



Footprints

Impressions from where we were to where we will be

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SAN DIEGO

Winter Issue 1993

Volume 2, Number 3



Francis Tanaka, M.D.

THANK YOU DR. FRANCIS - FOR EVERYTHING.

The JAHSSD is pleased to announce that on Saturday, April 2, 1994 we will be sponsoring a testimonial luncheon to honor Francis Tanaka, M.D. for his long and devoted services not only to the local Nikkei community but the greater community as well.

Please mark the date of the luncheon, April 2nd on your calendars now, and plan to join with us to honor a man who has done so much for this community. More details will be forthcoming in our next issue. Please also watch your organizational newsletters for further information too.

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ON THIS ISSUE

An issue that appears with recurring frequency in the works of academics is one that attempts to address the future of the Nikkei community in America. At the same time as the Sansei are assuming greater community leadership, they are also inexorably slipping into middle age. In increasing numbers their children, the Yonsei, are entering college and are already beginning to stake out the role their generation will play in the life of this community which can now trace its roots back at least 110 years.

One of the most persistent elements of the culture brought to San Diego by the Issei pioneers that is still highly visible are events that trace their origins back to the matsuri, or festivals of Meiji era Japan. In the past hundred years many of these festivals have evolved from Japanese matsuri to Japanese American celebrations, but the roots can still be clearly seen by those who pause to look for them.

The theme of this issue of *Footprints* is celebrations, past and present. We hope it stirs some memories for each of you.

MATSURI - FESTIVAL

1994, the Year of the Dog, will be initiated by Osho Gatsu, or New Year. Osho Gatsu is just one of the many Nikkei community celebrations that encircle us throughout the year.

Please See **MATSURI** On Page 7.

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THANKS - FROM THE PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

We would like to acknowledge the generous gift of nine issues of the Poston Chronicle covering the period of July 4 to July 25th, 1944.

This donation is the contribution of Mr. Fudo Takagi of San Diego. With his help and yours, we shall continue to preserve the story of the Nikkei in San Diego not only for future generations of Japanese Americans, but the greater community as well.

In addition the JAHSSD would like to acknowledge the gift of two hand carved abalone shells from Mrs. Mitsue Tanaka. They are fine examples of an art practiced by pre World War II Issei fishermen.

SPLINTERS FROM THE BOARD:

A MESSAGE FROM MICH

One of the central themes of Mich Himaka's talk to our annual meeting bears repeating. It went something like this:

If you're worried whether you can write well or not, or that you can articulate what your thoughts are - well, don't worry about it - just write those thoughts and experiences down and send them to the historical society. Some of us will look it over and try to help you make it readable if that's what's needed. And, if it's all right with you, we will publish them.

It doesn't matter if your parents or grandparents were well known in the community or not. They all had something to contribute. Every single one of them. Their experiences are something for all of us to treasure. I'm sure you all have some remembrance of our community that deserves to be shared. Something that you can contribute. Give it a try. Write it up and send it in. Put your phone number on it and if we have any questions we'll give you a call.

Do this for your children and grandchildren. Let them know what their Issei ancestors were like, and give them an idea of how tough it was on them. Think about it. The Issei had to make two starts in life. One when they came here from Japan, and the second after the war. I ask you, what other people had to do that? It wasn't easy for them.

If writing frightens you a little, give any board member a call and we will be happy to tape a statement and then, with your permission, turn it into an article. - Editor.

JINGORU-BERU! JINGORU-BERU!

Christmas at home in the late 1930s, No different than Christmas at other homes, I imagine, even if we were a Buddhist family. Times were still tough. Families were still trying to recover from the depression but Papa and Mama saw to it that we six kids were fed



Santa and Nikkei friends, San Diego-1926

somehow.

Christmas Eve. My sister and I hung a pair of Mama's stockings on the tansu. We had no fireplace, no chimney but we did have a skylight over our one bedroom in the tofu-ya where we all slept. Plenty of room for The Big Guy to slip down and do his thing. Why Mama's stockings? What could fit into our tiny socks? Not much! But, unfortunately, Mama and Papa were not familiar with that part of the Christmas tradition.

I guess I went to sleep every Christmas Eve with one eye open but not for long. However, I swear a couple of years I did hear some sleigh bells above our roof top but never the thump of Santa's sleigh landing or the beat of reindeer hooves.

Most Christmas mornings, Papa would come in singing:

Jingo-beru! Jingo-beru! Nantoka, kantoka yo!
Papa didn't know the words but he could carry a tune pretty good.

