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# The Cherry Blossoms

Washington DC

Each year the blooming of the famous Japanese cherry blossoms marks the unofficial beginning of spring in our Nation's Capital when hundreds of thousands of people visit Washington to enjoy their beauty. The most popular display may be seen in the massed planting of cherry trees that encircle the Tidal Basin in West Potomac Park. In this picturesque setting the blossoms produce the effect of white and pink clouds banked around the basin. Another display is in the 2 miles along the roadside in East Potomac Park.

#### History

About a month after President William Howard Taft took office on March 4, 1909, Mrs. Taft became interested in planting Japanese cherry trees in Potomac Park. Dr. Jokichi Takamine, the Japanese chemist famous as the discoverer of adrenalin, was visiting in Washington at that time and learned of Mrs. Taft's interest. Through his efforts, the Mayor of Tokyo, Yukio Ozaki, presented the gift of cherry trees in 1912 on behalf of that city to the City of Washington as a gesture of friendship. Each spring the blooming of these trees is a recurring gift, which becomes appreciated more and more each year.

The trees were raised at the Okitsu Imperial Horticultural Experiment Station at Shizoukan, Japan, under the supervision of Prof. Inokichi Kuwana, Director of the Yokohama Imperial Plant Quarantine Station, assisted by Dr. Manabu Miyoshi, the noted authority on Japanese cherry trees. The scions for these trees were taken in December 1910 from the famous collection on the bank of the Arakawa River in the Adachi Ward, a suburb of Tokyo, and grafted on wild cherry root stock. These grafted trees were lifted for shipment in December 1911.

The gift of 3,000 cherry trees of 12 varieties was shipped from Yokohama on board the S.S. *Awa Maru* on February 14, 1912. Upon arrival in Seattle, they were transferred to insulated freight cars for shipment to Washington; they arrived on March 25.

#### Planting

In a simple ceremony on March 27, Mrs. Taft planted the first cherry tree and Viscountess Chinda, wife of the Japanese Ambassador, planted the second on the northern bank of the Tidal Basin, about 125 feet south of what is now Independence Avenue. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Mrs. Taft presented a bouquet of "American Beauty" roses to Viscountess Chinda. Bronze markers were placed at the bases of the trees planted by our First Lady and the wife of the Japanese Ambassador.

Workmen continued the planting of Yoshino trees around the Tidal Basin. The cherry trees of the other 11 varieties and the remaining Yoshino trees were planted in East Potomac Park.

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### **Around the Tidal Basin**

At present, approximately 650 cherry trees line the Tidal Basin; 90 percent of these are Yoshino and 10 percent Akebono, which has single, pale-pink blossoms. The Yoshino, one of the favorite cultivated cherry trees of Japan, was developed about 1870. The beauty of this tree is in its great profusion of white, single blossoms. The Akebono is a seedling sport selection of Yoshino, developed by a nursery in this country in 1920. It has deep-pink buds, which open into delicate pale-pink, single blossoms, whereas the Yoshino has light-pink buds that open into white, single blossoms. The Yoshino and Akebono varieties bloom at the same time and are among the earliest in spring. The Akebono blossoms provide an attractive tint of pink to the dominant white Yoshino blossoms around the Tidal Basin. Together they provide a beautiful setting for the stately Thomas Jefferson Memorial.

### **In East Potomac Park**

East Potomac Park occupies an island extending 2 miles downstream in the Potomac River, southeast of the Tidal Basin. Cherry trees are prominently featured in its landscaping and more than 1,800 trees of the following varieties are now planted here: Kwanzan, Taki-nioi, Higan, Beni-Higan, Jugatsu-sakura, Prunus subhirtella Pendula, and Yoshino.

The Kwanzan is the most popular variety planted in East Potomac Park. It produces heavy clusters of double blossoms, and is among the latest to bloom. The deep-pink blossoms create a very colorful effect in the massed plantings of this variety in East Potomac Park.

### **Time of Blooming**

The date when the buds open varies from year to year, depending on weather conditions. It is impossible to make an accurate prediction on the blooming dates of the cherry trees earlier than 10 days prior to their bursting into full bloom. Since 1924, the Yoshino has twice come into full bloom as early as March 20, and once as late as April 17, with the average date being April 5. Twice since 1924 the Kwanzan has burst into bloom as early as April 14 and twice as late as May 1; the average has been April 22.

The blossoms are short-lived. Beginning to fall at the end of the first week, most of the petals have left the trees by the end of the second week.

### **The Cherry Blossom Festival**

The original planting of Japanese cherry trees on the Tidal Basin was commemorated first in 1927, when Washington school children reenacted the event, and in 1934 by a 3-day celebration sponsored by the District of Columbia Commissioners. The next year many civic groups joined forces to produce the "Cherry Blossom Festival."

Interrupted only by World War II, the annual festival has grown steadily in scope and popularity. In 1940 a

pageant was introduced. In 1948 Cherry Blossom Princesses were selected from every State in the Union and the Territories, and from these princesses a queen was chosen to reign during the festival. Now featuring many outstanding attractions, the National Cherry Blossom Festival is officially opened by the lighting of an ancient ceremonial Japanese lantern.

### **Japanese Lantern and Pagoda**

Adding oriental charm to the Japanese cherry tree display at the Tidal Basin is the Japanese Lantern presented to the City of Washington by the Governor of Tokyo on March 30, 1954. It commemorates the Centennial of Commodore Perry's historic mission to Japan. The lantern, made of granite, is 8½ feet high, weighs 6,000 pounds, and is about 300 years old.

