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Making the Invisible Visible: A Geospatial History of the Japanese-American Community in Tacoma, Washington 1888 to 1942

Judith A. Jones – University of Washington Tacoma – GIS Certificate Program

Hand Drawn "Mental Map" of Tacoma, Circa 1920
Source: Kazuo Ito

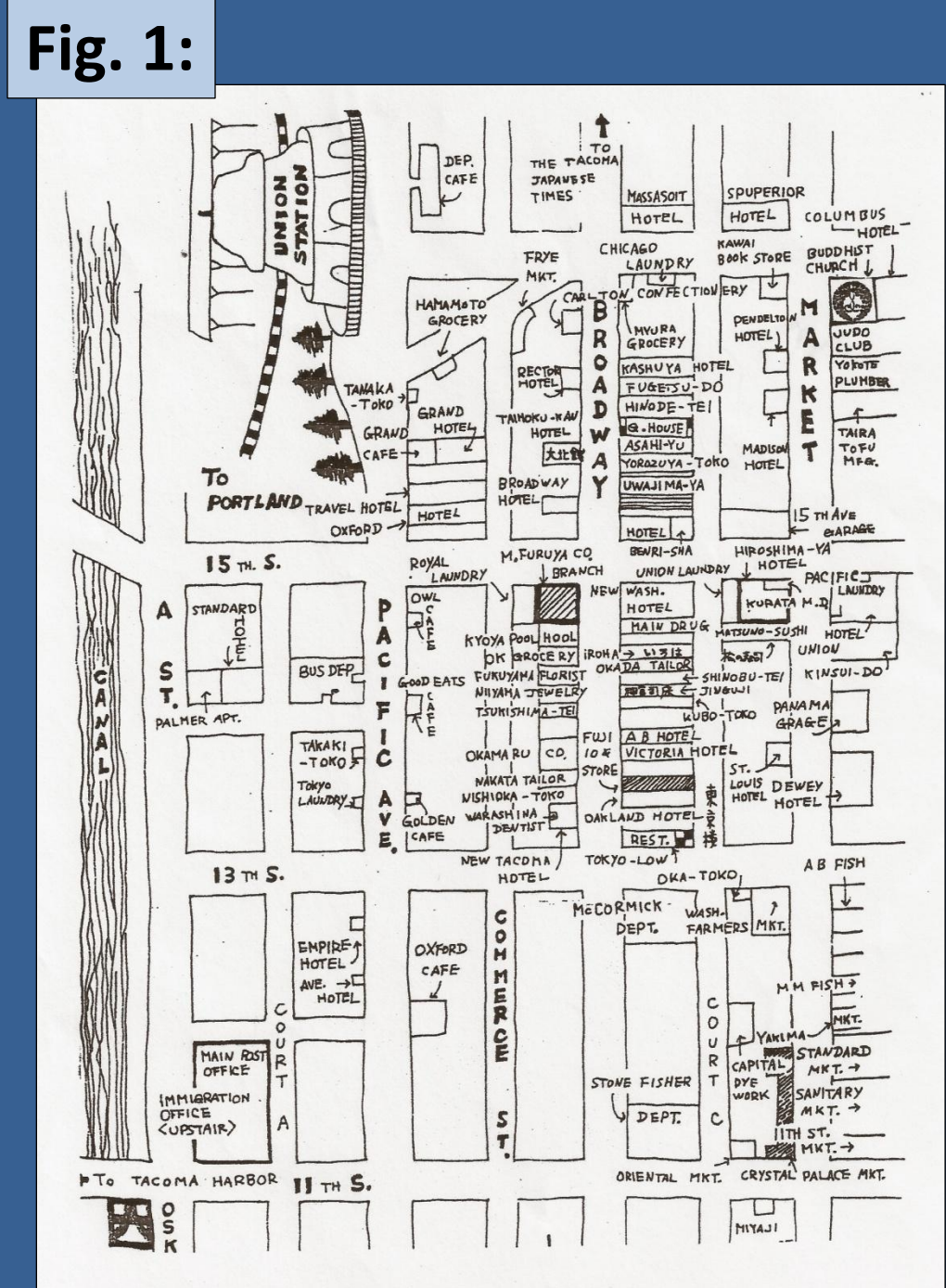


Fig. 2: Digitized Ito Map Japanese-American Sites Tacoma, Washington Circa 1920

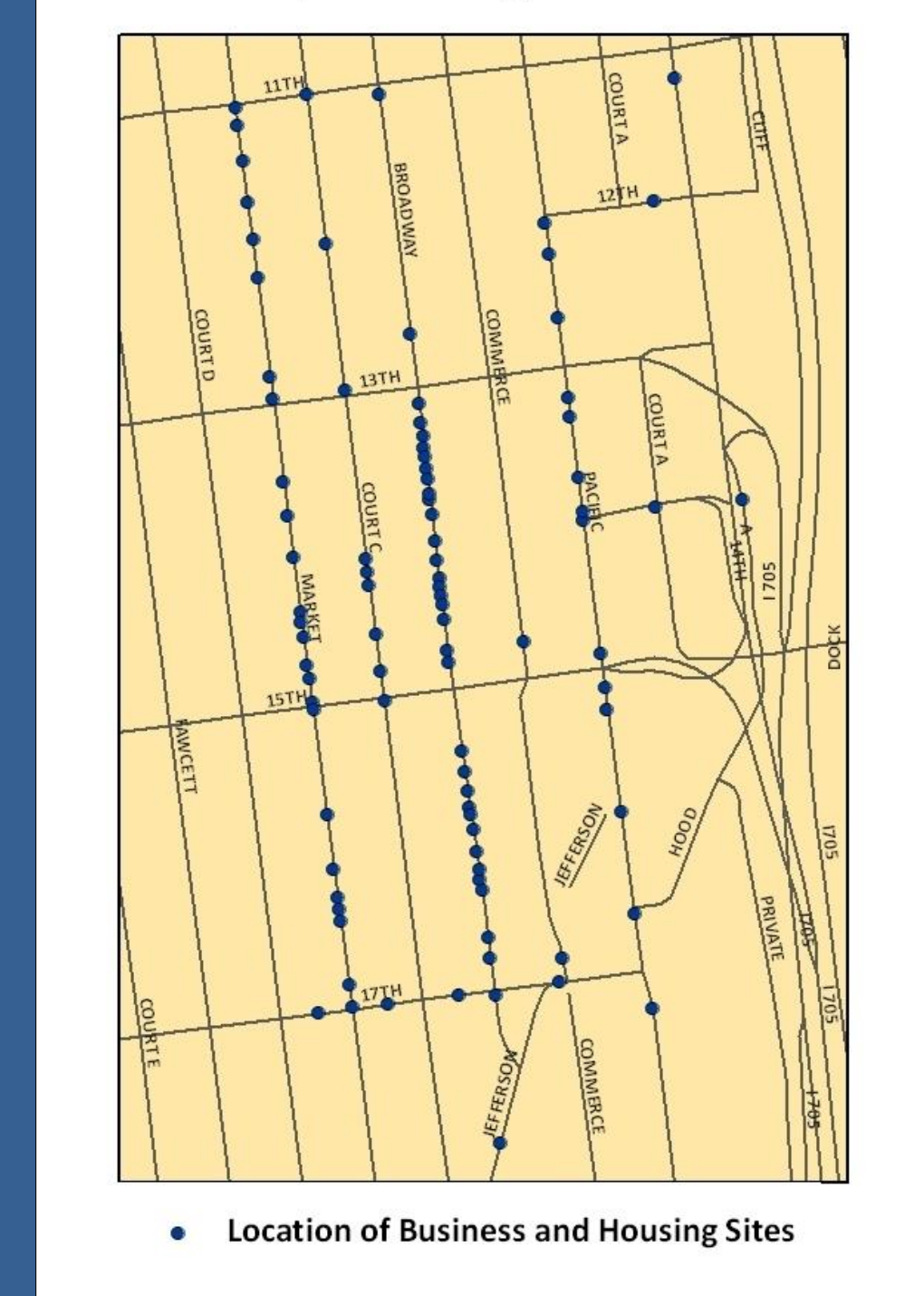


Fig. 3: Morrison Thesis Map "Japantown" Circa 1994



Fig. 4: Database Table Sample

NAME	BUSINESSOWNER	ARCHIVEADDRESS	ST_NO	ST_PREFIX	ST_NAME	ST_TYPE	ST_SUFFIX	CITY	ZIPCODE	VECTORTYPE	CLASS	USE_PURPOSE	DATEINUSE	TYPEOFSPACE	ROLEINCOMMUNITY	DATASOURCE	FIELDNOTES	GEOCODE_STROCMPL
AR Hotel	Yuzo Mori	1330 1/2 Broadway	1330		Broadway			Tacoma	98402	point	service	hotel	1915	private	private	Morrison		1330 Broadway
Akiyama Fruits	NA	1118 Broadway	1118		Broadway			Tacoma	98402	point	retail	fruits	NA	private	NA	Morrison		1118 Broadway
Asahi Shimbun Newspaper	Tatsuo Takei, manager	1532 Market	1532		Market	St		Tacoma	98402	point	service-professional	Japanese language newspaper	1912	private	branch office	Morrison		1532 Market St
Astor House	Soroku Kuramoto, Mr. Aiju Okanishi	corner of S 17th & D St		S	17th	St		Tacoma	98402	point	service	hotel	1890's	private	NA	Watanabe	rent was about \$18 a month	S 17th St
Astor House/Hiroshimaya Hotel	NA	1554 Market	1554		Market	St		Tacoma	98402	point	service	hotel	NA	private	NA	Morrison		1554 Market St
