

The Sekine Canada Story

Rivers Manitoba, 1973 – 1982

For about a decade, beginning in 1973, thousands of high-quality Sekine bicycles were manufactured near Rivers, Manitoba at the Oo-za-we-Kwun Centre in facilities that were once part of one of the most important Air Force Bases in Canada.



Presented by The Rivers Train Station Restoration Committee

The Sekine Canada Story

Rivers Manitoba, 1973 – 1982

The Sekine Story

Beginnings
The Facility
Setting the Wheels in Motion
On the Factory Floor
The End of an Era
An Enduring Legacy

Resources

It Was in the Paper - The Story Unfolds in the Press
A Free Press Article from 1973

Online Collections

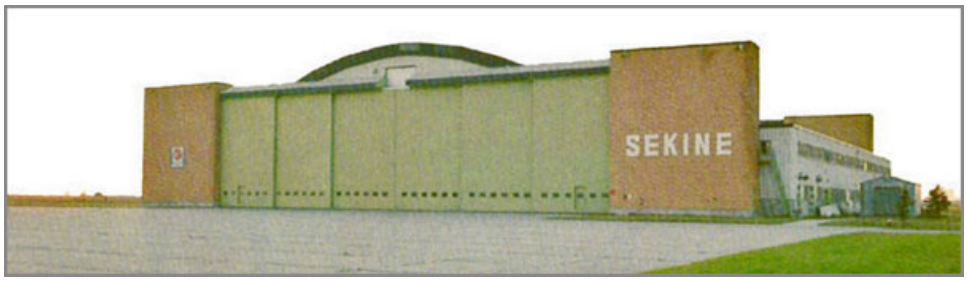
The 1975 Sekine Catalogue
A Sekine Owner's Manual
Newspaper Ads
Press Clippings

http://www.riversdalyheritage.ca/

The Rivers Train Station Restoration Committee would like to acknowledge
the support of Manitoba Sport, Culture, and Heritage
in the development of this initiative,
through a grant from the Heritage Grants Program
and through ongoing guidance and support of the
Historic Resources Branch.



Beginnings



For about a decade, beginning in 1973, thousands of high-quality Sekine bicycles were manufactured near Rivers, Manitoba at the Oo-za-we-Kwun Centre in facilities that were once part of one of the most important Air Force Bases in Canada.

The story of the Sekine Bicycle Company in Canada is a story that brings together many threads of the larger history of our community, our nation, and our trade relationships with the outside world. Japan was not a notable trading partner in the early part of the 20th century, and as the decades progressed it became our enemy in the Second World War. So the creation of the Sekine Corporation in Japan had little impact internationally.

Chuzo Sekine from Tokyo began manufacturing bicycles in Arakawa in 1912. It was a small enterprise in Japan's domestic market for some time and little detail is available about its operations. We do know that in 1950 the Sekine Company received a Japanese Trade Industry Award and that in 1962 they passed an industrial standards examination.

The city of Arakawa was a working class, industrial community and the original Sekine's were designed for practical transportation. Cars were not common and bikes were used for getting to work and running errands. The early Sekine's often had very large baskets or bins attached. This was long before biking became primarily a recreational activity.

Winnipeg filmmaker Derek Eidse interviewed Michio Kimura, who used to be the head engineer for Sekine Canada, as well as the assistant to the President of Sekine Canada. He knew the original Mr. Sekine from Arakawa, Japan.

He was known as a very humble man, and it was said of him that, "The lower he bowed, the more money he made." As a businessman he had an eye for detail and quality, and would regularly send raw materials back to suppliers if it didn't meet his approval.

The product evolved with the times. Bikes made in the 50's were far from glamorous. They were heavy dependable vehicles, built to last. But they also had

distinctive detailing that carried over into the modern era when bikes became more about recreation than about mere transportation.

In 1968, Sekine's new factory in Saitama Prefecture was the most modern bicycle production facility in Japan. In 1969, the product was selected as, "the best designed bicycle by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry in Japan.



A bicycle shop in Japan – practical transportation for working people.

After the Second World War, however, Japan slowly became more economically connected to the west. For some time "Made in Japan" was synonymous with low cost and many of its industries focused on mass production of inexpensive consumer goods. Low wages and other costs gave it an advantage over North American and European producers. This began to turn around in the camera and electronics industries in the 1950s, a trend that continues to this day when Japanese manufactured goods, from cars to guitars, are known for quality and workmanship.

As the 1970s opened, the U.S. market for adult bicycles was basically owned by the French and English. While Japanese bicycles were manufactured to very tight tolerances, and nicely finished (considerably better than their European competition), the Japanese had not yet come to terms with the average American's being taller and heavier than the average Japanese. (This gap was wider at the time than it is now, due to the privations the Japanese population suffered during and after the war.)



This plant, built in 1968 in Tokyo, Japan produces the Japanese – made Sekines.

Just as Sekine began developing models that would attract buyers in the American / Canadian market, the market itself expanded. Biking was no longer just for kids. Fitness was becoming fashionable, and recreational bike use was taking off. The economy was strong, wages were increasing, and people had both the leisure and the resources to pursue more recreational activities. Amongst the dedicated cyclists a quality bike was a necessity, and a status symbol. The Sekine became the BMW of the youthful, fitness conscious urban professional.

That change in lifestyles along with the general growth of international trade spelled success for Sekine. What had started as a small but successful business supplying the local market, was now becoming an international player in an expanding field.

By the early seventies, both Canada and the United States began importing bicycles from Europe and Japan, and the demand kept growing.

About that time the Canadian government, feeling pressure from a major domestic bicycle manufacturer who happened to have a bit of a strangle hold on the Canadian bicycle market at the time, elected to impose an import tariff on bicycles coming into the country. This was a standard economic tactic in that era when countries tried to protect their industries by making the price of imports artificially higher. What we now call globalization was about to change all of that, but for a time the strategy was successful in keeping jobs at home.

In this case, however, the tariff did not apply to bicycle parts, just complete bicycles. With this loophole in mind, foreign companies, such as Raleigh, Peugeot and Sekine set up shop on Canadian soil. Sekine lead the way and was soon exploring options that would allow it to manufacture in Canada and thus circumvent the tariff, while still using Japanese-made parts. It was seen as a win-

win. Sekine capitalized on the expanding market with increased production of parts, Canada got the jobs and other associated benefits of assembling those parts here.

