

# BIOGRAPHIES

of the

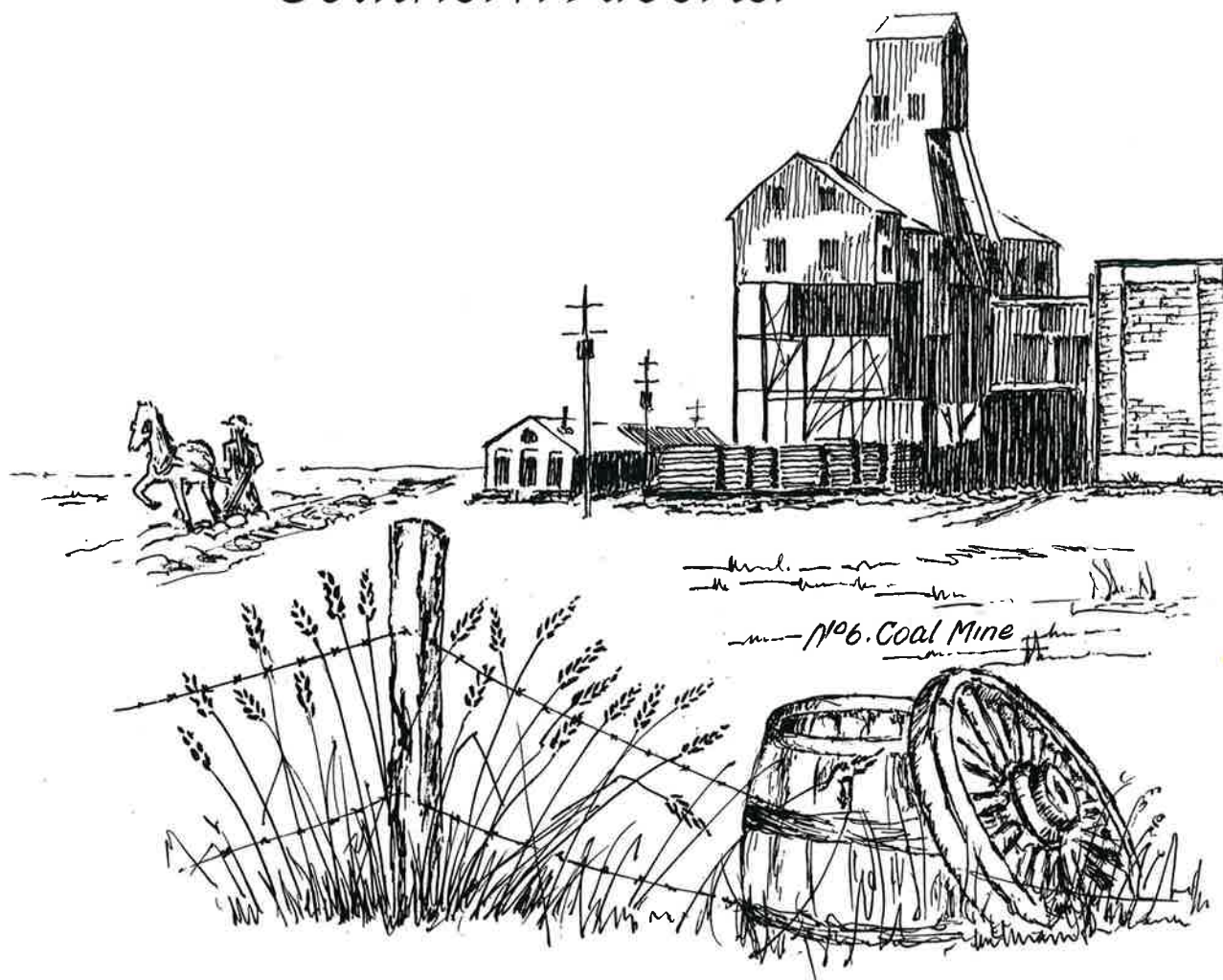
## Issei Pioneers

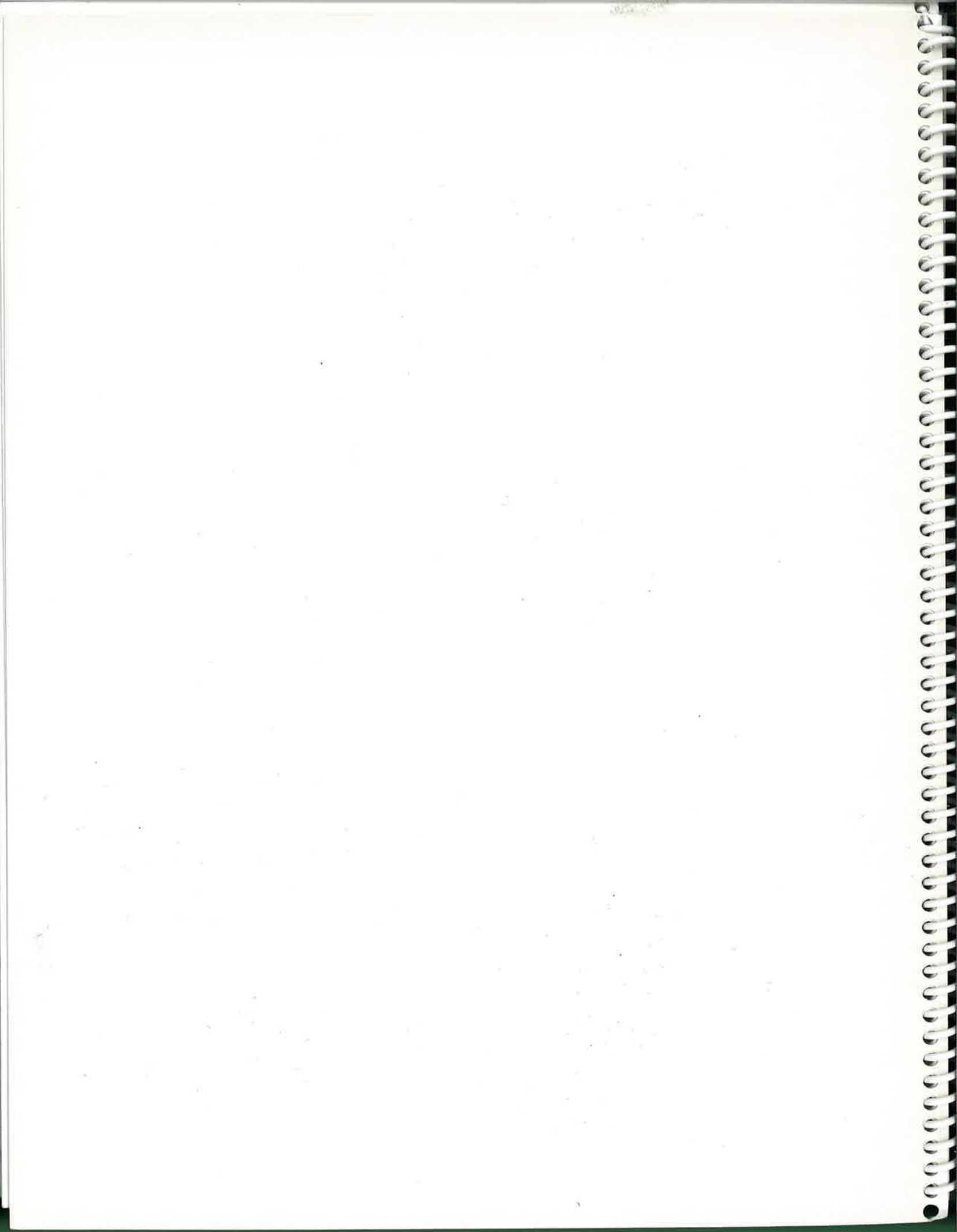
from

Okinawa

to

Southern Alberta





## Issei Pioneers

The biographies were collected  
to honour  
the memories and spirit  
of the Okinawan Issei Pioneers.

Mr. Yasuanno MAKISHI and Mr. Kozen OYADOMARI  
are believed to be the first Okinawans to settle in Canada around the  
year 1900.

Of the two hundred male Okinawans that came to Canada in the early 1900s  
about fifty men stayed,  
had families and made a life from this harsh and sometimes hostile country.

In the true spirit of the Pioneer Canadians,  
the Issei worked diligently  
and often under extremely difficult situations  
so that we,  
the descendants  
could live a better life than they ever dared to dream.

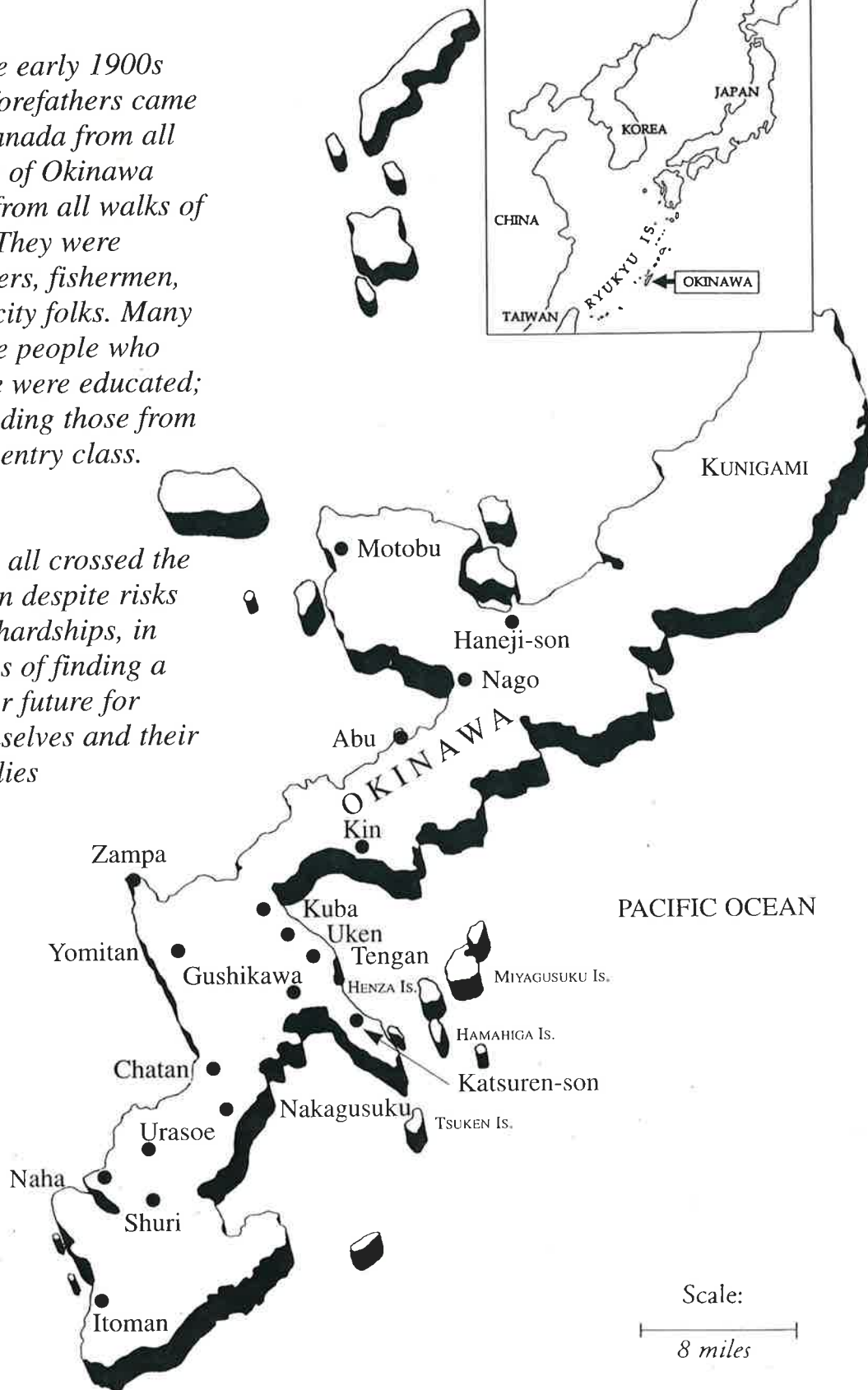
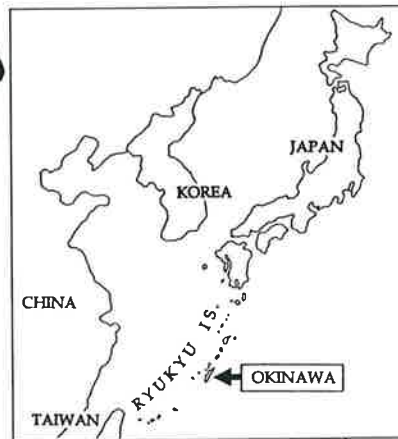
The biographies and photographs were collected from the families and friends  
of the Issei Pioneers  
and compiled by the members of the  
Okinawa Cultural Society  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
Year 2000



