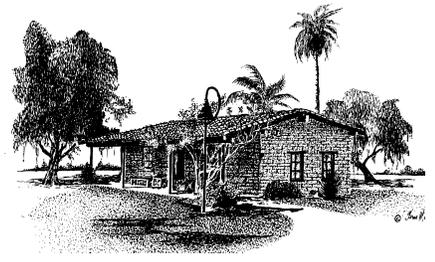


# Fairview Register

Monthly publication of the Costa Mesa Historical Society, a non-profit 501(c)(3)

MEMBER: CONFERENCE OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL HISTORY



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## Fall Calendar Fills Up with History

Summer is a wonderful time to relax and enjoy the sunshine. But as autumn arrives and the sun sets a bit earlier and the kids go back to school, who among us doesn't look forward to brushing away the mental cobwebs and returning to the learning mode?

The Costa Mesa Historical Society and our friends have lined up some great events to help you make the transition from summer fun to autumn learning. Be sure to save these dates!

### 72ND ANNUAL LION'S CLUB FISH FRY

Summer won't quite be over when the Lion's Club Fish Fry, one of the city's biggest events, returns this September. The popular festival expects an attendance of 15,000, and will feature live music, carnival rides, and plenty of fish made with Heinz Kaiser's secret 70-year-old batter recipe. Proceeds from the event are donated to organizations throughout the community — including the historical society. So come by and show your support!

**When:** September 20-22 **Where:** Fairview Park

### VETERANS SHARE THEIR STORIES

*Voices* is a biannual storytelling project that gives veterans a platform to share memories of their military experience. The content of this powerful program is raw and unfiltered and promises to bring both tears and laughter.

**When:** 7 p.m. Saturday, October 5 **Where:** Heroes Hall, OC Fairgrounds

### SOCIETY HOSTS DOCENT LEAGUE

The Orange County Docents' League is an association of volunteer docents for Orange County museums. The league operates under Arts OC, the premiere arts advocacy organization in the county. Members meet twice annually at organizations that have been specially chosen for what they can contribute to other museums and archives. Past venues have included the Bowers Museum, the San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary, and the OC Historical Society. The Costa Mesa Historical Society is honored to host the league's fall meeting.

Art Goddard will speak on how the society makes its vast collection accessible to the public, and Mary Ellen Goddard and Estelle Hughes will guide tours of the historical society museum and the Diego Sepulveda adobe. If you're involved in archiving and collections, this event will be a great way to network with others who share your interests.

**When:** Monday, October 14 **Where:** Historical Society Museum, 1870 Anaheim Ave. See flier for more.

### A THEATER LEGEND SPEAKS

Our 2019-2020 Speaker Series kicks off with a bang this October as we're joined by theater critic Tom Titus. Mr. Titus has written about local theater since 1965. He didn't just write about plays. He performed in them and directed them, too. In June, 1965, he made his acting debut in the first production of the Costa Mesa Civic Playhouse, "Send

Me No Flowers." Later, he served as the Irvine Community Theater's artistic director for 31 years. It's hard to imagine anyone who knows more about the theater than Tom Titus. If you love the performing arts, you won't want to miss this.

**When:** 2 p.m., Sunday, October 20 **Where:** Historical Society Museum, 1870 Anaheim Ave.

### ARTISTIC LICENSE FAIR AT THE ADOBE

Makers and buyers return to the Artistic License Fair, a popular event featuring the work of dozens of Southern California artisans. The event is great for Costa Mesa history, too. The event is located by the Diego Sepulveda Adobe, and each year docents introduce a steady stream of new visitors to local history.

