

日系 Nikkei
national museum
& cultural centre

NIKKEI IMAGES



First World War Soldiers overseas

Back row: Sachimaro Morooka (from Tokyo in 175th – 50th Batt), Sainosuke Kubota (Kagoshima, 175th -50th Batt), Noburo Murakami (Fukuoka, 52nd -13th Batt). Front row: Zennojo Kubota (Kagoshima, 128th Batt), Aitoku Yamasaki (Kagoshima, 175th – 50th Batt), Nuinosuke Okawa (Shizuoka, 192nd – 10th Batt); circa 1917.

Courtesy of Brian Yamasaki NNM TD 1171.6



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A black and white portrait of a middle-aged man with a mustache, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a dark tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is plain and light-colored.



NNMCC Membership form

Our Conscription Crisis

Japanese Canadians under Military Services Act, 1917

by Kaye Kishibe



Canadian Japanese Association. Front row (L-R): Matsunoshin Abe, unknown, Uyeda, unknown, unknown, Consul Ryoji Ukita, Mohei Sato, unknown, unknown, Saburo Shinobu. Back row (L-R): Matsumoto, Yaju Fukui, unknown, Motoji Yanagisawa, unknown. Vancouver, circa 1918. NNM 1994.70.27

On August 4, 1914, Great Britain declared war on Germany, and Canada as a British colony followed. As people living in Canada, Japanese Canadians felt that they must become involved. By fighting as Canadian soldiers, they would be able to demonstrate their loyalty to Canada and prove their fitness to become full citizens. At the time they did not have the right to vote which reminded them that they did not have all the rights of Canadian citizens. They also felt, as *issei* born in Japan, that they had obligations to both Great Britain and Japan through the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902.

The Canadian Japanese Association (CJA), as the representative voice of Japanese in Canada, sent a

telegram to Sir Robert Borden, prime minister of Canada, on August 10, 1914, offering the services of Japanese Canadian volunteers. A telegraph was also sent to the prime minister of Japan, Count Shigenobu Okuma, asking if there were legal impediments to Japanese reservists serving under the British flag.

Perhaps reflecting the confusion at that time, the responses from the two governments were rather vague. There were no developments for almost a year. But in late 1915, the CJA was approached by an officer of the Canadian Army Service Corps in British Columbia. A plan was proposed for a self-sustaining militia unit sponsored by the CJA and financially supported by donations from

the community. The expectation was that the unit would be “authorized” by Ottawa to become incorporated into the Canadian Army and eventually see action overseas.

The plan was quickly put in motion. Recruitment took place during Christmas and New Year holiday. Two hundred and two responded. A drill hall was rented and a drill master hired. Training began on January 17, 1916. But the crucial “authorization” did not materialize as expected. Finally, on April 21, a telegram informed the CJA that the unit would not be authorized. The reason given was that it was too small, more a company than a battalion as it was claimed. With the rate of attrition in the front, the small community would not be able to supply replacements to keep up their numbers. This was reasonable enough, but there also were political objections from British Columbia to granting full citizenship with franchise to returning veterans. The group was disbanded on May 11, 1916.

However, although not quite two years into the war, recruiting officers of Alberta battalions were having difficulty meeting their requirements for volunteers. By accepting the Japanese Canadian volunteers as individuals, not as a unit, many were able to enlist in Calgary and Medicine Hat.

By the end of May, volunteers from Vancouver were training in Sarcee Camp in Alberta. On June 26, 1916, the first group boarded the train from Medicine Hat and by July 5 landed in Liverpool, England. By September, they were in France engaged in the Battle of Somme. The first death in action was recorded on October 9, 1916.

The New Reality in 1917

In 1917, the world recognized a new reality of this war. Although it was now into the third year, there was no end in sight. It was turning out to be a long war. For the Europeans, the last war in memory was the Franco-Prussian War, 1870-71, that lasted eleven months. For the Japanese, the Sino-Japanese War, 1884-85, lasted nine months. The more recent Russo-Japanese War, 1904-05, lasted twenty months.

But it was not only the duration, but the sheer brutality that made this war so unusual. The battle of Vimy Ridge of April 1917 resulted in 3,598 dead with about 7,000 wounded, amounting to 10,000 casualties during four days of fighting.

Germany remained strong and resilient. Other nations were brought into the conflict, which was becoming truly a world war. The British Admiralty invoked the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and asked Japan to help by sending two cruisers to Cape Town and a squadron of four destroyers to Malta. The latter made 348 sorties escorting 788 ships against U-boats. This was in addition to Japan’s efforts in patrolling the Pacific. This contribution of the Imperial Japanese Navy earned Japan’s place at the Peace Conference that ended the war. The US entered the war in April 1917, but it took time to prepare their war machine, which was not unleashed on the Western front until the summer of 1918.

Prime Minister Borden toured Europe in the spring and returned from France convinced that for Canada to make a contribution toward allied victory, she must adopt compulsory military service. He followed this up with passing the Military Service Act of 1917, on August 29.

The Japanese Canadians did not need the prime minister to tell them the realities of this war, as about this time, veterans began to return home. Many were wounded soldiers discharged from military hospitals in France or England. These were noted in the community newspapers: Eiji Nagai discharged from the army (May 2, 1917); returning soldiers Mokichi Sakiyama and Ryukuzo Hoita welcomed by Nikkei in Victoria (May 6, 1917); executives of the CJA held a welcoming party for returning vets (May 22, 1917); CJA holds welcoming event for six returning volunteers (October 8, 1917). In their letters from the trenches, they had written how different the reality of war was from what people read in newspapers at home. Now they were able to face their friends and tell them what they had experienced. For instance, Sakiyama, mentioned above, was a gas attack victim.

The new Military Service Act was a complex document defining the subjects of draft as well as dividing them into various categories with a number of possibilities for exemptions. As a result, it immediately caused heated public discussion throughout the country. On the side of Borden were the British Canadians who were loyal to the mother country. On the other side were the farmers, trade unionists, non-British recent immigrants, and religious pacifists. Most French Canadians saw no reason for them to sacrifice their lives for a British imperial war.

For the Japanese Canadians, there were questions. It is believed that about a third of the community was made

up of naturalized Japanese. These young men between the ages of 20 and 45 would be eligible for the draft as “British subjects” in Canada. The immediate concern was economic. How were the families and businesses going to survive without the bread-winners and workers?

But there was a deeper issue. These were people who had chosen to live in Canada permanently, put down roots in this country and raise families. There were immigrants who felt they could not commit to this war or feel loyalty to Great Britain. But the naturalized Japanese were different. Japan, their country of birth, was actively engaged in the war as an ally of Britain. Their discussion was not objection to fighting, but whether Canada would keep faith and grant the rights of full citizenship which includes the franchise if they willingly sacrificed their lives.