# O K I N A W A

*In the early 1900s our forefathers came to Canada from all parts of Okinawa and from all walks of life. They were farmers, fishermen, and city folks. Many of the people who came were educated; including those from the gentry class.*

*They all crossed the ocean despite risks and hardships, in hopes of finding a better future for themselves and their families*



Scale:

8 miles

**Asato, Takehito (1883 - deceased in Okinawa)***by Roy Asato*

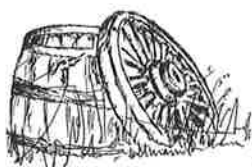
Mr. Asato, the elder brother of Matsu Asato came to Canada in July, 1918 at the age of 35 years. He was known in the Okinawan community as "Aniki" or older brother. Mostly, he worked and lived on farms with his younger brother, Matsu's family. His wife and children remained in Okinawa and though he became a Canadian citizen, Takehito returned to Okinawa during the repatriation of the Japanese in 1946.

**Asato, Matsu (1889 - 1971)****Asato, Kamado (Miyagusuku ) (1905 - 1967)**

Mr. Asato came to Canada in 1907 at the age of 18 years from the village of Nakagusuku in Okinawa. He worked for the CPR and in sawmills in BC. In Lethbridge he saw the first train cross over the high level bridge in 1909. He bought a farm east of Raymond and sold it in 1917. Because of language barriers and misunderstandings, his final payment for selling his wheat did not come until 1957.

Mr. Asato went back to Okinawa in 1929 to marry Kamado Miyagusuku. The couple settled on rented farms in the Coaldale area and in the winter, Mr. Asato worked in the No. 6 coal mine to supplement the family income.

Mr. and Mrs. Asato raised six children. Roy of Coaldale, Tom and Sally Matsui of Edmonton, June Hellmer of Golden, B.C. and Mona Skibbe of North Vancouver. Sam passed away in 1996.



**Goshinmon, Jingyu (1889 - 1965)**  
**Goshinmon, Kame (Toyama) (1899 - 1933)**

*by Shig Goshinmon*

Mr. Jingyu Goshinmon was born in 1889 in Hamahiga village in Okinawa (across the bridge from Henza). Jingyu emigrated to Canada in 1907, where he worked for the CPR. His wife, Kame (Toyama) Goshinmon arrived in Canada in 1917 at 18 years of age. The family lived in Hardieville, where seven children were born including Noboru, Shigeru, Kanako and Minoru. There was a scarlet fever epidemic in Hardieville when Minoru died.

Mrs. Goshinmon died in 1933 of meningitis following childbirth. Jingyu moved his family to the McNally area where they grew potatoes and grain.

In 1936, Jingyu returned to Okinawa with the three youngest children, who were to be raised by his sister. Jingyu returned to Canada in 1937 and farmed in Coaldale.

After World War II he returned to Okinawa where he built a home on his property. He passed away in 1965 in Okinawa.



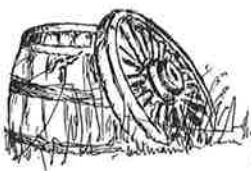
**Hamabata, Kamasuke (1897 - 1974)**  
**Hamabata, Chiduka (Tanaka)**

*by Chiduka Hamabata*

Kamasuke, a fisherman, came to Canada from Henza, Okinawa in 1918. In the early years he worked as a farm labourer in Raymond and Welling. Later, he bought a farm in Coaldale growing mainly grain and potatoes. He also kept livestock and eventually, grew sugar beets and increased his herd of beef cattle.

In 1937, Kamasuke married Chiduka Tanaka and raised seven children. The two sons gradually took over the farm work while four of the five daughters became nurses. Kamasuke's health began to deteriorate and the hard farm work became difficult. He spent much of his time at his favourite fishing hole. In the winter he went ice fishing and visiting friends. His eldest son took over the farm but later moved to Monarch to raise registered quarter horses.

Kamasuke died suddenly in 1974. Their children are Happy of Victoria, Nadine McKague, LaVerne Major and Lindsay of Lethbridge, Louise Harrison of Invermere, BC and Duane of Monarch. The family lost Cheryl in 1990.



**Higa, Matsuzo**  
**Higa, Kame**

*by Nori Higa*

My grandparents, Matsuzo and Kame Higa were born in Ogusuku, Okinawa and came to Canada on December 12, 1912. They settled in White Rock, B.C. and worked at the Campbell River Sawmill until it closed operation. They then bought 12 acres of land in White Rock on Pacific Ave. and State Road. Here they raised Leghorn chickens for eggs they shipped to Vancouver.

In 1942 they were evacuated to Tashme Camp. In the 1950s I got my grandparents to join us in Taber, Alberta from Lumby, B.C. They operated a tofu and akeh business in Taber until they passed away.

They raised two daughters, Tomi Higa and Haruko Sato. Matsuzo and Kame also adopted and raised their two grandchildren, Nancy Setoguchi and George Higa.

Grandfather passed away on April, 1954 and Grandmother on November 18, 1961.





**Higa, Matsu (1894 - 1980)**  
**Higa, Tomi (1902 - 1999)**

by *Nori Higa*

My father, Matsu Higa was born in Kuba, Okinawa on November 9, 1894 and came to White Rock B.C. in 1924. My mother, Tomi Higa was born in Ogusuku, Okinawa on May 21, 1902 and came to Canada in 1927. My father worked in Campbell River Sawmill until it stopped operation. He then helped my grandparents on the farm. In the thirties he got a job at the Brownsville Sawmill in South Westminister. After a few years we moved from White Rock to New Westminister to join Dad.

In 1942 when all the Japanese were all told to move 100 miles inland from the coast, my parents decided to move to Alberta to keep the family together. We lived in Sterling, Alberta from April 1942 until 1948 when we moved to Taber.

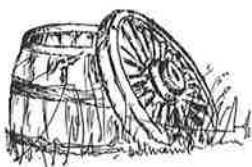
After my grandparents died my Dad and Mom took over the tofu and ageh business until they retired in 1980.

In keeping with Okinawan tradition, in 1998, Tomi Higa was honoured by the Okinawa Cultural Society in a "Kajimaya" celebration of her 97th birthday.

My parents raised six children. Noriyasu (Nori), Masayoshi (Roy), Fumi, Fujiko (Fudge), and Yasue (Yas). The eldest, Jinsei died in Okinawa.



*Mr. and Mrs. Higa were enthusiastic and loyal fans at the local hockey arena for many years and were avid sports fishermen. Mrs. Higa was noted for her generous contributions of manju and mochi to various functions and for her infectious good humour.*



**Higa Shinri (1879 - 1950)**

*by Sam Higa*

Shinri Higa was born in 1879. He was a strong, aggressive man who entered the Japanese army as a raw recruit and was sent to fight in the Russo-Japanese war. He was promoted to Tokumu-Souchou (2nd Lieutenant) and went to Taiwan.

He came to Alberta in 1913, where he found employment with the CPR. Later, he worked in the coal mine at Diamond City, then at No. 6 Mine in Hardieville. His goal was to purchase land in Okinawa. He sent for his son Shinei, who arrived in 1917. Shinri lived on various farms with his son and daughter-in-law, Uta, and their quickly expanding family. In 1936 he returned to Okinawa, realizing his dream of owning property. His life of prosperity was short-lived, however, with the onslaught of World War II. Shinri died on January 25, 1950, surrounded by his wife and four children who remained in Okinawa.

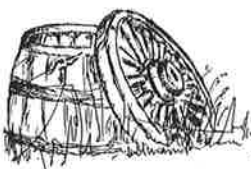
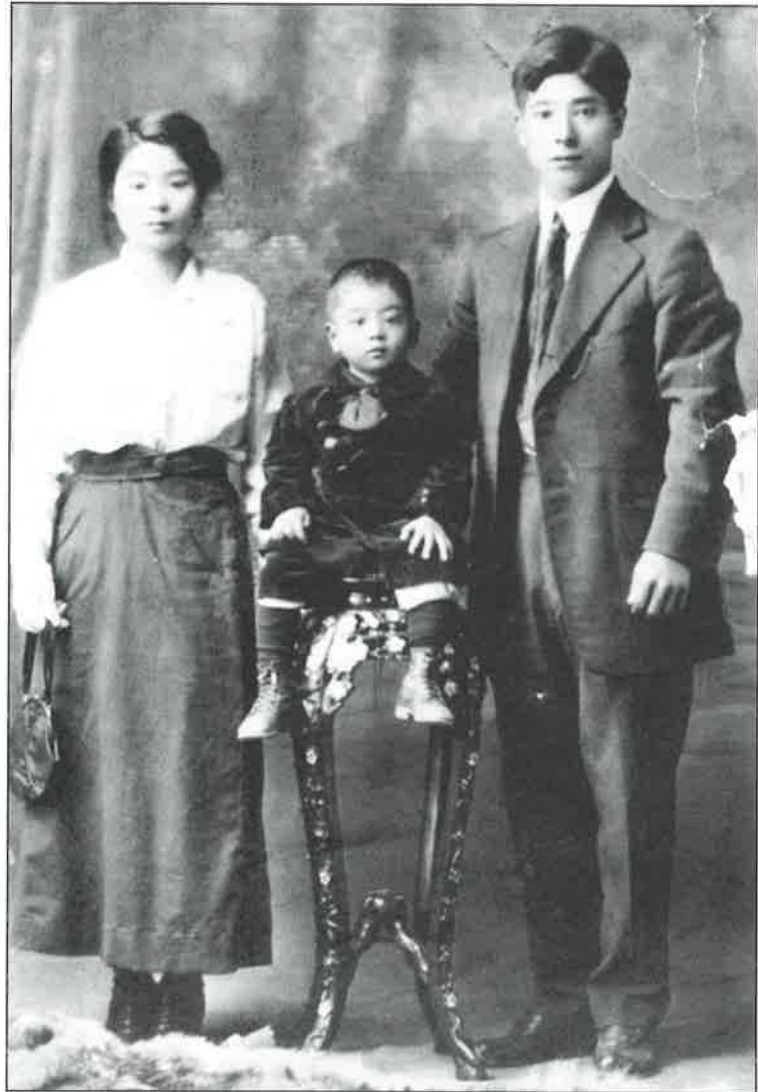


**Higa, Shinei (1879 - 1948)**  
**Higa, Uta (Asato) (1897 - 1988)**

*by Sam Higa*

Shinei Higa was born in Kunigami county, Miyago, Okinawa on September 4, 1897. He came to Canada, docking at the Port of Victoria on March 21, 1917 and joined his father Shinri in toiling at No. 6 Mine. In 1919 he sent for his wife, Uta (nee Asato), and 3-year old son George Yoshihisa. Their trip was fraught with hardship as they were detained in Yokohama for several weeks until it was their turn to embark. After a voyage of several weeks they landed in Victoria, BC, where again they waited for Shinei to retrieve them. In Victoria there was an Okinawan community and they were met by the Kohashigawa family, and also established a life-long friendship with Mrs. Nishima.

