

NIKKEI IMAGES



1901 Mikuni family studio portrait. From left, son Asajiro age 17, Kisuke Mikuni 46, and wife Sano 41. Fujiwara family photo

 **Nikkei**
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Submissions Welcome

We welcome Nikkei family and community story proposals for possible publication. Articles should range from 500 to 3,500 words and include high-resolution digital photographs with photo credits. If you have stories related to Japanese Canadian history, culture, and arts that you would like to preserve and share, we invite you to contribute. We are dedicated to capturing and documenting these narratives for future generations. Let's work together to ensure these significant stories are preserved and celebrated.

Find our publishing agreement online at centre.nikkeiplace.org/nikkei-images. We appreciate all submissions.

For more information or to submit your work, please contact Nichola Ogiwara, Communications Coordinator, at:

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Terminology

Evacuation: Implies extraction from an area for the removed individual's personal safety. The government used the term to describe the forced uprooting and forced dispersal in the 1940s, as well as the internment of Japanese Canadians.

Ghost towns/Relocation camps/ Relocation centres: Many abandoned mining towns in BC, literal ghost towns, were turned into internment camps.

Internment: More accurately describes the confinement of citizens labelled as enemies in wartime against their will.

Repatriation: Was in response to a "loyalty to Canada" survey that allowed the removal of almost 4,000 Japanese Canadians to Japan.

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Thank You Linda

By Sherri Kajiwarra, Director | Curator



Linda Kawamoto Reid
Photo by Adam PW Smith

We celebrate Linda Kawamoto Reid as she retires from the Nikkei National Museum after 16 years of dedicated service. Self-trained in Japanese Canadian genealogy and research, Linda is a much sought-after expert in the field of Nikkei heritage, with contributions to exhibitions, websites, articles, documentaries and feature films in her long list of achievements. She is also gifted at flower arranging, often donating centrepieces or bouquets for exhibit openings, gala parties, and celebrations of life at the NNMCC. Of the many tasks in her role as Research Archivist on the museum team, Linda was dedicated to the publication of Nikkei Images, and in her spare time, she volunteered her time to the Japanese Canadian War Memorial Committee, and continues to lead the very special Remembrance Day ceremony in Stanley Park on Nov. 11 each year. For her encore, she has joined the JC Legacies group and we wish her well in her continued dedication to the community.

Who was the First Japanese Immigrant to Canada?

Reconciling Conflicting Claims

By Ann-Lee & Gordon Switzer

Japanese began settling in Canada in the late 19th and early 20th century. Earlier, some had visited as sailors on sealing ships, as shipwrecked sailors picked up at sea, or as short-time sojourners—all returning to Japan. In 1880 an Imperial Japanese Naval training ship brought over 300 cadets to

Esquimalt Harbour for a week's visit. But who was the first Japanese to come and stay? Manzo Nagano's name is the most well-known of the early immigrants, but was he really the first? This article will examine three candidates; judge for yourself.

Manzo Nagano

Did He Come in 1877?

S ometime in the early 1970s Toyoaki (Toyo) Takata chanced upon a paragraph in a 1938 book by Charles Young and Helen Reid, *The Japanese Canadians*, which claimed that Manzo Nagano had come to Canada as a sailor in 1877 and settled in New Westminster.¹ The quote was attributed to a UBC master's thesis written by Rigenda Sumida in 1934. Sumida had based his statement on an earlier work by Jinshiro Nakayama written in Japanese in 1921.

Takata was delighted to discover that Nagano had arrived in 1877. He wanted to help revitalize the Japanese community across Canada which had been dispersed during the Pacific War. This could be the key to uniting the community: encouraging the Japanese Canadian community all across Canada to celebrate 1977 as the centennial of the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant to Canada. The centennial celebration proved to be a tremendous success

that helped connect Japanese Canadians across Canada and raise their profile in Canada in general.

Nakayama's book runs to 1,239 pages. In it he tried to list all Japanese immigrants living in Canada, their children and their place of origin in Japan. Within these pages is his 1920 interview with 65-year-old Nagano. Nakayama's interest in Nagano had been sparked through reading an earlier study, Sumio Ishidate's book, written in Japanese in 1909, the *Kanada Doho Hatten Shi*, 1. Five pages give the early history of Victoria and describe Japanese organizations in the city. Ishidate had interviewed members of this community, including Manzo Nagano. It is illuminating to read what Sumio Ishidate wrote about Victoria in 1909.

We Japanese have travelled more than 4,500 nautical miles across the Pacific to step upon Canadian soil for the first time. How many years ago, what year? Already

1. Charles H. Young and Helen R. Y. Reid, *The Japanese Canadians*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1938.

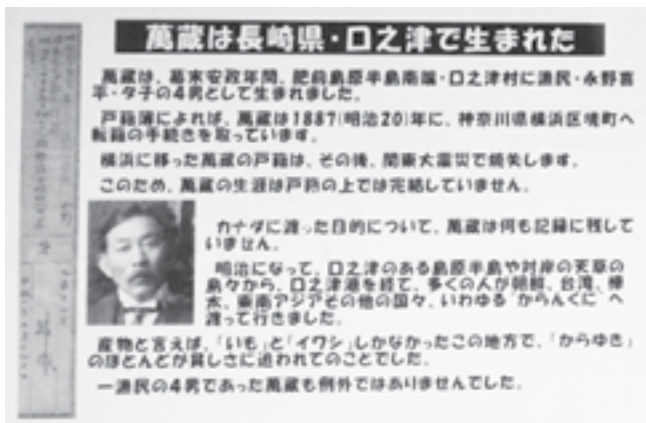
thirty or more years have passed. There is no hard evidence in existence. We can only speculate. Summing up the recollection of the old-timers, it seems Japanese began to come at least by the 10th year of Meiji (1877). Nagano Manzo, from Nagasaki Prefecture, who runs a miscellaneous goods and Japanese curio shop in Victoria, is one of the earliest. I have heard it from him that he landed in Victoria Harbour in March of the 10th year of Meiji. Later, in the autumn of the 17th year of Meiji (1884), several Japanese landed at Victoria . . . Kiske Mikuni and Tomekichi Homma who live in Vancouver district are people who came during that period.²

In 1909 Nagano did not claim to be the first immigrant. Sumio Ishidate only said that he was

one of the earliest. “Thirty or more years” before 1909 would mean that sometime during the 1870s, it was believed, the first Japanese had come to Canada. Note that in 1909 Nagano said he landed in Victoria harbour. Ishidate clearly states as noted above, “There is no hard evidence in existence. We can only speculate.”

Eleven years later, on the other hand, when Nagano talked to Jinshiro Nakayama, his story had vastly expanded. Below are quotes from Nakayama’s interview with Nagano in 1920 in Victoria. The story of Nagano is found on pages 37-42 of his book, *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan* (Encyclopedia of Japanese in Canada), Vancouver, 1922. Below is Rigenda Sumida’s condensed translation in 1934. Note that Nagano is now claiming he arrived in New Westminster not Victoria as he had told Ishidate in 1909.

