

4th-graders able to get a dose of history outside the classroom

Barsotti Books and the Barsotti family have release an updated version of Joan Barsotti's book "Okei-san: A Girl's Journey, Japan to California, 1868-1871".

Written by Joan Barsotti, the book will be the focus of the inaugural El Dorado READS program. The program will be available to all fourth-grade classrooms in El Dorado County. The "El Dorado Reads Okei-san" project will run from April 9 through May 30.

As part of the program, all schools will have the opportunity to apply for grant funds from the Joan Barsotti Foundation Fund at the El Dorado Community Foundation for a field trip to visit the Wakamatsu Tea & Silk Colony Farm – which is the site of the Okei-san story. The Wakamatsu Colony Farm, recently acquired and now managed by the American River Conservancy, is located in the Gold Hill area, a mile south of Coloma and the Marshall Gold State Historic Park. The farm was settled by Japanese colonists from Aizu Wakamatsu in July 1869, and is believed to be the first Japanese colony in North America. It also contains the gravesite of Okei Ito, the first Japanese woman buried on American soil. It is the birthplace of the first naturalized Japanese-American, and is the only settlement established by samurai outside of Japan. In large part to its significance in Japanese-American relations, the site is on the National Register of Historic Places.

On the property, students will be able to walk in Okei's footsteps. Events will include touring the farm house where Okei lived, hiking up Okei's favorite hill, and learning about the variety of swords used in Japan during the period before

Okei left her home for California. Students will also learn about the art of calligraphy. Additional presentations are being planned.