

“Around Town” - Japanese Emigration to Hawaii explored

Visit by Junko Nishida from the Museum of Japanese Emigration to Hawaii Reveals Rich Lāna‘i History

Junko Nishida and Kyoko Takagi visited Lāna‘i to share and learn more about the history of our island home. They brought with them a photo journal kept by Ichisaburo Nakamura, Lāna‘i Japanese Language Teacher (1938-1941), which revealed beautiful images of Lāna‘i’s earlier days, and the story of Japanese detention during World War II. During the visit, the ladies had the opportunity to sit down with Aunt Sally Takahama, Aunt Kazuko Oyama, and Warren Osako as we explored Nakamura’s history. The photos reveal the faces of Lāna‘i families, including Arthur Takayoshi Osako, and elder members of the Honda and Kinoshita families (If you recognize others in the photos, please let us know). This short story is a summary of the records and photos kept by Ichisaburo Nakamura, and generously share by Junko and the director of the Museum of Japanese Emigration to Hawaii (www.towatown.jp/hawaii/) Ichisaburo Nakamura was born in 1906 at Pāpa‘ikou, Hawai‘i. In May 1911, he and his family returned to Japan.

1926-1936. Nakamura received his teaching degree in 1926 from Yamaguchi Shihan Gakkou (Yamaguchi University), and taught in Yamaguchi and Oshima. In 1931, he received a letter asking him to return to Hawai‘i Island and teach Japanese language. He returned to teach at Pāpa‘ikou, Hawai‘i and in 1936, he married Hisayo Sakamoto, whose father owned Sakamoto Store Kohala.

1938. Nakamura saw an ad in the newspaper announcing a position as teacher and principal at the Lāna‘i Hongwanji Japanese Language School. He applied and was hired. During his stay on Lāna‘i, Nakamura collected photographs and documented his experiences in his annotated photo journal.

1941. On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japanese forces. Nakamura, the Buddhist priest, Tadao Kouchi and several prominent members of Lāna‘i’s Japanese community were arrested and jailed in the prison adjoining the police station on the corner of Market and Church streets (now 8th and Fraser). In early 1942 Nakamura and Kouchi, along with other Japanese prisoners from Lāna‘i were transferred to Maui. There, the police asked him “which side do you want to win?” He said, “Neither side, I’m hoping for peace.” As a result, he was transferred to Sand Island, and in October 1942, the Nakamuras and Kouchis were shipped to the “relocation” camp at Rohwer, Arkansas.

1945. On December 13, 1945, Nakamura and his wife were released. They returned to Hilo. Reverend Kouchi and his family returned to Lāna‘i to rebuild the Hongwanji. The original Lāna‘i Hongwanji, dedicated in September 1924, had been taken from the Japanese community and given to the Union Church. In support of the rebuilding of the Honowanji, the Hawaiian Pineapple Company gave Kouchi and community the building (formerly a dormitory), situated on the corner of Fraser and Kaumālapa‘u road, current home of the Hongwanji.

In the following years, Nakamura lived on both Hawai‘i and O‘ahu, teaching, returning periodically to live in Oshima. In 1971 Nakamura and his wife returned to Japan, where he passed away in 2004. Hisayo Sakamoto Nakamura passed away in 2013 at the age of 100. His collection of annotated photo albums was donated to the Museum of Japanese Emigration to Hawaii.



Kyoko Takagi, Junko Nishida, Kazuko Oyama and Sally Takahama looking at his toric photos and notes from Nakamura-san. Photo by Kapa Maly



Children of Japanese language school on picnic outing along old (upper) Keomoku road. The little boy with head tilted to left in front row is Arthur Takayoshi Osako. Ichisaburo Nakamura is the man with a head bandana behind the children.



As the description for the above is written in Japanese, we could not translate it. If any of our readers can, please let us know what the occasion was



Nakamura’s annotated photo album page, Japanese POW at Rohwer, Arkansas (1943), including Mr. and Mrs. Nakamura.



Sample of the pages in the annotated photo album. Second photo down on right side is at the old Hongwanji, I. Nakamura on right. I believe Otomatsu Honda is next to him, and others uncertain. Also, a Lana‘i home, activities at Kaumālapa‘u. Top left photo is in Hilo Harbor - Kapa Maly



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