the new Speedway (what is called Potomac Drive today) would be an ideal place for the trees. Eliza Scidmore came that day, and now they had a common cause.



"In the Woods," David Fairchild's home in Chevy Chase, MD



David Fairchild in his Washington, D.C. office

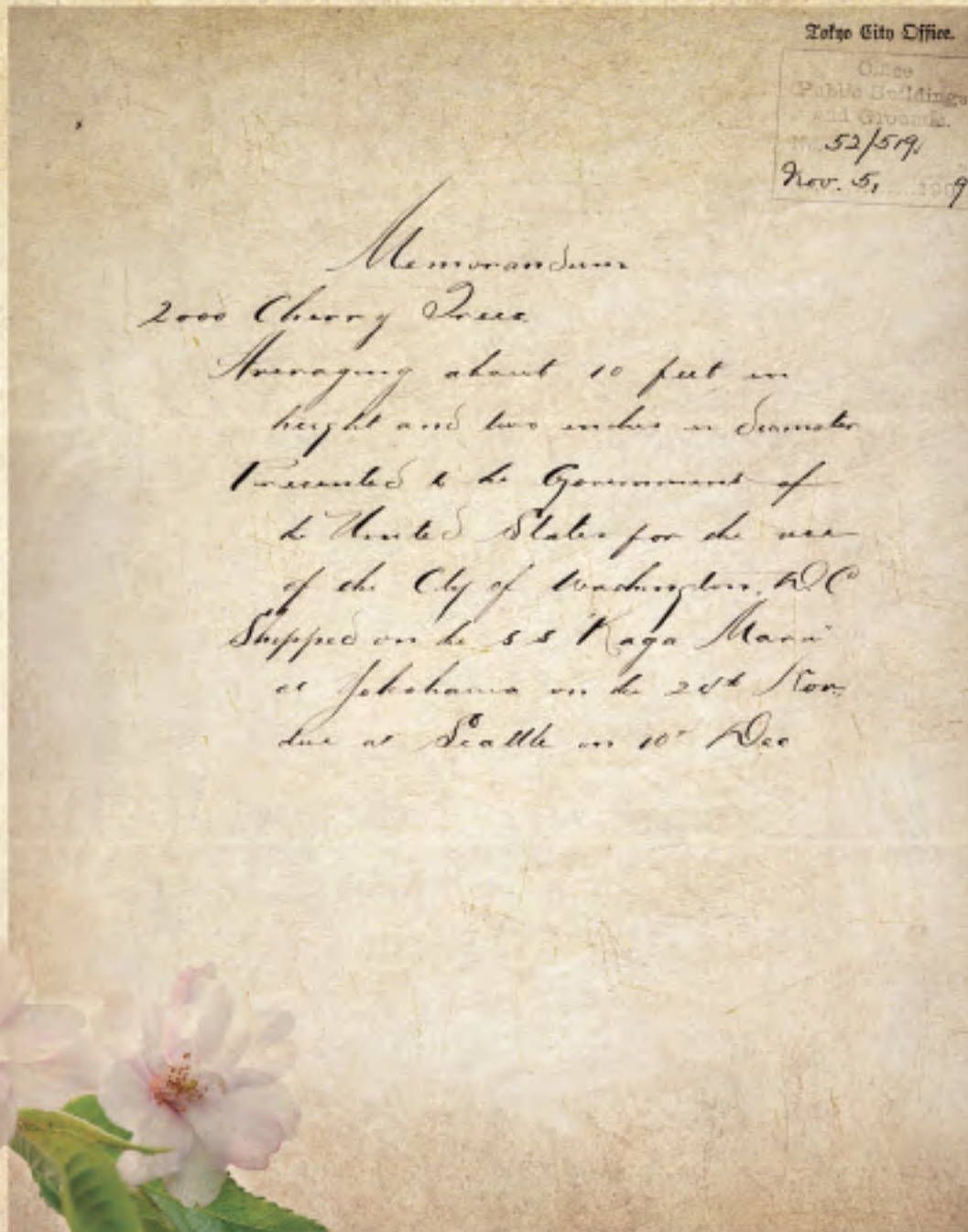


One of four photographs of Japanese cherry trees sent by David Fairchild to Helen Herron Taft

Memorandum from Tokyo City Office describing 2000 cherry trees.

