



# JAPANESE AMERICANS OF SAND POINT- PONTIAC

***"When my father first migrated to America in 1907..he and his friends started farming at a place called Pontiac. And Pontiac later was to become the Sand Point Naval Station"***

**Jim Hirabayashi, Densho Oral History**

The story of the Japanese American community at Sand Point-Pontiac serves as a poignant microcosm of the experiences faced by numerous small, yet vibrant, Japanese American communities throughout the Puget Sound area. Despite confronting significant racial prejudice, first generation *Issei* carved out spaces for themselves and their families, establishing homes, businesses, and fostering strong community ties. For the Japanese American community at Sand Point-Pontiac, the concurrent development of Sand Point as a Naval Air Station, coupled with Executive Order 9066 signaled the end. Today, its legacy endures through a handful of oral histories and photographs preserved in local archives.

## A CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Formal steps towards Euro-American settlement of the Sand Point peninsula, began with the U.S. Government Land Office survey in August 1855, which opened the land for homesteading. Surveyors noted dense Douglas fir, cedar and hemlock forest, extensive wetlands and swamps, and a 30-acre lake fed by small streams. Thirteen years after the survey, the first homesteaders began logging the area and, according to census records, were farming by the early 1870s.

While the earliest and largest Japanese American settlements in Seattle were concentrated in the International District (*Nihonmachi*) starting in the late 1800s, Japanese immigrants began moving into areas of North Seattle, including Sand Point, particularly for farming, around the early 1900s.

Before any farming could be done however, much of the logged land needed clearing.

*The slashings and small timber [on logged-off lands] can be burned by cheap Italian or Japanese labor at reasonable expense, and...the land quickly becomes productive."* - Joe Smith, *The Rural Northwest* (1903)

Landowners often hired Japanese logging crews to clear their property, or they entered into "clear and farm" agreements where Japanese workers cleared the land in exchange for the right to farm it, typically for five years.

**Shoichiro Katsuno** was likely able to farm at Pontiac for some amount of time, in exchange for clearing the land of small timber and stumps. In this 1912 photograph, Shoichiro Katsuno (*back row 7<sup>th</sup> from left*) is pictured with his hand-built Pontiac homestead and other *Issei* members of the Pontiac cooperative farm group who were from Nagano prefecture, Japan. The caption of the photograph reads:

*"[Paying for] only for glass, nails, stovepipe, all the wood was free for clearing the land, [he] knew how to make cedar shakes from work in sawmill earlier"*



*In the front row, seated are Aiko Katsuno (2nd from left) and her mother Mrs. S. Katsuno (3rd from left). Standing in the second row, from left Mitsuo Hirabayashi (4th from left); third row Takashi Toji and Shungo Hirabayashi (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> from left);*



