

JAPANESE AMERICAN LANDOWNERSHIP DURING INTERNMENT: A DETAILED
EXAMINATION OF SELECT REGIONS OF SACRAMENTO AND SAN JOAQUIN
COUNTIES

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COUNTIES

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Abstract

of

JAPANESE AMERICAN LANDOWNERSHIP DURING INTERNMENT: A DETAILED
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Detailed information on economic losses suffered by Japanese American internees is scarce, especially community-specific detail. This study helps to address this problem by examining Japanese American landownership in communities within Sacramento and San Joaquin County during internment. Because of its relevance to economic activity as well as its psychological connection to community identity, landownership is of particular interest in examining the effects of internment.

To develop an understanding of how internment affected real estate owned by Japanese Americans and how Japanese Americans reacted to protect their own interests, this study relies primarily on property and financial records held at county recorder offices and oral histories collected by the California State University Oral History program. Other sources proved vital to compiling lists of Japanese American-owned properties in the studied area, particularly property tax records and the Stockton City Directory.

Internment proved to have a significant and deleterious effect on Japanese American land ownership. All of the regions examined saw a decrease in Japanese American-owned land, generally resulting from economic hardships associated with internment. Whites did not organize to deprive Japanese Americans of their land, and panic sales or extraordinary pressures not related to a reduction in income had little to no effect on Japanese American real estate holdings during internment. Most of the Japanese American land sales that did not ensue from reduced income and financial obligations occurred because of permanent migration that followed removal and internment.

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Date

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II is an event of considerable interest, historical and otherwise.¹ Scholars have focused much of their writing on the significance of imprisoning United States citizens on the basis of race and the sociological effects of internment on the Japanese American community. Academic interest in the subject began during the war; U.C. Berkeley sent a team of sociologists to internment camps to study the effects of incarceration on the Japanese American community.² Despite this attention, few have studied the real property losses suffered by Japanese Americans as a result of internment. Panic sales of Japanese American property and the overall deleterious effects of internment on the finances of internees are frequently mentioned in passing, but this is usually in a way that emphasizes the emotional impact of internment and only intended to complement a larger theme. cursory and superficial conclusions on economic issues are commonplace in part because the widely varied experiences of different Japanese American communities make it difficult to create generalizations that hold true for all internees.

Some interest in evaluating economic losses arose during the push for official acknowledgement of injustice and redress in the 1980s. Until then the big round number

¹ Throughout this study, I use the term “Japanese Americans” to indicate not only United States citizens of Japanese descent, but also any combination of this group and immigrant Japanese aliens. The term “Japanese” will be reserved for situations affecting only non-citizen aliens.

² Dorothy Swaine Thomas and James Nishimoto, *The Spoilage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946).

quoted for Japanese American economic losses during internment was \$400 million. Research by Sandra C. Taylor and others have shown that this amount was not based on any actual data or research; it was in fact either fabricated or the result of faulty assumptions and misunderstanding.³ Congress established the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) in 1980, in response to the growing redress movement. One of CWRIC's tasks was to calculate the economic losses suffered by Japanese Americans as a result of internment. With the limited evidence available, supplemented by gathering a considerable number of testimonies, CWRIC arrived at the still imprecise estimates of between \$108 million and \$164 million in income and between \$11 million and \$206 million in property lost as a result of internment. A study commissioned by CWRIC estimated total uncompensated losses at \$1.2 billion to \$3.1 billion dollars.⁴ Outside their relevance to redress, these large round numbers tell us very little. Important questions of who lost what kind of property and where, when, and why those properties passed out of Japanese American control remain unanswered in the search for an average dollar amount lost by internees.

I set out to study Japanese American landownership during internment to answer those more detailed questions. Investigating the impact of internment on Japanese American landowners tells us much about how internment affected both the stability of an ethnic community's population and its economic health. While daily life in the

³ Sandra C. Taylor, "Evacuation and Economic Loss: Questions and Perspectives," in *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress*, edited by Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H.L. Kitano (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 165.

⁴ Taylor, 166.

internment camps varied little regardless of the region the internees came from, the effects of internment on local Japanese American communities differed widely.

Anecdotal stories dominate the War Relocation Authority's own study of evacuee property, which fails to offer meaningful generalizations that hold true for Japanese Americans across the exclusion area.⁵ Studies of the effects of removal and internment done at a local level can reveal the differences between cities and counties and the variations in how these larger communities dealt with Japanese Americans.

Methodology

I chose to begin with the farming town of Florin, California. Situated in the Central Valley ten miles southeast of the state capital, Sacramento, Florin in the early 1940s had a relatively large and geographically cohesive Japanese American community with a high rate of Japanese American landownership. In addition, the town of Florin itself, a thriving local business district before the war, never recovered from internment.⁶ The extent of the economic impact of internment on Florin, as well as the direct causes of Japanese American property losses, was largely unknown. For farming community like Florin, studying the most important measure of real property, ownership of productive

⁵ Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, by Ruth E. McKee (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946).

⁶ Wayne Maeda, *Changing Dreams and Treasured Memories: A Story of Japanese Americans in the Sacramento Region* (Sacramento: Sacramento Japanese American Citizens League, 2000), 188.

farmland, would reveal much about how internment affected landowners themselves as well as the community as a whole. Such a study would also provide useful detail for understanding historical topics such as California's racist land policies and internment in the context of its role as one of the largest forced separations of United States citizens from their private property.

Uncovering the history of Japanese American landownership in Florin required the use of a variety of records. Sacramento County Assessor's maps proved invaluable in compiling a list of Japanese American landowners up to 1939, as well as confirming the geographic concentration of Japanese American farm owners in and around Florin. Unfortunately, the Sacramento County Assessor's Office kept remarkably poor records throughout the 1940s.⁷ Changes in title and other records affecting property through the crucial years of internment were found at the Sacramento County Recorder's Office, where all land sales in the county, along with most other actions affecting a title, had to be recorded. These records are all available on microfilm, and they supplied the bulk of ownership information used in the current study for the period of internment. Records found at the Recorder's office included documents such as birth certificates, court decisions affecting property, power-of-attorney agreements, and even loyalty oaths. Transcripts of interviews conducted by the Florin Japanese American Citizens League

⁷ Staff at the Sacramento County Assessor's Office and the Center for Sacramento History (formerly SAMCC) confirmed the Assessor's Office began updating the same map book every year in the 1940s, instead of creating new ones, erasing the names of previous land owners whenever a tract was sold.

Oral History Project provided invaluable context, and in many cases revealed the motives and events affecting Japanese American landowners.

Collectively, these records show that internment had a major impact on Japanese American-owned farms in Florin. Twenty-five Japanese American landowners, about one-sixth of the total, sold their land during or as a result of internment and decided not to return to Florin. Those who did return often found farms damaged or misused in their absence. Before the physical removal of Japanese Americans from Florin, the prospect of internment did not provoke a dramatic response from Florin farmers. Panic selling did not infect the Florin Japanese American community. Nor did whites make an organized attempt to acquire Japanese American-owned land. The various strategies used by Japanese Americans to retain ownership of their land during internment proved largely successful. While internment imposed a financial hardship on Japanese American farm owners, it did not force a widespread loss of their land or end Japanese American farming in Florin.

Building upon the study of Florin, I expanded my research efforts to northern San Joaquin County and the City of Sacramento. San Joaquin County, immediately south of Sacramento County, also had a substantial number of Japanese American farm owners. Unlike Florin, however, they were not as geographically concentrated. Japanese American farmers in San Joaquin County also grew a wider variety of crops. Because of the available records, Lodi, a small city in northern San Joaquin County, could also be examined in detail. City landowners in both Lodi and Sacramento faced different

challenges than farm owners. Within city limits, most of the property in Japanese American hands consisted of either family homes or commercial real estate.

Methodology for the City of Sacramento was similar to that employed for Florin. For Sacramento, City Assessor's map books were available through 1941, providing a complete list of Japanese Americans who owned land in Sacramento when the United States entered the war. This list, together with the records at the Sacramento County Recorder's office, enabled me to examine every land transaction during and immediately after internment. The Florin Japanese American Citizens League's oral histories again proved useful, as a few of those interviewed lived in Sacramento before internment. One hundred and thirteen Japanese Americans owned land in Sacramento at the beginning of 1942. By the end of 1945, thirty-two of them had sold their land. However, a fifth of these sales were to other Japanese Americans, and only five properties changed hands in the tense atmosphere after the exclusion orders were issued but before the physical removal of Japanese Americans. Although panic sales of business property were common before internment, these had minimal effect on landownership. As was the case in Florin, no evidence exists of any organized attempt by whites to acquire Japanese American property. Instead, financial hardships imposed by internment account for most of the land lost by Japanese Americans during this period.

Compiling a list of Japanese American property owners for northern San Joaquin County proved more difficult. No assessment records or other comprehensive government documentation could be found outside of Lodi. Instead, the rural sections of the 1942 Stockton city directory supplied Japanese family names that allowed me to

construct a list of potential Japanese American farm owners in the region.⁸ The areas of northern San Joaquin County studied thus represent primarily the rural mail routes served by the Stockton and Lodi Post Offices. In addition to the geographic limitations inherent in this method, my research design also likely omits some farm owners who did not use the rural mail service or whose property was legally held in the name of a city resident. However, a comparison between the number of Japanese American-owned farms identified in the course of this study and the number one would expect to find based on Adon Poli's 1944 study of Japanese Farm Holdings for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics indicates most, if not all, were accounted for.⁹

Research on Lodi was facilitated by city assessment records that displayed property taxes and payment information for the years 1941, 1942 and 1943. The lists of potential and actual property owners were taken to the San Joaquin County Recorder's office and all recorded actions taken by them were reviewed. The wider search necessitated by the lack of assessor's records outside of Lodi turned out to be beneficial, as I uncovered some information pertaining to land leased by Japanese American farmers and some of the larger Japanese American farms in the southern delta. Finally, I was once again able to benefit from a series of excellent oral history interviews, in this case

⁸ R.L. Polk and Co., 1942, *Polk's Stockton (San Joaquin County, Calif.) City Directory* (Monterey Park, CA: R.L. Polk and Co.). City directories were similar to a modern phonebook, but dealt instead with mailing addresses. Compiled from information from the Post Office, they were essentially a complete record of mail recipients in their region. The 1942 Stockton city directory covered four geographical areas: the cities of Stockton and Lodi and the rural mail routes serviced by the Stockton and Lodi Post Offices.

⁹ Adon Poli, *Japanese Farm Holdings on the Pacific Coast* (Berkeley, CA: 1944), Figures 2, 3.

conducted by a consortium of North Central Valley chapters of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL).

Although only a small city, Lodi nevertheless had a compact Japantown area. Fifteen individual Japanese Americans, in addition to two Japanese American corporations and the local Buddhist church, owned land in Lodi. Most of these properties represented family homes. Only two individuals would sell their land as a result of internment, one owner immediately before internment, the other immediately after. In contrast, the rural areas around Lodi and Stockton had a much more active record. Internment resulted in a high number of land sales, roughly one quarter of the fifty-one confirmed Japanese American properties in the rural areas around Lodi and Stockton. At the same time, there were also a considerable number of farmland purchases by Japanese Americans during internment, including several from white farmers. Japanese Americans in the Lodi and Stockton rural areas bought nearly as many parcels as they sold.

Japanese Americans throughout San Joaquin County, along with other Asian Americans, also faced a threat from the State of California that did not materialize in Sacramento County. Beginning in 1944, the San Joaquin County District Attorney's office, seeking to confiscate property under California's Alien Land Laws, filed six cases against landowners identified in this study, five of which were at least temporarily successful.

In a general sense, the experience of all the studied areas was fairly similar. Japanese American landowners with healthy finances before the evacuation order was published managed to retain control of their property throughout the war years.

Landowners who owed debts secured by their property frequently ended up selling their land because of their inability to earn money during internment. Leaseholders and sharecroppers, who operated their own farms but did not own their own land, proved to be the farmers most affected financially by internment. Like many business owners, the abrupt removal of leaseholders and sharecroppers from their communities meant a sudden end to their leases and other business arrangements. Even for internees who owned land and held onto it, internment was a financial disaster. During World War II most farmers earned record profits, enjoying the rare combination of good yields and high prices. Japanese American internees were lucky if they returned to land that had not been mismanaged and only slightly vandalized. However, the legal effort to escheat land under the Alien Land Law represented the only concerted effort to deprive Japanese Americans of their land. While a number of individuals did see the potential to make a quick buck by operating Japanese American farms during internment, only responsible operators experienced in proper farming practices enjoyed reliable profits.

Chapter 2

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The Japanese navy attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Most Japanese Americans in the Central Valley, while worried in the abstract about the nation(s) to which they felt allegiance going to war, did not expect the war to directly affect their lives. To be sure, a few, such as Percy Nakashima, suspected Japanese Americans were “in for a lot of trouble.”¹⁰ Taeko Shiromizu, mother of a newborn baby, wasn’t worried about racist backlash.¹¹ Like many of her fellow Americans, her fear was that Japan might bomb California next.¹²

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order Number 9066, authorizing the establishment of “military areas” from which “any or all persons” could be excluded.¹³ Most residents of Florin first learned they would eventually be evacuated after March 2, 1942, when General John DeWitt published

¹⁰ Percy Shotetsu Nakashima, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Percy Shotetsu Nakashima*, by Henry Yui, January 23, 1992 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1994), 9.

¹¹ In Japan it is traditional for individuals to list their family name first and their given name second. Japanese immigrants to the United States almost invariably adopt the Western naming convention, listing given name first and family name second. All names in this paper are listed given name first and family name second.

¹² Florence Taeko Shiromizu, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Florence Taeko Shiromizu*, by Helen Shiromizu Honda, November 11, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 10.

¹³ Executive Order Number 9066, as quoted in Dillon Meyer, *Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority in World War II* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 1971), xxiv.

Proclamation Number One, identifying the exclusion zone from which all persons of Japanese descent would be removed.¹⁴ Chiyo Shimamoto's father, Kango Mitori, continued working until the day his family left for internment, unable to believe removal would be carried out. She recalled him saying "'Roosevelt's not going to put me in one of those places, because I never did anything wrong.' That's what he would say."¹⁵

Eventually, on the day of removal, his family told him they had to leave now:

My father, he was bent over and prematurely gray with all his hard work that he'd been working, he slowly climbed up into the truck. With tears in my eyes, I watched him. I will never forget that scene. Three years later he died of a heart attack. He never got his pep back after we left for camp.¹⁶

Removal of Japanese Americans from Sacramento and San Joaquin counties occurred during the second half of May, 1942. Although they knew as early as March they would be forcibly evacuated at some point, Japanese American residents of Florin received only about ten days advance notice before the actual day of assembly and evacuation.¹⁷ For the rest of the exclusion zone, the day of departure differed from one

¹⁴ Meyer, *xxiv*. Proclamation Number One established the area from which persons of Japanese descent, including United States citizens, would be prohibited. The exclusion zone included the western halves of Oregon and Washington, most of California, excepting a mountainous area along California's eastern border, and the southern half of Arizona.

¹⁵ Chiyo Mitori Shimamoto, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Chiyo Mitori Shimamoto*, by Arleen Mataga, April 8, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 14.

¹⁶ Shimamoto, interview, 17.

¹⁷ Kiyo Sato-Viacrucis, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Kiyo Sato-Viacrucis*, by Fumiko Deguchi, April 19, 1988 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), 37. Kiyo Sato-Viacrucis recalled that notice of evacuation and instructions were posted in the form of large white signs placed throughout areas where Japanese-Americans lived, but the authorities made no direct contact.

community to another, but almost all internees were faced with two weeks or less notice before evacuation. The community proved remarkably organized and responsive to the government order. George Miyao, whose family lived a few miles away from other Japanese Americans living near Florin, recalled that he never received any official notice from the government, “JACL tell us what to do so we just follow the order.”¹⁸ On January 2, 1945, almost three years later, the West Coast exclusion orders finally ceased to be in effect. Japanese Americans who chose to return to Florin arrived singly or with their families throughout 1945.¹⁹

A History of Discrimination

Well before internment, Japanese immigrants to the United States lived with a wide range of discriminatory laws and regulations. Japanese immigration itself had been subject to increasing restriction until 1924, when Congress banned it altogether. Because this ban included wives of Japanese immigrants, Japanese bachelors hastened to visit Japan to find wives or to arrange for “picture bride” marriages before the law took effect.²⁰ This rush was particularly urgent because cultural preferences discouraged

¹⁸ George Miyao, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with George Miyao*, by Ichiro Nakashima, April 29 and May 3, 1993 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1994), 6.

¹⁹ Meyer, xxv.

²⁰ Miyo Fukano, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Miyo Fukano*, by Gail Matsui, May-June 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 10.

marriage with non-Japanese, and until 1948, California law prohibited marriage between whites and any other race.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, employers valued Japanese immigrants as a cheap source of farm labor, but as more and more immigrants from Japan acquired land and began competing with other farm owners instead of laboring for them, hostility to their presence intensified.²¹ Restrictions on non-citizen landownership began in 1913, when California passed its first Alien Land Act.²² By 1924, California made it illegal for Asian immigrants to lease land under any kind of arrangement.²³ Oregon and Washington followed California in passing similar laws. However, United States citizens could not be prohibited from owning or leasing land. Although federal law prohibited Asian immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens, the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed citizenship for children born in the United States.

