

History of Japanese-Americans in Sanger dates back to 1890's

The history of Japanese-Americans in Sanger dates back to the late 1890's. Many immigrants first came to this area as migrant farm laborers. They provided a significant labor force working in the farmlands and orchards. By working hard and saving their earnings, they were able to accumulate enough funds to lease or purchase land. For the Japanese immigrant this was not easy.

Although their moral and ethical standards were similar to the Puritans, the Japanese were targets of racial discriminations since they were highly visible and their religion and customs were different from the so-called "established society."

In the early 1900's laws were passed to deter Asian immigration, to deny citizenship, and to prohibit non-citizens' ownership of property. "Gentlemen's Agreement" prevented the Japanese from obtaining employment in any professional or semi-professional capacity. With these odds against them, the Japanese immigrant did not have much hope for the future. Many Issei immigrants lived frugally and worked hard to accumulate as much fortune as they could in order to return to their native country to retire in peace.

Immigrants from many lands.

However, in Sanger, a small agricultural community composed of immigrants from Germany, Italy, Armenia, the Scandinavian and other countries, there was a feeling of neighborliness. Many of these immigrants from the European countries could not speak English well, either.

The Caucasian neighbors trusted the clean-loving, quiet, hard working and honest people whose well-behaved children were accepted as equals by their children. Unlike the big cities, where the bitter racial discrimination was prevalent, the Japanese in Sanger were more or less accepted.

The Japanese immigrants contributed greatly to the economic growth in the agricultural field. They cleared and cultivated dry grassy wilderness into productive farmlands. They were pioneers in citrus, grapes, and deciduous fruit culture as well as in the nursery business.

The Round Mountain Citrus Company owned by several Japanese families in the early 1900's, raised, packed and sent fruits to the San Francisco markets. Fresh vegetables were grown in the rich riverbottom soil by the industrious farmers and distributed to stores in Sanger and Fresno.

In the business area, the Home Grocery, a neighborhood store owned and operated by Yoshiki, Nakamoto and Tanaka families, was located on L Street across from the Sanger Depot. They stocked grape pans, grape knives and other tools necessary for the farm laborer as well as the groceries and other sundry merchandise.

Star Restaurant

The Star Restaurant, located on the same block as Home Grocery and under the expert cooking of Masami Arita, served tasty Chinese food. It was a favorite meeting place for the Sanger Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Y's men, Toastmasters Clubs and many other organizations. There was also a barbershop operated by Ginji Ota at 1106 Eighth Street.

Buddhism was major religion

Buddhism was the major religion of Japan and most of the immigrants continued to follow the beliefs of their ancestors. However, there was a small number of newly converted Christians who belonged to either the Congregational Church or the Methodist Church.

Because of the language barrier, these Christians went to their respective churches in

to Fresno for their services in the beginning, but in 1927, with the increase in membership, they were able to organize and purchase a building in North Sanger where they could meet. A separate group of Buddhists also met in Sanger.

Start Japanese Community Hall

As children were born and grew, the leaders in the area realized the need for a place where all the Japanese in the Sanger community could gather for social events or separately for religious purposes, and a place where their children could be taught the language and ethical codes of conducts of their ancestors. This was the beginning of the Sanger Japanese Community Hall.

A private home located at 800 K Street was purchased and converted into a social hall. Wisely, the leaders concurred that, although religious meetings could be conducted, no permanent shrine or altar could be installed in the building.

Japanese well organized

The Japanese community in Sanger was well organized. There was the Doshikai (Friendship Club) for the Issei (first generation of immigrants), and the YMA and YWA for the Nissei (second generation).

The older people enjoyed getting together for Japanese movies, local talent shows, including drama complete with costumes, listening to lectures by the clergy or visiting dignitaries, and celebrating Japanese holidays.

The young people got together for social gatherings. The American-born youngsters grew older and wanted to dance as their friends at High School did, but they met opposition from their parents.

The Issei did not trust this foreign custom. Dancing became quite a controversial issue and was frowned upon by most of the older folks in those days. Masami Arita related the following in the publication, Success Through Perseverance, Japanese-Americans In The San Joaquin Valley, "At one New Year's party in the hall, Mr. Hasegawa, one of the outspoken leaders of the community, in his speech gave approval for dancing in the hall, thereafter, dancing was enjoyed at all the parties." Slowly, the immigrants were being Americanized by their children.

Japanese Hall used as school

One of the main functions of the Japanese Hall was to teach the Japanese language to the children. The Issei felt that their children needed to know both English and Japanese in the event they were forced to return to Japan.

The children attended Japanese schools on weekends to learn to read and write Japanese and also to learn standards of conduct and moral judgement. Some of the principle teachings were to respect their elders and those in authority, especially teachers and religious leaders; to be honest; to persevere in the face of adversity; to never forget any act of kindness done for their benefit; and, above all, to never bring shame to the family name by word or action.

Japanese further education

Children grew, went to elementary schools in the district, high school in town, and, depending on family circumstances, worked at home on the farm or went on to college. The parents encouraged their children to attend college at great sacrifice to themselves so as to ensure a better future for them. They believed that education was the best, if not the only, key to success.

As time went on, the Issei dropped their dreams of returning to Japan. They began to

dates visitors, tourists and business men coming into the area is a member of a coast-to-coast association, Best Western Motels.

