



# Nihon Bunka/Japanese Culture: One Hundred Years in the Pajaro Valley

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## Chapter 1

### Tradition Dictates Tomorrow: The Pioneers

No records are known to exist that precisely pinpoint the date that the Japanese came to the Pajaro Valley. It is known that twelve Japanese laborers came to the area sometime in 1892, first to work at a saw mill and later at a hops farm. There is no way to know their thoughts, their dreams or their fears. We don't even have their names. But just imagine for a moment what it must have been like for them in a beautiful, rich land filled with promise - but completely alien in every aspect, for until 1885, few Japanese had ever set foot in America. But Japan's emigration restrictions were eased that year, and young men came seeking their fortune here - as so many did from around the world.

Those laborers were the start of the Japanese community in the Pajaro Valley, which would go on to influence every aspect of life here, even as its people fought discrimination and adversity to settle in this land.

The California Gold Rush, beginning in the late 1840s, attracted people of all nationalities to the port of San Francisco. Among them were the Chinese, who worked in the Sierra gold fields, and who later provided the lion's share of the labor for the transcontinental railroad (1869), the dykes of the Sacramento and San Joaquin River delta and to complete the Southern Pacific Railroad Coast Line connection between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

As these monumental projects were finished, the Chinese turned to agricultural work - again providing a vast labor force needed to support expanding California markets.

Upon the 50th anniversary of the Watsonville Japanese American Citizens League in 1984, historian Sandy Lydon wrote: "After Japan relaxed laws prohibiting emigration in 1885, Japanese farm laborers began to replace the aging Chinese in the fields of Hawaii, California, Oregon and Washington. The number of Japanese living in the Pajaro Valley grew from a handful in 1890 to over four hundred in 1900, and the young, energetic men soon filled the slots being vacated by Chinese in agriculture as well as finding employment as domestics, laundrymen, woodchoppers and railroad workers in the Monterey Bay region."

Kazuko Nakane, author of *Nothing Left in My Hands* - an outstanding reference for the history of the first Japanese settlers in the Pajaro Valley - believes that the early settlers had a high degree of literacy, the vision to become landowners with the ambition to work toward this goal and a high value placed on mutual aid, all of which led to their future success.

Sakuzo Kimura is believed to be the first Japanese labor contractor, bringing twelve men to work in an Aptos sawmill and in the Pajaro Valley at an East Lake Avenue hops farm. Kimura, a man of about 40, made contracts quickly, aided by his fluency in English. He had learned the language while working for the U.S. Navy, according to Nakane.

As the number of Chinese agricultural workers declined, the number of men emigrating from Japan steadily increased to work in crops, especially strawberries, on the Central Coast.

In the beginning, the vast majority of Japanese immigrants to the Pajaro Valley were men. Due to unfamiliarity with language and customs, and to the continuing anti-Asian policies which created a climate of discrimination, these newly arrived agricultural workers joined together in "labor clubs," "employment clubs" and "societies" for contract labor, living arrangements and mutual aid.

Kimura established the earliest known labor club in 1893. After the clubhouse was destroyed by fire, it was rebuilt in 1897 as the Shinyu (good friends) labor club. The Japanese "labor boss" system was similar to the Chinese boss system - for an annual fee, the contractor secured work for the members and acted as a mediator between the employer and the workers.

In times of unemployment, the workers would also lodge and cook meals at the club. The clubs naturally became early social centers for the growing Japanese community. Japanese boarding houses soon followed, and by 1910 there were ten establishments in Watsonville that provided lodging, meals and employment information.



*"Japanese Club," an Early Pajaro Valley Labor Club, 1896-1910*

Despite being strangers in a strange land, the early Issei men enjoyed the carefree life of bachelors. Many men traveled light, with just a buranketto (blanket) over their shoulders.

As bachelors are wont to do, some Japanese men spent their money foolishly. Across the river in what is now Pajaro, the Chinatown there offered gambling and paid female companionship. The Chinese gambling houses were nicknamed "Shanghai banks."

But as time went on, the men began longing for family life, and they also found ways to increase their profits in order to support a wife and children.

