

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

THE PANAMA HOTEL

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Panama Hotel

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Panama Hotel: 605 South Main Street
Hashidate Yu: 302 6th Avenue South

Not for publication:

City/Town: Seattle

Vicinity:

State: WA

County: King

Code: 033

Zip Code: 98104

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local:

Public-State:

Public-Federal:

Object:

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District:

Site:

Structure:

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

1

Noncontributing

 buildings

 sites

 structures

 objects

0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

| | | | |
|-----------|------------------------|------|---------------------------|
| Historic: | Recreation and Culture | Sub: | Other: Japanese Bathhouse |
| | Domestic | Sub: | Hotel |
| | Commerce/Trade | Sub: | Other: Retail Stores |

| | | | |
|----------|----------------|------|----------------------|
| Current: | Domestic | Sub: | Hotel |
| | Commerce/Trade | Sub: | Other: Retail Stores |

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Early 20th Century American Movements, Commercial Style Building

Other (Japanese Style *Sento* (or Bathhouse))

MATERIALS:

| | |
|-------------|--|
| Foundation: | Concrete |
| Walls: | Masonry and Wood frame with red brick veneer |
| Roof: | Torchdown |
| Other: | Stucco |

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**Summary**

Located in Seattle's International District, the Panama Hotel is nationally significant for its association with the historical theme "Japanese immigration to the United States." Similar to other immigrant groups, the new arrivals from Japan reestablished and adapted Japanese practices in the new world. The Panama Hotel houses the Hashidate Yu, a Japanese-style bathhouse, in the hotel's basement. Bathing was a valued tradition in Japan; it was among the most significant traditional cultural practices brought to the United States by Japanese immigrants. At one time, there were hundreds of Japanese-style bathhouses in the western United States. Now there are only two; the other is at Walnut Grove, California. The Panama Hotel also is significant as a building type that is exceptionally valuable for the study of the earliest generation of Japanese immigrants in the United States. Built in 1910, the Panama Hotel was designed by Sabro Ozasa, one of a few Japanese American architects of the time and the first Japanese architect to practice in Seattle. The Panama Hotel is located in the heart of the traditional Nihonmachi, or Japantown, and has provided temporary lodging for nine decades. Because Japanese were not welcomed in the United States, they faced discrimination, segregation, and dispossession. Like Chinatowns and Koreatowns across the nation, Japantowns were enclaves that provide safety and familiar surroundings to newly-arrived immigrants.

The Panama Hotel: Physical Description

The Panama Hotel is one of the original buildings in the City of Seattle's International District and is a contributing resource in the National Register nomination for the Seattle Chinatown Historic District (also known as the International District).¹ The hotel's basement contains the Hashidate Yu bathhouse. The Panama Hotel is located at 605 S. Main Street, at the corner of 6th Avenue South and Main Street, in Seattle, Washington. It has changed very little since its construction in 1910; a lack of prosperity has kept the hotel's various owners from making any major renovations. Even the basement, which housed the bathhouse, has only seen a small amount of alteration. Consequently, the Hashidate Yu has retained a high degree of integrity despite the many years that have passed since its period of operation.

The Panama Hotel's position within the context of the once-thriving Japantown, as well as its physical similarity to neighboring structures, cements its key position as a contributing building in the district. The Seattle Chinatown Historic District nomination touches on the preponderance of single-room occupancy hotels (SROs) in the area:

Although over 40 hotels in the International district have been demolished since 1950, 30 historic hotels remain and constitute the most characteristic building type in the King Street district. Typically, these structures are three- to six-story brick buildings with residential units in the upper floors and retail businesses in the ground level storefronts...

Although most of these hotel buildings are three to four stories in height, some climb to five or six stories. In general, the buildings cover 100 percent of their lots, resulting in a strong, unbroken street wall throughout the commercial core... The relatively plain facades of the hotels serve admirably as backdrops for the many signs, balconies, and applied ornamentation which have historically characterized the district...

¹ The Panama Hotel, which contains the Hashidate Yu bathhouse, is included as a contributing building in the Seattle Chinatown National Register of Historic Places District. The interior features of the Hashidate Yu were not documented in the nomination form for the District.

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Structurally, these buildings overwhelmingly feature masonry and wood frame construction, with some masonry and heavy timber construction and, in later years, reinforced concrete and wood frame construction.²

The Panama Hotel's exterior is described in the National Register nomination for the Seattle Chinatown Historic District:

...constructed of masonry and wood frame on a concrete foundation, with street level storefronts...simple red brick veneer with some ornamental embellishments, including rusticated yellow brick corners and radiating brick window headers with projecting keystones. Cornice has been removed and replaced by a stucco band and storefronts have been altered. Despite these changes, the building helps define the once thriving commercial hub of the Japanese settlement.³

Indeed, both the exterior and interior of the Panama Hotel retain a high degree of integrity. The five-story Panama Hotel consists of the basement bathhouse, six ground level storefronts on Main Street, a mezzanine level, and three floors of guest rooms (94 single rooms). Historically, the mezzanine floor was used as office space and proprietors advertised with signs conspicuously placed on the street-facing windows. The offices have since been converted to residents' rooms.

The interior is reached by passing through the double doors of the main entrance on Main Street and ascending a flight of stairs flanked by the original brass railings to the mezzanine level. After passing through another set of double doors, one continues up another flight of stairs to the reception desk on the first floor. The reception area is comprised of a four-room square connected by a small corridor.

On the immediate left is the built-in wooden office where the hotel owner and guests exchange keys and money through a large window. Inside the office is a desk, above which is the original telephone switchboard, still in use. Just behind the reception office is the laundry room. Across the small hallway from the laundry room is the kitchen, currently used by the hotel owner, Jan Johnson, and hotel staff. The kitchen was remodeled in the 1980s but retains its original use. In front of the kitchen, directly across the small hall from the reception office, is a room currently used for storage. Johnson remembers that the Hori family, who owned the Panama Hotel from 1938 until she bought it in 1985, used this room as a dining room.

Outside of the four-room reception area are other guest amenities. A built-in phone booth is immediately left of the reception office. Left of the phone booth is a resident lounge. The remainder of this floor, as well as the two floors above and the mezzanine level below, are residents' rooms. It is unclear if there was a designated owner-in-residence room. Current owner Jan Johnson occupies a standard room in the hotel, and a peephole in the door is the only attribute that distinguishes it from the other rooms.

The wide central stairway is the main path between floors. There is an additional stairway in the southwest corner of the building directly above the bathhouse that is primarily used by hotel staff. Above each stairway is

² Lawrence Kreisman, Urban Conservation Specialist, edited by Leonard Garfield, Archeology and Historic Preservation Specialist, Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, "Seattle Chinatown Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1986), 2-3.

³ Ibid., 10.

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a skylight that Johnson installed in the 1990s. There are two fire escapes, one on the east side and one on the west side of the building. The interior stairways, hallways, and guest room walls, are sided with plaster.

The rooms are small and most are approximately ten feet long and twelve feet wide. Some bigger rooms exist on each floor at the center of the building. Standard rooms have one window each but the larger rooms and corner rooms each have two windows. Rooms are heated by the original radiators. About a quarter of the rooms are connected by internal doorways.

