

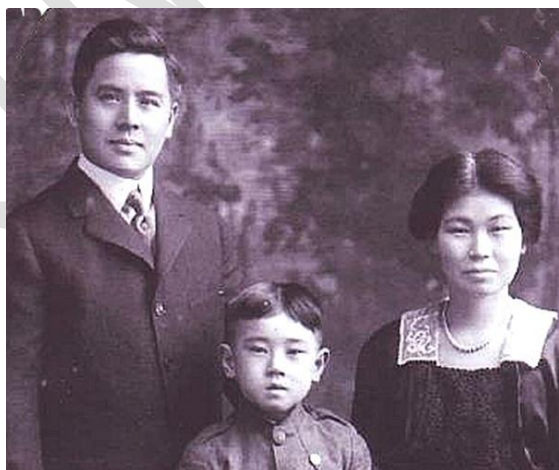
Looking for Frank K. Hayashi

By Bill Curtis

This is the story of my search for Frank K. Hayashi, a son of Japanese immigrants who grew up in Cranford and with his parents moved to Japan in 1934. My quest began quite a few years ago when I received an e-mail from Jim Harford a 1941 Cranford High School graduate who inquired if the Historic Society knew what Frank Hayashi did during World War II. This was not an unusual question. Anyone who remembered Frank would certainly have been curious about his service to Japan during the war. Japan had attacked us at Pearl Harbor and the Philippines and initiated our entry into the war. This had resulted in great animosity toward all things Japanese. We as a peaceful nation had also been disturbed by the atrocities the Japanese committed in wars against China, Korea, and Manchuria.

The list of friends of Frank Hayashi was legion; they went to school with him, played football, baseball or basketball with him, socialized with him and probably ate in his father's restaurant. How could the question not arise about Frank's activities in Japan during World War II? What did Frank do? Was he an officer in the Japanese army or navy? Was he an interpreter? A spy?

Frank according to U.S. Census data was born in 1912 in New York. While Frank was still a small child, the Hayashi family moved to Cranford where his parents were employed on the Thomas Sperry estate on Riverside Drive. Sperry was the wealthy businessman who founded S&H Green Stamps. The earliest mention of the Hayashi family is in the 1916 *Cranford Directory*. They are listed as living in a home at 205 Casino Avenue which was immediately next to the estate of Thomas Sperry. Frank's father had apparently left the employ of Sperry and was striking out on his own. In the same year, Hayashi rented space in the Cranford Trust Company building at 32 North Avenue West and opened a restaurant. (That location is presently Breadsmith.)

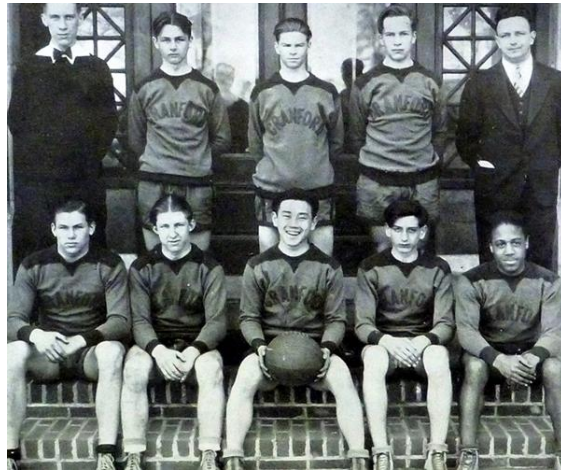


The Hayashi family around 1916

Then in 1920, Hayashi moved his restaurant to 3 Miln Street, the former home of Dr. McConnell. (Today it is the site of the Cranford Post Office.) The 1920 U.S. Census lists the occupants of 3 Miln Street as Frank's father and mother, Frank 8 years old, 5 employees (cook, kitchen worker, and 3 waiters) plus 2 boarders. By 1922, Hayashi's restaurant had become a popular eating place so

much so that the Rotary Club chose it for all of its functions. To accommodate the crowds, an addition to the building was added.

Frank was one of the most popular young men in Cranford. His athletic prowess, access to a car and ability to bring friends into Dad's restaurant for free snacks after a night out enhanced his popularity. Impressed by his outstanding athletic ability, the prestigious Blair Academy recruited Frank while he was still attending Cranford High School. He was the perfect all American young man.



