

# Sacramento River Delta Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

“For what is the present, after all, but a growth out of the past.” – Walt Whitman

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NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 32, NUMBER 2

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### President's Notes

My term as president is almost over. It has been enjoyable to serve as your president again. The main reason is that we have a board that excels in working together and getting the job done. Thanks to all of them. Our new 2013 Pear Label Calendar is out and looks excellent again. Thanks to all the board for their great work in putting this project together along with the donors who have made this financially possible. Hope you can all purchase one and maybe for your friends too. Our part of the Pear Fair was a success and a special thanks to all that helped. Along with the Friends of the Clarksburg Library and Jim Dahlberg's expertise in setting up we had an excellent display for all to see on Delta history.

Our programs again brought us some great speakers and visual displays. In September we had Philip Garone on a program of the wetlands and water birds of Sacramento-San Joaquin Valley. November brought us Keith Burns on his collection of Erle Stanley Gardner (author of Perry Masson and Delta books).

This coming January at our Potluck our program will be the history of Courtland High School. We do need any photos, items and histories you may have to share. Please contact the resource center or me if you have something. In the future programs we

will have Phil Pezzaglia on his new book coming in March on the Delta Towns.

Also, hopefully a program on the results of the “We Are Where We Eat” of which we co-sponsored. So far the Delta area has been a success in people bringing their stories and recipes forward. I will continue to arrange programs and if anyone of you have an idea for a program don't hesitate to contact me. Thanks again and a very merry holiday wish to all.

Thanks, Tom

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Barry's Machine & Supply from Courtland  
Roy Chaix from Courtland  
Bill & Cindy Corp from Walnut Grove  
Philip Deak from Walnut Grove  
Dolk Tractor Co. from Rio Vista  
Harvey Lyman Company from Walnut Grove  
Rod & Paulette Hennem from Courtland  
Lindsay Hutchinson from Santa Barbara  
Lira's Supermarket from Rio Vista

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society

JANUARY GENERAL MEETING & ANNUAL POTLUCK

Tuesday, January 15, 2013 at 6:00 pm

**Jean Harvie community Center** 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove

Please bring food for 10: A—G Salad H—M Dessert N—Z Hot Dish

Please call Tom Herzog 916-871-4060 if you have any questions

## A Japanese Daimyo Along the Sacramento Delta: Keijiro Yagi an Extraordinary Issei Pioneer

By George Yagi Jr.

A son of one of Japan's ruling samurai families, Keijiro Yagi was unique among the many Issei, first generation Japanese Americans, who traveled to California during the early part of the twentieth century. In pursuit of the 'American Dream' he journeyed to the United States determined to restore his family's fortunes, which had suffered tremendously from the collapse of feudalism. However, after his arrival in California, his priorities changed as he sought to establish himself among the prominent farmers in the Delta. Until the outbreak of the Second World War, despite numerous obstacles, and through hard work and perseverance, he accomplished what many immigrants to America had sought to achieve, prosperity in a new land.

### Vassals of the Tokugawa

Keijiro was the eldest son of Lord Ukichi Yagi, who ruled over the village of Heiwa, located outside the city of Nagoya. A proud samurai family, the Yagis owed their status to the Tokugawa Shogunate, who also granted them the use of a fortress as their family home. However, by the time of Keijiro's birth on July 15, 1875, the Yagi clan's fortunes were rapidly deteriorating as the samurai were stripped of their many privileges by the newly established Meiji Government. Indeed, when he was only two years old, the final blow to the samurai class came when the wearing of swords was prohibited. Not surprisingly, numerous samurai rose up in revolt, culminating in the dramatic Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. As the modern Japanese army emerged victorious from the conflict, the samurai vanished into the annals of history.

Fortunately for the Yagi family, the government did not strip them of their fort and they were permitted to retain possession of their ancestral home. As a child Keijiro often spent his time climbing a persimmon tree which grew in the courtyard of the fortress. In addition, although feudalism ceased to exist, the fort also continued to operate under tight security and its gate was immediately locked shut once residents or visitors entered or exited the grounds.

Raised in such surroundings Keijiro understood his proper place in Japanese society and throughout his life his manner of speech was that of the samurai class. However, despite that the Yagi clan managed to retain vestiges of their proud past, all was not well for the family, which had suffered financially from Japan's modernization.

