

Finding Your Japanese Roots in the U.S. and in Japan

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PART 1: RESEARCH IN THE UNITED STATES

1. Start with yourself and work backwards in time.
2. Gather your tools.
3. Create a pedigree chart, starting with yourself, your parents, and your grandparents. Fill in what you know and add to it as you gather more information.
4. Create a family group sheet for every married couple on your pedigree chart. Fill in what you know and add to it as you gather more information.
5. Gather your treasures. Ask about items your relatives might have. Look for old passports, letters and envelopes with return addresses, naturalization papers, anything written in Japanese.
6. Talk to the oldest living relatives. Take notes or record the interview. Bring artifacts and treasures with you to help spur their memory. Ask if they have any memorabilia. Be prepared to photograph or scan any items.
7. Keep track of the information you are collecting either in a research log, notebook, or computer program.
8. Collect vital records. These are the birth, marriage, and death records of each person on your pedigree chart. If you are able, start collecting data on the individuals in your family group sheets, too.
9. Look for census records. The federal government started keeping track of the population in 1790, but very few *nikkei* are in the census before 1880. Start with 1940, and then go back until you arrive at your immigrant ancestor. Census records can have important clues for finding additional records. Be sure to look for year of immigration, citizenship status. Remember to follow clusters of families.
10. Other important resources include immigration and passenger records, land records, newspapers, Social Security applications, military records (including WWI draft registration cards and MIS database), and cemeteries.
11. Internment Camp records are rich with biographical information. In terms of individuals, only WRA Internee Data Files and U.S. Final Accountability Rosters are available online. The actual case files must be ordered from the National Archives. If your family was in a WRA camp, you should order a file for each person. If your ancestor was in a Department of Justice camp, an Enemy Alien case file may exist. Names can be searched online through National Archives. There will also be a separate file for each family member who received reparations.
12. Assembly Center Records can be viewed on microfilm at the National Archives in College Park, MD, and in San Bruno, CA. Some films are missing.
13. Assembly Center Newspapers and WRA Camp Newspapers can be found on Ancestry.com, Densho.org, and the Library of Congress. Both sets are available through the National Archives. Camp newspapers have also been added to the subscription site GenealogyBank.com.



14. Not all Picture Brides have case files. Those files that do exist are from California and Hawai'i. They are located at the National Archives in San Bruno and are indexed on Ancestry.com as "California, Chinese Arrival Case Files Index, 1884-1940."
15. If your immigrant ancestor was living in the U.S. in August 1940, he or she likely has an AR-2 (Alien Registration form), which can be ordered through USCIS. If he or she was living in the US in 1944, there may be an A-File, or a C-File for those who later became naturalized citizens. The earliest files have been released to the National Archives. Check archives.gov and search for your immigrant by name. If located, place the order for the A-file by email. If you cannot locate your ancestors by name, place an online index search with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

PART 2: RESEARCH IN JAPAN

1. Review all of your clues. In order to proceed, you will need to know the name of the village or city where your immigrant ancestor originated.
2. You should know how to write your family name in *kanji*.
3. You are entitled by law to receive a copy of your family *koseki*, if you can prove your direct lineage to the person listed on the document. Use all of the information you have already gathered to prove your relationship to your immigrant ancestor.
4. Find the municipal office which corresponds to your ancestral village either online or in the *Zenkoku Shichosan Yoran*. Many rural communities have merged or changed names. Most city offices have the information online. Google translate is helpful.
5. Place an order for your *koseki tohon* through the city office. Each office has its own form but the process is similar throughout the country. You can also hire a researcher to do this for you or contact the Family History Center in Tokyo for assistance.
6. Translating old *kanji* can be tricky. There are many translation services available and hiring a professional translator is recommended.
7. Once you have the first *koseki* translated, you may have enough information to order more, such as those of the maternal lines.
8. *Kakochō* are Buddhist death records, which are often held at the family home and/or temple. These records usually have posthumous names along with the date of death or burial; sometimes given names are included, especially with newer documents.
9. Don't let the language stop you! Take a journey, either through research or in person.



