

**JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE**  
**48th JAACL National Convention**  
**National Council Meeting**  
Washington, D.C.  
July 7, 2017

**A RESOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN  
CITIZENS LEAGUE RELATING TO THE WAKAMATSU TEA AND SILK COLONY,  
THE FIRST JAPANESE COLONY IN NORTH AMERICA**

**WHEREAS**, on May 20, 1869, the steamship China landed in San Francisco carrying the first group of settlers from Japan to the United States. These settlers fled a bloody civil war in Japan, and intended to establish a permanent agricultural colony in California; and

**WHEREAS**, this group from Aizu Wakamatsu, led by John Henry Schell, traveled upriver by boat to Sacramento and overland by wagon to establish the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony on 640 acres at Gold Hill, near the historic gold rush town of Coloma in El Dorado County on June 8, 1869; and

**WHEREAS**, the colonists brought thousands of mulberry trees for silk farming, tea plants, bamboo roots, and many other Japanese agricultural products. They prospered at first, and participated in the 1870 San Francisco Horticultural Fair, displaying tea plants and plant oils; and

**WHEREAS**, in the early 1870's, the colony suffered numerous setbacks. The drought of 1871-72 exacerbated the water shortage and financial help from Japan never arrived. The remaining colonists sold off most of their belongings in order to survive. Some were able to return to Japan, and others moved elsewhere to find more gainful employment; and

**WHEREAS**, Okei Ito who remained behind, died in the spring of 1871 and is believed to be the first Japanese immigrant to die in this country; and

**WHEREAS**, in the ensuing years, the Wakamatsu Colony was lost and forgotten until after World War I, when a search was undertaken by several Japanese Americans from the Sacramento and Placer County areas, with the assistance of Henry Veerkamp, the son of the family that had befriended the Japanese settlers; and

**WHEREAS**, the State of California designated 1969 as the centennial year of Japanese immigration to the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, on June 7, 1969, then-Governor Ronald Reagan and Japan Consul General Seiichi Shima dedicated a state historical plaque designating the Wakamatsu Colony as California Registered Historical Landmark No. 815; and

**WHEREAS**, on October 9, 2009, the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places; and

**WHEREAS**, efforts to preserve the site of the Wakamatsu Colony are currently underway, thanks to a partnership coordinated by the American River Conservancy, the Japanese American Citizens League, the Veerkamp family, and many others in the neighboring communities; and

**WHEREAS**, preservation of the colony site will recognize the contributions of Japanese to the development of the agricultural industry of California, will acknowledge the historical achievements of the pioneer Veerkamp family, and will contribute to a better understanding of the legacies of the Native Americans who originally inhabited the Gold Hill region; and

**WHEREAS**, the State of California recognized May 20, 2007, as the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony Day and encouraged all members of the legislature and the governor to help educate all Californians about the Colony’s history in California; and

**WHEREAS**, planning is underway for the WakamatsuFest150! to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Wakamatsu Silk and Tea Farm Colony on June 6-9, 2019.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the National Council of the Japanese American Citizens League** that JACL acknowledges the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony as the first Japanese Colony in North America; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that JACL acknowledges the contributions of the Japanese colonists of the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony and their descendants in the development of agricultural industry in California; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that JACL encourages members to support and attend the WakamatsuFest150! event in 2019.

**Sponsored by:** Florin JACL – Sacramento Valley Chapter  
(JACL entity)

**Dated:** 5/5/17  
Month/Day/Year

**Approved by:** Josh Kaizuka  
Name (Please Print)

**Title:** Co-President

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ /s/

**Sponsored by:** Sacramento Chapter  
(JACL entity)

**Dated:** 5/5/17  
Month/Day/Year

**Approved by:** Janice Yamaoka Luszczak  
Name (Please Print)

**Title:** President

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ /s/  
Signature

**Please check one:**

**Fiscal Impact Statement attached**

**No Fiscal Impact** (meaning that the resolution does not call for any action that will be carried out by JACL staff, or incur any costs to JACL)