

LESSON 1 SOURCE 1.19 THE ATAGI FAMILY

Family Name: Atagi

Family Members: Tsunematsu, Kaya, Kaoru, Hisao, Kenji, and Osamu

Street Address: Steveston, B.C.

Occupation: Atagi Boatworks, fishermen and boat builders

Location: Steveston, British Columbia



Steveston is a major fishing village in southern British Columbia. It sits where the most important river in province, the Fraser River, meets the Pacific Ocean. Docks and canneries line its shore. Fishermen, ship-builders, and merchants call Steveston home. These lands sit on the traditional and unceded territories of the $s\acute{c}awa\theta ena?4$ $t\acute{a}m\acute{e}x^w$ (Tsawwassen), $S'ólh$ $Téméxw$ ($Stó:lō$) Kwantlen, $Stz'uminus$, $x^w m\acute{a}\theta k^w \acute{a}y\acute{a}m$ (Musqueam).

The promise of Steveston's abundant waters first drew settlers from Japan, China, and Europe to the region in the 1880s. At that time, Canadian law ordered local First Nations from their traditional lands to designated reserves. Despite this attempt to separate First Nations people from settler life, they became part of the growing village and work in the fisheries and canneries. Racial discrimination persists in the 1930s. Cannery owners pay workers differently, according to their heritage.

There is an old story that the first Japanese migrants emigrated after hearing that you could drop a bucket into the ocean and pull it up filled with salmon. Many came from Wakayama, a coastal region in Japan. They bring with them old knowledge of boatbuilding and fishing. Japanese Canadians work hard and have become some of the most successful fishers in the province. In 1939, there are several Japanese Canadian run fishing co-operatives.

Steveston has the second largest Japanese Canadian community in British Columbia. A Japanese Mission and hospital serve the needs of the fishermen, cannery workers, and their families. There is also a Buddhist Temple. In 1939 Japanese Canadian children attend classes with students of other backgrounds. Alongside other residents in Steveston, Japanese Canadians celebrate Dominion Day and May Day. Many follow Japanese tradition and celebrate Girl's Day in March and Boy's Day in May. In the summer, there are community picnics and play baseball.

LESSON 1 SOURCE 1.19 THE ATAGI FAMILY

ABOUT THE ATAGI FAMILY

The Atagi family lives in Steveston, a thriving fishing town. Their father, Tsunematsu, fishes in the summers and builds boats in the winters. He opened the Atagi Boatworks in 1905. He is a master of his craft: since he began, his boatworks has built over 300 fishing vessels. His carpenters use whatever tools are best for the job, whether Japanese or Canadian. Around the community, Tsunematsu is known as “the President” for his wise leadership.

Tsunematsu’s success allowed him to purchase land and build a home in Steveston. He built other buildings on the property, which he rents to other families. The children play together. Sometimes, they sneak into the workshop to watch the carpenters at work. Many look up to the Atagi brothers: Kaoru, Hisao, Kenji, and Osamu.

The Atagis have a full household, filled with visiting neighbors, and hired carpenters. In the evening, the workers gamble. Mrs. Name Atagi cooks for everyone. Maintaining the house is a full-time job.



Left: The Atagi Boatworks. University of British Columbia Rare Books and Special Collections BC-1532-1246-1

Centre: The Atagi brothers: Kaoru, Hisao, Kenji, and Osamu. Photo courtesy of Susumu Tabata.

Right: The Atagi family with neighbors and friends. From left to right: Susumu Tabata, Osamu Atagi, Shoji Tabata, Kaoru Atagi, Shizemi Tabata, Mrs. Atagi, Mr. Atagi, Mrs. Yamashita, H. Tabata, Hisao Atagi. Photo courtesy of Susumu Tabata.