



Nikkei Images

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Finely Crafted Wooden Boats and Magnificent Gardens- Stevestons's Murakami Family

By Marilyn Clayton



The smells
and sight
of flying
cedar chips, the
whirr of power

tools and the banter of Japanese
craftsmen no longer permeate the air
along Steveston's waterfront. Now
aluminium fishing boats ply the
Fraser's waters that once were
graced by finely crafted wooden
masterpieces, hand-built mostly by
Steveston's community of Japanese

*Asayo and Otokichi in Asayo's
beautiful garden. — 1930s
Murakami/Ohama family collection*

master craftsmen.
Few structures remain
to tell the rich story
of the Japanese boat
builders and their

families in Steveston. However, the
City of Richmond and Britannia Her-
itage Shipyard Society have jointly
begun a project to restore the home
and boatworks of the Murakami fam-
ily, a unique representative example
of the lifestyle of early Steveston
immigrant boatbuilders.

(Continued on page 2)



(Continued from page 1)

The salmon fishery has been at the heart of Steveston's economy for over a century. In 1901 the shores of the Fraser boasted 49 operating canneries. Integral to the early B.C. coastal salmon industry were the skilled Japanese boatbuilders and fishermen initially lured to Canada by dreams of wealth. Fishing and boatbuilding were common in their homeland and these activities did not require an extensive command of the English language.

The enticing descriptions and

"Though the couple struggled, they also managed to enjoy the finer things in life."

stories sent home by early settlers eventually resulted in a major Japanese migration, many of whom came to dominate the fishing sector as fishermen and boatbuilders in the early 1900s.

In 1908, Otokichi Murakami, already a trained carpenter at age 21, travelled to B.C. from Hiroshima, Japan. Settling first in Nanaimo, he later moved to Steveston. In 1923 he met and married his bride Asayo, a teacher who also hailed from



George Murakami (left), Mamoru Shimane (center rear), Kimio Shimane (right), Isamu Furuya (center front) —1934

Murakami/Ohama Family Collection

Hiroshima. The couple first lived in housing provided by the Pacific Coast Cannery, where they began raising their family. Around 1929 they moved next door to the Britannia site and rented a property from the Phoenix Cannery. From 1929 to 1942, Dwelling #40 of the cannery houses that dotted the Britannia landscape was their home. It is only because the Murakami family generously continues to share their recollections that we are able to have this glimpse into those early days at Britannia.

If we had entered their home in

those days, we would have been ushered through a gallery of photos of five sons and five daughters who by 1942 filled the Murakami's six-room house.

Early on, the children lived a carefree life; a busy mix of schooling, chores and playtime. The family built their own boatworks adjacent to the house. Each winter, Otokichi laboured to produce two hand-built fishboats, then went out fishing as soon as the season began. During the summer months, Asayo worked long hours in the surrounding farm fields or on one of the cannery production lines.

Though the couple struggled, they also managed to enjoy the finer things in life. Otokichi had a great love of duck hunting, a pastime that provided needed food and down for the warm quilts Asayo made for each of her children. At the back of the family home, Otokichi hand-built a Japanese-style bath, known as a furoba, for his family's enjoyment. Asayo had a deep appreciation for music and often played her prized violin, brought with her from Japan. She also created and faithfully nurtured a magnificent garden, with climbing roses so profuse they all but obscured the front entrance of the house.

This is but a small part of the Murakami family story. To learn more, visit the Britannia Heritage Shipyard Park Site and watch for the opening of the Murakami Visitors' Centre in the restored family home in May 30, 1998.

Britannia Heritage Shipyard and Gulf of Georgia Cannery Tour



Come view a piece of Japanese Canadian heritage!
Sponsored by the JCNMAS

Sunday, 10:00AM June 7, 1998
Contact the JCNMAS for details: (604) 874-8090

Marilyn Clayton is an historical researcher for the city of Richmond.



