

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW #450-1

with

Masao Asada (MA)

March 25, 1992

Kailua, O`ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[Editor's note: Also present at the interview is Masao Asada's wife, Sumie Yamashita Asada (SA).]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Masao Asada, for the World War II oral history project, on Wednesday, March 25, 1992, at his home in Kailua, O`ahu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Mr. Asada, let's start. Why don't you tell me first, when you were born and where you were born.

MA: Okay, I was born in Pearl City, July 20, 1908.

WN: What part of Pearl City?

MA: Pearl City Peninsula is what it is actually is. About halfway down to the end. Pearl City Peninsula is about a mile, mile and a half, I should say, from the boundary. We used to call the boundary where the railroad used to run. And from the railroad tracks [*i.e.*, *O`ahu Railway & Land Company*] down they used to [*call it*] Pearl City Peninsula.

WN: The railroad [*tracks*] ran alongside on what we call Kam[*ehameha*] Highway now?

MA: No, it's (further) down (about one-half mile from Kamehameha Highway). Well, in Pearl City, (the main part of town was near the railroad station). (From the railroad station down we considered it to be the start of Pearl City Peninsula.) Pearl Harbor is what they call the East Loch, and then Pearl City Peninsula extends, and the Waipahu side of the (peninsula) was the (Middle) Loch.

WN: Oh, I see. West Loch was more toward `Ewa.

MA: `Ewa side. West Loch extends into Honouliuli, the old Honouliuli. (The entrance to West Loch from the ocean is near Hickam Field.)

WN: You mean the . . .

MA: Well, [*Waipi`o*] Peninsula.

WN: Oh, I see.

MA: And so the loch extends close to Hickam Field.

WN: Pearl City Peninsula?

MA: No, the [*Waipi`o*] Peninsula. Pearl City Peninsula is right down (from Pearl City town), and then (extends to near) Ford Island. So Ford Island was maybe a mile.

WN: You mean from the . . .

MA: Pearl City Peninsula to Ford Island.

WN: Oh, that far?

MA: Yes, it's quite far. Because the olden days, the cruiser was able to go as far as halfway of Ford Island, but they never put a cruiser in there before, that I know of. But there all these destroyers used to anchor in the East Loch. Down on the Middle Loch, around the [*Pearl City*] Peninsula side, not too many was coming in there. Mostly near Ford Island side, near the entrance side. But I don't know when they dredged the harbor. They dredged the harbor.

WN: Were you there when they dredged it?

MA: Oh yeah. It was before the war. And they were dredging and especially Ford Island side, I think it's pretty deep now. Right around, near the entrance to Pearl Harbor, on Ford Island side, on Middle Loch side, over there was naturally deep.

WN: I see. So the area between Pearl City Peninsula and Ford Island was dredged?

MA: Yeah, they dredged the whole harbor. [*Beginning in 1902, a channel leading into Pearl Harbor was dredged, allowing large numbers of naval ships to enter.*]

WN: How would you get to Pearl City Peninsula?

MA: Well, when you come in on Kam[*mehameha*] Highway, you know where the Pearl City Tavern is? Well, that's where you come in, and you just keep on going straight down.

WN: Okay, so that's Lehua Avenue?

MA: Lehua Avenue, yes. And Lehua Avenue extends all the way down to the [*Pearl City*] Peninsula. And I think it went down to. . . Coral Avenue used to be the last road on Pearl City Peninsula. And then the next one was Aloha Avenue, and then we were on Franklin Avenue.

WN: And in those days, the roads were paved and everything?

MA: Well, in the olden days, it wasn't paved, because [*at one time*] the whole peninsula was owned by the railroad.

WN: Dillingham?

MA: O`ahu Railway [*& Land Company*], yes. And of course, all along the waterfront side, there

were [*families*] like the Waterhouses and the old Forbes family, and then the Robinsons and then way on the end, before World War I, is—chee, what was that guy's name? You know the old American Factors? Used to be Hackfeld and Company, German. Well, the president of Hackfeld and Company built a home right on the end of the peninsula. He had a big home over there. Then when war started, they, I don't know, the government took over everything. So . . .

WN: In World War I?

MA: World War I. Then, later on, the Magoon family came in. Miss Magoon was married to O. N. Tyler. (I was told Mr. Tyler was a navy officer.)

WN: Tyler.

MA: And they had a home way on the end, that was way after World War I, before World War II. And right next door was her sister now, I can't think of her sister's name. You know where Gem [*Department Store*] is, in downtown?

WN: Kapalama?

MA: Kapalama. Is that Kapalama?

WN: Well, there's a Gem's Kapalama.

MA: No, no, there's one . . .

WN: Ward Avenue?

MA: Ward (Avenue).

WN: Oh, the Ward family.

MA: One of the Magoon daughters was married to the Ward family. And the Ward family owns all that property over there.

WN: You mean, the Ward Estate?

MA: The Ward Estate.

WN: The area surrounding the [*Neal S.*] Blaisdell Arena [*in Honolulu*]?

MA: All that area. So they had a home over there.

Then going around the other way (to Pearl City Peninsula), there was a Harry Cobb. He was treasurer of O`ahu Railway [*and Land*] Company. Ted Cooke had a home on the waterfront too. And Dr. (Arthur Hodgins' summer home). And then Robert [*W.*] Atkinson, he was the president of Hawaiian Dredging [*Company*].

WN: Did Dillinghams have a home there?

