

## The Strawberry Capital

JIRO INOUE, as one of the first Japanese residents in Maple Ridge to buy land, became a strawberry farmer in 1906. The son of a samurai warrior, he had been born in Saga-ken, Japan, in 1870 and had studied law at Waseda University in Tokoyo before travelling to Taiwan to engage in the wholesale food business. After a few years he returned to Japan and took up several occupations before going to Belgium in 1897 to learn the glass manufacturing business. He later went to Seattle, Washington, where he became an adviser to a successful Japanese merchant. He bought 20 acres of land in Haney, built a permanent home, and began to grow strawberries. His enterprise was successful, and after a few years he began writing articles for the Japanese newspapers, enticing his countrymen about opportunities in the Fraser Valley. Inouye was responsible for pioneering the strawberry industry among the Japanese and was often referred to as the “Japanese Village Chief of Haney.”

The Japanese men who read his articles wanted to come to British Columbia to get away from the poverty and the years of conflict in their own homeland. Although the Japanese had been victorious in their war with Russia in 1905, the conflict had left Japan financially crippled.

Yasutaro Yamaga arrived in Maple Ridge in 1908, a year that witnessed one of the largest waves of Japanese immigrants to British Columbia. Sixteen years younger than Inouye, Yamaga had been born in Toyohama-mura, Toyotagun, Hiroshima-ken, and had arrived in BC via Seattle. Like many immigrants, Yamaga had visions of a better life in Canada and dreamed of one day owning five thousand acres of golden fields on the prairies. He learned of the Fraser Valley and about the profitability of strawberry growing through Inouye’s articles in Japanese newspapers.

By 1910 a few of the new immigrants had managed to scrape up enough money to lease or make a down payment on a 5- or 10-acre parcel of bush land. Yamaga managed to buy 10 acres east of Baker Road and south of Dewdney Trunk Road in 1912. In his 1958 biography *My footsteps in British Columbia* he talks about this time:

We had to work hard for our wages in the shingle bolt camp or general farm work in the summer time to save money. We returned home in the winter months to clear our own land. We

### Opposite

Kane and Jiro Inouye, 1908.

Often referred to as the Japanese Village Chief of Haney, Inouye founded the Japanese Berry Growers Ltd.



could not afford to buy lumber to build our houses so we helped each other by felling large cedar trees and bucking it up into three-foot lengths to make cedar shakes for the walls and roof of the shack. We cut out long and straight poles for studs and rafts; thick shakes were laid on the ground for the floor. Bed and furniture were also made by hand; an apple box for a chair etc. We used straw for our mattress, which perhaps originated the slang expression “hit the hay” as one retires for the night.

... Sometimes we put up a layer of building papers inside or made a double wall with paper in between to keep out the draft and frost. But you can imagine how cold it was in the winter, thick ice in the water bucket and icicles formed on top of our blanket from our breath through the blanket. After 10 or 15 years of such pioneering life, we were able to build a frame house with sawn lumber.

Often too poor to buy stumping powder, the men dug around the huge cedar stumps with mattocks, a hand tool similar to a pickaxe, and shovels. Eventually, the men would dig down deep enough to build a fire to burn the roots. Some giant stumps took upward of two weeks to burn.

Most of the single Japanese men to arrive in Maple Ridge seldom saw the opposite sex of their own race for the first several years. Starving for female companionship, some of the men took to drinking and gambling. A few of the new settlers, through an exchange of letters and photographs, managed to arrange for a “picture bride” to come over from Japan for the purpose of marriage.

One such bride was Koto Tanaka, who travelled by steamship to Victoria and from there to Hammond, where she arrived in November 1907 to marry Sansuke Kawamoto. There were eight other Japanese families in the district at the time. Koto learned that her husband had leased to purchase five acres of stumps from a white owner for the purpose of clearing the land and planting strawberries. In 1909 Koto gave birth to the first of her nine children. During the winter of 1913, Koto returned to Japan with her first three children and explained their plight to her parents. Heartbroken, she decided to leave her young children with her parents and return to the relentless labour of clearing land. She later wrote:

My fifth child came and our financial difficulty was slowly easing. Our prosperity became the centre of Hammond as Japanese families began to increase. A Japanese language school was built a short distance away from our house, and my fourth child began to attend. My husband found a job at the Hammond Mill, two miles away, a distance he had to walk at six every morning.



