

SAKAI NURSERY, TANK HOUSE
99 South 47th Street
Richmond
Contra Costa County
California

HALS No. CA-6-H

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Pacific West Regional Office
1111 Jackson Street
Oakland, CA 94607

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
Sakai Nursery, Tank House

HALS No. CA-6-H

- Location:** 99 South 47th Street
City of Richmond, Contra Costa County
California
- U.S.G.S. Richmond Quadrangle (7.5')
Mercator Coordinates: 559224mE, 4198192mN
559371mE, 4198186mN
559236mE, 4198024mN
559398mE, 4198021mN
- Present owner:** Richmond Community Development Agency
440 Civic Center Plaza
Richmond, CA 94804
- Present use:** Vacant
- Most recent use:** Flower nursery (until 2003)
- Significance:** The Sakai Nursery Tank House is a contributing resource to the historic significance of the Sakai Nursery. The Sakai Nursery is located at the intersections of South 47th Street and Florida Avenue in Richmond, Contra Costa County, California. The nursery is located on a nearly rectangular 5.59-acre site that is bounded on the north by a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) right-of-way, on the east by South 47th Street, on the south by Florida Avenue, and on the west by South 45th Street. The Oishi Nursery (HALS No. CA-5) is located east of the Sakai Nursery on the east side of South 47th Street. The Sakai Nursery site includes the original Sakai family house, another family residence, twenty greenhouses, and various buildings and structures such as a boiler house, water tanks, a flower warehouse for grading and packaging cut roses, storage sheds, worker housing, paved paths, a system of drainage trenches, and overhead steam lines for heating the greenhouses that were associated with the operation of the nursery. Two residences that were originally built for Sakai family members are located across Florida Avenue on separate parcels of land to the south of the nursery proper.
- The Sakai Nursery began in 1906 when the Tokaro Sakai family purchased two and a half acres of land, relocated a greenhouse from another nursery in Berkeley to the property, and began to

grow carnations for cut-flower production. By 1927, the family had switched to raising greenhouse roses. The Sakai Nursery continued to specialize in growing high-quality roses that sold at premium prices and to be family-owned and family-operated until its closure in 2003. The property was sold to the Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency in 2006.

The Sakai Nursery was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the California State Historic Preservation Officer in 2007 under Criterion A at a local level of significance for its significant associations with Japanese American history in Richmond and with the history of the San Francisco Bay Area cut-flower nursery business. When it closed in 2003, the Sakai Nursery was one of the last two remaining examples of the community of Japanese American flower growers which developed in Richmond during the first decade of the twentieth century. The other example was the Oishi Nursery (HALS CA-5) located on an adjacent property on the east side of South 47th Street.

Although not large enough to support the range of local services and organizations that developed in *Nihonmachi*s (Japantowns) in cities such as San Francisco and San Jose, Richmond's cluster of Japanese American nurseries were historically significant as a *Nikkei* (Japanese immigrant and their American-born descendants) community centered around the cut-flower industry. By 1910, two clusters of Japanese-owned flower nurseries formed the heart of this close-knit community, and by World War II, approximately twenty nurseries had been established. These nurseries grew primarily carnations and roses, two flower types that were sold every day of the year and thus provided a steady source of income. The cut-flower industry provided an economic means for this ethnic community to survive the initial wave of immigration and to continue to flourish into the late twentieth century. Because a large number of the Japanese nursery owners had purchased their land before the passage of the 1913 Alien Land Law, which forbade property ownership to most Japanese as Aliens ineligible for citizenship, Richmond's Japanese American community was a remarkably stable and long-lived ethnic enclave. Most of California's Japanese American communities could not be recreated after World War II, and their members dispersed. However, despite their forced removal from homes and businesses during World War II, many of Richmond's Japanese American nursery owners returned to their neighborhood and revived their businesses after the war.

Richmond's Japanese-owned nurseries were part of the larger group of San Francisco Bay Area cut-flower nurseries that developed on the fringes of the urban core in San Francisco, Contra Costa, Alameda, and Santa Clara counties during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. With a limited capital investment, families were able through intensive cultivation and hard work to utilize small tracts of open land – often as little as one acre – to create profitable floricultural enterprises. After World War II, increasing development pressures in these areas, along with changing technology and market forces, contributed to the displacement of the Bay Area nurseries. Additionally, in Richmond the extension of the Eastshore Freeway (Interstate 80), located just east of the Sakai Nursery, resulted in many of Richmond's Japanese American nursery owners losing their land to during the early 1950s. The freeway and new commercial and residential development have replaced these nursery operations.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

- 1. Date of Erection:** The two-story, seven room Sakai Family house located on the Sakai Nursery was constructed in 1922 (City of Richmond Building Permit # 4018 for a “frame cottage” is dated May 10, 1922, final inspection October 5, 1922). The tank house located on the Sakai Nursery was constructed in 1922 to supply water for the adjacent Sakai Family house. The water tank adjacent to the tank house was built a few years later as the water needs of the nursery increased.
- 2. Architect:** None
- 3. Original and subsequent owners:** The tank house and the water tank were owned by the Sakai Nursery until 2006 with the Richmond Community Development Agency purchased the property.
- 4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:** The tank house and the adjacent water tank were built by members of the Sakai family or Sakai Nursery employees, who built the other outbuildings and the greenhouses on the property.
- 5. Original plans and construction:** The tank house was originally constructed to supply water to the Sakai house and the nursery. The City of Richmond building permit for the Sakai house was issued in 1922. The original construction included the pump house building and the water tank on a wood-frame structure with wood exterior rustic siding still extant today. The wood-frame pump house is a small one room building (a small storage area is enclosed on the south). The tank house included a wind mill on the south side of the water tank. The interior largely is an open free span space. A small storeroom is located at the southeast corner of the interior. The interior would have originally included water pumps.
- 6. Alterations and additions:** The tank house has not been considerably altered since 1922. One small shed roof addition covered with fiberglass is at the center of the west façade. The wind mill adjacent to the water tank has been removed (part of the supporting metal frame still survives).

The use of the original pump building changed to pesticide mixing in circa 1970. A concrete pad and a metal tank had been added in the southern half of the interior at that time. A small area at the south end of the interior is enclosed with modern chicken wire. The cylindrical water tank adjacent to the tank house was added a few years after the tank was constructed. Both structures are visible on a 1930 Sanborn Map of the Sakai Nursery.

B. Historical Context

a. Bay Area Context for Settlement and Development of Japanese American Communities

Japanese began to arrive in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1869, when a handful of young men immigrated to San Francisco. Most of these initial immigrants made their way inland to the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony in El Dorado County, the earliest chapter in the long intertwined history of Japanese settlement and agriculture in the Golden State. The U.S. Census of 1870 showed fifty-five Japanese in the United States; thirty-three were in California, with twenty-two based near the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm. The census of ten years later demonstrated a slight increase to eighty-six Japanese in California, with a total of 148 nationally. After Japan liberalized emigration restrictions in the mid-1880s, the number of immigrants climbed more rapidly as young men sought to leave sparse economic opportunities in their home communities for the United States. By 1890, 2,038 Japanese lived in the United States, with 1,114 residing in California.¹

San Francisco's *Nihonmachi* (Japantown), the first in the continental United States, remained the largest Japanese settlement until the 1906 earthquake.² Japanese immigrants in San Francisco founded numerous social, economic, cultural, and religious organizations that served local residents as well as immigrants who settled in smaller Japanese communities scattered throughout the Bay Area. Not coincidentally, anti-Japanese sentiment rose as the numbers of immigrants increased around the turn of the twentieth century. Newspapers such as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, nativist trade unions, and politicians such as San Francisco Mayor (later Senator) James Phelan focused white Californians' fears on the economic "threat" posed by Japanese immigrants. Although widespread, anti-Japanese hostility was particularly charged in San Francisco where the Board of Education adopted a new policy in 1906 restricting Japanese students to a segregated "Oriental" school. The Japanese government's formal protest led to an international dispute that resulted in the "Gentlemen's Agreement" of 1908 limiting immigration of Japanese laborers to the United States.³ Five years later, anti-Japanese factions scored another victory with the passage of the 1913 Alien Land Act forbidding property ownership by "aliens ineligible for citizenship."⁴

Until the Gentlemen's Agreement, immigrants from Japan, like those from China, had been primarily male. One provision of the 1908 agreement served as a catalyst—

¹ Isami Arifuku Waugh, Alex Yamamoto, and Raymond Okamura, "A History of Japanese in California" in *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California* (Office of Historic Preservation, California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1988),

http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/5views/5views4a.htm (accessed 18 October 2010).

² Tim Kelley, "Draft San Francisco Japantown Historic Context Statement," October 2003, <http://www.sf-planning.org/> (accessed 18 October 2010). Los Angeles became home to the largest Japantown after 1906, a title it maintained until well after World War II.

³ Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 201-203.

⁴ Waugh, Yamamoto, and Okamura 1988.

presumably unwitting—to a fundamental shift in the character and development of Japanese communities across the nation. By allowing wives and children of laborers to continue to enter the country, the Agreement encouraged the formation of families and the development of more stable Japanese enclaves in the United States. As the *Issei* (the immigrant generation) gave birth to the *Nisei* generation, Japanese language schools and other cultural and civic institutions arose to serve the changing community. San Francisco's *Nihonmachi* added midwives and dressmakers reflecting the growing presence of families; yet the number of Japanese in the city counted by the U.S. census remained stable; the 1940 population of just over 5,000 represented an increase of only a few hundred from the 4,700 residents counted in 1910.

In the decades from 1910 to 1930, numerous *Nihonmachi* had sprung up throughout California with a significant concentration of Japanese in the Bay Area region. By 1930, there were 6,250 Japanese residing in San Francisco, 5,715 in Alameda County, 4,320 in Santa Clara County, and over 1,000 in Contra Costa County. The growth of Japanese enclaves outside of San Francisco was perhaps not surprising given the devastation of the 1906 earthquake and the intensified anti-Japanese sentiment of the subsequent years in San Francisco. In addition to the prospect of less hostile settings, Japanese immigrants responded to the inducements of labor recruiters who drew them away from San Francisco to outlying areas for work on railroads, canneries, and farms throughout the Bay Area.⁵ Anti-Japanese groups, citing the entry of “picture brides,” waged a long campaign to completely exclude Japanese immigrants, which eventually succeeded with the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924. That legislation completely curtailed immigration from Japan until 1952 when an allotment of 100 immigrants per year was designated. While this legislation closed the door to further immigration from Japan, communities established by the *Issei* grew, and often prospered, during the 1920s and the 1930s.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 brought the first four decades of community building by the Japanese immigrants and their children to an abrupt close. By the following morning, civic leaders, clergy, schoolteachers, and other prominent members of Japantowns across the nation were picked up in FBI sweeps and jailed. During February 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which opened the door for a series of military proclamations governing conditions for all “enemy aliens,” which included Italian and German residents without U.S. citizenship. Significantly, the distinctions between “aliens” and “non-aliens” applied to residents of Italian and German background did not extend to members of Japanese communities. German and Italian immigrants who had gained citizen status, as well as their American-born children, were exempt from the restrictions and the ultimate incarceration extended to “all persons of Japanese ancestry.”

