

Booklist

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The Sakura Obsession: The Incredible Story of the Plant Hunter Who Saved Japan's Cherry Blossoms.

By Naoko Abe

Mar. 2019. 400p. illus. Knopf, \$27.95 (9781524733575). 580

It's rare for a tree to be so closely associated with a nation's identity, but such is the case of the flowering, or ornamental, sakura, or cherry, in Japan. Emblematic of new life, inextricably linked to imperial governments, and conscripted into a jingoistic symbol of patriotism during times of war, the alluring pink-white cherry blossom may have a short life, but the species itself has a long and rich history. Intrigued by the role cherry trees play in her country's national persona, journalist Abe tells the remarkable tale of how this once-ubiquitous tree was on the verge of extinction in the 1920s. Its salvation came in the form of a member of the British gentry, one Collingwood Ingram, whose cherry-tree devotion led to the creation of a massive arboretum in Britain and an advocacy of cherry-tree culture that spread throughout the world. Combining vast historical research, perceptive cultural interpretation, and a gift for keen, biographical storytelling, Abe's study of one man's passion for a singular plant species celebrates the beneficial impact such enthusiasts can have on the world at large.

— *Carol Haggas*