



SAN JOAQUIN HISTORIAN

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The Japanese in San Joaquin County Past and Present

by Chiyo Shimamoto

To understand and know the Japanese immigrant pioneers one has to know about their background and the reasons for their coming so many nautical miles to a land so foreign to them. The lure of wide open spaces and supposedly untold riches to be gained was enough to entice the brave and the daring, but it took more than that for the immigrant Japanese to leave the homeland they loved to come to the United States.

The plight of the farming class in Japan was worsening during the waning years of the Tokugawa Shogunate. The life of the peasant farmer was rendered almost unbearable by the fluctuating prices of rice, diminishing food supply and plundering of the farmers' lands by Ronins or masterless Samurai. The Samurai were the paid protectors of regional war lords. As the regime of the Tokugawa Shogunate waned, the war lords were hard pressed and could not keep their Samurai retainers on the payroll. Trained only for war and use of the sword, these masterless Samurai raided the farms for food to sustain themselves.

In 1868 the Tokugawa Shogun resigned after an unsuccessful armed conflict between the Shogunate party and the Loyalists. The Tokugawa Shogunate which had remained in power from 1603 to 1867 was finally at an end. Feudalism was abolished and the monarchy was restored.

The new Emperor Meiji made many sweeping changes. The 1633 edict forbidding any Japanese subject from going abroad was abolished. The Japanese could now come and go to other nations, if they wished, without fear of death upon returning. The common people could now have surnames. Universal education was initiated.

The small Dutch settlement at Nagasaki was encouraged to import books on many subjects except Christianity. The lone Dutch doctor taught medicine to willing Japanese students by sign language and example. Suddenly foreign information on many subjects was in great demand.

The Meiji government sent its first group of contract laborers to the Kingdom of Hawaii to work and learn advanced methods of agriculture. For the hard pressed farmers this was an opportune time to send their second or younger sons to America where these young men might have a better life than in their small villages. In Japan the eldest son always inherited the parents' property. If there were no sons, the eldest daughter took a husband who would give up his surname for his new wife's name.

These were exciting times for the people of Japan. By the late 1800s and 1900s the flow of Japanese immigrants to the United States began. These immigrants were mostly the younger sons

of farm families. Some of the new emigres took their wives with them.

About this time the Chinese in California were beginning to feel the effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which had stopped further immigration of Chinese into the United States. The Chinese, as was their custom, did not take their wives or families with them when going to another country. With no new young Chinese to replenish the labor supply the farms operated by Chinese went into a decline. The exodus of the aging Chinese population to the cities left a void in the agricultural field in California. With the attrition of the Chinese population, the new, young energetic Japanese were here just in time to fill this void.

By 1900 there were 24,000 Japanese immigrants on the mainland of the United States. Most of these immigrants were from the rural areas of Japan. Many of these Japanese first began working on the San Joaquin and Sacramento delta farms. As these young men's confidence and savings grew, they began to send letters to their families and friends in Japan requesting appropriate wives for themselves. Thus, the "Picture Bride" system began. Many of these young men sent pictures of themselves so that the prospective bride could see what the prospective groom looked like. Professional intermediaries flourished. For a fee the intermediaries arranged everything. After an exchange of pictures and a marriage by proxy, the new brides were issued passports and were soon on their way to California. This practice was discontinued in 1921 at the request of the United States Government, and in 1924 Congress passed the Asian Exclusion Act prohibiting further immigration of the Japanese from Japan.

The new young couples worked hard on these Delta farms, learning the new methods of agriculture in their new world. Looking around for suitable areas to settle in, they were amazed at the wide open areas and vistas around them. San Joaquin County attracted

many of these early immigrants. These new pioneers were called Issei, which meant the first generation in America. The children born to them in the United States were called Nisei or second generation.

The rich soils and abundant water supply of the San Joaquin County attracted many of the Issei. These new young Japanese families settled in areas such as Lodi, Stockton, Manteca, Linden, Turlock and French Camp. Many started small vegetable farms known as "truck farms" in San Joaquin County. Not much initial investment was needed to start these farms. With just a few acres a family could grow many varieties of vegetables.

