

謎言

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Was Kayamori a Spy?

BY MARGARET THOMAS

PHOTOS FROM THE
KAYAMORI COLLECTION,
ALASKA STATE LIBRARY

The children just called him Picture Man.

NOBODY IN YAKUTAT REMEMBERS THE Japanese photographer's first name for sure. To most, he was Kayamori—the man under the hood behind the big box camera.

He photographed village weddings, Fourth of July foot races and funerals. His camera documented the passing of the wealthy and well-liked, with their flower-bedecked caskets and crowds of suited mourners, hats in hand. When the Salvation Army band escorted paupers' plain boxes, Kayamori was there, too.

"He was just part of the whole big family in town," says Yakutat resident MaryAnn Paquette. "Whenever something was happening, he was there."

The photographer, whom elders describe as quiet, generous and kind, lived in this southeastern Alaska village for nearly 30 years. But the only people

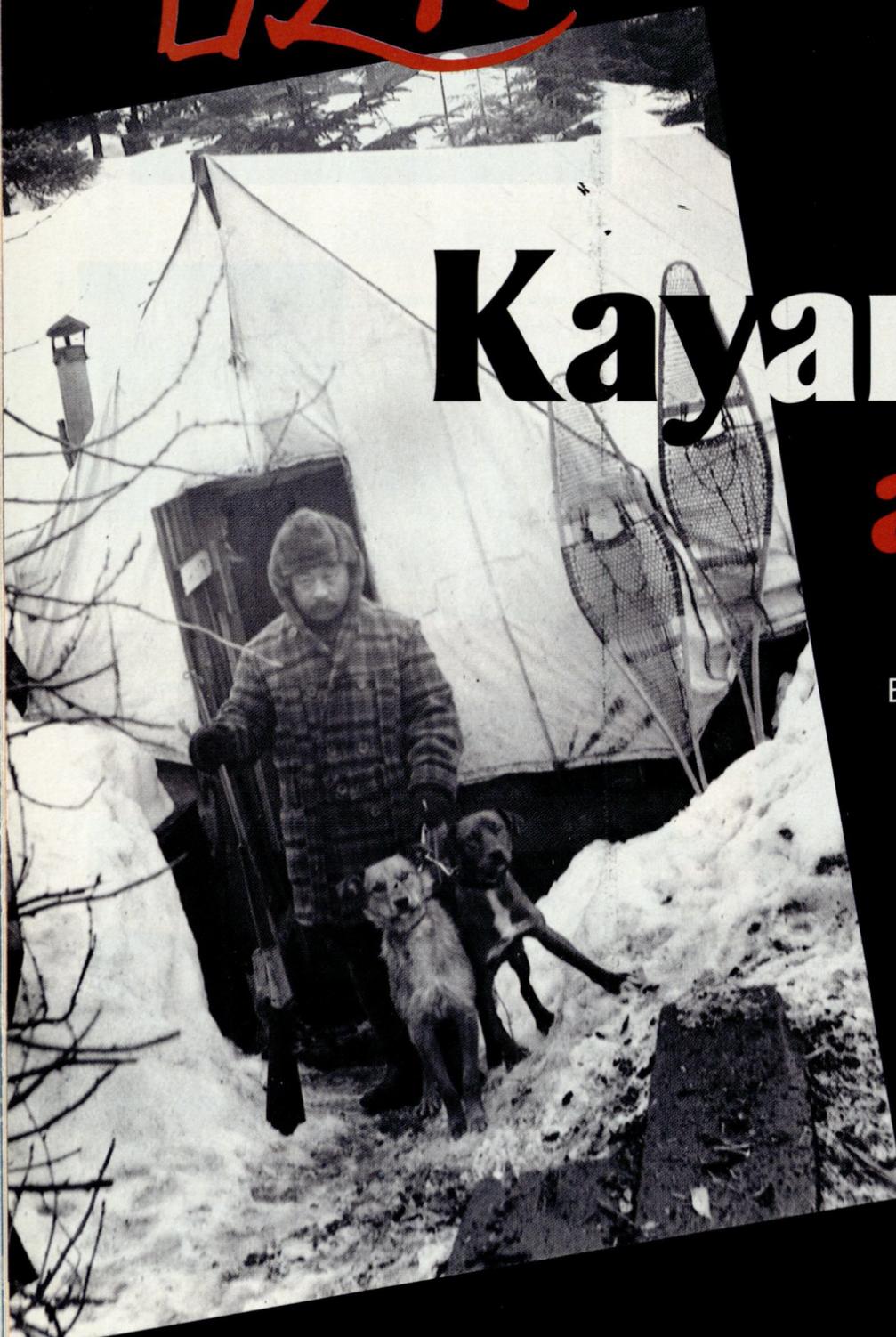
who attended his funeral in 1941 were soldiers with shovels.