From late March 1942 through that summer, residents of the Bay Area's Japanese communities were forced to register and report at local processing sites, and were then transported under armed guard to assembly centers. Japanese Americans spent the months preceding this forced relocation amid growing anti-Japanese hysteria, increasing

⁵ Ibid.

restrictions, and uncertainty about their fate. Final notice of internment came just two weeks before they were to leave their homes and businesses—hardly enough time to arrange their affairs for the duration of the war. Most Bay Area “evacuees,” as they were termed at the time, spent their first months in detention at a hastily converted San Bruno racetrack renamed the Tanforan Assembly Center. For the next three years, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated in ten fenced and guarded concentration camps, with the majority of Bay Area residents assigned to Topaz Relocation Center in the desert of central Utah.

Those who did return had to rebuild lives that had been dramatically altered by the concentration camp experience. By 1950, the Japanese population of California decreased to 84,956; in some communities half of the pre-war occupants never returned. Most of California’s *nihonmachi* never regained their pre-war vibrancy. San Francisco, Alameda, and Santa Clara counties each had 4,000 to 6,000 Japanese residents counted by the 1950 census. Non-Japanese businesses and residents had moved into sections of town previously occupied by Japanese Americans. The war was also a turning point in generational control of businesses, churches, and community politics, as the adult children of immigrants began to dominate in all spheres of Japanese activities.

This post-war period was one of intensive efforts to re-establish *Nikkei* communities. The struggle for economic survival began anew. Those *Nihonmachi* able to be rebuilt were again the centers of the Japanese American community but were centered on the needs and interests of *Nisei* and *Sansei*, rather than the immigrant generation. The decade 1950-60 saw almost a doubling of the Japanese population in California, to 157,317 as the third generation of Japanese, or *Sansei*, were born. Most of that increase took place in the Southern part of the state.⁶ As more families moved out of *Nihonmachi*s to other neighborhoods or to the suburbs, traditional Japanese communities in Northern California lost residents, or struggled to retain their post-war numbers.

b. Development and Role of Flower Nurseries in Bay Area Japanese American Communities

The first commercial nurseries in California followed on the heels of the Gold Rush as discouraged prospectors turned to plants as their “fortune.” By the 1850s, Sacramento, San Francisco, and the East Bay’s Niles area (now part of Fremont) held a number of extensive nurseries specializing in fruit trees, ornamental trees, and flowers. By the 1890s, large nursery enterprises (at times comprising hundreds of acres) circled the Bay with greenhouses and fields planted in roses, camellias, shrubs, vines, fruit, and ornamental trees.⁷ A voluntary group of nursery and fruit growers, the State Horticultural Society, began meeting in San Francisco in 1879 to share knowledge and secure state aid for their endeavors. County Boards of Horticultural Commissioners followed soon after. The California Association of Nurserymen (C.A.N.) held its first

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gordon Van Laan, *A Penny A Tree: The History of the Nursery Industry in California, 1850-1976* (1990), 6-9.

annual convention in Los Angeles in 1911.⁸ Although the Southern California Japanese Nurserymen's Association was a charter member of C.A.N. by the late 1930s, the organization went on record in 1943 "as opposing the return to the Pacific States all persons of Japanese ancestry for the duration of the war, that all Japanese aliens and all Japanese guilty of subversive activity be barred permanently from these states, and that members sponsor an educational program of propaganda to acquaint the American people with the true facts of the situation."⁹

Japanese immigrants and their children had met with this type of prejudice and discrimination since first arriving in the United States. Like most members of ethnic "minorities," they were generally denied employment in industrial or trade labor settings. Faced with such employment discrimination, the majority of Japanese Americans found their livelihood in self-employment or entrepreneurial opportunities within the boundary of their immigrant community. For Japanese in California, a large proportion of these self-generated entrepreneurial activities revolved around agriculture. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, many recent Japanese immigrants began as contract labor in the Golden State's fields. By the turn of the twentieth century, agriculture and related activities in wholesale, retail, and distribution were an important economic foundation for Japanese families and communities across the state.

Japanese immigrants were staking their claim to leadership in Northern California floriculture, particularly in the production of carnations and chrysanthemums, by the early decades of the twentieth century. Unlike Anglo nurserymen who specialized in ornamental and fruit trees, shrubs, and vines, Japanese nursery owners often could not hold title to their land and usually focused their efforts on plants that yielded products on small plots of land and within a short timeframe. High-priced fruits such as strawberries and cut flowers met those requirements. Although a small segment of California's agricultural arena, flower growing appealed to Japanese immigrants as a source of greater autonomy and higher income than contract field labor and was not a target for anti-Japanese agricultural interests, as were farming and fishing.¹⁰

Bay Area Japanese floriculture began with the arrival of the Domoto Brothers, *Issei* pioneers who immigrated to San Francisco in 1884. By the following year, the four young men had rented a plot of land in Oakland where they established the first commercial flower growing enterprise in Northern California. By 1904, their enterprise was the largest flower-growing business on the West Coast, utilizing national and even international distribution and employing workers recruited from the Domoto's home prefecture of Wakayama.¹¹ Viewing their employees as "colleagues rather than competitors," the "Domoto College" as the nursery was often called, trained numerous immigrants in floriculture and encouraged employees to start their own businesses.¹²

⁸ Ibid., 31, 57.

⁹ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰ Gary Kawaguchi, *Race, Ethnicity, Resistance and Cooperation: An Historical Analysis of Cooperation in the California Flower Market* (PhD Diss., University of California, 1995), 2-3.

¹¹ Kenji Murase, "Nikkei in Northern California's Flower Industry," *Nikkei Heritage* (Summer 2001): 5.

¹² Gary Kawaguchi, *Living With Flowers: The California Flower Market History* (San Francisco: California Flower Market, 1993), 18.

Along with Richmond, substantial groups of Japanese-owned nurseries grew up in the East Bay cities of Alameda, Fremont, and on the Bay side of the San Francisco peninsula from Santa Clara to San Mateo.¹³

The Domotos, and the growing regional network of Japanese-owned nurseries they mentored, serviced one of the most enthusiastic markets for cut flowers in the United States. With the nation's highest rate of per capita flower sales, the San Francisco *Chronicle* announced in 1902 “. . . no other place on the Western Continent buys so lavishly from the professional florists as does this big, young, cosmopolitan town by the Golden Gate.”¹⁴ Growing fortunes in San Francisco and the region fueled taste for exotic décor and flora such as those featured in the Japanese Tea Garden at San Francisco's 1894 Midwinter Fair. Not even the tragedy of the 1906 earthquake depressed the region's appetite for cut flowers, as residents purchased floral tributes for the dead and bouquets and corsages to cheer up survivors. Richmond nurseryman Isaburo Adachi viewed the smoke from the great fires following the earthquake with sorrow for the sufferers and fear for his new business. His concern was assuaged a few days later when he stepped off a ferry in San Francisco and saw that flowers were selling briskly as balm to battered spirits.¹⁵

While the 1906 earthquake did not harm most of the *Issei* greenhouses, which had been erected on cheaper land in the East Bay and South Bay, it did destroy the outdoor wholesale flower market in downtown San Francisco used by the region's Japanese nurserymen. Under the leadership of the Domoto Brothers, forty-two Japanese nurserymen formed the California Flower Growers Association (later incorporated as the California Flower Market in 1912) as charter members and began to search for a suitable indoor site.¹⁶ Control of wholesale business was doubly important for Japanese flower growers, as the retail business was already well established and most whites would not have bought from them in any case.¹⁷

Bay Area flower growers had to orchestrate production to match peak demand periods (generally holidays) and to find efficient means of distributing their extremely perishable products to buyers. These growers, who came primarily from Japanese, Italian, and Chinese immigrant communities, realized early on that controlling sales to retailers and wholesalers was essential to the health of their enterprises. The San Francisco Flower Terminal, which opened its first covered market in 1909, was a “unique coalition of three ethnic groups” that protected the grower's need for fair prices while supplying the buyer's desire for access to a broad selection in one place.¹⁸ Japanese California Flower Market members worked cooperatively with the Italian San Francisco Flower Growers Association and the Chinese American Peninsula Flower Growers Association to set policies and manage the Flower Terminal. One example of the Flower Terminal's

¹³ Kawaguchi 1995, 56-57.

¹⁴ Kawaguchi 1993, x.

¹⁵ Kawaguchi 1995, 73.

¹⁶ Murase 2001, 7.

¹⁷ Kawaguchi 1995, 9.

¹⁸ Kawaguchi 1993, viii, 28.

cooperative strategies was establishing the Market opening time of 7 a.m., which allowed growers whose nurseries were farther from San Francisco to not lose out to those with the advantage of closer proximity.¹⁹

The California Flower Market represented dozens of Japanese-owned businesses from around the Bay Area and was emblematic of *Issei*-initiated enterprises in the produce and flower industries throughout California. Vertically organized, these enterprises were based on a system in which all operations were owned and run by Japanese, from raising the plants to wholesale distribution to retail sales. Organizations developed along similar lines included the Southern California Flower Market in Los Angeles, Lucky Produce in Sacramento, and the City Market in Los Angeles. Cooperatives like Naturipe in Watsonville, Santa Cruz County, were similarly organized to improve the growing, packing, and marketing of crops produced by Japanese farmers.²⁰

The *Issei* placed great value on having their children continue their floriculture businesses and were concerned that as they assimilated into American culture the *Nisei* would pursue career paths that took them away from the nurseries. During the mid-1930s, members of the California Flower Market established the Junior Floriculture Association of Northern California, which organized social activities such as movies and dances for the community's young men and women, as well as provided training in floriculture.²¹ Richmond's Sam Sakai and Joe Oishi belonged to this group, and Sam was one of three *Nisei* men funded to participate in an educational tour of other markets in Detroit, Boston, New York, and Denver in 1939.²² The Association was disbanded around 1940, but by that time the California Flower Market had been advised by their attorney to transfer shares in the corporation to the *Nisei* because their status as American citizens might protect the enterprise in the face of growing anti-Japanese sentiment.²³ The attorney also recommended that the Market elect a new board made up of citizens. Richmond's Sam Sakai was chosen as first *Nisei* with full voting privileges as Board member in 1940.

