

CALIFORNIA POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY

SAN LUIS OBISPO

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ethnic Studies Project

INTERVIEWEE: SHIGECHIKA KOBARA AND KIMI KOBARA

INTERVIEWER: Yoshiko Tachibana

SUBJECT: Japanese Americans in San Luis Obispo County

DATE: March 1, 1980

PREFACE

When I came to San Luis Obispo as a student from Japan, I became acquainted with the Eto family. Later, when I began my study of Japanese American history in San Luis Obispo County, I visited with Mrs. Take Eto, the first generation immigrant from Japan; Mr. and Mrs. Masaji Eto, the second generation; and Mr. and Mrs. Alan Eto, the third generation; and their children, the fourth generation, who all live on their family farm in Los Osos.

While I was conversing with them, I became very excited and impressed because, in my mind, I had a vague picture of my mother's family. I felt that my grandmother might be like Mrs. Take Eto, who is ninety-one years old now, and my mother also could be like Mrs. Margaret Eto, since she, too, was born in California, though she returned to Japan when she was small. I have never heard the story of my grandparents' life in America, why and how they came, or why they returned to Japan. Now, however, I could imagine the whole story of my mother's family life.

Later, when I visited with Mr. and Mrs. Shigechika Kobara, I felt the same emotions. I felt I had known them for a long time; I thought that they must be just like my grandparents who had died before I was born. Mr. and Mrs. Kobara's experiences, even their lives themselves, were duplicates of those which my grandparents were supposed to have had. I could hardly control my deep emotions while doing the interview. Later, I drove with them to visit the sites which had been important in the history

of the local Japanese people. We visited Mr. Ken Kobara's farm and the surrounding vicinity, stores which had been owned by the Japanese, and the old Japanese language school which is now used by the Boy Scouts. Time has passed and I can see Arroyo Grande has become bigger now, but, with Mr. and Mrs. Kobara, I am still able to see in my mind the way it was when they were young.

Yoshiko Tachibana

INTRODUCTION

During World War II, about 120,000 Japanese living in the area of the West Coast were relocated to internment camps. According to information provided by Mr. Masaji Eto, a prominent Nisei (second generation of Japanese immigrant) of the Central Coast, around 300 Japanese families resided in San Luis Obispo County before the internment, but only a small portion of them returned to their homes after the war. Among the original Japanese families who returned to the county were the Kobaras, Ikedas, and the Saruwataris, whose interviews form the text and appendixes of this project.

Because of laws relating to land ownership, most of the Japanese families leased their land in the Central Coast and, during the war, the land was leased to other tenants or left idle. Even after the war, many of them were denied the opportunity to renew their leases. Therefore, when they returned, many families had lost the chance to work the land where they had originally settled after coming from Japan. In other words, many of them had lost their first homes in America.

Although there is much information about the history of Japanese Americans, there is very little information about Japanese American history in San Luis Obispo County. The purpose of this paper is to provide information about Japanese American history in San Luis Obispo County through the biographical interview ~~of the Japanese American community~~ which will answer questions about specific historical events such as the evacuation.

This interview was conducted to fulfill the requirements of a Cal Poly class. During the Winter Quarter of 1980, Dr. Arthur A. Hansen, Director of the Japanese American Project of California State University, Fullerton's Oral History Project, was a visiting professor at Cal Poly who designed the class entitled, "Japanese American Evacuation." Requirements of this class consisted of a series of tasks leading to one final product: that is a tape-recorded interview with a selected representative of the San Luis Obispo County Japanese American community.

Because I was familiar with a well-known Japanese American family, the Etos, prior to taking the class, I was able to develop a list of interviewees for the class with Mr. Eto's help. The list consisted of 11 people, two Issei (first generation of Japanese that came to America) and nine Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans).

According to a professor of history at San Diego City College, D. Estes, in his paper, Researching the Local Japanese American Experience or Where Do I Go from Ground Zero?, "perhaps the richest source of information on the local Japanese experience will come from the Issei pioneers and their Nisei children. . . ." Since Issei pioneers are getting fewer and most of them speak Japanese, as I do, I felt it was a great opportunity to interview Issei in order to leave their interpretation of their history for their ancestors.

