



A Brief History of Wakamatsu Farm

About two miles South of the California gold discovery site in Coloma, the first Japanese settlers in North America arrived at Wakamatsu Farm on June 8, 1869. The American River Conservancy (ARC) purchased the 272-acre historic location of the *Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony* in November 2010. ARC now invites the world to share the abundant historical, cultural, natural, and agricultural resources available at landmark Wakamatsu Farm during public events, tours, and private bookings.

Located 50 miles from downtown Sacramento, Wakamatsu Farm is California Registered Historical Landmark #815. The Farm is listed on the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance. Recognized as the “Japanese American Plymouth Rock,” it holds three distinctive first honors in the Japanese American immigration story:

- Site of the first Japanese colony in America
- Birthplace of the first birthright Japanese American citizen
- Resting place of the first Japanese immigrant and woman who died and remains buried on American soil

Young Okei Ito arrived at the Farm with at least 22 farmers, carpenters, samurai, and others to establish their tea and silk farm. When she died at the age of 19 in 1871, she became the first Japanese pioneer to lose her life pursuing her own unique version of the American dream. Her grave is so vital to people of Japanese descent that visitors have been paying their respects to “Okei-san” for nearly a century. Many will admit they were trespassing at the time because the farm was private property, as it remains today.

To widely welcome the world, ARC hosted an international sesquicentennial festival in June 2019 celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Wakamatsu Colonists’ arrival date. The event commemorated 150 years of Japanese American immigration beginning at the Farm in 1869. A similar event 50 years prior during June 1965 recognized the Japanese American centennial. Through public events and programs, ARC continues inviting the world to Wakamatsu Farm as a community place to experience natural resources, sustainable agriculture, and cultural history.

While the Japanese farmers succeeded for merely a few years, their immigration story holds the greatest fascination for visitors, historians, artists, educators, writers, performers, film-makers, and the like. But the history of the Farm began long before the Colonists’ arrival. The enchanting Gold Hill region was home to countless generations of native peoples who were devastated by the 1849 Gold Rush. During the 1850’s, the Farm’s fertile soils proved prosperous for the Graner and Veerkamp pioneer families. After successfully farming the land for over 140 years, the Veerkamp family sold the Wakamatsu Farm property for fair market value to ARC. Since then, ARC continues tirelessly pursuing sustainable ways to nurture a thriving destination farm where private and public occasions entice visitors to cherish Northern California’s foothills communities.

Located in the American River watershed, Wakamatsu Farm is a stunning agricultural and natural landscape with a mosaic of springs, streams, wetlands, and oak woodlands. Picturesque ponds and scenic natural features attract migratory species while sustaining year-round wildlife. As a land trust and conservation non-profit organization, ARC is equally dedicated to preserving the natural, agricultural, and extraordinary cultural resources of the land in perpetuity. Wakamatsu Farm is ARC’s flagship property where the Conservancy’s three pillars of conservation, stewardship, and education come alive and invite an international community that extends across American and to Japan.

ARC’s goal is to help the Farm achieve its highest modern potential while respecting its past, present, and future for generations to come. ARC leases 110 acres of crop land and livestock pasture to two independent farming operations, *Free Hand Farm* and *FogDog Farm*. As a working farm with resident farmers, the site is private property. Unscheduled visits are not appropriate. While this heritage site is not a public park, visitors are welcome year-round during scheduled events, tours, and programs found at www.ARConservancy.org/events. People of all ages enjoy tours, events, field trips, volunteer programs, gardens, native plant nursery, wheelchair-accessible lake loop trail, tea house, and much more. Private tours and events are arranged by contacting ARC at wakamatsu@ARConservancy.org or 530-621-1224. Discover more about Wakamatsu Farm at www.ARConservancy.org/wakamatsu.