MA: Dillingham family had a home too, way on the other end. And before the war [*World War II*], [*before*] Atkinson moved to Nu`uanu. He leased the property to Pan-American. And his [*and others'*] home [*became*] the Pan-American [*China Clipper*] base when they were using seaplanes. And so, the whole Atkinson home over there—he had a big yard over there, it was Pan-American [*China Clipper*] base. That was when Pan-American first started to fly. [*Pan-American China Clipper service began in 1935.*]

WN: So this must have been in the thirties?

MA: It could be late thirties. Forties, they were flying already.

WN: Right. So this is before the war, World War II, yeah?

MA: Yes, long before World War II [*1935*].

WN: These families, did they live there permanently or was this more like a beach . . .

MA: More like a summer home.

WN: Summer home, I see.

MA: But some of them used to live [*there permanently*], but most of them were summer home.

WN: Was it a nice beach or something up there?

MA: Well, the beach was nice at that time. But when the navy—before the war—the navy start bringing in a lot of ships and, oh, that area was all contaminated. They used to run oil, you know, to cover up the (shoreline), because the ships just discharge everything. And it must have been a good many years later that they don't allow ships to dump out all their waste, so that I think now it's clean. But before the war and during the war, oh, that beach was terrible.

WN: As a kid growing up over there, was it a good beach?

MA: Oh yes, we used to go out fishing, all kinds, and we used to enjoy out there. We used to go out swimming, you know. And there was a big (wharf)---the [*O`ahu Railway & Land Company*] railroad used to own that pier. And olden days, at one time, they used to ship pineapple. They used to raise pineapple way up above the heights. That was where [*Pacific*] Palisades is now. All that was all pineapple before. [*The pineapple was grown by Libby, McNeill & Libby.*]

WN: Oh.

MA: So all that pineapple, they used to bring it down [*to Pearl City Peninsula*], and ship it by boat to town.

WN: I see. So they used to bring it by truck from [*Pacific*] Palisades down to the pier . . .

MA: Yes.

WN: . . . at the [*Pearl City*] Peninsula, and then the ship used to . . .

MA: Sometime they have a barge. And take it down to (Pier 16, I think).

WN: They didn't use the railway for that?

MA: They didn't use the railroad too much. I don't know why.

WN: Maybe they were using it more for sugar?

MA: No. Later years, I think, they did use the railroad, but in Pearl City, they didn't have too many side tracks where they have freight cars to come in. But later years, they did extend more side tracks to load and unload. So in later years, I think, they were using the train. I don't know when they quit planting pineapple up there, though. But at one time, it was pineapple.

WN: Did Dillingham have their---did O`ahu Railway [*& Land Company*] have any kind of headquarters over there?

MA: No, they had a station, a ticket agent, you know. And he used to handle everything, from mail all the way. . . . We didn't have no post office then (chuckles). The ticket agent was running the post office and everything. Because all the mail used to come on the train before, when the train was running (chuckles).

WN: I guess in those days, that was real country over there.

MA: Oh yes. But `Ewa district had a courthouse in Pearl City. So it [*`Ewa district*] extends from `Aiea all the way down to Wai`anae, [*so*] the [*`Ewa district*] court was in Pearl City at one time. But we didn't have any police station or whatever. The police were operating from the courthouse. And the courthouse, they had the tax assessor in there, and the police and whatnot.

WN: Tell me something about your dad [*Otojiro Asada*].

MA: Oh, my father was sort of a independent person, you might say, that he never wanted to work for anybody. So he came to Pearl City, and in those days part of the peninsula, on the upper side, was rice patch. So he came to Pearl City and he was a rice farmer for two years. He was a bachelor on the farm, and according to what he was telling us, when he was still a bachelor, he used to stay way up in Kipapa Gulch. And I guess in those days, nobody—well, [*people*] owned the land, but nobody take care of it, and he was up there and he cut the guava trees, was making charcoal. His profession was wood cutting and charcoal. And so he was saying that he used to make charcoal over there and if he go down, daytime, they suspect him [*of trespassing*], so he used to go down from early evening and deliver his charcoal to Waipahu. His main charcoal customers were the—well, olden days, they had these *senbei* manufacturers, small family-type. They were one of his best customers. So he (sold all the charcoal to them).

WN: Did he have like a oven that he---how did he make charcoal in those days?

MA: Well, most charcoal, they have a cement oven like, you know. But he didn't have that, he used to pile the wood—well, the hole in the ground was about, oh, four feet deep. Then from the bottom, he used to pile his wood up in pyramid. Maybe the thing was about, oh, eight or ten feet high. Then as soon as he gets all this wood piled up in there, he wraps it all around with this roofing iron. And then, when he covered with all the roofing iron, then he used to put mud. So every time he makes charcoal, he banks it with this mud, and (there were four vents).

WN: Where does he put the mud?

MA: Outside of the roofing iron.

WN: I see.

MA: And then, right on the top, he used to have an opening of—if I'm right, he had an opening about two or three feet wide, and about maybe another three feet or four feet in length. And then he starts his fire from the top, see.

WN: Oh.

MA: And when the fire catches on to the big one, then he used to cover it, on top of that, and then he used to pack mud on top of it. And he used to have four vents. And first ten days, he used to watch that day and night. So he, I don't think he slept too much nighttime.

(Laughter)

WN: This was *kiawe*?

MA: *Kiawe*.

WN: How big were the logs?

MA: Oh they were—he was using mostly the stumps. See, he buys the wood, and then he digs the stump out, he don't pay for the stump. He just pay for the wood. When he tackles a big tree, he digs around for couple of days before he knocks it down. But he used to dig all around and cut the biggest root, and whichever way he wanted to tumble that thing, he used to chop the roots away.

