



Living Here - History

Comments (75) | Recommend (19) | Print

Sacramentan who saved Japanese family farms in 1942 will be honored

By Stephen Magagnini
smagagnini@sacbee.com



Published: Saturday, Feb. 13, 2010 - 12:00 am | Page 1B
Last Modified: Saturday, Feb. 13, 2010 - 5:25 pm

One crisp, bright morning last week, two old friends gazed lovingly at a scruffy field in south Sacramento.

A few gnarled walnut trees and a thick pine are all that's left of Marielle Tsukamoto's lush family farm in what was old Florin town.

Once filled with roses, persimmons, strawberries and sweet flame Tokay grapes, the field is Tsukamoto's monument to all that's good about the human spirit.

That spirit's name is Bob Fletcher, a lanky 6-footer who stepped up to save three Japanese family farms – including this one – when 3,000 of Japanese descent were sent to

SLIDESHOW



RANDALL BENTON / rbenton@sacbee.com

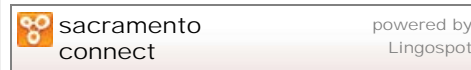
Marielle Tsukamoto greets Bob Fletcher at his home in Sacramento. Fletcher stepped up to save three Japanese family farms when 3,000 Sacramentans of Japanese descent were sent to internment camps in May 1942.

POPULAR COMMENT

"When you think about it, this rare and amazing human being is a REAL hero."

-- marknem

Leave your comment



Jardine: Misuse of tiny McClatchy Park stinks



Everything Data Plan. Only \$69.99 a month. Only from Sprint.

Stories | Like | Share | SacConnect | Search | Chat with your friends

Most were U.S. citizens. After the Japanese bombing of [Pearl Harbor](#) on Dec. 7, 1941, many lost everything – their homes, farms, jobs, dignity and pride in being Americans.

Fewer than 200 came back to Sacramento, and Florin became a ghost town.

But Fletcher, an agricultural inspector and University of California, Davis, grad, couldn't stand to see their hard work go to waste.



The Bee's 2010 Golf Guide
Bill Bradley, 2 weeks ago



Sacramento fertile ground for bonsai lovers - Gardening - sacbee.com
Debbie Arrington, 5 days, 8 hours ago

Saviors as tornado hit: A table, a wall, a freezer
HOLBROOK MOHR and JAY REEVES, 2 weeks, 3 days ago



Obama loosens throwing arm for ceremonial pitch
KXTV - News Local, 1 month, 1 week ago



Clinton, officials race to speed Haiti relief aid
KXTV - News Local, 3 months, 3 weeks ago

Marysville's small

"I did know a few of them pretty well and never did agree with the evacuation," said Fletcher, now 98. "They were the same as anybody else. It was obvious they had nothing to do with Pearl Harbor."

So he quit his job and worked 90 acres belonging to the Tsukamotos, Nittas and Okamotos until they came home from camp in 1945.

Next Saturday – 68 years and one day after President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered the U.S. Army to round up all suspected "enemy aliens" – Fletcher will be honored at the Florin Japanese American Citizens League's "Time of Remembrance" ceremony for his courage.

"I don't know about courage – it took a devil of a lot of work," said Fletcher, who harvested their crops, paid their taxes and mortgages, and split the profits.

"I don't take any credit for what I did," said Fletcher, who still lives half a mile south of the farm with his wife, Teresa.

But Tsukamoto – whose dad, Al Tsukamoto, asked Fletcher to take over his farm – said, "Bob was taking a real risk."

More than 2,400 Americans were killed in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Fletcher was called a "Jap lover" and was nearly hit by a bullet fired into Tsukamoto's barn.

"When my dad asked about the bullet hole after the war, Bob said it was a hunting accident, but my dad said, 'You don't shoot pheasants with a .22,' " Marielle Tsukamoto said.

"We don't want Japs back here–EVER," read one sign posted at a local business.

At the time, The Bee editorialized: "Californians never can feel reasonably secure until all enemy aliens – and fifth column citizens too – are put in a place and surrounded with conditions that will make it utterly impossible for them to serve their superiors. ...

"Many who are innocent of any intent of wrongdoing or who even may be loyal to the United States will be compelled to face hardship and sacrifice."