The pieces of the puzzle were coming together – the increased design expertise at Sekine headquarters, the growing popularity of cycling, and the need to be competitive in a foreign land.

At the same time (1969) the Canadian Government began to focus on a proactive approach to the economy of Canadian manufacturing. DREE, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion was created to spur growth in regions that required it. Grants and loan guarantees were the tools it would use to promote industry

Timing is everything, and there was one more component needed.

In 1973 it just so happened that the recently closed Canadian Forces base near Rivers Manitoba, was home to the Oo-Za.We-Kwun Centre, a project with a twofold purpose. Its mission was to provide industrial training for Aboriginal Manitobans while providing a new lease on life for the recently abandoned base with its wide variety of infrastructure. So, right here in Rivers Manitoba, we had both a supply of workers and a ready infrastructure for a manufacturing enterprise.



The Oo-Za.We-Kwun (Yellow Quill) display at a parade in Rivers – mid 70's

So it was that an Asian business giant would partner up with the Canadian government and a First Nation business group, to use that available space to create and market the Canadian made Sekine bicycle.



The Facility

A New Life for The Rivers Base



Base construction – a huge project with a wide-ranging economic and social impact.

Just as Rivers was recovering from the Great Depression, the establishment of the Air Force Base just outside of town changed everything. Rivers was (is) a railway town and the direct trans-continental rail link to ports in Eastern Canada was essential to its role as the site of a vital wartime project. We were far from the front…but connected.

RCAF Station Rivers opened May 1942 when No. 1 Air Navigation School re-located to Rivers from RCAF Station Trenton, becoming No. 1 Central Navigation.

The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan saw 130,000 personnel from Great Britain and the Commonwealth graduate from 107 training schools across Canada. The impact of that decision was lasting and transformative.

People from all over the Commonwealth were transplanted into the municipality. The economic spin-offs were enormous. The very identity of the town was shaped by the proximity of the thousands of young men. Relationships were built, many of which lasted long after the war was over.

As the war progressed, Rivers also became a training centre for Army pilots, parachutists and flying instructors from the Army, RCN and RCAF. Additionally, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the Air Dispatch School made Rivers their home.

By the time No. 1 CNS disbanded in August 1945, a combined total of 11406 Commonwealth navigators had been trained here.

RCAF Station Rivers – A Peacetime Role

The wartime training that took place here was a huge contribution to the Allied war effort and the people of Rivers were (and are) justifiably were proud to be part of it. That alone would have shaped the nature of the town of Rivers for decades to come.

But the real long-term impact was assured when RCAF Station Rivers remained open after the war, becoming part of the post-war RCAF. For the next two decades it served a variety of training functions, all vital to the purpose of a Peacetime Armed Forces in a Cold War world.

The Army Aviation Tactical Training School provided pilot training to Army aviators, as well as helicopter instructor training for the Army, RCN and RCAF. No. 6 Signal Regiment, Royal Canadian Corps of Signals and the Air Support Signals Unit provided communications duties at Rivers.

The Canadian Parachute Training Centre, established at Camp Shilo in 1942, merged with the Airborne School of the Canadian Joint Air Training Centre and relocated to RCAF Station Rivers, making the station Canada's main para-training centre.

Aside from the importance of these various training missions to our national security, there were countless benefits to the local community. In 1948, the Joint Air Photo Interpretation School opened at RCAF Station Rivers. While the analysis of aerial photographs certainly had vital civil defense purposes, locally we were left with a series of vivid aerial photos of local towns and sites that help us continue to interpret our regional history. In some cases they are the only existing visual reminders available.



The base became a social centre for the community.



The people of Rivers were able to use the extensive modern facilities.

In 1956, with the Royal Canadian Navy having recently acquired its first fighter jet, the F2H3 Banshee, pilots from VF 870 and VF 871 Squadrons were also sent to Rivers for training. These and other functions came and went over the years As a result of the Unification; RCAF Station Rivers was re-named CFB Rivers.

The End of an Era

In much the same way as events conspired to create a situation whereby the timing was right to establish a Bicycle Factory in rural Manitoba, a series of events seemed to work together to close CFB Rivers.

In a way it came down to cost cutting and politics. The nature of armed forces is always changing. The nature of defense needs changes with changes in technology and the international situation. As the memory of World War 2 faded and the geopolitical makeup of the work changed, new priorities emerged.

An earlier example was the story of the Avro Arrow, an advanced fighter jet developed in Canada, then scrapped after a huge expense. Why? Our American neighbours were already changing the focus of nuclear defense by focusing on missiles rather than planes. Canada felt pressure to do the same. The next war would be much different from the last one.

The Federal Government had already amalgamated Canada's Armed Forces, and the next step was "rationalizing" military installations. In other words, the feeling was that there were too many Forces bases and we could do without a few. CFB Rivers was declared surplus to defense needs and as a result, the station closed in September 1971.

A New Life

In September 1972, the land was turned over to the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for use as an industrial training centre for Manitoba First Nations, the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre.

The Centre was designed to be a unique and innovative experiment to improve the well-being of Canada's poorest demographic group.

The Air Force base provided a 2,500-acre site and the Centre had a maximum population of 3,000 people. It included an industrial park with four industries, a day care centre, a school, a recreation program and counseling services.

The concept was first developed by Frank E. Price (1931-2015) in the proposal, *Rivers Training Centre: A Social Change Program for Indian People*. The identified needs of First Nations people included lack of training and saleable skills, and the inability to relate to an urban environment.

The stated purpose of the Oo-za-we-kwun Centre was to "provide technical training facilities to Indians so they may find better employment". Its objective was to provide "Canadian Natives with training, employment and a future ... bringing together different cultures into a closely-knit community environment."

Today we might reject the plan as being based upon some cultural presumptions, but in 1972 it was well-intentioned and had the support of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood.

According to its own publicity, the Centre was "designed to help Native People participate more effectively in a modern Canadian environment. The residential family program includes a five-week Life Skills course followed by a two-year transfer of learning period during which counseling, paid employment, and community activities are available." The Centre was named after Oo-za-we-kwun (O-zah-wah-sko-gwan-na-be or Yellow Quill), c1840-1910, chief of the then Portage Band of the Plains Ojibway. He was signatory of the 1871 *Treaty One* between Canada and the First Nations.