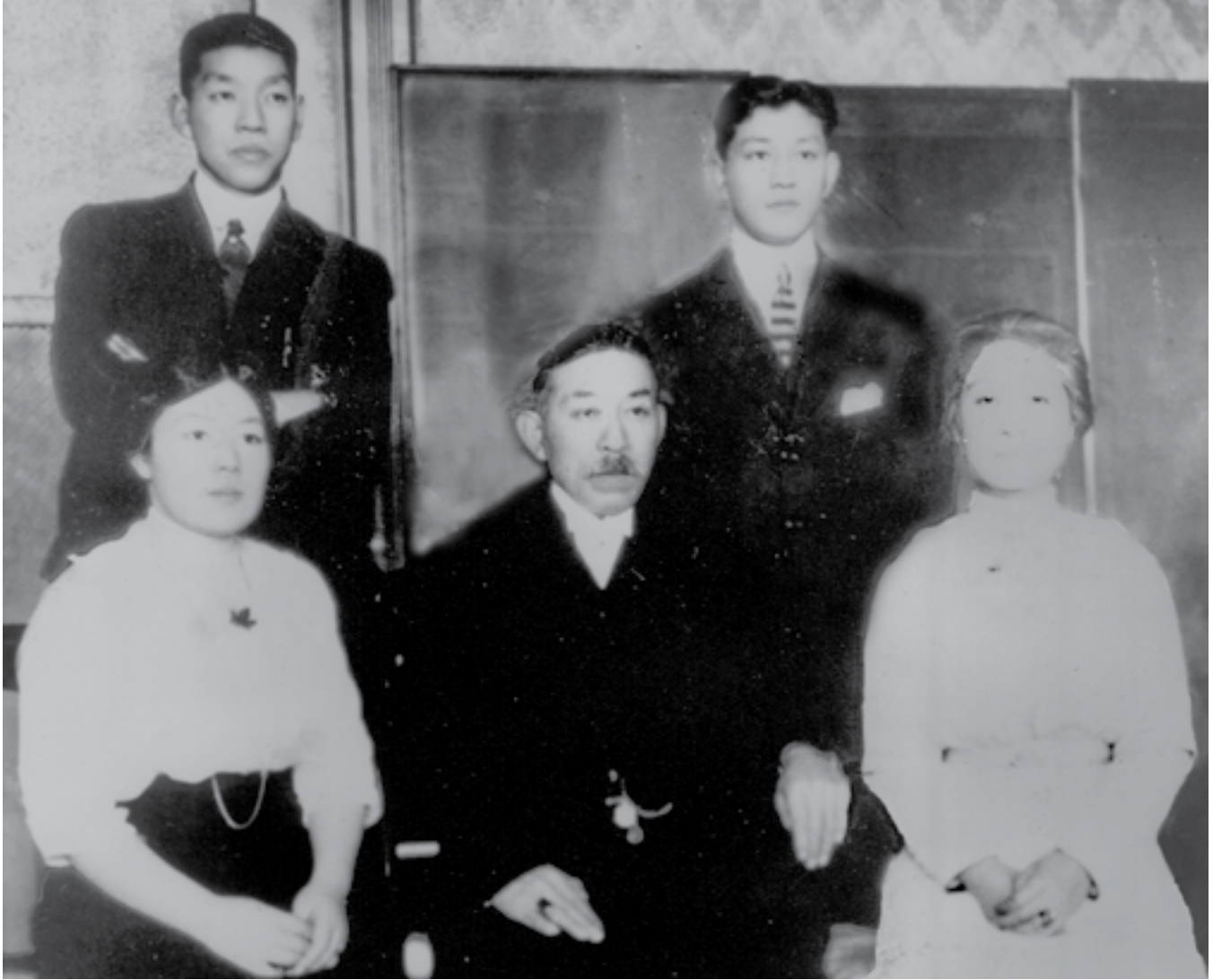
Is he a man of destiny or a man who builds his own destiny? I cannot know with confidence that I know the answer. He was illiterate as he had received no formal education, and thus he never used sophisticated ways of expression. . . Manzo Nagano at the age of 19 became a sailor and in 1877 came to Canada but remained in New Westminster when his boat left. He borrowed a boat and with an Italian partner, engaged in salmon fishing in the Fraser River, the forerunner of the hundreds of Japanese fishermen to follow. In 1880, he came to Vancouver, then more popularly known as Gastown, where he was a longshoreman. But he was apparently an adventurous spirit for, unable to settle down, he sailed to Shanghai, then to Nagasaki, then to Hong Kong and in 1884 back to New Westminster, at which time he found seven or



PHOTO

Copy of an original document displayed at the Kuchinotsu Museum of History in an exhibit on Manzo Nagano. It shows that Nagano transferred his permanent domicile in 1887 to Yokohama. This proves he was living in Kuchinotsu at the time and planned to move to Yokohama. (A. Switzer photo)

2. Sumio Ishidate, *Kanada Doho Hatten-shi 1*, (History of the Japanese in Canada, 1), Tairiku Nippo-sha, Vancouver, 1909, 46-51.



eight Japanese engaged in fishing. He went to the United States and once more entered fishing, but one day was driven by a storm up the Fraser River in 1886. This time, he found five Japanese fishermen in New Westminster. He returned to Seattle and entered business, but in 1891 returned to Japan.* In 1892, he again came to Canada, this time to Victoria, where he opened a store, and in 1894 initiated the salt-salmon industry in British Columbia. In 1898, he brought a wife to Canada and finally settled down in Victoria.³

PHOTO

Manzo Nagano, seated (centre) with his wife Tayoko on the right and George's wife Seki on the left. Standing behind on the left is oldest son George and on the right son Frank. 1910. (*Nagano family photo*)

Nakayama's version of Nagano's story contradicts key points of the earlier Ishidate version. The place of his arrival is only the first of many disagreements. Nagano claimed that during those years after 1877 he worked as a deckhand, fisherman, longshoreman,

*In a more complete translation Nagano said he returned to Yokohama in 1891 and opened a western-style restaurant but it failed so he decided to go to Victoria

3. Rigenda Sumida, "The Japanese in British Columbia," MA thesis, manuscript, UBC Library, 1934. (translation from pages from the above book, 37-42).

and entered into business in Seattle—before returning to Japan in 1891.

