



# Nikkei Images

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## Powell Street Historical Walking Tour

by Judy Inouye

**O**n this historical tour of Powell Street we will take you back in time to the pre-1942 bustling community of Japanese Canadians and Japanese immigrants who lived and worked in this area of Vancouver, British Columbia. The community grew and thrived over a fifty-year period from the 1890s to its abrupt end in 1942. At one point, its population reached around 8400, a significant proportion of the 22,000 persons of Japanese background then in Canada.

This article has grown from the work of many people. Among the sources of information for the tour are Audrey Kobayashi's *Memories of our Past: a brief history and walking tour of Powell Street* (1992); A. Katsuyoshi Morita's *Powell Street Monogatari*, translated by Eric Sokugawa (1989); JCNMAS *Powell Street Map and Index* (draft, 1995); walking tour scripts by Audrey Kobayashi and Pearl Williams; and personal reminiscences of former community members.



**Vancouver Japanese  
Language School**

The tour begins in front of the Japanese Language School, at 475 Alexander, a block north of Powell Street. The present-day Japanese Language School was also the site of the school in

pre-war days. The main building was next door at 439, and 475 was the new extension; the two buildings were separate structures. There was also a playground on the corner which may have been a vacant lot and not owned by the school. Only the building at 475 was returned to the school by the City of Vancouver after the war. To the east of this building, the Language School is currently in the process of building its new facility.



**500 and 600 blocks of  
Alexander Street  
(looking east down  
Alexander)**

The next two blocks of Alexander once housed the red light district of Vancouver's Caucasian community. By 1912 the churches had caused many of the establishments to close. The brick building on the southeast corner was referred to as the Sailors' Home. It appears that the building was a hostel for merchant sailors while in port but this information has not been verified. By 1940, the two blocks had become residential with boarding and rooming houses and single-family dwellings. The single-family dwellings often housed boarders as well.

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## ... Powell Street Historical Walking Tour

(continued from page 1)



***Walk toward Dunlevy (west) on the north side of Alexander Street.***

The south side of this block consisted mainly of single-family dwellings and small boarding houses. Two of the original houses can still be seen. If they are typical examples of the dwellings in this block, the houses must not have been too small. Again, the single-family dwelling often housed one or two boarders in addition to the owner's family.



***Stop at northeast corner of Alexander and Dunlevy.***

Looking down Dunlevy, at the foot of the street you can see a dock with containers piled on the wharf. This was the site of Hastings Sawmill. Nothing is left of the mill now except for the office building, which has been preserved as a heritage site and now houses the Flying Angel Seamen's Club. The origin of the Powell Street Japanese Canadian community can be traced to this sawmill. The first known Japanese immigrant mill worker in 1883 was one Takezo who is remembered now only by his first name. In the same year or in 1886 (the records are not clear on this), Yasukichi Yoshizawa was the first boss of a crew of Japanese workers at the mill. Mr. Yoshizawa was also known as "Indian Yasu" because he traded with the Indians on the Skeena River for salmon. He was also the first Japanese immigrant to die in Canada. In the year of his death, 1889, over 200 Japanese workers

were employed at the mill. These workers first lived in floating scows and fishing boats on Burrard Inlet, possibly at the foot of Gore Avenue, but rooming houses quickly sprang up to meet the emerging needs. Services such as food shops, barbers, laundries and recreational facilities were quick to follow and thus the Japanese Canadian community established itself in this area.

The streets had been laid out in 1886 when Vancouver was incorporated as a city. This area was the first to receive water, electricity, sewage, and streetcar service, because the white middle-class population were the area's first residents. By the 1890s, fueled by economic prosperity, the middle class moved out to Fairview Slopes (also known as "Nob Hill") and the West End, leaving the Powell Street area free for settlement by Japanese immigrants.



***Look toward the south side of Alexander to No. 362 in the middle of the block.***

No. 362 on Alexander housed a Japanese restaurant, called Yoshinotei, on the ground floor and the Japanese Businessmen's Club on the second floor. The restaurant was a first-class establishment with tatami rooms and it ranked with the Miyako Restaurant in New York City. The Japanese Businessmen's Club was the headquarters of some of the most powerful men in the community, among them Etsuji Morii who was a controversial figure in the community.