The Oo-za-we-kwun Centre was initially funded by the federal government department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, the Manitoba Government and the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood although the latter two pulled out during the life of the Centre.

Initially deemed a success, the Centre attracted some notable clients.

Edson Industries, a truck camper and trailer manufacturer moved from Neepawa, Manitoba, to benefit from the subsidies provided. It employed 80 people but went bankrupt in 1983.

Arnold Manufacturing produced vinyl furniture, which then evolved into fiberglass seating, as it was sturdy and vandal-proof, for restaurants such as McDonalds. After closure, they moved to Windsor, Ontario. The company was involuntarily dissolved in 1988.

Tim-Br-Fab Industries produced pre-fabricated home packages. They were sold across Western Canada. The company survived. It is now located in Oak Bluff, Manitoba. It retains essentially the same business model.

Over 10,000 people took part in the Oo-za-we-kwun program. A number of important Canadian Indigenous leaders worked or trained there:

Ernie Daniels, chief of Long Plain First Nation (1978-1984) and Vice-chief of the Assembly of First Nations
Eli Taylor, chief of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, elder.
Alan Pratt, elder, Sioux Valley Dakota Nation.
Norman Fleury, professor Brandon University, elder, Metis National Council.
Margaret Smith Lavallée, Elder in Residence, University of Manitoba.
Jules Lavallée, Elder in Residence, Red River College.
Violet Daniels, elder, Peguis First Nation
John Hicks, Churchill, Manitoba, Chairperson, Atuqtuarvik Corporation
Ken Courchene Jr., Chief, Sagkeeng First Nation.

There is an active "alumni", composed largely of children who were brought up at the Centre.



The self-contained site, with spacious industrial buildings and adjacent residential complex was ideal for a manufacturing venture.



The proximity to Rivers, and its transcontinental railway line was also advantageous.



Setting the Wheels in Motion

Establishment

With cycling experiencing a boom, Canada's small bike industry couldn't supply the demand. Consumers wanted new, sleek ten-speeds – more like the expensive racing bikes produced in Europe.

Sekine was in a position to provided bikes that approached that quality, but at a lower price. In 1971 Acklands Ltd. Of Winnipeg began importing and distributing Sekines. H.C. Paul and Co., a subsidiary that oversaw the leisure products division, saw a dramatic increase in sales.

Imported bicycles into Canada had tripled in the previous three years, reaching a combined total of 450,000 last year - that he was having trouble getting deliveries on the 25,000 or so Sekine bicycles he was distributing through western Canada. So he pitched the idea to the Sekine people — why not start a plant and make the bikes in Canada?

Another key figure was Bert Luckhurst, of Resource Development Associates in Winnipeg, business consultants for the Oo-Za-We Kwun, who suggested the abandoned Rivers air force base, now home to the a training centre tor Aboriginal Manitobans, as the site for the plant. Mr. Luckhurst, at the time, told a Free Press reporter that: "We think the idea should work well. A good percentage of the employees — there'll be about 40 to start with, but this should increase to 100 once actual manufacture gets underway next year — will be Indians in the area. Employment and training for those who wish it is the point of Oo-Za-We-Kwun. The Sekine people are expected to bring about three key executives to work in the plant, and some engineers to get it started. After that, they'll rely on local labour."

Negotiations went on for about a year, with Sekine executives making several trips lo Canada lo look over the site. Somewhere along the way, DREE (The Department of Regional Economic Expansion) was approached for a $450,000 incentive grant to help Sekine renovate an old hangar into a $1 million factory.

Apparently one feature of the set-up that appealed to the Japanese was that the plant would be in a "controlled environment," rather like an industrial park, which helps foster the Japanese idea of workers, being treated more like a family than is the case in North America.

The availability of 400 unoccupied houses adjacent to the facility which would be

leased to Sekine personnel "at modest rents," was another inducement for the company to come.

In October of 1972 extensive negotiations took place involving Manitoba Economic Development officials, Mr. Paul, and Sekine representatives. There were visits to Japan and the Sekine executives visited the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre. Sekine was at that time looking at several options.

On Nov. 22, 1972 the Winnipeg Free Press reported that Frank Price, the manager of the Oo-Za-We-Kwun native training centre in Rivers announced an agreement in principle to locate the enterprise on the abandoned Forces base close to Rivers.

BUSINESS WRAP-UP

Agreement Reached On Cycle Plant

Frank Price, manager of the Oo-Za-We-Kwun native training centre in Rivers, Man. says agreement has been reached in principle to locate a bicycle manufacturing plant at this community about 30 miles northwest of Brandon.

Mr. Price said two Japanese firms, Sekine Industries Ltd. and Nagase Co., signed the agreement earlier this month with H. C. Paul Co. of Winnipeg, a division of Acklands Ltd., a Winnipeg industrial supply firm.

Acklands would sell bicycles built here on the north American market.

Mr. Price said completion of the agreement is contingent upon receipt of a grant of about $450,000 from the federal department of regional economic expansion.

If established, the bicycle plant would employ about 150 at the Oo-Za-We-Kwun centre, established last year when the Canadian Forces abandoned their air base here.

Initial production was projected to be about 50,000 bicycles a year. At first, the bikes — three, four and ten-speed models — were only assembled at Rivers, with parts shipped from Japan.

"The main advantage at first will be that parts will be available for servicing," said a spokesman at H. C. Paul at the time.

Eventually, the idea was to have Sekine manufacture the bikes from scratch at Rivers, and to supply a North American market that could reach three million machines annually.

In April of 1973, Sekine Industries, Nagase and Co. (and import-export company). AndH.C.Paul Co. formed the joint venture Sekine Canada Ltd. And announced plans to build a $1.2 million plant in an aircraft hangar on the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre.

Over that summer equipment and engineers arrived from Japan and the huge hangar was converted into an assembly line, offices, and storage facilities.

Soon after the announcement of the deal there was an interesting wrinkle in the story. Osmond Mellon, who hoped to manufacture bicycles in Winnipeg, claimed that some proposed changes on bike safety regulations were designed to favour

the Japanese company. It seem that Sekine was one of the few companies that could meet certain of the new regulations.

The regulations were proposed by Professor David Anderson of the University of Winnipeg who was commissioned by the Provincial Government. He proposed a "double braking system" as a safety feature. He denied any political motivation and claimed he had never heard of Sekine when making his proposals. Mr. Mellon said the innovation is not used in Europe, long accepted as leaders in bicycle engineering.