The hotel's interior retains much of its physical integrity: original doors, windows, woodwork, floors, railings, brass fittings, and switchboard. Even the brass fire alarms are original to the building. Also noteworthy is that the hotel retains its original use as a single-room occupancy hotel in the International District.

During the urban renewal period of the 1970s, the Panama Hotel went through a series of changes typical of buildings located in inner-city neighborhoods. City of Seattle permits from this period show a variety of changes mandated by the city in order to comply with new housing, fire and safety codes. Modifications in the 1970s and early 80s included installing additional bathrooms, stabilizing the building in case of an earthquake, installing sprinklers and standpipes, and replacing some interior materials with fire-resistant surfaces.

The basement is accessible by two exterior entrances and an interior stairway between the basement and one of the Main Street storefronts. The Hashidate Yu has a separate entrance and address from the hotel, located at 302 6th Avenue South. The basement of the Panama Hotel has two sections, one on Main Street and one on 6th Avenue South. It is the 6th Avenue South section of the basement that houses the Hashidate Yu bathhouse. The other side of the basement accessible by Main Street is interesting for another reason: it contains artifacts left by Japanese Americans when they were forced to evacuate Seattle's Nihonmachi on the eve of World War II internment. Because they were only allowed to carry with them a minimum of personal possessions, many left behind trunks and suitcases filled with personal treasures and everyday items at the Panama Hotel which was considered to be a safe place to store their possessions. While the World War II artifacts are significant in their own right, there were many other basements, sheds, and buildings that held Japanese possessions for the duration of World War II internment. What is remarkable about the basement of the Panama is that a dozen or more of these packed trunks and suitcases remain.

Hashidate Yu Bathhouse: Physical Description

The Hashidate Yu bathhouse retains a high degree of integrity. It consists of men's and women's soaking tubs along with separate changing areas for men and women. The men's side of the bathhouse retains the original advertising signs installed over the clothes lockers. The bathhouse in the basement of the Panama Hotel is the only bathing facility to remain intact in the International District and one of only two surviving *sentos* or public bathhouses in the United States.

Entrance

The street-level entrance to the basement is situated immediately north of the NP Hotel on Main Street. To enter the bathhouse at 302 6th Avenue South, one must pass through a chain link gate and descend a stairway before approaching the large double-doors, which mark the entrance to the bathhouse. The brass railings along the walls leading to the doors are missing and have not been replaced. Entering the door to the bathhouse, one passes a still-existing hanging sign labeled "Laundry" in English and in Japanese characters.

Upon passing through the double doors, the visitor paid admission to the proprietor at a counter on the far left. Cost of admission varied depending on the year; users recall paying anything from 15 cents before WWII to a

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dollar just before its closing. Beyond the counter was strictly the bathhouse operators' domain and led to the laundry facilities.

Men's Bath

The men's bath was superior to the women's facility with significantly more space, improved features, and access to a carpeted sitting area and refreshment stand. As one passes through the doorway to the men's bath, there is a sign requesting the bathhouse user to remove his shoes, accompanied by shelves on which to put them. Directly ahead is a seven inch high raised wooden platform, covered with the original linoleum in a fern pattern. Along the western walls of this room are fifteen wooden lockers (numbered right to left) with butterfly hinges and internal hooks. Shelves and coat hooks on the south wall of the men's room offered a place for bulkier items. Above the lockers were advertisements for a variety of products in both Japanese and English, most of which remain. They advertise products or services for the Cascade Company Soda, West Coast Printing Company, Hikida Furniture and Appliance Company, Yesler Hardware and Plumbing Supplies, Tenkatsu (restaurant) (this is the only sign which is dated: 1946), and Dr. Duncan Tsuneishi (Optometrist). All of the signs are bilingual with the exception of the Cascade Company Soda sign, which is only in English. These signboards appear to be original to the baths; they are an integral fixture in the moulding and purposely have been designed to conceal pipes. The interior walls are sided with wood paneling and the floor is covered with the fern-patterned linoleum.

Directly across from the wall of lockers is the soaking tub which is the dominant feature in the room. Although this is actually one large room, a number of elements give the illusion of a separate space for bathing. First, in order to enter the part of the room with the soaking tub, one must step off the seven inch platform onto a floor area with small (about a two-inch diameter) hexagonal tiles, white with symmetrical flower patterns. The "flowers" themselves are six dark sections, forming a sort of circle, with a white section in the center. The tiled borders against the walls and bath basin are also white with a black pattern in a standard Greek Fret motif commonly used in lobbies and other public open spaces. At this point, one must pass a square wooden post that supports a sink for washing, small shelves and hooks for personal items, a mirror on the upper half of the post (on all four sides) and scrolled, gooseneck lighting fixtures crowned by glass shades. The sink, as well as all sinks and showers, drains directly onto the floor, which gently slopes toward the northeast corner of the room where there is one large drain. Just beyond the post is one step (down) to the tub area.

The soaking tub, or *furo*, is rectangular, 133 inches long and 87 inches wide between outside edges. It is situated against the southern and eastern walls of the room. A plan of the room indicates that the basin is directly adjacent to the women's tub, but a partition wall separates them. The basin is two-tiered, the bottom acting as a step up and bench and the top forming the edge of the bath. The benches at the tub's edge allowed the patrons to wash there, outside the tub, before entering to soak. The tub appears to be constructed of concrete with a marble veneer on the basin's exterior. The interior of the baths is cement but upon close examination there is a thin layer of concrete veneer that was applied on top of a larger concrete slab. The vertical concrete and marble walls are in excellent condition with the exception of a few places abutting the floor. The horizontal panels, however, have suffered from pitting. This is expected considering that water would have collected on the horizontal panels and minerals would have sped the corrosion process.

Two water faucets, hot and cold, are located on the east wall of the room along the top panel of the tub. It is unknown whether the faucets were original to the baths or if they are a later addition. Beneath the faucets, along the top ledge of the tub, is a panel of painted metal below which is the concrete tub. These metal panels probably attempt to control moisture from the constant steam generated by the bath. The tub itself is taller on this side; 38 inches from the floor to the top ledge as opposed to 34 inches on the western side. From the floor to the interior concrete bench is 15 inches. The height of the bath basin decreases from the northernmost to the

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southernmost point; at the southwestern corner of the women's bath (which is attached to the men's bath), the height is only 29 inches.

To keep the bath water hot, additional pipes run along the back wall of the tub near the bottom covered by wooden blocks with holes drilled in them. The blocks protected the bathers from the hot pipes while the holes allowed the heat to pass from the pipes to the water. There are some signs of deterioration to the wooden blocks.

All the interior walls are lined with a tongue-in-groove wooden paneling painted white. However, on some walls, the top half are coated in thin metal sheets also painted white.

About halfway between the east and west walls of the room running north-south along through both the men's and women's rooms, is a four-paneled wood divider suspended from the ceiling. While its precise function is not known, it is clear that its presence has prevented steam from the baths from damaging the ceiling beyond the divider. The steam, as it rises, is therefore contained near the one source of ventilation, a metal hood located above the shower.

Women's Baths

Upon entering the women's side of the Hashidate Yu, the most obvious characteristic is its small size. The women's *furo* is roughly a third of the size of the men's baths (84 inches long compared to the men's tub at 133 inches long), but is of the same width. After passing low racks and shelves for shoes and stepping up onto another 7-inch wooden platform, one immediately encounters a bloc of 12 cubby spaces for personal belongings, below which is a bench as well as a line of coat hooks on the left wall. The area above the coat hooks once featured advertisements similar to those above the men's lockers though they no longer remain.

