

Yama, Washington:

A Brief Narrative and Introduction.

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North end of the Washington Hotel (Left foreground) and residences, ca. 1915

(Photo courtesy of the Bainbridge Island Historical Museum)

A Brief History of Yama:

Captain William Renton purchased the property surrounding the west end of Blakely Harbor on 30 June, 1863, under the Donation Land Act, and construction of the Blakely Sawmill was completed the following April. The initial labor force was nearly exclusively of European ancestry, and about two-thirds of the employees were immigrants from Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Scandinavia, Belgium, Prussia, and Greece. By the early 1870s, growth of the lumber industry and a decline in railroad construction led to an influx of Chinese laborers at the Blakely mill. But by 1877, labor disputes and anti-Chinese prejudice among Anglos had reduced the Chinese population of Port Blakely to 14, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prevented the mill from hiring Chinese immigrants. The first Japanese immigrants to settle in Port Blakely may have arrived as early as 1883, although the earliest written documentation of any Japanese settler in the Pacific Northwest is a seaman who arrived in 1888, and whose name is not recorded. The 1889 census lists 35 Japanese men residing in Port Blakely, most of whom were employed at the mill. Most arrived without passports, and are not recorded in the census by name.

Kihachi Hirakawa arrived in 1890, and his accounts are the earliest known descriptions of the Japanese residents in the region that are recorded in their own words. He reports that the mill's workforce consisted of about 50 Americans, 200 Scandinavians, and 23 Japanese (Price 1989:135). Residential areas surrounding the mill were ethnically segregated, and Hirakawa describes 24 Japanese men (presumably including himself) living together in a single place, known as "*Nagaya*" (Hirakawa n.d.). This shared living space was most likely a "bunkhouse" or "barracks" style building, or a "long house," which is the English translation of the Japanese word "*Nagaya*." Several *Nihonmachi* (Japanese settlements) existed on the Pacific Coast by the late 19th Century, including in San Francisco and Vancouver BC, and these ethnic enclaves were generally referred to as "Japantown" or simply "J town" by local English speakers. *Nagaya* was the northern extent of Port Blakely's *Nihonmachi*, and was located on the lower slopes, adjacent to the southwest end of the mill's log pond. Most of the residents of *Nagaya* intended to stay in

the United States only long enough to earn money with which to buy property in Japan. They referred to themselves as “*watiridori*,” or “birds of passage,” as an analogy to migratory birds. The rule of “primogeniture,” in which eldest sons inherited all of the parents’ property, was common in Japan at the time (Evans, Pers. Comm.), so younger sons were forced to seek their fortunes away from the family farm or other property. The *Watiridori* came to Yama for economic reasons.

