

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 44

RESOLUTION CHAPTER 51

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 44—Relative to the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day.

[Filed with Secretary of State June 1, 2007.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SCR 44, Cox. The Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day.

This measure would recognize May 20, 2007, as Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day in the State of California.

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; 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 1870s, however, the colony suffered numerous setbacks. The drought of 1871–72 exacerbated the water shortage and financial help from Japan never arrived; and

WHEREAS, 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, Matsunosuke Sakurai, Kuninosuke Masumizu, and Okei Ito remained behind at the colony site. They were befriended and employed by the Francis Veerkamp family; and

WHEREAS, Matsunosuke Sakurai stayed with the Veerkamps until his death on February 25, 1901, and is believed to be buried at the Vineyard Cemetery at Coloma, the historical site of Marshall's gold discovery a few miles from Gold Hill; and

WHEREAS, Okei, the Schnell's nursemaid, died in the spring of 1871, and was buried on the knoll of the hill which she reputedly liked to climb to watch the sunset and look towards her homeland. A marble headstone now marks her grave, inscribed in both English and Japanese, "In memory of Okei, Died 1871, Age 19 Years, A Japanese Girl"; 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; and

WHEREAS, These historians first interviewed 75-year old Henry Veerkamp, the son of the pioneer family that befriended the Japanese colonists. Mr. Veerkamp shared many memories of the Wakamatsu Colony, and was able to disclose the location of the original colony and Okei's grave; 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 Regan and Japan Consul General Seiichi Shima dedicated a state historical plaque designating the Wakamatsu Colony as California Registered Historical Landmark No. 815; 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; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate of the State of California, the Assembly thereof concurring, That the California Legislature recognize May 20, 2007, as Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Day in the State of California; and be it further

Resolved, That the California Legislature encourages all Members of the Legislature to help educate Californians about the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony's history in California; and be it further

Resolved, That the Secretary of the Senate transmit copies of this resolution to the author for appropriate distribution.