

# Baker's Japanese Community: 1900-1942

by  
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It's well known that a small Chinese ghetto existed at the southeast corner of Baker City's business district from the late 1860's until about 1940.\* Not so well known today is the fact that from the early 1900's until 1942, Baker, as it was known then, also had a small population of Japanese. It is the purpose of this article to recognize the Japanese community's presence in Baker for several decades and its sudden disappearance. Featured is the Yano family, starting in Whitney at the western edge of Baker County in the early 1920's, moving to Baker in the late 1930's, leaving Baker County in 1942, and following their successful lives up to the present.

## The Earliest Evidence

Mount Hope Cemetery in Baker City contains poignant evidence of the town's former Japanese community. There are two sections with Japanese graves, a small section at the north edge and a larger section in the northeast corner. The earliest burial was in 1908, the last in 1948. Excluding the 1948 burial, between 1908 and 1938 there were 26 burials, averaging almost a burial per year, indicating a fairly substantial population of persons of Japanese descent living in Baker during that period.



*Oldest section of Japanese graves located at northeast edge of Mt. Hope Cemetery*

Following is a chronological list of the cemetery's Japanese graves by date of death. Age at death is in parentheses. An asterisk indicates location in the smaller and apparently older section.

- \*T. Sakaguchi, 1874-1907 (ca. 33)
- \*T. Tashiro, b. 1887, d. Feb. 11, 1908 (21)
- \*K. Okimoto, b. Nov. 20, 1887, d. Jan. 14, 1911 (23)
- \*T. Norieda, b. Apr. 15, 1879, d. Jan. 15, 1911 (31)
- \*S. Hayashi, b. Jan. 3, 1889, d. Oct. 30, 1911(22)
- Mankichi Nakayama, b. Mar. 5, 1868, d. July 18, 1913 (45)
- \*D. Yamagami, b. 1866, d. July. 5, 1914 (48)

- \*Sasaye Iwaki, b. Aug. 19, 1896, d. Jun. 24, 1916 (19)
- M. Moriya, b. May 5, 1888, d. June 23, 1918 (30)
- \*Inscription in Japanese: "Grave of Aiko Yonemura, died November 1918"



*Grave of Aiko Yonemura. Hers is the only Japanese grave with the inscription in Japanese*

- S. Hidaka, b. July 9, 1875, d. June 20, 1919 (43)
- Infant, Son of G. & K. Yasui, b. & d. Feb. 8, 1920 (0)
- Tatsuichi Ishizu, b. & d. Feb. 19, 1920 (0)
- Tatsuichi Otsuki, b. Sept. 7, 1904, d. July 11, 1925 (20)
- Haru Hirata, b. May 15, 1879, d. July 2, 1925 (46)
- Infant sons of Mr. & Mrs. Jimmy Yasui: Fumio & Humio, b. Jan. 19, 1927, d. Jan. 31, 1927 (12 days)
- Kanematsu Hiyo, b. Mar. 3, 1871, d. Sept. 18, 1928 (57)
- Shigeko Hayashi, b. July 12, 1926, d. March 18, 1929 (2 years, 10 months)
- Sada Kuniyashi, b. Feb. 26, 1916, d. Dec. 19, 1930 (14)
- Kiichi Ishibe, Oct. 20, 1877, d. May 1, 1934 (56)
- Harry Unoskue Miyake, b. June 1872, d. Sept. 1935 (63)
- Tomoji Suga, b. Sept. 15, 1897, d. July 1937 (39)
- Bunji Yamano, b. Jan. 17, 1884, d. Jan. 5, 1938 (54)
- Jokichi "Joe" Hirata, b. May 18, 1879, d. Feb. 24, 1938 (58)
- Imai Sukizero, b. Oct. 16, 1865, d. Dec. 1948 (83)

Offset one row east of the line of graves in the larger section is a memorial stone with the inscription: "This Marker Dedicated in Reverent Memory of J. Hirata, Our Founder and Leader." Jokichi "Joe" Hirata was a merchant who lived in Baker from at least 1912 until his death in 1938.



*Newer section of Japanese graves  
located in the northeast corner of Mt. Hope Cemetery*

The first Japanese immigrants to Oregon arrived in Portland in 1880. In the 1890's Japanese men found work as railroad section hands. Their numbers increased from 600 in 1896 to 1,221 by 1906, when they comprised about 40 percent of the total railroad labor force in Oregon.\*\*

The 1899, 1901, and 1905 Baker City Directories list no Japanese residents. However, it's not known how reliable the enumerations were, for just five years later the 1910 U.S. Census contains the names of twenty-three Japanese living in Baker City and twenty-five Japanese in the little towns of Whitney, Clifford (west of Whitney), Huntington, Iron Dyke Mine (Homestead), McEwen, and Sumpter.