As we look down the alley to our right, we see the backs of the buildings which used to be the

boarding houses of the Maikawa store. There was much activity in the alleys and breezeways between the buildings. Some small businesses, such as tofu-makers and other food manufacturers, had shops fronting the alley. Between the buildings, there were usually walkways of around three feet in width, a typical architectural feature in Japan. Today, from the streets these walkways cannot be seen, as most have been closed off, giving the appearance of each shop abutting the next. Visitors may be interested to go down the lanes to look at the backs of the buildings. Though the fronts have been remodeled, much of the original structure can be seen from the back and some small buildings on the lane (such as those of the tofu and other food makers) can also be seen. However, please remember that people still live in this area and may not appreciate the intrusion; their privacy must be respected. Please also remember that hidden narrow walkways can be dangerous. If you visit the lanes, be careful and do not go alone.



***Walk south on Dunlevy to Powell Street.***

At the northeast corner of Dunlevy and Powell is the Marr Hotel. At this site was the Judo Club started by Etsuji Morii. R.C.M.P. officers came to this club to practice judo.



***Walk east on Powell to Jackson. Stop at the northwest corner of Jackson and Powell.***



### *Japanese Methodist, United, Buddhist Church*

Look toward the southeast corner of Jackson and Powell to the current Japanese Buddhist Church. On this site was the Japanese Methodist Church, built in 1906, and which became the Japanese United Church in 1923. This church was a major focus of the community. Children and young people, whether Christian or not, came to play basketball in the gym at the back of the building. English classes were conducted on the second floor by the ministers, student ministers such as the late Anglican minister, Rev. Gordon Nakayama, and other church workers. There were also a number of residential rooms on the second floor; these were usually occupied by students, particularly student ministers. After the war, the building was returned to the Japanese United Church and was used by the church for various activities until it was sold to the Buddhist Church. Private property was confiscated but property belonging to organizations was returned to the original owners after the war.



*Cross to southwest corner of Jackson and Powell.*

Look toward the northeast corner at the small wooden structure. This was a candy store run by Kingo Matsumoto, a Canadian World War I veteran and war hero. On the northwest corner was Star Dairy, a milk and confectionery store operated by the Fukushima family. A few years ago, Michael Fukushima made a film, *Minoru: Memory of Exile*, about the life of his father during the relocation period; and this store is featured in the film.

### *Powell Grounds (Oppenheimer Park)*

Another important place for the community was Powell Grounds or Oppenheimer Park. The Park was named for the street on the other side which is now called Cordova but was originally Oppenheimer Street. Powell Grounds was the home of the famous Asahi baseball team and the team drew a large number of spectators to its games which were held at the west side of the park. Canadian-born Aiko Saita, who became an opera star in Japan, also gave an open-air concert for the community in this park. The large trees on the east side of the park have been there since pre-war days. The park continues to be a part of the Japanese Canadian community as the home of the annual Powell Street Festival and also the gate-ball grounds for Tonari-gumi seniors.



*Walk by the park toward Dunlevy.*

On the other side of the street at 463 was Oya Shoten. The Oya family is credited with a lot of firsts for the community: first general store to serve the community; Mrs. Yo Oya, the first Japanese woman to come to Canada in 1887; and Katsuji Oya, born in 1888, the first nisei to be born in Canada. In later records the store is called Maruchu but it continued to be run by the second son Jiro until 1942.

No. 439 Powell was a building owned by the Uchida family, Chiyoshichi and Kinuko, from Saitama. Chiyoshichi was a labor contractor and his wife Kinu ran the boarding house. The son, Matasaburo, who became a medical doctor, had his practice on the second floor. The daughter, Chitose, was the first Japanese Canadian to graduate from the University of British Columbia, in 1916.

No. 451 on Powell is a good example of "boomtown" architecture, with pitched roof and a square or rectangular-topped false front. At



Oppenheimer Park (Powell Grounds), Vancouver, viewed from Dunlevy and Cordova Streets, circa 1920. JCNMAS, Shokichi Akatsuka fonds, 92/20.022a-c.





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the back of 451 was the Tanaka Tofu establishment. Mr. Tanaka owned the building and rented it out to stores in the front with residences in the back, and ran his business in the back from a separate building.

At the northeast corner of Dunlevy and Powell is the present-day Marr hotel (already mentioned) which was formerly called the Imperial Hotel. It was constructed in 1910 and was bought by Honda and Kurita in 1918. It was probably not originally built by Japanese immigrants. The basement of this building was also the site of the Judo Club Mentioned earlier in the tour.