I'd jump out of bed, glance at the empty stockings and run to the storefront window to see the Christmas tree all lit up. If we had anything at all at Christmas time, it was a decorated tree with all those silver tinsel (I

could never remember what they're called) things hanging from the branches. All those lights in the shape of Santa Claus, bells etc. They don't make them anymore, do they? I miss them.

Usually, the space under our tree was bare because we were all wearing our gifts from Mama and Papa. My sister, Mizu, and I were the youngest and usually got one toy in addition to our clothes.

I remember one year we both got skates. Another year, I got cap pistols, two of them! The best was the year I got a red Radio

Flyer wagon, a small one but still treasured. I remember one year my brothers got a B-B gun rifle to share. (things must have been good that year.) If we forgot anything, one thing we never forgot to say on Christmas morning was: Thank you, Mama, Thank you Papa, Merry Christmas, Everyone.

Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

-by Mich Himaka

OBON-ODORI AT POSTON

What follows are the memories of my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Susumu Kawato of Obon-odori at Poston, Arizona. It may not be totally accurate; the events having taken place over fifty years ago, and memories have a habit of fading.

Although the Obon-odori is a Buddhist religious ceremony, the event was watched and enjoyed by camp members, no matter what their religion. Indeed, even the dancers' religions were of not of any consequence, as long as they were willing participants! The odori did not take place every year; in fact my parents could only recall it happening perhaps twice during their four years of internment. Obon-odori in camp was a far cry from today's celebrations. It took place in an open area between buildings 310 and 322. This general area was where the internees had built a community hall and swimming pool, a government-operated canteen (general store) was also located there. The dance field was lit by electric lights that were hung up for the occasion by the internees.

Young girls between the ages of five and the early teens were taught the odori movements by some of the Issei. On Obon night, most dancers wore ordinary street clothes; some were adorned in hand sewn yukatas that were made from cloth ordered from the Sears, Roebuck or Montgomery Ward catalogs.

There were no religious rites before the dancing began. This was primarily a social occasion. The odori lasted two or three hours but that was because there was much socializing between each dance. The music was provided by home made wooden flutes and taiko drums. Camp vocalists sang the songs. The dancers were far out-numbered by the spectators, who gathered at the site carrying their home made chairs. The dancers moved to the music in a traditional circle as spectators from all over the camp watched and visited with each other.

Although there was no recorded music,

no colorful lanterns, and no refreshments (the canteen was closed in the evenings), the Obon-odori was a welcome diversion for the internees.

-by Nancy Kawato Nakatani



In the swing- Obon-1985

FIRST ANNUAL MEETING - A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

On Saturday, October 2nd, over a hundred members and friends gathered at VFW Post 4851 to inaugurate the first annual meeting of The Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego. With Aileen Oya serving as the Mistress of Ceremonies the audience was treated to a brief business meeting chaired by our president, Ben Segawa who also installed our newly elected board members: Masato Asakawa, Michio Himaka, Aileen Oya, and Hideko "Bubbles" Shimasaki.

Please See **MEETING** On Page 9.



Funeral photo-1931

KODEN - THE NIKKEI EXPRESSION OF GRIEF

The man feels lost. His father has died suddenly of a massive heart attack. He struggles to understand the "Why and How" of his own existence, at the same time he must deal with the suddenness of the event, and the empty pain he feels.

He wishes that his family had been more involved with a church community as he remembers how much strength a Caucasian friend found there. Finally he can only mutter, "Shikata ga nai" under his breath and stares silently out the window.

A few days after the funeral the family members come together to go through the many Koden cards they have received. Somehow they were not prepared for either the volume of cards or the number of people who attended the services. The mortuary seated over 300 people, and even at that there was standing room only.

As the family begins go over the names that were so diligently recorded by the members of the Church's Koden Committee, it is gratifying to see that two of Dad's old classmates from high school had come all the way from San Francisco. Considering the cost of airfare, the short notice, and the large koden

offering, the children are amazed that their father's death meant so much to these former classmates from so long ago.

It is only when their Mother speaks that they gain a fuller insight into what has transpired. She reminds them that when Asahi-san died in 1962 she and Papa made the trip to the San Fernando Buddhist Temple for the services, even though it was the middle of the strawberry season, and now... the Asahi's are returning that "favor" to their family. It is part of a fundamental value of Japanese culture

known as *giri*, the Mother continues, a moral obligation the family has towards others who have extended a kindness. The reason for the detailed koden, list, she goes on to explain, is so that their family will have a record for the future. When their time comes to "return the favor".