In preparation for the interview, I read extensively including Japanese books and articles. Also, Dr. Hansen provided lectures and suggested guidelines for interviewing Japanese Americans in San Luis Obispo County on the topic of wartime evacuation. A copy of these guidelines follows:

A. General Guidelines

1. Interview Shape: Since your primary objective is to gain information and perspectives relevant to the evacuation of San Luis Obispo's Japanese American community during World War II, this subject should constitute approximately sixty percent of your total interview. Still, you should recognize that the evacuation, as with any historical event of great moment, cannot be understood in a vacuum--i.e., without reference to causes and consequences. Accordingly, both the prewar and postwar context of your interviewee and the San Luis Obispo Japanese American community should comprise roughly twenty percent of the entire interview.
2. Interview Focus: Throughout your interview, you must keep in mind that your interviewee is both a unique individual and a member of a particular ethnic community. Hence, your task is simultaneously to reveal both a personal and a group biography. Be sure, then, that your interview does not corrupt itself into being merely a personal portrait of a corporate collage.
3. Interview Conduct: Your strategy should be initially to pose general open-ended questions in the hope that the interviewee encompasses specific information you are seeking within his/her own narrative structure. Only subsequently should you avail yourself of the opportunity of (1) raising more close-ended questions respecting desired areas of information not touched upon by the interviewee; and (2) following up areas of information not anticipated in advance by you but alluded to by the interviewee in the course of his/her narrative response to your open-ended questions.
4. Interview Temper: You should be mindful at all times that you are the co-creator of an historical document. This means that you are to take an active part in the interview by asking questions of such a character and in such a fashion as to produce a series of problematical situations for the interviewee to resolve. Do not, in short, allow yourself to become a mere passive audience and permit the interviewee to simply tell his or her story; what you are engaged in is historical inquiry and not merely the tape-recording of historical data.

B. Specific Guidelines

1. Areas of Inquiry for Interview: To impart structure and development to your interview, you should, if possible, take up the following areas in systematic succession: (1) prewar family and personal background; (2) prewar community character and development; (3) immediate pre-Evacuation conditions;

(4) the Evacuation experience proper; (5) immediate post-Evacuation conditions; and (6) postwar personal, family and community situation.

2. Topics of Inquiry on "Prewar Family and Personal Background": You need, at least briefly, to inquire about the history of the interviewee in Japan (if Issei) or his/her parents (if Nisei); the conditions surrounding his/her immigration experience (when, why, how, port of embarkation, etc.), including whether or not entry was legal; his/her activities and whereabouts prior to coming to San Luis Obispo County; and what the interviewee and his/her family did (educationally, occupationally, etc.) during the time prior to the wartime evacuation.
3. Topics of Inquiry on "Prewar Community Character and Development": Since there exists so little in print about the pre-war Japanese American community in San Luis Obispo, you need to apply sufficient resourcefulness in your questioning in this area to allow the interviewee, in effect, to recreate that "lost" world. You need to be particularly attentive to the following sort of concerns: the size and geographical distribution of the community and how this changed during the prewar years (in this connection, you might even want to bring a map of SLO County to the interview and have the interviewee point out specific areas in which Japanese Americans lived and worked); the type of work engaged in by Japanese Americans; the location and nature of any commercial and/or cultural centers for the SLO Japanese Americans; the extent and variety of community institutions (such as the Japanese Association, the Japanese American Citizens League, churches, language schools, prefectural organizations, youth groups, etc.); the formal and informal leadership structure of the community, including the names of specific people who were regarded as community leaders; the manner in which people in the community handled such life needs as birth and death, medical care, marriage and divorce, and the like; the extent to which the community members relied on services provided by larger Japanese American communities on the West Coast like San Francisco or Los Angeles, or even Santa Maria and Santa Barbara (newspapers, marketing cooperatives, educational institutions and other social services); the degree of acceptance and/or patterns of discrimination experienced within San Luis Obispo (economically, socially, politically) and how discrimination was coped with by community members..
4. Topics of Inquiry on "Immediate Pre-Evacuation Conditions": Here you need to explore such items as the following: apprehensions and tensions experienced by the SLO Japanese American community prior to Pearl Harbor, and how these were countered; the impact of Pearl Harbor itself, both on the

interviewee's immediate family and on the community as a whole; whether the interviewee or any of his/her family members were involved in the initial Department of Justice roundup of "suspected enemy aliens" and the reasons given, if any, for their removal from the community; the reaction of the San Luis Obispo County population as a whole after Pearl Harbor (including any groups or individuals that either stood out as "friends" or "foes" of the Japanese Americans); the disposition of businesses during this period of crisis; who served as spokespeople for the community during this interval (like the JACL) and how successful were their efforts viewed by the Japanese Americans; what kind of rumors circulated during this time within the community, and what actions were precipitated by these rumors.

