

MEETING MANJIRO ENTHUSIASTS IN KOCHI

Sometimes things just work out perfectly!! My trip to Japan in July 2013 was mainly planned to participate in the Shimane Prefecture Grassroots Summit sponsored by the John Manjiro Whitfield Commemorative Center for International Exchange, based in Tokyo. The meetings took place in Matsue City, where I also had my exciting homestay. Months before my trip I had received an invitation from Dr. Joel Joos inviting me to the University of Kochi to give a lecture on Commodore Perry. It sounded exciting so with some manipulation of my travel schedule I added Kochi to my trip as a destination. I had learned previous to my trip from Hiroko Todoroki that the Manjiro Societies in Kochi Prefecture and other areas would be coincidentally meeting in Kochi during my visit and members were invited to my lecture.

A friend of mine, Mrs. Masako Sakamoto, from a previous trip, and her daughter Kimiko, met me on July 11, 2013, at the Kochi airport and they acted as my guides during my visit. They drove me to the Richmond Hotel and we were surprised to be greeted by the very affable Mr. Akio Hosokawa, who gave me several gifts. Later we were joined by the ebullient Masako Motoyoshi and for a while my head was spinning with numerous plans discussed in Japanese. Dr. Joel Joos and Mr. Loren Waller, from the University of Kochi, soon arrived and offered some translation. We then went to a nice Japanese restaurant within walking distance and enjoyed a good meal with appropriate amounts of beer and sake.

In the morning we stopped at the University of Kochi at 11 AM for an interesting discussion with a few students in Dr. Joos' class, who were interested in practicing their English with a foreigner. After a nice lunch, we visited the Museum of Art in Kochi and had a great tour given by the Assistant Curator, Emiko Ota. I was able to view the interesting art called "Letters of Thanks" done with string by well-known artist Ms. Chiharu Shiota. The string art filled a large room and had thousands of suspended letters, including one from me that I had mailed earlier from the USA. I also viewed an historic Kimono donated by Mrs. Shizuko Takezaki, who was my hostess on my homestay in Nahari in 2011.



Students after discussion pose with L. Waller, M. Perry, J. Joos, and M. Sakamoto



"Letters of Thanks" at the Art Museum

The lecture at the University of Kochi was at 6:30 PM and was attended by approximately 130 persons including many from the Manjiro Society. Following the lecture we had a delightful Japanese style dinner at the Sunset Library Restaurant of Masako Motoyoshi with key members of the Manjiro Society. It was a friendly affair with all attendees speaking and even some singing and guitar strumming by Kaoru Mori of Beatle's songs.



Making paper at the Paper Museum



Masako and Kimiko Sakamoto at Paper Museum

The next morning Masako and Kimiko gave me a great tour of the Paper Museum, which I thoroughly enjoyed. At the museum we met the curator, Masayo Takahashi, who gave us a behind-the-scenes tour of some details that interested me. We then visited the Ryoma Sakamoto Museum, where the Manjiro Society was having its meeting. I was introduced to the members and was happy to say a few words of greeting and appreciation for the opportunity to meet so many Manjiro Society members. Overall the visit to Kochi was outstanding and it was a real pleasure to be able to give a lecture on Commodore Perry in a university setting to so many outstanding students of Japanese history that are members of the university community and the Manjiro Society.



Post-lecture Japanese-style dinner at the Sunset Library Restaurant