Koden, the Mother explains originated in Japan where it is referred to as "incense money". The custom came to the United States with the first Issei pioneers. Later, when money was short in the community, the koden offerings helped pay the funeral expenses and get the family through the difficult period following the death of a loved one. One local mortuary quickly recognized the nature of the custom and always extended their services to Nikkei families. They knew the money would be there. "Haven't you ever wondered why most Japanese families use the same mortuary?" asks the Mother. "It's just another example of *giri*" she explains, "They always took care of the community, no questions asked."

Then, as the family began the process of acknowledging the offerings, the younger members understood why the small packet of stamps was placed in each envelop. "Another example of *giri*?", asks one of the sons.

Please See **KODEN** On Page 6.

KODEN Continued from page 5.

"Yes", replies the Mother, "but when I was a little girl they sent green tea, or even better, sweet bean jelly."

As observers of this scenario, what are the preliminary insights we can draw from this short encounter with a Nikkei family dealing with grief?

1. While the fundamental nature of the koden offering has changed in the past hundred years, it still serves a special role for both the family, and in allowing the donors to express their grief through this showing of sympathy and solidarity with the family.
2. The Nikkei expression of grief is approach in a very communal manner, and finds its greatest strength in the personal presence of others who have, in some cases, come long distances, at a high cost, to be present with the family.
3. Within the Nikkei funeral ritual, one finds aspects of Christianity and Buddhism, with little conflict in the values for those involved.
4. That of all of the religious practices of the Nikkei community, the funeral service remains one of the rituals most vividly indigenized. Incorporating as it does parts of the old world into perfect harmony with the values of the new world.

by- Reverend Tom Fujita

The Reverend Tom Fujita is the Pastor of San Diego's Ocean View United Church of Christ.

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SHORTCHANGED IN AMERICA

Fred T. Hosaka, a former San Diegan now living in Oregon, has written a book, *Shortchanged in America*, A Story of Hardship, on the life of his father, Minetaro Hosaka. Minetaro Hosaka was an early pioneer Issei farmer, who farmed in Mission Valley across the road from the old mission (where, incidentally, our president Ben Segawa's family farmed after the war), later in Sunnyside (now part of Bonita) and in Oceanside.

Fred traces his father's life from his birth in Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan, through his immigration to the United States, first to Hawaii, then to San Diego and finally, to his subsequent internment and death in Lordsburg, New Mexico during World War II, just one day before he would have been released to rejoin his family.

Fred also writes about his mother, his own life and those of his brothers and sisters. It is an exciting and moving story; an important addition to the recorded history of Japanese Americans in San Diego. We all thank Fred Hosaka for his labor of love in bringing the story of his father and his family to us.

Copies of this important work is available from Fred Hosaka, HC Box 5770, Coquille, OR 97423 for \$15, including postage and handling. Checks should be made out to Fred Hosaka.



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MATSURI Continued from page 1.

Today, the old and the new have become part of the fabric of our lives. Obon, Nisei Week, JACL Picnic, Church and Temple bazaars, VFW dinners and so on throughout the year, right up to the JACL/VFW New Year's eve dance. Each of these events are in fact, the lineal descendants of the Japanese tradition of matsuri.

Before the War the Issei of San Diego recognized a cycle of matsuri that began with Osho Gatsu. The celebration was more the observation of a season, rather than the celebration of a day. It was a special family time marked by distinctive foods made with ingredients like red beans for good luck, nori and lobster for long life, and tangerines displayed and served as a reminder of one's family heritage.

And, what could be more communal than the making of fresh mochi for ozoni, the first meal of the new year. It was also a common time for money, in the form of a bonus, to be paid to employees. Eventually, both the gifts and the season came to be known as o-seibo. In the family oriented culture of the Issei it became customary to spend New Years' day visiting relatives and friends. Even the most modest homes made sure that there was abundant food and drink for anyone happening by. Even today, considerable skill is required to gage just how much to partake of in relation to how many homes one still has to visit.

Many Nisei women remember with fondness Girls Day, known in Meiji times as Jomi no Sekku and later as Hina Matsuri. The observance, known as the Doll Festival, is celebrated on the third day of the third month. On this day dolls dressed in ancient court dress are arranged on five steps with the Emperor and Empress on the top tier. Peach (momo) blossoms, symbolizing happiness in marriage are prominent among the decorations.

Since a complete set of dolls, then, as now, involved a major expense many girls had to be content with only the royal couple, known as the Dairi Sama. Filial Piety was a central theme of the festival, but perhaps the single most important aspect of the celebration was the expression the family's pride and joy in their daughters.



Girl's Day display-1931

On the fifth day of the fifth month the boys had their day. There still exist pre-war photos taken in San Diego showing the great carp banners that symbolize Tango No Sekku, or Boys Day floating gracefully over homes with male children. These Koi Nobori, or flying carp are the dominant symbol of the festival. The koi represent strength and determination, and the ability to overcome

Please See **MATSURI** On Page 8.