*Float honoring Japanese, ca. 1912, taken by Hugh Denham  
from the roof of his saddle shop on NE corner of Main and Auburn*

The 1912 Baker City Directory lists several Japanese, most of whom worked in restaurants and hotels. Jokichi "Joe" Hirata, who died in 1938 (see cemetery list above), resided at 1703 Resort, address of the three-story Wilshire Hotel formerly located on the southeast corner of today's Chevron gas station at Old Post Office Square. J.K. Okamura ran the Arcade Restaurant at 1816 Main. Maxy Taikoya was proprietor of the

OK Restaurant at 2828 Broadway on the north side of the block between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> streets. The following Japanese worked at the Elk Café and Hotel (today's site of U.S. Bank ) and probably resided there as well: Sanosuki Kotou, Fusakichi Kuranishi and wife Kioto, Saiichi Sagawa, Jitsuda Sugi, and Jitsuda Yashi.



*Japanese residents posing with girls of the Japanese float in front of Wilshire Hotel at NW corner of Resort and Auburn*

An article in the “Morning Democrat” newspaper (August 19, 1910) reports that the Commercial Club—the Chamber of Commerce of the era—was recruiting “several Japanese merchants,” among whom was Frank Kuranishi, “who will open the new café on Main Street.”

## Baker's Transitory Japanese Residents

Most of Baker's Japanese residents did not stay long. The only Japanese names in the 1912 directory still listed in the 1917 directory are Jokichi Hirata and Frank Kuranishi. Hirata was operating a merchandise and grocery store at 1702 Main, which was just west of his residence in the Wilshire Hotel, both on the site of today's Chevron station. Later Hirata's store was located at 1904 Resort.

New Japanese names appeared in the 1917 and 1920 directories. Frank Yamada, proprietor of the Senate Café, resided at 1932 Resort. K. Ishibe, who died in 1934 (see cemetery list above), was proprietor of the St. Lawrence, Baker's second oldest hotel, and had a side business as a broker for Japanese laborers. Also acting as a broker for Japanese laborers was Samuel E. Kawata, who lived west of the Presbyterian Church at 2345 Washington Street. Fred Kurihara ran the Oregon Restaurant in the St. Lawrence Hotel building, where one of the workers was C. Morita. I. Mori was a laundryman for the OK Hand Laundry at 2824 Broadway Street. U. Nakao was proprietor of the Imperial Hotel at 2006 Main, present site of U.S. Bank. W.E. Sake was a cook at the Rainbow Café on the southeast corner of Main and Court streets, a building that has been the site of many restaurants over the years and in 1909 served as a movie theater. Both George Shinoda and James Yasui worked at the Antlers Hotel at 1925 Washington Street.



*Baker in 1930's looking north down Main Street*

The 1930 Federal Census has this information about the Yasui family household: Jinny "James" Yasui, age 50, wife Ishi, age 38, both born in Japan, and daughters Lily, 11, Rose, 7, and Pansy, 6. The daughters were all born in Oregon. Also living in the household were lodgers Roy Moryasu, 31, and Tom Ogana, 34, both born in Japan. Phyllis Badgley (BHS '42) remembers the daughters as all having flower names. Pansy was in Phyllis' class. Phyllis says the family lived at 1759 Valley between Resort and Powder River, one block north of Chinatown.

The 1937 and 1941 directories reveal the list of Japanese residents had doubled since 1920. But, with the exception of Joe Hirata and James Yasui, every name was new. The bulk of the new Japanese residents were working in cafés. Baker Café at 1826 Main, a Chinese restaurant owned and operated by the Mon Lee family in the 1940's and 1950's, gave employment to several Japanese: Gem Abe and wife Toshiko, Tom Akiyama, Eraburo "Frank" Ohta and wife Hisako, and Harry K. Yamaoka and wife Chiyo. Working at the Trail Café at 1840 Main were the café's manager, Joe Shigamori, plus cooks E. Shintani, B. Yamano, James Yasui and wife Ishi, Kazuo Hayashi, Thomas Ogawa, and Eraburo Ohta. Across the street from the Union Pacific railway station, the Crabill Hotel and Restaurant at 2930 Broadway, present location of a car wash, employed J. Kurata and wife Kuni, managers, and Frank Mizoguchi.

A number of Japanese residents found work outside the restaurant business. Masa Yano is listed as a foreman for Sumpter Valley Railway. (See Yano Family Parts I & II below.) K. Hayashi worked in road construction for Stoddard Lumber Company. Tokusaburo Okafuji had two janitor jobs, one at Stockmen's Exchange at 2024 Main and the other at Harrison's Fountain Lunch at 1833 Main (where the author did janitor duty in high school). Lily Yasui, a 1936 graduate of Baker High School and daughter of above-mentioned James and Ishi Yasui, went to work right after graduation as a stenographer for Anderson Motor Company at 2225 Broadway, present location of the 5J School District administrative office.

