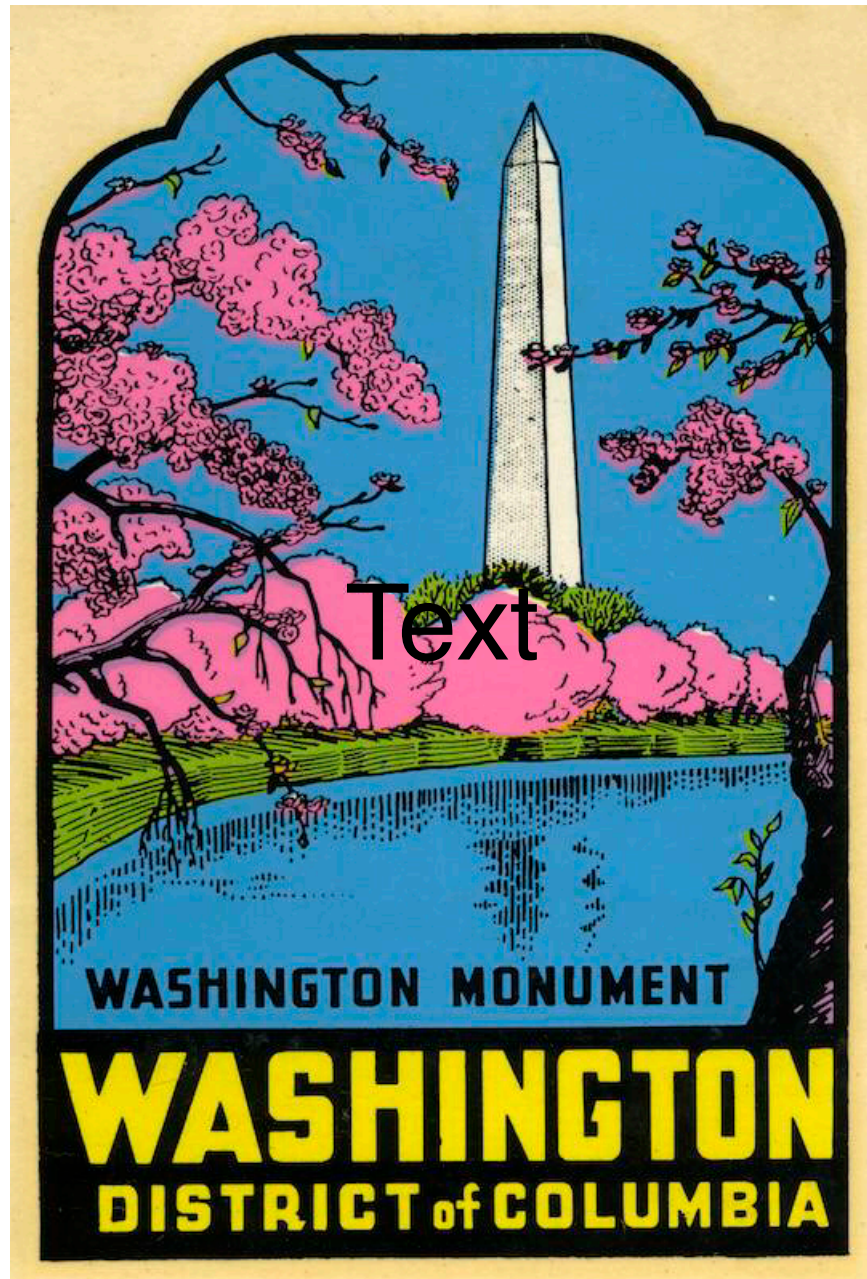


**TIME**

## The Complicated History Behind Washington's Cherry Trees



A decal of the Washington Monument, with cherry blossoms pictured, from 1956. Jim Heimann Collection / Getty Images

More than a century after Washington D.C.'s famous cherry blossom trees were first planted, the annual springtime blooming has become a favorite point in the capital calendar. Beginning on Sunday, this year's festival will once again celebrate the pleasant and pink sight. (Next week is probably the **best time of all** to check them out.)

It's not a secret that the trees were a 1912 gift from Japan to the U.S. in honor of cooperation between the two nations, but the mechanisms behind that gift-giving are a little more complicated than that explanation might suggest.

As TIME would **later tell the story**:

*When Teddy Roosevelt decided it was high time to put an end to the Russo-Japanese War and intervened in 1905, indignant citizens of Tokyo poured into the streets and burned down buildings to show their displeasure with the peace terms. Yukio Ozaki, then mayor of Tokyo, felt differently; grateful for the U.S. mediation, he sent a thank-you gift of 2,000 Japanese cherry trees to the city of Washington in 1909. When the trees reached the U.S., however, the Department of Agriculture looked the gift trees in the bark and found they were heavily infested with the San Jose and the West Indian peach scale, Oriental moths, earwigs, and thrips. The Department had them destroyed.*

*Yukio Ozaki persisted. He had shoots taken from cherry trees near Tokyo and grafted on wild cherry roots. Set out in disinfected ground, the new trees grew pest-free and in 1911 Ozaki shipped 3,000 of them to Washington. This time the trees were found acceptable and planted along Washington's Tidal Basin.*

Ozaki would continue to support warm relations between Japan and the U.S. throughout his life, even as war divided the two. Sometimes at **great risk to his own life**, he spoke out for disarmament, peace, international cooperation and independent democracy.

Though his life was long and extremely busy, Ozaki clearly remembered the gift of the cherry trees as a high point. In the 1950s, when Ozaki—then in his 90s—was on his deathbed, he composed **this** poem:

*As I gaze at cherry blossoms in my garden*

*From my sickbed, I recall*

*The Potomac in spring.*















## Did You Know?



1


Known as “President's Palace,” “President's House,” and “Executive Mansion,” Teddy Roosevelt dubbed the name “White House” in 1901.



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