



Street Stories

Kunimoto Court

GPS: [49.1512911,-122.2884864,17z](https://www.google.com/maps/place/49.1512911,-122.2884864,17z)



Members of the Kunimoto family in 1926 (front row, from left to right): Fumiko, Tsuchiye holding her daughter Toshiko (born in Mission), Hideko, and Shingo holding his son, Tamiko. In the back row, is a cousin Shinkatsu. In addition to managing his farm, Shingo was president of the Mission Japanese Farmers Association for 5-6 years and actively involved in associations for rhubarb and hop growers.

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Shingo Kunimoto was born October 23, 1885 in the village of Mori, in Kunamoto Prefecture on the island of Kyushu in Japan. When his parents died and the family's property went to the eldest son, Shingo, being the younger of two sons, received nothing. Therefore, when he was 18, he immigrated to Canada to make his fortune.

His first job was as a logger on Texada Island. Here he learned to speak English, and in 1910 received his Canadian citizenship. Around this time, Shingo married Tsuchiye Yoshioka in Victoria. She was from a well-off family and had recently emigrated from Japan.

Shortly afterward, Shingo began his own logging operation on Texada Island and eventually ended up in the Hatzic area in 1920. While logging there, he bought a 2.7-hectare parcel of land about 200 metres from Stave Lake Road. Initially the family lived in a small house just east of the property until their home was built on the south side.

Shingo gave up logging and set about making a farm out of his Mission land. Their youngest son, Roy recalled: "Clearing the land and establishing a farm became a long and tedious chore through the '20s and early '30s... Trees were felled by hand and stumps were blasted with dynamite later to be pulled out by

a horse-turned winch."

As Shingo cleared his wooded land, he planted berry and fruit crops. Meanwhile, he and Tsuchiye were raising a family of six: Chikao, Fumiko, Hideko, Tamiko, Toshiko, and Roy (a first daughter, Sumiye, had lived only a month in 1912).

In the spring of 1942, after Japan had entered the war, the Kunimotos' land was confiscated and they were sent to Picture Butte, Alberta. Here they lived in a small, bug-infested shack while toiling from dawn to dusk, seven days a week, in the sugar beet fields.

When the war was over the Kunimotos moved to Lethbridge. Roy meanwhile, went on to the University of Manitoba and earned an engineering degree. "They took away everything I worked for in my life," Shingo told his son. "So if you get an education, they can never take that from you." Shingo, who passed away in 1965 and Tsuchiye in 1965 both stayed in Lethbridge the rest of their lives.

Through a project initiated in 1989, the Archives houses the records of 80 Mission Japanese pioneers including the Kuminoto family comprised of photographs, family history and a personal memoir by Roy Kunimoto.

By David Buss; edited with additions by Val Billesberger