Alameda Tonarigumi Markers
Martketplace - REV 8/26/22
Traces of Alameda Japantown
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Alameda’s Historic Japantown

Tonarigumi

Traces of Alameda Japantown

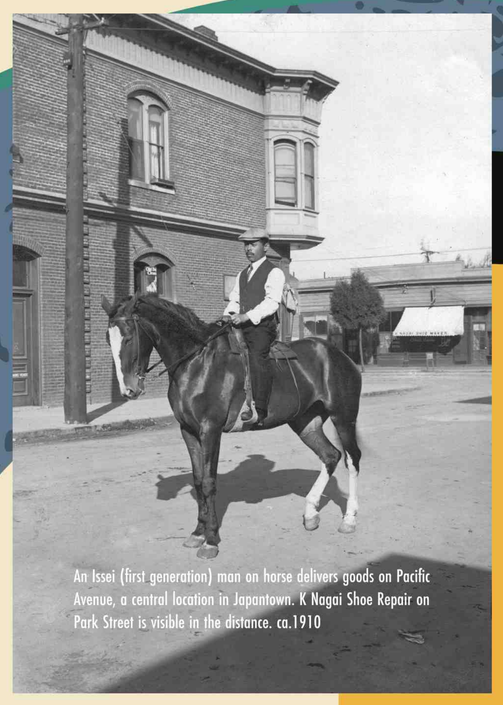
Opening up shops on Park Street

Maneki Neko, or beckoning cat, raises its left paw to welcome in customers.

Traces of a small close-knit Japanese community remain, yet little is known of the Japantown that once thrived in Alameda.

At the turn of the 20th century, Issei, first generation Japanese immigrants, came as sojourners, seeking a better life, with a dream of making their fortunes. Faced with racial hostility and feeling unwelcome, the newcomers took comfort in living close to each other for mutual support. Unable to shop in stores or eat in local restaurants, some began their own small businesses. By 1912, Japantown included grocers, restaurants, hotels, bathhouses, barbers, tailors, pool hall, laundries, shoe repair shops, bicycle shops, and a tofu shop.

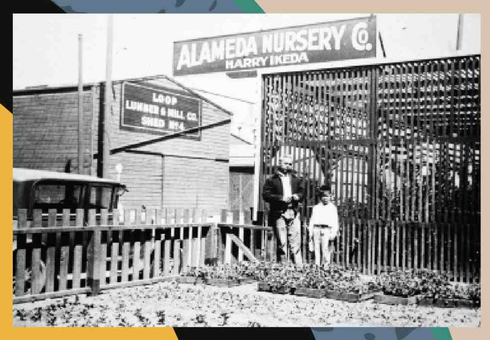
The six-block radius from Park to Oak Street, and Eagle to Webb Avenue began as an ethnic enclave for bachelors and expanded as men sent for wives from Japan. Most of the Issei men and women worked as domestic workers in large Victorian homes across town. By the mid 1920s, nurseries offered support to the Japanese in gardening and landscape work.



An Issei (first generation) man on horse delivers goods on Pacific Avenue, a central location in Japantown. K Nagai Shoe Repair on Park Street is visible in the distance. ca.1910

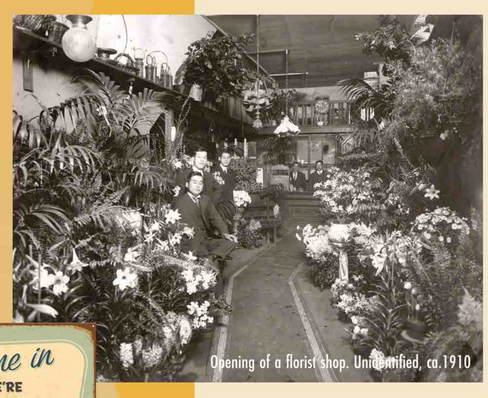
Imagire Sewing School opened in 1922 by Sunao & Shizu Imagire at 1620 Park Street, and later moved to a location in Oakland.

Meiji Laundry, an early business serving Japanese bachelors, was located at 1620 Park Street, ca.1910



Harry Ikeda and son Mitsuru stand in front of Alameda Nursery located at 2530 Blanding Ave. ca.1934 The nursery was one of the few early businesses that resumed after the war.

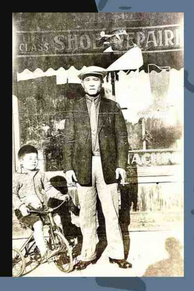
Mataichi Ozeki captured in print a vibrant era in Alameda’s Japantown from Ozeki Photo Studio, located at 1621 Park Street. He poses for a self portrait wearing a waiter’s uniform. ca.1910



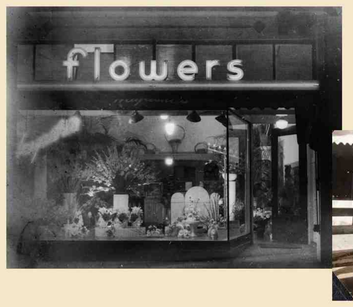
Opening of a florist shop. Unidentified, ca.1910

Hayashi Florist first opened on Park Street in 1902 and moved to Santa Clara Ave. by 1912. The Kono and Towata families ran the floral shop at 2305 Santa Clara Ave. before and after the war.

The Iwaihara family driving in a Model T. Ford near the Fernside district in Alameda, ca.1916



Keiji Shiota set up a shoe repair shop, a trade with easy set up and minimal investment. ca.1921



Following WWII, John and Anna Towata ran this beloved flower shop with its iconic neon sign, for over sixty years.

Amy (Kono) Nobusada sits in front of the shop that the Kono family owned and operated as “Hayashi Florist” until forced to close prior to WWII. ca.1930

Nisei (second generation) children, pose with tricycles in Japantown. ca.1910

Yoshio Itahara rides a bicycle to his job as a domestic worker. ca.1910

Photo credits:
Ozeki Photo Studio, The Alameda Museum, Courtesy of Iwaihara, Koike, Kono, Shiota, and Towata families.

Tonarigumi, next door or close neighbor in Japanese, describes the cohesive bond in Alameda’s Japanese American community that remained steadfast despite racism, wartime hystèria, and the erasure of its Japantown. The four historic markers tell the story of the spirit and resolve of the Japanese immigrants settling and adjusting to a new land in Alameda.

Tonarigumi, Alameda’s Historic Japantown
A collaboration of the Alameda Free Library, Buddhist Temple of Alameda, Buena Vista United Methodist Church, City of Alameda and Rhythmix Cultural Works.
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