To enter the bathing room itself, one walks through what resembles an opening of a wooden gate and steps down onto the white flower-pattern tile with a zig-zag border, identical to that of the men's room. Also, wood panel dividers separate the men's and women's sections. The men's and women's tubs are separated by a poured concrete base topped by these panel dividers. The panels were constructed of the same tongue-and-groove painted wood as is seen on most of the other interior walls.

In the women's tub, the wooden panels that protect the interior pipes are fully intact. The women's tub had its own hot and cold water faucets thereby controlling the heat independently of the men's bath. The bath basin itself is identical to that in the men's section, only smaller.

Work Space

Beyond the visible customer service spaces was the worker's domain, which would allow the bathhouse operators to support the workings of the establishment. The work space is a narrow corridor beyond the west and north edges of the bathhouse. Throughout the corridor are small mirrors, shelves and exposed light bulbs, activated by pulling a hanging chain that is connected to a heavy metal button. Two sliding windows where employees passed refreshments and towels to male patrons, are built into the walls but from the service corridor they are quite high (from within the bathhouse, they are easily reached because the carpeted area was on a wooden platform).

All of these features survive with a high degree of integrity. The only missing elements are: the brass handrails leading from the street to the bathhouse's entrance, the front counter through which customers paid the proprietors, the advertisements over the women's cubbies, the carpet from the men's sitting area and artifacts associated with bathing (such as stools, brushes and sponges). While these items contributed to the bathhouse's

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décor, their absence does not represent a major loss; overall, the bathhouse is fully intact and maintains a high degree of integrity.

Summary:

The Panama Hotel has survived intact since its construction in 1910. Systematic research on Japanese American historic places by Gail Dubrow, author of *Sento at Sixth and Main*, reveals that only one other Japanese bathhouse has survived of the hundreds that once existed in Japanese American communities. Located in Walnut Grove, California, the Miyazaki bathhouse possesses less physical integrity than the Hashidate-Yu. According to the *Sacramento Bee* (March 24, 2000), the Walnut Grove building and bathhouse are in a state of disrepair: “the roof is missing over the baths end of the building, and trees grow beside the tiled bathing fixtures... Whole sections of floor are missing.” Hashidate-Yu is the best surviving example of a *sento* on American soil possessing all of the archetypal features of a Japanese public bathhouse.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: __ Locally: __Applicable National
Register Criteria:A X B __ C X DCriteria Considerations
(Exceptions):

A __ B __ C __ D __ E __ F __ G

NHL Criteria:

1 and 4

NHL Criteria Exceptions:

N/A

NHL Theme(s):

I. Peopling Places
 3. Migration from Outside and Within
 4. Community and Neighborhood
III. Expressing Cultural Values
 6. Popular and Traditional Culture

Areas of Significance:

Ethnic Heritage: Asian

Period(s) of Significance:

1910-1942

Significant Dates:

1910 and 1942

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Sabro Ozasa

Historic Contexts:

XXX. American Ways of Life
 E. Ethnic Communities

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**Summary Statement of National Significance**

The Panama Hotel is nationally significant for its association with the immigration of Japanese to the United States and is exceptionally valuable for its representation of a building type significantly associated with Japanese Americans. It is located at the heart of Seattle's International District, which has long been the epicenter of Japanese American culture in Seattle and was one of the major Nihonmachis, or Japantowns, in the United States. Major Nihonmachis in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle, as well as smaller Japanese settlements in agricultural valleys and rural towns, contained a multitude of commercial, social, cultural and religious institutions that served the Nikkei community from the earliest settlement to World War II. The Nihonmachis provided *Issei* (first generation Japanese Americans) and *Nisei* (second generation) much needed services.

Seattle's Nihonmachi was an important community in itself as well as a regional draw for Japanese Americans in the northwest, many of whom lived in temporary logging, mining or railroad camps, as well as those involved in cultivating Washington's fertile valleys. Nihonmachis in the western United States allowed Japanese immigrants to share familiar cultural traditions and adapt to new settings. This is particularly evident in the community institutions of the Nihonmachis, many of which could have been found in any such community. Religious institutions, Japanese language schools, laundry facilities, barbershops, and bathhouses were all places for gathering, sharing of resources, networking, and affirmation of cultural traditions in a new land.

The Panama Hotel was designed by Saburo Ozasa, the first Japanese architect to practice in Seattle and one of the earliest Japanese architects to practice in the United States. In its basement is an intact *sentō* or public bathhouse. Public bathhouses were found in virtually every American Nihonmachi and represented the adaptation of a centuries-old Japanese tradition. Bathing was among the most significant traditional cultural practices brought to the United States by Japanese immigrants. The Japanese tradition of bathing is at least 1,200 years old and has taken many forms. Bathing met physical and social needs; many houses were developed without private bathing facilities so public bathhouses, mostly in urban areas, became common. The *furos*, or tubs, that Japanese immigrants constructed in American Nihonmachis are among the few surviving elements of the built environment that reflect a distinctively Japanese American tangible heritage.

The Hashidate Yu is one of only two historic *sentos* or public bathhouses known to have survived in the U.S. of the hundreds that were built in the first half of the twentieth century. It is an outstanding representative example of an urban bathhouse and it has survived with a high level of integrity. The *sentō*, or bathhouse, is central to the identity of the Japanese American community from the earliest settlement to World War II and thus draws its significance from this association. Of the many institutions that Japanese Americans carried from the old world to the new, the *sentō* is one of the most traditional both in terms of its rituals and architectural form. The surviving *sentō* at Sixth and South Main in Seattle is an exceptionally rare example of the community institutions that were founded by first generation immigrants to America.

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THE TRADITION OF BATHING**Traditions and Typology: From Japan to the United States**

Bathhouses have a long history in Japan before their appearance in the United States. Bathing and rituals of purification are a significant and intimate part of Japanese culture and religion.

Buddhist Temples

Bathhouses have existed in Japan since the eighth century, when they were a central feature of Buddhist temples. The first public bathhouses were connected with temples and monasteries. One of the first bathhouses in Japan was located in the Second Month Hall of the Todai-Ji Temple; the Temple was built on a natural spring and it served as a place for purification rites of the Buddha and as a bathhouse for the monks. Buddhist temples provided baths as a resource for the general public who did not have private facilities.⁴ Although its religious connotations eventually faded, the act of bathing persisted in Japan. Bathhouses became social gathering places for urban dwellers.

Public Bathhouses

The first public bathhouse, or *senjo*, was established in Osaka in 1590 and by the mid-1800s there were 550 bathhouses in Tokyo alone. The development of indoor plumbing in private dwellings has significantly reduced attendance to public bathhouses in the past 40 years from 20,000 to 10,000. At their peak in the mid-1960s, there were 23,000 public baths in Japan; six million people a day visited the baths in Tokyo alone.⁵ In Japan, bathhouses are still a practical alternative: many Japanese houses are small and plumbing was generally a late addition to households. Public bathhouses have played an important role as community gathering places where neighbors could meet regularly and share news.