As the agriculture of the valley changed from grain and sugar beet cultivation to fruit production some of the Issei became half-share strawberry farmers. In this arrangement, the landowner provided the land, plants and equipment, and the Japanese farmer raised the crop. The profits and risks were shared equally between the two. In the "History of the Japanese People in Watsonville", written for the 60th anniversary of the Buddhist Temple, it is noted that the first sharecropper was Senzaemon Nishimura, who worked on the Hopkins Farm.

For most of the Japanese, sharecropping paid far better than contract wages. Eventually, many Issei farmers became cash tenants, leasing land with an annual payment and retaining all the crop proceeds. One source reports that in 1900, Ueda Tao became the first Japanese farmer to lease a strawberry farm. The following year, individuals named Nishimura and Tetsutaro Higashi also leased land.

The next step in the improvement of farming conditions was the organization of cooperatives in which individuals pooled their money to lease land in the Pajaro Valley. Among the earliest such arrangements was the Y.Kosansha Company. Some of those associates were Kumajiro

Murakami, Taroichi Tomioka, and three Yamamoto brothers - Matasuchi, Heitsuchi, and Taneichi.

At the same time, more Japanese women began to arrive in the Pajaro Valley, many of them as brides for arranged marriages. (California and other states had laws preventing interracial relationships.) For some, the arrangements were made in Japan between families from the same village who knew each other well; for others, the bride and groom met only after arrival in San Francisco. They were called "picture brides" since most had never met their husbands-to-be, but had exchanged photographs and letters.



*"Picture Brides" ca. 1910*

According to the book *Japanese American Women: Three Generations 1890-1990*, by Mei Nakano, the women were especially hard-hit by culture shock in an alien land. Few learned to speak any English at all. Farm laborers' wives had to set up house in dirt-floor shacks that contained nothing but a bed, a table and a wood stove.

Although some picture brides deserted their husbands because of the hardships, most stuck it out, compelled by the strong cultural values of gaman (perseverance in the face of adversity) and giri (a sense of duty). When times were tough, Issei women would shrug and say, "Shikata ga nai" (It can't be helped).

By 1910, there were 168 Japanese women in the Pajaro Valley. These women not only enabled the establishment of families, but fostered the growth of community life, businesses and cultural organizations. As children were born and raised, the entire family worked in the farming operations, increasing the family's economic security. Children were taught at a young age to pull weeds and do other field chores. Wives worked in the fields and also took care of the home and children.

According to Nakane, women also acted as midwives, set up boarding houses and ran restaurants. Some men also looked for other lines of work, such as Bunkichi Torigoe, who established a watch and bicycle repair shop in Watsonville in 1909. Others were Yasutaro Iwami, who set up a barber and billiards shop in 1900; and Keizo Atsumi, who opened a tailor shop in 1901.

Watsonville's Japantown began to appear at the south end of Main Street around 1905. By 1920, there were public baths, groceries, shoe stores, photographers, a tofu factory, an opera house, a Japanese school, a stagecoach company and doctors. Peddlers also made trips between labor camps to sell their wares.

In addition, a Japanese Presbyterian church and a Buddhist temple were established, as was the Japanese Association, which was founded to fight anti-Japanese laws.

As the population of the Japanese community increased, so did the number of agreements and laws that restricted their citizenship as well as ownership, and eventually leasing, of land. Under the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907, Japan continued to allow the departure of wives and

children of men already in the United States, but stopped issuing visas to laborers. In 1911, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization decreed that only Caucasians and people of African descent could apply for citizenship.

Resentment against the West Coast's Japanese communities had been building for some time, perhaps due to envy of the immigrants' business success. Nakano reported that newspapers fanned the flames by printing headlines like:

THE JAPANESE INVASION  
THE PROBLEM OF THE HOUR, and  
CRIME AND POVERTY GO HAND IN HAND WITH ASIATIC LABOR

California's Alien Land Law of 1913 denied ownership of land to Japanese aliens and restricted leasing to a maximum of three years. Subsequent legislation in 1921 denied the right to even lease land. Finally, in 1924, all immigration from Japan ceased under U.S. legislation that prevented entrance to anyone who was not eligible for citizenship.

The Japanese devised a number of ways to get around the restrictions. Sympathetic lawyers would draw up land deeds in the names of children, who could own land because they were born in the United States and thus given automatic citizenship. Older Nisei also bought land for others, such as Ichiro Yamaguchi, who recalled his life for *Nisei Christian Journey*: "After I was 21, I had to buy land for other people ... I would sign the papers and they would make all the payments."

