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The JCCC Archives Need Your Help!

The JCCC is pleased to bring you Kokuban - our monthly e-bulletin that covers topics from heritage treasures to stories about this unique community.

### **Nikkei Stories: Colonia Hirano, Brazil**

The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre is pleased to announce that a new permanent exhibition will be coming to the Moriyama Nikkei Heritage Centre which will tell the story of Nikkei communities in the Americas. In anticipation of its launch in November 2020, we will be sharing snippets of stories from these communities. This month we will be talking about an incredible story of a community called Colonia Hirano in Brazil.

Brazil has the largest Nikkei population in the world, with an estimate of **1.9 million Japanese Brazilians** residing in Brazil. Being a cosmopolitan city, Sao Paulo was also where the majority of the Nikkei community made their home.

Five hours drive away from the city of Sao Paulo lies a sleepy town where the settlement of Colonia Hirano was first established in the early 20th century. You may have heard stories of hardships where Japanese Brazilian issei had to brave through the thick rainforest and founded Japanese colonies. Colonia Hirano was one of the colonies established by the sweat and blood of Japanese Brazilian issei.

In 1915, a leader of the Japanese community, Umpei Hirano gathered 300 immigrants who were working in various plantations to form a new Japanese colony. The property was part primeval forest, untouched by human civilization yet. With little tools and even less experience, they hired local Brazilians in the region to help them clear the dense forest.



*Japanese Brazilian and local Brazilians contracted to clear the forest to establish Colonia Hirano. Photo courtesy of Associação Cultural Agrícola e Esportiva Hirano de Cafelândia*

After undertaking the monumental task of clearing the land, the settlers started building homes and preparing the land for agricultural activities especially rice cultivation. The new settlement was fertile and suitable for growing rice as it was near the Dourados river. However, living so close to the river, the new settlers were soon plagued by malaria, which killed more than 60 of the issei pioneers. Unable to catch a break, the colony also faced a swarm of locusts that destroyed their crops and a year later, they suffered an intense draught. Soon after, Hirano himself died from the Spanish Flu.

Despite many setbacks, the Japanese issei of Colonia Hirano devoted their lives and resources, and eventually became successful in cultivating cotton and coffee. As we are learning more about the early beginnings of Colonia Hirano, the descendants of the Colonia Hirano's issei celebrated the 70th anniversary of the first Buddhist Temple in Brazil situated in Colonia Hirano on June 2020. However, due to the outbreak of COVID-19 across the world, all on-site celebrations were cancelled. [Watch this short clip](#) compiled Associação Cultural Agrícola e Esportiva Hirano de Cafelândia to learn more about the Heianzan Komyoji Temple and Colonia Hirano.

This article is written by Su Yen Chong with the assistance of Fernando Takashi Yoshimura, a descendant of Sadaichi Yamashita who was one of the pioneers of Colonia Hirano. We are grateful for the resources courtesy of Associação Cultural Agrícola e Esportiva Hirano de Cafelândia.

Do you have personal stories or connections to the Nikkei communities outside of Canada? We would love to hear them! Please send them to [heritage@jccc.on.ca](mailto:heritage@jccc.on.ca)

## **40th Anniversary of JCCC Karaoke Club**

For Bob Nishikawa, his connection with JCCC Karaoke started when, one day back in the 1970's, plumber Shigeki Sora came to his home to do some repairs. Bob happened to be singing one of his usual tunes, and when Shigeki heard his song, he encouraged Bob to come out to the singing group at the JCCC. At that time, karaoke wasn't

established in Toronto yet, and the group gathered at 123 Wynford Drive, the old location for the JCCC, to sing, and pianist Vernon Hakkaku would whip up any requested tunes on the piano to provide accompaniment for everyone.

Fast forward 40 odd years, and Bob finds himself back at the JCCC Karaoke Club, this time as president. The club was hoping to organize a big party this year to celebrate the club's 40th anniversary. Unfortunately, with the pandemic, all plans are put on hold.

The JCCC sat down with Bob Nishikawa for a chat about the beginnings of the JCCC Karaoke Club, its development, and future.

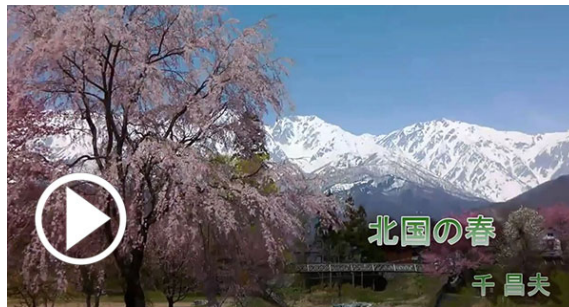
(BN– Bob Nishikawa; JC – JCCC)

**JC:** 40 years of JCCC Karaoke – that's quite an achievement. How was karaoke popularized in Toronto?

**BN:** At that time [the late 1970's], there were many new immigrants coming to Canada from Japan, and they would bring the small karaoke machines with them from Japan. There were lots of home parties where people gathered and sang. The machines played songs, and you can plug in a mic, but it was just sound, no TV.

**JC:** How did the Karaoke Club at the JCCC start?

**BN:** Lots of nisei knew some Japanese pre-war songs that their parents used to sing. They were the ones who really longed to sing, so they would ask around for people to bring a karaoke machine back from Japan. They eventually got hold of one through Roy Shin's connections with Matsushita Electric (later known as Panasonic). The pioneer of our club really was Roy. Lots of people came to sing, and lots of people also just came to listen too.



**JC:** What were some of the popular tunes?

**BN:** **Kita Kuni no Haru** was a real favourite. Even though many of the nisei could not read Japanese, they would know the words to the songs, or use romanji (using alphabet to write and read Japanese) to teach one another the songs. People would copy the tape and share it so everyone could learn.