Through mandatory military service, Canada was demanding sacrifice from its citizens. Japanese Canadians saw that this was real sacrifice with examples right before their eyes: there were returning injured veterans. The veterans had seen their comrades die. One in four did not come home. The returning veterans were home because of their injuries.

The volunteers who went before were willing to pay this price in return for recognition of their rights. But at this stage, even with the evidence of death and injuries, the issue appeared unresolved. Without a clear commitment from the government on this fundamental issue of rights, conscription was not acceptable to the naturalized Japanese Canadians.

The Election of December 17, 1917

The Canadian government called an election for December 17, 1917. Prime Minister Borden wanted to form a broadly-supported Coalition Government to implement

the policies of the various Acts in 1917. He united his own Conservatives, English speaking members of the Liberal party, and Independents into a Union government. But he was not able to persuade the French Canadian members of Parliament into the Union government, so the bitter divisions in the country remained. To poison matters further, the government introduced election rules not used before, such as allowing mothers, wives, and sisters of soldiers to vote in the election to ensure victory of the Union Government. The opposition called this “rigging” the election.

The Naturalized Japanese Organization

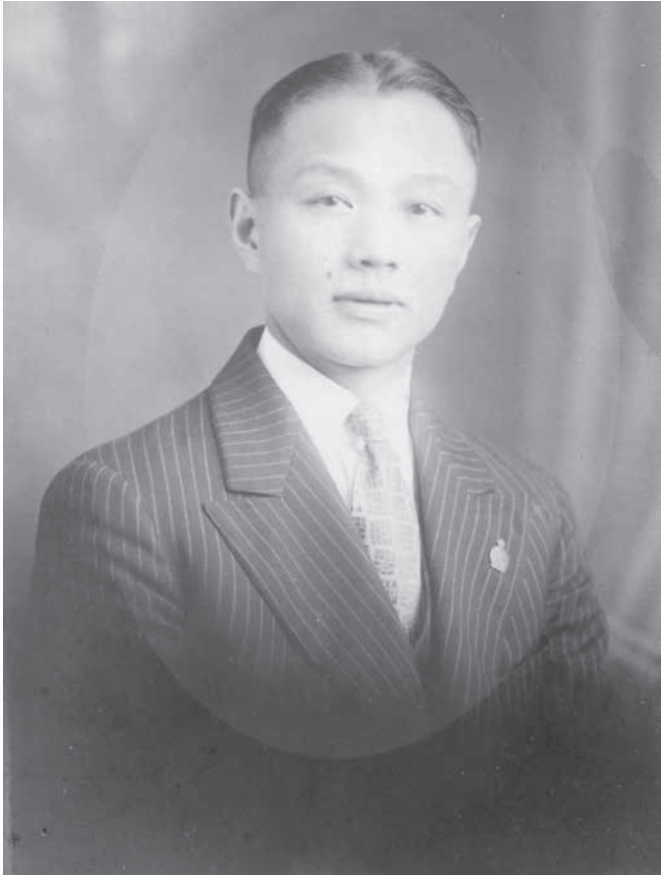
The naturalized Japanese held a meeting on December 9, 1917 at the Orange Hall in Vancouver. Over a hundred persons attended to discuss issues and organize themselves for further action.

When the meeting began, Masanori Tada stood and spoke about the purpose of the meeting. He was elected to the chair. He appointed Jiro Fujikawa the secretary/recorder and the discussion began. The consensus was that the central thrust of the Naturalized Japanese Organization’s action should be the struggle for the franchise. The group passed a resolution translated here from the Japanese:

“We, the naturalized Japanese, give full respect to the Military Services Act of 1917; however, at the same time, we insist on the naturalized Japanese’ inherent right to exercise their franchise. If this right is not granted, however, then we understand that we have no obligation to perform duties under this Act”.

*Naturalized Japanese Organization
Resolved, December 9, 1917.*

The group elected eighteen members to the Implementation Committee to carry out whatever



Yonikichi Hayashi drafted March 11, 1918 in Vancouver BC into the 1st Depot Battalion, BC Regiment. Regimental #2020591. NNM TD 1043.1

tasks were necessary. The committee was headed by Masanori Tada, president; Kazuo Ito, treasurer; Mitsuo Suzuki, auditor; and Yorikazu Shirakawa, secretary. An additional auditor was to be appointed from Steveston. A five dollar membership fee was established. In addition, the committee was entrusted with developing action plans, financial control, collection of donations, and all other necessary tasks.

During the following weeks, the committee was busy. It sent the petition to the federal government, and followed up with a telegram to demand quick response. The committee also did outreach work to keep the community informed of what was being done. It also planned legal action to be brought to the appeal court of British Columbia. For this court case, the committee engaged the law firm of Craig and Parkers and developed a war chest. Also, when they heard of naturalized Japanese receiving conscription notices, they intervened with the recruiting officer to have the matter deferred until a response from Ottawa was received.

The petition was deliberated by Ottawa from January 15 to 17, 1918. The decision was made by Order-in-Council: it was that all naturalized Japanese be exempted from military service.

The Naturalized Japanese Organization met on

February 3, 1918 at the Orange Hall in Vancouver. Tada took the chair and after the treasurer’s report, the secretary reviewed the events leading to that day. Then Tada stood and made his recommendation that with the decision coming from Ottawa, there was no task remaining for the organization and it should disband.

There were strong opinions expressed that the organization should continue the struggle for the franchise. But the consensus was that the struggle for rights should be that of the Canadian Japanese Association. Since many of the naturalized Japanese were younger, it was suggested they join the youth wing of CJA.

The money collected for the anticipated legal battle was distributed to three recipients: the families of fallen soldiers, the Japanese language schools, and the Youth Wing of CJA.

Author’s Postscript

There is a list of 24 Japanese Canadians who were drafted into the Canadian Army. Since one was from Calgary and five from Dawson City, they would not have been part of the Naturalized Japanese Organization. Their experiences will not be known without further research. Most likely they were treated as men who, although exempt from conscription, enlisted and saw action. 🌸



Lost and Found

Do you know this young soldier? What about the other men in the photo? Because we don't. What we do know:

Title: A Studio Portrait of a Man in a Military Uniform with Medals and Two Others

Institution: Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre 2011.711.27

The military uniform appears to be a Japanese imperial army uniform from the Russo-Japanese war.

That is it! What can you tell us?

If you have any clues to the identity of these men, please contact Linda Kawamoto Reid, Research Archivist, at lreid@nikkeiplace.org.

Nippon Fujinkai – Japanese Women’s Associations

by Eiji Okawa

This story is featured in the Nikkei National Museum’s exhibit commemorating the centennial of Japanese Canadian involvement in the First World War, 物部・もののふ:Warrior Spirit, on display at the NNM from October 8, 2016 - January 15, 2017.



The Nippon Fujinkai, circa 1910. NNM 2010.31.17.

