

FOOTPRINTS

Impressions from where we were to where we will be

The Newsletter for the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego

Fall Issue 1995
Number 2

Volume 4



What an electrifying experience was Elaine Hibi Bowers reaction to the March Poston Trip, however the same could be said of her July concert.
photo by Yukio Kawamoto

AN AFTERNOON TO REMEMBER

by Masato Asakawa

Elaine had said that what she wanted was a "pleasant afternoon" for the audience, and it certainly was that and a great deal more. Sitting there among many old friends and listening to the wonderful music — it made me feel that all was right with the world. I looked around to see how others were reacting and noticed how quietly attentive the audience was, yet they seemed relaxed and enjoying Elaine's performance. Her comments about the music and composers were also well received. It was truly an afternoon to be remembered. All too soon the performance was over and we were enjoying the refreshments prepared by Jeanne Elyea and her crew.
See An Afternoon. page 3

'MEMORIES LIGHT THE CORNERS OF MY MIND ...

by Michio Himaka

SAN DIEGO NIHON-MACHI — We did have our own little group of non-Japanese characters who hung around our little corner of the world during the Pre-World War II days

And our only memory of these characters is that no one I talked to could remember full names, only nicknames or first names in most cases.

For example, Kuni Kawamoto, whose parents ran the popular Frisco Cafe on Fifth Avenue, remembers a Filipino waiter who worked for them

"I knew him only as Cinco. He was a strong guy. He could carry 100-pound sacks of rice in each arm and one 100-pound sack in his teeth. Really!"

"He must have stayed working at the restaurant even after we left because he was still working there after the war. I saw him when I came home to check on the family property after the war."

And everyone I talked to all remembered "Shorty," a Filipino who had retired as a Navy chief before the war.

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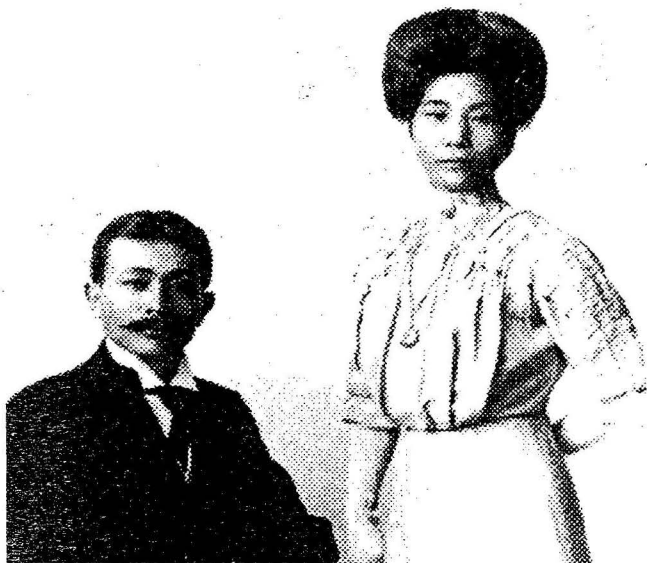
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TWO WHO CAME. EARLY ISSEI PIONEERS;
MR AND MRS. KIKUJI KAWAMOTO

WHY DID THEY COME?

by Don Estes

One of the perennial questions raised about the *Issei* is why did they choose to leave Japan, and come to the United States? In the best tradition of a paradox, the answer is, at the same time, both simple and complex. Based on our interviews made in the 1970s with local *Issei* pioneers, it appears that the great majority of the men we talked with came to better themselves economically.

At the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth Century the chances for economic improvement in Japan were perceived by most of those interviewed as being decidedly limited. Again and again in our interviews we heard the phrase, *Nihon ni itemo ga nai*, or, "If we had stayed in Japan, we would not have made it (economically)." When asked to be more specific our *Issei* interviewees talked about chronic overpopulation, and the shortage of agricultural land. In this context, it should be remembered that prior to the passage by the Japanese Diet of the American imposed Farm Land Reform Law of October, 1946, almost fifty percent of all the arable land in Japan was classified as, "tenant land," and thirty percent of all farm families were tenant farmers. The average farm family in the Meiji
See Why Did They Come, page 5

SPLINTERS FROM THE BOARD . . .

Board Members wish to extend their sincere congratulations to our Board President Ben Segawa on his September 9, 1995 marriage to Grace Karamoto. We wish them years of health and happiness.

