

To Florence



Sincerely,
Anna Matangam

WETAH



Sincerely,
Anna Matsumoto

WETAH

It was quite a thrill, for 19-year-old Georgiana “Anna” Wilson Matsuyama, to become queen of the Sonoma County Fair in 1939. “First time I ever had a Japanese kimono, it was so nice,” she said.

Her father, Atsuo, was Japanese. Her mother, Georgiana Wallman, was of German descent. Being of mixed heritage didn’t hurt her chances at the Fair.

Anna then met John Towata, of Alameda, CA., in 1941, and they were married on May 3, 1942. It was just six months after Pearl Harbor was bombed. Their next stop wasn’t a honeymoon. It was incarceration, courtesy of the U.S. government, and Executive Order 9066.

From
QUEEN
to
INCARCERATION



John and Anna walk down the steps of the Towata home in Alameda, just after they were married. John's mother, an Issei, was an 'enemy alien' and was restricted from attending.

Their honeymoon was held in Tanforan (seen below).

“When we went to the (Tanforan) Assembly center (a horse racing track), I was so surprised, the life we had,” Anna recalled. We had one room and we had blankets for doors. Johnny and I had a blanket for a door. It smelled

like horses, it was really bad. I said, I don't see why they put us in camp, what's the matter with our president? We didn't even know a word, maybe two or three words of Japanese and that's it.” In September, they were relocated to Topaz, Utah.



An example of the horse stalls where the Towatas, both American citizens, would make their new home.

MILITARY 2011

“When we got to Topaz it was so cold. It was stormy and sandy. The dust storms were just terrible. You could hardly see your way around. I thought I’d go for walk, I couldn’t see where I was going. I was by the heater and this man said, ‘you’re in my apt.’ Oh my God, they all looked alike. I finally found where I lived. Our Barrack was 12-6A.”

Life inside a relocation camp was an

odd mix of incarceration and attempts at normality. For the Towata’s first wedding anniversary, they tried to forget the insanity of their American lives.

“For our first anniversary we went to the mess hall, and went to a movie, but the show broke down five times. We were so disappointed. But my husband said, if we ever go home, I’ll buy you a home, so don’t worry.”

SERIAL NUMBER 109	1. NAME (Print) John Seiji Towata	ORDER NUMBER 125
2. ADDRESS (Print) 2139 Pacific Ave Alameda Alameda Calif.		
3. TELEPHONE 1538J	4. AGE IN YEARS 32	5. PLACE OF BIRTH Alameda
DATE OF BIRTH 2 1 1908		6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.A.
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mr. Henry Towata		8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON Father
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 2139 Pacific Ave Alameda Alameda Calif		
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME Towata Florist		
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS 1502 Park Street Alameda Alameda Calif		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
REGISTRATION CARD D. S. S. FORM 1	10-17105	<i>John Seiji Towata</i> (Registrant's signature)

John's WWII draft card

John and Anna left incarceration in Topaz on February 28, 1944, to work in New York. Not surprisingly, John worked in the flower business there. He had owned or operated Towata Florist at 1502 Park St before the war (see his WWII draft card, above).

“When we came back from camp, (1945) the boys couldn’t find a job,”

Anna said. “Finally we came to Alameda. And he (John) went looking for a job and he found a flower shop (photo below).”

“For four years, he cleaned the place and he made nice arrangements. The boss liked him and the landlord liked my husband so much, he said he was selling the flower shop and would give my husband first option.”



fTowers

Hayashi's



Hayashi Florist at 2305 Santa Clara in 1939. At this point it is owned by Harry Kono. Hard to see, but at left is the “Hayashi” name in neon. It can also barely be seen just below the “flowers” neon. In 1948, new owner John Towata remodeled. The “flowers” neon was replaced (see photo previous page) but it appears to be very similar to the original seen here.

“We only had enough to buy a truck to deliver, so my husband went to Ole’s restaurant (Ole’s Waffle Shop in Alameda) and Ole said he would lend him the money. On the way back from Santa Cruz, the truck jack-knifed and killed Ole and his wife, so we figured we couldn’t buy the flower shop.”

“But then we went across the street and told Pete and Guy (Casali), who had a grocery. Pete said I’ll lend you the money (\$2000), so in 1951* we

purchased the flower shop. That is how we got started.”

The 2305 Santa Clara Ave location of Towata Flowers was originally known as Hayashi Florist, owned by Hirokichi “Harry” Hayashi. When WWII began, it had been owned by Harry Kono for some time. During the war and just after, it appears to have been owned and operated by Anthony Giosso. John closed Towata Flowers in 2009. As of 2023, the building still exists.

* The date of the purchase and the founding of Towata Flowers is debatable. Various sources state is as 1945 to 1951.



An empty Towata Flowers, seen in March 2021. There is little left of what was once a vibrant Japantown in Alameda. As of mid-2021, it is Magpie & Thorn. They sell pottery, gifts, and rare plants.

John Seiji Towata Sr., was born on December 21, 1909, and died on April 28, 1991. Anna was born on November 10, 1916 and died on August 6, 2016.

On her gravestone, her name is spelled Georgianna (two n's) "Anna" Wilson.

Anna in kimono photo courtesy Vivian Ikeda. Modern day photos from Topaz in 2016 courtesy Elaine Morizono.

Thanks to Jo Takata for additional information about Anna.

Special thanks to Anna's niece, Judy Towata Wiener, for her assistance with this document.