

# Japanese Sword Society of the United States, Inc.



## NEWSLETTER

The Official Bi-Monthly Publication of the Society. Membership - \$10.00 Annually

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Volume 9 No. 4

July - August 1977

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### NEW MEMBERS -

It is our pleasure to welcome the following eleven new members to our society:

L. Michael Bateman,  
Gary D. Murtha,  
Lewis C. Smith III,  
Ronald C. Ayola,  
Fredrick H. Seguin,  
Bernard Selway,  
William Botts,  
Joseph G. Bell,  
Jerry P. Cunningham,  
Sam Someya, Syuwa  
Henry C. Lamborn,

### WEST POINT SWORD EXHIBIT -

A fine exhibit of Japanese swords from the David E. J. Pepin Collection is presently on display at the West Point Museum Special Exhibition Gallery, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York. The exhibit will run through September 16th and is open to the public at no charge.

Thirty-seven representative blades and koshira have been selected for exhibition. The visitor will be able to enjoy such names as Yoshimichi I, Rai Kinmichi I, Tadatsuna II, Tadahiro (with cutting test), Magoroku Kanemoto, Bizen Sukemitsu and many others. Koshira displayed include a Daimyo quality daishō and a rare Ito Make Tachi with the Imperial kiku mon and containing a double mei blade by Bizen Katsumitsu and Munemitsu. A free copy of the exhibition catalogue can be had simply by requesting one from the museum.

The Pepin Collection is the results of sixteen years of sword hunting and is one of the significant collections in the United States. It is always a rare treat to have the opportunity to view private collections. Although it is a little late to announce this viewing, anyone having the chance should visit the exhibit. It will be a learning experience well worth the time spent.

BIRMINGHAM SWORD SHOW. -

The first "summer" sword show of the Southeast Token Kai was held in Birmingham, Alabama the weekend of August 19th. The show was once again a success with good floor action and sword conversation on hand for all. Although no lectures were scheduled this time, the movie featuring Master Swordsmith Shigemasa Sakai at his forge (mentioned elsewhere in this issue) was shown. The polisher shown in this movie, Kiyoharu Omino, was on hand and assisted many of us with our questions on swords.

A JSS/US meeting was discussed prior to this show but due to the lack of officers able to attend, it was postponed until Chicago.

Our thanks to Paul Couch and the Southeast Token Kai for the enjoyable weekend. The idea of a summer show was given to Paul by a number of people who felt it a good time for an event. It looks like this will be a regular feature for as long as the demand is there.

CHICAGO SWORD SHOW -

The Token Study Group will hold their annual fall sword show the weekend of October 29th/30th. The event will be at the O'Hare Inn, Des Plaines, Illinois as in the past. This show is always very well attended and proves to be a very good show each year.

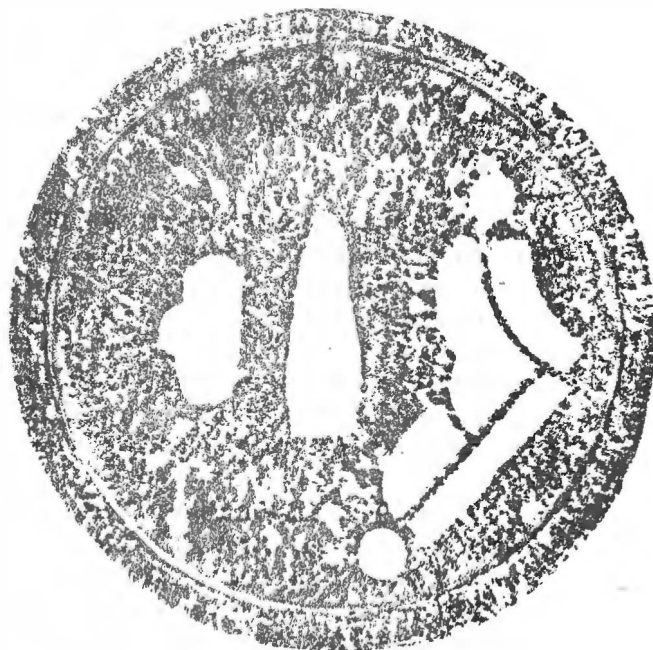
The JSS/US will hold a meeting at this show as most of our officers should be able to attend. Our Chairman, Bob Lewert, will have returned from Japan and a visit with Dr. Homma of NBTHK by that time and should have some solid information for us as to our 1979 plans. Everyone is encouraged to attend. For further show information, contact: Ted Wysocky

