

Memories of the Aftermath of the Internment Camps

by Pastor George Takashima

Following the end of World War II, in the summer and fall of 1946, Japanese Canadians were scattered all across the prairies and Ontario.

In Ontario, there were two “collection/temporary residential” centres set up: one in the Toronto area and one in Fingal. Fingal, located about 20-30 km west of St. Thomas, was an RCAF pilot training centre during the war years. It was sitting empty, and so many Japanese Canadian families from the “ghost towns” moved there. The stay would vary from several months up to a year. During this period, the “residents” had the opportunity to see where they would like to relocate—Hamilton, Niagara peninsula, Chatham, London, Leamington, and so on.

The Takashimas and the Komiyamas (the parents and the late Rev. Tak Komiyama) left New Denver, B.C., in November 1946, travelled by bus to Nelson and then hopped on the train to Toronto. There the two families split—the Komiyamas continued their journey to Montreal where Tak would become the first minister of the Japanese United Church congregation that met at The Church of All Nations. We journeyed southwest to Fingal, where we would stay for six months.

We chose to settle in London, where my father established his business. There were already a few families settled there, among them the Suzukis: father, mother, and their seven sons and families. One of the sons (I cannot remember his first name) had a son and three daughters; the son was the well-known David Suzuki. I believe his twin sister became a renowned artist.

My father (Yoshichika) was instrumental in organizing in the fall of 1947 a Japanese Christian fellowship (later known as LJCCF—London Japanese Canadian Christian Fellowship), which met monthly at the local YMCA. There were over 20 Issei families that took an active interest in the fellowship, people like Sunahara, Yabuki, Tomonaga, Suzuki, Honkawa, Nagata, Oya. Each month, a Japanese clergy person from Toronto or Hamilton would travel to London to meet with the people and conduct worship.

People I remember include Miss Lily Uyeda, one of two United Church deaconess (the other being Grace Namba, who also served the people in London), the Rev. Kosaburo Shimizu, the Rev. Tak Komiyama (who had moved to Hamilton from Montreal), the Rev. Ed Yoshioka, and the Rev. Nobuo Kobayashi, from Japan, who was on staff at Kwansai Gakuin University and was doing post-grad studies at Emmanuel College (circa 1950).

The LJCCF met for over 15 years before it disbanded. When they had their monthly services, it also became a social time for the people as well. I remember they had lots of scrumptious food following each service and the people really “made a night of it.” Sometimes, there would be two services a month.

There were also fellowship groups established in Chatham and in Leamington but they were smaller. These people were also served by the visiting clergy listed above.

