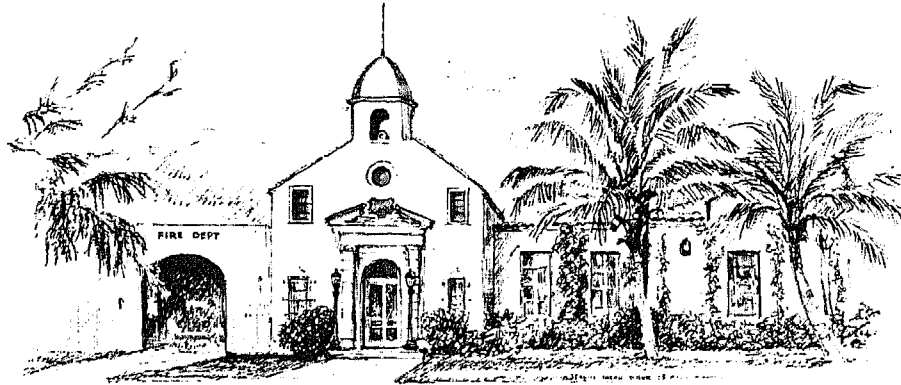


The Spanish River Papers

OCTOBER 1977

VOL. VI, No. 1



OLD CITY HALL, HOME OF BOCA RATON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Jeanne Nixon Baur, Artist

A report to the membership of
Boca Raton Historical Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 1113 • Boca Raton, Florida 33432

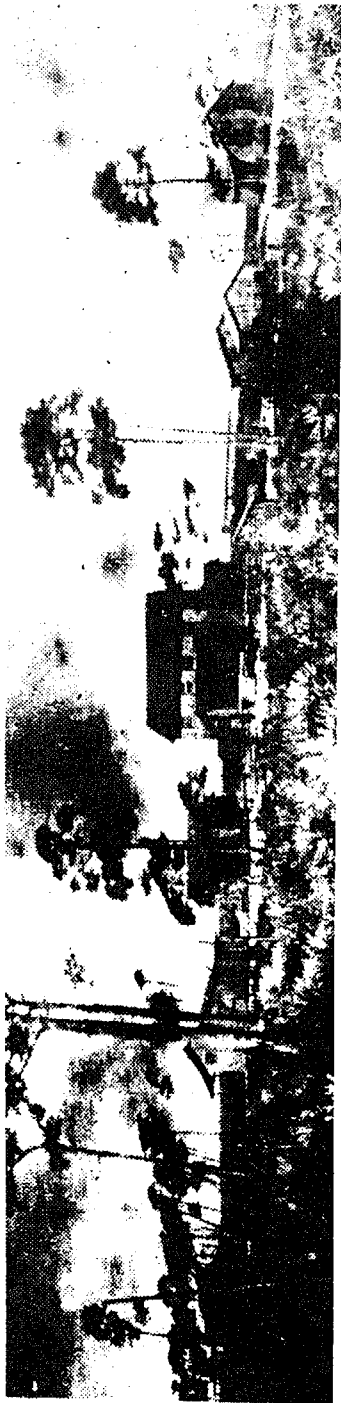
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"First Settlement in the Japanese Colony at Yamato, Dade County" photograph from the "Homeseeker," *The Florida Farmer*, November 1908. The house in the center of the photograph is believed to be that of Joseph Sakai.

YAMATO

Five years ago a *Miami Herald* article on the Japanese settlement at Yamato could be entitled "The Lost Colony." Today, with the opening of Morikami South County Park and the Morikami Museum, most residents of south Palm Beach County are aware of the general story of the Japanese farmers who arrived in Florida in the early years of this century. Led by Joseph Sakai the first small group of Japanese settled near today's North West 51st Street in northern Boca Raton on land provided by Henry M. Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway. Calling their settlement Yamato, or "large, peaceful country," an ancient name for Japan itself (contrary to local legend the name has no connection with the Japanese pronunciation of tomato) they began clearing land and planting pineapples. Although the Japanese farmers succeeded for a few years in the backbreaking task of "pine" growing, in 1908 a blight hit their fields, which, combined with the increasing competition from Cuban pineapples, forced an end to their communal existence. Some of the settlers returned to Japan, some left to work in other areas of the United States, but a few hearty souls remained in south Florida.

