

Alameda's

# *Methodist* **JAPANESE** **SCHOOL**

**It was a bright** summer Sunday afternoon in 1910, when a young boy, Mas Miyauchi, was first enrolled in the Japanese school at the Japanese Methodist Episcopal Church, South (JME), by his parents.

“The curriculum of the Alameda Japanese School was unique in that it followed almost exactly the primary educational practices as found in any part of Japan under the guidance of the Japanese Ministry of Education,” Miyauchi re-

called in 1983.

“The Alameda Public School System was in existence at the time,” he continued, “but the Japanese language school was an accredited full-time school administered entirely in Japanese. Arithmetic, reading and writing, composition, calligraphy, Japanese ethics, history and geography, Japanese songs and to top it all, one hour each day, from eleven to noon was allotted for English reading and writing taught by an American woman teacher, Mrs. E. G. Smith.”

Miyauchi admits in his 1983 document that his memory of the exact date of the school's opening is iffy. Who can recall exact dates from 70 plus years ago?

He says the school was founded in "1908 or thereabouts."

"The (JME) Alameda Japanese Grammar School existed as a full time Japanese language school only during an eight-year period from about 1908 to 1916," Miyauchi wrote. "Mr. Ohba was the sole teacher over the whole period\*."

and buggy? Highway 101, connecting Gilroy to San Jose, was not built until the 1950s. State Route 17, connecting San Jose to Alameda, was more a series of interconnecting roads before the 1930s. The census begins the year before, and can continue after the actual year of release.

Masaharu lists himself as a farmer, not a teacher, on the 1910 census. Perhaps the Obas lived in Gilroy only briefly and then quickly returned by late 1909 to Alameda.

*Gilroy township (part of)*  
(insert proper name and, also, name of class, as township, town, precinct, etc.)

**THIRTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES: 1910—POPULATION**

Oba Masaharu	Septant	35	11	12	1	Yp. Japanese	Yp. Japanese	Yp. Japanese	1907	al	English	Houseman	Farm
Kura	Septant	30	11	12	2	Yp. Japanese	Yp. Japanese	Yp. Japanese	1908		English	book	Private family

"As I recall it, when I first entered the Alameda Japanese Grammar School in the summer of 1910, there were already two classes above my class." That's how Miyauchi comes to think that the school opened in 1908.

Masaharu Oba arrived in America in 1907, and his wife, Kura, in November 1908. Her destination upon arrival was Alameda, CA., according to the record of her voyage aboard the Tenyo Maru. Her trip was paid for by her husband. With Masaharu already living in Alameda, he could have been teaching at JME by 1908, as Mas Miyauchi states.

But per the 1910 U.S. census, Masaharu and Kura were residing not in Alameda, but Gilroy. Even today, it's nearly a two-hour drive to make that trip.

How could Masaharu manage to teach in Alameda in 1908 or 1909, when his only transportation at that time was likely a horse

Perhaps a clue lies in Miyauchi's 1983 recollections. "My first glimpse of the Alameda

Japanese Grammar School was on a summer Sunday afternoon in 1910. My father and mother were seeing Ohba Sensei at 2311 Buena Vista Avenue for the purpose of enrolling me as a student in this private school which was the nearest Japanese school to our house in East Oakland." Youngster Mas Miyauchi didn't meet Masaharu Oba until 1910.

JME church member Masataro Fujii wrote that a farewell party took place on February 25, 1917 for the Obas. By 1918, Masaharu left teaching and was working in San Francisco as a Customs Broker for F.F.G. Harper Company. He and Kura were still residing in Alameda at 1311 Oak St.

Could the Obas really have lived in Gilroy by 1909 yet teach in Alameda? The crystal ball is a bit murky on that part of their history.

# Masaharu Oba lists himself as a school teacher in Alameda in 1913

## 1913 LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 20, 1907, to be delivered

S. S. "Shingo Maru" sailing from *Yokohama*, *May 10th*, 1903

No. on List.	NAME IN FULL.		Age.	Sex.	*Calling or Occupation.	Able to—		Nationality.	Race or People.	Last Permanent Residence.		Final Destination.
	Family Name.	Given Name.				Yrs. Mos.	Married or Single.			Read.	Write.	
1	<i>Inamura</i>	<i>Kichiu</i>	42	M	Worker			Japan	Japanese	Alameda	Alameda	Alameda
2	<i>Okabe</i>	<i>Kunzo</i>	38	M	Farmer			Japan	Japanese	Alameda	Alameda	Alameda
3	<i>Oba</i>	<i>Masaharu</i>	38	M	School Teacher			Japan	Japanese	Alameda	Alameda	Alameda

\*Much of this document is based on Mas Miyauchi's 1983 written recollections of the JME Japanese School. It is by far, the most detailed personal record of the school's existence, or of any Japanese school in Alameda at the time.

Mas states that "Mr. Ohba was the sole teacher over the whole period\*," but later in the document clarifies his meaning. He may have meant that Ohba was the only full-time teacher during that time. He lists all the sensei (instructors) as:

**One man teacher,  
supervisor & principal  
OHBA, Masaharu**

**English teacher  
Mrs. E. G. SMITH**

**Kindergarten  
MIKI, Torao  
MIKI, Tomo (Torao's wife)**

**Part time Japanese School  
after public school hours  
HATA, Kano  
AKAMATSU, Norichika  
NAKAJIMA, Isoji  
Mrs. Isoji NAKAJIMA**

**Mr. Yamamoto  
Mrs. Yamamoto  
Mr. Hisatomi**

**REGISTRATION CARD**

SERIAL NUMBER: 30711 ORDER NUMBER: 12710

1. NAME: MASAHARU OBA

2. PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS: 1311 Oak Street, ALAMEDA ALAMEDA CALIFORNIA

Age in Years: 43 Date of Birth: Jan. 23rd 1875

RACE: Japanese

U. S. CITIZENSHIP: ALIEN

PRESENT OCCUPATION: Customs Brokers EMPLOYER'S NAME: F. F. G. Harper & Co.

PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS: 510 Battery St., San Francisco, Cal.

NEAREST RELATIVE: Name: Kura Oba Wife Address: 1311 Oak St., Alameda

I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE:  
P. M. G. O. Masaharu Oba

**Masaharu's World War I draft registration card, proving that he is working in San Francisco as a Customs Broker for F.F.G. Harper Company by 1918.**

**This coincides with Masataro Fujii's (previous page) history about a farewell**

**party for the Obas in 1917. The Obas were still residing in Alameda at 1311 Oak St.**

**In 1915, the Oba's Japan-born daughter, Izu, immigrated to Alameda as a 13-year old. She married Shuzo Arai in Alameda in 1925 and then and Shuzo disappear into the mists of history.**

**By 1940, Masaharu and Kura were living in Los Angeles and he was working as a Japanese language teacher.**

**World War II records of the Obas are sketchy at best. Kura was relocated to Manzanar. Masaharu never appears anywhere in any of the camps, although it seems likely he was arrested early by the FBI given his occupation. If so, there is no evidence of where he went.**

**By 1950, they were living at 2110 Corinth, the heart of what is now known as Sawtelle Japantown. Not to be confused with Little Tokyo in Los Angeles, Sawtelle is a street in West LA where many Japanese lived and businesses sprung up before and after WWII. Masaharu became the principal of a Japanese School there.**

**Masaharu died February 13, 1954 in Los Angeles. There is no record of Kura's death.**