Uoki Sakai
Fish Market • 1906

Kazichi Sakai arrived in San Francisco in the 1890s. He worked as a cook and sold fish door-to-door from a horse and buggy. After the 1906 Earthquake he opened a combined grocery, fish market and ship’s Chandlery on Geary Street. The store’s name (Uoki) comes from a combination of “fish” and “happiness,” one of the many in Kazichi’s name.

As Nihonmachi grew, the store moved to Post Street. Sakai’s customers relied on him for hard-to-find specialties and staples of the Japanese diet: fifty-pound bags of Japanese rice varieties, daikon (a large white nashi), kabocha (Japanese pumpkin), gobo (burdock root), and impeccably fresh fish—to be served raw as sashimi, simmered in a warming seafood nabe (stew), or grilled as shioyaki or teppanyaki.

As Japanese Americans were sent to internment camps in 1942, the Sakai family moved all of their possessions, including their truck, into the store and boarded up the front, hoping for the best. Returning from internment in Topaz, Utah in 1945, they were among the fortunate few whose store and possessions were intact. They quickly reopened, providing Japanese foods rich with memories and tradition as well as new items reflecting change and adaptation resulting from the Japanese American experience.

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