Shinei worked in the mine by day, and on neighbouring farms in the evening until they were able to purchase the Van Horn farm. Shinei and Uta had a large family - George, Harry, Jim, Tom, Francis, Sam, Jack, Larry, Carol, Geri, Jeff, Eileen, Judy and Victor. Shinei passed away suddenly in 1948, leaving many young children. Uta regretted her lack of education and was determined that her children would receive post-secondary education. The older siblings made many sacrifices so that the younger ones could realize this ambition. Grandma passed away in April, 1988.



**Higa, Shusei**

*by Yeiko Higa*

**Photo: unavailable**

Mr. Shusei Higa came to Canada in 1907 and like many of the other Okinawan men, he first worked with the CPR and later in the Number 6 coal mine in Hardieville. Mr. Higa returned to Okinawa.

**Higa, Shucho (1904 -1993)**

**Higa, Yeiko (Kanashiro)**

Shucho Higa is the son of Shusei Higa. He came to Canada from Yomitan in 1920, lived in Hardieville and initially worked in the Number 6 coal mine. He had desires to study in school but was very disappointed that he was not given the opportunity to further his education in Canada. Before his marriage to Yeiko Kanashiro in 1945, he worked with the Medorumas on a farm in Iron Springs. In 1945, he began to work at the Number 8 coal mine in Lethbridge until its closure in 1957. For the next 15 years he worked at the Frache's Greenhouse, then enjoyed many years of retirement.

Shucho was a long - time secretary for the Okinawa Doshikai (Issei Okinawa Association) and kept meticulous records for the organization for many years. He was so dedicated and committed to the Doshikai that he was known to walk the distance from the Medoruma farm in Iron Springs to Coaldale to attend a meeting. He was also a faithful member of the Buddhist Church.

Shucho-san is remembered by everyone that knew him as a very honourable, considerate person, soft spoken and was especially gentle with children. He enjoyed performing Okinawan odori and spent many hours playing the samisen at home.

Shucho and Yeiko raised five children. Ian, Allan, Karen Hargrave and Doug. They lost Ivan in 1951 at the age of five years. They have five grandchildren.



**Kanashiro (aka Kanagusuku, Kinjo) Bokuri (1866 - 1948)***by Mihoko Kanashiro*

Bokuri Kanashiro came to Canada from Yomitan in 1907 as a contract worker with the CPR. Later he settled in Hardieville and worked at the No. 6 coal mine. He sponsored his first, second and third sons to Canada. Also, coming to Canada was his brother, two nephews, cousin and cousin's son.

Bokuri returned to Okinawa, bought land and built a house for the family he had left in Okinawa.

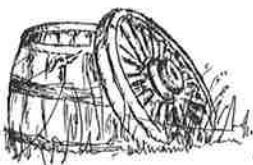
**Kanashiro (Kinjo) Bokutarro (1894 - 1965)  
Kanashiro (Ushi)**

As the first son of Bokuri, Bokutarro came to Canada in 1911 and worked with his father on various CPR work gangs. Later they found work in the Number 6 coal mine and settled in Hardieville. With the gradual closing of the coal mine and the depression, life was very difficult for everyone. In 1934, Bokutarro returned to Okinawa with his wife "Umani" and four small children.

In 1972, his grandson Noriaki Kinjo came to Canada and settled in Calgary. His father Hedae Kinjo was born in Hardieville. カキ

**Kanashiro Bokusei (1907 - 1937)**

Bokusei was the nephew of Bokuri and came to Canada in 1924 at the age of 15 years. He lived with the Kanashiro extended family in Hardieville. In 1937, at the age of 29 years, Bokusei died in a unfortunate No. 8 coal mine accident.



**Kanashiro, Bokujin (1898 - 1965)**  
**Kanashiro, Oto (Sokei) (1906 - 1992)**

*by Mihoko Kanashiro*

Bokujin, the second son of Bokuri, arrived in Canada from Yomitan in 1914. He worked in the Number 6 coal mine in Hardieville. He lost his first wife Kana in 1924 leaving him with three small children. In 1930, he went to Okinawa and married Oto Sokei also of Yomitan. On returning to Canada, they settled in Hardieville. The Number 6 coal mine closed in the midst of the great depression, causing the family to move to B.C. in 1936. Bokujin found work at the pulp and paper mill in Ocean Falls, B.C.

During the early years of WW II, Oto was among the Japanese women in Ocean Falls that helped in the war effort by knitting one pair of heavy woolen army stockings per week. Later in 1942, the forced evacuation of the Japanese from the west coast brought the family back to Alberta to work on sugar beet farms in the Iron Springs area. Initially, the salary for sugar beet contract was less than subsistent wage for a family of eight and it was necessary for Bokujin to supplement the income by finding other seasonal work. Through the cold Alberta winters he worked in "bush camps" (logging) in the Crowsnest Pass region and northern Alberta. For two decades, Bokujin and Oto along with their children, worked many long hard hours labouring in the sugar beet fields, growing potatoes, beans and other vegetables. Their priority and concern was for their children to receive further education so that they could lead more comfortable lives than they had experienced growing up on the farms. The family bought a house in Lethbridge in 1959 and they gradually moved off the farm by the end of 1962.

They were both actively interested in and involved in the Okinawa community and the Japanese United Church. Oto was the secretary for the Japanese UC Women's Association for many years and kept meticulous records for the group. The traditional fund raising Chow Mein Dinners were started by the women in this group in the 1960s and Oto's recipes are still used for making the dinners today.

Bokujin and Kana had three children. Hiro Kanashiro passed away in 1986, Sumiko lives in Japan and Tom Medoruma lives in Lethbridge.

Bokujin and Oto had seven children, Nori in Toronto, Kimiko Bruce in Vancouver, Toshio and Mihoko in Lethbridge, Danny in Edmonton and Florence McCallum in Calgary. The eldest Mutsuaki died before the age of two.



**Kanashiro, (Kanagusuku) Bokushin (1902 -1987)***by Mihoko Kanashiro*

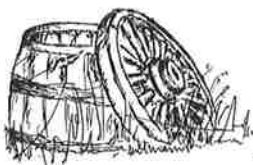
Bokushin was the third son of Bokuri to come to Canada. He arrived in 1917 at the age of 15 years and attended Hardieville school until he was old enough to work in the coal mine. After the closure of the Hardieville mine in 1935, Bokushin moved to Lethbridge.

During the evacuation of the Japanese from the west coast, Bokushin met the train daily to see if he could be of assistance to those coming off the train. No doubt, many people were helped by him during this very confusing time.

Bokushin was always very supportive to his elder brother Bokujin and his family. He spent much of his vacation time from the coal mine helping in the sugar beet field. He came on the local bus carrying a watermelon and other goodies from the city. He sometimes spoke of Okinawa and what it was like coming to Canada. Bokushin was always ready to talk to the younger generation of the hardships endured during the great depression and the troubles when the miners went on strike. Perhaps he was eager to have some of the family history passed on to the next generation.

Bokushin continued to work in the Number 8 coal mine until it closed down in 1957. After that he worked in the Number 10 coal mine in Shaughnessy until its closure in 1965. He was officially retired but joined his friend Shucho Higa at Fraches Greenhouse for a few more years of work.

Bokushin played the samisen and drums but only on the rarest occasion did he entertain at an Okinawan event. He lived his life in good health until he passed away in 1987 at the age of 85 years.



**Kanashiro Bokuzen (1883 - 1950)**  
**Kanashiro Kamado (1895 - early 1980s)**

**Photo unavailable**

Bokuzen came to Canada from Chatan, Okinawa following the birth of his son Bokusei and the passing of his wife Tsuru in 1911. He was a cousin to Bokuri Kanashiro. Bokuzen and his second wife Kamado had two daughters, Masako and Yayeko were born in Canada. He called his eldest son Bokusei to Canada in 1926. He returned to Okinawa in 1928 with his wife and daughters. He had three more children born in Okinawa.

**Kanashiro Bokusei (1911 - 1986)**  
**Photo unavailable**

*by John Kanashiro*

Bokusei or "Boxy" as many of his friends called him, was the son of Bokuzen. He arrived in Vancouver in 1926 at the age of 15 years. He attended Strathcona High School in Vancouver. During his bachelor days in Vancouver he stayed at a rooming house owned by Yasutaro Kanashiro and became close friends with the elder members of this family. Boxy was a sumo wrestler and competed at the Minshu Newspaper picnics. He worked at a sawmill, a papermill and was also employed by the BC Woodyard Company owned by T. Sakumoto and K. Oshiro. The evacuation of Japanese from west coast brought Bokusei to live in Calgary. He worked at Bridge Brand Produce and was married to Yoshiko Tamura for a time. They had one daughter, Euna. Bokusei retired to Vancouver.

In 1983 or 1984 Bokusei's half brother, possibly Bokusho came to Canada and Bokusei returned to Okinawa with him. Bokusei passed away in 1986.





**Kanashiro, Yasutaro (1882 - 1974)** by John Kanashiro / Yeiko Higa / Dick Kanashiro  
**Kanashiro, Kami (1899 - 1995)**

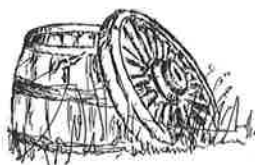
In 1907, Yasutaro Kanashiro emigrated to Canada from Henza, Okinawa and arrived in Vancouver.

Between 1907 and 1918 he was employed in various jobs in BC and Alberta - CPR section gangs, sawmills, as a busboy and cook's helper for the McIntyre Ranch and Alexandria and Dallas Hotels in Lethbridge. During these days, he encountered ranch hands dressed in chaps with guns holstered on their hips. Occasionally, with a bit too much to drink they would discharge their guns into the ceiling and walls terrifying hotel patrons. At other times, Yasutaro recalled these "cowboys" going to the Old Man River Valley, below Lethbridge to harass the natives who had set up their winter encampments in the valley. Yasutaro remembers seeing the natives with their feet wrapped in gunnysacks coming to the back door of the hotel in search of food. He felt compassion for these people and managed to give them handouts without jeopardizing his own job.

Yasutaro had little or no formal education when he arrived in Canada. With the aid of Mr. Kohashigawa and others he learned to read and write in Japanese.

In 1918, Yasutaro returned to Okinawa where he married Kami Teruya. The couple set sail for Vancouver in 1920. Yasutaro again held down several jobs, now to support a growing family, working in sawmills, making ice cream for Mr. Tsuji, setting bowling pins and utilizing his carpentry skills as maintenance person at the Japanese School where he made school furniture.

In the spring of 1942, Yasutaro and Kami and their nine children - Yeiko, John, Ken, Fumi, Jim, Jack, Dick, Helen and Lorraine - were evacuated to Alberta, where they were employed on sugar beet farms in Coaldale, Readymade and Crystal Lake area. In 1958 they retired and settled in Lethbridge. Yasutaro passed away on November 19, 1974 and Kami on August 14, 1995.



