

Takasuka rice

Written by Mariko Kubota

Takasuka rice was produced by a Japanese man of the name, Jo (Isaburo) Takasuka.

Jo had an interesting career.

He was born on February 13, 1865 in Matsuyama, Ehime Prefecture, Japan into a Samurai family.

He was educated in Japan as well as in the USA. He was conferred the Bachelor of Arts Degree by Westminster College in Pennsylvania, USA in 1896.

While he was in the USA, he changed his name from Isaburo to Jo.

In 1897, he went back to Japan after travelling extensively in Europe.

In 1898, he was elected as a member of the House of the Representatives in Japan, and he served as the member of Parliament for five years.

After giving up standing for a third election, he came to Melbourne accompanied by his wife, Ichiko and two small children called Sho and Aiko by the ship "S.S. Empire" on March 15, 1905.

Soon after his arrival, he set up a trading company called "Takasuka, Dight and Company" at 136 Queen Street. He taught Japanese at Stotts' and Hoare Business College while conducting his business. He was the first Japanese who taught Japanese in a classroom situation in Australia. Due to the White Australia policy, which was implemented in 1901, they were allowed to stay only for one year. However, he managed to extend his visa for another year with Japanese consular assistance. In the meantime he decided to grow rice, which Australia had to import from overseas at that time. With the help of Commonwealth analyst WP Wilkinson, he met the Premier, Thomas Bent, and Minister for Crown Lands, and persuaded them to lease him crown land near the Murray River for the experiment of growing rice. The area was famous for flooding. Jo thought that it was an ideal area for rice farming as nothing else could be grown in that area.

Before being granted the lease, he rented 35 acres of land in Nyah near Swan Hill from S.P. Watson, and planted rice seeds which his father sent from Japan. Meantime, the government permitted him to lease 200 acres of land in Tyntynder West. The rent was 6 pence per acre. The conditions of the lease were that he continued to grow rice and spend 10 shillings per acre to improve the property for 5 years. He would have a perpetual lease for 3 pence per acre annually, if he fulfilled these conditions.

The 1906 crop was unsuccessful as sheep ate the crop before harvesting.

In 1907 he rented 65 acres of land in Piangil and planted rice seeds. However, due to the lack of water, he only managed to get three bags of rice. Some of the rice was black and the rest was green and inedible.

In 1908 he moved to Tyntynder West where he got a lease from the government. In order to build a levee bank, he needed £700 which he did not have. His family was forced to live in a cottage only 15 feetX18 feet. He was busy building the levee bank at Gunbower Creek, and he forgot to plant rice. His father Kahei Takasuka brought 15 bags of rice seeds from Japan and helped Jo to build the levee bank.

In 1909, they managed to secure 40 acres of land surrounded by the bank and planted the rice. However, the flood destroyed the bank, and all crops were damaged. They evacuated to Nyah.

He wrote a letter to the government and requested that they allow him to invite two rice specialists from Japan, but his request was denied.

In 1910, Jo devoted his effort to rebuild the levee bank. He planted rice on one acre of the land in Nyah, and constructed a 1.25 mile long bank, but again the bank was destroyed by the flood. However fortunately a small amount of rice was harvested that year which could be used as rice seeds for the following year.

In 1911, he planted 25 varieties of rice seeds on 20 square feet of land for experiment in Nyah, and he found that three varieties were successful. The three varieties were called *Kahei*, which was named after his late father, *Hideri-shirazu* (strong for drought), and *Shinriki* (The Power of the God).

He wrote a letter to the Department of Crown Lands, and pointed out that half of the land was land he had leased, but the other half was Crown land, and suggested that the government pay half of the cost for constructing the levee bank, but the government had another agenda, and ignored his request. The government's plan was to give the land around Jo's land to newly arrived migrants from Europe, and Jo's land was an obstacle for their plan.

In 1912, the government notified Jo of their project for the reclamation of the land around Jo's property, and until this project was completed, perpetual lease of the 47th land, for which Jo had the lease, would not be considered. They also rejected giving financial assistance toward the levee bank construction. The reason they gave him was that he did not invest £100 a year so he had failed the condition that they had imposed.

The Age reported Jo's success entitled "Victoria rice trial by a Japanese", and said that he proved that we can grow rice if we irrigate properly.

In 1913, Jo sowed Kahei and Ehime, the name after the Japanese prefecture he came from, on the 5 acres of land in Tyntynder West. He successfully harvested one ton of rice per acre, which is equivalent to 12 bags of rice.

At the end of the year, he tried 54 varieties of rice seeds. This time he used a machine to plant the young plants instead of planting manually. He used 2-4 feet of water per acre, and successfully harvested more than one ton per an acre.



Rice harvest in 1914 (Jo and his wife Ichiko). The photo was provided by Mr. Satoshi Takaichi, Source: [HTTP://JT1865.WPBLOG.JP/%E3%82](http://JT1865.WPBLOG.JP/%E3%82)

In 1914, he could not cultivate 50 acre of land due to drought and he could irrigate only 10 acres of land. Despite this, he managed to obtain 60 bags of rice. It was commercially successful. That year his income was £230. He donated the proceeds from the first 100 pounds of rice seeds to the Lord Mayor's Belgium relief fund.