Hot Springs

Public baths were not exclusively an urban tradition they also were a popular resort destination in conjunction with Japan's numerous hot springs. Known for their perceived healing properties, hot springs were very common in Japan largely because of the island's mountainous landscape and dynamic volcanic activity. Depending on the mineral content of the hot spring, a variety of illnesses were supposedly cured by an extended soak. For example, a hot spring rich in sulfur was thought to be effective for skin diseases, rheumatism and diabetes; springs rich in carbon dioxide were known to alleviate high blood pressure and heart disease; an acidic spring reportedly could cure venereal disease, rheumatism and skin diseases. Whether or not hot springs actually cured these illnesses, they were and continue to allure Japanese travelers.⁶

Hot springs take different forms. Most occur in natural settings but some exist in urban areas; twenty-six natural hot springs are found throughout Tokyo, for example. Baths and bathhouses are generally built around thermal springs similar in form to their public urban counterparts, and proprietors charge a relatively high fee for their use. In some cases, entire resort towns were built around the hot springs and became a regional draw for tourists; these resorts generally included the baths and bathhouses, restaurants, shops and hotels or cabins. Many of these resorts featured both indoor and outdoor baths, the latter being especially attractive to patrons seeking a healthful and restorative experience.

⁴ Peter Grilli and Dana Levy, *Pleasures of the Japanese Bath* (NY: Weatherhill, 1992), 57.

⁵ Kevin Sullivan and Mary Jordan, "Traditional Japanese Bathhouses Turn Trendy to Survive," *Seattle Times*, February 18, 1996.

⁶ Grilli and Levi, *Pleasures of the Japanese Bath*, 128-136.

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The tradition of bathing in Nihonmachis in the United States was borrowed directly from Japanese practices, although some practices were adapted in the American context. The *furos*, or soaking tubs, constructed by Japanese immigrants in western states were variants of ones in Japan.

FROM JAPAN TO THE U.S.: BATHHOUSES ALONG THE PACIFIC COAST

As the migration began from Japan to the United States, Japanese immigrants tended to settle in the westernmost towns, often the sites of debarkation. Japanese immigration began during the Meiji period in Japan accelerating in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Agricultural depression and poor economic conditions brought a class of rural Japanese to the United States in search of better economic conditions. The Meiji Restoration, which led to the end of the Samurai period, brought immigrants to America in search of opportunity. The United States was in need of laborers to help build railroads and fuel the growth of the mining and timber industries. The demand for labor increased after 1882 when Chinese workers who had immigrated to help build railroads and mines in the West, were expelled from the United States.

According to Gail Dubrow, Associate Professor of Architecture, Urban Design, and Planning at the University of Washington, some traditional cultural practices were regarded as essential even in the lumber camps where Japanese immigrants labored temporarily.⁷

Their desire for familiar food fueled the rise of import/export companies such as Furuya, which ultimately rose to be powerful centers of influence in urban Nihonmachis. A 1915 Furuya Company catalogue and surface artifacts on the site of a western Washington lumber camp suggest that a wide array of Japanese import goods comforted what one man described as “a smelly group of young bachelors some ten miles deep in the mountains with no amusement whatsoever except the sound of the wind echoing among the hills and the whine of the milling machines.”⁸

Similarly, Japanese-operated barbershops, laundries, and bathhouses, provided Japanese laborers with familiar services while in unfamiliar territory. A center of settlement and conglomeration of services, Nihonmachis grew in response to the needs of Japanese laborers who required work clothes, documents, supplies, temporary housing, and places of entertainment. Before the Nihonmachis, however, Japanese Americans most often found themselves in logging and railroad camps or farming communities and took every opportunity to partake in traditional cultural activities such as bathing.

Information on bathhouses in the United States was derived from Japanese American directories from the 1930s, which provided the broadest level of data. Also consulted was Eugene Itagawa, an expert on Japanese American resources in the California State Historic Preservation Office. Finally, researchers inquired about the possibility of extant bathhouses among Japanese American historical societies and organizations regarding private bathhouses and surviving sheds on rural properties.

⁷ Gail Lee Dubrow, “Deru Kugi Wa Utareru, or The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hit: The Architecture of Japanese American Identity, 1885-1942. The Rural Environment.” *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 19, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 319-333.

⁸ Kazuo Ito, *Issei: A History of Japanese Immigrants in North America*, trans. Shinichiro Nakamura and Jean S. Gerard (Seattle: Japanese Community Service, 1973), 402.

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Lumber Camps and Farming Communities

Bathhouses were rare in the earliest work environments for Japanese immigrants at railroad and logging camps. However, there are some indications that Japanese immigrants built and used *furos*, or soaking tubs, even in these remote settings. Dubrow has found that:

The Japanese section of Barneston, a western Washington mill town established by the Kent Lumber Company, included a substantial building (approximately 17' x 22') with signage marking it as "The Baths" that operated in the Japanese style. A 1911 photograph taken by the Seattle Water Department documents the facility and former workers remember bathing there communally.⁹

Japanese workers at some logging and lumber camps in the Pacific Northwest built *furos* that ranged in size from small tubs to communal facilities.¹⁰ Shigeru Hidaka, who worked in Oregon and Washington, recalled that:

Four to six men shared one room, and in the middle there was a wood stove. In winter we put our wet rain clothes beside the stove to dry. We sliced cypress and red pine, piling up the cross-sections very high, and used them for firewood. The bath was a box-shaped Japanese one.¹¹

John Rademaker argued in a 1939 dissertation that the relative lack of bathhouses in sawmills and lumber camps contributed to the *Issei's* decision to move out of the woods and into family farming:¹²

In one further particular the Japanese culture contributed to the desirability of farm life as contrasted with railroad and sawmill employment. Even the poorest Japanese farm could boast its own bathhouse, modeled in many cases directly upon those which stood on the farmer's ancestral home in Japan. In railroad work this was frequently an impossibility, and the same was true of the usual logging camp.¹³

Attached sheds and seemingly ordinary out-buildings regarded as important construction priorities on Japanese American farms, contained *furos* that carried connotations of civility, luxury, and family privacy. Their ubiquitous presence on Japanese immigrant farmsteads indicates Japanese Americans' preference for these facilities wherever a longer-term settlement was feasible. Indeed, bathhouses were evident in the small Nihonmachi of farming communities, suggesting that they became an integral fixture of the community once it was settled enough to warrant building permanent facilities. One such example is Walnut Grove in Sacramento County, California, which, along with the Hashidate Yu, is one of the two surviving public bathhouses in the United States.

As Japanese Americans began to settle in urban areas, bathhouses not only followed but flourished as a result of a more permanent pattern of settlement and a growing community. Vestiges of family *furos* probably remain on many farmsteads on the west coast that were occupied by Japanese Americans during the pre-WWII period.

⁹ The Rev. Joseph Sakakibara, quoted in Ed Suguro, "Old Sawmill Town Remembered." *Northwest Nikkei* (May 1994), 7 and 15.

¹⁰ Dubrow, "The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hit."

¹¹ Ito, *Issei*, 408-409.

¹² Dubrow, "The Nail That Sticks Up Gets Hit."

¹³ John Rademaker, *The Ecological Position of the Japanese Farms in the State of Washington* (PhD diss., Dept. of Sociology, University of Washington, 1939), 129.

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One notable example is the Hori Furoba, a King County landmark in Auburn, Washington, where the shed still survives but the tub no longer remains.