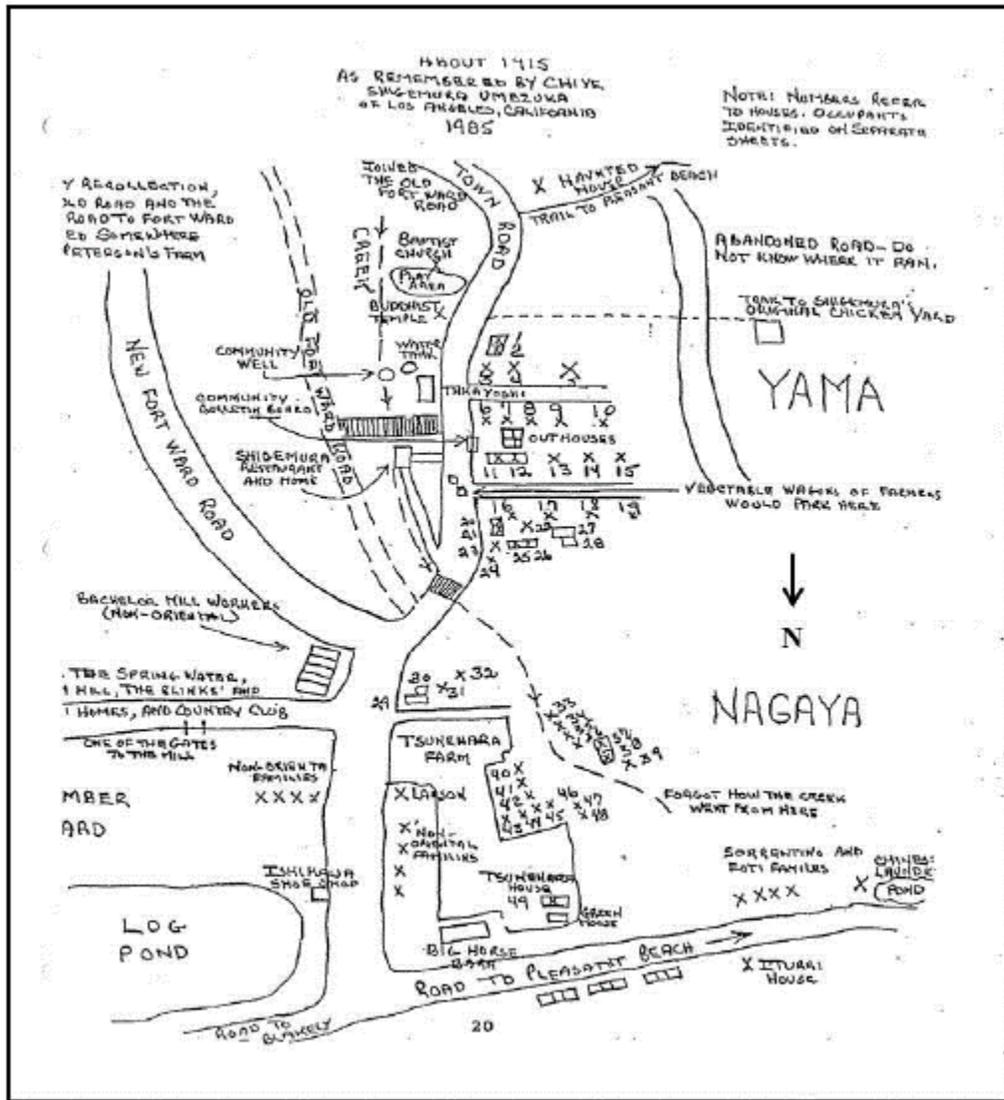


Fig. 1: Map of Yama and Nagaya, ca. 1915, as remembered by Chiye Shigemura Umezuka in 1985. Note that this map is oriented with North towards the bottom of the page. (Map courtesy of Andrew Price.)

Within a few years of Hirakawa's arrival, Hanjiro and Fuji Kono were one of the first married couples to arrive in Port Blakely. They constructed their house of lumber provided by the mill for that purpose, on land that remained property of the mill. Their house was to the south of *Nagaya*, up a steep slope which gave the village of *Yama* its name (the word "yama" is Japanese for "mountain"). Other families followed shortly thereafter. Unlike the *watiridori*, most of these families intended to remain in the US, although for some, such as Sohichi Takahashi Shigemura, military service required him to return to Japan to serve in the Army during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05.

Hanjiro Kono soon expanded his house into the Washington Hotel, which included both a Western style restaurant popular among mill workers, and Japanese baths. (Price 1989:139) describes these as "communal" baths (*Sentō*, (銭湯), although evidence recovered during the 2015 field season suggests that they were more likely *ofuro* (風呂), or "personal" tubs.



Fig. 2: Washington Hotel and residential architecture, seen from the town road. (Photo courtesy of Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.)

Tomegoro and Tamao Takayoshi arrived in Port Blakely in 1898, and became one of the most influential families in Yama. Tomegoro Takayoshi was frequently referred to as "the General," which

Price (1989:140) interprets as a sign of his high regard by Yama residents, although his children and grandchildren note that he did not achieve that rank in the Japanese military. Takayoshi built a general store (which may have been the source of his nickname), and sold both domestic and imported Japanese goods. He also built a photo studio and a “tea garden.” The project’s cultural interpreter, Ms. Etsuko Evans (Pers. Comm.) notes that historical photos of the garden show that it differed from a traditional *chashitsu* (茶室), and is more consistent with locations used for the informal *nodate* (野点) or “picnic” style tea ceremony.