**Yasutaro Yamaga,  
Manager of the Pacific  
Berry Growers Ltd.**

#### Following Pages

**Pacific Berry Growers at Front and Ontario Streets, circa 1925.**

However hard the beginning was, the Japanese immigrants worked tirelessly to clear their land for strawberry production. The effort paid off, and soon they enjoyed good prices, as for a few years there were not enough berries on the market. However, when during the First World War the price for strawberries climbed to 21¢ per pound and all the strawberry growers made a fortune, white farmers from all over the coast were also lured to strawberry farming, which eventually led to a collapse of the price.

By 1913 the Japanese had acquired the old Lillooet School at Lillooet Road (232nd Street) and Dewdney Trunk Road for use as the Haney Nokai (Farmers’) Hall. A few years later there was some strong anti-Japanese sentiment in the farming community that resulted in the Agricultural Association passing a resolution barring Japanese from their directorate. As a result of this setback, the Japanese in 1924 built an agricultural hall adjacent to the old school, which by this time was being used as a church and for Sunday school.

In 1919, to cope with the local glut of berries, Eugene Merrill Gilland and Charles Edgar Edgett, brokers from Vancouver, organized the Pacific Berry Growers Ltd., a co-operative in Haney with both Caucasian and Japanese berry growers as shareholders. The co-op built a \$10,000 berry processing plant near the Port Haney CPR station, where the berries (and later also other soft fruit) were loaded onto waiting refrigerated railcars for shipment to Calgary and beyond.

However, around this time the fresh BC berries encountered stiff competition from US-grown berries shipped across the border into Calgary and sold at less than fair market prices. It would really have been the task of the federal government to safeguard Canadian markets against American intervention, but it was a rural political lobby in Victoria who managed to persuade the general public that the downturn in the berry market was caused by the Japanese by overproducing and underselling. These accusations soon pitted the “white” against the “yellow” berry

growers. By 1920 white farmers actually dominated the strawberry-growing industry, owning 70% of the land for soft-fruit production.

The Pacific Berry Growers adapted to the changed market conditions first by installing a jam-making plant to handle their berry surplus. Later it branched out even further to include an on-site tinsmith and plumber as well as jams, soaps, dry goods, clothing, and women’s and men’s boots. And yet, when Mr. Gilland, one of the co-operative’s founders, visited a fruit growers’ association on Vancouver Island, he was harassed for “allowing Japanese shareholders” into his organization.

In 1923, to deal with the economic and political difficulties, the Pacific Berry Growers established its own union, still with a percentage of Japanese directors, and in 1926 seventy Maple Ridge berry farmers united to start the Maple Ridge Co-operative Produce Exchange. Yamaga, as the exchange’s manager, presided over the building of a large warehouse between the rail tracks and the river directly south of the Bank of Montreal and west of the CPR station. The Japanese also had their own farmers’ association, the “Haney Nokai.” Sometime prior to 1923 there were Nokai in Mission, Whonnock, Haney, and Hammond who had organized themselves as the Federation of Fraser Valley Nokai.

Despite the peaceful and productive co-operation at the local level, anti-Japanese sentiments continued to grow. The Japanese were accused of “working harder” than the white people, thereby “stealing” the livelihood from “nationals.” Eventually Ottawa gave in to pressure from municipal and provincial politicians and put the squeeze on the Japanese fishing fleet plying up and down the west coast by ordering a 40% cut in the number of salmon gill-net licences for the Japanese.

In contemplating these measures, one should be reminded that the First World War was just over, during which the Japanese were seen in a very different light. Yasutaro Yamaga writes in his memoirs:

When World War I broke out, we Japanese as a member of the allied forces lent our aid to the



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Port Hammond Nokai (Farmers') Hall and Language School 1918.  
The building was located on the north side of Dewdney Trunk Road  
west of 5th Avenue (now 216th Street). It burned down in 1930 and  
was replaced with the Japanese Temple (now the Houston Pub & Grill).  
Note the flying of the Japanese flag as well as Britain's Union Jack.