²¹ Gary Y. Okihiro and David Drummond, “The Concentration Camps and Japanese Economic Losses in California Agriculture, 1900-1942,” in *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress*, edited by Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H.L. Kitano (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1991), 169.

²² *Ibid.*, 168.

²³ Fukano, interview, 10. While the meaning of landownership is fairly clear, a variety of arrangements can be meant by the term “lease”. The least restrictive arrangement occurred when a Japanese American farmer rented, for a set period, land for a flat rate payable at a defined time, occasionally including restrictions on what type of crop could be grown, and how often. This is what is most often meant by the term “lease-holder.”

“Share-cropping” involved renting land for a set period for a percentage of the harvest proceeds, resulting in a varying income for the land owner depending on how profitable the season was.

A third type of arrangement called for a combination of the other two types of lease. The farm operator owed, on paper, a flat rate to the land owner, but that rate is paid by means of a mortgage on crops. Frequently, only a percentage of the crop would be mortgaged, meaning that in a bad year the land owner might not receive the full rent he expected to be paid.

For the sake of simplicity, in this paper all of these arrangements will be referred to by the generic term “lease.”

Florin resident Tsune Tahara and her husband were Japanese citizens in 1928, and embodied exactly the type of people the Alien Land Act was intended to affect. As *issei* (first-generation Japanese Americans), it was impossible for the Taharas to apply for citizenship.²⁴ Many *issei* living in Florin, including the Taharas, purchased land by using the name of an adult *nisei* (second-generation Japanese Americans) they knew. In Florin, this person was often Yasuji Ouchida, a *nisei* who willingly lent his name to *issei* purchasing property with cash.²⁵ Between 1935 and 1945, Yasuji Ouchida participated in the sale or purchase of no less than thirteen tracts of land.²⁶ Ouchida was hardly the only *nisei* acting as the legal name for Japanese citizens who wanted to own (or lease) land. Multiple *nisei* in each community studied performed this function. In San Joaquin County, Minoru Hayashi owned land for the Akita family, while Mr. Kawada and Mr. H. Shimasaki helped the Fukano family lease land.²⁷ Aya Motoike described her family's

²⁴ While no naturalization process existed for Japanese immigrants at that time, a minute number of *issei* managed to achieve American citizenship because of their service in the United States armed forces during World War I.

²⁵ Tsune Tahara, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Tsune Tahara*, by Marion Kanemoto, April 13, 1991 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1993), 51. Yasuji Ouchida was also known as Harold Ouchida within the Florin community, and is listed in many official records as Y. Ouchida.

²⁶ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 529, page 609; Book 533, page 4; Book 544, page 171; Book 554, page 249; Book 559, page 232; Book 619, page 365; Book 653, page 388; Book 751, page 212; Book 769, page 100; Book 779, page 45; Book 898, page 456; Book 1001, page 268; Book 1036, page 258; Book 1046, page 377; Book 1054, page 262. Some uncertainty in the exact number of transactions Ouchida was involved in results from two tracts of land that Ouchida purchased and sold within a week. These may have been essentially single transactions.

²⁷ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," microfilm, San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, Stockton, Book 827, page 278. Fukano, interview, 10.

arrangement: “Because of the Alien Land Law, a Hawaii-born friend’s name, Sadaki Higashi, was used to purchase the land. He was never actually involved in farming, name only. At the end of the harvest, we would offer an honorarium.... Many people did it that way.”²⁸

Many other Japanese citizens owned land through children who were natural-born citizens of the United States. Although this was common practice, if the child was very young a judge’s approval was necessary for many actions involving the land’s title.²⁹ The Taharas used both adult and child proxies. In 1928 they purchased forty acres with cash, using Yasuji Ouchida’s name. One month later, after the Taharas learned it was possible to keep land in their child’s name, they transferred their farm to their eldest son, Hiroyuki Tahara.³⁰ Similarly, the Akita family transferred their land to their daughter, Hideko Akita, in 1943, after Minoru Hayashi indicated he no longer wanted it in his name.³¹ The State of California tried to attack this type of arrangement when it began escheat cases

²⁸ Aya Motoike, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Aya Motoike*, by Natsuye Bernice Endow, March 20, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 13-14.

²⁹ Sacramento County Recorder’s Office, “On Record,” Book 640, page 223; Book 832, page 490. On August 14, 1937, Benkenichi Mayeda, father of Nichi and Tokiye Mayeda, had to appear in court to obtain a judge’s approval to purchase land for his children’s estate. He would return on July 29, 1940 to obtain permission to lease oil exploration rights to Independent Exploration Company on the same land. The courts routinely approved this type of request.

³⁰ Tahara, interview, 51-52.

³¹ San Joaquin County Recorder’s Office, “Official Records,” Book 827, page 278.

against several Japanese American landowners in 1944, including the teenage Hideko Akita.³²

Enter the FSA

Having decided on the removal of the Japanese from the West Coast, the United States government, in the form of the Western Defense Command under General DeWitt, showed little interest in preserving Japanese American property. Despite concerns voiced by Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy and the Tolan Committee, among other officials, the government engaged in little or no advance planning regarding what to do with the property of Japanese Americans.³³ Eventually, the Western Defense Command and the Treasury Department delegated the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco to protect the internees' business, commercial, and movable property. Opening its first office to handle this responsibility on March 9, 1942, the Bank did so principally by encouraging internees to make their own voluntary arrangements with their property.³⁴ With its late start and hands-off approach, the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco did little to ensure fair deals for business owners liquidating their stock-in-trade or residents selling automobiles or other personal items. The Bank's most beneficial service involved

³² Ibid., Book 889, page 33.

³³ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 14, 17. The Tolan Committee served as the Congressional body responsible for oversight related to internment.

³⁴ Ibid., 24, 27.

the storage in government warehouses of the personal property of 2,983 families who had not disposed of their property at the time of evacuation.³⁵

Japanese Americans also rid themselves of considerable personal property both as a result of wartime regulations on what they could own and out of fear of being viewed as too Japanese, thus coming under investigation by the FBI. Some of the regulations, such as the prohibition on persons of Japanese descent owning guns, might have made sense if they had only been extended to the *issei*, who were categorized as “enemy aliens.” But when the federal government applied these restrictions to the *nisei*, it violated the civil liberties of American citizens. The fear of the FBI was justified. Investigation of Japanese Americans began after Pearl Harbor, and FBI arrested community leaders, Japanese language instructors, and most Buddhist ministers.³⁶ Even though none of the Japanese Americans arrested was ever convicted of espionage, they nevertheless languished in prison without trial.³⁷

Japanese families threw away or destroyed property to protect themselves from suspicion. Lydia Haruko Ota, like many other internees, participated in this destruction, “Radios, guns, Japanese swords were disposed of into the outhouse. The Japanese books

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁶ Alice Yang Murray, *Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 107.

³⁷ United States, *Personal Justice Denied: Report of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians* (Washington D.C.: The Commission, 1982), 28.

and pictures were all burnt.”³⁸ Alone among Japanese Americans he knew, young photographer Richard Shizuo Yoshikawa kept his camera despite laws prohibiting their possession by persons of Japanese descent. He kept it with him in plain sight of army soldiers while being moved from Stockton to the assembly center, and was pleasantly surprised to retain it throughout internment.³⁹

Responsibility for agricultural property was delegated to the Farm Security Administration (FSA). In the short period between March 15, 1942 and May 31, 1942 it accomplished a considerable amount of work. It identified 6,664 farms whose operators were being evacuated. The farms comprised just over 230,000 acres of land.⁴⁰ Although the FSA also suffered from a lack of time to do its work, it employed a much more active and hands-on approach to dealing with Japanese Americans’ property than the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco. The reason for this difference is clear. Although its self-congratulating *Final Report* gives lip service to the protection of Japanese American property, the FSA’s primary intent was to ensure continued agricultural production on farms owned or operated by Japanese Americans. The agency was concerned that

³⁸ Lydia Haruko Ota, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Lydia Haruko Ota*, by Arleen Ota, May 6, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 19.

³⁹ Richard Shizuo Yoshikawa, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Richard Shizuo Yoshikawa*, by Aeko Fenelon, May 26, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 12.

⁴⁰ United States, Farm Security Administration and Lawrence I. Hewes, *Final Report of the Participation of the Farm Security Administration in the Evacuation Program of the Wartime Civil Control Administration, Civil Affairs Division, Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Covering the Period March 15, 1942 Through May 31, 1942* (San Francisco: Farm Security Administration, 1942), 5. Hereinafter referred to as *Final Report*.

landlords, creditors, and purchasers might take advantage of internees because this abuse might come “at the cost of serious loss of agricultural production.” Additionally, having heard of their imminent removal, “there was a possibility that Japanese operators would abandon farm land, would discontinue normal agricultural operations, or would refuse to consummate transfers of their agricultural properties.”⁴¹

The FSA’s first task involved the identification of the affected properties. In the few weeks it operated, it established fifty-six field offices in the four affected states, staffed with Field Agents and other support personnel.⁴² By the end of March, 1942 it had succeeded in identifying most of the pertinent farms and collecting information that included their location, the name of the operators, and a description of the property and its assets.⁴³ Although the task of identifying farms would continue, the FSA began to “recruit through publicity, individual contacts or organizational contacts the necessary qualified operators for evacuated farms.”⁴⁴ In addition to conducting its own search for substitute operators, the FSA also collected information on those individuals who privately arranged with Japanese Americans to take over their farms.

The FSA faced considerable difficulty in arranging for operators to assume control of the affected farms. The planting season for many crops coincided with the removal of Japanese Americans from the exclusion zone, while the harvest season for

⁴¹ Ibid., 2, 3.

⁴² Ibid., 11.

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14.

some early crops, including strawberries, started immediately after internment began. Many Japanese Americans were thus reluctant to transfer their farms until they were convinced removal would actually take place. Even then, many Japanese American owners and tenants resisted working with the FSA because they feared prosecution under Alien Land Laws. Difficulties in finding substitute operators stemmed from the shortage of farmers capable of running farms in the same intensive style used by most Japanese Americans, the tendency of potential substitute operators to wait until the last possible opportunity to squeeze the best possible deal from Japanese Americans in a bad bargaining position, and a growing fear of a farm labor shortage exacerbated by the removal of Japanese American farm workers.⁴⁵

In order to encourage substitute operators to take over farms, the FSA authorized its Field Agents to provide short-term agricultural credit on favorable terms, secured by liens on crops and chattels, and to act as a referral service between substitute operators and the normal agricultural credit system.⁴⁶ In total, the FSA would make 722 loans totaling \$3,434,008. The U.S. Army contributed one million dollars to underwrite these loans, with the rest coming from the President's Emergency Fund.⁴⁷ Despite the availability of government credit, the FSA still had considerable difficulty finding substitute operators for most farms, especially the smaller farms. In many areas, the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16. Although a chattel can be any moveable article of personal property, most chattels referred to in this study were farm tools or machinery necessary for agricultural production.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 17, 39.

agency turned to agricultural processing and marketing organizations to take over multiple properties. These associations, cooperatives, and corporations had a financial stake in the continued operation of their suppliers, and were encouraged to act on their own to find substitute operators after taking control of the property. Many internees also had greater confidence in dealing with these groups than with the government, since they had a long affiliation with these organizations.⁴⁸

Less important in San Joaquin County, this type of arrangement would be the centerpiece of Japanese American land management during interment in Florin. In 1942, with the encouragement of the FSA, the Florin Fruit Growers Association took over twenty grape farms. The association would assume control of additional farms after the FSA passed on its operations to the War Relocation Authority (WRA). The Florin Fruit Growers Association, like almost all of the organizations who assumed control of internee farms, used credit from the FSA to form a dummy corporation, Fruit Farms, Inc., to protect the parent organization from potential losses.⁴⁹

With the exception of collecting on the loans it had made, the FSA declared its work disposing of internee property essentially completed on June 1st, 1942.⁵⁰ The FSA transferred official responsibility for Japanese American farm property to the War

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁹ Okihiro and Dummond, 173.

⁵⁰ FSA, *Final Report*, 43.

Relocation Authority on August 1, 1942.⁵¹ Not hesitant to praise its own work, the FSA declared:

For purposes of historical interest and the record, it should be borne in mind that the undertaking involved, namely that of transferring, during a period of ten weeks, the farming interests of 6,789 farm operators and 231,492 acres of intensively cultivated land is probably one of the most dramatic events in the agricultural history of the United States. No function heretofor [sic] performed in so short a period in the domestic affairs of the United States can compare in magnitude and intensity with the Japanese evacuation in Military Area No. 1.⁵²

The FSA claimed to have effected the transfer of “99 percent” of the impacted farms and to have achieved as nearly as possible “the major objective of the program; namely, the continuation without serious interruption of agricultural production.”⁵³ In reality, despite the FSA’s significant achievements, it could not prevent significant disruption to agricultural production. The FSA’s declared aim to protect “the interests of Japanese farmers in their crops, as well as their chattels and leases” would prove hollow.⁵⁴

As the loans it had made came due in early 1943, the FSA itself became one of the biggest threats to both continued agricultural production and internee property. Because a large number of substitute operators failed to repay the loans they received from the FSA, the FSA adopted “a firm collection policy” of foreclosing on crop and chattel mortgages regardless of the potential effects on continued agricultural production. The policy stated that, “the loans will be collected from any monies available from the

⁵¹ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 41.

⁵² FSA, *Final Report*, ii.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

crop and equipment chattels notwithstanding it may work a hardship on the borrower and possibly mean the other creditors, including the Japanese, may get nothing.”⁵⁵ In many of the lease agreements affected, the substitute operators owed Japanese American landowners a percentage of the crop sales on a sharecropping basis. But because the FSA loans had priority, Japanese American landowners would get nothing if the substitute operator failed to pay the full amount of the FSA loan. In addition, even on farms not owned by Japanese Americans, the collateral for many of the chattel mortgages was equipment loaned by internees to substitute operators at the behest of the FSA.⁵⁶ As Lieutenant Colonel Clark Washburne of the Western Defense Command’s Civil Affairs Division noted to Colonel Karl Bendetsen, “The likelihood of charges that the evacuees have been robbed of their equipment and interest in leases becomes obvious.”⁵⁷

In Placer County, the FSA had turned to the Nash-DeCamp Company to operate several orchards for which it had been unable to find substitute operators. Like other marketing organizations, the Nash-DeCamp Company set up a dummy corporation, Northern Farms, Inc., to protect itself from potential losses. Northern Farms, Inc.’s only assets were leases from twenty Japanese American owners. Northern Farms, Inc., leased the farms on a sharecropping basis and promised the Japanese American owners fifty

⁵⁵ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 49, 53.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 49, 50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

percent of the net operating profits.⁵⁸ Only five of the twenty farms showed a profit for the 1942 season, and by 1943 Northern Farms, Inc.'s only asset was \$2,017.19 held in a bank to be paid to the five Japanese American owners.⁵⁹ The FSA asserted a claim to these funds on the basis that the United States was not a party to the individual leases and that the loan it had made to Northern Farms, Inc. was based on a crop mortgage covering the entire acreage operated by Northern farms, Inc.⁶⁰

Northern Farms, Inc. indicated it would not pay the \$2,017.19 voluntarily, on the grounds that it was not the actual owner of the funds. If sued, Northern Farms, Inc. declared it would seek to interplead as defendants the five interned owners whose farms had showed a profit.⁶¹ A report on the case prepared for the U.S. Attorney General by the United States Attorney in San Francisco states that under California law a mortgage would ordinarily prevail over the interests of the lessor, but:

If the evacuees could be interpleaded, I do not believe that rule would be applied here, however, because of the relation that existed between the United States and the evacuated lessors. The United States evicted the lessors as a military measure. Before evacuation, the United States arranged with Northern Farms, Inc., to lend money secured by a mortgage on the crops planted by the lessors about to be evacuated and required the submission of the leases between the evacuees and Northern Farms, Inc., before the loan was made. The United States thus knew that each lessor was to be paid as rent 50% of the net operating profit of his farm. These leases were part of a Government caused, instituted and approved program. The United States owed the evacuated lessors, all of them citizens of the United

⁵⁸ Ibid., 59, 60.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁶¹ Ibid. In other words, Northern Farms, Inc., intended to convince the court that the five Japanese American landowners were the proper defendants and that the FSA needed to sue them rather than Northern Farms, Inc.

States, a duty to protect their interests in their crops. The United States certainly would not be protecting the interest of the lessors if it asserts a right to the profits of the farms prior to that of the lessors and particularly if, as here, it asserts that the profits of these five farms be applied to the deficits suffered by the other lessors. I believe the United States would fail in a court of equity if the evacuees could be interpleaded.⁶²

In court, internee interests tended to lose when they conflicted with FSA collection efforts. In the state of Washington, William Shimasaki had agreed to sell immature berry and vegetable crops to Farm Management, Inc. for \$4,000, half of which he received immediately from the corporation. When it filed for bankruptcy, the company still owed Shimasaki \$2,000. After the liquidation of its assets, primarily farm equipment, Farm Management, Inc. failed to satisfy the amount it owed the FSA, and the Washington court allowed no other claims, including Mr. Shimasaki's.⁶³

Japanese American Landownership Across the Exclusion Zone

By 1940, Japanese Americans operated 6,118 farms in the Pacific Coast region (California, Oregon, Washington), 5,135 of which were in California. This number represented 3.2 percent of the total number of farms in the same area. Japanese American farms tended to be small, with an average size of 42.2 acres, compared to a region-wide average of 230.6 acres. In total, Japanese Americans controlled only 0.4 percent of total

⁶² Ibid., 62, 63. The Northern Farms, Inc., case was never decided in court.