HELP WANTED -

Arnold Frenzel has sent in the tsuba oshigata at the right and has asked for help in identifying the design done in sukashi. The tsuba is Katchushi work (armorsmith) and dates from late Muromachi Period.

Anyone caring to venture a guess as to what is represented on this tsuba should contact:

Arnold Frenzel



## HORIMONO DEMONSTRATION

as reported by

Richard K. Hayashi

San Francisco: On August 4th a Japanese sword horimono demonstration was given by Master Shigemasa Sakai, a member of Tokyo Swordsmith Association. The demonstration was held in the reception room of California First Bank (Bank of Tokyo) and was sponsored by the Northern California Japanese Sword Club. Master Sakai, who was born in Shizuoka, Japan, is 72 years old and is known throughout Japan as an outstanding contemporary swordsmith and horimono artist. He is listed in the Who's Who of Gendaito Katana Kaji and ranks very high in the listing. Master Sakai visited San Francisco and Los Angeles during his short tour of the United States. He was accompanied by his apprentice, Mr. Arai, Mr. Kiyoharu Omino a prominent sword polisher in Tokyo and Dr. Muramatsu, a medical doctor and member of the Musashino Japanese Sword Society.

The program began as Master Sakai was introduced by John Yumoto. After the introduction an 8mm sound movie was shown. The film, taken and narrated by Dr. Muramatsu, showed Master Sakai forging a sword while assisted by his apprentices. Every step of sword making was covered by this film including the many folding steps, the Sakai family method of coating the blade with clay to form the hamon and finally Master Sakai placing his signature on the tang with hammer and chisel. The finished sword was then shown being polished by Mr. Omino with details of the various steps clearly illustrated.

After the film presentation, Master Sakai demonstrated his carving or chasing technique using two tree stumps, one on top the other, as a working table. On the top stump a tar-like substance was used as a vise to hold the blade. The tar was heated to make it soft so that the blade can be imbedded into it. Once the tar hardens the blade cannot be budged. An unpolished tanto blade was used for the demonstration. A bonji character was traced onto the surface of the blade using a brush and a special red tracing ink. This was done freehand and without tracing paper. By using a number of selected chisels and rotating the stump, Master Sakai painstakingly carved the bonji onto the blade. A small steel mallet was used to pound the chisel. After he finished the bonji inscribing demonstration he removed the blade. He then placed a tang, removed from a defective blade, onto the tar. He proceeded to trace his name and date of the demonstration onto the tang. After the tracing was made he proceeded to chisel in his name and date. All of the demonstration was done in a kneeling position with the aid of a cushion (zabuton). Master Sakai wore a special costume of brocaded silk. He did not wear the traditional black cap (eboshi).

