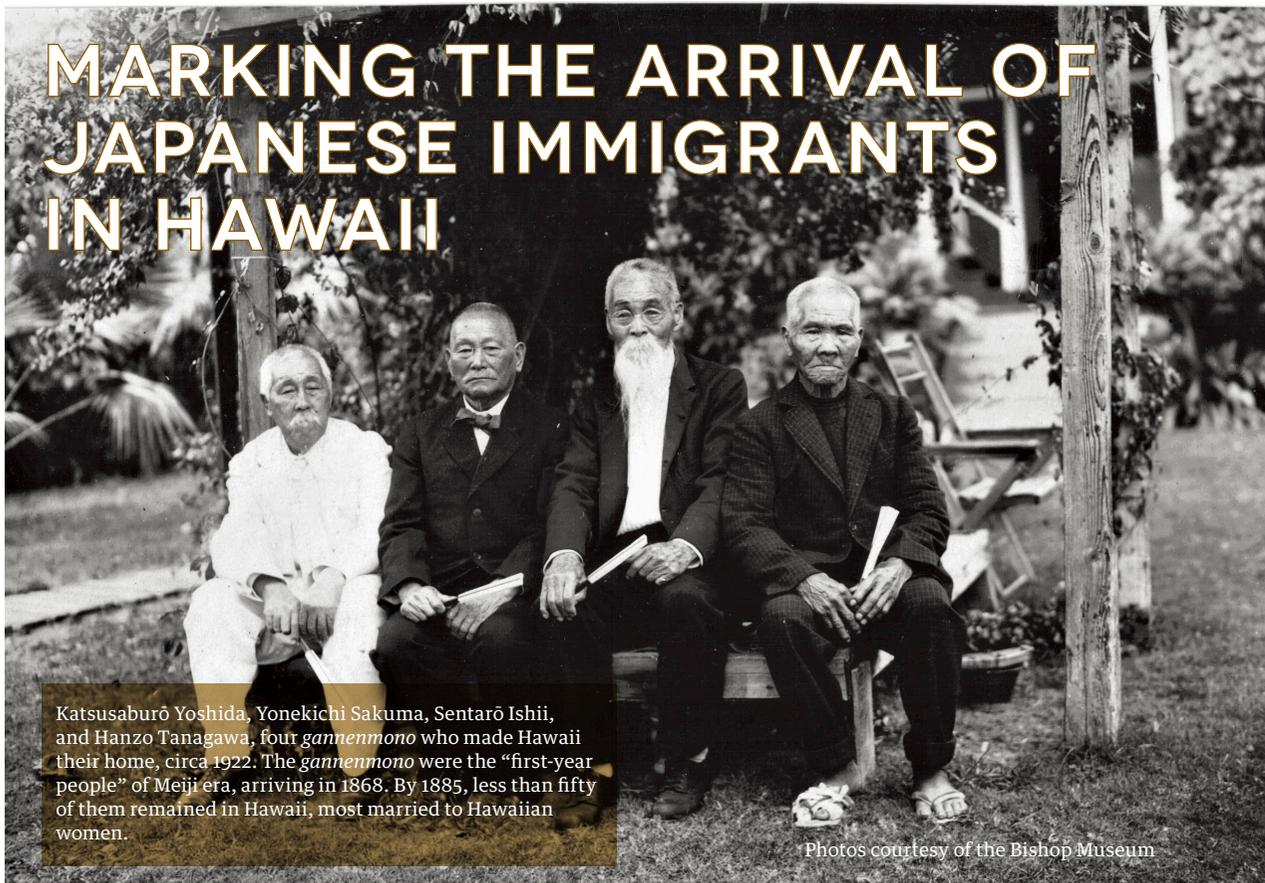


KATSUYA YAMADA

To mark the 150th anniversary of the first Japanese immigrants landing on Honolulu's shores, Hawaii is putting on a host of commemorative events during 2018.