"Memorandum

2000 Cherry Trees, Averaging about 10 feet in height and two inches in diameter Presented to the Government of the United States for the use of the City of Washington, D.C. Shipped on the SS Kaga Maru at Yokohama on the 24th Nov due at Seattle on 10th Dec."



The next year, on March 4, 1909, Nellie Taft became First Lady of the United States. Her biographer says that she organized two dinner parties for members of Congress, but soon became bored. She wanted to make a larger mark.

On April 1, the idea came to her. She decided that she wanted to create a public area in Washington where everyone could enjoy the outdoors. She thought of the new Speedway area (Potomac Park). She got in her car and drove there herself, and by afternoon she had put the plan in motion. She would build a band stand, and there would be outdoor public concerts.

On April 5, she received a letter from Eliza Scidmore, who suggested that Japanese cherry trees be planted there. Nellie wrote back just two days later, on April 7, and said "I have taken the matter up and am promised the trees."

Dr. Takamine, who was visiting Washington with the Japanese Consul General in New York, Kokichi Mizuno, soon heard about this, and the next day he asked whether Mrs. Taft would accept a gift of 2,000 trees from Japan. Two days later, on April 10, Mrs. Taft replied that she would. Eliza Scidmore was overwhelmed. She had been conducting a fund-raising campaign at the time aimed at planting just 100 trees every year, and now there would be 2,000 — just like that.

Consul General Mizuno suggested that the gift should be put into official channels. But who should officially make the gift? In Japan, it was decided that the trees would officially be given from one capital city to the other, from Tokyo to Washington, D.C., as a gift of friendship.



In 1897, Congress passed a bill establishing the area of the Tidal Basin as a public park.

January 7, 1910: Upon their arrival, the flowering cherry trees were inspected by the Entomologists and Pathologists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture at the Garden Storehouse on the Washington Monument Grounds.



THE SHIPMENTS

The trees arrived in Washington the next year, in January 1910. Unfortunately, to everyone's shock, the trees were infested with at least 16 different kinds of insects and diseases. Although everyone feared a diplomatic incident, they had to be burned so the infestation would not spread.

But Dr. Takamine was not concerned. He again stepped forward and offered to arrange for a second shipment — this time not 2,000 — but 3,000 trees.

On February 2, 1912, Mayor Ozaki wrote to say that 3,020 trees were on their way to Washington, D.C.

The Japanese spent a lot of time trying to determine what was wrong with the previous shipment. They focused on the soil and the age of the trees. As a result, the new batch of trees was produced in new soil. The new shipment arrived in Seattle in early March 1912. The plant quarantine inspectors said that they had never seen a shipment "cleaner and freer from insect pests." The trees were then transferred to a refrigerated railway car and sent on to Washington, where they arrived on March 26.

Mrs. Taft couldn't wait. The very next day, March 27, 1912, she planted her tree.

Two years later Mrs. Taft published her autobiography. In it she wrote, "I watched the [trees] that were planted later with great interest, and they seem to be doing very well. But I wonder if any of them will ever attain the magnificent growth of the ancient and dearly loved trees of Japan."



Portrait of Helon Herron Taft (Nellie Taft, The First Lady of the United States)



Right: January 7, 1910: Japanese Cherry trees pruned and ready for heeling in.

Below: October 26, 1911: Wild cherry of Japan on which Japanese flowering cherry is grafted. Shows the excellent root system produced from the cutting.



Mayor Ozaki and his wife, Yei Theodora Ozaki



Ozaki paid a heavy price for his opposition to the right wing in Japan. He opposed Japan's increased military spending; he opposed the Japanese government's move to stifle political dissent; he opposed Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany; and he called for peace with the United States.

In October, 1909, an official letter from Tokyo Mayor, Yukio Ozaki, notified the Superintendent of the Public Buildings & Grounds Department in Washington, D.C. that the city of Tokyo intended to donate 2,000 cherry trees to the United States.

RECEIVED

Tokyo City Office

Office
Public Buildings
No. 11, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000

13th October

Superintendent of Public Buildings
& Grounds War Department
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir,

It gives me great pleasure to inform you that the Corporation of Tokyo, at a recent meeting of the Council, resolved to present two thousand Japanese Cherry trees to the Government of the United States for the use of the City of Washington, D.C. In pursuance of that resolution, I have the honor in the name of the City of Tokyo, to request your acceptance of our token of esteem & good-will.

