



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MATSUDA FAMILY AND FARM

BEFORE VASHON

Heisuke Matsuda was born in Japan in 1877 and came to the US in 1898. As a laborer and single man he moved around following work opportunities, beginning first in Hawaii cutting sugar cane, and on to the Alaskan Klondike then to Cle Elum, both for coal mining. Eventually, he found work in Fife on the truck farm of another Japanese immigrant named Yoshio Yoshioka.

Heisuke returned to Japan in 1921 to find a bride, and through the customary practice of go-betweens, he met and married Mitsuno Horiye (born 1892). They came to the US via Seattle in 1922, and then on to the Yoshioka farm where they lived and Heisuke worked and where, in July 1923, their son Yoneichi was born. Shortly afterward, they moved to a similar farm near Seattle, and in January 1925, daughter Mary was born.

FIRST VASHON FARM (1927-1930)

In 1927, the family moved to Vashon Island and leased a 10-acre farm and house in the Shawnee Beach area. With the help of a work horse named Dolly, Heisuke raised vegetables which he transported by horse-drawn wagon to the store at Magnolia Beach and to the docks at Burton and Shawnee for sale in Tacoma. He also grew loganberries and cherries.

The exact location of this farm is not specified in the sources; however we can make a pretty good guess. Mary remembers frequently playing with Yoneichi at Shawnee Beach and interacting with neighbors and travelers at the dock there, and that the farm's water was pumped from a nearby creek. **Map 1** is a 1936 aerial photo of the Shawnee Beach area. Outlined on the map is the one site that shows recent signs of cultivation and that matches the size, location and nature of the farm that Mary describes.

The 1930 census, apparently taken when they still resided at Shawnee, lists the family's precinct as Burton and Heisuke's occupation as a fruit farmer. The Matsudas were among 141 individuals on Vashon whose "color or race" is shown as "Japanese."

THE 1930s

In 1930, at the beginning of the Great Depression, Heisuke purchased ten acres of farmland at Center and built a four-bedroom house and a barn on it all for \$2000 that he had saved for this purpose. Because Japanese-born immigrants were prohibited by law from owning land, Heisuke

purchased the property in the name of Yoshio Yoshioka's adult American-born son, Daiichi, until his own American-born son, Yuneichi, reached adulthood.

Map 2, another 1936 aerial photo, suggests by the pattern of cultivation that the ten acres are the fields presently defined as parcel 0622039002 (the one that is the site of the barn and house and is now zoned industrial) and parcel 0622039157 (the one that is now owned by Mary and is planted with a variety of trees).

In addition to strawberries, the Matsudas grew other crops, as described in the following excerpt from the Woodroffe book (pp. 56-57):

Heisuke was an enterprising man who experimented with crops and grew loganberries, Olympic berries, gooseberries, and eventually currents. He designed a system to increase the efficiency of the gooseberry harvesting process by constructing flats, screens, troughs, and a giant fan to separate the leaves from the berries.

Loganberry growing is heavy, intensive work. The canes grow along the ground in the winter months. Then in the spring, workers wearing heavy gloves lift the vines and weave them along parallel horizontal wires to fill the spaces between the wires. Mary remembers sitting beside her parents at night with a needle, picking the thorns out of their fingers.

Currents were easier to harvest because they are bushy and grow like clusters of grapes. The flats could be stacked and packed to stations close to where the pickers worked.

The whole family worked on the farm. During the early 1930s, they relied on harvest-time help from migrant Native American workers who lived temporarily in tents they pitched on the property. As the Depression wore on, Heisuke hired Vashon families for this work, and eventually recruited crews of off-island teenage boys, who bunked in the barn and ate food that Mitsuno prepared.

During this period, Heisuke sold crops in Seattle, Tacoma and Puyallup, transporting them via Vashon Auto Freight. Later in the decade, when Masa Mukai set up his berry processing operation, the Matsudas sold their berries to him.