Minor controversies aside, the first 250 bicycles were shipped on Monday, August 20th.

September 8th, 1973 saw the grand opening with a staff of 43 Aboriginal employees and 10 Japanese technicians. Officials toured the plant. Invited officials attended a reception at the former Officer's Mess Building. Sekine President N. Sekine attended and gave a speech.

Long-term plans included a growth in the work force to 200 employees with sales of $20 million a year. As proposed, the plant was a joint venture with the newly formed Seking Canada Ltd. manufacturing the bikes, Nagase and Co., a marketing the bikes in the U.S., and Winnipeg firm H.C. Paul, handling marketing in Winnipeg and Canada. Rivers would be home to the North American headquarters of Sekine Canada. Ltd.



Opening of Sekine Bike Plant at Officer's Mess. At the Podium - the Manager at Sekine, beside him, Frank Taylor, and a Japanese Representative

The Grand Opening in Rivers was presided over by Len Evans, Manitoba's Minister of Industry and Commerce and Nobuyoshi Sekine, the President of Sekine Canada.



Mayor Frank Taylor - at the opening of Sekine Bike Plant

Prior to the opening senior officials of the Manitoba Department of Industry and Commerce had visited Japan to outline marketing and feasibility studies. The Federal Department of Economic Expansion provided a $350000 incentive grant with the start of production.

Along with the aggressive marketing campaign came news of the promised expansion. H.C. Paul, Sekine board chairman announced that a 4.2 million dollars expansion would see seventy-five jobs added to the workforce. Aboriginal workers made up 75% of the workforce, and Dr. Ahab Spence, Manitoba Indian Brotherhood president was appointed to the Board of Sekine Canada.

$3 Million Bicycle Firm Opens At Rivers

RIVERS, Man. (CP) — A $3-million bicycle factory owned by Sekine Canada Ltd. was officially opened Saturday at the former Canadian Forces Base near this southwestern Manitoba community.

Bicycle Plant To Grow

By JOHANNA POWELL
Free Press Staff Writer

A $4.2 million expansion program was announced Monday by Sekine Industries Co. Ltd. for its bicycle plant at Rivers, Man.

Along with adding new equipment the company was seeking to increase the Canadian content of its bikes. Buying Canadian - made tires could save the company $150000 a year.

In addition to the partnership outlined above, the venture was also affiliated with the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, governments, and local people looking for options after the Canadian Forces Base closed in 1971. As collaboration with Manitoba's aboriginal people and with the Oo-Za-We-Kwun native training centre, it promised to be a success.

Workers selected from communities across Manitoba were given a two-month orientation before moving on the factory floor. Mr. Paul reported that he observed

a good working environment. Although the following remarks seem a bit paternalistic today, we can suppose he meant well when he said:

"*The Indian has always been a craftsman, he has thousands of years of experience behind him not being given a chance for expression". "Five employees have proven so skillful that they have been promotes to suprevisory positions."*

Plans were already in the works for a U.D. Office in Fond du Lac Wisconsin and there was a general optimism about an expanding market.

On June 19, 1974 the Free Press reported that Sekine Canada Ltd. held its first annual board meeting at the Mercantile Bank in Winnipeg. Attendees included Rinzo Hoh of Tokyo, Sekine Vice President, and Mitsuaki Kumori of Rivers, Sekine Canada President and Board President, along with senior management from Tokyo, Osaka, Winnipeg and Rivers.

It was at that meeting the Dr. Ahab Spence was appointed to the Board. Dr. Spence, a Cree, was born in Split Lake in 1911. After graduating from the University of Saskatoon he worked as a Minister and Teacher in Indian Missions for twenty-eight years. He served as a canon and archdeacon with the Anglican Church and as a Residential School Principal in Sioux Lookout Ontario. He then became an Officer with the Department of Indian Affairs and a President of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood. Dr. Spence was awarded an honourary LLB Degree from the University of Saskatoon in 1964 and a Centennial Medal in 1967.

In 1974 a Japanese TV crew began preparing to shoot a documentary on the Sekine plant. Director Hirushi Sasaki indicated the project hoped to go beyond reporting on the Sekine plant, and explore the story of Canada's Aboriginal People.



On the Factory Floor

Made in Rivers



The mandate of Sekine Canada Ltd. was to start a Canadian made bicycle company which would operate, subsidized by the Canadian government, for ten years, after which the company would be on its own.

Basically it started as an assembly plant. Bicycle frames, forks, and other parts were shipped from Japan and brought by rail to the hangar. Parts were inspected then sent to work stations. Assembly was a mixture of skilled labour and mechanization. For example, on the wheel assembly line spokes were inserted into hubs which were then laced by hand into rims. A machine then automatically tensioned the 36 spokes in 15 seconds.

Another interesting apparatus was the wheel-truing machine. It took skill to adjust it for different rim sizes but was a marvel of automation.

A worker had to lay a wheel into the machine where a press held the hub in place. Within seconds the machine simultaneously used 36 screwdriver-like bits around the circumference of the rim to tighten all the spoke nipples to a specific torque. The final truing adjustments were done by hand.

Separate stations assembled handlebars. An assembly line moved upturned frames along a conveyor as components were attached. Quality control inspections were a key element of the process, before packing and shipping was completed.



Hard at work at the Sekine Canada plant

In the beginning, they enjoyed great success and their bikes soon became known for their excellent quality. Frame paint was electrostatically applied, resulting in a superior overall finish. Attention to detail and considerable pre-assembly work made them a pleasure to assemble at retail outlets. It was quite possible to set up a new Sekine in approximately half the time of similar competing brands. The quality surpassed that of its major competitor of its day, the Canadian Cycle and Motor Company (CCM). They provided serious competition to that one time premier bicycle manufacturer, and were often better made than many of the bicycles being imported during the "Bike Boom" era.

Canadian made Sekine bicycles were distributed throughout North America, with sales as far away as Hawaii and Alaska, and were readily available in most major centers across Canada.