**Kanna, Chofu (Saburo) (1884 - 1954)**  
**Kanna, Toshi (Onaga) (1894 -1981)**

*Alice Kanna Kanashiro*

Saburo Kanna came to Canada from Yomitan, Okinawa early in the 1900s. His wife Toshi Kanna arrived in 1918 from Shuri, Okinawa. The family lived in Agnace, Ontario where Mr. Kanna worked in the boiler room for the CPR. They lived there for many years and the children were all raised in Ontario.

In 1940, the family relocated to Hardieville and lived there for a short time. They moved on to farm, first in Taber then to Iron Springs, Alberta. The family laboured long hours growing a variety of mixed vegetables and potatoes. Mrs. Kanna also grew a lovely flower garden in front of their home. Mr. Kanna often played the samisen and sang at home for his family.

Mr. Kanna died suddenly in 1954 in an unfortunate car accident. The family moved to Calgary and Mrs. Kanna passed away in 1981. Mr. and Mrs. Kanna's four children are, Joe and Agnes of Calgary, Alice Kanashiro of Lethbridge and Tom the eldest, passed away several years ago in Thunder Bay, Ontario.



**Kohashigawa, Kyosei (1889 -1987)**  
**Kohashigawa, Miyo (Nagata) (1898 - 1987)**

*Yoshiko Kohashigawa Higa*

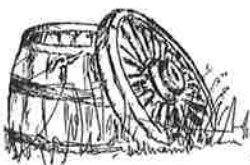


Kyosei Kohashigawa was born in Chatan, Okinawa on October 24, 1889. He came to Canada in 1907, debarking in Victoria, one of the fifty men recruited to construct the Canadian Pacific Railway. As work was scarce on the west coast he left Vancouver for Southern Alberta, doing odd jobs at High River and Okotoks. He spent his first Canadian winter in Fort Mcleod working as a houseboy for the commander of the R.C.M.P. In the spring of 1908, Kyosei went to Lethbridge and worked on the railways and at the Number 6 coalmine in Hardieville. Work was difficult so he returned to Vancouver to work in a hotel. It was here he met Mr. Makishi and they worked with a sawmill gang in New Westminister. He again returned to Lethbridge and worked at the Dallas Hotel, then in Nanton as a bellboy and chamber helper.

In 1918, Kyosei went to Victoria to meet and marry his picture bride, Miyo Nagata, a policeman's daughter who had arrived from Chatan, Okinawa. Here on Store Street, their first child, Yoshiko was born and where they first met Shinei Higa and his wife Uta. The Kohashigawa's and the Higa's were later to be united by the marriage of both their first-born, Yoshiko and George.

Kyosei learned the barbering trade and returned to Hardieville where many of their friends settled, working as a miner during the day and operating a hotel barbershop and pool hall during the evening. Miyo Kohashigawa tended the boarders and looked after their Japanese Goods' Store. After the mine closed, the Kohashigawa's farmed in several Southern Alberta locations before retiring in Coaldale in 1957 and eventually in Lethbridge.

The Kohashigawa's had ten children: Yoshiko, Amie, Sakae, Shigeru, Shizuko, David, Yuriko, Gordon, Edward and George.



**Makishi, Yasuanno (1875 - 1960)**  
**Makishi, Kiyo (Tamashiro) (1896 - 1986)**

*Mary Makishi Nago / Amy Inaba*

Mr. Makishi arrived in Canada around the year 1900 and is believed to be one of the first Okinawans to settle in Canada.

When Mr. Makishi left Shuri, Okinawa he took a job as a fireman on a steamship. He had many tales to tell his children of his adventures to places like Singapore, Bombay, Seattle, Glasgow and other ports around the world.



He worked on the ship for several years and on one of the trips to Glasgow, Scotland, he was responsible for bringing back to Japan, a ship for the Red Cross. His daughter Mary recalls her father saying that when the steamship arrived in the Port of Vancouver, he was met by a group of Okinawan men, or was it Japanese men that persuaded him to leave the ship and help them find jobs. As Mr. Makishi was able to speak English, he obliged by leaving the ship then going north to Nanaimo on Vancouver Island to buy land. He was able to employ these men by logging the timber and milling the lumber to sell the product to the CPR to be used as ties for the railway.

Mr. Makishi was also employed by the CPR, going as far as Kenora, Ontario to work and was in Lethbridge at the time when the high level bridge was being built. At this time he worked as a pay master for the CPR.

Back in Vancouver, in 1907, he became a proud naturalized citizen of Canada. In December of 1910, he went back to Okinawa to marry Kiyo Tamashiro. They came back to Canada in June 1911 and settled in Drumheller where Mr. Makishi worked as a fireman in the coalmine for the next nine or ten years.

In 1910, Mr. Makishi purchased 160 acres of undeveloped land in Lyalta, Alberta. He began to develop this land in 1920 growing mainly wheat and oats. He also raised livestock including chickens, pigs, cows and horses. By 1939 Mr. Makishi decided to move to irrigated land in the south. He found a farm to buy in Picture Butte then returned to Lyalta and sold his land. On returning to make final arrangement to buy this new farm, he was met with a new restrictive law prohibiting the Japanese from purchasing land.

Mr. and Mrs. Makishi and family moved to rented farm in Picture Butte then later settled in Coaldale, Alberta. They were devoted Christians of the Anglican faith and later the Grace Gospel Church. They had two children, daughter Mary Nago and son Ted who passed away in 1996.



**Medoruma, Isamu**  
**Medoruma, Nobuko**

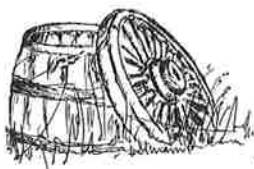
*by Tom Medoruma*

Mr. Medoruma came to Canada from Miyagi Island in the early part of 1900 and Mrs. Medoruma came a little later from Yanbaru, in northern Okinawa. Initially, Mr. Medoruma worked as a bellboy at the Lake Louise Hotel then moved south to work on the McIntyre Ranch. Later he settled in Hardieville working at the Number 6 coal mine followed by renting land at the McKenzie farm just east of Lethbridge. Many of the Okinawan picnics of the 1930s took place on this farm. After some ten years on the McKenzie farm, Mr. Medoruma moved his family to Iron Springs and rented land from Roy Johnson. On this farm he grew government seed potatoes and mixed vegetables. In 1945, he won the coveted award for growing the best netted - gem seed potatoes. He was presented with a medal to show for his achievement.

Over the years Mr. Medoruma took many pictures with his camera and in the process recorded the lives of many Okinawans in the first half of this century.

Mrs. Medoruma, may have assisted some of the Okinawan births during home deliveries. She was a kindly delicate lady who passed away in 1949 after a lengthy illness.

Mr. Medoruma retired from farming in 1952 and moved to Hardieville with his son and family. Mr. and Mrs. Medoruma raised one son, Tom Medoruma of Lethbridge.



**Miyagi, Kamekichi (1888 - 1950)**  
**Miyagi, Shige (Kohashigawa) (1894 - 1981)**

*by Jack Miyagi*

Kamekichi Miyagi came to Canada from Haneji-son with a group of 70 people around 1907. He worked on the CPR, mined in the Number 6 coal mine in Hardieville, and was a barber in Victoria, B.C.

In 1917, Shige joined her husband in Kelowna, B.C. where they worked on a vegetable farm. Tadao was born in 1919 and Isamu (Jack) in 1920. Shige took the two boys back to Okinawa, then returned to Canada where Haruko was born. In 1929 she returned to Okinawa with Haruko.

In 1937 Isamu returned to Canada, joining his father to work on the Higa farm near Lethbridge. A year later they moved to the Coaldale area to farm.

Tadao was killed in the war in Okinawa in 1944. In 1949 Kamekichi returned to Okinawa with heart problems and died there a year later at age 62.

Shige returned to Canada in 1956 and lived in Lethbridge. She liked the outdoors - picking beans at Nishimas, tending her garden, and picking asparagus in the Lethbridge area. She enjoyed travelling, reading, watching hockey on TV and having her half glass of beer as a nightcap. She passed away at age 87 in 1981.



**Miyasato, Kamakichi (1880 - 1958)**  
**Miyasato, Yoshi (Yamanoha) (1899 - 1977)**

*by Geri Miyashiro*

Kamakichi Miyasato was born in Abu, Okinawa in December 1880. He emigrated to Canada where he found employment with the CPR. He later worked for the McIntyre Ranch, where he learned to bake and cook. He was noted for his superb apple pie, and his Okinawan dishes.

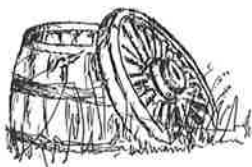
Mrs. Yoshi Miyasato (nee Yamanoha) was born on July 9, 1899 in Nago, Okinawa and came to Hardieville in 1925. She and Kamakichi ran the Alberta Cafe on Second Avenue South in Lethbridge, next to the Lethbridge Hotel.

Yoshiobasan was an excellent entertainer, refined in the art of Okinawan dance, samisen and koto. Kamakichi also played the samisen, and Yoshi danced and sang at Okinawa parties.

Kamakichi baked and decorated wedding cakes for the Nisei, passing on that art and making rafute to Masa Goshinmon.

They adopted Jimmy Miyashiro in 1934, following the death of his mother.

In 1956 the Miyasatos returned to Okinawa, where Kamakichi passed away. Yoshi made the voyage back to Lethbridge in 1968, and lived at the Edith Cavell Nursing home until her death on November 19, 1977.

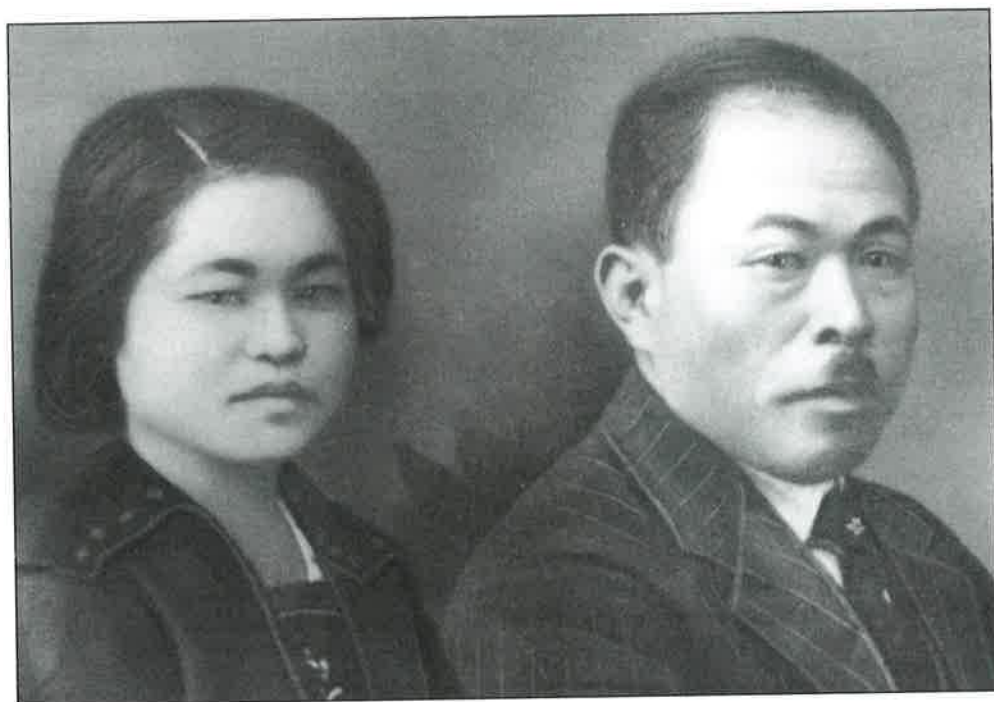


**Miyashiro Masei (1878 - 1938)**  
**Miyashiro Gozei (1904 - 1934)**

*by Seiko / Geri Miyashiro*

Masei Miyashiro was born in Henza, Okinawa in 1878, the eldest son of Kamei Miyashiro (Uwe Nagsuku). He emigrated to Canada pre-1920 and probably worked for the CPR and Hardieville coal mine, as did most Okinawan immigrants of that era. He returned to Okinawa and married Gozei Miyaganeku of Itoman. They returned to Canada in 1925 and farmed in Raymond, where Takashi and Masa were born. They moved to Hardieville, where Masei worked at the mine, then to various farms in the area where Seiko, Julia, and Jimmy was born. They were living at the Hamabata farm when Gozei passed away at 30 years of age. Jimmy was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Miyasato.

