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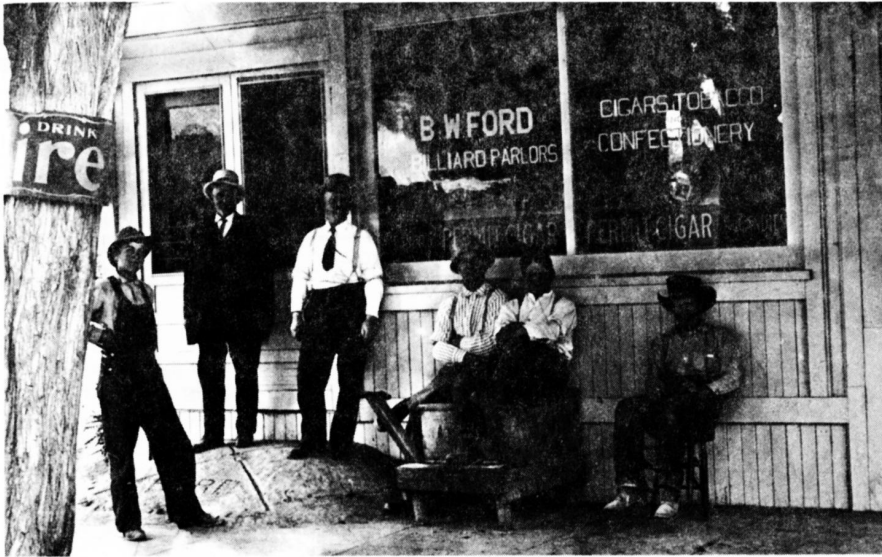
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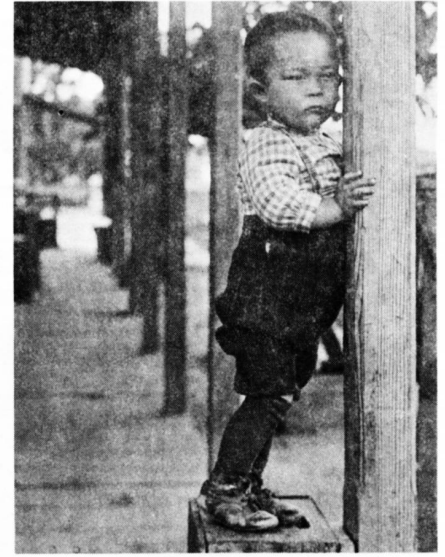


*“We all need to know
who we are, how we have
become what we are . . .
For individuals and
groups alike, experience
produces a self-image . . .”*

From *Nearby History*,
David E. Nyvig and
Myron A. Marty (1982).



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THE HUTCHINSON COLLECTION:

More Questions Than Answers

By Russell C. Fey

Editor's Note:

The FCCHS Archives house five major collections of glass and film negatives comprising over 2,000 images. The Hutchinson Collection is a group of 337 glass negatives that record the people, buildings and street scenes of Fowler, California, circa 1915.

Russell C. Fey, a professor in the Urban and Regional Planning Department of California State University, Fresno since 1969, has been working with the FCCHS glass negative collections since 1979. During his recent sabbatical year from CSUF, he studied at the University of California, Riverside in the history department's program in Historic Resources Management. He worked as a volunteer with the Society staff during his internship project which focused on the assessment, conservation and analysis of the glass negative collections. This

work was the subject of his field report entitled "Manual for the Conservation of Photographs at the Fresno City and County Historical Society." In the course of his work, Mr. Fey developed a method for analysis of each negative in the FCCHS collections. This form provides a document to catalog, record the condition and nature of the negative and its support, and analyze the content of the image. Mr. Fey used the form to analyze four glass negative collections comprising a total of 1,000 images.

Mr. Fey was honored as the Society's 1981 Volunteer of the Year in recognition of his donation of time and effort to exhibit preparation and production of slide presentations, and for his continuing commitment to the image collections in the FCCHS Archives. He also serves on the Society's Archives Advisory Committee.

More can be learned about a photographer by looking at the entire body of his work than can be told by looking at a single photograph. A single photograph records the time of the exposure, the people, the setting, the appearance of the subject, the day and the conditions of the event. The body of work reveals the photographer in terms of the relationship between himself and his subjects, how the human subject responded to the photographer, and provides a vantage point to his insight.

The Hutchinson Collection in the archives of the Fresno City and County Historical Society (FCCHS) is a group of negatives taken in Fowler, California during the first decade of the twentieth century. These photographs recorded the early symbols of the town as it changed from a frontier railroad settlement in the San Joaquin Valley of California to a settled community. The photographs caught the spirit of the people who moved to this small settlement, became the community and established the traditions of their region.

These photographs are made all the more remarkable by several attributes of the photographer's selection. The photographs show people who are not among the "first families" of the community, whose names do not appear in local histories as the founders of a community's major institutions. Second, the photographs show a large number of black and Japanese families and businessmen who settled in Fowler. Third, a significant number of images reveal the homes of the "average" citizens of the community, although some homes are identified as belonging to certain citizens of prominence.

Who was this photographer? Was he an amateur who liked taking pictures of his neighbors? Was he a professional who took some photographs out of doors, and others in a studio? Are the 337 negatives in the Hutchinson Collection the entire output of this person, or are there more negatives extant? These and other questions have yet to be answered. This collection is, however, the work of a sensitive photographer, one who established an astonishing rapport with his subjects, and one who has revealed much about the social history of Fowler.

The history of an area is written by all of its people. Our understanding of Fowler and Fresno County will be enhanced by an examination of all its artifacts. In this case, the artifacts are visual images of a view that has since changed. At the time the exposure was made, articles were arranged in a way that expressed a choice by the subject whether to include them or not in the picture. The photographer then exposed his negative, recording the moment and providing a reservoir of potential understanding and insight for future generations of viewers. The Hutchinson Collection provides that opportunity, for within the frames of the negatives are contained an infinite variety of relationships which are subject to questions, insight, speculation, and understanding for viewers in the future.