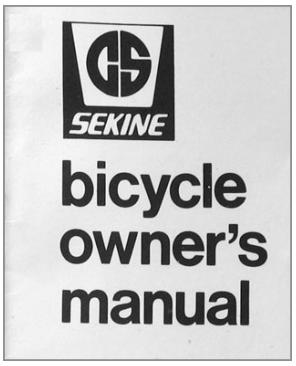
Bart Lavallee remembers visiting the Sekine Plant as a boy and admiring the bikes displayed in a showcase by the entrance and remembers his dad buying him the shiny new 10 speed. He is still in possession of a Girl's Sekine and say the finish is as bright as new.

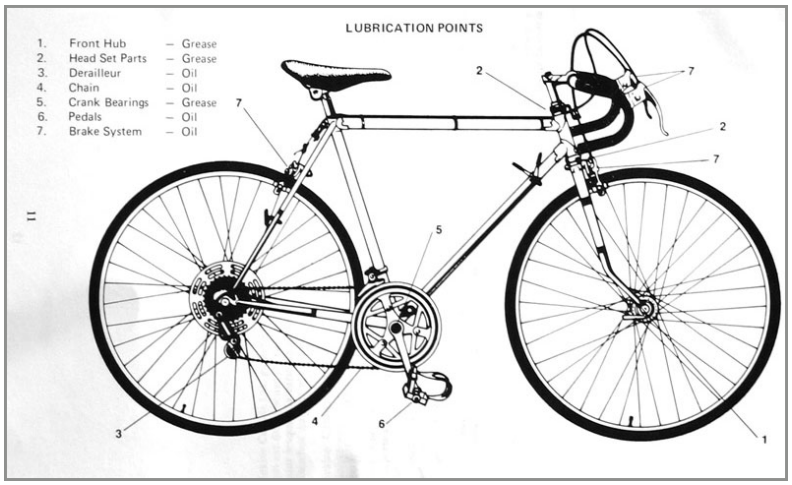
A Superior Product

That the Sekine bicycle was known as a quality product should come as no surprise. In the early seventies, the Japanese business machine was focused on quality and quality assurance. Bicycles were just one of countless excellent products being exported by Japan. It was under the supervision of Japanese quality engineers that Canadian Sekines were built.

This meant that the bikes were always a cut above. It was not uncommon to hear local bicycle shop (LBS) owners comment positively on the quality of the bicycle and its presentation when they arrived at the shops. For example, Sekine was the only company that offered a road bicycle with the handlebars already wrapped with handlebar ribbon.

Each bike came with a 15 page manual with assembly, safety and maintenance instructions.







The Sekine SHX 270:

The bicycle was light, sleek and attractive, but never achieved much of a following.

It was designed for competition and, as such, was not a comfortable bicycle to ride recreationally. But, as collectible bicycles go, the Sekine SHX is one of the most desired of the Canadian made vintage road bicycles. They are rare and well fitted bicycles that shine with a dignity that they deserve.



The Sekine SHC 271

The more basic Sekine bike was not as special, but a quality ride all the same.

With the appearance of the SHC and lesser series, we see the disappearance of the exotic tube sets featured on the more sophisticated Sekine bicycles. Gone also is the chrome plating found on the SHT and SHS models.

Though the SHC 271 was equipped with quick release wheels, the alloy rims were replaced by the much heavier and less effective steel units. Other steel components added even more weight.

Despite the slightly lower quality of the materials, The SHC 271 is a very nice recreational bicycle that offers a lively ride. It will please all but the most demanding vintage road bicycle rider. And once again, like all Sekine bikes, the finish and art is just great, durable and pleasing to the eye.



The lower end models did, however, sport a unique and often times well remembered head badge containing a single rhinestone. Many of the people, whose interest focused on ten speeds in the those days, fondly remember this unique badge and often go on to comment on how good the Sekines, of their day, were.

All in all, the lower end Sekine was a well-made bicycle that could be had for a modest price, unlike its more sophisticated brother, the SHX that sold for $439.95 Canadian in 1976.



Lifetime Guarantee

Sekine Canada Ltd. guarantees the replacement of any original part on its products which is defective in material and/or workmanship. This applies to products for which a warranty card has been returned to Sekine, but excludes the frame and frame forks which are given a **lifetime guarantee.**

Sekine Canada Ltd. will replace without charge any original part that is determined by a Sekine representative to be defective under the terms of this guarantee.

Note: Failure due to accident, abuse, neglect, normal wear, improper assembly outside of the plant, improper maintenance, or use of parts inconsistent with those sold, is **not** covered by this guarantee.

Sekine Canada Ltd. maintains at its Rivers plant replacement parts for all models sold. Sekine Authorized Dealers maintain supplies of approved parts, special tools and specialized know-how. A team of Sekine engineers is available for consultation and advice.

SEKINE

A Guarantee - signed by Mishio Kumouri, Plant Manager, remained in Canada and now lives in Winnipeg



The distinctive headbadge with its iconic rhinestone.

Some will find it interesting that after all the years that have passed since the last Canadian Sekine rolled out of the plant at Rivers, that one of the more prominent features remembered was a piece of costume jewelry, glued into the Sekine headbadge,

The rhinestone headbadge was usually fitted to early Sekines, those manufactured prior to about 1975. After that, or some other very close to it date, the Medialle badge came into being. Though not a memorable as the incredibly unique rhinestone model, the Medialle badge did, nonetheless, scream vintage,

thanks to its ornate appearance and cut out windows. It was truly an item to help set the Canadian Sekine apart.





Of course these cosmetic add-ons were pure marketing attempts. It seems they were a success in they remain in the minds of people nearly half a century later.

The appearance of the Canadian made Sekine changed some time after the middle of the 1970s as did model names and the range of models offered. Art work became simpler and most chrome plating on frame sets was eliminated. Fork blades, on some of the higher end models, did retain the chrome blade ends

