

# A Japanese American Family 1902–1992

## Finding Records to Recreate the Hirai Family Story

Linda Harms Okazaki  
[LindaHOkazaki@gmail.com](mailto:LindaHOkazaki@gmail.com)



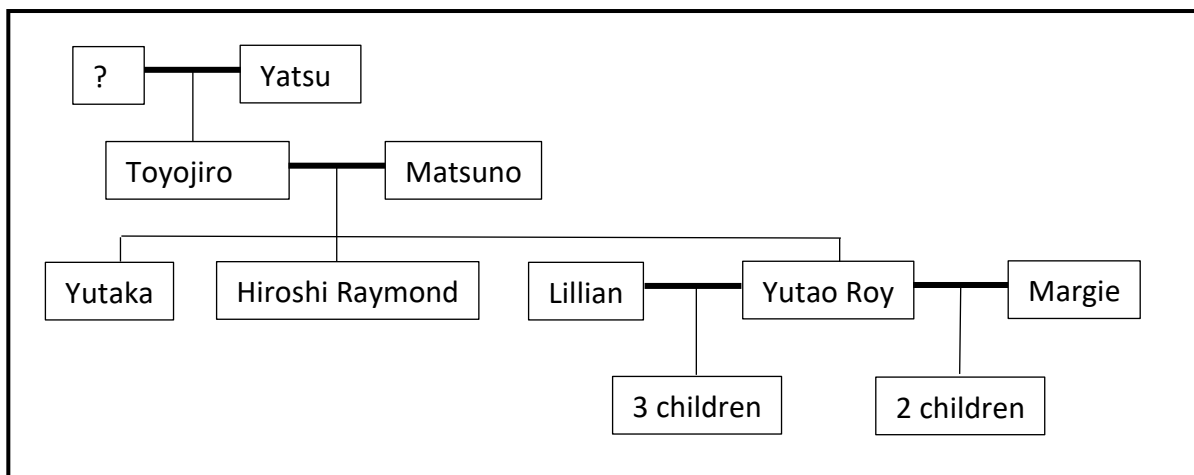
### Introduction:

The experience of Asian immigrants to the U.S. and their descendants is part of American history. While each Asian group had slightly different experiences based upon the country of ancestral origin, factors such as cultural nuances, language, social norms, religious customs, calendar differences, laws, historical events, and the socio-political climate of the era in both the ancestral country and the U.S. must be taken into account when compiling a family history.

### Overview:

Toyojiro Hirai was the first in his family to immigrate to the U.S. from Japan (1902). His wife and second son followed separately. A third son was born in the U.S. By examining both conventional and ethnic-specific documents, the lives of Toyojiro, his wife, his children, and his grandchildren can be reconstructed.

### Family of Toyojiro Hirai: parents, spouse, children, and grandchildren



### Conventional and Ethnic-Specific Records for Researching Japanese Families in the U.S.

### **Alien Files and AR-2s**

- A-files which have been released to the National Archives are indexed in the NARA catalog. Those A-files not yet released are available through USCIS.

### **Census Records**

- Very few Japanese lived in the U.S. or Hawai'i prior to 1885. Look for year of immigration as well as land ownership. Names can be difficult to decipher.

### **Court Records**

- Look for adoption, divorce, and probate files, as well as guardianship papers pertaining to land ownership.

### **Directories**

- In addition to traditional city directories, Japanese community directories are available in some locations.

### **DNA**

- The use of DNA in Japanese families is complicated due to the custom of adult adoptions in order to carry on a surname.

### **FBI Files**

- FBI files pertaining to some Japanese/Japanese Americans detained or arrested during WWII are held at the National Archives in College Park, MD.

### **Immigration Records**

- Look for immigration records among all family members.
- Look for minutes from the Boards for Special Inquiry, as well as Immigration Arrival Investigation Case Files, 1884-1944 at the National Archives in San Francisco, CA.

### **Internment Camp Records**

- Records are held at different branches of the National Archives, depending on the type of internment and the type of record.

### **Land Records**

- Alien land laws varied by state.