Fig. 3: Takayoshi’s store, photo studio, and garden, with three daughters, Kimi, Masa, and Yuri. (Photo courtesy of the Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.)

Takayoshi’s businesses were located immediately to the south (uphill) of Kono’s Washington Hotel. In addition to the general store, photo studio, and tea garden, Takayoshi also built an ice cream

parlor, using cream from Jons Peterson's Sunny Hill Dairy, just uphill to the south of Yama. He was also the first resident of Yama to have a telephone and a motor vehicle.



Fig. 4: Takayoshi's store. Community center/Buddhist Temple in background. The vehicle has a 1918 license plate, and appears to be a Ford Model T2 "Runabout,," which had a spread at the front axles, which were the widest point (hubcap to hubcap) of 5'8" (1.727 m), so we can use this photo to estimate that the "Town Road" was approximately 8 feet (slightly more than 2 meters) wide. (Photo courtesy of the Bainbridge Island Historical Museum.)

South of Takayoshi's businesses stood a community center (background, fig. 4) which served both as a Japanese language and culture school and as an informal Buddhist temple. Ms. Etsuko Evans has learned that there probably was not a formally dedicated Buddhist temple at Yama, since there were no ordained monks living in Yama, and that the residents of Yama relied on visits of itinerant monks from Seattle and elsewhere. The building described as a "Buddhist Temple" by Chiye Shigemura Umezuka

(daughter of Sohichi Takahashi Shigemura) in Price's (1985) unpublished sketch map may not have been a formally dedicated temple, but was remembered as such.

To the south of this building was an open playfield, and a Baptist Mission was built in 1901, to the south of the playfield. Each of those structures was on the east side of the "town road," which was composed of planks donated by the mill for that purpose (Price 1989).

West of the town road, across from the Washington Hotel, a Mr. Ikuta ran a community barber shop, and historical photos, Chiye Umezuka's maps, and site topography all suggest that the majority of the residential structures extended to the west of the road, uphill from the area that we have taken to calling "downtown Yama."

The mill continued in operation until the end of World War I, and closed permanently in 1922, after which residents of Yama and Nagaya began moving away from the village. Some left for other locations on Bainbridge Island, but most traveled to Seattle, Tacoma, Vancouver, San Francisco, or Los Angeles, in pursuit of employment. By the mid-1920s, Yama and Nagaya were abandoned. The residents took with them whatever was of value, including the milled lumber, unbroken glass windowpanes of the buildings, and obsolete wood-burning stoves. They left behind only those materials that were lost or deliberately discarded. This much we know, so far.

The Yama Project:

The Yama Project is a multidisciplinary endeavor that combines traditional archaeological research with cultural anthropology, history, ethnic studies, materials science, ecology, geomorphology, geography, the history of architecture, and several other fields, in an effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of people's lives in this late 19th/early 20th century immigrant settlement. Our goal is not simply to find the materials that were left behind, but to use those materials as a means of interpreting and understanding the lives of the people who made, used, and discarded those items. We hope to learn what daily life was like for the residents of Yama and Nagaya over the course of our examination of this site.

Doing so will help us to produce a more complete and inclusive picture of this important, but nearly unknown chapter in Washington State history.

Years after the Blakely Sawmill closed, the City of Bainbridge Island took ownership of the property, and it subsequently fell under the jurisdiction of the Bainbridge Island Metropolitan Park and Recreation District. No modern construction occurred on the site, however, and the site was gradually reclaimed by second growth forest.



Fig. 6: Yama, as it appears today. Ferns, English ivy, nettles, blackberries, and second growth cedar, maple, and alder cover the once thriving village.