Women’s associations that were organized by Japanese Canadian women in the early twentieth century were called *fujinkai*. Seventeen years after the arrival to Canada of the first known Japanese female immigrant, Yo Shishido, the Nippon Fujinkai was founded in Vancouver in 1904. Under Genko Nagamine’s leadership, the initial mandate of the Nippon Fujinkai was to raise funds

to send relief for the bereaved families of Japanese soldiers who were killed in the Russo-Japanese war.

By 1907, the Nippon Fujinkai had over 170 women who worked tirelessly to support immigrants who came to Canada from Japan¹. With the growth and diversification of Japanese communities and enclaves in British

Columbia, there were over eight *fujinkai* organizations in different regions of the province in the early twentieth century. These included the *fujinkai* in Haney, Steveston, Ocean Falls, New Westminster, and other areas, as well as Buddhist and Christian *fujinkai* in Vancouver. The *fujinkai* groups served to bridge Japanese groups with the broader Canadian society. They also networked with different associations within the Japanese Canadian community, such as the ubiquitous prefectural associations, to address various social issues and to help settlers adapt to the new socio-cultural environment in Canada.



Composite portrait of the Vancouver Buddhist Fujinkai, 1915. JCCC 2001.11.29

During the First World War, *fujinkai* worked jointly with other women’s associations and the Canadian Red Cross. Prior to the systematic uprooting of Japanese Canadians from the coastal areas during the Second World War, the Haney region of what is today Maple Ridge was home to a thriving Japanese Canadian farming community. The Haney town hall was used to convene tea parties and meetings in which the members of Japanese and white women’s associations discussed how best to organize their efforts in order to support men who were fighting for Canada and the Allies on European battlefronts². As a result, the women of *fujinkai* knitted pajamas, socks, and bandages, and packed them into care parcels that were sent to the soldiers.

Fujinkai also carried out charity campaigns to raise funds for Vancouver General Hospital. In 1909, the women raised over \$1,000 from the community³. Ten years later, they managed another donation of nearly \$5,000⁴. The donations were made to pay for the medical services that Japanese immigrants received at the hospital, and

to support the hospital when government funding for medical care was lacking.

Partly because of the paucity of historical records, *fujinkai* and the women who ran them have been among the voiceless groups in Canadian history. However, in the words of Nakayama Jinshirō, who published his magnum opus on Japanese communities in Canada in 1921, it was the “greatness of women’s power” that propelled the transformation of Japanese immigrants from transient migrants to permanent residents of their adoptive country, Canada. Indeed, as ethnicity-based women’s groups, *fujinkai* made important contributions to the diverse and complex history of twentieth-century Canada.

Source

Kanada dōhō hatten taikan, zen [Encyclopedia of the Development of Japanese in Canada]. By Nakayama Jinshirō. In Sasaki Toshiji and Tsuneharu Gonnami, eds. *Kanada iminshi shiryō*, vol. 8. Tokyo: Fuji Shuppan, 2000 (originally published by Japan Taimusu in 1921). ㊦

¹Kanada dōhō hatten taikan, 1691.

²Ibid., 1695.

³Ibid., 1692-93.

⁴Ibid., 1575, 1581.

From World War I Battlefields to Vancouver, BC

submitted by Susan Yatabe

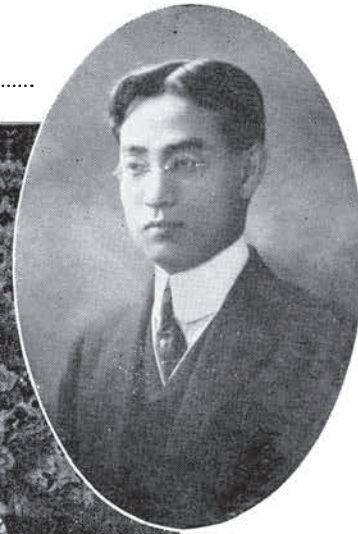


Dr. Ishiwara and his office at 438 Alexander Street, Vancouver, circa 1919. NNM 2001.8.2.3.2.30

In 1958 the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (JCCA) held a contest inviting issei, nisei, and sansei to contribute essays based on their own experiences.

Written in Japanese, Mrs. Tsune Yatabe (1894-1984) submitted to the contest her experiences as a volunteer in Vancouver during the 1918 Spanish flu epidemic. The story was written with the help of Mrs. S. Yamazaki. Although Mrs. Yamazaki had also volunteered with Mrs. Yatabe in 1918, the story was written from Mrs. Yatabe's point of view. Kazue Kitamura translated this story into English.

In 1918, Mrs. Yatabe had two young children. Her husband Gensaku Yatabe (1879-1938) was a gardening contractor who ran his own business in Vancouver. He contributed to the design of the original Nitobe Memorial Garden at the UBC. With the help of one of Gensaku's gardening clients, the family moved to Ontario during World War II. Mrs. Yatabe wrote this story when she was living in Toronto. The Yatabe family eventually had eight children.



Classroom in session at the Strathcona School, Vancouver, 1918. NNM 2010.23.2.4.512

Spanish Flu

by Tsune Yatabe

October 13, 1958, 9 Hendrick Avenue, Toronto, Ontario

In mid-October of 1918, a terrible influenza epidemic arrived in Canada from the battlefields of World War I in Europe. It was called the Spanish flu.

The Spanish flu spread to Vancouver, British Columbia, where many Japanese immigrants lived. Public schools and churches were forced to close to prevent the flu from spreading. Many patients could not stay in hospitals, as many doctors and nurses had been sent to work at the battlefields.

A Japanese pastor from the Methodist church, Mr. Masamitsu Akagawa, and a missionary from his church took the initiative to tackle the epidemic. Mr. Akagawa said, "The first Japanese patient was Akio Iwatsuru. He was a Japanese student and a Christian".

It was terrible and sad to see so many patients unable to get treatment and dying.

Mr. Akagawa visited the Japanese Consulate for some help and advice. He and Mr. Ukita (the Consul) arranged for a special hospital to be set up for Japanese patients. They obtained permission to use Strathcona Public School as a temporary hospital. Many *issei* and *nisei* had studied at the school.

There were four main doctors: Dr. Shimotakahara, Dr. Takahashi, Dr. Ishiwara, and Dr. Kinoshita. They worked very hard on behalf of their patients.

Fortunately, Mrs. Akagawa was an experienced nurse. She devoted herself to taking care of patients. She worked with Mrs. Nakano, who was married to a pastor, and Mrs. Higashi, who was from the Japanese Red Cross. One of the nurses was the daughter of Dr. Watanabe. Although more and more patients arrived at the hospital, few nurses applied for the work. They feared getting infected.

We saw Mr. and Mrs. Akagawa working very hard. As healthy people, we felt we should do something to help them. Although we and other friends from church discussed what we should do, we did not have any

good ideas. Some of us said that we should not risk becoming infected. Others said we could help the Akagawas by giving them things they needed without directly contacting the patients.

