

Wakamatsu Colony of El Dorado County comes to life in book

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The tale of the Wakamatsu Colony is well-known in Japan, but obscure in California – though it took place right here.



Placerville poet Brigit Truex is making a small effort to change that.

Truex's book, "Strong as Silk," was published this month, telling the Wakamatsu story in an unusual combination of fiction and haiku.

In the late 1860s, a group of samurai-class men and women – losers in a Japanese civil war – established the colony in rural El Dorado County and tried to produce silk and tea. It was the first Japanese settlement in North America.

A few years ago, Truex came across a news article about the colony.

"I never heard this story," she said. "It just sort of caught my eye."

She began to write some poems and do some research to learn more about it.

Whether through bad planning, bad weather or sabotage, the colony had failed after a few years and its inhabitants scattered with hardly a trace.

Read the whole story