For example, what do you see of the family shown on the front cover? Start with the obvious—they are outside instead of in a studio. They are dressed in their everyday clothes, but one of the boys is wearing stiff new overalls. They are standing and sitting in the dirt on the curbing of the street, leaning against a tree. Look at the faces, the eyes, the coloring of the father's arms and forehead. He works outside and wears a cap. A farmer? The mother is wearing a plain wash dress. They look directly at the camera—straight into our world, without a hint of awkwardness or about what they "should" look like. The father supports and protects the smallest child, the mother stands above the group and provides a focus to the triangular composition of the family group. What quality is derived from their position against the strong tree, or from the angled limb on the right which reinforces the triangular composition, creating a subtle stability? A clearer statement of personality and capability for dealing with the world can hardly be made.

What were the circumstances of this curbside portrait of these strong Californians? This is one of two pictures of the family taken the same day. In the other one, the family is sitting on the front steps of their home. The character of the individuals is not revealed as it is here. Was the photographer asked to make the picture? Were they prepared for his coming? Was the event of a "photograph" still so new that people didn't think to "dress up" for it? Was their attitude simply, "show us as we are" or did they not yet have an "attitude" toward the camera? Was this their first picture? We may never know these answers, only that a family group dressed in their everyday clothes had their picture taken in

In the twenty years between 1886 and 1906, eleven churches were established in Fowler. They included the Presbyterian, the United Presbyterian, First Christian, Armenian Congregational, the oldest Armenian Apostolic house of worship in the United States (McFarland, 1972:19), two Baptist churches, a Buddhist, a Methodist, an Episcopal, and a Catholic church. This great variety of religious beliefs reflects the heterogeneous nature of the community's early settlement.

In *Garden of the Sun*, Wallace Smith stated that "the census of 1930 revealed that Fowler was the most cosmopolitan community west of the Mississippi River" (Smith, 1960:382). This quality is reflected in the



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a familiar setting by a person whom they trusted, resulting in an image of strength, pride and beauty.

THE HUTCHINSON COLLECTION

The negatives in the Hutchinson Collection quietly show a cross-section of a small agricultural town in central California. Originally known as Fowler's Switch, and incorporated in 1908 as Fowler, the town grew as a retailing and service center to the agricultural land surrounding the community. The early agricultural enterprises hinted at the present variety. Settlers started with sheep and cattle, then wheat, which was replaced by raisins; and by 1900, the "fruit packing industry was going full blast" (McFarland, 1972:11).

Hutchinson Collection's photographs which reveal an unexpected number of blacks and Japanese residents, merchants, and farmers.

Other than having several photographs attributed to him in *Village on the Prairie*, and a reference in the same book that he had donated six city lots for a new park at Main and Third (McFarland, 1972:23), not much else is known about Paul Hopkins Hutchinson. He came from New England, settled in Fowler in 1901, never married, and ate at the town boarding house run by Mrs. Powell, which was across the street from his residence (Whitely, 1981). He was involved in several business enterprises, among them the Fowler Packing Company. Hutchinson was elected City Treasurer in 1927 and held that post until he retired in 1954. He died a year later.

In developing this brief information about Paul Hutchinson, a number of people in Fowler who knew him were interviewed with specific reference to his photographic activities. He had lived in Fowler since the early 1900s, so his pictures of the community would have spanned a significant number of years. Yet, only 337 negatives survive, and those are limited to the early years.

Surprisingly, no one thought of him as a photographer. Many did not know if he even took photographs, had never seen him with a camera, or associated him with photography. Photographs on pages 15 and 42 of *Village on the Prairie* are attributed to Paul Hutchinson, and also identify him as one of the people in the picture. This was not impossible as the photographers used self-timers in those days. But it suggests that he might have been a collector of photographs rather than a photographer.

The contents of his estate, recorded on September 26, 1957 (#28503), in the County Recorder's Office, also suggest that he was not a photographer, for it revealed nothing of a photographic nature—not even a photograph!

Who was the photographer? The Fowler Improvement Association's (FIA) records indicate that the negatives were given to them by Paul Hopkins Hutchinson, but do not state when the gift was made (Henderson, 1982).

What seems clear, however, is that Hutchinson was probably not the person who exposed the negatives in the collection that bears his name. Mr. Lionel Henderson, an acquaintance of Hutchinson, did indicate that Hutchinson "had an accumulation of pictures. He collected them!" (Henderson, 1981), and he apparently donated all of them to the FIA.

From an unknown photographer, to Paul Hutchinson, to the FIA and finally donated to the FCCHS Archives in 1970 by the FIA; an extraordinary group of photographic survivors has recorded a small California town at the beginning of its new promise. This collection reflects the nature of that community as few known photographers have done in any community in the San Joaquin Valley. The great variety and diversity in the collection shows houses large and small, family groups, individuals, some agricultural views in the country, and informal scenes of the town itself with the merchants and proprietors standing beside their

businesses.

The duplication and printing of this collection, funded by the La Paloma Guild in 1981, was a very important step in the use of the resources of the FCCHS Archives. Until then, few knew that the collection existed, or what its contents contained. The collection was difficult to use because it was in a form (glass negative plates) that was fragile and hard to understand, and therefore generally unusable to the public.

Now the collection is available to see in positive prints, and is organized in notebooks according to subject matter. Prints can be ordered from



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the duplicate negatives, and the original glass negatives are stored in archival sleeves in a safe depository. The collection accessibility and utility to the public will be multiplied as more people search the evidence of Fowler's life to provide insight and answers to some of the questions that are raised.

ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTION

There is a cohesiveness about the images in the Hutchinson Collection that is subtle and difficult to define, but is best seen in the photographer's images of people. All of them are outside, most are in the open shade of a tree. All are documentary in the sense that they are arranged in relation to specific surroundings probably commemorating a specific occasion. This implies a prearranged time rather than a candid, spontaneous happening.

Who was the photographer? He was a man, for his image is reflected in the glass store window of one of the

commercial photographs. This is the key unanswered question, for the rapport that existed between the photographer and his subjects suggests several possible answers. Was he an amateur or a professional? He was adept at taking what are now termed "environmental portraits," for none are interior studio exposures. Were these images simply one facet of a body of work that is yet to be revealed? Surely, 337 negatives were not all of the exposures taken during a lifetime. The narrow time span of the exposures also suggests that there are more. There is no progression of vacant lots being filled in with new buildings, or a repetition of people (showing age) over a period of time, or a succession of different styles of automobiles. Rather, all of the pictures seem to have been exposed over a short period of time. The streets are dry and unpaved, leaves are on trees, the people are dressed in warm weather (not yet hot) clothing. Were they all taken during the spring of one year?

