

All About Miss Nagano

Various Archived Articles about Miss Nagano: the Japanese Friendship Doll

[A Special Reunion for Miss Nagano](#)

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by Jennifer Potts, October 17, 2013



(Left to right) Sarah Greenberg, Ellen Semple, Miss Nagano, Masaru Aoki, Haruo Morita, Noriko Gordon

Here at the Delaware Historical Society, our diverse collections are at the heart of what we do and they attract history lovers of all stripes. We dearly love our research visitors but, every so often, it's nice when our collections inspire something a little different. This month, I was delighted that one very special item, our Japanese Friendship Doll, Miss Nagano, was at the center of a very special reunion of old friends and admirers, some of whom had been directly involved with her conservation and return trip to Nagano, Japan back in 2004.

Miss Nagano is one of the original fifty-eight Friendship Dolls that were sent to the U.S. from Japan in 1927 as goodwill ambassadors. These dolls were destined for museums all over the country and we acquired ours in 1928 through the diligent efforts of Emalea Pusey Warner (1853-1948), a prominent Delaware social reformer and leader in the Women's Movement. Since then, Miss Nagano has been with us through all the ups and downs of world history and remains a centerpiece of our collection.

Fortunately, interest in the Friendship Dolls and what they were meant to represent also survived the years, and, with the discovery of our doll's true identity as Miss Nagano in 1996 (she was originally billed as Miss Karafuto) discussions got underway with regard to a return visit to Nagano, Japan. In 2004, these dreams finally came to fruition with Miss Nagano's return to Japan for professional conservation at the Tokyo workshops of the Yoshitoku Doll Company (where she and the other Friendship Dolls were originally made) and inclusion in a temporary traveling exhibit program about the Friendship Dolls in Nagano Prefecture. As part of the celebrations accompanying this momentous event, former Delaware Historical Society Board President, Ellen Semple, and then-Executive Director, Joan Reynolds Hoge, traveled to Japan to represent the Delaware Historical Society at the homecoming and unveiling ceremonies that took place in Nagano.



Mr. Aoki fixing Miss Nagano's kimono & obi

For some of Miss Nagano's most recent visitors, including Ellen Semple and Masaru Aoki (a specialist in Friendship Doll conservation at the Yoshitoku Doll Company who was involved in Miss Nagano's conservation), it was a happy reunion that allowed them to revisit fond memories of the 2004 trip. The visit and reunion were organized by Noriko Gordon, a Japanese-born educator, Friendship Doll enthusiast, and co-discoverer of the Miss Chosen Friendship Doll in Connecticut. Also present were Haruo Morita, a Japanese businessman with a passion for Friendship Dolls and their history, and Ellen Semple's grand-daughter, Sarah Greenberg. During the visit, it was wonderful to watch Mr. Aoki apply his expertise to Miss Nagano's kimono and obi, which he refreshed and retied in the correct traditional manner so she looked her best for everyone. It was also wonderful to see this diverse group brought together by their united interest in our doll and her history; and to have Miss Nagano continue to fulfill her role as a goodwill ambassador who connects Delaware to the wider world. Thanks to everyone who visited for making this another memorable occasion!

Jennifer

Sept 2016

This Month in Delaware...

Official preparations are firmly underway for a return visit to Japan for Miss Nagano, one of the original fifty-eight Japanese Friendship Dolls sent to the United States as a goodwill gesture in 1927. At that time, the Delaware Historical Society was the lucky recipient of one of these dolls, originally billed as Miss Karafuto. Fast forward to 1996: The doll's true identity as Miss Nagano is established by Friendship Doll scholar and expert Michiko Takaoka, who was able to identify the mon (emblem) associated with Nagano Prefecture on the doll and her kimono. This mix-up was part of a much larger one that originated back when the dolls were carelessly unpacked and attributed in 1927.

This new attribution proved a cause for celebration and began a series of negotiations between the Delaware Historical Society and various agencies back in Nagano Prefecture. The plan was for the newly-discovered Miss Nagano to return to Japan for conservation work at the Yoshitoku workshops where she was originally made and then spend a year being exhibited at various locations throughout Nagano Prefecture. This heady scheme finally became a reality in September 2003, when representatives of the Shinano Education Association visited Wilmington for a formal loan signing ceremony to set things in motion.