JC DIRECTORY – USELESS THEN, PRICELESS NOW

BY TOYO TAKATA

It became virtually useless within a year after it was released. This was the 200-page Japanese Canadian directory printed and issued in September, 1941, by *Tairiku Nippo*. *Tairiku Nippo* was the largest of the three Japanese dailies published in Vancouver all of which were shut down by Ottawa following the attack on Pearl Harbour. The directory contains more than 7,000 names, listing each individual's Canadian address and homeland prefecture or ken. The names, in alphabetical sequence along with the prefectures, appear in Japanese, with the addresses being set in English.

By September of 1946, all but a few hundred of the listed addresses had been changed forcibly by Order

“By September of the following year, all but a few hundred of the listed addresses had been changed forcibly by Order in Council.”

in Council. The exceptions were those individuals not located along the Pacific Coast. With the coastal addresses no longer relevant, the primary purpose for the directory was erased.

However, I have frequently referred to the nearly 60-year old *Tairiku* directory in my continuing historical study of the Nikkei. Since no comparable alternative exists, I value it as a priceless resource. It also proved to be a useful guide in pursuing matters of personal interest.



*“Repatriation”; location unknown
— [ca. 1946]
JCNMAS/ 94/81.008a-c*

The directory was intended to cover all of Canada and to some degree, it succeeded. According to the 1941 Dominion census, citizens of Japanese descent were located in every province and the Yukon Territory except for P.E.I. The directory has no one listed living in P.E.I. nor in New Brunswick, but it lists Sahichi Suzuki as living in Halifax, confirming the Japanese presence in Nova Scotia.

Sahichi Suzuki was a seaman aboard a British freighter sunk by a U-boat in World War I, rescued and brought ashore at Halifax where he was allowed to remain permanently. During World War II and even following Canada's declaration of war against Japan, the Halifax paper reported that his movements were not restricted.

Although the Province of Quebec recorded 42 Nikkei in the 1941

census, only one name is included with a Montreal address. In Ontario and on the Prairies, in comparison to the census numbers, the directory listing is sparse.

Yukon was a unique case. So

“As to surnames, ‘Tanaka’ was the ‘Smith’ of the JC community with 107 counted”...

many Japanese had joined the 1896 Klondike gold rush that in 1901, more of them were in the Territory (84) than in the rest of Canada combined (58), excluding, of course, B.C. The 1941 census dwindled the Yukon Japanese number to 41 and on that basis, they are well represented in the directory with six residents in Dawson City and others in Whitehorse, Carcross and Mayo Landing. Among those in Dawson, Makisaburo Kawakami is described as a scholarly but incompetent shopkeeper in *“I Married the Klondike”* by Laura Berton, mother of prolific author, Pierre Berton.

Now, how was *Tairiku* able to compile thousands of individuals' names, together with their addresses and prefectural backgrounds? Generally, Isseis were avid readers of Japanese dailies and were eager to keep up with local news and tidings from Japan. The *Tairiku*, being the most popular, with its subscribers' list likely including Kawakami and Suzuki, was the perfect beginning for the directory. The *Tairiku* would also rely on its correspondents in settle-

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Watari Dori — (A Bird of Passage)

Reported by Liz Nunoda

Vancouver, B.C. — On the afternoon of Sunday, March 8, the JCNMAS presented Linda Ohama's documentary, *Watari Dori — A Bird of Passage*, in the JCCA Activity Centre.

The documentary aired the previous week on the History Channel as part of an ongoing series titled *Scattering of Seeds*. It tells the story of Irene Tsuyuki, a Nisei woman from Vancouver who's family returned to Japan after being released from the Tashme internment camp in 1946. The film includes her reminiscences of life in Vancouver prior to World War II and after returning to Canada in the late 1940s.

Mrs. Tsuyuki is reunited in the film with one of her former high school teachers from Tashme, Winifred Awmack. Both were in attendance at the JCNMAS showing. Director, Linda Ohama, was also in attendance.

This film is a beautifully shot, emotionally moving document of the experience of two women, one an interned and exiled Canadian citizen of Japanese ancestry, the other a Caucasian school teacher who was moved to assist the Japanese Canadian community during a terrible time. It is a testament to the strength and better natures of two people who befriended one another in difficult and painful circumstances.