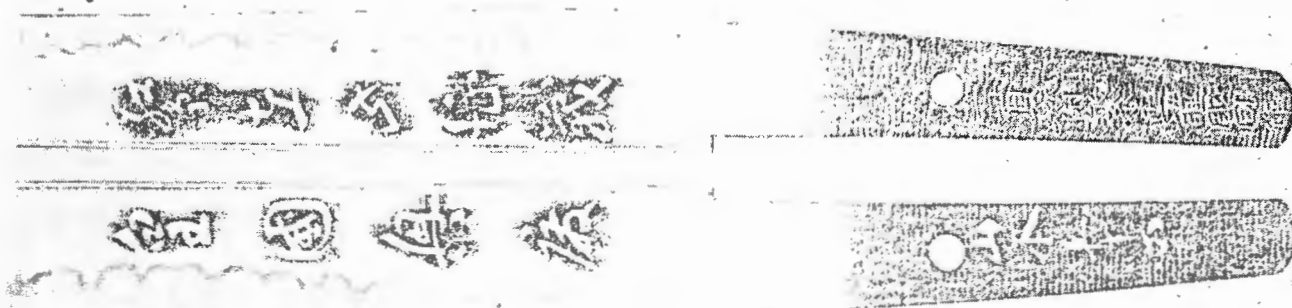


SAKAI IKKANSAI SHIGEMASA

During the war Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto received a certain sum of money from the Emperor of Japan as a token of appreciation for his outstanding efforts in fighting the war. Admiral Yamamoto took this money and commissioned Master Sakai to make (10) tanto for him. These tanto were to be given to members of the Admiral's top staff. Both Admiral Yamamoto's name and Master Sakai's name were chiseled onto the tang of the tanto. On the blade the words, "Rise and Fall of Japan Depends on the Outcome of the War", were chiseled, in Chinese characters. One of the remaining blades was displayed on the table at the demonstration. To see and handle this rare specimen that actually belonged to Admiral Yamamoto at one time was a rare privilege for the ones who attended the event.

Visitors attending the demonstration included R. B. Caldwell of Dallas, Texas and Keith Austin of Tudor, California. Mr. Austin is the only living caucasian Japanese swordsmith in the world.

The full sword name of Master Sakai is "SAKAI IKKANSAI SHIGEMASA". His swords are valued from 3 million Yen upwards (\$11,000+) according to the latest Blue Book of Gendaito Blade Values. He has a long waiting list of blades to be made.



ADMIRAL YAMAMOTO TANTO BY SHIGEMASA

and San Francisco, and these shinsa brought home the fact that unsigned koto blades were not all "big names" just waiting to be discovered, and indeed it was hard to get more than a school identification on most of them; even then, the more desirable schools were infrequently designated. That further altered the structure of prices away from unsigned pieces. Similar reasoning could be applied to papered vs. unpapered blades.

In the last six months a number of factors have operated to turn the market around. The Japanese economy has weathered the recession as well or better than any, and the Yen has risen strongly relative to the dollar. Rising Japanese incomes and a more favorable exchange rate make it both more possible and advantageous for them to buy in foreign markets. The U.S. economy has also recovered, if somewhat less strongly than expected. Exhibits of Japanese art, including swords and tsuba, have become more common and have stimulated considerable interest. The exhibit of Walter Compton's collection in New York in 1976 and the extensive write-up of that exhibit in Time<sup>2</sup> has done something to put Japanese swords into the arena of conventional art objects with a predictable broadening of the market. Some dealers have added to wider recognition, for better or worse, by widespread and large newspaper ads across the U.S. Finally, the monthly Newsletter of the Japanese Sword Club of Southern California has recently carried observations about a stronger market including one enclosure making reference to "fabulous prices." When these sorts of things occur, collectors sense a market reversal and the race is on. From the foregoing and other observations I think we are now in the early stages of a strong market upturn, and barring some unforeseen occurrence there is no reason to believe that it will be short.

While too much ought not to be read into them, the following data are instructive. Four Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc. sales are examined, and house estimates and realized sale prices are compared. I think that house estimates tend to be valid expectations of selling price ranges and that such estimates are based on immediate past auction performance. Hence, in comparing estimates to realized prices, in a falling market estimates will tend to be higher than realized prices and in a rising market they will tend to lag. The data comes from catalogs in my possession, and shows estimates as means of the median estimate ranges, and the sale average is a mean.

Date	Estimate \$	No. in sale	Price \$	No. sold	Change %
Nov. 19, 1975	1,707	33	1,255	26	-26
Apr. 21, 1976	1,111	44	1,359	44	22
Dec. 1, 1976	667	13	727	12	9
June 14, 1977	1,154	29	1,715	29	49

The foregoing only records swords, however one would expect the same to hold for tsuba, armor, and the like. While it might not be evident yet, it is likely in the future that unsigned blades and wakizashi will rise in relative value. It will not be long before our ranks are swelled by those who see dollar signs and not art objects and who have not learned some of the lessons of recent years. Caveat emptor!

