

**JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORY  
IN MORGAN HILL**

**Written by Mr. Brian Shiroyama**

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a small number of Japanese immigrants settled in Morgan Hill mainly to farm. Most came from Hiroshima and Kumamoto. Prunes, apricots and cherries were the main agricultural products. Unfortunately, life in California was not easy as racism was a way of life. For example, Japanese immigrants could not become citizens of the United States, and therefore, could not own land. By 1924, Congress barred all Japanese immigration.

Despite those discriminatory practices, by late 1930's, their decades of dedication and hard work finally began to provide better American-style living for themselves and for their Nisei children. Unfortunately, their lives were dramatically interrupted when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 in February 1942 resulted in the total disappearance of Issei and Nisei from Morgan Hill and all Western states. They (totaling 120,000, majority of whom were US-born citizens) were detained in 10 massive camps operated by the War Relocation Authority. Many lost everything since they were given much less than a month to leave their homes and abandon their farms/businesses. Confinement lasted until 1945. Hardship endured by Issei and their children and their spirit of "gaman" allowed them to persevere.

Upon their release, most had no money and no place to go. Many families including the Hanamoto family ultimately settled in Morgan Hill after trying to start their lives elsewhere. Strawberry sharecropping for the grower named Driscoll became one of the most successful ventures for those who were looking to start a new life. Driscoll wanted the Japanese workers because of their well-established reputation before evacuation as being honest and hard working. Consequently, many worked for Driscoll and succeeded in starting a new life. They lived in

three camps provided by Driscoll, helped each other and gradually regained their living as the Issei did three decades earlier.

After strawberry sharecropping, some Issei and Nisei tried to be on their own. For example, the Hanamoto family was able to buy a kiwi farm. Others successfully grew flowers or operated nursery and farms. In early post-war Morgan Hill, the number of Issei and Nisei was estimated at “a few hundred.”

By late 1950's and early 1960's, many Issei retired and let Nisei run their businesses. Donations from Issei and Nisei enabled the construction of a building in 1967 that became the Morgan Hill Buddhist Community Center.

At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Nisei who had suffered so much and lived through unthinkable hardship are now in retirement. Sansei and Yonsei now take up the leadership positions vacated by Nisei. Life is good again for the Japanese American community in Morgan Hill.

## Strawberry Harvesting in the Madrone/Morgan Hill area during the 1940's - 1960's



Photo of Horace Nishijima picking berries

In South County, strawberry farming became a significant part of the Issei (first generation) and Nisei (second generation) Japanese American economic recovery after WWII.

The wooden push cart and strawberry crate are examples of the type of equipment utilized during strawberry harvesting. The wooden crate and hand cart were pushed along in the furrows between rows of strawberry plants. The fruit was picked by hand and deposited into the crate, as the person moved towards the end of the rows of berries.



Hand push carts were fabricated by each individual farmer, the example the left picture was utilized on the Hanamoto ranch during the 1950's and 1960's. The wooden crate that sits on top of it was made for "cannery/ juice berries", or with 1-pint paper baskets inserted, "market berries".

Photo of a push cart, crate and cannery strawberries



Photo courtesy Kihara family.

Even on a Sunday, strawberries were an important part of the day.

Taken at Madrone Camp 2, in the background Driscoll housing. Kaz Kawaguchi residence is on the left and Hanamoto house is to the right of it.



The Kihara family Madrone Camp 2



Redwood flumes like the one shown in the lower part of this photo were used for irrigation and the wooden corks were use to control the flow of water.



Kameo, Seigo & George Hanamoto 1946



Shoso Hanamoto holds a strawberry crate while standing in a field, circa 1950 s