

Japanese Family History Resources

Below are several online family history resources that may be useful for your Japanese family history research.

a. General Family History

There are many general family history websites that are available online, but the two largest are Family Search (FamilySearch.org) and Ancestry (Ancestry.com). There are some differences between the two sites. A brief description is provided below.

i. FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/>)

FamilySearch is a nonprofit family history organization operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is the largest family history organization in the world. The history of FamilySearch can be traced back to the founding of the Genealogical Society of Utah back in 1894. Many immigration documents, including naturalization requests and ship manifests can be obtained through the FamilySearch website. FamilySearch accounts are free to anyone. Current holdings of FamilySearch include 8 billion names, 3.2 billion digital images and 490,000 digital books. In addition, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also operates the Family History Library (35 North West Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84150) and over 5,100 Family History Centers located in 145 countries (for specific locations, see <https://www.familysearch.org/help/fhcenters/locations/>). The Family History Library and Family History Centers have been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, online resources continue to be available. FamilySearch's Research Wiki (with nearly 100,000 online topic- and location-specific articles) may be of particular interest (https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page). FamilySearch also maintains a worldwide "Family Tree" where anyone can submit their family history information. All submitted information (except for living individuals) is viewable and changeable by the general public.

ii. Ancestry (<https://www.ancestry.com/>)

Ancestry.com is the world's largest for-profit genealogy company. The company claims access to approximately 10 billion historical records. Subscriptions are required, but through agreements with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, subscriptions are free to members of the church. In addition, free access to Ancestry.com is permitted at the church's Family History Centers. There is considerable overlap between the records accessible through FamilySearch and Ancestry.com. Any family history information that you submit to Ancestry.com is only accessible by you. Ancestry.com also provides professional genealogical research referrals and genealogical DNA testing.

b. General History and Geography

A general understanding of the history and geography of Japan, as well as specific information related to the region where your ancestors are located, provides useful background and context for your family history research.

i. **Wikipedia (English)** (<https://www.wikipedia.org/>)

As with many topics, Wikipedia provides good general information regarding the history and geography of Japan and many of the regions and cities of Japan; however, some of the information is cursory and incomplete in some instances.

ii. **Wikipedia (Japanese)**

(<https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E3%83%A1%E3%82%A4%E3%83%B3%E3%83%9A%E3%83%BC%E3%82%B8>)

The Japanese version of Wikipedia provides considerably more detailed information regarding Japanese history and geography than does the English version. The obvious obstacle to those who do not read Japanese is that the material is in Japanese. This obstacle, however, can be overcome to some degree through copying and pasting text paragraphs into online translation tools (e.g., Google Translate). It should be noted that while the Japanese version of Wikipedia is very good, it is by no means exhaustively complete.

c. **Japanese Language Resources**

For *Nikkei*, the Japanese language can be a significant obstacle to family history research, particularly when you are trying to identify your pre-immigration ancestors. There are countless online Japanese language resources that are available. Here are some of the more useful ones.

i. **Google Translate** (<https://translate.google.com/>)

Google Translate is a free, multilingual neural machine translation service which can translate text between 109 languages. Google Translate provides a good initial translation; however, small language nuances may be overlooked. When pasting *kanji* only (as opposed to a mix of *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*) into Google Translate, care should be given that the automatic language recognition functionality properly identifies Japanese and not Chinese.

ii. **Weblio** (<https://eije.weblio.jp/>)

Weblio is a very good English-to-Japanese and Japanese-to-English translator. It is particularly useful in providing potential readings of Japanese first names.

iii. **Kanjipedia** (<https://www.kanjipedia.jp/>)

Kanjipedia is one of the better *kanji* dictionary sites. The Japanese-based website is maintained by The Japan Kanji Aptitude Testing Foundation (日本漢字能力検定協会 *Nihon kanji nōryoku kentei kyōkai*) which has the mission of improving the *kanji*-related aptitude of both students and adults. *Kanji* that are not listed in Kanjipedia are either archaic or extremely obscure.

iv. **Jim Breen's Japan Page** (<http://nihongo.monash.edu/japanese.html>)

This is a sprawling compilation of links covering a wide range of Japanese-related topics, including language, online dictionaries, computing, and telecommunications. It is maintained by Monash University located in

Melbourne, Australia. The English-based website is not as polished as many of the other websites presented here; however, its online presence dates back to 1994.

v. Professional Translators

Upon receipt of *koseki* documents from Japanese municipal offices, you will need to translate the Japanese-language documents into your own primary language. It should be noted that for family history purposes, you do not need a word-for-word translation. Instead, you only need the relevant names, dates, places, and other information from the *koseki* documents. For instance, you really do not need information regarding the identity of the specific village official who received the birth notification of your great-grandfather.