Our Board would like to add more members to our Board. If you would like to work with an active, hard-working group contact any Board member, names and phone numbers on back page.

FOOTNOTES

from the editor, Jeanne Elyea

Correction to our last newsletter, *MASUMOTO* is the correct spelling to the family name under the family photo on page 5, not Matsumoto. Sorry.

We need articles and they don't have to be from Poston or pre-war. Young people, please write your experiences. I know we have many young talented people in San Diego who are creating history today. Write it down and we will be glad to share it. Also please make any suggestions about what you would like to see in the newsletter. Tell us what interests you.

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An Afternoon. continued from page 1

It was so good to see old friends come out for the event. I hadn't seen Ed and Shiz Urata for the longest time. James Yamate, and Florence and Moto Asakawa were seated near the piano; and Florence later commented on how fast Elaine's fingers moved. I don't live far from Art and Lillian Kaihatsu but it has been too long since we talked, so this was a good chance for us. It was nice to see Reverend Tom Fujita and Sachi relaxing for the afternoon and loyal supporters, the Tsuida sisters (Bubbles Shimasaki, Parker Uda, and Masako Matsuhara), Ben and Mickey Honda, and so many others. It was great fun socializing after the recital. Best of all was seeing a smile on Mabel Hibi's face — I could almost feel the pride.

The event was a total success. We achieved our goal to raise funds for the Historical Society and more importantly to "have a great afternoon". I hope this isn't the last of this type of event.

P.S.

by Elaine Hibi Bowers

I thought that I would like to play, just once, for those who had expressed a desire to hear me play.

Now we have made it happen, and, based upon the enthusiastic comments that followed, I believe that, together, we have succeeded in sharing a special space in time, bonded by great music.

You were an exceptional, incredible audience. For over an hour, without benefit of a break, you listened attentively while we went through 250 years of music history at mach speed with the giants of the "classical" piano literature: J.S. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Brahms, Debussy and Rachmaninoff.

Thank you, all, who had the interest, courage, curiosity, and trust to support this rather daring, untried, unique endeavor. And very special thanks for invaluable assistance to Naomi Himaka, Ralph Miyashiro, Suzy Yamada, Julie Yamauchi Peer, Bill Elyea, Union Bank, and St. Mark's Lutheran Church of Chula Vista.

In response to our summer issue, Shinkichi Tajiri sent this map of his area and a corrected address. Please feel free to contact him, as follows:

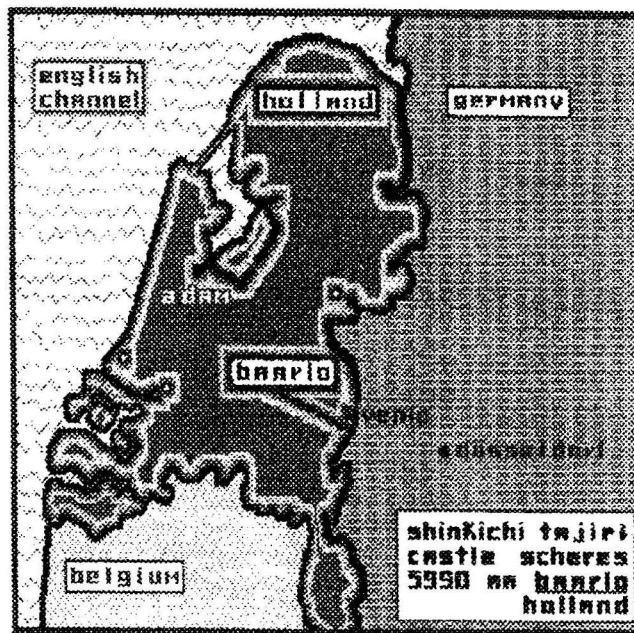
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HAVE YOU SEEN US?

by Jeanne Marumoto Elyea

Mr. Oscar Canedo, an instructor at Southwestern College told me that his grandmother had an album left in the basement of the house where she has lived since 1961. The house was previously owned by an American family.

The photo album was discovered about 10 years ago when the family was cleaning the area after water damage and according to Sarah Alva, Oscar's grandmother, the album belonged to a Japanese family who occupied the cellar prior and possibly early war time.