**When:** Saturday and Sunday, October 25-26 **Where:** Estancia Park

#### SEPTEMBER MUSEUM OPENINGS

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

Museum	Adobe
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Promoting and preserving Costa Mesa's history is our mission

# The Imotos of Santa Ana Avenue

by Cory Smith

*We are grateful to member Cory Smith for submitting this well-researched piece in response to our May article on Japanese Costa Mesans. If you have corrections, further details about the Imotos, or more on the city's Japanese heritage, we would love to hear from you. — Editor*

I was born in 1941 and grew up in Newport Heights. Among my early childhood memories is a Japanese family who lived at the southwest corner of Santa Ana and East 17th in Costa Mesa. Their name was Imoto. I remember hearing my parents, Don and Helen Smith, talk about Mama Imoto, her son Tom, and daughter Ruby.

Usuke and Kimiyo Kataoka Imoto emigrated from Japan to the San Joaquin Valley in 1914. The Pacific Mail Steamship Company Passenger List specifies Lodi as their destination. Usuke was 30 years old and Kimi was 18. Three children were born in Stockton. Mamoru Harold was born on May 18, 1915, Tadashi Thomas on August 4, 1916, and Satomi Ruby on January 17, 1918. Sadly, Usuke died on January 18, 1919. Kimi supported her family by teaching dress-making, according to the 1930 census. As a widow in the early 1930s, Kimi Imoto settled with her three teenage children

on, I believe, an acre of farmland in Costa Mesa. They grew a truck garden and sold the produce.

Ruby, like Harold (I don't know about Tom), was able to go to college. She went to the USC School of Dentistry, where she was one of the first students of Japanese descent. There she met her future husband, Kenji "Ken" Uyesugi.

The Imoto brothers and Ken Uyesugi all registered for the draft on October 16, 1940. Harold enlisted in the Army on October 17, 1941, while Ken enlisted in the Army on January 24, 1942. After training in the Military Intelligence Language School, Ken served in the Pacific theater during the war, earning a number of decorations, including two Bronze Stars. Ken and Ruby married when Ken was on furlough in 1943. The same year, Harold died of "accidental electrocution."

On May 17, 1942, Kimi, Tom and Ruby arrived at the Relocation Center at Poston, near Yuma, Arizona. Tom was released from Poston on January 18, 1944, and went to Detroit to learn automobile maintenance. Kimi and Ruby were released on October 31, 1945, and returned to Costa Mesa, where they were fortunate to be reunited with their property on 17th and Santa Ana.

During the war, my parents purchased two lots at the corner of Santa Ana and Broad Street in Newport Heights, in-

tending to build two houses, one to live in and one to sell. In his search for workers, Don found Tom Imoto — thus beginning the long friendship between the Imotos and the Smiths. Tom worked on the two houses and, in 1948, on four rental units my father built on East 18th Street. Tom also built a gas station and garage on the corner of his family's property.

Ruby built a tiny dental office on the same land, on Santa Ana between their house and the garage. She was my dentist from the time I was five until I moved to Oregon in 1992. I believe I was one of her first patients at age five, and one of the last she let go because her medical liability insurance premiums were unsustainable on part-time basis. Tom, of course, always saw to the maintenance of our family cars.

Tom's first gas station was, I believe, of standard Flying A design. The station was later changed to Phillips 66. Ruby's dental office was a small square brown stucco edifice, maybe 30x30 feet. Inside was a skinny waiting room, a dental operations room, a lab room with an autoclave for sterilizing instruments, a small washroom and a back door. Ruby's mother, Mama Imoto, as she was known, did the bookkeeping for both Ruby and Tom. She loved to smile and had a delightful sense of humor. Because of her limited English, customers at Tom's gas station often treated her subserviently. Even as a youngster that disturbed me. I liked her a lot and knew that she was special and smart.

Ken completed his college degree in 1946, then taught

Asian Studies for a year at USC before landing what he described as a "very fine position" in sales and management with the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada. Ken and Ruby came back to Costa Mesa. At first they lived with Kimi and Tom in the farmhouse on Santa Ana. Eventually they bought their own

home in the city and raised two children there, a daughter Sharyn and a son Kevin. Sherry went to USC and married a dentist, Takeo Yamamoto. In semi-retirement Ruby treated a handful of patients in Tak's office.

