

MAMORU KURAMOTO

MRS. HASEGAWA: Today is July 31, 1980. I, Yoshino Hasegawa, am privileged to interview Mr. Mamoru Kuramoto at the Fresno County Library.

Where do you live, Mr. Kuramoto?

MR. KURAMOTO: My present address is 11700 East Rose Avenue, Selma, California, 93662.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is your name?

MR. KURAMOTO: Mamoru Kuramoto.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where were you born?

MR. KURAMOTO: I was born in Hiroshima, Hiroshima City. It's a city now, but it wasn't a city a long time ago. The place is Mitakimachi, it's west of Hiroshima City.

MRS. HASEGAWA: And when is your birthdate?

MR. KURAMOTO: My birthdate is September 15, 1904.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is the place of your longest residency?

MR. KURAMOTO: It would be Selma. I came to Selma before 1929 and have been there until the present time. It'll be about 51 years now.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you remember anything about Japan; about your parents or any interesting experiences?

MR. KURAMOTO: My father had returned to Japan, so I came to America with him. But my mother never did come to America. I was 14 years old at the time. The first time my father came to America was in Meiji 42 (1909). He went to Oregon the first time and stayed there two years and then returned to Japan. He probably worked on the railroads at that time.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did he make lots of money and go back to Japan?

MR. KURAMOTO: No, that's not it. He went back because he had a young wife. I had an older sister, and my father came to America after she was born. My mother stayed with the grandmother all the time; she never did come to America. In the year of Meiji 25 (1892), my father came to America. At that time, he must have gone into the Oregon woods. Some went to Hawaii, but those that came to America probably had a contract to work on the rails. He stayed in Oregon two years. When he came to America later it was in the year of Meiji 42 (1909). I was about five years old. In that trip, he must have been here over 10 years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: On his second trip, did you come with him to Selma?

MR. KURAMOTO: No, we came to Fresno.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What port did you enter?

MR. KURAMOTO: We landed in San Francisco, my father and I. We went to Los Angeles, and I went to school for a very short time there. At that time, my father went to Imperial Valley to work. I had a cousin I stayed with in Los Angeles and went to school from there. I also had an older brother who went with my father and worked with him.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did your older brother come with you from Japan?

MR. KURAMOTO: No, he came earlier, and he came by himself. He, too, came to Fresno, and he grew vegetables here for about 10 years.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you go?

MR. KURAMOTO: In West Fresno by California Avenue. And we used to grow vegetables there. It was truck gardening, so we grew a variety of vegetables like carrots, celery, and others.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did you take your vegetables?

MR. KURAMOTO: There was a Fresno Market. In the old days, it was located between Tulare and Mariposa Streets, but I'm not sure what the cross street was. It was beyond the Buddhist Church, so it may have been around "B" or "D" Street. It was there that the old Fresno Market was located. It was owned by a Chinese, and so we called it the Chinese Market. It was later, around 1930, that the market on "G" Street was built. Before then, we used to take our vegetables to the old market.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You were farming in Fresno, then? Why did you move?

MR. KURAMOTO: The soil wasn't very good around Fresno, so we moved to Selma in 1929 where the soil was much better.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you were growing vegetables in Fresno, did you own the property?

MR. KURAMOTO: No. We were renting the place. When we moved to Selma, we did own that property.

MRS. HASEGAWA: At that time, wasn't there the Alien Land Law?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes, there was. There was a man in Visalia, Uoto-san, and it was his older brother Teruichi's name we borrowed to purchase the land. He was a friend so we didn't have to pay him any money. Of course, there were cases where people gave money to thank the person for the use of his name.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you grow on this land from 1929?

MR. KURAMOTO: We had 20 acres and 10 acres of it was in Thompson grapes. Later we pulled the grapes and grew vegetables on the 20 acres. Right now it's all in walnuts, because the younger ones do not want to grow vegetables.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who was the manager of the Farmers' Market you mentioned earlier?

MR. KURAMOTO: The new market on "G" Street was owned and operated by shareholders which consisted of farmers and wholesalers. The majority

of shareholders were Japanese.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I suppose the Japanese in this area took all the vegetables there?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. The Fresno Market was in operation a long time. They've sold a lot. The prices of vegetables were profitable.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then, did you increase your land?

