CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with JUDITH PENDLETON

Interviewed

By

Paul Clark

On December 2, 1974

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: JUDITH PENDLETON

INTERVIEWER: Paul Clark

DATE: December 2, 1974

LOCATION: Fullerton, California

PROJECT: Japanese American

RP: This is an interview with Mrs. Judith Pendleton, nee Matthias, for the Japanese American Oral History Project at California State University, Fullerton. The interview is being conducted in the Engineering Building on the Cal State Fullerton campus. The date is December 2, 1974, and the time is 8:40 P.M. The interviewer is Paul F. Clark. Now Mrs. Pendleton, could you please give some information on maybe where you were born and how your family happened to arrive in the Seabrook Farms area?

JP: Well, I was born in Bridgeton, New Jersey, in 1935. In 1942 or '43, I don't recall the exact date, 400 Japanese American people, families, came into our area. This caused quite a lot of problems because we were right in the middle of World War II. There were hate Hirohito type, monkey posters around. And in this area, there were no Orientals at all. We had never seen any Orientals. The population itself was around 20,000 in Bridgeton at that time, and I would say 20 to 30 percent black, but we did not know any Orientals. As a child, my parents were very upset. There were a lot of phone calling around the community, and my parents discussed taking me out of public schools. And we were told that we would be seeing Japanese people on the streets, and we should cross the street and avoid them at all costs.

PC: They were not liked very much when they first arrived.

JP: No, in fact, my parents were quite upset. Almost felt that there would be big problems in the area because of this.

PC: Even though you did have a substantial black population in the Bridgeton area?

JP: Yes, well, the black population was hometown. They had been there for generations, because it was a stop on the Underground Railroad, and South Jersey is below the Mason-Dixon Line. Although the Mason-Dixon Line did not extend through South Jersey. Therefore, we were used to having a black population. The black population is located all around the city. As the city grew—the city itself is along a tidewater river,

and as the city grew, I suppose, the whites moved in the outer parts of the city and the blacks moved beyond that, in a circle-type pattern. Then the whites moved, finding homes outside of that. So the city itself is quite integrated.

The Japanese American people came to Seabrook Farms, which is located about five and a half miles north of Bridgeton, on the Deerfield Pike. Seabrook itself is one of the largest frozen food processors in the world probably. It consists of a large cannery, a series of buildings, actually. And the Seabrook Village is no more than a post office and a grammar school, up through eighth grade. At this time, there were nothing but barracks that had originally been put there for migrant farmers. They had also been hastily built for German POWs during World War II. I don't think those German POWs were there when the Japanese families arrived.

Later on, after the war, in '46 and '47, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian people came over from Germany. They didn't get along at all well with the Japanese Americans. Then Seabrook built, oh, I would imagine, a little track of about 100 homes, small three-bedroom homes, to house all these people. He owns, or leased a lot of the farmland around there. And there was a lot of tenant farms in that area. So some of the people were dispersed throughout that community.

PC: You told me your mother had been born in the Bridgeton area.

JP: Yes, my mother's name was Titus, and she had been born and raised there. She had worked for Seabrook, also, as a bookkeeper from, I imagine, 1920 till the Depression. Let's see, I was born in 1935, she quit work about that time. So she knew C.F. Seabrook and his family. He would make a very interesting biography himself, because he made and lost several fortunes. He may be still alive, I don't know. Anyway, we didn't know, no one ever knew how come Seabrook decided to import 400 families into our little lackadaisical community in South Jersey.

Within five years, the Japanese Americans were accepted in the population. Within five years, their children were excelling in our high schools. When I went to high school—I graduated in '52, so I went there in '48—everything was fine. I mean, my parents didn't warn me to stay away from Japanese people. (laughs) I was allowed to have Japanese friends in my home, and I was allowed to visit Seabrook and visit with my high school friends there. We had normal relations. We did not date. There was not too much interracial dating at that time. Some, but not much. I went away to college in '52, and I came back in—well, when I was 25. At that time, I lived in Bridgeton for two years, there was interracial marriage and dating. By that time some of the Japanese Americans had left Seabrook and had moved into the city of Bridgeton. Those who had stayed there—

PC: This was in the fifties?

JP: Well, no, wait a minute. [recording pauses] That was in 1959 and '60, when I lived there in Bridgeton, as a young lady of 25. I did go back to New Jersey for a week in '69 and that was the last time I was there. My stepmother and I, at that time, we did discuss the Japanese Americans in the community. I recall she told me that there was quite a bit of interracial marriage, at that time.