How long did this photographer work in Fowler? Do any more negatives survive? Locating the prints of these negatives in private ownership might reveal the names of the subjects, the dates of the photographs, or even the imprint of the photographer. All of these clues can help to determine who, what, when, where, and why, and can give great depth to the knowledge and understanding about Fowler and the life of its inhabitants.

The 337 photographs can be separated into four categories—Buildings, Groups, Individuals, and Miscellaneous. The "Building" category comprises almost half of the collection, and can be further divided into Homes and Businesses.

Many of the photographs of buildings have a person or people standing in the foreground: residents in front of their homes account for 26 percent of the total number of exposures; houses alone for 5 percent; proprietors on the sidewalk in front of their businesses total 13 percent. Several of the photographs show Japanese proprietors in small family groups including their children, and husband and wife. The only photograph with a Caucasian family in front of their store is the Joe Silva family. This is a combination of both a residential and a business image.

The residential pictures show people in front of their homes, sitting on porches, in swings or other lawn furniture. In these pictures, the

camera shows the entire front of the house, using people either for scale or for identifying them with their residence. These are important statements, for they match the people with their "places," giving future viewers an opportunity to see where and how they lived.

The viewer also has an opportunity to observe the level of outside maintenance of the homes and the yards, reflecting their attitudes toward "landscaping" of their residences, the nature and position of the trees being planted, and the use of flowers and gardens. Many of the homes show a packed earth surface around the building. Some homes have lawns, most are fenced using several different types of fencing and most have sidewalks and wooden curbs, but no pavement or permanent street surfacing.

As a group, most of the houses are one-story California bungalows or cottages with wooden siding, either clapboard or board and batten construction. Although the houses range from small, simple two and three-room cottages to several large two-story homes, the vast majority are small bungalows. The photographs present a community of modest homes. If we assume that the pictures were taken between 1905 and 1915, some of the residences pictured may be some of the original homes in Fowler, which was first settled in 1878, subdivided in 1882, and incorporated in 1908. Unfortunately, only a few names and no dates are found on these photographs.

The balance of the collection is divided between images of groups of people (22 percent) and images of individuals (25 percent).

Family groups predominate and are all taken outside. There are only two indoor pictures and both are of one of the Japanese-owned businesses. At the time, interior pictures were taken with natural light or by using flash powder. In a studio setting, lighting could be controlled, but it posed some difficulty in a residence or business.

Of the individual pictures, women, men and children were represented by 11 percent, 8 percent, and 6 percent of the total. These images were exposed on the porch of a house, in the yard, or at the front gate of the residence. About half of the children were babies, apparently taken at the time that a family group was assembled. Contrary to the "bear skin rug" approach of the Victorian studio

photographer, these were outside, and the babies fully clothed.

A miscellaneous category of only 23 negatives demonstrates the preponderantly urban and portraiture nature of the collection. Sixteen photographs show men at work. Several men are in an agricultural setting, several are grading streets, brickmasons are constructing a commercial building and others are painting or working on a house. Several show the Fowler Shoeing Company, a blacksmith shop. This category should be very revealing of the level of technology and the tools and materials in use, but it is limited. Several farm wagons are shown but little is revealed about crops, methods of farming, packing or food processing.

On a secondary level, many of the photographs of individual men demonstrate Fowler to be in the transitory stage between the horse and wagon and the automobile, and between the bicycle and the motorcycle. **Village on the Prairie** places the first automobile in Fowler in 1902, and identifies the first owner of an automobile in Fowler in a 1903 photograph attributed to Hutchinson. A few images of garages are found, and several show "cycleries" selling both bicycles and "motorized" cycles. "Indian" and "Harley-Davidson" brands are readily identified.

Animals and pets are scarce. There are two photographs of a muzzled bear and one photo of cows in a pasture. Horses are shown in relation to the wagons and buggies. A few riding horses, several dogs and puppies, and a kitten represent the few animal pictures.

Fowler's downtown park, established through the work of the Fowler Improvement Association, is shown in several photographs. The bandstand is in the center, and the stone water fountain, placed by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, is prominently shown. The land for the park was dedicated in 1901. The bandstand was constructed in 1908.

Village on the Prairie states that the Fowler Grammar School building was moved to Main and Sixth streets, and then became the Grand Hotel, after the original Grand Hotel burned in 1906. A photograph of the H. Sumida and Co. building, dated 1907, shows the former grammar school in the background, on its second site. A sign on its belltower advertises "Rooms."

Further identification of the automobiles in the pictures will help to date the photographs. Several pictures show a proud family in their new automobile parked diagonally across the middle of the street. Signs on the commercial garages attest to the speed with which businesses rushed into the automobile accessory market. A photograph of the Fowler Garage shows three mechanics and two bystanders changing 36 inch tires! Behind them, a metal display sign for "United States Tires" bears a happy motorist in his driving cap and goggles.

STYLE AND CONTENT

The photographer depicted both large and small groups, some neatly dressed up for the occasion, others more informally attired, but expect-



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ing to have their pictures taken. Some photographs are of homes with the families on the porch or in the front yard. Others are portraits of families, which were taken on the front porch or out in the yard. A rather arbitrary division is made between those images that show an entire identifiable house (with the family in front) and those taken as closeups of the family (with the house simply as the backdrop).

The Fowler Improvement Association identified the intersecting corners of the streets on which some of the homes were located. This identification will facilitate follow-up comparative photographs. Others, however, are not recognizable structures in the background. Local knowledge of the community would prove to be of great benefit in locating houses. Identifying the location, when the homes were constructed and by whom they were occupied, will give names to the faces of people seen on porches and front lawns.

In the group portraits there are frequent mother - daughter, father - son, and three generations images. Several show fathers at work with their children present, either helping out (as in the case of the blacksmith and his son) or simply being there. The children of Fowler knew where their fathers worked and what they did.

