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JAPANESE FLOWER-GROWING INDUSTRY
IN AMERICA

CALIFORNIA
FIRST BANK 

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EARLY HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA FLOWER MARKET, INC.

The history of the California Flower Market goes back to the mid-1880s when it was all started in Oakland by the foremost pioneers Kan Yoshiike and the four Domoto brothers. They started to grow flowers and sold them on the steets at almost at the same time. They started out as street-peddlers in downtown Oakland hauling their self-grown cut-flowers in wicker-trunks and baskets going around selling to the retail florists or peddling them door-to-door to individual homes. Gradually, other Japanese followed suit started peddling in the same fashion, and they began coming to San Francisco by train and by ferry-boats hauling their wicker-trunks filled with flowers. On arriving in San Francisco, they would go to retail florists one after another trying to sell the flowers to or taking orders from them. Since on many occasions, however hard they tried dragging their tired feet, they would have many left -over flowers, so on their way back on the ferry-boats, they would dump them into the Bay and come home.

Eventually, they started gathering as a group in downtown San Francisco around the corner of Market and Kearny Streets and started forming a market of a sort, along with the Italians and Chinese who gathered there for the same purpose. The small retail florists from all over the city would start coming to buy flowers from them, who would have their horse-driven wagons from which the flowers would be sold. This method of selling flowers lasted until the time of the Great Earthquake in 1906, when the city ordinance prohibited them from gathering on and using the sidewalk to conduct business. Consequently, the leaders among the Japanese flower growers got together and organized the California Flower Growers Association for the purpose of furthering their flower growing industry, protecting their mutual interest and to avoid any unnecessary competition among the growers. This was in 1906. After much difficulty in finding a rental building for their market place, since the Domoto brothers finally rented a store in 1909 on Lick Place, an alley between Kearny and Montgomery near Sutter in San Francisco, the California Flower Growers Association was able to rent a portion of the store space from the Domoto's to have a market place of their own for the first time. This was the first flower market of the Japanese flower growers in California.

The members of the California Flower Growers Association decided to have a corporation and in 1912 the California Flower Market, Inc. was formally licensed under the state law with its Inaugural General Meeting being held on June 12, 1912, at which time Motonoshin Domoto was elected its first President. The California Flower Market was in operation on Lick Place until the space became over-crowded shortly thereafter and its first move was made to a rented basement on Bush Street between Kearny and Montgomery Streets.

However, this place also became over-crowded and finding the necessity of having a building of their own for their specific purpose, in February of 1914, the Market leased a two storey building at St. Anne Place and Bush Street, at the former site of the California Theatre, which was destroyed by the 1906 Earthquake. The Pacific Telephone building presently is situated on this location. The California Flower Market was located on St. Anne Place until in 1924 when a flower market building was built at 5th and Howard Streets with the California Flower Market owned by the Japanese occupying the building jointly with the Italian and Chinese flower growers. This site at 5th and Howard Streets was the San Francisco Flower Terminal until the present Terminal at 6th and Brannan Streets was completed and became ready for operation in 1956. It is noted that around in 1920, the California Flower Market had over seventy member growers who came to sell their flowers at the Market from various outlying areas in Oakland, Alameda, Stege, San Leandro, San Mateo, Redwood City, Mountain View, Sunnyvale, San Jose and even Vallejo.

THE FOREMOST PIONEERS OF JAPANESE FLOWER-GROWING INDUSTRY IN AMERICA

1. Kan Yoshiike: First to introduce large Japanese chrysanthemums.

Yoshiike was born on May 2, 1858 in Nagano-ken, Japan and arrived in San Francisco on October 20, 1882 to study in the United States. Shortly after his arrival he became a school-boy living at a Mrs. Barstow's at Linden & 22nd Streets in Oakland. In 1885, he went back to Japan, got married and in January 1886 he returned to the United States with his bride, Shigeko, at which time he also brought with him some seedlings of large Japanese chrysanthemum. With the permission of Mrs. Barstow, for whom he again worked and lived in the family with his wife, planted the chrysanthemum seedlings in a portion of the backyard. This experimental growing of the Japanese chrysanthemums, commonly known as "the mums" turned out to be successful in the first couple of years. Consequently, he decided to put off his ambition of studying back East and devoted himself to the flower-growing, particularly to the chrysanthemum growing. This was the beginning of the Japanese flower growing industry in the United States.

Prior to Yoshiike's introduction of the Japanese large chrysanthemums, there already existed the small chrysanthemums (pompoms) originally imported from China. However, since the large chrysanthemum was still a novelty here in America, the chrysanthemums sold exclusively by Yoshiike came to be highly valued. Yoshiike and his wife, in the beginning, after working hard during the day for the Barstow family, would go out towards the evening as street-peddlers and in a short time later were able to have a flower-stand at the corner of Broadway and 14th Street in Oakland. At first, not knowing at what price the flowers would sell for, they sold them for a quarter a piece, but before long they were selling at a high price of even a dollar a piece.