⁶³ Ibid., 65.

farm acreage in the three Pacific Coast states.⁶⁴ However, in part because of the skill and hard work of the Japanese American farming culture, this was some of the most valuable and productive land on the Pacific Coast. As the FSA reported:

The average value per acre of all farms [in the Pacific Coast states] in 1940 was \$37.94, whereas that of Japanese farms was \$279.96. This difference in value is due primarily to the fact that Japanese agriculture has been a highly intensive and productive enterprise. Three out of every four acres of Japanese farmland were devoted to actual crop production, whereas only one out of every four acres of all farmland in this area are planted in crops.⁶⁵

Japanese American-operated farms were particularly important for several specialty crops. The FSA noted that, “for example, in California, Japanese operators grew 90 percent of the strawberries, 73 percent of the snap beans, 75 percent of the celery, 60 percent of the cauliflower, and 45 percent of the tomatoes.”⁶⁶ The FSA also noted that when the Secretary of Agriculture set wartime production goals for 1942, “it was anticipated that they [Japanese farmers] would produce over 40 percent of all California truck crops.”⁶⁷

San Joaquin County followed the general pattern of Japanese American agriculture in the region; most of the farms located there featured small but intensive operations producing a variety of truck crops. However, Japanese Americans also operated some large potato farms in the southern delta region. In contrast, while Florin

⁶⁴ Poli, 21.

⁶⁵ FSA, *Final Report*, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. “Truck crops” are vegetables and other products produced for transportation to local markets, generally foods that are better when purchased fresh, but spoil quickly.

claimed a few truck farms, the vast majority of farmers there concentrated their efforts on only two crops, grapes and strawberries. The farmland in Florin also featured shallow soil of generally inferior quality when compared to most other farming regions in California.⁶⁸

In 1940, Japanese Americans operated 416 farms in Sacramento County, 205 of which they owned. Florin alone accounted for about half the county's farms held by Japanese Americans. San Joaquin County, which had a much higher tenancy rate, contained 214 farms operated by Japanese Americans, 53 of which they owned. About sixty percent of the farms owned lay within the area covered by the Stockton and Lodi rural mail routes.⁶⁹ San Joaquin County mirrored the rest of the Pacific Coast region with respect to tenancy; the overall Japanese American tenancy rate for the region was 70 percent.⁷⁰

According to the U.S. Census in 1940, the Pacific Coast region contained 112,533 "persons of Japanese ancestry," 45 percent of whom worked in agriculture.⁷¹ Extrapolating from a WRA survey, Adon Poli estimated that 2,300 Japanese Americans owned farms on March 1, 1942. By October 31, 1943, Japanese Americans sold 13.7 percent of these farms to "non-Japanese". Because Japanese Americans purchased a

⁶⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁹ Poli, Figures 2, 3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 23.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1. Arizona, also part of the restricted area, is frequently ignored by government reports on the agricultural effects of internment, since only 52 Japanese Americans operated farms in that state. FSA, *Final Report*, 6. The area covered by Poli's report also differs from the exclusion area by including lightly populated eastern Oregon and Washington.

number of farms equaling 3.4 percent of total ownerships, Poli estimated that Japanese Americans had retained 89.7% of their earlier farm properties at the beginning of November, 1943.⁷² With the cessation of leasing activity as a result of internment, Poli predicted, “the principal remaining interest of the Japanese in agricultural land within the West Coast evacuated area, therefore, will be that retained through their ownerships, which amounted to about 27 percent of their total pre-war holdings.”⁷³ Certainly some former lessees would return to farming after internment, but increases in land prices and rents—in addition to decreases in Japanese American financial resources during internment—would mean that prospective lessees would be in a significantly worse bargaining position after internment.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19.

Chapter 3

FLORIN

During the interwar period, Florin distinguished itself as a farming community known primarily for its grape and strawberry crops. Other commercial crops grown in Florin by Japanese-American farmers included hay, wheat, and a variety of vegetables, but grapes and strawberries easily outweighed all other crops combined in terms of profitability and economic importance to Florin.⁷⁴ Grapes were the highest value crop grown in the area, but it could take several years for grape vines to mature and begin bearing fruit.⁷⁵ Virtually all of the grapes grown in Florin belonged to the Tokay variety. Most were sold as table grapes, although there were at least two wineries purchasing grapes from Florin.⁷⁶ The vines required pruning by skilled laborers every year to maintain their productivity. In Florin, most, but not all, of the farmers and laborers skilled in pruning were of Japanese descent.

Strawberries, the other major crop grown in Florin, could be harvested the same season in which they were planted. Frequently grown between rows of immature grape vines or in areas unsuitable for grapes, strawberries required more labor than grapes, but the work—primarily weeding and picking—could be performed by unskilled laborers.

⁷⁴ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," microfilm, Sacramento County Recorder's Office, Sacramento, Book 747, page 359 and Book 758, page 410.

⁷⁵ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 94.

⁷⁶ Alfred Iwao Tsukamoto, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Alfred Iwao Tsukamoto*, by Kinya Noguchi, June 2, 1992 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1995), 15-17.

Many Japanese immigrants to Florin first found work laboring in strawberry fields. One such immigrant was Tsune Tahara, a woman who emigrated from Japan in 1916. She had recently married her second husband, who had returned to Japan from Florin with the ashes of his first wife, who had died of stomach cancer.⁷⁷ As the daughter of a samurai, Tsune initially found hard physical labor in the strawberry fields very difficult. The Taharas nonetheless saved money for twelve years, working on both white and Japanese-American-owned orchards and farms. In 1928 Tsune and her husband finally managed to purchase a forty-acre farm containing a vineyard and land for strawberries.⁷⁸ The pattern shown here by the Taharas was a common one for *issei* landowners. The vast majority of Japanese immigrants arrived in the United States with little to no capital, and those who found ways to purchase farms generally did so after long years of hard work and saving. In contrast, many *nisei* who genuinely owned their own property either had help from their family or saved enough money to purchase land in a much shorter period of time because of increased earning potential due to their education or language abilities.

The Japanese-American community in Florin did not exist separately from the larger community. To be sure, some *issei*, especially those who labored under a Japanese American supervisor, had minimal interactions with whites because of language and cultural barriers.⁷⁹ In contrast, the *nisei* generally had white friends and acquaintances they knew well. Within the school system, officials segregated grade schools, but not

⁷⁷ Tahara, interview, 21, 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 91.

secondary schools. Florin represented a higher concentration of Japanese American farms than could be found in San Joaquin County, but Japanese American farms were geographically interspersed with white farms in Florin. Japanese-Americans and white Americans thus got to know each other as neighbors. Bob Fletcher remembered the childhood joy of purchasing fresh strawberries from a neighboring Japanese-American farm during harvest season.⁸⁰ Still, the establishment of Japanese-owned shops produced some discord in a community that generally enjoyed racial harmony. According to Alfred Tsukamoto, white merchants emerged as the most prejudiced residents of Florin after they lost considerable business when Japanese-owned shops opened in Florin.⁸¹

Most interaction between Japanese-Americans and whites occurred for commercial reasons. Land was bought and sold between Japanese-Americans and whites, and the various growers associations all had Japanese-American and white members. The most common form of Japanese-American and white interaction was white landowners employing Japanese laborers for pruning, weeding, and harvesting grapes and strawberries. Throughout the Depression, Percy Nakashima, whose parents owned fifty acres of land in his name, led a crew of largely *issei* grape harvesters for George Carlisle every year after the strawberry season ended. They developed a close friendship, and

⁸⁰ Robert Fletcher, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Robert and Theresa Fletcher*, by Elizabeth Pinkerton, April 1995 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1995), 12.

⁸¹ Alfred Tsukamoto, interview, 19.

George Carlisle, like many white friends of Japanese-Americans, would help the Nakashimas preserve their land during internment.⁸²

Before Internment and Coping Strategies

In Florin, no widespread sale of Japanese-American owned land occurred between Pearl Harbor and the removal of Japanese-Americans from the exclusion area. The experience of Florin contradicts anecdotal accounts of panic sales of property reported in other communities.⁸³ Prejudice aroused by the war and the threat of evacuation seem to have had the opposite effect on Florin landowners. Although several purchases and sales of land by Japanese-Americans took place in 1941, only a handful of transactions transpired in 1942. The considerable uncertainty among Florin farmers about when they would be forced to evacuate, and whether they would have time to harvest the strawberry crop, may have actually encouraged caution rather than panic.

Although they knew evacuation was coming because of Proclamation Number One, Florin farmers had no more than ten days of warning before the departure date. They nonetheless continued working as usual until the army posted official notice of evacuation. Unfortunately for the strawberry farmers, evacuation occurred just before harvest time. Percy Nakashima echoed many of the Florin Japanese-Americans in describing the pain and financial loss resulting from leaving a season of work to rot on

⁸² Nakashima, interview, 8-10.

⁸³ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 9, 17.

the fields.⁸⁴ Even though they expressed concern about evacuation and the harvest, Japanese-American farmers in Florin did not experience any special pressure or opportunity to sell their land.

Masao Yamamoto sold twenty-five acres to William Rauser for \$2,000 on May 9, 1942, the only Japanese-American landowner in Florin to sell his land shortly before internment.⁸⁵ Providing a counterpoint to this sale, one enterprising Japanese-American landowner named K. Tsuda purchased a second house with a mortgage from Capitol National Bank on May 18, 1942.⁸⁶ These were the only voluntary land transactions by Japanese-Americans in 1942, but a few unfortunate farmers also had their land foreclosed. K. Sugimoto lost his twenty acres of land to foreclosure in April 1942.⁸⁷ This unhappy event provides some evidence that the price of land in Florin did not collapse because of the threat of internment. Sugimoto's twenty acres sold in a foreclosure auction for a high bid of \$700 dollars; he had purchased the same land in 1936 for \$850.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Nakashima, interview, 9.

⁸⁵ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 956, page 779. Without knowing the quality of the land, including the presence of farm buildings or a home, it is impossible to tell if \$2,000 constituted a fair price for Masao Yamamoto's twenty-five acres. Judging from other sales in the area with reported prices, it could be anywhere from under half the normal value (for quality land with improvements) to a little above market value (for unimproved farmland without an existing orchard or vineyard).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Book 945, page 201. K. Tsuda, who also owned a farm, had previously purchased a newly built home for resale. He would also make a small profit on this house, whose purchase was recorded as Florin was being evacuated.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 956, page 31.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, Book 956, page 32.

Internment presented several threats to the property of Japanese-American residents of Florin. The chief worry involved paying yearly property taxes.⁸⁹ Many of the leases and other property arrangements used by Japanese-American landowners from Florin during internment specifically sought to address this problem. Property mortgages were not an issue for most Florin farms; although two foreclosures occurred in 1942, there were no other foreclosures for the duration of internment.⁹⁰ Several farms did have outstanding debts in the form of crop mortgages. These mortgages were small short-term loans to farmers using crops still growing in the fields as collateral. While not a direct threat to Japanese-American farm ownership, the obligation to pay off the crop mortgages added financial pressure on Japanese-Americans unable to earn income in camp. Considerable worry among Japanese-American residents of Florin also ensued over the safety of their personal possessions and valuables. Many evacuees, short on time because of the hurried evacuation notice and their frantic efforts to harvest part of the strawberry crop, hastily stored items, especially furniture, in attics, neighbors' houses, or community churches.⁹¹

Japanese-American landowners who arranged leases with close white friends from the Florin community suffered the least damage from internment. Most of the households that managed to arrange these leases included an adult *nisei*. This was a

⁸⁹ Tahara, interview, 45.

⁹⁰ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 956, page 32; Book 944, page 471.

⁹¹ Dorothy Love Mack, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Dorothy Love Mack*, by Jim Carlson and Lynn Kataoka, April 28, 1991 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1991), 28.

direct result of second-generation Japanese-Americans' superior English skills and network of friends outside of the Japanese-American community. Percy Nakashima "arranged with our most trusted Caucasian friend, George Carlisle," a lease giving Carlisle full authority to operate the Nakashima's farm.⁹² The duration of the lease was "from the date of the Army evacuation" until the family "returns to take possession of the... property." The lease obligated Carlisle to pay the taxes due on the Nakashima's property.⁹³ Three other families would also turn their property over to Carlisle under the same terms, with two of these leases arranged at Percy Nakashima's urging.⁹⁴ While Carlisle and the families he leased from drew up proper and formal contracts that were notarized and recorded, many internment leases lacked such legal niceties. Alfred Tsukamoto entered into a verbal deal with Robert Fletcher, using the lure of wartime prices to convince Fletcher to quit his job as a state fruit inspector and lease the Tsukamoto farm and two other farms adjacent to it.⁹⁵ For many Japanese-Americans, white friends within the Florin community helped to limit damages suffered as a result of internment.

Japanese-American landowners often negotiated leases with personal acquaintances on a completely informal basis, and thus did not file these arrangements with the Sacramento County Recorder's Office. The post-war oral interviews conducted

⁹² Nakashima, interview, 10.

⁹³ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 963, page 30.

⁹⁴ Nakashima, interview, 10-11.

⁹⁵ Alfred Tsukamoto, interview, 18.

by the Florin JACL reveal the nature of these leases. Fumiko Deguchi recalled that her family's farm was informally leased to a crew foreman who had previously been employed by the Deguchis, and she lists three other families who also leased their land to former white employees.⁹⁶ Ms. Deguchi is less grateful to the tenants that leased her family's land than Percy Nakashima, noting that while they upheld their promise to pay property taxes and keep up the farm, the tenants also made large profits during the war years from high grape prices.⁹⁷ Still, leases between Japanese-American landowners and members of the Florin community well known to them served as the most successful property-management solution to internment. Unfortunately, these leases were exceptional rather than common.

The most common method of securing land during internment involved Japanese-Americans giving power-of-attorney to the Florin Fruit Growers Association (FFGA), a grape cooperative whose membership included the vast majority of grape farmers in Florin.⁹⁸ Because Japanese American farming techniques made Florin's poor soil profitable, the scarcity of individuals with similar expertise after evacuation ensured the FSA had a particularly difficult time finding substitute operators.⁹⁹ The agency thus enlisted the FFGA to assume control of Japanese American farms. The FSA loaned Fruit

⁹⁶ Fumiko Deguchi, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Fumiko Deguchi*, by Kiyoko Sato-Viacrucis, April 29, 1988 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1992), 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹⁸ The acronym FFGA is not used in any of my sources, but I include it here for the reader's convenience.

⁹⁹ FSA, *Final Report*, 29.

Farms, Inc., a dummy corporation controlled by the FFGA, \$148,471 to cover operating expenses. This distribution amounted to fifty percent more money than other loan issued by the FSA.¹⁰⁰

Virtually every Japanese-American farmer growing grapes who did not arrange a personal lease signed a power-of-attorney agreement with the FFGA. A total of fifty-four Japanese-American farm owners, about forty percent of the Florin total, entered into this kind of arrangement. The standardized agreement gave the FFGA full authority to operate or lease the farms involved, essentially bestowing it with every conceivable power except right to sell off the land.¹⁰¹ The Association turned around and attempted to sub-lease as many of the farms as it could, using the rents it collected to pay the property taxes of all the farms it controlled. Japanese-American farmers whose farms were leased saw no return from rents.¹⁰² Like the power-of-attorney contracts, the lease agreements offered by the FFGA were also standardized. The lease allowed full use of the property in question in exchange for rent and proper maintenance of the farm and its equipment. The return of the farm owner terminated the leases, but the agreements guaranteed the lessee's right to profits on any crop cultivated in the year the lease was terminated.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Table 12.

¹⁰¹ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 941, pages 78-80, 105-106, 270; Book 956, pages 21-32, 179, 265; Book 1035, pages 306-309, 319-329, 331-358, 460, 487, 495. Some other small cooperatives filled a similar role during internment, but they were never responsible for more than a few farms.

¹⁰² Miyao, interview, 7.

¹⁰³ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 1035, page 487.

Although the leasing agreements signed by the FFGA were standardized, the quality of the tenants the association contracted with varied considerably. Alfred Tsukamoto, the sole Japanese-American serving on the Florin Fruit Growers Association's five-member board, complained that:

some of the trustees rented the best producing vineyards to their relatives – and then the least producing vineyards they hired somebody to run it in a haphazard way. You know, there were a lot of people from Oklahoma who came and stayed one season and then they left. It was very hard to deal with them.¹⁰⁴

Clearly, the Association had difficulty finding any tenants for many of the farms in its charge, and in many cases it leased farms to lessees from outside Florin who had little knowledge of strawberry or grape farming. In most cases, out-of-state tenants earned whatever value they could from a year or two of grape harvests, without properly tending the vines. The tale of Masato Nakano's farm showcases the short-term emphasis of many of the tenants leasing Japanese-American farms. The Association first leased Nakano's land to Jacob Haas for the 1943 growing season, filed a quit claim action in the beginning of 1944, and finally leased the land again to Jerome Kara for the 1945 growing season.¹⁰⁵ Japanese-American farm owners had little knowledge of or impact on the leasing process.