In Nagano's account given to Nakayama, he mentioned that he had returned to Japan in 1898 to marry his wife, Tayoko. What he left out of his story was that she was his third wife. Evidence confirms that Nagano married twice in Japan between 1886 and 1891 (years he claimed he was at sea, in New Westminster or Seattle). Nagano's first wife, Sayo, produced a son Tatsuo (George) in 1887 in Japan. Sayo died in Japan (although no record of her death can be found). When Nagano arrived in Victoria in 1892, he was accompanied by his second wife Tsuya. She gave birth to a daughter Haru the next year. Unfortunately both died within seven months and are buried in Ross Bay Cemetery in Victoria. His third wife, Tayoko Ishi from Tokyo, was 32 when she married Nagano. Frank Terumaro was born on October 3, 1898, in Victoria, Tayoko's only child. Nagano's oldest son by his first wife, George, had accompanied Tayoko on the move to Victoria. After Frank's birth there were no more children. Both boys grew to manhood and spent the rest of their lives in North America.

The first fact of Nagano's story above that can be corroborated is his claim to have come to Canada in 1892. In 1893 he is listed in the Victoria city directory as J. M. Nagano, ("J" was for "Jack", his adopted English name). He was operating the Oriental Bazaar at 90 Douglas Street.⁴ Since the information would have been gathered the year before, he was definitely in the city in 1892. Nagano was 37 years old when he arrived with his second wife, Tsuya,

22 years old. While Nagano told Nakayama that he had been away from Japan from 1877 to 1891, this would be impossible since during that time he had produced a son; George's marriage certificate states that he was born in Japan. Other proof that Nagano first came to Canada in 1892 and not in 1877 is found on his naturalization papers of 1897, when he stated under oath that he had come to Canada in 1892.⁵ Over the next two decades Manzo Nagano is included in the Victoria city directories at different addresses.

In Nagano's hometown, Kuchinotsu (near Nagasaki), the local museum has a prominent display case devoted to "Nagano, First Japanese Immigrant to Canada." However, the museum has no documents about any of Nagano's early life abroad before the time he moved to Victoria in 1892. There is one document displayed behind glass that indicates Nagano must have been in Yokohama after 1887.⁶ It is an official form showing that Nagano transferred his permanent domicile to Yokohama in 1887.⁶ That was the same year his first son George was born in Kuchinotsu.

Yokohama became an "open port" after 1859, one of the few ports where foreigners were allowed to live and do business. By the 1880s the city was known as the "Gateway to the West." At that time, Japan was undergoing a tremendous modernization. Its first movie house opened in 1870 and a rail line to Tokyo began operating in the same year. Although there is no direct proof Nagano spent the years after 1888 in Yokohama, he did officially change his residence and he married a woman from Tokyo after

4. *Williams Official British Columbia Directory*, January 1893, p. 576.

5. B. C. County Court (Victoria) a naturalization applications and oaths of allegiance, 1859-1917, BC Archives, Royal BC Museum.

6. Kuchinotsu Museum of History and Folklore, Minamishimabara City, Nagasaki Prefecture. Sumio Ishidate, *Kanada Doho Hatten-shi 1*, (History of the Japanese in Canada, 1), Tairiku Nippo-sha, Vancouver, 1909, 46-51.

the death of his first wife. Somehow he had to have acquired business skills in order to run a gift shop, and learned how to negotiate the exporting and importing of goods. He himself claimed he was in Yokohama in 1891. Circumstantial evidence places him in Yokohama several years earlier.

In summary, up until 1892, everything Nagano told Nakayama in 1920 should be disregarded, as no corroborated information can be found in Canada, Washington State or Japan. Only the events taking place after 1892 can be confirmed.

By 1920 Nagano was suffering from tuberculosis, and the next year fire destroyed most of his stock in his last gift shop at 1501 Government Street. Although Nagano left Victoria a sick man, with his business in ruins, during his first twenty years he had been the most successful Japanese businessman employing eleven people in three shops. He was a founding member of the Japanese Association and served as its first president in 1908. For a time he was quite prosperous. However, by 1921 he was operating only one rented store and living upstairs with his wife. Both sons had married and left Victoria.

When Nakayama dropped by for the interview, Nagano was in poor health still a proud man. Perhaps, rather than disappoint the learned journalist interviewing him, he elaborated the details of his life. Possibly the stories he told about his early years were tales he had heard told by other old-timers over sake in the late evenings. Within two years of the meeting with Nakayama, Nagano had returned to his hometown in Japan. He died on May 21, 1924. His remains are buried in the cemetery of the Gyokuho-ji Zen temple overlooking Kuchinotsu harbour. While definitely not the first Japanese immigrant to British Columbia, he was a colourful and successful businessman. He raised a family

whose descendants still live in North America. Today Nagano is remembered as a prominent early Japanese pioneer in Victoria.

As a final demonstration of the importance of Toyo Takata's role in creating the myth of Manzo Nagano, two final examples are offered. The first is found in Roy Ito's book, *Stories of My People*. Ito mentions that Ken Mori met George Tatsuo Nagano, Nagano's son in 1977, at a dinner marking the centennial of the first Japanese immigrant to reach Canada. Mori asked George if he had been aware that his father was the first Japanese immigrant to Canada. George explained that he only learned that fact from Toyo Takata when Toyo visited him in Los Angeles! He told Mori that he did not know much about his father's early life, in fact, "his father was always too busy to talk to his two sons."⁷

The second example comes from the author's correspondence with George Nagano's son Paul (Manzo's grandson, born 1920) at the time a retired Baptist minister living in Alhambra, California. When contacted, Paul wrote back, "I'm sorry but, I am not able to uncover any background material of Manzo, especially his early experiences. Toyo Takata is the historian that has researched much about Manzo." In further correspondence, Rev. Paul indicated that Toyo Takata had provided him with most of the background information to write his own short biography of his grandfather. Paul's account appeared in Gordon Nakayama's book, *Issei: Stories of Japanese Canadian Pioneers* published in 1984. Rev. Paul's account adds further contradictions to the story of his grandfather. One example is, he states that "Manzo was born on Nov. 26, 1853," while most other accounts report he was born in 1855.

Someone once referred to Nagano as the Paul Bunyan of Japanese Canadians. But Paul Bunyan

7. Roy Ito, *Stories of My People: A Japanese Canadian Journal*, Nisei Veterans Association, Hamilton, Ontario, 1994.

was a mythical Quebec logger (Bon Jean) before being transformed into a larger-than-life American hero who performed fantastic feats. Nagano was no mythical figure; he was a very real, important and respected member of the Japanese community of Victoria after his arrival in 1892. When he told his story to Nakayama, for some reason, he spun a myth about his early life. A few of his claims were: that he arrived in New Westminster in 1877; fished for salmon for two years with an Italian partner; moved to Gastown in 1880 and worked loading lumber for a while; got restless and signed on a ship that travelled to Shanghai and then to Nagasaki; he said he was on another ship in 1884 going to Shanghai, Hong Kong; eventually he left that ship in New Westminster—not to stay, but moved to Whatcom County in Washington State to fish for halibut; one day a storm blew his boat up the Fraser River; returning to the United States he opened a tobacco shop in Seattle and later operated

western-style restaurant in the city; he claimed to have returned to Japan in 1891 to open a western-style restaurant in Yokohama. None of these claims, made in 1920 to Nakayama, can be corroborated in any other source. Only after his restaurant in Yokohama supposedly failed, prompting a move to Victoria in 1892 to open a store selling Japanese goods—does his true story begin. In the mythical story he told, about his wandering from 1877 to 1892, he never mentioned his first two wives or his son born in Japan, nor did he give any hint of how he learned to run a business.

