



BONSAI/SUISEKI DIPLOMACY

It was a diplomatic first for an American President to give a bonsai and a viewing stone to a Japanese Prime Minister. In an official ceremony at the Blair House on May 2, 1999, President Clinton presented Prime Minister Obuchi with a California juniper bonsai and an American "Shore stone". The Prime Minister was reportedly so taken with his gifts that he personally carried them with him to his bedroom in the Blair House when he retired for the evening.

- The California juniper had been trained by Ernie Kuo, who had purchased it from Sam Ugeno who had collected it in the Tehachapi Mountains in Kern County, California.
- The stone had been collected by Jim Hayes in California's Eel River in October 1998. It was one of the finest stones that Jim had ever found, and he had named it "Way of Eternal Peace."

You will recall that last November when President Clinton visited Tokyo, Prime Minister Obuchi had given him two bonsai and a Tiger stone. (See the article "New Gifts from Japan" in the Winter 1998 issue of the *NBF Bulletin*.) The stone is on exhibit at the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum, and the two trees will be displayed once they come out of quarantine. The Prime Minister's gesture raised the visibility of these two related art forms to a head-of-state level.

President Clinton, in preparing for Prime Minister Obuchi's visit to

Washington this past May, must have been amused by the idea of making a return gift in kind. Dr. Tom Elias, Director of the U.S. National Arboretum, with support from Dan Glickman, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, proposed that President Clinton present Prime Minister Obuchi with an American bonsai and viewing stone. Once this suggestion was accepted by the White House, Jim Hayes and Ernie Kuo, both Directors of the National Bonsai Foundation, offered to make available to President Clinton a masterpiece suiseki and a masterpiece bonsai, respectively.

The behind-the-scenes activity then moved into high gear. Working with Warren Hill, Curator of Bonsai at the National Bonsai and

Penjing Museum, Carl Swenson of Baltimore, Maryland made a beautiful wooden box for Jim's Eel River stone, to which the White Horse attached the Presidential Seal. Ernie's juniper was crated up in California and shipped to the National Arboretum. Tom Elias and Jack Sustic, Assistant Curator of Bonsai at the Museum, then took the stone and the juniper to the Blair House where they were presented to the Prime Minister and then displayed there.

Following the opening ceremonies on the South Lawn of the White House to welcome Prime Minister Obuchi, President Clinton and the Prime Minister went into the Blue Room to inspect four bon-

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Prime Minister Obuchi and Mr. Kato with California Juniper.



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President's Letter

The efforts of NBF and the U.S. National Arboretum to educate the public about bonsai got a major boost during the last year. As the article beginning on page 1 explains, we could not ask for greater publicity for bonsai than the round of bonsai and suiseki gifts between President Clinton and Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi. NBF's Directors, Jim Hayes and Ernie Kuo, donated to President Clinton the suiseki and bonsai that he in turn gave to Mr. Obuchi.

We have Mr. Saburo Kato to thank for bringing bonsai to this lofty level of visibility. As Chairman of the Nippon Bonsai Association and Mr. Obuchi's bonsai teacher, Mr. Kato is doing wonders for the world of bonsai.

More behind-the-scenes details on Mr. Clinton's bonsai and

suiseki gifts to Mr. Obuchi will be revealed by Dr. Tom Elias in an article to be published soon in *Bonsai Magazine*.

Mr. Kato's lecture at the U.S. National Arboretum on "The Heart of Bonsai" is summarized on page 5. This was an inspirational talk, and we plan to make available a video of the talk and the demonstration by Mr. Hiroshi Takeyama and Mr. Jiro Fukuda that followed it.

I know you will enjoy reading Cheryl Manning's account (on page 4) of John Naka's recent visit to the Museum. It mentions Bonnie Kobert's excellent bust of John which the Foundation is having cast in bronze and which will be placed just inside the entrance to the John Y. Naka North American Pavillion.