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Tsukamoto, interview, 17. Tsukamoto anticipated this problem while serving on the Florin Fruit Growers Association's board, which was one of the factors that led to Tsukamoto's recruitment of Robert Fletcher to lease the Tsukamoto farm.

¹⁰⁵ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 1035, page 259; Book 1041, page 140; Book 1102, page 234. A quit claim agreement or lawsuit serves to terminate a lease agreement or other arrangement that would otherwise remain in force.

When asked whether tenants had rented or leased his land, George Miyao responded, “the Florin Fruit Grower says they cared of that. I don’t get nothing.”¹⁰⁶

Some Japanese-American residents of Florin arranged for more traditional power-of-attorney agreements in order to manage their affairs during internment. Many lawyers in the Sacramento area held power-of-attorney for Japanese-American clients, giving them full ability to sign contracts or otherwise act on their clients’ behalf.¹⁰⁷ Japanese-Americans who relied on a Sacramento attorney during interment found these agreements useful. For one thing, they did not have to bring documents cross-country to be signed and notarized in internment camps.

Most Japanese-American landowners in Florin who did not grow grapes failed to find anyone willing to lease their land during internment, although the large number of informal leases and arrangements makes it difficult to know exactly how many Japanese-American landowners made no special provision for the care of their land. Even the vineyards that were leased or taken over by the FFGA were not always farmed in the same manner. For instance, the original operators had frequently grown strawberries or other truck crops between the rows of grapes to ensure profitability. Even those substitute operators who properly tended the vines rarely continued this practice.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Miyao, interview, 7

¹⁰⁷ Sacramento County Recorder’s Office, “On Record,” Book 972, page 202. The full text of the agreement between Yeneto Gotan and W.M. Jenkins is representative of power-of-attorney agreements signed by Japanese-American farmers, excepting those signed with the Florin Fruit Growers Association.

¹⁰⁸ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 94.

During and After Internment

In January 1943, the WRA evacuee property supervisor, who had previously worked for the FSA, reported that the attempts by the FSA to find substitute operators for Florin had “met with little success. It was almost impossible to secure operators to farm these ranches in the way that the Japanese had done. Consequently the strawberry acreage dropped from approximately 1600 acres to probably less than 200 acres.”¹⁰⁹ By the spring of 1945, only thirty acres of strawberries remained under cultivation.¹¹⁰ Grape production also declined, although not as dramatically. In 1942, about half the normal crop of grapes was harvested, in part because of the severe labor shortage. Local estimates put the number of Japanese Americans evacuated from Florin at 2,000 or 2,500.¹¹¹ Most of the evacuees were not members of a family that owned its own farm, but were laborers or lease-holders. In fact, because Japanese Americans were the largest source of labor in Florin, many white-owned farms also struggled to operate after evacuation. The credit offered by the FSA in 1942 was not available in later years, and despite the efforts of the FFGA, Florin grape output would continue to fall during the war.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 97.

¹¹¹ Mack, interview, 32; Fletcher, interview, 44. The United States Army split Florin into four evacuation zones, making it impossible to obtain official evacuation numbers exclusive to the farming area around Florin.

¹¹² WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 95.

Virtually all of the Japanese-American land sales in Florin resulting from internment occurred after evacuation, usually in late 1943 and early 1944. Most of the internees who sold their land chose to sell all of it; few sales involved part of an owner's property.¹¹³ In total, approximately twenty-two Japanese-American farms were sold during internment, about one-sixth of the total owned by Japanese-Americans before evacuation.¹¹⁴

Little evidence exists of fraudulent pressure to sell land. The one exception comes from Kiyō Sato-Veracruz, who recalled that her father sold ten of his twenty acres of land to Artz and Cook Realty, which had sent him a letter during internment warning that those ten acres would be seized for wartime use if Mr. Sato refused to sell.¹¹⁵ Kiyō Sato-Veracruz is certain this claim was fraudulent, but it should be noted that Japanese-Americans concluded only one other sale of land to Artz and Cook Realty during internment. No obvious pattern of repeat fraud thus emerges.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Sacramento County Assessor's Office, "Sacramento County Parcel Map Book, 1939," seven volumes, (Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center, Sacramento); Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 1042, page 445; Book 1046, page 371; Book 1054, page 262; Book 1080, page 377.

¹¹⁴ Uncertainty in the precise number of farms sold is due to several tracts of land sold by Yasuji Ouchida, and the difficulty in knowing which tracts were genuinely his and which he owned in name only.

¹¹⁵ Kiyō Sato-Veracruz, interview, 107.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108. Artz and Cook was a large, respected real estate company that had been established in Sacramento County for well over a decade. Its solid reputation could account for Mr. Sato's belief in their warning. The ten acres they demanded abutted railroad tracks, which was the reason given for their importance. While it is possible that the threat of wartime seizure was legitimate, it is highly unlikely given the land was never transferred to the United States government. In addition, land needed by the Army or other government agencies for wartime

One of the reasons for the relative success of Florin Japanese-Americans in preserving ownership of their land was the nature of their holdings. Farmland's value is dependent on the quality of the crop it can produce each year, as well as the value of improvements such as barns, wells, and houses. Business owners who did not own the land their shop rests on had little choice other than to sell their business and goods. Farmers in Florin could reasonably expect most of their property to survive internment. Considered in this light, it makes sense few Japanese-American landowners in Florin sold their land. S. Sakamoto cultivated a variety of fresh vegetables for his truck farming business in addition to beans and sugar beets. In May, after the date of evacuation was announced, Sakamoto sold his business and his vehicle, but he kept his farm in Florin.¹¹⁷ Other farmers also sold their cars or tractors, either in anticipation of looting or for money they needed during internment.¹¹⁸ Those who didn't sell their vehicles and machinery and also didn't have a tenant to protect their property found their vehicles stripped for parts or stolen after returning to Sacramento.¹¹⁹

Although most Japanese-American farm owners retained their land through internment, few of their farms remained unscathed. Looters pillaged homes, thieves and

purposes generally was purchased through eminent domain proceedings, which did not take place here. Mr. Sato received payment of \$175 an acre. It is difficult to tell the market price for quality farmland at this time, but a rough guess based on other land sales suggests Mr. Sato received somewhere between forty to ninety percent of the true value.

¹¹⁷ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 747, page 596; Book 758, page 410; Book 948, page 355.

¹¹⁸ Nakashima, interview, 12.

¹¹⁹ Sato-Viacrucis, interview, 109.

vandals stole or destroyed farm tools and implements, and negligent or careless tenants damaged many of the vineyards. Recalling the exodus of Japanese Americans from Florin, the WRA evacuation property supervisor reported, “the train in which the evacuees were leaving had not yet left before people from various parts of the county began to pilfer their homes and ranches, breaking windows, filling wells with debris.... The County Sheriff was unable to do anything about this.”¹²⁰ George Miyao recalled that upon returning to Florin, he found his trucks stolen and his tractor stripped for parts. In a house emptied by looters, Miyao struggled simply to acquire a pan and some rice to feed his family.¹²¹ In addition to the loss of personal property, Miyao’s farm itself had lost \$860 of its assessed value, twelve percent of the prewar total.¹²² The WRA reported that looters thoroughly plundered abandoned houses, taking doors, window frames, sinks, and even floorboards.¹²³ The damage was not limited to private residences. Japanese-American churches, where many internees from Florin stored their furniture and possessions, likewise were looted or destroyed. Checking on the belongings of another

¹²⁰ Wayne L. Phelps, as quoted in *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 95-96.

¹²¹ Miyao, interview, 17-19.

¹²² Sacramento County Assessor, “County Assessment Records – Real Estate and Improvements,” Florin S.D., Miyao. Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento.

¹²³ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 96.

family, Kiyō Sato-Viacrucis discovered that arsonists had burned Mayhew Baptist Church to the ground.¹²⁴

Careless tenants were another source of destruction. The Taharas, who had allowed the Florin Fruit Growers Association to administer their farm during internment, returned to find their property in terrible condition. Their vineyard, like the rest of the farm, showed signs of extreme neglect.¹²⁵ In addition to losing their belongings, the Taharas found their house in horrible shape. A tenant leasing two farms had stayed in the neighboring Boy house and used the bedrooms in the Tahara house to raise chickens.¹²⁶ County tax receipts show that the Tahara property was valued at \$2,640 in 1943. Damage to improvements during internment reduced the assessed value to \$2,300.¹²⁷ Kiyō Sato-Viacrucis found similar damage to her family's farm. Their walnut orchard was fine, but the vineyard was "half-dead", and cows allowed loose on the farm had caused considerable harm.¹²⁸

Incomplete records of the assessed value of real estate in Sacramento County provide some additional evidence for the destruction that occurred on many Florin farms.

¹²⁴ Sato-Viacrucis, interview, 97. Kiyō Sato-Viacrucis also suspects Japanese-American possessions had been looted prior to the fire, since no sign of ovens, stoves, or other metallic items survived the fire.

¹²⁵ Tahara, interview, 69.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹²⁷ Sacramento County Assessor, "County Assessment Records – Real Estate and Improvements," Jackson S.D., Tahara.

¹²⁸ Sato-Viacrucis, interview, 98. Kiyō Sato-Viacrucis and Tsune Tahara both use the phrase "half-dead" in referring to their families' vineyards. It is unclear whether they mean half of the vines were completely dead or if all of the vines were in very poor health.

These documents list a land value, improvement value, and a total value for a particular property for the years 1943 through 1947. Most records show little to no change in the value of the property, but many Florin properties owned by Japanese Americans show revision downward in the form of a crossed-out value in 1943 or 1944 accompanied by a revised, lower value. In 1943, for instance, Susumu Taniguchi's 17.5-acre farm had a land value of \$630 and an improvements value of \$950, for a combined assessed value of \$1,580. In 1944, the improvements value dropped to \$400, bringing the total value down to \$1,030. This remained the value until 1947, when Taniguchi apparently rebuilt some improvements, raising the improvements value to \$850 and the total value to \$1,480.¹²⁹

Another record provides one of the few bits of evidence of a Florin resident experiencing difficulty paying taxes. Kimiye Hayashida's twenty-acre farm, which lost almost half of its improvements value in 1943, was assessed to the State of California in September of 1943 instead of Hayashida. On other forms, changes in the assessee represented a permanent change in ownership, but in this record the assessee is changed back to Kimiye Hayashida with the note "redeemed, added to 1946 rolls."¹³⁰ The most likely explanation is that in the chaos of 1942, Hayashida failed to pay taxes and the property was confiscated. When the tax bill was later satisfied, Hayashida regained control of the property.

¹²⁹ Sacramento County Assessor, "County Assessment Records – Real Estate and Improvements," Enterprise S.D. Taniguchi. For most farms, the assessed value of the property was probably lower than the actual market value.

¹³⁰ Ibid., Pleasant Grove S.D., Hayashida.

The forty-acre farm owned by Yoneko, Teruko, and Masao Gotan is the only Japanese American property in Florin to show an increase in improvements value during internment, increasing from \$1,910 in 1943 to \$1,960 in 1944, presumably because of the work of an industrious tenant.¹³¹ Except for the Gotan farm, most of the Japanese American records in Florin show no change, a minor decrease in improvements value, or a major decrease in improvements value of up to sixty percent of the original total.

The few fortunate Japanese-American residents of Florin who returned to undamaged farms were those who had arranged personal leases with white residents of Florin. Mary Tsukamoto, for one, expressed her gratitude to Robert Fletcher for preserving the Tsukamoto farm during internment.¹³² Fletcher, on the other hand, felt bad that a few possessions had once been stolen from the Tsukamoto house while he had been out.¹³³ Similarly, the Deguchi family lost a few items to theft, but Fumiko Deguchi recalled that they returned to Florin to find their tenants had already moved out, cleaned their house, and left flowers to welcome the Deguchis home.¹³⁴ A few Japanese Americans found their property safe-guarded by strangers. Yoneko Hamamoto recalled that she and her husband arranged for the McClatchy Real Estate Co. to lease out their house. The unnamed real estate agent managing their house insured all of the Hamamoto's possessions and warned the tenants that if they stole anything they would be

¹³¹ Ibid., Enterprise S.D., Gotan.

¹³² Mary Tsukamoto, *We the People: A Story of Internment in America* (Elk Grove, CA: Laguna Publishers, 1988), 204. Mary and Albert Tsukamoto were married.

¹³³ Fletcher, interview, 61.

¹³⁴ Deguchi, interview, 8-9.

fighting an insurance company rather than a Japanese American owner. Yoneko Hamamoto expressed her deep gratitude to be able to come home to an undamaged house with all her possessions intact.¹³⁵

None of the Japanese landowners who returned to Florin and managed to keep their land through internment sold it in the two years immediately following their return, despite hardships they faced resuming normal operation of their farms. Beyond the neglected farms and stolen or destroyed property, some of the Japanese-Americans who allowed the FFGA to run their farms had to wait for tenants to leave. Japanese-American landowners who returned in mid-1945, after the growing season had begun, faced tenants guaranteed the right to harvest that season's crop under the lease agreements signed by the FFGA. The Tanaka family had this problem, which they solved by working as laborers until their tenants' lease expired at the end of 1945.¹³⁶

Some Japanese-Americans who returned to Florin early in 1945 also faced the threat of violence. George Miyao believed many Japanese-Americans waited until mid or late 1945 to return to Florin because they feared confrontations.¹³⁷ Miyao returned to Florin in January of 1945 and recalls hearing about a Japanese-American house that was burned down in Florin and another across the county that was dynamited. He personally

¹³⁵ Yoneko Hamamoto, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Yoneko Hamamoto*, by Jim Carlson and Lynn Kataoka on September 9, 1988 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1995), 37-38.

¹³⁶ Myrtle Natsuye Furukawa, Myrna Mitsuye Hitomi, and Teri Sumako Mizusaka, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with the Tanaka sisters*, by Joann Kubukawa, November 20, 1993 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1997), 35.

¹³⁷ Miyao, interview, 18.

experienced a stare-down with two Filipino men he suspects had planned to harm him or his farm.¹³⁸ However, most Japanese-American landowners interviewed by the Florin JACL Oral History Project did not report worrying about their safety when they returned to Florin. Kiyo Sato-Viacrucis recalled hearing about two house burnings, but not feeling personally threatened.¹³⁹

Most Japanese-American farm owners maintained ownership of their property during internment and returned to Florin. However, Florin as a town and farming community never regained its pre-evacuation importance. Mary Tsukamoto wrote that one of the most surreal experiences of internment was feeling as if she had entered a war zone upon returning to the town of Florin and seeing the charred remains of abandoned shops.¹⁴⁰ The area would not be rebuilt until the expansion of the suburbs around Sacramento reached Florin in the 1960s.

Economic forces pushed in the slow disappearance of farming in and around Florin. Falling prices for produce and increased competition from richer farmlands farther south around Lodi account for most of the decline in farming in Florin after internment. Although Tokay yields were considerably higher in the Lodi area, Florin farms had survived by being closer to the Sacramento market and thus able to supply a fresher

¹³⁸ Ibid., 19. Florin did not have a large Filipino community, but tension and occasional violence between Japanese and Filipinos was common in California at that time. WRA reports confirm the story of a few Florin homes burned to scare Japanese-American returnees. WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 97.

¹³⁹ Sato-Viacrucis, interview, page 104-105.

¹⁴⁰ Mary Tsukamoto, *We the People: A Story of Internment in America*, 204-205.

product at the start of the season, when prices were highest.¹⁴¹ The San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner began noting the value of a new supply system moving produce quickly from farms up the interstate to market by 1941.¹⁴² When the high wartime prices for agricultural prices began to fall, Florin found itself without the competitive advantages necessary for its farms to survive.

¹⁴¹ Fletcher, interview, 29; Mack, interview, 28; WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 94.

¹⁴² San Joaquin County Department of Agriculture, "Agricultural Crop Report" (Holt-Atherton Special Collections, University of the Pacific, Stockton), 1941, 1943.

Chapter 4

RURAL SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

Northern San Joaquin County is a rich agricultural region. Unlike Florin, it has high quality soil, and remains to this day productive farmland. Japanese American farmsteads dotted the entire county, unlike neighboring Sacramento County, where they were concentrated in certain areas. Japanese Americans' neighbors came from a variety of backgrounds, but a large number were Italian immigrants, with whom the *nisei* got along with quite well.¹⁴³ Little day-to-day racial prejudice existed within the community before the war, but, as in Florin, there certain businesses had to be avoided. Chiyo Shimamoto said that growing up she learned that certain conversation topics “you don't ask or talk about. So we just stayed away from those subjects.”¹⁴⁴ Fumiko Akutagawa recalled that as a schoolchild “there were a couple of kids who picked on me and other Japanese kids.... Good thing there were some big Caucasians who beat up on them.”¹⁴⁵

In the agricultural areas around Lodi and Stockton, Japanese American farmers tended to practice the intensive agricultural style noted by the FSA.¹⁴⁶ However, unlike Florin, enough neighboring farmers of other races grew the same crops and were

¹⁴³ Motoike, interview, 10.