*Some of Baker High School's Japanese students in the late 1930's and early 1940's*



*Ethyl  
Kajikawa*

*Martha  
Roqui*

*George  
Hirata*

*Sonya  
Hirata*

*Katherine  
Yamaoka*

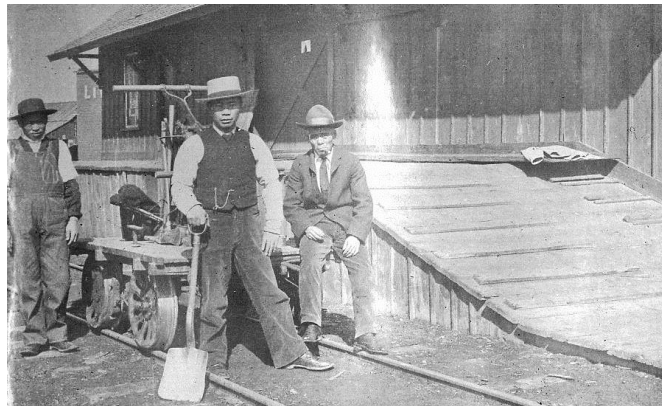
As mentioned above, Jokichi "Joe" Hirata, leader of the Japanese community, died in 1938. The 1930 Federal Census lists Hirata as a fifty-year-old widower living at 1215 Auburn in the home of son Frank, age 31, and daughter-in-law Umeko "Mary," age 29. Also in the home were Joe's son Charles, age 25, and Frank and Umeko's sons George, age 9, daughter Sonoye "Sonya," age 8, and infant Tsuyoshi, age 1. All adults were born in Japan and all children in Oregon. In the 1940 census Frank is listed as a truck farmer and Sonya as a private music teacher.

Joe Hirata was still listed in the 1937 directory as a grocer in the J. Hirata Company at 1904 Resort, assisted by son Frank. After Joe's death, the 1941 directory lists Joe (should be Frank) Hirata, wife Mary, as a farmer living at 456 Spring Garden. Frank was probably growing vegetables in the former Chinese Gardens located on the east side of Powder River between Spring Garden and Auburn streets. By 1941, Baker's Chinatown,

located on the north side of Auburn west of Powder River and east of Resort, was about to go out of existence as a residential area for Chinese, who had occupied the little ghetto since the late 1860's. A similar exclusive Japanese residential area never developed in Baker, although before 1900 Baker's few Japanese residents probably resided in Chinatown.

### The Yano Family— Part 1

During the 1909-1910 school year, Susan Browning Cochrane taught a dozen students in a one-room school located one and a half miles west of Whitney, Baker County School District #42, in a little valley on the North Fork of Burnt River. Interviewed years later by Baker County school historian Dr. James R. Evans, Cochrane described activity in that isolated, mountainous area fifty miles from Baker: "People there made their living mostly by cutting timber, and the logs were hauled out on the flat cars of the Sumpter Valley Railroad. Some Japanese worked on the section."



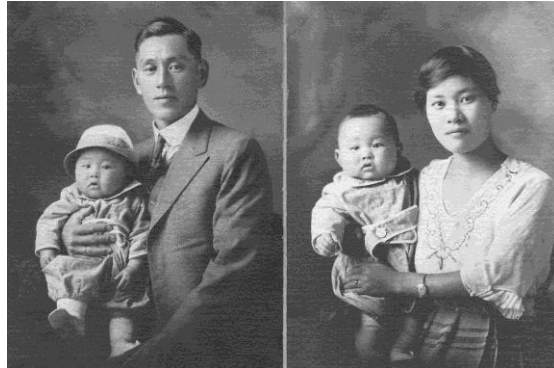
*Sumpter Valley Railway Depot at Sumpter. Japanese workers with their "speeder."*

In the early 1920's, one of those Japanese railroad workers on the Whitney section was Masayuki "Masa" Yano. Masa's wife, Yoshiko, gave birth to five boys in seven years. Masakazu "Mas" was born in 1922, Yukio in early 1924, Terou (originally Teruo) in 1925, Shero (originally Shiro) in 1927, and Hesa (originally Hisao) in 1929. (Their grade school teacher changed the spelling of the boys' names to conform to what she thought they were saying.)