5. Topics of Inquiry on "The Evacuation Experience Proper": This is the focal area of your interview and requires indepth exploration. Some of your questions should treat the following matters: when and how were your interviewee and the community informed of the evacuation; did they participate in the "voluntary" segment of the evacuation, and if so, where did they remove themselves to; if they went to an assembly center, which one and what was it like and how long did they stay there (indeed, how did they get there); what did they do to protect their property upon being notified of their evacuation; if they went to a relocation center, which one and what were their initial impressions of it and their long-term experiences in it; How long did they stay in camp, and what was the condition of leaving camp; did they answer the loyalty oath of 1943 in a way which caused them to be sent to the segregation center at Tule Lake, and if so, what was their experience like there; did they experience expatriation or repatriation to Japan, and if so, what were their impressions of Japan when they went there. (These represent only a few things you should consider asking relative to this area. Obviously, many more specific things need to be taken up. Your objective is to have your interviewee portray vividly this dramatic interval in his/her life, so don't hesitate to ask candid questions like: "Some people have called the relocation centers 'concentration camps.' Do you agree with this terminology when you reflect upon your experience at Manzanar/Heart Mountain/Granada, etc.?"
6. Topics of Inquiry on the "Immediate Post-Evacuation Conditions": Here you need to ask such things as: when did your interviewee return to San Luis Obispo County; did his/her whole family return at this time, and if not, why not; what was the nature of his/her reception by the San Luis Obispo community at large; what was the condition of his/her property upon returning; why did so small a number of prewar members of the Japanese American San Luis

Obispo community return to San Luis Obispo after the war; what happened to those areas within the county which had been occupied by Japanese Americans prior to the war; what arrangements were made by the government or local officials to facilitate the resettlement of returning Japanese Americans.

7. Topics of Inquiry on the "Postwar Personal, Family and Community Situation": Among things which merit asking your interviewee herein are: to briefly compare the pre- and postwar Japanese American community in San Luis Obispo; to describe the way in which they and their family still participate in the local Japanese American community, if in fact they actually do so; to discuss the manner in which the evacuation experience continues to play a part in their lives and that of their family and community; and, finally, to comment on whether they feel such a thing as the wartime evacuation of the Japanese Americans could ever occur again in the United States.

Results of all the interviews conducted by the students in the class would be made available for interested researchers at the Cal Poly Library catalogued within the collection of the San Luis Obispo County Oral History Organization. Also catalogued within the collection are many pictures related to the various interviews.

Each student in the class not only taped an interview with the person they selected, but also transcribed the tape and had the transcript corrected by the interviewee.

I chose to interview an Issei couple of Arroyo Grande, Mr. and Mrs. Kobara. Since the native language of both the interviewer, myself, and the interviewees is Japanese, I translated the interview from Japanese to English.

On March 1, 1980, I met with Mr. Shigechika Kobara at his home in Arroyo Grande, a small town on the Central Coast of California. At the time of the interview, Mr. Kobara was 88 years old and had been retired from farming for many years. His wife, Mrs. Kimi Kobara, was 80

years of age and was also present and took an active part in the interview, adding ideas and helping to explain details. Mrs. Isoko Fuchiwaki, one of the Kobaras' daughters, also was at the home that day and occasionally helped Mr. Kobara clarify his statements.

The interview begins with Mr. Kobara's life shortly before he arrived in the United States in 1907, and follows him to Seattle, to Los Angeles, to Soledad, and finally to Lompoc here on the Central Coast in 1911. During the next 12 years, he worked on farms throughout the area including Guadalupe, Avila Beach, Oceano, and finally Arroyo Grande in 1923 where he was a successful farmer and one of the founding members of the Pismo-Oceano Vegetable Exchange.