Even though later legislation prevented minors from owning land, some individuals were able to hold land in the name of an American citizen. For the most part, however, the land laws reduced the number of independent Japanese growers.

As a result of the land laws, followed by the Great Depression, many Issei never regained their former economic stature. However, the community they had established in the Pajaro Valley continued to persevere, until anti-Japanese feeling reached its height at the beginning of World War II.

## Chapter 2

### 100 Years of Agriculture: The Land Blossoms

Agriculture brought pioneer Japanese immigrants to the Pajaro Valley one hundred years ago. A century later, agriculture is still the valley's principal economic activity, and Japanese Americans have played an important role in the success of local agriculture.

The earliest commercial cultivation of strawberries in the Pajaro Valley took place in the late 1860s in the Vega district, on the Monterey County side of the Pajaro River. After the coming of the railroad in the 1870s and the development of extensive irrigation systems for strawberries in the 1890s, Pajaro Valley strawberry production increased dramatically. The special relationship of Japanese families to strawberry cultivation is a major chapter in the history of the Pajaro Valley.

"The Japanese and Dalmatians (Slavs) have assisted in producing the changes introduced in the kinds of crops grown. The former, being unusually skillful berry growers, have had something to do with the expansion of the production of berries until much of the land is thus employed, whereas before their influx, little of it was so used. The latter have done much to encourage the growing of apples." (U.S. Immigration Commission, Reports, 1911.)

The unusual skill that Japanese workers demonstrated in working with strawberries was accompanied by their desire to gain more independence as growers and to be able to retain more of the profits of production. Another early strawberry cooperative was J. and S. Kosansha, operated by Otokichi Kajioka and four others.

For the 75th anniversary of the Westview Presbyterian Church, Kenji Shikuma described his family's early involvement with strawberry growing:

"As I can recall to my memory as related to me by my parents on various occasions, father (Unosuke Shikuma) came to Watsonville in the year 1902, and his first job was working in the onion field for which his wage was one dollar a day; dollar and fifteen cents during the peak days. On the following year, he started growing berries on share together with some of his friends.

"In 1907 when Mother came here from Japan to join him as a young bride, they started out their life together as the berry growing family unit by joining other relative and friend family groups to form an association to lease the ground together. To start with, the families lived in crudely constructed camp houses roughly furnished with simple home-made tables, benches, shelves, and wooden bed-frames.

"In most cases, two families occupied the same house separated only by a thin-walled partition. As time went by and with the coming of children, they managed to work out for separate housings. Here in this so-called "Strawberry Camp," we of the old Niseis made our initial start in this world.

"About the time I was a few years old, father leased the ground on his own and fulfilled his immediate ambition - that of becoming an independent strawberry grower. To operate a strawberry ranch on somewhat bigger scale and on his own was quite different from what it was farming on share-crop basis, as it required greater financing in the first place, the need for working capital.

"He borrowed the money from his trusted Commission House in San Francisco Produce Market to finance his berry growing, and that he in turn agreed to deliver certain portion of his crops toward repayment on the loan. The well-known department and hardware store in town, the Ford's, at that time extended him a credit liberally which helped him greatly in making his start.

"When he became an independent grower, he took on sharecropper families, provided each a house, and had each family grow two to three acres apiece. Often times our home was a social center, as father would always welcome all those on the farm for any special occasions ..."

About 1920, the largest and most productive strawberry ranch in the world was established under a partnership between Unosuke Shikuma, Heitsuchi Yamamoto, O.O. Eaton and Henry A. Hyde east of Salinas on the Oak Grove ranch at Natividad. Strawberries that were previously shipped in large chests to San Francisco on the railroad, were now transported by motorized truck with a cooling device, in small wooden trays holding twelve-pint baskets.



*Family Picking Strawberries on White Ranch, near Freedom Boulevard, ca. 1920s*

In order to overcome many marketing difficulties - overproduction, price fluctuations, lack of standardization, and absorption of profits by the commission houses, the California Berry Growers Association was formed in 1917. The association's constitution stated that the board of directors was to be made up of equal numbers of Caucasian and Japanese directors.

