

Destination Vashon 2017

Preserving the Japanese American Presence on Vashon

By Bruce Haulman

Seventy-five years ago, the Japanese American Community on Vashon Island was shattered. Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on Feb. 19, 1942, ordered the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast Exclusion Zone, and then three months later Civilian Exclusion Order No. 68 ordered the assembly and forced removal of the Vashon Japanese American community on May 16, 1942.

On Vashon, four different groups are working to keep the memory of these events alive, to preserve and maintain the experiences of the Vashon Japanese-American community, and to ensure that we never forget the harm that fear and hatred can cause. In the coming months, several events will be open to the public to learn more about this history of the island.



Mukai House, Garden, and Barreling Plant, 1937

The Friends of Mukai are working to preserve the landmarked Mukai House, Garden and Fruit Barreling Plant; and will hold regular open houses at the site all through the year. The Friends of Mukai was formed in 2012 to restore and preserve this national treasure and is in the process of completing plans to fully restore this significant historic site. Built in 1930, the buildings are a synthesis of two cultural influences: the desire of Japanese immigrants to be American in D.B. Mukai's design of the house and barreling plant, and their desire to retain their culture in Kuni Mukai's design of the Japanese stroll garden. The garden is historically significant because it is the only Japanese garden in the United

States created by a Japanese woman. You can learn more about the Mukai House, Garden, and Fruit Barreling Plant at the Friends of Mukai web site friendsofmukai.org.



Matsuda Farmhouse and Family, 1938

This summer on July 29, the Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust will host a fundraiser Party Under The Big Sky at the Historic Matusuda Farm. Conserving the farm honors the Matsuda family and their history as Japanese strawberry farmers on Vashon. This is the Land Trust's first-ever farmland preservation project and has brought the community together to recognize the agricultural, recreational, natural, and cultural significance of the property. The Land Trust is working to link the property into an island-wide public trail system, to renovate the farmhouse, to conserve an important meadow habitat in the center of the island, and to develop the property into a community farm. You can learn more about the Land Trust and the Historic Matsuda Farm at the Land Trust's web site vashonlandtrust.org.



Marshall Strawberries, B.D. and Milton Mukai, circa 1916

Next April, Vashon's Heritage Museum will host an exhibit, curated by the Vashon Japanese American Research Project, that tells the story of the Japanese American Community on Vashon. Between 1900, when the first Japanese Americans were recorded on Vashon, and 1942, the community grew and prospered. Strawberry farming was the basis for the success of these immigrants, and as they became successful, they became a well-integrated part of the Vashon Island community. Their exile and imprisonment during World War II effectively shattered this community, and of the 132 island Japanese Americans who were exiled, only about 40 returned to the island to resume farming and to pick up their lives that had been interrupted by the war. You can learn about the Heritage Museum at the Museum web site at vashonheritage.org

Today, Vashon still has about 40 Japanese-American residents, but only a handful of them trace their heritage to the Vashon Japanese American community from before World War II. Most of the Japanese Americans on Vashon now have their own stories of exile and imprisonment in other parts of the West Coast, and most came here for the same reasons other residents have come to Vashon over the past half-century. The Vashon Japanese American Research Project, is a volunteer-driven research project with an 11-person advisory committee composed of islanders, half of whom are of Japanese American descent which works with all of these organizations to preserve the history of the Japanese American Community on Vashon. You can learn more about the project at the web site vashonhistory.com