## THE BIRTH OF PONTIAC

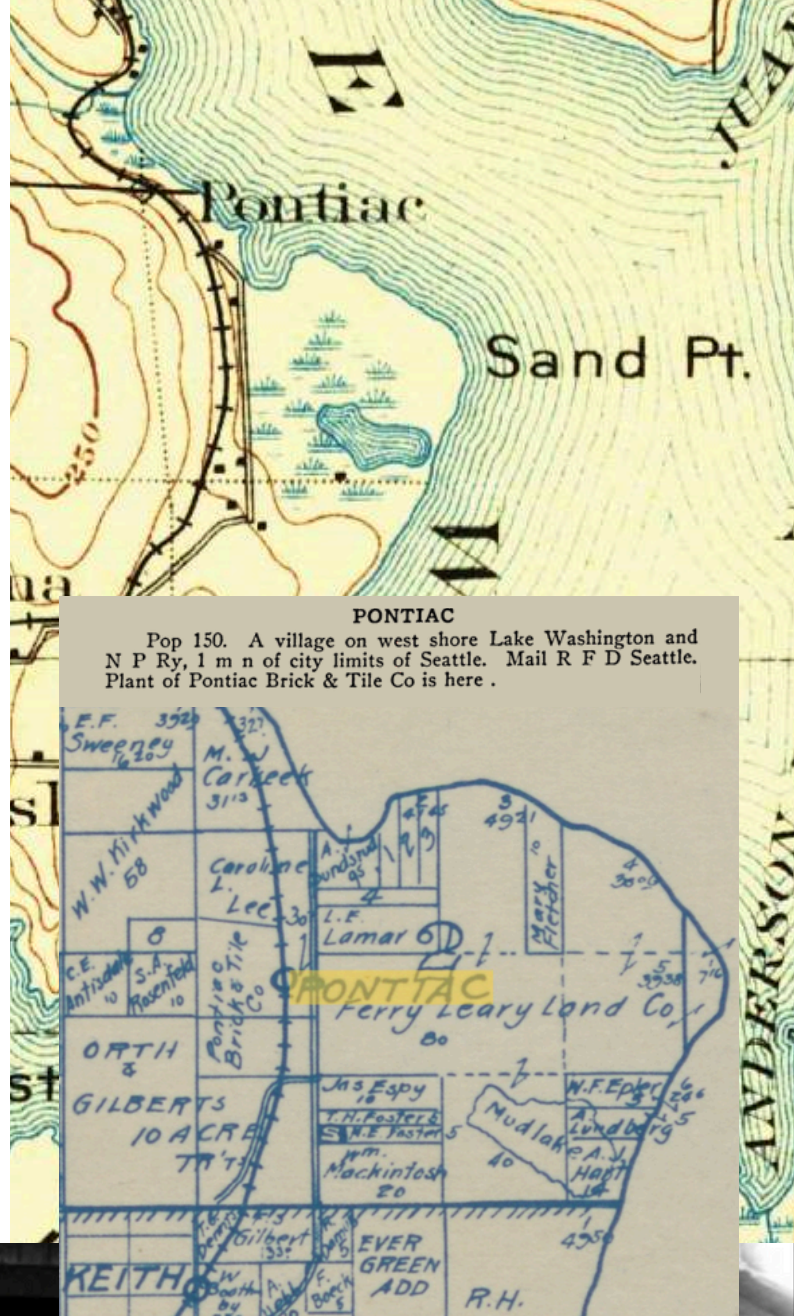
The name "Pontiac", referring to Pontiac Bay and the surrounding area near Sand Point, was named by landowner Osborn M. Merritt who hailed from Pontiac, Michigan. In advance of the Seattle, Lakeshore & Eastern railroad line completion, the family established the Pontiac Shingle Company in 1884 at Sand Point. Other industries followed including Edward Lee's Shipyard and the Pontiac Brick & Tile Company in 1889.

By 1891, the rail stop closest to these businesses was listed as the "Pontiac stop on the line" with maps from the 1890s showing the area as Pontiac. A small community formed around these industries, complete with a post office and school.

Pontiac School, a one-room school house and the first school in the Sand Point area opened in 1890 and was closed by 1918.

With so many Japanese pictured here at the Pontiac School, why in this 1912 *Kroll Atlas* (right) is there not a single Japanese land owner? Japanese immigrants were prevented from owning land in Washington, due to discriminatory Alien Land Laws.

Most, if not all, farmers in the Pontiac-Sandpoint area were leasing land to work on.



Pontiac School, 1915. Courtesy UW Libraries Special Collections.



## THE GREEN LAKE - PONTIAC FARMERS ASSOCIATION

According to a 1935 article in the Japanese American Courier, the first Japanese families to arrive in Pontiac were the **Kinomoto** family in 1904 and the **Hirata** family shortly after. Over two dozen Japanese American families can be traced to Pontiac-Sand Point at some point between 1904 and 1942.