MR. KURAMOTO: Then I bought 10 acres in Fowler, and I grew vegetables there, too.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How many people were required to grow the vegetables?

MR. KURAMOTO: In Fresno, my brother and I with part-time help. When we moved to Selma, we had additional help.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you get married?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. I went back to Japan in 1930 and brought back a wife. Because I'm an alien, I could only bring someone who was a U.S. citizen. My wife was born in Reedley. She went back to Japan when she was five and was educated there. A friend was the one who arranged or was baishaku for the marriage.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How was the land when you first came to Selma?

MR. KURAMOTO: Selma's ranch was very good land. Ditch water was available. I, think it's the branch of the Kings River. Since we grew vegetables, we also pumped water quite a bit. At the beginning we used a large gasoline engine to pump water. In those days, there weren't any tractors. The first time we purchased a tractor was in 1941, but before that we used horses. On the 20 acres, we needed about four horses. Yes, it was hard. We needed two persons to drive the horses. After we cut the vegetables, they were bunched and washed, and then we would market them. They were transported on trucks. When I came to Fresno in 1919, we used horses to haul the vegetables to market.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did they teach. English at the Buddhist school?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes, they did.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What sort of leisure time did you have?

MR. KURAMOTO: Well, I don't remember any. I don't think we had any. We were too busy growing vegetables at home.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You didn't have girlfriends?

MR. KURAMOTO: If we had, we wouldn't have had to go to Japan.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There weren't many Japanese girls in those days?

MR. KURAMOTO: That's right, there were very few. If there were, they got married right after high school.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you go to dances or to the movies?

MR. KURAMOTO: In those days, they didn't have dances.

MRS.,, HASEGAWA: What did the young men do for social activities?

MR. KURAMOTO: There used to be the men's organizations, but we seldom attended the functions.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you do any reading?

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MR. KURAMOTO: Well, we did some. We purchased the books at Komoto Book Store, and there were the newspapers.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What about homes in those days?

MR. KURAMOTO: In those days, there weren't the good homes that we have now. We just had a small house, but we also built a "nihonburo" (Japanese bath).

MRS. HASEGAWA: What type of "nihonburo" did you build?

MR. KURAMOTO: You mean, you don't know the "nihonburo"? It was 2'x3', made of redwood, and the bottom would have a sheet of tin. If it was made out of metal, it would be too hot to touch. It feels very relaxing once you get in. In those days, all Japanese homes had nihonburo, but these days no one has them any more.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Who did the cooking for all the men folk, since there weren't any women in your family?

MR. KURAMOTO: My father did the cooking; he cooked the usual things. They didn't have the stoves that we have now, so they had to have wood for cooking. I think the coal oil stove appeared around 1925. And for light, we used to use kerosene lamps. I think electricity came to Fresno around 1925 or '26. When we moved to Selma we didn't have electricity.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have any children?

MR. KURAMOTO: I have three girls and one boy.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is your wife's name?

MR. KURAMOTO: Her name is Chiyeko. The names of the children are: The oldest is Midori, which is married to Nino, a farmer in Madera. Mineko is not married, and she works for Fresno County. Next is Alice Nishimura of Sanger, Eddie's wife. And Henry is home helping me. That's all.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you have any grandchildren?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. There are three in Madera and two in Sanger.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Let's see. You purchased 20 acres in Selma and 10 acres in Fowler.

MR. KURAMOTO: Besides that, I bought some land in Selma near Highway 99. It was originally 40 acres, but the freeway took some, so now it's about 32 acres. And we also have some 40 acres close to our home place.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you grow vegetables on all those places?

MR. KURAMOTO: No. The only places we grew vegetables were on our home place and in Fowler. The rest are Thompson grapes. Right now, the prices are good for table grapes. We also make raisins. We have 10 acres of muscats which we usually ship to the East.

MRS. HASEGAWA: So you worked hard growing vegetables and grapes and made lots of money.

MR. KURAMOTO: No, we didn't make any money.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you first arrived in America and were working at various places, did you experience any prejudice or discrimination of any kind?

MR. KURAMOTO: I guess we were pretty lucky and had very good neighbors. The only trouble we had was after the war when we came back to Selma from camp.

MRS. HASEGAWA: At the time of Pearl Harbor, where were you and how did you hear the news?