Useful Websites for *Nikkei* Research

URLs valid as of 8 May 2020

Ancestry.com

www.ancestry.com

Documents related to Nikkei include immigration records, census records, WRA Final Accountability Rosters, guardianship records, Japanese-American Internee Data File

Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation

www.aiisf.org

Informational assistance but no primary records

Alien Files (A-Files)

<https://www.archives.gov/research/immigration/aliens>

Bancroft Library

<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/>

Numerous primary sources

Bishop Museum Library/Archives

<https://www.bishopmuseum.org/>

Index to archival database can be viewed online; numerous archival holdings

Calendar Conversion

http://www.yukikurete.de/nengo_calc.htm

California Digital Newspaper Collection

<http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>

California State Library

Confinement and Ethnicity: National Park Service Book (online and in print)

http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/active_learning/explorations/japanese_internment/confinement_ethnicity_nps_sm.pdf

California State University Japanese American Digitization Project

<http://digitalcollections.archives.csudh.edu/digital/collection/p16855coll4>

Cyndi's List

<http://www.cyndislist.com/us/>

A cross referenced list of all things genealogy

Densho

www.densho.org

Free online archive of data and images pertaining to internment camps, based in Seattle

Family History Center in Tokyo (not just for Tokyo)

JapaneseSupport@familysearch.org

5-10-30 Minami Azabu Minato-ku

Tokyo 106 JAPAN

Phone: 011 (81) 3-3440-2764



FamilySearch

www.familysearch.org

Check catalog for microfilm holdings, many in Japanese language. Search by state, country, or use the “wiki,” similar to Wikipedia but for genealogy

Find a Grave

www.FindaGrave.com

Free online database of cemetery information

Hawai‘ian State Archives

<http://ags.hawaii.gov/archives/>

Includes online digital archive of pre-1900 immigration cards.

Onsite holdings include passenger manifests, marriage records, court records, Hawai‘an census

Hawai‘ian Sugar Plantation Archive

<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~speccoll/hawaiihspa.html>

Honolulu County Genealogical Society

<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~hihcgs/>

Japan Children’s Rights Network (lots of useful information for genealogists)

<http://www.crnjapan.net>

Japanese American National Museum

www.janm.org

Numerous primary records and extensive library.

Japanese American Relocation Digital Archive (JARDA)

<http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/jarda/>

Digital photos and documents pertaining to the internment camp experience

Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i

<http://www.jcch.com>

Archival collections, oral histories, historic photos.

Catalog is searchable online. Some translation services

Library of Congress

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/internment/>

Many photos, educational resources, online digital newspapers, ethnic newspaper onsite

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, Japan

<https://www.mofa.go.jp/>

Website is in English. Research Room includes microfilm of passport applications. Bring passport for identification

National Archives and Records Administration

www.Archives.gov

Internment camp files, camp newspapers, photos, Department of Justice Case Files

National Association of Japanese Canadians

<http://www.najc.ca/>

National Japanese American Historical Society

<https://www.njahs.org/>



Online Archive of California

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/>

Access to finding aids for manuscripts, photos, other materials held in libraries, museums, archives, institutions across California

Translation/Dictionary

<http://jisho.org> (English, Japanese, Romaji, Kanji dictionary)

<http://translate.google.com/#>

United States Department of Homeland Security

<http://www.ice.gov/foia/>

Information regarding Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act

United States Immigration and Naturalization Services

www.uscis.gov

A-files and C-files. Place an index search first (\$20 per name), then place an order for the file. Check the National Archives first to make sure the A-file has not been released to Kansas City or San Bruno. Onsite library available for research by appointment. Numerous online descriptive pamphlets including:

<http://www.uscis.gov/history-and-genealogy/genealogy/files-numbered-below-8-million>

University of Hawai'i at Manoa

<http://manoa.hawaii.edu/library/research/collections/archives/manuscript-collections/hawaii-war-records-depository/>

Assorted War Records

University of Southern California Digital Library

<http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/>

University of Washington: Japanese Americans in the Pacific Northwest

<http://guides.lib.uw.edu/research/nikkei>

Washington State University: Japanese American Internment During WWII

<https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/>

Wayne Collins Papers

http://pdf.oac.cdlib.org/pdf/berkeley/bancroft/m78_177_cubanc.pdf



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Online Resources for Writing Your Family History

50 Questions to Ask Relatives about Family History.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/fifty-questions-for-family-history-interviews-1420705>

Create Your Own Writing Retreat While in Self-Isolation

<https://pwcenter.org/playwriting-toolkit/create-your-own-writing-retreat-while-self-isolation>

Six Tips for Writing Your Family History – Family Tree Magazine

<https://www.familytreemagazine.com/premium/6-tips-writing-family-history/>

Hire Someone to Help You Write

Rachael Rifkin

<https://www.rachaelrifkin.com/>