***Cross to southeast  
corner of Dunlevy and  
Powell.***

### ***Powell Grounds and Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement***

The northwest corner of Powell grounds is where all the action took place on baseball day. The bleachers were at this corner and the diamond was down at this end; kids would play under the bleachers and pick up coins dropped by spectators. Across the street and to the south is the Catholic Japanese Mission of the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, referred to by the community as "Omelia-san" for Kathleen O'Melia, or Sister Mary Stella by her religious name, the nun who was in charge of the mission. Around the corner on Cordova Street was St. Paul's Church, which was affiliated with the mission. Sister Mary Stella, the other nuns and Father James Quigley visited the sick at the Oriental Hospital located at Powell and Campbell Avenue about five blocks east of here. Tuberculosis was the scourge of the community and the

Oriental Hospital was where patients from the community were confined. The church also ran a nursery school, provided English language classes, and served the community in many other ways. It continues to serve the largely non-Japanese community which now lives in the area.

### ***Tamura Building and World Hotel***

Across the street is the Tamura Building which was built in 1912 by Shinkichi Tamura, a merchant and speculator. It housed many business establishments, including a bank on the corner and the World Hotel on the second floor. The hotel was a residential hotel, or rooming house. Also on the second floor was the office of the Japanese Canadian newspaper, *The New Canadian*. On the ground floor was a string of shops including a fish shop and bakery (see photographs).

### ***Powell Pharmacy, Saito Tailors***

Across the street on the corner was Powell Pharmacy (widely known as "Powell Drugs"), which dispensed prescription drugs. Japanese Canadians could not become pharmacists and could not obtain a license to operate a pharmacy. Mr. Hoshino, who was half owner of Powell Pharmacy, got around this problem by going into partnership with a Caucasian pharmacist, a Mr. Shaw. The Hoshinos were evacuated to New Denver, where Mr. Hoshino died. Mrs. Hoshino continues to live in New Denver to this day and is active in the Japanese Canadian community. Next door to Powell Pharmacy was Saito Tailors. Mrs. Saito did alterations and pressing. Suzuki Optometrist was a few doors to the west and dispensed eyeglasses.



***Walk westward along  
south side of Powell.***



"Sun Bun" Tamura Building, Powell and Dunlevy Streets, Vancouver, circa 1935. This old postcard view shows ornate roof pieces that are no longer present (see facing page). "Sun Bun" is possibly a corruption of "San ban," meaning "Number Three." JCNMAS, Jiro Kamiya Collection, 95/102.1.001a-b.



### *Showa Club*

At 380 was the Showa Club. This was a social club formed from the merging of three pool halls but its main activity was gambling. Gambling was illegal so a guard was posted at the bottom of the stairs at all times. When he caught sight of the law, he would press a bell on the wall. Upstairs, tables were flipped over and the inhabitants would pretend to be socializing over tea and cakes. Seiji Inouye (my father) knew someone who worked there and from time to time would receive the cakes which were used as props. Tokuko Inouye (my mother) was really impressed because the cakes would be from the Bon Ton — nothing was too good for the gamblers!

### *Tonari Gumi*

At 378 is Tonari Gumi, a present-day organization which is important to the Japanese Canadian com-

munity. Begun in the 1970s by Jun Hamada and ably looked after following Jun's death by Takeo Yamashiro, a postwar immigrant from Japan, it serves the community as a drop-in center as well as providing a support and recreational facility for senior citizens.

### *Aki Restaurant*

Another post-war establishment is Aki Restaurant, at 374, one of the earliest post-war Japanese restaurants in Vancouver. In pre-war days, Shibuya Clothing occupied the premises. Shibuya sold men's and women's clothing.

### *Maikawa Department Store*

Across the street at 369 was the Maikawa Department Store. The owner's name can still be seen on the front of the building (*see photo, p.6*). The Maikawa brothers became very successful in Vancouver. The first

Maikawa shop to be opened was a fish shop in 1905 on the other end of this block. Another brother ran a garage at Gore and Alexander and still another opened a general store. Above the stores were boarding houses for employees and apprentices. During the 1930s the Maikawas owned most of the stores on the north side of the 300 block. In 1936 several buildings were consolidated behind an elaborate storefront and a modern department store was opened. Some of the roofs of the original buildings are visible behind the façade.

### *Kato Shoes/ Kay's Seafoods*

At 338 was Kato's Shoes, which sold new shoes and also did repairs. After the war, for several decades, Kay's Seafoods, a Japanese Canadian fish and kamaboko store run by Mr. Yoshida, occupied the premises. The store is now under Korean proprietorship and continues to be frequented by the Japanese Canadian community.

