

LESSON 1 SOURCE 1.14 THE SHIMOTAKAHARA FAMILY

Family Name: Shimotakahara

Family Members: Kozo, Shin, Sachi, George, and Vernon

Street Address: 210 Powell Street Vancouver, B.C.

Occupation: Doctor

Location: Vancouver, British Columbia



Vancouver sits on the coast of British Columbia's mainland, on the shore of the Pacific and near the mouth of the Fraser River. New arrivals to the region recognized the geographic advantage of a settlement in this place. The land on which it stands has long been home to people of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh-ulh Temíxw (Squamish) and səliwətaʔtəməxʷ (Tsleil-Waututh) territory).

In 1939, Vancouver is the economic engine of the province. The Canadian Pacific railway carries timber, coal, and canned fish across Canada. The port delivers the same resources across the world. It is a time of optimism: this year has shown the first signs of economic prosperity since the Great Depression. Newcomers pour into the city hoping to take advantage of the province's natural wealth.

Powell Street is the heart of Japanese Canadian life in Vancouver. It is lined with Japanese Canadian-owned shops, businesses, restaurants, boarding houses, and food merchants catering to Japanese Canadians in and beyond Vancouver. Powell Street begins in the business centre of Vancouver and runs east toward the city's working-class districts. Shipyards and lumber mills lie north of Powell Street. Residential neighborhoods, with family homes, expand southwards. The streets bustle with millworkers, entrepreneurs, established families, and new immigrants.

Not all Japanese Canadians live in the Powell Street neighborhood. Some families have moved to different parts of the city. Successful entrepreneurs live in wealthier neighborhoods like Kerrisdale. Even as the community grows, however, Powell Street remains a vital centre to Japanese Canadian life. Only there can you find the home-turf of the beloved Asahi baseball team, uniquely Japanese cuisine, and the headquarters of community newspapers.

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ABOUT THE SHIMOTAKAHARA FAMILY

Dr. Kozo Shimotakahara owns the building at the corner of Powell Street and Main Street. Dr. Shimotakahara became the first Japanese Canadian physician when he established his practice in the 1920s. His offices are upstairs, beside a dentist's office and nineteen apartments. Downstairs, at street level, there are several businesses, including a clothing store, a watchmaker, and a photography studio. At the west end of the building, on the corner, Mr. Eizo Shinkoda runs the Takahara Drug Store.

Dr. Shimotakahara and his wife, Shin, are well-known around Vancouver's Powell Street for their contributions to the community. They have three children: Sachi (17), George (22), Vernon Shinci (24). Now, only Sachi lives with his parents in their beautiful home on 1245 West 10th Avenue.

The Japanese Canadian community struggles with high rates of tuberculosis (or TB), a highly contagious respiratory disease. Life during the Great Depression is gruelling: many people work hard jobs, eat poor diets, and live in crowded conditions. In these conditions, the disease spreads easily. Dr. Shimotakahara works with the Vancouver Health Department and other Japanese Canadian health professionals to run TB clinics and educational campaigns about the disease. Their efforts make a difference: since they began, they have reduced disease rates by nearly half.



Left: Dr. Kozo Shimotakahara was an ardent sport fisherman. This photo is from 1930. Nikkei National Museum 2001.4.3

Centre: This is the Shimotakahara home at 1245 West 10th Ave, West Vancouver. Library and Archives Canada/RG33-69/e011167808-024

Right: Dr. Kozo Shimotakahara owns this building at the corner of Powell Street and Main Street. His offices are on the second floor. Library and Archives Canada/RG33-69/e011167808-026