From 1903 to 1906, Yoshiaki Yamashita of Tokyo toured the United States providing instruction in the new martial art of judo. In Washington, D.C., he provided instruction for the sons and daughters of the nation's political and business elite and was brought to the White House to teach President Theodore Roosevelt. In 1905-1906, he was employed by the U.S. Naval Academy to train midshipmen, but after his contract ended in the fall 1906, he returned to Japan and continued to teach judo until his death on October 26, 1935. He was posthumously awarded the 10th degree black belt, the first ever so honored.
The Yamashita photograph album contains 53 silver developing out prints apparently taken to illustrate various judo throws and holds, along with Yamashita's calling card and four documents relating to his time teaching judo in Washington.

See similar SCUA collections:

**Japan Photographs**

**Background on Yoshiaki Yamashita**

Seeking to strengthen his nine-year old son's "character," Samuel Hill sought out a suitable man to provide instruction in an exotic art he had seen during a business trip to Japan: judo. A wealthy Seattle railroad executive, Hill had the contacts -- and funds -- to hire the best and in February 1903, Kazuyoshi Shibata, a Yale student and friend of a Japanese acquaintance, recommended Professor Yoshiaki (Yoshigutsu) Yamashita as the best man for the manly job.

Born in Ishikawa Prefecture on Feb. 16, 1865, the son of a minor samurai, Yamashita had a basic grounding in the traditional martial arts before joining the new Kodokan dojo of Jigoro Kano, the founder of judo, in August 1884. Yamashita rose steadily, even rapidly, through the ranks, achieving his sixth degree black belt in 1898 and gaining wide respect for his technical mastery. By the turn of the century, his reputation earned him a position teaching judo at the Japanese Naval Academy and Tokyo Imperial University.

Having long believed that making judo better known abroad would be good for Japan, Yamashita was an outstanding choice to spread the discipline in America, and he quickly responded to Hill's inquiry. Accepting the offer in August 1903, Yamashita sailed for Seattle the following month, bringing with him his wife, Fude, and a 19-year old assistant, Saburo Kawaguchi. Barely a week after their arrival, the trio gave a private judo exhibition for Hill and prominent invited guests, which historian Joseph Svinth believes may have been the first Kodokan judo exhibition for a non-Japanese audience in North America.

From Seattle, Yamashita and his party traveled across country by rail to Washington, D.C., where Hill's son, John Nathan Hill, was then living. Offering demonstrations and lessons through the Japanese Legation, Yamashita found an eager audience of students in the nation's capitol, and a surprisingly strong interest among the daughters of the nation's political and corporate elite. Among the many who took notice was the President, Theodore Roosevelt, who had a well-known passion for what he considered manly pursuits. Through the Japanese Naval Attaché, Isamu Takeshita, Yamashita was introduced to Roosevelt at the White House in 1904 and by the spring, he had Roosevelt adding judo to his regular fitness regimen.

In January 1905, Yamashita left Washington to accept a position instructing midshipmen at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. At the same time, representatives of the Army visited Annapolis to investigate the potential of Japanese martial arts, but while these representatives were favorably impressed, the Academy opted instead to hire a wrestling champion to train the cadets, a man who preferred the traditional western sports of boxing and wrestling.

From this point forward, Yamashita's American sojourn wound down. His contract with the Naval Academy was not renewed for the fall 1905, but after Roosevelt personally intervened, Superintendent James H. Sands agreed to rehire him for another year. At the end of this second term, however, Sands recommended that the judo program be discontinued as not essential to shipboard life. Yamashita returned to Japan in the fall 1906 and continued to teach judo until his death on October 26, 1935. He was posthumously awarded the 10th degree black belt, the first ever so honored.