After Pearl Harbor, the FBI closed the offices of the California Flower Market for several days, confirming the growing perception that a rapid turnover of leadership to *Nisei* was critical. This accelerated process of shifting authority and responsibility to the younger generation mirrored the experiences at family nurseries where children were taking on the mantle of authority for the first time as well. The California Flower Market was able to open within a few days, but gathering of *Issei* for board meetings was considered a potential threat, and officer positions were transferred to *Nisei* in January 1942. Sam Sakai was voted in as the California Flower Market president on January 10, 1942, a position he held for over three decades. Sakai and the board arranged for the Italian-American San Francisco Flower Growers Association to act as caretakers of the California Flower Market until end of war. Although the steps they took hastily before

¹⁹ Ibid, 28.

²⁰ Waugh, Yamamoto, and Okamura 1988.

²¹ Kawaguchi 1993, 47-48.

²² "Interview with Joe Oishi" in *Not at Home on the Home Front: Japanese Americans and Italian Americans in Richmond During World War II*, Donna Graves, ed. ([Sacramento, CA: California State Library, Civil Liberties Public Education Program], 2004), 3; "Interview with Sam Sakai", Ibid., 23-24.

²³ Kawaguchi 1993, 54.

relocation and Sakai's continued oversight of the business from Rowher Relocation Camp ensured that the Market would avoid bankruptcy, the organization ran in the red for the duration of the war.²⁴

While a number of families in the Bay Area lost their nurseries during internment when they could not make payments on mortgages and property tax, many families were successful in reestablishing the businesses they had spent decades creating. By the 1950s, these nurseries profited from increasing sales to national markets as airfreight expanded. California flowers filled empty cargo planes returning to the southern and eastern portions of the U.S., and as their higher-quality and lower-prices ensured that California growers gained an increasing share of the national market in cut flowers. New associations such as the Society of American Florists and the Florists' Telegraph Delivery Association were formed to coordinate expanded post-war floral marketing.

Land-rich nursery owners found they had better access to loans in the post-war period through Japanese banks and Americans banks. By the 1960s, California was the national leader in production of carnations, chrysanthemums, and roses.²⁵ The prosperity of this period was enhanced by new developments in chemical fertilizer and soil steam sterilization that ended the need for the traditional rotation of growing sites to protect against root diseases. As Japanese American nurseries found the resources to expand physically, they needed to augment their workforce beyond the small number of family members and immigrant workers from Japan. New workers, many from Mexico, meant that nurseries had to face issues related to employee rights and unionization for the first time.²⁶

In 1965, the U.S. Agency for International Development introduced floriculture to Colombia in an effort to lure farmers from the lucrative growth of coca plants, which supplied cocaine to the U.S. drug trade. The federal government kept duties low and fought trade barriers as part of the "war on drugs." As flower growing took hold in parts of South America, the foreign growers were able to produce flowers at a lower cost than their U.S. counterparts due to lower land and labor costs, a warmer climate which resulted in lower heating costs, and government support. Flowers imported from South America first swept out the flower industry on East Coast and Midwest, and later California. As a result, Northern California growers became more reliant on local markets for sales and saw their profit margins dwindle as the oil shortages of the 1970s and 1980s made heating costs for greenhouses soar just as the government increased regulations over labor and pesticide use. The employment opportunities for third generation of Japanese in America, or *Sansei*, increased substantially compared to their parents and grandparents. Most were college-educated and did not choose to enter the difficult and increasingly precarious field of flower growing. Many families found that rising land values led to a decision to "grow condos" and sold their land to developers.²⁷ Post-war population growth and urbanization put pressure on growers as escalating

²⁴ Ibid., 56-58.

²⁵ Ibid., 72-73.

²⁶ Ibid., 73.

²⁷ Kawaguchi 1993, 88, 84.

property values encouraged nursery owners to close their operations and move to areas further on the Bay Area periphery, such as Half Moon Bay, Gilroy, Watsonville, and Salinas.²⁸

c. Settlement and Development of Richmond's Japanese American Community

When the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad established Richmond as the site of its West Coast terminus in 1897, it ushered in a transformation of the small agriculturally-based community and brought new kinds of workers to the area, including the first Japanese immigrants. One year before the first train pulled into Richmond's new station in 1900, Japanese began laying track for the railroad. By the end of 1900, the Santa Fe yards employed one hundred Japanese workers who labored alongside Chinese and a few African American men. By the following spring, Japanese workers made up over half of the yard's workforce. Living first in boxcars and later in company-supplied barracks, Japanese railroad workers' lives were concentrated in what is now the west side of town between Garrard and Castro Streets, northeast of the Point Richmond area.²⁹

Japanese immigrants formed a second community on the east side of town just a few years after the railroad began running through Richmond. The first Japanese nursery was established shortly after the turn of the century in the area known as Stege (incorporated into Richmond in 1905) when the Nabetas brothers brought nursery skills learned from the Domotos after arriving in the U.S. in 1892.³⁰ The Nabetas and Isaburo Adachi, who began his El Cerrito nursery in 1905, are credited as founders of the vital network of Japanese American flower growers that developed along the Richmond, El Cerrito, and San Pablo border. The area offered inexpensive land that was near public transport and that had water readily accessible by well.³¹ Immigrants who staked their future in Richmond's nursery community followed a pattern typical of Japanese floriculture around the Bay Area. According to historian Gary Kawaguchi, Japanese Americans came to dominate the Bay Area flower industry through cultivating small, inexpensive urban plots on the outskirts of metropolitan centers. By intensively cultivating greenhouse plants and using the unpaid labor of family members, these nurseries were able to cultivate high quality, highly-priced cut flowers.³² Most Richmond nurseries started in carnations, which required smaller cash outlays and less floricultural expertise than roses or potted plants.³³ By the 1920s, several added roses and other, more lucrative plants to their nursery stock.

Within ten years of the Nabetas' arrival, families by the name of Honda, Hoshi, Mabuchi, Maida, Mayeda, Ninomiya, Oshima, Oishi, Sakai, and Sugihara made the Richmond area

²⁸ Murase 2001, 14; Kawaguchi 1993, 82-83.

²⁹ Peter M. Banks and Robert I. Orlins, "Investigation of Cultural Resources Within the Richmond Harbor Redevelopment Project 11-A, Richmond, Contra Costa County, California," (March 1981), 5.9-5.12.

³⁰ Kawaguchi 1995, 55.

³¹ Banks and Orlins 1981, 5.29.

³² Kawaguchi 1995, 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, 55.

an East Bay center for Japanese American nurseries.³⁴ Newcomers were often recruited through kinship ties associated with their home prefecture of Wakayama, which led to a community that shared close social, economic, cultural, and family connections. Ultimately encompassing more than a dozen families, the nurseries were concentrated in an area that extended east from 47th Street to San Pablo Avenue, and were bounded on the north and south by the Santa Fe railroads and Potrero Street.

In the early years, the nursery families' lives were linked to the Japanese community of railroad workers on the other side of town. The railroad workers' quarters included a public meeting place where the entire community shared gatherings such as traditional Japanese New Years' festivities.³⁵ The young men who founded the Richmond nurseries quickly called for brothers, wives, and children from Japan, or married and started families, to help them establish their new lives. While cut flower nurseries required relatively small capital outlays for land and plant stock, the labor required to produce and market flowers was intense and unremitting. Richmond's Japanese American nurseries were able to thrive and expand by virtue of their family-based economies. Generally, *Issei* men rose in the early morning hours to carry bundles of flowers in large baskets strapped to their backs as they rode streetcars and the ferry to market in San Francisco.

While the men traveled to and from San Francisco in the first part of the day, their wives usually worked with a small number of Japanese employees to cultivate the flowers, which grew in raised beds on low platforms. Interviews with Richmond's *Nisei* make it clear that boys and girls were expected to join in the nursery work when they returned from school. Carnations required the construction of elaborate string grids to support the top-heavy stems when loaded with buds and flowers, and children worked alongside adults on this tedious task. Until steam systems for soil sterilization were introduced after World War II, all of the dirt in a greenhouse needed to be hauled outside every year and spread in the daylight to kill bacteria and fungi.³⁶

The physical plant of nurseries included a number of different structures including greenhouses, wells and water towers, windmills, buildings that housed boilers needed to heat the greenhouses, and houses for families and often employees. While these structures were similar to those found in nurseries throughout the region, some aspects of the Richmond nurseries reflected their residents' roots in Japan. Plants popular in their home country, such as camellia, willows, and bonsai trees, were often placed adjacent to the family home.³⁷ Interviews with Richmond *Nisei* include accounts of their work

³⁴ "The Way We Were: Family Histories: Richmond Gathering, July 28, 1996, Miller/Knox Park, Point Richmond," 31 and passim. This compendium of memories was collected for a reunion of Richmond's Japanese American nursery families held in 1996.

³⁵ Banks and Orlins 1981, 5.13-5.14.

³⁶ William Sakai, Interview by Donna Graves, September 2004; Tom Oishi, Interview by Donna Graves, September 2004.

³⁷ Information about the landscape plants was gleaned from interviews with William Sakai and Tom Oishi and by studying photographs of families from each nursery in the 1940 California Flower Market album, in the personal collection of Tom Oishi.

stoking the fire in the *furo*, or traditional Japanese bath, that the nursery families relied upon.³⁸

Most of the nurseries were begun with small amounts of capital saved by immigrants in previous work in the United States; several Richmond *Issei* used wages earned during their tenure with the Domoto Brothers to begin their nursery businesses. Generally initiated with the purchase of a few acres, the nurseries grew as greenhouses, and often additional parcels, were added year by year. Meriko Maida recalled that: “During those early days everyone was busy trying to get established in their nurseries but they were willing to help each other build greenhouses and such.”³⁹ When the Alien Land Act of 1913 threatened their hard-earned livelihood, some nursery owners responded by forming family corporations and conveying majority ownership to an American citizen. According to one account, white bankers agreed to support this tactic by becoming the majority stockholder in name only. In other cases, families placed land in the name of an American-born son, a strategy employed by many Japanese Americans to protect their property across the United States.⁴⁰

As families grew in the 1910s and 1920s, Richmond’s small Japanese community founded places for worship and started its own Japanese school (*Nihon Gakuen*). The Adachis and other Buddhist nursery families traveled to temples in Berkeley and Oakland, while the Christian families joined Richmond’s East Bay Free Methodist Church near South 47th Street and Cutting Boulevard. An auxiliary to the larger Free Methodist Church on Derby Street in Berkeley, the smaller Richmond church rented rooms to the Japanese community for services and Sunday school on Sunday afternoons.⁴¹ Richmond’s *Nihon Gakuen* was one of hundreds established wherever groups of Japanese immigrants settled in the United States; California alone had over 250 language schools by the start of World War II. According to historian Gail Dubrow: “Their numbers testify to the growing *Nisei* population, *Issei* anxiety over their precarious status in the United States as aliens ineligible for citizenship, and dismay over the manners of their American-born children.”⁴²

While language schools developed for much larger *Nihonmachi*, such as Seattle’s *Kokugo Gakko*, held classes in Japanese language, history, and deportment six days a week, Richmond children attended such classes only on Saturday. But the Richmond facility held a far more important role in the community than a space solely devoted to training the younger generation in how to read and write in Japanese. As the numbers of *Nisei* grew, special programs and performances were organized by the students to demonstrate their newfound skills to parents. The entire community gathered at the language school

³⁸ Tom Oishi, Interview by Donna Graves and David Washburn (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, 2004).