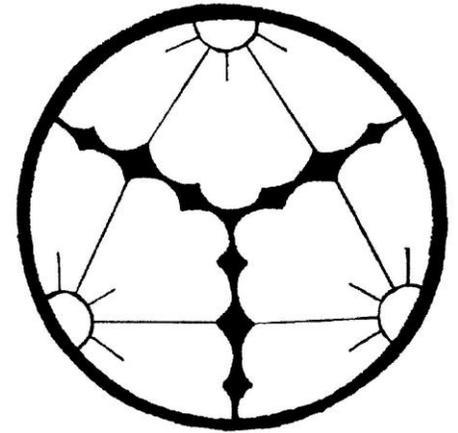
Consequently as a young man, Keijiro ambitiously sought to remedy the situation and began to look towards the United States as a place where he might be able to

raise another fortune. Leaving the care of his parents and the estate to his younger brother, Masutaro, he boarded a ship to California during the early 1900s, determined to earn a thousand dollars and return home.

### California Pioneer

Like many Issei, Keijiro entered the United States through San Francisco, via Angel Island. Soon after his arrival he made his way to the Delta where he worked for a short time as a farm laborer. He found it a disagreeable business; he worked for very little pay under poor conditions. On one occasion he was given the task of cleaning ditches while exposed to the hot summer sun, a job he found very unpleasant. The foreman yelled if anyone stopped for a moment to take a break, so he devised an ingenious way to find some rest by placing his hat upon his shovel and waving it back and forth while he sat in the ditch. He made it appear that he was working and managed to find some relief from the scorching heat.

Unsurprisingly, Keijiro quickly left the life of a laborer and set out to become a farmer. In 1908 he formed a partnership with S. Sato and began farming on land which was described as, "Two hundred acres lying along Beaver Slough or Sargent Canal & forming the extreme southern portion of the ranch known as the Gersbacher Place near New Hope



**Plumb Flower - Ancient coat of arms or mon of the Yagi Clan. A Plumb flower divided into three, each flower has three petals**

Landing." In order to fund this business venture he mortgaged his crop of potatoes for the sum of \$1,500 in gold coin, which was to be repaid at 10% interest. Under these circumstances this was clearly an ambitious and risky enterprise. The crop was successful, and by the following year he ended his partnership with Sato but continued farming, adding an additional fifty acres. Throughout his career as a farmer he continued to maintain no less than two-hundred and fifty acres of land. As 1909 progressed, in order to fund this rapid expansion, he took out another crop mortgage in April for the sum of \$3,125 in gold coin. In addition, instead of potatoes, the mortgage was specifically for "grain and vegetables of all kinds and hay to be grown during the year." Interestingly the men who financed this mortgage, J. J. Hickey and Don Ray, were also his landlords. Apparently, the two had great faith in Keijiro's farming abilities.

Following the outbreak of First World War, another crop mortgage was taken out on November 27, 1914 for "the crop of Beans, barley, potatoes, corn and all other vegetables now being, standing and growing or to be grown in 1914 and 1915." While Keijiro only had to pay 8% interest for \$1,000 in gold coin, there were hidden dangers in the arrangement. The indenture itself was riddled with complicated legal language and also contained a provision for Ray

Gower, the person who financed the mortgage, to have the legal right to seize the crops should Keijiro fail to pay. Not surprisingly, such harsh terms were enacted the same time anti-Japanese legislation was passed which prohibited Issei from owning land. Meanwhile another ongoing movement, which temporarily failed due to the eruption of the war in Europe, was also aimed to prevent Issei from leasing land. Despite these setbacks, Keijiro continued to prosper and the twenties brought an era of booming prosperity. During this period he also managed to purchase over one-hundred horses, which were used in his ambitious farming operations.

Towards the latter end of the 1920s Keijiro left the Sargent Canal Ranch and moved to Courtland where he continued farming, first on Grand Island and later on Sutter Island. In addition, he soon met a young lady named Kaoru Umeda, who was descended from a prominent samurai family from Kumamoto, and



**Keijiro with son George at Umeda family farm around 1940**

who had immigrated to the United States in 1919. In 1928 the two were married and in 1930 their eldest son George was born. As the Yagi family in America began to grow the Great Depression was in progress, but, they did not feel its effects.