In February, 1942, Mr. Kobara was taken to the Justice Department Internment Camp at Bismarck, North Dakota, while his family went to the Assembly Center in Fresno, California. He was eventually allowed to rejoin his family and they were transferred to the Relocation Camp in Gila, Arizona where they remained until 1945 when they returned to Arroyo Grande and resumed farming.

Since that time, the Kobara family has been active in the Japanese Christian fellowship as well as in the agricultural community in this area.

Despite his 88 years, Mr. Kobara is bright, alert and articulate. He seemed to have prepared well, and tried hard to relate his life precisely and chronologically. Though he was initially somewhat cautious, he soon relaxed and seemed eager to share the story of his early life and the role of the Japanese in the culture of this area. The fact that he could do this in his native language no doubt made it much easier as his English is very limited. The closeness which developed between the

people involved soon led to a spirited and fascinating discussion and a sharing of feelings which went beyond the scope of the questions. In this translation, an effort has been made to retain the emotions of the conversation as well as the actual words which passed between us.

I was first introduced to Mr. Kobara by Mr. Masaji Eto, a member of a prominent Japanese family in the area. It is through his efforts that much of the history of the Japanese American on the Central Coast has been gathered, translated, and made available, either in written form or verbally. This information, along with other research items which played a part in the preparation of the interview are listed in the bibliography which accompanies the interview.

The Kobara family is one of many who played an important part in the history of the Central Coast--as Japanese, as members of the small Japanese Christian community, as farmers, and as Americans.

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YT: This is an interview with Mr. Shigechika Kobara and Mrs. Kimi Kobara for the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Department of History, Ethnic Studies Oral History Project. The interviewer is Yoshiko Tachibana. The interview is being conducted at 543 South Elm Street, Arroyo Grande, on March 1, 1980 at 10:00 in the morning. The Kobaras' daughter, Mrs. Isoko Fuchiwaki, is also present at the interview.

Mr. Kobara, you came from Kagoshima, didn't you?

SK: Yes.

YT: About when?

SK: In 1907, around New Year's Day. We landed in Seattle.

YT: Were there many Japanese with you?

S.K.

SK: Yes, there were many with me.

YT: Could you tell me why you came to the United States?

SK: My father's business had failed when I was fifteen, in the second grade of middle school in Japan. My father told me that he could not send me to the school any longer. At the same time, one of our neighbors had planned to come to the United States, so I decided to come with him.

YT: You said you were fifteen at that time. You were still very young.

SK: Yes, I was still like a child.

YT: After arriving in Seattle, did you start working at once?

SK: I was just enjoying myself for about two months. Then a friend who lived in the neighborhood told me about a job, so I became a helper for a Japanese waiter. After I had worked there for about one year, my brother came from Japan. My relatives in Los Angeles had often asked me to come there, so I moved to Los Angeles in the spring of 1908.

Many Japanese were planting strawberries in Gardena where it was very rural at the time. I worked there for one year. After that, I went to Soledad where a friend from my hometown had contracted with

S. K.

the Spreckles Company for a sugar beet ranch. I worked there for about one year. In 1911, a friend of mine and I went to Lompoc and raised onions and potatoes. For three years I worked in Lompoc, but our business failed and we were in debt.

KK: The price of onions was too low.

SK: I came to the sugar beet ranch in Guadalupe then and worked hard to pay off the debt. I worked for Mr. Ooishi for two years. Then Mr. Tomooka asked me to help on his potato farm. I worked for him for five years. In 1920, my wife came from Japan. At that time, Mr. Koyanagi from Kumamoto was working at Ooishi's with me. We left and went to Avila to raise green peas. After two years, we found that our land was too small for two of us to work, so I rented fifteen acres from a friend in Oceano. Now Ken, one of my sons, is living there. Since then, 1923, I have been living here in Arroyo Grande.

YT: Were there many Japanese around here in 1923?

SK: No, not many, but Mr. Saruwatari and Mr. Fukuhara were here in Oak Park planting strawberries. East of here, I was the first one to plant peas which grew well and sold for a good price.

The next year, Mr. Hayashi came from San Francisco and settled next to me as a farmer. In the following year, Mr. Ono came from Pismo to work with me and we earned a lot. Many of my countrymen heard about our success with peas and joined us: Mr. Fukuhara, Mr. Kawaoka,

S.T.