The 1940 census recorded the Matsudas' precinct as Quartermaster and Heisuke's occupation as a berry farmer. They were four of 126 people on Vashon whose "color or race" was listed as "Japanese." The census also indicated that they owned, rather than leased, their home. This information was undoubtedly self-reported and likely how they characterized their arrangement with Daiichi Yoshioka. All of the Matsuda family members belonged to the Vashon Methodist Church, although the parents, like many of their immigrant peers, participated mostly in special Japanese-language services in private homes.

THE 1940s

In the early 1940s, events far beyond Vashon – the bombing of Pearl Harbor and entry of the US into war with Japan, and the US government's treatment of people of Japanese ancestry on the west coast – combined to plunge the Japanese people of Vashon into a wrenching and life altering experience that cannot fairly be recounted here. This section of the timeline describes

what happened to the farm during this period based on the family's accounts. Mary Matsuda Gruenewald's book, Looking Like the Enemy, tells their story in personal and compelling detail.

On May 16, 1942, the Matsudas and all other residents of Japanese ancestry were "evacuated" from Vashon Island and sent to internment camps. It should be noted that a small number, including the Mukais, were able to remove themselves voluntarily because they had someplace else to live outside of the west coast exclusion zone.

In the short time leading up to their evacuation, the Matsuda family made hasty arrangements for the care of their home and farm. As with the other evacuees, they knew little about what was to happen to them and what options they had, so it was almost impossible to plan. They asked Mack Garcia, a Filipino immigrant who had lived in the barn and worked on the farm for the past six years, to move into the house and take over the daily operations of the farm. In addition, the Matsudas joined several other evacuee families in placing the financial management of their farm in the hands of a local deputy sheriff. Though the deputy was considered to be reputable, the Matsudas (unlike some of the others) took the additional step of putting their arrangements with him into a written contract. He was authorized to oversee the farm, including its finances, with Mack Garcia as the "boss in residence." All costs and income would be split fifty-fifty, with the deputy making regular reports to the family.

At the time of their evacuation, Heisuke was 65 years old and Mitsuno 50. Yoneichi (18) had already graduated from Vashon High School, where as a senior he had been student body secretary and a member of the varsity football team. Mary (16) was nearly finished with her junior year.

Upon leaving their home and community, the family went with other evacuees by special ferry to Seattle and then by special train to Pinedale Assembly Center near Fresno, California. From there they began a journey that would take them to three different internment camps. First, they were placed at Tule Lake in northern California. While there, Mary took high school classes and graduated. The second stop was at the Heart Mountain camp in Wyoming. During this time, Yoneichi and Mary took advantage of the opportunity to leave internment in order to help with the war effort. Yoneichi, like other young Japanese-American men from Vashon and elsewhere, enlisted in the Army's 442nd Nisei Regimental Combat Team. He left for basic training in June, 1944. Mary was accepted to the Cadet Nurses Corps and in August, 1944 left for training and work in a hospital in Clinton, Iowa. At the same time, Heisuke and Mitsuno requested and were allowed to relocate to the Minidoka, Idaho camp to be closer to their old friends, the Yoshiokas. While at Minidoka, Mitsuno was able to leave the camp for periods of time to work at a cannery in Ogden, Utah.

Earlier, in October, 1942, the Vashon-based deputy traveled to Tule Lake with an offer to buy the farm from the Matsudas. (Presumably he knew about their arrangement with Daiichi Yoshioka). They declined his offer and essentially never heard from him again while they were away from Vashon. Without the status reports they had expected to receive, the Matsudas worried continuously throughout their internment about their home and farm, especially when they heard from other internees who had lost everything. In December 1944, after completion of training, Yoneichi was granted home leave before being deployed to Europe. Instead of going directly to Minidoka to see his parents, he made a brief visit to the farm on Vashon to see its

condition for himself. There was some risk to this decision because, despite his uniform, he was still legally prohibited from being in this location. Yoneichi found the farm run down, but otherwise okay. He made one other important stop on his way to Minidoka, this one in Nampa, Idaho, where Daiichi Yoshioka lived with his wife. While in army training, Yoneichi had passed his 21st birthday and wanted to conclude the planned transfer of farm ownership. Recognizing the uncertainties inherent in his overseas deployment, he also wanted to delegate his ownership authority to Mary. Daiichi had the documents prepared by a notary and Yoneichi picked them up, visited his parents and deployed to Europe.