The photographs of people in the Hutchinson collection are portraits. As implied agreement between the photographer and the subject is evident. Unlike the snap-shot or the photograph of an unprepared subject, these portraits are all consciously done. There is not a single "candid" photograph. The families are posed outdoors in their yards, under the shade of trees, having their pictures taken in attitudes and places familiar to them. Only two of the pictures seem to be "staged", as in the scene at the side of the house with a young boy, a young girl, and perhaps a grandmother. The boy handles the hoe rather stiffly, and the girl and grandmother pick flowers to add to a tranquil bouquet. The young man is wearing a white shirt and tie which further emphasizes the stiff formality of the arrangement.

This is in contrast to the family group on the front cover. They are sitting at the curb in the shade of a tree in front of their house. The simple dignity of the group (how many portraits have you seen taken at the curb?) projects a unity of the

family and speaks volumes of the significance of the event to the family. The strength of the people transcends the commonplace setting of the photograph. That they are sitting on bare ground, at a curbside, some in bare feet and all in "everyday" clothing, only emphasizes the value of the moment that has been placed on the photograph by either the family or the photographer.

The clothing in many of the group portraits is noteworthy. The children are in their everyday clothing, dresses and overalls, not in their "Sunday best." They are shown as they are, not in a pose of cleanly pretense. The adults are a step up in the clothing scale, but are still not dressed in their finest attire. The men may wear ties but also have worn shirts. The women are neat, but dressed in everyday clothing. A few images are formal, the people better dressed and presented in substantial settings. It is interesting to compare the setting and the quality of dress in the complete collection and realize that the photographer predominately dealt with families on the modest end of the socioeconomic scale in Fowler.

This unknown photographer seems to have been conscious of the "everyday" scene — people at work, families in a home atmosphere, groups of people having the equivalent of a snapshot taken. This is frequently more revealing of the people, their places and times than the "mask for posterity" that is often seen in the studio portrait. This documentation of the everyday scene, however, was done with a 5" by 7" camera set up on a tripod with a dark cloth around the photographer's head. Even the amateur of the day carried a large box containing all of the film holders and accessories. These were not "snapshots" with a 35mm camera as we know today, but they were informal photographs, taken by a friend, for they are open, and reveal a trusting relationship with the photographer and his camera.

There are more intriguing questions than answers in the Hutchinson Collection. Were these commissioned portraits? Was the photographer paid for his work? Did he take them as his documentary photographs to illustrate the people who lived and worked in Fowler? Were they friends and acquaintances? Did the people ask that he take them outdoors or in their places of work, rather than in the formality of the studio with its stage-setting background and the

startling light of flash-powder? Did he take portraits on a house-to-house basis, posing his subjects outside in suitable light and setting? Were they simply documents by a perceptive photographer of the manner of living at the turn of the century?



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PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS

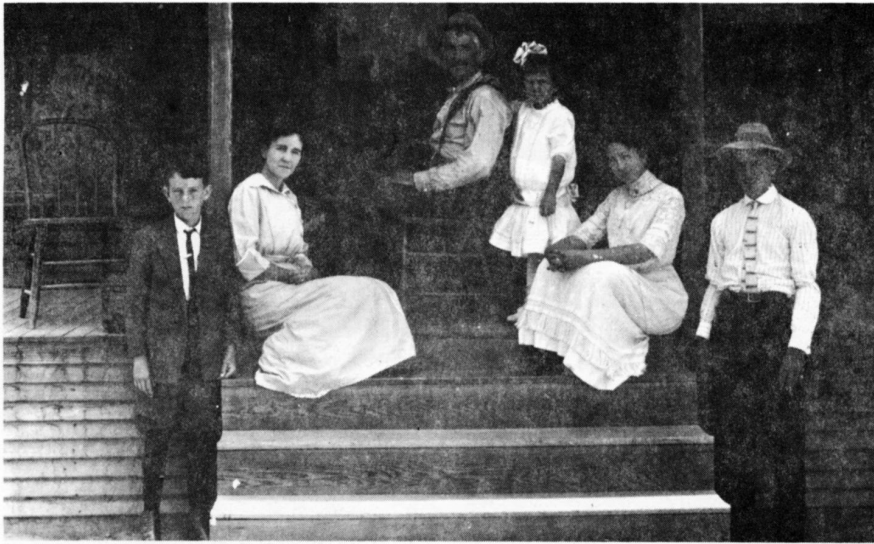
Families

No. 204

This family group poses the question of family expectations. Two mature women are in the picture, perhaps a mother and an older daughter. The symmetrical arrangement of the composition is created by the sunlit foreground forming a base for the picture, and the receding steps channeling the eye into the composition toward the father's face.

What does this arrangement say about male-female relationships, expectations and roles? The two older women are sitting at the top of the steps, and the youngest girl is standing with her hand on her father's shoulder. These three form a symbolic triangle with the father at the apex, strengthening an interlocking dependence of the members of the family toward each other. The two sons, both appearing to be in their teen years, are flanking the family, a part of it, but separated by the porch pillars.

Does the empty chair on the left have a symbolic meaning? An absent member, the death of a family member, or just the photographer's absentmindedness? Did the family seat themselves? Were they arranged? Are their positions random, or do they express concepts about the relationships, symbolic roles or expectations of family members?



No. 204



No. 4



No. 239

No. 4

Who is this extended family and what were their circumstances? One man is located in the center of this group of women and children. Two older women are on the flanks. Are they representing the two sides of the family? Standing almost equidistant from the central man are two younger women. Daughters of the older women? Are the children arranged in front of them their offspring? Is the woman on the left, imperceptibly nearer to the man than the one on the right, married to the man? Are those six children their offspring? The man leans his head a little to the left, toward his own descendants? The balanced symmetry of this entire group begins to develop individual identity on examination.

The children are without shoes, and the ground around the tree is bare. The smallest boy in the center, protected by his father, appears to have a harmonica stuck in the pocket of his bib overalls. The two girls to his left are wearing dresses cut out of the same material. The littlest children hold hands, while resting them on the father's knee, and oldest girl protectively rests her hands on the shoulders of the youngest in front of her.