Mr. Hayashi's brother, Mr. Fuchiwaki, my brother, Mr. Saruwatari, Mr. Takeda, Mr. Nakamura, and Mr. Kubo. All together, about nine of us were growing peas.

Before this, around 1921, seven or eight Japanese in Pismo were already planting peas and they established their union and packing house in Oceano. They shipped peas not only to Los Angeles and San Francisco, but also to the East by train. We joined in the union and together established the Pismo Oceano Vegetable Exchange. Through the organization, we were also able to ship the peas to the East.

YT: The company started before World War II; what happened to it after the war?

SK: After the war, almost everyone except Mr. Kawaoka and Mr. Ono came back and continued operation of the company. After several years, however, some of the Issei including Mr. Hayashi and Mr. Ikeda died, and the Nisei, therefore, became the chief members of the company. Since that time, the packing house has been managed by the Nisei.

KK: The Nisei are working successfully now.

SK: Yes, the Nisei extended their lands further than the Issei, and the business prospered.

YT: I would like to go back to the story of your early days. When you

B.H.

first left Japan, did you think that you would ever want to return?
I can imagine that you worked hard in Seattle.

SK: Yes, I borrowed the money for my transportation from my uncle because my father did not have money. After I arrived in Seattle, a man from my hometown encouraged me to become a school student, but I knew I had a debt and I decided to work instead of going to school. I received only a ten dollar per month salary because I was too young to earn the usual wage. The wife of the restaurant owner gave birth to a baby at that time; she already had two children ages four and two, so I was the baby sitter for them for half of a year. (laughs)

YT: Have you gone back to Japan since then?

SK: In 1930, I heard that my father was very sick, so I took all my family with me and went back.

YT: Could you tell me when you decided to become a citizen instead of returning to Japan permanently?

SK: It was after the war. At first, I intended to go back to Japan when I had saved enough money, but since my children did not want to live in Japan, my wife and I decided to live in this country. Also, when I was in Japan in 1930, my leased land, which now belongs to Ken, was put up for sale by the landlord. My friend, Mr. Ono, wrote me about this and urged me to come back.

delete

S.K.

YT: Before the war, you had land and your business was a success.

SK: Yes. The business did well. I rented thirty acres of Hayashi's land. I did not have much difficulty living; I can say that I was rather well-to-do.

YT: How many children do you have?

SK: Four of them, two boys and two girls.

YT: I understand that all the family members of Japanese farmers worked in their fields. Was this true with your family?

IF: No, not all of us.

SK: The year the war began, my first son was in Pasadena attending the university. My second son, a high school boy, and my two daughters went to the relocation camp together. In February, I was taken to North Dakota because I was one of the committee members of the Nihonjin-kai (Japanese Association). In June, a hearing was held there, and I was asked to describe many things in detail. After that, I was released and went to ~~Tulare~~ to join my family in the assembly center. Probably the reason I was released so easily was that I had purchased about \$3,000 in bonds before the war.

YT: The war began in December, and it was in February that you were taken. You were not taken immediately, is that right?

S.K.

SK: Yes. Gradually, the atmosphere was getting worse.

YT: Were all the local Issei taken and interned away from their families as you were?

SK: No, not all of them. About six of the committee members and regular members from around here were taken to North Dakota.

YT: Is Nihonjin-kai the same as the Japanese American Citizens League?

KK: No. Nihonjin-kai was organized in San Luis Obispo, and it usually took care of the local Japanese since there were many of us around Pismo and San Luis Obispo. Some of the members of the committee were first taken and sent to North Dakota or somewhere else.

YT: Did the rest of their families go to ^{Tulare}~~Fresno~~ right after the men were taken?

KK: No, it was April before most of the families put away their belongings and moved to Tulare and Fresno. We settled there, and Papa came back there.

YT: Could you tell me what the situation was at that time? Did you all agree with the relocation or did you just follow orders?

KK: There was no way to do anything about it, so we reluctantly left our home. The atmosphere of the neighborhood was not friendly any more;

D.K.

it was very bad. We believed that if we left our belongings in the house, they might have been burned, so we put them in an Army warehouse.

YT: When you returned, were they all right?

KK: Yes, they were. Some of our belongings we left in one of the rooms of our house which was locked. Precious and important things were in the Army warehouse.