Currently, only one public bathhouse in a small agricultural setting still exists but its condition is marginal at best. The community of Walnut Grove, California, near Sacramento, was an active Nihonmachi that provided housing and services to Japanese farm workers until the internment period. The bathhouse and attached apartment house and storefront were integral fixtures of the Walnut Grove Nihonmachi since around 1916 and the bathhouse itself, originally called the Miyazaki, featured two *furos*, showers, and elaborate decorations.¹⁴

Walnut Grove had been a thriving Nihonmachi in its heyday and attracted patrons from as far as San Francisco. The community developed after a fire in 1916 destroyed the preexisting neighborhood. The Miyazaki was housed in a building not unlike the Panama Hotel, with apartments and storefronts to support other businesses. The Miyazaki was located in the back of the building, and was one of two public bathhouses in the Nihonmachi.¹⁵ The building and bathhouse currently are in a state of disrepair. If restored, Walnut Grove will provide a significant glimpse of Japanese rural history and tradition of bathing, complementing the Hashidate Yu's example of a *senjo* in a major urban Nihonmachi.

Another vestige of the Japanese tradition of bathing in the United States is the White Point Health Resort in southern California. Developed by Ramon Sepulveda and Tamiji Tagami in 1915 around a natural hot spring, White Point featured spring-fed sulfur pools, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, sulfur pools, cabins and a hotel. The facilities were popular with Japanese Americans who were denied access to other hot springs in the area and became an important fixture in *Issei* recreation. Unfortunately, the Long Beach earthquake of 1933 destroyed the hot springs and its facilities and the resort was never rebuilt.¹⁶

Finally, the Gilroy Yamato Hot Spring in California is the most extensive Japanese resort to include bathing facilities. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Gilroy Hot Springs is the best surviving example of the *rotenburo* and complements the Walnut Grove and Seattle examples.

Urban Communities

Nihonmachis were the center of Japanese immigrant life in America and were the community context in which most Nisei or American born children of Japanese immigrants were raised before WWII. Large Nihonmachis included places of first debarkation. Nihonmachis included Little Tokyo in Los Angeles; Isleton, Sacramento, California; Walnut Grove, Sacramento County, California; and the Japanese district in Portland. Additional Nihonmachis were found throughout small towns and rural areas throughout the Hawaiian Islands, California, Washington and Oregon, and to a lesser extent in Idaho, Utah, Colorado and Wyoming.

As Japanese immigrants began to settle permanently and the first wave of male immigrants were joined by wives and began to establish families in the United States, Nihonmachis began to provide a wider range of community services. The City Guides published by the Japanese language newspaper *Rafu Shimpo* in the late 1930s, provide a glimpse of services and goods typical of Nihonmachis. Community building services and organizations such as regional associations, *gakuens* or Japanese language schools, community theaters and social halls, and religious institutions were established in Nihonmachis large and small. Commercial stores,

¹⁴ Walt Wiley, "Japanese Bathhouse Awash in History," *Sacramento Bee*, March 24, 2000.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Five Views: An Ethnic Historic Site Survey for California* (Sacramento: California Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, 1988), 192-193.

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bathhouses, hotels for visitors and transit passengers (those on their way to camps and smaller communities) are vital elements of larger Nihonmachis.

Although Nihonmachis typically were urban settlements, smaller versions existed in small towns that served agricultural settlements. Likewise, a trip to an urban Nihonmachi was a major event for Japanese who had settled in more remote areas. Many Japanese Americans who did not have access to public bathhouses in their own communities frequently would travel to larger Nihonmachis to bathe, socialize, and stock up on provisions. Coming from sawmill towns and farms, *Issei* who patronized the Nihonmachi's Japanese hotels, restaurants, pool halls, and bathhouses "could forget our being in a foreign land."¹⁷ Before the war, there was a multiplicity of choices for bathhouses in Nihonmachis along the Pacific coast, particularly in Seattle. However, other Nihonmachis in the western United States featured numerous bathhouses especially in the pre-war era.

Many elders remember the variety of bathhouses that existed in western cities before WWII. Tuneki Kagawa, a member of the *Issei* community, operated a bathhouse in Portland called Ebisuyu. He describes running the operation and his efforts to preserve the style of a typical bathhouse in Japan:

...I myself started a Japanese bath, Ebisuyu [in Portland]...there was another bathhouse [nearby and] they had new equipment, but mine was old and the tub was wooden. But old *Issei* seemed to prefer this wooden tub to the new one, so I had regular customers...The bathhouse was divided into two rooms, one for men and one for women, just as in Japan.¹⁸

Community directories published by the Nikkei press provide a clear picture of the popularity of Japanese bathhouses in the pre-WWII period, and the other related businesses with which they were associated. A directory produced by the Southern California newspaper *Rafu Shimpō*, reveals a multitude of bathhouses throughout the state but especially concentrated in the Nihonmachis of larger cities, such as Los Angeles and San Francisco. In 1939 alone, several bathhouses existed in Los Angeles and San Francisco and at least ten more were scattered among the smaller towns of Palos Verdes Estate, San Pedro, El Centro, Oxnard, Santa Barbara, Fresno and Salinas. According to *Rafu Shimpō*, Los Angeles' Nikkei community had a choice of at least nine bathhouses in 1939, the majority of which were clustered in the heart of Little Tokyo from 300-700 East 1st Street. They included the American Bath, Hiro Bath, Nihon-boro, and Tokiwa-Yu.¹⁹ No less than five barbers and three pool halls were located in that same stretch, and many more were sited on surrounding streets.

San Francisco had at least five bathhouses in operation in the pre-war period. Three were located between 1600 and 1900 Post Street: Kikunoyu Bath, Minatoyu Bath, and Post Bath, surrounded by more than a dozen barber shops, while Pacific Bath and Tokyo Bath were located on Stockton and Geary Streets respectively. The 1939 Directory suggests that some bathhouses, barbershops, and pool halls were co-located, such as the Pacific Bath and Barbershop or the Futatsuki Barber Shop and Pool Hall. Similarly, the Kikunoyu Bath, Suzuki Barbershop, and Kikuno Pool Hall all operated out of 1615 Post Street, although the different names and telephone numbers suggest independent management.²⁰ Others enjoyed immediate adjacencies, such as the Nakahara Barber Shop and Hideshima Pool Hall.

Even smaller Japanese American communities, such as Salt Lake City's cluster of Japanese businesses in the vicinity of West-South Temple near West 1st and 2nd South, had multiple listings in the 1939 Directory,

¹⁷ Ito, *Issei*, 834-35.

¹⁸ Ito, *Issei*, 861

¹⁹ *Rafu Shimpō* (Los Angeles, *Rafu Shimpō*, 1939), 95.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 465, 471.

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including Igata Barber and Baths²¹, Iyetsuka Barber and Baths, and Matsuda Pool Hall. There is no evidence that customer preference for one bathhouse over another were divided by religion, prefectural origin, or other obvious lines, though the activities of soaking in a *furo*, getting a haircut, or playing pool were clearly social activities that reinforced relationship networks in the Nikkei community.