Cherry trees are very extensively cultivated in this country and are the most admired of our flowering trees. There are several hundred different varieties, but

for the purpose of this shipment, two of the most representative kinds have been selected and I beg to assure you that it will remain to the citizens of Tokyo, a pleasing memory as well as a matter of civic pride to know that their small offering will be permitted to contribute to the adornment of the beautiful Capital of the Great Republic which they all admire.

The shipment will be made as per accompanying Memorandum and I trust the trees will arrive in good condition as every care has been taken in preparing them for the long journey. The trees should not be set out until the coming spring and you will know best how to keep them healthy in the meantime either at Seattle or Washington. With sentiments of respect & high consideration, I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

Yukio Ozaki
Mayor of Tokyo

January 7, 1910: U.S. Propagating Gardens, Washington, D.C. Japanese cherry trees as they were received from Japan.



January 6 1910: U.S. Propagating Gardens, Washington, D.C. House in which flowering cherries from Japan were stored until they could be inspected and planting in the spring.



桜



Utagawa Hiroshige (1842?-1894) Woodblock print triptych depicting cherry blossoms in full bloom along the Sumida River.



Planting Plan of Cherry Trees, East Potomac Park, date?



Aerial view of the Tidal Basin and East Potomac Park



The Tidal Basin with its rows of cherry trees is a favorite spot for artists



Aerial view of the National Mall and Memorial Parks



Cherry tree planting

Telegram from the U.S. State Department to the U.S. Embassy in Japan regarding the destruction of the trees.

TELEGRAM SENT.

Department of State, + Pe

Washington, January 28²⁸, 1910. 1pm
Bemby

Amenbassy,
Tokyo.

It has been found necessary to destroy all the cherry trees presented by the municipality of Tokyo for the use of this city. The reports of several experts of the Department of Agriculture show the trees to be badly infested with the root gall worm, certain fungous diseases, and insect pests, some hitherto unknown in this country, whose introduction might result in future in enormous detriment to trees and agriculture generally.

On behalf of this Government and the authorities of the District I have expressed to the Japanese Ambassador keen regret at this ~~occurrence~~ ^{loss}, in the case of so very handsome a gift and one so greatly appreciated by the authorities and people of Washington. The President is also extremely regretful and Mrs. Taft particularly expressed real sorrow.

You will make explanation in the above sense to the mayor and municipality of Tokyo and mention the matter to the Foreign Office. ^{Since} ~~It~~ would seem advisable that the matter be ^{generally understood} ~~recepted in the press~~ in its true light.

Filed by *W. G. J.*
by operator *225 P. M. Jan 28, 1910* *Stacy*



Diseased Japanese cherry trees are destroyed



The diseased trees are burned



What happened afterward

PART THREE

WHAT HAPPENED AFTERWARD

Glenn Brown stayed at the AIA until 1913 and then returned to private practice. He retired in 1925. Later, the Washington chapter of the AIA established the Glenn Brown Award “to honor an individual who has raised public awareness of architecture and its benefits to society, and who has improved the quality of life in Washington, D.C.”

David Fairchild retired to Miami, to an eight-acre compound he called the “Kampong.” He continued to scour the world for tropical plants to place in his “Kampong,” which today is the Fairchild Tropical Botanical Garden. During his years as a plant explorer, Fairchild is credited with having introduced more than 200,000 species and varieties of plants into the United States, including nectarines and mangoes, dates and pistachios, and, of course, the Japanese flowering cherry trees.

What about Eliza Scidmore, the woman who would not give up? She continued to travel the world and write about it. She was in Geneva at the League of Nations in 1928, when she expired at the age of 72. Her remains were taken to her beloved Japan, where she was buried in the Foreigners Cemetery in Yokohama. Today, there are four cherry trees near her grave.