In early 1945, with Yoneichi in Europe and Mary in Iowa, their parents in Minidoka began receiving letters from creditors requesting payments for fertilizer, plants, labor and other costs of running the farm. It was clear to them that they were being victimized by the deputy sherriff, who had never sent them any of the farm income and now was apparently not paying any of the expenses. In addition, they believed from camp rumors that the war would be over in the coming months and they would be released from internment, so they would be going home as foreign-born immigrants without full rights to run a business and without access to the legal authority and physical help of their son and daughter. Mary attempted to mitigate some of these problems from afar, but Heisuke and Mitsuno arrived on Vashon in September, 1945 -- three years and four months after evacuation -- glad to be home, but clearly not able to manage the farm themselves. Yoneichi was not expected back from Europe until perhaps the end of 1946, and Mary's nursing program in Iowa would last until 1947.

Heisuke (by now age 68) and Mitsuno (53) worked hard in the coming months performing maintenance on the house and farm and preparing for the upcoming growing season with advances and credit from previous suppliers and customers. Then, in early May, 1946, Heisuke was injured by his horse, Dolly, while cultivating strawberries and suffered several broken ribs. His doctor ordered him to refrain from all outdoor work through the strawberry harvest season. In response to the extreme hardship posed by the timing of the injury, the doctor initiated a request through the local Red Cross for Yoneichi's early release from duty in Europe. A woman from the Red Cross expedited the request, and Yoneichi was at home on Vashon by mid-June. Ironically, the woman who helped so much was the wife of the deputy sheriff.

Upon his return, Yoneichi assumed management of the Matsuda farm. Pickers, scarce during the war years, became more available, and the market for strawberries returned, at least temporarily, from its wartime lows. He eventually resolved issues with creditors and even received an offer \$2000 from the deputy sheriff for failure in following the contract. Yoneichi rejected the offer and took no further legal action

Yoneichi never spoke to his family about the details of his wartime experience. It is well known that his Nisei regiment was given especially difficult and high risk assignments and suffered heavy casualties in Europe. The family only discovered after his death that he had received a bronze star for his actions in a battle in April 1945.

Mary completed her nurse's training, and after taking her Iowa state board tests, returned to Vashon in mid-1947. By the end of that year, she had moved to Seattle to begin her career as a registered nurse at Providence Hospital

THE 1950s

By 1954, Yoneichi significantly expanded the size of the farm from its original 10 acres to almost 39 by acquiring properties immediately to the west and to the northwest. This expansion was a bold step because signs of change were beginning to appear in the strawberry market and Vashon farmers were facing new difficulties competing. The growth in farm size also undoubtedly required Yoneichi to invest more in mechanization and to augment his capacity to irrigate larger and more distant fields.

To meet his irrigation needs, Yoneichi, apparently with encouragement and technical assistance from the King County Soil Conservation Service, devised a plan to capture winter storm water draining from his own newly-acquired lands by constructing an earth fill dam across a seasonal water course to create an impoundment reservoir and then pump the water out to irrigate his strawberries during the dry season. Fundamental to the acceptability of his proposal was the fact that the stream, though tributary to Judd Creek, was seasonal and usually dry by April, so the impoundment would not affect Judd Creek flow levels during more critical times of the year. He constructed the dam in the fall of 1954. In 1957, Yoneichi was named Conservationist Farmer of the Year by the King County Soil Conservation Service, presumably for his irrigation project.

The decade of the 1950s also brought milestones in the lives of the individual family members.

Following a change in the law making them eligible, Heisuke and Mitsuno studied and passed the exam and finally in 1954 became naturalized US citizens. Heisuke, then age 77, had been in this country for 56 years and Mitsuno for 34.

Mary continued her career in nursing. While working on her bachelor's degree at the College (now University) of Puget Sound, she met her future husband, Charles Gruenewald, and they married in 1951. They moved to Boston for his advanced degree in theology and then to assignments with Methodist churches in Washington as well as Idaho and Colorado. Mary found work as a nurse as they moved, and she also had three children between 1954 and 1960: Martha, David and Ray.