Before leaving for the camps, one woman sold her six-room boarding house for \$149, Tsukamoto recalled. A friend sold the family car for \$5. Families tied up their dogs at the train station in Elk Grove. "I never saw Uppy again," Tsukamoto said of the family dog.

Tsukamoto was 4 years old when her family was sent to a camp in Jerome, Ark.

Japanese farmers had lived in Florin since the 1890s. Tsukamoto said her grandfather left Japan after his parents died because he was the ninth brother in a society where the first brother got everything, and "number nine was less than nothing."

Her grandparents loved the United States, Tsukamoto said. "After Pearl Harbor was bombed, my grandmother said, 'Japan's going to lose.' "

The day the family left the farm, her grandmother burst into tears.

"She wasn't sure she'd come back alive and she'd never see her [rose garden](#) again," Tsukamoto recalled. "I took her hand and said in Japanese, 'It will be OK, you'll see your garden again.' "

Tsukamoto told Fletcher that she'll never forget the look of joy on her grandmother's face "when she came back and saw the roses were still alive."

Fletcher said several other Sacramentans stepped up to save Japanese farms.

"But Bob, you didn't take advantage of us," Tsukamoto replied. "The story of people like you hasn't been told enough – otherwise, people think everybody was against us."



Buddhist congregation prays for new year
AppealDemocrat, 4 months,
1 week ago

MOST VIEWED

BLOG POSTS

State budget woes grow deeper as rosy projections come up short

FPPC launches probe of Dan Waters' permitting job

Region's commercial real estate market on knife's edge

Sacramento sheriff's candidate briefly subjected to restraining order in '99

Dan Walters: California's quandary Greek-like?

Marcos Breton: Stuck-up Davis takes itself down a few pegs



QUICK JOB SEARCH

Enter Keyword(s): Enter a City:

Select a State: California
Select a Category: All Job Categories

Advanced Job Search | Search by Category

SACRAMENTO BEE TOP JOBS »

MAINTENANCE WORKER ...

PLANT MECHANIC/WELDER PLACER ...

View All Top Jobs

SACBEE MARKETPLACE

Featured Categories

Legal Worship
Education Health View all ▶

Keywords:

Category: Search Within:
Select Category: 15 miles

Search

Advanced Search

Tsukamoto, president of the Florin JACL, said the 75-year-old civil rights organization has learned from Fletcher's example, helping people of all races in need. Fletcher donated land for a Florin community center used by the JACL.

Today, the roses are long gone, and the family stopped raising Tokays in the 1950s because they couldn't compete with Lodi's grape industry.

Tsukamoto finally is trying to sell the farm, which sits in an industrial zone. "It's about time," Fletcher joked, then observed wistfully, "That big [pine tree's](#) grown up a lot."

WHAT'S NEXT

Bob Fletcher will be honored Feb. 20 at the Secretary of State Auditorium, 1500 11th St. The event begins at 1 p.m., doors open at 12:15 p.m.; free parking is across the street. For more information, call (916) 685-6747.

© Copyright The Sacramento Bee. All rights reserved.



Call The Bee's Stephen Magagnini, (916) 321-1072. Bee researcher Sheila A. Kern contributed to this report.

Hide comments on sacbee.com

About Comments

Reader comments on Sacbee.com are the opinions of the writer, not The Sacramento Bee. If you see an objectionable comment, click the "report abuse" button below it. We will delete comments containing inappropriate links, obscenities, hate speech, and personal attacks. Flagrant or repeat violators will be banned. [See more about comments here.](#)

POWERED BY Pluck

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Login](#) | [Register](#)

Comments: 75 Showing: Newest first



TeriDillon wrote on 02/17/2010 06:20:08 PM:

What a great story! It is wonderful to see these stories and to know that brave people have done the right thing even when it was difficult to do. Mr. Fletcher is a true hero.

This was a shameful time in our history. You know, I never even heard about this until I was an adult. It was not taught in school. It is sad to me to know that there is still people who would make this same mistake all over again.

Anyway, I celebrate Mr. Fletcher and those like him. These are the true American heroes!

 [Recommend \(2\)](#)

 [Report abuse](#)



[neltharion](#) wrote on 02/16/2010 01:09:22 PM:

Replying to fsteph (02/13/2010 04:32:06 PM):
"You're misinformed csr4452. Check historical events before you post."