His son Sho took some of the rice seeds and sold them to the Department of Agriculture in New South Wales. Jo wrote the following instruction.

"Rice can be cultivated using the same machine used for Wheat. The only difference between rice and wheat is that rice needs irrigation. It is possible either to use a drill to sow, or to spread seeds. When the cultivation area is vast, you can harvest using a mower or binder. You need to dry them for a few days before threshing."

The Department of Agriculture started the trial of Takasuka rice at Yanco in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation area

As mentioned previously, the Department of Crown Lands had a plan to use the land surrounding Jo's property for European migrant settlement. Unaware of the government agenda, Jo petitioned for the government assistance for construction of a water supply system, fence, and levee bank in Tyntynder. In response to Jo's request, the Department of Land reported that his house was worth only £10 and, that the 2.3 miles long levee bank had been completely destroyed, and the land had been ruined. They suggested that Jo should grow rice in Swan Hill and give up the land in Tyntynder. Despite the official's persuasion, Jo returned to Tyntynder and spent £150 to improve the house, and spent £80 for construction of the levee bank. Although short of £500 as contracted, he was granted a perpetual lease of the land in 1915.

In 1916-7, the river did not dry completely, so he was unable to build the levee bank. Meantime, the experiment of Takasuka rice at Yanco in NSW continued. However, due to hot wind at the time of the flowering, it was unsuccessful.

In 1918, The river dried and Jo resumed construction of the levee bank. The experiment of Takasuka rice at Yanco was unsuccessful that year again due to the outbreak of locusts.

In 1919, He cultivated 5 acres of land and sowed rice. However, it failed, since the seeds he used were four years old. He needed to invest more money for the construction of the bank and he tried to get a loan from the bank. However, the bank told him that since he only had the perpetual lease for Tyntynder West, he did not own the land, they could not loan any money to him. Jo applied for the selection purchase lease. It was rejected on the grounds that he failed to comply with the cultivation condition of his perpetual lease.

In 1920-21, his farm was flooded and he had to use a boat to send his children to school. The Takasuka rice trial at Yanco failed again due to frost.

In April 1921 he reported that he had no income for the 1920 financial year. Jo tried to get a bank loan of £1000, as he estimated he needed that amount of fund in order to construct 3 miles of levee bank, which would take 6 months to construct. There were a few enquiries about rice farming, but he was unable to provide any rice seeds for those who were interested in rice farming.

Jo had decided to reappeal for the selection purchase lease. He made representations to the local Member of the Parliament. He argued his case personally before the Minister. His appeal was successful and the Departmental decision was overturned, and the selection purchase lease was issued to him.

In 1922, he purchased land in Tyntynder West for £ 200. That year the rice harvest was successful, but he was facing financial difficulty, as he had spent all his savings for purchasing the land. Yanco started experimenting with rice seeds imported from California, and they found that the varieties Caloro, Wataribune, and Colusa were successful.

In 1923, Jo wrote to the Victoria Agriculture Department and offered his son Sho to serve as a rice farming specialist and in lieu of his service, he requested their assistance in a rice growing trial. However, his request was denied.

In 1924, he wrote to the land and territory Minister, Senator Pierce and he repeated his petition, and added that he imported 50 varieties of rice from Japan, but due to lack of the flood prevention policy, he could not see the future of rice farming around the Murray River. He also stated that rice was the most useful crop for Australia and with 2-4 feet acre water, Takasuka rice could produce 1.2 tons of rice. The Age reported Pierce's statement about Jo's petition. Pierce sent Takasuka's petition to the Trading Committee, and he supported the promotion of rice demonstration as there is a possibility to create a new industry. As a result, Nyah new settlers' union, French Consul, and the Queensland government showed interested in rice growing. Robert Harbour and Company offered to support the rice milling.

In 1926 commercial production of rice started around Murrumbidgee area, using Takasuka rice grain. However, they all failed.

In 1927, at Yanco, Caloro became the dominant variety of rice in Australia. Jo abandoned rice growing due to financial difficulty, and he turned his attention to Vine growing.

By 1928, the government concluded that Takasuka rice was unviable, and Takasuka rice was completely abandoned.

Jo went back to his home town, Matuyama, Japan in 1939 leaving his family behind, and passed away on February 15, 1940.

The Takasukas endured hardship for many years, but successful Takasuka rice production was short lived. However, no one would argue against him as being the pioneer of rice growing in Australia, and his legacy lives on. The road leading to the levee bank he constructed in Nyah Forest was named Takasuka Road, and a monument was built near the levee bank. The Takasuka family's possessions have been displayed at The Pioneer Settlement Museum in Swan Hill.

His son Sho Takasuka became a successful tomato grower, and became the Huntly Shire President between 1964-70.

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メルボルン&タスマニアを基点とした日本語エコツアー、エコツーリズム講座 特集記事&リポーターオーストラリアで最初の稲作事業に成功した日本人、高須賀穰

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About the Author

Mariko Kubota is a former lecturer in Japanese at the University of Melbourne and the author of a novel entitled "Australian rice growing pioneer's wife, Ichiko Takasuka." (豪州米作の祖の妻、高須賀イチコ)