- |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Kumejiro Matsumoto | 7 Tadaichi Yawashita |
| 2 Sanjuro Saito      | 8 Shusuke Yamamoto   |
| 3 Matsutarō Seto     | 9 Tatsuo Saito       |
| 4 Sansuke Kawamoto   | 10 Doug Oike         |
| 5 Harukichi Kato     | 11 Idori Kawamoto    |
| 6 Iwamatsu Okazaki   |                      |



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local war efforts. Japanese women, though few in number, headed by Mrs. Inouye, participated in the local Red Cross works and the men folks helped the Y.M.C.A. [Young Men's Christian Association] fund collection and other patriotic functions. All B.C. people showed to us their deep appreciation to Japan for the Japanese cruisers guarding the coast from the menace of the German cruiser *Emden* in the Pacific waters during the war.

Yamaga continues to describe the Maple Ridge Armistice celebrations, in which the Japanese played a major part, and adds: "My blood becomes warm when I recall these happy occasions and I cannot help but compare them with the bitter experience we had to go through during World War II as enemy aliens."

The *Canada Shinpo* (News) reported about the First World War victory celebrations that were held at the Haney Agricultural grounds following the armistice:

Farming Village Celebrates – Peace celebrations were held at Hammond, Haney and Whonnock fair grounds. Many compatriots living there also participated in the event that turned out to be very successful. At the entrance of the grounds, a 35 foot high arch that was built by the Haney Japanese Nōkai soared into the sky. This caught the attention of many Hakuju people. Flags of all allied countries, wreathes and exquisitely arranged flowers decorated the interior of the large exhibition hall. Large tables capable of accommodating 600 people were set up. Types of dishes that are rarely seen around these areas were placed on the tables. With the firing of a cannon shell at 1 pm, and to the tune of a brass band, both Japanese and Hakuju people sat down together at the table to eat. Some 150 Hakuju ladies did the serving. As there were about 1,800 people to be fed, dinners were served in 3 shifts. Everyone appeared satisfied and the dinner ended successfully. After dinner, the crowd gathered outside. Following a congratulatory speech by Senator Taylor, Major Martin (representing the Prime Minister), awarded silver medals to some 50 returned veterans...

The newspaper report failed to mention that the Major Martin was actually Major Donald B. Martyn, the former Ruskin school teacher and then real estate partner of Hal Menzies.

As early as 1927 an anti-Japanese group was formed, representing public and private organizations concerned with any race that might be "a menace to the supremacy of the white race in Canada" and calling itself the "White Canada Association." This group prepared a paper entitled "Report on Oriental Activities within British Columbia," urging the governments in both Victoria and Ottawa to prevent the Japanese from owning or leasing land.

While for Ottawa the matter may not have seemed urgent yet, the climate on the provincial level had definitely changed by then. In September 1928, Nelson S. Lougheed, as the newly-elected provincial Conservative Minister of Public Works, told a 400-strong enthusiastic audience at a banquet in his honour at the Agricultural Hall in Haney that his government had always stood for total Oriental exclusion, charging that the Japanese's lower standard of living and their habit of employing the labour of spouses and children allowed them to sell at lower rates. Lougheed bragged that

his logging company employed 700 men and that not one was an Oriental. Throughout his speech, he was often applauded for his stance against Japanese farmers.

On 15 February 1930 an article written by Charles E. Hope, Honorary Secretary of the White Canada Association, appeared in McLean's Magazine, once again accusing the Japanese of unfair practices. The highly educated Yasutaro Yamaga wrote an eloquent response, published in the April issue of McLean's, in which he defends the Japanese loyalty to Canada and the Japanese contribution to cultivating land and stabilizing the farming industry. He concludes his article with an appeal to "British justice and British fair play," expressing his confidence that:

... any little prejudice that may now exist is only because the two races have not as yet become sufficiently well acquainted. We are all likely to be suspicious of what is strange to us. When we get to know each other better, we will learn to have a better mutual respect for the sterling qualities of each race, even though it may be that we can never form one homogeneous unit, we can and will work side by side in harmony, striving to make Canada and the whole world the better.

Yamaga was certainly doing his share in trying to foment better understanding between the two races. In 1924 he had been instrumental in bringing together both Caucasian and Japanese mothers to form a Parent Teachers' Association to tackle not only some of the language barriers (up to then Japanese children attending public schools didn't speak English), but other misunderstandings as well. Mr. Yamaga explained,

Another unforgettable gain achieved by the P.T.A. [Parent-Teacher Association] movement was the complete disappearance of the Japanese children's inferiority complex when they saw their mothers work with their friends' mothers equally in school matters. This psychological gain was a tremendous benefit for Canadian society as a whole. With this encouraging result, I urged Japanese parents of the other schools, such as



Japanese Temple on Dewdney Trunk Road—now the Houston Bar & Grill.