WN: So he paid for the wood? What do you mean he paid for the wood?

MA: I guess he was pretty sharp. He used to go and see a tree, and lot of these wood he was buying from the railroad.

WN: I see.

MA: The property is railroad, so he estimate a tree, he used to grade the wood, number one and number two. Number two is, I think, about three or four inches in diameter, branches. But anything bigger than that was number one. So he'll say, well, he gonna have one cord of number one, and, say, half a cord of number two. Then he estimate how much he's gonna sell it, so he gonna pay so much to buy it.

WN: So he buys the whole tree?

MA: He buys the whole tree.

WN: I see.

MA: And then the small branches like that, well, as a kid, I used to help, work, cut the wood, too. When I was about seven or eight years old. I can't swing an axe, so he give me a cane knife.

(Laughter)

MA: I do the small ones.

(Laughter)

WN: That's kind of hard, eh?

MA: Yes.

WN: Cane knife for *kiawe* wood.

MA: No, the cane knife, you get it sharp, boy, you can cut it. Just swing it around. But years later, he quit that and then he went into papaya farming. He was one of the early one, papaya farming. And he bought quite a bit of land around where we were living, on Franklin Avenue.

WN: From [B. F.] Dillingham?

MA: [From] Dillingham, we bought some land. But Dillingham, he was kind of prejudiced. I'd say he didn't like to sell it to Japanese. Some of the land, I think, was Dillingham's land, but my father had a very friendly tax assessor. I think his name was Hayselden. And whenever he wants to buy land, and if it belongs to Dillingham, this tax assessor would go and tell Dillingham that he want to buy that place. And so Dillingham didn't suspect that this guy was a middleman (chuckles). And he'd go and buy the land, and he'll get all the titles in his name, then he transfers it to my father. But my father was kind of a—he was looking more forward to years ahead, I think. All the land that he bought, he was telling us that he's an alien and if there ever is a war between Japan and United States, "They gonna take my property away, because I'm an alien." So he used to deed all the property to us, to the kids, my brother and I, you know. And so all the land around that he bought, was either in my name or in my brother's name, you know.

WN: How old were you when you started to have the land deeded to you?

MA: Oh, I was pretty small yet. When he bought the first lot, I was only about four or five years old, I think. I can barely remember. But he did buy one lot. See, those lots down Franklin Avenue was 50 by 200 feet, you know. So was a pretty good-size lot.

WN: Now you were saying there were a lot of big shots that lived in that area, and then you have like your father. Were there other---did all the Japanese live together in the same area?

MA: Well, there were quite a bit of Japanese family there, but they were all working for these people there, you might say the big shots that owned the property, as yardboy, taking care of the yard and whatnot. So like the Dillinghams and all the property owners down there, they all had Japanese men as yardboy, they call 'em.

WN: And were they supplied housing?

MA: Yes, they were supplied housing. They used to have (caretakers' homes, some were across the street from the main home).

WN: Were there other people like your father that owned land and . . .

MA: No, nobody (on the peninsula).

WN: . . . was independent?

MA: Nobody was over there. My father was the only independent one over there. I know one time, one of this family was fired, and when you get fired, you get no place to go, so they used to cry to my father to let them stay there. And my father had several old shacks around there, it was old but it was liveable. And so they used to rent and stay there for a while until they find another job. But in [*Pearl City*] Peninsula, my father was the only independent one that wasn't connected to anybody.

WN: How many Japanese families would you say were living up there?

MA: Oh, about, roughly about ten to twelve, I guess, families. But there were a few bachelors too, Japanese bachelors over there.

WN: Did you---did the families get together occasionally?

MA: Well, we used to, my father used to have this *mochi* pounding thing, you know, so every once a year we used to have quite a party.

WN: New Year's time?

MA: Yes, before New Year's like that. And they all bring their *mochi* rice and pound it together. So sometime they used to pound all day. But they all come and help, so no problem. But I think New Year's about the only time everybody used to get together. Sometime we used to have church service at the home. Pearl City Hongwanji minister used to come down. Then they got so that once a month, they used to have it so each family would take over one, "Next month, I'll have it at my place," and so forth. They used to go around that way. So it was quite a community.

WN: So all the Japanese were members of the Hongwanji?

MA: Yes, they were all Pearl City Hongwanji members.

WN: Did you folks socialize at all with the big shot families?

MA: Not in those days. They looked at Japanese as though we're all laborers, or whatever (chuckles).

WN: Was your father—you know, being so independent and owning land—was he like a leader or a big shot among the Japanese?

MA: No, I don't think so. But lot of times, something happen, they used to come and talk things at our place. Because he [*Masao Asada's father*] don't have a boss, so much easier for people to

come to our place. If you go to somebody, a caretaker's home, if the boss comes around, they, maybe, may not like it. So they used to come to our place and talk, like that.

WN: Besides Hongwanji, were there other kind of organizations?

MA: No, there wasn't anything in Pearl City in those days.

WN: No other Japanese did farming down there?

MA: No.

WN: Other than your father?

MA: Nobody down there. Years later, before World War II, there were quite a bit of people and there were some farming.

WN: But not when you were a small kid?

MA: When I was small kid, (we were the only independent family).

WN: So as a small kid, what did you do to have good fun?

MA: Well, we used to go fishing a lot.

WN: What did you catch?

MA: Oh, in the mornings, you go down the pier [*i.e., landing*], you can get *papios*. And then we go out on a boat and in the harbor, we used to, on this—they used to call this *`omaka*, looks like a—what's that fish?

WN: A small fish?

MA: No, it's a good-size fish. But it's different from *papio*. The *papio* is a wider fish.