It sort of surprised me to know, in 1969, that there were so many Japanese Americans still living in this community of South Jersey. Considering that this was, well, twenty years since their dispersal from Southern California. Which is my motivation to be here tonight. I have always thought that this was one of the most disgraceful things to have ever happened, or one of the most disgraceful chapters in American history. Except for the treatment of the American Indian, I don't know who has gotten worse treatment than the Japanese Americans. So that is why I am here, because I thought—and I could share any of my personal background, not that this makes up for anything, but it gives a legacy—lest we forget, and lest this ever happens again. This can happen to people because 400 Japanese families—they lived in extended families—that's a lot of Japanese people to be uprooted.

I can remember seeing the old women with their obi, and the children walking behind. I can remember these scenes from my childhood. Of course, when you mature and learn of prejudice, you begin to have a realization of what happened to the different populations, in different parts of the world, then you realized that you have lived in a place where this had happened, where people had been displaced. Then you feel that you have to do something.

[00:10:13]

PC: The Japanese Americans first came to Seabrook in 1944, '43?

JP: Yes, as far as I can recall. I just have to go by how old I was and how I remembered.

PC: How old were you when you seem to remember the Japanese Americans?

JP: Well, I was born in 1935 so I must have been eight or nine, I would say, at this time.

PC: They first came to Seabrook. They didn't live in Bridgeton?

JP: No. I don't know whether the men were kept at the camp or not. I do remember just seeing women and children in the streets of Bridgeton shopping. I don't really remember seeing very many Oriental men. Now they may have been very busy, working in the cannery and working in the fields. I don't know this was because they were kept there or not. In my hometown, I would just see the women and children for a long time.

PC: Were there guards about Seabrook Farms that you could tell?

JP: I don't know. I know there were guards there for the German war prisoners who had been kept there. It seems to me that they left before the Japanese came.

PC: Do you know whether these German war prisoners were paid?

JP: I think they just elected to work. I don't think they had to work, but they chose to work rather than the monotony of being in a camp. They were young men. I remember

seeing them being brought into the different canneries, one which was not far from my home. I remember seeing them with their guards—and dogs were guarding them, also.

PC: The Germans?

JP: The Germans. And the guards had guns, of course.

PC: They lived in barracks there at Seabrook Farms?

JP: Yes, I think, I am quite sure.

PC: The Japanese moved into those barracks?

JP: Yes, I remember seeing the barbed wire and the large chain link fences. It seems to me they were there for the Germans and not for the Japanese. Although, the Japanese may have been kept behind the fences for a while. I think the fact that they were isolated in South Jersey was enough of a security measure. There was one bus line going to Philadelphia. But I think the fact that they were in such an isolated community kept them pretty much in one part.

Later, when I was in high school, and I talked to my Japanese friends, they told me that they had come from camps. They had come from camps, I believe, they mentioned camps in Wyoming—and they hated the camps. I don't remember the names. But I do remember how they hated the camps because they were cold. And they seemed to feel that being in South Jersey was a much better place to be than in the camps because they did have free access—well, by that time it was '52 and they seemed to feel that the conditions were much better in South Jersey. The climate was probably a lot better. They did talk that they had farms and houses, and had to leave them. I did have the impression that they had to leave rather hurriedly, and go to the camps. A lot of their brothers and older cousins enlisted in the service. They were pretty proud of the 442nd. A lot of friends would mention that they had someone in that division.

PC: They were very proud of it.

JP: Yeah. That was one way to get out of the camps, it was about the only way to get out of the camps. Of course, they came as children since they were also eight and nine when they were in the camps. They probably didn't have too much of a remembrance of hardships. I imagine the parents sheltered them and saw that they had food and they weren't behind in school. They must have had some schooling because they were the same age as I. So they didn't fall behind that way. In high school, we used to talk about, "Well, what are you going to do when you graduate from high school?" They would talk about going to college, and to nursing school, and then they would say, Yeah, but I think I'm going back to California because there is nothing here for me.

PC: Cold.

JP: Yes. And we would discuss, Well, who would you marry? And they would talk

about—I remember one of my friends, I said, "Would you marry a Caucasian?" And she said, "Absolutely no." Then I'm quite sure Hazel did marry a Caucasian because I did go to my ten-year high school reunion and it was sort of a surprise. I remember teasing and saying, "Hey, (laughs) you said you weren't going to do that."