If Nagano was not the first, who might it be?

PHOTO

Manzo Nagano's grave site in Kuchinotsu on the grounds of the Gyokuhoji temple of the Soto Zen Buddhist sect. The authors visited Kuchinotsu in 2016 to research Manzo Nagano's hometown near Nagasaki. (G. Switzer photo)



Tomekichi Homma

Early Activist

If Nagano did not arrive in 1877, who might have been the first immigrant from Japan to put down roots and leave his bones in Canada? Sumio Ishidate quoted above, had written in 1909 that “in 1884 several Japanese landed at Victoria . . . among them Kisuke Mikuni and Tomekichi Homma”.

Most documents circulating today mention Homma as arriving in 1883 in Steveston, where he later joined other Japanese to fish for salmon. Nobody has made the claim he was the first Japanese to arrive, because it has been generally accepted that Nagano had come in 1877. Now, with no evidence to support Nagano’s claim, Homma moves into the running.

PHOTO


Studio portrait of Tomekichi Homma, 1909.

Yoshimaru Abe Collection NNMCC 2013.55.4



Chronology of Tomekichi Homma's Life

Below is a chronology of Homma's life that has appeared in a number of published documents. (*The claims in italics have not been substantiated after detailed search of historic records.*)

- 
- 1865** ● Born on June 6, in Ichikawa, Chiba, Japan
 - 1883** ● *Age 18, arrived in Canada and settled in Steveston, British Columbia*
 - 1887** ● *Helped to establish the first Japanese Fishermen's Association in Steveston, and became its first president.*
 - 1887-99** ● *Held the position of president of the Fishermen's Association, helped to establish the Fishermen's Hospital and the first Japanese language school in Steveston.*
 - 1896** ● *He became a naturalized Canadian citizen.*
 - 1897** ● Married Matsu Tanikawa of Fukuoka, Japan, moved to Vancouver, helped to publish the first Japanese language newspaper, *Canada Shimpō*, provided labourers for the CPR construction projects, opened a boarding house on Pender Street, founded a social club and served as chairman.
 - 1900-02** ● Legally challenged the provincial government's law that denied Japanese Canadians the right to vote. In the first court review the judge supported Homma's right to be on the Voters List. The province appealed the decision to the B.C. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court once more agreed that Homma had a right to vote in elections. Not satisfied, the provincial government appealed to the Privy Council in London (At the time the British Privy Council was the last court of appeal for Canadian legal cases). On December 17, 1902, the Privy Council in England reversed the B.C. court's decisions. Consequently Homma was prevented from being able to vote—as were other Japanese Canadians.
 - 1909** ● Moved to the Great Northern Fish Cannery in West Vancouver, working as a night watchman. He lived in one of the small homes built for fishermen, until interned during the Pacific War.
 - 1915-22** ● Conducted interviews for Jinshiro Nakayama for the publication of *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan* (Encyclopedia of Japanese in Canada).
 - 1929** ● A fire burned down Homma's house in the Cannery, destroying all his diaries and records that he had maintained over the years. Sometime during the next few years he suffered a stroke and slowly lost control of his speech and some mobility.
 - 1942** ● Interned to Popoff Internment Settlement in B.C.'s interior near Slocan.
 - 1945** ● Homma died on Oct. 28, at age 80, buried at Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver, B.C. His wife lived on until 1951.

The chronology can be considered relatively reliable from 1897 on, with three exceptions: *Canada Shimpo* was not published until 1907, at that time under the editorship of Rev. Kaburagi. Second, the Japanese language school in Steveston was not operating until 1906, well after Homma moved to Vancouver. Third, The Japanese Fishermen's Hospital was not erected until 1900.⁸ That was the year the newly formed *Gyosha Dantai* (Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society) agreed to assume responsibility for the hospital. Homma had moved to Vancouver earlier.

First, the chronology above states Homma was naturalized in 1896. The correct date was 1893. Proof is found in the documents sent by the Attorney-General of B.C. to the Privy Council in London on appeal regarding the right to vote.

On page 2, numbered paragraph 2, the following statement appears:

The Respondent is a native of the Japanese Empire, not born of British parents. Having settled as an alien in British Columbia, he on the 4th April, 1893, duly obtained a certificate of naturalization in Form "C" in the Schedule to the Naturalization Act (R. S. Can., cap. 113).⁹
[In the documents Homma is referred to as "Tomey" Homma, rather than his full Japanese name.]

PHOTO

Taken at the Great Northern Cannery, West Vancouver, 1921. From left: Shingo (age 6), Mother Matsue (41), holding Keay (1), Joe (16) standing, Yoshi (3), Tomekichi Homma (56), Seiji (10), 1921. Homma Family Collection NNMCC 1994.88.3.3



-
8. Daphne Marlatt, *Steveston Recollected: A Japanese-Canadian History*, Victoria, B.C., 1975. pp. 35-37. (Earlier in 1898, the Japanese Christian Church located on the cannery, opened a small clinic supported by Minister Matsutaro Okamoto and Ukichi Oyama to deal with the typhoid epidemic).
 9. Appeal to the Privy Council, from the Supreme Court of British Columbia, (in regard to voting rights), Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre, Burnaby, B.C., Homma Family Collection

Before examining other major mistaken claims, it is worth looking at his two most important contributions. He will always be remembered for his legal fight to secure the franchise for naturalized Japanese Canadians. Next, would be his assistance with the work of Jinshiro Nakayama in compiling the history of early Japanese arrivals to Canada, *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan*, published in Vancouver, 1922. It is important to note that none of the misinformation as to dates or activities attributed to Homma was ever claimed by him to be true. No examples have been found where he misrepresented himself. However, there remain a number of contradictions in the general literature (as well as in the chronology above) to what others have claimed about his early years. Below are four examples of published material containing misinformation.

1. *The New Canadian*, Jan. 1, 1992 in a story about the opening of a new school named Tomekichi Homma Elementary School in Steveston:

Tomekichi Homma was born in Japan's Chiba-kem June 6, 1865 . . . At the age of 18, [1883] he emigrated to Canada . . . "Mr. Homma was one of the first Japanese to settle in Steveston and was instrumental in organizing other fishermen expatriates into an association in 1887, serving as its first chairman until 1899.

