

10-10-2008

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Recommended Citation

Murata, Alice, "120 Years Since Fujita's Birth, Part 2" (2008). *Counselor Education Emeritus Faculty Publications*. 21.
<https://neiudc.neiu.edu/ced-emer/21>

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120 Years Since Fujita's Birth ~Part 2~

by Alice Murata

The other body of Fujita's works that remains notable is the St. Valentine's Day massacre. The 18th Amendment banned the manufacture of liquor. Although alcohol trade was illegal, it was very lucrative and gangs fought for control. Al Capone came from New York to organize bootlegging, prostitution, gambling, and racketeering. He bribed police and politicians. Corruption reigned. In the 20's more than 500 were killed by machine guns. Still, Al Capone was able to manipulate media to view him in a favorable manner. Mr. Lewis, Chief Historian at the Chicago History Museum, considers Capone to be a brilliant organizer, shrewd businessman, and good at manipulating journalists. The gangster was viewed as a likeable person and simple businessman, who donated to soup kitchens. He wanted to be seen as a good Robin Hood, denying any knowledge about murders.

Al Capone and other notorious gangsters knew Fujita and many people knew of Al Capone's misdeeds but were too afraid to say or do anything. Only Fujita was brave enough to photograph the St Valentine's Day massacre. His photo of the dead men revealed they were facing the wall when shot because of how they laid face up covered with blood. The public was shocked by these images of men lined up and assassinated. Bugs Moran said "only Capone kills like that." These photos changed the image the public held of Al Capone and demanded that something be done. Turning against Capone, their blind treatment ended when they saw him as the monster he was. They cooperated with government and ended Capone's rule of Chicago. He was convicted of tax evasion.

Lewis, put into context the times when Fujita lived and worked. The significance of acts can be better appreciated when placed into a historical setting. Lewis said the first photograph placed in newspapers was 1890. The Daily News was a leader in using graphics and photos in its paper. Chicago was getting to be so large and people were not able to get around very well that they looked to the newspaper and the images contained there to understand the city. It offered readers a visual "slice of life." The world was becoming more visually oriented and photography was a powerful way of communicating information.

Fujita was a part of the moment photographic journalism was developing and contributing to better understanding Chicago. Lewis thought that Fujita had the unusual ability to be at the right place at the right time. Even today Fujita's photographs are very powerful. His work has stood the test of time and stands out among the many Chicago photographers.

After Fujita left the news business around 1929, he opened his own commercial photography business at 5642 South Harper in one of the World's Columbian Exposition Buildings. His basement apartment there

has been replaced by new townhouses. In 1935 and 1936 he was commissioned by the federal government to take pictures of federal work projects all over the United States. In 1950 he moved his commercial and artistic photography shop to 1011 La Salle Street where he did work for American enterprises such as Sears Roebuck, Johnston Motors, and Stark Nurseries.

Fujita said "my dream... is to go far away from civilization some day and lose myself in the wilderness. I already have the spot picked out- the northern end of British Columbia, which I believe is the most beautiful country in the world. Nature and the drama in it are all the companions I need. There I shall do what I like best to do, read and write. And I don't propose to take another picture."

Around 1928, Fujita constructed a cabin reflective of a Japanese country home on a remote island in Minnesota in what is now Voyageurs National Park. The four acre property was purchased in Florence Carr's name because aliens were not permitted to own land. The couple wed in 1940 to protect his various properties. From 1928 to 1941, he went there into the wilderness alone to escape city life and turn to his love of nature and poetry. His cabin is a registered historical site resting among the granite rock deposits from the last glacier. These rocks are deemed to hold power and audible memory, perhaps of Fujita's spirit.

Many are captured by a special room which Yamashiro finds reminiscent of Fujita's seaside home in Japan. He could easily picture Fujita working and meditating among the pines, rocks, and waves of water. Fujita left the island in 1942 with the beginning of World War II because of the anti-Japanese sentiment there. Residents referred to his place as "Jap Island."

After this time, Fujita escaped to the Indiana Dunes, an hour from Chicago, where he had a cabin. The researchers attempted to find this home without any luck. It is now part of the Indiana Dunes National Park. Fujita was granted American citizenship by special congressional action introduced by Senator James Hamilton Lewis.

Fujita loved writing tanka poems and became the master of tanka poetry in English. He attempted to capture "that fine and illusive mood, big enough to illuminate the infinity of the universe." His poetry conveyed Japanese moods, expressed emotions in the English language. His poems capture movement of life from one form to another.



St. Valentine's Day Massacre by Photographer, Jun Fujita
Courtesy of Chicago History Museum

The storm has passed,
The sky washed clear,
Rain drops on twigs
Reflect the moon.

His works formed the foundation of English Tanka and were published in *Tanka: Poems in Exile*. Harriet Monroe published some of Fujita's watercolors and poems in her *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*

After Fujita's death on Saturday, July 13, 1963, he was cremated at Graceland Cemetery but the burial site is unknown. This giant in tanka poetry, photographer of nature - flowers, forests, and landscapes as well as of Chicago history, and painter of delicate watercolors of nature as well as maker of sake (Japanese orange wine) and avid boater is gone but his spirit or soul remains.

The motion of the trees
and the motion of the lake
in and out of time.

In 1964 Florence Carr Fujita donated many of her husband's historic photos to the Chicago Historical Society, previous name of the Chicago History Museum. It includes the Eastland album as well as glass negatives of zoo animals, Chicago structures such as the interior of Rockefeller Chapel and people such as Einstein and Mayor Cermak. He took photos of prince Takanaka's 1931 visit to Chicago. Fujita was proud of his work and this museum is a logical place for them because when the Daily News closed in 1961-62, all of their photographic negatives numbering 300 to 500,000 were donated to the Chicago Historical Society. If you would like to see Jun Fujita's photos, some are currently on display at the Chicago History Museum in their Crossroads of America Exhibit on the second floor. Go see his images of the Eastland Boat Disaster, the 1919 riots, and St. Valentine's Day Massacre. Other more artistic photographs of Fujita are housed at the Art Institute including those published in Home and Highway, a Allstate Insurance Company publication.

I am very, very grateful to Russell Lewis and Rob Medina of the Chicago History Museum for permission to use Fujita's photographs for this article. Lewis is a longtime friend of the Japanese American community. He and I arranged the meeting of the Consul General of Japan and then museum president, Lonnie Bunch, which resulted in the use of the museum for the opening 150th Year Celebration of Perry's opening Japan for trade. Bunch is now back in Washington DC working on opening the African American Museum.

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