MR. KURAMOTO: I was at the Market on the Sunday it was announced. I thought it was a bad situation, but I guess we couldn't help it. All that time we traveled to Selma to the market, but we didn't have any trouble.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were you evacuated?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. We went to Gila, Arizona. We were in the white zone, so we left here around August 4th. from Sanger on the Santa Fe. The train was covered.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you know approximately how many there were with you on the train?

MR. KURAMOTO: There were many. There must have been around 500 people. It took about a week to get there. Every day there must have been about 500 people leaving. It took about a week to do all that. In Camp I in Gila, Arizona, there were 5,000 people; and in Camp II, there was also 5,000 people. In the two camps together, there must have been 10,000 people. They came from all over. The people living on the west side of Selma went into the Fresno Assembly Center.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you went on the train, did the children go with you?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. All four children were there with us.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What kind of food did they serve on the train?

MR. KURAMOTO: I forgot what we had. It wasn't much.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were the children in good health during the trip? When did you arrive at camp?

MR. KURAMOTO: The children were fine. I think we got there about noon. We went on bus to the camp. When we arrived, the barracks were built, but the pipes weren't laid for the shower facilities. We had to go to another block where the people from Turlock stayed to take our showers.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What did you do in camp? What type of work?

MR. KURAMOTO: Since I had raised vegetables, I became the advisor for raising vegetables. Later, the man who was supervising left camp, and so they asked me to take over the work. They gave me a pickup for the work. The salary was \$19 a month, the top pay in camp.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When did you come back to this area when they closed the camp?

MR. KURAMOTO: I believe it was February 15, 1945. We did not stay to the closing date. Those that came home earlier, arrived here shortly after the New Year. We came back on the train.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you come back to your home? Was it vacant?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes, we came back to our house. We had two Mexican families taking care of the places while we were gone.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Then, these two Mexicans took care of your farms, grew the vegetables, marketed them, and shared the profits with you?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. But we lost money due to mismanagement.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Were your houses and land intact?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. Both the houses and land were there when we got back. We moved into our home. The Mexicans lived in the house next door. We were fortunate. Many Japanese families returned here, because they had no place to go. Some didn't have anything to come back to. Some sold their farms early and left for camp. Those that had vineyards sold them for \$300 an acre, and when they came back it was \$700 an acre. But those who bought farms then were lucky. I guess that was the worst time for many who didn't have land. At the time we were going into camp, there was someone who wanted my farms. After my wife came, I changed the title of the, land to my wife's name. This man kept telling me that since my wife was a citizen she's okay, but because I was an alien I should sell the land, I told him that if the government takes the land, there's not much I can do. So I left it at that and went into camp.

MRS. HASEGAWA: It was wise of you to have changed the title of the land to your wife's name.

Do you belong to any organizations?

MR. KURAMOTO: From the beginning, I belonged to the Buddhist Church.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you attend church regularly?

MR. KURAMOTO: Well, t didn't every Sunday, but when they had special occasions in Fresno or Selma we would go.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is Howakai that the Buddhists attend?

MR. KURAMOTO: Howakai is every month. Kaiyoshi (Buddhist priest) would come around and hold services. Yes, they have one in Selma. There's a Christian church in Selma, too. I believe it is the Methodist Church.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In Selma, they have the one building and both Buddhist and Christian services are held there?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes, both services are held there. I suppose at one time the Issei Buddhist and Christians didn't get along together. But now there's no conflict in Selma at all. There must have been some jealousy in the old days.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Which was the larger congregation in Selma?

MR. KURAMOTO: Well, the Buddhists have more members. Once a year we have a memorial service, and at that time both the Christians and Buddhists get together. We have a representative from the Buddhist Church and the Methodist Church at the memorial services on May 30th.

MRS. HASEGAWA: I wonder how many Japanese there are in Selma right now?

MR. KURAMOTO: I guess there must be about 100 Japanese families. Each family may have married children or whatever, but there's about 100 members.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Where did your children go to school?

MR. KURAMOTO: My children went to Selma Grammar School and through Selma-High School. The older ones attended Fresno colleges, the boy went to Berkeley.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What is your son doing now?

MR. KURAMOTO: He's farming. He went the last year to Fresno State and graduated as an entomologist. He didn't want to farm, but at that time I had trouble with my eyes, so I asked him to take over.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did your wife help with the farm work?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. It was a hard life for her.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you remember any happy, sad, or humorous incidents you recall from the past?