WN: Right, right.

MA: But this *`omaka* was a sort of a, rather like a . . .

WN: Like an eel?

MA: No, what they call that fish? They sell that in the market there.

SA: Not *papio*?

WN: Same color as *papio*? Silver?

SA: *Akule*?

MA: Yeah, *akule*.

WN: *Akule*, oh.

MA: Yeah, it's look more like *akule*, except this *`omaka* had yellow stripes on the body. I don't see that fish anymore around, though.

WN: I never heard of it.

MA: I don't know, the *`omaka* is, must be a Hawaiian name.

WN: So you used to go out on what, a rowboat?

MA: Yeah, we used to get boat. The big shots, they used to have rowboats. We used to go out on their boat and (chuckles) fish outside, when they are not around.

Before the war started, that was way back in 1923, my brother started a produce business. And then, later on that year—he had a helper one time, he hired a man and I think he got quite gyped out of that guy. He fired him anyway. He was going out with merchandise and don't bring back too much cash. (Chuckles) So he fired him. And then he asked me to take over and we were going to Ford Island and sell our produce to the families [*living*] over there. Not too many houses over there.

WN: Who lived on Ford Island back then?

MA: Ford Island, that time, when they first had that, the army had half of Ford Island, and the navy had half of it. The army base was Luke Field. That's the first place they had the airplanes. And they had about thirty homes on the island. And I used to go out on a rowboat. I used to row across the bay into Ford Island, do business over there.

WN: That was one mile?

MA: About a mile.

WN: How long did it take you?

MA: Well, on a calm day, was easy, but, boy, on a windy day, was rough rowing. (Laughs) And sometimes you see some big sharks, too, you know. This one time I know this big shark start circling my boat, and the fin's up. Just by looking from my boat, there could be about, oh, good eight or ten feet, big buggers with their fins sticking out. Summertime, there's plenty of sharks in there. But never heard of anybody got attacked with the sharks, though. In fact, I never heard of that over there before. But lately you hear so much about the sharks attacking. Olden days, we used to go swimming and they never bothered us.

WN: So, your brother started the produce store in '23?

MA: Yes.

WN: You were fifteen years old. But prior to that, what, you were going to school?

MA: Oh yes, I was going Pearl City.

WN: Where did you go to school?

MA: Pearl City [*Elementary*] School.

WN: And you walked?

MA: Oh, I had a bicycle. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh yeah?

MA: So I was riding a bike to school.

WN: How many other children lived in that peninsula?

MA: Oh, there was a quite a bit. Maybe about—at least twelve to fifteen kids. See, olden days [*beginning in 1891*] the railroad used to run a train [*i.e., a railroad branch line*] to the [*Pearl City*] Peninsula, they had a special engine and one coach. [*B. F.*] Dillingham owned the railroad. The railroad owned the property. The [*O`ahu Railway & Land Company*] owned all the [*Pearl City*] Peninsula property. [*In 1888 B. F. Dillingham acquired seventy-five acres of Manana Peninsula, later called Pearl City Peninsula, for fifty dollars an acre. The following year, another 145 acres were added. O.R. & L. then ran a branch line down the peninsula in 1891.*] So each time a train is coming in from town, [*passengers*] would wait at the Pearl City station, and this train would pick up the passengers, if there is any, to go down the peninsula. After the [*main*] train passed Pearl City, going on through Waipahu to `Ewa Mill, they used to run the [*branch*] train, whether there was passenger on or not. So each time a [*main*] train comes into Pearl City, the [*branch*] train would go down. And each time a [*main*] train is going to town, they come down and run the [*branch*] train down, and then meet the [*main*] train that's going to town at the peninsula.

WN: You mean, you talking about a special tracks that ran off the main tracks . . .

MA: Yes, off the main track.

WN: . . . down into the peninsula . . .

MA: Yes.

WN: . . . on the waterfront, you mean?

MA: No, was alongside of Lehua Avenue.

WN: Oh, I see.

MA: The track was running all the way.

WN: But the whole train didn't go down, just one.

MA: Just one coach and if there was any freight, they used to hook a flatbed. And if there wasn't too much freight, they didn't use that. We had to go and pick it up at the Pearl City station. Anything, big stuff that's bulky, like if you want to build a house and get lumber coming in,

why, a whole load of lumber would come in and they would bring 'em down.

WN: On the tracks?

MA: Yes. Then from the track, the consumer that ordered the lumber, that was his, they had to pick it up at the track.

WN: So there was like a smaller engine?

MA: Yes, they had a, like, they had an engine, similar to this—well, now, you don't see it, but the plantation used to have a small engine. That's the kind of engine they had.

WN: Did your father use the railroad, at all, for his business?

MA: No, I don't think so. He used to have a horse and—they used to call that dray, eh?

WN: Gray?

MA: Dray, it's a flatbed, four-wheel, built for freight. And one horse. And he used to deliver his charcoal to Waipahu himself. But, you know, you have a horse, the upkeep is not too cheap, you gotta feed 'em, eh? So later years, there was one old Japanese man, he had an old truck. So he used to hire and he quit keeping the horse. But way back when I was kid, (he had a horse, and our job was) to feed the horse.

WN: That was one of your chores?

MA: Yes, winter months when there are lot of grass, you know, we used to take 'em out in the pasture out there and tie 'em to a *kiawe* tree, and graze 'em out there, in the grass.

WN: What other chores did you have as a kid?

MA: Well, I don't know. I know whenever there was work, we used to have to help him. When we start taking out the charcoal, we used to have to bag 'em. We used to bag 'em in a big brown gunnysack. The thing used to weigh about eighty pounds, you know.

