

# RE-MAPPING TACOMA'S PRE-WAR JAPANTOWN

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## LIVING ON THE TIDEFLATS

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## Abstract

This article, drawing on oral histories with Nisei, addresses the dearth of publications about pre-WWII Japanese life in the urban U.S. and provides evidence of Japanese immigrants' active presence in the lumber industry and on Tacoma's tideflats. This is important not only for Tacoma's history and a fuller accounting of the major industries that shaped the south Puget Sound region, but also because Japanese contributions to early industrial development are often overlooked. The oral history narratives also stretch the boundaries of what has been depicted as a densely-connected and lively Japanese community in the downtown core. Also, stories of moving from and between sawmills and the ethnic economy highlight the fluidity of employment from the lumber industry to self-employment. This article thus argues for a remapping and expansion of existing visualizations of the Japanese community and for recognition of Japanese presence in the tideflats and sawmill spaces.

# RE-MAPPING TACOMA'S PRE-WAR JAPANTOWN LIVING ON THE TIDEFLATS

*He worked for the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company, down in the tideflats, they called it. And they used to have many, they used to have housing for their Japanese employees, houses numbered from 1 to 14 or something. And my brother remembered that we lived in number 11 at one time, and number 14 at another time.*

Fumi Sato Hattori, on her father's occupation and their family residence in Tacoma (2005).

## Introduction

Few urban histories of the pre-World War II era have documented and recognized the lives and contributions of Asian Americans, including those of first (Issei) and second generation (Nisei) Japanese. When S. Frank Miyamoto published his manuscript on Seattle's Japanese community in 1981, for instance, there was *no other* "published study of a Japanese minority community before World War II" (Miyamoto 1984: vi). General understandings of "American" immigration often focus on white and European migrants, rather than those from China and Japan who also arrived in the late 1800s and early 1900s (see Takaki 1998: xii). Moreover, if Asian American populations were included in published histories, they were "almost always about Chinese rather than Japanese," and, as Roger Daniels has argued, the representations were "pejorative about nine times out of ten" (1992: 427-8). In *Before Internment: Essays in Prewar Japanese American History*, Yuji Ichioka noted

this dearth of scholarship on prewar Japanese American history, writing that scholars have treated the interwar period simply as "an interlude between the ... 1924 Immigration Act, terminating all Japanese immigration, and the outbreak of WWII and the ensuing dramatic wartime mass internment of Japanese Americans" (Ichioka: 2006, 3). While the focus on internment is undeniably important and understandable, academic neglect of the prewar period not only precludes a full understanding of internment and the years that follow, but also makes it difficult to examine fully two central themes in Japanese American history: the "problems of generation (distinctions between Issei and Nisei) and dualism (dual identities, affiliations, and loyalties)." (Azuma, 2006: xviii).

This article, drawing on oral histories with Nisei who were former residents of Tacoma and students of Tacoma's Japanese Language School, which was in operation from 1911 to 1942, aims to partially address this neglect in the historical record. Analysis of the oral history narratives helps fill in gaps in the scholarship on prewar Japanese Americans and provides primary source material that will contribute to future scholarship. In addition to evidence from the oral histories, we also build on archival material available in University of Washington Libraries Special Collections.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we note not only the contributions Japanese Americans made to Tacoma's economic and social development, but also their active presence in the lumber industry and on Tacoma's tideflats. Moreover, we note that work in the sawmills was not necessarily a lifelong occupation, but rather a starting point for new Japanese immigrants who then moved into the local ethnic economy.

<sup>1</sup> See below. These collections include the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company Records and the Ronald Magden Papers.



MAP 1: This map shows the relationship between the downtown core of Japanese businesses and residences and the houses on St. Paul Avenue that were across the street from the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company operations. Map created by Sarah Pyle 2018.

Descriptions of Japanese families and workers on the tideflats are significant in that the writings that do exist about the pre-war Japanese community in Tacoma focus primarily on the businesses and homes in the downtown core (e.g., Morrison 1994, Magden 1998, Norima 2016, Sullivan 2016). Such a focus certainly is for good reason. The main religious and educational institutions were located in the downtown core and the vast majority of Tacoma Japanese lived in a fairly concentrated and socially isolated district between South 11th and South 21st Streets and Tacoma and Pacific Avenues. The 1920 U.S. Census in fact shows that 1306 Japanese lived in Tacoma “with approximately nine hundred and thirty of them living in this small four by four block area” (Morrison 1994, 28).<sup>2</sup>

Yet the oral histories we analyzed strongly suggest that the existing maps of Tacoma’s pre-WWII Japanese community need to be expanded to account for the tideflats’ residents and experiences.<sup>3</sup> In particular, the

<sup>2</sup> This area refers to 11th to 19th and Tacoma to Pacific.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Morrison’s study does list businesses and residences in

St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company employed a number of Japanese workers and a number of Japanese families lived in housing along St. Paul Avenue, across the street from the sawmill operations. (See Maps 1 and 2) A history of the company by Murray Morgan (1982) does not, however, mention Japanese workers or the individual houses or the boarding house for Japanese. Although a history of the Japanese in Tacoma by Ronald E. Magden (1998:1) mentions in passing Japanese pioneers who “found work in sawmills far from towns,” he does not write about the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company or provide much about working in Tacoma tideflats. Thus, we argue here that a re-mapping of Tacoma’s pre-WWII Japanese community is needed to illuminate the greater diversity of spaces and patterns of movement.

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South Tacoma and in the description of the main commercial and residential core recognizes that the area south of Pacific Avenue and into the tide flats had “a smattering of Japanese-American residences and businesses,” including a boarding house for single men (1994, 42).

We begin with a brief description of the oral history project and mapping methods. This is followed by historical background on Japanese labor immigration in general and the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company more specifically. The article then turns to the narrative evidence of regular Japanese presence on the tideflats from the oral histories. We conclude by emphasizing the importance of daily paths and spatial experiences for the constitution of individual identity, and thus the significance of documenting movement across and to/from the tideflats.

## Oral History Project and Mapping of the Narratives

The material in this article is based primarily on oral histories with Nisei in their seventies and eighties who were reflecting on their childhoods at the time of the interviews, which were conducted in the early and mid 2000s. The interviews were conducted in Tacoma, Oakland, Los Angeles, and Chicago by Mary Hanneman and Lisa Hoffman with Japanese Americans who had grown up in Tacoma, Washington until they were incarcerated during World War II. The oral histories focused in particular on their experiences at Tacoma's Japanese Language School, which they attended daily after American public school (see also Hanneman n.d., Hoffman 2014, Hoffman and Hanneman forthcoming). A total of forty-four individuals participated, forty-two of whom attended the Language School; all interviews were videotaped and transcribed. The oral history project was initiated when Hanneman and Hoffman learned that the University of Washington Tacoma (UW Tacoma), which owned the Japanese Language School building, had decided it would be demolished after historic preservation review recommendation (Stamets 1994).<sup>4</sup>

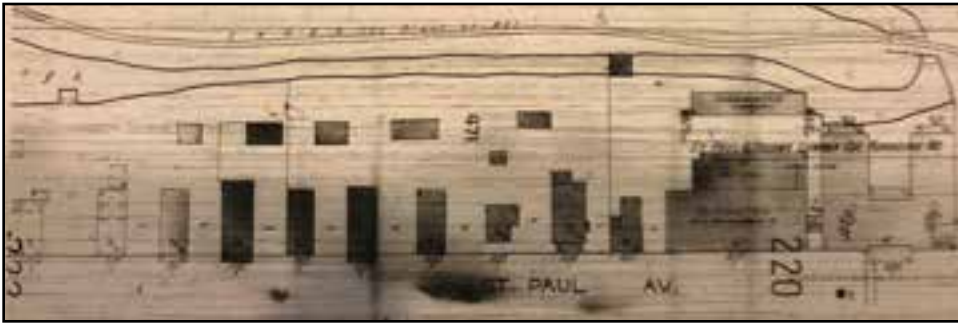
<sup>4</sup> The report stated that major renovations would be necessary to bring the building up to contemporary safety codes. These renovations would be so extensive as to compromise the building's historical architectural qualities and thus potentially nullify its architectural qualifications for historic preservation status.

UW Tacoma had purchased the Japanese Language School building in 1993 from Tadaye (Fujimoto) Kawasaki, who had herself attended the School as a child.<sup>5</sup> The campus master plan encompassed not only this building, but also other parts of the original Nihonmachi ("Japantown," or Japanese area) in Tacoma, including the Whitney United Methodist Church and property adjacent to the still-active Buddhist Church. Troubled by the loss of this structure, one of only four buildings built by the Japanese community in pre-WWII Tacoma left standing, Hanneman and Hoffman began the oral history project.