MR. KURAMOTO: In the early days we were poor, so all we thought of and concentrated our efforts on was in making money.

MRS. HASEGAWA: There must have been some "tanoshimi" (happy moments) while the children were growing up?

MR. KURAMOTO: If you say happy times, perhaps it must be when the children were attending schools.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you have Japanese movies that you attended then?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. Then we would go.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did your children go to Japanese school?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes. They attended the Japanese school. Our children were small, so they didn't go very much. The older two went to Japanese school. When the Japanese teacher quit, the Japanese school folded up and that was true elsewhere.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do your children speak Japanese?

MR. KURAMOTO: No, they don't use the language very much.

MRS. HASEGAWA: When you compare the present day to the older days, do you see any economic or social change?

MR. KURAMOTO: I believe economically we have improved very much, especially the Japanese. But I think everyone is basically better off today.

MRS. HASEGAWA: You said that there wasn't any discrimination, but don't you think there was some against the Japanese as a whole?

MR. KURAMOTO: Well, yes, I guess the Alien Land Law would be a form of discrimination against the Japanese. In the early days, the Japanese had picture bride marriages, so they discontinued that. Then, the men couldn't bring their Japanese wives into America. This, too, would be discrimination. But, now, there's none.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Did you belong to any farm organization or club of any kind?

MR. KURAMOTO: The only club I belonged to was the Fresno Buddhist Organization.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In Sanger there was, an organization called "Doshikai," a social club for Issei. Did you have anything similar in Selma?

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes, there's a Selma committee that helps Japanese families when there is a death in the family. They have services at Selma Mission Church or at Fresno Buddhist Church.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Do you still observe some Japanese customs such as at the time of a marriage celebration?

MR. KURAMOTO: Well, the weddings seem more Americanized rather than following the Japanese customs.

MRS. HASEGAWA: In your everyday life, do you follow Japanese traditions or customs?

MR. KURAMOTO: Well, I guess there's differences in Japanese and American customs.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How different are they?

MR. KURAMOTO: In Japan, at my brother's place, when the son gets



married, they all live together. But in America, when the young people get married they have separate homes.

MRS. HASEGAWA: How do you feel about that?

MR. KURAMOTO: I think I prefer the American way. My older brother's place, because of the Japanese tradition of living together; there's the grandmother, the father, and his family. There's three generations in one household. So the poor bride might have difficulties at times, and those Japanese brides have been known to be very patient and enduring. Nowadays, I believe the young couples live apart when they get married.

MRS. HASEGAWA: What about Japanese food?

MR. KURAMOTO: When it comes to food, my family seems to prefer American food. They eat what they like to eat. But if my wife cooks, she might cook Japanese food. Generally, she cooks what the majority enjoy eating. In America, it's very simple to drive to the grocery store to buy whatever is needed. In Japan, I don't think it's that simple to buy everything they need. The ingredients in the grocer/stores are very expensive.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you very much for the interesting conversation.

MR. KURAMOTO: It wasn't very much, I'm sorry.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Is there anything you would like to say--something for the future, some advice for the younger generation based on your experience?

MR. KURAMOTO: I think the Japanese should stay together as a group and work. I know there are many intermarriages, but I prefer Japanese marrying Japanese. What do you think?

MRS. HASEGAWA: In my family we have five children, and four of them are married to "Hakujins" (Caucasians). Our youngest son has a Japanese girlfriend now, and I'm hoping that one will marry a "Nihonjin" (Japanese). The important thing is that the couple understands, loves, and are able to communicate with each other. It is their lives.

MR. KURAMOTO: Yes, I think that way, too, and hope that the marriage runs smoothly.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Ever since the children were small they were educated and taught to be proud of their ethnic background.

MRS. KURAMOTO: Japan is a small country, but it's a good nation; one we could be proud of. This is something that should be taught to the younger ones. There are good Americans, and as long as we understand each other without trouble I think it will be fine. I would like the children to visit Japan and understand their good heritage. In Japan, the male is more dominant; in America it seems as if the women are stronger, especially in the home. There are good things about a man and good points about a woman. The two together should raise the family.

MRS. HASEGAWA: Thank you very much for this interview.