As this issue of the *Bulletin* indicates, much is happening at your Museum. We hope you will visit soon and often.

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sai. Two of them were the trees that the Prime Minister had presented to President Clinton in November 1998. The other two were from the Museum's North American Collection. Mr. Saburo Kato, Chairman of the Nippon Bonsai Association, accompanied the President and Prime Minister. Mr. Kato is the Prime Minister's bonsai teacher.

Those of us interested in bonsai and suiseki were delighted and fas-

cinated to watch these back-and-forth gifts between President Clinton and Prime Minister Obuchi. Hopefully these gifts will spark a new interest on this side of the Pacific in these two ancient art forms.



Eel River Viewing Stone

Check Out NBF's New Website:
www.bonsai-nbf.org

Japanese Bonsai Collection Strengthened

by Dr. Tom Elias

The National Bonsai and Penjing Museum received seven new bonsai plants this spring in honor of Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi's official state visit to Washington, D.C., May 2-4, 1999. This gift consisted of two large specimens, a holly (*Ilex serrata*) and a Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*), and five smaller plants. The holly is an 80-year old forest-style planting and was selected for showing in the annual Kokufu Bonsai exhibition held in Tokyo in February. This is the oldest and most prestigious of all bonsai exhibitions worldwide. This specimen is now on display in the Japanese Collection in the Museum. The 60-year old Japanese maple with its leaves turning a brilliant yellow and red in the autumn will be in quarantine at an APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Quarantine Service) facility in Beltsville for

at least a year before it can be released for display.

The five smaller shohin bonsai varied in age from 15 to 50 years of age. They consist of a Trident maple (*Acer buergerianum*), Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*), Japanese five-needle pine (*Pinus parvifolia*), zelkova (*Zelkova serrata*), and a Chinese juniper (*Juniperus chinensis*). The pine, juniper, and zelkova are all currently on display in the Japanese Pavilion; the two maples will have to join the larger maple in quarantine facilities for many months. We look forward to the time when we can bring these maples out from quarantine status and place them on public display in the Museum.

The genesis of the gift came from meetings in Tokyo in February when Elizabeth Ley and I met with Mr. Saburo Kato and members of

the Nippon Bonsai Association. At that time, it was agreed that a gift of several new bonsai would be a suitable way to commemorate Prime Minister Obuchi's planned visit with President Clinton. This latest gift adds greater depth and breath to the Japanese Collection at the National Bonsai and Penjing Museum. This Collection is the finest display of Japanese bonsai in North America.



Holly Forest

Photography Project: First Step Completed

Last year, the Foundation and the U.S. National Arboretum began work on a joint project to take new photographs of the bonsai, penjing and viewing stones in the collections at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum. The new photographs will be used on the websites of the Foundation and of the National Arboretum, and published in new books, pamphlets and postcards showing the Museum's collections.

The project's objective is to gain a wider audience for the magnificent trees and stones exhibited at the Museum. This will help to educate the public about the Museum's collections and enhance the Museum's visibility.

The first phase of this project—shooting the Museum's viewing stones—has been completed. Earlier this year, Jim Hayes and Joe Mullan photographed the almost 60 stones in the Museum's collection. Jim, who is an NBF Director and Publisher of the magazine *Waiting To Be Discovered*, was the art director for the shoot; Joe Mullan, a professional photographer who has worked with Jim on his magazine for a number of years, was the photographer.

Working with Warren Hill, Jack Sustic and Martha Edens, Jim and Joe spent several long weekends at the Museum. Both Jim and Joe are ultra-perfectionists, and on average they devoted more than one hour to photographing each stone.

We are now starting to print a series of postcards featuring the view-

ing stones. These postcards will be available for purchase at the U.S. National Arboretum. The next step will be to develop a book on the viewing stones, which Jim estimates will have 50-60 pages and be available in both hard- and soft-cover editions.