My husband went to the hospital. He wanted to help the patients, but Mrs. Akagawa said, “We prefer women, not men, as nurses”. The next day, I applied for the work. After learning that I applied, two church friends also applied. I was very glad.

One of us worked in the kitchen, and the other two worked in patients’ rooms. We worked very hard under Mrs. Akagawa’s supervision.

However, we were not prepared for such an experience. We worked a 12-hour shift from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm with an hour for lunchtime. It was hard work.

I had never seen a dead body before I worked in the hospital, but there I saw many bodies every day. The funeral parlour was too busy to remove the bodies immediately, so the bodies were left on the beds. I was initially shocked to see so many of them. As I worked every day, I got used to seeing them.

The room I worked in had about eight middle-aged patients. One of them had a high fever and talked constantly about her children. Another woman tried to leave the room. I had to supervise her. I also talked with other patients who had high fevers.

One day Mr. and Mrs. Taira entered the hospital with their child. They did not appear to be ill. Mrs. Taira was three months pregnant at the time. Most patients in the early stages of pregnancy did not survive. Mrs. Taira and her husband died three days after arriving. Their child was orphaned. Some staff members looked after the child, in particular a man who had returned from the war. He always carried the child on his back while working. One elderly woman was very kind and said, “Because

I have enough money, please look after the child, no matter the cost”. I could not forget her kindness.

A patient gave birth to a baby while staying in the hospital. Mrs. Tateishi helped with the delivery.

I felt very tired for a few days. Normally because I started work early in the morning, I had a good appetite by lunchtime. However, one day I did not feel like eating lunch. I asked Mr. Fujita to take my place, and went home to rest.



Group portrait including Dr. Shimotakahara (front row left), Mr. Hatashita, and Mr. Y. Arikado. Vancouver, circa 1920. NNM 2010.31.24

I completely forgot that we had been told that if we felt ill, we should not go home, but stay in the hospital. I went home because I was concerned about my children. While in bed at home, I began to worry that I was infected.

I telephoned some doctors, but could not reach them. After waiting until the morning, I saw Dr. Takahara and learned I was indeed infected. He admonished me for not following the doctors’ advice.

The ambulance came to my house and took me to the hospital. I had a high fever at the time. My oldest child cried when he heard that anyone who was taken to hospital by ambulance died.

My husband also developed the flu and came to the hospital with our 18-month-old son. Fortunately, they



Consul General Ukita (1916-1921) and his wife surrounded by important men in the Japanese Canadian community. Mohei Sato is the third man from the right standing in the back row. Vancouver, circa 1920. NNM 2010.31.10

were able to leave the hospital after a few days. I learned this later.

I was overwhelmed when I saw my father standing at the hospital gate, wearing fine clothing. I spoke to him in my dream.

The flu gradually subsided, but my high fever continued. Four doctors lost hope and gave up on me. I was told I was going to die. Many patients visited me after learning I was not going to live much longer.

Doctors wanted to keep me in quarantine in a different hospital because my condition was very serious. However, my fever suddenly disappeared. The doctors thought it was a miracle.

They decided to let me remain in the hospital and hoped I would recover soon. I learned this later and I appreciated their work on my behalf.

The hospital became quiet after many patients recovered and left. Few doctors and nurses remained working there. On the last day, Mrs. Hokkyo had a bad cough, and I was asked if she could stay in my room. We were the last two patients.

Mrs. Hokkyo kept calling the staff, but nobody came to our room. She began to cry. Three staff members were in the office, but the office was very far from our room. I felt sorry for her, so I got out of bed and crawled all the way to the office. When I returned to the room, I tried to get on my bed, but fell off.

I later learned the reason why no one came to our room. Later that night, it became very noisy outside. News from the battlefield often came to the hospital, and the three staff members were excited to hear the news about the end of the war. Many people were honking their car horns and making celebratory noises.

I was allowed to return home on that exciting day. I was in a car decorated with flags from different countries. It was November 11, 1918, a historic day for not only the world but also for me.

As I had been about to die three days before, it felt strange to be alive. At the same time, I felt very sorry for many friends who lost their lives to the Spanish flu.

To view the Japanese submission at Library and Archives Canada visit heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c12833/230?r=0&s=2 (Image 348 to 389) 🌐

Aitoku Yamasaki

by Sanae Fukushima, Gen Sato, and Ruth Simpson

The late 1800s were turbulent years in Satsuma (now Kagoshima), in Kyushu, the most southern part of Japan. It was the site of the Satsuma Rebellion which ended in 1877 and spelled the end of the *Samurai* era in Japan. It was in this environment that Aitoku Ohama was born on September 18, 1887, in Iriki, Kagoshima, Japan. He was the second son born to Kakunoshin and Mino Ohama.

Aitoku spent his childhood years in Iriki. No doubt Aitoku grew up listening to his father Kakunoshin's experience spent in Saigo Takamori's forces in the Satsuma Rebellion where he served at the age of 16 in the medical corps. As you may be aware, the historical novel, *The Last Samurai* was based on Saigo Takamori's life. Did Kakunoshin's account of his life in that Rebellion Army of long ago have a bearing on son Aitoku's decision to join the army in a country across the ocean?

Aitoku married Ai Yamasaki, in Iriki, Kagoshima. Ai Yamasaki was an only child. As was the tradition in olden times in Japan, if a couple had only a daughter when she married, her husband became a *yoshi* (adopted son) and took the wife's family name. Aitoku on his marriage to Ai was a *yoshi* and was adopted by the Yamasaki family and received his new surname. They had their first child in Iriki; the child died in infancy.

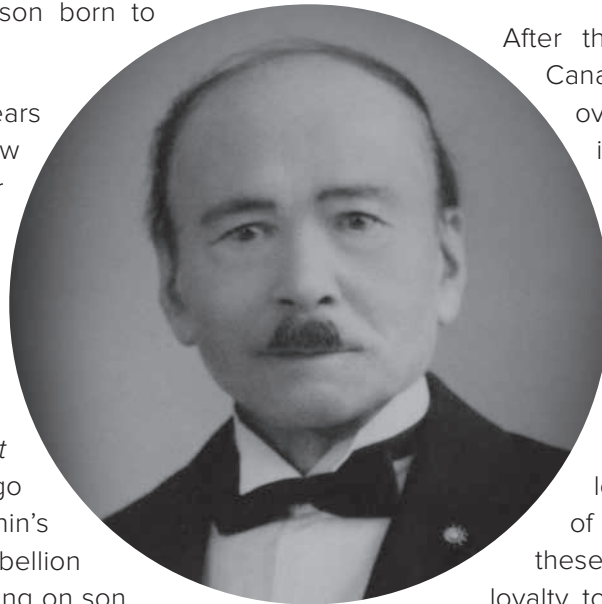
In the late 1800s and early 1900s there was a wave of Japanese leaving their homeland to live in Canada to seek a new life. In 1907, Aitoku and Ai Yamasaki decided to leave Japan to embark on a long journey to a faraway country called Canada. They arrived in Vancouver and travelled to Calgary, Alberta.