2. *The Richmond Review*, Jan. 10, 2009, headlined "Homma fought back against racism":

[Homma] arrived in Canada in 1883. Established first Japanese Fishermen's Association in Steveston in 1887 and served as president from 1887 to 1899.
3. Vancouver *Shimpo*, Jan 1, 1998, featured a major article in Japanese based on a book in Japanese by Shigeharu Koyame, *The Life of Tomokichi*

Homma. The article was translated into English by W. Hashizume, appearing in the *Nikkei Voice*, Feb. 2000:

Homma was born in June of 1865 in Onigoshi-mura (now Ichikawa Machi), to a samurai family that had served the Lord Kuroda family for generations. In 1882 at age 18, Homma sailed for Canada and was engaged in salmon fishing in Steveston." (There are conflicting views as to when he came to Canada—some say 1883, others 1887.)

4. 4. *Nikkei Legacy*, by Toyo Takata, published in 1983 on p. 63; Takata describes Tomekichi (Tomey) Homma:

He was not a passing migrant clutching at quick riches. Ascion of proud lineage, Homma was a born leader and devoted activist. As a pioneer who landed in Canada in 1887, he and his cohorts founded Steveston's Gyosha Dantai [Fishermen's Benevolent Association] and he was selected to be its first chairman. Besides, he was prominent in creating the earliest Japanese language school, and was a factor in the first Japanese daily in Vancouver, Canada Shimpo. His English was such that he was called upon to assist in the courts.

Two additional statements need to be clarified. The first is the claim that Homma became the president of the Japanese Fishermen's Association in 1887. *The Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet*, produced by the Nikkei Fishermen's Book Committee in 2009, gives a detailed history of the three early Fishermen's Associations.¹⁰ The first, *Ryoshi Dantai* or the (Japanese Fraser River Fishermen's Association), was created in 1897. The records of

10. Masako Fukawa, Stanley Fukawa and the Nikkei Fishermen's History Book Committee, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet: BC's Japanese Canadian Fishermen*, Madeira Park, B.C., 2009. pp. 73-97.

the Association clearly state that Tomekichi Homma was the president from its formation in 1897 to 1899. There was no *Ryoshi Dantai* or *Gyosha Dantai* in 1887. In fact, there is little evidence that any Japanese lived in the area. Toyo Takata wrote about Gihei Kuno visiting Steveston for the first time in 1887, when he famously saw teeming salmon moving up the Fraser River in such numbers a person could almost walk over them. Realizing the potential of the Fraser River salmon, Kuno wrote back to his village in Wakayama encouraging people to come to Steveston. The result was a heavy migration from Wakayama over the next few years. Within a short time, over half the population of Steveston was made up of people from Wakayama.

What did the village of Steveston look like in the 1880s when the first Japanese fishermen arrived? The village that became Steveston took its name from Manoah Stevens who brought his family from New Brunswick around 1878. In 1880 his son received a large crown land grant, part of which he subdivided into 237 small lots on a grid pattern. Over the next ten years he also sold larger lots for industrial use near the Fraser River. Steveston was incorporated in 1889. By 1890, 100 lots were sold, and a federal government wharf was built. In 1892, there were 200 names in the *British Columbia Directory*, which also included a write-up mentioning two hotels, two general stores and 1½ miles of wooden sidewalks. A road to Vancouver had been started and regular steamship connections to Victoria, Vancouver and New Westminster were in operation on the Fraser River.

Japanese fishermen began working for the Phoenix Cannery in Steveston during the mid-1880s. In 1894 it provided land for a Japanese chapel, which also served as a community gathering hall.

In 1898 it was being used as a Church-sponsored hospital. Over the years, many Japanese fishermen's families rented homes on cannery land.

Toyo Takata's *Nikkei Legacy* states that the first Japanese working in Vancouver were employed at Hastings Sawmill in 1892. Steveston at the time did not even have a road to Vancouver. It seems improbable that any Japanese was fishing out of Steveston as early as 1882 or 1883, dates given above as when Homma first arrived.¹¹ At that time the village had not even been incorporated. It is not likely that Homma arrived before 1887, the date Takata gives. However, there is no verification that he came in that year. All we can state as fact is that Homma was in Steveston by 1897 when he was elected president of *Fureza Gawa Ryoshi Dantai* (Fraser River Japanese Fishermen's Association). Homma himself gives still another date for when he first came as will be seen below.

Many other incorrect statements have been made over the years in various accounts of Homma's life. Since this article is only interested in establishing that Homma did not arrive in Canada before 1887 there is no need to continue recounting his life after 1901. Yet one more document is worth presenting, at least in part. *The New Canadian*, of August 9, 1977, featured a front page article titled, "The Early Pioneers". It was a translation from a series of recollections from the *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan* published in 1922—mentioned above. Roy Ito acted as editor, coordinating seven translators. The article translated was by Tomekichi Honma [sic]. He discusses the history of the first Japanese immigrants as well as his own personal life in Canada. The quotes below focus on his own life, while a few others are included to add colour and context.

11. Rigenda Sumida, "The Japanese in British Columbia," M.A. thesis, manuscript, UBC Library, 1934. (On page 225, Sumida wrote, "The first Japanese fishermen were found in Steveston in 1885." but offers no proof.)



PHOTO

On December 18, 1902 *The Daily Colonist*, Victoria carried a front page story telling how Tomey Homma had lost his challenge to gain the right to vote in British Columbia.

Below are Homma's words written in 1922.

Looking Back by Tomekichi Honma [sic]

I came to Canada about thirty-three years ago. As I look at the diaries I have kept all these years, I recall the many incidents and people that comprised the Japanese community in the early days.

When I came to Canada thirty-three years ago (1889), there were very few Japanese. Now there are more than 10,000 living here. Two men who did exceptionally well are Senkichi Tamura and Masajiro Furuya. They came to Canada with only the clothes they wore, worked as labourers, went into business and became rich men. . . .

On July 12, 1886 the Canadian Pacific Railway finally reached Vancouver. . . . At that time there were not too many Japanese lived in Canada and not too many white people. By 1892 a few Japanese lived a very rugged life in the bunkhouses. Then eight or nine little shacks were built by the Japanese near Hastings Mill. . . .

In May, 1899 Nagao and I became labour contractors for the C.P.R. The men we recruited were all new to railroad work except for Nakakichi Nakazawa who came from Portland. When Nagao and I had a misunderstanding in March, 1903 I left and Atsuo Hattori from Seattle took my place. . . .

Mitsuhei Yamano and I became partners and started a rooming house. Others who got into this business were Ichitaro Suzuki, Ikuno Murakami and Hikotaro Miyasaki who started a rooming house behind the law courts. . . . This was about 1899 or 1900.

I started fishing on a Columbia boat at Steveston in 1892. A man called Yamashita built a half deck onto the Columbia boat. The Columbia boat easily took water in the rain and in the rough sea. The half deck gave shelter to the fishermen and prevented the water from getting into the boat. Within a period of two weeks all Japanese had half decks

built. Suga-ju (Jukichi Hayakawa) received the first fishing license. [Independent fishing licence in 1889; Japanese fishermen had worked on contract with the canneries earlier] . . .