We recognize that these oral histories provide memories of childhood from the position of old-age and post-wartime incarceration. Some locations, such as "Tokyo Beach" (see below) where the children would go to swim and play on the tideflats, are difficult to locate precisely based on the interviews. Nevertheless, these oral histories both correct an urban history that typically has ignored the Japanese immigrant experience and provide what we argue here is historically significant information about the spaces inhabited by Japanese families. The interview narratives are punctuated by spatial references, including specific addresses of homes and businesses, as well as general area names where they would go for leisure activities. Many of these references coincided with what has been considered the definitive map of Tacoma's pre-war Nihonmachi, which was originally dated as 1926 and published in Kazuo Ito's volume *The Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America* in 1973.<sup>6</sup> It was this map that was included and used

<sup>5</sup> Tadaye Kawasaki's mother had encouraged her to purchase the building, which she did in the late 1940s, see HABS No. WA-209: 12 and interview with Tadaye (Fujimoto) Kawasaki (with her sisters Yoshiko (Fujimoto) Sugiyama and Kimi (Fujimoto) Tanbara), July 2004, Tacoma.

<sup>6</sup> The map was drawn by Kazuo Ito.



MAP 2: This 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington shows St. Paul Avenue and depicts 9 of the 14 houses, the Japanese Boarding House, another boarding house, dining room, commissary, and laundry.

as an important part of the urban history provided in Ronald E. Magden’s *Furusato: Tacoma-Pierce County Japanese* (1998) as well. Yet in analyzing the oral histories, we realized that the spatial patterns of work, residence, and community life needed to include more about life on the tideflats - and the clear connection between residence and work at the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company - as well as other locations, such as housing near additional sawmills along the current Ruston Way and Schuster Parkway.

Recognizing that the oral histories were providing additional information that could fill out the Ito map, Hanneman and Hoffman brought Sarah Pyle, a senior in the Geographic Information Systems Certificate Program and Sustainable Urban Development ma-

ior at UW Tacoma, onto the project as a research assistant. This in turn led to further research in the UW Libraries Special Collections St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company and Ronald Magden archives. In Special Collections, we also identified official Tacoma and Pierce County maps

from the early 1900s showing the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company property, including St. Paul Avenue and the fourteen houses<sup>7</sup> mentioned by the interviewees (Metsker 1926). The most accessible map, the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Tacoma* (1912), available on microfilm, but with some pages missing, shows 9 of the 14 residences depicted in the *Metsker Atlas* (see MAP 2).

The process of turning the interview transcripts into geographic data required several steps. Pyle reviewed the oral histories and created the data from the spatial references in the narratives.<sup>8</sup> Due to the nature of the interviews - older individuals reflecting on childhood memories over 60 years prior and against a backdrop of a drastically different urban landscape in Tacoma - many of the comments did not provide specific locations or addresses. Rather, interviewees noted a range of blocks where one could find a building or referenced a location as “across the street” or “next to” another notable location. In addition, some references conflicted with existing maps, creat-

<sup>7</sup> The 1926 Metsker Atlas does not show houses 9 and 13, but adequate space between buildings indicates they once existed there. Of note, Clinton Butsuda (see below) remembers twenty-one houses, but no map depicts houses numbered up to twenty-one. The Sanborn map, which depicts nine of the houses, shows smaller buildings behind the numbered buildings, but they are not labeled.

<sup>8</sup> To identify spatial comments that could be digitized, Pyle both read through interview transcripts and used NVivo software, which allows for fuzzy queries (e.g., misspelled, plural or conjugated).



MAP 3: This map, created by Sarah Pyle (2018) and based on the 1926 Metsker Atlas, shows the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company Hotel, dining facility, the numbered residences where some Japanese families lived, and the Japanese Hotel, which we understand functioned as a boarding house for Japanese laborers.

ing the need for analyzing spatial references across the interviews. The information gathered was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and then digitized in relation to a 1917 *Brown and Nicholson* map and cross-referenced with the 1926 *Metsker Atlas*.<sup>9</sup>

In focusing on the mapping of the spatial references, we were struck by comments about playing, fishing, living and working on the tideflats and in sawmills and the lumber industry, mentioned by *twenty-four* of the Nisei interviewed - just over half of the interviewees who grew up in Tacoma. Yet no existing maps of Tacoma's Nihonmachi acknowledged the Japanese presence in the area. The St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company, mentioned specifically by four interviewees, was a main employer of Japanese laborers in the tideflats. Other publications also report Japanese laborers at Wheeler-Osgood Lumber Company, down the street from St. Paul & Tacoma, (Watanabe 1988: 100), and the Pacific National Lumber Company and

Mitchell Lumber Company (Otsuka n.d.). Other interviewees noted companies such as the Pt. Defiance sawmill (Oral History Interview, Yoshida et al. 2003). In addition to the sawmill and other production facilities, the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company opened a supply store and boarding house for workers (Morgan 1982). Also, along St. Paul Avenue were the fourteen individual houses for families of workers as well as a boarding hotel for Japanese laborers (e.g., see Oral History Interview, Hattori 2005). The 1926 *Metsker Atlas* and 1912 *Sanborn Map* clearly showed these spaces, including the houses and the additional boarding hotel for Japanese workers at the mill, but the houses have not previously been highlighted as residences for Tacoma Japanese families. (See Maps 2 and 3)

The one exception is a memoir written by Clinton Butsuda and available in the Ronald Magden Papers,<sup>10</sup> <sup>10</sup> "Memories of St. Paul Avenue," photocopied unpublished

<sup>9</sup> The completed dataset of roads Pyle digitized contained 1,200 segments in order to facilitate future research into the time period. Seventy building footprints came from the interview data.

and thus not widely published. His descriptions of growing up on St. Paul Avenue are rich and specific, “a very good place to grow up” he noted, adding clarity to other comments and memories. As he visited again in the late 1908s he could almost “hear Mr. Mostrom playing his mandolin on his front porch,” and the “children’s voices of the past playing in the street and the alley,” and “see the willow tree” that his father had planted (1992, 1). Here and below we quote him at length.

## Japanese Labor Immigration to the Pacific Northwest

It is important to frame the Japanese presence along St. Paul Avenue in Tacoma’s tideflats in relation to larger historical trends of both reliance on and backlash against Asian labor immigration. Tacoma’s expulsion of the Chinese in 1885 provides one of the most ignominious examples of the late 19th century American backlash against Asian labor, but the sentiments expressed so explosively in Tacoma had been given legal sanction at the national level by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which completely cut off new immigration of Chinese labor to the U.S.<sup>11</sup> Despite popular U.S. sentiment against Chinese immigration at the end of the 19th century, the demand for cheap labor in North America did not abate and in the late 1890s and early 1900s this need was increasingly filled by labor from Japan. As Stan Flewelling argued, “much of the West was built on the cheap labor rendered by immigrant peoples” (2002: 17), including those from China and Japan.

Japan’s opening to the West during its Meiji period (1868-1912) resulted in the relaxation of emigration

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manuscript, 9/24/92, Box 2, Research Materials (folder 7), Acc. 5185-003, Ronald Magden Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries. We were alerted to the Butsuda memoirs in Asaka 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Though initially enacted for a period of ten years, the Act was renewed in 1892 and by 1902 it was signed into permanent law (and not repealed until 1943 when the U.S. and China were wartime allies).

laws in Japan, allowing for an outflow of Japanese laborers that coincided with the increased demand for labor and with the rise of the practice of labor contracting (*keiyakunin*) on the American west coast.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the window for Japanese labor immigration was relatively limited (1885 to 1924), as the immigration of Asian labor remained a contested political issue in both the U.S. and Japan.<sup>13</sup> Late-19th and early 20th century discriminatory U.S. immigration policies are well-documented and Japanese emigration policies evolved in response to these pressures and Japan’s fears of diplomatic backlash from the U.S. For example, by 1907-08, Japan and the U.S. entered into the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement,” in which the U.S. agreed not to enact legal restrictions on Japanese immigration in exchange for Japan’s agreement to completely restrict labor emigration to the U.S. “prevent[ing] anyone other than parents, wives, and children of men already in the United States” from emigrating to the U.S. (Nimura 2016; see also Daniels 1988: 125-6; Daniels 1992: 433; and Takaki 1998).