B & B Salad Shop and Fruit Stand	NA	1209-1/2 Pacific Avenue	1209		Pacific	Ave		Tacoma	98402	point	service	hotel	NA	private	NA	Morrison		1209 Pacific Ave
Buddhist Church	Shiotami	1112 Broadway	1112		Broadway			Tacoma	98402	point	retail	salad & fruits	NA	private	NA	Morrison		1112 Broadway
California Chop House	NA	1715 Fawcett	1715		Fawcett	Ave		Tacoma	98402	point	spiritual element	church/temple	NA	private	NA	Morrison		1715 Fawcett Ave
California Laundry	Katami Nakano	1322 Pacific Avenue	1322		Pacific	Ave		Tacoma	98402	point	retail	restaurant	1912	private	restaurant	Morrison		1322 Pacific Ave
Central Hotel	NA	953 S Tacoma Ave	953		Tacoma	Ave	S	Tacoma	98402	point	retail	laundry	1909	private	private	Watanabe		953 Tacoma Ave S
Central School	NA	1211-1/2 Pacific Avenue	1211		Pacific	Ave		Tacoma	98402	point	service	hotel	NA	private	NA	Morrison		1211 Pacific Ave
		760 S Tacoma Ave	760		Tacoma	Ave	S	Tacoma	98405	point	education	school		public		Magden	school where all immigrant children attended	760 Tacoma Ave S

Introduction:

Prior to World War II, the urban core area of Tacoma, Washington served as the hub of a culturally rich Japanese-American community. Beginning in the late 1880's, the booming railroad, timber, and agriculture industries attracted workers to this region, including many Japanese immigrants. Tacoma's "Japantown" or Nihon Machi encompassed the area between 11th and 19th Streets and Pacific and Tacoma Avenues. Japantown experienced its zenith between 1900 and 1920. After 1920, "it began a slow decline, culminating with the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II" (Morrison 2, 41,42). This once culturally dynamic area is now in need of recognition and preservation. The goal of this project, therefore, has been to collect and analyze primary data from various historical archive sources (such as books, old maps, and newspaper clippings) in order to identify any geospatial patterns that exist between the visual representation of Tacoma's Pre-World War II Japanese community and contemporary Tacoma. These analyses can then offer insights into recognizing and preserving important historical elements.

Methods:

For this project, historic map images (example Fig. 1) were aligned with Tacoma Streets spatial data utilizing ArcGIS georeferencing tools. Next, the locations of Japanese sites were converted to point or polygon features on a map through a digitizing process (Figures 2 & 3). Additional books, historic photographs, and newspaper clippings were researched to locate other relevant Japanese sites in Tacoma. A database table was created to record attribute information for each site (Fig. 4). These sites were then geocoded, using the address field in the database as a primary key. A final comprehensive map visualizes these sites and their classifications (Fig. 5). Two additional maps (Figures 6 & 7) separate these sites into two categories: business and personal life pattern sites.

