

# JAPAN

THE CULTURE TOWER, Tateshina, Nagano Prefecture, (Near Chino City, Pool-Daira)

Artist: unknown

Commissioned by: Seiji Shike

Dating: 1940

A direct descendent of the Old Well, the Culture Tower was built by a Japanese alumnus of the University of North Carolina. Seiji Shike, after graduating from Waseda University, Japan, received his master's degree in journalism from UNC in June 1916. Many years later, after becoming the creator and editor of *Sinbun no Sinbun*, a Tokyo newspaper, which is still printing newspapers today, Shike commissioned the Culture Tower at Tateshina, a remote area of Japan. The December 1940 UNC *Alumni Review* shows a photo of the Culture Tower that Shike sent to President Frank Porter Graham with a copy of the dedication speech given on September 22, 1940. The temple is a white, mushroom-shaped structure with eight round pillars, a rounded, fat variant of the Old Well.

On the temple is a plate with an inscription translated roughly, "This structure was built by the *Sinbun no Sinbun* as a memorial of KIGEN 2600. In the dome of this temple have been stored 6000 items, for example, newspapers, magazines, books, to be retrieved in 100 years. The dome will be opened on January 1, KIGEN 2700." KIGEN (an ancient Japanese calendar system) 2600 is equal to 1940 A.D. and KIGEN 2700 is equal to 2040 A.D. In his dedication speech, Mr. Shiki stated that the eight pillars of the temple represent "national ideals of culture involving the eight corners of the universe."



Figure 88. The Culture Tower, Tateshina. The temple was inspired by the Old Well and built by a Japanese alumnus just before World War II. Photo by Mr. Yosiyuki Ogihara and Mr. Yutaka Oshima of the Tateshina Rotary Club.

Shiki's letter to Graham says he collected news articles from "India, Australia, Egypt, Cyprus Island, Portugal, to say nothing of British and American newspapers," to place in the time capsule (the dome of the temple). He says that not only printed publications and books were placed there, but also posters, records (he means phonograph records), scenes of landscapes,

portraits of important world figures, and donations from Japanese families. He closes his letter to Graham, "We are anxiously waiting for your esteemed answer, Respectfully Yours, Seiji Shiki, Alumni 1916 [sic]." Graham replied to say he had sent the documents to the Alumni Association.

In February 1947 an envelope was placed on the desk of the Secretary of the UNC Alumni Association from Wilton Dillon of the General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP). Dillon explained that Shiki had asked General Headquarters to make sure that an attached letter from Shiki got to the university. Shiki was "in regular attendance at our SCAP press conferences," said Dillon. The opening sentences of Shiki's letter, written on January 27, 1947, is a bittersweet reminder of post-World War II times and of Mr. Shiki's love for the university:

Dear Sir: Happy circumstances which will be referred to somewhere in this letter threw the present correspondent in a mood to write to you, whose name is dearly associated with the school I graduated from exactly 30 years ago. As I write this letter, at this crucial time of the century when the nations are yet at pains from the shocks and strains following the greatest armagedon [sic] the world has ever seen, my sentiments turn back to the days when I spent my memorable adolescent days in the academic garden in North Carolina. I hope this will give us an opportunity to warm up our friendship extended from across the Pacific and the years I spent in your campus will always remain as a source of peaceful energy and the foundation of my future endeavor.

In reading the letter of Mr. Shiki to the university, so filled with love and admiration, written at a time of anguish, one cannot help being stunned by the ironies present in the Culture Tower. Perhaps his reaction to the turbulence he saw around him in 1940 made him attempt to preserve some remnants of civilization before it was possibly destroyed. The Culture Tower was his contribution to countering the menace he knew was approaching. He copied and revised the Old Well to make his architectural protest against destruction and narrow-mindedness. (He and President Alderman would have gotten along just fine, since this is the same protest that Alderman was making when he built the Old Well in 1897.) In the end, Mr. Shiki's vision of peaceful international exchange is the one that prevailed over other visions.

Seiji Shiki came back to Carolina in the 1950s and met with old friends from his university days including Bob Madry, a fellow student in the journalism school and a relative of the author of this book. That was not his only post-war contact with UNC. Mr. Shiki hosted the post-war visit of a university professor to Japan and gave him a \$5 cash donation to UNC. He explained that, given the times, he could afford no more and was sending it with the visitor, as he had no confidence in the Japanese postal system.

Seiji Shiki was not a Tar Heel born but part of his soul was surely burnished with Carolina blue.

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