<sup>2</sup>"Sculpture in Cutting Steel," (March 22, 1976).

AN INTERVIEW IN DALLAS -

The following interview was recently recorded in Dallas, Texas and submitted to the Newsletter by R.B.Caldwell. The occasion was a visit to Dallas by Mr. Yoshindo Yoshihara and Mr. Okisato Fujishiro. Mr. Yoshihara is a very promising Japanese swordmaker. He and his brother have a kaji in Tokyo as did his father before him. Mr. Fujishiro is one of the foremost sword polishers in Japan. He is the son and nephew of the two Fujishiro who wrote the two volume set of books we all constantly use in our research. He is one of the finest young polishers in Japan today and we can expect to hear more of him in the future. The interview was moderated by Mr. Caldwell with Mr. Shozo Miyashita serving as translator. In attendance were Mike Quigley and Bill Trevino.

Question: (Caldwell)

I have a general question and would like to direct it to both our guests. How do they feel that the level of involvement and sword study in the United States is progressing?

(Yoshihara) Of the advanced U.S. collectors I have met during this visit I feel their study and collections are just about the same as the advanced collectors of Japan.

(Fujishiro) This is my first visit to the U.S. and after meeting many collectors I agree too that the top ranking U.S. collectors are about the same as the top ranking collectors of Japan. I have been very pleased that no collectors have asked me prices on their blades.

(Trevino) That is very unusual as we are price orientated here as that is how we establish values.

Question: (Quigley)

I have a general question pertaining to condition of katana here in the states. I remember when I was involved in the 1972 shinsa having mentioned to Dr. Sato that many blades which would be submitted would be in bad condition and asked if these can be judged. To this he said yes. I would say that during the last three shinsa that 50% of the blades submitted were not in good polish. Does this have any bearing as far as classification is concerned?

(Yoshihara and Fujishiro) This is a very difficult question to answer and we must pass on it. This is because this decision (as to classification) would be up to the shinsa team involved and the results would vary from team to team.

(Caldwell) But if you personally were judging a blade in poor condition, what would you do?

(both) This becomes a very confusing feeling in this case.

Question: (Trevino)

How much does the kaji (swordsmith) polish a blade upon completion?

DALLAS INTERVIEW cont'd.

Does he do just the general contours and then turn it over to the togi for final shapping and polishing?

(Fujishiro) If a good first rate katana maker is involved, he will progress his work well into the final shape and then turn it over to the polisher for finishing. If the katana maker is low ranking, he will simply put on the hamon and then let the polisher correct and establish the blades contours from a rather early stage. So the extent of the completion by the kaji depends on his abilities.

(Trevino) Well who is the one who determines the kissaki or how much niku (meat) the blade should have. Is this the area of the kaji or do they work together on determining this?

(Yoshihara) A good kaji will do this alone, but these good kaji are limited and are only high ranking makers.

(Fujishiro) Low ranking smiths do just basic shapes and then give it to the polisher. The polisher then makes things as they should be.

Question: (Trevino)

Mr. Fujishiro, when you get a blade in for polish with serious damage (broken kissaki, etc.), must you go to the books or your sensai to determine what the restored blade should look like?

(Fujishiro) I must always think of original shape. If old polish is in good work, this is no problem. If the case be a broken kissaki, then you must study the hamon and think of what fits the hamon.

Question: (Caldwell)

In the 15-20 years that I have been connected with Nihontō, I have heard that when the present generation is gone, the young people of Japan will not take up the study of the sword because they will not be willing to spend the time to apprentice and it is no longer possible to make a living out of it. You two gentlemen are 2nd generation and some of the best in your field. Is there an interest in the young people in Japan today in nihontō, enough that they will apprentice the 3-5 years required to become profficient in whatever their field is be it sword polishing or sword making. In other words, when you are gone will the art of the sword dissappear too?