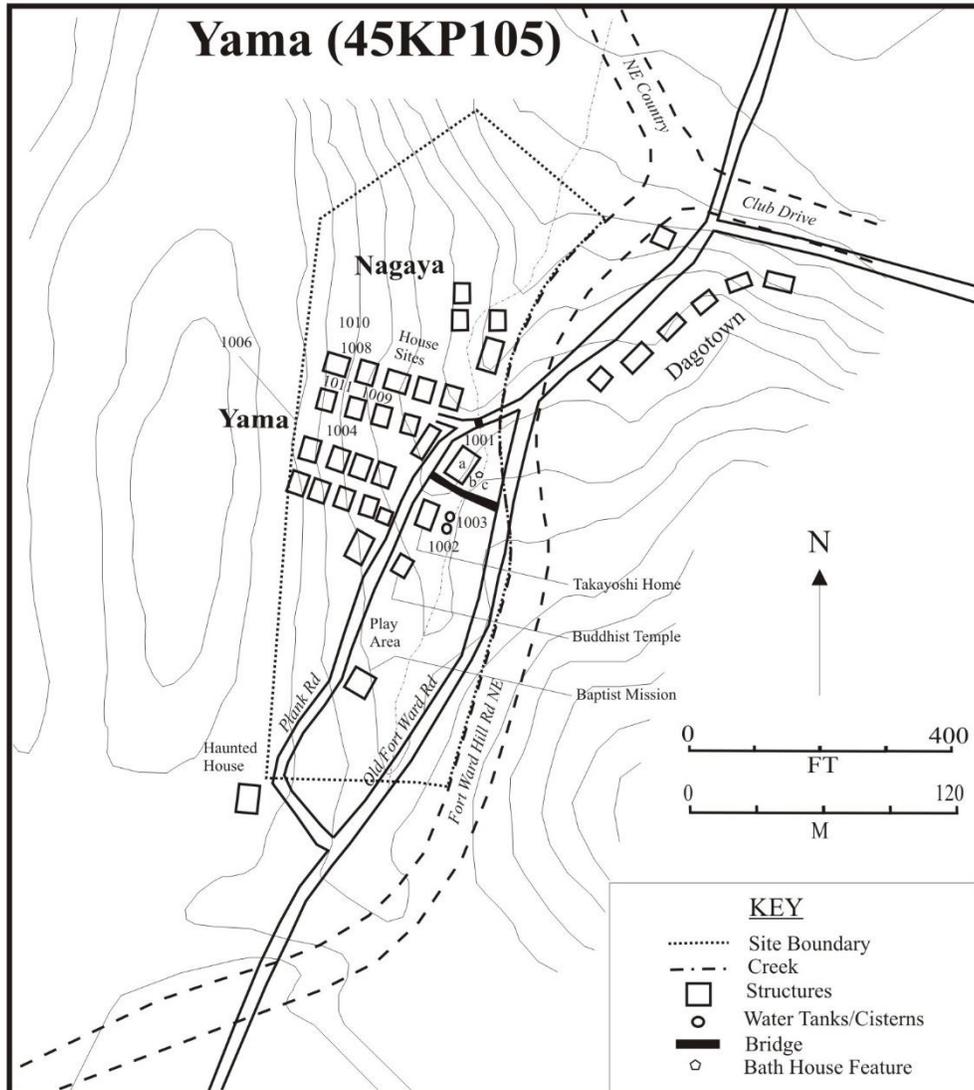
Of all the *Nihonmachi* of the Pacific Northwest, only the Yama site is relatively intact. All other early historic locations of Japanese settlements in Washington State been significantly disturbed by 20th century development before they could be investigated by archaeologists. Thus the Olympic College Yama Project offers a unique opportunity for archaeologists, students, and the general public to learn about life in a late 19th and early 20th Century Japanese transnational community.

The site was initially inspected by archaeologist Richard Daugherty in 1992 (Daugherty 1992a, 1992b, 1993). Daugherty found the site largely intact and recommended further research. In 2012 and 2013, Mr. Rick Chandler, curator of the Bainbridge Island Historical Museum (BIHM) visited the site and collected surface artifacts, and recommended a formal investigation. Dr. Caroline Hartse of the Olympic College Department of Anthropology contracted archaeologist Robert Drolet, Ph.D. to conduct a formal field research project, as an archaeological field school opportunity for Olympic College students.