³⁹ “The Way We Were . . .” 1996, 23.

⁴⁰ Banks and Orlins 1981, 5.31.

⁴¹ Lynne Horiuchi, “A History of the Japanese American Community . . .,” in *Not at Home on the Home Front: Japanese Americans and Italian Americans in Richmond During World War II*, ed. Donna Graves ([Sacramento, CA: California State Library, Civil Liberties Public Education Program], 2004), 15-16.

⁴² Gail Dubrow with Donna Graves, *Sento at Sixth and Main: Preserving Landmarks of Japanese American Heritage*, (Seattle: Seattle Arts Commission, 2002), 109.

for weddings, funerals, and holiday events. Several times a year, the facility screened samurai films with live narrators recounting the stories in Japanese.⁴³

Begun sometime after 1910, Richmond's language school was first held in a small number of private homes, including the Oishi and Maida houses. By the early 1930s, a permanent teacher from Berkeley was hired, and the community was prosperous enough in resources and offspring to erect a purpose-built language school at the southwest corner of Wall Avenue and South 47th Street. Title to the lot at 4700 Wall Ave. was held in the name of Shigeharu Nabeta, *Nisei* son of the first Richmond flower grower, Yataro Nabeta. The simple wood-frame structure of one story was sheathed in clapboards and held a kitchen and two toilets, as well as the common room for classes and community gatherings.⁴⁴ This structure was demolished after the war as part of the Redevelopment Agency's development of new housing in the area.

Richmond's Japanese Americans faced entrenched patterns of discrimination before the war. The community's largest employers—Standard Oil, the Pullman Plant, and the Ford Assembly Building—refused to hire *Issei* or *Nisei* workers. Adults and children knew in which stores and public spaces they were welcome, and where they would be shunned.⁴⁵ Yet oral history accounts by Richmond *Nisei* invariably describe life in their neighborhood as a warm, friendly rural landscape inhabited by similarly hard-working families from Italy, Portugal, and Germany. Children from the various immigrant families played together in the nearby fields and shared classrooms in local public schools. Families swapped produce with their neighbors and sent their children to buy milk from the Gerletti's, who lived just across Wall Street from the Maida nursery.⁴⁶ The friendship between the Sakais and the family of German Americans John and Clara Heinemann was so close that the Heinemanns went to great lengths to visit their friends in Rowher Relocation Camp in Arkansas, and again when the Sakais spent the latter part of the war in Colorado.

World War II utterly changed the fortunes for Richmond's Japanese American community. Like all Japanese and Japanese Americans who resided in the United States, Richmond's Japanese American community history featured the stark break of wartime relocation and imprisonment. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) sweeps that followed immediately upon the devastation of Pearl Harbor rounded up men from several local families, including the Nabetas, Adachis, Hondas and Ninomiyas, and held them without formal charges. Meriko Maida remembered:

⁴³ "The Way We Were . . ." 1996, 23; Banks and Orlins 1981, 5.32; "Interview with Joe Oishi" in *Not at Home on the Home Front: Japanese Americans and Italian Americans in Richmond During World War II*, ed. Donna Graves ([Sacramento, CA: California State Library, Civil Liberties Public Education Program], 2004), 5.

⁴⁴ Banks and Orlins 1981, 5.32.

⁴⁵ "Interview with Jun Honda" in *Not at Home on the Home Front . . .*, ed. Donna Graves ([Sacramento, CA: California State Library, Civil Liberties Public Education Program], 2004), 7-8.

⁴⁶ For descriptions of multiethnic, pre-war Richmond, see "Interview with Tom Oishi" and interviews in *Not at Home on the Home Front . . .*, ed. Donna Graves ([Sacramento, CA: California State Library, Civil Liberties Public Education Program], 2004).

*We heard of the FBI taking our friends and neighbors to jail during the night. Luckily our Father was not. We worried that if we were found with Japanese items such as records with patriotic themes and pictures of the Sino-Japanese war, etc. we could be severely punished. Mother spent hours burning many items. The hardest thing for her to do was to burn the Buddhist altar that held the tablets of our ancestors. She wept bitterly while asking for forgiveness.*⁴⁷

The interim period between Pearl Harbor and the mass relocation was a period of uncertainty amid increasingly restrictive government policies, and increasing public suspicion and hostility. Japanese language schools were ordered closed just two days after Pearl Harbor and within a few weeks all of Richmond's Japanese had to turn in radios and cameras to their local police. In mid-January, every member of the community was required to register at Richmond's main post office on Nevin Avenue.

By the end of January 1942, the U.S. Attorney General had issued the first of a series of orders establishing strategic areas along the Pacific Coast and ordering the removal of all "enemy aliens" from these locations. This edict meant that all of Richmond's *Issei* had to find housing outside of the "prohibited zone" that lay along most of the East Bay waterfront and encompassed all of Richmond. While a number found housing close by in the East Bay, either through renting new quarters with others who had to relocate or doubling up with friends in Berkeley and Oakland, others moved further away to the Central Valley in hopes that this might prove a safe place for the duration of the war.⁴⁸ Families were split up as parents and younger children moved away, leaving older *Nisei* to run the family businesses as best they could. Bank accounts were frozen, curfews imposed and movement around the area restricted just as the *Nisei* struggled to take over operation of the nurseries without their parents' guidance.

The families all had to decide how they would pursue protecting their nurseries in the absences that looked increasingly inevitable. The North Richmond nursery owners were especially fortunate. Their friends and neighbors, Frederick and Carrie Aebi and their children, oversaw the Ninomiya, Kawai, and Sugihara nurseries, as well as their own, during the years of internment.⁴⁹ Most of the growers around Wall Avenue tried to make lease arrangements with other East Bay flower growers to manage their property and businesses. Some members of the community, like the Katayanagis who owned Park Florist on Macdonald Avenue, were forced to sell their holdings. The Hoshis, whose nursery lay just north of the Oishis, were among a small number who lost their nurseries to banks when they were unable to pay their mortgages and property taxes from internment camp.⁵⁰

By May 1942 the entire Richmond Japanese community was sent to Tanforan Assembly Center in San Bruno after formal processing at Berkeley's First Congregational Church.

⁴⁷ "The Way We Were . . ." 1996, 24.

⁴⁸ Horiuchi 2004, 18-19; W. Sakai 2004.

⁴⁹ Dashka Slater, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" *East Bay Express* (29 August 1997).

⁵⁰ T. Oishi 2004.

Invariably, oral history accounts from those detained describe abysmal conditions at the converted racetrack. Making do with belongings that could be stuffed into the two suitcases permitted each person, the *Nikkei* slept in hastily partitioned stables. The whitewash applied to these “dormitories” could not obscure the hay stuck to the walls and the stench that rose in the spring rains.⁵¹

Although a few of Richmond’s families ended up in other relocation camps, the majority were assigned to Topaz Relocation Center in Utah’s remote desert and arrived there by train in September 1942. Forced to live behind barbed wire and under armed guard, the Richmond families, like other Japanese Americans, attempted to make the best of their unjust circumstances. Richmond internees married and gave birth in camp, and older *Issei* found precious time to pursue hobbies, such as poetry and calligraphy, that were not available to them in their taxing workdays at the nursery. Some of the *Nisei* men joined the U.S. Army’s highly decorated (and segregated) 442nd Regimental Combat Unit. Many took advantage of work furlough opportunities offered to those who answered “loyalty questionnaires” beginning in early 1943.⁵² Organized by Jun Agari, a cousin of the Sakais and Oishis, a number of Richmond men found work in nurseries around the Chicago area, and sent for siblings and parents to join them as they could.⁵³

Richmond’s nursery families were released from camps and began to return to their homes in the spring and the summer of 1945. They found a neighborhood utterly transformed by the boomtown environment that Richmond’s Kaiser Shipyards had created in their absence. The rich fields around their homes were filled with defense housing units and the streets teemed with people who had swelled the local population from 23,000 to over 100,000 in just two years.⁵⁴ While a few nurseries were in good condition when their owners returned, others had been vandalized or had lost their plant stock to neglect. Many wartime leaseholders quickly found they could reap greater profits by subdividing all of the nursery structures and renting to shipyard workers desperate for housing. With their homes occupied, several families found temporary lodging in government-supplied housing set aside for “evacuees” at Fall and Gordon, just south of the nurseries across Cutting Boulevard.⁵⁵

Reestablishing the nurseries took remarkable effort and grinding labor; some families had to literally pick up the pieces as shattered panes of greenhouse glass littered every square foot of their property. While conditions varied, every family suffered from the loss of property and years of lost income. A remarkable number of Richmond’s nurseries were revived in the years just after the warXthe Adachis, Fukushimas, Fujiis, Hondas, Maidas,

⁵¹ For one such account, see “Interview with Jun Honda,” *Not at Home on the Home Front . . .*, ed. Donna Graves 2004, 15-16.

⁵² Lawson Fusao Inada, editor, *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment Experience* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2000), 417.

⁵³ See interviews in *Not at Home on the Home Front . . .*, ed. Donna Graves 2004, 15-16. and T. Oishi 2004.

⁵⁴ Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993).

⁵⁵ “Interview with Maria Mayeda Hirano” in *Not at Home on the Home Front . . .*, ed. Donna Graves 2004, 17.