In 1958, Yoneichi married Marjorie Nakagowa, whom he had met through mutual friends in Vancouver, B.C., and in 1960 they purchased and moved into their own farmhouse on 10.7 more acres of farmland (now known as parcel 062203-9008) immediately west and south of the lands he had acquired in the early 1950s, bringing the total contiguous acreage of the Matsuda farm to 49.57 based on current King County Assessor's data for the owned parcels. This appears to be the final acquisition and therefore the maximum size of the farm. The Woodroffe book supports these conclusions by stating that the farm reached 50 acres in size. Interestingly, Yoneichi may have believed he owned about 48 acres: the 37 he listed in his 1954 water right application, plus the 10.7 purchased in 1960.

Map 3 shows in diagrammatic form the entire Matsuda farm. No 1950's-era aerial photos are available online.

THE 1960s AND 1970s

Yoneichi and Marjorie had four daughters: Marlene, Kathryn, Marguerite and Sheila. At some point, Yoneichi attended and graduated from college and eventually became a teacher of social studies and Japanese language at Ingraham High School in Seattle. He was also active in the Vashon community as a member of the Sportsman's Club and as an elected commissioner of the Cemetery District. Somehow, he managed to crowd it all in: family, teaching, commuting and farming – even if it meant cultivating his strawberries after dark, riding his tractor with the lights on.

Tragically, Marjorie died of cancer in 1973, while their daughters were still teenagers and younger, and in 1977 he married Miyoko Nishi.

Heisuke and Mitsuno lived out their lives in the farmhouse they built in 1930. Mitsuno died in 1965 and Heisuke in 1970.

For most of her nursing career, Mary worked at Group Health Cooperative in Seattle, where in 1971 she founded their Consulting Nurse Service to provide telephone consultations with registered nurses for patients with urgent health conditions.

As Yoneichi continued his commercial strawberry production over the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, it was clear that broader forces in postwar society and markets were taking their toll, and the once-robust strawberry production on Vashon was in irreversible decline. Bruce Haulman, in a recent article in the *Beachcomber*, cites several specific reasons, including inexpensive refrigeration and inexpensive shipping by truck over the new interstate highway system; revised child labor laws and requirements for better housing for migrant workers; and the growing market impact of large corporate farms in Florida and California.

Increasingly unable to compete, long-term Vashon farmers either stopped growing strawberries entirely or began transitioning to other crops. The Mukais appear to have stopped by 1950, though they continued to operate their Cold Process Fruit Barreling Plant until 1969. Augie Takatsuka gradually shifted to Christmas trees and holly, and last hired strawberry pickers in about 1982, after which he converted to a u-pick berry farm until the early 1990's. Tok Otsuka transitioned to corn and then finally to Christmas trees. Although it's not clear how long he continued to grow strawberries, he apparently ended using pickers in 1984. A similar trend occurred with non-Japanese-American farmers. , **The Matsudas continued their operations with hired pickers through the 1985 season, making theirs probably the last large-scale commercial strawberry harvest on Vashon.**

THE 1980s

In the early 1980s, Yoneichi and Miyoko turned their attention to downsizing the farm. In 1981 the Matsudas received approval of a short plat that would enable them to sell the northwestern part of their farm as three individual 5-acre lots (SP 380034, AF 8102240655). In 1984 they revised the short plat (AF8410050876) to work in combination with a 1985 boundary line adjustment (AF 8502190645) in order to sell a reconfigured 20.38 acres (including 1.8 acres

resold to a neighboring property) to All-Pro Broadcasting (AF 198502080489) for a complex of antenna towers and transmitting equipment. (All-Pro resold about 1.8 acres to a neighboring property.) The Matsudas carried the contract on their sale to All-Pro and received payments over the next 25 years (AF 198502080491).

Incidentally, it should be noted that in 1976, Yoneichi transferred ownership of the southerly 5 acres of the original farm to Mary via quit claim deed (AF 197611030019). It seems likely that in the years immediately following, Yoneichi continued to use the property in his farming. So, by 1985, the Matsuda farm consisted of 24.37 acres owned by Yoneichi and Miyoko, and 5 acres owned by Mary.