¹⁴⁴ Shimamoto, interview, 14.

¹⁴⁵ Fumiko Akutagawa, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Fumiko Akutagawa*, by Michael Nakagawa, July 15, 1999 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 9.

¹⁴⁶ FSA, *Final Report*, 5.

relatively familiar with the methods needed to operate Japanese American farms that substitute operators for most crops could be found, even if internee farms did not operate at peak efficiency. The exception was the strawberry crop. Although known today for its particularly large and luscious strawberries, in the early 1940s virtually all of San Joaquin County's strawberry production was in the hand of Japanese Americans.¹⁴⁷ Strawberries were not, however, a major crop in San Joaquin County. Only 166 acres were planted in the county in 1941, approximately one-tenth of Florin's acreage.¹⁴⁸

Grapes ranked among the more important crops in San Joaquin County. Growers cultivated tens of thousands of acres of wine, table, and juice grapes. The Tokay grape was one of San Joaquin County's major varieties, and the variety grown by most Japanese Americans. Cultivated primarily as a table grape, a large portion of the crop was used for wine in years prices were high.¹⁴⁹

Japanese Americans also distinguished themselves as major producers of a wide variety of truck crops in San Joaquin County, including, among others, tomatoes, lettuce, pepper, and celery. When the Secretary of Agriculture established 1942 production goals for vital farm products needed for the war, Japanese American farmers had been expected to provide over fifty-four percent of the tomatoes, and over forty percent of all California

¹⁴⁷ San Joaquin County Department of Agriculture, "Agricultural Crop Report," 1943, 4.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1941, acreage summary.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1942, 1943, 1.

truck crops.¹⁵⁰ Taeko Shiromizu's family grew "row crops, like onions and other vegetables. And we rented different farms in different areas to raise tomatoes. But mostly it was onions and strawberries. Strawberries are a hard, back-breaking job."¹⁵¹ In the southern delta region, Japanese American farmers in San Joaquin County also had significant amounts of land devoted to potatoes.¹⁵²

Before Internment and Coping Strategies

In the rural areas of San Joaquin County under review, seven Japanese American landowners sold eight parcels of land to individuals of other races in early 1942, shortly before removal. This was a significant transfer of land for the Japanese American community, more transfers than would occur for the rest of the war combined. Yet, when examined in detail, they encompassed only small areas of land and, while this land was sold in anticipation of internment, they do not reflect panic selling or extreme pressures to sell. Two sales were of houses in county subdivisions outside city limits.¹⁵³ Five sales involved farms of varying size. The smallest sale, by Misao Nagata Morodomi, was for

¹⁵⁰ FSA, *Final Report*, 6.

¹⁵¹ Shiromizu, interview, 25.

¹⁵² Fukano, interview, 17.

¹⁵³ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 768, page 307; Book 778, page 220.

only six acres. The largest sale was a thirty-five acre farm sold by a Y. Yoshikawa.¹⁵⁴ Ted Shotaru Yamada sold his small farm to a woman by the name of Bautista in April of 1942, but kept the oil, mineral, and gas rights to the property, a unique condition.¹⁵⁵ Mr. Yoshikawa's sale provides the only hint of possible panic selling. His thirty-five acres sold in late May, 1942, just before removal; a price of only \$175 was listed when the deed was transferred.¹⁵⁶ Without any corroborating evidence, it seems likely that the price was intentionally misrepresented for some unknown purpose or that it should properly read \$1,750, which would probably still be low, but was potentially a fair price.

Some of the land sold had been mortgaged by its Japanese American owners.¹⁵⁷ Mortgages were far more common among San Joaquin County Japanese Americans than Florin Japanese Americans. The larger number of sales before internment in San Joaquin County may have been due to the painful prospect of making mortgage payments while interned. In another land transfer, the U.S. Army forced a Japanese American farmer to sell his property in the spring of 1942 for the construction of the Stockton Holding and Reconsignment Depot. One of many landowners affected, he was one part of a large

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., Book 760, page 41; Book 767, page 260; Book 768, page 402; Book 769, page 225; Book 781, page 81.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., Book 778, page 227.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., Book 768, page 402.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., Book 758, page 274; Book 774, page 256; Book 779, page 122.

eminent domain proceeding and received market value, as set by the court, for his land.¹⁵⁸

Sales between Japanese Americans generally took place on paper only, as when the Akita family transferred their land from Minoru Hayashi's name to their daughter Hideko.¹⁵⁹ Multiple sales between Japanese Americans occurred in early 1942, but only one clearly qualified as a genuine sale: when Teruo Tanaka bought 7.2 acres from Ayao Endow.¹⁶⁰ The spike in land transfers by Japanese Americans in early 1942 resulted from Japanese Americans simplifying their property records and ensuring they could meet their financial obligations while interned, as opposed to a disorganized abandonment of property. Satoru Sasaki illustrates this trend. After selling his house in late April 1942, he divested himself of an additional fifteen acres of land a month later, in order to pay off a debt incurred four years earlier. But he also bought sixty acres of land in April 1942, indicating he was not simply dumping property for ready cash.¹⁶¹

In total, Japanese Americans purchased five areas of farm land from whites in early 1942. This reinforces the notion that for Japanese American farm owners the spring of 1942 represented a time of hurried transactions in general in San Joaquin County, rushing planned acquisitions as much as forcing sales. Isamu Funamora already owned

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., Book 778, page 106; Book 781, page 22.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., Book 827, page 278.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., Book 768, 298. One indication of a genuine sale between Japanese Americans was the presence of a deed of trust, showing that a mortgage was needed to raise money to buy the land.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., Book 768, page 307; Book 769, pages 122, 204; Book 779, page 122.

fifteen acres of farmland in May, 1942, but he bought another fifteen acres from a fellow by the name of Leffler, with the help of Shotetsu, Minoru, and Hioroichi Funamora.¹⁶² The additional partners may have been necessary in order to purchase Leffler's land quickly, before the government removed all four of them from the exclusion zone.

Property mortgages and taxes were the major concerns for Japanese American landowners during internment. Both types of obligations remained in effect during internment, even though the federal government denied the internees the opportunity to earn significant income. Jobs in the camps paid between \$12 and \$19 a month, even for doctors working in camp hospitals or at other skilled positions. This amounted to less pay than a conscripted army private earned at the same time.¹⁶³ Only rarely did farms actually have tax liens placed on them, but the threat posed a serious concern. Lydia Ota, whose family lived in San Joaquin County, recalled that her family had to sell one of their two farms because of tax liabilities.¹⁶⁴ The records indicate that the sale of that farm in 1945 did not represent a forced sale to the state for back taxes, although the Otas had lost two-thirds of an acre for this reason in 1938.¹⁶⁵ It took time for the state to act on mounting tax obligations, which gave families like the Otas time to find a buyer before the State confiscated the land.

¹⁶² Ibid., Book 769, page 264.

¹⁶³ Taylor, 166.

¹⁶⁴ Ota, interview, 19.

¹⁶⁵ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 625, page 59; Book 900, page 139.

As in Florin, most of the lease agreements between Japanese Americans and friends or neighbors contained a provision requiring the lessee to pay property taxes on the owner's behalf. From a practical standpoint, this was probably a relief for the county Assessor, who otherwise would have had to contact scattered landowners in internment camps around the country. Several mortgages were satisfied by Japanese Americans without associated land sales in early 1942. Tsutomu Tsudoma finished paying one off in March 1942, and two months later she managed to pay off another loan undertaken less than a year earlier.¹⁶⁶ Efforts to get out from under such obligations provide further evidence of successful action by Japanese Americans to prepare themselves financially for internment.

Of fifty-one Japanese American farm owners in the studied area, thirty-nine retained ownership of all of their land through internment.¹⁶⁷ In their efforts to preserve their farms, Japanese Americans in San Joaquin County commonly favored leasing their properties to private individuals, frequently neighbors or other acquaintances. Unlike Florin, no agricultural marketing organization similar to the Florin Fruit Growers Association assumed control of a large number of farms. A few farms were part-owned by Japanese Americans with individuals of another race. In 1941, for example, Kimiye and Shizuo Watanabe purchased sixty acres of land for \$8,000 with another couple by the

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., Book 774, pages 61, 277.

¹⁶⁷ Some Japanese American land owners who purchased their land before 1936 and took no recorded actions through 1945 may not have been identified as land owners, even if they received mail in the studied area. Nineteen families with Stockton or Lodi rural route addresses did not record actions, but most were probably laborers or leaseholders who lived where they worked. Some few may have commuted to work in Lodi or Stockton.

name of Brandt.¹⁶⁸ Excepting the few part-owned farms, operation of virtually all Japanese-American owned farms was transferred to another private individual. Willing lessees were more easily found in San Joaquin County because the Japanese American-owned properties were dispersed among a larger non-Japanese population, their land was more desirable than in Florin, and with less land devoted to vineyards or orchards, farmers leasing Japanese American land could grow different crops if they didn't have the skills necessary to continue farming in the same style.

Lease agreements and other arrangements between Japanese American owners and those taking control of their property varied considerably in formality, detail, and intent. Many were verbal accords and most were not officially recorded. In addition, widespread use of power-of-attorney agreements frequently obscured the true terms expected by the two parties. In San Joaquin County, most power-of-attorney agreements between Japanese American landowners and individuals facilitated verbal leasing agreements. Occasionally, this was specified in the power-of-attorney language itself. The agreement between Shoji Ishimaru and Karl Mog provides a case in point. In addition to standard power-of-attorney language, the agreement specified that the powers granted were to be used for the operation of Ishimaru's three hundred-acre farm.¹⁶⁹ A few power-of-attorney agreements enabled the attorney-in-fact to arrange lease agreements

¹⁶⁸ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 683, pages 331, 333.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., Book 697, page 419; Book 767, page 202.

after removal had begun rather than operate the farm.¹⁷⁰ Lydia Ota noted that her family granted “Mr. Baldwin, our neighbor, power-of-attorney and he took care of our two ranches.”¹⁷¹ This particular arrangement did not cover the actual operation of the farms. Baldwin sold the Ota’s unharvested vegetables at a considerable discount to a Mr. Pagala, but he made no other arrangement to continue production after the next harvest.¹⁷² The failure of their family’s “attorney” to find a lessee for the farms helps explain why the Otas would need to sell one of their farms to satisfy their tax obligations.

The most detailed lease agreement recorded in San Joaquin County was between Takeshi Kubota and John H. Fox. The lease granted Kubota’s twenty-three acre farm to Mr. Fox beginning on May 4, 1942, with the exception that Kubota had until May 15 to harvest his spinach crop. Fox thus essentially arranged to lease the planted celery crop until January 20, 1943, although he could take fifteen additional days in the case of a late harvest. Management of the farm was subject to several specific provisions, as well as to one general requirement that the “Lessee shall conduct all of its farming operations in a good and farmer-like manner, according to the usual methods of husbandry practiced in the neighborhood.” Payment was to be made on a sharecropping basis; forty percent of the gross proceeds for sale of the celery, less specified expenses, was due to Mr. Kubota. Payments were due weekly during shipping season, and the agreement obligated Mr. Fox

¹⁷⁰ In most cases, the recorded power-of-attorney agreement did not specify which function the attorney-in-fact performed. Oral histories and the fact that most attorneys-in-fact were not lawyers by profession form the basis for the conclusion that most such agreements represented informal lease agreements.

¹⁷¹ Ota, interview, 19.

¹⁷² Ibid.

to have daily shipping records available for Mr. Kubota or his agent. Unusually, Mr. Kubota remained responsible for property taxes and all other assessments against the property.¹⁷³

Most lease agreements were not as formal. Setsuku Fujishige arranged a three-year lease for his farm in April 1942, for \$300 a year, but the lease was never officially recorded. However, because , because Setsuku's child, Kaname, legally owned the farm, a court order permitting the lease had to be obtained, and this court order was properly recorded.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, on May 19, 1942 the San Joaquin County Superior Court permitted the estate of minors Yutaka Ralph Tsutsui and Minoru Tsutsui to lease a thirty-one acre tract that included a house, farm, and a full complement of agricultural tools to Louie Leung On, Louie Lung Chung, Louie Gett, and Lee Loy You.¹⁷⁵ In practice, the children's mother, Kiyoko Tsutsui, owned and leased the land.¹⁷⁶

All of the Japanese Americans interviewed by the North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project whose families owned land recalled that it was leased or taken care of in some fashion by a neighbor. As in Florin, a positive correlation existed between the condition of the property after internment and how well known the lessees were to the property owners.

¹⁷³ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 768, page 234.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., Book 782, page 62.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Book 782, page 134.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., Book 697, page 357; Book 753, page 360.

Many San Joaquin County internees suffered considerable losses in personal property, although they had fewer problems with damage to their farms from irresponsible tenants than Florin landowners. The truck Lydia Ota's family chose not to sell survived the war, but burglars broke into their house and stole the furniture and piano stored there.¹⁷⁷ James Hajime Kurata reported his parents' farm "was still there. It had been under the care of Everett McKenzie, a Caucasian friend of ours and so they were able to return home. Although during the war the bunk house that we had for the grape pickers that we hired during grape picking season burned down."¹⁷⁸ Aya Motoike noted her family's good fortune: "The Italian people who leased our land from us greeted us and said that the trees have grown. We were very grateful. Our neighbors were mostly Italians who were good to all Japanese."¹⁷⁹ No plan could guarantee safety from damage or vandalism, however. The Shiromizu family found a "Mexican friend" to operate the farm and arranged for "Caucasian neighbors" to check on their property, but they still returned to find their house and farm a mess.¹⁸⁰ Although they managed to get re-established farming, "we had lots of cleaning up to do. And, well, a lot of cleaning up to do."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Ota, interview, 19.

¹⁷⁸ James Hajime Kurata, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with James Hajime Kurata*, by Arleen Mataga, May 12, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 15.

¹⁷⁹ Motoike, interview, 10.

¹⁸⁰ Shiromizu, interview, 12.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Even Japanese American owners who kept their farms throughout internment and returned to find them in excellent condition suffered considerable economic loss. In California, World War II presented farmers with that rare combination of high yields and high prices. Annual reports by the San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner show year after year of high profits that interned Japanese Americans missed. In 1942, the total value of all crops and livestock in the county increased thirty-three percent, primarily the result of higher prices.¹⁸² In 1943, the dramatic spike in agricultural income continued as total value in San Joaquin County rose another forty-six percent over 1942. The increase in 1943 was driven primarily by an incredible 211 percent increase in the value of the grape crop, together with considerably higher prices for truck crops.¹⁸³ Although it is probable that some of the increase in prices for truck crops resulted from absent Japanese American production, prices for most farm commodities were high during the war. Depending on when they returned to their farms, Japanese Americans farmers lost three or four years of exceptional profits.

Japanese Americans who had been leasing land, using both formal and informal arrangements, found their leases terminated as a result of internment. Although it was not specifically looked for, some evidence of this result surfaced during the course of this study. Four recorded lease cancellation agreements were identified, two dealing with land leased by W.I. Wakida, one dealing with land leased by K. Yada, and the last related to

¹⁸² San Joaquin County Agricultural Commissioner, "San Joaquin County Annual Crop Report," 1942, *i*.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1943, *i*.

land held by Y. and Fumie Tanabe. Recorded in March 1942, the Wakida cancellation agreements, covering two parcels of land totaling 468.5 acres and the Yada cancellation agreement covering 139.5 acres simply cancelled all provisions of the previous leases. All obligations for both the lessor and the lessee ended immediately, with no special arrangements for crops already planted or any other circumstance.¹⁸⁴ Although no longer obligated to pay rent, Wakida and Yada had already planted crops that now belonged to the landowners. If the owners could arrange for a normal harvest, they would profit from planting already undertaken by the former lessees. Agreements like those entered into by Wakida and Yada are among the reasons the WRA criticized the federal government for being slow to set up procedures to safeguard internee property.¹⁸⁵ In some rare cases, the lessee and lessor were both Japanese Americans. Koichi Inouye was leasing 403 acres on Bacon Island in the delta region from Togo Shima at the beginning of 1942. In April Inouye and Shima agreed to cancel the lease and the accompanying crop mortgage Inouye owed Shima.¹⁸⁶

Y. and Fumie Tanabe's cancellation agreement with landowner D.C. Basolo was negotiated by the FSA in May 1942. It represented the type of agreement the FSA tried to arrange for Japanese American leaseholders. The agreement cancelled the Tanabe's lease of 200 acres of farmland, and the lessor, D.C. Basolo, agreed to pay \$3,200 to the

¹⁸⁴ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 752, page 478; Book 764, page 391; Book 774, page 66.

¹⁸⁵ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 4.

¹⁸⁶ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 781, page 65.

Tanabes in exchange for crops growing on the land and farm equipment owned by the Tanabes.¹⁸⁷ The cancellation agreement satisfied the FSA's primary concern of continuing agricultural production, including preservation of farm machinery during a wartime shortage, and it provided some compensation for the labor of the Tanabes.