Results/Discussion:

Of the 282 Japanese sites analyzed, 217 were classified as business sites. The business corridors were located mainly along Market Street, Broadway, and Pacific Avenue. A variety of retail businesses existed; however, laundries, barbers, restaurants, and produce markets top the list. Hotels constitute the majority of the business/service category. Forty personal life pattern sites were located with the majority of those sites being housing. Twenty-five sites could not be classified due to lack of available information. A ground-truthing tour confirmed 17 extant Japanese building sites as of May, 2010. Other extant buildings may exist; however, further research into plat and property records will be required to confirm their authenticity due to street name, building number, and building façade changes over time. One of the most significant outcomes of this project has been the creation of a comprehensive database that is being utilized to organize and preserve vital historical records, as well as to facilitate future research.

Data Sources/Works Cited:

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 Otsuka, Shunichi, and James Watanabe. *History of the Japanese of Tacoma*. [S.l.]: Pacific Northwest District Council, Japanese American Citizens League, 1988. Print.

Japanese-American Sites in Tacoma, Washington 1888 to 1942

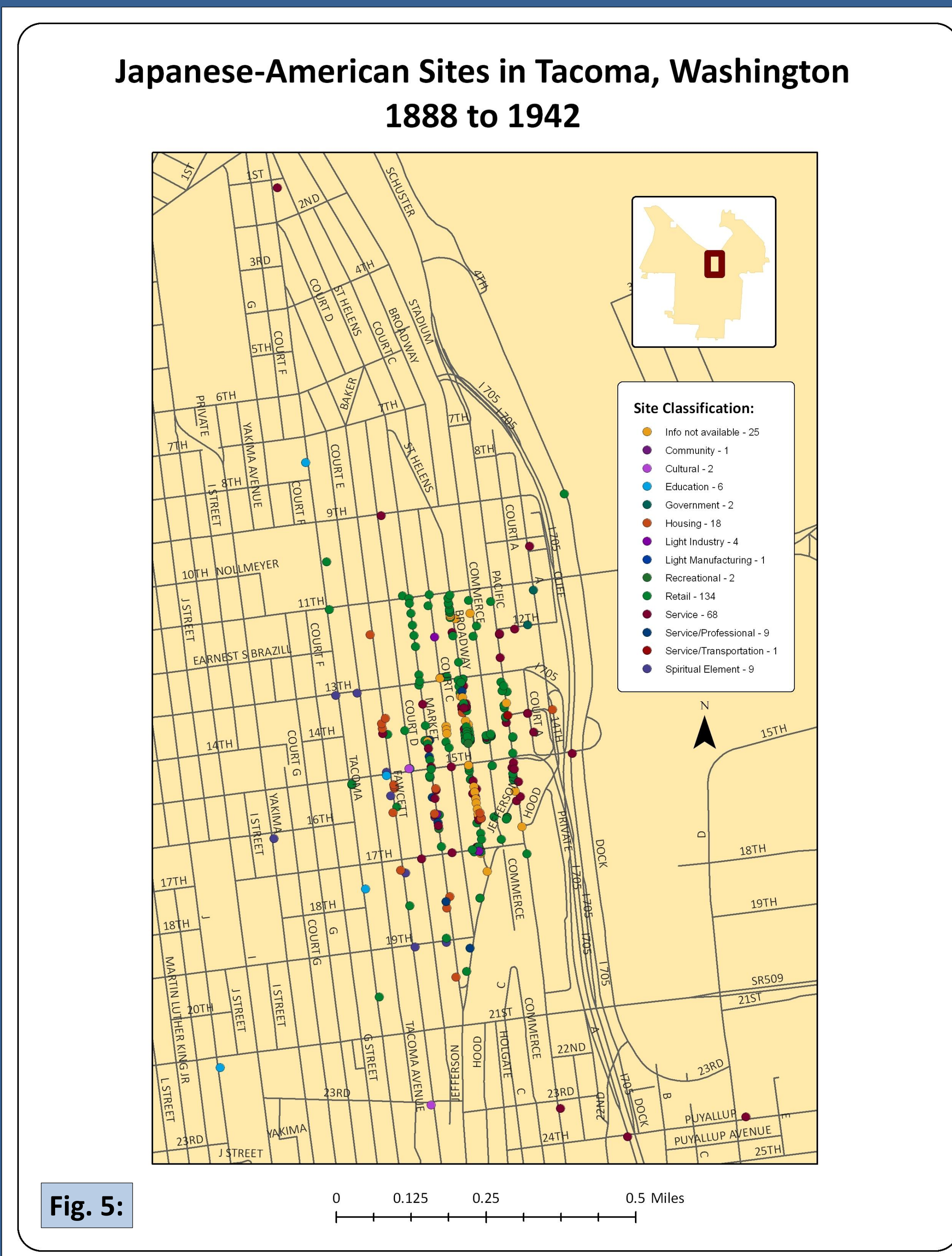


Fig. 5:

