

"The 1960 Hog Lift," 2001

The 1960 Hog Lift to Japan

How Iowa & Yamanashi Became Sister States

by Ginalie Swaim

Photo Captions: A farmer's home in Yamanashi, Japan in the 1950s was considerably different than its equivalent on an Iowa farm.

Another Yamanashi farmhouse, destroyed by typhoons. The story of Iowa's 1960 relief effort unfolds through photographs and clippings in scrapbooks kept by Iowan Richard S. Thomas.

I AM NOT a world traveler. Count Victoria and Key West, Halifax and L.A. as the distant reaches of my modest travel career. But in October 1999 I found myself seated on a tatami mat in the home of a Japanese family, surrounded by laughter, new friends, and intriguing foods with wonderful colors and textures. Given my non-nomadic nature, it's unlikely that I ever would have been part of an Iowa Sister State delegation to Yamanashi, Japan, if it hadn't been for a typhoon, a Des Moines Air Force officer, and a plane full of hogs.

In the autumn of 1959—while I was still an Iowa farm kid chasing hogs, in fact—typhoons ravaged Yamanashi, the prefecture (or state) west of Tokyo. As a third grader, I probably hadn't studied Japan yet, but another Iowan knew the country well. M/Sgt. Richard Thomas, of Des Moines, had been stationed with the U.S. Air Force in Japan. He had visited Yamanashi, dramatically rimmed by mountains (including Mt. Fuji), and with vegetable gardens and rice paddies tucked into every available space. And he had gotten to know several people there. Hearing that typhoons had damaged one of his favorite areas of Japan spurred him to action.

Photo Caption: M/Sgt. Richard S. Thomas (in cap) was the "go-between for Iowa-Yamanashi and Des Moines-Kofu sister affiliations," according to the photo caption in a scrapbook kept by Thomas. Here he poses in front of the Air Force plane that carried the hogs. With him (from left) are Japanese dignitaries Juji Kasai (former National Diet member), Seiichi Natori (Speaker of Yamanashi Prefectural Assembly), Ryogo Matsuura (Economic Director of Yamanashi Government), and Mayor Keijiro Takano of Kofu.

What Thomas and other Iowans soon set into motion was a series of endeavors that would build a bridge of friendship and cooperation between Iowa and far-distant Yamanashi.

IN JANUARY 1960 at the Des Moines Airport, a gift of 36 breeding hogs awaited departure for Japan in a U.S. Air Force C-130 specially fitted out with aluminum hog pens. Lt. Col. Oscar

Tebbetts of Des Moines headed the airplane's all Iowa crew, The 28 gilts and 8 boars (Poland China, Landrace, and Minnesota No.1 and No. 2) were accompanied by farmers Roscoe Marsden (of Ames) and Albert Miller (Ogden), who would stay for two months to teach Japanese farmers how to raise hogs on corn. The hope was that the gift of the hogs would assist Yamanashi in the wake of the typhoon damage and also help modernize Japanese agriculture. As Marsden said, "We're going to have to learn to live with people on the face of this earth. Foreign affairs in this day of modern transportation have become local affairs."

Walter Goeppinger (Boone), president of the National Corn Growers Association, had spear headed the project. Sixty thousand bushels of corn were also headed to Japan, along with the hope that Japan would become a market for Iowa's surplus corn.

All but one of the 36 hogs weathered the 40-hour trip (one died in Guam). Betty Hockett, of Osceola, with her husband, Lloyd, and sons, was among many families of U.S. servicemen stationed in Japan. Hockett and others greeted the plane in Tokyo. Scratching one of the hogs on the back, she said, "Can you smell Iowa on me?"

M/Sgt. Thomas also associated hogs with Iowa. Described by reporters as "a rawboned Iowan with a love for Japan," Thomas said, "Everyone in Iowa knows hogs. They'd be run out if they didn't."

Photo Caption: Welcomed by onlookers and international flags, the Iowa hogs arrive at the breeding station in Kofu. Below: The first shipload of corn arrives in March 1960.

After a two-week quarantine, the hogs were transported to the Sumiyoshi Breeding Station in Kofu, where they were met by Governor Hisashi Amano. Kofu, the capital of Yamanashi, and Des Moines had already begun a Sister Cities relationship under President Eisenhower's People-to-People program, first launched in the mid-1950s. "This is a warm hand of friendship extended across the sea," said Hideo Tokoro, Japan's agricultural attaché to the U.S. "It is the spirit of the people-to-people program expressed in the most realistic as well as the most sublime of terms. "Like these hogs you have presented, the seed of friendship you have planted will increase itself, producing generations of blue ribbon friends and goodwill of the purest strain." This "warm hand of friendship" would continue to stretch across the Pacific in the years to come. That March, the Yamanashi prefectural government passed a resolution making Iowa its sister state, and Iowa followed suit later that year. The next spring, Governor Hisashi Amano visited Iowa to celebrate the relationship, and in June 1962, Yamanashi sent a gift to Iowa-also of considerable weight but of far more melodious sound than three dozen hogs. The gift was a bronze temple bell (weighing a ton and measuring four feet high) and a bellhouse (fabricated in Japan and shipped in 39 boxes for assembly here). A site south of the capitol was chosen for this "bell of friendship," as reporters called it.

Photo Caption: Yamanashi Governor Hisashi Amano gives a hearty pat to an Iowa hog, as dignitaries, workers, and photographers look on.

It soon became a popular backdrop for photographing Japanese visitors to Iowa. And there were many-for these gifts of hogs and corn, bell and bellhouse, as well as the rapidly developing Sister State relationship, brought on a steady stream of Japanese visitors to Iowa, and Iowans to Japan.

ONE OF THOSE VISITORS was Iowa governor Harold Hughes in the mid-1960s. "After we landed in Tokyo, I left the other governors for the two-hour train trip to Kofu," he wrote in his autobiography. "Arriving at the station, I found myself amid a sea of little children waving American and Japanese flags. Some five thousand people were there for a tumultuous welcome.

"I toured the farms, including the hog barns which are enhanced with fresh flowers in vases every day. For the benefit of the hogs, said my Japanese guide. When he pointed to thousands of swine and said, 'From Iowa,' I remembered the Japanese friendship bell recently installed on our Statehouse grounds and thought how some twenty-odd years before we were deadly enemies. I glanced at my guide and estimated him to be my age. If I had been sent to the South Pacific, we could have killed each other."

The flow of people between Iowa and Yamanashi has grown steadily over the years. Most recently, Governor Tom Vilsack and First Lady Christie Vilsack were guests in Yamanashi last year, as part of the 40-year celebration of "sisterhood," and this August, Governor Ken Amano and a Yamanashi delegation visited Iowa during the week of the State Fair.

Scores of people, ranging from students to dignitaries, have crossed this bridge of friendship between Yamanashi and Iowa, to share children's artwork and quilts, to discuss issues like aging and agriculture, and to tackle RAGBRAI and Mt. Fuji. As the Japanese attaché had predicted, gestures of great generosity in 1960 and 1962 have produced for Iowa and Yamanashi "generations of blue ribbon friends and goodwill of the purest strain."

Photo Caption: In 1962, Yamanashi sent Iowa an enormous bronze bell and bellhouse, as thanks for the 35 breeding hogs and 60,000 bushels of corn that Iowa sent the prefecture after devastating typhoons. Below: The elaborately ornamented "bell of friendship" and bellhouse were installed south of the capitol, here visible in the distance.