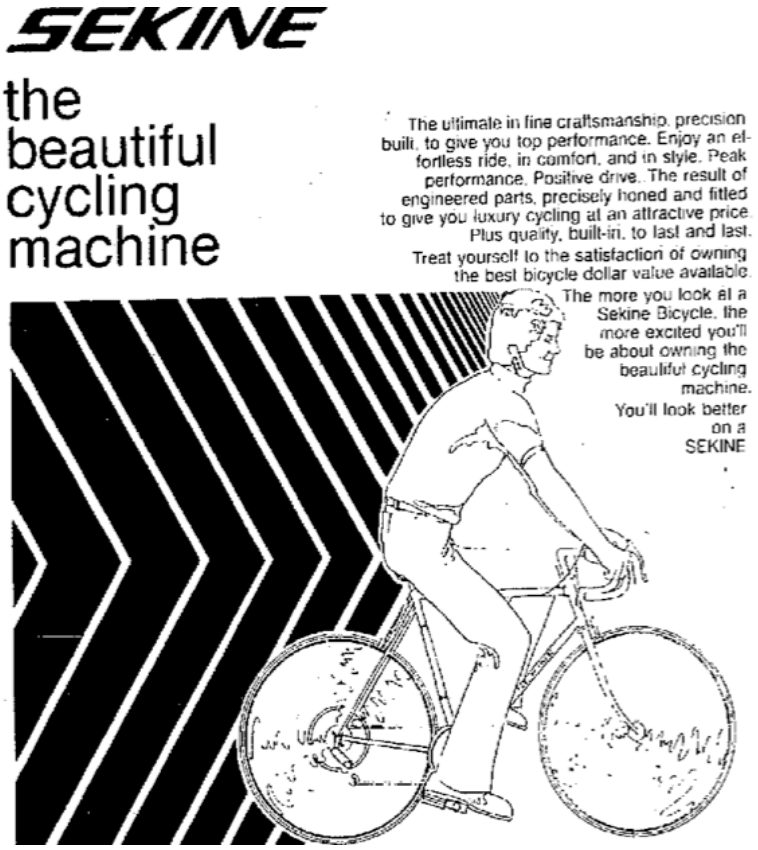
The 1979 suggested price list ranged from $1854 to $899.

On The Factory Floor

The daily operation of the Rivers Sekine factory was unique in several ways. The manufacturing work was carried out largely by participants in the Lifeskills /Job Training program of the Oo-za-We-Kwum Centre and was supervised by highly trained Japanese engineers. Most of them resided in the former base housing almost adjacent to the factory building. The components were made in Japan, although there were plans to begin sourcing some part from Canadian manufacturers.

The main focus was to take those quality parts and assemble them in a manner that assured the consumer of a reliable, highly functional, and attractive piece of machinery. As we have said, these bikes were about much more than simple transportation. They were designed to inspire pride of ownership and lasting service.

The whole process from upper management down to the factory floor seemed ideally suited to produce the desired results.



A Sekine ad from June 10, 1974 in the Winnipeg Free Press.

Photos from1978

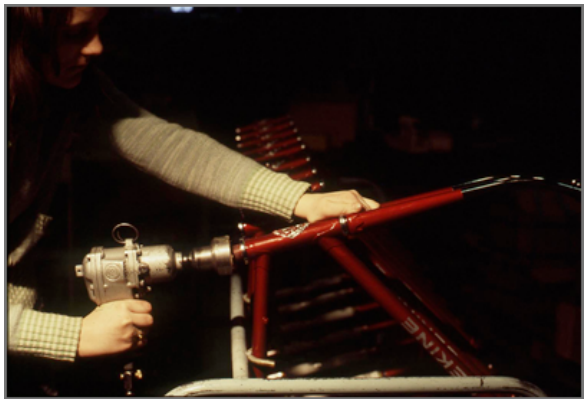
The following illustrate some of the factory operations that went into producing a quality bike,



Work on the assembly line requited precision.



Applying the iconic decal.



Highly skilled precision work was essential at every step.



The paint shop – vital to the appearance of the finished product and to its longevity.



Inspection was the vital final step in each phase.

Promotional photos from the catalogue.





Workplace Skills

By 1976 the factory had a proven production and sales record and was ready for expansion. Up until that point it was merely assembling Japanese part, now it planned to expand the manufacturing component. That would take some skills upgrading and a million dollar frame manufacturing facility with semi-automatic brazing machines. More skilled labour and training would be required. Frame brazing and painting required a higher level of skill and wages for those positions were higher.

At this point most parts still came from Japan but some were being sourced in Canada.

Life on the Factory Floor

Some Memories from Dave Cluney…

The plant was important for a number of reasons, one being that local jobs were an asset to the community. His dad was a production Manager at Sekine and Dave worked in the welding shop brazing bike frames.

Dave has one of only 12 Sekine 5 Speed Touring Bicycles made at the plant. 5 went to the US 7 that remained in Canada.

These bikes were deluxe in every way. They had brake lights and signal lights that flashed in a sequence of three bulbs, like some of today's cars. They came with AM radio and their own special Tire Pump (to fit the Japanese made tubes.)

He bought it when the plant was closing, and selling off everything. It was the last one available, displayed in the showcase that was located on the second level of the factory.

As with all Sekines, the workmanship and materials were excellent.

He recalled an interesting incident from his first day on a job. There were three supervisors in charge, each of whom who spoke limited English. He was shown the work station and one manager showed him how to adjust the torch used for brazing the tubes together to assemble the frame. A little later the second manager came by and told him to change the adjustment of the torch. Later still the third manger came by and asked him to change the setting again. Finally the first manager came back and reprimanded him for changing things.

The mixture of local workers, Aboriginal workers from other communities and Japanese supervisors, made the operation unique and no doubt was beneficial as a cultural exchange. More than one of the Japanese workers, stayed in Canada and a few married girls from the nearby Sioux Valley Reserve (Now The Sioux Valley Dakota Nation).

He remembers a man named Yamota as being the "Head Guy".

The giant hangar that became the factory was the largest structure on the base, built to accommodate the huge twin bladed "Vertical Lift Helicopters " that were used in Canada's First Helicopter Squadron.

Another Personal Experience

Twenty six year old car mechanic, Mr. Mamiya was one of eight workers who cam from Japan to the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre in July of 1973 to turn a vacant aircraft carrier into a bicycle factory. Looking back, he remembered that summer

as “a lot of fun”. He and other workers rented a house from among the hundreds available that used to house military personnel.

Once the plant was operational he became the maintenance man and was responsible for making sure that the assembly machines ran properly.

In his spare time he enjoyed summer activities such as camping and swimming, and although he tried curling he remembers our Manitoba winters as a time when he preferred to stay indoors.

Workplace memories included operating the electric forklift and the difficulty encountered when one had to drill into the high-strength concrete floor that was designed to support huge aircraft. Mr. Mamiya and other Japanese workers left in 1979, and he took with him the custom 1974 red Sekine SGT bike that he had brazed together himself.

The Sekine Frame Shop – 1977

For some Sekine employees in Japan, the opening of a branch plant in Canada provided an opportunity for advancement, or perhaps an opportunity for adventure.

