

County of El Dorado

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CINDY KECK.....CLERK OF THE BOARD



February 26, 2007

Diane Matsuda
Executive Director
California Cultural and Historical Endowment
900 N Street #300
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Matsuda,

This week, the American River Conservancy (the "Conservancy") will submit a grant application to the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (the "Endowment") for funding to acquire 303 acres of ranch land owned by the Veerkamp family in western El Dorado County (about 40 miles due east of the State Capital).

The Conservancy has initiated an extensive capital campaign to raise the matching funds required by the Endowment. Through this capital campaign the Conservancy expects to raise the balance of necessary funding to complete the acquisition of these ranch lands as well as support the restoration of historic buildings and design and build an interpretive facility for the historic Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony established in 1869.

The Wakamatsu Colony is the first and most important Japanese pioneer site in California and North America. The Japanese colonists introduced traditional Japanese agriculture to El Dorado County and California. The Wakamatsu colonists participated in the San Francisco Horticultural Fair in 1870 and won an award for its silk production. The original farmhouse, barn and a grave site and headstone for a young Japanese girl (Okei Ito), and a state historical land mark plaque dedicated by Governor Reagan in 1969 are the only historical artifacts of the Wakamatsu Colony.

It is the vision of the Conservancy, the Veerkamp family, the Japanese-American Community and State Parks to resurrect a living-history, interpretive State Park facility recreating the Wakamatsu Colony at the peak of its existence. In addition, the project as outlined by a Grant Deed of Conservation Easement will provide for over 200 acres of wildlife habitat, the restoration of the Wakamatsu - Veerkamp homestead, a historic barn and dairy. The Conservation Easement also allows for the development of a new dairy and creamery with irrigated pasturelands on 60 acres that will continue the historic and productive use of these ranch lands.

As County Supervisor for District IV, the boundaries of which contain the Veerkamp Ranch and Wakamatsu site, I want to express my full support to the vision for the protection, restoration and interpretation of the Wakamatsu and Veerkamp family history of this site. It is our expectation that this facility will become a part of the County's farm trail program which highlights the broad range of agricultural production in El Dorado County.

Lastly, the Conservancy has an 18-year history of completing over 50 conservation projects in El Dorado County. The Conservancy provides education, conservation and stewardship programs to protect and conserve fisheries and wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, cultural heritage and recreational lands throughout El Dorado County. I know this agency has the experience and project completion skills necessary to meet all project and Endowment requirements.

Thank you for your review of this letter and your support of this very exciting El Dorado County project.

Sincerely,

**ORIGINAL SIGNED BY
SUPERVISOR BRIGGS**

Ron Briggs
Supervisor
El Dorado County, District IV

tlg/rvb

February 21, 2007

Diane Matsuda
Executive Director
California Cultural and Historical Endowment
900 N Street, #300
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Ms. Matsuda:

The Sacramento Japanese American Citizens League and the Sacramento Tohoku Shinwa Kai support the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (Endowment) grant application submitted by the American River Conservancy (Conservancy) to acquire 303 acres of the Veerkamp family land in El Dorado County. The Conservancy provides education and stewardship programs to protect and conserve scenic vistas, cultural heritage, and recreational lands in the foothills of the eastern Sacramento Valley. As the agency responsible for acquiring and protecting over 7,800 acres of land in El Dorado County, the Conservancy has demonstrated the administrative skills and experience to successfully fulfill all Endowment requirements.

The Conservancy's application meets the Endowment's legislative mandate to recognize and appreciate California's culture and history. Acquisition of the Veerkamp property will contribute to the preservation, interpretation, and understanding of California's cultural diversity. The thread of contribution to California's heritage is represented by the pioneering Veerkamp family to the state's significant agricultural industry and by the influence of Japanese Americans to California's economic and social strength.

The Veerkamp family pioneered the farming and dairy economy of El Dorado County. The Veerkamp heirs have agreed to sell the family property to the Conservancy. The Veerkamp property includes lands associated with almost 140 years of international relationship between Japan and California. The State of California recognized the historical significance of the Wakamatsu Silk and Tea Farm Colony as a State Historical Landmark in 1969 in celebration of the colony's centennial anniversary. The Wakamatsu colony was established in 1869 at Gold Hill on the Veerkamp property when a group of Japanese settlers arrived in California to escape a civil war waging in Japan. The colony successfully competed at the State Agricultural Fair by winning an award for its silk production. This was the first large-scale settlement of Japanese immigrants in mainland United States. The original farmhouse, a gravestone of a young Japanese girl (Okei), and a state landmark plaque are visual reminders of the colony's legacy.

Although the colony lasted only two years, the legacy of the colony continues to attract many students, scholars, and visitors from Japan. The story of the Wakamatsu colony has inspired residents of Aizu Wakamatsu to erect a replica of Okei's grave marker in Japan. A group of Japanese delegates, including the Mayor of Aizu Wakamatsu, intends to visit El Dorado County in October 2007. Because of private property ownership, access to the colony site is currently limited. Transfer of the property to the Conservancy will enhance public access in the future when the California State Parks Department participates in a program to interpret and promote the story of the Wakamatsu colony. The Marshall Gold Discovery State Park in Coloma is located only three miles from the Veerkamp property. One of the descendents of the colony married Carrie Wilson, an African American resident of Coloma. In October 2001 the Veerkamp family donated two historic artifacts, a short samurai sword and a large silk banner, to the State Park at Coloma to facilitate the interpretative history of the colony.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY
TOM FUJIMOTO

Tom Fujimoto, member
Wakamatsu Colony
Memorial Committee

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY
SALLY TAKEDA

Sally Takeda, member
Wakamatsu Colony
Memorial Committee

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY
PAUL ITO

Paul Ito, member
Tohoku Shinwa Kai

21 February 2007

Diane Matsuda
Executive Officer
California Cultural and Historical Endowment
900 N Street, #380
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Ms. Matsuda:

We are writing in support of a project proposed by the American River Conservancy, Coloma, for which a grant is being requested.

The Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony was the first important Japanese pioneering endeavor in California and, quite likely, North America. We base this on the historical archaeological work we were involved with in 1993 that involved a water pipeline project constructed over lands on which the Colony was situated in the 19th century.

The manufacturing of silk from silkworms was an economic venture encouraged by the California legislature of the mid-1800s, particularly as an undertaking for women.

In addition to the historical aspect of the Japanese colony, the variety of educational opportunities that exist in the immediate vicinity of the Veerkamp Ranch (the location of the Tea and Silk colony) include prehistoric sites (Nissenan). Although off the Ranch one site in particular may be the site described as *Ekelepakan* by A.L. Kroeber in his Handbook of the Indians of California. This was a major site and the possibility of additional Native Californian sites and/or features on the Veerkamp Ranch seems a distinct possibility.

The village of Gold Hill developed adjacent to the Veerkamp Ranch and the Tea and Silk Colony during the Gold Rush and remnants of hydraulic gold mining can be found in the area. Within a very short period of time ditches were constructed for placer and hydraulic mining ; competition for ditch water increased as agriculture quickly developed and some of that competition seems to have contributed to the difficulties experienced by the Japanese in their agricultural efforts.

As an opportunity for educating young people about the diversity of California's history and difficulties experienced by many people we cannot think of a more significant and historically important site.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY
SUSAN LINDSTROM, Ph.D.

Susan Lindstrom, Ph.D.
Archaeologist and Historian

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY
JEAN STARNES

Jean Starnes
Archaeologist (Retired)