Vancouver, British Columbia, also had a prominent Nihonmachi which allowed new immigrants a place of transition between the old world and new. The Nihonmachi evolved and thrived into an active Japanese American community according to Tsutae Sato:

There were...three Japanese daily newspapers – *Tairiku Nippo*, *Canada Shimbun* and *Minshu*, and whites called Powell Street ‘Little Tokyo.’ Gradually the Japanese population increased and there came to be three Buddhist Churches. Also, the Japanese Language School developed to the point where there were as many as a thousand students. The Japanese could dine on miso soup with tofu, eat rice with Japanese tea poured over it, accompanied by pickled radish, and then console their homesick hearts while dipping leisurely in the Japanese public bath. Though they had connections with whites concerning their businesses, Japanese could live among themselves in their daily life...²²

Clearly, Nihonmachis in the western United States allowed Japanese immigrants to share familiar cultural traditions and adapt to new settings. This is particularly evident in the community institutions of the Nihonmachis, many of which could have been found in any such community. Religious institutions, Japanese language schools, laundry facilities, barbershops, and bathhouses were all places for gathering, sharing of resources, networking, and affirmation of cultural traditions in a new land.

Another reason Japanese immigrants established their own services, was that many anti-Japanese exclusionists reflected their prejudice by denying services to non-white people. Indeed, barber shops and restaurants under white management were well known for refusing to serve Japanese immigrants, and movie theaters often refused to sell them tickets for the best seats, requiring Japanese immigrants as well as their American-born children to be seated in the balcony with African Americans. Given their own pride and prejudices, the second-class seating was infuriating. Some swimming facilities also excluded the Japanese among other people of color. The most widespread form of discrimination limited the sale and rental of real property to white people through restrictive covenants and informal agreements. For these reasons, the hotels, barber shops, restaurants, bathhouses, and Nihonmachi theaters provided welcoming gathering places that insulated customers from the harsh winds of racial discrimination and the growing pressure for outright exclusion.

The 1950s saw a decline in the existence and use of public bathhouses. Post-war housing provided at least one but often multiple bathrooms in each private dwelling, usurping the need for a public facility. Furthermore, after WWII the role of the Nihonmachi as the center of residential life for Japanese Americans dissipated. Issei practices became less prominent, especially in public. One source suggests that health and sanitation concerns contributed to the decline of *sentos*. Since the Hashidate Yu is one of the few extant bathhouses in the country, its recognition and protection is critical.

²¹ Ibid., 506.

²² Ito, *Issei*, 840-841.

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Seattle's Nihonmachi (Japantown)

Seattle's Nihonmachi was the jumping-off point for Japanese immigrants who were going to work off in the woods, bays and fields of the Pacific Northwest. The community was established as early as 1891 when part of Dearborn Street was known as Mikado Street. According to historian David Takami, "by the mid-1920s, the Nihonmachi extended from 4th along Main to 7th, with clusters of businesses along Jackson, King, Weller, Lane, and Dearborn streets."²³ Seattle's Nihonmachi contained all the elements necessary for a strong community, including temples, churches, language schools, theaters and community halls. A strong commercial district defined the core of the Nihonmachi. Restaurants, hotels, boarding houses, bathhouses, and health resources met the needs of Japanese Americans who resided within the urban community or in one of the many rural settlements throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Seattle's Nihonmachi served as a regional draw for Japanese immigrants who had settled on the urban periphery as well as in rural and remote areas. Those who lived outside of the city frequently would visit the Nihonmachi on the weekend to shop and attend events at the Nippon Kan Theater. Ritoju Nishimura, born in the Ehime Prefecture in 1878, began work for an Italian farmer in the South Park area (outside of Seattle) in 1903. As an agricultural laborer engaged in daily backbreaking work, he would make the half-hour trek to Seattle's Nihonmachi where he would enjoy the many services, including a Japanese public bath.²⁴

It is widely recognized that the intersection of 6th and Main, the location of the Hashidate Yu bathhouse, was the physical and cultural epicenter of Seattle's Nihonmachi, literally at the heart of the goods and services provided by the Nihonmachi. Indeed, businesses in close proximity to the 6th and Main intersection, including the Hashidate Yu, Panama Hotel, NP Hotel, and various other restaurants, barbershops, and laundries, enjoyed much prosperity. The NP Hotel, located adjacent to the Hashidate Yu, was so prominent that former resident Yukiko Fujii, commented, "[it] constituted the center of the Japanese district and the hotel was the center of Japanese society."²⁵ In addition, the Oriental-American Bank, now destroyed, was built at that intersection in 1910 relocated from the central business district.²⁶ The relocation of the bank illustrates the significance of the 6th and Main intersection and its draw for local businesses and consumers.

As the symbolic and real center of Seattle's Japanese community, 6th and Main was a critical site for Japanese festivals, such as the Bon Odori, which enabled the Nikkei community to temporarily exhibit their cultural heritage for both Japanese and white audiences. The Bon Odori, one of the most prominent of these festivals, featured parades along the many blocks of the Nihonmachi. It featured folk dance and music, traditional clothing such as kimonos and *zori* (sandals), Japanese lanterns, colorful decoration, and festive food like *zenzai* (sweet red beans) and *kintoki* (sweetened ice).²⁷

Takashi Hori, owner of the Panama Hotel from 1938 to 1986, recalls a thriving and vital community in the Nihonmachi:

Jackson and Main was the center of Japanese Town....There were business associations, the grocers association, the hotel association, the launderer's association—all Japanese....There were people around the neighborhood in all sorts of business. There

²³ David Takami, *Divided Destiny: A History of Japanese Americans in Seattle* (Seattle: Wing Luke Asian Museum, 1998), 29.

²⁴ Ito, *Issei*, 522.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 534.

²⁶ David A. Rash, *The Asian American Presence in Seattle* (unpublished manuscript, 1998), 4.

²⁷ Yoshisada Kawai in Ito, *Issei*, 809.

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were grocers, there were cleaners, you know. They had drug stores in the area, they had the confectionery stores. Barber shops. We were in a Japanese neighborhood and you associated most with Japanese friends, like I would associate more with my Japanese tenants living there or business people in the area. There was a grocery store underneath, there was a printing shop underneath. Underneath there was a bathhouse that somebody else ran.²⁸

Several Japanese bathhouses were located within Seattle's Nihonmachi, such as Hinode Laundry, Kawano, and Hara, as well as additional bathhouses listed for their laundry facilities, including the Hashidate Yu.²⁹ According to historian Kazuo Ito, Seattle's Nihonmachi had six public bathhouses at one time. Mas Fukuhara remembers that these establishments provided the only bathing facilities for the many residents who lived in storefront businesses, hotels, and rooming houses in the pre-WWII Nihonmachi.

Resident Dell Uchida recalls the prominence of bathhouses throughout the community as well as a particular fondness for the Hashidate Yu:

There were about four bathhouses [in Seattle's Nihonmachi] that I remember: the Shimoji, the Hinode, the Naruto, owned by the Kosugis on Washington, and the Hashidate under the Panama Hotel... The area was almost solid Japanese who mostly lived in housekeeping rooms.... There were at least 10 bathhouses in the '20's and '30's in Nihonmachi or Japantown...³⁰

Mr. Hori recalls that during World War II and the Japanese internment, the hotel's and neighborhood's residents shifted from primarily Japanese to laborers attracted to the city for war-related jobs.³¹ After World War II, the demography of the area changed; many residents who were interned in camps during the war did not return and the area was transformed from Japantown to the International District. Many of those who did return had sold their property for next to nothing and had to rebuild their livelihood. Other cultural groups moved in, including Filipinos and Caucasians. The only bathhouse to reopen in the post-war period was the Hashidate Yu in the basement of the Panama Hotel. The construction of Interstate 5 through the heart of the Nihonmachi further altered the landscape. Today, the remains of Seattle's Nihonmachi are cut off from each other by the freeway and other recent additions. But the heart of the Nihonmachi at 6th and Main, with its hotels, Japanese restaurants, barbershops, and bathhouse, still conveys a strong sense of what the community was like during its heyday in the pre-war period.