During the 1930s Keijiro began modernizing his equipment and the number of horses dwindled as they were replaced by new tractors. He also established a labor camp for his numerous workers who came primarily from the

八木慶次郎氏の農園



豆時前の手入仕事にして左端より三人自轡を握て立てるは八木氏なり

(村守神郡東海縣知愛) 氏助鎌田岡

(村和平郡嶋中縣知愛) 氏郎次慶木八 町英十五百三豆數少作耕

**Keijiro as a young famer in the Delta. He is third from left standing behind plow. Preparing for bean planting.**

Philippines. Throughout this period he raised a number of crops for seed which included carrots, table beets, onions, lettuce and even zinnias. As a result of his hard work, he became a highly respected leader in the Japanese community. However, he preferred to maintain a low profile and did not very often venture outside of his farm to socialize. Nevertheless, he remained a prominent figure in the community, which was only heightened by the fact that he also provided loans to other Japanese Americans.

### Pearl Harbor and its Aftermath

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, disaster befell the Yagi family once again. In May of 1942, Executive Order 9066 gave the family only three days to prepare for evacuation. Keijiro himself, however, was allowed a week to settle business on the farm. After carefully packing and storing all their personal belongings in their home on Sutter Island, the Yagi family was taken to the Merced Assembly Center where they remained until they were transported to Granada, Colorado. While at Granada, Keijiro found work as a butcher and Kaoru as part of the camp's kitchen staff. Although removed from his familiar surroundings, Keijiro maintained his prominent position in Japanese American society. Indeed, when a shipment of supplies from Japan was delivered to the camp by the International Red Cross, he was absent as part of a group photograph. His face was inserted onto the official portrait (an interesting example of early photo editing.) He was absent due to the death of his life-long friend, Ryojiro Yamada, who had traveled with him from Nagoya when they had both immigrated

to the United States as young men. Yamada, at the time of his passing, was interned at Poston. As the two men were like brothers, Keijiro quickly sought and received permission to leave the camp to attend the funeral.

With the end of the Second World War, Keijiro and his family were among the last to leave Granada. At this time he was seventy years old and could hardly be expected to start over again. Upon the family's return to Courtland, they discovered that their home had been ransacked and most of their property was stolen. During their imprisonment representatives of the Ferry-Moorse Seed Company confiscated some of the family's private property. Claiming that the crop for 1942 was a loss, which it was not, they seized the family car, a 1936 Ford Sedan, and all the farm equipment which included, a 1936 Ford pickup truck, a International Crawler tractor, a McCormick Deering tractor, a cultivator tractor, and all six remaining horses. It was said that the cruelty of this action was fueled by the personal grudge of one of Ferry-Moorse's employees, who had lost a son fighting the Japanese in the Philippines.

Their eldest son George was still too young to begin farming; having just entered high school, so Keijiro and Kaoru persevered and found work as farm laborers on Ryer Island, close to Rio Vista. Upon George's graduation in 1949, instead of taking over the newly established family farm on Union Island, with the outbreak of the Korean War he was drafted into the U.S. Army to fight for the country that had interned his family. After surviving the battlefields of Korea and returning home from active duty in 1953, George was finally able to help his father and began farming himself. Unfortunately, Keijiro did not live long to see his son's success and passed away on June 12, 1957.

Keijiro achieved the 'American Dream' only to have it taken away due to the misfortunes of war. His story is very tragic and comparable to others who lost their livelihoods due to Executive Order 9066. He was an extraordinary figure who achieved what he had set out to do. Despite the setbacks of the Second World War, his legacy lived on. In 1997, unknown at the time, his son retired from farming on the very same land his father had started farming on in 1908, the Sargent Canal Ranch. It can be safely said that in doing so, Keijiro's dream had at last been fulfilled.



Image of Keijiro inserted upper right in photograph



Remains of Yagi farm today on Sutter Island – single long barn. House they were forced to leave in 1942 was demolished long ago.

## Bibliography:

### Primary Sources

Crop Mortgage Records, San Joaquin County Historical Society, Kennedy Library.

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Harold Jacoby Nisei Collection, University of the Pacific, Holt-Atherton Special Collections.

Helen Yagi Sekikawa Interview, 2008.

### Secondary Sources

Sansom, George. *A History of Japan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958-63.

Harvey, Robert. *Amache: The Story of Japanese Internment in Colorado During World War II*. Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2004.

This newsletter article was written by Dr. George Yagi, Jr., PH.D. He is an Adjunct Professor of History at the University of the Pacific Center for Professional & Continuing Education. Keijiro was his grandfather.