Generally their American neighbors in Florida welcomed the hardworking and thrifty Japanese, but in 1912-13 a wave of anti-Japanese sentiment was responsible for attempts to impose restrictions on their ownership of land. In 1941 the attack on Pearl Harbor was responsible for a new wave of anti-Japanese feelings stirred by rumors of espionage activities. Nonetheless, unlike the Japanese of California, the Yamato farmers were not settled in internment camps, although restrictions were placed on their movements.

One of the last survivors of Yamato, George S. Morikami, acquired a fortune in land through years of dedicated work. As a gift to his adopted country, Morikami donated the land for the South County Park that bears his name. On Sunday, 6 November 1977, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the Boca Raton Historical Society will honor the memory of the Japanese pioneer settlers with a tea at the Morikami Museum, 4000 Morikami Park Road, Delray Beach, Florida.

The materials used in this edition of *The Spanish River Papers* are from the archives of the Boca Raton Historical Society and the library of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County. For those wishing additional information on Yamato, two recent scholarly articles have appeared in *Tequesta*, the Journal of the South Florida Historical Society: George E. Pozzetta, "Foreign Colonies in South Florida, 1865-1910," XXXIV, 1974 and George E. Pozzetta and Harry A. Kersey, Jr., "Yamato Colony: A Japanese Presence in South Florida," XXVI, 1976.

Donald W. Curl, Editor

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This photograph, from the Boca Raton Historical Society archives, is unidentified except for the date "April 24, 1932." It is believed that the photograph was taken in front of the old Methodist Church (formerly the Community Church) and that the Japanese family shown is named Kobayashi. Mrs. Lillian Race Williams, in the black dress, is standing in the doorway at the far left. The two young boys, in short pants, standing in the front row on the right side of the picture are believed to be William and John Mitchell. The historical society would like to make its records as complete as possible. You can help by identifying others in the picture. From time to time the *Spanish River Papers* will publish other "unidentified" photographs and ask for the aid of the society's members in identification.

From Frank Chesebro's diary:

. . .25 December 1903

"A Jap here at Rickard's looking for a tract of land for a colony."

. . .27 December 1903

"Mr. Curry and the Jap leaving on the train."

* * * * *

From the *Tropical Sun*, 3 November 1906, "Industrious Japs Will Soon Incorporate" --

In the interest of securing a postoffice to be known as "Yamato," Mr. J. Sakai, manager of the Yamato colony of Japanese, was in Jacksonville yesterday in consultation with Postmaster D. T. Gerow, and it is understood that the matter of giving this Florida colony a postoffice of its own will be taken up at once with the postoffice department....

Mr. Sakai is enthusiastic regarding the colony, and is confident that the success that has marked the progress of the colony since its establishment sixteen months ago is certain to follow it through the remainder of its career. And the success of the past has been almost phenomenal.

Yamato is a colony made up wholly of Japanese, located about twenty-one miles below Palm Beach. The Florida East Coast Railway Company, desiring to help the colonists all that it could, established a regular station there and all trains, save the express trains, stop there. The chief industry of the colony is pineapple and fruit-raising, and in this line all have been universally successful.

There are at present about fifty acres set in pineapples alone, to say nothing of the acreage devoted to other fruits and vegetables. The colony, through its management, helps the colonists dispose of its fruits and sees to it that the production of the several farms are marketed at the best prevailing prices.

Eight houses have been built recently, and last week seven newcomers arrived from far-away Japan. Among the new arrivals is a Japanese woman, and Mr. Sakai stated yesterday that she was the first Japanese woman to reach the colony direct from the home country.