I think, of my high school class, there were nineteen people of Japanese ancestry. I've counted them. I'd say at least half of them came back here to California. Half of them are still living in Bridgeton. When the war was over, I remember there was sort of an exodus. I would say, of the 400 families, half of them did decide to come back to California as soon as they could.

PC: This was immediately after the war?

JP: Yes, I rather imagine. But then it was a cost thing, too. It [Seabrook Farms] was as far east as you can go, and I don't think the government offered to pay their fare back here. Of course, while they were in Seabrook, they accumulated goods and—

PC: Personal things?

JP: Yeah. It would probably be quite an undertaking to move a family across to the West Coast. Of course, they didn't know what was here [in California] either.

PC: Do you happen to remember any Japanese who were Spanish-speaking, or may have come from Peru?

JP: No. I do know some of my friends knew a little bit of Japanese, maybe one parent was born in Japan. But I would say that my friends were all California born, and didn't know very much Japanese, except a little bit that their parents had taught them.

They did eat Japanese food. They would bring in their lunches, Japanese food, and we used to trade our lunches as kids do. I remember by the time I was in high school, by '52, there was a doll festival in Seabrook Farms. They would serve Japanese food. I would say, from '50 on, you could buy Japanese food in our stores.

There was also a Buddhist temple after they arrived in Seabrook. Seems to me there was only a Presbyterian church nearby, so they either went to the Presbyterian church or they did build a temple, or a little building which they could use part of it as a temple. That's another thing my parents were very upset about. I mean, when they first came, my mother said, "Well, they are not even Christians, they're pagans, or heathens!" (laughs) She'd be so surprised to find out how enlightened they were, really, considering her narrow religious beliefs. So I think, possibly, it was a racial prejudice.

And then, also, the fact that it was right in the middle of the war—when Pearl Harbor was bombed. And the fact that we were bombed, indeed, and the fact that we were pretty close to the ocean, thirty miles. Which meant we had blackouts on the East Coast, and we had sirens. So this meant in the middle of the night, the siren would go off—and my father was an air raid warden, so this meant that he would run outside with his flashlight and his helmet on. It meant that my mother—to set an example in the neighborhood—had to take her three daughters down to the basement and turn off all the lights. She had cots fixed up in the basement. This went on the whole war, these air

raid sirens and the disturbance to the family. We had buckets of sand around, and water. I don't know what two buckets of sand would have done. (laughs) So I have vivid memories of the war. It was kind of fun being a kid because it meant the whole house was dark. And mother would call the dogs inside. My mother was sort of upset because my father would take his flashlight and would go off and wander around the neighborhood protecting everybody else, while we were sitting in the dark in the basement. My mother (laughs) actually went out and bought another dog because we had just a little lap dog; it wasn't considered much protection. I can understand now she was [concerned]—we lived in a wooded area.

[00:20:39]

PC: Was it wooded around Bridgeton, outside the farming area?

JP: Yes, the soil is very sandy; it's loam soil. South Jersey is the garden state. We feed New York City and Philadelphia and the Eastern Seaboard. We get two crops from the land and there are a lot of canneries. Hunt Foods is located there, Seabrook, Ritter's, and Owens-Illinois Glass, to make the glass jars, and also because the sand is nearby—

PC: Is this in the Bridgeton area?

JP: Yes, that's about all the industry. A lot of the people work seventeen weeks, and then pick up unemployment the rest of the year. They work the cannery season and they work shifts. There is a lot of poverty in the area. I didn't realize as a kid growing up, but it's a depressed area.

PC: What about Seabrook? You were saying he was a very interesting man, winning and losing many fortunes. How did your family happen to get to know him?

JP: Well—

PC: Did you happen to work for him, or did any of the family work for him?

JP: My mother worked for Mr. Seabrook. And she was also a friend of his daughter, Thelma. I was a friend of his granddaughter, Patty. Patty-Barbara and I went to school, to about eighth grade, when she went to private school. So I had that connection of knowing a little bit more about the Seabrooks. C.F. Seabrook himself had one of the largest houses in the area. It was sort of like a small estate in South Jersey, located not too far from Seabrook Village. It had a swimming pool, which was very unique and unusual (laughs) because there are seven lakes in my hometown. Of course, everyone learns how to swim very early, and nobody swims in a pool. So I remember because I knew Patty, I would go to birthday parties and so forth at C.F. Seabrook's little estate. I remember seeing him. Then I also did work there for one year when I was, I guess, a junior or senior in high school. I worked there one summer.

PC: Were his wages good?

JP: No, he paid minimum of course. I think minimum, at that time, was seventy-five cents an hour, something like that. He certainly didn't pay anything more than the minimum standards in the canneries or in the fields.