One of the most famous and respected Japanese in America, Dr. Jokichi Takamine, continued to do everything that he could to promote better understanding between the land of his birth and the land that he loved, which afforded him great success. In addition to founding the



Dr. Jokichi Takamine

Nippon Club, he was one of the founders of the Japan Society of New York and the Japanese American Association of New York. He continued his legacy of science and innovation and became the first president of the pharmaceutical company Sankyo Seiyaku, known today as Daiichi Sankyo. For more than a century, the impact of his discoveries has helped millions of patients all over the world. He died in 1922 at the age of 67, and is buried in New York.

One month after the tree planting, Nellie Taft suffered a stroke. Nellie always wanted her husband to be President, and she had achieved her dream. But as Taft's first term came to an end, Teddy Roosevelt turned against him, and the Republican Party — and the Republican vote — split. Taft lost. He and Nellie then went to Yale, where he taught constitutional law.

In 1921, Taft got his dream wish and was named Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. That brought Nellie and him back to Washington, where for years she enjoyed taking family and friends down to the Tidal Basin to see "her trees."

Taft died in 1930 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Nellie joined him there 13 years later, just one month after the Jefferson Memorial was dedicated, and the scene at the Tidal Basin became complete.

And finally, Mayor Yukio Ozaki. From the 1920s onward, Ozaki paid a heavy price for his opposition to the right-wing in Japan. He opposed Japan's



Taka-Diastase, part of Dr. Takamine's legacy of pharmaceutical innovation



Mayor Ozaki touring the Tidal Basin during a visit to Washington, D.C. in 1931 with his two daughters.

increased military spending; he opposed the Japanese government's move to stifle political dissent; he opposed Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany; and he called for peace with the United States. He told the New York Times in 1933 that he thought he might be assassinated; and indeed people did try to kill him — a number of times. During the war he was watched constantly and was arrested for allegedly insulting the Emperor.

In 1945 the war was over and Ozaki continued to be elected to The National Diet of Japan, Japan's

legislature. By the end of his political career he had set a record for Japan that has never been broken. He was elected to Japan's very first Parliament in 1890, where he served continuously for 63 years. He was called the god of constitutional government.

Interestingly, in Ozaki's autobiography, when he talks about his time as Mayor of Tokyo, he never mentions the gift of the trees. Ozaki came to Washington, D.C. in 1910, a year after he offered the trees, and again in 1919 and 1931, but he never wrote about the trees. So why is that? One can only

speculate. Ozaki's autobiography is an intensely political document. His primary concern was always establishing democracy and constitutional government, and trying to prevent the slide to military government and war. Compared to that, how important can trees be, as beautiful as they are?

But then something happened that changed him. In 1950, Ozaki was invited to the United States. He was 90 years old and in failing health, but he decided to go. It was the first time he traveled overseas by airplane. When he arrived in Washington in June 1950, he was invited to Congress. It was only

Chair read out a proclamation praising Ozaki for the gift of the trees, the Senators from the 48 states came up, one by one, to thank him and shake his hand.

Perhaps, when it came from his peers and when it came from fellow political leaders, he finally understood what the trees meant to everyone in America.

Ozaki returned home to Japan, and on October 6, 1954 he died in his sleep, at the age of 95.

And as the Chair read out a proclamation praising Ozaki for the gift of the trees, the Senators from the 48 states came up, one by one, to thank him and shake his hand.

five years after the war ended, and here he was, in the city that had led a world war against his country, and which now was the capital of the free world. On the last page of his autobiography, for the first time, Ozaki talks about the trees. He describes his trip to Washington and the welcome he received.

In what seems to be something unprecedented, Ozaki was invited to sit on the floor of the United States Senate, not in a special gallery seat upstairs, but on the floor, among the Senators. And as the

There's one more "whatever happened to" question? In 1912 there was no Jefferson Memorial. It wasn't completed until 1943, 31 years later.

So what was the Tidal Basin used for? What did the cherry trees look at every day? It was Washington's own little beach. For years, that's where Washingtonians went swimming.

Now, the 1901 McMillan Commission report said that there should be a monument at the Tidal Basin, either to one distinguished American or to a group

of Americans. So in 1925, there was a competition to design a Theodore Roosevelt Memorial, which would be placed right there at the Tidal Basin.

They picked the winning design, but the Congress never appropriated the funds to build it. And then seven years later, in 1932, Teddy's cousin Franklin

was elected President. Unfortunately for Teddy, Franklin was a Democrat, and he thought the honor at the Tidal Basin ought to go to the founder of the Democratic Party, and the author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson.



