

A Japanese Canadian Farming Neighbourhood

In the early decades of the 20th century, the area around Sharp Road, Wildwood Crescent, and Norton Road was home to one of Salt Spring Island's most active Japanese Canadian farming communities. Families cleared forested land and established productive farms that supplied eggs, berries, vegetables, and poultry to markets on the island, in Victoria, and beyond.

This thriving community was dismantled almost overnight in the spring of 1942, when Japanese Canadians were forcibly removed from the coast and sent to internment camps during the Second World War. Adults were allowed to take only two suitcases each and were given less than forty-eight hours' notice before they had to leave their homes. The properties and belongings were vested in the Custodian of Enemy Property as a 'protective measure only'. In 1943, however, the government authorized the sale of all seized Japanese Canadian property without the owners' consent. The costs of internment were later deducted from the proceeds of these sales. Though the original community was displaced, its presence remains embedded in the fields, roads, and waterways of the Sharp Road area. Fragments of glass from the old greenhouses are still found scattered in the fields.

Okano Creek

Today, one quiet reminder of that history remains in the landscape. The small stream flowing through the former Okano farm was officially named Okano Creek in 1989. The naming was initiated by property owner Isabel Vane Hunt (1917 - 2009) and biologist Kathy Reimer, who worked to restore the stream and name the creek to honour the Japanese Canadian pioneers who once farmed there.



Picnic of the Japanese Young People's Association at the beach on Booth Bay, ca 1933. First row L-R: Tameo Peter Murakami, Shigeru Nakamura, Masayoshi Philip Murakami, Victor Masatoshi Okano. Second row L-R: Shiyoso Mikado, Sueyuki James Okano, Kanako Numajiri, Yoshi Numajiri, Sachiko Numajiri, Alice Murakami, Tomiko Nakamura, Kumanosuke Okano with Violet Murakami on his lap, Sayoko Okano, Masukichi Mikado, Hichiro Nakamura. Third row L-R: Kuniko Joan Mikado, Kiyoko Nakamura, Shigeko Martha Mikado, Hatsumi Ito, Toshie Nakamura, Haruko Sylvia Nakamura, Haruko Ito, Kazuko Mary Mikado, Miyoko Okano, Umeo Luke Murakami, Kazumi Jerry Ito, unknown boy, Suekichi Gordon Nakamura, Ichiro Numajiri, unknown girl. Back row L-R: Charlie Okano, Masao Ito.

Residents of 'Little Japan' in 1941

At the time of the Uprooting, nine Japanese Canadian families lived in this area.

Kumanosuke and Riyo Okano were the first to settle on Sharp Road, purchased 50 acres in 1919 and later expanding their holdings to roughly 200 acres with large greenhouses, market gardens, and poultry operations.

Kumanosuke and his son Masatoshi Victor also co-owned 100 acres of forested land on the north slope of Mt Erskine that they used for timber harvesting for greenhouse operations; Sueyuki James Okano had 38 acres at the end of Sharp Road also for timber harvesting.

In 1932 Katsuyori and Kimiko (nee Okano) Murakami purchased 17 acres of uncleared land, developing their own productive farm.

Tsunetaro Murakami* and his son Tameo Peter Murakami developed a 27-acre farm covering present-day Wildwood Crescent.

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The Okano family with Katsuyori Murakami outside their home.



Nakazo and Hatsue Ito with their children.



Katsuyori and Kimiko Murakami with their children outside their home on Sharp Road.



The Mikado children outside their home on Norton Road.



Victor Okano and Minoru Takao, inside the Okano family's first greenhouse.

Morihei and Sukino Murakami farmed 21 acres at the corner of Sharp and Lower Ganges Roads, with extensive tomato greenhouses. Their son Masayoshi owned a woodlot used for greenhouse operations. Morihei was known as a skilled carpenter and boatbuilder.

Across Sharp Road, the Ito family had 5 acres, purchased after relocating their farm on the corner of Fernwood and North End Roads.

On Norton Road, Masukichi and Tsutayo Mikado purchased six acres in 1936, where they built their home, ran a laundry, and maintained a market garden. The Inouye family owned a 10-acre property near Rainbow and Atkins Roads.

In addition to the above families, the Hiranos and the Oharas both lived on the Okano's property; the Hiranos built the 5-room house at the south end of Sharp Road—forming part of this closely connected community.

*no relation to the Katsuyori Murakami family.