PC: When did he get started in that part of the state, do you happen to know?

JP: Well, I know he had an engineering business, and he also had a packer agency. And he did engineering in Russia, in Siberia, over there for a while, in the 1920s. He had to leave all this heavy equipment behind. I don't know if that was because of the revolution or what. I remember my mother telling me how he lost much of his engineering equipment. He was building bridges and I think they were unsafe or something. I don't know what happened. (laughs) He was the first person to perfect freezing foods.

PC: Oh, really?

JP: Sure. That's where he made all of his money. Of course, to this day, they package—Seabrook Farms is a big label on the East Coast, and they package for Bird's Eye. They package for other houses, all kinds of frozen vegetables, plus canneries. Plus he also had orchards—apples and peach orchards.

PC: All in the Bridgeton area?

JP: Yes, all in that area.

PC: Did he own those lands?

JP: Yes, he owned a lot of the land, and of course he rented other parts of the land. All the houses on Seabrook land was painted grey. Although the houses and barns were white. You could drive around and see what belonged to Seabrook and what didn't, in that area. Another thing he did, he irrigated his land, which, in South Jersey, wasn't considered necessary because there's a lot of humidity there. And it rained quite a bit. Seabrook irrigated his land by portable irrigation and stationary irrigation equipment. That way, he was sure that if it didn't rain in two weeks, he could raise his crops—he could force his crops along. He could get more growing seasons out of his land. He also had huge, large tractors, large—I don't want to say combines, but big, heavy equipment. He had the money to buy them.

PC: Did he have this initially?

JP: Eventually, yes. He also had three sons. So they worked there with him on the farm. His grandsons are there to this day; they're also contemporaries.

PC: He's still alive?

JP: As far as I know, C.F. Seabrook is still alive. He would be in his eighties or nineties by

now.

PC: When he came back from Russia, this was probably in the 1920s you were saying. He probably came to Seabrook Farms next?

JP: I think he always owned land in that area. Now, whether he inherited it or how he came by his first fortune, I do not know. But I know he was creative in a way. Instead of canning peas, broccoli, and corn, he allowed them to put in the equipment that one needs on a large scale to freeze and package frozen vegetables. I can remember when we first got our frozen vegetables. It was like, "How about this!" It was Seabrook Farms. Of course it was packaged for the New York market. I can remember debating upon whether frozen peas were better than canned peas or not. (laughs) And of course, they are.

PC: Was this new idea of his well-received at first?

JP: As far as I know, yes. Probably, people thought he was kind of crazy to retool his cannery and go into frozen vegetables, I would rather imagine. It takes a creative mind. He wasn't afraid to try new things.

PC: In an article by a fellow named George G. Olshausen, entitled, "Experiment at Seabrook Farms," which he wrote for the *Far Eastern Survey* in September of 1947, he says that they, the Japanese Americans, were well-received by the surrounding community. You seem to have indicated that they were *not*, at least, initially, well-received.

JP: No. Well, eventually, yes. Within a couple of years, or even within a year, there was acceptance. Initially, we were frightened. We had never seen Oriental people before. It was like having people move in from Mars or someplace. Then, too, we thought possibly they were spies. Or why had the government sent them all the way to the East Coast from California? We all knew they had originally come from California. We thought, well, there must be some reason why they were here, that they were not loyal.

PC: There was something wrong.

[00:30:05]

JP: Yes, something was very strange about this. However, we were not sure what. Nobody told us. My father worked for the newspaper. I remember, there was never really much introduction to the community. Nobody really knew why they were there.

PC: Did the U.S. Government seem to care or try to smooth things over?

JP: No.

PC: Was it a Seabrook brainchild in a way?

JP: Yes. We all thought C.F. Seabrook was looking for cheap labor. He was probably having trouble because, during the war, everybody was making this big effort. My father was working two jobs. Everybody was saving tires and giving up extra pans for the war effort. They were having scrap drives. My mother was rolling bandages once a week at the school. Everybody was very busy in the war effort. And we just felt there were not enough young men to labor in the fields. And he had found a source of labor. We just felt that Seabrook needed cheap labor and then he had found a source.

PC: Do you remember how he happened to recruit the Japanese?

JP: No, I was just a child. All I know is my parents discussing the fact that now, all of a sudden, a *fait accompli*, there are 400 families going to our school. (laughs) And good heavens, whatever are we going to do about this situation?

PC: What did they initially think they were going to do? They were going to voice their discontent, or was it just talk?

