



Jpn farm laborers Ca.
1908
MASUO Yasui in
middle w/ vest + hat

H + M Yasui
collection

Homer & Miyuki Yasui
11448 Rainier Ave. S.
Apt 337
Seattle, WA 98178

Japanese Farm Laborers

1908

Neither the location nor the purpose of this gathering of the Japanese men are known, but some educated guesses can be made.

On the original photograph, there is a handwritten notation that the picture was taken in 1908. This photograph that you are looking at has been cropped. The original, and a newly-made 4 x 5 negative, which I will keep, exist.

Masuo Yasui, who is pictured here wearing a straw boater, is the man with the white dress shirt, tie and vest. Chiho Tomita, wearing a white towel over his head, has a cup in his uplifted right hand.

Yasui is known to have done some labor contracting, and as far as I can determine, he once kept hours and wages for a crew of Japanese men who worked in a hop yard in Aurora, OR. We no longer have that record book, because we donated it, together with a lot of other documents, to the Oregon Historical Society last year.

It seems to me that the date on that record book was in either 1906 or 1908. I'm not sure. Chiho Tomita worked in the Hood River Valley from 1906 onward, but that is not to say that he couldn't have worked elsewhere—such as Aurora—at other times.

Masuo Yasui moved to the Hood River Valley in 1908, when the three Yasui brothers bought their first store there. However, it's pretty well documented that he traveled back and forth between Hood River and Portland fairly often. The store was not a resounding success in its very early days, and Masuo Yasui in those years did a lot of different things, including running a Japanese Farm Employment agency.

Therefore, it's possible that the location of this photograph could have been in either the Willamette Valley or the Hood River Valley. The fact that the men seem to be eating apples (whatever's in the box—apples or potatoes), proves nothing.....except that if those are indeed fresh apples, then that means that this photograph was taken in the fall, because apples are picked in September, October and sometimes in November. And in that case, it would seem much more likely that this picture was shot in the Hood River Valley, and the crew was a bunch of apple pickers.

On the other hand, I can't say that this photograph wasn't taken in the Willamette Valley either. Maybe Yasui brought a hop-picking crew a box of apples when he went to visit them during their lunch break. That's equally possible. He used to bring soda pop or ice cream treats to berry pickers.

So take your pick.