The *Japanese American Yearbook* (1918) states that such an organization was suggested by Issei who were members of Kashu Chuo Nokai (California Central Farmers Association), a Japanese farmers' organization. Members of the California Berry Growers Association's first board of directors were: Mark Grimes, Sumito Fujii, James Hopkins, O.O. Eaton, J.E. Reiter, R.F. Driscoll, T. Sasao, T. Kato, K. Shikuma, F.J. Moriyasu, and Philip S. Erlich.

"Naturipe" became the official trademark for the Association in 1922, and in 1958, the name of the Association was changed to "Naturipe Berry Growers," which is now one of the largest berry cooperatives in the world.

One of the earliest Pajaro Valley lettuce growers of any nationality was Kyuzaburo "Harry" (H.K.) Sakata, who immigrated, alone, to Canada from Wakayama province at the age of fifteen. After working and living with his uncle in Canada for two years, he joined other relatives, and members of his village in Japan, who were farming near Lompoc, California.

Together they pooled their resources, saved money and eventually bought land and a thresher. Having received a satisfactory return for their efforts in raising beans due to good market conditions during World War I, part of the group returned to Japan, but H.K. Sakata decided to stay.

After searching for farm land, even as far away as Mexico, he decided to buy in the Pajaro Valley. By this time, California's Alien Land Law had come into effect, but with the help of an attorney, the L and W Land Company was established with the title held in the name of his minor children, who were United States citizens.



*Kyuzaburo Sakata with Prize Heads of Lettuce*

In 1918 Sakata shipped ten teams of horses and the thresher from Lompoc to Pajaro Junction by Southern Pacific railway, and thus began local farming operations which his descendants and others have continued to the present day.

Although beans were the main crop in the early days, a great variety of berry and vegetable crops were gradually added to supply the three local Espindola grocery stores. From 1921 lettuce was produced on the Sakata ranches, and Sakata was one of the first West Coast growers to ship lettuce, packed in ice, by rail to eastern markets.



*Japanese Laborers Harvesting Beans*

The partnership of Travers and Sakata, growers and shippers, was formed in the 1920s. This enterprise eventually became Sakata and Son in 1939, producing sugar beets, lettuce, cauliflower, carrots, cabbage, potatoes and other crops.

Following the enormous disruptions caused by the declaration of war against Japan, all company debts were settled through the sale of land and equipment, and remaining land was placed with a property manager and leased to local growers for the duration of the war and the family's forced relocation in the Poston, Arizona, internment center. Eventually the family's operation of the Pajaro Valley ranches was resumed, and row crop production takes place today on several valley ranches.

In an interview with Luella Hudson McDowell in 1987, Hisaje "Frank" Sakata said:

"In concluding, we have had a continuous business history since December, 1917, although we have not lived here all that time. During the war years, we were guests of the government in the Salinas Rodeo grounds for three months and a year in the Poston area of Arizona. Subsequently we lived in eastern Oregon for thirteen years.



"In the Pajaro Valley we have lived and have had neighbors who are Americans of diverse national origin. It has been a privilege and an opportunity to have amiably done business with persons with diverse names such as Nielsen, Crosetti, Jericich , Travers, Gonzalez, Wong, Hudson, Matiasevich, Silliman, Shikuma, Oksen, Eaton and various others - really a cross-section of Americans from all over the world."

Although flowering plants have always thrived in the climate of the Monterey Bay, the flower growing industry was not established until after World War II. There were only three commercial flower growers in the late 1950s.

A particularly interesting chapter of the history of cut flower production was told by Harry Fukutome in the booklet prepared for the 75th Anniversary of Westview Presbyterian Church. Japanese Americans in northern California were acutely aware of the devastating postwar conditions in Japan, and many relief supplies were sent by organizations and individuals. The plight of thousands of refugees returning from Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria to Japan was one of these many severe problems.

In 1955 the International Agricultural Fellowship Association (Kokusai Noyukai) arranged for the emigration of 1,000 agricultural workers to the United States under a refugee act that was in effect at the time.

In 1973, Harry Fukutome related:

"He (Unosuke Shikuma) personally visited Japan in 1955 and 1956 and interviewed the young people in Kagoshima and Yamaguchi prefectures and invited eight of them to his farm and asked them to help him in raising strawberries. These ambitious and grateful young men were full of hope and not only worked day and night for him, but were greatly influenced by Mr. Shikuma's character and all were led to Christianity.