JP: Well, I don't think there was any place to complain to. My own parents' solution was to send me to Catholic school. That's what they felt they were going to do, and they never did. They made good the threat. But I was quite worried because I didn't want to go to Catholic school. Because, like many Protestant children, I had heard that the nuns all carried rulers and went around hitting people all the time. (laughs) So I didn't want to go to the Catholic school.

PC: We don't do it all the time; sometimes they do.

JP: Well, there's no corporal punishment in New Jersey, except of course what goes on in private schools, so we had this idea. And I wanted to keep in my own public school.

PC: Was there just one grammar school in Bridgeton?

JP: No, there were about eight different grammar schools, but only one parochial school. That was Immaculate Conception. The Japanese children went, of course, to Seabrook Elementary School.

PC: Near Seabrook Farms?

JP: Yes, it was just there, within walking distance of where they were living. It was a pretty good sized building. They had a good education because other kids went to Seabrook, too, and a lot of the Japanese Americans—I went the college prep route in junior high and high school—were in my classes were able to learn. Their English was probably better than our English, coming from the Bridgeton school. The Catholic students had to go to Vineland, which was an additional ten miles, and there was no busing. So unless your parents were willing to drive you back and forth or carpool [it was difficult]. And most of the Catholic kids went to school with everyone else, too.

PC: It would have been quite an effort on the parents' part.

JP: It would have been impossible. But I didn't know that when I was eight or nine. I thought, Oh, dear! I am going to be sent to Catholic school just because there are Japanese kids in our high school.

PC: When the Japanese people come into town to buy or shop, was it mainly clothing and things of that nature? Did they also buy groceries?

JP: No, there was a grocery, a market, out at Seabrook. I think it was one thing that wasn't owned by Seabrook. There was a good sized market there, but they did come in to Bridgeton to purchase all the other goods. They had to.

PC: They normally wouldn't stay very long?

JP: No. There was a bus. I suppose it only costed about ten cents to go from Seabrook to Bridgeton Bus Depot and back again. They'd come to town on Saturday afternoon. This population—everybody goes to town on Saturday afternoon. (laughs) So I can remember seeing Japanese kids in school. I also remember, too, my father used to take us for a Sunday ride every once in a while. If he had the gas, we'd go out in that area, and we would see Japanese American people out in Seabrook. And when the Estonians and Lithuanians came out, they used to play soccer and volleyball and we used to go out and see them play because the games were quite interesting.

PC: Did they play versus the Japanese?

JP: No, I don't ever remember that at all.

PC: So they set up their own teams?

JP: Yes, and there was animosity, too. The Japanese people didn't play any sports that I know of. But when the Lithuanians came out there, the Lithuanians used to play versus the Estonians, and they didn't get along very well, those two groups. And they had all been in German displaced persons camp in Germany. I guess Hitler sort of accepted them as Aryan. Then, from Germany they came to the United States because they didn't want to go back to Estonia or Lithuania. What's the other one?

PC: Latvia.

JP: Latvia, yeah, because of the Communist takeover. So they elected to come to the United States. And I suppose by this time, some of the Japanese families were coming back to the West Coast so C.F. Seabrook contracted to take so many Baltic people. Those people did not get along in our community for a long time because they did not want to learn English. They had already learned German, so they figured why learn another language? A lot of the students in school were three and four years *older* than we were because the scoring had been messed up in the displaced persons camp, and they spoke

English very haltingly at first. Of course, they spoke Estonian or whatever among themselves. There was just always a feeling when you went into the girls' bathroom, and two Estonian girls were talking, you had a feeling that they were talking about you. Then, also, their clothing, for a long time, was very European and very handmade because it was just what they could collect in the camps.

I remember when they came to the community, there were drives. And I can remember my mother helping me to get used clothing and canned goods and things to take out to Seabrook for these poor Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian people. There was a lot of feeling that here were people from the camps, and the war was now over, we should help these people if at all possible. But those people never did integrate in the community while I was there. The Japanese students, on the other hand, were Americans. They spoke English. They had all of our little customs and there was no feeling of apartness, I guess, towards the Japanese students.

PC: They very quickly integrated.