These new Japanese farmers employed many of the practices learned in Japan on their parents' farms. From used lumber and junk scrap iron these ingenious farmers made much of their own equipment such as sleds, wheelbarrows and leveling equipment. They also re-fashioned hand tools to fit their needs. They also developed wooden sluices and clever ways of irrigating small patches of land. Farmers fashioned box making forms so that their small children could pound out boxes for packing the vegetables. Many of these Nisei children learned through practice to make boxes very efficiently. Harvesting, grading and sorting equipment used on the farms was usually home made. With conservation and skill

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George Shima using a horse to plant potatoes.

the Issei truck farmers produced quantity as well as high quality vegetables for the fresh produce market in Stockton. It was not long before these farmers monopolized the fresh produce market.

The Japanese Growers Association was formed to regulate trade and settle problems among the various growers. The non-Japanese farmers were alarmed over the success of these new young farmers. Through powerful agricultural lobbies the California legislature passed the 1912 Alien Land and Naturalization Law. This law prohibited Alien Japanese from becoming naturalized citizens and also prevented them from purchasing land. The leasing of land was limited to three years per lease. This ruling necessitated frequent moves for these families. The successful Japanese farmer who tried to purchase land through his American born children was discouraged from doing so by the 1920 revised Alien Land Laws which prohibited the Japanese immigrant parents from serving as guardians of their minor children's properties. The Japanese Association was formed to try to fight against discrimination with George Shima as its first president.

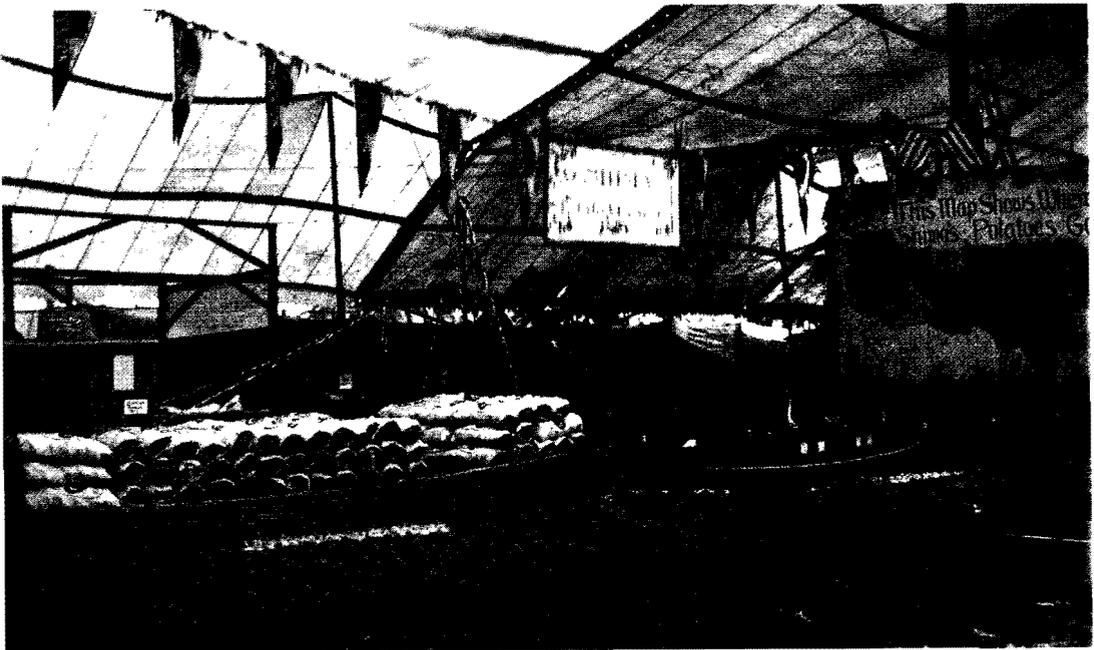
George Shima, the famous "Potato King," was a successful potato grower on the San Joaquin Delta. He raised potatoes on twenty Delta islands. Although he was only able to purchase 1,500 acres on King Island before the 1912 Alien Land and Naturalization Law went into effect, he farmed the other islands by leases and share-cropping. He hired people of all races on his farms. He was the first to wash and grade his potatoes. Transportation, marketing and manufacturing companies benefited from his successful enterprises. The Shima building on the San Joaquin Delta College grounds in Stockton was named in his honor. George Shima contributed much toward the growth of Stockton.