Penjing Mountain Stone

John Naka Visits Goshin

by Cheryl Manning

Living in Los Angeles has its drawbacks—high crime, smog, freeway gridlock, etc. But one heavenly aspect to life in the City of Angels is proximity to John Naka. I've been blessed with the opportunity to study with John, join his clubs, and occasionally slurp a bowl of noodles with him. As with all good things, you just can't get enough. So when the opportunity arose for me to accompany John Naka and Marybel Balendonck to work on trees at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum, I jumped at the chance.

Little did I know that when John visits the Museum, a talented army of volunteers appears to assist him, Warren Hill, and Jack Sustic. So I spent most of my time following John and documenting the weekend in photos.

The first order of business was the annual NBF board meeting. I'd been forewarned that I'd be taking notes for John so that he could participate more effectively. Unfortunately, my handwriting is not the fastest or neatest. I tried to convey all that took place in the meeting, including the humorous comments. There was always a 3–4 minute delay in John's laughter, which I found most hilarious. My, we enjoyed ourselves. But seriously, I was so happy to assist him in being a part of the meeting.

One highlight of the board meeting was the unveiling of a bust of John sculpted by Bonnie Kobert. The clay was still wet and I assumed she was going to make some final adjustments to her creation because she had the live model to work from. I was truly amazed at what she'd accomplished using photographs. Later a bronze will be cast from the model. After 19 pages of notes and a slight case of writer's cramp, the meeting was adjourned, with the remainder of the weekend devoted to the trees.

Actually, before the board meeting Warren Hill took us out for a tour of the trees. John and Marybel were delighted at how healthy and well groomed the trees looked. John also had the opportunity to look over trees he'd like to do a little work on. One job was to reposition one of Goshin's trees that was leaning too far forward. Harry Hirao's tree was due for a little haircut, so it was also brought into the Yoshimura Center.

On Saturday, everybody was busy trimming, wiring, photographing, or sharing information. Vaughn

Banting brought along photos of an experimental technique for creating taper in bald cypress. Marybel had found out the day before that her elm grove, along with Wayne Takayasu's California juniper, would be on display in the White House during Prime Minister Obuchi's visit. So she gave it a marathon haircut that took two days but resulted in a most spectacular bonsai. In Blair House, where Prime Minister Obuchi would reside, George Yamaguchi's black pine, Mary Madison's buttonwood, as well as an Eel River stone donated by Richard Manning, were all ready for display.

The biggest excitement of the day was the arrival of Ernie Kuo's California juniper that President Clinton was planning to present to Prime Minister Obuchi the following weekend. John supervised the unpacking of the crate and everyone was pleased to see how beautiful the tree looked.

Sunday was more of the same—trimming, wiring, photographing. A cross-country flight and two nights of frolicking with friends had taken its toll. So we cut the work day short and traveled to the quarantine facility to view the maple tree and Ezo spruce tree that Prime Minister Obuchi had given President Clinton.

The hospitality that was showered on John and his friends as well as the fabulous collection of trees at the Museum made this a memorable weekend.



Bonnie and John



John inspecting California Juniper

Assistant Curator Jack Sustic

As of April 1999, Jack Sustic was hired into a permanent position as Assistant Curator of Bonsai. Jack had been an intern at the Museum from June to December 1996, during which time his salary was funded through NBF's **Barbara Hall Marshall Internship Program**. He rejoined the Museum's staff in May 1998 as the **Barbara Hall Marshall Assistant Curator of Bonsai**, which was a temporary position funded by NBF. As we had hoped, the federal government has now assumed the funding of Jack's job, and he is now in a permanent position as Assistant Curator of Bonsai funded by the federal government.

Jack has been an outstanding addition to the curatorial staff at the Museum. His new position gives him much more responsibility for the care of the Museum's bonsai and penjing collections, and for arranging exhibits at the Museum. Jack is also presenting more public demonstrations.

In the photograph below, Jack is shown at the White House with the Ezo spruce that Prime Minister Obuchi gave to President Clinton.