Mayedas, Nabetas, Ninomiyas, Oishis, Sakais, and Sugiharas all returned from camp to reclaim their livelihoods and community in Richmond. They were aided in great part by the tradition of cooperation established at the community's outset. Another factor in the community's success was the partnerships that the now-adult *Nisei* forged with their parents. The immediate post-war economic recession, along with the influx of veterans seeking jobs, meant that *Nisei* often found their family business one of few employment options.⁵⁶ Faced with lingering anti-Asian discrimination and prejudice from the war years that limited their opportunities, young Japanese American men and women who left Richmond as high school or college students were now ready to take on leadership in the nurseries established by their parents. Ironically some of the nurseries were displaced in just a few short years when eminent domain related to the construction of Interstate 80 (I-80) cut through the properties in 1948 (construction on I-80 began in 1954).⁵⁷ By the mid-1960s, records indicate that of the original group of nurseries centered on Wall Avenue only the Adachi, Maida, Oishi, Oshima, and Sakai families still survived.⁵⁸

3. Historical Background on the Sakai Family and the Development of Sakai Nursery⁵⁹

Like all Japanese immigrants in the late nineteenth century, Kotaro Sakai came to the United States in 1898 in search of economic opportunities. Born in 1873 as Kozaburo Oishi, he was adopted by the Sakai family at age two after the Sakai's oldest son had died. In the *yoshi* tradition that shaped many Japanese families, those without sons adopted younger boys from nearby families to ensure a male inheritor of the family's name and property. Descendants describe the Oishis as samurais who later turned to education, while the Sakais were farmers cultivating small plots of land. Kotaro's birth father, Sadamoto Oishi, was a secondary school teacher and teacher of Confucian ethics.⁶⁰ Kotaro moved back to the Oishi family home to attend high school. *Yoshi* sons often married a daughter of the family in which they were adopted, and Kotaro married Chu Sakai in 1897 in their hometown of Sasayama in the prefecture or state of Hyogo-ken.⁶¹

Kotaro left his wife and infant daughter, Chizuru, in 1898 and immigrated to the San Jose area, where his two older brothers, Tokutaro and Seizo Oishi, were already in business. According to family accounts, he farmed and cleared land to support himself before his wife left their daughter with her mother and joined him later that same year. Starting a

⁵⁶ Kawaguchi 1993, 64.

⁵⁷ The Hondas and Nabetas re-established businesses in North Richmond.

⁵⁸ 1966 Sanborn map reproduced in PES Environmental Inc., "Phase I Environmental Site Assessment: Miraflores Housing Development, Richmond, California" (July 23, 2004).

⁵⁹ This section is an excerpt from the *Historic Architecture Evaluation, The Oishi, Sakai, and Maida-Endo Nurseries, Richmond, CA* (Donna Graves, Ward Hill, and Woodruff Minor, 2004), 45-49; minor revisions were made to adhere to HALS grammar and punctuation conventions; limited information that occurred after this history was prepared in 2004 was added (i.e., such as the sale of the nursery in 2006 and the death of Sam Sakai in 2008).

⁶⁰ Names, birth dates, and some details are from an unpublished genealogy supplied by Charlotte Sakai titled "Sadamoto Oishi Family."

⁶¹ "The Way We Were . . ." 1996, 44-45, 49.

new life in the United States meant great effort for the couple. Chu worked for several years as domestic help for a German family, while Kotaro continued as an agricultural worker, sometimes for his brothers' operation. By approximately 1902, they had gained the resources to lease land in the Alviso area and grew strawberries while Chu gave birth to a second daughter Shizue (Sue) in 1903 and son Tetsuma in 1906. Chu would leave the baby in a basket alongside the fields while she worked with her husband.⁶²

In 1906, the Sakais purchased two and a half acres of bare land in Richmond and soon relocated a broken-down greenhouse from a nursery in Berkeley to the property. Sam Sakai, son of Kotaro and Chizuru, described their setting down roots in Richmond:

*The location was cheap property and about a half mile to the street car line. In those days back in 1906, the distance to transportation became a big factor. In Richmond, Adachi family and Nabeta Brothers were operating the nursery. My parents were given much help in building their home and in digging a well by hand. Much help was given over how to grow the flowers as well as how to build the greenhouses.*⁶³

The nursery started out with carnation stock, and the Sakais soon hired a knowledgeable *Issei* from the Adachis who added needed expertise to the nursery. The first fifteen years in Richmond were marked by hard work and slow growth, with some periods of profit when new greenhouses and a boiler were added to the operation. Eldest son Tetsuma described some of the family's struggle during this period:

*After the Issei quit (in 1918) we had a series of men working for us, but none knew how to grow carnations. The business started to go downhill. Many of our neighbors who had been farming in Japan . . . were doing very well growing carnations. [Kotaro] never had any farming experience (or a green thumb!).*⁶⁴

While Kotaro concentrated on selling their flowersXcarrying up to fifty bunches of carnations on his back as he set out to the San Francisco Flower Market at 4:30 a.m. three times per weekXhe left the nursery management to Chu and hired workers. Sakai family members have described Chu as the “brains and energy” behind the nursery; her drive, ambition, and family background in farming apparently made her a critical foundation to the success of the Sakai nursery.⁶⁵ Although often overlooked, the contributions of immigrant women were often a critical factor in the establishment of family businesses. A 1929 publication titled “The History of Japanese Floriculture in California” included an essay describing the myriad roles that wives and mothers played in the establishment of nurseries. Along with their own domestic chores and childcare, *Issei* women’s work included many greenhouse tasks as well as supervising the feeding and care of hired employees.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “The Way We Were . . .” 1996, 52.

⁶⁵ “The Way We Were . . .” 1996, 51; Kawaguchi 1995, 46-47; Sam Sakai 2004; William Sakai 2004.

The Sakai family grew as Sam, Roy, and Ruby was born in 1909, 1912, and 1922. Kotaro and Chu also took in Jun Agari, the young son of their first daughter who had remained in Japan when they emigrated and who died at an early age.⁶⁶ In 1922, a two-story home replaced the collection of structures that had previously provided the family living quarters. Sam Sakai described the family as living in “a little bunkhouse” with “a kitchen in one corner, bedroom and shelving.” A shed holding a Japanese bath was nearby, yet spaced to keep the fire that heated water from spreading to other buildings.⁶⁷ The City of Richmond building department file for 99 S. 47th St. includes a permit to K. Sakai dated "5/10/22" for a “cottage” valued at \$3,500 with the builder listed as J.F. Walden. (This simple Craftsman Style house and the water tower near it may be the oldest structures extant on the current property.)

Sometime in 1924, the Sakais bought an adjoining two and a half acres and began to grow roses. Tetsuma described the shift as difficult for the business, with his parents still dependant on hired workers for floricultural expertise, which was not always on hand. The quality of the roses suffered in the first few years, and business was so slow that Chu convinced Tetsuma to drop out of college in 1925 to help with the family enterprise.⁶⁸ Tetsuma took on the huge task of renovating the original greenhouses, which were now nearly two decades old. He described them later as “too low, and of poor quality. They had to be modernizedXthey had no salvage value so we tore them down and put up new greenhouses.” Tetsuma assisted a hired carpenter in building the first new greenhouse, and then built the rest himself with help from family and hired hands.⁶⁹ “We were able to put up close to 100,000 square feet,” Tetsuma later recalled. Permits in the City of Richmond building department show six greenhouses were approved for Mikado Nursery, as the property was briefly listed, and later Sakai Brothers, between 1927 and 1931.⁷⁰

According to historian Gary Kawaguchi, nurseries specializing in roses and carnations weathered the Great Depression better because their flowers could be cut and sold on a daily basis unlike chrysanthemums, which only sold a few months of the year and were more dependent on out-of-state business.⁷¹ The Sakais continued to prosper enough to add to their nursery throughout the 1930s. They bought an additional two acres of land in 1932, and added seven more greenhouses to the property by spring of 1940.⁷² As their sons reached adulthood and married, they built modest homes for their new families on or near the nursery. A one-story stucco house was built on the western edge of the property

⁶⁶ “The Way We Were . . .” 1996, 11.

⁶⁷ Sam Sakai 2004, 21.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 52-53.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Permits in the city's building department for new or rebuilt greenhouses at 99 S. 47th St. are dated 8/12/27, 8/3/28 (for two greenhouses), 9/11/30, and 8/13/31 (for two greenhouses); these permits were for Greenhouse Nos. 8 through 13 which are located in a row on the northern portion of the nursery property.

⁷¹ Kawaguchi 1993, 49.

⁷² Permits found in the city's building department for additional greenhouses are dated 6/30/36, 9/24/36, 6/28/37, 10/2/37, 9/1/39 (for two one-story “garden houses”), and 4/12/40; these permits were for Greenhouses Nos. 1 through 7 which are located in a row on the northern portion of the nursery property.

for Tetsuma in 1938. Sam and his bride Nellie built a similar home in 1940 just across from the Oishi property at 223 S. 47th St. in which Sam still resides.⁷³ A home for the youngest son, Roy, was built in 1941 just across from the southwest corner of the nursery at the corner of Florida and South 45th Street.⁷⁴ All of these homes are still standing, but the house at 200 S. 45th St. (Roy's home) is no longer owned by the Sakai family. Their construction within and adjacent to the nursery property attested to the importance of the intergenerational management for the nursery, and the commitment family members had to building upon the foundations laid by *Issei* pioneers.

This foundation was threatened by the build-up to wartime relocation. A lease arrangement for the nursery was made with Mr. Brunetti from the Oakland Flower Shop, and the Sakais, unlike most of their Richmond neighbors, made the choice to move to Central California before “enemy aliens” were forcibly removed. “We went to Stockton first thinking it wasn’t coastal and would be okay,” recalled Tetsuma’s wife Kazue. They were encouraged to relocate to Stockton by the husband of the family’s eldest daughter, Sue, who owned a store and large home in that town.⁷⁵ Japanese and Japanese Americans in the Central Valley were sent to Rowher Relocation Camp, rather than Topaz where the rest of Richmond’s families were assigned, so the Sakais made the three-day train trip to Arkansas after temporary incarceration at the Stockton fairgrounds.

The Sakais spent a relatively short time behind barbed wire. By spring of 1943, Sam Sakai had found employment in a Denver nursery through a Bay Area nursery colleague who had relocated to Colorado as internment approached. Sam and his wife Nellie both worked at the nursery and lived in an apartment supplied by the business. When his older brother Tetsuma and his wife decided to join them, Sam and Nellie found and purchased a house in Denver with savings from the Richmond nursery. A year or so later, Nellie’s parents joined them when the Sam and Nellie rented about sixty acres near Greeley, Colorado, where they grew vegetables.⁷⁶ The youngest son, Roy, left Rowher to serve in the U.S. armed forces.