If you are unable to read Japanese yourself, you will need to identify a translator to perform this translation. One option is to request assistance from a friend who can read Japanese; however, be aware that some of the language and conventions used in *koseki* documents are from before World War II and may be somewhat unfamiliar to younger Japanese.

If you do not have a friend who can read Japanese, you may need to enlist the help of a professional translator. It should be noted that some professional translators both in Japan and overseas will reject *koseki* translation requests because they are not modern Japanese. Professional translators willing to accept *koseki* translation requests will likely be in either the legal or immigration fields.

d. Japanese Map and Place Name Resources

The use of maps and other place name resources will improve your family history research experience by providing spatial context for the Japanese place names that you identify.

- i. **Google Maps (<https://www.google.com/maps>)**
Google Maps has excellent coverage of Japan. For Japan, the best functionality is achieved using Japanese-language inputs, but the English-language inputs still provide very good results.
- ii. **Google Earth (<https://www.google.com/earth/>)**
Google Earth provides additional geographic visualization beyond what is in Google Maps. Again, for Japan, the best functionality is achieved using Japanese-language inputs, but the English-language inputs still provide excellent results.
- iii. **Mapion (<https://www.mapion.co.jp/>)**
Because Japan does not have Western-style street names or addresses, there are a large number of Japanese-language mapping and navigation tools. One of the better ones is Mapion.
- iv. **Japan Post (<https://www.post.japanpost.jp/zipcode/index.html>)**

Japan Post provides a zip code look-up function that also includes accurate *katakana* readings for all address *kanji* located in Japan. Unfortunately, this zip code look-up function is not available in English.

- v. **Japanese Phone Directory (<https://jpon.xyz/>)**
Jpon.xyz provides online access to Japanese phone directories from 1993 to 2019. The jpon.xyz phone directory can be used to identify potential names and addresses for targeted letter writing for households at or near your ancestors' *honsekichi*. Comprehensive access is available for a monthly fee, but access is free for the 2000, 2007, and 2012 directories.
- vi. **Immigration Era Maps**
UNDER CONSTRUCTION

e. Institutions

The following institutions can provide useful information related to your family history research:

- i. **U.S. National Archives and Research Administration**
(<https://www.archives.gov/research>)
The National Archives and Research Administration (NARA) provides access to Japanese-American naturalization information (i.e., alien files), as well as internment-related information. Most Japanese-American records are located at the National Archives (San Francisco) (Leo J. Ryan Building, 1000 Commodore Drive, San Bruno, CA 94066); additional Japanese-American records are located at the National Archives (Kansas City) (400 West Pershing Road, Kansas City, MO 64108).
- ii. **Consulate General of Japan in Honolulu**
(https://www.honolulu.us.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/findingroots.html)
The Consulate General of Japan in Honolulu (1742 Nuuanu Avenue, Honolulu, HI 96817) provides access to the Japanese Family Registration Cards. It should be noted that these are not *koseki* documents, but voluntary registration cards maintained by the Japanese Consulate for Japanese nationals (including *issei* immigrants) who lived for a period of time in Hawaii.
- iii. **Japanese American National Museum (<http://www.janm.org/>)**
The Japanese American National Museum (JANM) (100 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012) houses the Hirasaki National Resource Center (HNRC) which provides research materials documenting the Japanese-American experience.
- iv. **Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Center**
(<https://centre.nikkeiplace.org/>)
The Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Center (NHMCC) (6688 Southoaks Crescent, Burnaby, BC V5E 4M7) houses the Charles Kadota Resource Center which provides research materials associated with the Japanese-Canadian experience. One-on-one family research assistance is available at the

Resource Center through Research Archivist Linda Kawamoto Reid (lreid@nikkeiplace.org). Of particular interest to Japanese-Canadians is the "1929 Directory of Japanese Residing in Canada".