WN: Charcoal was like whole?

MA: Well, it's all broken up when you take it out. In chunks, pretty good-size chunks.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

WN: Okay. Tell me something about your mother [*Masuno Asada*].

MA: My mother, she used to do all the family cooking. And at one time, when my father was in the wood business, he used to have one, in fact, several men, he used to hire. And they used to stay at our place and my mother used to do all the cooking for them. You know, 'cause they were bachelors. Then she used to do all the laundry. She used to take in laundry too, in younger days, you know, wash.

WN: For the bachelors?

MA: And some of the families too. *Haole* families that lived out there. They didn't have any home help so they used to hire this wash woman. And she used to go out, help in washing laundry all around.

WN: Did she help your father at all, in the business?

MA: Well, not outside, no. She used to stay home. Take care of the house and whatever she can do at home. She was taking in some laundry too, my mother. In those days, all hand wash. No such thing as washing machine. (Chuckles) So she used to work hard too.

WN: Did you help your mother at all, too, in, you know, around the house?

MA: Oh yes, around the house, sometime, whatever we could do.

WN: Plus you had two sisters, too.

MA: Yes. They were all young yet, below me.

WN: What was your house like?

MA: Well, was built something like a bungalow. (Laughs) Iron roof. Then when he start cutting more wood, why, when he hired these bachelors like that, he used to extend the house.

WN: Was your father's house bigger or nicer than, say, the other families that worked for the big shots?

MA: Well, it was a pretty good-size home we had. I don't know, in area, I don't know. Roughly maybe twenty-five feet by thirty feet. I think there were two—I think one side was one big bedroom, and one side was a living room.

WN: Okay, so, what about things—was there anything like sports, organized sports or anything down there?

MA: No, not in those days. (Laughs)

WN: Nothing organized.

MA: Nothing organized. We used to get together and play marbles and stuff like that. We used to have a game we used to play a lot, peewee?

WN: Peewee, yeah.

(Laughter)

MA: You remember those things?

WN: Well, I—lot of people have told me about it.

MA: Yeah.

WN: With the stick and . . .

MA: Right, cut the broom handle and we used to have a lot of argument over that.

(Laughter)

MA: We used to fight a lot when you go into that. One tries to cheat the others.

(Laughter)

MA: But there wasn't too much, because the parents never did too much with the kids. And they all working, so they were too busy to—so we had to find our own enjoyment.

WN: Were you folks allowed in the big shots' yards or anything like that?

MA: Well, lot of times they're not there. But the yardboys, they don't like kids to come around, mess the yard up.

WN: Oh yeah. So after your father was doing charcoal—did he sell wood too, by the way?

MA: Yes, he was selling wood too.

WN: Firewood?

MA: Firewood. He used to sell wood by the cord, by the whole chunk. Or some people wanted all chopped. He used to cut 'em into. . . . See, all the woods are four feet long. So he used to cut 'em in three sections, and the big ones, we used to chop it with an axe. And chop it to a size that they can use in the wood stove. And that was a job too.

WN: You folks had wood stove in your house?

MA: Oh yes.

WN: Kerosene?

MA: Wood stove.

WN: Oh, wood stove.

MA: Years later, we had kerosene.

WN: Okay. Were there stores in the area? Where did you folks get your, you know, your goods, your rice and things like that?

MA: Pearl City, when we were kids, there was only one store, the [N.] Miura Store on the corner.

WN: That was where, on the peninsula, or . . .

MA: No, way up on Kam[*ehameha*] Highway [*and Lehua Avenue*], right on the corner.

WN: You mean where Pearl City Tavern is now?

MA: Oh, right across [*the street where the Pearl City 7-Eleven stands today*]. I don't know when they terminated the market [*N. Miura Store closed shortly after the end of World War II*], but anyway the old folks died and one of the sons was my classmate, you know. Tom Miura, he's still living. I think he was one year older than me. But we used to go school together, his father [*N. Miura*] owned that store over there. And that was the only store. Then they had a Chinese store near the railroad station, right below the railroad station, Mow Leong Store. [*Mow Leong Store was located where Lehua Elementary School stands today.*]

WN: Mow Leong.

MA: There was a butcher shop too, Chinese butcher shop, was selling meat. And I forgot the name of that butcher shop. And they had one restaurant, Eto, Japanese fellow was running the restaurant over there.

WN: So, did, like Miura Store, for example, would send *chomon tori* down to your house?

MA: Either that or we used to go up [*to the store*] and order. Like rice and stuff, they used to deliver. They used to have a horse and buggy. They used to deliver. But small stuff, we used to go and pick it up.

WN: Oh, you folks used to go the store and go get it.

MA: Yes.

WN: Then nobody came to take your order.

MA: Oh, no. But years later, there were. I don't know just how long. From Waipahu they start coming in. This Kato Store from Waipahu came in and they used to send a salesman and all the neighbors would gather at our place and they used to order their. . . . 'Cause that Kato Store was sort of a cash-and-carry, like, you know, you pay in cash, no charges. So salesman used to come our place in the evening, and then all the people know when he's coming, so whoever want to buy, they used to come down [*to MA's house*] and order. And he used to deliver at our place, then from there they used to pick 'em up and take it home. Sometimes my father used to shop in Waipahu too, I guess, when he delivers the charcoal and stuff like that. He used to buy things in Waipahu and come back. So we were pretty well organized on merchandising.

WN: But Miura Store was mostly charge?

MA: They were all charge. Those days, I don't know how, they used to carry everyone [*for*] about ninety days, though. You don't pay by the month (chuckles).