In congratulating itself on efforts to protect the interests of Japanese farmers, the FSA's *Final Report* makes a big deal of the efficacy of the agency's power to freeze assets under dispute, which was delegated to the FSA by the Treasury Department.¹⁸⁸ In the event landlords failed to come to terms negotiated by the FSA, it could threaten to freeze the assets involved, especially crops in the field and farm machinery belonging to Japanese American operators. The federal agency actually used its freezing power in only one instance. The FSA had found a substitute operator willing to take over a lease and pay the Japanese tenant \$1,500 for property appraised at a \$2,000 value, an arrangement the FSA considered fair. The landlord, however, refused to agree to the arrangement, instead offering to buy the tenant's property for \$200. Negotiations failed for approximately three weeks, until the FSA declared the property frozen on April 20, 1942.¹⁸⁹ The agency's *Final Report* lauded its own efforts in broad congratulatory declarations:

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 778, page 108.

¹⁸⁸ This power to freeze assets derived from the Trading with the Enemy Act and theoretically dealt only with alien property. In the spirit of the time, the FSA made no provision to distinguish between immigrant aliens holding Japanese citizenship and natural born citizens of the United States who were racially classified as Japanese. FSA, *Final Report*, Exhibits 10-14.

¹⁸⁹ FSA, *Final Report*, 35.

Widespread publicity was given to the fact that the Farm Security Administration was committed to a policy of promoting fair dealing. The Japanese farmers availed themselves of the service of this organization when they felt that they were being placed in unfair bargaining positions or were mistreated by creditors or landlords.¹⁹⁰

Wakida and Yada's lease cancellation agreements, and the agency's own policy to "exert special efforts only on those cases which were brought to the attention of the Farm Security Administration by individual Japanese," show that although the agency could claim to have been of some benefit to Japanese American farmers, it failed to achieve its stated goal of protecting Japanese American property.¹⁹¹

During and After Internment

Internment had a notable impact on the farm labor situation in San Joaquin County, although the labor shortage was not as serious a threat to production as it was in Florin. Overall labor costs in 1942 doubled from what they were in 1941. This was not only due to internment; Stockton and other areas of San Joaquin County attracted large defense projects that employed many former agricultural laborers.¹⁹² The Tokay grape crop, moreover, was lighter than expected, in part because growers had to rely on inexperienced labor as a result of internment. The labor shortage also reduced yields for other crops, including cherries, sugar beets, onions, and most notably tomatoes. Japanese

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² San Joaquin County Department of Agriculture, "Agricultural Crop Report," 1942, *i*.

Americans had been heavily involved in tomato production and tens of thousands of tomatoes now went unharvested because of a lack of labor. In addition to the inability of farms to find sufficient workers early in the harvest, the slow pace of labor left the tomato crop vulnerable to a strong early frost, which killed 60,000 tons of ripe tomatoes still on the vine.¹⁹³ In 1943, labor problems within individual agricultural sectors were less notable, although labor costs in general had continued to increase, reaching a level 200 percent higher than at the start of the war.¹⁹⁴

One of the few explicit references to evacuation by the San Joaquin County Department of Agriculture occurred in reference to strawberries, which virtually disappeared in San Joaquin County during the war.¹⁹⁵ By 1944, the only strawberry production in San Joaquin County was a tiny operation specializing in selling plantings to farms in coastal counties and breeding new varieties.¹⁹⁶ Other crops in San Joaquin County that showed a significant decrease in production during the war but which then rebounded after internment were lettuce and pepper, although neither experienced the catastrophic reduction found in the strawberry crop. Internment-related labor problems would continue to hinder growers during the war. In 1944, the Tokay grape harvest

¹⁹³ Ibid., 1942, 1-3.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 1943, *ii*.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 1943, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 1944, 4.

achieved only average levels of quality, and growers had a difficult time meeting customers' quality standards for table grapes because of inexperienced labor.¹⁹⁷

Very few sales of Japanese American land occurred in the rural sections of San Joaquin County during or immediately after internment. Shizuko Teshima Kamimoto sold her house in the county in October of 1944, and Takeo Okamoto sold about five acres of land in November of 1944. Kamimoto resided in New Jersey at the time of the sale, suggesting she may have sold her home because she did not intend to return to San Joaquin County.¹⁹⁸ Shigeru and Lydia Ota sold half of their land in January of 1945 but kept another fifteen acres of farmland.¹⁹⁹ In December of 1944, Percy and Fred Nakashima sold several contiguous plots of a county subdivision for \$29,750.²⁰⁰ One month later, the Nakashimas used their earnings from the sale to buy 390 acres of land.²⁰¹ Taking place in January of 1945, this was the only significant purchase of land in by returning internees. One purchase of land by a Japanese American from a white owner occurred during internment in San Joaquin County, when Isamu, Edna, and Shigetaro

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 1944, 1.

¹⁹⁸ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 901, page 483; Book 907, page 161.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., Book 900, page 39.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Book 900, page 141. Although the plots were part of a subdivision, this did not necessarily mean the land was developed. Many farming areas were also organized as subdivisions. This was a different Percy Nakashima than the one who lived in Florin.

²⁰¹ Ibid., Book 908, page 214.

Funamora, through an attorney-in-fact, acquired a thirty-one acre orchard in July of 1944.²⁰²

The Delta

The southern delta region of San Joaquin County falls outside the area carefully studied, but it was nonetheless an important center of Japanese American agriculture, particularly Bacon Island. Perusal of the records at the San Joaquin County Recorder's office points to the unusual nature of this region, in that several Japanese Americans managed to acquire exceptionally large farms and in that these owners did not generally practice the intensive style of agriculture common to smaller Japanese American farms. One hundred-and-one years old when she was interviewed in 1998, Miyo Fukano was growing onions, potatoes, and beans in the southern delta in 1916. She considered the development of the region one of the major *issei* contributions in agriculture:

there was governmental assistance in developing the south delta of Stockton, but it was the Japanese who developed it. At first they built levees, then pumped water out into the river. After the surface was dry, the peat soil was scorched before growing the crops. When the soil became like 'ashes', the potato crop improved.²⁰³

²⁰² Ibid., Book 895, page 469.

²⁰³ Fukano, interview, 17.

If land records allow historians to identify some of the delta farmers, they afford but few details of how they preserved their property during the internment period.

Stewart Nakano owned two hundred acres of Bacon Island land and maintained control of it during internment.²⁰⁴ Similarly, in 1941, Shoji Ishimaru purchased three hundred acres of Bacon Island land he had previously been leasing on a sharecropping basis and managed to hold onto it through internment despite a property mortgage.²⁰⁵

Togo Shima, also known as George Shima, acquired a large area of Bacon Island in 1939, purchasing 692 acres from the financially indebted Stewart Kazuichi Nakano with the help of a \$17,000 loan.²⁰⁶ Nakano paid off his obligation on his Bacon Island land, as well as mortgages on property in Stockton, while keeping two hundred acres of farmland.²⁰⁷ In 1941, Togo Shima was leasing an additional four hundred acres of land for \$4,500 a year. He had planned to do the same in 1942, but as a result of internment purchased two hundred of those acres for \$10,000 instead.²⁰⁸ Although the fate of his land during the war is unknown, Togo Shima took out an additional \$50,000 mortgage on his land in October of 1945 in order to begin farming again.

Siblings Charles and Sally Nishimoto owned a 694-acre farm in the southern delta. According to the WRA, they leased their farm to a substitute operator for a period

²⁰⁴ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 624, page 152.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., Book 712, page 490; Book 726, page 419.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., Book 638, page 219; Book 724, page 418.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., Book 624, page 152; Book 662, page 381; Book 730, page 384.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Book 758, page 304; Book 773, page 116; Book 781, page 66.

of three years, expecting \$9,000 in rent to be paid in 1942 and \$10,000 for each of the remaining two years.²⁰⁹ The tenant accepted a \$22,050 loan from the FSA to purchase farm machinery and plant three hundred acres of tomatoes, secured by a crop and chattel loan. He later claimed to the WRA that he had told the FSA Field Agent from the start that there was no way he would be able to repay the loan in the first year. The Field Agent apparently promised the tenant that the loan would be renewable from year-to-year, despite the one-year term, and that rent could be paid to the Nishimotos before loan payments were made.²¹⁰ During the harvest season of 1942, however, the tenant ran into the same labor shortage many of the tomato growers in San Joaquin County faced and made considerably less money than anticipated. When he contacted the FSA, that agency informed him that if the loan was not paid on the due date, the chattel mortgage on his farm equipment would be foreclosed. In addition, he learned that the proceeds from the crop sales could not be turned over to the Nishimotos until the resolution of the crop mortgage.²¹¹ The tenant then contacted the WRA Evacuee Property Division, informing officials that no rent would be paid. The tenant also declared he wanted to plant fall crops for which there was an expected high demand, but could not do so if the FSA foreclosed on his chattels. In response, the WRA requested that the FSA delay foreclosure on the loan in order to foster food production and protect the interests of the Nishimotos.

²⁰⁹ WRA, *The Wartime Handling of Japanese Evacuee Property*, 65. The names Charles and Sally Nishimoto used in the WRA report are fictitious. The tenant is not named.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

Despite the WRA's appeal, the FSA foreclosed on the tenant's farm machinery and equipment.²¹²

The Nishimotos, who had obtained work releases and were farming in Michigan, were considering not returning to California when the exclusion orders ended. In December 1944, the Nishimotos, through the WRA's Sacramento evacuee property office, listed the property for sale in December of 1944 at a price of \$135,000, including commission, escrow, and title fees.²¹³ This amount, though based on a recommendation by the manager for the Nishimoto's reclamation district, was deemed significantly below market value by the evacuee property supervisor in the WRA's Sacramento office.²¹⁴ In June of 1945 the same Sacramento office informed Mr. Nishimoto that a prospective buyer had offered \$100,000 for the land, but the property supervisor advised strongly against accepting, believing the land could either be sold for more or would be worth considerably more if the Nishimotos could organize a crew of returning internees and acquire the necessary equipment. The WRA would later learn that the Nishimotos had returned to California in late 1945:

They sold their ranch for \$100,000, a sum that netted them \$30,000 above their indebtedness. With this capital they purchased a three-story building in Stockton, in which they are operating a hotel and two shops. According to the report, Mr. Nishimoto professes that he is "satisfied with the entire deal."²¹⁵

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 66, 67.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 67.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 68, 69.

Charles and Sally Nishimoto were probably pseudonyms for Jack Yoshio and Dorothy Chiyeko Matsumoto, though some discrepancies exist between the WRA account of events and the Matsumotos' records from the San Joaquin Recorder's office. In addition to a jointly held tract of land totaling 694 acres, Dorothy Matsumoto owned a small piece of land in Stockton that sold in December of 1944.²¹⁶ Jack Matsumoto also owned twenty acres of land within the Stockton and Lodi rural area, which he purchased in 1941 and kept throughout internment.²¹⁷ The Matsumotos leased their 694 acres of delta land to a Kim Wong, resident of San Francisco, for a term of three years, with a possibility of extending the term to the end of 1945 if the exclusion orders remained in effect. The rent due totalled \$30,000; \$5,000 every half year, the first payment due immediately. Additional clauses restricted the amount of land that could be used for sugar beet production and noted the Matsumotos would continue to be responsible for taxes and insurance payments.²¹⁸ Dorothy and Jack, now both married, did sell land in November of 1945, but the sale totaled only 350 acres.²¹⁹ The price is not listed in the official records, but if the Matsumotos did in fact receive \$100,000 for the sale, that would indicate a fair price for 350 acres rather than a bargain price for 694 acres.

²¹⁶ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 908, page 124.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Book 768, page 311.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Book 804, page 290. The lease agreement was not officially recorded until December of 1942, but it was not unusual for many agreements made just before removal to be recorded very late. In some cases this was because of the general haste of dealings, in others because it could be difficult to deliver documents to internees to be notarized.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Book 952, page 324.

Escheats

The WRA noticed a major increase in California and Washington Alien Land Law investigations and related confiscation proceedings in the “postevacuation period.”²²⁰ Wartime hatred increased the desire to prosecute violations of the Alien Land Law. Time-consuming and expensive, counties had avoided pursuing Alien Land Law escheat proceedings because the costs outweighed the benefits. In 1944, encouraged by anti-Japanese fervor, California appropriated \$200,000 to pursue confiscations under the Alien Land Laws.²²¹

The laws placed the burden of proof on the landowner, forcing them to prove that they were not holding the land in name only to circumvent the ban on *issei* landownership. The state also targeted land held by *nisei* children, who could have their property confiscated if the state asserted that their *issei* parents were the true owners. Some defendants never even received notice of the proceedings against them, causing the San Francisco WRA office to arrange with the state attorneys general to deliver additional copies of summons and complaints from each case, which it ensured were delivered to defendants.²²² The Alien Land Laws had long been a concern for Japanese Americans, even adult *nisei*. Some title companies in San Joaquin County, most notably

²²⁰ Department of the Interior, War Relocation Authority, *Legal and Constitutional Phases of the WRA Program* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), 52.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

Stockton Abstract & Title Company, had long required *nisei* doing business with them to certify and record a copy of their birth certificate, thus proving their U.S. citizenship.²²³

In San Joaquin County, Alien Land Law investigations began in 1944 and continued through 1946. *Lis Pendens* notices were filed for property owned in practice or in name by the Akita, Higashi, Hirata, Shimamoto, and Watanabe families, and also for land owned by Stockton Theater, Inc.²²⁴ Most of the cases took place in 1944, when the exclusion orders prevented defendants from appearing in court because Japanese Americans were prohibited them from returning to California. As a result, families without lawyers to appear for them, like the Watanabes, lost their right to present a defense because of failure to appear in court.²²⁵ But even lawyers who represented the Akitas and other families still faced daunting challenges, such as the difficulty of representing clients hundreds of miles away whose important financial records remained in storage and largely inaccessible.²²⁶

²²³ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 897, page 480. This is Shizuko Teshima Kamimoto's birth certificate, recorded at the request of Stockton Title & Abstract Company.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, Book 889, pages 31-33; Book 927, page 177; Book 936, page 315; Book 952, page 188; Book 991, page 31. A *Lis Pendens* notice is recorded in order to notify prospective buyers that real property is subject to a pending legal action.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, Book 895, page 281.

²²⁶ Transcripts of court proceedings, investigation records, and other material related to Alien Land Law proceedings in San Joaquin County were recently discovered by accident during a renovation of the San Joaquin County Courthouse, literally in dusty boxes. Through the efforts of the Stockton chapter of the JACL, the records are now at the Holt-Atherton Special Collections at the University of the Pacific. The records are still being processed and should be available to researchers in late summer, 2010. While I was examining other material in that archival collection, the staff kindly allowed me to look at the records in process of being accessioned. I

The prosecutions certainly caught the attention of Japanese American landowners, and also prompted significant concern among other Asian Americans. Within San Joaquin County, Shoji Ishimaru, David Thomas Nakata, Joe Yutaka Nishikawa, and Chan Yee Park Jow all took the extraordinary step of filing pre-emptive quitclaim actions against the State of California, seeking a declaration “that the State of California has no right, title, or claim of escheat whatsoever” upon their property, and “that the State of California is herein enjoined and debarred from claiming any right, title, claim, or interest in said property.”²²⁷ Filed in 1947 and 1948, all four actions proved successful.

The Oyama family, Southern California landowners, also faced escheat proceedings. *Issei Kajiro Oyama*, however, found a good lawyer and vigorously defended his son Fred Oyama’s estate. On January 19, 1948, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Fred Y. Oyama, et al, v. State of California* that Japanese American minors could not be prohibited from owning land because by doing it the state violated their rights as citizens to equal protection. Although the Oyama case did not overturn the Alien Land Laws, it effectively undercut most of the State’s escheat actions.²²⁸ Indeed, state courts in turn used the *Oyama* verdict to dismiss the previous judgments against the

spent most of the time engrossed in the court transcripts for the Akita case. When the material becomes available for a more thorough examination, it will provide ample resources for a detailed study of Alien Land Law investigations and escheat proceedings.

²²⁷ San Joaquin County Recorder’s Office, “Official Records,” Book 1012, page 181; Book 1065, page 384; Book 1088, page 234; Book 1157, page 317.

²²⁸ Christine McFadden, “Documents Tell Government’s Side of Alien Land Law Cases,” *Pacific Citizen*, February 5, 2010.

Higashi, Hirata, Shimamoto, and Watanabe families.²²⁹ These families received no compensation for the temporary loss of their land, and the dismissals of the judgments against them contained a waiver from each of them releasing any claim they might have against the State of California as a result of the decision.²³⁰ Chii Watanabe, an *issei* woman and one of the primary defendants in the Watanabe case, did not refer to the case when interviewed for the French Camp JACL. However, her daughter Fumiko recalled that the family worked elsewhere in California after internment before returning to their land around 1948.²³¹

²²⁹ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 1106, page 417, Book 1124, pages 82, 83; Book 1134, page 162. A dismissal of the judgment against the Akita family was not found in the San Joaquin County "Official Records Index," but the transcript of court proceedings indicate that the Oyama decision also caused a restoration of the Akita's property. No judgment had been filed against the Stockton Theater Company.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Chii Miyazaki Watanabe, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Chii Miyazaki Watanabe*, by Lydia Ota, March 2, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 17. Chii Watanabe's family is distinct from the Watanabes who were part owners of a farm with the Brandts.