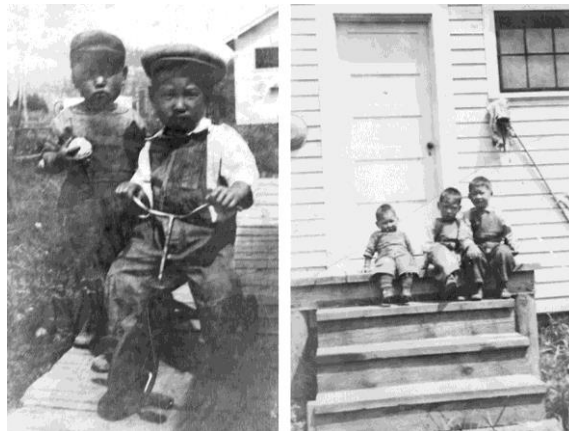
*Locomotive (smoke) on SVRy spur to mill. Town of Whitney (far right).*

The family lived in company housing near Whitney. Shero was born at home, but all the other boys were born in St. Elizabeth Hospital on 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Baker. The boys attended the one-room school west of Whitney. The Yano family had a car but also rode the train. They came into Baker several times a year, especially on holidays like Memorial Day and the Fourth of July.



*Masayuki and Yoshiko Yano holding first-born son, Masakazu, 1922*

As the boys got older, Masa, a high school graduate from Japan, wanted a better education for his boys than they could obtain at the Whitney school. So, in about 1935, Masa moved his family into Baker, where they lived in company housing in South Baker for a couple of years and the boys attended Baker schools, Tiedemann Elementary School (South Baker) for the younger boys, brand new Helen M. Stack Junior High School and Baker High School for the older boys, the latter two schools located across Washington Street from each other.



*Yano boys at Whitney. Yukio and Mas (on trike). Terou, Yukio, and Mas on steps.*

According to the 1940 U.S. Census, Masa, age 52, was a section foreman working 48 hours per week, making \$1,500 per year, and living with his five sons at 910 Resort Street--the parents had previously divorced. Around this time management of SVRY promoted Yano to the vital rail inspector position. As inspector he rode a little "speeder" along the tracks making sure the rails could safely carry trains loaded with logs, gold ore, mail, and passengers over the railway's 80 miles of narrow-gauge line between Baker and Prairie City.



## Baker High School's Japanese Students

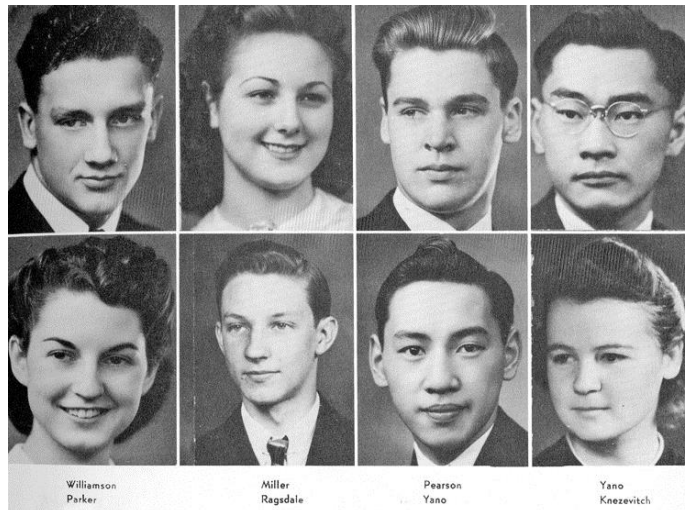
The "Nugget," Baker High School's yearbook, and Dr. James R. Evans' "Gold Dust and Chalk Dust," a history of Baker County schools, document the presence of Japanese students in Baker High School. In the 1930's and early 1940's, the following students of Japanese descent, almost all born in this country and therefore U.S. citizens, graduated from Baker High School: in 1934, Lola Yamaoka; in 1936, Ida May Yamaoka and Lily Yasui; in 1938, George Hirata, Ethel Kajikawa, and Katherine Yamaoka; in 1939, Sonya Jean Hirata and Martha Rokui; in 1940, valedictorian Rose Yasui, Mary Yamaoka and Harry Yamaoka; in 1941, Mas Yano; in 1942, Yukio Yano; and in 1943, Haruyo Kurata; none during the balance of the 1940's.

