

FOOTPRINTS

Impressions from where we were to where we will be

The Newsletter for the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego

Summer Issue 1998

Volume 7 Number 2



ONE OF THE FOUNDERS

by Don Estes

San Diego's early Nikkei community centered around three economic activities: fishing, farming and commercial business. In this third article on early Issei pioneers in San Diego County, we move our story from the sea to the area's rich agricultural fields.

One of the Twentieth Century's early Issei agricultural leaders was Sataro Owashi. Born on June 7, 1887 in Kushimoto-machi, Nishi Muko-gun, Wakayama-ken, he arrived in the United States in March 1900. Shortly thereafter, Owashi left California and spent the next three years in areas as diverse as Montana and Minnesota.

In 1903, Owashi returned to Los Angeles where he gained employment with Y.M. Bamboo Company, then located near Fourth and Spring Streets in downtown Los Angeles. He planned to apprentice himself to a master builder and learn the techniques involved in the manufacture of bamboo furniture. After he had developed the appropriate skills, he then planned to relocate to Peru and manufacture bamboo furniture for export to the United States. After four

years with the Y.M. Company, he determined that the interest in bamboo furniture in this country was only a passing fad without a real future. He left his employment and became a houseboy for an American family serving in that capacity for four years and, in the process, improving his command of the English language.. Later, he worked on a farm in Orange County before coming to the San Diego area.

See Founders page 2

DATES TO REMEMBER

July 25-26: Vista Obon Odori
Vista Buddhist temple

August 1: Obon Odori
6:30 P.M. San Diego Buddhist Temple

August 2: Chula Vista - Odawara
3 P.M. Sister City Bingo Party

September 5: Ocean View United Church of Christ
Bazaar 11 A.M. OVUCC

September 19: VFW Post 4851 Semi Annual Fund
Raiser 6 P.M. VFW Post 4851

September 27: Rev. Miyaji Farewell Luncheon
Marriott Hotel Mission Valley

October 24: JAHSSD Annual Meeting
"Salute to Women in Our Community"
11 A.M. - 2 P.M. Buddhist Temple

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PARKER HISTORICAL SEEKS MEMBERS

The Parker, Ariz., Historical Society is seeking Americans of Japanese ancestry, particularly those interested in the Poston Relocation Center, who might desire to join their organization.

Their society is dedicated to preserving the history of the Parker area. In addition, they offer quality educational programs and are attempting to build a museum to showcase the record of the Parker Valley.

Membership can be obtained by sending ten dollars to the Parker Area Historical Society, P.O. Box 1500, Parker, Arizona 85344.



The author with Masami Honda, one of the REgenerations Project Narrators.

LEARNING ABOUT POST-WAR RESETTLEMENT IN SAN DIEGO

by Joyce Teague

It's a beautiful San Diego winter afternoon. A lighting kit and camera have been set up in the living room of the Pacific Beach home where I am about to conduct the first interview for the REgenerations Oral History Project. I am nervous about it, but probably not as much as the attractive, sparkly-eyed Nisei woman who has agreed to talk about her post-World War II experiences. After all, I will sit off-camera with my pages of scribbled notes, while she will have the glare of the lights on her throughout. But several minutes after the first question is posed, she reaches back in her memory to share what her life was like from the day she walked away from the barbed wire. Her nervousness and mine fade as she recalls an earlier time of youthful struggle and the decisions she made. Perhaps she is sharing some observations for the first time in her 80 years. Three hours pass quickly...

Why Study Resettlement?

The World War II internment of people of Japanese descent has been well documented and researched. Dozens of moving personal accounts of internees describing their experiences of being ordered from their neighborhoods and relocated to the camps. There are several scholarly works on the same subject. But surprisingly, very little research has covered what we are calling the Resettlement Years--the period immediately following the war when Nikkei families were faced with the daunting task of rebuilding their lives after being abruptly uprooted from home, community, and business.

Founders continued from page 1

In 1909, Mr. Owashi relocated to the Palm City area where he raised tomatoes and strawberries. He worked in the South Bay until March 1911 when he was forced to return to Japan to recover from an illness he had recently contracted. During his recovery in Wakayama-ken, he was introduced to the woman who later became his wife. In early 1912, Sataro Owashi and his new bride, Haru, returned to Palm City and began to work their new 40-acre farm.

About this same time, many of the local Issei farmers had come to the conclusion that they needed to organize to protect their joint efforts. In 1912, Owashi and six other Issei farmers formed the Japanese Farmers Association of San Diego. The organization was formally incorporated by the State of California on December 23, 1916. Signing the articles of incorporation as president was Sataro Owashi. The other signatories included George Tsunada, Tozan Nikuni, Sakuhichi Yano, Asataro Yuhashi, Mitsusaboro Yamamoto and Genjiro Sato.