Visitors from all over the world including many movie stars have stayed at the Motel through the years including Lassie.

Comparison of Sanger's Town House

Gayley Lodging House built in 1889, one year after the founding of Sanger, provides a sharp picture of 100 years progress.

Charles and Emma Gayley built the Gayley Lodging House in 1889 and was one of the first brick buildings in Sanger. It still stands at 1122 Seventh Street on the alley

1973 from the Ivan Hayes, and moved here from Imperial.

They have made many improvements at the Motel with new carpeting furniture, colored television and automatic dial telephone system.

in the Patterson Building, now the Sanger Hotel.

The Brouwers have installed the complete building and up-dated the refrigeration system. They have landscaped the garden and yard have flowers blooming the year around.

Italians migrate to the Sanger Area

From the picturesque beauty of the rolling hills of Tuscany, the erstwhile land of the Etruscans with all of its diversified cultures; from the magnificent Italian Riviera, the coastal mountains of Orco, Savona and the Ligurian port of Genoa, home of the discoverer of America, Cristoforo Colombo; from Piemonte with its Grande Paradiso and snowy Alps, as well as the cities of Torino, Asti, Cuneo and Valle di Lanzo; from the land of Lombardia, the home of many industries, opera and ballads, the romantic lakes of Como, Garda and Maggiore; from Venice and surrounding areas which outlived the many battles of the invading northern hordes reminisced in the love song "Sul ponte di Bassano" chanted by the valorous soldiers fighting in the First World War; from the ancient and historical beauty of Abruzzo, Calabria, Sicilia, and Maschito with its distinctive dialect; the Region of

Puglia with Bari and other provinces of Italy, the Italian immigrants embraced in an emotional farewell as they left their dear ones to see a new life in America.

Many were never to meet again. Some disappearing before embarking and at sea, or turned back at Ellis Island where some lost their identity before entering their dreamland, America.

Bringing with them their merest possessions, they arrived in Sanger where they were to meet a relative, a friend, a husband, or alone to face an undetermined future. They also brought with them their greatest possessions; faith, love, hope and a positive determination to succeed, even though they had dreamed of a place with its streets paved with gold instead of the "fango" (mud) they actually found.

The Italians worked for the Hume

Bennett Lumber Company where lives were lost; learned to cultivate and lease the rich soil; learned merchandising and eventually became successful Sanger community leaders, educators, doctors of medicine and other sciences while embracing their new land of opportunity to their bosoms.

Leaning on their limited educational basis, many, self-educated or not, read the Sanger Herald, the Fresno Morning Republican, becoming later on citizens of the United States and leading at times or need in the sales of War Bonds. Also, they were never discouraged to refrain from making their favorite beverage from the juice of grapes, or even once forgot their heritage and their native land, leader of the fine arts.

Innately religious, through their church they soon were to join the rank and file of the Italian Catholic Federation (celebrating its golden jubilee on

July 17, 1988) and/or joined the Sons of Italy Lodges.

Their love for America and for Sanger has been transmitted to their descendants, who also thrive on the rich heritage of their fathers and forefathers. From the traditional music of Italy, one song says it best: We left our towns and country
We left with the greatest honor
With thirty days of steamship
To America we arrived.
To America we arrived
Without finding hay or straw
We slept on the hard earth
Like the animals we rested.
We traveled mountains and valleys
Till we found an honest work
With all our strength we reunited
And built country and towns

It is a song from Sing-A-Long N6 from "The Old Immigrants" (I vecchi immigratri).

Frank Merlo

Japanese-Americans

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settle down to live out their lives happy in the assurance that America was indeed a country of freedom and opportunity for their American-born children, although they themselves were barred from owning property or becoming citizens. As their children came of age, properties were acquired in the names of their American born children and better homes were built and furnished.

Pearl Harbor attack

Just about the time when the Issei had reached the peak of their careers and occupations, and felt they could enjoy their hard won rest, the surprise attack by Japan on Pearl Harbor shattered their hopes for a peaceful future.

Ihara, Kiyoto Ihara, Toshio Ihara, Jerry Kanagawa, John Masuda, Sam Matsumoto, Benny Matsunaga, Tom Matsunaga, Henry Mizuki, Jim Mizuki, Kango Mori, Sadao Morikawa, Mack Nagata, Ben Nakamoto, John Nakamura, Joe Nakashima, Hisao Nishimoto, Katsumi Nishimoto, Masayoshi Mishimoto, Roy Mishimoto, Masami Nishina, Ben Nishioki, George Nishioki, Mikoto Nishioki, Ben Ogawa, David Ogawa, Jonathan Ogawa, Olive Ogawa, Abe Ohama, Ben Ohama, George Okajima, Kay Tamada, Jim Tanaka, Calvin Tange, Henry Tange, Kiichi Tange, Larry Tange, Ted Tange, Frank Yamamura and Jim Yamamura.

Eager to leave the camps

Meanwhile the Nisei were eager to leave the concentration camps and prepare for the future by attending college or to find a job. Students whose educations had been interrupted, left for schooling at approved colleges in the Midwest and the East Coast.

Those seeking jobs found that permission to leave could be had if they participated in

Church.

Because of the language barrier, these Christians went to their respective churches in Fresno where worship services were conducted in Japanese. The Buddhists also traveled

the only, key to success.

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... .. at the school