(Yoshihara) I do not have any worry about the next generation because many young people come to me and ask to become my student. Then again I am only 2nd generation and only 34 years old so I can not know about things when I am 70. I do know that there are many young people interested in polishing and swords today.

DALLAS INTERVIEW cont'd.

Question: (Quigley)

Many times I have run into blades with kizu such as blisters. How are these problems handled? Do polisher try to work around them or do they try to repair these problems?

(Fujishiro) It depends on how bad the problem is. Each polisher must learn to handle these situations.

(Caldwell) Mike, before you arrived here today we were looking at a Morishige here. It had a very small fukure (blister in the monouchi area. I asked Fujishiro-san about this specific thing, as he is an expert in this area of repair I might add. He said in this particular case he would work around it because a umegani (fill) would be extremely difficult to do properly. Exactly the right steel fill would need to be used otherwise it would look terrible. On this particular blade he suggested to leave it alone. So generally, they just work around such a problem unless they are sure that they can fix it right.

Question: (Caldwell)

Yoshihara-san, what is the most difficult sword to construct; I have heard masame and suguha?

(Yoshihara) I do not think it is this style. I feel it does not depend on which school's hada or style of hamon. Most difficult thing is shape. If I am going to make a copy of a Kamakura tachi and I want it in the same shape as original, this is the most difficult task to do.

Question: (Quigley)

In Japan, if an owner likes his blade to be polished sashikomi only and maybe the polisher prefers keisho - how do you work this out?

(Fujishiro) Most top polishers in Japan can do both ways. If the owner wants keisho, this would be done. But if the owner wants sashikomi and perhaps the blade is very tired, then sashikomi can not be used. In other words, all blades can take keisho polish but not all blades can take sashikomi. They can not do sashikomi on tired hada or weak hamon.

Question: (Trevino)

Yoshihara-san, do you do testing on your own blades? Also, would modern blades hold up in the test of battle as well as the old blades did, in your opinion?

(Yoshihara) Many times I have done testing on my own blades. I use bamboo or straw bundles for this. As for cutting power, there is no difference between old blades and modern.



DALLAS INTERVIEW cont'd.

Question: (Caldwell)

When a blade is presented to a polisher, would he prefer the owner to say "do what you feel is correct for the blade, you polish it as you see fit.", or do you prefer some owner's instructions?

(Fujishiro) I am always very glad to hear what the owner would like, particularly as in the case of a large chip, etc.

Question: (Caldwell)

About how long does it take to polish a katana? Is that up to the individual polisher or do you have an average time required?

(Fujishiro) It takes around 10 - 15 days for katana, but it depends on the sword and not the polisher. A blade about half the katana size, about 5 days and around 3 days for a tantō. Again, it depends upon any problems and the specific blade being polished.

Question: (Caldwell)

What advice do you gentlemen have for us to help us improve our studies?

(Yoshihara) Of the collectors I have met here, most are top ranking collectors and I can not find any advice for them.

(Fujishiro) I would like to make a good book - not too difficult a book, but a good study book to help the collectors here.

(Some discussion followed with reference to the language problem in attempting sword study in the U.S. and the need for english texts.)

(Caldwell) The problem is, all the books are in Japanese and one must rely on what can be learned from the photographs alone. At least an english index would help, as NBTHK does in their fine publication.

(Fujishiro) I will look into this problem when I return home and will see what can be worked out to assist in solving this problem.

(Caldwell) We thank both of you gentlemen for being with us and for sharing your knowledge with us. We will make sure it gets into the hands of the other students and collectors in the United States.

Editor's comment: Our thanks to R. B. and the Dallas crew for sharing this enjoyable interview with us. Some of the interview was edited because of the difficulty in transcribing the tape (I would make a lousy secretary!), but it is hoped that enough continuity has been left to make the interview readable for everyone. We have been promised some follow-up material on this visit for future Newsletters.