Lodi, home of the famous Tokay grapes, was also where the Japanese excelled. There were some truck farms in Lodi, but most of the Japanese there worked for the Tokay grape growers and shippers. Many vineyardists erected farm labor camps on their properties and hired Japanese labor bosses. These labor bosses were responsible for hiring crews to prune and harvest the grapes. There were many foot-loose unmarried Japanese men who went up

and down the San Joaquin Valley working in the crops. They were called "blanket carriers." At grape harvest time they converged toward Lodi to work in the vineyards. If a vineyardist had a good vineyard of packing grapes as well as a good cook in the mess hall, the labor camp boss had no problem rounding up a sizeable crew of workers. A Japanese labor boss who had a wife who was a good cook doubly benefited because the laboring "blanket men" spread the news and recruitment was no problem.

These Japanese laborers on the grape farms were expert packers of the beautiful Tokay grapes. The agricultural inspectors knew and respected these pickers' work so that the vineyardist had no problem having his grapes pass inspection. The Nisei children growing up in these labor camps became good workers also. The Nisei children learned early to study hard and have good work ethics. These children were good students in school and achieved high scholastic records. As one youngster was quoted as saying, "I had better get good grades or else." "Be a credit to your race, study and work hard," was what was reiterated all through the Nisei children's youth.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan and the start of World War II affected the Japanese on the West Coast with far reaching results. Franklin D. Roosevelt, our President, signed Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. This was an official order to remove all United States citizens of Japanese ancestry as well as all Japanese aliens from Washington, Oregon and California to the interior of the country. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) was created to implement the executive order. The Japanese were given such a short time to dispose of their possessions and properties that there was much loss of valuables. They were only allowed to take what they could carry in their two hands to the temporary assembly centers. The San Joaquin County Fair Grounds was the center for those Japanese living in most of San Joaquin County. There were 4,390 detainees held in the San Joaquin County Fair Grounds from May 10, 1942, through October 17, 1942, until a permanent internment camp was constructed for them in Rohwer, Arkansas. There were ten permanent internment camps constructed in the interior of the country to house the 120,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese aliens.



San Joaquin County Fair Shima Exhibit in 1913.



Strawberry harvest in Lodi. The center figure is Chiyo Shimamoto.

On September 4, 1945, Executive Order 9066 was revoked and the Japanese could return to the West Coast. Many of the Japanese internees elected to settle in the Eastern States. The internees who came back to California faced a lot of hostilities at first. The Nisei (second generation) were now the heads of households. They had to not only care for their aging Issei parents but also raise their young families. Their hopes and desires for further education became only an empty dream. These young Nisei families had to start from scratch just as the Issei, their parents, had done. Field work, housework, packing sheds — no job was passed up. Slowly the Nisei rebuilt their lives in San Joaquin County. Some eventually became large tomato growers. Some specialized in specialty crops of large acreage but the “truck farms” were of the past. In Lodi some of the men became labor bosses on the vineyardists’ grape camps just as their fathers had. The former “blanket carriers” were few in number and aging. The labor bosses had to rely on commuting farm laborers of other races. Some Nisei were eventually able to purchase vineyards of their own.

The Nisei were determined to give their children, the Sansei or third generation, a good education at all

costs. They sacrificed much for them. Of all the minority groups in the United States today, the Sansei have the largest number who are college educated, an impressive accomplishment in just three generations.

The Walter-McCarren Immigration and Naturalization Act was passed by Congress in 1952. This act allowed the Japanese the right to become citizens of the United States which gave them the right to vote. It also allowed the Japanese to enter the United States through the quota system. The Issei flocked to classes set up for them. How proud they were to become citizens of the United States where they had lived and worked for the greater part of their lives.