The next year, Owashi teamed with his long-time friend and neighbor Asataro Yuhashi to switch from growing strawberries to honeydew melons. The melon variety was new to the San Diego area and became instant hit among fruit-eating Southern Californians. The two agricultural entrepreneurs initiated a local advertising campaign that saw their profits soar.

As anti-Japanese activity began to pick up at the close of World War I, Issei farmers found themselves under increasing pressure from locally owned Caucasian produce houses who were refusing to buy Japanese grown crops. In response to these increased attacks, Owashi spearheaded the organization of the all-Issei Vegetable Growers Union, which opened its own produce stall near Sixth and J in San Diego's market area.

See Founders page 5

See Learning about Post-War page 3

How did families cope after losing their property and livelihood? Were they able to resume prewar careers, schooling, personal relationships? Where did they live when they returned? How were they greeted by their neighbors? What kind of help did they receive? What were their hopes and dreams for themselves and their children? These are among many questions about the Resettlement period which the REgenerations Project is seeking to answer.

The Research Team

The REgenerations Oral History Project is partially funded by the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund. It enables teams in four cities--San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose, Chicago--to interview ten people per region about their postwar experiences. Our team, under the umbrella of the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego, is led by Susan Hasegawa. She makes certain we work in concert with the other teams within the project guidelines and meet our deadlines. Don Estes serves as Regional Scholar, responsible for educating the team about the history of the Nikkei in San Diego. Debra Kodama and I conduct the interviews; Leng Loh is our videographer; and Carol Estes produces transcripts of the interviews. Ours is a compatible and focused group.

Last summer, team members from all four regions gathered in Los Angeles for four days to learn specific techniques we should use in preparing for and conducting the interviews. Coordinated by the Japanese American National Museum, these sessions were an inspiring introduction to the kind of stories we should try to elicit and the most effective ways to get people to tell them. We also learned that the regions were surprisingly different in the job and human resources available to the returning Nikkei.

We Would Like to Interview You...Please!

Once our team returned to San Diego, Susan and Don concentrated on coming up with a list of potential interview subjects. Our Nikkei community is small but full of stories of people who persevered through rough times trying to achieve success while raising their families. Our list needed to reflect a range of occupations and backgrounds, plus the experiences of both men and women. One important criteria was picking people who had been evacuated from and later decided to return to San Diego. But we found what it really boiled down to was--who among our pool of people would be willing to talk freely about these things, knowing their words would be both video- and audiotaped?

See Learning about Post-War page 4

IN MEMORIAM

The JAHSSD notes with sadness the passing of the following San Diegans and former residents of our community. We extend our heartfelt condolences to their families and friends.

Roy S. IWASHITA - February 7, 1998
John ONO - February 14, 1998
Yoshio HAMADA - February 17, 1998
Tsuruyo OZAKI - March 6, 1998
Chisako KUROYE - March, 1998
Kiyo KAWASAKI - March 22, 1998
Sadame UCHIMURA - April 1, 1998
George NAKANO - April 10, 1998
Tokuko TANAKA - April 10, 1998
James Zenji KASUBUCHI - April 12, 1998
Muneo TORIMARU - April 30, 1998
Momoyo AMANO - May 6, 1998
Kurt B. DATE - May 19, 1998
Tokuko SASE - May 23, 1998
Sade KOHARA - June, 1998
Toshiko MORI - June 8, 1998
Kajiro OYAMA - June 22, 1998
Mizue Himaka COPPLE - June 23, 1998
Kazukiyo OTO - July 9, 1998

IN GRATITUDE

The JAHSSD Board gratefully acknowledges the receipt of the following monetary donations.

Esther Hancuff, in memory of the late
Louise Spears.

Yoshiko Hasegawa, in memory of the late
Louise Spears.

Don and Carol Estes, in memory of the late
Louise Spears.

Victory Wholesale Grocers: A Division of
Brothers Trading Company, In memory of the late
John Ono.

John C. Copple, in memory of his late wife,
Mizue Himaka Copple



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THINGS WE'RE DOING

On **June 7th** the JAHSSD presented a photo essay on the History of the **San Diego Buddhist Temple**. The photo exhibit was seen during the temple's annual bazaar in the Sangha Hall. It was free and attracted a great crowd.