SUMIMASEN, PLEASE EXCUSE US

We need to make the following corrections to our Fall, 1993 issue:

Page one - Genkotsu is the correct spelling. There was a transposition in the headline. The correct spelling was used in the article.

Page three- Lois Hara was incorrectly identified as Susan Hara Namba's sister. Lois was, in fact, Susan's Mother.

Page three- The January flood referred to took place in 1916 not 1961.

Masthead volume and issue number should read: Volume 2, Number 2, not Volume 1, Number 3.

Machigaimashita (Oop's, we goofed)

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

The JAHSSD welcomes the following members who have recently joined with us to perpetuate the Nikkei story:

Min and Emma Sakamoto, and Mary Takasaki (Life Members)

Moto and Florence Asakawa (Life Members)

Clare and Joe Alves

Vince Battaglia

Ben and Miki Honda

Kajiyo Oyama

Alice Yano

Elizabeth H. Yamaguchi

Fred T. and Jacquelyn B.

Hosaka

Connie I. Taniguchi

1994 membership cards are now being printed and will be in the mail shortly.

life's obstacles. Usually one koi is flown for each boy in a household. Even the colors of the banners are important with red symbolizing the sun and thus life, and black representing the rain clouds and fertility.

Another banner frequently seen floating below the koi, are multi colored streamers known as fukinagashi. The word fuki means free or unrestrained, and the pennants are made from material dyed five different colors; green, white, red, yellow, and purple. Boys Day was a time to tell again the story of Momotaro the Peach Boy who slew the wicked Oni and saved his parents and his village.

Beginning in mid July and continuing through early August the Nikkei communities gather to celebrate the great Buddhist festival of Bon. The roots of the observance can be traced to China and a three day celebration to honor the spirits of departed ancestors. Coming to Japan in AD 658 Bon has been regularly celebrated ever since.

The dances, known as Bon Odori, that have become so central to the celebration were initially dances of lamentation for the spirits of the departed. By the early Twentieth Century Obon had evolved into an expression of respect for the departed tinged with the joy

Please See **MATSURI** On Page 9.



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Mochi making on the farm-December 30, 1924

MATSURI Continued from page 8.

of community and togetherness. It has become a time when young and old, male and female, friend and stranger, Buddhist and non



Issei Halloween party, Sweetwater-1922

Buddhist can all join together in dance and song.

Not surprisingly the Issei, like most immigrants began to adopt and adapt American festivals as well. Judging from photos of the pre-World War II period Halloween and Christmas were popular seasons for the Nikkei

too.

Today, as we look around it is easy to see that the legacy of the matsuri is still with us. As one would expect, the forms have changed, but the traditions persist in whole, or in their American adaptations right up to our time

by Don Estes

MEETING Continued from page 4.

The business concluded, an obento lunch from the Ichiban Restaurant was served. For dessert fortune cookies with "winning" fortunes for a lucky few were in order as the door prizes were passed out

Mich Himaka spoke eloquently on "Kino" here in San Diego as he remembered, and the audience was moved to much laughter and a few tears.

After the meeting Aileen invited the audience to stay and talk about old times and view the exhibit put together by Don Estes, Aileen Oya and John Rojas. The general consensus was that everyone had fun, and went home feeling good. And after all, that's what the get together was all about anyway.

JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SAN DIEGO 1994 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ Initial Application ☐ Renewal

- ☐ \$20 Individual
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- ☐ \$25 Senior Mr. and Mrs.
- ☐ \$200 Charter Life (Individual)
- ☐ \$300 Charter Life (Mr. and Mrs.)
- ☐ \$100 Corporate (Annual)
- ☐ \$500 Corporate (Life)

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IT'S TIME FOR YOUR 1994 MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Now is the time to renew your membership in the JAHSSD for 1994. We appreciate all the support you have given us in our inaugural year and hope you will continue that support.

You will note that we have had to raise our membership fees for the Senior category from \$10 to \$15. When we established our membership schedule we didn't anticipate that the majority of our members would be seniors, which has the lowest membership fee; therefore, we had to raise the fee for that one category so that we can generate a little more income.

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However we have created an additional category, Senior, Mr. and Mrs. The fee for which is \$25.

Please send in your check for your membership renewal together with the membership application located elsewhere in this issue. Thank you for your continued support of our efforts.

GIVE YOUR CHILDREN THE GIFT OF HISTORY

With the advent of the Holiday Season you have an opportunity to give your children the gift of history and tradition.

Consider a membership in the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego for your loved ones.

It's a gift of knowledge and understanding.

JAHSSD
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