We thank you for sharing this interesting and informative article.

### NOTE:

*The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society welcome articles written about the Delta and its residents but reserve the right to edit for length and clarity.*

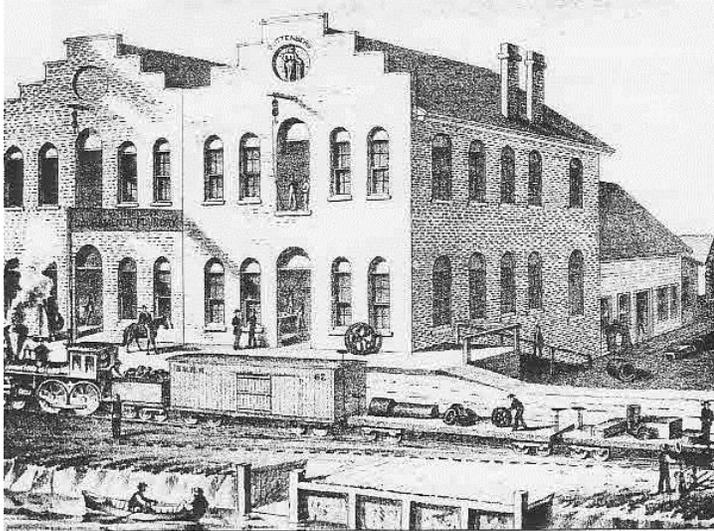
## **George William Gutenberg Smith**

By Kathleen Graham Hutchinson

Smith was born in Sacramento March 12, 1903 the son of William James Smith and Minnie (Guttenberg). Minnie was the daughter of William Guttenberg of Sacramento who was a direct descendent of Johann Gutenberg who in 1438 invented the printing press and who printed in Basel, Switzerland the beautiful and famous "Gutenberg Bible".

William Gutenberg married firstly Katherine Klumpp of Elbern Kohlener (George L. Klumpp mortuary, Sacramento) and secondly in 1857 the widow Katherine Schweitzer of Bavaria born 1832. He was born in 1828 in the Rhine Province of West Prussia. Gutenberg was a foundryman and apprenticed as a molder in Bremen before emigrating to the U.S. He initially lived in Connecticut (Meriden, Waterford, Hartford) before sailing from New York to the Isthmus

and on to California. He worked in Shasta City, Shasta County before settling in Sacramento. In Sacramento he established the G and N Foundry. It burned three times and each time he rebuilt. Among his many manufactures was the iron fence surrounding the Reynolds house near Walnut Grove and likely, the iron grill which once graced the Italianate tower on the Smith house below Courtland. He had two daughters: Julia and Wilhelmina. Wilhelmina "Minnie" married William J. Smith.



**Gutenberg Foundry**

All of George W. G. Smith's paternal grandparents also emigrated from Germany. George Augustus Smith was born 1830 in Bavaria and his wife Margaret (Hale) Smith in 1836 also in Bavaria. He died in 1910 and his wife 1916. Their son William James Smith was born on Grand Island, Steamboat Slough in 1860. William J. Smith died July 12, 1929 and his widow June 10, 1957.

George W. G. Smith was educated at Onisbo school two-miles south of Courtland. (It merged in 1916 with the Courtland school to form Bates Joint Union School.) He entered Courtland high school in 1916, graduating in 1920. Until 1926 he studied at the University of



**George W.G. Smith 1920**

California and in 1926 the University of Michigan. 1927 through 28 he attended George Washington University Law School in Washington DC.

In 1929 he joined his father in the fruit business. The land on Grand Island was originally acquired by his grandparents and devoted to Bartlett pears. In 1930 he left for San Francisco and remained until 1940 selling life insurance. The Depression hit the Smith family exceedingly hard. He moved back to Courtland in 1941 and resumed farming and fruit cultivation.

He was active in the Boy Scouts of America, UC Alumni Association in Sacramento, various fraternal orders and was a stalwart of the Sacramento County Republican Party, serving as Chairman of the Sacramento County Republican Central Committee. He was the token Republican on the ballot many times going up against the entrenched Sacramento Democrat, Congressman John E. Moss.