**Scope of collection**

The Yamashita photograph album consists of 53 silver developing out prints of Yamashita's tour of the United States in 1903-1905. Laid onto stiff cardboard pages in a canvas-bound album, the images appear to have been used as teaching aids or as promotional material for classes taught by Yamashita in Washington, D.C., during the early months of 1904. A small number of images show Yamashita, Yamashita's wife, Saburo Kawaguchi, and their students, but the majority are intended to depict particular judo holds and throws.
Laid into the album are four documents: a list of judo exercises (2p.); Yamashita’s address (“kindness of Lt. [Isamu] Takashita” of the Japanese Legation); a receipt in Japanese and English for payment by George de Geofroy, (presumably for judo lessons); and instructions for various judo throws (6p.). Yamashita’s calling card is included in an envelope laid into the front of the album. Many of the images are numbered in the negative and appear to have been photographed in a rather elaborate setting.

Inventory

Mr Kamaguchi -- Mr. Kitagaki -- Prof. Yamashita -- Mrs. Yamashita
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Children’s class: Margaret Perrin -- Miss A. Lee
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Nage no kata: Uki Otoshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print
Se i Nage
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Sukui Nage
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Uki Goshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Harai goshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print
Tsurikomi goshi
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Uchi mata (rotation [arrow])
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Tomoe nage (a)
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print
Tomoe nage (b)  
ca.1904  
Silver developing out print

Ura hage  
ca.1904  
Silver developing out print

Tsuru otoshi  
ca.1904  
Silver developing out print

Yoko gake [photo loose, laid into album]  
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Yoko gake
cia.1904
Silver developing out print

Yoko guruma
cia.1904
Silver developing out print

Uki maza (a)
cia.1904
Silver developing out print

Uki maza (b)
cia.1904
Silver developing out print

Dai i kyo: Tai otoshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Osoto gari
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Da ashi harai
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Yoko otoshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Dai san kyo: Harai goshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Dai shi kyo: Kata guruma
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Dai roku kyo: Giyaku maki komi (a)
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Giyaku maki komi (b)
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Dai i kyo: Tai otoshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Dai hi kyo: O goshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Sumi gaeshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Dai san kyo: Obi otoshi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print
Dai shi kyo: Utsuri goshi
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Tawara gaeshi
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Dai go kyo: Uchi maki komi
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Se oi otoshi
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print
Se oi otoshi
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Osoto guruma
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Dai raku kyo: kube nage (a)
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

Kube nage (b)
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print
Hiza guruma
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Kueki raoshi (a)
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Kuyeki raoshi (b)
ca.1904
Silver developing out print
Uchi konei (a)
c.a.1904
Silver developing out print

[Uchi konei] (b)
c.a.1904
Silver developing out print

Tsuki komi (a)
c.a.1904
Silver developing out print

(same)
c.a.1904
Silver developing out print
Ke komi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

Yoko uchi
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

[unidentified throw]
ca.1904
Silver developing out print

[unidentified kick]
ca.1904
Silver developing out print
[unidentified throw]
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

[Prof. Yamashita, Mrs. Yamashita, unidentified American]
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print

[Prof. Yamashita seated between unidentified Americans]
ca. 1904
Silver developing out print
Prof. Yamashita seated between unidentified Americans

c.a. 1904

Silver developing out print

Geofroy, George de: Receipt for $50 to Yoshiaki Yamashita

c.a. 1904

Receipt, 1p.

In Japanese and English, signed "Received payment, Prof. Y. Yamashita."

Yamashita, Yoshiaki: Address in Washington, D.C.

c.a. 1904

AMs, 1p.


Yamashita, Yoshiaki (?): Instructions on judo throws

c.a. 1904

AMs, 6p.

In English, includes detailed information on how to perform throws, parrys and counters.

Yamashita, Yoshiaki (?): List of judo holds and throws

c.a. 1904

AMs, 2p.

In English, organized by kata and roughly equivalent to the images in the album.

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**Administrative information**

**Access**
The collection is open for research.

**Provenance**

**Bibliography**

**Digitized content**
All images in the collection have been scanned and are available online through our digital repository, Credo.

**Processing Information**
Processed by rsc, February 2008.

**Language:**
English

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Kawaguchi, Saburo.
Yamashita, Fude.

Contributors
Yamashita, Yoshiaki [main entry]

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