In Japan, debate on emigration policy took place against the backdrop of Japan’s Meiji-era national focus on achieving equal status in the international

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<sup>12</sup> The majority of this emigration occurred between 1890 and 1907, a seventeen-year period that can be further divided into two distinct phases, 1890-1900 and 1901-1907. Between 1890 and 1900, nearly 27,500 Japanese emigrated to the U.S., mostly laborers; in 1900 the Japanese government began to strictly limit the issuance of passports to laborers and of the nearly 37,000 passports issued in the 1900-1907 period, slightly fewer than 5,500 went to laborers (Ichioka 1980, 326-327). Ronald Takaki also reported that between 1885 and 1924 180,000 Japanese, mostly young men with some education, went to the U.S. mainland (1998: 45).

<sup>13</sup> Japanese immigration to the U.S. in general occurred primarily between 1885 when the first official immigrants went to Hawaii, then a U.S.-controlled territory, and 1924, when the Immigration Act of 1924, the so-called “Exclusion Act,” barred the immigration of persons not eligible to become naturalized citizens of the U.S.

community, which centered on revising the unequal treaties Japan had been forced to sign with the Western powers in the 1850s and 1860s. In this context, Japanese policy-makers believed emigration policy could have a potent impact on Japan's international reputation. They thus argued that "citizens who went to the U.S. and the West [must] be people whom the government deemed worthy of representing a growing and important imperial presence in East Asia. Put another way, they should categorically not be 'low class' or 'densely ignorant'" (Sawada 1991: 342).

Starting in 1885 when official emigration from Japan to the U.S. began, most Japanese migrants ventured to Hawaii and California and businesses in the Pacific Northwest had to compete with their counterparts in California to attract labor from Japan. By the end of the 1890s however, the establishment of labor contracting firms, Tacoma Construction and Maintenance Company and the Oriental Trading Company of Seattle, both founded in 1898, gave western Washington businessmen a means for recruiting Japanese labor, primarily for work on the railroads (Ichioka 1991: 329-330). The impact of these labor contractors is clear in that by June 1900, "almost half of the 12,635 Japanese admitted to the country entered through the Pacific Northwest" (Fiset 2009: 2).

With the growth of labor-contracted Japanese emigration, entrepreneurs in Japan began producing guidebooks for would-be migrants to the U.S. to instruct them on how to navigate successfully the potential pitfalls of life in their new home. One such publication, *Kitare Nihonjin* ("Come, Japanese"), provided instructions on such things as American table etiquette and foodways, and also paved the way for a general adoption of a strategy of assimilation by advising, "Do the right thing. If you don't, all Japanese will suffer." In 1893, for instance, the arrival from Asia of the SS Tacoma in the Port of Tacoma brought ninety-six passengers from Japan and one hundred and forty-two from China (Flewelling 2002: 20-21). That these

Japanese migrants had studied their guidebooks seems evident from this racist and essentializing commentary on their arrival published in the Tacoma Daily Ledger:

Polite fellows are these Japs, and the inspector was more than once embarrassed by the profound bows and graceful flourishes of arms. They were all neat and genteel looking and were minus the 'smell' so noticeable among the Chinese immigrants.

The Ledger's judgmental ranking of these new arrivals continued:

A great difference is noticeable between the Japanese and Chinese immigrants. The Japanese came dressed in American costumes throughout, down to their very shoes... They try to adopt American ways even while on the ship before they arrive, and consequently watch the actions of the Americans closely. The Chinese, however, are all dressed in their quaint garb and are as completely Chinese in America as they are in China" (*Tacoma Daily Ledger* 1893, quoted in Flewelling 2002: 21).

Despite efforts to learn American ways, discrimination and racism were prevalent as labor contractors dispersed Japanese workers across the Pacific Northwest and west coast. The majority of Japanese labor went to work on the railroads, while lumber, canneries and agriculture industries absorbed much of the rest. The labor contractors worked as intermediaries between the Japanese immigrants and their employers, negotiating wages and conditions for a fee that was deducted from their wages. Some Japanese also "served as foremen or field bosses" who "supervised the workers, translated instructions, and disbursed

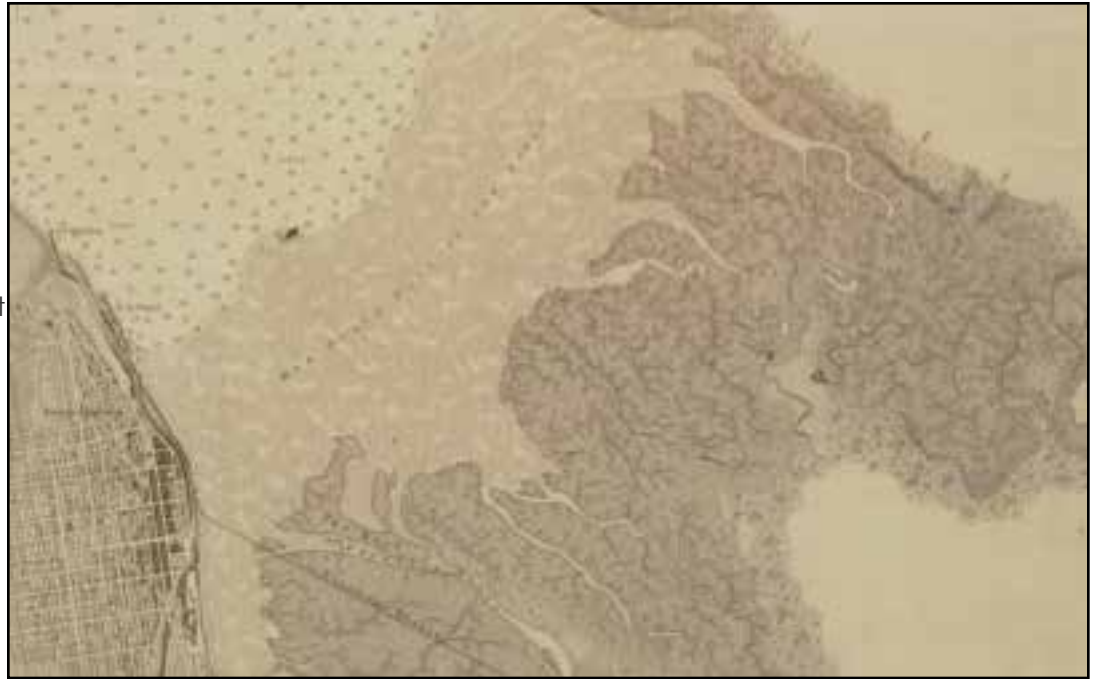
wages” (Takaki 1998: 182-3). One example is Kenkichi Honda who worked as a “labor gang foreman” for the Wheeler-Osgood Lumber Company, near the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company on Tacoma’s tideflats. Honda was described as “well respected by this company, and he became the foreman over thirty Japanese workers. He is a good natured, modest, quiet individual” (Watanabe 1988: 100). In addition to working in more urban areas, Japanese laborers went to smaller mill towns in Washington State, including Port Blakely, Port Townsend, Enumclaw, Onalaska, Snoqualmie Falls, and Selleck (Fiset 2009: 2). Significantly, by the first decade of the 1900s, sawmills in Washington and Oregon employed some 2,200 Japanese workers (Fiset 2009: 3).

## The St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company

The Great Northern and the Pacific Northern railroads, the largest employers of immigrant labor, helped drive the growth of the timber and lumber industries in the Pacific Northwest in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In an almost symbiotic relationship, lumber was needed for railroad construction itself, and railroads would be used for shipping lumber to mid-western and east coast markets (Morgan 1982; Cornwall 1938). In Tacoma, the first sawmill opened in 1852 and over the course of the 1880s, sixteen sawmills and shingle mills opened along the Tacoma waterfront (Magden 2008).

By far the largest of these was the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company. Founded in 1888, the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber eventually operated three mills built

on what Tacomans called “The Boot” a marshy, boot-shaped “on-again, off-again island” (Morgan 1982: 258) located “off the main tideflats, bordered by two branches of the Puyallup River and Commencement Bay” (Morgan, 1982: 49). In 1887, St. Paul, Minnesota businessman and Civil War veteran Colonel Chauncey Griggs traveled west in search of investment opportunities. Courted by the Northern Pacific Railroad, he found “a magnificent body of Northern Pacific [Railroad Company] grant land timber on the Puyallup River, consisting of 80,000 acres, all in Pierce County” and cooperated with three others to start the company: Addison Foster of St. Paul, Henry Hewitt, Jr. of Menasha, Wisconsin and Hewitt’s brother-in-law Charles Hebard Jones of Menominee,



Map 4: This map shows the original tideflats, including “The Boot” purchased by the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company for their sawmill operations (US Coast Geodetic Survey [1888] 1976).