Progress and prosperity are said to be everywhere in evidence, and a rapid growth for the colony is assured. Mr. Sakai now has an agent in Japan, and through him the pick of the Japanese agriculturists are being sent to Florida. The colony is intensely patriotic and is working in every way to advance the general

welfare of the state, which all have adopted for their future home....

That the interests of the entire state of Florida are really at heart with the colonists is shown by the fact that the object of the colony, as set forth in the proposed petition for incorporation, is as follows:

"The object of this association shall be to encourage and develop the spirit of colonization among our people of Japan toward the United States; to build up our ideal colony and to inculcate the highest principles and honor as a Japanese colony; to study and improve local farmwork; and to introduce Japanese industries which we can adapt to the place and which may tend to advance the industries of Florida and to secure mutual benefits.

The association is incorporated by the Japanese and the members must be of the Japanese nation.

Any Japanese who settles permanently on Yamato or its suburbs may become a member of this association by signing the contracts and agreeing to be governed by the constitution and rules of association upon payment of the initiation fee.

Any Japanese who shall start work and want the assistance of the association, but does not declare his intentions to permanently settle on the place or does not conduct business independently, may become a member on probation.

The officers of the association shall consist of a manager, a secretary and a treasurer....

The officers of the association as authorized by this constitution, shall be elected by ballot at the annual meeting to be held in October.

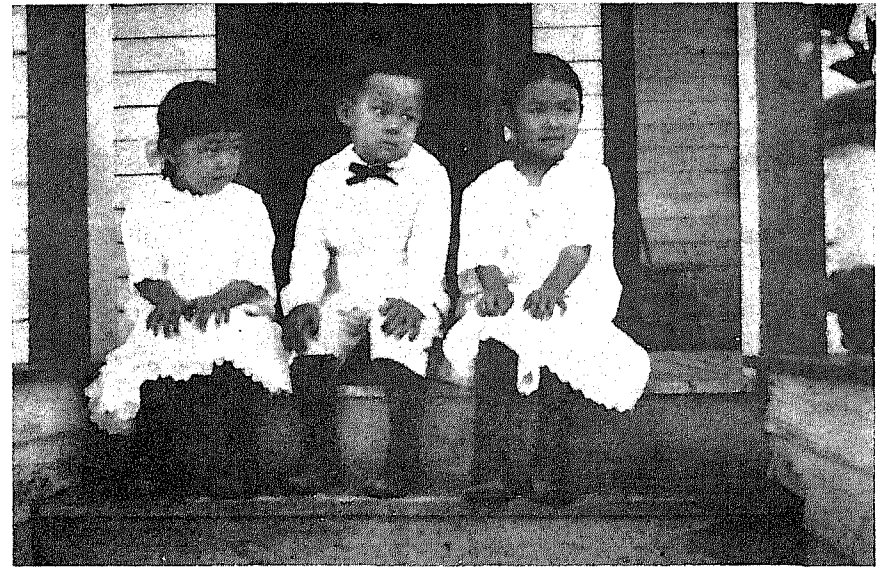
To create a fund for the association, all members thereof shall assist in clearing two acres of pine lands, and in planting and cultivating pineapples on the same during the year, first beginning in 1906.

The general and special expenses of the association shall be paid by the produce from the pineapple farm.

The disposal of the fund created, and also of the product of the two acres cleared, shall be decided at a meeting of the members of the association.

A violation of the constitution, or of the by-laws, and any act or acts contrary to the spirit of a true Japanese; and any act of damage to the association, or any member of the association, shall be expulsion from membership in the association, and the one so found guilty shall pay the amount of damages, to be estimated at a meeting of the members of the association....

* * * * *



Three Yamato children. Lawrence Gould photograph, 1914-15.

From The Florida Farmer's "The Homeseeker" July 1908

YAMATO. The Japanese growers at Yamato are thriving. Last week two cars of pines were exported to England. One grower shipped 800 crates of tomatoes, which netted him \$2 a crate.

