

MIGHT LIFE | Wrigleyville bar that drew Japanese Americans gets in last cuts

man will walk into the dark lounge wearing a winter cost and no one eyed. But toward the exel of the

BY DAME HOEKSTRA PORTOR CONTRACTOR It is not ther for an old man har to close in the spring.

Especially within the trendy The Nisel Louise, 3439 N. Shef. first lines of 'Avigleyville. field, is the neighborhood's last small tavere, where you can walk in other a Cube game, fired a next and discuss the merits of the team's 1964 patching rotation. The cursers will honor the space for a

wearing a winter coat and to on will notice. The Nises is that kind The Nisei Lounge is for sale. Owners Scott Martin and Dis Papageorgakia haser a potential buyer, and regulars are construced the lounge is an good as good.

The five har is on a piece of property as precious as a beauty Kerry Wood right area. At a farewell party for regulars Society night, choosists capcakes were served. A couple of shoke of sake were knocked back for old

"I was embarcassed." Martin not been signed. and Monday "Scenetimes things

Martin bought the Nisei in 1993 with Dure Jernilo of Green Mil. they're been working on the sub-

floor of Links Hall in 1961. The Nimigrants. But the har has been open to all walks of life Last year actor Ethan Hawks came loto the



Nisei Lounge's entry in '100 Historic Bars of Chicago' by Sean Parnell

146 HISTORIC BARS OF CHICAGO

-616L

NISEI LOUNGE

3439 N. Sheffield Ave. (3500N, 1000W) Chicago IL, 60657 (773) 525-0557 CSARCHANO

Neighborhood Open 'til & Cover Drinks

Music

Wrigleyville

2am (3am Sat); never a cover 30 bottled bars including Asahi None, Matsuya around corner for sushi

A jukebox-like, on-demand WXRT Neighborhood Tavern, Japanese Pub

An island in a sea of sports bars, the Nisei Lounge is a Wrigleyville oddity: a quiet neighborhood bar with a unique character. With every bar in a three-block radius bursting at the seams with drunken fans after a Cubs game, it's as though Nisei resides in a parallel universe, unnoticed or forgotten as dust drifts in the rays of sunlight occasionally breaking through the tinted appliqué on the picture windows. The bar was named for the Nisei, or "lost generation" of American-born children of Japanese immigrants (the Isei). During World War II, almost all of these American citizens were imprisoned in Japanese internment camps. Once released, many Isei moved to Chicago, numbering 20,000 by the mid-1950s, second only in the U.S. to New York City. Today, the Nisei Lounge is a reminder that it wasn't too long ago that Japanese Americans were viewed with scrutiny, and this was one of the only places where they could congregate safely in public. The tavern first opened at Clark and Division in 1950 by Kaunch Hirabayashi and moved to its present location in 1958. Scott Martin, owner of Andersonville legend, Simon's Tavern (p. 176), along with Green Mill (p. 76) owner Dave Jemilo, purchased the Nisei Lounge in 1992. While the Japanese-American clientele has passed on, the lounge continues to honor the Nisei with Asahi Super Dry (the best-selling beer in Japan), a few Japanese covers on the jukebox, and by keeping the name, Nisei Lounge. Kanpai!

Nisel while working on a produc-tion upstairs at Links Hall, Just like this happen in a partnership And ank Carlos Zambruno and last month Johnsty Depp wat-Michael Barrett.

jazz club farne. Jerollo later sold hin share. Pepageorgakin hought his built in 2001. Martin said

dered into the Nisel after flowing noctured scenes for his Julia

SEE WESTL PROFE 28

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On a warm spring day, an old

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

NISEI | It's last call for dive bar that once was haven for Japanese Americans

Dillinger opus in the alley be-hind the bar. Kaunch Hirabayashi

opened the original Nisei Lounge in 1949 at Clark and Division. When the bar moved to its present location. Chicago was home to more than 150,000 Japanese Americans, about 30,000 of whom had been interned in camps during World War II. Many Lake View-based Japanese Americans since have moved to the suburbs.