In 1975 Mr. Seki, a young engineer, applied for a supervisor position in the Rivers operation. The plant was just beginning to prepare for expanding, and for the local manufacturing of the frames. Seki spent a year in training in Japan before his arrival at Oo-Za-We-Kwun in June of 1976. He took over the frame shop and was responsible for training and supervising welders, as well as quality control and productivity. The frame shop grew to 14 skilled employees and was making 200- 250 frames per day.

He was very busy. It was hard work. The shop was hot and poorly ventilated. Frame brazing releases harmful gasses. Like several of the other Japanese workers, he stayed in Canada after the plant closed. Mr. Seki and a few friends rented a truck and headed for Vancouver.

Thanks to the Sekine Zine for the previous two items.



The End of the Era

The Market Changes

Sekine Cycles' period of little-challenged prosperity was short lived. A combination of competition, market forces, economic factors and random circumstances all contributed to the demise of the Sekine Canda Co. and the Rivers operation.

The Bike Boom that sponsored the interest in building Sekines in Canada tapered off. Hindsight tells us that booms, trends and fads are, by nature, temporary. Bicycle sales in Canada, and around the world, dropped, forcing companies to rethink their futures and production goals.

In addition to that challenge, other issues surfaced.

Coming soon after steady progress up to 1974, some news caused some concern locally.

The Canadian government saw fit to lower the tariff on bicycle imports, from 25% to 15%, in 1975. This encouraged a new rush of imports, which proved to be bad news for Sekine Canada, as well as other domestic bicycle manufacturers of the time. A re-instated 25% tariff in 1975 provided some temporary relief.

The conveniently available labour force, which helped attract the initial investment, turned out to have a down side. Oo-Za-We-Kwun housed the workers and provided 50% of the employees' wages for the first six months. The goal of Oo-Za-We-Kwun was to provide training to allow it's clients to move on to un-subsidized employment elsewhere. For Sekine that meant high turnover of staff. As the manufacturing Component increased and more skills were required, that became a problem.

By 1978 Oo-Za-We-Kwun was finding that the $2 million annual operational grant wasn't covering its training operations and its responsibility for maintaining the huge property. At the same time independent sources were beginning to question the whole concept.

To add to the financial concerns North American inflation rose in the 1970's causing financial problems for companies financed by large loans. Sekine experienced cash flow problems related to the nature of their operation. There was a long time between the day the bike was assembled to the day they got their payment for that bike.

Sekine continued in production until the early eighties amid a series of ownership and investment changes as efforts were made to save the operation.

Oo-Za-We-Kwun was closed in June of 1980, eliminating the ready labour supply. Loans were called in and subsidies dried up. The Manitoba Government declared the operation “not viable” and withdrew any support.

Sadly, in the midst of mismanagement allegations the company fell into receivership. By 1981 the doors of the Sekine plant were closed and the assets sold off the following year, to help offset outstanding debts. Sekine Canada would never recover, although Sekines were still manufactured in Japan for a time.



An Enduring Legacy

The Legend Lives on….

It has been nearly four decades since the last Sekine was produced at the Rivers facility, but the name and the reputation of Sekine bikes has endured. It's easy today to find friends and acquaintances who fondly remember their Sekine. Many still have them.

But the story is more than just about bikes. It is about international trade partnerships. It was an element of globalization before the term was popular (or unpopular). Businessmen and engineers from Japan came to this modest prairie town, and interacted with local businessmen, municipal officials and factory employees.

It was an example of a rural development partnership between levels of government and a community, and I am sure that lessons were learned. It was an experiment in collaboration between government, a community, an industry, and a First Nations organization. The involvement of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood reflected efforts at partnerships, and early efforts at what we now call reconciliation. Every step in that process is an essential part in a process of coming to terms with the injustices of the past.

It is a story about finding ways to make practical use this amazing local facility that was such an important part of the wartime effort and the peacetime mission of the Canadian Forces. The base was an important factor in the economic, and cultural life of the town of Rivers. When it closed there was naturally an interest in finding a use for the infrastructure.

Looking back, because it was only viable for a relatively short time, we might question the end results, but instead we should look at it as worthy effort, a much-needed experiment, that brought many positive results.

The Sekine Zine



One of the many efforts to keep the story alive is the Sekine Zine –
a black-and-white, 36-page photocopied booklet that details the history of Sekine Canada Ltd. and includes photos and tidbits you won't find anywhere online. If you've ever wondered about Sekine bicycles, where or how they were made, this zine has all that information- and more.

It's not a detailed guide to specific bicycle models, many of those are available online, but contains general identification pointers, a serial number guide, and an extensive reference list for further reading. It is a valuable resource for the bike enthusiast.

Anyone wanting multiple copies should email at rodoftheflies @yahoo.ca. As of January 2019, zines were still available.

A World Tour – On a Sekine

In 1980 Sekine Canada invited a special guest to the factory at Oo-Za-We-Kwun. It was Richard DeBernardis. That is the same Richard DeBernardis who appears in the 1980 Guinness Book of World Records.

The connection?

On Sept 10, 1978 Mr. DeBernardis set out on a journey – his goal was to travel the perimeter of the United States. His transportation? A Manitoba made Sekine bike that he had purchased in Anchorage Alaska, and that had already taken him from Alaska to Mexico in 1976.

He set out from Seattle in September 10, 1978 with a bike loaded with 25 kilograms of gear, and in 180 days he pedaled 12.092 miles before rolling in to Seattle on March 8, 1979.

He donated the bike he had used to the Guinness Museum in San Francisco so Sekine Canada flew him from Los Angeles to Manitoba, brought him out to the Sekine plant, and gave him a new one.

He needed it for his next trip. On September 10. 1981 he left Tokyo, Japan and cycled 6235 around the perimeter of Japan. He became the first person to cycle the perimeter of Japan's four main islands and did it in 77 days. He donated that bike to the Guinness Museum in Tokyo.

Richard later founded the Perimeter Bicycling Association, which helps organize cycling events like the "El Tour de Tucson" a long-distance charity event. His original Sekine, is now back in his possession and proudly displayed on the wall over his desk in his office in Tucson Arizona.