Chapter 5
SACRAMENTO

Japanese American property in the City of Sacramento differed considerably from that examined in the rural regions. In general, they owned or rented two types of property: urban or suburban homes, and commercial property. Although most Japanese Sacramentans owned the former kind of real estate, a sizeable minority also claimed commercial properties. Most of the urban property in Japanese American hands was concentrated in the nebulous Japantown region had developed by the 1930s along 3rd, 4th, and 5th Streets from K Street down to the southern edge of the downtown grid. By 1941, ninety-four Japanese Americans owned a slightly larger number of properties in Japantown and its adjacent areas, while nineteen Japanese Americans held title to twenty-three properties outside the downtown region but within city limits. These suburban properties consisted entirely of homes, most of which continued in a line south from the Japantown region of downtown into the Riverside and Land Park areas. Husband and wife Walter and Tomoye Tsukamoto were the only Japanese American landowners with properties in both the downtown and suburban regions.²³² Of the total 113 owners, twenty-nine—about one-fourth of the total—would sell land before, during, or

²³² Sacramento City Assessor, 1941, "Assessor's Map Book, 1940-1941," Center for Sacramento History, Sacramento.

immediately after internment. Two more sales were only nominal transfers between Japanese Americans.²³³

Before Internment and Coping Strategies

In Sacramento, only five sales of land by Japanese Americans occurred in early 1942, before removal. Matsuye Harada, S. Kawada, and Walter and Tomoye Tsukamoto all sold suburban homes and used the proceeds in order to get out from under mortgage obligations. Harada and Kawada had incurred the loans within three years of the sales, as both had recently purchased their homes. The Tsukamoto loan was much older, dating from 1932.²³⁴ No obvious financial motive drove the sales by Henry Taketa and Frank G. and E.A. Nagano, both in April 1942. Henry Taketa sold one of several properties held in his name, an urban home in the eastern part of downtown, to a Milka Radonich.²³⁵ The Naganos sold what was probably the only commercial property transferred before internment began, a small lot in the block bounded by Q & R and 4th & 5th Streets. Lillie Jang Fong purchased the property.²³⁶

²³³ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 943, page 279; Book 1155, page 287.

²³⁴ Ibid., Book 925, page 287; Book 929, page 205; Book 936, page 332; Book 943, pages 23, 279; Book 947, page 206; Book 960, page 30.

²³⁵ Ibid., Book 929, page 205.

²³⁶ Ibid., Book 943, page 433.

Recurring expenses, particularly mortgages and property taxes, constituted the single biggest concern for internees trying to preserve their property during internment. Many of the sales in Sacramento, beginning with the Harada and Kawada sales, served to spare the banished population from having to fret about onerous financial obligations. Several other landowners, such as Roy and Fujiko Nikaido, paid off the remaining amount due on their mortgages without selling their land.²³⁷ The large number of these loans satisfied in early 1942 indicates the desire of Japanese American landowners to put their finances in order before leaving for the camps.

Surprisingly, little commercial real estate seem to have been sold because Japanese American tenants had to suddenly dispose of their businesses. Sacramento, like other urban areas, did see several Japanese American businesses close their doors and sell off movable property, but the land itself—even if owned by Japanese Americans—rarely changed hands. Although this study was not designed to uncover evidence of business property sales, nine recorded sales turned up at the Sacramento County Recorder's office during a cursory survey of documents. Although this list of business sales before internment is certainly not comprehensive, many of the records are notable.

Sales of Japanese American businesses ahead of internment began as early as February 21, 1942, when B. Fujii of the M.K. Liquor Company sold his stock of distilled liquors and his liquor license to Ameial Sarzotti and James Traversi for a total of \$750.²³⁸ Most business property sales took place immediately before removal, in May of 1942.

²³⁷ Ibid., Book 846, page 602.

²³⁸ Ibid., Book 935, page 240.

Buyers exploited the misfortune of Japanese Americans by buying their businesses and goods at bargain prices, but few buyers bought property for resale. Most buyers were already in the market for the type of property they purchased from Japanese Americans. Jeannette Micheli, for instance, bought the New Modern Cafe from Kazume Fujita on April 11, including its furniture, silverware, kitchen equipment, and every other conceivable physical asset, but she was already in the market for restaurant equipment; Micheli purchased “Frank’s Place,” a restaurant owned by Frank Avila at the same time.²³⁹ Most of the businesses recorded sold were restaurants and groceries, but there were a variety of other businesses, including The Sun Company, a men’s store, which Levison Schneider purchased in May 1942 from a Mr. Yokomichi.²⁴⁰

The “purchase” of the Riverside Nursery by Haruki Higashino from Frank Higashino was among the pre-relocation transactions in Sacramento. Haruki, a minor, was in fact receiving his family’s business so that it would legally belong to a United States citizen.²⁴¹ At the same time, the Higashinos appointed Lee O. Townsend as attorney-in-fact for young Haruki Higashino.²⁴² This strategy suggests that, like the agreements formed by many San Joaquin County farm owners, the Higashinos had found

²³⁹ Ibid., Book 948, pages 84, 85.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., “On Record,” Book 948, page 86.

²⁴¹ Ibid., “On Record,” Book 948, page 132. Unlike real estate, it was legal for Japanese aliens to own businesses. The Higashinos probably wanted to avoid potential property seizure under “enemy alien” statutes by putting their business in the name of a United States citizen.

²⁴² Ibid.

someone willing to operate their business during internment and were providing that person with the legal means to do so through a power-of-attorney agreement.

During and After Internment

Most sales of Japanese American land in Sacramento during the war took place while the exclusion zone was in effect. Eighteen of the twenty sales involved persons of other races. The remaining two were to other Japanese Americans, but evidence exists that these real estate deals constituted genuine sales and not represent transfers in name only.²⁴³ One sale of commercial real estate in this period clearly had links to an earlier business property sale. In April of 1942, Irene Fujimoto sold the stock, fixtures, and equipment of her business to Y.D. and S.D. Chanesian, at the same time paying off a loan originating in 1937.²⁴⁴ One of the few business owners who also owned the location her business occupied, Fujimoto waited eleven months to sell land in the block bounded by H & I and 7th & 8th Streets to Y.D. Chanesian.²⁴⁵ It is unclear why Fujimoto waited almost a year between selling her business and selling her land. She may have been waiting for a good offer for her property or for the Chanesians to raise additional funds.

The most common motivation for sales of Sacramento land during internment was the inability to pay mortgages on the property in question. Ten of the remaining nineteen

²⁴³ Ibid., Book 985, pages 64, 116; Book 1064, pages, 111, 477.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., Book 947, 103; Book 948, page 57.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., Book 983, page 210.

sales during internment were directly related to a mortgage paid off at the time of the sale. Hana Iki owned the most strikingly indebted property. She had purchased two lots in the Riviers subdivision in March 1942, subject to a \$600 mortgage. By March 1943, the property was subject to two other mortgages held by private individuals Irene Kung and Kato Uyeda, totaling \$2000. In May of 1943, Hana Iki managed to sell her lots to Irene Kung for forgiveness of the loan owed to Kung, enough money to pay the loan owed to Kato Uyeda, and Kung's agreement to assume the original mortgage and responsibility for all 1943 property taxes.²⁴⁶ A less complicated but essentially similar deal occurred in November 1942, when Masao Nakashima sold property in the city block bounded by L & M and 3rd & 4th Streets to the Long Beach Building and Loan Association for fifty dollars and the Association's agreement to repay the mortgage Nakashima owed on the property.²⁴⁷

Most Japanese American landowners who found it necessary to sell their property during internment probably received close to market value for their land. Some indication this is the case is provided by the sale of two pieces of land in the city block bounded by V & W and 4th & 5th Streets. The Superior Court of Sacramento approved the sale of this land in February 1944 to Happy Wong by the minors Hiroshi and Kiyomi Kanegawa, The Superior Court found itself satisfied that the minors' estate was receiving "at least

²⁴⁶ Ibid., Book 916, page 393; Book 929, page 492; Book 961, page 233; Book 996, page 460; Book 998, page 374.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., Book 978, page 490; Book 980, page 444.

ninety percent of the value” of the land.²⁴⁸ On the other hand, Masayuki and Tsura Nishimura certainly lost money from the sale of their land during internment after the courts ordered the Nishimura’s property confiscated to satisfy a judgment against them. In September 1943, the county sheriff seized one plot of land located in the block bounded by G & H and 27th and 28th Streets and sold it at auction for \$2,500 to help the Nishimuras liquidate the debt of \$9,999.40 owed to the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. Another tiny piece located between Q & R and 6th & 7th Streets fetched only \$100. In May 1945, the Nishimuras would buy the land located between G & H and 27th & 28th Streets back from the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company for the sum of \$3,500, one thousand dollars more than the company had paid for it.²⁴⁹

Eight of the Japanese American property sales that took place during internment were not associated with the satisfaction of a mortgage or any other obvious motive to sell. Most owners, after all, kept control of their property or took rational, ordinary steps in disposing of it. Commercial property owners who rented their property out to tenants found it relatively easy to find a manager for their property. A certain K. D. Thomas managed multiple properties, arranging agreements with three clients, Natsuko Nakatani, John Takegi, and Mikeo Takeoki that appointed Thomas power-of-attorney specifically for the purpose of managing their properties.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Ibid., Book 1045, page 380; Book 1055, page 160.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., Book 993, page 314; Book 1028, page 112; Book 1036, page 263; Book 1046, page 82; Book 1154, page 16.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., Book 963, pages 78, 79, 91.

Four sales of property by Japanese American owners in Sacramento occurred shortly after internment ended, but these sales were counterbalanced by a few purchases by returning internees. Yoneko Hamamoto and George Kambara both sold suburban homes in the summer of 1945, apparently deciding not to return to Sacramento. George Kambara resided in Wisconsin; Hamamoto's location was unknown.²⁵¹ Hiroshi Ikemoto and May Meiko Sato also sold land upon their return to Sacramento, freeing up money to reestablish themselves. Mr. Ikemoto sold land in the block bounded by E & F and 9th & 10th Streets in March 1945, subject to taxes for 1944, to Mathilde Bartalini. In September of the same year, Ikemoto purchased a suburban home in the Howell Clark subdivision.²⁵² Sato, on the other hand, arranged to lease one of her commercial properties in January 1945, while selling another commercial property in the block bounded by L & M and 5th & 6th Streets to Louis Novick, subject to back taxes and water utilities. Money from this sale paid off a chattel mortgage taken out in April 1942 on furniture and equipment in the Fairmont Hotel, owned by Sato.²⁵³

Compelling evidence of property damage and theft perpetrated against Japanese American property in Sacramento during internment is scarce. Though such crimes doubtlessly occurred, they evidently did not reach the level of severity as those in Florin and its environs. At the same time, the study of property damage in Florin is more easily

²⁵¹ Ibid., Book 1148, page 304; Book 1154, page 301.

²⁵² Ibid., Book 1134, page 233; Book 1168, page 188.

²⁵³ Ibid., Book 947, page 311; Book 951, page 187; Book 1120, page 270; Book 1121, page 461; Book 1123, pages 12, 121.

studied because of the existence of county property tax assessment receipts, the Florin JACL's oral histories, and the WRA's use of Florin as an example in its report on internee property. It is probably safe to assume that the extreme acts of vandalism, arson, and destruction that were perpetrated against isolated farm buildings in Florin did not occur in urban Sacramento, but that the theft of furniture and other personal property was common throughout the exclusion zone.

Chapter 6

LODI AND STOCKTON

Lodi is a small city in northern San Joaquin County. It lies on generally flat land in one of the more fertile regions of California's Central Valley. In the 1940s, Lodi was one of a string of communities that prospered along what was then U.S. Route 99 and is now State Route 99. Running south from Sacramento to Stockton, the two largest cities in the Central Valley north of Fresno, the list of the communities along that corridor included: Florin, Elk Grove, Galt (on the southern edge of Sacramento County), and Lodi. The only incorporated city other than Sacramento and Stockton, Lodi featured a small but significant Japantown area consisting of residences and a business district. At the beginning of 1942, fifteen Japanese American individuals owned land, mostly homes in the Barnhardt subdivision, as did the Buddhist Church of Lodi and two discernibly Japanese American corporations, the Hiroshima Ya Hotel Company and the Takeuchi Company. On a per capita basis this was a comparable or slightly higher rate of Japanese American landownership than Sacramento. The Lodi Japantown extended beyond these properties. As was the case in Sacramento and elsewhere, most Japanese Americans did not own their own homes or any other kind of land.

Only two Japanese American landowners sold property in Lodi as a result of internment. This may have been in part because few of the properties held mortgages, which proved rare in the frugal Lodi Japanese American community. Gekishi Yamashita sold his Lodi house in March of 1942, before evacuation, in an agreement which also

included a provision for the payment of property taxes for 1941.²⁵⁴ Several months after the federal government lifted the exclusion orders, in August 1945, Kiyoshi and Paul Shimada sold their Lodi house from Chicago, deciding to settle in the Windy City rather than return to the San Joaquin Valley.²⁵⁵

N. Shimamoto sold two Barnhardt subdivision lots and a thirty-acre farm to Ritsuo, Ritsuye, and Norio Yamanaka in 1941. From the existing records, this would appear to qualify as a genuine sale, because N. Shimamoto paid off a mortgage at the same time.²⁵⁶ The Yamanakas kept their land during internment, but in 1945 California, in the form of San Joaquin County District Attorney Chester E. Watson, filed escheat proceedings against the property, naming N. Shimamoto as the principal defendant and the Yamanakas as associated defendants. The investigators believed the Yamanakas were holding the property in name only for Shimamoto, who had apparently been in some violation of the Alien Land Law. Shimamoto's mortgage repayment indicates that the district attorney made a mistake in assuming the Yamanakas did not genuinely own the land. In any case, the San Joaquin County Superior Court quickly judged in favor of the State, but the judgment would ultimately be dismissed in the wake of the *Oyama* decision in early 1948.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ San Joaquin County Recorder's Office, "Official Records," Book 781, page 15.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., Book 943, page 131.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., Book 722, page 467; Book 748, page 23. N. Shimamoto's given name is unknown.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., Book 927, page 177; Book 931, page 96; Book 1106, page 417.

Lodi stood in stark contrast to Stockton, which saw a large volume of urban property sales by Japanese Americans during internment, far more than Lodi and the unincorporated agricultural land around both cities. But while various transactions were identified in the course of this study, conclusions regarding the overall effects of internment on Japanese American landowners in Stockton cannot be rendered confidently without access to information about those owners who did not sell their property. In the absence of surviving assessment records, such a list is difficult to create. One can only be certain that many Japanese Americans in Stockton sold land as a result of internment, including several commercial properties.

Oral histories confirm that Japanese American city residents in San Joaquin County experienced mixed success in the way wartime caretakers administered their property during internment. Kaoru Ito and her husband owned a home and commercial property in Stockton during internment. A Mr. Cassidy of the Bank of America assumed responsibility for the Itos' commercial holdings, while they entrusted their home to a different agent. Mr. Cassidy regularly collected rents and sent them on to the Itos. The Ito's home, however, was a source of several problems, including theft and inconsiderate renters. Kaoru Ito recalled, "we had trouble with them even after we returned to Stockton. They refused to leave the home."²⁵⁸ On the other hand, renters could be conscientious about respecting the owner's property. As Richard Yoshikawa remembered, his family decided to leave their house to someone they knew, "Dad had a customer that had done

²⁵⁸ Kaoru Ito, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Kaoru Ito*, by Dorothy Okura and Chisato Watanabe, December 4, 1997 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1998), 17.

missionary work in Japan. He spoke fluent Japanese and volunteered to take care of our house while we were gone. We stored most of our things in the basement and the missionary lived on the top floor.” The missionary did not pay rent, but he did pay the taxes due on the property.²⁵⁹

In May of 1942 Robert Fong purchased the stock and furnishings of Miss Utsumi’s milkshake shop and confectionary.²⁶⁰ Looking back from a modern perspective, there is something depressing and ironic that a fit of racist hatred against a supposedly foreign “other” caused the ruin of iconic American businesses like milkshake shops. Utsumi’s milkshake shop was not the only Stockton-based sweet drink business to suffer from internment. In April 1942, M. Kawamoto sold his soft drink business to a Mr. Lundy.²⁶¹ In Lodi, K. Hayashi sold his laundry to Henry Fink. Fink released Hayashi from his lease and a chattel mortgage and paid \$1300 on top of the debt forgiveness in May of 1942.²⁶²

Notices of business property sales, one of the most visible and immediate effects of internment, are subject to the same reservations as other details from Stockton; without a comprehensive list of businesses owned or even just a full list of sales before internment, few definite conclusions can be drawn. It can be said with reasonable

²⁵⁹ Yoshikawa, interview, 12.

²⁶⁰ San Joaquin County Recorder’s Office, “Official Records,” Book 782, page 103.

²⁶¹ Ibid., Book 760, page 474.

