Religion has long played a central role in the life of the Japanese American community. Most laws did not subscribe to a single, exclusivistic belief system but instead incorporated various religious elements in their daily lives. In Japan, families registered with their local Buddhist temple and also observed temple-sanctioned rituals at local Shinto shrines. Traditional beliefs encompassed folk gods and demons, nature spirits, shamanism and Confucianism. Several thousand ‘hidden Christians’ practiced their faith in secrecy to avoid persecution during Japan’s Edo period. The first documented Japanese American organization was the Fukuin Kai, the Japanese Congregational Church, which began meeting in 1873 in the basement of the Chinese Methodist Mission in San Francisco’s Chinatown. In a few years this organization would give rise to various Christian churches and be joined in the community by Buddhist and other religious groups. Despite differences in religious doctrines and practices, these groups established a continuing tradition of community service.

**Community Activities**

Scouting and Youth Activities

Scouting and youth activities are an important part of Japantown’s community life. One of the various Boy Scout troops, Troop 12, based at St. Francis Xavier Church, and another at the Japanese American Athletic Association, Inc. (JAAA) help to organize activities for young people. The JAAA also sponsors a special youth division with a baseball program.

Church Bazaars

Japanese American religious federations sponsor church bazaars, which feature a variety of Asian and Western foods, as well as crafts, mining, and other items for sale. These events are held in conjunction with other community observances, such as Japanese American Religious Federation (JARF)’s annual Star School at 1715 Octavia Street and trans-Pacific sonoma belief system but instead incorporated various religious elements in their daily lives. In Japan, families registered with their local Buddhist temple and also observed temple-sanctioned rituals at local Shinto shrines. Traditional beliefs encompassed folk gods and demons, nature spirits, shamanism and Confucianism. Several thousand ‘hidden Christians’ practiced their faith in secrecy to avoid persecution during Japan’s Edo period. The first documented Japanese American organization was the Fukuin Kai, the Japanese Congregational Church, which began meeting in 1873 in the basement of the Chinese Methodist Mission in San Francisco’s Chinatown. In a few years this organization would give rise to various Christian churches and be joined in the community by Buddhist and other religious groups. Despite differences in religious doctrines and practices, these groups established a continuing tradition of community service.

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