

HISTORY

1905 - Dr. David Fairchild In 1898, Dr. David Fairchild became the first chief of the Sections of Plant and Seed Introduction for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He invented the system of indexing plants still used today. He tried to grow Japanese flowering cherry trees on his own land in Maryland and they flowered. He spoke on the topic of beautification of Washington, DC with cherry trees and inspired Eliza Scidmore of the National Geographic Magazine to lobby for trees for Washington.

1910 - Eliza Scidmore Eliza Scidmore worried over the poor appearance of the marshy swamp at the foot of 17th Street, NW. There was then no stone wall for a Tidal Basin. She lobbied for the planting of flowering Japanese cherry trees in Washington since early in the century. She was an editor and writer for National Geographic Magazine.

1910 - Dr. Jokichi Takamine Dr. Jokichi Takamine, the famous Japanese chemist who discovered adrenaline, contributed his own money to help purchase flowering cherry trees as a gift for the city of Washington, DC.

1912 – Mayor Ozaki - Mayor Ozaki, originally from Ise, served simultaneously as Mayor of Tokyo and as a representative to the Diet from Mie Prefecture. When he was mayor of Tokyo in 1912, he was responsible for the gift of the first 3,000 flowering Cherry Trees to Washington, DC. In the past several years the United States Cherry Blossom Queen has been the guest of the Ozaki Foundation in Mie Prefecture.

1912 – Mrs. William Howard Taft Dr. David Fairchild, the botanist for the Agriculture Department who grew trees on his own property in Maryland, and Mrs. William Howard Taft, both envisioned a grove of cherry trees along The Speedway. The Speedway was a road called that because horses could pull carriages at a fast trot and could "speed" along an area now roughly equivalent to Independence Avenue from 17th Street, SW to the area of what is now The Lincoln Memorial. But in 1912, there was no Kutz Bridge over the Tidal Basin and there was no finished Tidal Basin stone wall. There was a watery lowland that attracted insects. Now the stone wall of the Tidal Basin is just about 40 feet south from the first tree planted by Mrs. Taft -.There was no large ceremony the day Mrs. Taft planted the first tree. The planting was "unofficial" and only Mrs. Taft, the Japanese Ambassador and his wife--Count and Viscountess Chinda, Col. Cosby, and Eliza Scidmore were the five notables present.

1939 – First Cherry Blossom Queen The first four Cherry Blossom Queens were selected by the Cherry Blossom Festival Committee of the Washington Board of Trade for the years 1939, 1940, 1941, and 1947. NCSS started selecting Queens with a random spin of The Wheel of Fortune in 1948. There was no Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, DC for the years 1942-1945 due to war with Japan.

The pre-war festival did not resume until April 1947. During World War II, the style editors of Washington newspapers did not refer to the "Japanese" Cherry Blossom Trees. Instead, reporters had to use the term "Oriental" Cherry Blossom Trees until the end of the war in August 1945.

1948 – Wheel of Fortune Chooses Princess Sixteen-year old Doris Sheldon of Delaware points to the Wheel of Fortune after she has been selected as the Cherry Blossom Queen for 1948 during the second festival after the end of

World War II. The age for princesses included high school students in the late 1940s but quickly shifted to college age in 1949.

1949 – President Truman and Congress Charter NCSS Festival Chairman Edward Carr invited President and Mrs. Truman to attend the 1949 Cherry Blossom Ball at the Mayflower Hotel and they attended briefly. In 1950, the President gave a speech at the opening ceremony on the Tidal Basin on April 1. Re-establishment of peaceful relations with Japan and bringing democracy to that former enemy nation were important policy items for Mr. Truman. On April 3, 1952, President Truman signed Public Law 82-293 giving a congressional charter to NCSS.

1951 – International Princess Added The festival included cherry blossom princesses from overseas embassies in Washington, DC in addition to the state princesses in 1951. Even as this festival was trying to heal wounds from the war with Japan that ended in 1945, this year American troops were fighting in Korea. But the International Community was invited to participate in the Cherry Blossom Festival and through the years many Embassies have participated. They have sponsored a princess, sometimes a family member of one of the Embassy staff or even bringing a princess from their country. Besides sponsoring a princess Embassies have provided a full dinner, a luncheon, a tea and sometimes just a chance to learn about their culture. Many times the Embassies have students attending university in Washington and they may serve as princess. Did you know that once you cross the threshold of an Embassy you are then in their country? What an exciting way to “get away” for a quick foreign vacation! The Embassies choose whomever they want for princess by following the guidelines set up by NCSS relating to the US princesses. It is not unusual to see an Embassy princess dressed in her native garb for the Cherry Blossom Parade or they may even wear a colored gown for the Grand Ball. International Princesses are excluded from the Spin of the Wheel as they are representing their country, not the USA and the chosen queen will represent the USA.

1954 – First Year of the U.S./Japanese Stone Lantern Lighting Tatsuko Iguchi, daughter of Japan's Ambassador to Ottawa, Canada, came to Washington, DC in March 1954 to light the 300-year old Japanese Stone Lantern on American soil for the first time. The six-ton eight and one-half feet-tall lantern was taken down in Ueno Park in Tokyo where it has stood since 1651 and shipped to America as a gift to the people of Washington, DC.