"Almost all of them became American citizens. When the Refugee Act Agreement was fulfilled, each of them chose his own vocation. (The agreement was that they must work in the sponsor's field for three years.) Some became gardeners, others strawberry growers, but Akira Nagamine took up flower growing as his goal. He recognized how Watsonville weather was suited for such industry.

"So, depending heavily upon the support of Shikuma brothers, he planned to become a flower grower. He became a worker in a flower-growing firm in Mountain View.

"Meanwhile he called his brother, Osamu Nagamine, his brother-in-law, Hachiro Fukutome, and they all learned the technique of the industry for about three years. Though they had acquired the technique and the knowledge, they had very little capital.

"So, instead of going on separately, they joined resources and in 1962, they were able to secure a land which they had long waited for - about five acres on Condit Lane, which was an apple orchard. They started growing carnations first. At that time, there were only three flower growers in this area, Ben Craust, Mas Tachibana, and Sakae Brothers.

"Since 1962, besides Nagamine Brothers, others came into this area: Nakashima Growers, PV Green House and others. When the new growers business and its success was reported, old timers from the Bay Area moved to Watsonville, and on top of that when the promotion for cut flowers throughout the country was accelerated, many refugees from Japan and new immigrants poured into this area primarily to raise carnations.

"... Come to think of it, we owe so much to the faithful and devout Mr. Shikuma who left a lasting impression upon us and we cannot forget the personal guidance he gave us at its beginning."

## Chapter 3

### Uneasy Settlement: The War Years

Japan's fateful decision to drop bombs on Pearl Harbor did more than destroy ships and planes - it also exploded the tenuous hold that Japanese immigrants and their descendants had on their adopted country, the United States.

For Issei and Nisei, the news of the December 7, 1941, attack was more than a declaration of war. It was the beginning of an inner battle that hurt them more than they could say.

One woman quoted in Mei Nakano's book described her feelings at the news: "An old wound opened up again, and I found myself shrinking inwardly from my Japanese blood." Watsonville resident Ichiro Yamaguchi wrote, "When Pearl Harbor was bombed, I felt like somebody shot me ... I was worried that something might happen to us."

His fears were warranted, since the next day, the assets of the Japanese were frozen and the arrests of community leaders began. A curfew was imposed as well.

The official spokesman for the Japanese Association, Ichiji Motoki, told the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* that "these people wish to lead peaceful lives and are not the element of potential troublemakers." Even so, arrests continued to be made of such "troublemakers" as Buddhist priests, teachers, ministers, Japanese Association officers and newspaper correspondents. Charges were never proven against any of them, according to *The Japanese and Japanese Americans in the Pajaro Valley* by Eleanor Johnson and Opal Marshall. Other individuals were questioned by the FBI and kept under surveillance.

It was not long after that the first evacuations were announced. The first was minor, an order for all aliens to vacate a five-mile radius of the coast. This covered the area west of Highway 1, including Larkin Valley and the Roache District. It displaced some 23 Japanese families.

According to documents from the California Historical Resources Commission, written by Salinas resident Violet De Cristoforo, by late January 1942 newspapers were printing unsubstantiated stories about Japanese American spies and saboteurs. On Feb. 19, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the mass expulsion and incarceration of Japanese Americans.

By March 1942, many Japanese had left the Watsonville area voluntarily, creating a farm labor shortage. A committee of Watsonville Nisei even drove to Idaho to see about purchasing an apple orchard, in hopes of moving the entire Japanese community there. However, according to Sandy Lydon, the soil was rocky and poor, and their plan had to be abandoned.

Young Nisei men were also given the choice of being evacuated or joining the military, and many did sign up. Young women also volunteered for the Women's Army Corps and the U.S. Cadet Nursing Corps.

After March 25, restrictions were placed on the movements of Japanese in Watsonville, Gilroy, the Monterey Peninsula, Salinas and San Benito County. Between April and June, they were taken to the Salinas Assembly Center, located at the Salinas Rodeo grounds.

Posters were hung everywhere to give "Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry." The evacuees could take nothing with them except bedding and linens, toilet articles, clothing, utensils, plates, cups and unspecified "personal articles."

The Japanese Americans had to sell all they owned or leave it with someone they trusted. Kazuko Nakane writes that they had to sell their belongings for a fraction of what they were worth, in order to be ready for the evacuation. Just as when they emigrated from Japan, they could take only what they could carry.