**Kinomoto, Hirata, Adachi, Nagasawa, Itami, Yamagiwa, Takasugi, Katsuno, Ko, Lida, Watanabe, Kobayashi, Yoshida, Nishimoto, Ito, Hirabayashi, Iko, Kobayashi, Mochizuki, Uyeji, Kimura**



The Uyeji family began living and working at the Hirata farm in the Pontiac area around 1916. Later, Mr. Uyeji became an independent farmer by leasing a small piece of land at 6020 Sandpoint Way.

The Uyeji family got together with the Adachi and Takasugi families every December to make mochi.

"In the early days, we didn't have electricity, phones, or city water. We had a pure water from a well. We bartered, vegetables for a chicken or even good apple cider. At another place, an elderly gentleman, Mr Boothby sold eggs for 10 cents a dozen. He was generous with an old chicken for stew or soup.

Cooking was done on a wood stove. My father went to Ballard for cheap cedar bark that was trimmed off logs at the sawmills. It was wet so the big load we got in the summer had to be stacked to dry. Another job was to make boxes for the tomatoes, cauliflowers and other vegetables. "Pappa" got some lumber cut to size. He made a form on a table for certain boxes and we hammered away. This was better than hoeing weeds around the cabbage plants, picking peas and snap beans." - Tomiko Uyeji

Their small farms produced a variety of vegetables such as celery, lettuce, cauliflower, beans, peas, beets, carrots, radishes and green onions. Most of the produce was taken to the Pike Place Market or to wholesale companies such as the Green Lake Pontiac Farmers' Association,

Board member of the Green Lake Pontiac Farmers' Association and Sandpoint-Pontiac neighborhood leader, Toyosaku **Ito** conducted research on a special cauliflower that would be ready for market in the early summer before other local farmers could harvest the vegetable. By importing the seeds from Denmark and grew the cauliflower on the hillside that had good drainage. The cauliflower from the Pontiac area became a special and profitable product.

**"Later my father was able to borrow money for a truck. He made the back into a flatbed so he could haul crates of vegetables into Seattle. He covered the creates with wet canvas and would leave before sunrise so the vegetables wouldn't wilt." - Tomiko Uyeji**

**Coming down the hill toward Sandpoint Naval Air Station was the truck farm of Mr. and Mrs. Yamagiwa, our dear Issei couple. They had no children so they treated us kids well with tasty goodies. Next to this home was the Hirata's farm. I was born in their home. - Tomiko Uyeji**

*Photo caption below: Uyeji family left to right - Tomiko, Kame, Oto Uyeji, Kame Uyeji, Tak Courtesy Densho*







*Photo caption:*  
Japanese and Euro-American women bobbing for apples at Pontiac cooperative farm group's sports day and picnic, Pontiac c.1914. The Issei invited Euro-American families in the neighborhood to participate in these festivities. Courtesy Jay Hirabayashi

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The Greenlake Japanese American Community came together around organized social and cultural activities. The Sandpoint-Pontiac Japanese families took part in sports, Japanese Language School, and cooperative business associations. They also recreated and socialized locally.

**"They sponsored picnic gatherings, with food and games, and even invited Caucasian acquaintances who lived in the area to join them." - Jim Hirabayashi**

The children would go swimming at Sandpoint Swimming Beach during the hot summers. They also played football and other sports in the cow pastures with neighbors that treated them well.

The children, Kame, Tomiko and Tosh **Uyeji** worked on the farm when they were not in school. attended Japanese Language School. Tomiko **Uyeji** played on the girls' Green Lake Softball Team and Kame and Tosh were members of the Green Lake Judo Team.

Fred **Uyeji** played baseball on the Green Lake Juniors' Baseball Team and the Johnson Drug Bombers Basketball Team.

*Photo caption:*  
Clockwise from top. Sandpoint Picnic 1925, Swimming at Sandpoint (Back row: Yoshi Hirata, Middle Row: Rick Tanagi, Roy Tanagi, Ko Abe, Front Row: Esther Hiyama, Kame Uyeji, George Tanagi. Source: Densho), Greenlake Japanese Language School, Green Lake Judo, Green Lake Softball Team.