*At far right is Baker High School at Washington & 5<sup>th</sup>. Today called Central School.*



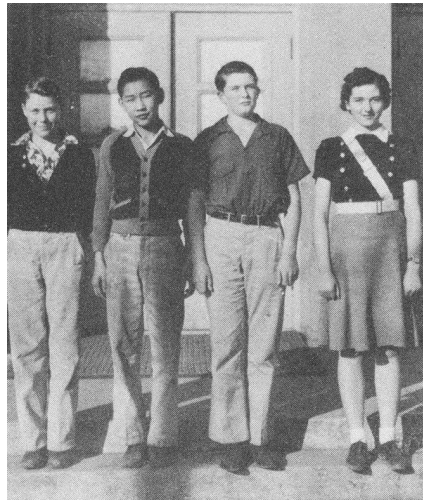
*Masakazu "Mas" Yano (in middle) played right guard on the varsity football squad.*

Teen Talent, a Junior High School literary and artistic publication, contains poems written by Japanese students: in 1936, an untitled poem by Rose Yasui; in 1937, "A Garden in Japan" by Pansy Yasui, and "A Plane to Fly" by Mas Yano; in 1939, "The Moon" by Grace Kobayashi, "Nature's Masterpiece" by Pansy Yasui, and "Sea Thoughts" by Yukio Yano. The 1937 Junior High School student council included Pansy Yasui, Secretary, and Mas Yano, who represented his homeroom.



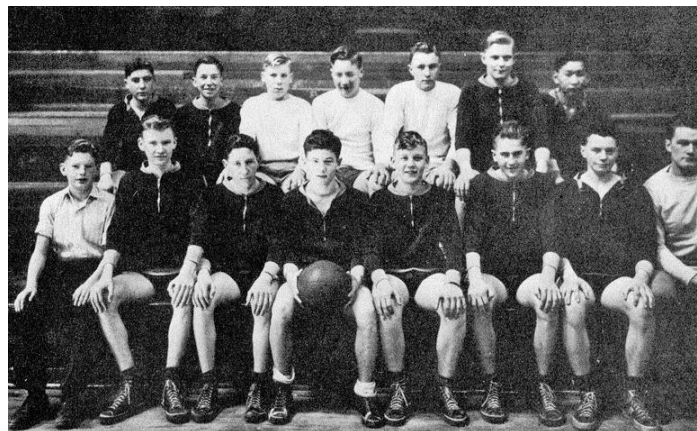
*Senior Mas Yano, above, and Junior Yukio Yano, below, were vice presidents of their classes seen here with other student council members.*

Nugget pages are full of photos of class members, organizations, and activities, including numerous Japanese students. In 1942, Torch Honor Club's top officers were Grace Kobayashi, President, and sister Ruth Kobayashi, Vice President. In addition, the Kobayashi sisters were co-editors of the Nugget. Other Japanese members of Torch Honor Club were Sonya Hirata, Mas Yano, Yukio Yano, Martha Rokui, Rose Yasui, John Kajikawa, and George Hirata. George also played violin in the high school orchestra and was student manager of the varsity football team.



*Terou Yano, second in command, with other officers of the Jr. Hi Student Patrol*

Mas Yano was Secretary of his ninth grade class, Secretary of the Letterman's Club, Vice President of his senior class, and in his junior year was named to the Blue Mountain Conference all-star football team. Yukio Yano played on the varsity football team and held elective office. In 1942, senior Yukio Yano was Vice President of the Baker High School student body and in previous years had been Vice President of his junior class and Secretary of his freshman class. Terou Yano was Vice President of his freshman class and captain of the Junior High football team. Shero Yano and Harry Yamaoka also played football in Junior High School.



*Shero Yano, upper right, was on the Jr. Hi. basketball team.*

## Effect on Baker's Japanese Community After the Attack on Pearl Harbor

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. And the United States promptly declared war. One month later Bill Studer, a Baker native and 1938 graduate of Baker High School, joined the Marine Corps. That same month, Sumpter Valley Railway fired Masa Yano, age 53, single father of five young boys.

The war with Japan profoundly affected both men's lives. Studer died fighting the Japanese in the South Pacific.\*\*\* Masa Yano, his sons, and other Baker citizens of Japanese descent suffered major disruptions in their lives. (More about the Yano family's story later in this article.) All together over 2,000 Baker County citizens served in the military during the war; 89 of them died.

The U.S. government considered as possible threats to U.S. security persons of Japanese descent on the West Coast, whether they were aliens or U.S. citizens. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 authorizing the Secretary of War to designate certain areas as military zones from which persons could be excluded at the discretion of the military commander in charge. The order did not specify ethnicity, but in implementation persons of Japanese descent were virtually the only residents affected by the order.



*Heart Mountain Japanese Relocation Camp north of Cody, WY.*

*Two future spouses of the Yano brothers were interned here and one at Minidoka, ID.*

The western edge of Oregon's Exclusion Zone was the Pacific coast and the eastern edge was roughly defined by Highway 97 from Rufus on the south bank of Columbia River, south through Madras, Redmond, Bend, Klamath Falls, and on south to the California border. Japanese west of Highway 97 were rounded up and placed in internment camps, which they could not leave without military permission.