Working in conjunction with the **Chula Vista Historical Society**, your society will be presenting an exhibit featuring photographs and artifacts illustrating the contributions of the Nikkei to San Diego County. The exhibit is scheduled to run from June until early 1999 at the Chula Vista Historical Society's museum which is located on Third Avenue just south of the Park Plaza Center between F and G Streets

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Yuki Kawamoto's recall of "grade-school days" in the last Footprints helps make the newsletter something to look forward to - personal features with a historical slant - besides what the Society is about. Such human-interest cameos certainly add life and sparkle.

— **Harry K. Honda**

(Editor's Note: Mr. Honda is the editor emeritus of the Japanese American Citizens League's *Pacific Citizen* newspaper. We would invite our readers to submit articles similar to Yuki's to run in future *Footprints*. Please, don't be shy. Everyone has a story or two to tell about the past. And don't worry about grammar or spelling. Those things can be fixed.)

Learning about Post-War from page 3

Getting people to say yes proved to be more difficult than we had anticipated! Several we approached simply did not want the stress of being videotaped. Others felt (erroneously) that their stories might be too mundane or ordinary to warrant such attention. Because so little research has been done in this area, we knew no story was too ordinary, for we don't yet have a yardstick against which to measure whether ones postwar activities were common or unique for the time period. Our interviews would help establish these measurements for our community. Nonetheless, it was a surprisingly long process settling on the ten narrators who are included in this first phase of the project.

In the Future?

Although the REgenerations Project as currently

funded only has resources to complete the ten interviews, our team would like to be able to capture unique resettlement stories of many more San Diegans to be archived with JAHSSD. Besides making these interviews available to scholars studying the postwar era, we hope to use the gathered stories to create a documentary or perhaps teaching materials which would show the public what the Nikkei postwar experience was like.

Helping to document these histories has allowed me to meet some extraordinary men and women among the San Diego Nikkei. From my very first interview, there has been a sense of privilege to hear these stories, some being told for the first time. As young men and women, the narrators were willing to work hard to establish themselves anew in the community. Remarkably, they did so with little bitterness or complaint. And although we have yet to evaluate the information we have gathered, certainly it is clear that one thing all these people have in common was a determination to move toward whatever the future promised in spite of the setbacks of internment.

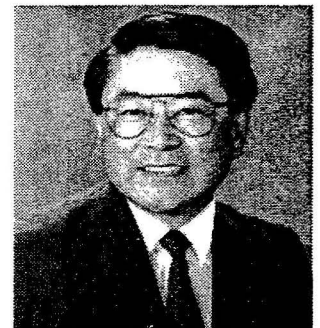
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Sataro Owashi, who organized two of the largest Issei agricultural organizations in San Diego County, died in 1918 as a result of the great Spanish Flu epidemic that broke out after WWI. In a two year period, that epidemic killed over a half a million Americans, including 368 in San Diego.

MEMBERS SPEAK UP

by Elaine Hibi Bowers

Results of a recent membership survey conducted by the JAHSSD indicates members prefer our annual meetings be luncheons held on Saturdays at the San Diego Buddhist Temple featuring exhibits and special speakers or panel discussions.

Suggested topics for our guest speakers or panelists included discussions or demonstrations of Japanese arts and crafts, the Chinese community in San Diego, popular Nisei culture, historical background and generational studies of the Nikkei community and our "past, present and future."

As for future activities, members suggested trips to the Poston/Laughlin area, Los Angeles area museums and shows, cruises and 3-day trips to anywhere.

Fund raising ideas suggested included holding a Kanojo fashion show and bake sales at the annual meetings.

Still others suggested the JAHSSD should network and work closer with other JA historical societies such as those in LA and San Francisco, that we need to generate education for San Diego youths on Japanese American historical background and coordinate programs with San Diego area high schools about our place in U. S. history. **(NOTE: JAHSSD members periodically have made several appearances before high school, middle school and grammar school classes in the past and avail ourselves to schools whenever requested to appear. We also ask members to sign up for our speakers bureau so we can call on people should such requests come up. Call board members to volunteer.)**

As for *Footprints*, members would like us to include a membership list occasionally, stories on Nisei athletes, the Gardeners Association, high school and college memories and activities, Japanese low-riders (Did we have any, etc.?) **(NOTE: We would gladly accept articles on those subjects that are of interest to members or anything else that members or readers would be interested in. As we have urged in the past, please sit down, and write what you remember of your past friends, life on the farms, in Fish**

Camp, Downtown, East County lifestyle, North County lifestyle, South Bay lifestyle, living in Coronado your past friends and neighbors, family members. That's OUR history. No other group can claim that but us, the Nikkei community. And don't worry about grammar or spelling. We will edit it as best we can without embarrassing anyone. WE NEED ARTICLES AND WE WELCOME YOURS!)

And remember this, when you write something about your family or family members, it's not bragging, it's pride and we as a community need pride to sustain us as a family, which we are.