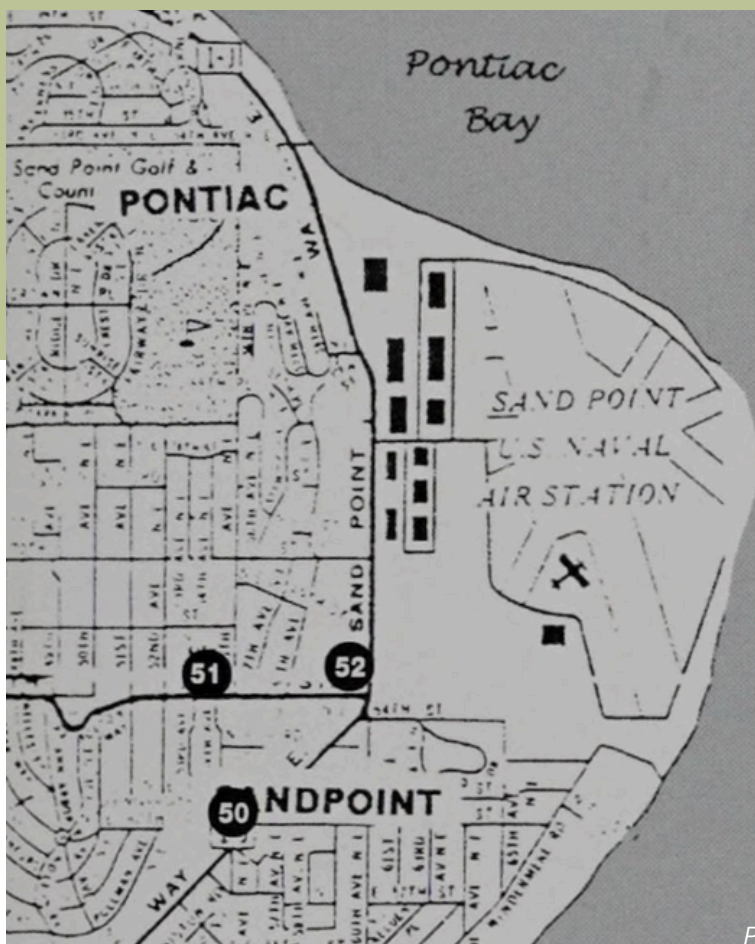
## CARKEEK PARK MOVES, MAKING WAY FOR AN AIRFIELD

The original Carkeek Park (1918-1926) was a 23-acre park established near Pontiac Station on land owned by Pontiac Brick and Tile co-owner, Morgan Carkeek.

However, in 1926, the federal government condemned all of Sand Point as the site for a Naval Air Station. As a result, the park needed to be relocated. Morgan J. Carkeek, who had originally donated land for the first park, offered funds from the sale of the Sand Point property towards the purchase of a new park site. The new Carkeek Park, located in what is now the Broadview neighborhood of North Seattle, was then formally dedicated on August 24, 1929.

*Image above: Greenlake Japanese American Association Picnic at Carkeek Park, 1930.*

*Below right: Sand Point Naval Air Station, c. 1931*



While the development of the Sand Point Naval Air Station was not the sole force driving Japanese farmers from the area, it is clear that by the time the Sand Point Naval Air Station was well established in the mid-1930s, only a handful of Japanese American families appear to still be in the area: the Uyejis, Itos, Hiratas, and Takasugis

*Photo caption left: Map of Japanese American families in Sandpoint-Pontiac, c. 1935. Numbers correspond to families as follows: 50 (Uyeji), 51 (Ito), 52 (Hirata). We also know the Takasugis were still farming near the Uyejis.*



## EXECUTIVE ORDER 9066 REMOVES LAST JAPANESE FARMERS FROM PONTIAC

The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, threw Sand Point Naval Air Station into high alert. Clerestory windows were blacked out so the Base might not be seen from the sky and in all manners, the Base dramatically ramped up its operations and security.