WN: Did they have “new month?” Do you know what that is?

MA: Yes. They used to say, well, put it on “new month,” then everybody would buy.

WN: Yeah.

MA: About twenty-fifth of the month. [*Charges made after the twenty-fifth of each month would not be counted towards one's bill until the following month.*]

WN: For big things like rice and feed, and things like that . . .

MA: They used to deliver. Mow Leong, years later, they start to deliver too. And the old man kind of retired and the son came. He was, I think, working in town someplace, and he came back and then he started running that Mow Leong Store then. And he used to deliver.

WN: So when you were growing up, the roads were all dirt roads?

MA: Well, Lehua Avenue was paved, but it was a narrow road. Hardly two cars could pass through. That's when the railroad owned it. So I think they had it paved at one time. And after that, they didn't do too much.

WN: And then Franklin Avenue was all dirt.

MA: The dirt road, yes. And then the railroad turned that road [*over*] to the City [*and County of Honolulu*]. That was way back, before World War II. When the city took it over, then they paved it. All the side streets and everything.

WN: The city took over the . . .

MA: . . . (whole peninsula road). The railroad turned the whole road (over) to the city. So that's when we got paved street.

WN: So Dillingham sold to the city?

MA: I don't know what the deal was, whether they sold it, or they just gave it to them, to maintain the (road). Until then, the railroad had to maintain everything. I know when the railroad had it, they used to have this *kiawe* tree growing alongside of the road. And this [*Albert*] Van Valkenburg was living over in the peninsula. He was the president of the [*O.R. & L.*] land department. And my father used to buy. . . . When he buys trees from the railroad, he used to do business with them. So when I was about ten or eleven years old, I think—no, not quite, about eight or nine yet, I think, one year summertime he wanted to hire me and cut the *kiawe* off. These young trees growing, cut all that. And so I said, “Well, I cannot tell you I going work.” I said, “My father always waiting for me during summertime (chuckles), to help him.”

So he said, “Oh, you go and tell your father that I want to hire you for several days to clear the road.”

So I talked to my father, and he said, “Well,” he says, “buying wood from him, so maybe you better go help.”

(Laughter)

MA: So, you know how much he paid me? I work from eight in the morning till about three-thirty. Fifty cents.

WN: For the whole day?

MA: For whole day!

(Laughter)

MA: You work in the sun, too, you know. And in those bushes, there's a bee nest, you know. And one time, I got stung. And Van Valkenburg had another brother living with him. He was a cripple, he had a wooden leg, I think. He had a small cottage and he was living with the brother over there, and he used to—when I go to work or when he hires me, to get the tools, he used to give me the key and go in. Pull the tools that I need from the tool shack. And then, when I come back with the tools, then he'll check to see I got all the tools that I took out.

But one time, the bee stung me. It was only about two o'clock in the afternoon. And I went back, and first thing he saw me, he start grumbling at me. He says, "This is not three-thirty yet." He should give me a chance to talk to him.

And so I said, "Look," I said, "I got bee sting, I'm going home. I cannot work." (Chuckles)

Then he realized why I came back, you know. He said, "Does it hurt you?"

I said, "You try and get it yourself." I was so darn mad.

(Laughter)

MA: Then one time he came back again, a year later, I think. Summertime, he wanted to cut one tree down for his own (use), and he says his yardboy is going go and cut, so, "I want you to go help him."

And, boy, I think I worked with him two days, and then the (third) day, I quit, you know. I told him, "I'm not coming already." That old man so darn lazy, he let me do all the work, and he's sitting down over there.

WN: Who? This is Van Valkenburg?

MA: No, that guy.

WN: Oh, oh, oh, the yardman.

(Laughter)

MA: Yardman. Second day I went back and I didn't tell that man, but I told Van Valkenburg's brother, that I'm not coming from tomorrow.

He said, "Why?"

I said, "I can't get along with your man. Let him go cut it himself, 'cause he was just sitting down and let me do all the work. I don't want to come. I quit."

WN: Well, you must have been a good worker, then . . .

MA: Well, when I start to work, I used to work, you know. You getting paid, so you supposed to work. So I never did fool around. One time I was clearing the road, and I got through quite early, and I say, "I'm all finish already today, so I'm going home."

And he says, "No, you don't go home." The brother says. "Mr. Van's coming home four o'clock this afternoon, so you stay here until four o'clock."

So I says, "Well, what I going do, sit around?"

He says, "No, you go and get a rake and rake all the yard." (Laughs)

And I said, "All right."

WN: They had their own yardboy, eh?

MA: Yes, they had the yardboy too, but these fruit trees are terrible. I have one avocado tree in the back [*Masao Asada's current home*], boy, every day I'm there, this time of the year, all the leaves fall down. Oh, I raked it yesterday, and today it's full of leaves already. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, boy. So, tell me about your [*half*] brother's [*Kazuo Sumikawa*] vegetable store. Did he start it in '23, or he already had it?

MA: No, he started in '23.

WN: Together with you.

MA: Yes.

WN: What made him to that, do you know?

MA: Well, he used to be a carpenter, you see. And then building start to slack, he was going as a carpenter to military bases. And that time, I think, part of Ford Island was still building and he was working over there. Several other boys used to go with him. They used to row across and go to work over there. Then, when that job got through, Wheeler Field, was kind of building up, and he was up there for several years. Then he finally decided he want to quit carpenter. Too much running around for jobs. So then he went into business.

WN: So what did he have to do to get started?