The Japanese pioneer Issei who came to the United States and settled in San Joaquin County have contributed much to our country. They have shown how the rich soils of our county could grow so many varieties of vegetables. They have also shown how to grow superior vegetables not equaled the world over. Their innovative farm equipment was the forerunner of today’s modern farm equipment. The skill of the Issei “blanket carriers” who harvested the Tokay grapes in Lodi has never been equaled. The “Potato King,” George Shima, turned the San Joaquin Delta in-

to a huge enterprise and became history. The Japanese ethnic foods such as teriyaki chicken and tofu are common delicacies to all of us in San Joaquin County today.

Through adversity, discrimination and internment the pioneer spirit of these Issei has prevailed. They have taught and shown their children, the Nisei, how the human spirit can overcome great obstacles.

The Nisei or second generation, because of their early nurturing years and in spite of the indignities of incarceration in internment camps, have distinguished themselves by their Americanism. The members of the famous all Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Unit who fought and sacrificed so many of their lives in the European Theater of World War II and the lesser known contributions of those in the Military Intelligence Unit in the Far Eastern Theater of this same war were also from towns like Stockton, Lodi and Tracy. Their feats of bravery and sacrifice will go down in the annals of military history.

The Sansei or third generation are slowly becoming woven into the mosaic of the contemporary American scene.

The Issei prepared the path, the Nisei constructed the bridge, the Sansei can walk across it straight and tall. The world is in the palms of their hands. The way was prepared for them by the sufferings and struggles of the Issei. May it not have been in vain.

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Excerpts from speeches by Chiyo Shimamoto

WE THE PEOPLE. By THE NATIONAL JAPANESE AMERICAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THIS BITTER SWEET SOIL. By Suchen Chen

Chiyo Shimamoto is the author of "To The Land of Bright Promise," a publication of the San Joaquin County Historical Society which is on sale at the Museum Gift Shop. For many years Chiyo owned and operated a beauty shop in Lodi. She is very active in community affairs and is very busy being a Docent and leading the training program for new Docents for the Museum.



G.I.s in Brisbane, Australia - Pacific Theater during World War II. In the center is Iwao Shimamoto, Chiyo's husband.



Grandma

Smothered in vinyl, your kimono rests its silkworm tapestry in closeted clutter, while neglected ash nestles stoically in bronze. They capture me with tales that I never let you impart when my child's guile had me fooled that language was an unbreakable barrier. Now, in regretful mirth, I imagine storybook tales from your silence.

Your bridal journey of salt and sickness empowered you to endure. And the sun, though harsh, took many years to weather your skin. Soil envelopes around your tiny, tired feet and endless plantings comprised life from season to season. Ownership, rest, and streets paved with gold proved elusive, but you refused to succumb, and blessed yourself with nine healthy children.

When yellow became a violation, America spat in your face and caged you like a cricket. Then reassurance of superiority finally soothed white hysteria, and you were allowed once

again, "freedom".

Your children flew, and their children took giddy delight in your dentures, your candies; took for granted your knowledge of things now laboriously remembered, like the New Year's rice cakes that toughened hands shaped swiftly from steamy dough, and the man, earth, and heaven of your flowers in their arranged simplicity.