SK: A white Portuguese man was living next to us. We had all known him and had been very close friends since he was young. When we left, he ~~Joe~~ ^{Silveira} ~~Severa~~, rented our land by paying only the county tax. Also, I asked him to keep my house and equipment and tools. He took care of them very well and we got everything back without much damage.

YT: I heard that some of the Japanese lost everything to thieves or had family pictures destroyed and so on. You were quite lucky.

KK: ~~George~~ ^{Joe} had worked on our farm as a tractor driver since he was a youngster. When he heard about our leaving, he said he wanted to be a farmer, so we gave him seeds and rented him a tractor and land in exchange for watching our place. We did not have our house burgled.

YT: After the war, only a few people returned to their own places around

S. K.

San Luis Obispo, is that right?

KK: Yes, and we were the first one who returned.

SK: Before the war ended, an officer of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) asked us to go home because we had land and a house. I came back here with my daughter Isoko in May¹⁹⁴⁵. The atmosphere around here was still bad, so a man from WRA watched us every night.

IF: We slept in the hall because it was more dangerous beside the window.

KK: We stayed in the camp. Papa and Isoko came back to us there and said it was very frightening.

YT: Just because someone was Japanese, they might be treated badly?

KK: Simply, they were just mean to us, weren't they?

IF: They shot guns in the air.

KK: The house which is now Ken's had a hall in the middle. The two of them slept there; they were frightened. The WRA man came every night and parked the car on the bridge and watched the house all night. How kind he was!

YT: Could only certain people come back earlier -- before the end of the war?

S.A.

SK: Probably the government had decided to first release the people who had land and houses. They thought that in this way it might be easier for us to settle again. It was like nothing I had ever experienced before--many hardships and it was threatening at first.

YT: When did the rest of your family return?

KK: In July, just around the end of the war. After coming back here, we listened on the radio when the Emperor declared the war was over. I think the WRA wanted to see how we could adjust returning to life here. We were probably one of the case study families, and Papa and Isoko were the first returnees in Arroyo Grande.

After awhile, some of the people who used to live in the Santa Maria Valley visited us from the camps. They wanted to look around their former homes, but they were turned away by hotels from overnight lodging, so they came and stayed with us. I could not buy much meat, but I served them *miso* soup and rice. There were many who needed such help.

When I went to buy groceries in Arroyo Grande, I was told not to come any more. Then Mrs. ^{Eileen}~~Irene~~ Taylor, who was a president of the Arroyo Grande Women's Club, made a speech at the meeting that was held after we returned and asked the members to welcome the Japanese who would be returning soon. I guess her speech made the atmosphere warmer.

S.K.

YT: Is that so? There were some of whom you were afraid, but there were some good people too.

KK: Yes, there were.

YT: I am still wondering why WRA let you return before the war ended. Do you think that they might have become aware that it was a mistake to gather the people in relocation camps?

SK: I guess that the government presumed the end of the war was coming and that they should let the people with land and homes go first. They hoped these families would recover naturally.

YT: Were you all in the same camp?

SK: Yes, we were in the Gila (Arizona) camp for four years.

YT: Did you get a job in the camp?

SK: Yes. In the camp there were many units including agriculture, so I worked as a farmer.

YT: What did you plant?

SK: Like here, I raised the vegetables which we used at the camp.

S.H.

KK: In the summer they harvested watermelons and *uri*, a kind of squash.
Those who had experience raising chickens worked at the chicken farm.

YT: I can imagine you were thrown into confusion and panic at first.
How long did it take you to get settled in the camp?

KK: The Japanese were so cooperative and quiet that there was not much trouble. It was very hot while we were in Tulare^{Assembly Center} for three months during the summer. Then we went to Gila. The young generation in particular did not want to stay in the camp any longer, so they left for Chicago and Ohio. In the end, many of those left in the camp were older people and children.

YT: I would like to ask some about the Japanese Christian Church in Santa Maria. Was it located there before the war?

SK: Yes, it was there before the war.

KK: We celebrated the 50th anniversary last year.

YT: Is that building the original one?

SK: Yes, it is.

YT: How many people belonged? When it was the most active, was it filled with the congregation? When I visited there last year, I saw only twenty or so.