The results of the survey:

Luncheons: 23

Brunches: 10

Dinners and Afternoon Teas: 4

Sites:

Church/Temple: 25

VFW Hall: 10

Southwestern College: 6

(With suggestions that the site be rotated or a more central location be found.)

Program Ideas:

Exhibits: 22

Speakers: 21

Panel Discussions: 8

Other suggestions included help upgrade Manzanar, hold benefits showing Japanese language movies, hold more than just an annual membership meeting, advertise JAHSSD exhibits and tours.

Questions asked included what is being done to preserve local historical records such as oral histories, photo collections. **(NOTE: We do have a collection of material on hand and are in the process of trying to find a site to store the material. We would welcome any further donations of such records, documents and photos, etc.)**

Another comment noted that "the Japanese American National Museum in LA hopes to open in January 1999 and that the new pavilion will be a pleasant surprise, something to be proud of, first class."

So there you have us, warts and all, and we thank you for your input.

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Audrey Barry

10016 Campo Rd.
Spring Valley
California
91977-1801

PH 670-9953
FAX 670-3397

FAREWELL TO REV. MIYAJI

After 12 years of dedicated service to the Nikkei community of San Diego as a whole and the Buddhist community in particular, the Rev. Akio Miyaji is being transferred by the Buddhist Churches of America to the Orange County temple effective Oct. 1.

The Buddhist Temple of San Diego will hold a farewell luncheon for Rev. Miyaji and his bride, Tamiko-san, from noon to 3 p.m. on Sunday Sept. 27 at the Marriott Hotel in Mission Valley.

To make reservations for the luncheon, call the temple at **239-0896**. Cost is \$20 for adults with lower costs for Dharma School students. The menu will consist of turkey lunch for adults and chicken fingers for children with an optional vegetarian dish also available.

The **deadline** to make reservations is **September 6**.

Sangha members and friends are invited to make contributions towards a gift for the Miyajis with a suggested amount of \$5 per adult or \$10 per families. Please submit separate checks for the lunch and gift. **Checks should be made payable to the Buddhist Temple of San Diego.**

Under Rev. Miyaji's leadership, the temple has seen a revitalization of the youth groups and the Dharma School attendance.

His eagerness to represent the temple in a variety of ways has been greatly appreciated not only by the Nikkei community but other community groups before whom he has appeared.

In one particular appearance before a Methodist Church group in La Mesa with Bill Teague, Rev. Miyaji was praised highly by the members for his presentation. Members said later that his appearance drew the largest group of listeners for the series that church was presenting.

Rev. Miyaji has been a great friend of the JAHSSD making himself available to write or interpret Japanese script or documents.

We will miss his dedication to the Nikkei community, his commitment to serve, his friendship and his great sense of humor. We also will miss his terrific beef curry, which was one of the staples at the temple bazaars and food bazaars.

(He'll have to leave his recipe for all to share. Maybe he will let us run it in *Footprints*.)

We will also miss seeing Sensei carrying almost every baby within sight! No politician ever carried more babies than Sensei!

We thank you, Sensei, for all you have done for the JAHSSD and its members and we look forward to seeing you on your visits here as guest speaker at the Buddhist Temple in the future.

ANNUAL MEETING THEME WILL SALUTE COMMUNITY WOMEN

A "Salute to Women" will be the theme of the JAHSD annual membership meeting luncheon scheduled Oct. 24 at the Buddhist Temple Annex Hall.

The meeting is scheduled from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and plans are to honor three woman in the community.

We are privileged to have enlisted the Hon. Gail E. Kaneshiro, judge of the Municipal Court of San Diego, to be our guest speaker and we urge members to come out to salute our honorees.

Judge Kaneshiro was a deputy district attorney with the County of San Diego for 12 years before her appointment to the bench and a deputy city attorney with the City of San Diego for eight months before that.

A native of Hilo, Hawaii, Judge Kaneshiro earned a bachelor of arts degree at Boston University in 1973 and a juris doctor's degree from the Washington University Law School, in St. Louis, Mo., in 1976.

She was admitted to the California State Bar in 1977. After working with the city attorney's and district attorney's offices here, she was appointed to the Municipal Court bench in 1989 by then Gov. George Deukmejian.

She is married and has a daughter, Mari.

Further details about the luncheon will be forthcoming when plans are finalized.



NAOMI HIMAKA

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Newsletter Staff

Editors: Michio Himaka
Yukio Kawamoto

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Footprints Editor
P.O. Box 620988
San Diego, CA 92162-0988

JAHSSD

Michio Himaka
Yukio Kawamoto
P.O. Box 620988
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