Actually he's not misinformed. Japanese Americans did fight in the war for the U.S. Also second, third, and fourth generation Citizens were interned only because of their race. It is you that needs to check your historical events before you post.

 [Recommend \(3\)](#)

 [Report abuse](#)



[MarkCamp](#) wrote on 02/14/2010 09:01:09 PM:

A picture of the lot would have been nice.

 [Recommend \(0\)](#)

 [Report abuse](#)



[wyoilla](#) wrote on 02/14/2010 02:22:28 PM:

I am so proud of Bob and Teresa Fletcher. I know them both, and have admired them for years. They are still giving so much to the Florin community. They are quiet, modest people who never look for the limelight. I am so pleased they are being honored.

 [Recommend \(3\)](#)

 [Report abuse](#)



[all5x](#) wrote on 02/14/2010 00:48:56 AM:

It does us no good to stand in judgement of the actions taken in the past. It was a different place and time. We should learn from the past and use that knowledge in the future.

 [Recommend \(2\)](#)

 [Report abuse](#)



[giron](#) wrote on 02/13/2010 09:53:28 PM:

We Americans should start thinking as Americans and not where our ancestors came from. The English and the French got us into two WW II. The English and the French are the cause of WW II after what they did to the Germans at the end of WW I. The English can't win a war anymore without our help. We need to start thinking as Americans all of us and not where our ancestors are from. Look into our history we turned our backs on the Americans on the Philippines at the beginning of WW II to help Churchill and Stalin. Americans first from now on. All of us.

 [Recommend \(1\)](#)

 [Report abuse](#)





[Brandon_Abell](#) wrote on 02/13/2010 09:18:13 PM:

@Kensc1:

What does "this president" have to do with this story? Keep your

mindless politics out of this. You are not a patriot and not even an real American. Crawl back into that tiny little trailer park cave of yours with your tinfoil hat firmly attached and wait for your imaginary black helicopters to come collect you.

 [Recommend \(1\)](#)  [Report abuse](#)



[sbadger](#) wrote on 02/13/2010 08:45:30 PM:

Mr. Fletcher represents what is good in America.

The Carmichael Patriot types represent a coward? Ignorance? Stupidity? Someone that hides behind something, like an American flag? never mind, they will never be like Mr. Fletcher.



 [Recommend \(1\)](#)  [Report abuse](#)



[woodlander95](#) wrote on 02/13/2010 08:08:38 PM:

continuing my last post:

Italian citizen of Latin American counties were sent to the US for internment. We must understand the full extent of internments to make sure nothing like it ever happens again.

 [Recommend \(0\)](#)  [Report abuse](#)



[woodlander95](#) wrote on 02/13/2010 08:06:46 PM:

Replying to jasisrad (02/13/2010 05:39:09 PM):
"It's amazing to me how misguided nationalism can lead some to even attack a story like this. The political climate in the nation today is seen by many as black or white, and they then see history through their same distorted lens. Really?
Complaining about a story like this because it's not a story...":

The article should definitely be ran. However, people were commenting that it was only the Japanese that were sent to internment camps, which is incorrect. Japanese were the largest group. German Americans and Italian Americans were also sent to internment camps. Also, Japanese, German and Ita

 [Recommend \(1\)](#)  [Report abuse](#)

More comments on this story: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#)

[Jobs at Bee \(Hiring\)](#)

Positions Available in Bee Now Accepting Applications.
[Bee.searchworklistings.net](#)

[Gibbs Farm](#)

Infos including pictures for Gibbs Farm in Lake Manyara.
[www.goodearthtours.com](#)

[Sacramento Bee Jobs](#)

Now Hiring - Sacramento Bee! Make up to \$37 per hour.
[www.CandidHire.com](#)

Ads by Yahoo!

Contact Us

- [Site Feedback](#)
- [Corrections](#)
- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Bee Jobs](#)

Share Content

- [Share your pictures](#)
- [Share your videos](#)
- [News tips](#)

Advertise With Us

- [Place a classified ad](#)
- [Place a real estate ad](#)
- [Place a rental ad](#)
- [Place a newspaper ad](#)

Online Extras

- [Newsletters & Alerts](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)
- [Maps & Directions](#)

