



Keno Museum 2006-08-59 (Mayo Historical Society)

Massa at his Sourdough Café, Keno City, 1964.

MASSA SAKATA

A community minded entrepreneur

By Hidden Histories Society Yukon

By more than one account, Masayuki “Massa” Sakata, who arrived in the North shortly after the Klondike Gold Rush, is remembered for his generosity with children. Velma Lyons Hull recalled the café owner chopping popsicles in half to share among the children in Keno.

“What a kind and wonderful man,” Lyons Hull commented on social media, in 2019.

Later in life, Massa received the Centennial Confederation Medal for his many positive contributions to Yukon communities. He was also welcomed into the Yukon Order of Pioneers, one of a very few members from a racialized background.

Massa was probably born in 1888, in Japan, to Wasaburo “Big Joe” Sakata and Yukuno Takata. Joe arrived in the Yukon in 1899 and worked as a cook on the stern-wheelers plying the Whitehorse to Dawson run. Yukuno arrived in 1905, followed by their son, Massa, two years later. The family established the Japanese Employment Agency to assist other Japanese newcomers find work and opened the Occidental Café in Dawson City.

Massa married Masa Takata in April 1914. The couple had a son, George. Then, in 1917, Massa’s parents, wife, and son left Dawson City for Japan. Massa stayed

behind. It’s possible the trip was meant to be short term; the *Weekly Star* reported that Massa was looking after the café during his father’s absence.

Joe returned to Dawson in 1919 and apparently tried convincing Massa to join the family in Japan, but Massa stayed in the Yukon. In the ‘20s, Massa worked as a cook on the steamer *Nisutlin* and at the hospital in Mayo. He was back in Dawson City in the 1930s working as a barber. He also worked as a cook in Elsa for the Treadwell Yukon Company until wartime shortages shut down operations, in 1941. By the late ‘40s, Massa had acquired the Rex Café in Dawson.

In 1950, Massa opened the Massa’s Sourdough Coffee Bar in Keno City, which he operated until his retirement, in 1965.

Massa was appointed to serve as the Yukon ambassador at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics. It was the first time in 46 years that he saw his son George.

Massa died in Whitehorse in 1974. Sakata Lake, west of Braeburn Lake, is named after him.

If you knew Massa Sakata or have stories about him, please contact the Hidden Histories Society Yukon at info@hhsy.org. **Y**

Hidden Histories Society Yukon researches the stories of Black and Asian people who have contributed to the development of the territory.