Pontiac fell within Exclusion Zone 57 and residents of Japanese ancestry were ordered to be "evacuated" on May 12, 1942. After the Uyejis, Takasugis and all other Japanese American up and down the west coast were forcibly incarcerated. While they were gone, the farms and homes they worked so hard for, were forever changed.

### *Jap's Bright Yellow Turnip Field at Sand Point Mowed*

"Officials of the Naval District said two officers made an observation flight yesterday and reported that, whether intentional or not, the fields of yellow did form a marker pointing out Sand Point. So long as the farm is uninhabited, they decided to take no chances on leaving the fields ablaze with blossoms"  
- May 11, 1942, *Seattle Times*

While incarcerated in Tule Lake, the Uyeji and Takasugi family farms were condemned and seized by the Navy to build a storage facility, now the home of the National Archives and Records, marking the end of the Japanese farming community era at Sand Point - Pontiac.

A new aviation supply warehouse, on which construction was started before the end of the war, is to be completed to serve the postwar needs of the Supply Department, officials said. It is situated in an area immediately southwest of the station proper. The new warehouse will increase storage space by 120,000 square feet, at a cost of approximately \$500,000.



*Above: Uyeji family in greenhouse c.1930s.*

*Below: In 1944, two years after the family was forced to abandon it. .*

"Fifty years ago, I visited my stomping grounds knowing that there will be complete changes. It was a shock!...No more tall pine trees or lovely green ground vegetation...What I saw was rich top soil covered with black tar-like cement and a monstrous thing for a warehouse. - Tomiko Uyeji, 2005

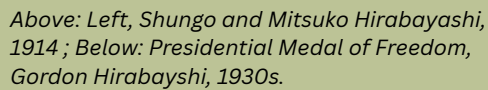
The saga of the Japanese community at Sand Point - Pontiac illustrates systemic injustice layered over generations of perseverance.

Barred from the fundamental right of land ownership by discriminatory Alien Land Laws, these industrious farmers poured their immense labor into leased lands, transforming what was often marginal acreage into productive agricultural hubs.

But the expansion of the Sand Point Naval Air Station that consumed their farms and the final, devastating blow of forced removal during WWII marked the end of the Sandpoint-Pontiac Japanese American community.

"Our so called Pontiac neighborhood is only in my dreams now. At 84 years of age, I love to dream and nobody can take it away." - Tomiko Uyeji, 2005





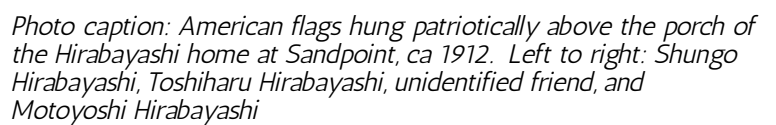
**Shungo and Mitsuko Hirabayashi**, both came to Sand Point from a farming community in Nagano prefecture in Japan.

"In 1911, several cousins of Dad's, along with friends from Nagano prefecture, formed a collective and began a vegetable garden in Pontiac, on the shore of Lake Washington. Later, this area became part of the Sand Point Naval Air Base..." - Jim Hirabayashi

Their son, Gordon was born at Sand Point on April 23, 1918. Gordon would later become well known for intentionally defying the exclusion orders targeting people of Japanese ancestry in 1942, believing them to be unconstitutional and discriminatory.

He refused to report for "relocation" to an internment camp and turned himself in to the FBI to challenge the legality of these orders. His case, *Hirabayashi v. United States*, went all the way to the Supreme Court in 1943, a critical early legal stand against the government's actions.

In 2012, Gordon Hirabayashi was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, recognizing his courage and his fight for civil liberties.



*Below: Gordon Hirabayashi, Shungo Hirabayashi draft card, Gordon Hirabayashi Presidential Medal of Freedom*