JP: Well, they were just kids, yeah. They were Americans, where we never felt that way about the Estonians. We always felt that they were somehow different. And they *were*. They were older that we were. Also, their morals were not up to par because of living in camp situations. I think the women had, in order to live, prostituted themselves. There was a lot of stealing. Evidently, it had gone on in the camps, and when they came to Seabrook—from the Japanese students, we learned that the Latvians were all thieves. They would pick up things that didn't belong to them. They were also dirty. Of course, the Japanese people were very clean, tidy, and neat. Well, we soon learned that their neighbors, the Estonians, were not. They also liked to drink beer. They were bawdy and they played these wild soccer games and played volleyball, and liked physical activity. Also, they were tall and blonde and very Aryan looking peoples. Of course, the Japanese people were not.

So there was a lot of friction between groups in Seabrook. I remember all my friends were, of course, the Japanese students. And I can remember hearing them say that they had to go on the same buses with the Estonians to Seabrook every day. They were not very charitable, I think, toward the Estonians because they had also been displaced, you see. Where the Anglo living in the community like I was living, we felt this great sympathy when we heard that these displaced people were coming from Europe, and then it didn't work out too well. They didn't assimilate too well into the community.

[00:41:25]

PC: Did you happen to notice, on the part of any Japanese children, any concern that possibly they or their parents or somebody they knew would possibly be deported to Japan? Sent out of the country or suddenly would have to leave Seabrook Farms?

JP: Well, see, it was '52, so the war was over.

PC: A crisis can occur any time prior to '52.

JP: Well, I remember they were very thankful to be out of the camps in South Jersey. I don't remember anybody saying, Well, it's a good thing we weren't sent to Japan. I know in high school we used to talk. I used to talk to Tokio Ito, a friend of mine, about wouldn't it be fun to go to Japan? (laughs) Here you are an American, but you are, after all, Japanese. So wouldn't it be funny going to Japan? I often wondered if any of my friends ever did have that much curiosity to go back. I guess it would be sort of a trip because the kids *were* American kids, you know? They had the same ideas about dating and we went to football games. The boys played on the football team and the girls sang in the glee club and they were in different clubs. I have my yearbook here, I brought it with me. I was looking through here and you can see Japanese faces, Anglo faces, and black faces on the same teams.

PC: Could you possibly name a few of your friends that you think might have come back to California? Were you talking about it?

JP: The kids I knew the most were Tokio Ito, Juna Noway, Betty Hagata, Hazel Ikeno, Alan Susaki, and Marian Hirata.

PC: There were others, of course.

JP: Yes, but I knew those kids the most. I was in classes with those kids. We palled around a bit, and I would really like it if any of these people would contact me. I would really love to talk to them. It would really be fun. We did lose contact. Of course, I lost contact with—I graduated with about 280 people and I've lost contact with them *all*. (laughs) It's not like I really remember any people in my high school class very well.

PC: By the time you graduated from high school, were there Japanese living in Bridgeton? Or were they mostly in Seabrook?

JP: Yes, they had started to come into the Bridgeton area. I think there were a couple shops in Bridgeton owned by Japanese by that time. A small jewelry shop, I remember, which was located next door to the furniture company.

PC: Were there still people living out at Seabrook?

JP: Yes. Most of the people were still living out at Seabrook in the houses that he built, the tract houses that he built. However, no longer were *all* the Japanese people working in Seabrook. Some had found jobs in other canneries or at Owens-Illinois. Some had found other employment rather than work at Seabrook by that time.

PC: They were moving out of the area then, too.

JP: Yes. They did not, as far as I know, move into Philadelphia or anyplace else on the seaboard. They just either lived in Seabrook or in Bridgeton, where they were accepted. If they bought a house in the neighborhood, that was fine. They got accepted. Or they came back to California, and then in the Los Angeles area, too, as far as I know.

PC: You were mentioning that the Estonians weren't very well-received. Did they integrate?

JP: No.

PC: Even the last time you were back there, which was in '69, did you see any Estonians?

JP: No. I lost track of the Estonians. Although, I understand, when I was there, for two years in '59 and '60, at that time, a lot of the Estonians had moved into New York and the cities along the seaboard. They had found little communities and they had moved away from Seabrook, a lot of Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. I understand some of them, too, went home. I had a friend tell me that a lot of Estonians decided to go back home to Estonia.

PC: There were still numerous Japanese.

JP: Oh, yes. Of course it would be pretty hard. It was not a visual thing. You can't walk down the street and tell who was Estonian and Latvian. They could have assimilated into the community and I would have not known it as well. But I do recall seeing interracial couples together: Japanese and Anglo. So there was marriage; and when I was in high school, of course, this was considered verboten. In fact, I remember my mother being pretty upset just because I said, possibly, I might date a friend of mine. And she was a little bit upset about it so I decided not to push the point. I was sixteen and my mother had just decided to let me date, so I certainly wasn't going to rock any boats. (laughs) I don't know what she would have done if I had said, "Well, I *am* going to go out." But I never pushed that button.