Michigan (Cornwall 1938: 18).<sup>14</sup> From the Tacoma Land Company they purchased the Boot, a tract of “40 acres, to which was added a long strip of land 500 feet wide extending in a northerly direction to deep water on Commencement Bay, where docks were to be built.” (Cornwall 1983: 21-22). With two mills in operation (the first opened in 1889 and the second in 1900) and a third added during WWI, the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company complex on the Tacoma tideflats would become “the world’s greatest lumber producer.” (Morgan 1982: 55-65).

Despite various setbacks, a confluence of factors contributed to the overall success and growth of the mill, including the revamping of the tideflats into industrial waterways (see Maps 4 and 5), construction of multiple mills, and introduction of new technologies such as the band saw, creating what one correspondent for

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14 The four men were originally introduced by a railroad executive over dinner, brandy and cigars in Tacoma Hotel’s Stone Room (Morgan 1982, 48).



Map 5: This map outlines the contemporary port and main urban area in Tacoma. Note in particular the waterways in relation to the original and natural tideflats. Map created by Sarah Pyle 2018.

the *Mississippi Valley Lumberman* called “The most perfect sawmill” (Morgan 1982: 166).<sup>15</sup> With all this growth, the “greatest problem was labor.” The work was “rough and sometimes dangerous,” both in the logging camps and in the mill itself and even at the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company, considered one of the better companies (as were Simpson and Weyerhaeuser), “the hours were long, the pay low..., even by the industrial standards of the day, and the authority of the boss often oppressive” (Morgan 1982: 198). As Murray Morgan described it, those who labored in this industry “were men regarded as stronger of back than of mind, the unskilled, the foreigners, itinerants, ‘womanless, homeless, voteless’” (1982: 198). Nevertheless, over the fifty-year period between 1888 and 1938, the mill “maintained an average of 1000 workmen in its payroll” (Cornwall 1938: 30). This included a number of Japanese immigrants.

## Japanese Laborers and the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company

The St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company was considered one of the best mills to work for by the overall working population, in part because it offered various inducements even to “the unskilled, foreigners and itinerants” who ended up taking the physically demanding and sometimes dangerous work available

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15 Murray Morgan’s history of the company notes that by 1912 the Company was in full-production mode, with Mill A running a day shift while Mill B was “double-shifting, turning out lumber for two ten-hour shifts, six days a week”. That year a fire destroyed Mill A, causing an estimated loss of half a million dollars; although despite conflict within the Company, rebuilding the mill began almost immediately, and the Company was well-placed to take advantage of the boom caused by WWI (1982, 188). Other difficulties overcome by the firm included, for instance, forest fires that destroyed 12 billion board feet of timber in 1902 (and resulted in 35 lost lives) and the disruption in trade on the west coast due to the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 (despite an ephemeral post-quake boom) (Morgan 1982).

at the Mill.<sup>16</sup> Some of these amenities included the “large wholesale and retail general store” that was situated on the mill site between the mill itself and the Company offices. The store supplied such merchandise as hardware, work clothing, and general work supplies and was, “for some years, the largest merchandiser in Tacoma” (Morgan 1982: 226, see Map 3 above).

Another major benefit offered by the company for some workers was the four-story, eighty by one hundred-foot St. Paul and Tacoma Hotel located on St. Paul Avenue, north of the fourteen houses where some Japanese families lived. The main floor of the hotel contained “a lobby, reading room and billiard and pool room.” A dining room completed the main floor, and was used for entertaining various groups, including trade groups such as the Association of Railroad Tie Producers. The upper floors served essentially as a boarding house<sup>17</sup> for employees who did not own their own homes and was sometimes called “Hotel de Gink” (Morgan 1982: 226).<sup>18</sup> Records for this boarding house in the archives of the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company in UW Libraries Special Collections show only European surnames. We did not find any Japanese names in those boarding records. Clinton Butsuda remembered this as the place where white men stayed, “with 100 rooms, billiard and pool rooms, library, and...[which] sold cigar, cigarettes and candies for the white laborers. Coming home from school we kids used to go in from one end of the building, race to the second floor, then back to the main floor and scurry out the front door”

<sup>16</sup> In a history of Japanese in Tacoma, however, Asao Otsuka calls out the Pacific National Lumber Company and the Mitchell Lumber Company as particularly good to Japanese workers (n.d.).

<sup>17</sup> Boarders lived in rooms in the upper story’s shared facilities: “Each floor had two baths, two toilets, and a room for drying clothes” (Morgan 1982, 226).

<sup>18</sup> “Gink” was a term used to refer to itinerant workers and homeless men. The first “Hotel de Gink” was founded in Seattle in 1913; other such hotels were opened in other cities around the U.S. over the course of the nineteen-teens.

(1992, 1-2). At the opposite end of St. Paul Avenue was a Japanese Hotel, however, suggesting that Japanese bachelor laborers stayed there.<sup>19</sup> In addition, two Nisei we interviewed remembered that two different Issei women cooked at the Japanese hotel, including Mrs. Okada.<sup>20</sup> Butsuda also offers wonderful detail of this boarding house:

At the end of the Avenue was a dark red and white trimmed two story Japanese boarding house with about 40 rooms for the bachelors. We used to go there to see men engage in Judo and Japanese fencing of kendo with pads, masks, and bamboo swords on holidays and on weekends. There was a large 6’ x 10’ concrete bath of hot water used for soaking after we washed and rinsed ourselves” (1992, 3).<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company had a “social club” that charged a small fee (50 cents per month) to support “a library with over 200 books, with English and Japanese titles, and a literary publication filled with stories and original poetry” by residents of the boarding house (Asaka 2014: 127). Between these two boarding houses, in a single row spanning the waterfront area between the St. Paul and Tacoma Hotel to the north and the Japanese Hotel to the south, were the single-family homes, in which

<sup>19</sup> In her dissertation, Megan Asaka argues that little attention has been paid to the bachelor life of Japanese immigrants, instead focusing on “the normative family life before WWII.” She argues this is in large part because of “the timing of oral history projects that started in the 1970s and 1980s” when many Issei had already passed away (2014, 125-6).

<sup>20</sup> See Asaka 2014 for more on how Japanese bachelors would hire cooks.

<sup>21</sup> “Memories of St. Paul Avenue,” photocopied unpublished manuscript, 9/24/92, Box 2, Research Materials (folder 7), Acc. 5185-003, Ronald Magden Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

Japanese employees and their families resided, constituting a tiny outpost of the Japanese community in Tacoma. Clinton Butsuda's memoir provides a list of those who lived there, including non-Japanese families. They were:

#1 Sundquist Family, "whose older daughter, Iveldell, attended the Japanese language and culture class after the regular school. At the Japanese Festival, the blonde Swedish-American girl in kimono would be dancing with the black-haired Japanese-American friends."

#2, Mathews, no children

#3, Vites

#4 Phillips

#5 Mogis, who had a son and two daughters"

#6, Mostroms, a large German family

#7, Mr. and Mrs. Lane

#8, Matsuis, "with their six sons and two daughters. In their garage was a Hutmobil Touring Car that I never saw running."

#10, Butsuda family, "People used to say it was the 'Garden of Eden', for my father grew the best flowers and vegetables on St. Paul Avenue....Hollyhock, blue bells, cosmos, Irish Broom, dahlias of all colors blended in with the green, green lawn. A large stately willow tree shaded the back porch. Our yard was the most popular place to play. It was a fun place to be."

#11, Satos, whose grandson, James Hattori, "is one of NBC's national news reporter."

#12, Yamamoto family, whose "son got the brunt of jokes and pranks. He was the kind of a kid that could take it and laugh about it."

#14, Watanabe family

#20, Paul Inouye lived there

#21, Asada, whose "father was taken away by the FBI right after Pearl Harbor just because he served in the Japanese Army long ago" (Butsuda, 1992, 2-3).<sup>22</sup>

According to Asao Otsuka, in an unpublished manuscript, in 1917 some 1,300 Japanese workers were employed in the approximately fifty sawmills in the Tacoma area, earning a total of over \$1,400,000 in wages.<sup>23</sup> By 1922 the number of Japanese employed in the Tacoma area sawmills increased to over 2,000 (Otsuka n.d.). Despite the lack of records of Japanese boarders in the St. Paul & Tacoma Company archives, these materials did confirm that Japanese workers were employed by the company. These records listed the individuals by first initial and surname, the type of job they performed, and the number of hours worked each day during a month. The following is an example of such listings from February 1915, night shift records.<sup>24</sup>

22 "Memories of St. Paul Avenue," photocopied unpublished manuscript, 9/24/92, Box 2, Research Materials (folder 7), Acc. 5185-003, Ronald Magden Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries. See footnote 7 regarding discrepancies in the number of houses on St. Paul Avenue.