1957 – First Crowning of the Mikimoto Pearl Crown Gen. Alfred Grunther, former commander of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE) and current president of the American Red Cross presents the ceremonial and priceless Mikimoto Pearl Crown to Jean Marie Lee of Alaska, the 1957 U.S. Cherry Blossom Queen.

In 1956, the Mikimoto Pearl Company of Tokyo created this magnificent ceremonial crown that is only used once each year to crown the U.S. Cherry Blossom Queen at the NCSS Grand Ball in April. Mr. Mikimoto presented the crown to the Washington Board of Trade to be first used fifty years ago during the 1957 National Cherry Blossom Festival.

The crown has 1,585 pearls personally selected by Mr. Mikimoto and they are set in a frame of 14K gold. The crown has a 6-3/4 inch base that is encircled with a band of ermine. Above the base is a coronet of perfectly matched pearls and delicately crafted gold blossoms, scrolls, and leaves. The most recent appraised value of the crown in 2005 for insurance was \$300,000 but in reality the crown is priceless because of its unique design and history.

Due to the weight of the crown, it is not practical for a young woman to actually wear the crown except for the few minutes it takes to crown the Cherry Blossom Queen while pictures are taken. It is then removed and the Cherry Blossom Queen is given a smaller crown, also a gift from Mikimoto that is hers to keep.

The smaller crown is brought to the U.S. by representatives of the Japan Cherry Blossom Association and the small crown matches the one worn by the Japan Cherry Blossom Queen while the matching sashes are made in the United States.

1965 – Lady Bird Johnson Plants Tree / Presidential Letter Sent Lady Bird Johnson plants a Japanese flowering cherry tree on the Tidal Basin just a few feet from a tree planted in 1912 by Mrs. William Howard Taft. The ceremony was in April 1965.

Linda Gail Quase of Pennsylvania, 1965 U.S. Cherry Blossom Queen, carried a letter from President Lyndon Johnson to the Prime Minister of Japan in one of the early visits to Japan.

1972 – Princesses ride in Parade 1972 United States Cherry Blossom Queen Lynn Armstrong of Massachusetts leads a section of the parade in a brand new Ford Mustang. About 52 new Mustangs and drivers for state princesses that year were donated by Ford as a special new car promotion. Lynn was a nursing student that year at Boston College. She was followed in the next car by D.C. Princess Jackie Henley who was a student at American University.

1976 – First Lady Betty Ford First Lady Betty Ford welcomed the 1976 Class of Cherry Blossom Princesses to the White House Rose Garden.

1980 – Wreath Laying Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery In many years the cherry blossom princess week has included laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery. In this picture the Class of 1980 watches the changing of the guard just after their class wreath has been placed in front of the center monument to grave of an American soldier from the First World War who was "known but to God."

1995 – Koto Concert at Lantern Lighting Ceremony A young Japanese-American music student plays the Koto, a long string instrument, is a traditional Japanese stringed musical instrument derived from the Chinese guzheng. The koto is the national instrument of Japan.[1] Koto are about 180 centimetres (71 in) long, and made from kiri wood (*Paulownia tomentosa*). They have 13 strings that are strung over 13 movable bridges along the length of the instrument. Players can adjust the string pitches by moving these bridges before playing, and use three finger picks (on thumb, index finger, and middle finger) to pluck the strings. She is playing "Sakura" which translates as "cherry blossom."

2000 – Rep. Shelley Moore Capito Rep. Shelley Moore Capito (R-West Virginia) became the first former cherry blossom princess to be elected to Congress in 2000.

2002 – Sen. Lisa Murkowski Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska was a cherry blossom princess when she was a student at Georgetown University. She was appointed to the Senate in 2002 and elected to a full term in 2004.

2004 – Congressional Reception Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) meets Ambassador and Mrs. Kato at 2004 NCSS Reception for Princesses and their Members of Congress. Democratic Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) also came to the reception.

2007 – Mrs. Yukika Sohma Mrs. Yukika Sohma, the daughter of Mayor and Mrs. Yukio Ozaki, spoke at the Lantern Ceremony on April 8, 2007. She turned 95 years old on January 26, 2007 and was born two months before Mrs. Taft planted the first cherry tree on March 27, 1912. Her father lived from 1858 to 1954--almost 96 years. He served in the Diet for 63 years and was called "the father of parliamentary democracy in Japan." He was also the appointed mayor of Tokyo in 1912 when he gave the first 3,000 flowering cherry trees to Washington.

2008 – 60th Anniversary of Cherry Blossom Ball The Grand Hyatt Hotel Ballroom at 1000 H Street, NW was the scene of the 60th Anniversary Cherry Blossom Ball and the cover above is from the souvenir program book. The 1962 Cherry Blossom Princess from Texas, Mrs. Lynda Bird Johnson Robb, sent a letter of greeting to the guests.

2015 – Rep. Debbie Dingell -Representative Debbie Dingell (D-Michigan), was a cherry blossom princess and became the first US non-widowed woman in Congress to succeed her husband.