### **Manuscript Collections**

- Manuscript collections may be found in both conventional and ethnic-specific locations. Look in major museums, local historical societies, and universities.

### **Military Records**

- Look for WWI and WWII draft registrations.

- Look for Japanese immigrants who served during WWII in ethnic-specific troops: Military Intelligence Service, or 100<sup>th</sup> and 442<sup>nd</sup> battalions.

### **Names**

- Japanese born in the U.S. often had both Western and Japanese names.
- Transliterating names from Japanese to English can result in unusual spellings.

### **Naturalization Records**

- Japanese immigrants could not become citizens until 1952—with the exception of those who naturalized in 1935 under the Nye-Lea Act for service during WWI.
- In 1907, American women who married aliens lost their citizenship. The Cable Act was amended in 1931, allowing American women who married Asian immigrants to retain their U.S. citizenship.

### **Newspapers**

- Ethnic-specific and internment-specific newspapers can be found on Ancestry.com, Densho.org, Library of Congress, the National Archives, and Stanford University *Hoji Shimbun* collection.

### **Religious Records**

- In the U.S., both Christian and Buddhist records are common.

### **Social Security Applications**

- These often name the immigrant parents, residence, and employer.

### **Vital Records: Birth, Marriage, Death, plus Adoption and Divorce**

- It was not unusual for U.S. born children of Japanese immigrants to have delayed birth certificates.
- Marriage records issued just after the time of immigration may indicate that the woman was a “picture bride.”
- Look for interracial couples who may have married in states without anti-miscegenation laws.
- U.S. death certificates may indicate names of parents, village of origin, or the cemetery.
- Gravestones may include biographical information.

## **Timeline of Events and Laws Impacting Japanese and Japanese Americans in the U.S.**

- 1868 – 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment provided citizenship to those born in the U.S.
- 1882 – Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers, opening the door to Japanese laborers in the U.S.
- 1898 – Hawai'i became a state
- 1905 – Japanese and Korean exclusion league formed in U.S. and Canada
- 1906 – Asian children in San Francisco were to be sent to segregated schools
- 1907 – Gentlemen's Agreement
- 1907 – Japanese and Korean Exclusion League renamed Asiatic Exclusion League
- 1907 – Expatriation Act: American women lost their citizenship when they married aliens
- 1910 – Angel Island Immigration Station opened
- 1913 – Webb-Haney Act (California Alien Land Law) prohibited land ownership among aliens ineligible for citizenship (Asians) and eventually spread to other states.
- 1917 – Chinese Exclusion Act extended to cover all Asians
- 1917 – Immigration Act of 1917, also called Asiatic Barred Zone
- 1918 – WWI Veterans were eligible for naturalization, except Asians
- 1920 – California Alien Land Law amended to close loopholes and end 3-year leases
- 1920 – Picture Bride era ends; Japan stopped issuing passports to picture brides
- 1922 – Cable Act excluded women who married aliens ineligible for citizenship (Asian)
- 1923 – U.S. upheld constitutionality of Alien Land Acts
- 1924 – Immigration Act of 1924 barred the entry of Asians without permanent residence
- 1931 – Cable Act amended; American women could retain citizenship, even if their husbands were ineligible (Asian immigrants)
- 1935 – Asian immigrant veterans of WWI could naturalize
- 1940 – Smith Act required all aliens to complete Alien Registration forms; American citizens of immigrant parents could lose their citizenship while residing abroad for six+ months
- 1941 – Pearl Harbor attacked; arrest warrants were issued later that day
- 1942 – Executive Order 9066 set the stage for the incarceration of individuals of Japanese ancestry living on the west coast
- 1943 – Chinese immigrants could naturalize
- 1947 – War Brides Act amended to include Asian women
- 1952 – McCarran Walter Act; all Asian immigrants had the opportunity to become U.S. citizens
- 1952 – Alien Land Laws invalidated
- 1959 – Hawai'i became a state
- 1965 – All Asians granted equal access to immigration and naturalization
- 1967 – Anti-miscegenation laws abolished in all states
- 1988 – President Regan signed the Civil Liberties Act