

James Matsumoto  
By Eva Cain and Benny Cox

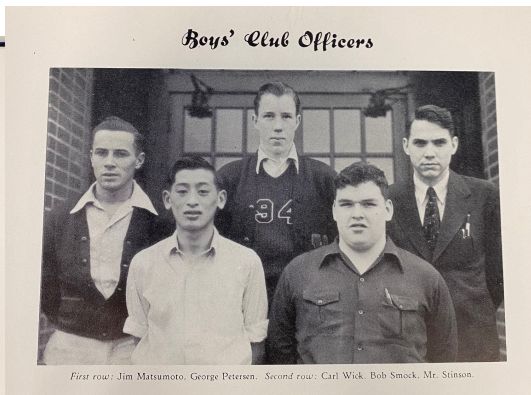
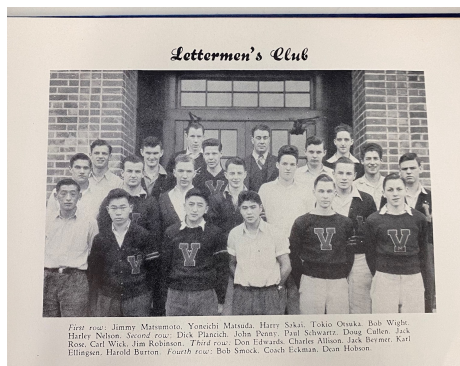
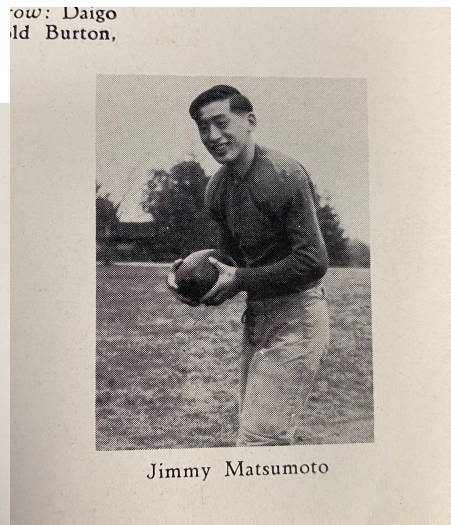
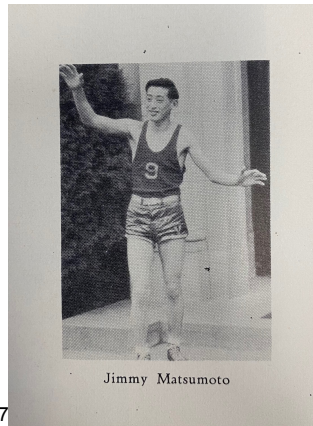
Family:



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James Matsumoto, known to islanders as “Jimmy Mats”, was born the 7th of 8 children on Vashon Island on November 15th, 1924. He had 7 siblings - Frank, Bob, Kazuo, Donald, Martha, Grace and William, though Kazuo passed away only 6 days after birth. His parents, Tahiye and Bunsaku Matsumoto, moved to Vashon from Japan.<sup>5</sup> Bunsaku, Jimmy’s father, was a farmer before he died in 1930. Jimmy was only five when his father got hit by a ford truck on the side of the road while leading his horse. He got badly injured and died in the ambulance on the way to Seattle hospital. No complaint was filed by the family and therefore no charges were pressed against the man who hit him.<sup>7</sup> After his death, Tahiye remarried on October 27th, 1931 and changed her last name to Usui.<sup>4</sup>

School life:



-year book 1941<sup>8</sup>

and 1942<sup>9</sup>

When he was in high school he was involved in many school activities. He enjoyed playing sports such as basketball where he was point guard for the 1940 and 1941 Tri League Basketball Champions.<sup>5</sup> He was also on the basketball team his senior year, up until he got interned.<sup>9</sup> That year Vashon High School had a very successful basketball team, top in the league with twelve wins and zero losses. Jimmy also enjoyed playing football. He was the president of the Lettermen's club, which was a group that had the purpose of "keeping law and order" at the football and basketball games.<sup>8</sup> All of these activities unfortunately came to an end as did his high school career when he along with all other Japanese people got interned.