The family makes a statement about who they are. They will prevail. What prompted the photograph? Was it a birthday or an anniversary that recorded this dignified formality for posterity?

No. 239

Everything in the picture contrasts with the preceding family groups. The two children, perhaps 10 to 12 years of age, appear to be with their grandmother. They are all dressed in their good clothes. The boy even appears to be wearing a tie. They are posed as if taking part in a tableau. The girl is picking flowers, but is looking up as if to listen to a bird call. The grandmother also appears to be picking flowers, but looks at the camera. The boy awkwardly holds a rake or hoe. The lawn furniture in the pleasant shade of the grass-covered lawn awaits an occupant. The scene is bucolic, secure and postcard perfect. Even the cottage is vine-covered, a residential symbol of middle-class values. The composition of this scene conveniently creates a frame to enhance the central figures. The dark tree's forms and shadows emphasize the contrasting subjects in the middle ground.



No. 29



No. 171



No. 265

Black Residents

No. 29

One of the surprising treasures of the Hutchinson Collection is the group of photographs of the different minority populations in Fowler. Considering that these pictures may have been made as recently as 1915, only fifteen years separate the images from the observation by the Bureau of the Census that the 1930 census had identified Fowler as being the most "cosmopolitan" community of its size west of the Mississippi River.

The FIA has identified one of the churches shown in the collection as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. One of the photographs shows a large congregation assembled for a group picture, which includes several of the people in the next sequence of images.

In this case, a young black girl is photographed on the front steps of her home, wearing a long white dress. This is one of a series of four pictures taken on the same day, two of her alone and two with her parents. Other girls were photographed of about the same age. Were they in a class together at school or Sunday School? Several older women were also photographed in dress clothing.

No. 171

This family is arranged in a circular composition, with the mother in profile looking toward the left, or inward, and the father reading and looking downward. The two girls on the porch are in white dresses; their hats link the space between their parents. The boy standing on the left holds the carriage handle which directs the eye downwards toward the baby, who in turn holds his mother's hand, thus completing the circular linkage. The posts of the porch frame the family unit, enclosing them in a tight rectangle.

This is an extraordinarily subtle composition. The parents' features are in profile. The children are all looking outward toward the camera. The father is pensively reading a Bible, as suggested by the texture of the cover and the thumb notches, and provides a thoughtful, mature model in the family circle. Even the baby carriage's round wheels carry out the circular theme of the family unity. Who are they? What has become of them? Where did they come from when they moved to Fowler? Was the father the minister of the AME church that was identified in the photo-

graph? The young son would appear to be about 12. Does he still reside in Fowler, or in Fresno? What is the history of this remarkable family?

No. 265

This gentleman's name is unknown, but surely it is to be found somewhere in Fowler's records. His face and distinguished demeanor bear witness to a lifetime of change and coming to terms with many of the world's follies. This man was the subject of three photographs in the same day, one of them a street snapshot.

The camera position is unusual, for it is at knee level as shown by the horizontal siding, looking up at the subject's face as he sits in the rustic bentwood rocker on the porch. With his hands in his lap, hat on his knee and gold chain in his vest, this gentleman presents a thoughtful portrait of one of the patriarchs of Fowler's black community. His role in the town? His name? Where had he come from?



No. 163

Japanese Residents

No. 163

A closeup of the Hom Cyclery on "Main between 6th and 7th" indicates the extent of the broad range of retailing and service activities engaged in by the Japanese residents of Fowler. The "Bicycle Shop" appears to have broadened its range to include motorcycles, a natural direction in that transitional age. This image perhaps shows the owner and a new customer. The brand on the motorcycle looks like an "Excello AeroCycle 94." The ramps from the building to the sidewalk to the street facilitate the safe passage of the bikes and motorcycles onto the street right-of-way.



No. 44

No. 44

This is the only negative of the Japanese residents which features both husband and wife and their children. The T. Kondo and Co. store is also one of the few to display Japanese characters on the company sign. Another woman and her three children are present in the camera's field of view. One would assume that these people were not deliberately included in the composition. Their presence might indicate an unfamiliarity by the photographer with the field of view of the camera, hardly a characteristic of a professional photographer; or it might indicate a different sense of the aesthetic characteristics of the photographic image than we have today.



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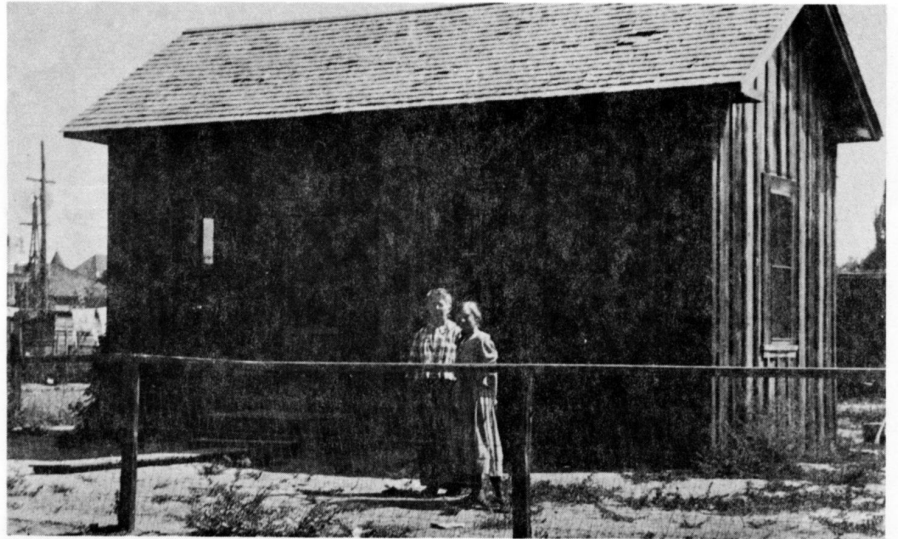
No. 2

All of the photographs of the Japanese residents of Fowler are taken in connection with their business enterprises. The photograph of the K. Sakamoto's Pool Hall is typical of a series of exposures which document the stores and businesses on Eighth Street, which provided merchandise, recreation, labor contractors, and offered services such as a shave and haircut and boarding houses. Small children are a prominent part of the family pictures, and are posed full front to the camera. It is evident that this is a formal occasion for pictures, both for showing the family and establishing the connection with a business enterprise.