Tetsuma Sakai was able to return to Richmond shortly after the New Year in 1945 and stayed for a month with their friends and neighbors John and Clara Heinemann. In an apparent attempt to pressure the family to extend the lease or even sell their business, the representative from the Oakland Flower Shop told Sakai that the family would not be able to find workers and their business would fail. Tetsuma and his parents reclaimed the family property but only received a portion of the profits entitled to them. Sam Sakai reported that the nursery workers did quit their jobs, but Clara Heinemann came back to her pre-war job in the packing shed, and the family brought in a new crew by recruiting workers from the relocation camp.⁷⁷

⁷³ Mr. Sakai died on 30 January 2008, after this historic context was prepared.

⁷⁴ Permits in the city's building department for these three buildings are dated 1/25/38, 3/5/40, and 7/18/41.

⁷⁵ Sam Sakai 2004; “The Way We Were . . .” 1996, 53-54; William Sakai 2004.

⁷⁶ Sam Sakai 2004.

⁷⁷ “The Way We Were . . .” 1996, 46; Sam Sakai 2004.

The Sakai facilities and plant stock were in a healthy enough condition so that the family began making profits shortly after the war ended. By the late 1940s, enough money had been saved for Tetsuma to purchase land for a Sakai nursery in Hayward that was at one time, according to his son William, the largest rose nursery in the U.S. As the Richmond nursery revived and flourished, they added new structures including substantially expanding the boiler house in 1947 and an incinerator and separate quarters for workers three years later. Reflecting an increased activity of production, the Sakais added extensions to their sorting and storage shed in 1952 and 1957.⁷⁸ They also built another house at 4606 Florida Ave. in 1958 for Chu Sakai.⁷⁹

As the *Nisei* took over nursery operations, Tetsuma remained in charge of production for the Richmond nursery, while Sam Sakai concentrated on marketing their flowers and continuing to serve as president of the California Flower Market board. The re-transfer of the California Flower Market operations and facility to returning *Nikkei* and the reconstitution of the Flower Market Board were largely due to Sam's efforts. Sam was a founder of the floral Trade Council, which worked to aid domestic flower growers as foreign competition increased, and was a primary force behind the large new facility the California Flower Market opened in 1956. When he retired from the Board in 1968 he was still appearing early in the Market to sell Sakai flowers. California Flower Market historian Gary Kawaguchi described Sam Sakai as a "man of few words and deliberate action [who] made his mark on the Market and the industry, serving on many industry-related boards in addition to his duties as president and his responsibilities to a thriving nursery."⁸⁰

The Sakai Brothers nursery continued to prosper long after other family nurseries floundered by concentrating on growing high-quality roses that sold at premium prices. Because cut roses were extremely perishable and Northern California growers could control temperatures and time their harvests for holiday sales more accurately than South American growers, initially foreign imports took somewhat less of a toll on the Sakais' business than it did on growers of other types of flowers. Yet, despite the efforts of Tetsuma, Sam, and Roy to plan for succession, only a few of the *Sansei* generation were interested in the family rose business.⁸¹

The nursery quit cultivating roses around 2003.⁸² After then several of the greenhouses were rented to an orchid grower.⁸³ Then in 2006 the nursery property and the parcels

⁷⁸ The City of Richmond building department files hold permits for a new boiler house dated 1/3/47; a brick incinerator was permitted on 7/6/50; worker's housing from 8/24/50; an addition of 20'-0 x 28'-0 to the sorting shed was permitted on 8/28/52 and another addition of 28'3 x 30'-0 appears on a permit dated 10/31/57.

⁷⁹ Sakai, William, Letter to City of Richmond Public Works (5 October 2006) in the City of Richmond Building Department files; Oshige, John (retired Sakai Nursery manager) and Mary, Interview by Denise Bradley, 1 March 2010.

⁸⁰ Kawaguchi 1993, 67-76.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁸² PES Environmental Inc., *Phase I, Environmental Site Assessment: Miraflores Housing Development, Richmond, California* (23 July 2004), 4.

⁸³ Charlotte Sakai, Interview by Denise Bradley, 2 March 2010.

with Sam Sakai's house at 223 S. 47th St. and the house at 4606 Florida Ave. were sold to the Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency which planned to develop the Miraflores Housing Development project on the Sakai property and on the adjacent property of the former Oishi and Maida-Endo nurseries.⁸⁴

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

- 1. Architectural Character:** The tank house is a simply detailed, wood-frame, vernacular building common on farms or ranches. The distinguishing characteristic of the building is the water tank and supporting frame structure projecting 18'-2" above the south half of the roof.
- 2. Condition of fabric:** The condition of the tank house is somewhat deteriorated because of deferred maintenance. Some of the exterior siding has been removed and the paint has blushed and peeled off much of the exterior. The framing supporting the water tank appears to be severely damaged. The framing may have some dry rot or termite damage.

B. Description of Exterior

- 1. Overall dimensions:** The tank house building has a rectangular shaped plan. The overall dimensions are 16'-4" x 27'-9". The building is 10'-3" tall while the wood-frame structure supporting the tank projects 9'-9" above the roof. The water tank itself is 8'-5 1/2" tall.

The water tank adjacent to the tank house is set on a 1'-10" base. The height of the water tank itself is 16'-5 1/2". The diameter of the water tank is 17'-10".

- 2. Foundation:** The building has a perimeter wood sill foundation. The structural frame supporting the water tank is set on concrete footings inside the building. The large water tank is set on a wood frame base.

⁸⁴ Katie Lamont (Associate Director of Real Estate Development, Eden Housing, Inc), Email communication with Denise Bradley, 19 August 2010.

3. **Walls and structural system:** The structural system of the tank house pump building is wood posts supporting eight wooden roof trusses. The building has a wood sill foundation. The walls are covered by wooden seven inch wide rustic siding.

The water tank wood-frame structure rises 9'-9" above the roof. The structure consists of two sections: the vertical framing members and the joists and beams supporting the floor under the water tank. The vertical structure has angled 6" x 6" wide corner posts flanking 4" x 4" intervening wood posts with diagonal wooden cross-bracing. The posts continue through the building's roof to concrete footings inside. Additional horizontal bracing and steel braces are at the base of the posts on the roof. Vertical posts support three horizontal 6"-6" beams under seven 2" x 8" floor joists and the wood flooring supporting the water tank. The octagonal shaped floor has a perimeter railing. The metal frame base for a windmill is on the south side of the water tank. The circular water tank at the top of the frame structure has walls of curved vertical boards held by three horizontal steel compression struts.

The large water tank adjacent to the tank house has walls of vertical 5 1/2 wooden boards held with steel compression struts. The tank is set on a wood-frame structure of horizontal joists.

4. **Porches:** The tank house does not have a porch. The water tank above the building has a perimeter balcony with a wooden railing.
5. **Openings**
 - a. **Doorways and doors:** The tank house building has single hinged doors on the east and south façades. The doors of both the east and south façades have a two light window above wooden rustic siding. The west façade has a garage opening on the north without a door. The opening is framed with plain boards. At the north end of the east façade is another opening (about six feet wide) with no door. A wood conveyor connects through this opening to a work bench inside the tank house building (the conveyor was used for moving equipment and pesticides into the building).
 - b. **Windows and shutters:** The tank house building has windows on the east and west façades. The fixed four-light, rectangular shaped, window at the center of the west façade is flanked by the garage opening and the door. The window is framed with plain boards. The same window was at the center of the east façade. The window opening is still extant, but the window glass and sash has been removed and replaced with fiberglass.

6. Roof

- a. **Shape, covering:** The tank house building has a gently pitched cross gable roof covered with corrugated metal. The water tank above building has an octagonal shaped hipped roof covered with metal plates.
- b. **Cornice, eaves:** The tank house building roof has eaves with a ledger board and exposed rafters.

C. Description of Interiors

1. **Floor plan:** The tank house building has about 460 square feet of interior space. The building has a single free-span space except for a storeroom at the southeast corner of the interior. Another area on the south (used for pesticide storage) is partially enclosed with chicken wire and plywood.
2. **Flooring:** The tank house building has a concrete slab floor.
3. **Wall and ceiling finish:** The tank house building interior is largely not finished. The interior wall and roof framing are exposed in the interior. The north wall of the interior is covered with horizontal wood boards. The small storeroom at the southeast corner of the interior is finished with vertical wood boards.
4. **Openings**
 - a. **Doorways and doors:** The storeroom at the southeast corner of the interior has a wooden sliding door on a steel railing. The openings on the east and west are framed with 2" x 4" wood studs.
 - b. **Windows:** The interior has plain boards framing the windows on the east and west facades.

5. Mechanical Equipment

- a. **Electrical:** A modern electrical panel is adjacent to the modern metal tank inside the tank house building.
- b. **Lighting:** The building has modern light fixtures attached to the roof rafters.
- c. **Plumbing:** The building has standard grade steel plumbing and modern plastic pipe (connected to the modern interior metal tank).

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The tank house is located on the northeast of the Sakai House. The building is oriented in a north/south direction perpendicular to Florida Avenue. The front entrance faces west while a rear loading area is on the east.

2. Historic landscape: The landscaped area around the Sakai Family House and the Tank House consists of a fringe around house in which are planted a few scattered shrubs, small fruit trees, grass, and weeds. These plants are in poor condition due to their age, severe pruning, and the fact that this area has not been maintained during the past four years when the nursery has been vacant. Historical photographs from the family's collection show that this landscaped area was always limited to the few feet around the house and consisted of randomly planted—but well tended—flowering shrubs and flowering plants, a row of fruit trees along the south side of the house, and two columnar evergreens flanking the front steps. The existing vegetation is what remains of this vernacular planting. The site plan drawings in HALS No. CA-6 include the names of the plant materials in the vicinity of the Sakai Nursery Tank House. The Narrative Report for the Sakai Nursery (HALS No. CA-6) includes a more complete description of the cultural landscape near the Sakai House, the tank house and their relationship to the Sakai Nursery.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: No original architectural drawings survive of the house.

B. Historic Views: Historic views of the Sakai Nursery Family House, the tank house, the water tank and the Sakai Nursery are in the collections of the El Cerrito Historical Society, El Cerrito, California; Richmond Library – Richmond History Room, Richmond, California; and the Richmond Museum of History, Richmond, California. Additional photographs are in the private collection of the Sakai family, Richmond, CA.