By early summer 1985, two other milestone events occurred: Yoneichi retired from the Seattle School District after 18 years of teaching, and the Matsudas harvested their last crop of strawberries after 55 years of production.

Then, in September of 1985, Yoneichi suffered a heart attack while on his tractor and died a week later. He was 62 years old.

Over the next few years Miyoko converted the farm to hay production.

THE 1990s AND BEYOND

Mary retired from Group Health in 1990 and became an activist on behalf of senior health care and keeping alive the story of Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Americans during World War II. She is the author of two books. Mary's son Ray Gruenewald has planted her 5-acre tract in a variety of trees.

Miyoko continued to live in the farmhouse and kept the farm lands in agricultural use by growing, mowing and selling the hay produced there. In July 2014, she sold her farm house and 12.37 acres to Erik Steffens and Kathryn Thomas, and shortly afterward entered into contract with the Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust for sale of the remaining 12 acres.

Map 4 shows on a 2009 aerial photo base how the parts of the Matsuda farm were divided and sold between 1976 and 2015.

ONE LAST NOTE

The reader may have noticed a certain lack of balance in way the genders are presented in this story. Some of that, especially early on, reflects the cultural norms of the day in general, and those of Japanese Americans at that time in particular. And part of it is the fact that males, including Yoneichi, appeared regularly as the only name on the various records, including title and water rights documents. However, were it not for two very important women, this story would not be told and the Land Trust would probably not have the opportunity to purchase this farmland. Miyoko Matsuda joined the family at a difficult time and lost her spouse early, but she kept the farm in agricultural production for 29 years and was this historic family's only

continuous representation on the island during those years. And Mary Matsuda Gruenewald, adamant that the story of Japanese Americans of her generation not be forgotten, published a very large share of the information drawn upon for this summary.

SOURCES:

- Mary Matsuda Gruenewald, Looking Like the Enemy: My Story of Imprisonment in Japanese-American Internment Camps, 2005.
- Pamela J. Woodroffe, “Mary Matsuda Gruenewald: The Strength of Family,” Chapter 6 of Vashon Island’s Agricultural Roots: Tales of Tilth as Told by Vashon Farmers, 2002. (The Land Trust co-sponsored this book).
- Bruce Haulman, “Visitors could ‘eat 20 miles of strawberries’ on Vashon,” Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber, July 16, 2014.
- Bruce Haulman and Jean Cammon Findley, Images of America: Vashon-Maury Island, p. 87.
- Vashon Census Project, 1930 and 1940 census details.
- King County, i-MAP, 1936 and 2009 aerial photo layers.
- King County Property Records, 1975 to present (to the extent available online).
- State of Washington, various water right documents pertaining to the Matsuda Farm.
- Recollections of two public presentations by Mary Matsuda Gruenewald, one as part of Vashon Community Care’s “Telling Stories” series (c. 2009), and the other as part of the rally to reform the board of the non-profit responsible for the preservation of the historic Mukai house and garden (2013).

Map 1: Likely Site of First Farm (1927-1930)