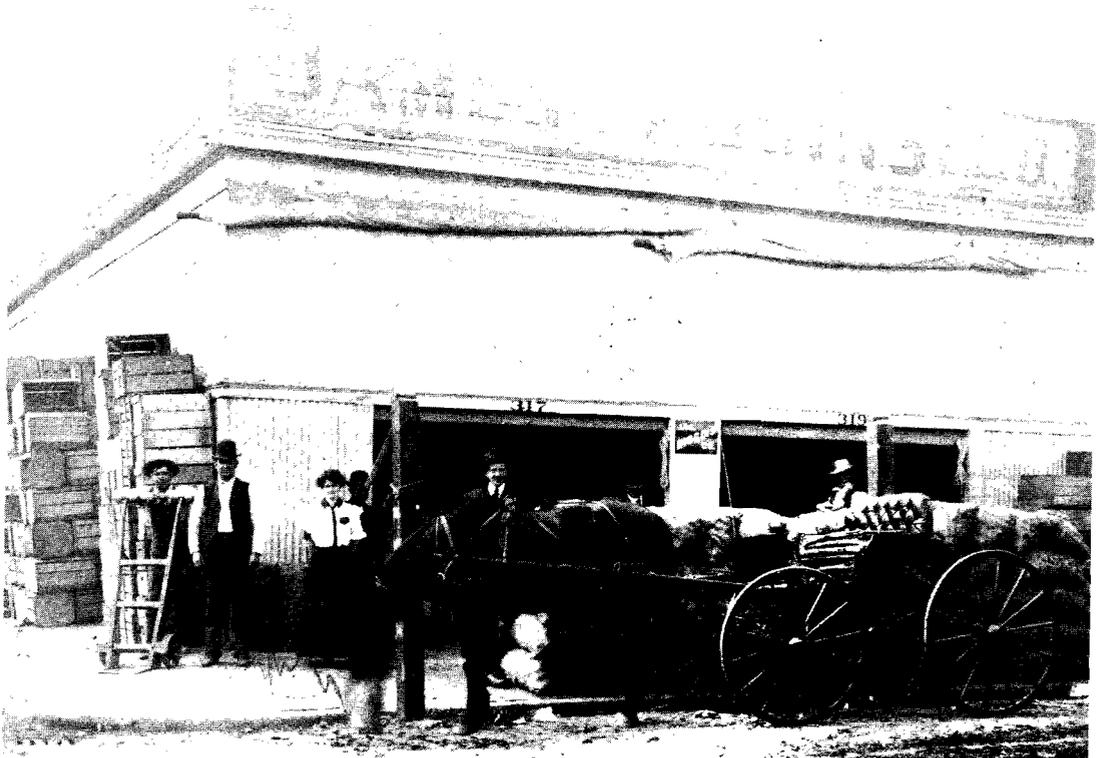
I tried to go back for you but could not be bitter and benevolent, haggard and happy, practical and proud. My creek is yet shallow, while yours has gushingly spent itself many times over. So I proclaim your story from pulverulent remembrances, and create, for you, this expression of respect.

Robin A. Hattori

Robin A. Hattori wrote the above tribute to her grandmother (Chiyo's mother). The drawing on the left shows Chiyo's mother when she came to this country, the one on the right is when she went to the retention camp, and the one in the middle shows her a short time before her death.



Faith Shimamoto, Chiyo's daughter, an Electronics Engineer at Lawrence Laboratory at Livermore. A good example of the Third Generation (Sensei).



James Higgins, San Francisco Produce House, showing Delta Potatoes, 1906.

The Stockton Commandment

by Niles White

Mired in a recession and in the last year of its independent existence, the Holt Manufacturing Company in 1924 produced a curious document titled the "Ten Commandments of Salesmanship". It wasn't experience that caused the commandments to be written down, although the commandments reflect experience. They were written 41 years after Charles and Benjamin Holt, already with 30 years of business experience between them, started their agricultural implements and machinery business in Stockton.

More likely, it was desperation. The commandments were set down as a result of the recession that followed World War I. It was a time when nationally hundreds of agricultural implement and machinery manufacturers were going out of business. Not surprisingly, the commandments did not offset the effects of recession on the Holt Manufacturing Company, nor its bad product mix, its debt, its outdated management practices and the absence of its founder, Benjamin Holt, who had died in 1920. The company was forced in 1925 to merge with the C. L. Best Gas Tractor Co. to form the Caterpillar Tractor Company.

The commandments were worded so that it was The Customer speaking to Holt salesmen, one tribe of whom lived in the Central Valley:

1. Be agreeable. *If your voice is disagreeable and your speech indistinct, see a specialist. Don't get mad.*

2. Know your goods. *And when you tell me anything, talk plainly. Most salesmen lack imagination. They cannot conceive the extent of my ignorance.* [Farmers, as customers, were not universally admired. In 1874, Augustin L. Taveau, U.S. agricultural commissioner, said that steam-powered agricultural machinery had not advanced as rapidly as it could "because the farmer himself had clogged its wheels with incredulity and prejudice." Another explained the farmers'

"pre-eminent conservatism" as caused by the "monotonous routine of his business".