Under the direction of Dr. Drolet, Ms. Etsuko Evans and Professor Floyd Aranyosi initiated historical, ethnographic, materials science, and archaeological research, with the cooperation of the BIHM. Dr. Drolet, Dr. Hartse, and Prof. Aranyosi developed procedures to create a field school class at Olympic College. The Yama Project offered a rare opportunity for Olympic College: archaeological field schools are usually conducted by research institutions and “four year” colleges. A field school offered at the community college level presented students an academic choice that is not available at most community colleges. The Olympic College Yama Project is an ideal way to offer “hands-on” teaching in field archaeology to a student population traditionally under-served in this type of education and job training.

Dr. Drolet led the field school throughout the 2015 season, during which faculty, staff, and students mapped the site. Students learned the techniques of site survey, surface collection, artifact analysis, and laboratory and archival research. Over 2500 artifacts were collected in 2015, analyzed in a classroom-based archaeology lab setting on the Olympic College Bremerton campus, and prepared for curation at the University of Washington’s Burke Museum. In addition to their fieldwork training, students were each required to produce an independent research project, and present their research with to class and the general public. Students presented their research findings at Olympic College, Bremerton on Washington State Archaeology Day in October, 2015, and several students presented their findings at the Northwest Anthropological Conference in Tacoma in March of 2016. Dr. Hartse hosted an information table and presented a paper, titled “The Yama Project: A Work in Progress,” at the Society for Applied

Anthropology meeting in Vancouver, BC in March and April of 2016, and Professor Aranyosi addressed the Washington State Legislature’s Heritage Caucus meeting in February of 2016



R. Drolet 2014b (Modified from Adam & Goldsworthy 2011)

Fig. 5: Preliminary field map of Yama and Nagaya by Robert Drolet, modified from the topographic map produced by Adam and Goldsworthy 2011. Dotted line represents site boundaries. Feature numbers follow the protocol established by R. Chandler. Solid rectangles and lines indicate the approximate locations of structures and roads during Yama’s heyday. A neighboring ethnic enclave was given the offensive nickname “Dagotown,” in reference to the Portuguese mill workers who initially settled there, but by the early 20th century, the population of this settlement was predominantly Hawaiian. That site is on private property, outside the boundaries of the Yama Project.

The 2015 Field Season:

Approximately 15 percent of the site underwent formal surface survey and collection in the 2015 field season, and only minimal sub-surface testing was done. Twenty-two surface features were recorded in 2015. We identified landscape terraces that had been modified for agriculture, relocated and measured a community cistern for drinking water, and recorded a “Furo” type bathhouse and numerous small, enigmatic, brick structures that are located across the site.

Numerically, the majority of artifacts collected in 2015 were fragments of bottle glass. Flat glass (mostly windowpane fragments), ceramic sherds, and ferrous metal artifacts were also common. Whole bottles and ceramic vessels were rare, but not entirely absent. Non-ferrous metal and enamel-plated metal were also abundant. Bakelite, an early 20th century synthetic plastic, was also found, although rare.

The majority of ceramic artifacts recovered in 2015 were porcelain and high-fired white ware, most commonly with blue on white decoration, most of which were probably imported from Japan. Polychrome on white ceramic sherds are also abundant. Domestic and European ceramics are present, but the majority of the polychrome ceramic assemblage is also of Japanese origin (Christiansen 2015).

Glass artifacts are predominantly bottle glass, and where the sources of bottles can be identified, these are mostly beer, wine, and non-alcoholic carbonated beverage bottles. Milk glass fragments are present, as are some examples of cosmetic and health-care product containers (Flinger 2015).