On the west side of the Tidal Basin is a Japanese Pagoda, hewn of rough stone. It was presented to the City of Washington by the Mayor of Yokohama to "symbolize the spirit of friendship between the United States of America and Japan manifested in the Treaty of Peace, Amity and Commerce signed at Yokohama on March 31, 1854. . . ." It was dedicated on April 18, 1958.

### **Cuttings Sent to Japan**

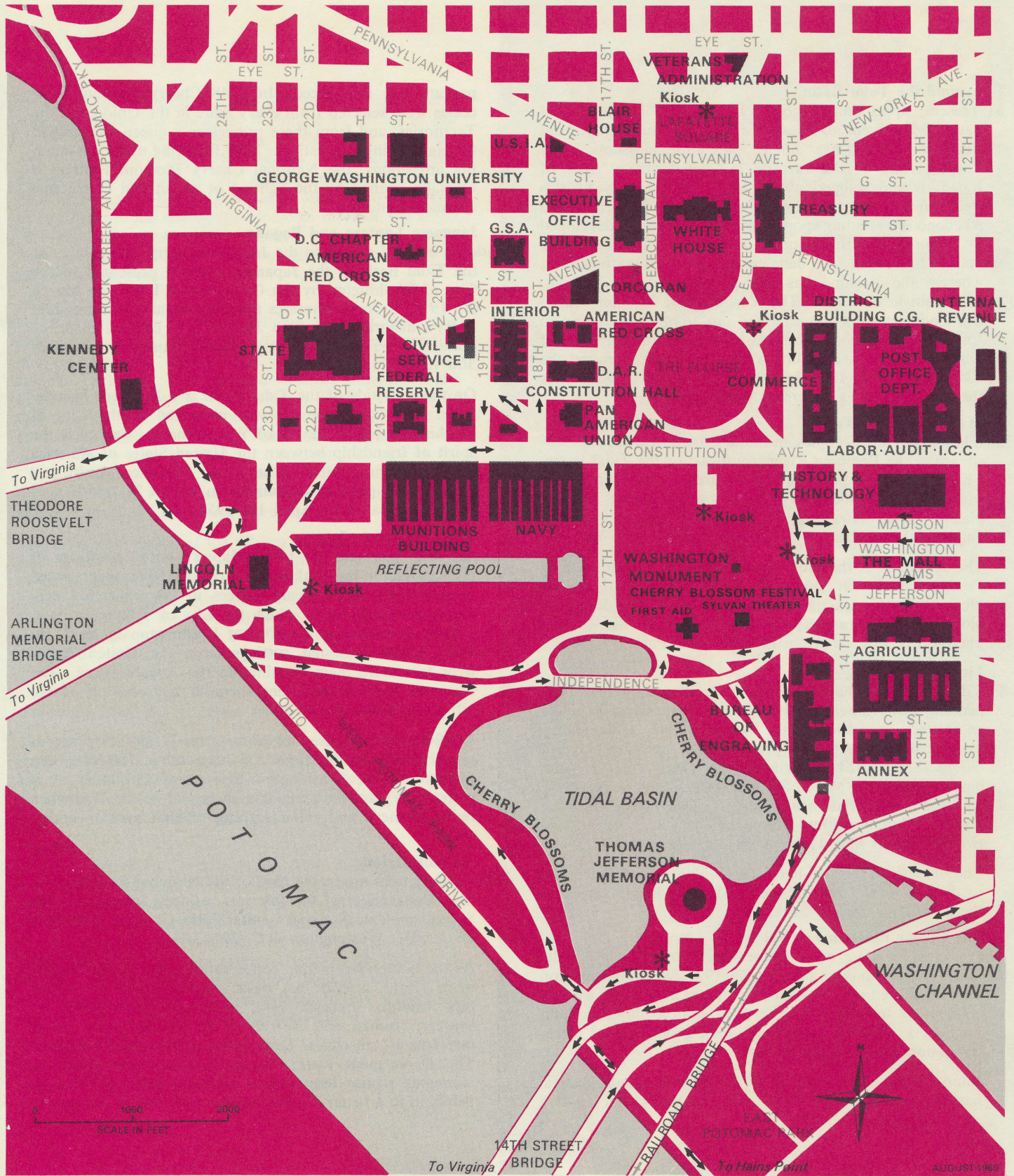
In the war years of the 1940's Japan's noted plantings of cherry trees on the bank of the Arakawa River deteriorated greatly from lack of care. Trees in this collection provided the parent stock which the City of Tokyo had generously presented to the City of Washington in 1912. In 1952 Japan requested cuttings from the United States' trees to restore their plantings in the Adachi Ward. The National Park Service sent them in appreciation of the gift from Tokyo in 1912.

In 1965, the Japanese Government made another generous gift of 3,800 Yoshino trees. Of this number, 700 have been planted on the Washington Monument Grounds. It is planned to plant the remainder there and on the Mall when redevelopment and relandscaping of that area is undertaken.

### **Administration**

The cherry trees are in the care of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. Address inquiries to the Superintendent, National Capital Parks-Central, 1100 Ohio Drive SW., Washington, D.C. 20242.

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has basic responsibilities for water, fish, wildlife, mineral, land, park, and recreational resources. Indian and Territorial affairs are other major concerns of America's "Department of Natural Resources." The Department works to assure the wisest choice in managing all our resources so each will make its full contribution to a better United States—now and in the future.



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AUGUST 1969

