

FOREWORD

During 1979 and 1980, the San Joaquin Valley Library System collected oral histories as a part of the Japanese-American Cultural Project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. These histories chronicle the events in the lives of Japanese people who immigrated to the Valley and their descendants. Their recollections are of inestimable value and form an important part of history of the Central Valley of California.

Special tribute should be paid to these immigrants and all immigrants who entered and still enter these United States. Our county is very much the richer by the addition of their contribution and the strength of character of these people.

We also wish to acknowledge the work of the volunteers who helped record and transcribe these oral histories, as well as the work of Yoshino Hasegawa, Project Director and Keith Boettcher, her assistant.

John K. Kallenberg, Member
San Joaquin Valley Library System Administrative Council

PREFACE

Although the Japanese have contributed greatly to the economic and cultural growth and welfare of the Valley, little has been done to acknowledge or to record that fact.

Success Through Perseverance: Japanese-Americans in the San Joaquin Valley, is an attempt to record the social, cultural, and economic history of the Japanese-American immigrants and their descendants in Fresno, Kings, Madera, and Tulare Counties. The primary purpose of this collection is to gather, from people who have witnessed or participated in the development of the San Joaquin Valley, information that will help scholars to place the role of the Japanese-American in perspective in western American history and to record their experiences.

Men and women from diverse occupations and geographical areas within the four counties were interviewed by people who were familiar with the background of the subjects. The result is the preservation of the intimate knowledge and unique experiences of over 140 people from rural and urban communities. Issei pioneers and Nisei who have lived in these four counties prior to and after World War II have been interviewed for this collection. Because the Issei men had to work several years in America before they could afford to marry, their brides were often 10 years or more younger. The Issei generation is passing on, there are more Issei women remaining than Issei men. The Issei women were the stabilizing factor in the settling of the Japanese in America. It was through their influence that Japanese schools and churches were established so that their children could take their places proudly in American society and still retain their Japanese cultural heritage. In the final analysis, Issei men who succeeded were those who had the encouragement and support of their women.

The interviews for this project were solicited through the Japanese and English language newspapers in the area. Volunteer interviewers' workshops were conducted in six key locations throughout the area. Many of the interviewers were long-time residents who were acquainted with the subjects.

The interviews were conducted in Japanese and English, depending on the interviewee, but all transcriptions are in English. Transcriptions of the original tape recordings were reviewed and edited by the subjects before being released. The original tapes have been erased or returned to the interviewees or their families.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the interviewees, interviewers, transcribers, and translators, who are listed at the end of each interview. Without their dedicated efforts, this collection would not have been possible.

Particular thanks are extended to the Administrative Council of the San Joaquin Valley Library System and especially to Mr. John Kallenberg, Fresno County Librarian, and to Mrs. Marie Marley, Project Executive Director, for their constant support and to the National Endowment for the Humanities for providing the funds for the Project.

The interviews collected here have not been refined into an organized history; rather, they are the raw material from which the reader may draw his own conclusions about the history of Japanese-Americans in the San Joaquin Valley. Because each person and each interview is unique,

there is no attempt to group the interviews by subjects discussed. The interviews were divided into volumes covering Fresno County (95 interviews) and Kings, Madera, and Tulare Counties (24 interviews). Interviews are arranged alphabetically within the volumes.

Keith Boettcher
Yoshino Hasegawa

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Japanese-Americans in the San Joaquin Valley area spans a period of 80 years, beginning in the late 1880's. The early Japanese immigrants provided significant labor forces working in the farmlands and orchards in the area. Businesses were established and developed to provide the farm laborers with the necessities of life important to their welfare.

In United States history, immigrants from other countries struggled to make a better life for themselves in the promised land of freedom and opportunity. For the Japanese immigrant this was not easy. Although their moral and ethical standards were similar to the Puritans, the Japanese were targets of discrimination since they were highly visible and their religion and customs were different from the so-called established society. Later as commercial and agricultural enterprises by the Japanese became successful, economic competition created another factor for ostracism.

In the early 1900's laws were passed to deter Asian immigration, to deny citizenship, and to prohibit non-citizens of Japanese descent ownership of property. "Gentlemen's agreements" prevented the Japanese from obtaining employment in any professional or semi-professional capacity. During World War II, American citizens of Japanese descent were forced to leave their homes in the Valley with their parents, to live in concentration camps.

While incarcerated, qualified Nisei men were drafted or volunteered for military service and valiantly served their country in the European and Pacific theaters. Before the war, with no possibility of owning property nor becoming citizens, the Issei strove to acquire fortunes with the idea of returning to their ancestral land to "raise the flag" and to retire in comfort.

The Nisei were encouraged to attend colleges at great sacrifice to their parents as as to ensure proper education and training for assimilation into American society. The Issei and Nisei persevered under great odds. Today the Issei are able to own land, and their offspring have taken their place in all phases of business and professional life.

Yoshino Hasegawa