**JC:** Last year, at JCCC's Nostalgia Night, we honoured the karaoke clubs. How do you

think Karaoke has contributed to our community?

**BN:** Our group now is very diverse. There are many Nikkei people, but also many Ijusha people, and even non-Japanese people. We don't only sing Japanese songs, many also like to sing English songs. Karaoke is a way to introduce people to the JCCC. There are now also many Karaoke clubs in our community too – Momiji, Buddhist Church, Konko Church, and a few others.

**JC:** What lies ahead for the JCCC Karaoke Club?

**BN:** The members are getting old, and the club is shrinking. But we want to make sure the [JCCC] Karaoke Club is not just a singing club, it's a social club. It's a club where we can have potlucks, share recipes, volunteer at the JCCC together, it has to be an enjoyable and social time. If people can see it as that, more people would come, I think.

## **Take Me Out to the Fireworks! / おうちで花火鑑賞**

If asked about the symbolic characteristics of a Japanese summer, fireworks is sure to make the list. It is a celebration enjoyed by people of all ages, and people in Japan since the time of the Edo period.

This year, as fireworks around the Toronto area, and many parts of the world are being cancelled, why not hop online to enjoy the grandeur of fireworks in Japan. These amazingly displays, usually only accessible to those lucky enough to make their way to the festivals and secure a viewing spot, are now available online.

夏の風物詩は？ときかて思い浮かぶものはたくさんあると思いますが、その中でも子供から大人まで楽しめるものといえば「花火」ではないでしょうか。歌川広重の浮世絵でも、江戸時代に多くの人々が花火大会を鑑賞している姿が描かれています。世界でもトップクラスといわれている日本の花火師。その技術が堪能できる打ち上げ花火を、今年はオンラインで鑑賞してみませんか。

### **[Omogari Fireworks Festival / 大曲の花火](#)**



Known as one of the three major firework displays in Japan, the Omagari Fireworks Festival is also a time where pyrotechnicians (firework specialists) to show off their skills and compete for the Prime Minister's prize. Synchronized with music and sound effects, each display is truly a firework musical masterpiece. You can see 2019's display [here](#).

日本三大花火大会のひとつであり、全国の花火師が技を競い合う花火競技大会でもある「大曲の花火」。昨年「花火ミュージカル」の動画は[こちら](#)。

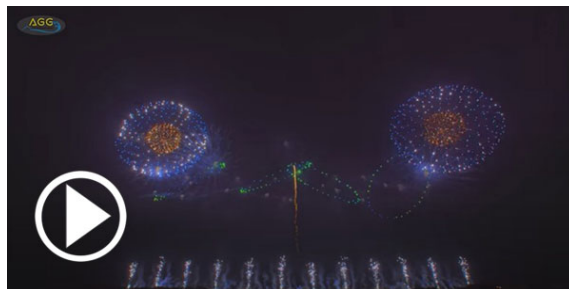
### [Nagaoka Festival Grand Fireworks / 長岡花火大会](#)



The Nagaoka Fireworks Display is also one of Japan's three major firework displays. The most breathtaking part of this display is that the fireworks runs along 2km of the riverbank to showcase a Fireworks Phoenix – this Phoenix is symbolic of the town's wish for restoration after deaths and damage brought about by WWII. 2019 marked the 15th anniversary of the Phoenix. Click below to see this spectacular firework display. Click [here](#) to watch.

長岡花火も日本三大花火大会の一つ。この花火大会の見どころは、河川敷2kmに渡って壮大に打ち上げられるです。「復興祈願花火・フェニックス」です。

### [Akagawa Festival Fireworks / 赤川花火大会](#)



Looking for a fireworks show with a twist? The Akagawa Fireworks Festival is one known for its artistic creativity. Accompanied by rock music, it creates a sense of a captivating live performance – you'd forget it's even fireworks. Click [here](#) to watch.

日本の花火大会の中でも芸術性の高さが評判の赤川花火大会。ロック音楽に合わせて繰り出される打ち上げ花火は、まるでステージパフォーマンスのよう。動画は[こちら](#)

### [Senko Hanabi / 線香花火](#)



And who of us don't know the fun and joy of sparklers – a simple incense that allows us to hold fireworks in our hands. Watch this video to see how intricate and profound the art of making a simple sparkler, or senko-hanabi, could be. Click [here](#) to watch.

打ち上げ花火ばかりを紹介してきましたが、「線香花火」も日本の夏にはかかせない風物詩です。職人によってひとつひとつ丁寧に作られる「線香花火」。その技術の紹介と、シンプルで儂い美しさをお楽しみください。動画は[こちら](#)

Though the pandemic has instilled a lot of distance between us and the world, but with the internet, it has also opened the door to many experiences that were traditionally rare and difficult to access. We hope we have given you a desire to explore and experience what Japan can still offer us from a distance.

国外で休暇を楽しめるまでにはまだ時間がかかりそうですが、インターネットを使えば行きたかった場所やイベント、そして普段は足を踏み入れられないような場所も楽しむことができます。日本に行ける日が早く来ることを願って。

**The JCCC Archives Need Your Help!**





*A Class Portrait of the Fairview Japanese School, 1940, JCCC Original Photographic Collection, 2001.4.74. For more information on this photograph, [click here](#).*

Help the JCCC Archives by identifying people in photographs. This month we would like to ask for your help in identifying the forty-two people in the photograph of the Fairview Japanese Language School taken on March 23, 1940 during their 14th Annual Graduation. Your contribution will help us in our work at the JCCC Archives. To send us information, please email [heritage@jccc.on.ca](mailto:heritage@jccc.on.ca).



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