

A Brief History of the Iowa - Yamanashi Friendship

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In August of 1959, an extremely destructive typhoon hit Japan. The prefecture (state) of Yamanashi, which is west of Tokyo and has Mt. Fuji on its eastern border, suffered the great damage as from the flood waters that came gushing out of the mountains which ring this state. In the village of Mukawa, 90 people died, 110 homes were destroyed and Hirasaki Junior High School was damaged from the flooding Ohmukawa River. In Nirasaki City, the flooding Kamanashigawa River damaged roads and the Junior high school. Throughout the state rice crops and its supporting soil were washed away, livestock died, and bridges were washed out.

Sergeant Richard Thomas of Iowa was stationed in the Pentagon in Washington D.C. at the time of the typhoon. He reacted strongly to the news of Yamanashi's plight since he had vacationed in the area when he was stationed in Tokyo and Fukuoka. He also had previously helped to form a sister-city relationship between Kofu, the capitol of Yamanashi and Des Moines in 1958; therefore, he knew government officials in Yamanashi personally.

When Sergeant Thomas heard about the typhoon's destruction, he cleared a farm aid proposal with Pentagon officials and then contacted the Iowa Department of Agriculture. Mr. Thomas was referred to Mr. Walter Goeppinger who was chairman of the Market Development Agency for Corn and Sorgum. Mr. Goeppinger had previously been working on Corn export promotion plans.

Governor Herschel Loveless gained the support of the federal "People to People" program and plans were made for the transportation of 35 head of "landrace" breeding hogs and 100,000 bushels of corn to be sent to Yamanashi by way of U.S. Air Force planes.

On January 20, 1960, hogs and grain arrived at Haneda Airport in Tokyo and were transported to a Sumiyoshi Breeding Station in Yamanashi on February 6, 1960. The breeding station was under the directorship of Takeyasu Minai.

At the same time as the "hog lift" operation was taking place, a delegation of Iowans including Representative Leonard Wolf from Waterloo, Rosco and Kay Marsden, and Albert Miller from Ogden arrived in Yamanashi on January 22. Congressman Leonard Wolf exchanged a message of friendship in front of the Prefectural office under the Japanese and American flags with Governor Hisashi Amano.

As a sign of the friendship that was generated by the "hog and grain lift" operation, Governor Amano visited Iowa from April 29 to May 3 of 1961. While in Iowa he visited a joint session of the legislature, joined the Drake University Relays Parade, and visited a family farm. During this visit, Governor Amano, acting on behalf of the people of Yamanashi, gave Iowans a great brass bell and a prefabricated bell house as a symbol of the prefecture's friendship with Iowa. This bell now stands just south of the capitol building.

As a result of this friendship hundreds of Yamanashi students have come to Iowa to study at our many fine colleges and universities. For many years, the Yamanashi students at Drake University would go to the capitol grounds on New Years Eve to ring the bell. In Japan, it is customary for nearly everyone to go to the shrine on New Years Eve, ring the bell, and pray for a good new year.

Over the past five years, the friendship between our two states has deepened. Over 150 Des Moines school children have participated in an exchange program with children from Yamanashi each staying with host families during their visits. Over 30 teachers from Iowa have taught in Yamanashi in English language schools, kindergartens and universities. Currently, Des Moines Area Community College has an affiliation with Yamanashi Gakuin University in Kofu, Yamanashi which has allowed seven faculty to teach and conduct research in their host institutions.

The friendship between our two states has deepened in another regard. At least three marriages have occurred between Iowans and citizens of Yamanashi. Two couples are residing in Yamanashi and one couple lives in Des Moines.