23 We thank Tamiko Nimura and Michael Sullivan for sharing this manuscript with us.

24 Time books (Mill and Camps), 1903-1918, Box 230, Night

K. Adachi	Clean, Shingle Mill
M. Jinguji	Clean, D.C. Carriage, H.S. Carriage, Burner, Sorter
K. Kawashima	Sorter, Clean
T. Asada	D.C. Carriage, Sorter
T. Mochizuki	Sorter, Clean
K. Yueta	Sorter
M. Sumi	Sorter, Clean
M. Yamasaki	Sorter
C. Magi	H.S. Offbearer, Sorter
H. Kadayama	Sorter
M. Kurata	Sorter, Clean
I. Nakagawa	Sorter, Clean
S. Tanaka	Sorter, Clean
R. Doi	Sorter, Clean
K. Okamoto [sic]	Sorter, Clean
K. Yoshida	Sorter, Clean

One narration of working at the St. Paul & Tacoma mill, as told by Shichiro Kumasaka and recorded by Kazuo Ito, reads (1973: 404):

Tashihiro Matsui from Shiga Prefecture was the bookman there, and under him fifty or sixty Japanese were working. I labored diligently, making nearly \$3 a day for ten hours of work. Since we were young, sometimes we took over-time work and went as long as twenty

hours without sleeping. I did all kinds of jobs, including slab-turning. Young Issei worked hard and sent their money back to Japan. There were some who sent as much as \$70 a month home.

In the Japanese camp at St. Paul most men were wholesome workers and we played judo, tennis and baseball in our leisure time. Setsuzo Ohta, who held fifth dan in Kodokan and was the uncle of Keisuke Yoshida (fourth dan) taught us judo. As for baseball, along with some Japanese students in Tacoma we organized the Taiyo Club. Among the players were Kiyoshi Kondo (later professor at University Illinois), and Hitoshi Okada. We had frequent games with Nippon Club, the center for which was the Tacoma Buddhist Church. There was a tennis court in the camp and on Sundays and holidays the workers used to bat balls back and forth. In the sawmill we spent close to \$30 for meals so it was pretty good for the time - as good as having hamburgers for breakfast.

Clinton Butsuda also supplied descriptions of work at the sawmill in his memoir.

My father used to take me through the mill where he worked with its huge cross-cut saws, the gigantic band saws and the ear-splitting noise of the planer. It was very impressive. My father worked as a foreman and a lumber grader. He would grade the lumber

#1-2-3-4 or S for scrap according to its quality as it came by one the conveyor and the men down the line stacked it on different piles according to the grade my father chalked on the boards. (1992, 4).

Japanese laborers worked alongside immigrants from across Europe, making significant contributions to Tacoma's early industrial development.

As competition in the industry increased in the early 1920s, the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company sought to expand its markets, and Japan, which primarily used wood for construction, was "especially attractive" (Morgan 1982: 218). The Company began to produce for the Japanese market, offering product that, per Japanese buyers' preferences, could be re-sawn in Japanese mills, including 4 x 4 x 4 inch, 24 x 24 x 24 inch and even 30 x 30 x 30 inch timbers. The larger timbers, actually cubes, for the Japanese market, came to be called "Jap squares" (as opposed to the smaller "baby squares") (Morgan 1982: 218). Just as the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 had seemed to promise a market for lumber, so too did the massive Kanto Earthquake in the Tokyo area in 1923. But as with the San Francisco Earthquake, Japan's disaster did not mean profit for the Tacoma mill as the Japanese ports were too drastically affected to function (Morgan 1982: 219).

While World War I led to a production boom and the post-war period saw many technological advances, this period also had downward trends (e.g., the stock market crash of 1929) and emboldened working men across the U.S. to unionize and make demands of their employers. In Tacoma, labor unions also started more direct organizing and negotiating, leading to strikes and confrontations in 1934 and 1935. Workers at the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company were part of this national trend, which led to violent clashes

between police and laborers in Tacoma (Gallacci and Karabaich 2006: 125-127; Morgan 1982: 238-242).<sup>25</sup> One of the Nisei we interviewed, **Hanna Kae (Nakagawa) Torimaru**, born in 1922, in fact had quite clear memories of clashes between workers and police. Her father and mother, originally from Hiroshima prefecture, ran the State Cafe, a small restaurant downtown<sup>26</sup> among whose customers were many workers. She recounted:

I have to tell you one thing, which I have never forgotten or gotten over the pain. And that was, during the mid-thirties, there was a huge longshoreman strike, and of course curiosity got the best of me. I had to go and see where all of this rioting and all this mass-hysteria was going on. And let me tell you, at that time, they were throwing, it looked like little grenades. That isn't what it was, but that's what it looked like to me, and actually I think they were tear gas, gas pellets that each of them was throwing, the police and the military would be throwing and then the longshoreman people would throw it

<sup>25</sup> Asao Otsuka, in his unpublished manuscript, "History of Japanese in Tacoma," (n.d., no page) comments on labor unions and Japanese labor in the early 20th century sawmills writing that the president of the Pacific National Lumber Company, one of the Tacoma area mills, "...took kindly to Japanese. He did not comply with demands of the Union and employed many Japanese. The Union was successful in ousting Japanese from sawmills in the area. On one occasion, when the Union recommended that Japanese join the Union, seeing the position and future of Japanese, he immediately recommended they join the Union, thereby avoided [sic] breakdown in relation." In addition, in Ronald Olson's DATE survey of multiple mills in the northwest, he notes that only at the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company were Japanese "allowed Union privileges, but this is the only instance" (1928, 16).

<sup>26</sup> The restaurant was originally on Pacific Avenue across from City Hall and later was located at 1512½ South Jefferson.

back. And they found that didn't work. I mean, we were able to watch that demonstration there, and it's really, a mass-hysteria is a frightening thing to observe. People are more like animals, they're not – emotion is so high. But finally, what they resorted to was, the police squad car on their tail light, what, what do you call that thing that sticks out, the exhaust? The tear gas was there, exhaust. And so, they were going up and down the street, and of course I got caught in that. Wowie, to this day I could remember that tremendous pain, and in your eyes, it just blinded with tears. It's so severe. You wonder, but that's how, it's about the only time anybody's ever said they hardly believed me, because they didn't know they would do such a thing. And yet I know, I saw it. Also felt the...the pain.

Recognizing Japanese laborers in the sawmills requires recognizing Japanese Issei immigrants and their Nisei families as integral parts of Tacoma's history and development. While much of the attention on Tacoma's prewar Japanese community has been understandably focused on businesses and families in Tacoma's downtown core, including Hanna's family's restaurant, in this overview of working in the lumber industry and at the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company in particular, coupled with the oral history excerpts reviewed below, we aim to emphasize the Japanese community's contributions and acknowledge the presence of these Japanese families in spaces typically identified as the starting points of Tacoma's notable industrial development.

## Nisei Narratives of Sawmills and the Tideflats

The immigration histories of the representative families in our study (such as the families of Fumi Sato Hattori, Riyeko Fujimoto, Chizu Takaoka, Ryo Munekata, Joseph (Joe) Kosai, Kazuo (Kaz) Horita and Mitsuhiro (Robert) Takasugi) are local reflections of the migration patterns dictated by both U.S. and Japanese migration law and industrial growth in the Pacific Northwest. These interviewees recalled childhood memories of living and playing on the tideflats; they recalled their parents' work-lives at the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company as well as other sawmills.