Some say Kayamori was a spy. FBI documents indicate that government officials were on their way to arrest him when he committed suicide, two days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Others insist the photographer was a victim of circumstances and wartime xenophobia.

In either case, his death is now part of the town's lore. His legacy, some 1,000 mostly glass negatives, connects today's 700 Yakutat residents to an era when industry and world events were just beginning to mold this seaside Tlingit village.

A slight man with a mustache and

[LEFT] Few photos exist of Kayamori himself. Yakutat residents believe this is one such rare photo. [BELOW] Yakutat was a bustling community in its prewar heyday.



A doctor, summoned to certify his death, says he saw a photograph of a younger Kayamori in a Japanese Naval Lieutenant's uniform.

thinning dark hair peppered with gray, Kayamori stood not more than about 5½ feet tall. "He always wore a little cap," remembers Paquette. In later years, he often used reading glasses.

Born Sept. 3, 1877, in Tokyo, Kayamori came to Yakutat at about the age of 35 to work in the Libby, McNeil & Libby fish cannery. As far as anyone remembers, he never returned to Japan. Some speculated that he was a military deserter. A doctor, summoned to certify his death, says he saw a photograph of a younger Kayamori in a Japanese naval lieutenant's uniform.

Kayamori arrived in Alaska around 1912 at the height of the Southeast cannery era, just one of the hundreds of Japanese, Chinese and Filipino migrants who crossed the Pacific to work each summer. Most of the Asians lived in a cannery bunkhouse and ate meals together at the company mess hall.

Kayamori at some point moved into a company cottage on a bluff overlooking the cannery and Monti Bay, near the Gulf of Alaska. The tiny house was painted maroon with black trim, to match the cannery buildings. Paquette remembers shades and heavy, dark curtains, probably protection for the dark-room inside.

Kayamori's own photographs offer glimpses behind the curtains: the horizontal panels of his bedroom door, shellacked with pictures of roses; leggy women in bathing costumes; and an angry Uncle Sam, armed with a bat, rolling up his sleeves. A rifle leaned in a corner near the door; a pistol dangled from a wall.

In another room, Kayamori photographed a life-size striped ceramic cat curled in a wooden armchair, near a bouquet of paper roses. A row of wall hooks

suspended a cloth bag bulging with correspondence. A modern Japanese woman smiled demurely from an import-export company's 1941 wall calendar.

Another picture shows a 1924 calendar from the same company hanging over a small table laid out with short-wave radio equipment and headphones, near a lowered lacy window shade. It's unclear whether Kayamori ever transmitted messages with the radio. He once told friend John Bremner that he tried to contact a cannery ship at sea, but the experiment failed.

Kayamori never hid his radio hobby. Kids were welcome at his house, says Paquette, who sometimes heard Japanese voices from the radio when she visited as a little girl. The photographer offered strange cookies, crackers and soft-shelled nuts from tins labeled with spidery script, she says. "He loved the children."

Mel Renner recalls squinting through the viewfinder on Kayamori's camera when he was a boy. "I think he probably got photographs of just about every kid in Yakutat."

Kayamori's portraits of adults were often formal—bob-haired Native women in flapper dresses, or sober men in suits arranged in rows at early Alaska Native Brotherhood conventions—but his camera played with the children. In one fuzzy picture a boy in an Indian chief's feather headdress collapses on a porch, one hand clutching a fatal arrow. A few feet away a child-executioner in an Indian war bonnet, still aims his bow.

Kayamori photographed the village's annual Christmas gathering and the New Year's Eve masquerade party. Diners



An interior shot of Kayamori's home. The cat in the chair is ceramic.

paused for his camera during a communal feast at the Alaska Native Brotherhood Hall in honor of George Washington's birthday. Says Renner, "He was a friend to everybody—but not that close."

Paquette remembers Kayamori as a loner who visited her Tlingit father occasionally. The two communicated in broken English and hand gestures, but considered themselves friends.