The Jefferson Memorial at bloom time



Dedication of the Japanese lantern, 1954. The lantern is lit once a year during the National Cherry Blossom Festival



Japanese ambassador and his daughter at the Lantern Lighting Ceremony, 1954



His Excellency Roichiro Asakai, Ambassador of Japan, and Noriko Ikida, daughter of the Prime Minister of Japan, 1961



First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson plants a cherry tree, 1965



The meaning of the trees

PART FOUR

THE MEANING OF THE TREES

What do the trees mean for us today?

First, of course, the blossoms remind us of their origin — Japan. They were given to us as a gesture of friendship, as an act of soft power. We remember that, and every year we light the Japanese lantern at the Tidal Basin. The two-week National Cherry Blossom Festival celebrates not just the arrival of spring but also our ties and friendship with Japan. Our great national institutions — the Smithsonian, the National Geographic Society, the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress and others — join with us and use the time of the Festival to highlight our ties to Japan. The Japan-America Society puts on the largest annual Japanese festival in the world, outside Japan.

I sometimes think that our Japanese friends don't fully understand how much the trees mean to our nation and to us personally here in Washington, D.C. It's more than just looking at the beautiful trees. Every year the capital of the United States of America celebrates our friendship with Japan through our National Cherry Blossom Festival, and that celebration extends far beyond the Tidal Basin. It's like an annual World's Fair with only one country — Japan. We don't do that for anyone else.

There's another meaning for us. In Japan, the blossoms are seen as a metaphor for the ephemeral, the fragile and often tragic nature of life. The cherry blossoms are beautiful but short-lived, and as they fall, they give rise to great sentiment.

In a Japanese movie, a falling blossom can mean that someone, a young warrior or a young woman, has died. Here in Washington, we share the Japanese admiration for the flower's beauty, but we don't attach the same philosophical and mystical meaning to them. To us, the blossoms are not a symbol of the fragile nature of life, and their falling is not a metaphor for death. They are a symbol of life — of rebirth — and renewal.



View of the Tidal Basin in Springtime



The blossoms are what spring is all about. In a city whose other symbols are made of marble and bronze, this symbol of Washington, D.C. is alive. As someone said, it's not springtime in America until the cherry blossoms bloom in Washington.

The blossoms mean that spring is finally here. The flowers are blooming, the weather is warming up, and the world seems new again. Like animals coming out of hibernation, we get outside, we start to move around, and once again we appreciate the beauty of this city. Our community comes alive.

The blossoms come back to us every year, no matter what the state of our economy, no matter whether our nation is at peace or war. No matter whether you're rich or poor, no matter what happiness or tragedy you might have had in your personal life in the past year, no matter what language you speak, whether you're Japanese or American or from any other country, the staggering beauty of the blossoms is there for everyone to admire and share. The blossoms belong to all of us — they are universal.



Photographs of festival activities courtesy of the National Cherry Blossom Festival®

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR



Like many other people, I have long admired the beauty of the flowering Japanese cherry trees, and I knew the basic facts about Mayor Ozaki and how the trees came to Washington. But as I started to read about Japan's gift to America, I learned that there were many other people involved in making this happen, each for their own reasons — Eliza Scidmore, Dr Jokichi Takamine, David Fairchild, and Nellie Taft. As I studied more, that led to learning about the people who were instrumental in transforming the physical appearance of Washington at the beginning of the 20th century, creating the site where the trees were planted — the City Beautiful movement, Teddy Roosevelt, and even, in a way, Pierre L'Enfant.

Learning and telling the story of how the trees came to Washington — and it's a great story — made me realize that at the end of the day, history is about people — the dreams they hold and the things they do. By definition, planting a tree is an act of faith in the future, and what these people did a century ago is still with us today. We should all be grateful to them.

John Malott began his 31-year career in the United States Foreign Service, holding positions such as Ambassador to Malaysia, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Consul General in Osaka, and Director of the Office of Japanese Affairs. After leaving public service, he served as President of the World Affairs Council of Orange County (California) and later as President and CEO of the Japan-America Society of Washington D.C.







*"The cherry trees I sent abroad
With the hope of increasing the
radiance of their spring
Have blossomed elegantly."*