"That's how this bar came

to be," Martin told me in a 2000 interview. "After the war ended they were back with their families. Having lost all their property by going in the camps, they came to the Midwest to find work. They'd go into a bar after work and the white guys would tell them, 'Get the hell

out of here." The Nisei Lounge was a familiar place in a strange land. The last great Nisei regular was Kenny Kuzuharu, who died last year. He proba-

Local Theatre Directory

During World War I, Kuzuharu was a member of the all-Japanese 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team, the most decorated unit in U.S. military history. Kuzuharu was decorated from head to toe, and fought while his family was interned behind barbed-wire

fences in Colorado. In the autumn of his life, Kuzuharu was a dishwasher at Chester's - now the Hamburger King, south of

would always sit in the same barstool and order a dollar draft of Hamm's beer. He had a mystical toothless smile punctuated by a white goatee. Sometimes he would gaze into the back bar mirror and see a friendly face. Only then would be smile

Kuzuharu was one of the last great wanderers in Wrigleyville, moving like blood from joint to joint. The neighborhood isn't like that anymore.

During the 1980s Los Angeles Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda would hit the Nisei after a Cubs game, and recently retired Cub equipment manager Yosh Kawano was known to stop in that used to exist [to Raul's for a visit. It's uncanny that the bar is in the verge of clos ing the year the Cubs introduced Kosuke Fukudome, the

Bartender Jennifer Ream says she has served plenty of bourbon and Pabst Blue Ribbon at the Misei

games since 1977, "It's the Lounge. team's first Japanese player. Cote said as he stood near "This bar is full of real the bar's cork dart boards. people," Philip Peck, 44, said "You don't have the drunker frat bums like you do at the at the "farewell party." The Chicago management con-\$48 for a bleacher seat, I'd sultant has been a regular watch the game with the regsince 1985, when there were Japanese singles on the jukebox. "You feel the charm. It's like DNA that reeks out of the walls, from the bad bathrooms to the secret door

International barber shop next door]." Bartender Jennifer Ream, 32, reported her regulars

Comment at suntimes.com

drink bourbon and Pabst

Because of Fukudome,

Blue Ribbon. "It's funny now.

everyone wants to do sake

bombs," she said on Sunday.

Financial journalist Jim

Cote is a Nisei regular and

last neighborhood bar here,"

other bars. Instead of paying

A 54-year-old native of

Kankakee, Cote has been a

"We're trying to figure out

Cubs fan since he was 4.

where we're going to go," Cote said. "Tve gotta go

ulars at the Nisei."

prospecting."

has been going to Cubs



1989 Chicago Magazine Profile

HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN

At the Nisei Lounge, beer and memories are always on tap

T'S PRIDAY NIGHT AT WRIGLEYVELLE'S MISEE LOUNGE. THE GUY - Avenue in 1958. The area was home to many Japanese-American professor trade stories about being mistaken for Japanese na- have now sold their homes and moved out to the suburbs." tionals while visiting Japan.

count as décor here; no one on the premises knows what the ideo ing, and eventually won compensation for property and possesgrams mean. The legend JAPANESE BAR is painted on the front sions lost during the interement. Last August, President Rougan window, yet you're likely to find yuppies playing Puerto Ricans at signed legislation authorizing tax-free payments of \$20,000 each to one of the two pool tables. And even when the Nisei, or U.S. born the estimated 60,000 survivors of the camps. children of Japanese immigrants, are in attendance, the drink of choice is a \$1.25-bottle of Old Style rather than sake.

been described as cross-cultural. Opened by Miroto ("Kaunch") 29 years, says he usually keeps quiet. A native of Hawaii, Tsuha Hirahayashi just after World War Two, the bar originally catered and his family were not subject to the relocation edicts. Like several to the Japanese-American community that had become established in Chicago by 1960, primarily on the North Side and in Hyde Park. all Nisei 642nd regimental combat team during the war. "Most of Of that community, 30,000 or so people had been among the 120,000 the Nisei that I know were in the camps," he says. "They're very relocated to internment camps in remote parts of the western bitter about it and I dun't blame them." United States following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

more benign here than on the West Coast. But many still found the rant, Radi Internacional Barbershop. The Bookworks. climate less than hospitable in Chicago bars. "We started coming to the Nisei because here we didn't have any problems," he says. "Ninety percent of the people here back then were Japanese."

Paul Igasaki, former president of the Chicago chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League, is a Sansei-a member of the generation after the Nisei. "I have a strong feeling for the Nisei ounge for what it has been to many of our people," he says. "They faced intense discrimination after the war, and there was really no place for them to go where they could feel comfortable."

Kaunch's younger brother Kazuo ("Zoke") bought the Nisei in 1955 and moved it to its current location at 3439 North Sheffield. Dan Koning is a contributing editor of Chicago magazine.

