



A Buddhist grave site lies at the heart of St. Hilda's graveyard. The fenced, moss-covered plot contains six headstones, the oldest ones inscribed with Japanese characters, and two unmarked graves. The names of the dead are Jiro Konishi, Hanna Konishi, Naokichi Kawamoto, Toshiko Konishi, Seiji Konishi, Sanji Konishi, Agnes Konishi Hodge and Shoji John Konishi.

Hanna and Jiro "Jim" Konishi immigrated from Japan around 1913, one of the first non-native families in Sechelt. They bore three sons, then two daughters, and built up a farm on the west shore of Porpoise Bay. Naokichi Kawamoto was a family friend, a fisherman who lived with the Konishis.

According to local historian Helen Dawe, author of *Helen Dawe's Sechelt*, Jiro Konishi was fast friends with her grandfather, Thomas Cook, who was one of the first white settlers in Sechelt.

Tragedy visited the Konishis around 1922 when their three-year-old daughter, whose name is given by different sources as Toshiko, Aki, or Oki, died from an accidental scalding.

"I can only just remember the little girl as being very young, a toddler," wrote Dawe. "They brought a Buddhist priest up from Vancouver to conduct the funeral service."

The gravesite was not then a churchyard, but the homestead of Thomas Cook. Cook buried two young children there, Oki Konishi and a four-month-old baby, Regnheld Evelyn Davidson, who died at Doriston, a settlement on Sechelt Inlet, in 1923. In 1930 Cook donated the land to the Anglican Church, Dawe wrote, "because he anticipated that the Anglicans would provide adequate care for the cemetery where the two children had already been buried."

The first St. Hilda's church was built there in 1936.

Meanwhile the Konishi farm prospered through the 1930s, delivering fruit, vegetables, and milk by horse and cart. Sanji, the youngest son, raised rabbits and sold the meat. In 1938 Jiro established a store, the Settler's Supply House, in Selma Park.

Billie Steele, another granddaughter of Cook, said Jiro gave fresh produce to many hungry people during the Depression, adding, "I'm sure many of them never paid him back."

The Konishi family's next round of sorrows began on the eve of World War II with the deaths of the two patriarchs, Naokichi Kawamoto in 1938 and Jiro Konishi in 1939. Jiro died of pneumonia at the age of 67 after a hurried trip home to Japan.

Then, on Feb. 26, 1942, the Canadian government ordered the removal of "all persons of Japanese racial origin" from the coast of B.C. This decision was viewed at the time as a necessary response to the Pearl Harbour bombing, but is

now widely viewed as an ethnic cleansing by racist politicians who seized on the war as an excuse to remove the Japanese.

On the Sunshine Coast, the Japanese community of fishermen and store owners at Egmont were given one day's notice before being forcibly boarded on a Union Steamship at Pender Harbour. Their fishing boats were confiscated and towed to the Fraser River, where they were looted and eventually sold.

Despite the short notice, the store owners tried scrupulously to settle all their accounts before leaving. Gladys McNutt, in her history of Egmont, describes one Japanese woman who sat down and cried as she tried to decide what to pack and tells how the white caretakers assigned to run the Japanese stores helped themselves to new undershirts off the store shelves as they prepared to take a "Japanese steam bath" in a newly confiscated house.

In Sechelt, the widow Hanna Konishi and her grown children received the same 24-hour notice to leave their home and possessions. Sanji ran to Thomas Cook to seek help, but despite his best efforts all Cook could do was gain one day of extra time for the Konishis. The family, together with thousands of other internees, was kept in stockyards at the Hastings Park Exhibition Grounds in Vancouver. A chaplain who visited them there reported Hanna cried constantly. The Konishis were later moved to an internment camp in the B.C. Interior and the Porpoise Bay farm they had tended for 30 years was confiscated, sold, and let go to ruin.

The eldest son, Seiji, drowned at Fort Fraser in 1946 at the age of 32. After the war Hanna Konishi worked as a housekeeper in Vancouver. The ashes of both Seiji and Hanna were reportedly returned to Sechelt, although there seems to be no record of Hanna's grave. The three surviving Konishi children never returned to live in Sechelt, though for many years they visited regularly to tend the family grave site.

The family fortunes improved after the war, judging by the inscriptions on the later gravestones. "So many happy memories" is Shoji's epitaph and his baby sister Agnes is remembered as "Beloved wife and mother." The last surviving member of the second generation, Sanji Konishi, died in 1994 at the age of 76. Only Shoji and Sanji were still alive in 1988 when the Canadian government formally apologized and paid \$21,000 to each living Japanese evacuee.

Fragments of the Konishis' story appear in different sources: Helen Dawe's Sechelt, the cemetery map and parish history of St. Hilda's, and the Sechelt Community Archives, which provided reminiscences from Bob Hackett, Gladys McNutt and Billie Steele. Bea Rankin, who interviewed Sechelt pioneers Florrie Clayton, Charlotte Jackson and Mary Gray in the 1980s, filled in more details from her notes. The Encyclopedia of British Columbia provides a concise history of the Japanese relocation during the war .

*-Nancy Mooto*