A significant finding from these oral histories is the description of the housing along St. Paul Avenue, which, as noted above, we were also able to locate with historical maps. Moreover, the stories of fishing, swimming, and playing in the tideflats expands our sense of the daily paths traveled by the Japanese community in Tacoma, including movement between the tideflats and the main Nihonmachi area in the downtown core where Japanese businesses, churches and the Language School were located.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, these narratives provide repeated memories of a father working in a sawmill, often when they first arrived in Tacoma, with transitions to small businesses such as hotels, markets, and laundries. In some cases, the small business was added on to the father's continued work in the sawmill, but in others it was a transition away from the early employment in the sawmill into an entrepreneurial venture. Starting one's own business was a way to avoid some of the discrimination and racism that Japanese faced,

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<sup>27</sup> See Hoffman and Hanneman (unpublished manuscript) for more on the importance of place and spatial experiences for identity formation and Tacoma's Japanese Language School.

leading to a culture of entrepreneurialism and self-employment within the Japanese immigrant community (see Takaki 1998: 180). The growth of such urban ethnic economies in Nihonmachi was “sudden and extensive.” By 1910, Ronald Takaki reported, “there were 3,000 establishments and 68,150 Japanese in the western states - a ratio of one business per twenty-two persons (1998: 186). Yet evidence that some families straddled the lumber industry and the ethnic economy suggests families made strategic decisions in deploying their labor, which were often gender and generation specific. The following excerpts from the oral history interviews provide these memories of the Tacoma experience in Nisei’s own words. We begin with information specific to the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company and life on the tideflats, but also have included quotes about working in other sawmills around the Tacoma area.

**Fumi Sato Hattori**, born in 1921, was the firstborn and the only girl in the family of four children. Her father was born in 1882 and came to the U.S. from Ehime prefecture on the southern island of Shikoku in 1905. Her mother came to the U.S. in 1920 upon marriage at age 19. Although Fumi Sato Hattori’s father came to the U.S. as a student, he sought work in the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company and worked as a planer in the sawmill. She explained that while he wanted to go to university, he could not afford to do so, “So, he went to work in a sawmill, and that’s where he worked his whole career.” Fumi also offered clear and distinct memories of the housing along St. Paul Avenue and the “piles of lumber” across the street from their home. Her mother ran the Superior Hotel at 17th and Market Street in Tacoma, where the family eventually moved after initially residing on the tideflats. Here she describes the situation:

He worked for the St. Paul in Tacoma Lumber Company, down in the tideflats, they called it. And they used to

have many, they used to have housing for their Japanese employees, houses numbered from 1 to 14 or something. And my brother remembered that we lived in number 11 at one time, and number 14 at another time. And across, between our house and, oh some distance away there was a boarding house for Japanese workers at the mill, and my mother used to cook there. And my father was a very reserved man. He never told us anything about his background. All I’ve learned is from his sister, who lived in New Orleans. And she communicated with her children. So, her children can tell more about my father’s family than my father did, because my father died when I was sixteen. He was coming home from work; he was hit by a car. He was a very healthy person. He used to walk to work and walk home. It was about two miles, but he worked a second shift, and I guess somebody... careless driver just hit him, and that’s when Mr. Semba... he was an insurance man, and he investigated the man who hit him. Of course, in those days we didn’t sue anybody, you know, but he investigated, and found that this fellow didn’t have any money or anything, so he couldn’t do anything.

As children, they played with others on the block on St. Paul Avenue, with the children of other company employees. This included other Japanese and Caucasian families. One such family was the Sundquists (mentioned by Clifford Butsuda, above), who had girls

with whom Fumi played.

Yes...Lillian was older than us, and Ivy was a little bit older than me, but she used to play with one of the Japanese girls, Chio, who lived a couple of doors down from me... And the Molstroms, they were mostly boys, but they had one girl, and Paynes—Ruth was a redheaded girl. I remember we always used to play, the whole block...We were poor, but we didn't know it. We got along fine, you know, with everybody on the block, and we lived in the tideflats, which was sort of not too upper class, but we didn't know that. We got along fine...We had church friends, you know, so a group of us used to go to Japanese school together, so we socialized with them. And the whole of St. Paul Avenue sort of, we sort of kept an eye on each other. Our activities sort of meshed. We had a happy childhood, really.

As with the majority of those we interviewed, Fumi remembered going to American school, going to Japanese school, and going home. The day was full with little time for extracurricular activities. Living on the tideflats added an additional constraint, however, as they had to walk the two miles home every day after Japanese school. Her memories of that walk accentuate the importance of these daily paths.

When it was foggy, my father would come down and meet us, you know, along the way. Because there's a... from the time we'd cross the 15th Street Bridge there's a long space of...I don't know what they had there, but there was nothing there. It was just dark, and so he'd come and meet us...we didn't

think much of it. There were several of us, you know, my brothers and a couple of neighbors.

Fumi also remembered that they joined the Methodist Church because of a missionary couple who visited the homes on the tideflats.

When we lived down in St. Paul Avenue, which is in the tideflats, there was a Caucasian couple that came down there, sort of missionary I think, I guess, to try to, you know, make sure that we became good Christians and all, and they used to come down. And so that's how we started going to church. And then we...they had the Japanese church in town, so we went to that.

Later in her childhood and before the tragedy of her father's untimely death, they moved into the central part of Tacoma. Fumi explains that it was really due to her mother's resourcefulness that she began running the Superior Hotel on the corner of Market Street and South 17th Street between the Methodist Church and the Buddhist Church (Ito 1973, Pyle 2018).

I guess my mother was probably more entrepreneurial than my father, and she saw a chance to lease a hotel, a small hotel downtown. And so, she ran the hotel, and my father worked in the sawmill. And that was really a life-saver, because there were four of us, and my father got killed, so she supported us until my brother went to college. I didn't get to go because I'm a girl. You know, in those days boys, it was more important that boys went to

college. So, when I think of it now, I'm just amazed at how my mother did it. You know, four kids, sending them all through school, Sunday school, Japanese school, and she paid for all that. I don't know how. It was just a small hotel, I think 39 rooms or something.

This situation was not unique to this family: mothers not only were responsible for raising the children and managing the household, but often were also responsible for running and supporting the family business.

Riyeko Fujimoto was born in Tacoma in 1924 and had one younger brother. Like Fumi, she remembered that her father first worked for the St. Paul & Tacoma sawmill and later in her childhood also ran a hotel with her mother, the Dendome Hotel on Market Street. In her family's case, the hotel was in addition to her father's regular work at the sawmill, rather than a transition away from this difficult work.

What I remember is, my dad worked in the lumber mill [St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company]. And then we moved to Tacoma, I think right before I started school, and he ran a hotel...She [mother] helped with it. My dad still worked in the sawmill.

In the interview, she also asked, "Is the lumber company still there?" Much of the Tacoma built landscape had changed, turning businesses into parking lots and high rises.<sup>28</sup> Notably, Pyle's mapping of the spatial references in the oral histories resulted in forty buildings

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28 When Clinton Butsuda visited in the late 1980s he saw "an empty stretch of sand and weeds. Gone are the houses, the sounds of the lumber mill and the sweet smell of the wood I loved so much. Gone is our beautiful willow tree...everything is gone...except in my memories" (1992, 4). "Memories of St. Paul Avenue," photocopied unpublished manuscript, 9/24/92, Box 2, Research Materials (folder 7), Acc. 5185-003, Ronald Magden Papers, Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries.

that were mentioned three or more times by the interviewees. Of these forty buildings, in 2018, thirty-six of these were vacant or parking lots (Pyle 2018; see also Nimura 2018; Howey 2010; and Jones 2010)

**Chizu Tomita Takaoka**, the third of seven children, was born in 1920. Her father, Tainojo Tomita, was born in 1885 in Fukushima prefecture, just north of Tokyo. The youngest child in his family, he attended fourteen years of school in Japan. Yet when his father passed away, not wanting to be a burden to his eldest brother and family, Tainojo emigrated to the U.S. in 1907. His older brother had a greenhouse in Seattle, and her father "grubbed for about five years ... and had enough money and went back to Japan and got married" in 1915 to Kinko Nihei, born in 1895 and also well-educated like Chizu's father. The couple later relocated to Tacoma where he worked in a garage.

Chizu, like Fumi Hattori, remembered playing with some of the children who lived on the tideflats.

I had one friend, now her name was Elvida, and the reason why is because she used to live in St. Paul. You know where that St. Paul is, used to be lumber, and then there was a group of Japanese that lived there, and Elvida was one of them, I don't know what her last name. So that's all the friends she had, too...she didn't live nearby, but she was my schoolmate. She was in my same class. The rest of them, eh, cordial, but you're not a friend.

**Jack Hata**, born in 1921, also remembered playing on the tideflats. His parents were both from Toyama

City with his father coming to the U.S. in 1915 at about age 25 (first to California) and his mother in 1920. His father worked in the photography industry and acted as the photographer for the Japanese community in Tacoma. Like his father, his mother was well-known in the community as she was a teacher at the Japanese Language School. When discussing what he did other than go to American school and Japanese school, Jack remarked:

Just the kid stuff, like in the fall we'd play touch football. In the spring, we'd play baseball. I guess that's about it. And we'd go to the beach and go swimming at the tideflats.