Houses

No. 47

This board and batten home is one of the simplest cottages seen in the Hutchinson Collection. With the vertical proportions of the house, windows and siding, it is probably one of the oldest homes in Fowler. The vertical siding goes all the way to the ground, suggesting that it might be resting on a redwood/mud sill on the surface of the earth. The tall proportions of the house and window details reflect a simplicity that is not seen in later houses or bungalows. The offset front door opens into a single room with a bedroom to the right, and a kitchen, perhaps attached as a shed, on the rear. The wire fence encloses a dirt yard, covered with miscellaneous weeds, with a chicken pecking the ground on the left. The returns on the gables would identify an attempt to add Greek Revival details to the structure. The building might be more accurately described as vernacular style, referring to adaptations of well-known styles subject to local taste and execution.



No. 47

No. 15

This scene is typical of the modest homes photographed in Fowler at this time. A California bungalow, one-story house with an offset front porch, and an enclosed, recessed back porch. A simple gabled roof, clapboard siding with vertical board foundation skirting, and a small front porch complete the modest exterior. This house is painted with contrasting white trim on the windows, posts and fascia boards.



No. 15

The yard is not planted and there is minimum foundation planting. No fence separates the yard from the street. No sidewalk has been installed, and only a board curb defines the street.

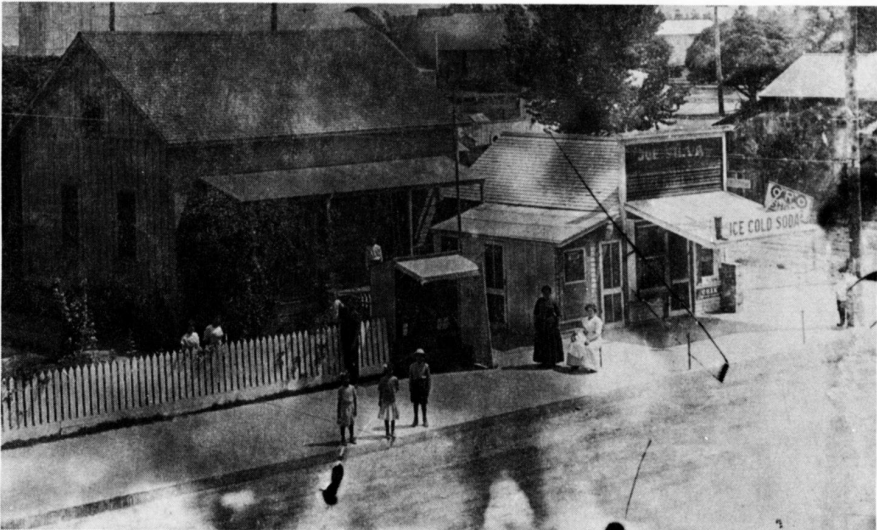
A clue to the photographer's attitude toward picture arrangement is the location of the three adults across the foreground of the picture. One sits on the porch, another stands in the yard in the middle of the picture, and a third in behind a low bush at the left side. The spacing seems to define the span of the property. The picture is taken from some distance away to show the entire house. The people seems to have increased the distance between themselves to "fill in" the greater area of the image.



No. 165



No. 271



No. 209



No. 234

No. 165

This elegant home reflects the influence of the best of the California Bungalow style on a two-story scale. It was identified by the FIA as the John H. Wynberg house on Merced and First Streets. It was distinguished by wide overhanging eaves, exposed rafters, an offset covered entry which repeats the flat slope of the house roof. An open porch with a pergola for vines and French doors into the living room complete the facade. A soy tub planter is present in front. The second floor has a continuous band of windows and shingle siding. The wide eaves reflect the Japanese influence that was translated into the California Bungalow style and the Prairie style. The windows grouped as a unit across the second story are characteristic of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie style, and represent a radical change from the window styles of the other houses pictured in this collection.

The soy tub planter is frequently seen in pictures of the houses in Fowler. Although none show Japanese characters, they resemble "soy tubs" that were imported from Japan. They appear with such frequency in these photographs that they must have been sold inexpensively or available widely in the community for use as outdoor planters.

Additional Family Views

No. 271

In this domestic scene, the man reclines in the hammock reading a newspaper. The woman, also sitting in the hammock, entertains him with her mandolin. The accessories around them suggest that this couple is frequently out-of-doors. The backyard is not covered with lawn, so a small throw rug is at their feet, with a fan nearby for hot days.

A mirror and towel are hung above a wash stand on the back porch of their cottage. A bucket and pan are close by to the left. Their well pump is between the house and hammock. The ubiquitous soy tub planter is also located on the back porch.

The house is a simple cottage, with a central corridor through to the front door. This cottage may be similar to the central corridor "I" house that was common vernacular architecture on the east coast of Virginia. With the varied cultural heritage that was assembling in Fowler, it would not be unusual to find architectural styles that were native to other parts of the United States, and which contributed to the varied styles of California. 11

No. 209

Seven pictures were taken of this family on the same day. Was the occasion the christening of the youngest child, who in this picture is being held by the woman in the light dress? Why are the family members spread out all over the image? A boy is standing next to the power pole on the right, three children are on the curb in the foreground. The father is holding the next youngest child in the center, and the two oldest girls are on the left, protected by the fence. One adult is on the porch of the house to the rear.

The photograph demonstrates the vitality of these family groups. The camera is positioned on high across the street, looking down on the group, including the store, the shoeshine stand and the house in the image. The family is spread as if to literally cover their "territory," from left to right, from front to back, with the baby, two women and the father and young child in the center. Does the house symbolize the family focus, the stores the economic means by which the group supports itself and establishes its place in the community.



No. 7

No. 234

This is the only picture in the collection that shows a young boy working with his father, in this case, in the Fowler Shoeing Shop of C.E. Smith at Sixth and Main Streets. The tools of the blacksmith are all present. Horseshoes are on the racks to the left, with bins of others below them. The forge to the rear has an electric motor to power a blower to keep the coals hot. The boy carries the hammers of the blacksmith, wears a leather apron and works in bare feet!