Masei tended the other children, farmed, and distilled spirits to support his family. The children went to Crystal Lake School on foot or by horse and buggy. The family has fond memories of their Dad's excellent cooking skills. Sadly, Masei passed away in June 1938 when Takeshi was 12, Masa 11, Seiko 10 and Julia 9 years of age. The children lived alone for five months until they were dispersed to various Okinawan homes in the Crystal Lake area.





**Miyashiro, Shiro (1874 -deceased in Okinawa)**  
**Miyashiro, Mrs. ( - deceased in Canada)**

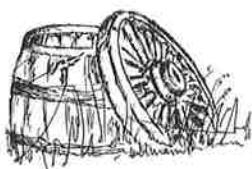
*by Mihoko Kanashiro*

Mr. Miyashiro was the eldest Issei in the Okinawan community and was known to everyone as Shiro-jisan. Mrs. Miyashiro was known as Shiro-obasan. Shiro-jisan came from Haneji, Okinawa. They lived in Hardieville while Shiro-jisan worked in the coal mine until it closed in 1935. They moved to work on a farm in the Coaldale area.

Shiro-jisan and Shiro-obasan had no children of their own but looked after three year old Hiro Kanashiro for four or five years after the loss of his mother. Hiro went on to Okinawa to live with relatives and returned to Southern Alberta in 1942 at which time he made his connections again with the Miyashiros. He often visited them on their farm in Coaldale.

After Shiro-obasan died, Shiro-jisan returned to Okinawa in 1952. Having spent most of his life in Canada, Shiro-jisan returned in 1957 for an extended visit. Hiro and Toshiko had just bought a new house in Calgary and their backyard was turned into a full scale garden so that Shiro-jisan could spend his time growing vegetables. After less than two years in Canada, he once again went back to his native Okinawa where he had a nephew and family.

In the summer of 1999, Susumu Miyashiro of Huntington, California came to Lethbridge to retrace his Great - Uncle's footsteps.



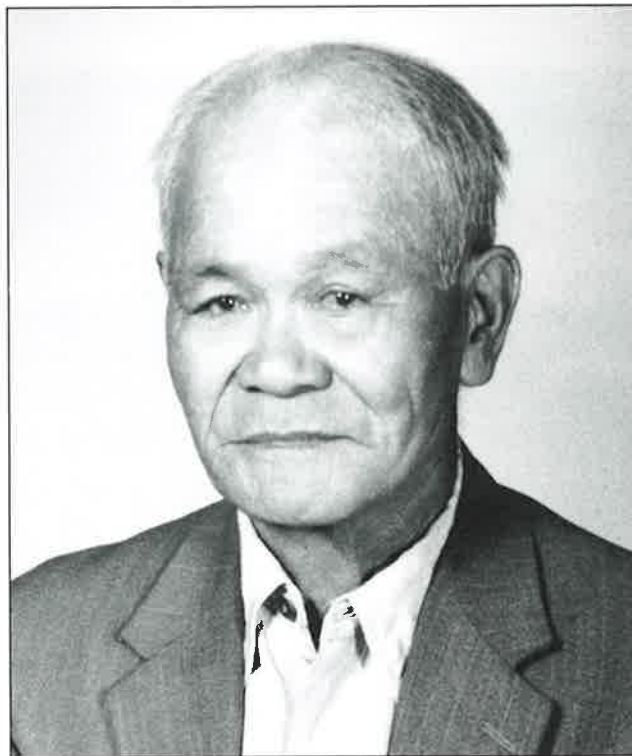
**Miyazato, Bunroku (1890 - 1967)**

*by Mary Nago*

Bunroku Miyazato came from Okinawa to Canada in the early 1900s and worked for a time with the CPR. He also worked for a while with a crew that cleared land to build the first school in Ft. Macleod, Alberta. Later, he rented land from Anno Makishi in Lyalta Alberta and grew row crops and potatoes.

With the encouragement of Mr. Makishi, Bunroku-san learned to write some English and was able to apply for his naturalization papers.

Around 1940 he lived in Vancouver, B.C. It is possible that he returned to Southern Alberta during the evacuation of the Japanese from the west coast. He then worked on various farms around Coaldale. After his retirement, Bunroku-san made plans to return to Okinawa, however, he died suddenly in Coaldale on December 10, 1967 at the age of 77. His remains were sent to Okinawa by Seiku Sakumoto.



**Nago, Mickey Eiro (1904 - 1968)**  
**Nago, Mary (Makishi)**

by *Mary Nago*

Mickey Eiro Nago was born in Gushikawa, Okinawa and came to Canada for the first time for a short time from May 22 to June 19, 1918 at the age of 14 years on the "Kama-Maru". He re-entered Canada to stay in 1922.

He worked for a time in Ontario at the CPR round house, then on to Chateau Lake Louise as a bellhop and night watchman, and from there to a more permanent job at Hotel Wales in Calgary.

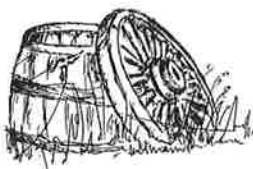
With the coming of the Second World War he was forced to leave his job and move out of the city to the Harry Hays farm outside of Calgary for a short period. Then it was back to Calgary to work for the Silk-O-Lina store in the fine china department.

On Dec. 9, 1942 he married Mary Makishi and stayed on the farm to assist the family for one year in Chin, Alberta. In 1943 he went to work at the Summit Lime Works in the Crowsnest Pass where three of the girls, Marlene, Faye and Lynda were born. Shortly after, a move was made back to the farm in Coaldale, again to help the family, where three more girls, Amy, Dianne and Luanne were added to the family.

He worked for a time in Winfield, Alberta where he broke his leg working as a lumberjack. The misfortune resulted in his return to Southern Alberta to work as a cook at Jack's Restaurant in Lethbridge.

This man of many talents had a degree in violin from the Associated London College of Music and aspired to teach violin but the opportunity never presented itself. He could also play the samisen and at social functions he was always called upon to sing and to play the samisen to accompany other performers.

Mickey passed away on July 9, 1968 at the age of 64.



**Nakama, Ginkichi (1885 - 1966)**  
**Nakama, Mitsu (Kohashigawa) (1897 - 1979)**

*by Ginichi Nakama*

Ginkichi Nakama emigrated to Hawaii before coming to Canada in 1907. He worked for the CPR and had various jobs around Vancouver before settling in Hardieville. Mr. Nakama worked at the Number 6 coal mine until it closed in 1935. The Nakama's found work on farms in Coaldale, Crystal Lake and McNally. Mr. and Mrs. Nakama moved back to Hardieville when they retired from farming.

Mr. Nakama enjoyed playing the samisen and often played for hours at home.

Mr. and Mrs. Nakama had eight children, Ginichi and Gingo (Joe) of Lethbridge and Kikuko (Florence) Kenyon of Kamloops, BC. They lost Ginshiro as a baby, George at age 12, Ginzo (Gerald), Chioko (Chuck) Takahashi and Ginji (Fat).



**Nishima, Chokey (1901 - 1982)**  
**Nishima, Uta (Kohashigawa) (1899 - 1993)**

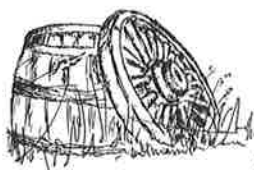
*by Mary Nishima*

Chokey, youngest son of Taketa and Masako Nishimazuru, came to Canada from Katsuren son, Okinawa in 1919 to join his brother Masu Nishimazuru who had come twelve years earlier. His love of farming was evident at an early age when he attended the agricultural school in Okinawa and then continued farming in Canada, working in the Raymond, Iron Springs, Shaughnessy, Lethbridge, Coaldale and Taber areas. He also worked as a miner in Hardieville and as a boilerman for the C.P.R. in Fields, B.C.

Uta, eldest daughter of Tokuhei and Nabe (Taira) Kohashigawa of Henji-son, Okinawa had arrived in 1921 to join her husband Ushi Oshiro and then had returned in the 1930s with her children to Okinawa. The war intervened before they could rejoin her in Canada. Two of the children, George and Shige, passed away in Okinawa and Yuko and Kazuyo returned after the war. Hideo chose to remain in Japan.

Chokey and Uta were married in Canada and raised four children Ayako, Mas, Mary and Ted. Chokey was active in the Okinawan community, holding Japanese classes in the 1930s, acting as a scribe and secretary, and helping to initiate the Okinawa Relief Project sending emergency supplies to victims of the war in Okinawa. He was very passionate about his adopted country and about his native Okinawa.

Chokey passed away at age 82 in 1982 and Uta at almost 94 in 1993.



**Nishimazuru, Masu (1885 - 1970)**  
**Nishimazuru, (Asato) Kama (1897 - 1946)**

*by Mae Hanson / Mary Nishima*

Masu Nishimazuru, known as "Jake Nishi", came to Canada in 1907 from Katsuren-son under the sponsorship of the CPR. He worked as a section hand for the CPR, living in the Raymond and Coalhurst areas. About ten years later, he returned to Okinawa to marry Kama Asato and bring her to Canada. They first settled in the Raymond area - these were very trying times for them. Their first child died, then Mary was born, but then they lost their third child. When Kama was pregnant with Susie, Masu decided to move his wife and child to Hardieville to stay during her last weeks of pregnancy to be closer to a doctor. Later they moved to Lethbridge where they ran a small grocery store.

In 1924 they moved to the Crystal Lake area north of Broxburn to farm. Seven more children were born - John, Helen, George, Molly, Fudge (Flossie), Tucker and Mae. In 1942 George passed away. In 1946 John died, then four months later his mother Kama passed away at age 49.

Life on the Nishi farm was always a center of activity. It was a home away from home for bean-picking crews, homeless bachelors, friends and relatives. Masu built a unique "bath house". It held a metal tub with a brick fireplace underneath and a wooden rack on the floor to prevent feet from burning. A fire broke out in the old "bath house" and the neighbours, Thiessens and Paharas were there in no time forming a bucket brigade from the pond and the fire was soon extinguished.

Masu was quite an orator, giving lengthy speeches at functions and at home. But the English language was a problem in the early years for most of the pioneers and they had to be creative in communicating their needs. Masu impressed his cronies when he managed to buy eggs at the general store by flapping his arms, clucking and squatting like a chicken.

Masu retired from farming in 1953 and moved to Hardieville. He made his final trip back to Okinawa in 1967 and passed away there in 1970 at the age of 85.



**Okutake, Tomosada Chotei (1897 - 1970)**  
**Okutake, Mary (Nishimazuru)**

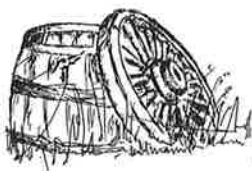
*by Vicky Okutake Trenchard*

Tomosada Chotei Okutake was born on June 4, 1897 in Shuri, Okinawa to parents Chosin and Tsuru Okutake. He had one sister and five brothers: one brother emigrated to California, USA and Tomosada Chotei joined his brother Tomomi Chokey in Canada in the early 1900s. He had served in the Japanese navy prior to coming to Canada. Here, in Canada, in the Hardieville, Lethbridge and Broxburn areas, he worked in various occupations - as a coal miner, potato farmer, wood worker, and until his retirement he worked at Frache's Greenhouses. At the greenhouse he took a special interest in the care and propagation of chrysanthemum, learning as much as he could about chrysanthemums including their Latin names!