Earlier this summer, Oscar brought the album to me and I showed the pictures to my mom, Mary Marumoto who thought one of the young men identified as Bill, looked like Bill Hosokawa who writes for the Pacific Citizen. I contacted Mr. Hosokawa by phone and sent him several pictures. He returned them with a nice note, in part "Please thank your mother for suggesting that the fine looking young man in the snapshot might be Bill Hosokawa, but he definitely wasn't me."

I have since contacted the Pacific Citizen and Kay Ochi, National Coalition for Redress/Reparation asking for assistance. Some of the names in the Album are: Stephen Mayeda (owner of the album), Masuda Boys, Bill and Harry Hosokawa, Takeda, and Mas Kato.

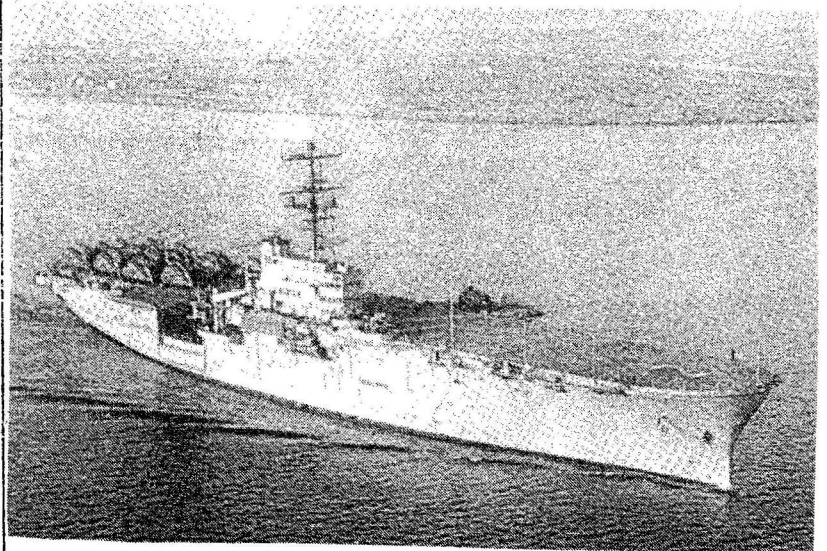
All the pictures except one appear to be pre-war. One picture only has Manzanar Committee on the back.

If possible, I would love to get this album back to the original owners, so if any of these pictures or names are familiar please contact me, Jeanne Elyea, newsletter editor (619) 690-1151 home, or 690-1224, (Mary Marumoto). I may have to put these pictures under "Have you seen us?" on milk cartons.

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Paul got to see the island - but not the carrier.

A CHANGE IN CLIMATE

by Paul H. Hoshi

My first visit to the North Island Naval Air Station took place back in 1935, when I came down from Seattle, where I was living at the time, to attend a convention of amateur radio operators. The gathering of "ham" operators was held in conjunction with the Southern California Exposition which had taken over Balboa Park that year.

On the convention program was a sight-seeing, guided tour of an aircraft carrier berthed at the North Island pier. Another Nisei and I were the only Japanese Americans to attend the meeting, so we set out by bus and ferry to reach the air station.

As our bus reached the dock where the carrier was tied up, we got off and walked toward the ship. Suddenly two military policemen pulled up in a jeep and ordered the two of us into the back seat of their vehicle. When we inquired as to why
See A Change of Climate, page 7

Why Did They Come?, continued from page 2
 period (1868-1912) had three or more children, and because the rule of *primogeniture* was followed, the eldest son generally stood to inherit the family holdings leaving any younger siblings facing very limited economic opportunities. Other concerns prominently mentioned in our interviews included crippling levels of taxation, and after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, the constant threat of military conscription.

One viable alternative for second and third sons was emigration, which must be remembered, included emigration within Japan to the developing industrial centers like Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka, or relocation to the newly opened, but agriculturally marginal lands like those in Shikoku and Hokkaido. Also an option was out migration to Hawaii, the American west coast, or Latin America, as well as Korea and Manchuria.

For the most part the new arrivals from the far West who chose the United States, and began to arrive in earnest after 1880, were young, unmarried men under twenty-five years of age. Based on our interviews it is clear that most of these men thought of themselves in terms of, *Wataridori*, or "Birds of Passage." From their initial perspective, they were merely sojourners; seeking to make an economic stake, and then return to Japan. As one pioneer Issei related, *I knew that if I could save a thousand dollars that, that would be enough money for me to have yoshi marriage arranged with a wealthy farm family.* (A *yoshi* marriage is a formal process involving adoption through marriage into the wife's family and assuming her family name.)