Getting interned:

On May 16th, 1942 all Japanese people living on Vashon Island were forced to leave to internment camps. The process would start by the Japanese people being interned would go on a march to the Seattle ferry dock, which was led by American soldiers. Once they got to Seattle, they would march down to where they would get on the train to the internment camps. Whilst going to the trains, the Japanese people being interned would be met by white people who highly disrespect them, even doing things such as throwing things at them and spitting on them. The trip to the internment camps was described by others as not knowing where they were going and they would have to close the shades on the windows whenever they got into a town. After spending some time at Pinedale Assembly Center, Tule Lake Internment Camp and

Minidoka Internment Camp, James Matsumotto went into the military in 1944 to Fort Douglas, Utah for induction, then he served until the end of World War II.<sup>7</sup>



[-Joy and Heartache exhibit](#)

Minidoka:



[minidoka picture](#)<sup>6</sup>

After being moved to Tule Lake, James Matsumotto was sent to Minidoka, which was an internment camp located in Hunt, Idaho. None of the internment camps people were sent to were that good, but perhaps Minidoka was one of the better ones as it had lower amounts of segregation compared to other camps and it had more volunteers from the U.S Army than other camps did. However, not everything at Minidoka was better than other camps. Minidoka still had issues such as the fact that there was a lack of privacy in the bathrooms for women and there were no privacy walls. Along with privacy issues, another issue with Minidoka was the climate.



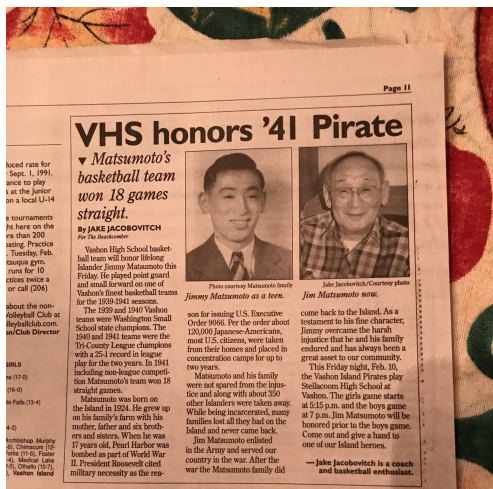
People from the area may have been used to the climate in Hunt, Idaho, but it was harsh on people coming from the northwest as the climate was a high desert area and it had high temperatures reaching temperatures of over 100 degrees fahrenheit.<sup>2</sup>

After internment:



James returned to the island after being interned. He wanted to come home to Vashon to explore his passion for farming, and became a strawberry farmer. He also founded his own company called Vashon Island Construction. Then on Bainbridge Island on October 28th, 1950 when he was 25 years old, he married Ann Yamashita. They were married for 61 years.<sup>5</sup>

Later life:



Through the rest of his life on Vashon, James spent much of his time golfing - including competing in tournaments into his 70s - fishing and farming.<sup>5</sup> He also loved spending time with his family, which

consisted of 4 children - his sons are Alan who lives in Yakima, and Gary who lives in Seattle. He also has two daughters - Eileen who lives in University Place, and Diane who lives in Seattle. He also had 7 grandchildren who all live on Vashon.<sup>1</sup> Jimmy was very loved on the island, so much so that near the end of his life, the Vashon Pirates Football team and the Vashon Pirates Basketball team honored him and hung his jerseys up in the Pirate's gymnasium where they still lie today. Jimmy had a very full life and he passed away on August 19th 2012 at the age of 87. A memorial was held that September at the Vashon Sportsmen's Club which was one of his favorite hang-outs throughout the years.<sup>5</sup> James Matsumoto was a treasured member of the Island and will be remembered for years to come.

#### Links:

<sup>1</sup>"James Toshiyuki Matsumoto Obituary (2012) The Seattle Times." Legacy.com. The Seattle Times, August 26, 2012. <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/seattletimes/name/james-matsumoto-obituary?id=13227631>.

<sup>2</sup>"Minidoka." Minidoka | Densho Encyclopedia. Accessed February 10, 2022. <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Minidoka#Blocks.2FBarracks>.

<sup>3</sup>"Minidoka." Minidoka | Densho Encyclopedia. Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Minidoka#Blocks.2FBarracks>.

<sup>4</sup>Ancestry.com. *1930 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002

<sup>5</sup>Service, Wire. "James Toshiyuki Matsumoto: Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber." Vashon. Vashon-Maury Island Beachcomber, December 9, 2016. <https://www.vashonbeachcomber.com/obituaries/james-toshiyuki-matsumoto/>.

#### <sup>6</sup>Minidoka Picture:

Isbree, Mark. "Minidoka National Historic Site." Minidoka National Historic Site . The Conservation Fund, n.d. <https://www.conservationfund.org/projects/minidoka-national-historic-site>.

#### <sup>7</sup>Google Drive Citation:

"Japanese Presence Project." Vashon Maury Island Heritage Museum, n.d. Accessed February 7, 2022.

#### <sup>8</sup>Yearbooks

Vashon Island High School, *Vashonian* (Vashon, WA: 1941), Vashon Maury Island Heritage Museum.

#### <sup>9</sup>Yearbooks

Vashon Island High School, *Vashonian* (Vashon, WA: 1942), Vashon Maury Island Heritage Museum.

<sup>10</sup>"Joy and Headache Exhibit ." Google Accounts. Google. <https://classroom.google.com/c/Mzc5NDUyMTk5MTg1/a/NDY0MzU1MDEwMTYw/details>.