WEST PALM BEACH. J. Saki and T. Ishibashi, from Yamato, came to this city this morning on bicycles to transact business at the local stores. They report having shipped eight cars of pineapples and will have five cars more. They say that their tomato crop did not pan out very well, but the pineapple crop is quite satisfactory, considering the weather conditions of this year.

* * * * *

From The Florida Farmer's "The Homeseeker" November 1908

YAMATO--A JAPANESE COLONY. What enterprise, ambition and hard work will do is splendidly illustrated in the Japanese colony at Yamato, twenty-two miles south of West Palm Beach. It was here that sixteen men, under the leadership of J. Sakai, came in 1904 and settled on 140 acres of land, where they immediately began clearing. They have now about seventy acres in pineapples, and last year they had 100 acres in vegetables, and they have purchased more land individually.

Their lands are splendidly adapted to the growing of the pineapple, and their fields are handsome as any to be found on the East Coast, and the cultivation under which they are kept is a

marvel to the ordinary grower. There is not a lazy bone in the body of these people, and they have a way of working that makes every effort count, and that the colony will be a success is without question.

There are some forty people in the settlement at this time, among them being two women. Mr. J. Sakai, the manager of the colony, went to Japan last year, and when he returned he brought with him a wife. Mr. Sakai has an interest in twenty-five acres in pineapples, and this year is planning to set out a large quantity of grapefruit and other citrus trees.

A leading man in the colony is Count Okadaira, a member of the royal household of Japan. He has twenty-seven acres in pineapples and is interested in the vegetable fields of Yamato. Both these men are graduates from American colleges, and are interested heart and soul in the prosperity of the colony.

Each year the colony has been visited by prominent men from Japan, and in a recent paper, a daily published in Osaka, Japan, there was published a continued illustrated article in four parts, telling the story of the Yamato settlement, written by Mr. J. Sakai.

The Japanese forming the colony of Yamato are adapting themselves to American ideas in their manner of living and dress. They are fully imbued with the American spirit, their highest ambition being to be called Americans and citizens of this country, which they greatly admire.

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From The Florida Farmer's "The Homeseeker" February 1909

LANTANA, BOYNTON, DELRAY AND YAMATO (JAPANESE [sic] COLONY). Enjoyed a most prosperous year throughout 1908. Although there was a great financial depression throughout the entire country, hundreds of thousands of workmen being without employment, yet this southern portion of the East Coast was the last to feel its dire effects, and this continued but for a short time. In the vicinity of the places named, vegetables, pineapples and fruits are grown in great quantities for the Northern markets. This section is rapidly becoming one of the greatest portions of the State in the cultivation of pineapples, and last year, in spite of the general depression, the fruit growers planted large acreages of pines. There is also a forward movement in planting citrus trees, and each year larger acreages are being devoted to this class of fruit. The villages have witnessed a phenomenal growth during the year and there is every evidence that this rapid development will continue through the year 1909.

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From The Tropical Sun, 1 May 1913

LOCAL AND PERSONAL. W. B. Ferguson has sold out his fruit business to T. Kamiya, one of the Japanese colony at Yamato, who has taken charge and has moved the stock over to the room formerly occupied by the express office, next door east of the Lake Worth Produce Co.'s store. Mr. Kamiya will continue the business in the new location and desires a share of the patronage.

LOCAL AND PERSONAL. Manager J. Sakai and little daughter, T. Kamiya and S. Harada were Japanese visitors in the city Saturday from the colony at Yamato.

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From The Tropical Sun, 16 October 1913

ANTI-JAP, editorial on anti-Japanese stand of Congressman Frank Clark. ...This sounds very well as being along the lines of the old fashioned Know Nothing party doctrines which the country seems gradually adopting but is not on a line with his F.E.C. Ry. friends who brought a number of Japs to this country and a colony of them are now living at Yamato where they own land.

