

News Journal

Japanese visitor and Friendship Doll researcher comes to Wilmington

Hirobumi Toyama is very likely the only person in the world that has seen Ellen C. both at her home in Japan and in her hometown of Wilmington.

Ellen C. is the centerpiece of the Wilmington College Meriam R. Hare Quaker Heritage Center's current exhibit, "Bridges of Friendship: How Children Learn about Other Cultures," which features more than 100 dolls from around the world and runs through Oct. 1.

Toyama is a retired high school English teacher from Nagasaki, Japan, visiting Wilmington.

Three decades ago he became enthralled with the story of the 1927 Friendship Dolls and, in particular the Ellen C. doll. Ellen C. was originally dressed by the local Friends junior Sunday school class and sent to Japan in 1927 as one of 12,763 Friendship Dolls.

It was a nationwide gesture intended to ease the rising tensions between the United States and Japan as a result of the 1924 Immigration Act that effectively ended Japanese immigration into the United States.

"Japanese were despised by many Americans at the time — there was a lot of hatred and discrimination against Japan," he said, stressing that those sentiments were by no means unanimous, as proven by the Friendship Doll project. Toyama and colleagues researched the Friendship Dolls and he edited a book that featured a doll known as Little Mary.

"Little Mary was sent from the United States (in 1927) and loved by Japanese children," he said.

"But Nagasaki had an atomic tragedy and Little Mary was killed by the bomb — but Ellen C. survived the war. 'Ellen C. was saved by the teacher who hid her.'"

Indeed, during World War II, most the American dolls in Japan were deemed as "an enemy, spy dolls" — and ordered destroyed. Ellen C. was hidden by a Japanese teacher and "completely forgotten" for many years. Eventually, Ellen C. was discovered in a storehouse and returned to the kindergarten class on Hirado Island.

In the early 1980s, Toyama and his colleagues who were researching the Friendship Dolls learned of her presence. Upon examining the doll, they noted a name card that read "Wilmington Friends Bible class." "Since there are very few Quakers in

See the Friendship Dolls

The exhibit, "Bridges of Friendship: How Children Learn about Other Cultures," features more than 100 dolls from around the world and runs through Oct. 1 at Wilmington College.



Hirobumi Toyama with Ellen C.

Japan, I didn't know 'Friends' means Quakers," he recalled.

"Several years later, the notion came to me: 'Friends means Quakers.'" So he sent a letter to Friends Journal, a national Quaker publication, inquiring if anyone knew about the Ellen C. doll that apparently originated in Wilmington.

Muriel Hiatt and Mary Elizabeth Stanfield sent him a 1927

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Journal clipping about Ellen C. and the other local dolls. "I was very happy with the news," Toyama said. "We exchanged letters between Wilmington and Nagasaki."

They learned that Ellen C. was sent to Japan among some 58 dolls from Clinton County, Ohio was the state that sent the most with 2,283 of the American Friendship Dolls.

Ellen C.'s namesake was Ellen C. Wright, a member of Wilmington College's first graduation class in 1875 and a beloved teacher at WC for more than 40 years through the early 1920s.

Their research prompted Stanfield to write a book about the rediscovery of Ellen C., titled *Ellen C., The Friendly Doll*, in 1986.

Upon learning Ellen C.'s story, Charlotte Pack, assistant curator of the Quaker Heritage Center and Peace Resource Center, was inspired last year to write an illustrated children's book, "Finding the Friendship Dolls, A True Story: How Children Can Help Bring World Peace." Toyama, who has seen more than

300 of the surviving Friendship Dolls, said he was thrilled to see Ellen C. as the centerpiece of the OHC exhibit.

"I hope many of the children and grandchildren of those who sent the dolls to Japan in 1927 will come here and see the Ellen C. doll," he said. "I want many people to come and see Ellen C. and learn how she survived the war — and now lives in a kindergarten class in Japan."

He said the fact of Ellen C. coming full circle in her 83-year journey from Wilmington to Japan and back to Wilmington for a several-month visit is especially symbolic.

"The friendship still lasts between the United States and Japan — it has lasted a long time," he said. "I hope children will know the meaning of the Friendship Dolls, that cultural exchanges will overcome disagreements between nations. 'I was moved when I heard the title of this exhibition: 'How Children Learn about Other Cultures,'" he said. "The Japanese and American dolls are beautiful — their cultures are beautiful."

Toyama has been speaking in local schools and at a lunch held in his honor Friday in Wilmington College's Pyle Student Center's Schmidt Room.

More information is available by contacting Charlotte Pack at the college, 382-6661 ext. 371 or 718.