*Cranford High School 1928 Basketball team
Frank is in the middle of the 1st row*

In 1934, Hayashi's restaurant was chosen to be the site of the new Post Office building. The family was paid \$15,000 for the building and they prepared to move back to Japan. Rumor has it that Frank disappeared rather than accompany his family to Japan, but after awhile he relented. Frank was now 22 years old.

In 1941 when World War II started, Frank was still in Japan. Cranford boys home on leave often got together to reminisce and swap war stories. It was said that any mention of Frank Hayashi's name produced a stream of vituperation. One story, purportedly true, relates that two Cranford soldiers were removed from different units. One was flown to Egypt and the other to Australia where each was questioned by U.S. Intelligence about Frank Hayashi who was raised in Cranford. Frank was then in his early 30's and had been living in Japan since 1934.

The first ray of light in my quest to find Frank Hayashi appeared when I found an article in the July 24, 1947 edition of the *Cranford Chronicle*. Ralph Cipolla a soldier from Cranford on occupation duty in Kyoto Japan stated that he had met Frank and that he was a civilian employee for the U.S. Army Special Service Section. He said that Frank was married, had 3 sons and that he was waiting to return to a position he held with American President Lines.

Then in 1960, the *Cranford Chronicle* ran an article stating that Frank Hayashi, a passenger agent for American President Lines, had visited Cranford and called on former classmates and friends. It said that he had also visited his son George who was attending college in California.

In 2007, knowing that Frank had been employed by American President Lines I took a chance and mailed a letter on our Society's stationery to the American President Lines office in Japan explaining that I was trying to reach a member of Frank Hayashi's family. I received a reply from Frank Hayashi's son George who said he was honored to hear that after all these years we were trying to find information about his Father. George who was then living in California had recently retired as chairman and president of American President Lines. At the time he was 71 years old and living with his wife and daughter. He said that his father Frank Hayashi had died in 1984 at age 76.

Over the years we occasionally spoke on the phone. I was always cracking to ask George about his father's role in World War II, but I just couldn't do it. George promised he would visit Cranford one day so we could meet face to face, but it didn't happen. One visit was prevented by his daughter's marriage. Others didn't take place because George was on the board of directors of a number of companies and something was always coming up. Then George had health issues. I also had health issues. The years passed on and on.



Hayashi's restaurant on Miln Street

In 2011, George sent me a note that answered all of my questions about his father, Frank Hayashi:

"Bill, Yes, I was born in 1940 and grew up in a city near Kobe. I was in the first grade when the war ended. I can still remember the bombings by B-29s, whose sounds I learned to recognize as a child. Some of their bombs dropped nearby when they missed their intended targets. At the time I was the only child that had a father. All the children in my age group's fathers had gone to war as Japanese soldiers and most never returned.

"My father (Frank Hayashi) was a naturalized Japanese citizen (American by birth) at the time, but luckily the Japanese authorities never trusted him and chose not to draft him into the military. It's strange that not being trusted worked out in our favor. During the early days of the American occupation of Japan my father was selected to work in the Special Section of I Corps U.S. Army for about 5 years until the American President Lines re-opened the Kobe office. An Army officer's family near Kobe also recruited my grandmother in the late 40's to take care of their household because she was so fluent in English.

"After I moved to California, unlike my mother, my father was not so concerned when I was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1965 during the Vietnam War."

In May 2012, my quest to find Frank Hayashi had come full circle. I was now searching for Jim Harford, who went into the U.S. Navy right out of high school, and had e-mailed me years ago about Frank Hayashi. But my e-mails to Jim were each returned as UNDELIVERABLE.

Now I began a new search to find Jim Harford. I found a listing with an address and phone number in Princeton. Jim was listed as age 89, which would be about right considering he joined the Navy in 1941. So I called while holding my breath, and a very youthful sounding lady answered. I thought I was speaking to a daughter of Jim, but it was Millie his wife. I told her about the long ago e-mail from Jim and all I had found out about Frank Hayashi. Millie told me that Jim had a touch of dementia. She asked me to send her the story so she could read it to Jim. She felt he probably would remember and enjoy it.

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