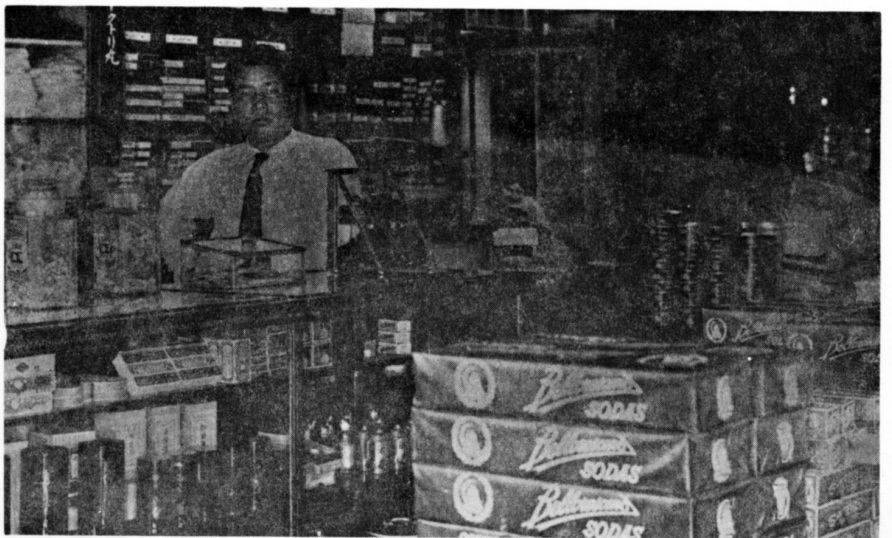


No. 259

Miscellaneous Views

No. 7

Another sequence of images (Nos. 7, 68, 177, 270, 285) repeats the questions about the relationships and content of family life in the early 1900s. This picture shows the family in the front yard of their two-story house, apparently in the country, for a water tower and windmill are concealed behind the house. The family consists of the father, mother and four small children. The father is holding a "symbolic" rake or hoe in his hands. The oldest girl holds a kitten and is sitting in a wagon, which is being "pulled" by the youngest.



No. 235

Two boys are on either side of the wagon, and the mother is proudly to the left of the group.

Behind this scene, fifty feet away on the front porch of the house, is another woman, obviously included in the picture, yet not a part of the immediate family group.

The presence of one man with several women and children is common in the collection of photographs. It poses questions about the absence of men from the family and group. With whom did unmarried women live. Were married women with children obliged to stay with their relatives in the absence of their husbands? The freedom with which people rearranged themselves in relation to other members of the extended family suggests an acceptance of the interlocked roles in the family group.

No. 259

This home presents a curious problem. It has the proportions of the California Bungalow style executed in shingles, but the siding is a long shingle type that is most common to early cottages. Each of the courses of shingles is about 2½ feet in length. The foundation siding is board and batten, but it starts at the window ledge and extends down to the surface of the earth. The home also has double hung windows, and a small entry stoop rather than a full porch. Board caps replace railings. The matron of the house rests on one side of the steps, and a glass milk bottle on the other side. The ever-present soy tub planter is located at the side of the house.

No. 235

The two interior pictures in the collection are both of the same store. This picture shows the proprietor standing behind the glass counter which encloses everything from porcelain tea cups and plates, small Japanese dolls, containers of tea, "Colgate's Ribbon Dental Cream", to "Hydrox Peroxide Cream". "Bell-crescent Sodas" are prominently stacked on the center counter, "Adam's Pepsin Tutti-Fruit" is on the counter in two convenient jars. Soft goods and bolts of printed fabric are on the counters to the rear. Other Japanese products are packaged and labeled in the counter. The proprietor, dressed in white shirt and tie, looks out on the world confident that his stock will meet the needs of his customers.



No. 236

Conclusion

The images in the Hutchinson Collection open an interesting window on life in Fowler. They raise many questions about the perceptions people have of themselves, the way they live together, and their attitudes about the camera and being photographed. How many of these questions are confined to Fowler and how many are characteristic of the San Joaquin Valley? We may think of the valley and its communities as having many characteristics in common, but is this a valid generalization? The "colony system" of this area's settlement had the result of promoting very diverse enclaves of homogeneous communities, which shared common weather-soil-irrigation-agriculture concerns. Did the towns also appeal to various ethnic groups, and therefore reflect different attitudes, social pressures and values? This single collection of negatives cannot answer all the questions it raises, but it suggests several areas for study.

Why should we care about the Hutchinson Collection? This is a miscellaneous collection of photographs taken from sixty-five to seventy years ago, by an unknown photographer in a small community in central California. To the best of our knowledge at this time, no person of fame or fortune is pictured in the group. The subjects generally are of modest means, and their names did not survive along with their images. What importance can they have for us?

First, the photographs convey a sense of "place", with Fowler the

specific location. What was the town like in the first decade of this century? The streets were unpaved, and the biggest building was the former grammar school, recycled as a hotel and commercial building. A large number of churches provided places of worship and a social focus for its residents. A business section was located on both sides of the railroad tracks. Local transportation was by horse and buggy, bicycle, motorcycle, and several automobiles.

We can see the houses, the way people dressed and looked, how they planted their flowers and the way they tended their yards. Family relationships between men and women, adults and children, families and their relatives are presented for our understanding. The action of daily life is better revealed in a newspaper. However, the visual evidence of who the people were, where they came from, what they did, and their relationships to family and relatives is revealed in these photographs. A sense of what people cared about in common is revealed by the presence of wooden curbs edging the streets, the paved sidewalks, and the grading and improvement of public streets. Fences demark private areas, but they are decorative and minimal, designed as very quiet statements of territoriality rather than aggressive statements of self-protection. Open front yards decorated with tubbed plants and foundation plantings around the house enhance and beautify the public face of the home and contribute to the community's gracious appearance.

The attitude of the subjects of the

pictures is arresting. They look at the camera with neither suspicion nor false posturing. They suggest a confidence that the cameraman will show them as they are, and they are confident in that role.

