

More Notes on New York Issei

BY MITZIKO SAWADA

(Part VI)

The retelling of history is impossible without documents, publications, newspapers, magazines, journals and the rich material left by organizations, associations and, most important, individual people.

Unfortunately, for a large percentage of smaller immigrant groups in America, such as the Japanese, what little remains is extremely hard to find. This is particularly true of the New York Issei group.

As I mentioned earlier, Mizutani Shozo's *Nyuyoku Nihonjin Hatten-shi* is, despite its limitations, the only work addressing the history of the New York Issei in one volume.

Organizations, churches, mutual aid societies, credit unions, English language clubs, young men's societies, Japanese associations, cooperative groups and other small institutions were established early in the New York Issei's history. Their membership lists, annual reports, minutes of meetings, brochures and news bulletins, which could provide valuable information about the Issei, are scattered, lost or were discarded. Time has a way of making dust collectors seem superfluous and irrelevant even though they may be the only record remaining of a specific past.

However, bits and pieces of information collected and put together could provide clues to the life of the

New York Issei. Organizational literature, memoirs, personal papers, diaries, letters or business records have intrinsic historic value.

If anyone is aware of any papers or documents, I would appreciate knowing of their existence. I would also like to own a copy of Mizutani's book. Please contact me (212) 282-8068, or write to me in care of the English Editor of the New York Nichibei.

(To be continued)

N.Y. NICHIBEI
2/12/81

More Notes on New York Issei

BY MITZIKO SAWADA

(Part V)

When the Issei began to arrive in California in larger numbers, they were greeted at the docks by a Japanese labor boss or broker. He supplied the American agricultural or transportation company employers with workers, depending upon the temporary or seasonal needs. The boss also provided the Issei with room and sometimes board, the quality of which was as varied as the number of labor bosses. Their profits were derived in various cunning ways. George Shima, the renowned "potato king," started

on his road to economic success as a labor boss.

In contrast, the New York Issei, once setting foot in the city, had to seek out boarding houses which accepted Japanese. Less than a dozen existed in the early 1890s, and were located near the industrial areas of Brooklyn and, later, Manhattan.

The boarding houses in Brooklyn were on bustling thoroughfares between Fulton Street, where the ferry depot was, and Navy Street, on the west side of the Brooklyn Navy Yard. They differed, based on the customers to whom they catered. Japanese-run houses did not appear until about 1892, when there were 400 to 500 Japanese seamen in and out of Brooklyn harbor.

One house was operated by Nakanishi Shoko, from Hyogo, one of the few Issei women in New York City. Her business acumen brought her customers and such good fees that she had to move to larger quarters three times. Other houses were run by American boarding housekeepers, missionaries or Japanese Christians, including Okajima Kinya, a former California railroad construction worker, who walked across the American continent, it is said, so fervent was his desire to preach Christianity to his fellow countrymen in New York City.

To know this much about housing in the early years, however, is not enough. The more subjective dimensions: privacy and comradeship, conflict and cooperation, frugality and extravagance, work and leisure—these aspects of life in living arrangements are crucial and would make our story of the early Issei more complete.

(To be continued)

N.Y. NICHIBEI
2/5/81