

Discover Your Japanese Ancestors

Presenter: Valerie Elkins

Rootstech Session RT0289



Website: ValerieElkins.com

Blog: FamilyCherished.com

Twitter: [@elkinsvalerie](https://twitter.com/elkinsvalerie)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/ValerieElkinsLLC](https://www.facebook.com/ValerieElkinsLLC)

The Importance of Culture and History in Searching Japanese Records

- Why Japanese vital records are not available online
- Why are obtaining access to records becoming more and more difficult
- How does WWII impact your research

Getting Started

- Finding your immigrant ancestor's name
- Know the year of birth
- Find their approx. year of immigration
- What to do if you don't know the *kanji* for their names

What's a *Koseki* and Why You Want It

- What a Household Register does and does not contain
- What does a *Koseki* look like and why you may have one and not know it
- Where to find your family's *Koseki*

Information Found on a *Koseki*:

- Family name and given name
- Date of birth
- Date of records and events (marriage, death, adoption, etc.)
- Names of the father and the mother
- If adopted, the name of the adoptive father and mother and the birth parents
- Often the wife's head of household and her *honseki-chi* or registered residence is listed
- If transferred from another *Koseki*, the former head of household's name is mentioned
- The registered residence *honseki chi* address

How to Obtain Your Family's *Koseki* (Household Register) from Japan

- Locating the current city hall
- Obtain and completing the city hall's *Koseki* request form
- Make a notarized copy of your photo id (Driver's License or Passport) and translate important information into Japanese
- Cost of copies and postage. Use International Money Order from US Post Office only.
- Highlighted pedigree chart
- Obtain the direct line ancestors' birth certificates up to immigrant ancestor who was born in Japan. [Note: Do not need ancestor's birth certificate if born in Japan]
- Return self-addressed envelope
- If someone is helping you with the language, a signed permission form allowing them to access the records on your behalf and a copy of their notarized ID as well

How to Recognize and Read a *Koseki*

***Koseki* Format:**

Format's may vary by prefecture and the year it was established. This format provides a good overview of the layout.

A) *Honseki chi*, the address where the person registered or maintains their *Koseki*

B) *Zenkoshu*, the previous head of household. This title no longer appears on the newer *Koseki*, (change made after WWII)

C) This section will provide dates and events about the family. Essentially, those who became part of the family through marriage or adoption or birth (*nyuuseki* notes), and those who leave the family through marriage, death or adoption (*joseki* notes)

D) *Zenkoshu tonu tsudukigara*, states their birth order, the relationship between the individual with the *koseki* (named in section H), and the person named as the previous head of household (named in section B). This section also is excluded from new *koseki* formats

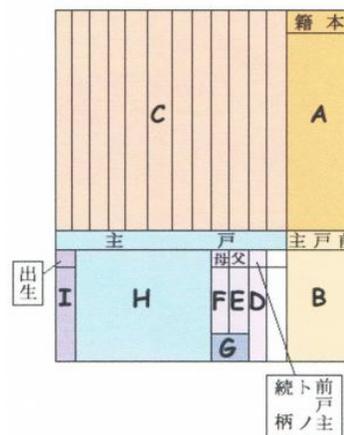
E) *Chichi* the father of the individual listed as head of household on the *Koseki* (person in section H)

F) *HaHa* the mother of the individual listed as head of household on the *Koseki* (person in section H)

G) The birth order of the individual in section H, the oldest son is called *chounan*, the second son is called *jinan*, the third son is *sannan*, the oldest daughter is called *choujo*, the second daughter is called *jijo* and third daughter is *sanjo*.

H) The head of household, listed on the *Koseki* .

I) *Shusse*, the birth date of individual in section H



Note: All years are written in the year of the Emperor's reign or *nengou*.