Aitoku was a merchant. He and his wife, at one time carried on a grocery store business in Calgary. He also

worked in an old hotel in Calgary. Life in Canada was not as easy as expected but they strove hard to succeed. There was much racial discrimination and prejudice against Asians, including the Japanese. Life was not pleasant in this environment. However, they persevered and worked hard to enrich their lives in this new country.

After the outbreak of WWI in 1914, Canadian troops were sent overseas to France to engage in combat. When the call went out to the men of Japanese descent living in Canada to serve in the Canadian Forces fighting the Germans in Europe, many Japanese men, including Aitoku, without hesitation answered the call to demonstrate their loyalty to their adopted country of Canada. It was the belief of these volunteers that by proving their loyalty to Canada in this way, it would pave the way to the right to vote.

Aitoku enlisted in Calgary, Alberta on August 23, 1916. His army training took place in Sarcee, Alberta. Upon completion of his training, he was part of the 50th Battalion of the Canadian Army (later incorporated into the 175th Overseas Battalion). This Battalion set sail from Halifax on Oct. 4, 1916. This Battalion was sent to the warfront in France to fight the German forces. While there, Aitoku was exposed to the Germans' chlorine gas bombs. He sustained very serious injuries: in particular, his lung was perforated. In 1917, he was sent for rehabilitation in a military hospital in England. Upon his return from England in 1918, he was admitted to Shaughnessy Hospital in Vancouver. He was discharged from the hospital and discharged from the Army in January 1919. He was awarded the British War medal and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal which was awarded to all soldiers in the Canadian Army). The medals are now in the proud



Above: Aitoku Yamasaki as councillor in Iriki, Kagoshima. NNM TD



Aitoku Yamasaki and granddaughter Sanae Fukushima in Iriki cemetery, Kagoshima prefecture, Japan, 1964. NNM TD 1171.1

possession of Brian, the first grandchild in the family with the last name Yamasaki.

A Japanese Canadian War Memorial was erected in Stanley Park, Vancouver in 1920 in lasting memory of the Nikkei who served in WWI. Aitoku Yamasaki is one of the names on the plaque. In subsequent decades, many of his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren have gone to see the monument.

Aitoku and Ai Yamasaki had seven children in Canada, born in various places in Alberta and BC. While he was overseas, an infant son died. Also, a daughter was born in January 1917. These events must have been heartbreaking for him to be separated from his family.

After his discharge from the army, he was reunited with his wife and children, living in Calgary and later on the West Coast. As was customary in those days, some of their children were educated in Japan. As a child reached school age, Aitoku travelled to Iriki, Japan, to take a child to live with his/her grandparents to be educated. After their education was completed in Japan, they returned to Canada.

The Yamasaki family moved to Vancouver and lived on Cordova Street, where Aitoku was involved in various jobs, including as bellhop in a hotel, fishing, and writing articles for the Japanese Canadian newspaper. Aitoku was relatively well educated and wrote letters for some of his friends so they could communicate with their relatives in Japan. He travelled to Japan several times. In 1941, he again travelled to Japan to settle his mother's estate, intent on returning to Canada. Aitoku unfortunately became very ill and was bedridden for some time. After his recovery, he was unable to return to Canada due to the outbreak of WWII. Life in Kagoshima and the rest of Japan was very difficult because of the war. During the war, he was investigated by the military police and city police on the charge of being a US spy due to the fact he understood English and had served in a foreign country. It was especially heart-breaking as he was again separated from his wife and children.

His wife was able to return to Japan in 1950 and they were finally reunited. Life was very difficult during the postwar years. They very much appreciated the packages that their children sent them from Canada.

They enjoyed the visits of their grown-up married sons and daughters and their children from Canada. In Iriki, they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary surrounded by their family and lifelong friends.

In Iriki, Aitoku became very involved in community affairs and local politics. He was elected Councilman for the Town of Iriki, and served in this capacity from April 1947 to May 1964.

Two of his grandchildren, Gen and his sister Ruth, who spent their childhood years in Japan until 1959, had the opportunity to visit with their grandparents a few times a year.

Gen's Remembrances:

One of the things I remember fondly is that when we were young, Grandpa would entertain us while smoking by blowing smoke out of his ears. I remember marvelling at that trick. I found out later from Mom that he had injured his inner membranes when he was gassed in the trenches during the war. He also indicated that he had vision problems in one eye. I recall asking him how he passed his physical exam for acceptance into the infantry. He smiled and said “language problem”.

While he had a stern and serious look, he was very charming and looked after his grandchildren well. I always thought that he had a sparkle of pride in his eyes when he took us out for walks.

Here is an anecdote that my grandparents told and that was also mentioned years later by one of their friends. It's a story that reflected the sad situation of racism and distrust of Asians by the mainstream community at that time. When they lived in a rural community, they used to invite friends, especially single men, over for dinner. They really liked Grandma's apple pie so they asked her for her recipe. They went into town and bought a large bushel basket of apples. Since they did not have enough room in their fridge, they left the apples outside. Unfortunately, the apples froze overnight. They then went back into town the next day to buy more apples. They later heard that townspeople were very concerned that something sinister was being plotted by these Japanese men regarding these apples. Why would anyone buy so many apples in two days?

In 2006, our family went to Iriki for a visit and to go *ohaka mairi* (grave cleaning) at the Yamasaki family

cemetery. It was indeed a fascinating and emotional experience for me to see Iriki more than 50 years later as an adult and to take my wife, sons, and daughter-in-law there. I told stories about their great-grandfather. I marvelled at what courage and commitment it must have taken for my grandparents to leave Iriki to immigrate to Canada one hundred years ago to start a new life.

We met a very courteous city official who indicated that Grandpa had served as a councillor for many years.

In a small restaurant in Iriki where our family of five comprised almost half of the diners, an elderly man with whom I engaged in a conversation remembered his father mentioning a well-known councillor named Aitoku Yamasaki. My grandfather was well thought of in this community.

Recently, I read a letter written by Grandpa in the late '40s to one of my uncles. It was written mostly in *hiragana* to make it easier for my uncle to read. I was very surprised to read another letter written to his new daughter-in-law who was not comfortable in Japanese. This letter was written entirely in English. I did not know until this time that Grandpa had a good command of written English.

Ruth's Remembrances:

I pay a silent tribute to my Grandfather every year on November the 11th as he helped to shape some of my views and the person that I have become.