Currently, the neighborhood remains an important district for Japanese Americans as well as other ethnic and cultural groups in Seattle, despite the many changes to the physical fabric. Indeed, because of the strong Asian American influence in the community, the International District is now listed in the National Register as an historic district. Furthermore, the International District, particularly around the 6th and Main intersection, is still a mecca of goods and services directed toward Japanese Americans. For example, the Ichiban Japanese Restaurant, Osami Barber, Tokuda Drug, and Asian Pacific Travel are just a few of the businesses within one block of the 6th and Main intersection that cater to the Japanese American population.

²⁸ Takashi Hori, interview, January 1993.

²⁹ Seattle City Directories, 1914 – 1955 (approximately every five years); Jean Motoko Joichi, *Initial Research on Japanese Bathhouses in Seattle* (unpublished paper, 1992).

³⁰ Dell Uchida, *Remembering the Ofuro (Japanese Public Baths)*, (Japanese Heritage Historical Society, 1993).

³¹ Hori, interview.

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The built environment of the International District exhibits a cohesive collection of contributing structures. Most of the buildings were built in the same general timeframe – after the Jackson Street regrade of 1907 and before World War II. The Jackson Street regrade was intended to connect east Seattle, such as Capitol Hill and the Rainier Valley, with the central business district.³² After the regrade, in fact, the building boom which took place in the area was recognized by local newspapers including the *Seattle Times* which noted in 1909 that: “many big buildings [are] now being planned.”³³ The consistency of building types in the district also reflects the fact that “a few architectural firms produced the designs for most of the major buildings, providing a consistent pattern of materials and details.”³⁴

HISTORY OF THE PANAMA HOTEL’S DEVELOPMENT AND OWNERSHIP

Built in 1910 at an estimated cost of \$50,000, the Panama Hotel was designed by architect Sabro Ozasa, “the first Asian-American to practice architecture in Seattle.”³⁵ According to notices in the *Seattle Daily Record* (1910), Ozasa worked on a number of buildings in the International District within a very short timeframe. He began his Seattle career in 1909, according to David Rash, but his name and phone number are not listed in the *Seattle Daily Record* until April 1910. Although he was trained as a civil engineer, Ozasa was referred to as an architect in trade journals and publications. Ozasa obtained 15 commissions in his short 18 month career in Seattle; most were for commercial buildings for Asian American clients but they also included 6 houses. One of his only remaining buildings is now the Bush Garden Restaurant at 612-616 Maynard Avenue South. He is frequently mentioned throughout the first half of 1910 as the chief designer of many buildings in the district. In April 1911, Ozasa received a commission to design a hotel in Tokyo, Japan, effectively bringing his Seattle career to an end. He died in Tokyo at the age of 45 in September 1915 of meningitis. David Rash, the leading scholar of the architecture of Seattle’s International District, offers a history of Ozasa and his work in his essay, *The Asian American Presence in Seattle*. According to Rash, Sabro Ozasa came to the U.S. via Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Australia, arriving in Spokane in 1894 where he enrolled in high school to learn English. He later moved to Eugene, Oregon, where he studied civil engineering at the University of Oregon graduating in 1907. He initially worked for the Oregon and Washington Railroad Navigation Company (where he would have come in contact with the Oriental Trading Company) in Portland, but by 1909 he was practicing architecture in Seattle.³⁶

The bid for Panama Hotel’s construction was ultimately won by the Manhattan Building Company in 1910 and the building was constructed that same year. Also in 1910, the hotel’s owners, both Japanese and American entrepreneurs, formed the West Coast Building Company, a real estate development that was probably Asian-American owned, as a residential hotel for Japanese laborers. Because of prohibitions against alien land ownership in the Washington State constitution, bicultural umbrella companies were a common mechanism for allowing Japanese Americans into the real estate market at that time. Publicly, the owners of the West Coast Building Company were listed as Augustus Packard, a lawyer and George Ward, vice president of the Oriental Trading Company, one of the largest Japanese contract labor companies in the Pacific Northwest.

According to King County Real Property Assessment and Tax Rolls, early ownership of the hotel and bathhouse remained under corporate control, most likely run by Japanese and American investors. Tax rolls for 1915 and 1920 indicate that Sound Trading Investment Company owned the building and paid its taxes; by 1925, ownership had shifted (at least in name) to Enterprise Investment Company.

³² *Pacific Builder and Engineer* 5 (January 19, 1907): 24.

³³ *Seattle Times*, December 26, 1909, 8.

³⁴ “Seattle Chinatown Historic District,” 7.

³⁵ Rash, *Asian American Presence in Seattle*, 21.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

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The Panama Hotel was run by a variety of proprietors throughout the century. The Seattle City Directory from 1914 indicates that the first managers of the hotel were T. Maeda and M. Miyuta. These names appear in the directories until 1931 but in various combinations and with a handful of others. For example, the 1922 City Directory lists the Panama Hotel's owners as T. Maeda, M. Mizuta, and H. Nishimura but in 1925, only T. Maeda is listed. By 1931, ownership changed hands: M. Tatsumi became the name associated with the Panama Hotel.

Takashi Hori and his father bought the Panama Hotel in 1938 and owned it until 1985; they had previously owned and managed an apartment building. When they bought the Panama, Mr. Hori recalled:

Well, it was pretty run down—because of the depression. The operator who was leasing it from the owner; they didn't put too much money into it so it was really a rundown place. The tenants were mostly Orientals. I would say half Orientals, half white. It was working people...some were working logging camps, others were working construction work...It's the type of people that were hanging around that area at that time—blue collar workers.³⁷

Based on listings in the Seattle City Directories, it is likely that the bathhouse was developed concurrently with the hotel itself. These listings continue under a variety of names: the Hashidate, the Hashidate Yu, and sometimes simply listed under the current manager's name with the proper name of the bathhouse omitted entirely. During the 1910s and 1920s, bathhouse operator N. Ito ran the bathhouse and laundry under the name Hashidate Laundry.³⁸ Although there are also specific categories for baths, the Hashidate Yu was not listed there most likely to discourage non-Japanese patrons. Photographs from this period also show signs in English advertising the laundry and a bathhouse sign in Japanese.

According to interviews, Fukuo Sano and his wife, Shigeko, with the help of their two sons, Eddy and Ted, ran the Hashidate Yu bathhouse from 1930 until 1942 and from 1946 to 1954, when it closed down. From 1943 until 1946, during the period of Japanese American internment, the hotel was leased to A. S. Munroe who did not operate the baths because of the high price of heating oil.³⁹ Instead, Munroe rented the basement including the *furos*, to Seattle resident George Francis who in 1944 was quoted in the *Seattle Times* as saying, "I was hard-pressed for accommodations a while ago, and was lucky enough to get these. With a little renovating, the quarters will be excellent."⁴⁰

The baths were closed in the 1950s due in part to the increased cost of water after the formation of the Municipality of Metropolitan Seattle in 1958 and in part to the dispersal of the Nihonmachi by the internment experience and the construction of a freeway through its core. Also, post-war housing occupied by Japanese Americans typically included private bathing facilities.