MA: Well, he started with produce. Years later, when I took over [*peddling*] on Ford Island, he was (*peddling*) in Fort Kam [*ehameha Military Reservation*].

WN: Now wait, you started at Ford Island, you said?

MA: Yes.

WN: Doing what?

MA: Produce. I was taking care of the produce.

WN: Oh, you had another store?

MA: No, (I was supposed to be working for my brother).

WN: Oh, you used to row.

MA: Yes, row over (to Ford Island).

WN: Oh, I see.

MA: So, then I was taking care of Ford Island, and then whatever delivery on the [*Pearl City*] Peninsula side, I was doing all that. Then he was going to Fort Kam, selling vegetables. In those days, the mess hall used to buy too, you see. So we used to sell to the mess hall and then part to the families. Then he'll extend it to Fort Shafter. And then, this thing, it works like a chain, you know. You do business with the mess hall, and the mess sergeant would transfer to some other place, and then, if he likes you, he'll coax you to come over to where he's (transferred). So then he [*Kazuo Sumikawa*] went to Fort Ruger for a while. Fort Ruger had one mess hall, I think. I think one of the mess sergeants from Fort Shafter was transferred over there, and then this mess sergeant called him to, "Oh, you deliver over here too." And so he extended all through that.

WN: So he went all the way out to Fort Ruger?

MA: Yes. (Chuckles) He goes to Fort Kam and then he goes out to Fort Shafter, part of—of course, he cannot get all the mess hall, you know. He get some of it and there's some other dealers used to come in too. Then after he gets through (Fort Shafter), he used to go to the wholesaler and load up and come (home).

WN: Where was the wholesaler?

MA: In those days, all on River Street.

WN: Oh, I see. So you didn't deal directly with farmers?

MA: No. Some we used to, but not too much. There was one big farmer in Pearl City. And there were several small ones, but we didn't do too much. There were about two or three farmers in Pearl City that we used to buy from. And whatever they don't have, (he) used to pick 'em up in town.

WN: Was it a store, actual store, that you folks had?

MA: Yes, at first was just peddling. So just start from over there, and during the day, why, nobody comes out anyway, so (chuckles). But later on, we open a small store, start off.

WN: So in the beginning, you put things on a truck and then went around?

MA: Yes.

WN: Oh, so where did you go?

MA: Well, I was taking care of Ford Island and part of [*Pearl City*] Peninsula. And he used to go out to townside, Fort Kam and whatnot.

WN: So when you went to Ford Island, what kind of boat did you have?

MA: Oh, I had a flat-bottom rowboat.

WN: Rowboat?

MA: Oh yes. (Chuckles)

WN: And you put your vegetables on there?

MA: Oh yes, and row.

WN: Every day?

MA: No, about three times a week

WN: So three times a week you'd load your boat—how long was your boat?

MA: Around a sixteen-footer.

WN: Sixteen feet.

MA: And then, later on, that boat was little too small, so we built a flat-bottom boat. That was a big boat, boy, that was rough, boy. That was twenty-seven feet long.

WN: And only you . . .

MA: Yes. Twenty-seven feet and the center was four-feet-something wide. I was using a ten-foot oar.

WN: One oar.

MA: One oar, ten foot long, used to row with two oars.

WN: Oh, no wonder you have muscles.

(Laughter)

MA: And that's not easy, boy. Windy days was rough.

WN: You would go out in the morning and then come back in the afternoon?

MA: Yes.

WN: Hoo.

MA: Oh, in those days was lot of work.

WN: And the vegetables were in crates, you put 'em in?

MA: Oh, we put 'em in boxes.

WN: And then once you got to Ford Island, how did you get to the commissary [mess hall] there?

MA: Oh . . .

WN: Truck over there?

MA: No, we had a pushcart. Two-wheel pushcart. (Chuckles) Rope that thing and push it. (Chuckles)

WN: And that held everything?

MA: Yes.

WN: That's some work!

MA: Today's kids, they don't know how much work I did. (Chuckles)

WN: My goodness.

MA: Younger days, I used to take a beating.

WN: So you would start off at the pier, at the peninsula?

MA: Yes.

WN: Load in the vegetables.

MA: Yes.

WN: Row one mile to Ford Island, get off the boat, unload it onto the pushcart.

MA: Yes.

WN: The pushcart was on your boat?

MA: No, I used to (leave) it next to the boathouse over there.

WN: And push it to different places . . .

MA: Yes.

WN: . . . commissary . . .

MA: No such thing, commissary, there's a mess hall and then the families. I used to finish the mess hall first and then push up to the families.

WN: And they're all *Haole* families?

MA: Oh yes, all soldiers. There were only about a half a dozen sergeants' quarters, and the rest were all officers' quarters.

WN: So from the time you folks started in '23, you were going down to Ford Island, there were military over there.

MA: Yes.

WN: Oh. And so what kind of produce mostly?

MA: Oh, almost any kind. Island produce and some Mainland. Fruits and whatnot. Then way back, when they closed Luke Field, and when Hickam Field opened up [*in 1938*], there was a lieutenant colonel. He was commanding officer of Luke Field, and . . .

WN: Who was this?

MA: Chee, what was his name?

WN: Oh, we can get it later.

MA: Chee, I used to remember his name. Anyway, when they closed Luke Field, and when he was going to Hickam, the wife told me, "I want you to come to Hickam Field."

And I said, "Oh, go to Hickam Field?"

But she says, "Well, no more Luke Field, all the army's going to open base over there." So, she said, "Come over."

And so I start to go to Hickam Field before the war. Those days are funny, you know, that the officers go to the officers' club, and they're socially, and they get to recommend people they talk about. So I was pretty well accepted, and for a Japanese, I was the only (Japanese) doing business with the military base, way before the war. And I started Hickam, and then Hickam start to build up. [*In 1917, the federal government acquired Ford Island for joint use by the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy. In 1919, Ford Island Air Station was renamed Luke Field. With the buildup of navy aircraft prior to World War II, the U.S. Army had to give up its facilities at Ford Island. In return, the U.S. government built a new airfield for the U.S. Army in 1938, named Hickam Field.*]

WN: How did you get to Hickam?

MA: I used to drive over with a truck. Oh, (Lt. Colonel) [*Eugene*] Fitzgerald was the commanding officer there.

WN: So did they pay you [in] cash?

MA: No, we used to charge them by the month. But when Hickam Field was pretty well built up [*after 1938*], then the [*U.S.*] Navy in Pearl Harbor, all the high-ranking officers was over there.

Captain of the [*Pearl Harbor Naval Yard*], and then the lieutenant commanders and commanders. High-rankers only. There were only about ten houses over there and there was one lieutenant colonel, Jackson, I think. He was the [*U.S.*] Marine [*Corps*] colonel, commanding officer. He had a quarter over there too, inside the navy yard.

One day I was coming out of Ford Island—we used to catch the ferry and come out. And coming out of Ford Island, the ferry landing was on navy yard side. So we had to go in through the main gate, navy yard. And when I was coming out, the marine stopped me, and he said the captain of the yard, Captain Roberts I think it was, wants to see you. I was in a hurry to come home, you know, I had to, I went to take an order and then deliver that same day. So I told the marine, I said, “Oh, I can't do it today, so maybe tomorrow or the day after.”

And then, the second day, I slipped by, I didn't go back. I didn't go and see him at the headquarters, you know. Then the third day, the marine tell me, “Oh, you didn't go and see the captain, and he's waiting for you.”

“Oh, tell him I'll see him tomorrow.”

(Chuckles) I didn't want to see him. I know what was coming up already. See, with all those quarters over there, he wants me to deliver. I know something like that is going come up, and I was so loaded already with work, I didn't want to (take in more calls).

(Laughter)

MA: And so the third day, I was coming out, the marine (at the gate stopped me and) says, “Wait, don't move.”

And then he called the sergeant out. The sergeant came out and he says, “Hey, you're supposed to see Captain Roberts.” He says, “Okay, this marine is going to take you to the,” (laughs) he put the marine on my truck. “Now,” he said, “go to headquarters.”

(Laughter)

MA: Oh shucks. And I went in there, and sure enough, he wanted me to deliver. And he says, “When you want to start? We want you to deliver here, too. You're passing through here every day,” he said, “I'm sure you can.”

But I said, “I'm loaded on the other side on my schedule.”

“Oh well, you fix your schedule,” and he says, “I want you to start from tomorrow morning. Here's your pass.”

(Laughter)

MA: He already had a pass for me to go around there. So I couldn't refuse him. So finally I had to take care of that and the worse of it is from there on, Makalapa [*Naval Housing*] was starting to build up. And then, the families up there want me to (deliver there)—they have friends who just came in. He says, “Oh, my friend is so-and-so and just moved into the Makalapa area.”

The wife would say, “Oh, on your way back, you can stop there, you're passing there

anyway.”

(Laughter)

WN: Was there any competition? Anybody else had same kind of produce . . .

MA: There was one more guy, Morris. He was a Portuguese guy. He was over there, but, I don't know, he didn't do, he was trying to come in [*Pearl Harbor*] Navy Yard, and he came in, and then finally he quit navy yard. And then, he was going around Hickam too. But, oh there was enough business for both of us, you know, we didn't fight about it. He came into Ford Island too, but he didn't last too long over there. The people over there were, I don't know, somehow they, I was lucky. They used to cater more to me.

WN: So, when you started in '23, you were doing mostly Ford Island only.

MA: Yes.

WN: And then your brother was going off to Fort Kam, Fort Shafter . . .

MA: Yes.

WN: . . . and Fort Ruger, later on. And then, what, as the years went on, the twenties, and the thirties, as other military areas were building up, your folks' business expanded then?

MA: No, we quit Fort Kam and Fort Shafter and (my brother) stayed in the (store). I was the only one was going out. My brother didn't go out at all anymore. He stayed home and took over the store. And we---it was 1929, we rebuilt a store in Pearl City [i.e., Asada Store]. And we went into full grocery and meat.

WN: In the peninsula, or . . .

MA: Yes, in peninsula [*on Franklin Avenue*].

WN: Oh, you had meat and things too, '29.

MA: Yes.

WN: I see. So it became more of a, like a walk-in place, too. People walk in and buy?

MA: Yes, it's a regular grocery store, old type of grocery store. And we had liquor in there too. During the war, liquor was good, you know. But we had all quotas. So people only can buy one quart, or one case of beer a week.

WN: Okay, we'll get into that, the wartime, little later. So in '29 you folks started the [*store*]. So at that time, Pearl Harbor area was building up, in the thirties? Makalapa and . . .

MA: (Hickam Field.) That was way back in late thirties [*in 1938*].

WN: Late thirties, Makalapa, oh I see.

MA: Yeah, about '39 or '40, before the war.

WN: Oh, I see.

MA: Hickam Field, I think, was around thirty—if I'm not mistaken, about '37. They start moving down there.

WN: Okay. So when you said an old-time grocery store, what do you mean by that?

MA: Well, you had the groceries and little vegetables, and we had some dry goods. Had a soda fountain in the store too.

END OF INTERVIEW