



Street Stories

Fujino Street

GPS: [49.1524735,-122.3178952](https://www.google.com/maps/place/49.1524735,-122.3178952)



Early photograph of the Fujino family taken approximately a year after their arrival in Mission (from left to right): Eijiro (oldest son), Sumako holding her daughter Iwajiro (the first Japanese born in Mission), and Kumekichi. Mr. Fujino devoted most of his time and energy to the many organizations of which he was a member, leaving Suma to manage the household and agricultural responsibilities.

Mission Community Archives Item 0191-02-001

Kumekichi Fujino had a simple dream: to be a farmer. Through hard work and determination, he made that dream a reality.

According to our records, Fujino was Mission's first Japanese pioneer. He came to Canada from Shiga-ken, Japan in 1898 aboard a steamboat called the Empress of China. Within five days of his arrival, Fujino was working at Sapperton Barnett sawmill, where he was paid 85 cents a day.

After almost four years, Fujino had saved enough money to return to Japan and bring back his wife Suma and son Eijiro, who would be the first Japanese-Canadian student to enrol in the Mission Public School system and graduate from Mission High School. By working hard and saving his money, Kumekichi was able to buy 12 hectares between what are now Hurd and Wren streets. He cleared the land for farming and built a house and barn, but unfortunately both burned down in 1908.

The Fujinos were not easily discouraged, and they quickly rebuilt. Despite their hard beginnings, including their house and barn being destroyed by fire in 1906, the farm flourished. They grew many varieties of fruits, berries and vegetables and raised cows, chickens, and rabbits.

As the farm grew, so did their family. Kumekichi and Suma had four more children in Mission: Iwajiro, Misu, Sawa, and Sueno.

Kumekichi was also very active in community affairs, serving as the President of the Mission Japanese Farmers Association, the Parent-Teachers Association of the Mission Japanese Language School, and on the executive of the Mission Buddhist Church.

Suma died in 1934, followed by Kumekichi in 1944. Eijiro and his family remained in Mission until the Second World War, when they were forced to leave their home for an internment camp. According to Eijiro's son Sakae (Donald), they were first sent to Greenwood, B.C., where they lived for four years in a small apartment. Other people were housed in buildings that were originally stores, saloons, and even undertaker firms.

In 1946 the family was moved to Oakville, Ontario, where they and other Japanese families lived in makeshift plywood housing. Two years later, the family was moved to Toronto, where they had one bedroom and shared the kitchen and bathroom with two other families. After the war, the Fujinos returned to Oakville, where they worked on another family's farm while Donald Fujino moved to the United States to live in Salt Lake City.

Recognition and commemoration of Mission's Japanese pioneers are reflected in our street signs. Fujino Street runs between 18th Avenue and Kudo Drive.

By Laura Barth; edited with additions by Val Billesberger

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