

## TAIKICHI KATO

Taikichi Kato was born in Midorii, Kawauchi-mura, Sato-cho, Asa-gun (now Asaminami-ku), Hiroshima-ken, Japan, on September 11, 1879. His parents were Bungoro and Otake Kato. He was the youngest son of a family with six children; four sons and two daughters, and he attended Gion Grammar School for 8 years.

He emigrated from Japan to America in April of 1899 at the age of 19 and arrived in Victoria, Vancouver Island in British Columbia, and his final destination was Seattle, Washington. According to Department of Justice records, he left Japan due to his parents having died previously. His uncle and cousins settled in Canada, but he made his way to southern California. He may have worked on the railroads in Montana and spent some time in Morgan Hill in northern California as a cook before settling in Garden Grove.

The 1910 Census of the U.S. lists Taikichi and Tsunekichi Neishi, both 30 and single, living in Westminster Township, probably Garden Grove, as farming partners.

Taikichi returned to Japan in February, 1913, and married Ume Kubota in May. The following year, Ume arrived in Seattle on July 28, 1914, on her way to rejoin Taikichi in Southern California. Ume was 21.

The couple had seven children; five boys and two girls. The oldest child, Hitoshi, was the only child born at a hospital due to complications at birth. The rest were born at home in Garden Grove, and Yuki Neishi (wife of Tsunekichi) was the midwife for many, if not all of those children.

Taikichi and Ume were among early Japanese pioneers in Orange County and were also supporters of the first Japanese language school in Garden Grove as their children attended the school. The school was built in 1904 by local farmers. The family lived on Taft Street in Garden Grove, and in the early 1920s, Taikichi and Tsunekichi bought land together in the Newhope area just east of Garden Grove and were among the first *Issei* landowners in Orange County. They were also partners in an orange grove and later, a walnut grove. The orange grove was purchased around 1922, under the guardianship of Mr. Willets of Santa Ana, because of the Alien Land Law. In Garden Grove, the family grew a mixed crop of vegetables.

The Kato family moved to Talbert, now Fountain Valley, shortly after the birth of their youngest child Yasuko, in 1928. They moved to Ellis Avenue and Cannery (now Magnolia). The family of nine lived in a three room, 20 feet by 40 feet lean-to, with a partial dirt floor and an outside *furoba* (bathhouse), outhouse, and wash basin for laundry.



As children, the seven siblings were almost always hungry. One of the sons, Tetsuo, remembered having to put a little sugar on a piece of bread, and sometimes food would run out while being passed around the table. This must have been a very difficult time for Taikichi and Ume, not being able to provide for their large family. Later, the family had horses and cows and also raised chickens and pigs.

Although the children attended public school at Fountain Valley Elementary, they also attended

Kato Family 1928

the Japanese School in Talbert that was built about 1912. The Katos actively supported it and Taikichi later became president of the Japanese School.

Tomatoes and chili were the main crops grown by the family from 1932 to 1934. About 22 acres of land on Bushard Street was purchased in Talbert (now Fountain Valley) in 1934. The family home was built there shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and still stands today in 2017.



Taikichi and son Masaru circa 1933

After FDR signed the Executive Order 9066 ordering the internment of people of Japanese ancestry, the family started to make plans to relocate temporarily out of state in various locations such as Colorado and Nevada. Since those did not pan out, the youngest sons Tetsuo, Tatsuo, and Tadashi were sent out of state to look for work, and the oldest son Hitoshi remained at home with mother Ume and the two younger sisters, Fumi and Yasuko. The second son Masaru had already been drafted into the U.S. army in September, 1941.

A day or so after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Taikichi was suddenly arrested by the FBI and detained in Santa Ana. Later he was transferred to La Tuna Canyon Detention Station in Tujunga, California. By February 22, 1942, records show that he was an inmate there. Sadly, none of the family members were allowed to visit him since there was a mileage limit of five miles for Japanese Americans traveling from home; Tuna Canyon was about 50 miles from the Kato home.

The family did not know how long Taikichi would be detained when he was first arrested. As a community leader and president of the local Japanese School, relatives thought that was the reason for his arrest. The family had also loaned property next door to their home on which the first Orange County Buddhist Church was built. Officially, however, FBI records state that he was arrested due to his membership in the Central Japanese Association of Los Angeles, and these associations collected donations in the thousands of dollars for the Japanese War and Navy. Taikichi had been a member of the Smeltzer (Huntington Beach) Japanese Association for 15 years and was an honorary Vice President for 1940.