Liz Nunoda is a volunteer of the JCNMAS who has been actively assisting with our oral history project.



*Winifred Awmack and Irene Tsuyuki
reminiscing at the former Tashme camp
Dale Gamble: Photo credit*

FALL/98 DANCE LESSONS

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Minnie Hattori (604) 591-3177





Tragedy on the Fraser

by Eric Sokugawa



*Japanese children's funeral — April 28, 1928
Courtesy of: City of Richmond Archives/ 1988 37 40*

This month, we touch upon a tragedy that befell the Japanese Canadian community here in Vancouver some seventy years ago. I came upon this story by accident as I was doing research for a project I was working on. At the Richmond City Archives I found a photograph of a group of mourners in their collection. There was very little background information on the photograph at the Archives other than a possible date and a notation that children died in a boating accident.

I have seen many group pictures taken at funerals but what intrigued me about this one was the number of coffins and the throng of mourners that lined an entire city block in the picture. I was able to confirm the date by taking a closer look at the "sotoba" (wooden grave tablet) leaning against the coffins. From this, I went to UBC to take a look at the *Tairiku Nippo* (*Continental Daily News*) for that date but what I found there was totally unexpected. My initial feeling was that the children had possibly been accompanying their parents (with lax child labour laws) on a fishing boat when they fell overboard and drowned. I had assumed that the photograph was

taken in Steveston from the number of Japanese people pictured. After all, very few in Vancouver were actually involved in fishing. I discovered some store signs using a loupe and looking these up in the city directory for the period, found that the photo was in fact taken in Vancouver in front of the Buddhist mission on what is now Franklin Street.

According to the *Tairiku Nippo* on April 19, 1928, what should have been a happy occasion took a turn for the worst and became a tragedy. A fisherman living at the Terra Nova cannery, Itaro Suzuki had just taken possession of a brand new carrier boat from the Atagi Boat Works the previous day and was taking thirty men, women and children on a test drive on the Fraser river following the launching ceremony. After hitting the shallow bottom of the river, the boat overturned, throwing most overboard. The lucky ones were rescued by other fishermen who were tagging along with their own boats. The unlucky ones consisted of a total of seven children between the ages of three and eleven who perished after

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they were tossed into the frigid waters. The children were Satoshi (5) and Fukiko (3), oldest son and daughter of Seichi Hamaura; Jirohachi (5), second son of Otohachi Koyanagi; Ichiye (10), second daughter of Koto Koyanagi; Toshie (7), oldest daughter of Toyohisa Koyanagi; Yukie (11), oldest daughter of Tamaye Harada; and Akira (11), second son of Ichi Nekoro.

Toyohisa Koyanagi, a fisherman, reportedly dove into the water from his boat and grabbed several of the children by their clothing but the water was so cold that he lost his grip and helplessly watched as they went under. He even saw his own daughter, Toshie drowning in front of his own eyes but there was nothing that he could do in the cold. He was saved from a similar

fate by the other rescuers.

During the course of my research, I found many stories of children drowning in the Fraser although stories like this one were not that common. Most of the children who accidentally fell into the river, were playing on the pier as they were waiting for their mothers to return from the canneries. From what I could tell, the adults who drowned were all fishermen who fell overboard while fishing. This can easily be explained if one considers the fact that the men spent long days out on the water for six of the seven days of the week during the fishing season.

This article is dedicated to those families that persevered through these tragic times — the very people that helped to create the fabric of the Japanese Canadian community.

Eric Sokugawa is currently the President of the Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association and the Vice-President of the JCNMAS.

Do you remember?

The following words were commonly used in the Japanese Canadian community. Does anyone still use them? Please contact the JCNMAS if you have other commonly used words that might not be as familiar today.

