

The Attraction of George Masa

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November 30, 2023

I am an Asheville native who came home after a stint elsewhere. I worked for Bonesteel Films mainly as producer and production assistant when Paul Bonesteel started to work in earnest on a documentary film about a photographer named George Masa. It began somewhat organically that I would be assigned to start digging into the story. Commencing of course with Bill Hart, who had the most information available and most significant catalogue of Masa's work, I set out to uncover the mystery of George Masa. At the time, Paul was a young filmmaker with some understanding of the world of fundraising and researching.

The timing was probably the best it would ever be—I was so green I didn't even know there were people I had no business bothering—and I gained access to people who remembered Masa when he was alive, along with some of the most influential people in Asheville of the period. This work led down so many different roads—the Grove Park Inn, the Biltmore Estate, the Carolina Mountain Club. My path crossed with other archivists and researchers interested in other photographers like Herbert Pelton, and the incomparable author Horace Kephart, as well as in the larger stories of the area and our National Park.

After the film was released, and in subsequent years, there was more interest in Masa, both for his story and his photography. At the time we started the project, he was only known to a handful. His photos and story were mostly in basements and attics and in inherited files.

Masa's story creates more questions than it answers: Why would this man who immigrated here from Japan (in a time that was politically tricky) create so much intrigue? He managed to have access to the aristocracy of Asheville who had enormous reach and access to important national figures themselves. Every discovery created a new set of questions. Clearly there was something about him then, as now, that continues to fascinate us. It's been 20 years since we worked on this film. Many of the people we spoke with and who so generously lent their time and treasure to us have now gone. I am so grateful to have had this singular experience and chance to meet Masa and scratch the surface of his story. It's been an adventure and a treasure hunt.

I was the third generation owner of a printing company called Daniels Graphics which acquired Miller Printing Co., and have inherited the art files and photography used for years of publications. I am humbled to be the keeper of that history and enjoy

conversations and learning new information from the many people that find Masa. Masa's story is so distinctly American and so unique to Western NC. It's hard not to get taken in by his contributions to this area, by his art, and by his personality that seemed to charm so many.

—Jami Daniels is the current owner and president of Ernest (a full service product fulfillment company and co-warehouse) and Brightbell (a 24 hour virtual receptionist service) both in Asheville, NC.