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Like many of their European counterparts, these early Japanese had both heard and read numerous stories about the opportunities available in the United States. There were even popular songs which described America as a *land of opportunity*. A place where it was commonly said that money was, *kusaru gurai* - a colloquialism, which is still used in Japan today to denote, *easy money*.

Initially these early immigrants referred to themselves as, *dekaseginin*, a pre Meiji term that was used to describe individuals who temporarily left their native places to seek employment elsewhere to supplement their family's income. During the Meiji period the popular meaning was extended to encompass the practice of going abroad for the same purpose: making money. Later the word *Issei* came into general usage, denoting these immigrants as the first generation of Japanese in the United States-the pioneer generation.

THIRD ANNUAL MEETING

Flyers for our Annual Meeting on Saturday, October 14, 1995 at Southwestern College Student Union were sent with our election material. A revised version is included with this newsletter in case you need another copy.

The program will include a panel of Veterans discussing their military experiences, including members from the 442nd Infantry Division, the most decorated combat unit of World War II.

Please help us share our heritage with the San Diego community by displaying any items you have that pertain to your Nikkei history, not just pre-war or Poston. All items will be return to you. Contact any Board member, names and phone numbers are on the back page.



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Memories. continued from page 1

Shorty operated a shoeshine stand in front of the Iwata family's restaurant. Shorty had that little strut that all sailors had when they walked, arms swinging and with a slight sway of the body.

Shorty had his chief's hat pushed to the back of his head and was always smiling. Nothing was ever wrong in this world with Shorty.

"There were people of lots of different nationalities who worked in the Japanese establishments downtown," recalled Jimmy Kondo. "We all got along well."

"I remember seeing Shorty after the war. He hadn't changed much but he didn't look well.

"There was Viola, who lived in the Hawaiian Hotel (across the street from the Takahashi-Kondo pool hall.)"

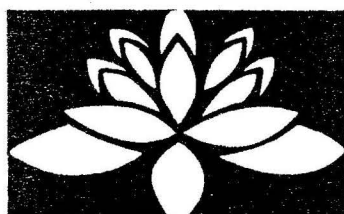
"Viola's mother, who was Hawaiian, operated a beer bar next to 10-Cent Meals across from our tofu-ya," my brother Osa recalled.

"(It was Viola's husband-to-be, Bill, a sailor who often came over to Papa to practice his Morse code with Papa who had been a telegraph operator in Japan during his youth.)

"And there was Smokey," recalled Umeko Kawamoto, whose family ran a barbershop on Island Avenue just east of Fifth.

Smokey with his dark curly hair and five o'clock shadow hung around with his Japanese friends mostly around the pool hall.

Ruth Voorhies, whose family ran the pool hall



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which with Nippon Shokai was the hub of activities for the community, remembered "Woody" Barlow.

"Woody was the beer deliveryman who delivered to all of the Japanese establishments in the area," Ruth said. "He was very fond of the Japanese people in San Diego."

Searching even farther back in her

memory, Ruth said she vaguely remembered a dark complexioned Native American man, who hung around the area.

I remember him because he often wore a tall, black hat with a round top. He rarely said anything but he smiled often and never bothered anyone.

In "our" neighborhood, which is on Fifth between Island and J, we had our own little group.

"Ochoa" was our garbageman who came around weekly to collect the "okara" from the "daizu" grindings at the tofu-ya, my sister Emi recalled.

"I used to practice my Spanish on him but he always corrected my enunciation," she said. "I used to get very frustrated. But he was a good man. He took our garbage to feed his pigs so they must have been very well fed with all that "okara".

"And there was a man who we all called 'Mister.' That's all we ever knew him by. (Mama and Papa pronounced it "Mees-tah.") He ran a barbershop next door to our tofu-ya.

"And a couple of doors north of our store, there was Johnny, who ran a Navy locker, where sailors could rent lockers to put their civilian clothes when they were on-duty."