Indeed, by the middle of the twentieth century, both the neighborhood and the industry had changed. By 1965, the property at 302 6th Avenue South was listed as vacant and there was no evidence of Hashidate Yu. The 1966 listings reflect the significant changes occurring in the neighborhood at the time similar to the fates of

³⁷ Hori, interview.

³⁸ There is some additional evidence that a Japanese American entrepreneur living in Seattle at the beginning of the twentieth century known as Chuzaburo Ito "was the president of the Japanese Barbers' Association and also ran a barber shop, public bath and laundry." (Ito, *Issei*, 152-53.) There is no proof, however, that the N. Ito listed in the City Directory and Chizaburo Ito, are the same person.

³⁹ Robert Mahaffay, "Japanese Bath is Discovered in Hotel 'Cave'." *Seattle Times* (September 24, 1944).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

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many urban communities in the 1960s. Vacancies in the neighborhood skyrocketed indicating that the demand for services simply could not support the once existing businesses in the district. In the 1950s, the Hashidate Yu like so many other local businesses closed its doors and remains undisturbed to this day.

The Panama Hotel and Hashidate Yu bathhouse are now owned by Jan Johnson, who bought the hotel from the Hori family in 1985. She still operates the Panama as an affordable single-room occupancy residential hotel. Jan agreed to not raise the rents for long-term tenants and is committed to maintaining it as an affordable place to live in the neighborhood and retaining its historic character. Upon purchasing the property not only did she assume ownership of the hotel, she inadvertently became the caretaker of Japanese American artifacts that had been forgotten in the basement of the Panama Hotel since World War II. In 1942, many Nikkei, forced to evacuate their homes for World War II internment camps, had packed their personal belongings in large trunks and stashed them in the basement of the Panama Hotel. Before selling the hotel, Mr. Hori removed most of the trunks that had been there for over forty years hauling many items to the dump. Still, Jan Johnson insisted on keeping as many as she could in the basement of the Panama Hotel. When possible, the trunks were returned to their original owners. Some owners, however, did not return to Seattle after the period of internment and others were not interested in reclaiming their belongings. They have since been included in temporary exhibitions at the Japanese American National Museum and on Ellis Island.

Jan Johnson's efforts to use the Panama Hotel as an educational resource were featured in a 1999 issue of *Preservation Magazine*:

For more than 10 years, Johnson has operated the basement and bathhouse as a private museum where she can impart the history of internment to school children and to people who ask...In the spring of 1997, she began converting a storefront in her building directly above the cellars into two bare-bones rooms of brick and wood. One room she hopes to use as a coffeehouse decorated with pictures of pre-war Nihonmachi. The other room she envisions as a museum about Seattle's Japanese-American community.⁴¹

Preservation of the Hashidate Yu promises to provide Americans of Japanese descent with a tangible reminder of an important aspect of their cultural heritage, and all Americans with a better understanding of the Japanese imprint on the western landscape.

RELATED PROPERTIES

Considering their past prevalence in Japanese American communities, it is striking that only a few examples of bathhouses, and only two public *sentos*, remain in the western United States and most likely the entire country.⁴² They include:

⁴¹ Charles Wilson, "Heartbreak Hotel: Japanese Artifacts Left in a Seattle Basement Freeze Moment in Time," *Preservation Magazine* 51, no. 2 (March/April 1999): 20 and 22.

⁴² The Hashidate-Yu at the Panama Hotel was determined to be the most outstanding extant example of a *sentō* based on the following research. A thorough review of directories produced by Japanese American vernacular newspapers provided a list of Japanese American bathhouses that were operating in the mid-1930s. These specific properties were discussed with SHPOs and local preservation officers from all states and cities that were hosts to significant Japanese American populations. These conversations resulted in a finding of only one other extant *sentō*, in California, that possesses a lesser degree of significance and integrity. Extensive communications with Japanese American community organizations in cities that had historic Japantowns resulted in a finding of no other extant bathhouses. Finally, the Preservation Planning and Design Program at the University of Washington maintains files on all known historic resources associated with Asian American heritage based on extensive contact with state and local preservation officers. All examples discovered in the course of this research are included in the NHL nomination. Based on this research, the authors of the NHL nomination have a high level of confidence in their assessment that the Hashidate-Yu in the Panama Hotel is the most outstanding extant example of a *sentō*.

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- *Private furo*: A shed that once housed a soaking tub on the property of Neely Mansion in Auburn, Washington, is now a King County Landmark. This is an example of a private *furo* sited in a farming community. The soaking tub no longer remains.
- *Hot springs*: An example of Japanese hot springs in Gilroy, California, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The site contains a complex array of resources associated with a resort destination.
- *Public bathhouse (reconstruction)*: A reconstructed bathhouse in Hawaii's Plantation Village on Oahu. This example features a *senjo* or public bath and small family *furo*. Both are useful for understanding the daily lives of Japanese plantation workers but neither are historic resources.
- *Public bathhouse (original)*: A public bathhouse in Walnut Grove, California, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and a contributing feature to the Walnut Grove Historic District. As an example of a small town public bath (as opposed to a *senjo* in a major urban Nihonmachi), Walnut Grove possesses characteristics unique to its setting.
- *Public bathhouse (original)*: The Hashidate Yu in Seattle's Panama Hotel is the most outstanding representative example of an urban bathhouse. The Hashidate Yu, in fact, possesses an extraordinarily high degree of integrity, particularly the interior features associated with the actual bathhouse. The scarcity of surviving examples of *senjos* in the United States coupled with the physical integrity and cultural significance of the Hashidate Yu, qualifies it for designation as a National Historic Landmark.

CONCLUSION

The Panama Hotel is nationally significant and worthy of designation as a National Historic Landmark for its association with the consequential historical theme of immigration. Many immigrants from Japan arrived in the United States in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries and made an imprint on the development of the nation, particularly in the western states. The first generation of immigrants brought their cultural traditions and adapted them to the new circumstances. Designed by one of the first Japanese architects to practice in the country, the Panama Hotel was constructed in Seattle's Japantown, an urban community that provided services to Japanese immigrants and sheltered them from an often hostile society. Among these services were hotel rooms and the traditional Japanese bathhouse within. The building is an outstanding example and a valuable resource for the study of the important story of the Japanese in the United States.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

Previously Listed in the National Register. Seattle Chinatown Historic District, NR # 86003153

Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.

Designated a National Historic Landmark.

Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #

Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

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- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government: City of Seattle Department of Construction and Land Use
- University: University of Washington, Preservation Planning and Design Program
- Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: Less than 1 acre

| | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|
| UTM References: | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| | 10 | 550680 | 5271870 |

Verbal Boundary Description: Parcel # 524780-1965; Seattle, King County, Washington

Boundary Justification: The Panama Hotel and Hashidate Yu are located entirely within the parcel boundary at the intersection of 6th Avenue and Main Street in what is currently called the International District in Seattle, Washington.

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

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Date: July 18, 2002

Edited: Antoinette J. Lee
National Park Service
September 5, 2005

DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
March 20, 2006