At that time, the representatives presented us with a small token of their appreciation: this laser world clock in the form of a book that opens to a color picture of two American Blue-Eyed Dolls, which were what initiated the doll exchange program between Japan and the United States. This kick-off goodwill gift (a wonderful echo of its predecessor!) marked the beginning of a rare opportunity for the Delaware Historical Society to use its collections to serve, not only the people of Delaware, but also an international audience. It was also wonderful to be able to add materially to the continuing story of one of our prized collections pieces.

Jennifer

Object Label - Miss Nagano Favorite Things

Japanese Friendship Doll “Miss Nagano”

Gift of Emalea Pusey Warner

This doll is one of the original 58 Japanese Friendship Dolls that were part of a cultural goodwill exchange program initiated in 1927 by former missionary, Dr. Sidney Gulick (1860-1945). The Friendship Doll project arose at a time when there was considerable tension between the US & Japan over the Immigration Act of 1924, which prohibited East Asians from immigrating to the United States. In response, Dr. Gulick formed a group that called itself the “Committee on World Friendship Among Children” and its first project was to send 12,739 dolls (later known as the American blue-eyed dolls) from American children over to children in Japan in time for the annual doll festival, the Hinamatsuri. The Japanese returned the gesture by commissioning 58 Friendship Dolls from the best doll makers in Japan and sent them over to the United States. Each doll represented a specific Japanese prefecture and came with a range of furniture and accessories.

The Society acquired our Friendship Doll in December 1928 through the efforts of Emalea Pusey Warner (1853-1948), a prominent Delaware social reformer and leader in the women’s movement. Our doll was originally billed as Miss Karafuto (shipping mix ups in 1927 meant that many of the dolls were misidentified, including ours). Miss Nagano’s true identity was not discovered until 1996, when Friendship Doll expert, Michiko Takaoka, was able to identify her from distinctive markings on the doll and clothing (the real Miss Karafuto is currently in Cincinnati, OH). Even after all these years, Dr. Gulick’s original gesture of peace and goodwill still resonates, and the Friendship Dolls now have a dedicated, world-wide following.

Blog Article

April 2011

A New Discovery about Miss Nagano

With all the bad news out of Japan recently, we felt compelled to offer something positive on the Japan front. On a beautiful spring day, with cherry blossoms in full bloom, we were very excited to have Alan Pate, an antique doll dealer and recognized expert on Japanese Friendship Dolls, visit us to study, document, and photograph one of the centerpieces of our collection: our very own Japanese Friendship Doll, Miss Nagano. Alan is currently doing the research for his upcoming publication, “Art as Ambassador: The Japanese Friendship Dolls of 1927,” and is in the process of visiting all of the forty-six known Friendship Dolls in the U.S. Our Miss Nagano is the 32nd doll he has visited so far. He also serves as an outside advisor for the online Friendship Doll database project currently being

undertaken by Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, which DHS also participated in last summer.

The Japanese Friendship Dolls were part of a cultural goodwill exchange program initiated in 1927 by Dr. Sidney Gulick (1860-1945), a former missionary who had spent time in Japan. In an effort to ease tension between the two nations over the Immigration Act of 1924, which prohibited East Asians from immigrating to the United States, Gulick formed a group that called itself the Committee on World Friendship Among Children and its first project was to send 12,739 dolls (later known as the American blue-eyed dolls) from American children over to children in Japan in time for the annual doll festival, the Hinamatsuri. The Japanese returned the gesture by commissioning fifty-eight friendship dolls from the best doll makers in Japan and sent them over to the United States. Each doll represented a specific Japanese prefecture and came with a range of furniture and accessories. Many of these dolls were sent to cultural institutions throughout the U.S.

The Society acquired our Friendship Doll in December 1928 through the efforts of Emalea Pusey Warner (1853-1948), a prominent Delaware social reformer and leader in the women's movement, and the doll was installed in the museum in Old Town Hall with great fanfare. That should have been the end of the story but it wasn't by a long shot! Massive shipping mix-ups when the dolls arrived in the United States from Japan meant that many dolls were misidentified and their accompanying accessories hopelessly misattributed, leaving a tangled puzzle that Japanese Friendship Doll experts like Alan Pate have been in the process of untangling for years.