**Ryo Munekata** was born in 1921, the eldest of three children. His father, Tadajiro Munekata, was born in Hiroshima prefecture in 1890. At age 16, he emigrated to Hawaii and six months later joined a brother in Seattle before relocating to Tacoma in 1906. Tadajiro worked at the Union Laundry between Market and Broadway in an alley off South 15th Street and attended Central School to learn English. Tadajiro returned to Japan in 1919 for his father's memorial service and while there, met Kasumi Okuhara, born in 1901. The two married in November and returned to the U.S. in December of 1919. The Munekatas ran the Broadway Hotel and later the Superior Hotel located at 1317 ½ Broadway.

Dr. Munekata was interviewed both with two other Nisei who wished to remain anonymous and recognized here as Man and Woman (Oral History Interview, Munekata 2005), and with Kunio Urushibata (Oral History Interview, Munekata 2003).

One of the joyful memories he and the others in the three-person interview recalled was about swimming on the tideflats in a place they called "Tokyo Beach".

Man: Well, we used to go to Tokyo Beach...

Munekata: That's Port of Tacoma.

Man: ...but at that time we didn't know the city sewer came down there, but we were still swimming there. We do see reminders floating down once in a while...

Woman: Well, that's all covered now...

Munekata: Now, I know my sister mentioned about going to the swimming, out Port of Tacoma way where the water was dirty, but during the summertime when we didn't go to summer school, we enjoyed hiking—walking—all the way out there and spent the day out there swimming, and then come home in the evening. We either hitched a ride back home or walked all the way back. But one of our favorite foods was potato and a can of pork and beans. And before we started the fire we would dig the sand and bury all the potatoes under there, and then build a fire—cover it with sand—and then build a fire over it, and then when we were ready for pork and beans, we'd just put it on the fire. And then if we wanted a potato, we'd dig around the side and get the potatoes out...I think we were going to—we were in junior high school and high school. And we never thought about, shall we say, being kidnapped or some adults hurting us. It didn't dawn on us. It was just living in the community like any other person, and we had no fear, and evidently our parents didn't have that fear either...

And once in a while when the parents are free, they'd come after us...That was fun. But if I knew what was there at that time, I don't think we would have gone there. (laughs)

He also noted these activities in his interview with Kunio Urushibata when they were talking about the port area.

Ryo: There was a beach out there. We called it Tokyo Beach. And why was it named Tokyo Beach? In that area, the...what is it? The lumber mill...

Kunio: Yes

Ryo: ...had a number of Japanese residents on their property. And when they—naturally they took the rail system, was it a street car? And that's where they all got off. So, the conductor decided to call it Tokyo. And when he would say, "Tokyo!" they all went to the front of the car and got out. (laughter) And the beach area was called Tokyo Beach. And that's where we used to go and spend our summers swimming. And the water, like Kunio was saying this morning, wasn't really clean water. There was a lot of sewage in there. (laughs)

In addition, they remembered that families, including one of their teachers, Mrs. Asada, lived in that area.

Munekata: Most of our classes were taught by a lady named Mrs. Asada. And she lived out in—I don't know what they call it today—but the tideflats area. And that's where she lived. And one interesting thing is that most of the teachers hardly had any kind of trans-

portation. They'd walk all that distance, you see, and like Mrs. Kawano.

Munekata: And there was a family—there were a few families that were living in that area that worked with the lumber industry. (Oral History Interview, Munekata 2005)

The three sisters in the Fujimoto family, **Yoshi-ko (Fujimoto) Sugiyama, Tadaye (Fujimoto) Kawasaki, and Kimi (Fujimoto) Tanbara**, were born in 1919, 1921, and 1924 respectively. In their group interview, they also remembered those who had to walk back and forth from the tideflats.

Tadaye: I used to walk on Pacific Avenue by myself and never thought anything of it.

Kimi: And then, you know, because our home was close to the church and the school, it was easy for us, but some of these students, they lived on the other side of 11th Street bridge, was it?

Tadaye: Tideflats.

Kimi: Yes, and they used to walk every day, in the dark, wintertime.

Tadaye: Some of the teachers, too.

Kimi: Yes. Some of the teachers did, too. But you know, you don't think about those things when you yourself have it so easy, you know, but some of them had to have a really hard time to go to school.

{Who lived on the other side? Were they families that had different types of businesses?}

Kimi: Well, no. They were hired by the sawmill? (looks to sisters)

Yoshiko: ...sawmill.

Kimi: Yes, sawmill...I don't know whether it was all sawmill or not, but it was more of them. But a lot of them lived on Broadway, Pacific Avenue. We were lucky, you know. We lived right across the street....

## Sawmills as entry employment

A number of interviewees recollected the experience of their father "first" working in a sawmill and then either transitioning to an independent business or adding a business to the family. The History of Japanese in Tacoma notes that "In early days the Japanese saved their income mostly from labor. Gradually, independent enterprises helped to shape up economy..." (Otsuka, n.d.). Megan Asaka also argues that the number of Japanese in the lumber industry declined by 1925, indicating that "lumbering had transformed from a critical source of income for those newly arrived from Japan to a stepping-stone out of manual labor and into independent business such as farming or hotel management" (2014: 128; also Nomura 1992, 4). This movement to an ethnic economy provided greater independence and avoidance of discriminatory employers and coworkers as well.<sup>29</sup> This important strategy for economic security through self-sufficiency is important to note. Moreover, although the following families did not live

<sup>29</sup> See Ronald Olson's descriptions of interviews he had with white mill workers. He summarized their attitudes as: "Usually there is an expression of friendship for the Japanese in the local mill, then a hesitation, followed by a vigorous statement of the belief that the Japanese should not be employed with white workmen and that they should be excluded so that they could not compete with white labor" (1928, 15).

on the tideflats and we have no evidence that they worked for the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company, we have included their narratives here to underscore the importance of sawmills as entry employment for those newly arrived from Japan. Per the historical record, we know that labor contractors brought in many men from Japan - and China - to work on the railroads, but these interviews illustrate that sawmills were another potential avenue for work.

**Joseph Kosai**, born in Tacoma in 1935, was one of seven siblings. His grandfather settled in Auburn "in a little community called Christopher" in 1900, followed by Joe's father's oldest brother, and then his father's mother and father in 1905. Joe's father was six years old at that time and did not go to Tacoma until 1923 when he was 24 years old. Joe explained;

In 1919 my grandfather passed away in Auburn, and so about 1920, '21, my grandmother and my father took the ashes back to Japan, since my father was still single at the time. My other two uncles were already married. So I guess it was my father's position to accompany his mother--my grandmother--to put the ashes back.

Like a number of others, Joe explained that his father worked in a sawmill and his mother worked at the hotel where they also lived. In another interview (see below), someone noted that Joe's father worked the night shift and also helped supply workers from Japan to the sawmills. Joe continued:

There were a lot of weekly boarders [in the family hotel] because all the people that worked in the lumber industry, especially those who worked up in the

mountains, would come in and then spend the week there or whatever. And so we had a couple people that were longtime friends of the family because they lived there. So, my mother ran the hotel. Probably her English was nil, just coming from Japan, but somehow she managed to run the hotel. And my father did work for the sawmill here in Tacoma.

In an interview with another **Nisei woman** (wished to remain anonymous), we heard about an additional family that experienced the employment entry into the sawmill and transition to running a small business in the main part of the Japanese area in Tacoma.

My father was born in 1907 in Japan and he came to the States to Tacoma, when he was, gosh, in his early teens. And he lived with a family, a Caucasian family, and I don't know how soon he started working in the sawmill, but that's what he did...And his older brother was here at the time.

After first working in the sawmill, they opened a laundry business where both of her parents worked.

We lived on Tacoma Avenue. We lived in back of my parents' business. They had a laundry business there.

**Hiroko Betty (Fukuhara) Yoshioka**, born in 1922, had a similar story about her father first working for a mill before moving to a new career. Both her mother and father were from Shizuoka, Japan.

I'm not sure about the year [my father arrived], but I know my father was here first, and then he went back to Japan to get my mother. And he used to work in the lumber mill in Tacoma. And then

after that he became a salesman, of stocks.

She also remembered that when her mother first arrived in the U.S., she did not know how to cook, so "all the lumbermen had to teach her how to cook!"

**Kazuo Horita** also knew some of the details about his parents' arrival in the U.S. His father, the youngest in his family and well educated "for the Japanese boys in that age," came in 1906 with his older brother to help make money to send home to his family. Apparently, the family had debt and this was their strategy for meeting those obligations. His mother did not come until 1920.