There was Tim, a Chinese man, who was partner with a Mr. Yoshimura in a pool hall and small cafe they ran across the street from our tofu-ya and next to Louie's Cafe (where they made the best bean burritos as I recall. And the beans really worked. At least I knew when my brothers had them. They will deny it, of course.)

"Papa used to hate to cut off the heads of live chickens when he brought them home so he used to take them to Tim to cut the heads off for him," Emi remembered.

"Mrs. Blackstone and her husband ran the Rescue Mission next door to the tofu-ya," Osa remembered. (My sister Mizu and I often joined the "regulars" there when they were fed. Couldn't help it when they offered us plates of food to eat. Couldn't refuse it, you know. It wasn't polite to refuse.)

"We were seldom short of potato chips," Osa recalled. (The mission folks used to give it to us.)

And speaking of giving, there was Pete's Beer Garden down the street from the tofu-ya. (Pete, again no last name because we didn't know it, was

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Memories, continued from page 6

the landlord, Mizu and I recalled. Osa and Emi thought it was Frank, who ran the second-hand store next to us and Tets didn't know. He was never home.)

Miz and I often would skate to the beer bar, peek in and the waitress would give us a bunch of pretzels.

Then there was Pete. Big Pete. From my 3-foot-at-the-tallest height, Pete looked to be 7-foot tall. He may have been. He was BIG! He looked even bigger in his blue and white striped bib overalls he wore over his T-shirt, often covered with dust from the van and storage place.

(Sometimes, he would take us down there at the foot of Fifth and let us slide down the slides from the second floor to the first.

(Mama and Papa called him "Pee-tah.") Almost every day on his way home from his job at Lyon's Van and Storage, Pete would peer in through the front screen door and holler, "Supper ready, Mama?" She would holler back, "Yes.")

(I don't know that we ever had him over for dinner but I doubt he would have enjoyed it too much. Most of the time, it was okazu. I hated okazu then. Now I eat anything. I know, I know. It shows.)

Finally, there was Joe Haller. Joe usually walked with an unsteady gait. More often than not, Joe was tipsy but more than anything, he was a friend to the family. I can still remember Joe wearing his Adams' hat with sweat-soaked hatband often pushed back to the back of his head.

(When we were in camp, Joe almost every month would send us comic books. Had we known some might become collectors items, we would have kept them all but we would have had nowhere to put them all.)

But Joe was a gentleman and treated Mama, Papa and my sisters with utmost respect.

Joe Haller died in his small hotel room that was over the old Nanking Cafe restaurant sometime after we came back to San Diego in 1948.

Mama cried. I'm sure all these people I speak of have already gone.

They were truly friends of the community. Now we could all cry because . . .

. . . (they) remind us of the way we were . . .

A Change in Climate, continued from page 4

we should get into the jeep, we were told that we were not allowed to go aboard the carrier. We were driven around the base in the jeep until our group had finished their tour, and then we were delivered back to our bus for the return trip to San Diego.

In July, 1993 a training squadron of Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force arrived in San Diego for a visit. As President of the House of Japan, I and our current queen were included on the community's welcoming committee for such visits. At the welcoming ceremony it is usual for our queen to present a bouquet of carnations to the highest ranking officer in the group. This has been an ongoing event for the past thirty years.

The welcoming ceremony is followed later by a ship's open house where members of the community are hosted by the commanding officer. They always have quite a spread of *nihon gotso*.

A few days after the arrival of the Japanese training squadron, I received a call from an aide to the Commander of the Third United States Fleet. The missess and I were being invited to an evening reception aboard the fleet's flagship, the *U.S.S. Colorado*, then tied up at North Island. The event was in honor of Japanese naval cadets from the training squadron and U.S. naval ROTC cadets who were training in Coronado at the time.

The admiral's aide informed us that following the reception my wife and I were invited to dinner at the University Club, a private club in San Diego. I was told that there would be four other couples from the community there to honor the Japanese admiral and his staff.

Upon arriving on the *U.S.S. Colorado*, we were greeted by the vice-admiral who reminded us to leave a little early so that we would not be late for dinner.

Upon arrival at the University Club, I was surprised to find that I and my Misses were the only representatives from the Nikkei community. Present were two vice admirals and their wives, the Mayor of Coronado accompanied by her husband, and one person representing the Mayor of San Diego.

Looking at the group, I could only reflect on my 1935 experience and think about how the climate had changed.



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