(C) 2008 King County

0 355ft

-  County Boundary
-  Mountain Peaks

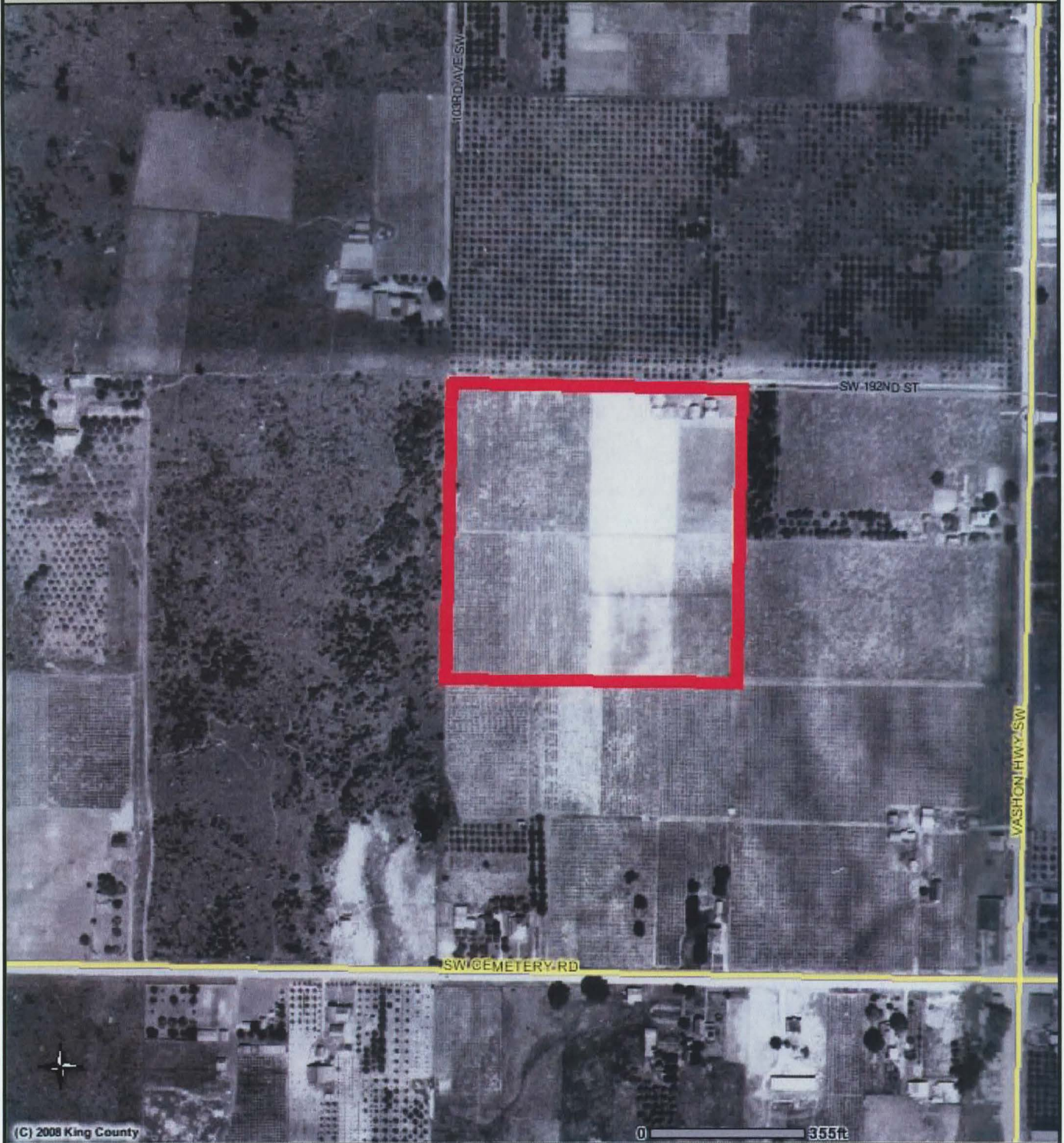
Legend

1936 B/W Aerial Photos

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Map 2: Matsuda Home and Farm Beginning 1930



