

Family History Newsletter



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The Family History group supports members in researching their family history research. Members have ancestors from around the globe.

They meet on the first Wednesday of each month at 7pm at the Maple Ridge Library.

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Fraser Valley Buddhist Church

by Gina Leigh

Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows were once home to a large, vibrant Japanese population. Japanese immigration to Canada increased greatly in the first 15 to 20 years of the 1900s. By the time the 1921 Census of Canada was taken many second generation children of Japanese descent had been born in Canada and were considered Canadians. (Source: *1921 Census of Canada, British Columbia, Fraser Valley, Dewdney*, accessed on www.ancestry.ca) Japanese Canadians settled, raised families and, amongst other occupations, contributed significantly to farming in the Maple Ridge area – old timers especially remembered the strawberry farms, and the title of “berry capital.”

The site in Maple Ridge where the Japanese worshiped and socialized from 1918 to 1930, was home to the Nokai Hall, Buddhist Church, Japanese Language School and meeting hall for the Hammond community of Japanese Canadians. The land located at 21525 Dewdney Trunk Road was donated by Sansuke Kawamoto whose home was nearby on 216th Street. The community had grown, so when the building burned down in 1930, they built the Nokai Hall on a different site and built the Buddhist Church on the site of the original building.

That building, the Fraser Valley Buddhist Church, was home to Houston’s Pub at one time although it

has been vacant for a number of years. Renovation plans stopped due to the scope of the work required to complete. The Office Liquor Store is currently in the building attached to the front of the church.

In 1942 the federal government enacted legislation resulting in Japanese Canadians being interned and their property confiscated. This church was among the many properties entrusted to the Custodian of Enemy Property and later sold.



The Fraser Valley Buddhist Church.
Maple Ridge Museum and Archives Collection, P00978

A work colleague of my friend Mat Condon was shown a number of artifacts relating to the church when he met with a representative of The Office. Mat told me about this “find.” I was immediately interested, however some time passed before I was able to follow up. Recently Mat was able to connect with the current owners of the building. I wanted to involve the Nikkei National Museum whose mandate includes the collection and preservation of artifacts and history relating to Japanese Canadians in BC and the rest of Canada.

On March 20, 2017, Colleen Beattie of Mission Springs LRS Group met with me and Linda Kawamoto Reid (Research Archivist at the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre in Burnaby). Linda has a personal interest in the Fraser Valley Buddhist Church because her grandfather, Sansuke Kawamoto, was the person who donated the land in 1918. This building seems to be the only trace of the Hammond farming community which once existed.



Colleen produced the item above, which she has donated to the Nikkei Museum. (The Nikkei Museum has since given the scroll to the Maple Ridge Museum because of its local history.) A scroll of paper with Japanese calligraphy, about 4' x 2-1/2', glued to a piece of foam core in a metal frame with broken glass. (The letter "A" is unrelated to the scroll but had fallen behind the broken glass and had not been removed when the photo was taken.) Two pieces of paper written in English were glued to the scroll.

Based on the contents of the top page, the scroll is a dedication document relating to construction of the Church and would have hung in the Church. Unfortunately, at the time of our visit Colleen had been unable to locate any of the other tantalizing items which existed at one time. Colleen assured us that she will keep an eye open for anything that may turn up in future.

2017 is the 75th anniversary of the Internment. Linda Reid has made a successful nomination to Heritage BC to designate the Fraser Valley Buddhist Church as a site of historic significance to Japanese Canadian history in BC.

The church may also be included on the Canadian Register of Historic Places. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/56-japanese-canadian-places-revealed-government-of-bc-1.4051659>

With thanks to Linda Kawamoto Reid for the information about the early days of the Nokai Hall and Fraser Valley Buddhist Church. Further information about the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre is available at www.nikkeiplace.org

Online Resources

Alberta Vital Records online!
provincialarchives.alberta.ca

- A little introduction to the records and how to search. <http://albertaresearch2.blogspot.ca/2017/03/historical-vital-statistics-in-alberta.html?m=1>

Family History Events

Abbotsford Family History Centre

www.abbotsfordfamilyhistory.com

- **Abbotsford Family History Day**, Saturday, April 28, 2017, 8:30am – 3:30pm. 30635 Blueridge Drive Fee: Free.

British Columbia Genealogical Society

www.bcgs.ca/?page_id=2511#.WL-ecTsrJPY

- Canada 150 Seminar – Celebrating our Canadian Ancestors with Dave Obee, Claire Smith-Burns, Mary Read, and Xexia Stanford, June 9 to 11, 2017, Fee: TBD.

Cloverdale Library

www.surreylibraries.ca

- **Orientations**, Saturdays, 10:00-10:50 am, April 1, Pre-registration recommended. Fee: free.
- **Family History Fridays**, April 7, 2:30 pm, Drop in. Join us to share and explore different topics in family history. Fee: Free.

Langley Centennial Museum

www.surreylibraries.ca

- **Sacrifice and Sorrow: exhibition opening & book signing**, with Warren Sommer, Sunday, April 9, 2017 3:00-4:30 pm. Fee: free.
- **BC Remembers: Reflections on the Great War**, with Chris Leach, Sharon Fisher, Mark Forsythe, Greg Dickson, Warren Sommer & Peter Broznitsky. April 22, 9:30 am – 4:00 pm. \$25.

Maple Ridge Family History Group, Wednesday, May 3, 2017, 7pm at the Maple Ridge Library.