One Christmas, the photographer delivered a camera for her older brother and sister to share, says Paquette. Another Christmas, he brought a miniature camera for the younger girls. Paquette still has some of the match book-sized pictures, which Kayamori developed.

Retired Yakutat fisherman Oscar

Frank Sr. remembers Kayamori as a cooker at the cannery's row of giant barrel-shaped retorts. Dented or leaky cans of fish he tossed to the kids who played under the stilted cannery on rainy days. The photographer may also have been a clerk at the company store at one time. His death certificate lists his final occupation as cannery watchman.

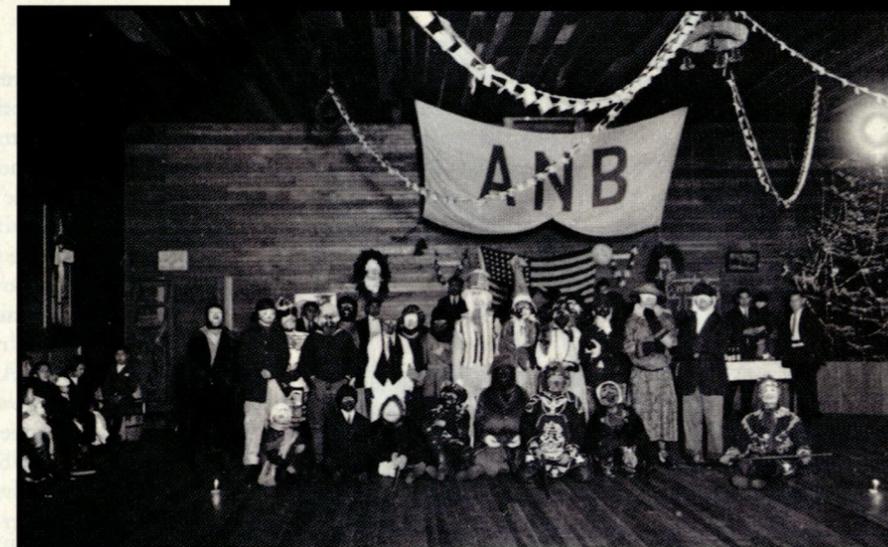
Instead of paying to eat at the cannery mess house, Kayamori cooked for himself. Residents say he never dated or drank. He told John Bremner that the money he saved went to Japan, though he never said to whom.

The expatriate followed news of Japan's invasion of China during the '30s, Bremner remembers. Pins plotted the progress of Japanese troops on a map of China posted on a wall in his home. "What are they fighting about, rice?" Bremner once asked. Kayamori replied, "The Chinese never say no to the Americans, they only say yes."

The photographer's other interests included fishing and duck hunting. He owned a small skiff and one of Yakutat's first outboard motors. On their way to hunt seals in Disenchantment Bay, Oscar Frank and his father sometimes stopped and shared a seafood meal with Kayamori at his spring fishing camp on Krutoi Island, east of Yakutat. Frank says he and others later wondered if the fisherman really used the remote island as a base for sounding depths off the vulnerable Pacific Coast. "The people start to think, well, he'd been a spy all the time he was here."

YAKUTAT CHILDREN USED TO hunt for glass fishing floats carried by currents from Japanese nets to the expanse of fine, white sand that rims the Gulf of Alaska for 90 miles south of Yakutat Bay. As World War II escalated, U. S. military experts worried that the beach, fronted by dense forest, might invite a Japanese invasion.

U.S. soldiers overran the village, even before America entered the war. Military engineers built a road from the town to a new 5,000-foot bomber runway. For a time, troops used the cannery as a bar-



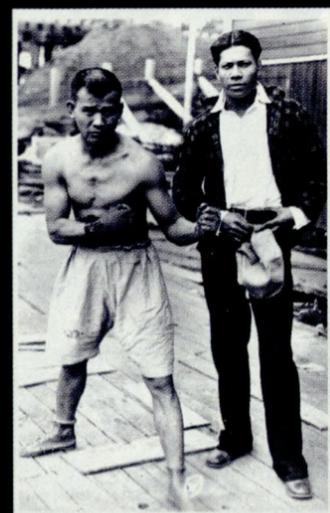
[TOP] A New Year's masquerade celebration, in Yakutat's Alaska Native Brotherhood hall. [ABOVE] A nurse gives children a lesson on brushing teeth. Outside the Mission School, later the Covenant Church. [LEFT] Mr. and Mrs. Chester Worthington, Yakutat's first Salvation Army workers. They are in Salvation Army uniforms; the Native drum is painted in a thunderbird motif.