He was active within the Okinawan community, acting as master of ceremonies, putting on comedy sketches at functions and making headdresses for the Okinawan dancers. He made the first pinata for the picnics.

He and Mary Masako Nishimazuru were married in 1938 at the Japanese Hall in Hardieville by Reverend Y. Kawamura. Their four children, Victoria, Marion, Jean, and Tom were all born at the Galt Hospital in Lethbridge. After retirement, Chotei and Mary enjoyed social dancing. The two-step was a favourite.

Chotei passed away on August 13, 1970 at the age of 73 and Mary on November 11, 1974 at the age of 54.



**Okutake, Tomomi Chojitsu (1888 - 1971)**  
**Okutake, Tsuru (Genka) (1904 - 1990)**

*by Pat Okutake Sassa*

Mrs. Tsuru Okutake was born on December 18, 1904 in Shuri, Okinawa. She married Tomomi Chojitsu Okutake April 1930, who was also born in Shuri November 21, 1888.

Tomomi emigrated to Canada in 1907, arrived in Vancouver and was employed with the CPR. He came to Hardieville, Alberta in 1911 and worked as a collier until he enlisted with the Princess Pat Canadian Infantry from May, 1917 to May,

1919. He served in Britain and France. On returning to Canada he lived in Hardieville and worked in the No. 6 coal mine. In 1930 he travelled to Japan to marry Tsuru Genka. They came back to Hardieville and Tomomi again worked at the No. 6 coal mine until it closed. They found a small plot of land near Readymade and grew a few vegetables. This venture did not last long. When the No. 8 coal mine opened, he returned to the mining industry.

Tomomi was amongst a few men in the Okinawan community that was able to speak English. He was frequently asked to be the interpreter or spokesperson for individuals and groups. He was instrumental in the purchase of the property located in Coaldale for the establishment of the combined social hall and later worship place for the majority families of Okinawan descendants. Years later, as the Japanese were allowed to live in the City of Lethbridge, he became a founding member of the Lethbridge Buddhist Temple and in 1961 he was again a founding member of the Lethbridge Honpa Buddhist Temple.

He retired as a coalminer after 36 years of service. It was not long after that, the collier's fund for retirees had run dry but he was able to draw the benefits of a war veteran. After his retirement, he rented about two acres of land for two years to grow beans. Gardening was Tomomi's favourite hobby as well as raising chickens as he did in the earlier years. Tomomi suffered a stroke on November 11, 1971 and died on November 23, 1971. He is buried in the Field of Honour in the Mountain View Cemetery in Lethbridge.

Tsuru taught sewing in Okinawa and contributed her share of kimono making for the Okinawa Cultural Society and other odori groups. Two years after Tsuru lost her husband, she joined the Lethbridge Seniors Center and learned many crafts and even attempted to learn the step dance. She enjoyed visits to other Senior Centers and organized overnight trips to hot spring resorts. She also registered at the L.C.C. to improve her skills in the English language. Tsuru died on May 28, 1990 following six long years in Taber Long Term Care unit where she had suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for some 12 years. She is also buried in Lethbridge at the Mountain View Cemetery.

Their children are Pat (Roy) Sassa: their two sons-Rod and Kevin and Easter (Vic) Ayukawa of Richmond, BC., their two sons are Darin and Curtis.





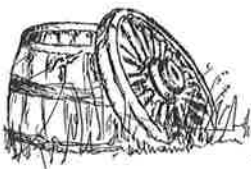
**Oshiro, Howa (1889 - 1962)**  
**Oshiro, Moto (1900 - 1985)**

*by Jim Oshiro*

Howa Oshiro was born in Naha, Okinawa in 1889. Moto was born in Itoman in 1900. They emigrated to Canada in 1918. Howa worked at various jobs, but mainly with CPR in Coalhurst, Alberta. They also invested in a restaurant in Raymond.

Their six sons - Scotty, Mace, Duke, Jim, George and Ted - and daughter Mary were born between 1921 and 1935. A growing family and the Depression years forced them to leave the restaurant business and become farm labourers in Raymond. They later operated a farm in the Readymade district.

After working so industriously for many years they retired in Lethbridge in 1958. Howa Oshiro passed away in 1962; Moto in 1985.



**Oshiro, Kamasuke (1888 - 1977)**  
**Oshiro, Masako (1899 - 1975)**

*by Aki Oshiro*

Mr. Oshiro came from Uken, Okinawa. He first went to Hawaii then to Canada in 1907. His ship from Hawaii was not allowed to land in Canada because of racial tensions in Vancouver. After a while, Mr. Oshiro along with others jumped ship and made their way to Vancouver. Before he was able to find regular employment, he went from door to door seeking domestic work. On one occasion he was paid with a loaf of white bread. He recounted the incident humorously that at the time he had thought that he had been given a "makura" (pillow) instead of food. On another occasion he had been given a slice of bread with cheese on it. Not knowing what cheese was, he was upset to think that he had been given rancid smelly butter on his bread.

Around 1908 or 1909, he met up with a group of men who pooled their resources and bought land near Nanaimo, B.C. They formed a cooperative and Mr. Oshiro was the secretary. The plans for this coop was to clear the land and grow vegetables to sell to the many work gangs around at the time. The plans did not materialize, they soon sold the land and the group dispersed. Later, Mr. Oshiro worked with the CPR, going across Canada and ending in Kenora, Ontario. He was in Kenora at the same time as Mr. Seiko Sakumoto.

Mrs. Oshiro from Tengan, Okinawa came to Canada in 1918. In 1923, the Oshiros moved to Raymond, Alberta. Mr. Miyazato had work for him on a thrashing crew on a wheat farm. The family moved to Vancouver the year George was born and Mr. Oshiro and Mr. Taro Sakumoto became the co-owners of the BC Woodyards Company. The family stayed in Vancouver until the evacuation of the Japanese from the west coast. They lived in Coaldale until the early 1950s and then moved to Saskatchewan for a time before returning to Lethbridge.

Mr. and Mrs. Oshiro had three sons, Roy in Okinawa, George in Abottsford, BC and Aki in Lethbridge, AB.



**Oshiro, Kana (1888 - 1974)**

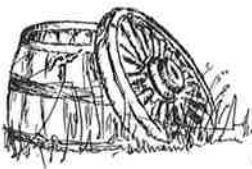
*by Susie Oshiro Makishi*

**Oshiro, Kana (1896 - 1951)**

Mr. Oshiro came to Canada in 1907. As with many of the Okinawan men that came to Canada during this time, Mr. Oshiro worked with the CPR until he moved to Hardieville to work in the Number 6 coal mine. Later the family moved to the McKenzie farm east of Lethbridge then to Shaughnessy, Picture Butte and Iron Springs. The last farm Mr. Oshiro lived on was in Vauxhall before retiring to Calgary in 1956.

Mrs. Oshiro came to Canada in April, 1924 from Miyagi Island, Okinawa.

Mr. and Mrs. Oshiro had seven children. Today, Art lives in Vancouver, Chuck and Yaye in Calgary and Ed in Victoria. The family has lost Mits and the youngest, Larry.



**Oshiro, Matsushi (1888 - 1963)**

*by Mary Nishima*

Matsushi Oshiro was born in Katsuren-son, Okinawa and came to Canada in 1907. He worked at the No. 6 coal mine in Hardieville, and on the farms in the Picture Butte area with his son Tom. They later moved to Calgary where he passed away at the age of 75 on November 25, 1963.

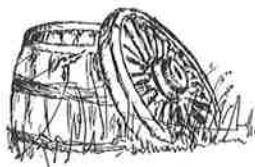


**Oyakawa, Kiyoshi (1899 - 1962)**  
**Oyakawa, Chitose (Matsuoka) (1889 - 1952)**

*by Hiroko Oyakawa Hoshizaki*

Mr. Oyakawa was born in Henza, Okinawa and came to Canada around 1907. He worked at a mill in Powell River, B.C. before coming to Alberta in the early 1930s. They spent the rest of their years farming in the area of Coaldale, Readymade and Hardieville.

Their daughter Hiroko Hoshizaki lives in Kelowna, B.C. Chitose Oyakawa had two sons by a former marriage, Tomotsu and Yoshiko Matsuoka are now both deceased.



**Sakumoto, Seiko (1872 - 1916)**

*by George Sakumoto*

Seiko Sakumoto emigrated to Canada in 1907. He was one of the 153 immigrants to emigrate from Okinawa that year to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway. Seiko left behind a wife, two sons Taro and Seiku, and two daughters, Kame and Tsuru in Yomitan, Okinawa.

However, this was not the best of times for Japanese immigrants to come to Canada. The provincial government of B.C. was attempting to stop all Oriental immigration to Canada. Seiko had arrived in Vancouver in the midst of a stormy Oriental exclusion movement and racial discrimination.

Seiko along with most of the Okinawans that came to Canada in 1907, worked industriously for the CPR in construction and repair of the railroad. He worked in the interior of B.C. on construction along the route of the CPR. He also worked in Alberta around Calgary and the Ft. Mcleod area.

In 1913, he moved to Kenora, Ontario with a group of his friends to work at the CPR roundhouse. The roundhouse was a service and maintenance depot of locomotive steam engines which were brought on regular basis for servicing.

After working for nine years in Canada, Seiko passed away in Kenora. Unfortunately, he did not realize his aim to become prosperous and re-unite with his family in Japan. He did, however, have his eldest son Taro with him when he passed away in Kenora, Ontario, in 1916.



**Sakumoto, Taro (1892 - 1956)**  
**Sakumoto, Fukuko ( - 1923)**

*by George Sakumoto*

Taro Sakumoto was born on December 16, 1892 in Yomitan, Okinawa. When his father left Japan for Canada, he carried out the responsibilities of looking after his mother, brother, and two sisters in Okinawa.

In 1912 at the age of 19, he came to Canada and worked with his father for the CPR in the interior of B.C. and later in Alberta. When father Seiko wanted Seiku, his younger son to come to Canada, Taro looked after all the arrangements. He contacted the Japanese consulate and raised the necessary funds to bring Seiku to Canada. When Seiko, the father passed away, Taro moved back to Vancouver.

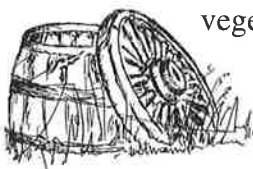
In 1916, Seiku emigrated to Canada only to find that his father had passed away. One month after his arrival in Canada in the fall of that year, Seiku with his brother Taro, moved to Kenora, Ontario to work at the CPR roundhouse. During that period of time in Kenora, Taro married Fukuko Sakumoto, a distant relative who arrived in Canada in 1918. She had been a school teacher in Japan. Taro and Fukuko had a daughter Hiroko (Hiroko Tamagi) who was the first child of Japanese parentage born in Kenora.

In the spring of 1920, Taro and his family and brother Seiku moved to Vancouver. Taro and Seiku found employment at a shingle factory in Vancouver. In the passing years, Taro and Fukuko had two more children, Seiyei and Mary. After Mary was born Fukuko, who had been in failing health, passed away in 1923.

The Sakumotos struggled through the depression years like many other people. However, with the upturn in the economy Taro and his friend Kamasuke Oshiro bought and operated B.C. Woodyards, a fuel supply company. This business was operated at the foot of Victoria Drive along the shoreline. The business was successful but had to be sold due to the outbreak of World War II. At that time, all people of Japanese ancestry were ordered to move from the B.C. coast.