PC: Is there anything that you might want to go over, anything that you might think of before we call this interview over?

JP: Well, turn it off and let me think for a minute, we'll see.

PC: You were saying that Seabrook was just simply across from Seabrook Farms.

JP: Yes. There was a school and a market and the barracks-type housing, which was later torn down after the track was built. But it was just a crossroads. There was maybe a service station or two there at Seabrook's.

PC: A big cannery?

JP: And a large frozen foods processing factory, or a series of buildings that was enfenced, and some office buildings nearby. The barracks themselves—I was in the barracks—were long and there was room for three or four families. When I was there, which was in 1950, around then, by that time, there were—

PC: The barracks were still there in 1950?

JP: Yes.

PC: They were still living in the barracks in 1950?

JP: Yes, the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians were living there. It's hard to say—*and* the Japanese were still living there.

PC: Living in separate barracks, I take it?

JP: Well, I think some of the families were adjacent to one another. Each barrack had a room for, say, two or three families. Inside the barracks were rooms that had been divided off. And, of course, people had them painted up and furnished the way they wanted, and then they rented those from Seabrook. And as soon as they had enough money, they moved into the tract homes, which were very small three-bedroom houses.

[00:50:46]

PC: I see. The tract homes were built in—

JP: After the war.

PC: After the war. But the barracks were still here, too?

JP: Yes. Eventually, I think the barracks were taken over by migrant labor, black migrant labor.

PC: Oh, I see. From the South?

JP: Yes. Well, the migrant labor came from—starting out in Florida, following the crops, and they would go north as far as New York. They would stay in New Jersey for at least a month, during the tomato season mostly.

PC: Then these tract homes were fairly nice, though, comparatively speaking?

JP: Yes. They were more or less like the tract located down by Hunt Foods, if you know where I mean. There is a tract that reminds me an awful lot of the Seabrook tract.

PC: Oh, here in Fullerton?

JP: Yes. It's down by Hunt Foods, on this side of Hunt Foods, off of Basque there.

PC: Bastanchury?

JP: Yes, off of Basque and I think it's Orangethorpe.

PC: Orangethorpe.

JP: There is a new tract there by Hunt Foods, and it reminds me a lot of the little tract where the Seabrook people lived. They had streets and little three-bedroom, one-story houses, a living room and a kitchen and three bedrooms, and a bath, and enough land around them. So those houses were really nice, decent. But these barracks themselves, they were close to one another. There were walks, wooden walks. They were not very pleasant on the outside. On the inside, of course, they'd fixed them up.

At Seabrook itself, there was nothing to do. There's also a community center out there, sort of like a small gymnasium. It had a volleyball court and, like, a little office, maybe one or two rooms. And there were large fields around where people could play soccer, but there was nothing for recreation. You had to come into Bridgeton to go to our two movie houses. There wasn't even a roller rink. The roller rink was in Vineland. There was hardly any recreation in the Seabrook community.

PC: Most of the recreation then was to be found in Bridgeton?

JP: In Bridgeton.

PC: How big was Bridgeton?

JP: About 20,000 [population].

PC: Twenty thousand?

JP: Yes.

PC: Which, comparatively speaking, for that part of New Jersey is big?

JP: Yes, it was the county seat. Bridgeton was the county seat. It was the Cumberland County Seat. So all of the court buildings are there. There was a poor house—a poor farm—and a mental asylum. One high school and about 42 churches. They're kinda crazy about churches out there. A downtown area, which kind of reminds me of Brea's downtown area.

PC: Oh, really? Brea resembles it?

JP: Well, yes. There's a beautiful park in Bridgeton, also. There's a huge park that someone donated to the city, which encompasses two large lakes and a raceway which was done by the CPA boys. You could canoe for miles and miles. There's a lot of ponds, and in the winter it freezes up, and you could skate for quite a distance.

PC: Were there segregated communities in Bridgeton? Like for the blacks?

JP: No, the blacks lived all over. However, there was one pocket in the downtown which was black-owned, [which had] a black taxi cab business, black barber shops, and black stores in just one little area of town. And then, one down by the cannery, by Hunt and Ritter's cannery. Those homes in that area, on Eagle Street, were mostly black homes in

that area. But other than that, you could find black people living all over on streets. Sometimes one side of the street were white and there were blacks living on the other side of the street. The town sort of just grew, like, topsy. The town was established in 1650, around there, by the Swedes. It's a very old town, yeah, along the river and there were a lot of glassblowers because of the sand. The Swedes had a glass industry, and from there, Owens-Illinois was built because of the availability of sand. It's twelve feet above sea level. We have hurricanes sometimes, about every five years. There's a loss of life in Bridgeton because of the hurricanes.

