

Earl Kazumi Tanbara 1905 - 1974

Earl K. and Ruth N. Tanbara Memorial Scholarship
Twin Cities JACL

Earl Kazumi Tanbara was born in Pleasanton CA on December 5, 1905 to Miyota and Takeno Tanbara who had immigrated to the United States from Okayama Ken, Japan, in the late 1890s. His younger sister, Grace Tomiko Kurihara of San Francisco, CA, died in 1992. Son, Thomas M. Kurihara of Arlington, VA, and two grandchildren survive Grace Kurihara. Earl died on January 4, 1974. His remains are interred in the Tanbara family crypt at Lakewood Memorial Cemetery, Minneapolis.

Earl Tanbara graduated from Los Gatos High School, CA, in 1923 and received a BA degree from the University of California, Berkeley in 1927. He worked for the Dollar Steamship Company from 1928 until 1939 when it was transferred to the U.S. Government and was the predecessor company of the American President Lines. He eventually served as the Director of Marketing for Dollar Steamship Co. He and Ruth traveled extensively around the world for Dollar Steamship Company.

Earl was united in marriage to Ruth Nomura Tanbara of Portland, OR at the Centenary Wilbur Methodist Church, Portland on September 16, 1935.

Earl played basketball, baseball, and tennis while attending the University of California. The Japanese American press portrayed him as the “heavy hitter” for the Nikkei San Jose Asahi baseball team that toured Japan in 1925. Recognized as an outstanding hitter, Earl was invited to play on a San Jose city all-star team against the visiting Pittsburg Pirates in 1924 (Pittsburg would win the World Series the following year). He was an accomplished contract bridge player, winning a San Francisco Examiner contract bridge tournament in 1933 while working for Dollar Steamship Co. An avid low handicap golfer, he was well prepared, carrying a left-handed wood and iron along with a full set of right-handed clubs.

In 1942, he relocated from Berkeley to a farm in Reedley, CA with Ruth and his parents in an attempt to avoid wartime internment. The bad news was that the boundary for relocating individuals of Japanese ancestry was moved further inland. As a result, they were facing relocation. The good news was that the U.S. Army officer who visited the farm to inform them of the need to move to an assembly center was a former high school classmate of Ruth from Portland. The officer offered them an opportunity to move anywhere East if they had friends who would accept them. They contacted friends in Minneapolis and they were placed on a military train headed for the Twin Cities. Earl’s parents were not able to go with them and were subsequently interned in Camp III, Poston, AZ.

Earl and Ruth moved several times after arriving in the Twin Cities and eventually settled at 218 S. Avon Street, Saint Paul. When they moved into the neighborhood, a military officer from Fort Snelling made the rounds of the neighbors to inform them about Japanese Americans of their citizenship record and to avoid any misunderstandings when Nikkei soldiers, including Ruth’s brother, Paul, were invited for dinner while on weekend passes from the Japanese Language Schools at Fort Savage, University of Minnesota, and Fort Snelling.

Earl and Ruth worked on their own to help evacuees as well. They assisted over 100 evacuees to leave camp and find a place in the Twin Cities. They also were active in placing many Japanese Americans in work situations in the Twin Cities during and after WWII. They housed as many people in their home as could comfortably fit, picked people up from the train, helped them find jobs and apartments on their own time in addition to their work with the resettlement committee. They also gave talks to community groups to help foster community acceptance of the new Japanese American residents in a state that only had 51 Japanese on the 1940 state census.

Earl worked selling automotive parts and auto glass and started the Pyramid Foam Rubber Products (now Pyramid Trim Products), a business that is still in operation at Prior and University Avenue. He was the editor of the San Francisco JACL Newsletter that became the *JACL Pacific Citizen*. Earl was one of the founding members of the Twin Cities chapter of the Japanese American Citizen League in 1946 and was on the board of the organization's credit union. He was helping to establish and was president of the Minnihon Arts Center when he passed away in 1974. In addition, he was active in many different civic activities including the Twin Cities JACL and Unity Church-Unitarian.