Japanese living outside the Exclusion Zone in the two-thirds of Oregon east of Highway 97, which included Baker County, were not required to leave. But they did. Baker's

employers fired their Japanese employees. Within a few months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Baker's Japanese community was gone.

Hugh Lee (BHS '54), whose parents had the Chinese restaurant Baker Café in the 1940's and 1950's, remembers, "We played with Japanese friends when I was six or seven and they just disappeared. I didn't know that their parents had lost their jobs. We had to put a 'WE ARE NOT JAPANESE' sign in our cafe window during the war."

During the war years, Myrtle Lee edited a monthly newsletter that went to all Baker County servicemen. In April 1942 she voiced this opinion about race relations: "There is, as you know, no race prejudice, nor war bitterness in our High School. Yukio Yano is vice-president of the Senior Class and rates high. He plans to be a Chemical Engineer. The highest rating girl in the class is Grace Kobayashi and her sister Ruth is third. Martha Oxnard is a close runner up of Grace's place and, since the Japanese families are moving to a farm near Vale, it will leave Martha at the head of her class. The Kuratas, who have run the Crabill Hotel for seven years have gone." Curiously, Lee made no comment about why the Japanese were moving from Baker.



*In 1942 at age three, Toshio "Tosh" Akahoshi and family were interned at Poston, AZ. He moved to Baker in the early '50s and graduated from BHS in 1957.*

A decade later in 1953, Toshio "Tosh" Akahoshi moved to Baker. Tosh, classmate of the author, graduated from Baker High School in 1957. In 1942 Tosh and family were living in Tulare County, California, where the family, consisting of parents and six children, was rounded up and interned in the Poston War Relocation Center on the Colorado River in southwestern Arizona, the biggest and hottest of all the internment camps in the United States. Tosh's father was born in Japan, but his mother, a Nisei (second generation) Japanese, and all of the children were born in the United States. Tosh, who today resides in Lincoln City, Oregon, says he does not remember much about living in the camp, since he was just three years old when interned.

## The Yano Family—Part 2

For two decades, Masa Yano was a trusted section foreman of a Japanese rail crew and ultimately rail inspector for the Sumpter Valley Railway. Nevertheless, soon after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, SVRy management fired Yano. As mentioned above, other Baker employers also fired their Japanese employees. Thomas Speros from Greece, owner of the Trail Café at the southeast corner of Main and Court streets, employed several Japanese workers, including Kazuo Hayashi—some of his relatives live in Ontario and Vale today. When Baker citizens quit patronizing his establishment, Speros closed it rather than hire non-Japanese staff.



*Masayuki "Masa" Yano, 1888-1957.*

After graduating from Baker High School in the spring of 1941, Mas, eldest of the Yano boys, worked with his father on the SVRy that summer. Then in the fall he entered the University of Washington, which in early 1942 was within the Exclusion Zone. Attending school in Seattle, Mas was the only one of the Yano family directly affected by the Exclusion Zone order. With internment looming, Mas tried unsuccessfully to obtain a student exemption from internment, so he returned to Eastern Oregon.



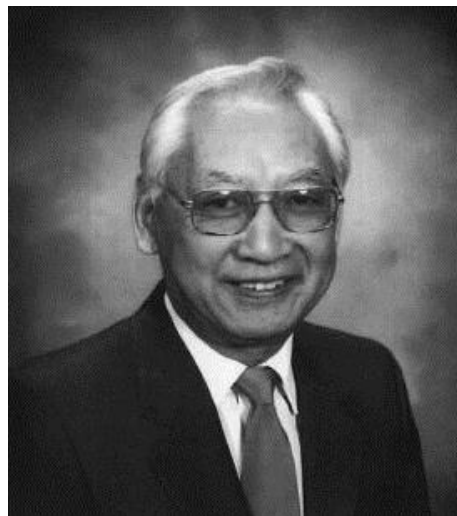
Yano brothers Terou, Shero, Hesa, Mas, Yukio.

Unable to find employment in Baker, Yano and sons remained in Baker until local schools let out in May. Mas, having left school in Seattle to avoid internment, was

instrumental in finding a place for the family to live in Ontario and in arranging the physical move from Baker. Masa, assisted by his boys, worked on the Blakesly farm north of Ontario. The family slept in a tent the first summer, then added onto a small house to have a warm place to sleep in the winter. For bathing they rigged up an outside Japanese Furo using water heated by a big fire.