PC: Is that right?

JP: Yes. Because most people don't pay much attention to the hurricane warnings because we're used to them. The problem is there are a lot of large trees, and if a tree happens to fall on you, forget it. (laughs) Or on your car?

PC: That's a marshy area, too, isn't it?

JP: Yes, hay marshes.

PC: Hay marshes?

JP: Yes. Salt hay is manufactured. It's used for bedding mostly, not for food. Along the coast of New Jersey are these large, salt, hay marshes where the snow geese make their annual migration. It's the only place in the United States where snow geese come on their way from the Arctic to the Antarctic. They stop in Fortescue, New Jersey, which is about eight miles from Bridgeton. I can remember as a child going down to see the snow geese come in and land. They nest there and feed there and then they continue on.

PC: Did the Japanese—

JP: Know about the snow geese?

PC: —know about the snow geese?

JP: Yes. I suppose they were told about the snow geese, I would imagine. Anyway, the salt hay marshes are tidal. Therefore they can't take any heavy equipment in there, so they have to mount a ring in the hay, like they did in olden times, with rakes and horse-drawn carts because they can't take any heavy equipment. The horse could only go in during low tide. They put the hay in sacks, not in bundles, like they do here on the West Coast or in the Midwest. So that's kind of an interesting thing, too.

There is quite a bit of wilderness left in South Jersey. *National Geographic*, about six months ago, had an article showing the deer which roam in the South Jersey Pine Barrens. During prohibition, a lot of people turned up dead in the South Jersey marshes; they were never quite found. There is a legacy of people running rum in the back South Jersey area, to feed New York and Philadelphia, using our area. There was also shipbuilding the old way. In the movie, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, they went to Fairton

with the true plans for the original *Bounty*. I remember seeing that being built when I was a kid, by local the shipbuilders, and going down to see the *Bounty*, which was a small ship by the way. (laughs) There are not very much, but there are some people who still live by the sea, and fish and crab. The Japanese people were interested in crabbing. I remember seeing Japanese families out crabbing on Saturdays and Sundays.

[01:00:26]

PC: Meaning going on a boat with sails?

JP: No, there's all sorts of little lanes and farm areas where you can go out over these little rows over these tidal lands. All you do is stop on a bridge and get some old horse meat that's decaying and throw a line out, pull it up very slowly, have somebody else with a net scoop up the crabs. And they're huge, about six or eight inches across. Then you just take them home live and throw them in a pot.

My sister and I used to like crab. We used to go down to Sea Breeze, Gandys Beach, and Bivalve, in that area, and crab. I remember seeing a lot of Japanese families, too, who soon learned how to crab. There's a lot of seafood that one can buy. So I imagine they enjoyed the fact that we could have fresh seafood. Although, to this day, I hate seafood because my father used to stop at Captain Bill's two nights a week, all during the war, and he would bring home fresh seafood, whatever had been caught that day—because meat was rationed. And I had so much seafood as a child; I don't like it. Although this was fresh lobster (laughs) and good fish that he was bringing home, but to this day I don't like it very much. And I don't like crab either because it was something anybody could do. Anybody could bring in crab.

PC: Not a delicacy so much as it was a staple.

JP: No. And I can remember my father telling me as a child—when we'd go down to the raceway or through the park, we'd always see black people fishing. And my father used to say, "The black people really like to fish. They really love to fish." It was not until I grew much older that I realized they were fishing for their food. It was cold and that's the reason families would be out fishing, laying muskrat lines. Not for the sport. A lot of boys in our neighborhood used to get some muskrat traps and set them up along the river. I remember hiking along the muskrat traps with them, and to us it was sport. It was fun. But they were tracking muskrats. I think we used to get $2 for a muskrat, for its ears or something like that. The boys were doing this to make a little pin money. Although, it was sort of a dumb thing to do because you were always losing your traps, and it was more trouble than it was worth. (laughs) But the black people were trapping muskrats to eat.

PC: Well, I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Japanese American Oral History Project, for taking the time to come down here to Cal State Fullerton to tape this interview. I also thank you, personally, for coming down here.

JP: You're welcome.

PC: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW