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The Japanese Association of Ensenada, 1930 to 2003

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The Asociaion Japonesa de Ensenada (Japanese Association of Ensenada) is a nonprofit organization established around 1930 by Japanese immigrants who lived in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico. Initially it was composed of *Issei* farmers, abalone divers, fishermen, and merchants who had come to Mexico between 1918 and 1940. The main purpose of the organization was to encourage *Issei* immigrants to help one another as they settled in this new land. For example, when a recently arrived Japanese immigrant or family arrived in Ensenada, the Association would provide them with a place to stay.

When the Second World War began, the Japanese who lived in the coastal and frontier zones of Mexico were forced to relocate to camps administrated by the Mexican Army which were located in the center zone of Mexico at the Distrito Federal (Mexico City) and at Guadalajara. Because of World War II, the Association was unable to operate from 1941 to 1946.

At the close of the war, less than half of the *Issei* who had lived in Ensenada chose to return. Those that did return reestablished the Japanese Association. Later, in the 1950s, local *Nisei* women founded the **Yuri Club**, a young women's social organization founded for fun and fellowship. Later, *Nisei* men joined in and it was soon agreed by all that they should establish a **Nisei Club**, an organization where the local Nikkei could meet socially and also work at the same time for the benefit of the Ensenada Japanese community.

Some years later, as the *Issei* generation began to age and pass away, the leadership of the organization was passed to *Nisei* women and men who took charge of the Japanese Association of Ensenada. Since then the Association has had its ups and downs, but from 1990 to 2003, the organization has been growing steadily.

Every year since the 1930s, one of the traditional events observed in Ensenada is the **Mochitsuki** at New Year. Other traditional events observed annually are: *Hinamatsuri* or **Girls Day** (since 1998), **Mother's Day** celebration, the summer *Undokai* (picnic), and an annual Christmas-New Year celebration.

Today, the main purpose of the Japanese Association of Ensenada is to promote an understanding of the history and Japanese culture among the Nikkei community. That's why our slogan, translated to English, is something like, "Our traditions among our generations." Although it has been difficult to accomplish this goal because of a limited budget, in October of last year we began a Japanese Language Learning School for children, and from February of this year, we added language classes for adults.

We have also sponsored other local cultural activities like a Japanese Cuisine Class and a "How to Make a Yukata" Workshop. We have also been promoting Japanese culture among Ensenada's majority community by arranging performances of **The Tsubaki Ensemble**, a nonprofit cultural organization from Nagoya City, who dance and play old style, traditional Japanese songs. We also give demonstrations of the **Japanese Tea Ceremony**, and present exhibitions of Japanese martial arts and costumes.

Today in 2003, there are only four *Issei* still living in Ensenada, so we realize more than ever the importance of teaching the new generation of Nikkei or Mexican-Japanese about their culture and their Japanese roots. We consider this a great responsibility for the Japanese Association of Ensenada. It is also our responsibility to promote a general understanding of the Ensenada Japanese experience and their contributions to the entire Ensenada community.

That is why this year on May 25, we will be participating with other immigrant groups in Ensenada in a festival called **Ensenada de Todos: Suma de Culturas** (Ensenada of All: A Sum of Cultures) that will be held in a place called Ventana al Mar (right next to the sea and the Port of Ensenada, where there is a monumental Mexican Flag). This is a festival designed for fun, featuring food, music, and dance. The festival is free, but the food is sold by every immigrant community as a fundraiser. It begins at 11:00 a.m. and finishes around 5:00 p.m. It's a day to learn about the immigrants from other countries and other Mexican states who have come to live in Ensenada.