He married Elizabeth "Betty" Archer the daughter of Henry Lester and Bertha (Dudley) Archer January 24, 1934. They had two boys: George W. G. Junior born 1938 who as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Marine Reserves was killed in a flying accident off the southern California coast, and Dudley Archer born 1939 who is also now deceased. Both boys married and had offspring. Dudley and his family lived at the old family home below Courtland.

Sources:

-Various

-History of the Sacramento Valley - Family and Personal Records

#### **Corrections from previous newsletters:**

December 2011 Newsletter – "Dickson Special" should be "Dixon Special"

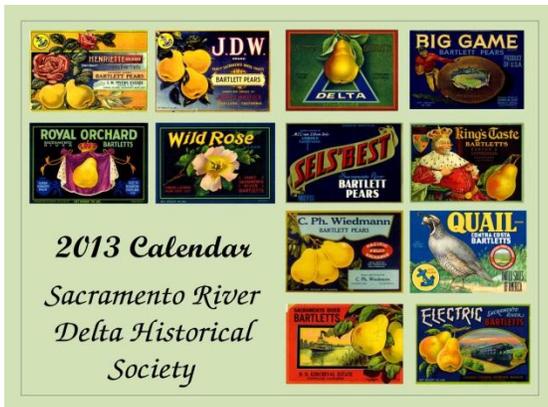
June 2012 Newsletter – Source for "River Road Art Gallery" article was Frances McCormick Armstrong

**SRDHS 2013 SCHEDULE**

January 15.....General Meeting/Annual Potluck  
 February 19.....Board Meeting  
 March 19.....General Meeting  
 April 16.....Board Meeting  
 May 21.....General Meeting  
 June 18.....Board Meeting  
                     June Newsletter  
 July/August.....Summer Break  
 September 17.....General Meeting  
 October 15.....Board Meeting  
 November 19.....General Meeting  
 December.....Board Meeting  
                     December Newsletter

**RESOURCE CENTER NEWS**

Remember to come get your 2013 SRDHS Calendar featuring 12 new Pear Labels from Jim Dahlberg's collection. Available at the resource center every Tuesday morning from 10 am to 1 pm. Or call Esther at 916-777-2227 if you would like to have one mailed to you.



**MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

We would like to thank all those who made memorial contributions to the Sacramento River Delta Historical Society.

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 E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

- I'm paying Annual dues for the following year(s):
  - 2013                       Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - \$25.00 a year for Annual Membership
- I've enclosed \$150 to become a Lifetime Member
- I'd like to register as an Honorary Member – Free to members 80 years and older

Please mail this form with a check payable to SRDHS to:

SRDHS Membership  
 P.O. Box 293, Walnut Grove, CA 95690

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**\$50 Silver Contributors      \$100 Gold Star Contributors      \$250 Platinum Contributors**

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Alma's River Café<br>Bogle Vineyards, Inc.<br>Boon-Dox Liquors & Deli<br>Bruce & Julie Cline<br>Delta Food Bank<br>Dr. Henry Go<br>Joe & Esther Koopman<br>Judy & Jim Culbertson<br>Ken & Doris Pylman<br>Mary Budnik Hanson<br>Maya's Restaurant and Gifts<br>McGahey Real Estate<br>Meyer & Cook Insurance Agency, LLC<br>Morris Motors<br>Pierson-Lambert Vineyards, LLC<br>Pylman Vineyards, Inc.<br>Strange Cargo - Locke<br>The Gardens Bistro<br>Wimpy's Marina | Al's Place, Locke<br>Barry's Machine & Supply<br>Chuck Baker's Ranch<br>Dolk Tractor<br>Harvey Lyman Company<br>Joe Enos Associates<br>John & Lyn Stutz<br>Lira's Supermarket<br>Marshall & Yvonne Pylman<br>Oto's Car Care<br>SI Consulting<br>Simpson Family Western Shore Orchards | Amistad Ranches-van Loben Sels<br>David J. Elliot & Son<br>Greene & Hemly<br>Mike & Wendy Stokes<br>Pump House Ranches, Inc.<br>Lincoln Chan Farms, Inc. |
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**INFORMATION**

Sacramento River Delta Historical Society web site is [srdhs.org](http://srdhs.org). Please view and enjoy the information. If you wish to email the resource center, the email address is [srdhs@riverdeltawireless.com](mailto:srdhs@riverdeltawireless.com).

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\*The Sacramento River Delta Historical Society publishes the Sacramento River Delta Society Newsletter twice a year.