

Ryutaro Nakagama

Ryutaro Nakagama offered homesick Japanese Albertans a taste of home.

Classified as an enemy alien and forced to evacuate from the west coast of Canada in the Second World War, Nakagama and his family moved to southern Alberta to prevent their family from being separated. They worked in the field close to Lethbridge, living in a beet shack so flimsy that snow blew through the cracks in winter, and weeds sprouted through the floorboards in summer.

Legally frozen to the farms where they worked, the Japanese could get no traditional food. Nakagama persuaded the authorities to let him deliver such food to other Japanese Canadians. After the war he bought an old truck and began to peddle fresh fish.

Japanese evacuees were not allowed to live and work in Lethbridge. But in 1949 Nakagama received special dispensation to open a grocery store there, which he stocked with Japanese food, rice tea, miso, and noodles. He became the sole Canadian distributor for Kokuho Rose, quality short-grain rice.

Nakagama assuaged the hunger of a displaced people at a time when the Japanese faced powerful discrimination.

Born: December 9, 1906 – Died: July 30, 1990



Ryutaro Nakagama and Nobuko Nakagama
Courtesy of Nakagama's Japanese Foods and Giftware

Additional Resources

- **CBC News**
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/nakagamas-japanese-foods-giftware-ryutaro-lethbridge-1.5421772>
- **Nakagama's**
<https://nakagamas.com/>

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>