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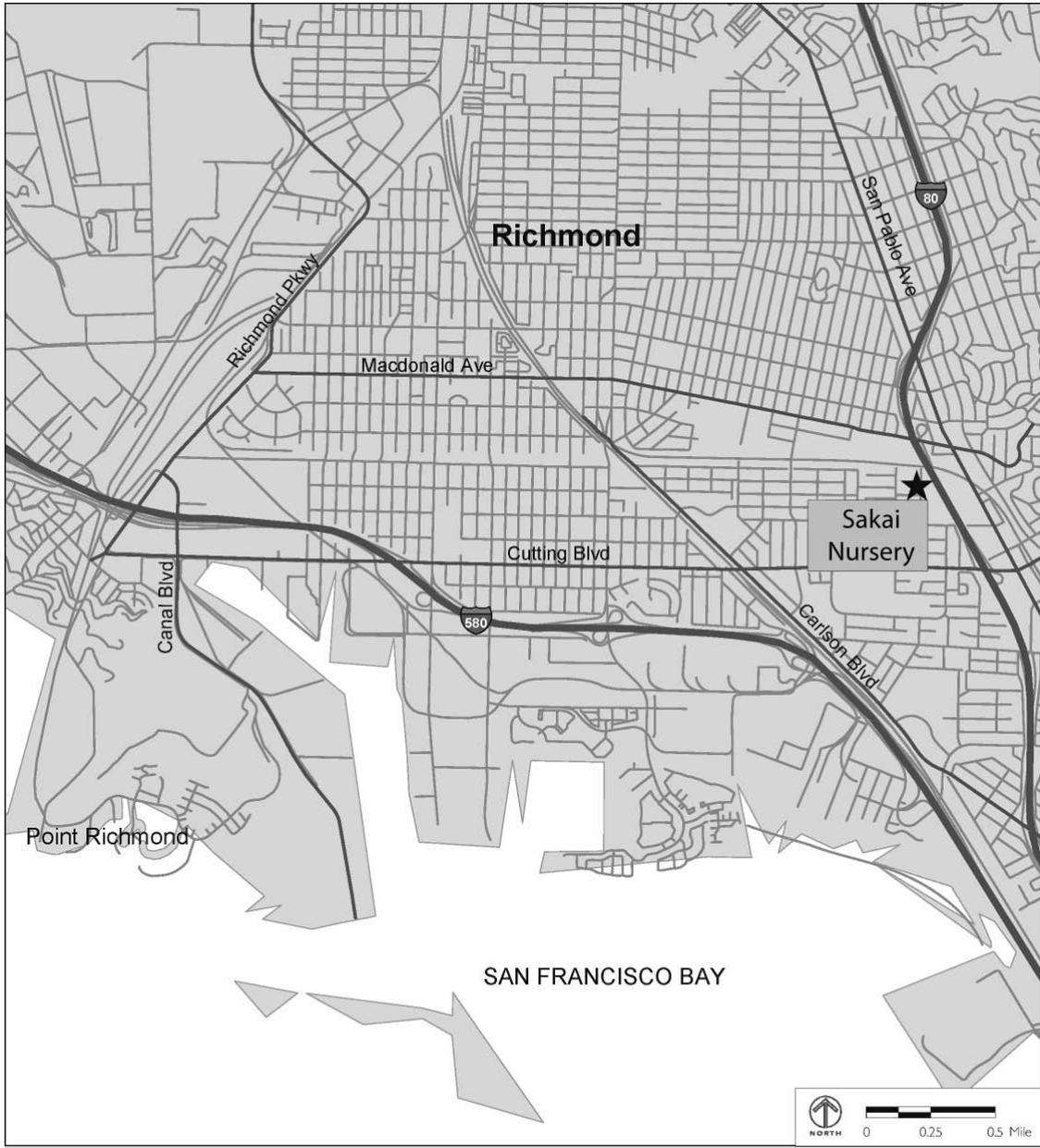
Sakai Property Plans/Blueprints Collection, Richmond Museum of History. The following plans (many dating from after the end of the National Register period of significance (1950) are listed in the collection: Alterations to residence, 4606 Florida, 1977 (14 sheets); Boiler blueprint Bartells Co., undated; Nursery hothouse plan, undated; House plans, Tetsuma Sakai, Hayward, 1950 (7 sheets); "Plot Plans," 1969 (2 large sheets, 12 small); Blueprints, double living units, Mr. S. Sakai, 1950 (2 sheets); Floor plan, elev., unknown bldg., 1969; Plans, lots 8, 9, 10, 1969; Greenhouse plans, 1988, 41 sheets; Blueprint, Boiler, 1946; Greenhouse plan, 1969; Home addition, 99 S. 47th St., ca. 1957; Floor plan, unknown structure, date unknown; Greenhouse plan, 1964; and House plans, Mr. & Mrs. S. Sakai, ca. 1953.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

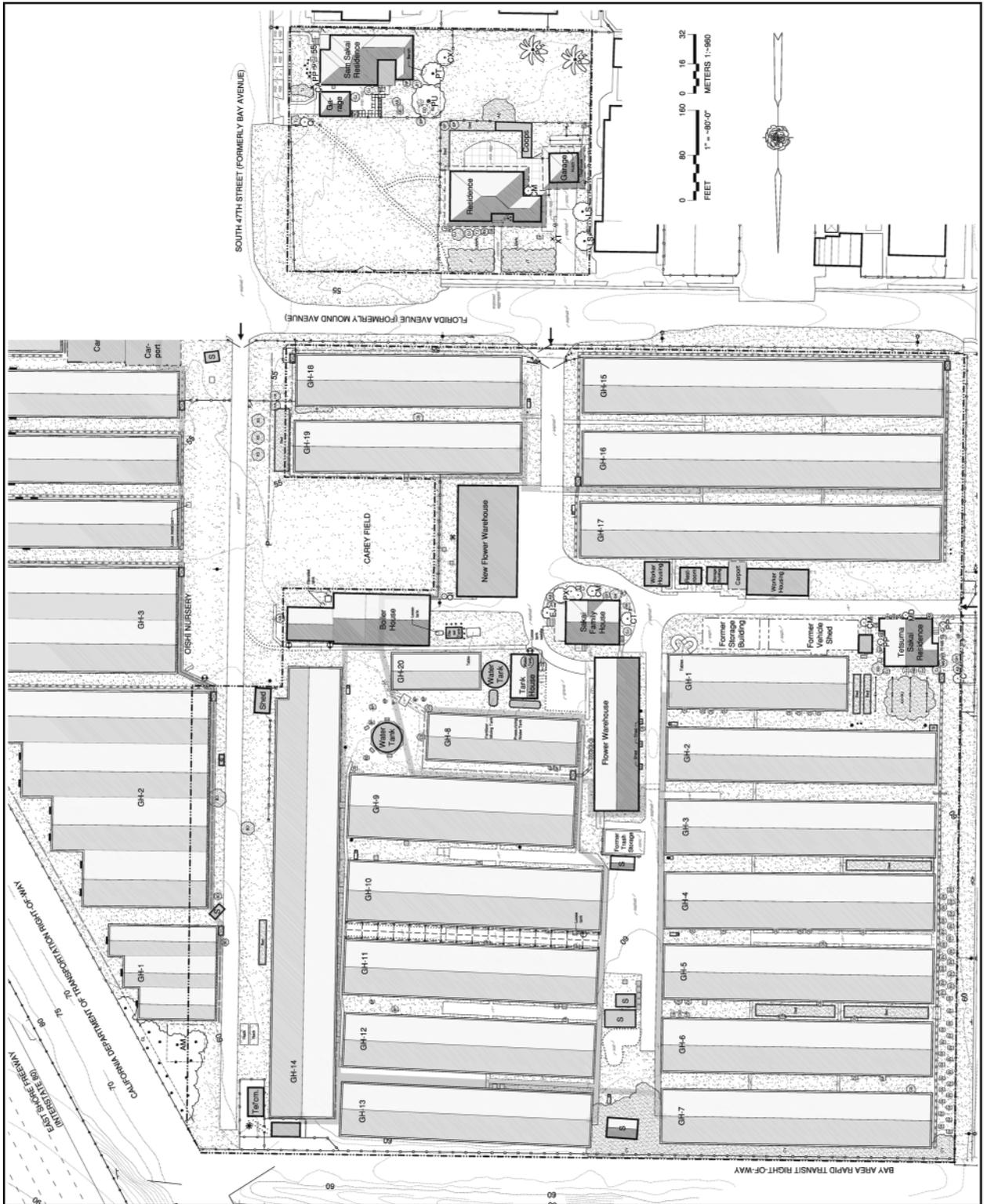
In 2006, the Sakai Nursery property was sold to the Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency which planned to develop the Miraflores Housing Development project, a mix of detached single-family houses and apartments, on the Sakai property and on the adjacent property of the former Oishi and Maida-Endo nurseries. The Miraflores project will result in the demolition of the greenhouses and the other buildings and structures on the Sakai Nursery which was determined to be a historic property by the California State Historic Preservation Officer in 2007. The Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS) documentation of the Sakai Nursery was undertaken to fulfill one of the stipulations in the Memorandum of Agreement (dated 9 January 2008) between the City of Richmond and the California State Historic Preservation Officer related to the adverse effects under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act to the Sakai Nursery that will result from the construction of the Miraflores project.

The HALS documentation was initiated by Linda Mandolini, Executive Director, Eden Housing Inc., for the City of Richmond, California. Project oversight was provided by Katie Lamont, Associate Director of Real Estate Development, Eden Housing, Inc. and Natalia Lawrence, Senior Development Project Manager, Richmond Community Redevelopment Agency. The drawings were prepared by Christine G. Pattillo and Cathy Garrett, landscape architects, and Cate Bainton and Justine Hirsch of PGA design. Brian Grogan, Photography + Preservation, prepared the large-format photographs. The report on the nursery's landscape was prepared by landscape historian Denise Bradley, and the