My remembrances of my Grandfather are fond ones: he loved thick toast with wads of melting butter; he liked his tea strong with lots of milk and sugar; and he referred to potatoes as “spuds”. Because he used to entertain us with his “magic” trick with pipe smoke, I cannot help but think of him whenever I smell pipe tobacco.

His world in Canada was one that treated Japanese Canadians differently from others—I remember him telling me that in Vancouver, when he went to movie theatres, he was not allowed to sit on the main floor—only on the second floor balcony. He was, on occasion, also directed to sit at the back of the bus.

He spoke infrequently about his war experiences; however, one thing that stands out in my mind is about the times that he would meet other Japanese

Canadian soldiers. They would literally jump for joy at seeing each other and hug each other in excitement. For someone like my Grandfather who was brought up in a culture of being reserved and not to show emotion, and certainly not show public demonstration of affection, the encounters must have been truly emotional ones.

In my discussions with him, one stands out poignantly. When I asked him why he was a Buddhist and not a Christian like my parents, this was the response he gave me: “You can't be a Christian and be a Buddhist but you can be a Buddhist and be a Christian”. To a young child like me, he seemed very wise and his words have stayed with me even until today.

Another granddaughter, Sanae, had the privilege of meeting Aitoku on two occasions.

Sanae's remembrances:

My initial meeting with my Grandfather was before he went to visit Japan in 1941. I was only five. I only have very faint images and memories of that visit.

In 1964, my husband and I travelled to Japan and went to Iriki to meet my grandparents. Grandfather proudly gave us an in-depth grand tour of Iriki, together with his commentary much like a tour guide. We went to the cemetery where many of the Iriki nobility of old were buried. He also took us to the family cemetery where we paid our respects to our ancestors.

We visited the school that my mother had attended. Grandfather even introduced us to the teachers. I walked in my mother's footsteps in the hallway and the school ground. What a very emotional moment for me!

What was my impression of Grandfather? He had a great gift of gab like a politician. Of course, he was a politician, albeit one in a small *mura* (village) in Japan.

Aitoku Yamasaki passed away in 1966 in his beloved Iriki, Kagoshima, Japan. His wife Ai Yamasaki passed away also in Iriki in 1970. They are presently survived by one son, Yoshiaki, age 95 in Toronto. Aitoku Yamasaki has left a legacy to 14 grandchildren, 14 great grandchildren, and three great-great-grandchildren who live in BC, Ontario, Nevada, and Japan. 🌸

Top: Aitoku Yamasaki in First World War Uniform, circa 1916.
NNM TD 1171.3

Bottom: Yamasaki family circa 1960. NNM TD 1171.4



An Extraordinary Life – Saburo Shinobu

by Susan Yatabe and Kazuko Yatabe, from notes by Sada Shinobu



Saburo's speech on April 9, 1920 at opening ceremony of the War Memorial. The man wearing glasses is Vancouver Alderman J. J. McRae, who attended the ceremony in the place of Mayor Robert Gale. Photo found in the album of Sada Shinobu.

Saburo Shinobu was born Saburo Takahashi on August 25, 1889 in Sanuma Miyagi-ken, Japan. When he married Sada Shinobu (of the nearby town of Ishinomori) in Japan, he took her surname, as she was descended from a prominent *samurai* family.

He immigrated to Canada, arriving in August 1907 alone, at the age of eighteen. He studied English in a public school in New Westminster (starting at grade 4), with much younger classmates. He graduated in 1913, from King Edward High School in New Westminster.

In 1917, he became secretary of the Skeena branch of the Canadian Japanese Association in Prince Rupert, BC. He took an oath of Naturalization on May 26th 1917, a few months before his wife Sada moved to Canada. He worked in Prince Rupert for two years before moving to

Vancouver to work at the head office of the Association to help Japanese soldiers who had been sent to World War I.

When the soldiers returned from overseas, Saburo worked tirelessly for their rehabilitation, as interpreter, go-between, and consultant.

He gave a speech in English at the unveiling of the Japanese Canadian War Memorial in Vancouver on April 9, 1920.

In 1925 the veterans were organised as the Japanese Branch of the Canadian Legion (BC Branch 9). In 1931, the leaders of Legion Branch 9 included veterans Sergeant Masumi Mitsui as president, Corporal Sainosuke Kubota as secretary, and Saburo as advisor. Ken Adachi's book



From the City of Vancouver online photo archive; it shows a large crowd gathered at the War Memorial on April 9th 1920. A translation from the *Tairiku Nippo* newspaper from that date states that Saburo Shinobu gave a speech at the War Memorial during the unveiling. CVA 99-240 Stuart Thomson Fonds.

(*The Enemy that Never Was*) says that Saburo Shinobu led the fight for the voting franchise for WWI veterans.

He began agitating before 1920 among many organizations throughout the province regarding the securing of the franchise for the Japanese veterans. When the matter of the revision of the provincial franchise was brought up at the Provincial Legislative Assembly, he secured assertions of support from the Members of the Assembly from many ridings.

On April 1, 1931, Mitsui, Kubota, Shinobu, and Noburo Murakami went to the Legislature in Victoria to seek the franchise for the veterans, with the help of other Legion members. The group met with every member of the Legislature to promote their cause.

The WWI veterans did gain the franchise from the BC government on that day, but only the veterans were given the privilege, and they earned it with only one single vote breaking a deadlock. The four Japanese Canadians apparently wept with relief when they heard

the news. Gaining the veteran franchise had been a 12-year struggle to reach that goal, and they were sleep-deprived and under great emotional stress. Receiving a heroes' welcome when they returned to Vancouver, they drove directly to the Japanese Canadian War Memorial in Stanley Park to honour the fallen WWI soldiers. Saburo later became the seventh person in Canada to be named an honorary life member of the Canadian Legion, the highest honour conferred by the organization.

Saburo Shinobu was the first Canadian of Japanese origin to earn the degree of Chartered Life Underwriter, after ten years of correspondence courses from the University of Toronto. At that time, of 700 underwriters in BC, only 20 had obtained this diploma. He sold insurance for Manufacturers Life to *nikkei* who lived all over BC. He travelled constantly, and due to his work, acquired a large network of friends and acquaintances.

Sada ran a finishing school for young Japanese Canadian women teaching sewing, cooking, flower arranging, and



Wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial. Mrs. Kagetsu is on the right side of the photo. NNM 2001.4.4.5.61 Roy Ito fonds.

needlework. She shared office space with Saburo at 302 Alexander Street near the Vancouver waterfront .

As Saburo was one of the few *issei* who could speak English fluently, he knew many people in the province, was well-travelled, and became a respected leader in the Japanese Canadian community of Vancouver. He was accused of being a spy for Japan, by *hakujin* living on Vancouver Island, for the same reasons.