'Stupid hysteria. I bet my bottom dollar that he was no spy.'

Those who knew the photographer remember him as keeper of the community's past.



[ABOVE] An unidentified cyclist poses on the dock. Note the three bottles hanging from the handlebars. [BELOW] Filipino cannery workers prepare for a boxing match.



racks. Village residents were ordered to hang blankets over their windows at night, and patrols scouted the dark neighborhoods for lights that could become targets for enemy aircraft.

Children counted the war planes as they roared into the sky each morning, and again as they landed. Uniformed men called a meeting at the ANB Hall and warned the town's 300 residents to prepare for an invasion, remembers Frank. Families were advised to cache food and other necessities outside the village, in case they were forced to flee.

To stress the need for vigilance, the military staged a sneak air raid one day, says Frank. A plane circled behind the town, cut its engines and rained leaflets on the village. By the time the mayor had sounded the alarm, the plane was climbing away over the Pacific. The leaflets said something like: "Expect the Japanese to attack from this direction." Some frightened families eventually moved to temporary camps on nearby islands.

Territorial Gov. Ernest Gruening called it "a shocking miscarriage of justice," when the U.S. secretary of war began to intern Japanese people from Pacific Coast states during World War II. Not all Alaskans, however, shared his outrage.

"Every Alaskan knows that the Japanese have conducted espionage activity in the territory for an amazingly long time," author Jean Potter wrote in her book *Alaska Under Arms*, in 1942. In the face of such certainty, a Japanese man with a camera must have taken on a sinister aspect.

In October of 1940, the director of the FBI sent a letter to Juneau agent R.C. Vogel requesting the names of "persons who should be considered for custodial detention pending investigation in the event of a national emergency." Vogel's reply included the name S. Kayamori and the following description: "Is reported to be an enthusiastic photographer and to have panoramic views of the Alaskan coast line from Yakutat to Cape Spencer."

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover wrote to

Brigadier Gen. Sherman Miles of the War Department's military intelligence division, a day before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, requesting information on a number of individuals. "Reported on suspect list, Alaska," Miles' reply noted under the name: Kayamori, Suzuki.

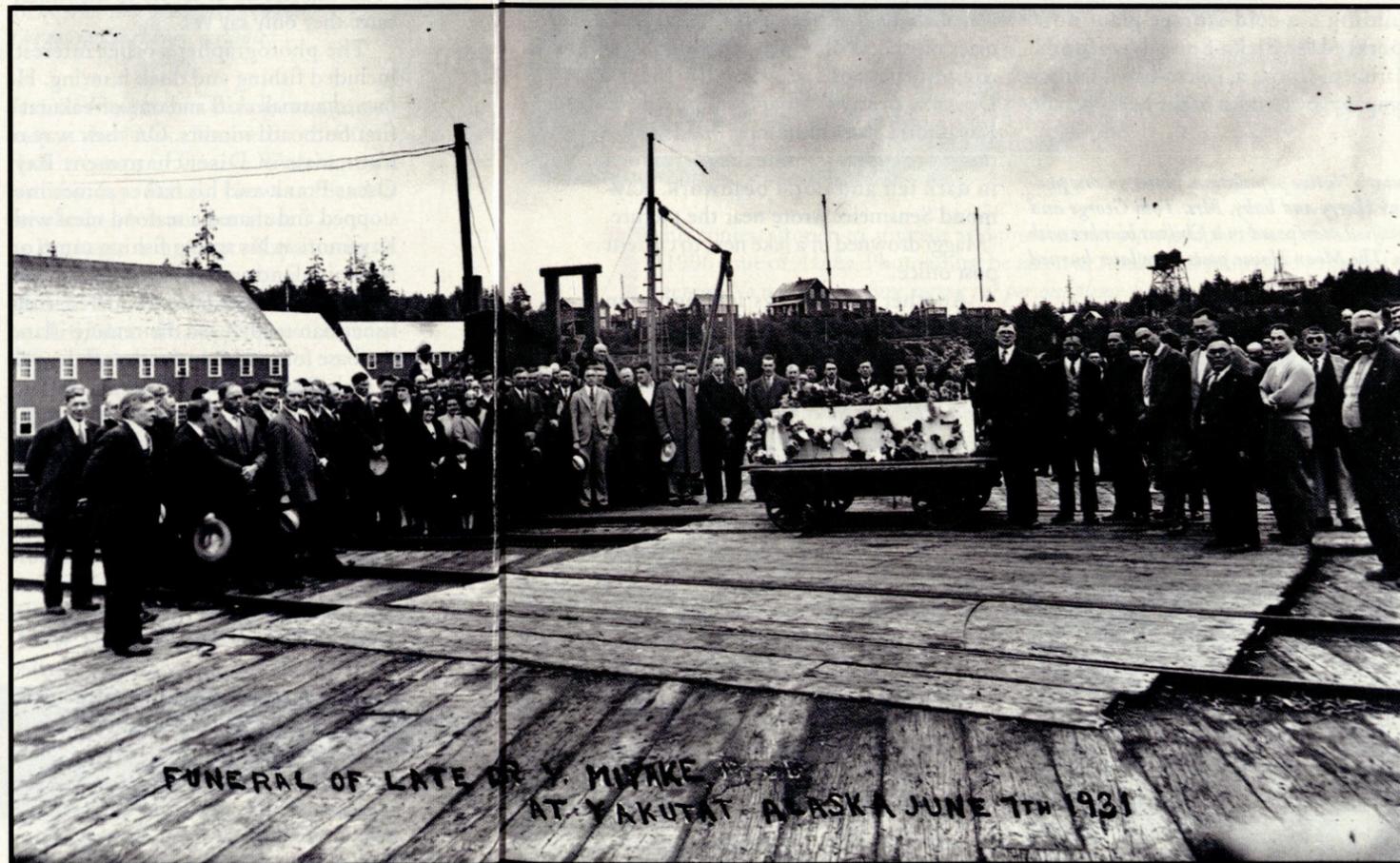
Federal agents questioned Wayne Axelson's father, a minister and Yakutat postmaster, about Kayamori. The photographer corresponded with Japanese friends outside of Alaska, but he didn't receive mail from Japan, says the younger Axelson, now a Washington state resident. His late father never believed his friend was a spy.