More than 3,600 Japanese Americans were held at the Salinas Assembly Center until July 4. Twenty barrack buildings were constructed, measuring 20 by 100 feet. The camp was divided into blocks made up of 14 barracks each. Each block held about 800 people and had its own mess hall, laundry and recreation room. The rooms had no shades, curtains, shelves, closets or lockers, so most evacuees stored their belongings under their beds.

Despite the poor living conditions and general confusion of the time, the center residents quickly formed a wide variety of social activities. Several enterprising souls put together a camp newsletter, *The Village Crier*, to report on the happenings. Activities during this time included concerts by a glee club and an impromptu band, games of Go and Shogi, Buddhist meetings, softball games, bridge, art classes and talent shows, according to copies of *The Village Crier*, obtained from the Bancroft Library.

The tone of the writing is generally sunny, although in one early issue an editorial appeared, signed only by the initials G.T.: "We are 3,000 strong with physical features that are alike. Does that make us think or do the things identically as the next person? Surely, we have minds of our own."



*Watch Tower, Poston, Arizona, 1942*

The author also advised readers, "Belief and faith in the ultimate success that is our heritage will help us through this adjustment period. We are not lost. Be strong."

Such was the community spirit of the temporary camp that when relocation plans were announced, the residents held "Hello, Arizona!" parties, decorated with paintings of desert scenery.

Ninety percent of the Salinas Assembly Center evacuees were sent to Poston Relocation Camp in Arizona; 1,222 of them were from Santa Cruz County. The Watsonville-area Japanese were split between Poston Camps I and II, according to Lydon.

In Nakano's book, one woman remembers her arrival at Poston Camp: "We arrived in the middle of a dust storm ... There were times when the electricity went off and we had no water." Evacuees found these "resettlement communities" surrounded with barbed wire and guarded by military police.

Accommodations were primitive, to say the least, and arrangements were especially hard on the very young, the very old and the ill. Most parents and caregivers had to carry several buckets of water to their living quarters each day.

Sleeping, eating, bathing and using the toilet was a group experience in the camps. The lack of privacy was particularly difficult for Japanese women. People waited in lines to eat, get shots and to get jobs.

Accommodations were similar to the temporary camps, modeled on Army barracks. Although the rooms were bare and bleak, the residents did what they could to become comfortable. Women ordered material from the Sears-Roebuck catalogue to make curtains, and the men scrounged lumber from wherever they could to make furniture.

As time passed, evacuees made a wide variety of items and even created gardens in the desert landscape. Ichiro Yamaguchi remembers, "In Camp II they had a crafts fair which was very interesting. I saw all the nice things and was amazed. People had the time to do these things. They had no place to go."



*Making Mattresses Out of Hay,  
Poston, Arizona, 1942*

The long-time farmers even managed to raise crops and raise animals, which helped supplement camp meals, according to Nakano. The government only allotted about 40 cents per meal. At the beginning, the food was generally abysmal, cooked by inexperienced hands and made from whatever was cheapest to buy. One woman said in Nakano's book, "At one time we were served liver for several weeks, until we went on strike." But by the end of 1943, the camps produced 85 percent of the vegetables the evacuees consumed.

There were also a variety of leisure activities at the camps, especially for the children. Scout troops were organized, as well as dances, concerts and all sorts of athletics. There were also schools for the youngsters, although the quality of education was uneven, due to the lack of proper materials and teachers.

Not surprisingly, tensions often ran high. Rumors were always flying. Yamaguchi wrote, "I don't know how many times I heard that the Golden Gate Bridge fell down, that the Japanese (from Japan) came and bombed it."

Evacuees could also work, both inside and outside the camp. Inside, they did a variety of jobs, although the most they could be paid was \$19 a day. They could also hire themselves outside the camp for farm labor. College-age students were also allowed to leave to pursue their educations.



*Group of Internees, Poston, Arizona, ca. 1942-1946*

Some did leave the camps and resettle in the interior of the United States. One survey quoted in Marshall and Johnson's book found that only 33.4 percent of the Watsonville Japanese had returned by 1946. Some, such as the Shikuma and Sakata families, went to Colorado and Oregon to farm.

However, many chose not to leave. This was partially due to the questionnaire that had to be signed prior to leaving the camp, which became known as the "Yes-Yes-No-No" form, which asked about the person's loyalty to the United States.