In 1900 the Japanese fishermen were organized into a union. Mr. Yamazaki (present publisher of *Tairiku Nippo*) became the secretary. [This was really a re-organization of the first Fishermen's Association that had formed in 1897 with Homma as president. With a new constitution it took on more responsibilities for the whole community. It was referred to as *Gyosha Dantai* or (Benevolent Society) rather than just a union] . . .

The Japanese are people of the sea and did not get into farming in Canada until the last ten years. In 1895 Kiskeya Mikumi [*sic*] started farming on Saturna Island. . . Mikumi [*sic*] started bringing immigrants to work on farms. He worked for Charles Gabriel, a Frenchman, who lived in Victoria. A man called Tsuchiya grew sugar beets in Raymond. He was the first to farm in southern Alberta.

In 1897 Mr. and Mrs. Ranzo Kishimoto (wife's name is Yoko) started teaching in a makeshift classroom in a house belonging to Mr. Mori on Powell Street. Torasaburo Tanaka and Waichi Kanemura were requested by the Japanese consul, Mr. Shimizu, to act as school trustees. . .

Tencho setsu [the Emperor's Birthday] was celebrated at the home of Kihei Kinzo Irie acting as chairman. Consul Nose attended dressed in formal court uniform. *Banzais* were shouted for the Emperor.

Thus Tomekichi Homma clearly states his date of arrival as 1889. Yes, this early immigrant became a Canadian, sank roots and stayed, even if it is clear he could not have arrived in 1883. If not Homma, who arrived earlier?

Kisuke Mikuni

The First Documented Immigrant

When Sumio Ishidate wrote about early Victoria in 1909, he had claimed, “In the autumn of the 17th year of Meiji (1884), several Japanese landed at Victoria . . . Kisuke Mikuni and Tomekichi Homma who live in Vancouver district are people who came during that period.” Like Homma, Mikuni never claimed in his lifetime that he was the first immigrant. Of course, as we have seen, neither did Nagano.

Of the two men Ishidate named as arriving in Victoria in 1884, he was incorrect about Homma as demonstrated. The other, Kisuke Mikuni is the real “first pioneer” who came to sink his roots deep into the soil of Canada. His life in Canada was one of enterprise and adventure, taking him from shop clerk in Victoria to a mine supervisor, to farmer, contractor, labour negotiator, and shipper of charcoal and cordwood. He helped countless Japanese immigrants settle into their new country of Canada. Yet Kisuke Mikuni is unknown even to most experts in Japanese Canadian history. Despite

this, he deserves prominence as the first known immigrant coming from Japan to settle in Canada permanently.

Nakayama wrote about Mikuni in his work of 1921:

Mikuni hailed from Okayama Prefecture. He resolved at an early age to travel abroad and quietly awaited his opportunity while frequenting the foreign trading houses of Kobe and Yokohama. He won, by chance, the friendship of Charles Gabriel, of a Yokohama trading firm and was repeatedly advised by the latter to travel to Canada, as a country of future promise, Mikuni accordingly seized the opportunity when it arose and followed Gabriel to Victoria, opening a Japanese store in the city... However, there were only one or two fellow Japanese in Victoria at the time and Mikuni’s life must have been an exceedingly lonely one.¹²

Charles Gabriel, a businessman and entrepreneur in Victoria, was the key to Mikuni’s life in Canada.

12. Jinshiro Nakayama, *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan: Furoku*, Vancouver, B.C., 1922, pp.133-137.

Son of a French mother and a Spanish father, he spoke fluent Japanese. Before moving to Victoria he lived in Yokohama, where he learned the language. Arriving in Victoria about 1882 with a wife and son, he engaged in wholesale trade and insurance. The next year he found himself acting as unofficial Japanese consul when twelve shipwrecked Japanese sailors landed in Victoria in March of 1883.¹³ With his knowledge of Japanese, Gabriel was able to assist the sailors to return home. The next year, Gabriel traveled back to Yokohama to gather goods for a store he planned to open in Victoria. He met Mikuni on that occasion and persuaded Mikuni to join him in Victoria and help run the store.

Again, Nakayama wrote:

Around 17th or 18th year of Meiji [1884], a French merchant, Charles Gabriel, who dealt with Japanese merchandise, kindly took care of Japanese immigrants such as... Mikuni Kisuke, Tamura Shinkichi, and Shino Arimichi. While they were working hard under Mr. Gabriel, a coal deposit was found in Tumbo Island, and Mr. Gabriel sent Mr. Mikuni back to Japan to recruit over 20 coal miners from Takashima Coal Mining Company...Mr. Gabriel was very helpful to Japanese immigrants and he was the guarantor and protector for those immigrants.¹⁴



13. *The Daily Colonist*, Victoria, April 13, 1883.

14. Nakayama, 133-137.



What other evidence have we that Mikuni, or any Japanese for that matter, were living in Victoria by 1884? Gabriel's Japanese Bazaar opened in time for Christmas 1884 on Government Street. A few months later, *The Daily British Colonist* carried a short item about a court case brought by Charles Gabriel against a Japanese man, Ischia Gama [*sic*]. Gabriel alleged Gama was a vagrant who harassed his Japanese employees—implying that he had two or more Japanese working for him.¹⁵

Like any store owner, Gabriel kept accounts in a ledger, and we are fortunate that the ledger has been preserved in the BC Archives.¹⁶ Kisuke Mikuni and eight other Japanese names appear in its pages. The “Japanese Mess” is tallied at \$118 in

1886—signifying a sizeable group of hungry clerks being fed at Gabriel's expense. In fact some of them boarded in his six-room house at 33 South Park Street.¹⁷ It is still standing in the same location, but the address is now 865 Academy Close.

PHOTOS

Above: In front of The Japanese Bazaar on Government Street: Kisuke Mikuni in a bowler hat, centre, Charles Gabriel on the right. The building still stands today as a gelato shop. HPO 022063 Courtesy of the Royal BC Museum.

Left: Charles Gabriel's house on South Park Street, where Mikuni and other Japanese employees boarded. It is still standing in the same location, but the address is now 865 Academy Close. G. Switzer photo

15. *The Daily British Colonist*, Victoria, March 25, 1885.

16. “Petty Ledger Book of Charles Gabriel & Co., Victoria merchants 1884-90,” B.C. Archives, Royal B.C. Museum, Victoria.

17. “S. Tamura at 33 South Park” in 1890, *Henderson's City Directory*.

In November 1886 two men told Gabriel about a coal deposit they had discovered on Tumbo Island, located off the north-east end of Saturna Island near the US border, worth at least \$25,000. Gabriel was intrigued. To check it out, he sent Mikuni as his trusted deputy over to Tumbo. Gabriel was convinced, but he needed two things: capital and miners. He took off to eastern Canada to raise the money. In January 1887 Gabriel sent Mikuni to Japan to recruit miners from Kyushu—another indication of Gabriel’s trust in him. Mikuni returned with about 20 seasoned miners.¹⁸

Gabriel left the shop to be run by his clerks and built a house on Tumbo Island to be near his new operation. Mikuni moved over with him, as interpreter for the miners and supervisor when Gabriel was away. In the 1891 Canada Census, Mikuni is listed as “interpreter,” as part of Gabriel’s household.