Opposite  
Real estate advertisements in the *Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Gazette*, 18 March 1949.

Haney Central and Hammond schools, where large percentages of pupils were Japanese, to join the P.T.A. of their schools.

Yamaga was also involved in the building of a Japanese hall and kindergarten at Lillooet Road (14<sup>th</sup> Avenue and then later 232<sup>nd</sup> Street) and Dewdney Trunk Road. Japanese pupils would attend the “white” Alexander Robinson School, located at Baker Road (17<sup>th</sup> Avenue and then later 240<sup>th</sup> Street) and Dewdney Trunk Road, Monday through Friday from 9 A.M. to 3 P.M. but would also attend the Japanese school Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 4 P.M. to 9 P.M. and all day Saturday.

In the 1930s there were also annual so-called “goodwill tours” to Japan for Canadian teachers, designed to improve the educators’ understanding of Japan and Japanese culture. But by 1938 the public talk to an audience of 200 at the Japanese community hall by one of those teachers turned this initiative into a liability: people suddenly became alarmed by the fact that Japan, although only a fraction the size of Canada, had a population six times greater. At this time Japan had invaded China and conquered Manchuria, and the United States had begun an embargo against Japan. Maple Ridge’s 2,000 Caucasian and 1,000 Japanese citizens came to the realization that Japan might be drawn into a war with the Americans—and Canada. The Maple Ridge embargo on shipments of scrap iron and lumber to Japan was the immediate result, soon to be followed by Orders-in-Council from Ottawa requiring gun registration and allowing searches of persons and premises without warrant, which were specifically aimed at the Japanese Canadians.

The bombing of the US fleet by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 sent shockwaves through Canada, but its effect on Canada’s west coast—and in particular Maple Ridge—was devastating. Air Raid Protection exercises were implemented in the schools and the homes, in the evening windows had to be covered with tar paper to achieve a blackout. The younger pupils, when questioning the purpose of the air raid exercises,

were told by their teachers that there might very likely be a night attack by Japanese bomber planes. It didn’t take long before Caucasian and Japanese children, who weeks earlier had been the best of pals, began to mistrust each other, and some Caucasian youngsters actually began to spy on their “yellow” classmates.

The police began searching without warrant several Japanese homes, looking for radios, guns, and explosives. Mostly the seized dynamite found on the premises of some Japanese farms was stumping powder for land clearing, but very soon rumours began to circulate that caused hysteria and paranoia.

Rather than return to real estate, war hero Donald B. Martyn had decided to make the military a career. He was first made the Deputy Minister of Industry but with the outbreak of the Second World War, he was transferred to Prince Rupert in charge of defenses before being brought back to Vancouver and placed in charge of defenses for the entire west coast. He worked out of the CPR Hotel Vancouver as a full colonel. Hal Menzies’ qualifications as a realtor weren’t wasted during the Second World War either. The Federal government hired him along with one other Caucasian to come up with a value for the Japanese farms. Donald E. MacKenzie, the manager of the Pacific National Exhibition, and Yasutaro Yamaga, the manager of the United Berry Growers, were the other two estimators. MacKenzie’s appraisal came in extremely low, Yamaga’s fair or slightly high, and Menzies’ right in the middle. The government took the MacKenzie estimate, which resulted in the Japanese farmers getting much less than fair market value for their properties. Hal Menzies’ real estate business spanned 50 years.

The provincial government organized the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers in the spring of 1942, and some 6,000 Caucasian men over the age of 40 volunteered to serve as the eyes and ears of the regular army in the event of a Japanese invasion.

On 4 March 1942 the federal government, by Order-in-Council, ordered the British Columbia Security



**In 1926, the Japanese built a Nokai (Farmers’) Hall at the corner of 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue (232<sup>nd</sup> Street) and Dewdney Trunk Road. The kindergarten and Japanese language school moved in downstairs in 1927.**

Commission to supervise and direct the evacuation of Japanese from the west coast areas of the province. In carrying out its duties the Commission was given much assistance by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Owen W. Fuller recalls the day when the school authorities came and removed the Japanese students from his classroom:

They took the Japanese kids out of the classroom in the middle of the day and two of them turned around and shook their fists in defiance and everyone just looked. I was in grade 3. These were the kids I played with and they were as Canadian as you or I. I don’t know who came and got them. I just remember them streaming out of the classroom and we were left with only about 13 kids in our class when they left. There was a pile of empty seats.