In addition to his insurance work and his Canadian Legion duties, Saburo volunteered at the Powell Street Japanese United Church, the Vancouver Japanese School Maintenance Association, and the Asahi Park Association. His family said that he was rarely home, as he was always travelling for work or at an important meeting.

One of the most important events in Saburo's life was to attend the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial in France in 1936 as a representative of Legion Branch 9. Saburo, Veteran Bunshiro Furukawa, and businessman Eikichi

Kagetsu were the three Japanese Canadian delegates among the Canadians who made this pilgrimage.

When World War II broke out, the Japanese Canadians were evacuated from their homes in BC. A temporary internment camp was established at Vancouver's Hastings Park, and together with World War I veterans, Shinobu became one of the security guards.

In September 1942, the Shinobu family was interned at Kaslo, BC.

During World War II, the Japanese owners of property on the BC coast were forced to sell their property by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Properties. The Japanese who were scattered throughout Canada contacted each other and formed a Japanese Property Protection Association for which Saburo became the general secretary of that organization while based in Kaslo. After a great deal of inconvenience, this group brought a suit against the Secretary of State, however lost at the Ottawa Exchequer Court trial held the following year.



Taken outside the Toronto Japanese Language School. It shows Saburo greeting the Crown Prince, who was 19 years old at the time. Courtesy Sada Shinobu.

After the war, when Japanese Canadians were ordered to move "back to Japan" or east of the Rockies, the Shinobu family moved to Toronto.

Soon after the end of the War, several hundred Japanese families received deportation orders and there was great confusion in the Japanese Canadian community. Religious leaders and influential citizens of Toronto, with the intention of forcing a change in the government's attitude, took the matter to the British Privy Council, and the Japanese residents in Toronto formed an association to protect the rights of the Japanese Canadians, with Saburo as its vice-president.

It was very difficult to find work in Toronto due to the racism and anti-Japanese sentiment that remained. Saburo worked in a factory and also in a laundry

room at one of the hospitals in Toronto, thanks to a friend Miss Florence Bird from his church-work in both Vancouver and Toronto. In Toronto, Saburo worked with others on the JCCD (Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy). Their major objective was to obtain the franchise for all Japanese Canadians, which was achieved in 1948. Eventually he began working once again for Manufacturer's Life Insurance Company.

Saburo Shinobu helped to organize the visit of Crown Prince Akihito of Japan to Toronto in April 1953.

Saburo's health was poor after the move from Kaslo to Toronto. He had several heart attacks after he turned 60. He died in 1956, aged 68.

Saburo Shinobu gave the following speech on April 2, 1931, the night after the passing of the bill on franchise for Japanese WWI veterans. The speech was presented at the Japanese Hall, 475 Alexander Street, Vancouver, BC. It was translated from Japanese into English by Kazuko and Eiji Yatabe, and provided to the JCCA History Committee in 1959 by Sada Shinobu.

Consul Edo, Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Knowing how busy you all are, I very much appreciate your attending this meeting tonight.

For many years I have been advisor to the Japanese Branch of the Canadian Legion, acting in the capacity of discussion counsellor to this group of veterans of whom roughly 50 had been killed in action, and to whose memory I would like to pay tribute.

In 1920 I was general secretary of the Japanese Association, and at the same time I was working for the veterans. In 1921 a campaign to obtain the provincial franchise was started, but it was not successful because of political opposition. In January 1925, I was made the advisor to the newly formed branch of the Canadian Legion, and up to this day I have continued to do my utmost in this capacity. I was determined that until the members of the Japanese Branch of the Canadian Legion had acquired the same rights as the other Canadian citizens, I could not resign my post. Throughout this period, I experienced many difficulties, but doing this grand work, I made many contacts among the Canadians and awaited the right opportunity.

On the matter of the franchise, since I believed that the entire membership of the Provincial Canadian Legion were behind us, I felt that the bill would be passed very easily, but when the actual time came, many problems arose and everything did not turn out as anticipated. As we visited members of the Legislative Assembly individually and spoke to them about the franchise for the Japanese war veterans, we discovered that even those whom we expected to agree immediately with us were reluctant to give a definite “yes” or “no”. 26 of them promised to vote in favour, but 4 of them gave emphatic “no’s”. Of the remaining, 11 were evasive, and 7 or 8 were undecided. Our hope was that half of the MLAs who would not commit themselves would stand by us. I am not at liberty to disclose why they would not commit themselves at this time. However,

when the time came, I was sure that they would be for us. It was often difficult to contact these men at the right time. Sometimes it would be 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning before we could catch these MLAs, but we felt that if we missed this opportunity, it would be gone forever, and we determined that this time we must do our utmost.

At the last Provincial Legislature, we heard that the bill for the revision of franchise was going to be brought up, but we were not certain, and neither were the MLAs. About four or five days before the session, we heard that because of the Doukhobor question, the matter of the franchise revision would be brought up, and our own problem would be brought up then.

Two days ago, the matter of the franchise revision was announced as being on the agenda. Up to this moment the Conservative Opposition Leader and the Liberal Party organizer were both veterans, and it was easy for us to contact them. Day before yesterday, after 11:00 pm, the question of revision of franchise for Japanese returned soldiers was passed over to a committee meeting. At this committee meeting, Col. Nelson Spencer and Captain MacIntosh asserted that since the Japanese veterans had rendered meritorious services for Canada, the franchise should be granted in recognition of it, but the Member from Alberni, Mr. Hanna, opposed this strenuously. The many MLAs in favour of the franchise revision thumped their desks and voiced their approvals loudly, while those in opposition spoke, I thought, in small voices.

The reason given by the opposition was thus: The Japanese had a lower standard of living, and thus it was undesirable for Japanese children to mix with other children. Although they recognized the fact that the Japanese veterans had rendered great service to Canada, they were not willing to grant them the franchise.

There was an unexpected turn in our favour, when the former Attorney-General, Mr. Manson, who had been first against us was won over to our side by our campaigning, and through the efforts of Mr. Pattullo. We were very lucky.

The present Attorney-General, Mr. Pooley, claimed that since in BC Orientals were not eligible for franchise, therefore, our veterans should not be eligible for franchise. The fact that they had rendered

valuable services during the War was appreciated, but should not make any difference. He then asked for this motion to be adopted.

The method of voting was first by a show of hands, but when a count was taken, there was one hand missing among those in favour. The vote stood at 17 against 18 opposed. Mr. Manson had not raised his hand. The vote was then taken standing, and this time Mr. Manson stood up and the count stood at 18-18. At this moment, Chairman Hayward cast the deciding ballot in favour of the opposition, and we therefore lost by one vote.

We spent a sorrowful night, and even our Canadian friends who had been campaigning with us cried. My Canadian co-campaigner turned sadly to me and said, “Mr. Shinobu, we feel badly. Possibly our campaigning wasn’t as thorough as it might have been”.

