

September Historical Question:

Which former Cottonwood Heights Resident was the first Japanese-American elected to public office in Utah?

Historical Answer:

Dr. Dan Oniki, who received his medical degree from the University of Utah in 1947, ran a family practice in Cottonwood Heights in J. Thomas Fyans' home after Fyans was called as an LDS mission president in Uruguay in 1960. Before Dr. Oniki moved to Cottonwood Heights, he opened up a family practice in Park City in 1949. In 1955, he was asked by Park City Republicans to run as a Republican for the Park City Council. He refused, and decided to run as an Independent instead.

However, Dr. Oniki needed three people to form an Independent Party in Park City. He was a member of the Kiwanis Club, so he recruited three friends and formed an Independent Party. Additionally, he found out he needed fifty people to sign a petition of support to get his name on the ballot. His wife Helen, sister of Tom Shimizu of Cottonwood Heights, walked down Main Street to collect the fifty signatures. Dr. Oniki won the election by 100 votes and served a four-year term on the Park City Council, thus becoming the first Japanese-American to be elected to public office in Utah.