S. R.

SK: Well, when it was established, there were many devoted Issei Christians -- about fifty. Mr. Minami of Guadalupe and other rich people contributed money, so the building was finally constructed.

YT: Did the people from this area go to the church in Santa Maria?

SK: Yes.

KK: The Japanese could not understand the English sermon if they had gone to the *Hakujin* (Caucasian) church. The Issei Reverend, Mr. Ooshita had been at the Japanese church for a long time, so we attended there.

YT: How many years did it offer the Japanese language service?

KK: We still have a Japanese service now. The *Hakujin* reverend now usually preaches in English on Sunday mornings, but he speaks Japanese when he has the Japanese speaking audience; then the Nisei and Sansei are bored because they do not speak Japanese. Now the Issei do not go to Santa Maria any more because the reverend from Santa Maria comes to Arroyo Grande every other Saturday to teach us.

YT: So now you do not need to go to Santa Maria for your service.

KK: No, we do not, but we go there once in a while on special occasions such as Christmas because that church is the main one.

S.K.

YT: When did the Arroyo Grande church start?

KK: About four years ago. Now we rent one of the rooms of the *Hakujin's* Methodist Church.

YT: Is Reverend Arthur Kamitsuka also a member?

KK: No, he went to the *Hakujin* church in Pismo Beach.

YT: Which is the larger community in San Luis Obispo County, the Christian or Buddhist?

KK: Buddhist is much larger. The Japanese around here mostly came from Hiroshima, Wakayama, and Kumamoto where Buddhism is very popular. I think that fewer than one out of ten is a Christian among Issei, but among Nisei who can speak English better, more are Christians.

YT: In the past, did your Christian church often get together with the Buddhist Church for functions?

KK: In Arroyo Grande, *Nihonjin Hall* was built, and both Christians and Buddhists could use it. The Japanese were a minority, so both religions worked together. We also shared the expenses of establishing a Japanese language school.

YT: Mrs. Kobara, did you become a Christian after you came here?

KK: I used to go to a Christian Sunday school when I was a child. My

S.K.

family in Kagoshima was Shinto, but there was no Shinto shrine here; therefore, I decided that Christ was a god and I became a Christian.

IF: It was very bad if you were a Shinto during the war.

KK: Yes, Shintoism was really hated at that time.

YT: Please tell me about the life here after coming back from the camp -- any hardship, discrimination and so on.

KK: Before the war, the women in my family had never worked in the field; we only cooked. We came back and found that Papa was not a farmer any more, but we had to do something anyway. We did not like to be idle, so we went to ^{Joe}~~George~~, who had worked on our farm, and asked him to give us some jobs. It was hard work such as thinning and was very tiring for me and my daughters because we had no experience working outside. There was not much work in the house, and we could not live without money, so all of us worked for a living.

We used to own many barracks for our Fillipino workers. Several families of friends, including Arthur's papa and the Ikedas, came back from the camps and lived in the barracks and went to ^{Joe}~~George~~'s to work. Every day we worked.

IF: I think the people were forced to leave the camps, weren't they?

S.H.

KK: That is right.

IF: Those who did not have a place to go came to us, I think. The authorities asked us to leave the camps by a certain date, and then they closed the camps. Some of the people, who did not have a place to stay, settled in partitioned rooms in the Japanese language school hall on Cherry Street in Arroyo Grande.

KK: Yes, that is correct.

YT: You grew peas in the very beginning. Did you plant them continuously?

SK: The three of us, Mr. Hayashi, Mr. Ono and I, grew bushpeas for the first three years. They grew very well and were sold at a good price at the market.

Then a salesman at the market asked us to plant a type of polepeas which grew well, had a nice appearance, and sold for a good price around Seattle. We went to a sawmill in Santa Cruz to order sticks for planting. Each of the three of us tried out the polepeas on three acres. They grew well and sold at a high price, so we raised only those peas for five or six years until about 1935. Then we could not plant peas any longer because a certain disease had spread over the peas as a result of continuous growing.

At that time, Mr. Yamaguchi, who managed a nursery in Venice, came

S.K.

and built a greenhouse. He grew seedlings of celery and so we planted celery. Since then we have grown vegetables such as celery, cauliflower and lettuce instead of peas.

YT: How about after the war?