Bricks, both whole and fragmentary, are common at the site. Examination of makers’ marks, when present, suggest that most bricks originated elsewhere; many bricks are inscribed with makers’ marks from England. The Denny Renton Brick Kiln was in operation from at least 1905 through 1927 (Gurcke 1987:224), so imported bricks were not needed at the site. One likely hypothesis is that the bricks were transported to the mill as ships’ ballast, and then discarded when the ships filled up with lumber. The abandoned ballast was then reused by the residents of Yama.

Retirement of “Doctor Bob”:

Dr. Drolet retired from teaching in December of 2015, and Professor Aranyosi accepted the position of Principal Investigator for, and Director of the Yama Project.

The 2016 field season:

Professor Aranyosi selected a team of crew chiefs drawn from locally available talent. The “senior crew chief” and Lab Director is James Schumacher (MA, Yale), a longtime professional archaeologist living on Bainbridge Island. Mr. David Davis (formerly of OC, currently a Master’s candidate at Central Washington University), and Ms. Jean Hannah (formerly of Tacoma Community College, recently a volunteer at the Suquamish museum) round out the staff.

In 2016, we intend to continue the surface survey, as well as conduct a limited re-analysis of a sample of grid quadrangles surveyed in 2015, in order to how artifacts are subject to movement and exposure at the site by slope and drainage patterns. This analysis will allow us to estimate the significance of artifact concentrations and distinguish those concentrations that are the result of cultural activity from those that are the result of erosion and secondary deposition. In addition, the 2016 field season has initiated limited subsurface examination by hand-dug shovel probes and the excavation of larger test units around known surface features. The first excavations were instituted in Week 3 of the 8 week long field season. Dr. Caroline Hartse and research assistant Etsuko Evans are continuing archival research during summer 2016. They are researching Japanese language newspapers from the Puget Sound region to contribute to the interpretation of the daily life at Yama. In addition, they are in contact and working with scholars in Japan to complete the picture of the local and global economic, social, and political forces that shaped the development of Yama.

Goals of the 2017 Field Season:

By the end of the 2017 field season, our intention is that the site will have been fully surveyed at the surface, and that we will have a representative sample of the buried archaeological deposits. When these milestones are reached, the Yama Project will focus on analysis and research of the recovered materials; curation of the site itself will be maintained by the Bainbridge Island Department of Parks and Recreation. The materials recovered from Yama will then be transferred to the UW Burke Museum, as this facility meets federal guidelines for long-term curation. Plans for future research are subject to change, of course. There is no way to know what will be discovered until it is discovered, so the possibility of extending the project beyond the 2017 field season must be considered.

Overview of the “Philosophy” of the Yama Project:

Professor Aranyosi will be explicitly following the protocol proposed by Dr. Douglass Ross (2009), viewing the lives of the residents of Yama through an interpretive lens of “transnationalism,” rather than “assimilation.” The difference between “transnationalism” and “assimilation” is subtle, and often underemphasized in historical archaeology, but I believe that it is significant in this case.

As Ross describes it, “transnationalism” is a sociocultural phenomenon in which immigrant communities adopt some aspects of the dominant culture, but retain aspects of their ancestral culture; they create a “cultural Creole” that emphasizes the cultural and material practices and artifacts of both the ancestral society and the culture of the immigrant’s new home. This transnational focus is in contrast with the “assimilation” assumption that immigrants can, should, or might desire to adopt the cultural practices of the dominant community in their new homeland. It is my contention that the Japanese settlers of Yama were not “trying to become Anglo-Americans,” but that they were Japanese-Americans who were creating an identity for themselves that re-defined what it means to “be American,” as well as what it means to “be Japanese.” They created a way to “be American” that included “being Japanese,” and the culture of Bainbridge Island today is a result of their effective work at being “transnational.” The Yama

Project hopes to explore that aspect of cultural interchange, and investigate the ways in which the culture of Washington State has benefitted from this transnational influence.

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Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community
Bainbridge Island Metro Park & Recreation District
Kitsap History Museum
Olympic College
University of Washington Burke Museum

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Cultural Resource Consultants, Inc.
Olympic College
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