"Stupid hysteria," bristles Axelson. "He was a tremendous individual. I have nothing but praise for the guy. I bet my bottom dollar that Kayamori was no spy."

After the Japanese bombed Pearl



[ABOVE] Identified members of this logging crew were Situk Harry, Samson Harry, Dick Harry, Tom Cox, Olaf Abrams, Peter L., Jimmie Jackson, Alex, Dick Nelson, Charlie Gudson and Bill Milton. [BELOW] The funeral of Dr. Y. Miyake, a good friend of the photographer's, on June 7, 1931. The casket is on a rail cart.



Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, it really didn't matter anymore. Soldiers stationed in Yakutat beat up the by-then stooped 64-year-old photographer. "They hushed it up," says MaryAnn Paquette, a teen at the time. "Everybody in town knew what happened."

Residents say Kayamori knew government officials were coming for him. So, two days after Pearl Harbor, he died as he had lived—alone. Local lore says he put on his suit, wrote a will and died in his armchair.

"Drug?" asks his death certificate under Cause of Death. Capt. Jack Karel, a 32-year-old military doctor stationed in Yakutat at the time, received word of Kayamori's death and phoned the FBI in Anchorage. The Hackensack, N. J., doctor says he waited for an agent to arrive before going to the photographer's

house. Karel later wrote, "We did find evidence of an attempt to burn some documents."

Tucked into a box of Kayamori prints at the Alaska State Library in Juneau is the image of a mustached Japanese man with graying hair, lying in a bed with his eyes closed and the covers pulled up. Paquette says the Kayamori she remembers was older, but after 50 years her memory of him is vague. Others say the man in the bed is the dead photographer. Another picture shows him in a suit, lying in a canvas-lined casket. Did investigators use Kayamori's own camera to document these final scenes?

There was no funeral. "That's the wartime. They don't think about Kayamori, like you," says Bremner with a smile. "They don't worry about Kayamori."

Bremner and others say the soldiers buried the photographer in some woods across the bay from the village, near his good friend, a Japanese doctor named Miyake who died in 1931. Later, the military paved the site for a naval ramp, says Bremner. The soldiers didn't bother to move the graves.

Kayamori's will left his few belongings to Yakutat's Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, but officials ruled the document invalid because the signature was not witnessed, says Bremner. Cannery official Ray McFarland auctioned the dead man's things, says McFarland's wife, Irene, of Washington state. Her late husband saved her a round Oriental tray and a blue bud vase.