The Tumbo mine became both Gabriel’s undoing and Mikuni’s opportunity. From the start, workers proved difficult to manage. In addition, the first shaft drilled filled with water and a boiler explosion killed two workers. Then, Gabriel lost his only son in a drowning accident during a family outing. Gabriel

eventually gave up and sold out. He and his wife left British Columbia, dropped out of sight, and possibly travelled to Japan to start fresh with another enterprise.¹⁹

As for Kiskeye Mikuni, his adventures had only begun. Taking a liking to the rural lifestyle, he purchased land at Winter Cove on Saturna Island, built himself a log house, and did some farming.²⁰ His boathouse remains, overlooking the cove and a projection of land now known as Mikuni Point.²¹ He also cut cordwood, and added value to the wood by getting it made into charcoal for use in the salmon canneries. As reported in *The Daily Colonist*:

Tug Eva took away two scowloads of cordwood from Little Canoe Pass on Thursday, for use in the new cannery on Lulu Island. Mr. Mikuni, the shipper, has also been successful in the making of charcoal, and has been able to supply quite a number of canneries this summer.²²

In 1894 Mikuni formalized his loyalty to Canada by becoming a British subject. After being confirmed as a worthy person by a witness (a routine step), he swore an oath of residence and allegiance.²³ Finally on Feb. 1, he received his

18. Nakayama, 133-137.

19. Marie Elliot, “Coal Mining on Tumbo Is.,” manuscript at the B.C. Archives. (Also Nakayama states Gabriel went back to Yokohama.)

20. *A Gulf Island Patchwork*, Gulf Islands Branch, B.C. Historical Association, 1969, pp. 57-58. (Mikuni’s house was later bought by another resident, Gilbert H. Anslie, and eventually it was moved to South Pender Island, renovated into a church, and, finally, it reverted back into a private dwelling. Coincidentally, his boathouse, still sitting on the beach, was also converted to a church. According to his death certificate, Mikuni himself was a Buddhist.)

21. “Mikuni Point”, Official Name. Feature Type: Point ... Gazetteer Map: 92B/14. Relative Location: N.W. side of Saturna Island, Cowichan Land District...www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcgn-bin/beg10?name=23593.

22. *The Daily Colonist*, Victoria, August 30, 1893. The remains of charcoal pits have been discovered on several of the Gulf Islands: Mayne, Galiano and Salt Spring, remnants of the occupation of Japanese.

23. B.C. County Court (Victoria), Naturalization applications and oaths of allegiance, 1859-1917, B.C. Archives, Royal B.C. Museum.

certificate of naturalization, listed as a farmer, Saturna Island. In 1898 he appeared on the Voters List for Saturna Island.²⁴

Within a year Mikuni moved off Saturna Island to take up a timber licence on a quarter section of land up the north arm of Burrard Inlet. He planned to apply for and establish a homestead on the property after clearing it of timber. The records of the Department of the Interior, Dominion Lands Branch, contain a letter Mikuni wrote to that effect, in 1905, expressing a wish to establish a homestead with “fruit orchard and chicken yard.” In that letter Mikuni declared he had been in Canada for 20 years, since at least 1885.²⁵

By the turn of the century, Japanese fishermen on the Fraser River and elsewhere numbered in the thousands. The cannery bosses tried to pay as little as possible for the delivery of fish. In June 1900, the newly formed Japanese Fishermen’s Association commissioned Mikuni to help negotiate on their behalf for better prices for their fish. An agreement was eventually reached after a bitter strike, and the fishermen were able to start the season in late July.²⁶

Mikuni did not confine his ventures to fish and charcoal. Knowing that the burgeoning railway and other construction were in need of raw materials, he operated a rock quarry on Howe Sound, shipping gravel from there by scow to the new C.P.R. docks in Vancouver.²⁷

Around the turn of the century, now in his mid-40s, Kiskey Mikuni found his true love, Sano Fujiwara, in New Westminster, where he settled. Sano was a widow with two teenage children, a



PHOTO

1901 Mikuni family studio portrait. From left, son Asajiro age 17, Kiskey Mikuni 46, and wife Sano 41. Fujiwara family photo

24. Sessional Papers of the British Columbia Government, 1899: “Kiskey Mikuni, Saturna Island, Farmer.”

25. “Correspondence relating to land settlement in the Rail Road belt and the Peace River Block, 1885-1949”, B.C. Provincial Archives, Royal B.C. Museum.

26. *The Daily Colonist*, Victoria, June 19, 1901.

27. Sumio Ishidate, *Kanada Doho Hatten-Shi, Vol.1*, Vancouver, B.C.: Tairiku Nippo Sha, 1909.

boy, Asajiro (or Arthur) 17, and a younger girl. In a few years, Mikuni's stepson became his partner in a number of business ventures: a rice mill and store, and some real-estate development.²⁸ At age 23, in 1907, Arthur was sent to Japan to get married in his mother's prefecture, and he brought his bride Tsuru home to Canada. Eventually they had five children; today their descendants live in Ontario.²⁹

Unfortunately Kisuke Mikuni was not able to enjoy his grandchildren. On May 21, 1909, at age 54, he died of heart disease. At the time of his death, his wife was back in Japan, probably looking after her daughter's marriage prospects. It was about a month before Mikuni's will was located. It included the name of his executor, Paul Okamura, a well-known New Westminster photographer.

From the probate court documents we learn something about Mikuni's assets, which included interest in real estate, shingle bolts, stocks, and some cash.³⁰ He was not wealthy, but one could say he did well. He left his estate in the hands of his stepson Asajiro, with the stipulation that he support his mother, Sano. She lived on 30 more years, and died at age 79 in 1939. Sano is buried next to her husband under a huge granite obelisk in Mountain View Cemetery in Vancouver.

PHOTO

Mikuni's gravel pit on Vancouver's North Shore, showing the gravel chute loading a barge. Mikuni's photo in the top right, 1909. From *Kanada Doho Hatten Shi*, by Sumio Ishidate



28. In 1908 Asajiro and Kisuke applied for a plumbing permit on property on Columbia Street; and N.W.M./A Building File, Water Connection Record, 20-12-1908 and 10-12-1908, New Westminster Archives.

29. In 2015 we contacted descendants of the Fujiwara family in Ontario; they were extremely helpful in providing information and photographs of the Mikuni family.

30. Succession Duty Act, Victoria, court document, June 5, 1909 in "Probate Records, B.C. Supreme New Westminster, 1881-1943", microfilm, B.C. Provincial Archives, Royal B.C. Museum, Victoria.

