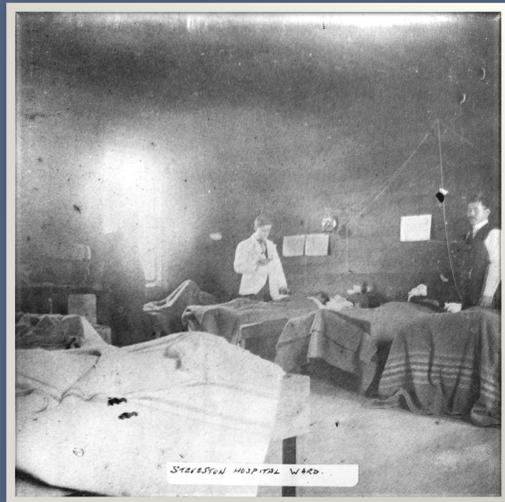


From Methodist Mission to Modern Hospital: The History of Steveston's Japanese Hospital 1895-1942

Helen Vandenberg, PhD Candidate, RN, University of British Columbia, School of Nursing
Nursing History Symposium, November 21, 2013



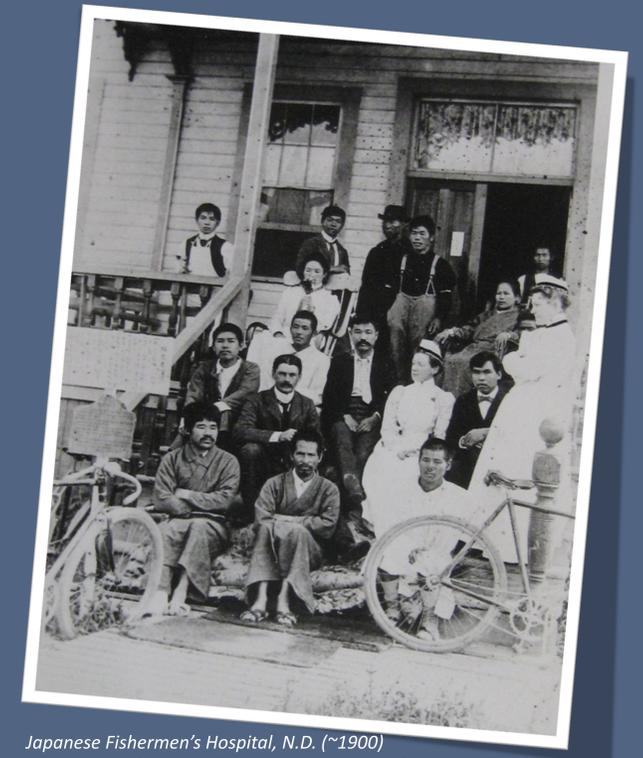
Japanese Methodist Mission, N.D. (~1899)
(Richmond City Archives, Dr. R.W. Large photo collection)



Inside the Japanese Methodist Mission Hospital, N.D. (~1899)
(Richmond City Archives, Dr. R.W. Large photo collection)



First Operation at the Mission hospital. Dr. Large assisted by his wife. N.D. (~1899)
(Richmond City Archives, Dr. R.W. Large photo collection)



Japanese Fishermen's Hospital, N.D. (~1900)
(B.C. United Church Archives, Steveston United Church Photo Collection)

Methodist Mission Hospital

During the 1880s, a small group of Japanese Methodist Missionaries called the 'Christian Endeavour' or 'Kyorei-Kwai' was established in Vancouver. The group was founded by Japanese Christians who entered British Columbia from the United States, where Japanese Methodist missions had been founded by the Methodist Episcopal church. The church sent missionary Matsutaro Okamoto to travel to British Columbia to visit many of the salmon fishing villages that were occupied by Japanese workers.

In 1895, Okamoto led the Vancouver Japanese Methodist mission. Two medical men Dr. Umetaro Yamamura and Dr. Seinosuke, travelled to Steveston and were appalled by the immoral behavior of the men at the canneries. In partnership with Okamoto, they decided that a mission should be built for the Japanese fishermen.

In 1896, a small building was erected on the grounds of the Phoenix cannery with help from the leader of the Japanese fishermen and the Japanese consulate. As soon as the mission was opened, an epidemic of typhoid fever compelled the missionaries to turn the mission into a make-shift hospital. Two Japanese lay missionaries, Mr. Koichi Inaka and Mr. Ukichi Oyama, cared for the sick as volunteer nurses. The hospital was operated for two years with the help of Japanese volunteers, but in 1898 and 1899 the Canadian Methodist Church hired physician Dr. Richard Whitfield Large to work at the mission hospitals during the fishing season.



Mr. Koichi Inaka San., Volunteer Nurse
(B.C. United Church Archives, Methodist Recorder, 1900)



Leaders of the Japanese Benevolent Fishermen's Association, 1897-1935
(UBC Special Collections, Koboyashi, 1935)



Japanese Fishermen's Hospital, 1919.
(Nikkei National Museum, 2001-8-2-3-2-10)

Japanese Fishermen's Hospital

As early as 1897, Japanese Christian missionaries believed that the Japanese fishermen would be an ideal group to build and maintain a modern Japanese hospital. Plans began to organize a subscription system and leadership board that would oversee the hospital's development. The development of the hospital as a 'modern' institution was driven by recent changes that occurred in Japan during the late Meiji Restoration. During this period, Japan revolutionized and began a campaign of modernization and militarization, with the goal of becoming an imperial power equal to that of Western nations. These ideas were utilized by Japanese communities abroad as they faced racism and exclusion from communities that supported the dominance of White-European culture. The Japanese hospital became a symbol of resistance for the Japanese community, an example of the success of Japanese populations in Canada. The Japanese hospital operated in Steveston until 1942, when it was closed due to the internment of all Japanese Canadians during World War II.

The history of the Japanese hospital in Steveston demonstrates that hospital development in Canada was not only shaped by medical advancement, professionalization of health care occupations and by state-driven initiatives, but also by the communities that established and maintained health care services during Canada's early colonial history.