Case in point the Delaware Historical Society: We originally thought that we had received Miss Karafuto in 1928 when we had in fact received Miss Nagano. The doll's true identity was not discovered until 1996, when Friendship doll expert, Michiko Takaoka, was able to definitively identify her from the distinctive markings on the doll and her clothing. The real Miss Karafuto doll is currently in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she was known as Miss Okinawa. Alan Pate's recent research visit to the Society to study Miss Nagano and her furnishings has turned up yet another interesting discovery. Although we have the original Miss Nagano doll and her correct kimono, it turns out that we have the furnishings that were meant to go with the original Miss Karafuto. Alan was able to determine this by identifying the unique design mark on each piece of the furniture. We also have Miss Karafuto's original stand.

Apparently we are not alone. During the course of his research, Alan has found many such mishaps and misidentifications and the problem runs so deep that all of the dolls and their accessories may never be able to be permanently reunited as originally intended. However, new research and careful documentation like Alan's is aiming to set right, at least on paper, what originally went wrong. From our perspective, the acquisition of new knowledge about the collections in our care is an ongoing process, and sometimes it's o.k. to be wrong as long as you keep moving forward. We look forward to learning more that will shed new light on Miss Nagano and her wider context.

About Japanese Friendship Dolls

Dolls have been a unique part of Japanese culture going back to ancient times. In Japan, some dolls are merely a child's plaything, while others are an object of artistic value, or an item of veneration. Two large doll festivals are held each year; Girls' Day celebrated in March and Boys' Day celebrated in May.

In 1927, an American activist missionary named Dr. Sidney Gulik founded the Friendship Doll Project in response to the U.S. Immigration Act which prohibited East Asians from immigrating to the United States. This new law especially damaged the relationship between Japan and the U.S. causing tension, which was a personal disappointment to Gulik who had spent many years teaching in Japan.

Dr. Gulik admired Japanese culture, and learned to read, write, and speak Japanese. He became a well-known advocate for international understanding and a defender of the rights of Japanese Americans, developing cultural programs in an attempt to mend the relationship between the U.S. and Japan by fostering understanding and appreciation of each country's culture.

Gulik co-founded The Committee on World Friendship Among Children, which launched a nationwide effort to encourage American schoolchildren to send dolls to their Japanese counterparts as a symbol of hope for international understanding. One of the goals of the committee was "To implant in the minds of children the ideals of goodwill, understanding, and peace among nations."

American children sent more than 12,000 dolls, dressed in handmade clothes, and accompanied by letters filled with good wishes, to Tokyo in 1927. The dolls received a warm welcome, arriving just in time for the Girls' Day Doll Festival where they were celebrated as a prized gift and later were sent to schools throughout the country.

The Japanese were so pleased to receive the American dolls, they commissioned the best doll makers in Japan to craft fifty-eight "friendship dolls" that they would send to the U.S. in December 1927. These exquisite dolls are almost 3 feet tall, have faces sculpted by artists using oyster shells, glass eyes, and human hair. They arrived by ship at the Port of San Francisco.

Each with her own passport, accompanied by a bridal trousseau of folding screens, lacquer chests, lanterns, tea sets, and silk parasols. Today the Japanese Friendship Dolls are recognized as some of the most significant dolls ever crafted in Japan. They traveled next

to Washington, D.C. for a large welcome ceremony hosted by the Japanese Ambassador and his young daughter where poems and songs written especially for the occasion were performed. From D.C., the dolls traveled to New York where they were greeted by the mayor and displayed at the Brooklyn Museum.

Nine of the dolls traveled to Delaware in 1928 and children were invited to see them at the Wilmington Public Library. Miss Nagano was presented by a 7 year-old girl of Japanese descent and was received on behalf of Wilmington by Mayor George W.K. Forrest and the 6 year-old granddaughter of Emelea Pusey Warner, a local philanthropist and leader in the women's movement who was instrumental in arranging the dolls' tour stop in Wilmington. Ads in the Evening Journal inviting the public to view the dolls stated, "These dolls are masterpieces of the most skillful artisans of Japan and are very much worth seeing."

Miss Nagano then made her home at the Delaware Historical Society, where she has been admired and cared for almost 100 years. In 2003, Miss Nagano was invited to return to her native Japan for one year where she was welcomed back with great fanfare, received professional restoration work, was on display at a museum, and participated in a documentary about the friendship dolls.