

# First Japanese immigrant had life of tragedy, loss

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History does not record what local residents had to say when Andrew McKinnon showed up in a little village east of Gresham, now known as Orient, with a Japanese woman and a small daughter.

The two Japanese must have been as rare a sight as butterflies in January.

McKinnon formed a partnership with his close friend, Robert Smith, an Orient landowner named William Maxwell, and a man known only as Allen. The four built a sawmill, which was named the Orient Steam Sawmill.

That raises the old — and never resolved — argument as to how the community of Orient got its unusual name. Many contend that McKinnon named the sawmill in honor of the Japanese woman and the town gradually assumed the name. But the late Louise Maxwell Nelson, daughter of one of the partners in the mill, insisted in a history she wrote that the local school was named Orient as kind of a joke because it was so far east of Portland.

No documents have been found showing that the name of Orient was in use prior to the 1880 arrival of the Japanese. Many historians think it is just too much of a coincidence to believe that Oregon's first Japanese residents moved to a town already known as Orient.

Miyo Iwakoshi did not live happily ever after in her new home. Her life was filled with tragedy and loss.

Only six years after his arrival in Oregon, McKinnon died and was buried in Gresham. Iwakoshi and Tama were left in care of McKinnon's partner, Robert Smith. Some accounts say Smith and Miyo married, but no records have been found to prove that. However, Smith is buried in the family plot in Gresham. And when he died, he left his property to Iwakoshi.

Miyo Iwakoshi's first years in Oregon must have been lonely. A brother, Rikichi, eventually joined



Miyo Iwakoshi, left, is shown with her family in Orient. At right, her adopted daughter, Tama, holds her son, Max. Tama's other youngsters pose for the photo in front of a huge fallen log. A photo in Wednesday's Outlook incorrectly identified Miyo Iwakoshi. The woman in the photo was Tama Nitobe.

the family. A skillful gambler, he was known as "Riki The Centipede."

By 1885, a few more Japanese were trickling into Oregon. One was 18-year-old Shintaro Takaki, who came to Portland from San Francisco selling cloth for a Kyoto merchant. In conducting her research in Japan, Akiko Sugioka learned that Takaki knew of the Japanese women in Orient through an acquaintance of his brother. He made his way through the virgin Oregon forest to the little community and made a rare find there in the woods — a young, pretty and single Japanese girl. Tama Nitobe was, by then, of marriageable age.

On May 12, Nitobe and Shintaro Takaki became the first Japanese couple to marry in Oregon.

Japanese tradition has it that the wedding had to be conducted

discreetly. From friends who knew the couple, Sumiko Ando learned, "Tama was from a very good family and her family background was kept secret. Therefore the marriage was very difficult, but they could get married by using a trick."

The trick, apparently, was that Tama Nitobe married under her American name, Jewel McKinnon.

Kazuko Underhill, one of several local women who helped in the research project, translated the Japanese name Tama to mean "treasure." She theorized that that is how the family arrived at the English name of Jewel.

The marriage of Takaki and Tama Nitobe meant that Miyo Iwakoshi would at last have a family in her adopted country.

Next: Life and death in Orient.