

The Takehara/Yada Tenement at 1017 West 7th Avenue

Courtesy of the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre Archives

Genya Yada and Rinnosuke Takehara built this tenement in 1913 to house Japanese workers who laboured at the various mills in False Creek during the industrial boom in the early 20th century. The building is perhaps the last and only tenement example of those days that survived urban renewal in many forms during the 60's-90's. In the early boomtown days, the city was full of low cost housing and innovative ways to house poor and transient labourers. The tenement is three floors built on the grade which slopes from 7th to 6th avenue, with a catwalk that drops to the different levels. Intact today are apartments which were converted from the original rooms. The building is considered "a place that matters" with the Vancouver heritage Foundation.

Genya Yada was from Chimoto mura, aza Higashi Nonami in Shiga Prefecture, considered a place that produced many entrepreneurs and many immigrants to Vancouver. Genya immigrated to Canada in 1897, Shige Teramura came in 1906, they were married in 1907 and lived in the rooming house on West 7th, where their children were born. Genichiro Yada, the oldest son was born in 1907 and at the age of 9 was sent with his brothers Genji & Hideo to Japan for education, returning in 1919. Although a typical arrangement for early immigrants, it was also a sacrifice to live apart and send money back to Japan for the children's keep and education. When Genichiro returned from Japan, he went to English language school at night in Fairview and work at the sawmill during the day. The wages were 27 cents an hour for 10 hours a day, six days a week, and he had to climb so many steps to get back to his lodging after a long day of work. In the early days, there were about 500-600 workers living near the sawmills in False Creek, and many families lived in their rooming house.

In 1923, his brother Genji and mother returned from Japan and they were finally united. The next year, his English teacher gave him the opportunity to sell insurance, and he eventually worked for Crown Life Insurance for 52 years. While selling insurance, Genichiro set up a shop called Cassiar General Store at 3390 Hastings Street in 1927 which his wife managed, and helped his father in law Teramura with a sawmill business near Main St & 5th Avenue called Kurt Randle Company. They had 35 employees who cut lumber in the False Creek operation until the recession in 1933 severely affected business. Genichiro then ran around trying to sell the lumber cheaply to keep them in business, and did anything like selling firewood and sawdust to Hindus.

The Yadas moved out of the 'Cabin' on West 7th Avenue in about 1927 (after 14 years) to set up the Cassiar General store on the lower level and the family accommodation was on the upper level, with a backyard for the children. They had land and plans to build an apartment building and another store, but those plans were levelled with the Internment. The Yadas were sent to Bridge River, a self supporting camp, and received a pittance for the sale of their properties. Their savings supported them for three and a half years, until the camp closed and they moved to Devine to work in the sawmill.

When allowed to return to the coast, the family did resettle in Vancouver.