The views of the Japanese commercial buildings raise questions concerning the role of these residents of Fowler, as do the photographs of the black residents. The stores and the commercial activities suggest several alternatives for research into the activities of the minority population in the development of the community.

It was stated during the interviews on this topic that there was a colony of black farmers to the west of Fowler. No photographs exist to record this in the Hutchinson Collection, but several exist of Japanese farmers with farm wagons and produce. Were the Japanese more businessmen than farmers, and were the blacks more farmers than businessmen? If so, this suggests a change from today.

How were the minorities accepted into the community? Were the stores of the minority businessmen patronized by all of the community? The size and number of stores suggest that there was either a large number of Japanese in the area to support them, or that the entire community patronized them. The presence of the "soy tub" planters in practically every residential picture suggests that some aspects of the Oriental produce found ready acceptance at every level of the community.

There are other images of ethnic groups in the Hutchinson Collection, however they are not specifically identified. The census of 1930 indicated a great variety of ethnic groups in Fowler. Did the photographer have images of other ethnic and racial minorities? Where might they be?

The photographs are more than social history. They are the repositories of symbols of other times. They contain information that each generation will recognize and use revealing more of the people and culture at that time, but also the people and culture of the viewer's time. We may see only those parts of the image that we recognize in ourselves, but the image will contain its information forever, to unfold with additional wisdom to the insights of future generations.



No. 278

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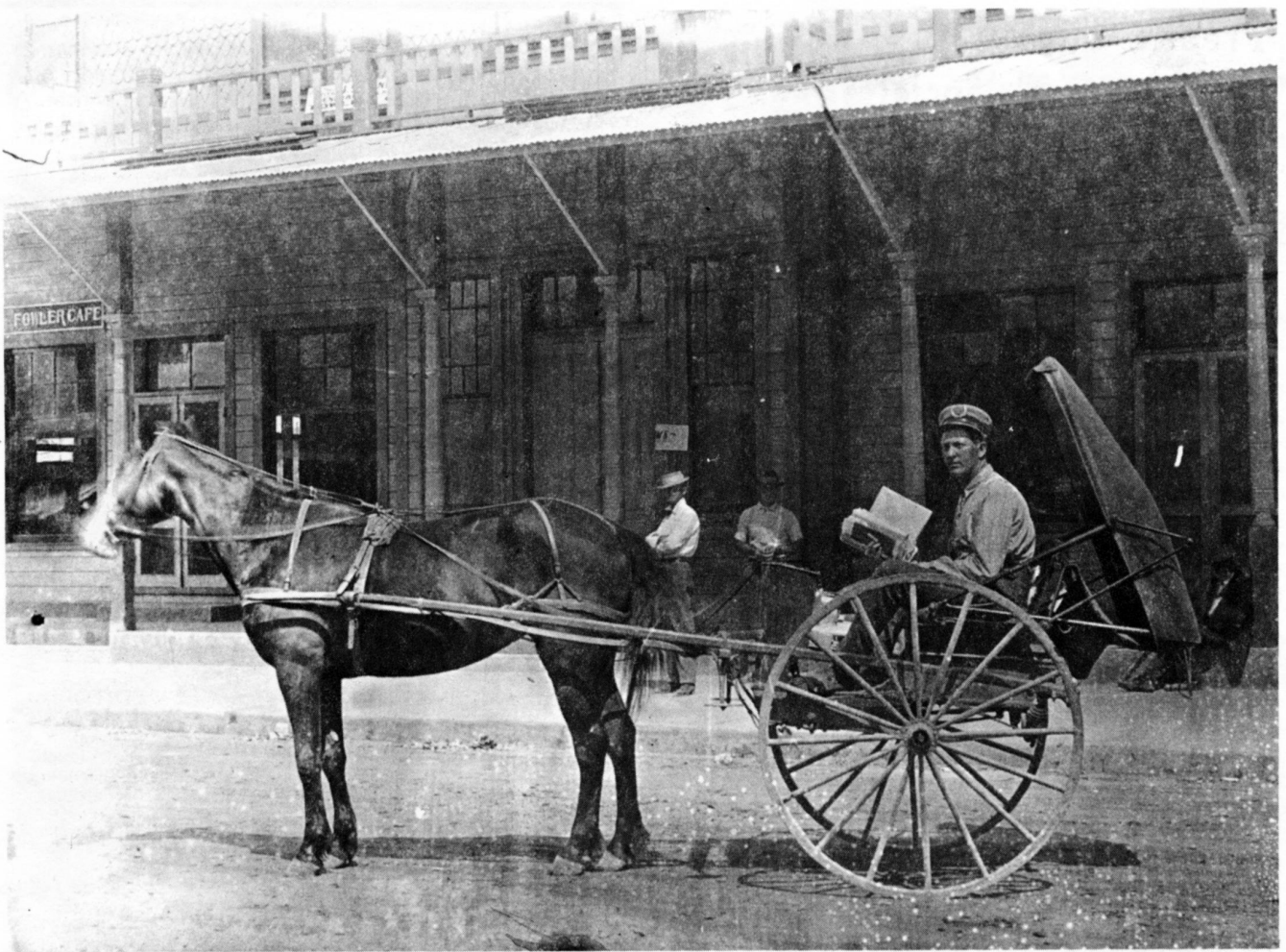
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No. 196

The Fresno City and County Historical Society is grateful to the Fowler Improvement Association for the donation of the Paul Hutchinson Glass Negative Collection.





No. 218



No. 75

In Appreciation

In 1981, the FCCHS La Paloma Guild donated \$2,500 to fund the preservation of the Hutchinson Collection. The fragile images on the glass plates were in various stages of deterioration, and action was needed to save this invaluable record of Fowler, California. Under the direction of Archivist Maria Ortiz, the project encompassed four important stages:

- 1) 5x7 film negatives were produced from the glass negative plates,
- 2) a research photograph of each image was printed,

- 3) the entire collection of glass plates was cleaned, and both glass and film negatives were archivally housed in acid-free "3T" envelopes and boxes, and
- 4) the research prints were housed in binders.

The collection's valuable information is now readily available for study, and has been used by a wide variety of researchers. Realizing the intrinsic importance of preserving our collective heritage, the La Paloma Guild has given 'life' to Fowler's history.