Adapted from Article and used with permission: Electronic Edition Debbie McMillan-Ito. "Family Registries, an Older Form from 1920". JapanGen Web <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jpnwgv/Kosekiolder.html>: accessed 11 October 2018

Tips and Tricks

- How to find a village or town that no longer exists
- Technology to help you read Japanese characters
- The do's and don'ts of using an online translation app or extension
- Alternate ways to find your ancestor's hometown

Buddhist Records and Headstone (*Ohaka*) Information

Japanese usually have, both a Buddhist burials and Shinto Weddings. The local Buddhist temple may have your ancestor's records dating back many generations. Often headstones have engraved genealogies upon them, but the names will most likely be their new Buddhist name given at death. Records will have the birth and the new names given. Family cemeteries are often located by ancestral homes. Cemeteries have been moved if the family moves their permanent domicile.

Japanese Calendar and Dates

The Japanese have used 3 different calendars:

- The Imperial Calendar based on the mythical founding of Japan in 660 BC
- The Japanese era name (年号 *nengō*) based on the reign of the current emperor, the year 2019 is *Heisei* 31
- The Gregorian calendar with some excluded dates

Currently Japan uses both the *nengō* era name and the Gregorian calendar used by the Western World. Regardless of the calendar type, dates are written by **year, month, day.**

The first year of an era is not a full year. For example, *Showa* 1 started 26 December, 1926, and *Showa* 2 started on 1 Jan 1927 a week later.

Link: Convert Western year to Japanese year

<http://www.allcalendars.net/JapaneseYearConverter.php>

Japanese Migration and Immigration

Japanese immigrants began arrive in America in the 1880's. Contrary to some reports, Japanese immigrants had some education and some financial means. During the years 1882-1924, Japanese arrived in the US to work in forests, mines and farms. Most settled on the west coast, but a significant number settled in the central US. *The Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908*, put an end to male laborers immigrating to the US, but allowed the immigration of Japanese wives and children. Through this loophole, thousands of Japanese picture brides came to the US for the unmarried Japanese immigrants. As of 1924, the National Origins Act put an end to this practice, and a tight control remained on Japanese immigration.

Major ports of entry: Hawaii, California and Washington State and Vancouver, Canada

Japanese Crests (*kamon*) Similar to European Coat of Arms, Japanese crests can be found on fabric, flags, swords, shields, etc. Close examination of old wedding or funeral photos often reveal the family *kamon* embroidered on the kimonos in various locations. Crests can be used as clues to help determine family lineage.



The Japanese Imperial Crest or *Kamon*

Japanese Heir Adoption

It was common practice for a Japanese family to adopt another male young adult or older children, if no male heirs were present in a family. Often a son, who was not his family's heir, would marry a daughter of a man with no male heirs. Upon their marriage, the groom would take the bride's maiden name as his and would become her father's heir. If they divorced, his rights to her family's estate would be returned; he would resume his own name and return to his family and again be recorded under the head of his household's *koseki*. These changes on the family's *koseki* can quickly become confusing. Using a genealogy software program is helpful to keep track of these changes and distinguish between direct lineage and adopted lineage. Adoptions were very common and frequent in almost all families and for varied reasons. Often families adopted a collateral relative's child. A good explanation of this practice can be found here: www.alanmacfarlane.com/savage/A-ADOPT.PDF

Helpful Japanese Research Website Links:

Links to Japanese in Hawaii: University of Hawaii Manoa
<http://guides.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/content.php?pid=110666&sid=1296514>

Japanese in Hawaii Book: an annotated bibliography
<https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/42154>

Early Hawaiian Vital Records: Ulukau Hawaiian Electronic Library
<http://ulukau.org/gsd12.7/cgi-bin/algene>

Link to online database of early Japanese immigrants to Utah, Wyoming and Idaho:
<http://abish.byui.edu/specialCollections/fhc/Japan/index.asp>

Finding Your Japanese Roots; A 6-page laminated quick guide by Linda Okazaki
Contact at LindaHOkazaki@gmail.com to purchase; <https://lindasorchard.com/research/>

©2019 by Valerie S. Elkins. May be used for personal or for classroom instruction if author's name is included on the printout.

Rootstech Session RT0289; Valerie Elkins, presenter