

Ground Breaking of Heiwa Peace Park
Salt Spring Island Japanese Garden Society

September 22, 2007

Rose Murakami

This memorial garden being envisioned is to acknowledge that Japanese Canadian pioneers did once live on Salt Spring Island and contributed to the Island's growth and development.

We hope visitors to the garden will discover or recall the history of Japanese Canadian pioneers, learn about their experiences and work to create a positive present and future.

Early records about the Japanese on Salt Spring Island are extremely sparse. Charles Kahn in his book SS wrote: Itinerant Japanese cleared land for South end settlers in the 1880's and 1890's.

The 1891 census lists none, but a Reverend Wilson in a booklet wrote that there were 10; there may have been others not recorded. If they were mentioned in any writings, they are not referred to by name, only as "Japs" or by a partial name.

They worked for white citizens as labourers on farms, in forests, in homes as servants as well as in clearing land.

They were valued for their efficiency and faithfulness to their employers. Also, they were "inexpensive" as they were paid less for the same job carried out by white individuals.

Our mother, Kimiko Okano Murakami, was the first baby of Japanese ancestry born in Steveston , BC in 1904.

She spent many years living on Salt Spring Island from 1909 to 1942 and remembered the names of many Japanese families living on Salt Spring up to 1941.

Their names slipped into anonymity, but I intend to change that now by reading out each family's surname.

They are:

1. Ando
2. Eizan, Toragora – had a log cabin on Booth Bay on the property later owned by the late Olive Layard. His grave is on that land.
3. Iboshi
4. Hirano
5. Inouye

6. Ishizumi
7. Isogai
8. Ito
9. Iwasaki
10. Izumi
11. Makino
12. Matsune
13. Mikado
14. Murakami
15. Murakami
16. Murakami
17. Nakamura – Bittancourt Road , laundry, left in 1937 for Victoria
18. Nakata
19. Numajiri
20. Ohara
21. Okano
22. Okano
23. Okano
24. Onouye
25. Shimoji
26. Tajiri
27. Takao
28. Takebe
29. Tanaka
30. Tasaka – left before 1941, Mr. Tasaka fished and during the off season, he made charcoal and sold it in Victoria to soap makers. His charcoal pit is yet to be discovered, but where they lived is easy to find. Each year a Japanese vegetable called bog rhubarb comes up in the spring marking their place of residence.
31. Tottori

In 1941, there were 11 families - 77 adults and children.

- Most children were born on Salt Spring Island
- 14 adults were naturalized Canadians
- 1 was Canadian born

Eight of the families were land owners. Most of them farmed, growing vegetables, varieties of berries, raising chicken for eggs, and milking cows.

Others fished, worked in the forest or on the Bullock estate as day workers.

Japanese Canadians were allowed only to work in the primary industries; fishing, farming, logging and mining. They could only buy private land, but never Crown land.

The Japanese community was a vibrant one, always busy and productive; everyone was very hardworking and goal oriented. Each family had high goals of achieving wealth and educating the children.

They celebrated special occasions together like New Year's, summer picnics and monthly upkeep of the Japanese cemetery. They also helped to encourage an active young peoples' group.

Japanese Canadians were also community minded; being available to fight forest fires, donating money or labour when asked to do so. For instance, when the Salt Spring Island Consolidated School (current elementary school) was being built, some people donated money while others helped with the carpentry work. They also donated money for a church organ and for the building of an Anglican church.

Although the Provincial and Federal Governments legalized racist laws against the Japanese Canadians, we adjusted to them and continued striving toward our goals. For example, our maternal Grandfather Okano came to Canada in 1896 and learned to be a fisher. He became very successful and eventually owned five boats. In 1919, discriminatory licensing law aimed at Japanese Canadian fishers resulted in many licenses being taken away from them. Grandfather Okano sold his boats and bought 200 acres on Sharpe Road, cleared 50 acres, built huge greenhouses, had milking cows and developed a very successful farm.