Hesa attended a nearby little country school named Jefferson. Shero, a freshman, and Terou, a junior, rode the school bus to Ontario High School. Due to the war with Japan, the boys experienced some racial discrimination from classmates in the Ontario area, in spite of being United States citizens born and raised in Oregon. Terou remembers harassment of Japanese students on the school bus. And Hesa remembers being beaten up after school just for being Japanese. Shero says, "There was a war going on and young boys were killed. I hold no bitterness on my part. Through all this turmoil (of the war years) I was destined to meet my future wife, Miyako Inouye, from Wapato Washington."

When the United States declared war on Japan, the four younger Yano boys were all in school in Baker. Yukio was in the middle of his senior year, the latter half of which must have been an awkward time for him, as evidenced by the Nugget staff's adoption of a war theme for the 1942 edition of the yearbook. For example, the caption under a photo of student council members, including Yukio, was couched in military terms. Student body President Bill Reddick was referred to as "Major General" and student body Vice President Yukio as "Lieutenant-General"; council meetings were for "mapping out...campaigns"; and a conference in La Grande was a gathering of "battalions"... "where methods of battle were discussed."



*Yukio Yano, 1924-2012*

Next to Yukio's senior photo in the Nugget was his stated aspiration, "Future: chemical engineer." But his plan to major in chemistry at the University of Oregon had to be put on hold, since Eugene was in the Exclusion Zone. After the war ended, Yukio applied for admittance to the University of Oregon and passed his entrance exam with a score of 98%. He met his future wife, Mary Nukida, in church at Parma, Idaho, where he was

speaking. In his senior year, Yukio and Mary got married and Mary joined Yukio in Eugene, where racial discrimination made it difficult for the young married couple to find housing. In 1951 Yukio graduated from UO with a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry.

After graduation Yukio farmed several years near Parma, Idaho, with Mary's brother, Ben Nukida. But due to health reasons, Yukio had to change his occupation. He went to California to pursue a career in chemistry in Nuclear Research Medicine at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory at the University of California, Berkeley.

Yukio had an illustrious forty-year career in chemistry. He is best known for his pioneering work in developing radio-isotopes for use in medical imaging. He authored or co-authored over 100 scientific articles, with titles like "Trapping and metabolism of radio-ions by the thyroid" and "Preparation of  $^{11}\text{C}$ -methyl iodide and L-[S-methyl- $^{11}\text{C}$ ] methionine by an automated continuous flow process." When he retired in 1991, he was Senior Staff Scientist in the Research Medicine and Radiation Biophysics Division of Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, Berkeley, California.

At the end of his career, Yukio was acknowledged for his "pioneering work in the peaceful application of nuclear chemistry to the study and diagnosis of human disease." Donner Laboratory recognized his "outstanding contributions to chemistry, physiology and medicine" as well as his efforts which "yielded inventions and chemical methods used throughout the world for the benefit of mankind." Yukio died in August 2012.

After Terou graduated from Ontario High School in the spring of 1943, he joined the Army. (Brothers Yukio and Shero were rejected by the Army for health reasons.) Terou trained at Fort Blanding in Florida, ending up in England in 1944. From there he took a troop train to southern France as a replacement to bolster the decimated ranks of the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team and 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Except for officers, the ranks of both units consisted of second-generation Japanese-Americans (Nisei). Terou, a BAR-man (Browning Automatic Rifleman), was assigned to heavy weapons D Company of the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion.



*Obverse and reverse sides of the Congressional Gold Medal awarded to Terou Yano for his service in the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion in WWII.*

Japanese-Americans wanted to show their loyalty to the United States, while many of their relatives were in internment camps on the West Coast. The 442<sup>nd</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> were famous for their determination in achieving their assigned objectives, which led to unusually high rates of wounded and killed in action. The 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion was informally called the “Purple Heart Battalion.”

Terou participated in several campaigns in Italy and eastern France, including rescue of the “Lost Battalion,” a unit of Texans that was surrounded in the Vosges Mountains just a few miles from the German border. During the rescue, more Nisei soldiers died than Texans rescued. After Victory in Europe, May 7, 1945, one of Terou’s assignments was guarding Germans in a prisoner of war camp, which he considered easy duty, since German POW’s had no desire to escape.

While still in Europe, Terou developed a thyroid problem. By the time he got back to the States, he had dropped from 190 to 100 pounds. The Army sent him to Madigan Hospital at Fort Lewis, Washington, where he had a thyroid operation and spent the next six months hospitalized. He was discharged from the Army in January 1947 and returned to farming with his father and brothers near Ontario.

After graduation from Ontario High School in 1947, Hesa, the youngest of the Yano boys, worked on rented farmland with brother Shero for five years. Then in 1952 he was drafted into the Army during the Korean War. After basic training at Camp San Luis Obispo, California, he specialized in communications. In South Korea, Hesa was stationed at Pusan and Teague (Daegu) in the 507 Signal Corps, where he maintained communications equipment on the Korean Communications Zone line (KCOMZ). After discharge from the Army in 1954, Hesa attended Cogswell Polytechnical College in California graduating in 1957 with an Associate Degree in Engineering. He worked at Sandia National Laboratories in Livermore, California, from 1958 to 1994, first as a draftsman and then as a computer programmer. Hesa and wife, Gloria Kimiko Fujita, met in Ontario, Oregon.