Five years later, in 1890, the Yoshiike's having accumulated some funds, moved to a vacant lot of approximately one acre at 16th and Willow Streets in Oakland, built five self-designed greenhouses, and grew the chrysanthemums and carnations in them. Improving the chrysanthemum growing year by year, they eventually shipped their mums to the eastern part of the country, where they were received with good reputation. As their business grew, the Yoshiike couple gradually accumulated wealth. In 1906, shortly after the San Francisco Great Earthquake, they retired from the flower growing business and built rental buildings in the vicinity of Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco. This venture went along smoothly, with good income from the buildings. Being childless, however, when his wife died in 1911, Yoshiike retired to Calistoga to live a quiet life and he later left for Japan in the early 1930s.

2. The Domoto Brothers: First to grow garden (potted) plants.

Two Domoto brothers, Takanoshin and Kanetaro Domoto, ages 20 and 16, respectively, arrived in San Francisco from Wakayama-Ken, Japan on November 18, 1884. The following year, in 1885, the two brothers rented a vacant lot in Oakland and started growing garden (potted) plants and flowers. This was the beginning of the Japanese in the United States to grow plants and flowers for commercial purpose.

Noticing the Japanese species of plants were very much in demand, they started to import camelia, wisteria, spearflower, azalea, etc. directly from Japan. The lily bulbs, in particular, were monopolized by the Domoto brothers. In 1887 they sent for their younger brother Motonoshin and in 1890 their youngest brother Mitsunoshin came over to join them. Since their land became overcrowded, in 1893 they purchased a two acre land on Central Avenue (presently 55th Street) in Oakland to expand their business. A special mention must be made that this was the first time the Japanese ever purchased land in the Untied States.

Two years later they further expanded their business by purchasing additional 2 acres of the adjacent land, built greenhouses and grew chrysanthemums, roses, carnations, camelias, lilies, etc. With further expansion in mind, in 1904 they made their second move to KYause Avenue in Oakland, where they purchased a land of 35 acres.

Prior to this, in 1896 the Domoto brothers set up a store "Domoto Bros." on O'Farrell Street near Taylor Street in San Francisco and had started selling the products grown in their own garden. However, two years later in 1898 they started importing food and general merchandise from Japan to provide and sell to the Japanese living in America. This portion of their business was mainly handled by their eldest brother Takanoshin, who in 1906 established and became the president of the North American Mercantile Co. (Hokubei Boeki) and the remaining three brothers continued in the flower growing business.

NEW METHODS OF CHRYSANTHEMUM GROWING DEVELOPED IN SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA AREA

The Japanese flower growing which started in the Eastbay expanded rapidly down to the San Francisco Peninsula area shortly after the San Francisco Earthquake in 1906, when many people, including Japanese started to move out of the city. The Japanese who moved down to the Peninsula gradually increased in population in San Mateo County, first of all in South San Francisco and shortly thereafter down in San Mateo, Belmont, San Carlos, and Redwood City, where they found the climate to be ideal and most suitable throughout the year for flower-growing.

The two Enomoto brothers, Eikichi and Sadakusu, who came to America in 1898 and 1899, respectively, from Wakayama-ken, Japan, started growing flowers in Redwood City in late 1906. In 1908, Eikichi Enomoto started a new method of growing the large Japanese chrysanthemums by using cheese-cloth, instead of in hot-houses. Along with the Enomoto brothers, Ryosuke Shibuya and other Japanese joined in the experimenting of growing mums around the same time in Redwood City and Palo Alto area. In late October of 1915, Sadakusu Enomoto shipped chrysanthemums in boxes from Redwood City to New Orleans and made it on time for use on All Saints Day, loaded on board a horse-driven Wells Fargo's express-wagon. This was the first interstate shipment of chrysanthemums on a commercial scale.

The method of using cheese-cloth for growing chrysanthemums prevailed until in the early 1930s. By using this method, the marketing season for chrysanthemums was limited to only about three months of August, through October and only to about the All Saints Day at the latest. In 1933, however, after much painstaking trial rearing, an epoch-making year-round growing of chrysanthemums was developed by Iwasuke Rikimaru at the nursery of Makio Watanabe in Redwood City. Rikimaru came to San Mateo in 1931 from Livingston where he was the manager of the Livingston Fruit Growers Association for eight years and assumed the position of the first general manager of the California Chrysanthemum Growers Association organized on April 6, 1932. Utilizing his knowledge of using black-cloth in growing fruits in the San Joaquin Valley, Rikimaru experimented the cultivation of chrysanthemum growing under black-cloth, aiming at flowers of better quality by controlling light to have mums grow evenly and to have them out on the market all the year round. After many trials and errors he finally succeeded in the year-round production of the large chrysanthemums. Consequently, much credit goes to Rikimaru who developed and introduced this black-cloth method, which is still being used presently and has made the mums to have such a popular demand and availability throughout the year.