After Japan attacked Pear Harbor on December 7, 1941, Canada activated the War Measures Act. From what the Government defined as the "Protected Zone", 100 miles inland from the BC coast, 22,000 innocent Canadians of Japanese descent, 75% who were Canadian born or naturalized, were forcibly removed from their homes in 1942. We became prisoners of the Canadian Government from 1942 to 1949. The reason was our race. Our rights as Canadian citizens were betrayed by our own Government.

During this time, when our journey into Hell was beginning, father and 4 other Japanese Nationals were sent to prison road building camps. Government Laws made it impossible for these men to acquire citizenship.

Mother became an instant single parent with five children, 1 – 13 years. She remembered by name throughout her life of 93 years, five Salt Spring Island citizens who supported the Japanese Canadians while others, long time neighbours and friends turned against our community.

On January 23rd, 1943, while 22,000 of us were in prison camps, the Federal cabinet passed Order in Council PC469. This gave the Secretary of State the power to dispose of our property without our consent. Gavin Mouat, Custodian of Enemy Alien Properties (yes, we were labelled enemy aliens), under the Secretary of State, carried out the disposal of our properties on the Gulf Islands. Some farms like our parents' were transferred to the Secretary of State then to the Director of the Veterans Land Act and subsequently sold at fire sale price to a returning white soldier.

The Iwasaki land, 640 acres, now called Sunset Drive with 3 ½ miles of waterfront, was transferred by the Secretary of State to Salt Spring Lands, the real estate company of which Gavin Mouat was President, for the sum for \$5,250.

The removal of people of the Japanese race from British Columbia was the first instance of "ethnic cleansing" as we know it today.

On August 4th, 1944, Prime Minister McKenzie King finally acknowledged that no acts of sabotage had been committed by any Japanese Canadian and they had been law abiding throughout. Yet, it took until March 1949; four years after the war with Japan had ended, to rescind the War Measures Act. Finally, the Japanese Canadians were given the freedom of movement and the franchise.

Most Japanese Canadians were left in abject poverty as we were forced to pay for our own incarceration and there was nothing left for us to return to.

The plan of the racist BC politicians such as Ian Alistair McKenzie, McGregor McIntosh, Howard Green and Halford Wilson worked tirelessly to keep the Japanese Canadians out of BC.

In 1945 the Government gave us an ultimatum; be exiled to a war torn starving Japan or go east of the Rockies . The SS Japanese Canadians went to Alberta , Saskatchewan , Ontario and Quebec .

One person, Tsunetaro Murakami (naturalized Canadian) left his adult son in Canada and went to Japan . The 25 acres he owned is now Wildwood Crescent . His black house can still be seen from Lower Ganges Road . One family, the Oharas, went to Japan , but the mother and children except for one son returned to Canada . Mr. Ohara died in the Lemon Creek prison camp.

Everyone exiled from Salt Spring Island endured unspeakable hardships, but re-established themselves elsewhere and carried on with life.

This could have ended the saga of the Japanese Canadians on Salt Spring Island had it not been for our parents who brought the family back in 1954, September 25th on mother's 50th birthday. They could not buy back the farm taken from them. Instead they bought scrub land and started all over again and eventually developed a remarkable market garden.

We were not welcomed back. We experienced many, many acts of extreme racial hatred from individuals and employees of established institutions.

Our family prevailed because of our parents' courage, determination, and intelligent problem solving abilities, strength and perseverance. Also, we were supported by many Salt Spring citizens and summer visitors who bought our produce.

In our family, we were taught to live the meaning of "Ganbaru" – a Japanese term meaning to persevere, don't give up, don't allow weakness or evil to have the upper hand and don't be content with second best.

Now a new generation of Japanese has come to live on Salt Spring Island . They will add to the history of Japanese Canadians on this Island .

May this garden bring unity, reconciliation and peace to all citizens of Salt Spring Island .