Trying to make him feel better, I answered, “We all did our best, and if it didn’t come through, it was through no lack of effort on our part”. However, the strenuous campaigning was too much for my friend, who began to feel violently ill. He asked me to call a doctor. This was at 2:00 am. It was like a nightmare.

However, we had not the slightest intention of slackening our efforts, and then and there, we discussed further means of continuing the fight.

Twigg and Macintosh who were in favour of granting the franchise to the Japanese war veterans began on the morning of the 31st to make personal calls to the individual Members. We had a stroke of luck. There was a Member from Anyox by the name of Kergin who seemed to oppose Twigg at any opportunity he could get. Any motion brought up by Twigg was always sure to be opposed by Kergin and Manson. However, Kergin had a change of heart and stood for the Japanese, going to the trouble of starting a campaign program for them among the Liberals. Even at the assembly hall, he was busy campaigning, and we could see it clearly from the spectators’ gallery.

The count was 18 for, 18 against, and of the 11 cabinet ministers other than the Minister of Public Works, Mr. Bruhn, they all were opposed. Following the

campaigning of Twigg, MacIntosh, and Kergin, Attorney-General Pooley and Minister Without Portfolio Maitland began an anti-vote campaign. Their campaigning was vigorous.

After Nelson Spencer, MacIntosh, Uphill, and Twigg gave very earnest speeches, the opposing side without arguing, insisted upon a vote. It was evident that they believed that even though they were losing in argument, they could win if it were put to a vote.

Altogether there were 38, but out of that group, MLA Shelly for some reason was absent and was not in time for the vote. I could not bear to watch, and bowed my head, covering my face with both hands.

“Mr. Shinobu, you’ve won!” the man next to me cried. I raised my head. There was no mistake, by 19 to 18 we had won!

Jubilantly I returned to the hotel to tell Mr. Mitsui the good news. Mr. Mitsui immediately telephoned Mr. Watanabe whom we heard jumping up and down with joy. In the background we could hear his young son shouting, “Hurray!”

Last night after the Bill passed second reading, people came happily from everywhere to shake our hands. We were informed that although it had yet to go through the third reading, it would be passed, for unless there was some special problem connected with it, the third reading was but a formality.

Sure enough, later that night the franchise revision bill, that is to say, Bill 76, safely passed the third reading.

Footnote:

Thanks to Masayuki Watanabe for providing a translation of the *Tairiku Nippo* newspaper that confirms that Saburo Shinobu gave a speech at the opening of the Japanese Canadian War Memorial on April 9 1920, and to Professor Jeanette Leduc for making this translation possible. Thanks also to Melinda Halfhide of Library and Archives Canada for finding the link to the Vimy Pilgrimage Diary of Saburo Shinobu. 🍁



Treasures from the Collection



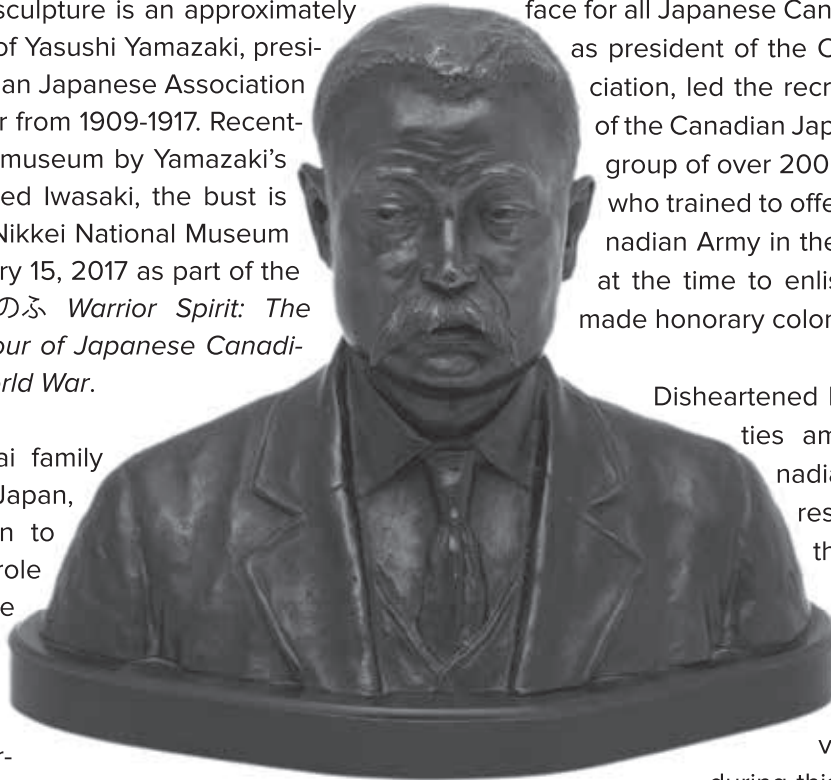
Bust of Yasushi Yamazaki

c.20th century 2016.22.1.1.1, Alfred Iwasaki Collection

by Carolyn Nakagawa

This bronze bust sculpture is an approximately 1:3 scale likeness of Yasushi Yamazaki, president of the Canadian Japanese Association (CJA) in Vancouver from 1909-1917. Recently donated to the museum by Yamazaki's great-nephew Alfred Iwasaki, the bust is on display at the Nikkei National Museum gallery until January 15, 2017 as part of the exhibit 物部・もののふ *Warrior Spirit: The Bravery and Honour of Japanese Canadians in the First World War*.

Born to a samurai family in Toyama-ken, Japan, Yamazaki went on to play a prominent role in the Japanese Canadian community. He was secretary of the Japanese Fishermen's Union in Steveston during the Fraser River fishermen's strike in 1900, a fierce labour dispute that involved continuing negotiations and rising tensions with both the canneries and the white fishermen's union. Later, as editor of the *Tairiku Nippo*, a Japanese-language community newspaper, Yamazaki set out to expose the trade of Japanese prostitution being undertaken in Canada, in hopes of shaming the community and the women involved into shutting the practice down in an effort toward saving



face for all Japanese Canadians. In 1916, Yamazaki, as president of the Canadian Japanese Association, led the recruitment and organization of the Canadian Japanese Volunteer Corps, a group of over 200 Japanese Canadian men who trained to offer their services to the Canadian Army in the First World War. Too old at the time to enlist himself, Yamazaki was made honorary colonel for his efforts.

Disheartened by the number of casualties among the Japanese Canadian soldiers, Yamazaki resigned as president of the CJA in 1917, leaving Canada to work as editor of a Japanese-language newspaper in Manchuria until 1933. He briefly visited Canada three times during this period, and was able to

help the community celebrate when Japanese Canadian veterans were granted voting rights. He died in Japan in 1947.

While the precise origins of this intriguing artefact are unclear, what is apparent is that the bust commemorates a remarkable man who worked hard to better the lot of the early Japanese Canadian community in every way he could. ☯