Those who answered the loyalty questions with "No" were sent to Tule Lake, the maximum security center, which also served as a prison for those Japanese who had failed to register for the draft. The loyalty questions proved horribly divisive for many Japanese families, according to Nakano.

In the spring of 1944, Executive Order 9066 was rescinded, and the loyal Japanese were finally allowed to go home. By the end of 1945, the camps had closed. But for the Issei and Nisei, there was no closing the door on the pain and bitterness they felt for the wasted years in camp.

Some Japanese did repatriate and move back to Japan. Even so, most chose to stay in the United States and to remake their lives there. By 1949, more than 57,000 had returned to the West Coast.

## Chapter 4

### A Time to Reflect: 1945 to Present [1992]

The Issei had come to the Pajaro Valley with dreams of a new land where they could prosper. Now, after the war, they and their children had to put the pieces of the broken dream back together.

According to Kazuko Nakane's book, some found their belongings, which had been stored by churches or trusted neighbors, while others discovered their homes in disarray, their things stolen or broken. There was prejudice on the part of some Caucasians, while others welcomed the return of the Japanese with open arms.

The Watsonville Buddhist Temple, which was closed during the war years, reopened in 1945 as a hostel for the evacuees returning to the area. The Rev. Yoshio Iwanaga, who had been placed at the Poston II camp and continued to hold religious ceremonies there, also returned to his church in 1945. He was not only the minister but also hostel administrator.

It took several years, but the lives of the Japanese slowly returned to normal. For the most part, the farmers went back to farming, and once again the valley bloomed. Strawberry production had dropped to almost nothing during the war years, but by 1953 was stronger than ever, with almost 800 acres devoted to that crop, according to Johnson and Marshall.

The Nisei married and began to have their own children. Many Nisei men and women found expanded job opportunities after the war. Previously, the Japanese had been hired mainly as laborers and domestics. But afterward, a variety of positions opened up for the better-educated, who became doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers and businesspeople. Popular choices of business included nurseries, florists, dry cleaners, food stores and hotels.

The Watsonville Citizens League once again became active. Formed as a social club in 1934, it became politicized by the events of the war. In 1947, a group of Nisei men met to reactivate the league and to pledge its commitment to community service. During 1948-49, the WCL provided aid to returning evacuees, helping them file claims for losses and assisting those who needed to re-register to vote.

In 1949, according to Sandy Lydon, the WCL officially became a chapter of the national Japanese American Citizens League, and changed its name to reflect that. The Japan Society, which had been the Issei service group, acknowledged the change in leadership and passed its torch to the Nisei by deeding the younger group its property on Union Street.

In [1956], <sup>1</sup> California's Alien Land Law was repealed by popular vote. [It had been declared unconstitutional in 1952 by the California Supreme Court in *Fujii v. State of California*.<sup>2</sup>] A campaign mounted in the late '40s and early '50s by the JACL (in which the Watsonville chapter took an active role) culminated in the passage of the Walter-McCarran Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1952, over the veto of President Harry Truman. This law allowed the Issei to become naturalized citizens. By then, most of the original immigrants were in their 60s and

70s, but even so, dutifully attended citizenship classes, took the test and were sworn in as U.S. citizens, according to *The Continuing Traditions: Japanese Americans, The Story of a People*, published by the Sacramento History Museum.

As time went on, the Japanese American sacrifices during the war were acknowledged, first by President Gerald Ford in 1976 with a proclamation titled "The American Promise." He stated in it that, "We know now what we should have known then - not only was the evacuation wrong, but Japanese Americans were and are loyal Americans."

In 1980, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians was established by act of Congress. The commission conducted hearings, heard testimony from more than 750 witnesses and examined more than 10,000 documents. In 1983, the commission ruled that the evacuation and internment were unjustified, and was the result of "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

The commission estimated the total loss in 1983 dollars to be between \$810 and \$2 billion, although other sources say the losses may be as high as \$6 billion. This accounts for damages and losses to businesses, disruption of careers, and long-term loss of income, earnings and opportunity.

The commission also decided that the government owed Japanese Americans an apology as well as redress for their losses. A fund was set up by Congress for this purpose.

President Ronald Reagan finally signed the Redress Bill on Aug. 10, 1988, and each surviving evacuee - about 60,000 across the United States - received \$20,000.