Mikuni, not Nagano or Homma, was the First Japanese Immigrant

There are no documented reports of any Japanese in Victoria or any other part of Canada before the years 1884-5. The first confirmed Japanese living in Victoria were clerks working for Gabriel. Mikuni was the first clerk Gabriel met and hired from Japan, in 1884. The other men hired as clerks came later than Mikuni and eventually most went back to Japan. Evidence suggests that Manzo Nagano came to Canada in 1892, not in 1877; while Homma claimed in 1922 that he had come in 1889. In spite of his claim, because there are so many inconsistencies in the dates related to Homma, it is possible he might have arrived two years earlier, but no earlier than 1887, and certainly not in 1883.

Then, why is Mikuni not better known? He died at an early age, and he spun no tall tales of his doings. He went quietly about his activities, moving through diverse enterprises, from mining supervisor to contractor, farmer, logger and more. Above all, he reached out to assist other immigrants, and with his good command of English, helped ease them into their new country. His friend Shinkichi Tamura became a banker. Yasushi Yamazaki, whom he befriended early on and worked with in the

contracting business, became president of Canadian Japanese Association in Vancouver, founded the newspaper *Tairiku Nippo* and was leader of the Japanese Canadian Volunteer Corps in 1916.

Jinshiro Nakayama provides us with an eloquent final tribute to Kiusuke Mikuni in his 1921 book: *Kanada Doho Hatten Taikan*.

He was an extremely cheerful and generous man and was kind to the point of forgetting to eat and sleep in providing guidance to those who followed him. It is no exaggeration to say that there is not one highly successful man in Vancouver or across Canada who did not receive his help or recommendations. An adventurous and intrepid spirit was the hallmark of his personality and once he embarked on a project, his perseverance allowed no adversity to stand in his way. He became particularly proficient in English and his conversational style was quite skilled. It is indeed difficult to imagine what more he might have accomplished had he been granted another decade of life and his death is much to be deplored.

translated by Howard Katz

Treasures from the Collection

Edward Banno and the Japanese Canadian Citizens' League Delegation

By Sam Frederick

The Nikkei National Museum's current digitization project is titled Behind the Lens: The Okamura and Banno Families, and will make accessible significant materials from the Banno Family Collection. Spanning from the 1900s to 2021 and across three generations, this collection includes records from New Westminster photographer Paul Okamura, lawyer and Nikkei Place founding Board President, Robert Banno, and his father, dentist Dr. Edward Banno.

Edward Chutaro Banno was born in Vancouver, BC in 1908. Moving briefly with his family to Japan before returning to Canada, he earned a degree in Zoology and Bacteriology from the University of British Columbia and a degree in dentistry from the North Pacific College in Oregon.

Following the enfranchisement of Japanese Canadian First World War veterans in 1931, many Japanese Canadians became involved in the renewed fight for the right to vote for all Japanese Canadians. In 1936, Dr. Banno was selected along with three other *nisei* from the newly formed Japanese Canadian Citizens' League (JCCL) to bring the federal franchise issue to Ottawa. This item in the collection is an early draft of an article that Dr. Banno wrote for the Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (GVJCCA) Bulletin in 1978 about the history of the JCCL. In it,

he describes the delegation and his fellow members: Miss Hideko Hyodo, a schoolteacher, Mr. Minoru Kobayashi, a life insurance agent, and Dr. S. Ichie Hayakawa, a university professor.

On May 22, 1936, the JCCL delegation presented their arguments in front of the Special Committee on Elections and Franchise Acts. Despite their arguments, the Special Committee denied their request for enfranchisement. While it was not the outcome they were hoping for, the delegation made significant strides in bringing attention to inequalities faced by Japanese Canadians and pushing back against racist policies of the Canadian government. Japanese Canadians would not receive the right to vote until 1949.

This digitization project has been made possible with support from the BC History Digitization Program and the Government of Canada. Ce projet a été rendu possible en partie grâce au gouvernement du Canada.

Sam Frederick is Digitization Technician at Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre. She previously worked as a Collections Assistant on the Tegami: Reaching Out Across Distance project, digitizing materials from the Eiji Yatabe and Shinobu Family collections. She has a Master of Information from the University of Toronto and originally hails from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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An Early History of The JCCA

It is difficult today to conceive ^{of} the cultural, legal and economic restrictions which burdened the second generation Canadians of Japanese origin in the early 1930's.

Most of Nisei grew up in a ghetto-like atmosphere. Outside of school contacts, they were largely isolated from ^{other} Canadians. In their everyday lives, they faced competing influences, within the family and the community. They did not have the right to vote in either federal or provincial elections. They were also denied the opportunity to pursue many professions. They were excluded from a number of desirable occupations. Their problem seemed insurmountable. Thus out of personal and communal frustrations of the Nisei, the JCCA was born.

Yet it was not a Nisei but a Japanese-born graduate of the University of British Columbia who began to organize a movement to gain legal and economic equality and a rightful part in Canadian society. The movement in 1932 found formal expression in the Japanese-Canadian Citizens' Association. Its founder was Hozumi Yonemura, who published a six-page English monthly. Although Mr. Yonemura was an excellent ^{public} speaker his efforts did not immediately result in a vigorous organization. Perhaps the time was not yet ripe.

PHOTOS

An Early History of the JCCA; 1978. Banno Family Collection. NNMCC 2016.30.5.2.3.

-3-

relations particularly in Pacific area. Needless to say the MacInnis resolution was defeated in the House of Commons. Prime Minister Mackenzie King commented that he was unaware that Orientals in British Columbia or the people of the province were advocating the right to vote to the people of Asian origin. Through official channels the JCCCL learned that a Special Elections and Franchise ^{Committee} would hear its petition for federal franchise in May of 1936.

It was an ambitious undertaking for a fledgling organization. ^{members started} To ^{members started} collect funds by various means. There was the matter of selecting ^{the} delegates. Four member representatives finally chosen were: Miss Hide Kyodo, a teacher with ten years' experience in Richmond and in fact the only Nisei teacher in the provincial educational system; Minoru Kobayashi, a young life insurance agent from Syveston; Samuel Ishiye Hayakawa, the Vancouver-born semanticist, then a professor of English at Madison, Wisconsin and now a U.S. Senator from California and myself who had started a dental practice less than a year before. Sam Hayakawa was chosen as the leader of delegation.

Thomas Morris, an attorney prominent in Progressive Conservative circles in British Columbia, undertook to prepare a brief on behalf of the JCCCL. It specifically called for Clause XI of the Elections and Franchise Act and Amending Act of 1934 to be repealed and to allow the British subjects



Portrait of Chutaro Banno, Hideko Hyodo, Minoru Kobayashi, and Dr. Ichiro Hayakawa on Steps of Parliament; Ottawa, Ontario, 1936. Banno Family Collection. NNMCC 2016.30.11.2.39.