*Hesa Yano served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.*



The Yanos financed purchase of farmland north of Ontario by share-cropping. Mas, who is retired and living in a care facility in Kennewick, Washington, eventually owned the Blakesly farm; Masa and Shero worked the Ralph Turner farm; Terou, back from the war, farmed the Watkins farm; and, when Masa died in 1957, Terou and Shero farmed together. Today Terou and Shero have separate farms operated by their sons Will, Kris, and Craig. In the early years, the Yanos raised onions, potatoes, sugar beets, and wheat . Most recently, they raise onions, wheat, beans, and seed corn, but no longer raise potatoes or sugar beets.



*Yano brothers Terou, Yukio, Mas, Shero, Hesa.*

### Afterword

During the period from 1942 to 1946, some 77,000 American-born citizens (Nisei) and 45,000 Japanese nationals, most of whom were permanent U.S. residents (Issei), were unconstitutionally deprived of liberty and property without due process. Although none of the Yanos were interned, some of their wives spent part of their childhoods in internment camps. Terou's wife Jane Yukiko Morishige and family were interned at Pinedale, then Tule Lake, both in California, and finally at Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Shero's wife Miyako Inouye and family were initially housed in a stockyard in Portland, Oregon, then sent to Heart Mountain, Wyoming; and Hesa's wife Gloria Kimiko Fujita and family were first interned at Pinedale, then Tule Lake, and finally at Minidoka, Idaho. Mas's wife Harumi Wakasugi and family of eight avoided internment by moving

from Banks, Oregon, to Ontario, Oregon, where they lived for a while in Harumi's married sister's garage.

In 1982, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians found that the incarceration of Japanese Americans had not been justified by military necessity but rather was based on "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership." Based on the Commission's report, the federal government issued an apology and awarded \$20,000 to each survivor.



*Girls playing flutes at Minidoka Relocation Camp in southern Idaho, ca. 1943.*

Terou's name is engraved on the "Go For Broke Monument" in Los Angeles, which commemorates WWII Nisei soldiers. (See [www.goforbroke.org](http://www.goforbroke.org) for their history.) Together the 100<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team became the most decorated infantry units in the history of the U.S. Army for size and length of service. In 2010, the U.S. Congress awarded each member of the 442<sup>nd</sup> RCT, 100<sup>th</sup> Bn., and the all-Nisei MIS (Military Intelligence Service, which served in the South Pacific) the Congressional Gold Medal, the nation's highest civilian award. In the summer of 2013, Terou showed this author his impressive, half-inch thick Congressional Gold Medal, big enough to cover the palm of the hand.

In 2008, years after his short attendance at the University of Washington, UW awarded Mas Yano an honorary degree as an apology for his having to leave the university during WWII.

The next generation of Yanos: Mas and Harumi's children are Ron Yano in the Treasure Valley area of Oregon/Idaho, Betty Goding in Washington, and Richard Yano in Arizona; Yukio and Mary's children are Roger Yano in the Los Angeles area, Deborah Yano-Fong and Colleen Yano-Kodani, both in the San Francisco Bay area; Terou and Jane's children are Greg Yano, John Yano, Kim Lee, Will Yano, and Kris Yano, all living

in the Treasure Valley area, except Kim in Washington; Shero and Miyako's children are Susan Schmeckpeper, Penny Atkins, Craig Yano, and Steve Yano, all in the Treasure Valley area; Hesa and Gloria's children are Michele Yano and Matt Yano in the San Francisco Bay area.

The author recognizes with gratitude the kind assistance of the five Yano brothers, their wives, and their children.

\* Gary Dielman, "Baker City's Chinatown," is available at these two websites:

[http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/entry/view/baker\\_city\\_chinatown/](http://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/entry/view/baker_city_chinatown/)

<http://bakerlib.org/files/archive/dielman-essays/Baker%20Citys%20Chinatown-%20rev.pdf>

\*\* Eiichiro Azuma, "A History of Oregon's Issei: 1880-1952," pp. 315-316, *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, vol. 94, No. 4, Winter 1993/1994.

\*\*\* The author's article about Studer, titled "Little Billy," is available online at Baker County Library's website: <http://bakerlib.org/photo-archive>. Click on "WWII," then scroll down to "John William Studer, KIA during Marine Assault of South Pacific Island of Bougainville."

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