POLISHING AND OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE -

John Yumoto has sent us the following announcement offering polishing services from Japan, through him. The announcement reads in part:

There are thousands of swords in need of polishing and other services in the U.S. However, these services of high quality have not been readily available to most of us. It has always been my dream that every collector of Japanese swords have at least one well polished and well documented item in his collection. It makes me very happy to announce that recently I succeeded in making an arrangement by which we can enjoy these excellent services same as leading sword dealers and appraisers are utilizing in Tokyo at fair prices and with fast service, usually within 90 days. I am confident that after commencement of these services, the demand for well polished swords will be such that polishers in the U.S. will be busier than ever.

The Kajiwara Kotoken and Associates, Fukuoka, Japan, will render such services, with completion usually in less than 90 days from the time of arrival there. If one wishes, the polished sword can then be submitted to the NBTHK shinsa for the owner. This may delay the return of the item a month or so and will at extra net cost.

The flyer announcing this service goes into details as to cost and agreements and anyone wishing to learn more about this should contact John and request information. The service was set up for members only, of the Northern California group, but John has given JSS/US the same privilege and we are welcome to take advantage of this service. For further information, contact: John Yumoto, or write the NL editor and I will send a copy of the flyer to you. It is preferred that John be contacted as he will be aware of the latest conditions of service.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CLUB NEWSLETTER -

Roger Dunn has asked that we announce the beginning of a monthly or bimonthly Newsletter to be presented by the Northern California group and edited by himself. This Newsletter promises to broaden our field of learning by additional articles and you are encouraged to join. Contact: Jim Hitchcock,

SHIRAZAYA MAKER AVAILABLE -

During the Birmingham Sword Show, I had the pleasure to meet Mr. Rob Tanner of Denton, Texas. Rob makes hand made shirazaya in 100% traditional manner and is fast gaining recognition for their excellence. The cost is expensive but the quality warrants it, so I am told. Hopefully an example of his work will be available for examination during the Token Study Group show in Chicago this Oct-

ober. For further information, contact: Rob Tanner, 1,  
His other talents are in the restoration of saya and doing high quality horn work.

ENCOURAGING WORD FROM NBTHK -

A letter was recently sent to Dr. Junji Homma, Chairman of NBTHK, requesting permission to use material from their publications in our Newsletter and Bulletin. A very warm letter was promptly received in turn by the Newsletter granting us this permission. I would like to publically thank Dr. Homma for granting us this privilege. This will allow us to greatly broaden our publication's scope and assist all of us in our sword and fittings studies. Dr. Homma was true to his word and is truly "guiding the U S. collector" by allowing us to benefit from the NBTHK writings.

JSS/US NEW ENGLAND BRANCH -

Arnold Frenzel has sent word of the excellent and well organized group, the New England branch of JSS/US. Arnold was invited to present a lecture to the group recently on the topic of tsuba. He was highly impressed with the sincere interest shown by the members of this branch. They are to be congratulated on this accomplishment. Other local groups are encouraged to get together for more such local study groups.

CUTTING TEST OSHIGATA REQUESTED -

An article which looks into the reading of various cutting tests is planned for this years annual Bulletin. Examples of tests (oshigata or photographs) with a complete reading (if available) is requested. If enough information can be gathered and presented in good order, it should prove a very worthwhile effort. Send such info to the Newsletter Editor. (If anyone else cares to edit this article, feel free to express this desire as my time is limited already).

WANTED - FOR SALE ITEMS - (A free service to our members)

- Wanted: Magari-yari (3-prong or trident spear) at a reasonable price. Send details to: Richard Hayashi,
- Wanted: Matchlock powder flasks. Contact: Ray Deadman
- Wanted: Shinto and/or Shinsinto Taikan. Will trade 1st rate fittings for a copy. Write: Newsletter Editor

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE - The September-October issue of the NL will go to press around October 1st. Please have all material for that issue into the Editor well ahead of this date please.

Note: Up-dated membership list (partial) is attached. Place with  
YOUR January 1977 roster.



RON HARTMANN