

The early Miami Beach and the Japanese gardeners

The city of Miami Beach is planning to celebrate its centenary in 2015 and various commemorative events will be held throughout the year.

The history of Miami Beach began when Carl Fisher, an entrepreneur, reclaimed the shallow water off the coast of Miami about 100 years ago. The reclaimed land was prepared and made green with a number of palm trees, shrubs and flowers by two Japanese gardeners, named Shigezo Tashiro and Kotaro Suto. The New Japan America Newspaper in Los Angeles recorded this story in its 1961 publication titled "One Hundred Years of the Japanese in the United States."

Recently I had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Eiji Joe Tashiro, son of Mr. Shigezo Tashiro, who told me stories about what Miami Beach was like in the 30's onward. Mr. Joe Tashiro was born in Miami Beach and currently lives in North Miami Beach with his wife. Mr. & Mrs. Tashiro have shown me a number of old and rare photos from their collection depicting Mangrove jungle, field of saw palmetto, preparation of earth, the Tashiro family in front of a car and the nurseries owned by Mr. Shigezo Tashiro.



Indian Creek, 1918

I spoke to them about the forthcoming centenary events of the city of Miami Beach and suggested that some photos be duplicated and presented to the city for the events due to their uniqueness and worth recognition. Mr. & Mrs. Tashiro gladly consented to the proposal.



Mayor Levine and Vice Mayor Malakoff (center), Mr. & Mrs. Tashiro (right) and myself (far left)

On October 21, Mr. & Mrs. Tashiro and I visited Mr. Philip Levine, Mayor of the city, and Ms. Joy Malakoff, Vice Mayor and Commissioner, to submit copies of the photos and a brief personal history of Mr. Shigezo Tashiro prepared by Mr. Joe Tashiro. The Mayor and Vice Mayor welcomed this offer and accepted the photos with pleasant surprise and great appreciation. They told us that they would make use of them as part of the centenary events in 2015, which we appreciated very much.

Today Miami Beach is one of the internationally renowned tourist destinations in the United States. But what is not well known is that the area was reclaimed land and a couple of Japanese men worked hard to prepare the earth to plant many trees, shrubs and flowers in the course of developing the city. It is also worthy to note that the Japanese residents in Miami Beach at that time including the Tashiros were not interned during WWII, but allowed to live in the city under strict supervision.

I would be more than happy if the photos given to the city would allow the present and future generations to share the fact that Japanese immigrants contributed to the making of Miami Beach, and thereby helping foster the bonds between Japan and the United States into the future.

Lastly I wish to express my deep appreciation to Mr. & Mrs. Tashiro for their cooperation with this small but invaluable endeavor.
