**Richard and Ina Ito: A Mystery Unraveled**

*Iona de la Torre, Getty Multicultural Intern, Hart Museum*

When I began my 10-week internship adventure here at the Hart this summer, I — like many a museum visitor and volunteer — was immediately spellbound by the mystery of the elusive Richard and Ina Ito, live-in housekeepers to Bill Hart while he lived in the mansion. Each museum volunteer whose tour I followed during my own training as a tour guide said something like this: “There’s a bit of a mystery surrounding these two…. all we know is that they were Japanese-Americans, they lived here as household staff, and they were good friends of Bill Hart’s.” My curiosity piqued, I made it my mission to find out what became of them in the cultural turbulence of the 1940s, when they “fell off the Hart radar.”

I wouldn’t go so far as to say that we’ve “gotten to the bottom” of the mysterious case of Richard and Ina Ito. But, their story has certainly unraveled some over the past two months as I’ve dug into various public records regarding their whereabouts during Hart’s lifetime and in the decades following. (Many of these databases have only just become available online within the past few years!)

Here is the Itos’ story as I have come to understand it.

The story begins with the birth of Shizuka Sugioka on June 24, 1911 in San Benito County, California to orchard worker Seigiro Sugioka and his stay-at-home wife, Kameno Takeda Sugioka. Mr. and Mrs. Sugioka were Japanese immigrants, and raised eight children as American citizens right here in California. Each child was given an American first name and a Japanese “middle” name; at least the Japanese name took on the character of a “middle” name on all formal documentation. Shizuka, the first daughter and second oldest Sugioka child, was given the first name, Ina, at her birth and was henceforth known as Ina S. Sugioka. Ina was still living with her parents in Hollister, San Benito County at the time of the 1930 Census; she was an 18-year-old high school graduate.

When she was 21, Ina married Richard Hideshiro Ito, a 27-year-old Japanese immigrant, who had arrived in the US in 1924. The two were married at the Japanese Independent Church of Hollywood – as in Hollywood, California – on September 15, 1932. Because Richard was not yet a US citizen, it appears Ina may have lost her US citizenship by marrying him. In 1922, Congress passed the Cable Act, which declared that any American woman who marries an Asian citizen will forfeit her own US citizenship as a result. Although there is no solid documentation to support that Ina was “de-naturalized,” at the time of her wedding, she was issued a social security number many years later. Issued when she was “re-naturalized”? It is a possibility, although it has not yet, again, been proven.

Before we get to social security numbers, let us get back to Richard and Ina’s marriage. When they walked down the aisle to become husband and wife, Richard listed Newhall as his residence, and Ina listed Hollister as hers. It appears that Richard brought his bride to the Horseshoe Ranch shortly thereafter, and the two settled in as dedicated staff through the 1930s.

In 1935, the Itos went on a trip to Japan. They returned via San Francisco on September 4, 1935, and they both listed W. S. Hart as their American contact and Newhall as their final destination. Did the couple procure the 300+ year old Samurai swords they gifted to Hart on this trip? Samurai swords that currently sit on display in the museum’s living room? Perhaps.

Fast forward to 1942. In February of that year, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized the internment of all Japanese and Japanese Americans living in the United States. On September 24, the Itos were sent to the Santa Anita Racetrack – one of the Assembly Centers – for processing, and then Richard and Ina were shipped to the Amache Relocation Center (camp) located in Granada, Colorado. Ina was released from the camp on February 5, 1943; Richard followed six months later on October 31. Reunited, the couple lived for a time in Denver, and Richard worked in a print shop, possibly as a photographer, in the city.

Exactly when Richard and Ina returned to Southern California is yet unknown. Richard declared his intent to become a US citizen while still living in Colorado in 1947, but he became a naturalized citizen in 1956 here in Los Angeles County. If Ina lost her citizenship, it appears to have been reinstated sometime before 1951 in Colorado. At least that is when her social security number was issued. So it is a safe bet the pair moved to Southern California sometime between 1952 and 1957.

Whenever they made it back, the duo appear to have moved around the Southland a bit, living for a time in Northridge, just a stone’s throw from their former Newhall home. Sadly, not much else is known about the final years of their lives. But Richard and Ina Ito are both buried at Green Hills Memorial Park in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. Ina passed away in 1988; Richard in 1993.

So while we have not fully solved the mystery of the Itos, we have a much better picture of their fates, and a chance now to remember their legacy. As evidenced by the charming appetizer platter with a raised relief of Two Gun Bill in the center and signed “To W.S. Hart, from Dick Ito, Xmas 1939,” currently on display in the Hart Museum’s kitchen, the Itos were more than just staff to the famous movie star. Let us remember them as such.