* * * * *



Children of the Yamato School with their teacher. The photograph was taken on Armistice Day, 1918. The Yamato general store is in the back ground. From left to right: Roka Kamiya, unknown, Masa Kamiya, Helen Grey, Hildreth Grey, teacher, (?) Smith, Franklin (?), Margie Smith, and Mishi Kumia.

From the Miami Herald, 17 May 1942

ALIEN FAMILIES TOLD TO MOVE: GERMANS AND JAPANESE AMONG THOSE VACATED AT BOCA RATON. German and Japanese families were among those served with notices Saturday to vacate immediately all the land west of the railroad at Boca Raton so the site can be used for establishment of the Palm Beach Air Corps Technical Training station.

The notices were served by deputy United States marshals after Federal Judge John W. Holland signed an order awarding the federal government immediate possession of the 5,820 acres.

Stuart W. Patton, assistant to the attorney general in the lands procurement division, who presented the petition, said it would be followed by similar action for possession of the Boca Raton Country club building east of the railroad.

The procedure was taken under the second war purposes act, he explained. No financial offer has been made by the government to the owners of the land, but an appraisal is being made under the supervision of Lt. Col. H. H. Cox, whose headquarters are at Atlanta.

The Boca Raton site was chosen after a tentative selection of a site at Vero Beach. Among owners of the properties listed in the petition filed in the name of the Secretary of War were H. Von Holst,* J. Yamandi, S. Ashida, S. Kamkama, J. T. Dismuke estate, Town of Boca Raton and Lake Worth Drainage District.

**The Herald later printed a correction to this article removing the name of Herbert Von Holst, the Chicago architect and owner of several houses in Old Floresta (see Spanish River Papers, February 1977) from the list of aliens.*

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From the Boca Raton News (date unknown)

HENRY KAMIYA DIES IN JAPAN. Word has been received here of the death of Henry T. Kamiya, 85, in Japan.

Mr. Kamiya came to Boca Raton from California in 1908 at the request of Henry Flagler, railroad builder and a developer of South Florida.

Mr. Kamiya was among the 17 families settling here in a small community called Yamato, just north of Boca Raton. Flagler gave these families free train passage from California as an inducement to settle here as truck farmers. All the Kamiya children were born here.

As the community grew, a school was needed. Mrs. Davis of Delray Beach was the first teacher. She was followed as a teacher by Mrs. Clementine Brown. One teacher taught all eight grades.

This school closed in 1924. The children then attended Boca Raton Elementary School and later, Delray Beach High School.

Mrs. Kamiya died in 1936 and was buried in West Palm Beach.

In 1941, Mr. Kamiya returned to California but following Pearl Harbor Day, he was detained in a relocation camp with other Japanese. Rumor around here said he was a cousin of the Emperor of Japan.*

He returned to Yamato in 1945 but found nothing left. It was said that his land had been incorporated in government land as part of the air base. Despite the cool post-war feeling, he stayed here almost a year then returned to California. In 1949 he went back to Japan.

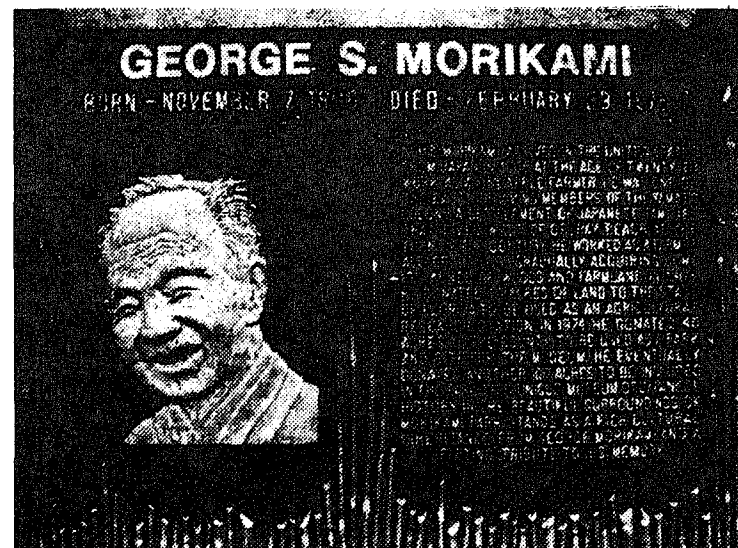
He is survived by five children, Kay, of Delray Beach; Frank, of Miami; Mrs. Mason Tukushima, of Los Angeles; Miss Mishi, of Washington, D.C.; and Mrs. Masubo Suga of New York; 11 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