### *Nimi Drugs*

At 331 was Nimi Drugs, selling Japanese and Canadian patent medicines. Katsuzo Ishikawa, the second Japanese immigrant landowner in the area, owned the premises before Mr. Nimi and ran a general store.

### *Morimoto doorway*

At 328, look at the tiles at the entranceway, which spell the name "Morimoto." We have no information as to whom Morimoto was. At one point, the Empress Cafe operated at this address..



The Tamura Building today, still easily recognized because of the distinctive corner pillars and cornices; however, the roof lines have been greatly simplified. JCNMAS, photograph (1997) by Naomi Sawada.



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Shirley and Joe Yamake in front of Maikawa Store, Powell Street, Vancouver, 1939. JCNMAS, 94/98.2.002a-b.

### *Fuji Chop Suey*

At 314 was Fuji Chop Suey, an important social center for the community. Restaurants in the community tended to be either small establishments which served good, home-style meals to daily customers or fancy restaurants frequented by men only; but Fuji was the elegant family-oriented restaurant where special occasions such as weddings were celebrated. The first floor was the restaurant and the second floor was rented out as a private dining room for weddings and other banquets. There was a balcony overlooking Powell Street. When we cross to the other side, we will be able to see the balcony.

### *Nakamura Florists*

Across the street on the southwest corner at 270 was Nakamura

Florists. The former proprietors' daughter, Tamiko, was named the first non-ordained moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Canada a few years ago.

### *Komura*

At the northwest corner at 269 was Komura, a general and food store. The name can still be seen on the tiled entranceway. Mr. Komura, a native of Yokohama, was a direct importer of food products from Japan. Representatives of his store also traveled to rural areas in B.C. such as the Fraser Valley to supply Japanese food to the outlying communities. Another supplier of Japanese foods to rural communities was Furuya, located in the 300 block.

### *Other Shops in the 200 Block*

Further down the 200 block was the Sun Peking Restaurant, under Chinese proprietorship, another favorite spot of the community. Sun Peking served Chinese food modified for Japanese tastes. Across the street was a bath house and barber shop which was in one of the oldest buildings in the community.

### *Fuji Chop Suey Balcony*

Look across the street at the balcony of Fuji Chop Suey and try to imagine the elegantly dressed party-goers getting a breath of fresh air on a summer evening!

### *Nippon Auto (Maikawa's Garage)*

To the north and across the street at Gore and Alexander you can see a

garage which looks much as it did in the pre-war days. Before the war, this was Nippon Auto Supplies, owned by one of the Maikawa brothers, Sadakichi.

### *Ernie's Ice Cream*

On the next north-south street, which is Main Street, was Ernie's Ice Cream — a favorite hangout of young people, especially university students.

### *Closing Remarks*

The 200 block of Powell was the community's oldest commercial street and the 300 block became the main commercial street during the community's heyday. Detailed information about the establishments is presented in the Powell Street Map and Index which is being revised by the JCNMAS. If you or friends or relatives have interesting stories on life in the community during the pre-war days, please get in touch with us. We are collecting stories so that our history can be passed on to future generations. Thank you for allowing us to share these stories with you.



The Maikawa Store at 369 Powell still shows the family name on its façade. JCNMAS, photo (1997) by Naomi Sawada.





# Thomas Kunito Shoyama: Our Living Treasure

by Midge Ayukawa

How does one write a short biography of someone whose *curriculum vitae* itself is many pages long and merely listing his accomplishments and the recognition and awards he has received would quickly exhaust the space allotted? When the subject is also one's hero, one's inspiration, and the most supportive critic of one's work, the task is well-nigh impossible!

Thomas Kunito Shoyama is no stranger to Canadians — Nikkei, economists, public servants, and academics — but he is also well-known in other countries, having been a consultant for the Canadian International Development Agency in Kenya, Ghana, and the South Pacific Islands and being at present an advisor to Cuba. He has been honoured by the emperor of Japan, and served until December 1996 as a director of the Bank of Tokyo Canada. Tommy once related to me with his typical wry humour that the retirement age of the directors of the Bank of Tokyo had been annually raised as he grew older.