Kaz also told a story of his father starting in the sawmill and then transitioning to a small business - in his case, a produce market.

He came over here, worked in a, and I'm not quite sure exactly how many years, but only a few years, in a sawmill. And then from there, he established his own produce market. He had that produce market for many years. I'm not quite sure the year, as I say, when he opened it, but it would've been somewhere around, uh, the late nineteen-hundreds. Late 1900, before 1910.

**Mitsuhiro (Robert) Takasugi**, born in 1928, was the second to youngest in a family of four children. Both his father and his uncle arrived in 1905 and began by working in sawmills in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada, suggesting they worked with labor contractors and were sent to that town. His strongest memory was of the family restaurant in downtown

Tacoma, and only later in life did he learn that his father and his father's older brother first worked in the sawmill.

The earliest I remember, you know, my father had a restaurant on Broadway. What I remember was a Chinese restaurant,<sup>30</sup> but on that map that you showed me [Ito's 1926 map] it has a—he had a restaurant before that, which was a Japanese restaurant.<sup>31</sup> And what I remember is we had a home on Fawcett Avenue...and we did okay, I think, in the time of the twenties, but then the Depression came on and things got very difficult, and my father's restaurant, you know, had to close during the Depression and so forth. Then, things got really hard...it was a very difficult time for him. He was a proud person, and, you know, he was Japanese, and he couldn't get, you know, any decent job or anything. So, he did what he could. Later on, I think he went to Alaska to work in those salmon canneries, and he worked out on the farm and things. Whatever he could find, he did. He also worked, I think, as a parking attendant in one place near the movie houses up there on 9th Street and near Broadway, some place around there.

[In the restaurant], he hired a dozen Chinese cooks. Oh, the first one, I don't know. I wasn't around then, but the second one, the Chinese restaurant, he hired Chinese cooks to cook

for him and he had the restaurant going. But I think, if you recall, in 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria, and... you know, I think the cooks quit because, you know, they didn't want to work for a Japanese at the time. And uh, so he had to do his own cooking after that, I think.

This I learned much later, you know, is that my father and his brother were here in 1905. And, uh, I think they were working in a lumber mill, I think, in Nanaimo. And his older brother was, I think, killed in an accident. That's what I, you know, learned much later. And, so I guess they eventually ended up in Tacoma, working in lumber mills. And then they—he started a restaurant, I think. And, uh, that's how we got to Tacoma, I think.

Some of the interviewee's fathers were involved in supplying laborers from Japan to the sawmills, like Mr. Kosai. Below is a lively conversation between a number of Nisei, all former residents of Tacoma and residing in Oakland, California. They participated in a group interview at the Buddhist Church and included siblings **Yoneko Aochi (b. 1918), Hiroji Aochi (b. 1919), and Katsuko Aochi (b. 1923), and Fusae (Fujii) Yoshida (b. 1927).**

Yoneko: My name is Yoneko Aochi and I'm the oldest of the five. I have my brother and sister here with me. They made me—they could help me with all the questions. I was born August 11, 1918. I'm 85 years old. And I was born in, what is it, 4733 1/2 Gold Street someplace

30 Later in the interview Mitsuhiro said the restaurant was named Iroha.

31 Mitsuhiro also noted the second restaurant was named Nikoro

in Ruston Way. I looked that up, that's why I remembered it. 4733 ½ Gold Street. Then they turned it--changed it to 4618 Waterfront Way. But when I was born it was 4733 ½ Gold Street, Tacoma, Pierce County, Washington. That's what it said... My father was working for the sawmill, and my mother was a housewife.

Katsuko: They had a hotel, too.

Yoneko: Yes. And then, I don't know how long my father was working for the sawmill, but I remember my father buying the hotel in Tacoma. Was it there on Jefferson Street? It was on the corner someplace.

Katsuko: Yes.

Hiroji: (nods affirmative)

Yoneko: I don't know how long he had it, but he sold that place and we bought a house right across the street from there, and we stayed there for a while until we got burglarized. And my father didn't like that and then he didn't want his children to be in the city, because when friends call, we--you know, he thinks we have to go out with the kids, with the friends, so we moved back to where we were, where we were born. And that was, I don't remember what year. And that's where we stayed for a long time, until the war, wasn't it? And then it was changed to 4618 Waterfront Street at the time...That's by the smelter. You know where the smelter used to be? ...It was right close to that. Now all the sawmills were right in front and that's where we were living, you know, downhill, in front of the place where we were living, but they're all gone now. Nothing left now.

Katsuko: My--our father worked at the Point Defiance...

Yoneko: Yes, Point Defiance Saw...was that the Point Defiance Sawmill, was it?

Katsuko: Uh-hmm.

Earlier in the conversation, the Aochi siblings and Fusae Fujii Yoshida talked about sawmill work and noted that some acted as a foreman, who would negotiate wages and working conditions and connected directly with labor contractors (see Takaki 1998).

Fusae: Wasn't your father involved in another business before the war?

Yoneko: (shakes her head no)

Hiroji: Ya, he had, ... at the sawmill...he used to take care of the Japanese workers....

Yoneko: What?

Hiroji: He used to take care of the Japanese workers at the sawmill...

Yoneko: Oh, yes, he was the foreman at the sawmill.

Katsuko: Yeah.

[And what do you mean, "He would take care of them?"]

Yoneko: There were...

Hiroji: ...say like sawmill needs some workers, sawmill workers--well, he would know somebody that would work in sawmill, like... Kosai--do you know Kosai? His dad used to work night shift, and he used to get Japanese sawmill workers for these different sawmills.

Yoneko: They used to have a boarding house

out where they all used to stay.<sup>32</sup>

Hiroji: Yes.

Katsuko: It was quite a big boarding house.

Yoneko: Mrs. Okada used to cook for them.

Katsuko: Yes...

Hiroji: In the old days there was quite a few Japanese working in different sawmills.

Yoneko: (nods and smiles in agreement) Yes, uh-huh.

Hiroji: St. Paul, and all around the waterfront. But Tacoma used to be a ...

Yoneko: ...lumber port anyway.

Hiroji: Ya, lumber port.

Yoneko: It was a lumber port. And we used to see those big Japanese steamships, is it that used to come down in front of the sawmill and take lumber out and take it back to Japan?

Hiroji: And since our house was up there higher, Tacoma used to be a nice harbor...ships would always have to pass by the house...

Hiroji: So, they said that we were spying!

Yoneko: Yesss....yes! So, when the war started, we were taken in.

Hiroji: She was one of those 24 hour detention. (the sisters laugh)...

Hiroji: Oh, yes.

Katsuko: Oh, yes, we had to register....

Hiroji: I happened to be at a meeting, because they had some city election, and they had

some candidates come over to speak to the Japanese, and I happened to be there, and when I came home, the house was dark, and I said, "Oh, my God!" We knew that we were going to be picked up because of our family in Japan and all that. Sure enough. So I naturally contacted the police department, hospitals, different organization, and nobody knew anything about it. And just about after midnight or later, they called the police department again, and they said, "Yes, they're here. They're well taken care of. Don't worry." Because I naturally thought that this was the start of the "round up" of Japanese in Tacoma.

Katsuko: We were the first ones...

Katsuko: Nineteen...

Hiroji: Oh, '42. Right after—the war started in '41, so it'd be about the early part of '42.

## Re-Mapping, Shifting Boundaries, and Identity

This article has aimed both to address the dearth of publications about pre-WWII Japanese life in the U.S., and to redraw what has been "mapped" as the Japanese community in Tacoma. This is important not only for Tacoma's history and a fuller accounting of the major industries that shaped the south Puget Sound region, but also because Japanese contributions to early industrial development are often overlooked. The oral history narratives engaged here thus stretch the boundaries of what has been depicted as a densely-connected and lively Japanese community in the downtown core. In addition, stories of moving from and between sawmills and the ethnic economy highlight the fluidity of employment from the lumber

<sup>32</sup> This sounds like the Japanese Hotel on St. Paul Avenue noted on the Metsker map (1926).

industry to self-employment. Moreover, there seems to be a degree of complementarity between work in the lumber industry and self-employment, albeit stratified by gender. This article has thus argued for a remapping and expansion of existing visualizations of the Japanese community and for recognition of Japanese presence in the tideflats and sawmill spaces. This is not meant simply as a supplement to the existing focus on the downtown core, but rather as a needed rethinking of the relationship between urban spaces and identity - especially between the Japanese Language School and an understanding of the self in the world.

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