Fig. 6:

Japanese-American Business Sites Tacoma, Washington 1888 to 1942

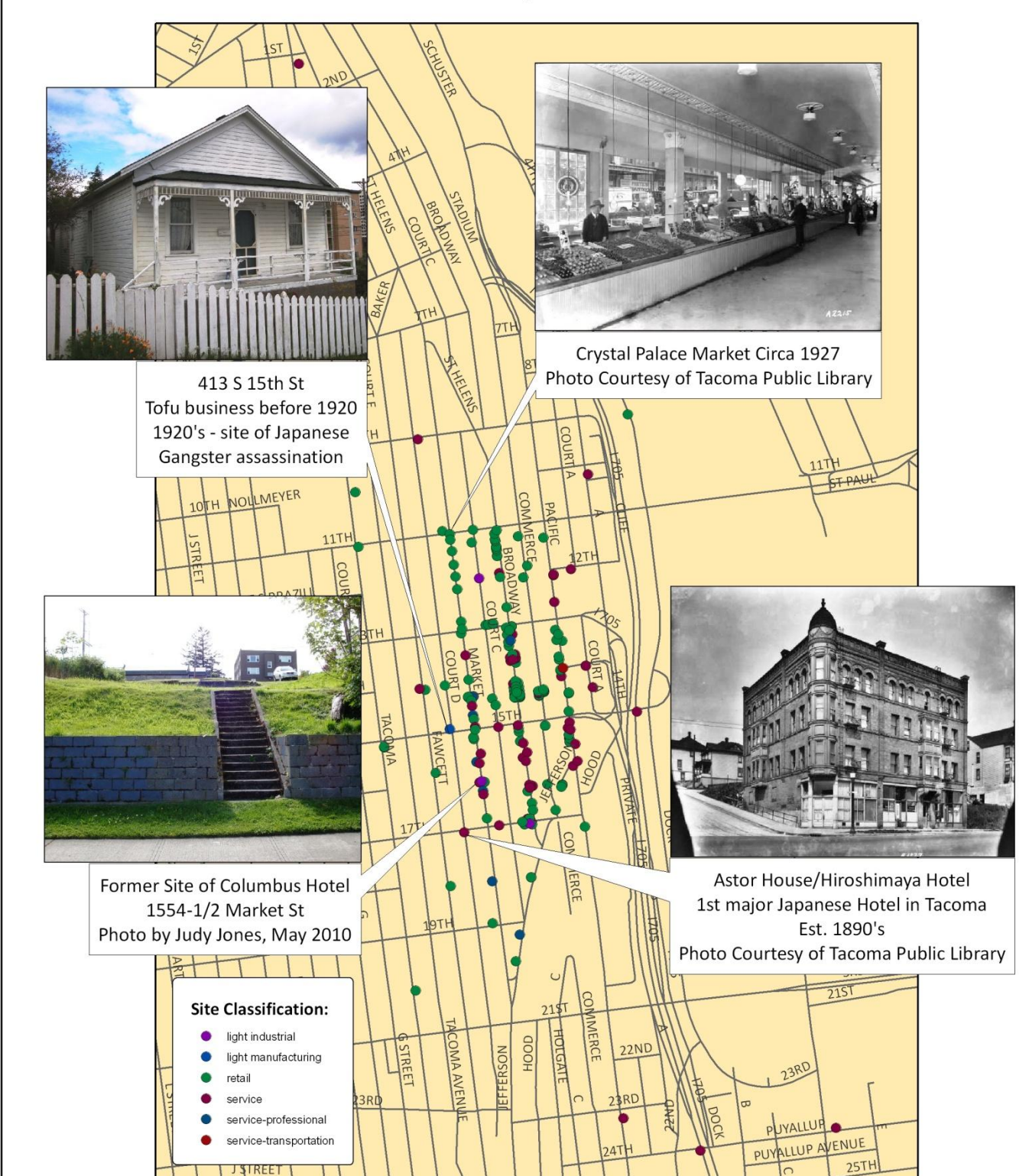
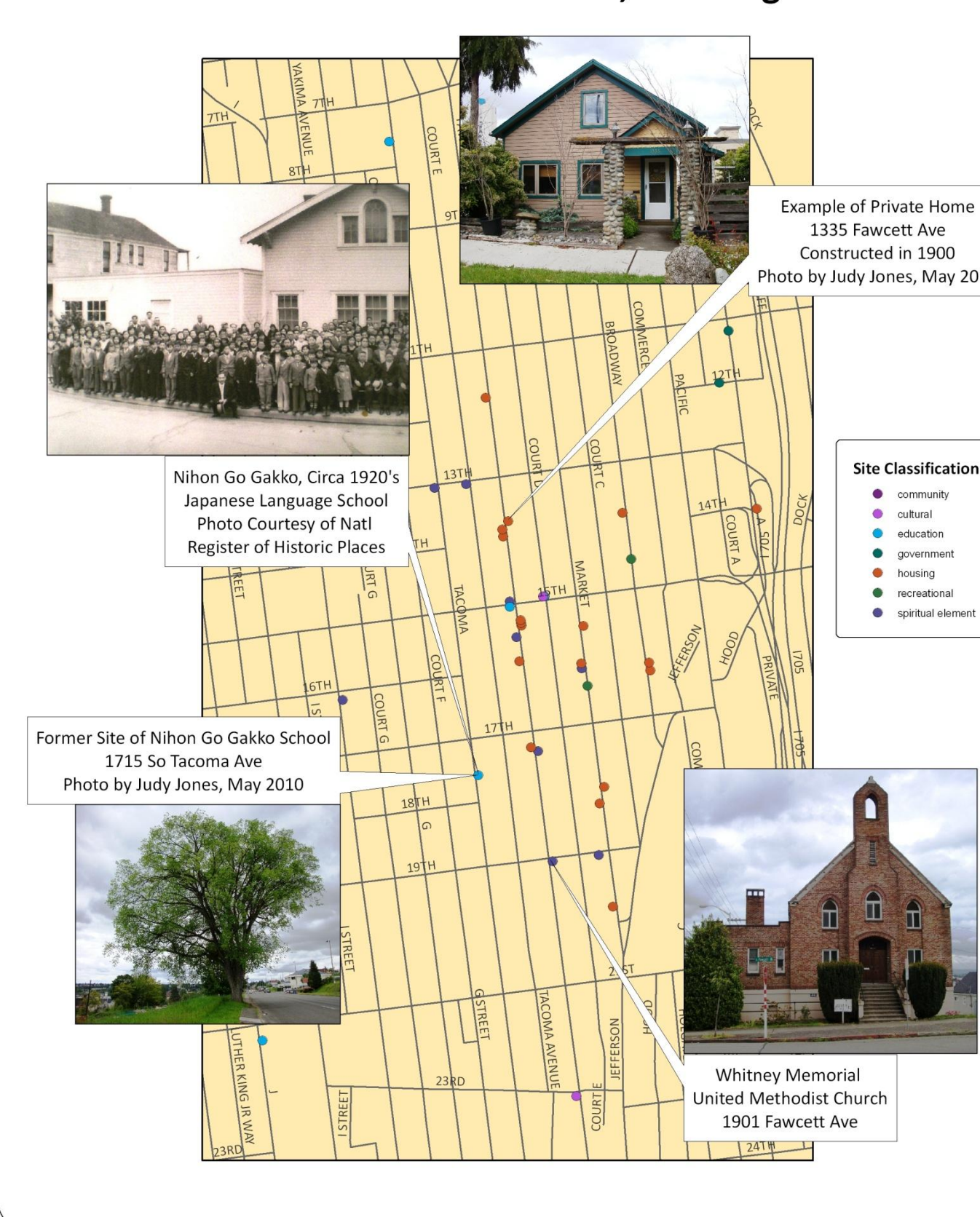


Fig. 7:

Japanese-American Personal Life Pattern Sites Pre-World War II ~ Tacoma, Washington



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