The Heart of Bonsai



On the first Sunday in May, 1999, Mr. Saburo Kato, Chairman of the Board of the Nippon Bonsai Association, Inc., gave a lecture on "The Heart of Bonsai." The lecture was given at the U.S. National Arboretum, in connection with Prime Minister Obuchi's state visit to the United States. Immediately following Mr. Kato's lecture, his colleagues Mr. Hiroshi Takeyama and Mr. Jiro Fukuda, gave a demonstration of bonsai techniques.

Mr. Kato explained that the "heart of bonsai" is its power to bring about important changes. This power stems from the love that each person gives to his or her bonsai. Mr. Kato said that each bonsai reflects "the love of a person to grow and nurture the small life of a plant." Therefore, when we look at a bonsai, "we can tell how much love is planted in that bonsai."

Mr. Kato believes that as more people understand and appreciate the power of bonsai there will be positive consequences both for world peace and the individuals who enjoy bonsai.

- For the world: "I believe that if bonsai becomes more popular and everybody in the world loves bonsai, wars will disappear on earth." *
- For the individual: "Bonsai will reward our love in two ways: one is a peaceful mind, and the other is a long life."

Mr. Kato explained why people can live a long life if they enjoy bonsai:

"There are two reasons: first, to grow bonsai means to take responsibility for another's life; second, to grow bonsai means to set up an objective.

Responsibility will make us work harder. In Japan, it is said that those who enjoy bonsai will not become senile. To fulfill the daily responsibility to our bonsai, we have to use both mind and body.

To set up an objective not just for tomorrow or next week is important. The objective is set up for a year later, ten years later, something far away. The objective is set up apart from everyday life.

We cannot avoid growing older. However, if we feel responsible for bonsai and set up an objective for bonsai, we tend to forget growing older and we end up living longer."

The Foundation is deeply indebted to Mr. Kato for his continuing support of the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum.

*As one observer later wrote: "You may think that this is a big dream about bonsai becoming an instrument for world peace, but if you get involved, you can better appreciate that possibility." Jules Koetsch in *PBA Clippings* June 1999.

UPCOMING MUSEUM EXHIBITS

Suiseki Exhibit

August 14–29, 1999.

A formal show of the Museum's viewing stones.

Brookside Bonsai Society Exhibit

September 11–19, 1999.

The bonsai of the Brookside Bonsai Society (Maryland).

Lancaster Bonsai Society Exhibit

October 9–17, 1999.

The bonsai of the Lancaster Bonsai Society (Pennsylvania).

Fall Foliage Exhibit

October 30–November 7, 1999.

A formal show of the Museum's bonsai exhibiting fall foliage or fruit.

The H. William Merritt Fund

Bill Merritt passed away on May 2, 1999. Bill had been drafted onto NBF's Board of Directors in the early 1980s, shortly after NBF was formed. It was the best move NBF ever made, for Bill's contributions to NBF's work became legendary. As Fred Ballard has said many times, the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum would not have been completed without him. As the Chairman of NBF's Building Committee, Bill spent untold hours reviewing plans, negotiating contracts, resolving disputes, and supervising implementation. Most characteristically, however, Bill took the time to build with his own hands the tokonoma displayed in the Mary E. Mrose International Pavilion at the Museum.

To recognize Bill's tremendous contributions to the National

Bonsai & Penjing Museum, the H. William Merritt Fund has been established by the Foundation. The goal of the Fund is to raise in excess of \$25,000. These funds will be used to construct a new entrance to the Japanese Pavilion at the Museum. This entrance will be named in Bill's honor.

Please send your contributions, marked for the H. William Merritt Fund, to Chris Yeapanis, Treasurer, The National Bonsai Foundation, 4228 Berritt Street, Fairfax, Virginia 22030. Checks should be payable to The National Bonsai Foundation. All donations are tax deductible as provided by law. For donations of stock, please call Felix Laughlin at 202/862-1040 to obtain NBF's brokerage account information.

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