Today in the Pajaro Valley, the Issei are gone, but their spirit lives on through three generations of descendants.

Much of the Japanese social life still revolves around the Watsonville Buddhist Temple and the Westview Presbyterian Church. Both have done much to keep Japanese traditions alive in the Pajaro Valley.

The Buddhist Temple has been the umbrella for a wide variety of activities. The temple has sponsored Cub Scout, Boy Scout and Explorer troops since 1924, according to *The Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 1906-1981: Watsonville Buddhist Temple*.

Under the auspices of the temple, there are also groups such as the Fujinkai, a women's service organization, as well as several Buddhist associations and a Dharma school. Classes are held to teach ikebana, the art of flower arrangement, and the Japanese tea ceremony. There are also kendo (a martial art), camera and gardening clubs.

Many of the Christian Japanese attend Westview Presbyterian Church. The church began as a mission in 1898 and continues to carry on that tradition with a variety of community projects. Among their beneficiaries are the Second Harvest Food Bank, the Pajaro Valley Shelter and disaster victims in all parts of the country. Currently, the church is raising funds to help hurricane victims in Hawaii and the South.



Active church organizations include the men's fellowship group, the women's society and a service group called JOY (Jesus, Others and You).

Westview, the Buddhist Temple and the JACL all provide funds for the Kokoro Nagakko, the Japanese school based at the temple. The school provides students with knowledge about the Japanese culture, and is open to students of all races.

The Watsonville Japanese American Citizens League continues to be active as well. In 1984, the Watsonville JACL, along with chapters from Salinas, Monterey, Gilroy and San Benito County, co-sponsored the placement of a plaque at the Salinas Rodeo Grounds. The plaque reads:

*This monument is dedicated to the 3,586 Monterey Bay area residents of Japanese ancestry, most of whom were American citizens, temporarily confined in the Salinas Rodeo Grounds during World War II, from April to July 1942. They were detained without charges, trial or establishment of guilt before being incarcerated in permanent camps, mostly at Poston, Arizona. May such injustice and humiliation never recur.*



*Monument to Monterey Bay Area Residents Detained in Salinas in 1942*

And in 1992, the Nisei achieved another milestone in their recognition. Fifty years earlier, they were supposed to receive diplomas from Watsonville High School, but could not because they were in the Salinas camp. On June 13, thirteen of them were handed their diplomas in a special ceremony.

The local JACL was instrumental in gathering funds in 1965 for the new Watsonville hospital, and also raised all the money needed to buy a building for the league. They have also done much to help the Issei in their old age, establishing the Kizuka senior center and providing activities for them.

The Nisei are now seniors themselves, and the Sansei are picking up where they left off. And the children of the Sansei, the Yonsei, will eventually leave their mark on the Pajaro Valley as well.

It has been a long, hard journey, but at last the Japanese Americans can truly call the Pajaro Valley their home.

### **Editor's Notes**

1. The date of 1948, originally given in this publication is incorrect. The correct date is 1956. Source: Okutsu, James. "Asian Land Laws." *Asian American Encyclopedia*. Marshall Cavendish, 1995. Vol. 1, p.18.

2. Ibid.

**Issei**

The first generation. The Issei were born in Japan. Most immigrated to the United States between 1890 and 1915

**Nisei**

The second generation, the children of the Issei. American citizens by birth, almost all Nisei were born before World War II

**Sansei**

The third generation of Americans with Japanese ancestry, most Sansei were born during or after World War II

**Yonsei**

The fourth generation, the children of the Sansei

**Gosei**

The fifth generation

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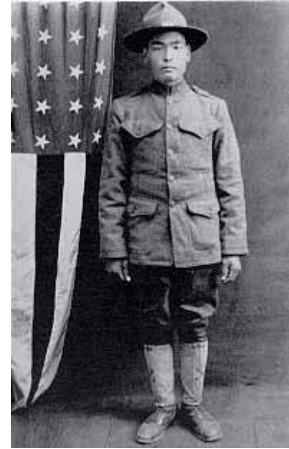
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*Watsonville Buddhist Temple, 60th Anniversary 1905-1966, 1966; and 75th Anniversary 1906-1981, 1981; Watsonville, Calif.*

### Source

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*U.S. Army WWI Issei Volunteer from the Pajaro Valley, 1918*