JAPANESE AMERICAN CITIZENS LEAGUE

48th JACL 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

2017 Resolution Form
For National Council Review
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 150th 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.
Please check one:

___ Fiscal Impact Statement attached

X 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)