Born and raised in Kamloops, Tom had little exposure to other Japanese Canadians in his formative years. His father, Shoyama Kunitaro, had emigrated to Canada from Kumamoto prefecture in 1898. He was the eldest son of a samurai rebel who, disgruntled with the actions of the new Meiji government, urged his son to emigrate and start a new life in a foreign land. [Mikiso Hane has noted: "In October, 1896, a band of two hundred warriors in Kumamoto



Tom Shoyama on Parliament Hill, Ottawa. Photograph courtesy of Tom Shoyama.

rose in rebellion. The incident was touched off by the government's ban on sword-bearing, but among the complaints mentioned by the rebels were the issues of Westernization, the diffusion of Christianity and the termination of stipends. The rebellion was easily suppressed."] Tom's father settled in Kamloops and was later joined by his wife, Wakabayashi Kimiko, a school teacher. The Shoyamas had a family bakery adjacent to the railroad tracks. Men riding the rails in the thirties went to the bakery to ask for hand-outs. Thus Tom learned about conditions outside Kamloops and the dire effects of unemployment and poverty.

It was not until Tom arrived at the University of British Columbia in 1934, supporting himself as a school-boy in the home of Andrew W. Johnson, a friend of his father's, that

he first began his association with nisei. He soon became involved with their social life. In the summer of 1935 he worked at the Easter Rooms, owned by Rigenda Sumida and his brother Hyosaku, while helping Rigenda with his MA thesis, "The Japanese in British Columbia." [This, incidentally, is a monumental piece of work and is a rich source of information on Japanese Canadians. Copies are available at the University of British Columbia, British Columbia Archives, and possibly other institutions. Much of the information is also in *The Japanese Canadians* by Charles H. Young and Helen R.Y. Reid, 1938.]

Determination, perseverance, and adventurousness, the characteristics of Tom's predecessors, were apparent in Tom's later efforts in breaking new ground for the nisei, publishing *The New Canadian*, working on behalf of the Japanese Canadians during the wartime upheaval, volunteering for the Canadian Army Intelligence Corps, and serving as economic advisor in the pioneer government of the CCF in Saskatchewan in 1946. In that role he participated in the first introduction of public hospital and medical insurance in Canada. In 1964 he joined the Economic Council of Canada in Ottawa as a senior economist. This was the beginning of his meteoric rise in the Public Service of Canada; eventually he served as Deputy Minister of Finance from 1975 to 1979 while also serving as part-time chair of Atomic Energy



Canada Limited, Special Advisor on the Constitution, Privy Council Office, and many boards of provincial and federal crown and mixed corporations.

Retirement for Tommy in 1980 was merely a change of venue. He moved to Victoria where he taught at the University of Victoria in the School of Public Administration and the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, while serving on the Macdonald Royal Commission and a number of boards. Although Tommy insists that he is now "cutting back," a fall issue of the *Victoria Times-Colonist* revealed that he was named to the Capital Health Board, mandated to carry out the integration of regional health programmes.

On September 24, 1996, at his eightieth birthday celebration to which I was extremely pleased and honoured to be invited, an impressive group of ex-Ottawa mandarins and University of Victoria academics came together in his behalf. With many humorous anecdotes, they extolled Tom's virtues, his brilliance as a public servant, his expertise as a gardener, and his devotion to Tommy Douglas, the late first CCF provincial Premier (Saskatchewan) and first leader of the New Democratic Party. We Canadian Nikkei have much of which to be proud — to be able to claim that he, named as an Officer of the Order of Canada (1978), and recipient of the Public Service Award of Outstanding Achievement (1978), the Vanier

Medal in Public Administration (1982), the Order of the Sacred Treasure (Japan, 1992), and honorary degrees from the University of British Columbia and University of Windsor (1984), is one of us. He continues to serve the Nikkei community also as honorary director of the Vancouver Japanese Language School and the Momiji Garden Society in Vancouver.

Tommy's contribution to public policy in Canada has been further recognized by the Canadian government in the creation of the Pearson-Shoyama Institute. Its mandate states:

"The Pearson-Shoyama Institute believes in a policy development process that is genuinely inclusive of Canadians.

We encourage greater responsiveness to our evolving pluralistic society by both the public and the private sectors, and encourage a broader vision and a more global minded approach to domestic and international affairs. The objectives of the institute are the: inclusiveness of people, inclusiveness of issues, common sense and expertise, and international co-operation."

Tommy has been serving on its Advisory Board since the Institute's inception. There is absolutely no doubt that we will continue to hear of his contributions to the Nikkei community, to Canada, and to the world.

### About our authors...

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