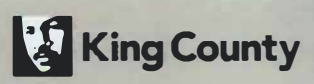
(C) 2008 King County

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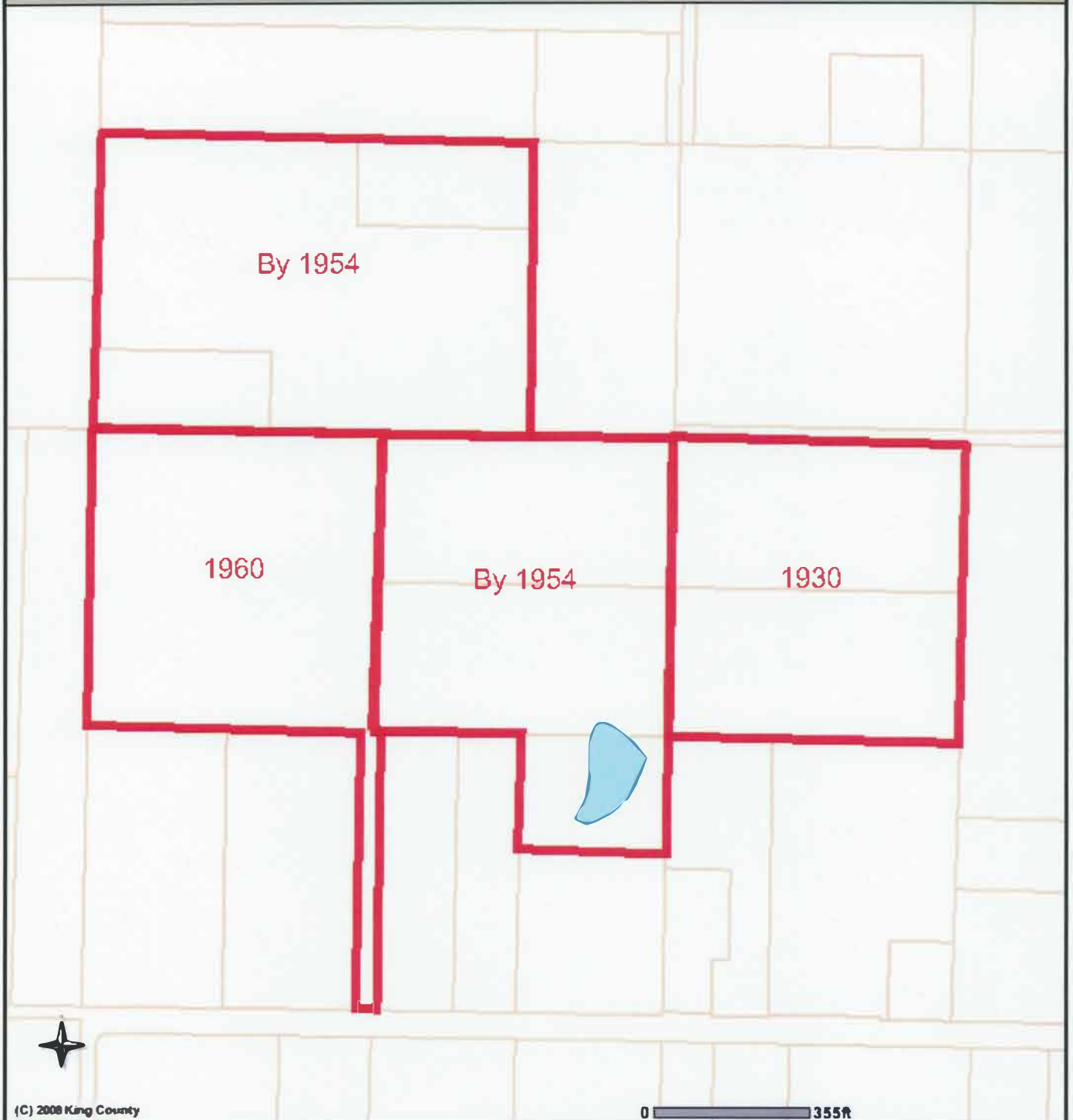
<p>— County Boundary</p> <p> — Mountain Peaks</p>	<p>Legend</p> <p>Highways</p> <p>Streets</p> <p>(cont)</p>	<p> Highway</p> <p> Arterial</p> <p> Local</p>
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Date: 8/8/2014 Source: King County iMAP - Property Information (<http://www.metrokc.gov/GIS/iMAP>)



Map 3: Matsuda Farm 1960



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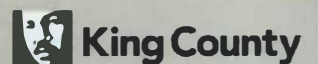
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Legend

- County Boundary
- Mountain Peaks
- Lakes and Large Rivers

- Streams
- Parcels

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Map 4: Matsuda Farm As Divided and Sold



(C) 2008 King County

0 355ft

- County Boundary
- Mountain Peaks
- Highways
- Streets
- (cont)

- Highway
- Arterials
- Local
- Parcels

Legend

2009 Color Aerial Photos (6in)
2009 Color Aerial Photos (12in)

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