²⁶² Ibid., Book 768, page 331. Two separate records related to the sale both begin on page 331. Henry Fink shows up in many Japanese American records from Lodi. He sold and bought multiple pieces of land with Japanese Americans in the years before the war, and was listed as one of the defendants in the Shimamoto escheat proceeding.

certainty that many Japanese Americans in San Joaquin County were involved in the grocery and hotel businesses. The New Franklin Hotel, the San Joaquin Hotel, “that certain hotel” at 132 Lafayette St., the Sunset Hotel, and Ace Rooms all lost their Japanese American ownership shortly before internment.²⁶³ Most of the hotel sales, unlike those of grocery or other merchandise stores, did not represent convenient opportunities to obtain cheap furniture and other artifacts, but rather involved the transfer of intact facilities that the purchasers intended to continue operating. For example, the Ace Rooms sale, by H.H. Hirose to Sakander Khan specifically included the hotel’s lease on the building it was located in.²⁶⁴ Almost all of the buyers were local businessmen. The exception, the Sugarman-Ralph Company, bought stock-in-trade and merchandise from two stores selling dry goods and clothes, one owned by Juichi Fujimoto, the other by T. and T. Miyata. The Sugarman-Ralph Company, headquartered in Los Angeles, might have purchased internee property in communities across California. It would serve as an interesting subject for historical study.²⁶⁵

Some internees found ways to continue operating their businesses as absentee owners. In March of 1942, James Nishioka appointed W. Thomas as his attorney-in-fact for the purpose of running the Stockton Theater Company, a movie house.²⁶⁶ Two other sales may also have indicated Japanese American businesses continuing to operate during

²⁶³ Ibid., Book 769, page 156; Book 781, pages 31, 123; Book 782, pages 33, 127.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Book 782, page 44.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., Book 769, page 149; Book 778, page 43.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Book 778, page 219.

internment. With his address still listed as his internment camp in Arkansas, John Hayashi waited until April 1945 to sell the Nobby Hotel, likely because he had decided not to return to California.²⁶⁷ Similarly, K. Tatayama sold all of the furnishings, etc. of the Richards Hotel, formerly the Mikado Hotel, to Alice Richards in August of 1945.²⁶⁸ These sales indicate that Hayashi and Tatayama probably ran their hotels through proxies until they decided to divest themselves of their properties after internment ended.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., Book 919, page 113.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., Book 942, page 169.

Chapter 7

ODDS AND ENDS

The JACL

The Japanese American Citizens League was and is undoubtedly the most visible and influential political organization in the Japanese American community. Before and during, internment, it advocated unquestioning loyalty to the United States government, including total compliance with government requests and regulations, as the best way to reduce racism and discrimination directed against Japanese Americans.²⁶⁹ The JACL showed up in many of the records reviewed in this study, sometimes in surprising ways. In 1942, the JACL mandated an oath of allegiance to the United States as a prerequisite to join the JACL. The Sacramento chapter apparently then required the oaths of new members to be notarized and recorded at the Sacramento County Recorder's office. The oath read:

I, the undersigned, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I do hereby forswear and repudiate any other allegiance which I knowingly or unknowingly may have held heretofore; and that I take these obligations freely, without any mental reservations whatsoever or purpose of evasion. So help me God.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Alice Yang Murray, *Historical Memories of the Japanese American Internment and the Struggle for Redress* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 108.

²⁷⁰ Sacramento County Recorder's Office, "On Record," Book 928, page 24.

Also recorded was a copy of a JACL identification card that included a signature, photograph, right-index fingerprint, and description of the member that included distinctive marks such as scars.²⁷¹

By serving as a major outlet of information and instructions to the Japanese American community, the JACL provided significant aid throughout the evacuation phase as well during internment itself. As George Miyao noted, the JACL both made him aware of the federal government's evolving policies toward Japanese Americans and advised him on how to comply with Washington's exclusion orders.²⁷² The JACL's role as a bridge between government organizations and the larger Japanese American community extended to the efforts of the Farm Security Administration.

In the FSA's *Final Report*, the agency lauds the JACL's efforts on behalf of the agency on multiple occasions, more so than any other organization save the FSA itself. Cooperation between the two organizations began soon after the Western Defense Command asked the FSA to assist in dealing with Japanese American agricultural property. During the initial survey of Japanese American-operated farms, registration of properties sometimes occurred at meetings sponsored by "Japanese American

²⁷¹ Ibid., Book 928, page 24; Book 948, page 191. In casual conversation with one of the employees at the Sacramento County Recorder's office, I showed him printed copies of the oaths of allegiance and asked him if he had ever seen anything like them before in the office's records. He was fascinated by the documents, particularly the fingerprint on the identification card, and confirmed that he had never seen any similar recorded records.

I only ran across oaths notarized and recorded by Masanori Hongo and Sumiye Osaki, but it seems likely that other declarations exist.

²⁷² Miyao, interview, 6.

societies.”²⁷³ The FSA’s Information Division, was charged with disseminating a variety of material about the FSA’s program and policies. Its efforts to communicate with Japanese American farmers before removal “included daily contact with the agricultural department of the Japanese American Citizens League.”²⁷⁴ In the FSA’s acknowledgements of assistance, the JACL received exceptional praise:

The Japanese American Citizens League and various kindred societies fostered an attitude among Japanese farmers which was the basis for the active cooperation of their farmer members in carrying out the policies which have been described in this report. It would be hard to overestimate the difference in results which would have been realized had this constructive viewpoint not been engendered by these societies.²⁷⁵

Racism, Here and There

One of the reasons many Japanese Americans decided not to return to California is that they frequently met with less racism and hostility away from the west coast. In some cases, other Americans far from the Pacific simply had no idea the Japanese Americans in their midst were, in fact, Japanese Americans. Asked if she experienced any racism in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she lived while on leave from camp, Chiyo Mitori Shimamoto responded, “No. Japanese were strangers. They had never seen Japanese before in that area. In fact, one fellow asked me if I was French. I said I was

²⁷³ FSA, *Final Report*, 12.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

French Indian.”²⁷⁶ Fumiko Akutagawa, attending commercial arts school in Cincinnati, Ohio, found locals were more experienced with a different Asian ethnicity. She recalled, “Most people thought I was Chinese instead of Japanese so they didn’t treat me badly. The girls in my school heard my name as ‘Fu-ming,’ and they came to their own conclusion that I was Chinese. I had no problem.”²⁷⁷ Many *nisei* found that simply having grown up in America made a difference in how they were treated. Tomoye Tsukamoto remembered that she and her children had no trouble driving alone across America after being released from camp to join her husband, Walter, “because we spoke like Americans. Without an accent.”²⁷⁸

In the South, especially in Arkansas where most Sacramento and San Joaquin County Japanese Americans ended up, the internees experienced few problems in dealing with the locals. On a rare trip to Little Rock with other *nisei*, Alfred Tsukamoto spoke about their treatment: “Once they met us, we all spoke English and we spoke good English. Sometimes some of the other guys around there spoke [poor English] – they treated us real fine.”²⁷⁹ William Tuttle, Director of Welfare at the Gila River camp in Arizona, remembered a business trip to Arkansas with his assistant, Mary Obata:

²⁷⁶ Shimamoto, interview, 20.

²⁷⁷ Akutagawa, interview, 21.

²⁷⁸ Tomoye Tsukamoto, *Florin Japanese American Citizens League Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Tomoye “Tommy” Eda Kasai Tsukamoto*, by Doris S. Kobayashi and Laura L. Kobayashi Ashizawa, 1988-1995 (Sacramento: Florin Japanese American Citizens League, 1995), 65.

²⁷⁹ Alfred Tsukamoto, interview, 33.

Miss Obata and I got into a train station in Little Rock and she had to go to the bathroom. And this is my first time in the South and hers. And she said, “Well it says ‘Colored only’ and ‘White only.’ Which one do I use?” I said, “I don’t know. We’ll ask the clerk.” And so she asked the desk clerk, and he said, “Oh, you’re white, of course.” Well, there she had been discriminated against and she’s told she’s white. So we both got a kick out of that.²⁸⁰

Americans outside of the exclusion zone were not always so accepting. In late 1943, Alfred Tsukamoto had made his way to Chicago on a work release and found a job at the Peter Pan Bakery. But Japanese Americans could only work there at night after a customer saw Alfred’s sister during the day and organized a boycott of the bakery.²⁸¹

Aya Motoike thought that World War II as a whole may have hastened the repeal of the Alien Land Laws and other discriminatory regulations faced by Japanese Americans because of the publicity surrounding the heroic combat record of the Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team.²⁸² But hostility to Japanese Americans in particular and racism in general remained common in California as former internees returned to the state. Homer Yoshio Takahashi’s family had come back to Loomis in Placer County and restarted their business in early 1945. “Loomis was sort of a hot bed. Some of the businesses had signs saying ‘We do not serve Japs.’ Auburn was the worst.

²⁸⁰ William Kelley Tuttle, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Chii Miyazaki Watanabe*, by Joanne Iritani, March 26, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 28.

²⁸¹ Alfred Tsukamoto, interview, 37, 38.

²⁸² Motoike, interview, 19.

Our store did get some of their old customers back, and slowly the rest came back to shop.”²⁸³

In the summer of 1945, six neighborhoods in Sacramento agreed, with a clear purpose, to property restrictions. The covenant stated unequivocally, “no part of said lots shall at any time be rented, leased, sub-leased or sub-let to, or to be occupied or used by any person of either Hindu, African, Japanese, Chinese, or Mongolian descent, but such property shall be restricted to persons of the Caucasian race forever.”²⁸⁴ The agreements were recorded shortly after the return of most internees to California for “the purpose of enhancing and maintaining the value of said property.”²⁸⁵ All of the agreements were recorded at the request of the Sacramento Abstract and Title Company. The six neighborhoods were Oak Terrace, Boulevard Park, and the downtown areas bounded by:

T & U and 17th & 18th Streets,
 E & H and 25th & 26th Streets,
 H & I and 24th & 25th Streets,
 W & X and 29th & 30th Streets.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Homer Yoshio Takahashi, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Homer Yoshio Takahashi*, by James E. Craig, May 7, 1998 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 27.

²⁸⁴ Sacramento County Recorder’s Office, “On Record,” Book 1168, page 13.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Book 1168, page 16.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Book 1168, pages 9-36.

A Self-Inflicted Wound

As a national security measure, internment proved worse than useless. In part a shameful reflection of anti-Japanese racism by many on the west coast, relocation more importantly betrayed the attitude of a small group of willful government officials and army officers led by Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy.²⁸⁷ Even decades after internment, Secretary of War John McCloy, who was the aide responsible for Japanese American questions for Secretary of War Stimson during World War II, continued to equate ethnic Japanese citizens of the United States with citizens of Japan.²⁸⁸ Racism, xenophobia, and paranoia about a “Fifth Column” of Japanese Americans combined to justify the arrest of thousands of Japanese community leaders by the FBI, despite the fact intelligence experts knew that Japan’s espionage efforts relied on white spies.²⁸⁹ Had the FBI devoted its resources to catching actual spies, they may or may not have been successful, but they would not have been terrorizing loyal Americans.

Internment was expensive. Only one small piece of the much larger government operation, the FSA hired 521 employees and spent \$300,000 in less than three months of operations.²⁹⁰ In addition, many of the loans made by the FSA were never fully repaid, and it enjoyed only partial success in ensuring continuous agricultural production on

²⁸⁷ United States, *Personal Justice Denied*, 4-6.

²⁸⁸ Murray, 17.

²⁸⁹ United States, *Personal Justice Denied*, 55.

²⁹⁰ FSA, *Final Report*, Table 13, Exhibit 38.

Japanese American farms. Whether food rationing or “Victory Gardens” would have been as vital in California if Japanese Americans had been growing truck crops instead of languishing in prison camps is a question for scholars who dwell in counterfactual history. Although Japanese Americans suffered most of the economic damage resulting from internment, many other Americans also felt the impact of their absence from California, including white landlords and farmers accustomed to relying on Japanese American labor. The FSA reported it:

received numerous emergency communications from landlords, community leaders and other persons interested in the farming of particular areas to the effect that removal of the skilled Japanese would paralyze certain farming operations and urging that the Farm Security Administration intercede to have the evacuation postponed.²⁹¹

Even the military, which in the form of General DeWitt was the most important advocate for internment, suffered minor inconveniences. Because the ethnicity of many of its recruits barred them from California, the Army’s Japanese language school at the Presidio in San Francisco shut down and moved its operations to Camp Savage, Minnesota. On a more personal level, like many other Japanese American soldiers, James Hajime Kurata had hoped to use his military leave to check on his parents’ farmstead in California. But even though he was performing his patriotic duty by offering to fight and die for his country, Kurata—on the basis of his ancestry—was refused permission to enter the exclusion zone.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Ibid., 30.

²⁹² Kurata, interview, 15.

Conclusion

Under any normal circumstances, an economic event that would force one-fifth or more of a community to sell farms, homes, and other real estate would be categorized as nothing less than a major catastrophe. Under the extraordinary and, with the possible exception of Indian removal, unprecedented removal and incarceration of virtually the entire Japanese American population of the west coast, the ability of most Japanese Americans to retain ownership of their land through internment is a testament to the community's indomitable spirit, financial prudence, and dedication to the American Dream.

Today, many of the communities studied no longer exist in the same form. Sacramento no longer has a Japantown, although there are still small shops where one can find handmade *mochi*.²⁹³ Florin never fully recovered as a farming community, although many of the Japanese American residents of Florin would continue to live there after the war. The Tsukamotos farmed grapes until 1949, when Mary Tsukamoto began her career as a school teacher. Alfred Tsukamoto would find a job at the nearby Army Signal Depot in 1950 and work there until retiring in 1979.²⁹⁴ After buying new land suitable for tomatoes, Percy Nakashima continued farming until 1954. But faced with competition from tomato farms using machine harvesters, Nakashima eventually took a

²⁹³ A traditional dessert made from pounded rice.

²⁹⁴ Alfred Tsukamoto, interview, 42, 46.

job at a Del Monte plant.²⁹⁵ George Miyao sold his farmland in 1952 and became a maintenance gardener.²⁹⁶ Like Miyao, most Florin farm owners, white and Japanese-American, would keep their houses but eventually sell the surrounding farmland to developers.²⁹⁷

Undeniably, internment dealt a staggering financial blow for Japanese Americans, but prosperity eventually returned to most of the community. And, perhaps most importantly, Japanese Americans did not permit internment to permanently separate them from the larger community. Today, the rapid disappearance of some of the old racial divisions make their previous existence seem absurd. This process is accomplished (or not accomplished) in the course of everyday interaction between individuals.

One sign of the growing rapprochement between Japanese Americans and the greater community occurred in 1971, when a small growers' organization formed and called itself the Nisei Farmers League. Because of common challenges from the emergent farm labor union movement under César Chávez, growers from all ethnic backgrounds flocked to the new, vibrant group. If not a pivotal moment in multiracial cooperation, the formation of the Nisei Farmers League nonetheless showed that only one generation after internment, white farmers in California were willing to join an

²⁹⁵ Nakashima, interview, 16-18.

²⁹⁶ Miyao, interview, 2.

²⁹⁷ Fletcher, interview, 65.

organization named for its Japanese American founders. Today, the president of the Nisei Farmers League is the Portuguese American grower, Manuel Cunha, Jr.²⁹⁸

Everyday personal interactions carry as much meaning as the large impersonal forces that affect our lives. In June of 1942, as the United States government opened a chain of internment camps and held Reverend Newton Ishiura's fellow Buddhist ministers in prison, Reverend Ishiura contracted tuberculosis and was moved from his assembly center to a sanitarium in San Fernando Valley along with one hundred and sixty-eight other Japanese Americans. An ambulatory patient outfitted in his pajamas rather than in his monastic robe, Reverend Ishiura found himself less than fully effective as a minister:

ISHIURA: And so I thought, well, if I had another kind of attire. In the meantime I got to know the Maryknoll Fathers pretty well. And I told the Father I need that stuff here – you know, that white collar. [He said,] “Sure.” The next day he brought me one my size. I wore it. I went to the wards. Wow, they sit up in bed, you know.

TSUDA [the interviewer]: They thought you were a Catholic minister?

ISHIURA: No. They knew I was a Buddhist minister.

TSUDA: [Laughter] But you were dressed much more respectfully.²⁹⁹

Before leaving, Reverend Ishiura organized non-denominational Sunday services for Christians in the sanitarium. He kept the collar during internment, and less than a decade

²⁹⁸ Nisei Farmers League, “Nisei Farmers League Today,” <http://www.niseifarmersleague.com/niseitoday.htm> (accessed March 22, 2010).

²⁹⁹ Reverend Newton Ishiura, *North Central Valley JACL Oral History Project: Oral History Interview with Reverend Newton Ishiura*, by Hiroko Tsuda, September 9 and 18, 1997 (Sacramento: North Central Valley JACL Consortium, 1999), 26.

after General DeWitt issued the exclusion orders, Reverend Ishiura successfully convinced the military to establish the Wheel of Dharma as the official symbol placed on grave markers for deceased Buddhist service members.³⁰⁰

Japanese American internment is important because of the damage it dealt to the United States' freedoms as well as its deleterious impact on the Japanese Americans and the Japanese American community. The story of farm sales and home mortgages during internment is also the story of everyday life, of anxieties about money, of hours spent bent over vine trellises, the satisfaction of a bountiful harvest, and the agony of being forced to watch a harvest go to waste. One hopes that, in a small way, this study has illuminated that history.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 28, 34.

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