

## LESSON 1 SOURCE 1.17 THE TAGASHIRA FAMILY

**Family Name:** Tagashira

**Family Members:** Masue, Rinkichi, Misayaki, Aiko

**Street Address:** 679 Cordova St. Vancouver, B.C.

**Occupation:** Tagashira Trading Co., barber, domestic work

**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 TAGASHIRA FAMILY

Masue and Rinkichi Tagashira are a relatively new couple. Masue was previously married. She had two children from this first marriage: Misayaki Donald (age 10) and Aiko (age 7). She became a widow, however, when her first husband suffered an injury at a logging camp in 1932.

In the Hungry Thirties life is hard. Jobs are scarce, and even fewer are available to women. Masue worked as a barber and then a domestic to support her children. A position at a Minister's home gave her an opportunity to learn English. She took language classes in the evenings, practicing with her children.

In 1938, businessman Rinkichi Tagashira needs help at his tobacco and candy wholesale company, the Tagashira Trading Company. Masue takes the position and soon they start acting like a family.

Rinkichi has owned the Tagashira Trading Company since the early 1920s. It sits at the edge of the Powell Street neighborhood. Masue helps at the counter, and sometimes Donald joins Rinkichi on delivery trips across the city. At home, Masue teaches *ikebana*, traditional Japanese flower arranging, lessons. Donald and Aiko attended the nearby Japanese Language School after their regular school days. The family attends church weekly.



Left: Masue Tagashira with her children: Masayuki Donald and Aiko. Courtesy of Donald Jinnouchi.

Right: Masue's apartment building. She and her children moved here in the late 1930s. Library and Archives Canada/RG33-69/e011178463