By this time, according to Yasutaro Yamaga’s book *History of Haney Nokai*, some 1,400 Japanese owned close to 3,000 acres of land in Maple Ridge, of which half was cleared, with some 650 acres planted in strawberries. During the short period from 1942 to 1945 the vacant Japanese farms fell into decay, berry fields lay in ruin, and valuables stored in sheds were stolen. Custodians were appointed to care for the properties, but according to one schoolteacher from Maple Ridge, the Japanese were “robbed blind,” both in price paid for the land and in possessions stolen. Public auctions were “set up” to sell the Japanese valuables that couldn’t be transported. Often bidders agreed not to bid against each other, and as a result the Japanese received very little for their possessions. Property was evaluated at



**A public auction takes place at the 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Dewdney Trunk Road. This facility was used to sell seized property from Japanese families. Early 1950s.**

about one fourth of its real value. On top of that, life in the camps in the interior was harsh, and most of the farmers who had come to Maple Ridge between 1910 and 1925 never returned from the internment.

After leaving Haney in the course of the mass evacuation of the Japanese, Yamaga worked at a sawmill in the Cariboo area of the interior of BC. He later moved to Beamsville, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto, where he and his wife founded a seniors' home for Japanese called "Nipponia Home."

When the war ended, returning veterans were offered a special deal on much of the land previously held by Japanese. The Japanese, on the other hand, were not allowed to return to Maple Ridge until 1949. They had the option of returning to Japan, although of the 24,500 Japanese still living in Canada in January 1946 only 6,000 were Japanese nationals. The rest were either naturalized Canadian (3,500) or, at 15,000 by far the

biggest portion, native-born Canadians. Even then, four years after the end of the war, there was a heated debate at an April meeting of the Associated Board of Trades in New Westminster. The fear was that "serious friction" would ensue between "whites" and the Japanese if these were allowed to return to the "strawberry capital of North America."

A closure of sorts was achieved only in 1988, when then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney enacted the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement, whereby Japanese who had been wronged during and after the Second World War, were "compensated" with \$21,000 cheques.

**Opposite**  
**Donald Blake Martyn, as a Canadian Army Captain from WWI he would later become Commanding Officer of the West Coast operations of the army during the Second World War.**



The Red Bridge, the first road crossing of the lower Stave River, was built in the summer of 1908. The photo shows horses and buggies crossing the bridge after it was formally opened by Governor General Lord Earl Grey. The site of the bridge is now behind the Ruskin Dam under about 20 metres of water.

## The Red Bridge at Ruskin

*Alma Ward née Hampton wrote:*

At the time the bridge was built, Mr. Robert Bonson (Bob), son of the pioneer Lewis F. Bonson, was the Government supervisor of roads and bridges.

He was a friend of William Hampton's who visited and stayed at our home when in the vicinity.

In the book *Maple Ridge, A History of Settlement*, page 54, it says, "it was popularly known as the Red Bridge, from the bright color of its paint, and it was opened by no less than the Governor General, Earl Grey, in front of an unimpressive scattering of local people."

This bridge was built in 1909, in the wilderness miles from Ruskin or any other locality. The "local people" who attended were eight young ladies from Port Haney, some of them school teachers. The picture taken at the time shows them to be dressed in their best summer dresses; three Hampton girls were there, Annie, Vina, and Alma, and from Haney: May and Esther Best.

Our brother Ernie was working in the area hauling logs with a team of horses, and it was from him and Mr. Bob Bonson that we learned of the opening ceremony. Behind us on the hill, there were two men in dress attire with high crowned silk hats. They were Earl Grey, the Governor General of Canada, and an aide or BC Government official. They arrived in a very nice carriage with a team of horses from the Livery Stable at Port Haney. After the ceremony, on our behalf we presented Earl Grey with a basket of Maple Ridge apples, and he was quite impressed with the gift.



**Esther Best.**



**Annie Hampton.**