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The Southern Blue Page: Serving San Diego and Imperial Counties

by Susan Hasegawa

Every morning I get up and read the San Diego Union-Tribune as part of my daily ritual. During the week I usually get different publications including Pacific Citizen, and Hawaii Herald (I'm originally from Hawaii, so news from the islands is always nice). I love reading newspapers and newsletters because they make me feel connected to different communities of interest.

Additionally, old newspapers are an incredible source for exploring the past. A wonderful collection of newsletters, donated by **Yo Kuyama**, opens a window into *Nisei* youth culture of the 1930s. Yo Kuyama's late husband, **Paul**, was one of many young *Nisei* who worked energetically at creating a cohesive Nikkei community in the San Diego and Imperial County region. The Southern Blue Page was a weekly newspaper produced during the height of the Great Depression to "create a true and strong Japanese American spirit that is distinctively San Diego's and Imperial Valley's which would harmonize in the social machines of our county."

Within these pages, one finds a vibrant community of *Nisei*, young adults and teens, who organized recreational, educational, and political activities. The Southern Blue Page was based in Logan Heights and reported on events and activities of the Nikkei community from North County to the Mexico border. An interesting aspect of the newsletter is its attempts at inclusiveness, both geographically and across generations. Although editors published sections in Japanese only sporadically, they were trying to appeal to *Issei* readers.

The Southern Blue Page obtained financial funding from both Nikkei and non-Nikkei sponsors, as well as individual subscriptions. Early 1936 editions included sponsorship by **Miss Mary Ichino** (sic), a nurse at Mercy Hospital, **Roy Hanaoka** of Brawley, **Susie Mukai** of Spring Valley, **Central Park Shoe Shop** under the ownership of **Mike De Turi**, and **Miss Anness Sloss**, a singing teacher. The latter two names obviously were not Japanese Americans, but probably had a substantial clientele of Nikkei families. In fact, Central Park Shoe Shop seemed to be a consistent advertiser during the life of the paper. I'm sure all the Nikkei attendees at socials and semi-formals shopped at Central Park.

Throughout late 1936 and 1937, more Nikkei businesses took ads in the paper and editors encouraged patronage of *Issei* enterprises. **The Nippon Co.** advertised free delivery in addition to "specializing in food stuff for Sukiyaki and chow mein." Other noted Nikkei businesses included **The Sun Cafe**, **Bernice Ohashi's Ginza Beauty Salon**, **Mrs. Katsumata's** "Smart Haircutting," and **Saito Studio** (photography). An editorial in the August 1936 edition exhorts readers to "Buy at Japanese Store" and proclaims, "The *isseis* are reaching a crisis! Their customers are Japanese, and in the decreasing population of *isseis* and a tendency of *niseis* to buy American, their business in time would fade out."

During a national economic crisis with double digit unemployment, the writer clearly appeals to young people's obligations to the *Issei* generation, but the editorial also depicts *Nisei* grievances of these businesses. In the last part of the editorial, the writer states: "But there is one thing that must be abolished before the *niseis* will buy from Japanese stores: the treatment of *nisei*

customers by *issei* clerks must be improved, and personal criticism in the form of personal gossip must be abolished.” While the *Nisei* writer rallied the community to ethnic economic solidarity, people like the writer also wanted simple respect for their efforts.

Most stories focused on San Diego, but the intrepid editors sought out stories from the far corners of the region with reports from Brawley, El Centro, and Calixico. Readers heard of Brawley’s post-Christmas dance headed by committee chair **Tsuyako Morita** and the **Di Gamma Japanese dinner** organized by **Toshiko Hamai, Suma Taira, Taka Aisawa** and **Yone Tamaki**. The El Centro YMWBA planned a farewell outing for **Mr. M. Okita**, a teacher at the Buddhist Church who was moving to San Luis Obispo. Calixico’s Japanese Boy Scout Troop 20 of Holtville celebrated a banquet in November of 1936. These stories brought together readers from all parts of San Diego and Imperial Counties.

The paper also published numerous items of interest to teenagers and young adults with a social notes section and etiquette advice. Teenagers seemed especially active in self-organizing with *Seinin Kai* groups in San Diego, Vista, Nestor, and Encinitas. They conducted beach outings, skating parties and number of dances. Of course, editors wrote on relationship advice, always a hot topic among teens. One of the more humorous was: “Never fall in love, because people in love can’t be reasonable.”

The ambitious staff of The Southern Blue Page had a vision of a united Nikkei community here in the southernmost region of California. They worked diligently to bring together towns separated by geography and generations during the Great Depression and celebrated successes and victories of the Nikkei community. The editor was **Chieko A. Sogo**, along with printer **Paul Y. Kuyama**, and executive secretary **Takoo P. Nakadate**. Other organizers included **Chizue Kushino, Hideko Umezawa, May Sakamoto, Alice Sogo, Frank Ono, Sukenori Aizumi,** and **George Kuratomi**.