Taro was a very hard worker, honest, and very straightforward. He and his brother Seiku got along very well from their youth until Taro passed away. The brothers were inseparable. Taro helped Seiku financially when he attended King George High School in Vancouver. When George, Seiku and Teru's son attended university, once again Taro gave him his support. When WWII ended, Taro and Seiku established a potato and vegetable farm and worked together until Taro passed away in 1956.

Taro's younger daughter Mary, predeceased him in 1940, and his son Seiyei (Sam) in 1942. Hiroko (Tamagi) the eldest daughter, at present, resides in Calgary, Alberta.



**Sakumoto, Seiku (1900 - 1994)**  
**Sakumoto, Teru (Matayoshi) (1901 - 1992)**

*by George Sakumoto*

Seiku Sakumoto came to Vancouver, B.C. in 1916. On his arrival, he found that his father had passed away. One month after his arrival in Canada, Seiku together with his brother Taro travelled to Kenora, Ontario to find employment in the CPR roundhouse where many Okinawans were working. After two years Seiku, along with Taro (who now had a wife Fukuko, and daughter Hiroko) moved back to Vancouver to escape the harsh winter climate in Kenora.

In Vancouver, Seiku attended night school while working until he had a good command of the English language. He then enrolled at King George High School in 1922 and graduated in 1925. While in high school, Seiku sent a proposal of marriage to Teru Matayoshi to come to Canada to be his bride. Teru had graduated from high school and was working at the time in a bank in Naha, Okinawa at the time enjoying the good life in the city. Seiku and Teru knew each other casually in Okinawa. When Teru was going to school in Naha, she met Seiku while he was in Naha to obtain a passport to emigrate to Canada. Teru accepted his proposal of marriage and Teru officially registered their marriage in the municipality of Yomitan, Okinawa in 1923. Teru came to Canada in 1925. When Teru arrived in Vancouver, she took the responsibilities of looking after Taro's children, Hiroko, Seiyei (Sam), and Mary as Taro's wife Fukuko had passed away.





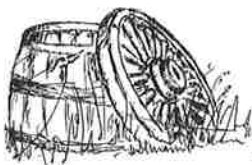
As a young man Seiku worked in the mainstream of Japanese society by joining the Japanese Labour Union. With his knowledge of English, he served as spokesman for the group. At that time, there was a great deal of animosity to the Oriental people by the Caucasians along the west coast. The Japanese Labour Union was appealing to the Canadian labour unions that their anti-Japanese stance to people of Japanese origin was wrong in principle. They worked vigorously and energetically for eight years to break down anti-Japanese racial barriers. Their hard work and energy eventually paved the way for a dialogue to accept the Japanese Labour Union to be affiliated with the Trade and Labour Council of Vancouver and New Westminster in 1928. He worked for the Minshu People's Daily News and worked in sales and as a bookkeeper at the People's Co-operative store which was a financial wing of the Japanese labour movement. From 1923 to 1941 he was secretary of the Vancouver Okinawa People's Organization.

In 1931, Seiku started his own business. He bought a truck and started selling wood. He started to prosper and owned three trucks hiring two workers to operate his trucks by the late thirties.

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, in 1941, the Canadian Government announced in early 1942 that all people of Japanese origin would be removed from the coast to an area 100 miles from Vancouver. Seiku was one of the first to go as he was in an age group that the government felt was a danger to the coastal communities. He arrived in the town of Yale, but his stay was short-lived as signs throughout the town showed animosity to people of Japanese origin. He left the next day after his arrival. When he departed, he met Mr. Shigejiro Edamura, by coincidence, on the same train. Together they travelled to Lethbridge, Alberta.

He and Mr. Edamura were befriended by Mr. and Mrs. Isamu Medoruma operating a farm in the Iron Springs area north of Lethbridge. Seiku soon found a farm that would take he and his family as beet-workers. He immediately called Taro, his children Hiroko, Seiyei (Sam) and his wife Teru and three children George, Amy, and Seiji to Iron Springs where they were to work on the farm of Mr. W. Scott.

Between April and June of 1942, 550 Japanese families were moved into southern Alberta sugar beet farms. There were 2550 people in all. Conditions on the majority of the farms were very poor. Their homes were shacks and there was very little source of a water supply for the Japanese evacuees. There were some friendly farmers that wished to hire the Japanese evacuees, but the evacuees were prevented from moving to farms where conditions were better by the B.C. Security Commission and the Sugar Beet Growers Association. The Japanese, tired of poor working and living conditions, organized and formed the Southern Alberta Evacuees Association. There were four regional associations consisting of Picture Butte, Raymond, Coaldale, and Taber. The Southern Alberta Evacuees Association formed a joint committee of these associations and Seiku was elected as spokesperson for the joint committee for 10 years. This organization worked very well to improve the working conditions of the Japanese evacuees. They worked to improve the condition of their homes to make them more livable. Beet contract prices were raised.



They established a minimum wage for work outside the sugar beets. School fees for the Japanese Canadian students were abolished and so was the restriction of movement from one farm to another. Seiku was the spokes person for the organization. However, he was only one of many people involved who sacrificed of their time and efforts to improve the conditions of the evacuees during those trying times.

In 1960, Seiku and Teru opened and operated a confectionery and Japanese gift store in Lethbridge, Alberta.

In 1963, Seiku became president of the Southern Alberta JCCA. (Japanese Canadian Citizens Association). In that same year he also became involved in the centennial project of Lethbridge, the Nikka Yuko Gardens. He became a member of the Lethbridge and District Garden Committee. It was composed of a group of Lethbridge citizens and members of the Japanese community to initiate, promote, and to bring to fruition the dream of a unique centennial project (1967), a Japanese garden in Lethbridge, Alberta. Those who strived to bring this centennial project to a successful conclusion had their names engraved on the peace bell in the Nikka Yuko Garden. Seiku's name was one of them.

In 1968, when the Okinawa Cultural Society was formed, Mr. Kamasuke Oshiro, Mr. Shucho Higa and Seiku were elected as advisors to the organization.

He was a member along with Teru of the Southern Alberta Japanese United Church. He served as a member of the board from 1952 to 1972. He became a member of the Japanese United Church in Vancouver from 1972 until he passed away in 1994.

Seiku and Teru decided to move to Vancouver, B.C. when their children had moved from the Lethbridge area. They came to Vancouver in 1972, where George and his wife Aiko and their two children resided. Jack and Amy (Higa) and four children also relocated to the west coast. Seiji, the youngest son lived in Toronto, Ontario at the time, but later moved to the west coast.

Seiku was always active in community affairs even in retirement. In 1975, he was elected the first president of the newly formed Okinawa-ken Yuaikai organization in Vancouver. He served in this capacity for two years. The Yuaikai held its 25th anniversary celebration in the year 2000.

Seiku and Teru had a happy life together. They celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary at the Hotel Vancouver in 1983.

The history of the Sakumoto family was taken from "*The Memoirs of Seiku Sakumoto*".



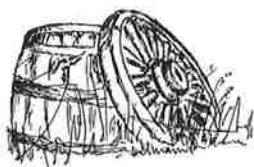
**Shimabukuro, Kana (1886 - 1965)**  
**Shimabukuro, Nabe (Toyama) (1894 - 1995)**

*by Naoko Shima Tamayose*

Kana Shimabukuro was born in Katsuren-son, Hamahiga in Okinawa in 1895. He came to Canada in 1907 and worked on the railroads in B.C., then came to Hardieville to work in the coal mine, and then beet farmed at Broder's in Coaldale during the 1960s. Kana and Nabe returned to Okinawa to live from 1934 to 1958. They returned to Okinawa once again in 1965 with plans of settling land ownership and then coming back to Canada, but after two months, Kana passed away in Okinawa at the age of 79. Mr. Shimabukuro was a hard working man who was a fisherman and enjoyed playing the samisen.

Nabe Shimabukuro was known to everyone as "Shima-no-basan". She was born in Kunigami, (Yanbaru) in northern Okinawa and came to Canada in 1911. She returned to Okinawa with her husband in 1934 and then came back to Coaldale in 1958 - later retiring in Vancouver. Nabe was a very healthy, hardworking, and a strong women who very rarely got sick. She enjoyed helping to raise her grandchildren, and beneath her seemingly tough exterior, Mrs. Shimabukuro was a very soft-hearted person whose philosophy included "don't let anyone go hungry". At 97 years of age the Vancouver Okinawan group held a Kajimaya celebration for her. She lived to be 100 years old and in her lifetime travelled to Okinawa at least 10 times.

Mr. and Mrs. Shimabukuro's children include: Nobuko Shima (Vancouver), Yoshiko Grover (Portland), Seiji Shima (Vancouver), Seijo Shima (Vancouver), they lost one daughter Yoneko and son Seisho. Their extended family includes 20 grandchildren, 34 grandchildren, and 22 great-great grandchildren.



**Shima, Seisho (Saburo) (1907 - 1976)**  
**Shima, Matsuko (Toyama) (1908 - 1995)**

*by Naoko Shima Tamayose*

Mr. Shima was born in Katsuren-son, Okinawa and came to Canada in 1923. He worked at the Hardieville coal mine Number 6 until 1934 before moving on to farm in the Coaldale area.

Mr. Shima had a love for the samisen and singing. There were many get-togethers at the Shima house where friends would gather and share laughter, talk about Okinawa, dance, and sing late into the night. At Okinawan events such as the New Year's party and annual Keirokai (a celebration held in honour of the elders in the Okinawan community), Mr. Shima contributed by playing his samisen and singing while others performed odori on stage.

Mrs. Shima also came from the village of Katsuren-son in 1926. After a lifetime of hard work on the farms, Mrs. Shima spent her retirement years at various crafts such as crochet and knitting. She also contributed to the sewing of Okinawan odori costumes for the Keirokai.

The Shima children are: Miyoko (Yosh) Fujimoto of Brooks, Naoko (Art) Tamayose and Sandy (Mas) Shigehiro of Lethbridge, Ray of Edmonton, Nancy (Don) Baker of Thunder Bay, Ontario, Meiko (Robert) Pennock, David and Randy (Bev) of Calgary. The eldest, Seiyei (Setsuko) Shimabukuro passed away in the late 1980s in Okinawa.



**Tamagi, (Tamashiro) Masuyei Fred (1891-1960)**  
**Tamagi, Kanako (1891 - 1975)**

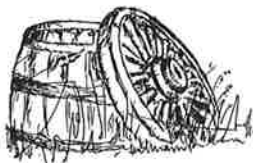
*by Winnie Tamagi Nakano*

Mr. Tamagi first emigrated to Hawaii before coming to Canada with his wife in 1911. In the early years Mr. Tamagi started many business enterprises, some were more successful than others. He opened a restaurant, shooting gallery, barbershop, confectionary store and a small trucking business. In between his many business ventures he worked in a coal mine, barbershop at night and also taught at a barber school. Later, Mr. Tamagi bought a house and 10 acres of land in Coaldale. Mrs. Tamagi grew the vegetables and Mr. Tamagi sold the produce in Calgary. With the help of their father, the two elder daughters, Winnie and Marline, rented a stall at the City Market in Calgary and sold vegetables while 14 year old brother Jim did the buying. From this humble beginning, this family enterprise grew to become Bridge Brand Produce in 1948 which eventually became the largest independent food service distributor in Canada.

Mr. Tamagi was active in the Japanese community, being an interpreter for new immigrants and helping them cope with the laws and regulations of their new country. He represented numerous people in various business and legal matters. Over the years he helped a great number of his countrymen.