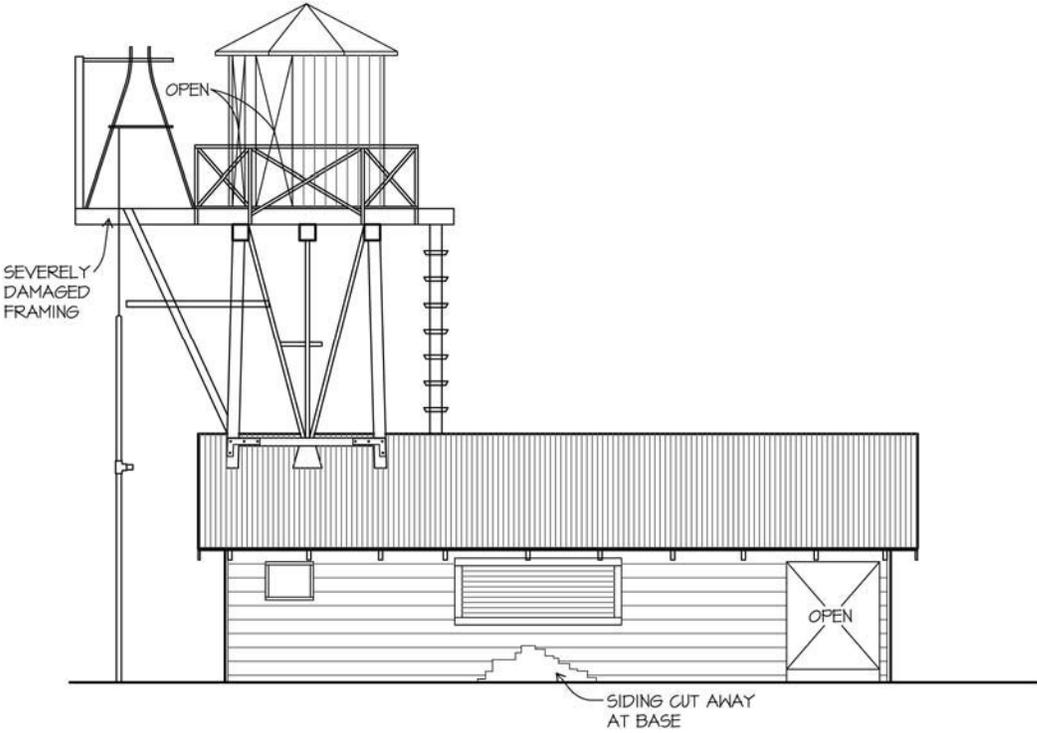
reports for selected historic buildings and structures were prepared by architectural historian Ward Hill. The historic contexts in these reports were based on historical research in a *Historic Architecture Evaluation* report prepared by Donna Graves (Historian), Ward Hill (Architectural Historian), and Woodruff Minor (Architectural Historian) in 2004. Sakai family photographs, collected by Donna Graves and transmitted to the archives of the Richmond Museum of History, the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Home Front National Historical Park, and the Richmond Public Library, were an additional source of information. Separate from the HALS documentation, architectural drawings of the Sakai family house, the tankhouse, and one representative greenhouse were prepared by Heidi Granke, Jason Wright, Lacy Bubnash, Kelly Wong, and Serpil Gezgin, architects and conservators with Architectural Resources Group. Additionally, as part of the mitigation measures for the Miraflores project, the Sakai family house, the tankhouse, and one greenhouse will be rehabilitated and retained on the project site.



Location Map (Source: Miraflores Housing Development DEIR 2009)

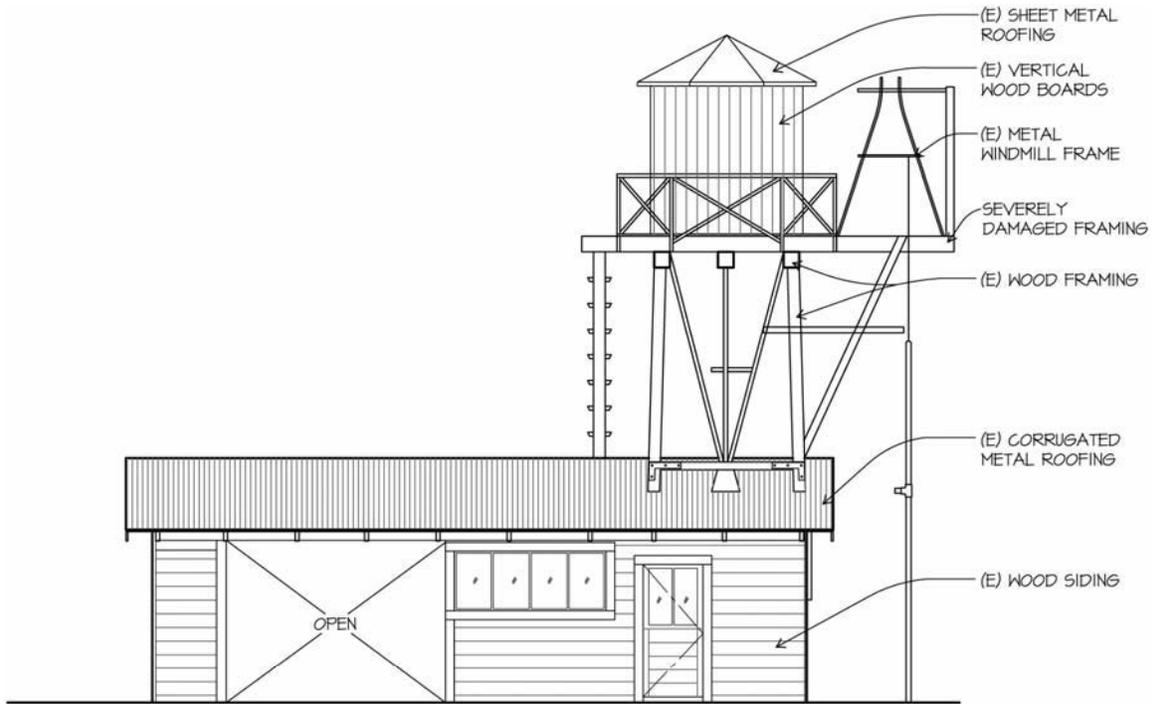


Sakai Nursery Site Plan (Source: PGAdesign 2010)



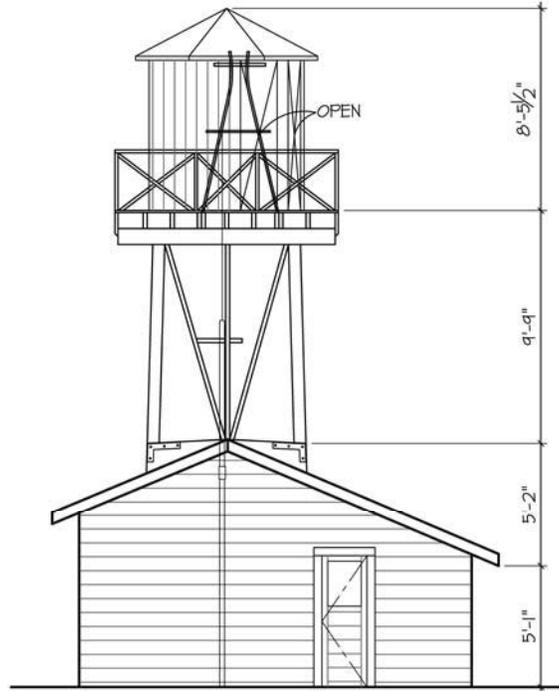
SAKAI WELL HOUSE
EAST ELEVATION

Sakai Nursery, Tank House
HALS No. CA-6-H (Page 41)



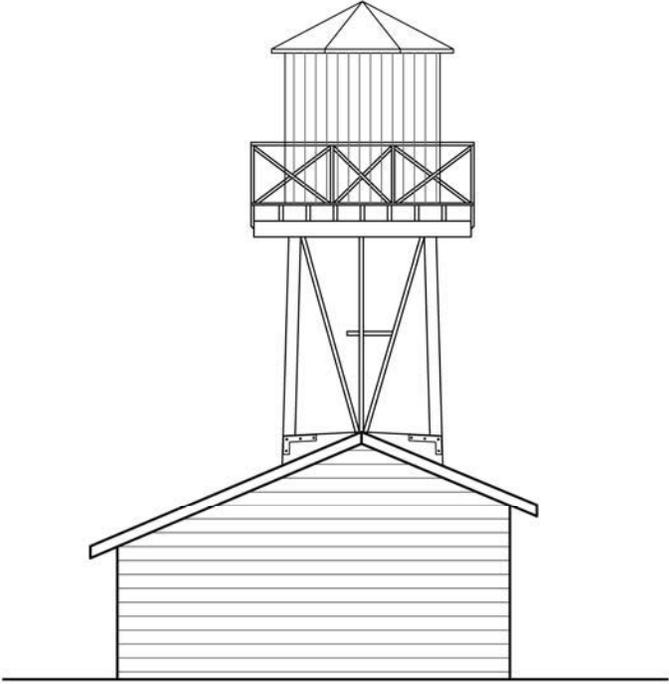
SAKAI WELL HOUSE
WEST ELEVATION

Sakai Nursery, Tank House, West Elevation
Drawn by Architectural Resources Group, May, 2010



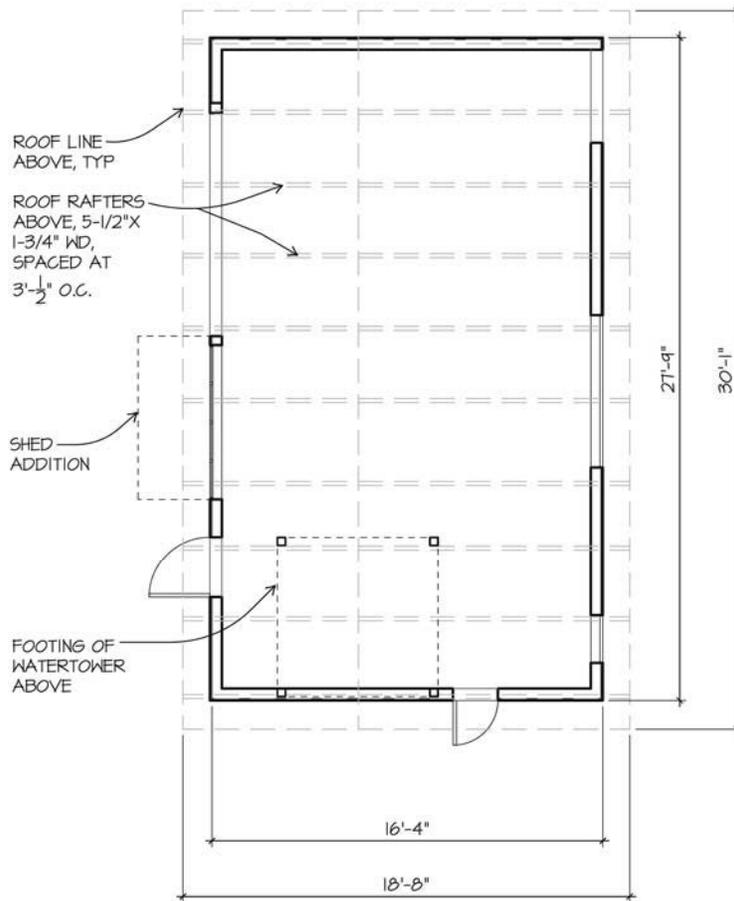
SAKAI WELL HOUSE
SOUTH ELEVATION

Sakai Nursery, Tank House, South Elevation
Drawn by Architectural Resources Group, May, 2010



SAKAI WELL HOUSE
NORTH ELEVATION

Sakai Nursery, Tank House, North Elevation
Drawn by Architectural Resources Group, May, 2010



SAKAI WELL HOUSE
PLAN



Sakai Nursery, Tank House, Floor Plan
Drawn by Architectural Resources Group, May, 2010