MARKING THE ARRIVAL OF JAPANESE IMMIGRANTS IN HAWAII



Katsusaburō Yoshida, Yonekichi Sakuma, Sentarō Ishii, and Hanzo Tanagawa, four *gannenmono* who made Hawaii their home, circa 1922. The *gannenmono* were the “first-year people” of Meiji era, arriving in 1868. By 1885, less than fifty of them remained in Hawaii, most married to Hawaiian women.

Photos courtesy of the Bishop Museum

A PPROXIMATELY 150 Japanese immigrants landed in Honolulu, Hawaii in the year 1868, the first year of the Meiji era (1868-1912) in Japan. They are called *gannenmono*, meaning “first-year people.” In 2017, celebrating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of these settlers, a group of twenty organizations called the Kizuna Group formed the Gannenmono Committee to represent the Japanese-American community in Hawaii.

Under the Meiji government at that time, journeying abroad was still illegal, thus making the *gannenmono* illegal travelers. They were treated as lawbreakers and viewed with distaste back in Japan. However, they developed a good relationship with local Hawaiians, and after Japan and the Kingdom of Hawaii concluded the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1871, around two hundred thousand more Japanese immigrated to Hawaii between 1885 and 1924, after which emigrating from Japan

was banned by the United States government.

Members of the Kizuna Group that form the Gannenmono Committee are all part of different



A talk session by *Gannenmono* descendants at the Gannenmono 150th Anniversary Commemoration/Symposium in Honolulu



Photos courtesy of the Bishop Museum

The *gannenmono* sailed from Japan to the Kingdom of Hawaii aboard the *Scioto*, pictured above. Leaving Yokohama on May 17, 1868, and arriving in Honolulu about a month later, on June 19, there were approximately 150 of them in all, including six women and a child.



Photos courtesy of the Bishop Museum

“The *Gannenmono*: A Legacy of Eight Generations in Hawaii” exhibition will be on view at the Bishop Museum’s Hawaiian Hall until February 24, 2019



organizations with their own purpose and mission. “But we all share one common idea,” says Sal Miwa, chairman of the Japan-America Society of Hawaii and one of the three co-chairs of the committee.

According to Miwa, at its peak nearly 43 percent of Hawaii’s population was Japanese, but that has decreased to around 14 percent. “In addition, the majority of those 14 percent do not speak Japanese, and only acknowledge their heritage by their Japanese last name,” he says.

Miwa adds that there are many successful Japanese-Hawaiians, and 37 percent of current city and state government officials have a Japanese last name.

“Many Japanese-Hawaiians are good-natured, hard workers, and do not discriminate or harm others, so they’re not a target of jealousy,” he notes. “Along with demonstrating these positive behavioral traits, our main wish is to leave good memories and pass down the efforts of our Japanese ancestors in Hawaii to the next generation.”

Many events were held to highlight the Japanese-American legacy, such as the *Gannenmono* Exhibition and Bon-Odori Dance Festival. The main event—the *Gannenmono* 150th Anniversary

Commemoration and Symposium in Honolulu—took place on June 7 at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. In addition to a memorial ceremony, the Consul General of Japan in Honolulu and several speakers were invited to give presentations. Tickets to the symposium sold out before the event, and well over five hundred people took part.

Miwa says that the two main issues the *Gannenmono* Committee faces are the lack of interest toward Japan among the younger generation and the increasingly advanced age of its main members. On the other hand, many Japanese-Hawaiians do have an interest in Japanese traditions, such as New Year’s celebrations and *shichi-go-san*, a children’s festival celebrating children three, five and seven years old. Miwa hopes these people will be the ones to pass down the legacy and honor the Japanese immigrants who came to Hawaii, and that they will continue to share their heritage and legacy with the younger generation and their descendants.

The *Gannenmono* Committee’s goal is to pass on the torch to the next generation of young Japanese-Hawaiians who have acknowledged and appreciate the wonders of Japan, and celebrate the 200th anniversary with them. ▮