According to some of the old-timers here, the Kamiyas were highly thought of as neighbors and were most charitable. One donation they made was for a large stained glass window in Cason Memorial Methodist Church in Delray Beach.

The ashes of Mr. Kamiya will be flown to the United States. Some will remain in California and the remainder will be placed at his wife's grave in West Palm Beach.

**At one time or another, "rumor" assigned a royal relationship to almost all of the Yamato settlers.*

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HIS LITTLE MOUNT FUJI WEALTH OF MEMORIES by Jerry Schwartz. George Morikami, Japanese expatriate, landowner and 89-year-old pineapple farmer, lives in a drab, yellow trailer perched on a miniature levee he built himself and calls Mount Fuji.

It is unlikely that many of the condominium residents living just a stone's throw up the road are even aware of the intensely private Morikami, who shuffles painfully on tired legs through his self-made tropical garden of pineapples, blackberries, peaches, mangoes, papayas, persimmons, corn, squash, cucumbers, peppers and soybeans.

And probably fewer realize that the gnarled, arthritic old man weeding his garden in tattered clothes smeared with black, sandy dirt owns land worth roughly \$1.5 million.

He is one of the last surviving members of Palm Beach County's Yamato colony, a settlement of Japanese families lured to the United States at the turn of the century with hopes of many dollars to be made farming in a rich new land.

Thursday the Delray Beach Kiwanis Club honored Morikami for giving 40 acres of land for a county park, but the frail farmer, who has been in failing health, was unable to attend his own testimonial.

George Morikami has journeyed far for his honor. "I came here in 1906. I was the only one of my people who was uneducated. They were all educated. I couldn't speak or write English," Morikami says.

"I just wanted to save a little money and go back home and do something. But at the end of three years, I looked and I had no money. Not even enough to go back home on. So I had to stay here. I have never been back."

The Yamato colony failed. The pineapples grew well but the Japanese could not compete with the low prices asked by the Cubans.

Most of the farmers left. Morikami stayed. It wasn't easy.

As World War II broke out, a dismal Morikami said, "I had a few acres--a small-scale farm. I was hardly making things go. Then a storm came and washed out my crop."

So a penniless, middle-aged Japanese farmer came hat in hand to a big U.S. bank looking for a loan while a Naval base in Hawaii called Pearl Harbor was making history. He didn't get the loan.

"When I was dead broke and I needed the money, the bank wouldn't lend it to me. Now they would lend me whatever I ask. But I have never borrowed one cent from them."

Instead, he returned to farming. He acquired a little farm by squatting. And slowly he began to buy land in southwest Palm Beach County.

"I bought the land at \$15 an acre. Some I bought at \$17 an acre. I would buy five acres here and then go somewhere else and buy another few acres.

"In those days, you put down as much money as you could and you pay the rest when you can."

Slowly he accumulated several hundred acres. The land he bought in 1942 is now worth about \$10,000 an acre. Morikami has given away 40 acres of his land for a county park. He's given away 40 more to the University of Florida for an experimental farm.

But he still has about 50 acres and a close friend says Morikami is worth at least \$1 million.

When asked if he is a millionaire, Morikami only smiles and says, "Well, some people say I am."