Richard DeBernardis (Right) with Andy Clarke in 2011



It Was in the Paper

The Story Unfolds in the Press

One can trace the progress of the Sekine Story through these newspaper headlines. The complete collection is available on the Rivers Heritage Website at:

http://www.riversdalyheritage.ca/

BUSINESS WRAP-UP

Agreement Reached On Cycle Plant

Nov. 2, 1972

PRO-JAPANESE ASPECT DENIED

2 Views Of Bicycle Rules

May 22 1973

$20 Million Sales And 200 Jobs Aim Of Rivers Bicycle Plant

Sept 18, 73

Growing Demand For Cycles Brought Japanese To Rivers

May 73

$3 Million Bicycle Firm Opens At Rivers

Sept 7, 73

Sekine Board Meets

June 19, 1974

Bicycle Plant To Grow

By JOHANNA POWELL
Free Press Staff Writer

74 June11

Sekine in distributing

Aug 24 1977

Japanese TV Plans Show On Rivers Area

Nov 27, 1974

Bicycle Charges Called Exaggerated

Dec 14, 1974

Sekine Officer Says Plant Isn't Expected To Close

Feb 10, 75

Bike firm hopes high

Tariffs, critics blamed for cycle plant market ruts

Sekine nears sixth year but still to find top gear



●Bicycle frames are racked up at the Sekine plant. After five years of operation the Rivers, Man. company has only captured six per cent of the Canadian bicycle market.

May 31, 1978

Long uphill pedal to much for Sekine

81

Rivers cycle plant needs $1 million to avoid spill

Jan. 2, 1982

Sticks in the spokes of Sekine

Jan 8, 1982

Sink or swim for Sekine

Jan 18, 82



A 1973 Free Press Report

Growing Demand For Cycles Brought Japanese To Rivers

By JANE BECKER

A unique combination of a waiting plant, a special labor pool, and a demand for bicycles far outstripping supply will give Manitoba its first bicycle plant this summer.

Moreover, the manufacturer, Sckine Industries Co. Ltd of Japan hopes eventually to supply the North American market from its plant at the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Indian training centre at Rivers, Man.

According to Bert Luckhurst, of Resource Development Associates in Winnipeg, business consultants for the training centre, The chief credit for establishing the bike plant should go lo H. C. Paul of Winnipeg, who has been distributing Sekine cycles across the west for several years.

Mr. Paul found demand growing so fast — imported bicycles into Canada have tripled in the last three years, reaching a combined total of 450,000 last year - that he was having trouble getting deliveries on the 25,000 or so Sekine bicycles he was distributing through western Canada.

"So he put the idea to the Sekine people — why not start a plant and make the bikes in Canada?" Mr. Luckhurst says.
Then Oo-Za-We-Kwun got into the picture, through the good offices of Mr. Luckhurst, who suggested abandoned Rivers air force base, now a training centre tor native residents in the area, as the site for the plant.

Negotiations have been going on for about a year, with Sekine executives making several trips lo Canada lo look over the site.
Somewhere along the way, DREE got into the picture, with a $350,000 incentive grant to help Sekine renovate an old hangar into a $1 million factory.

The Sekine people are coming again later this month and the first bicycle should roll off the production line in August.
"We think the idea should work well." says Mr. Luckhurst last week. "A good percentage of the employees — there'll be about 40 to start with, but this should increase to 100 once actual manufacture gets underway next year — will be Indians in the area. Employment and training for those who wish it is the point of Oo-Za-We-Kwun. The Sekine people are expected to bring about three key executives to work in the plant, and some engineers to get it started. After that, they'll rely on local labour."

He says one feature of the set-up that appeals to the Japanese is that the plant will be in a "controlled environment," rather like an industrial park, which helps foster the Japanese idea of workers, being treated more like a family than is the case in North America.

There are 400 unoccupied houses in Rivers which will be leased to Sekine personnel "at modest rents," another inducement for the company to come.

The centre is already taking applications for jobs at the plant, although no one will actually be offered employment until the Sekine executives arrive.

Initial production will probably be about 50,000 bicycles a year. At first, the bikes — Sekine produces three, four and ten-speed models — will only be assembled at Rivers, with parts shipped from Japan.

"The main advantage at first will be that parts will be available for servicing," said a spokesman at H. C. Paul the other day. "We're not sure if there will be any price change, since there is also a duty on bicycle parts entering Canada." Eventually, the idea is to have Sekine manufacture the bikes from scratch at Rivers, and to supply a North American market that could reach three million machines annually.

Mr. Luckhurst suggests there could be some problems in exporting the Manitoba bicycles to the U.S., though, because of the DREE grant involved. (U.S. manufacturers made such a fuss over Michelin tires being imported from that company's Nova Scotia plant, which also had government aid, that duty was applied to the tires).

Sekine, which has formed a new company, Sekine Canada Ltd., to produce the bikes in Manitoba, is not the only manufacturer to come to the old air base. Fiber-Lex, a Manitoba company making fiberglass products, Base International, which makes wall panelling, and Edson Trailers, which is moving from Neepawa, where space is inadequate for expansion, are also in the area.

They will give jobs — and training — to about 125 native workers by the end of the summer, it's estimated.

One unanswered question remains: Why does it take a Japanese company to come in and make bicycles in Canada for Canadians? Canada's only other producer at the moment is CCM Manufacturing, of Toronto. It supplies about 150,000 bicycles yearly and, in the words of Mr. Luckhurst, "can't begin to meet the demand."



Resources

The Sekine Zine



Anyone wanting multiple copies should email at rodoftheflies@yahoo.ca. As of January 2020, zines were still available.

Online Collections

The 1975 Sekine Catalogue
A Sekine Owner's Manual
Newspaper Ads
Press Clippings

http://www.riversdalyheritage.ca/

Online Sources

My Ten Speeds – Bicycles of Canada
https://www.mytenspeeds.com/My_TenSpeeds_1/Feature_Bicycles/Feature_Bicycles_Canada/SEKINE_HISTORY/CANADIAN_SEKINE_2_Intro.htm

Sekine
http://cansekine.tripod.com/id12.html

The Sekine Project
http://thesekineproject.blogspot.com/p/sekine-bicycle-database.html

Long after their heydey, Manitoba-made Sekine bikes still rolling
By: David Sanderson
https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/special/featured/Long-after-their-heydey-Manitoba-made-Sekine-bikes-still-rolling-316449011.html

https://sekinedoc.wordpress.com/2011/10/28/michio-kimura/