The Buddhist Church was built by the Katos and about 15 *Issei* families in 1935. It was later used as a hostel to house families displaced by the destructive and deadly Santa Ana River flood of 1938. I never knew my grandfather, but he, like my grandmother, must have been a kind and generous person. Although a family of nine, they offered one of the modest rooms in their house to the Rev. Giko Abiko and his wife and child. The reverend was assigned to the church built on the Kato property and he was also a teacher at the Japanese School around 1938.

After his incarceration at Tuna Canyon, Taikichi was taken to the Justice Department camp in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where ~~en~~ enemy aliens were held by the FBI. These segregated inmates were considered members of the ~~fif~~ fifth column or civilians acting traitorously or subversively to undermine the United States. It's hard to imagine what Taikichi must have endured under those circumstances and not having any contact with family members for several months.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
Immigration and Naturalization Service  
Washington

MEMORANDUM FOR ALIEN ENEMY INFORMATION BUREAU  
OFFICE OF THE PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL  
WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

In Re: Change of Status Feb. 25, 1942  
Detained Enemy Alien Date of this report

Name of Alien . . . . . : **Kato, Taikichi**  
Nationality . . . . . : **Japanese**  
Previously Detained At. . . . . : **Santa Ana, Calif.**  
Date of Change in Status. . . . . : **Feb. 22, 1942 3:30 P.M.**

PRESENT STATUS. . . . . : **Transferred to Tuna Camp Detention**

146-13-2-12-3560  
2-12-3560  
46-13-2-12-1111  
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
MAY 1 1942  
DIVISION  
ALIEN ENEMY UNIT  
ab: A

*Lemuel B. Schofield*  
Lemuel B. Schofield  
Special Assistant to the Attorney General

cc: Supervisor, Enemy Alien Parolees

Basis for report . . . . . : **Telegram 2/23/42 Davis, Santa Ana, Calif**

RECEIVED  
ALIEN ENEMY UNIT

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Taikichi Kato Transfer to Tuna Canyon February 1942

Ume Kato and her three children still at home boarded buses in Huntington Beach that took them to the Poston, Arizona camp on May 17, 1942. After Taikichi's incarceration in Santa Fe, he was paroled by the Attorney General on May 29, 1942, and inducted into Poston on June 23, 1942 and rejoined his family. They must have been relieved and overjoyed at their reunion.

Only a month after arriving, Taikichi went to lie down on a hammock under the barracks. The family installed the hammock there due to the extreme summertime heat of the Sonoran Desert, often reaching temperatures of 115 degrees. Ignoring warnings that the hammock was not safe, he fell and suffered a fatal injury to his neck. Relatives report that inexperienced interns at the camp hospital were trying to read books on how to treat him. The heat, dust storm, and power outage exacerbated his dire condition. Tragically, Taikichi passed away at the camp hospital at the age of 62, leaving his wife Ume a young widow of 49 with seven children.

After the war, Ume and her family returned to their home and farmland in Talbert. They were extremely fortunate to have family friends, the Wardlows, help supervise the Ruiz family who ran the farm; the Sievers family who took care of the orange and walnut groves, and the Meinhardts who lived in the Kato home and maintained it during the war. Most Japanese families lost everything when forced to sell their property and relocate out of state or to the concentration camps.

The Buddhist Church building on Kato property was again used as a hostel, but this time for families displaced after the war. Ume and her children began farming again. Due to their farming success, they were able to purchase additional land in Talbert in the 1940s. Through the years the family grew a variety of vegetables including Anaheim chilies, asparagus, bell peppers, bush beans, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, lettuce, and tomatoes.

In 1949 or 1950, the Kato family purchased their last farm acreage in San Juan Capistrano. Most of the farmland was sold and the family turned to property development and management in the 1960s. Taikichi's widow Ume was 72 when she passed away in 1965. Her ashes are interred with Taikichi's at a Huntington Beach cemetery.

Taikichi and Ume have left a proud legacy to their descendants and extended family, some now members of the *Gosei* generation. They endured the culture shock and hardships of immigration to a different country, poverty, the Great Depression, the deadly Flood of 1938, racial prejudice, and wartime hysteria. Over 100 years after Taikichi and Ume first arrived in California, their 91 relatives live in California, Arizona, Hawaii, Nevada, and Texas. We are extremely indebted to them for the backbreaking work and unimaginable sacrifices they endured so that we could enjoy the comfortable lives we are living today.