Some 20 years later, Yakutat residents Caroline and Larry Powell went to clean out the attic of an abandoned church mission house, scheduled for demolition. The couple found boxes of Kayamori's negatives, most on fragile 5-by-7-inch glass plates.

Children playing in the attic had scattered some of the plates across the floor, says Caroline Powell. The exposed images had begun to bubble and pull away from the glass.

The Powells gathered up the negatives and took them to the Forest Service office in Yakutat. But the agency had no

Two days after Pearl Harbor, he died as he had lived—alone.

money for printing, and returned the boxes five years later. Caroline Powell's brother, former Juneau mayor Byron Mallott, eventually delivered the collection to the state library in Juneau.

The city of Yakutat and the library paid to have two sets of prints made in

the late '70s. A group of Yakutat residents later met with a state librarian to identify people and places in the pictures.

ARUSTY CANNON STILL AIMS COCKEYED at the undeveloped oceanfront just south of Yakutat, now known as Cannon Beach. A paprika-colored Army tank molders near a picnic table, beach grass sprouting from its track. The dunes belong to beachcombers, four-wheelers and occasional summer surfers in wet suits.

Snow-capped Mount St. Elias juts up like a steeple overlooking the nearby Situk River. These days, the river's steelhead run attracts anglers from all over the world, including Japan.

Kayamori's cottage has long-since been replaced by a row of modern houses, but the old cannery still stands at the head of the bay, its gray lumber dressed up by a new blue aluminum roof. The building is a cold-storage plant now, operated by Sitka Sound Seafoods. Marubeni Corp., a Tokyo-based trading company, owns most of the business, and

Japanese technicians oversee roe packing at the plant.

Some of the new-generation employees have heard about Kayamori. "Yeah, he was a spy," says a water-quality worker on the plant's dock. "He committed hari-kari."

So modern myth is born.

Those who knew the photographer remember him as keeper of the community's past. Paquette went to city hall earlier this year to leaf through a set of three-ring binders and a box full of Kayamori's pictures. She's compiling her family history.

Yakutat resident Lena Farkas has looked through the binders too, searching without success for a family portrait that Kayamori took when she was a little girl. To her, that single picture is invaluable. A fire in the '40s consumed the family's home, including all of their photographs.

Other elders have penciled in memories on sheets of white paper opposite the photographs at city hall. Maggi Dixon, a pretty Native teen, posed for Kayamori's camera in long braids and a traditional white-ermine dress, trimmed in dark felt and floral beadwork. Raymond Sensmeier wrote near the picture, "Maggi drowned in a lake next to current post office."

Another print shows a Tlingit man among four propped-up carved posts. According to Sensmeier, a man named Tom Cox burned the Moon House posts on the beach "to save them from collectors."

Few other photographs of early Yakutat exist, says state photo librarian India Spartz. Tlingit ethnologists and Alaska historians from various universities have studied Kayamori's pictures. "There's always interest in this collection," she says. "It covers a time in that community that was very prosperous."

Those who peruse the pictures come to know the photographer as well as his time. By capturing what he found beautiful, funny or important, Kayamori has left an enigmatic portrait of himself. ★

MARGARET THOMAS, of Juneau, is a regular contributor to *Alaska* magazine.



[ABOVE] The flapper look of the 1920s invaded Yakutat's Native population. Notes on this photo identify the subjects as "Susie Johnson, Mrs. Jenny Harry and baby, Mrs. Tom George and child, outdoors among the trees." [BELOW] An unidentified man posed in a Chilkat blanket with four Shark House posts and four Moon House posts. The Moon House posts were later burned on the beach, a local man wrote, to save them from collectors.



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ALASKA MAGAZINE'S 1996 PHOTO CONTEST

This contest is open to amateur and professional photographers worldwide. Winners will receive gallery treatment in the July 1996 issue of *Alaska*. Photos must be taken in Alaska and submitted in one of three categories: Wildlife, Scenic or Human Interest. *No more than three entries per person, please.* Submissions, along with entry form, must be postmarked by Jan. 31, 1996.

All images must be high-quality 35mm, medium- or large-format color slide duplicates (**do not send originals**), or prints no larger than 5x7. Entries will not be returned. Winners will be asked to submit the originals for publication; all originals will be returned. Previously published photos, or images that have been accepted or are presently submitted to other publications, are not eligible. Photographers retain all rights to their photographs. *Alaska* magazine, in publishing winning photos, will have "one-time publishing rights."

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