Words contributed by Mary Ohara

Banbai: By and by (later)

Hanbaka : Hamburger

Souptonten: Superintendent

Deba: River

Dunzara: Down Cellar

Dekki: Deck (floor)

Saiki: Sack

Gunbutsu: Gumboots

Becon beby: (Bacon baby) piglet

Ohmu sutobu: warm stove

Loppu: Rope

Shiluba-Go: Bank (Ginko) Gin meaning silver and ko meaning to go thus bank was called Shiluba-Go





(Continued from page 3)

ments in B.C. and Alberta such as milltowns, logging camps, farming and fishing villages for their input. The membership lists of various Nikkei organizations were also likely utilized to add to the *Tairiku*'s lists of names in the directory.

As to surnames, *Tanaka* was the Smith of the JC community with 107 counted, followed by *Yamamoto* and *Nishimura* with 90 apiece. But actually, *Nishimura* is not more common than *Nakamura*, *Sato*, *Sasaki*, *Hayashi* or *Ito*, etc., but so many *Nishimuras* immigrated to Canada from Shiga Prefecture that they are high on the list.

Among the thousands, a lone non-Japanese surname, Scott, is sandwiched between *Sawayama* and *Seki* with the given name *Shohin* and a Victoria, B.C. address. *Shohin* Scott was an Issei woman married to an English businessman formerly of Shanghai. *Shohin* was her pen-name as a regular contributor of haiku verse to *Tairiku*. Being married to a Brit, Mrs. Scott was not evacuated and remained in Victoria until the 1950s when she returned to Japan after her

husband's death.

Some last names are identified with a particular prefecture. All of the 37 *Koyanagis* in the directory are from Fukuoka and the 31 *Oikawas* from Miyagi. Of the 36 *Kitamuras*, all but one hails from Shiga, along with the *Tsujis* and the *Ebatas*. *Higas* are Okinawans while the *Adachis*, *Kadonagas* and *Sumis* are Tottori-kenjin.

On the topic of prefectures, after sifting through page by page, all 42 including Okinawa and Hokkaido, along with the metropolitan centres of Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto (called fu), have sent immigrants to Canada. Wakayama headed the numbers parade as former residents dominated fishing centres such as *Stevenston*, second only to Vancouver as the largest Nikkei community in pre-evacuation Canada. Shiga, whose people were concentrated in Vancouver, were a close second. They were followed by Hiroshima which sent more settlers overseas than any other ken. At the short end, with only two names each in the directory are *Miyasaki* and *Nara*.

Since this directory was com-

pleted and produced basically in Japanese by *Tairiku Nippo*, it's plausible to presume that the names were strictly Issei and heads of households — this is not so. If it were, then the number of entries would not have reached anywhere close to 7,000. As proof, I am included and was living at home in 1941 under my parent's roof. I've also spotted numerous other Nisei throughout the directory.

On the other hand, the directory could be branded as being sexist. Less than five percent of individuals in the directory were women, and those whom I recognized were Issei widows who were now heads of their families. I could not identify any Nisei ladies. Obviously, they were deliberately excluded. For instance, in a prominent Vancouver family, the father and two sons were listed but not their gifted older sister whose name was well-known in the Nikkei circle.

Nevertheless, the *Tairiku* directory is an historical and irreplaceable piece of our past. Despite today's technology, there is little likelihood there will ever be another exclusively Nikkei Canadian one in existence.

Toyo Takata is a Director of the JCNMAS

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Are you interested in the history of the pre-war Japanese Canadian Powell Street community and will you have an hour or two of spare time on August 1 or 2?

JCNMAS wants you as a volunteer tour leader for the Powell Street Historical Walking Tour!

Tours are approximately one hour long, and a script, brochures and an orientation will be provided.

To obtain more information, please call:

JCNMAS Office (604) 874-8090 or Judy Inouye (604) 936-8592 e-mail: inouye@ucfv.bc.ca



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Mrs. Mio Shimizu and Family in
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Mr. and Mrs. Howard and Jane
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Mr. Gerald Thomson
Mr. Derek Wong and Family

Events Calendar

May 29-31: Topaz Reunion -
contact JCNMAS for details

June 7: Britannia Shipyard and
Gulf of Georgia tour - contact
JCNMAS for details.

August 1 and 2: Powell Street
Festival

October 4 (tentative): JCNMAS
Annual General Meeting -
contact JCNMAS for details

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