Why, then, does he live a hermit's life on a 35-acre plot of ground infested by sand fleas?

"I like this. It is simple. The land is all around me. I eat fresh fruits and vegetables I grow myself. No meat. I eat when I am hungry, day or night. If I had to live in town, I couldn't have this."

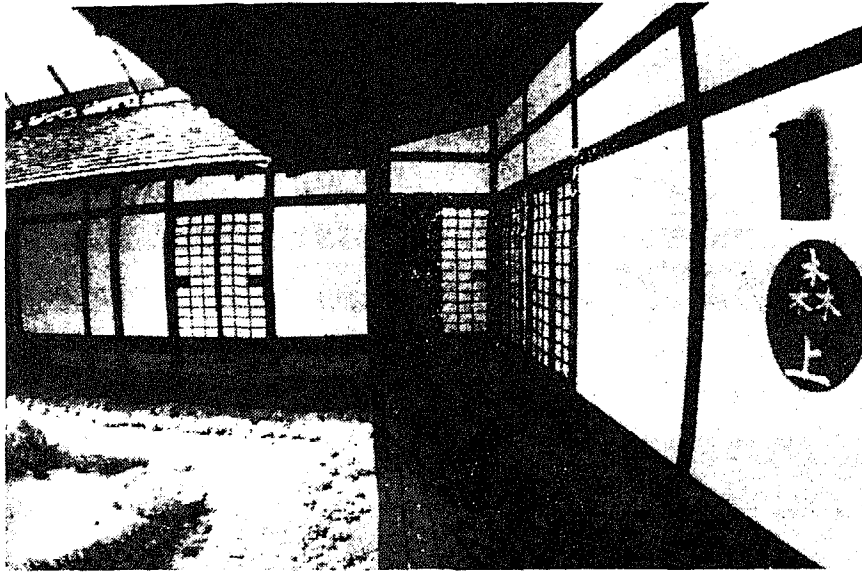
Though his life is simple, it isn't without its small luxuries. Dr. James Winchester, a former University of Florida agriculture professor who has known the old man for years, estimates there are more than 40 varieties of fruit trees and decorative plants on Morikami's land.

Winchester recalls that Morikami built the levee that his trailer stands on.

"He built the lake years ago and he plans to plant Japanese pine trees all around it. It's his ambition to live long enough to landscape it, and the way he's going, I wouldn't be surprised if he does," Winchester said.

Morikami intends to keep his money on paper as deeds in the county clerk's office. "The land is not for sale at any price," he says.

And then a man who is worth more than one million dollars looks out over an unweeded pineapple patch: "All I have now are my memories."



Courtyard of the Morikami Japanese Museum. Photograph by Mary Lou Foy for the *Miami Herald*.

From the *Palm Beach Post*, 1 March 1976.

PARK SITE DONOR IS DEAD by Peter Cooke. Early yesterday George S. Morikami, the Japanese immigrant who rejected offers of up to \$1 million for his acreage west of Delray Beach and instead donated the land for a county park, died of natural causes.

The 89-year-old pineapple farmer and benefactor apparently died in his sleep in the four-room trailer where he lived alone.

...Morikami came to the United States in 1906 to farm pineapples for a man who paid his fare and promised to pay Morikami and give him some land after five years of work.

But after three years the man died, leaving Morikami with nothing.