I remember going to the Imotos' farmhouse for dinner in the late 1940s. Just as a token of thanks for the friendship and support of Don and Helen. Of course, that was long before Japanese food became chic in Southern California (for obvious xenophobic reasons). Don and Helen had both traveled to Japan before, but it was my first experience with strange textures and flavors, and I was fascinated.

Shortly before I moved to Oregon in 1992, I made one last appointment with Ruby. She cleaned my teeth and gave me a dish towel with a crocheted hanging loop and a crocheted dish cloth to take with me to Oregon. I still have them.

Kimi Imoto died in 1978 at age 83. Tom Imoto died in 1988 at age 72. Ken Uyesugi died in 2005 at age 87. Ruby died in 2016 at age 98½. They are interred at Pacific View Memorial Park in Corona del Mar.



Harold and Ruby (left) appear in their Newport Harbor High School class photos. Note: The photo of Thomas T. Imoto (right) conflicts chronologically with other information we have.



Left: Mayor Katrina Foley speaks at the groundbreaking ceremony. Right: OC Fair Board members get their shovels dirty.

## Breaking Ground on New Aircraft Installation

On Thursday, August 8, officials and guests from Costa Mesa, Orange County Fair, Orange County Employees Association, Heroes Hall, and the Heroes Hall Foundation were in attendance at the Groundbreaking Ceremony for an actual Vietnam era A4 Skyhawk jet aircraft that will be installed and unveiled on November 9 during the annual Veteran's Day celebration.



Art and Mary Ellen Goddard sport matching shades while manning the booth at this year's Concerts in the Parks.

## Spreading History with Rhythm and Melody

Thank you to everyone who joined us at Concerts in the Park this year. We had a wonderful time meeting present and (hopefully) future members and volunteers. The music was pretty good, too! And a big thank you to Susan Weeks, Art Goddard, Mary Ellen Goddard, Estelle Hughes, Tess Bernstein, Cynthia Humphreys, and Jared Comini for welcoming newcomers to our local history.

### Shop with us on Amazon

Every time you start your order with Amazon Smile, Amazon will donate to the Costa Mesa Historical Society – at no cost to you. Visit [costamesahistory.org/smile](http://costamesahistory.org/smile) before making your next purchase. You can use your existing Amazon account.

### Temporary Parking Instructions

Entry to the historical society parking lot is currently limited to Anaheim Avenue, but this is subject to change. If Anaheim is closed, try Park Avenue. The project should be completed by spring 2020.

### Make a Difference – Volunteer

We're looking for part-time volunteers to set up and conduct tours of the **adobe**. We'll train you on everything you need to know. We're also looking for a volunteer to sit on two committees: the **Newsletter Assembly Committee** prepares the newsletter for mailing, while the **Adobe Committee** recruits volunteers to plan an event, become a docent, or work on exhibits. Committees meet monthly and are chaired by board members. Interested? Visit [costamesahistory.org/volunteer](http://costamesahistory.org/volunteer). Isn't it more fun to work as a team?

### Dues Overdue?

Make sure your dues are up to date by looking at your **dues expiration date** on the address label to the right of your name. If your dues are due, renew online at [costamesahistory.org/membership](http://costamesahistory.org/membership), mail in a check, c/o Susan Weeks, Treasurer, or drop it off on a Thursday or Friday from 10am to 3pm. Membership dues are listed on the back page.

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1900 Adams Ave.

Open 12-4 p.m. Every 1st and 3rd Saturday\*

Explore centuries of history when you visit one of Orange County's oldest buildings in its gorgeous setting at Estancia Park.

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1870 Anaheim Ave.

Open 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Every Thursday and Friday\*

View a mind-boggling array of artifacts from 5,000 years of Costa Mesa history – from the first peoples to the City of the Arts.

\* Or schedule an appointment at 949-631-5918.

I N S I D E

Celebrate Fall with History

Remembering the Imoto Family

Park Concerts, Skyhawk Groundbreaking & More!

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