Mrs. Tamagi was a very hard working person, she kept the family together with her ingenuity during the tough depression years. She raised crops on their farm in Coaldale while the family business was getting off the ground. When the business began to prosper, she was able to move to Calgary. Mrs. Tamagi enjoyed sports and followed football, baseball and hockey closely. She was respected by all her children and grandchildren for her hard work and kindness.

Mr. and Mrs. Tamagi's children are Winnie Nakano and Shirley Williams of B.C. Ken, Sam, Bill, Jim, Fred and Marline Olsen have passed away. Today, the grandsons carry on the family business at Bridge Brand Produce.



**Tamashiro, Kisei**

*by Sam Higa*

Kiseisan was cousin to Shinei Higa. His life showed another side of the Okinawa community - bachelors in Canada with families in Okinawa. Kisei was a gregarious person, freely dispensing advice and knowledge. He was well versed in Okinawan culture and odori, and taught dancing to children. In the pre-war years, young children who misbehaved were reprimanded by male adults. Kiseisan was noted for administering "kossas". Kiseisan was a skilled cook and worked in many Chinese restaurants, also becoming proficient in Chinese gambling. After the war he went to work in the Yukon, where he succumbed to cancer.



**Tamashiro, Masuro (Tamagi ) (1881 - 1973)**  
**Tamashiro, Kami (Oshiro ) (1899 - 1999)**

*by Tillie Tamashiro Gustafson*

Masuro Tamashiro was the sixth son of Masu and Kamatoo\* Tamashiro. He grew up in Higa, Okinawa. In 1904 he travelled to Hawaii, where he worked and lived for two years. From Hawaii he left for Canada in 1906, settling in British Columbia. He worked in various jobs in the lumbering, fish canning, and mining industries.

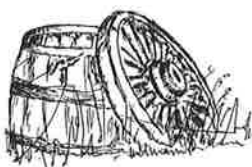
During WW1, on June 2, 1916, Masuro enlisted in the PPCLI of the Canadian army and served on the front lines in France. He was wounded and discharged on June 17, 1918. After the war he settled near Bashaw, Alberta on a homestead farm.

Kami Oshiro was also born in Higa, Okinawa. She was the third daughter of Masu and Kamato\* Oshiro. Kami came to Canada in 1921 to become the bride of Masuro Tamashiro.

Masuro and Kami Tamashiro are best remembered for their gardening. They served the community of Bashaw and district with their many acres of strawberries and other vegetables. Their root cellars were filled with fresh vegetables, which were sold to businesses and residents of Bashaw throughout the cold winters. They also grew many acres of wheat and raised a few milk cows. They retired from farming in 1973 and moved to the town of Bashaw. Masuro passed away in 1973 and Kami in 1999 a few months short of her 100th birthday.

Mr. and Mrs Tamashiro raised twelve children, six boys and six girls. Majoen, Anna Horney, Mary Inkster, Jack, Helen Wadlow, Tillie Gustafson, Lily Blair, Marlene Gourley and Martin. Joe, James and Maki have passed away.

\* Spelling of these names are as translated by the Canadian Immigration officials.



**Tamayose, Kiyuji (1884 - 1969)**  
**Tamayose, Tsuruko (Nakada) (1902 - 1982)**

*by Kimiko Tamayose Oshiro*

Kiyuji Tamayose was born in Okinawa on November 25, 1884. At the age of 23, he left Yomitan Zakemi, Okinawa and arrived in Vancouver, B.C. on September 17, 1907. He worked with the CPR in Rogers Pass for three years, before returning to Vancouver where he operated a rooming house and restaurant.

Mr. Tamayose was very much involved with the Okinawan youth and took interest in the direction of their futures. He had several attributes which he could draw upon to communicate with the youth such as an easy-going nature, good listening skills, and leadership abilities. He was also a part of the Doshi-Kai which was the first organized Okinawan group in Southern Alberta. In the mid-40s, Mr. Tamayose and others of the Doshi-Kai established a social hall in Coaldale for the purpose of forming an official gathering place for Okinawan families and friends.

Tsuruko Nakada was born in Okinawa on November 19, 1902. On August 15, 1921, at the age of 19, she married Kiyuji and then came to Canada on April 15, 1924. In Okinawa, Mrs. Tamayose was a seamstress, so she used her abilities to help make kimonos and costumes for odori. Mr. and Mrs. Tamayose resided in Hardieville until the closing of the coalmine in 1935. With their six children they relocated to a farm in Broxburn, east of Lethbridge. They continued to farm in Southern Alberta until 1956, at which time Mr. Tamayose retired and moved to Lethbridge.

Mr. and Mrs. Tamayose had nine children, two of whom predeceased their parents. Daughter, Teruko is honoured with other student nurses at Himeyurai no-to Memorial in Okinawa and another child was lost as a baby. Today, Walter (Yukiko) lives in Richmond, BC., Kimiko (Chuck) Oshiro in Calgary, Art (Naoko) in Lethbridge, Tony (Kim) in Port Coquitlam, B.C., Evelyn (Mas) Nishima in Taber and Georgine (Cassey) van Paassen in Calgary. Their daughter, Toshiko (Hiro) Kanashiro passed away in 1992.





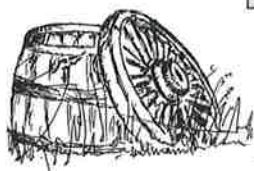
**Teruya, Seizen (1902 -1976)**

*by Gene Teruya*

Mr. Teruya came to Canada in 1920 and worked in the Number 6 coal mine in Hardieville until it closed in 1935. For a short time he found work at the Number 3 coal mine in Lethbridge before working at the Number 8 coal mine until its closure in 1957. Mr. Teruya then went to Hays to work as a cook at the PFRA until his retirement. He moved to Lethbridge and passed away on January 29, 1976.

Mr. Teruya enjoyed playing the samisen and often played at the Okinawan parties.

His family is Gene and Gary of Lethbridge, Pat Mead and Gail Newell of Wingham, Ontario. The eldest Bob Teruya passed away in 1999.



**Toyama, Shomatsu (1891 - 1978)**  
**Toyama, Maka (Ige) (1899 - (1992))**

*by Toki Toyama / Mitsuru Toyama*

Shomatsu Toyama left Kin, Okinawa as a young teenager around 1907 and went to Hawaii to work at the Dole Pineapple Co. In 1914 he came to Canada with the intention of joining his uncles in the U.S. but was unable to do so. He returned to Okinawa in 1916 to marry Maka, daughter of the prominent Ige family of Kin, Okinawa. He returned with her to Vancouver, B.C. where Masao (Chester) and Fumi were born. While pregnant with Seitoku, Maka returned to Okinawa for a short time and he was born there.

Shomatsu ran a cartage and transport business in Vancouver for several years. Six more children, Tokujo (Toki), Shomei (Joe), Joan, George, Roy and Bob were born in Vancouver. During the war, the family was uprooted to New Denver where Mitsuru was born. They moved to Alberta in 1945.

The gregarious couple and their children soon became popular participants of the Okinawan community activities, but the move to the sugar beet fields of Southern Alberta, in Readymade and Coaldale areas, had come as a shock to the city-bred family. They stuck it out for seven years before Joe and Toki arranged for their parents and younger siblings to join them in Toronto.

There, Shomatsu worked in a number of jobs: as a cook, a gardener, and at White Fish Co. in various capacities. The move to Toronto was a good one for the family as the career choices of each proved successful.

Shomatsu passed away on November 11, 1978 and Maka on March 5, 1992.



*There were a number of Issei men that came to Canada before the war and lived a long time in and around Hardieville and Southern Alberta. Many of them were bachelors and some returned to Okinawa. They have no family members living in Southern Alberta today. They too, are remembered as Okinawan Pioneers who spent most of their lives in Canada.*

### **Chinen, Densaku (Tasaka)**

Chinen-san came to Canada in 1907 from Yomitan. He first worked for the CPR then farmed around the Iron Springs and Picture Butte area.

He lived for a time with the Tamayose family. He often walked for miles to visit with his other friends from Yomitan. On his visits he enjoyed a cup of very strong black tea with lots of sugar.

Chinen-san moved to a nursing home in Calgary. His wife stayed in Okinawa and his son predeceased him.

### **Higa, Saburo**

Mr. Higa worked for the CPR and later at the coal mine in Hardieville until its closure in 1935. He worked on farms and lived with the Oshiro, Kana's family in Iron Springs.

### **Higashi, Nagotaro**

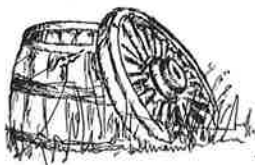
Higashi-san came from the same village in Okinawa as the Nishimazurus' (Katsuren-son). He worked for the CPR in the early years then lived and worked on farms around the Lethbridge area. He often stayed with the Nishimazuru family where he was well cared for and where he seemed to consider home. He was hospitalized for care in 1954 and died in the 1960s.

### **Ishikawa, Toku**

Mr. Ishikawa came from Urasoe, Okinawa in 1917. Initially he worked for the CPR. He worked on the Makishi farm in Lyalta for one or two seasons in 1932 or 1933. Later he moved to the Lethbridge, Coaldale area and for a time worked at the Hamabata farm. In the mid 50s he worked at a logging camp near Edmonton. He returned to the Hamabata farm and after a time passed away at a Lethbridge hospital.

### **Kina-san**

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Kina-san worked for Seiku Sakumoto on their rented farm in Iron Springs. He later moved to Coaldale. Kina-san had a wife in Okinawa and returned home.



### **Taira, Senzo**

Mr. Taira first worked for the CPR, then moved to Hardieville around 1910. Later he moved east to work with Mr. Kanna and Mr. Oshiro in Kenora, Ontario then at some point moved to Toronto. After 20 years he returned to Southern Alberta about 1948 and worked on the Makishi farm. He was a close friend of Mr. Makishi.

Mr. Taira remained a bachelor and returned to Okinawa in 1956.

### **Takayasu, Seiji (Masaji)**

When Mr. Takayasu first came to Canada, he worked for the CPR. Later he lived in Hardieville. His wife came in 1914. Mrs. Takayasu was known to grow a pretty garden in Hardieville but she found the winters too cold. In 1920, Mr. Takayasu took his wife and three children born in Hardieville, back to Okinawa.

Mr. Takayasu came back to Canada alone, then worked for the Number 6 coal mine in Hardieville until it closed in 1935. He farmed for two years then went back to Okinawa in 1937.

### **Uema, Gentoku**

Mr. Uema lived in Hardieville for many years. He built the Yamamoto house. He lost his wife and child due to illness. In the mid 1950s he was living in Edmonton and working as a janitor in a restaurant.

### **Yamashiro, Kamejiro**

Mr. Yamashiro was called to Canada by friends to work on a farm in Nanaimo, B.C. but when he arrived the farm was sold. He found work with the CPR and a sawmill in Vancouver.

He had a wife and children in Okinawa and returned in the 1930s. At that time he escorted Teruko and Wataru, Tamayose back to Okinawa. He returned to Canada and worked at the Hamabata farm for a while and then went to the Crowsnest Pass to work for a Lime Company.

In 1956, he made a final trip back to Okinawa and passed away there.

### **Yamashiro, Nta**

Mr. Yamashiro lived for a long time in Vancouver and later in the Crowsnest Pass. He returned to Okinawa in 1955 and had no family here.

*Some of the biographies were written by family members while others were obtained by interviewing people that knew them. There has been no attempt to make this a historical document as the information and facts have not been confirmed or verified. We regret any errors or omissions that may be present in this small collection of biographies.*

*Members of the Okinawa Cultural Society*