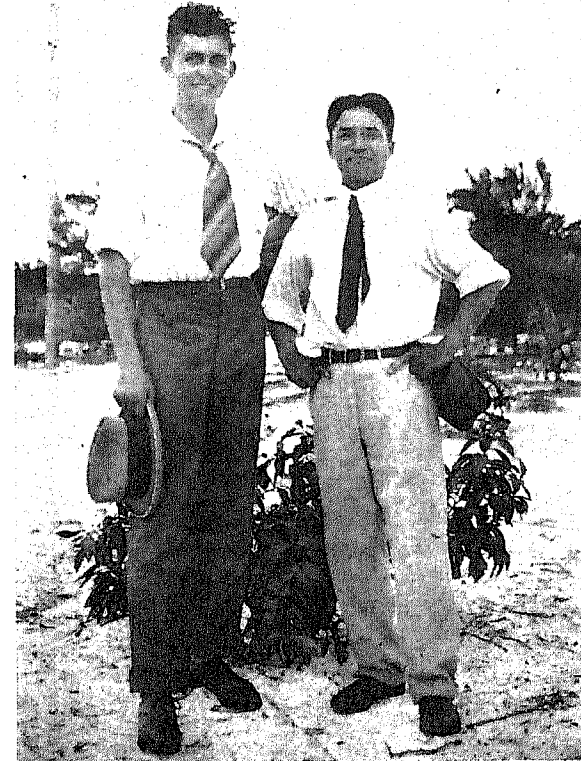
Morikami continued to harvest pineapples and worked as a vegetable broker. Gradually he acquired approximately 185 acres of woods and farmland west of Delray Beach.

In the mid-1960s Morikami gave the state 40 acres of his land to be used for an agricultural research station. About the same time Morikami offered 40 acres to Palm Beach County for a park, but the land was not accepted until 1974.

Morikami placed two stipulations on the land donation to the county. The first was that an access road be built so the public could reach the new park, and the other was that a Japanese museum be constructed on the site.

...On his birthday, last November 5, Morikami donated another 90 acres to the county to expand the park...

* * * * *



Lawrence Gould with Japanese friend. Gould taught school in Boca Raton in 1914-1915. He was later a member of the Byrd Antarctic Expedition of 1928-1930.

From the *Miami Herald*, 29 April 1977.

VISITORS WILL WALK SOFTLY IN MUSEUM by Barry Bearak.
Visitors will walk softly in the Morikami Museum. In fact, they'll be shoeless.

"We want people to be very aware they're stepping into a different world," says Larry Rosensweig, curator of the museum scheduled to open June 25.

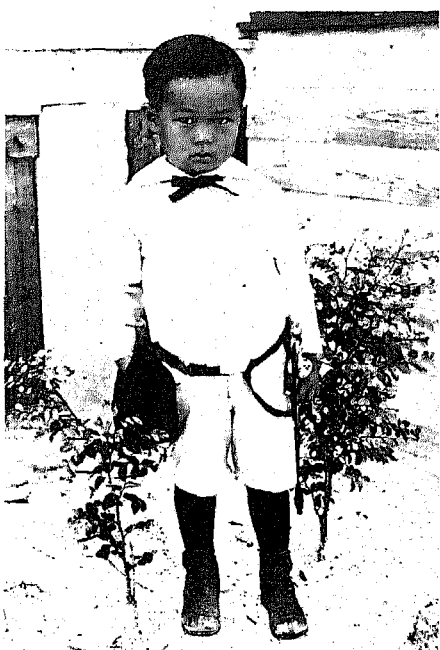
The unshod will traipse upon tatami mats, traditional padding of Japanese floors. Entrance ways will be covered with sliding shoji screens. Rooms will be decorated with objects of Japanese culture.

By and large, the museum, located west of Delray Beach, is now complete. Stunning gardens surround the \$150,000 structure of white stucco and dark wood trim. Local residents have loaned enough artifacts for initial displays.

...Facilities include a room for tea ceremonies, a display of children's toys, a library, a classroom, a slide show about the Yamato Colony and a room dedicated to George Morikami.

...Rosensweig says the building was designed as a traditional Japanese house. (It even has an outhouse.) And he says its evolution as a museum is something that has evolved slowly with help from an advisory committee of local citizens.

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Young Yamato resident with sword. Photograph by Lawrence Gould, 1914-1915.



George Morikami at 82. "He raises same crops as 60 years ago in Yamato Colony." Photograph by Tim Pallesen for the *Miami Herald*.