Judging by this label in the Nisei's

cellar - fresh, cold beer has been a

priority at the bar since 1951

with the goater has just awakened from his slumber, his head on families in the postwar era, drawn by the combination of nearby top of the bar, as the sing song strains of "Sukiyaki" replace Bob industries and low residential costs. "The block of Newport around Seger on the Rock ola. In the corner, two architects and a college the corner used to be half Japanese," Albert Kamiya recalls. "Many

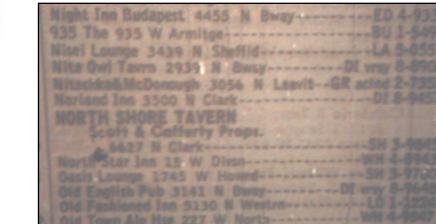
While some of the Nisci generation have tried to put memories A plastic bonsai tree and some framed Japanese ideograms of the internment camps behind them, others have been less forgiv-The subject of redress and compensation comes up often at the

bar (the National Council for Japanese-American Redress is based The original Nisei Lounge, at Clark and Division, could not have in Chicago). When it does, Jim Tsuha, who has tended bar here for of the bar's long-time patrons, he fought in Italy with the famous

Today Japanese businesses still dot a several-block long strench Afternoon regular Albert Kamiya remembers that attitudes of Clark Street, but the Nisei's immediate neighbors reflect the toward Japanese Americans during and after the war were much current demographics of the area: Le Cochonnet French restau-

When Zoke Hirabayashi died in April 1987, the bar was turned over to Tsuha and Zoke's daughter, Emi. With the help of daytime bartender Tom Yamauchi, they plan to leave the Nisei as it's always been-functional rather than upscale.

"We welcome anyone who wants a drink," says Tsuha. "If we didn't we'd starve. We have Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, whites, Orientals. People come here to discuss philosophy, religion, world events, whatever. They come together and they drink together. It really is a neighborhood bar."



Above and below, the original Nisei Lounge (name shown as ideogram, left) at Clark and Division was opened by Kaunch Hirabayashi (above, at far end of bar) after World War Two.

THE LAST WORD ON NISEI LOUNGE'S AGE. FIRST APPEARANCE IN PHONE BOOK 1951 CHICAGO YELLOW PAGES

A SHORT HISTORY OF NISEI LOUNGE WRIGLEYVILLE'S OLDEST BAR

The Nisei Lounge has been serving neighborhood residents and baseball fans at this location since at least early 1951. It is believed to be the Wrigleyville neighborhood's oldest continuously operated tavern. This was long before the neighborhood was known as 'Wrigleyville'.

When you pull up a bar stool, and lift a cold beer at the Nisei Lounge (pronounced 'Knee Say' and also happens to rhyme with "Hey Hey") you are joining generations of Chicagoans and baseball fans who came before you to have a cold beer or a cocktail at the Nisei.

Nisei Lounge was founded at 3439 North Sheffield in early 1951 by local Japanese-Americans residents so they would have a place to gather and socialize. There was a large japanese-american community in the Lakeview neighborhood in the years after World War II. The word 'Nisei' is the japanese word for second generation japanese-americans born in the States. Tavern history says that World War 2 Nisei veterans of the US Army's highly decorated Japanese-American 442nd Regiment were

When the Nisei Lounge opened at 3439 North Sheffield, the Cubs were only six years removed from their 1945 World Series appearance. Since the start of the 1951 baseball season, the Chicago Cubs have played over 9000 games and win, lose, or rain delay baseball fans have been stopping into Nisei Lounge after games for almost 60 pusenum season, the cincugo cous mave played over 3000 games and with lose, or rum delay baseban rums mave been stopping timo wiser counge after yours for all the less clear on which baseball players might have had a beer at Nisei Lounge over the years but we like to think there have been a few over the years.

In 1989 the original Nisei owners decided to retire and sold the business, but new owners Scott and Mike retained the name and continued to welcome old customers and new friends to Nisei Lounge. In 2010 the Nisei Lounge began a new chapter when it was sold to a group of friends who had just lost out to the Ricketts family by a few

When they were handed the keys on April 1st, 2010 the new owners cleaned up a little, added a new TV or two, and agreed to accept credit cards for the first time in the bar's history. Otherwise the Nisei Lounge remains Wrigleyville's oldest continuously operating tavern and endures much as it has for almost six decades, welcoming

Thanks for visiting Wrigleyville's oldest tavern and come back soon... because Nisei Lounge will be here.