SK: Yes, we grew almost the same types of vegetables after the war. Now the Nisei grow celery, cauliflower, Chinese cabbage, and so on.

KK: When the peas grew to this height -- about two feet -- they became red; that was the disease.

SK: That happened because we grew the same type of peas on the same soil.

KK: Then we substituted celery which is still planted around Oceano and Arroyo Grande, because the soil is appropriate for it. Today the Nisei have become big farmers. They operate huge tractors like that one, of one hundred fifty horsepower, and work expansively and steadily.

YT: Of course, there were no tractors in the early days, were there?

KK: There were horses.

I hated the early days. Once in awhile, I went hoeing, taking my two children with me. The older Issei really had a hard time.

S.K.

When I came to my husband, he worked for Mr. Tomooka and he got up at four o'clock in the morning to feed and brush the horses. I came from Japan and I would not stay in bed when my husband was going to work. I got up and sat on the bed wondering why I came to such a place.

SK: Maybe she came with the belief that America was a nice country. She cried and cried. (laughs)

KK: I was brought up in a well-to-do family in Japan. I could go to girls' high school and a sewing class and I was enjoying myself, but I came to America and found out that my husband did not even own his house yet. I was very disappointed and cried every evening.

YT: When you were told about your marriage as a picture bride, were you able to get information about your future husband from America? How did you decide to marry him?

KK: My husband's house and mine were on the same block, and his father and mine were friends. His father asked my father if he could give his daughter to his son. The arrangement had progressed, and it had been almost fixed. Gradually, I understood what kind of man he was by corresponding with him several times; then I married him.

YT: Where did you land when you first came to the United States?

S.K.

KK: In Seattle.

YT: Did your husband come to see you in Seattle?

KK: Yes, he came to meet me. I remembered his brother, a naval officer, and I found a man who resembled him. I thought that this was the man whom I was about to marry. From the deck I fixed my eyes on him even though I had never met him. This is why it is called a picture bride.

SK: In 1920, the American government was ready to ban the system of picture brides, so I had no choice but to marry then; there was no alternative.

IF: A picture bride is a reasonable way to arrange a marriage. I think that in Europe this kind of arrangement still exists and is practiced.

YT: I think I have asked you almost all my questions. You must be very tired.

SK: Oh, no. You may ask some more if you want.

YT: Did you ever subscribe to Japanese newspapers?

SK: Yes. Japanese newspapers have been established since early days, and I still subscribe to them from Los Angeles.

S. H.

YT: Have you celebrated holidays and seasonal events such as the New Year Days and Obon according to the Japanese traditions?

SK: Yes, we did the same kinds of things as in Japan.

KK: We took both sides. My family got together to celebrate such American holidays as Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Today, we are aged, so we go to our childrens' homes.

YT: How did you do the funeral services?

KK: We gathered in a hall in the Japanese language school and had a service according to the family's or individual's religion.

YT: Is there a Japanese section in the cemetery in Arroyo Grande?

SK: No.

KK: We used to have a Japanese section, but now we are all mingled in a large yard.

YT: I have one more question. When you first came here, were there many American's living here? Did they also engage in farming?

SK: Many Portuguese were living around here, and they were mainly farmers and dairymen.

S. R.

YT: Because of Cal Poly, there were many students, faculty and farmers living around San Luis Obispo, weren't there?

KK: Yes, many Portuguese were there too. When the rains came, many of the dairy farmers became happy and rushed into downtown and enjoyed drinking.

YT: Did you have any meetings or parties with the Americans?

SK: No, almost none at all.

IF: Nihonjin-kai was usually in charge of almost everything for the Japanese.

KK: Because we did not understand English, we were not comfortable among the Americans. The Japanese gathered among the Japanese in the Buddhist or Christian churches and had parties like New Year's parties. We Japanese used to do things with the Japanese community.

YT: Did you go on picnics arranged by *Nihonjin-kai*?

KK: Yes, we did.

YT: I guess those kind of occasions are getting rare now.

KK: We do not go on picnics anymore.

D.K.

IF: Four, five, or maybe ten years ago, we went on a picnic. Groups of friends held parties, but the Nisei do not need these activities now because we can get along with the Americans.

YT: Thank you all for spending this time and talking with me; it has been a very enjoyable time for me.

SK: You are welcome.

Shigehiko Kobara

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