To balance the ledger, Thomas Jefferson described farmers as "the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, [in] whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit of substantial and genuine virtue.]

3. Don't argue. *When you argue with a man, you are trying to push him. He may be weak and pretend to be convinced. Overnight he will change.*

4. Make it plain. *Get a grasp on the fellow you are talking with. Answer his questions without looking at your books, charts or tables.*

5. Tell the truth. *By the law of averages, honesty gives the greatest profits. If you are working for a concern where you cannot tell the truth, quit and go elsewhere.*

[Oscar Starr, who worked for both Holt and Best, told F. Hal Higgins, agricultural historian, about a Holt exhibit at the San Francisco fair on the eve of World War I. A Holt "45" crawler tractor was rigged to turn slowly in a circle on the floor. Dad Crook, who had trained for the ministry, was in charge of the exhibit and, according to Starr, "naturally had to answer a lot of foolish questions." Yielding to boredom, Crook at one point casually assured a visitor that the tractor was going around in circles because it was a mechanical sheep herder. Awed, the visitor went away to spread the word of the marvel he'd seen until someone put him straight.]

6. Be dependable. *If you tell a man you are going to do a thing, do it if it costs a leg.*

7. Remember names and faces. *Don't call me Green when my name is Crane. I am sensitive about my name.*

8. Don't be egotistical. *I am. You must not be. Don't show off. You came to sell me something, not to make a good impression. Magnify my ego, not yours.*

[Salesmen closer to the frontier days were no more egotistical than later salesmen, but they were less constrained. According to Higgins, "California pioneer tractor men (including salesmen) ...were rugged boys who were in a hurry to get answers to tractor power. They believed in competition by contact, whether by fist in personal arguments or pulling contests."

Holt and Best steam and gas tractors had tail-to-tail tugs of war and competi-

tions to determine which tractor could pull the most plows. Farmers, contractors, loggers, salesmen and tractor servicemen cheered and betted on the outcomes. Contests frequently were spur-of-the-moment affairs and were not sanctioned by management because they were crude measures of performance. "Yes," a salesman would have said under his breath, "but they're fun."

D.G. Best is the grandson of Daniel Best who founded the Daniel Best



Salesmen and dealers of Best agricultural machinery pose behind railing at Walla Walla Fair, 1908. In background is the first model of the Betty Best Side Hill Harvester. For more than 40 years, the Best and Holt companies competed fiercely for farm business in the Far West until they merged to form the Caterpillar Tractor Company in 1925.

— Courtesy Dept. of Special Collections, Univ. of Calif., Davis

Agricultural Works in San Leandro. Daniel Best was Ben Holt's strongest competitor. The grandson recalled a story on the competition between Holt and Best when their tractors were exhibited at a state fair:

As I recall, the sprockets on the old Holt machines were cast iron, and the ones on the Best machines were steel. So the Best salesman grabbed a sledge hammer or something and whanged on the Best sprocket and it rang. The Holt salesman said, "Well, I can do that to mine too," so he did it, and broke the sprocket. (Or maybe the other way around.)

9. Think success. Radiate prosperity. Do not mention calamities, dirges, funerals. Be a pollyanna.

10. Be human. If the company merely wanted to disseminate information, they would use a catalogue, not you.

The commandments are direct, unequivocal, free of the plague of bureaucratese. But the fact they were written at all suggests bureaucracy and the passing of simpler frontier days. For example, take a look at the "commandment" in the Holt Bulletin, vol. 25, no. 255, written in Stockton and dated September 12, 1907. Presumably it was addressed to everyone and not just salesmen. It was short enough to fit in the upper right-hand corner of the bulletin. "Smile and hustle" was all it said.

Niles White is also the author of "A Bloomer in Wheat" published in the Summer 1992 issue of *The Historian*. Niles has a degree in English from the University of Arizona and a degree in Journalism from Arizona State. He has worked in Journalism, Advertising and Technical communications.

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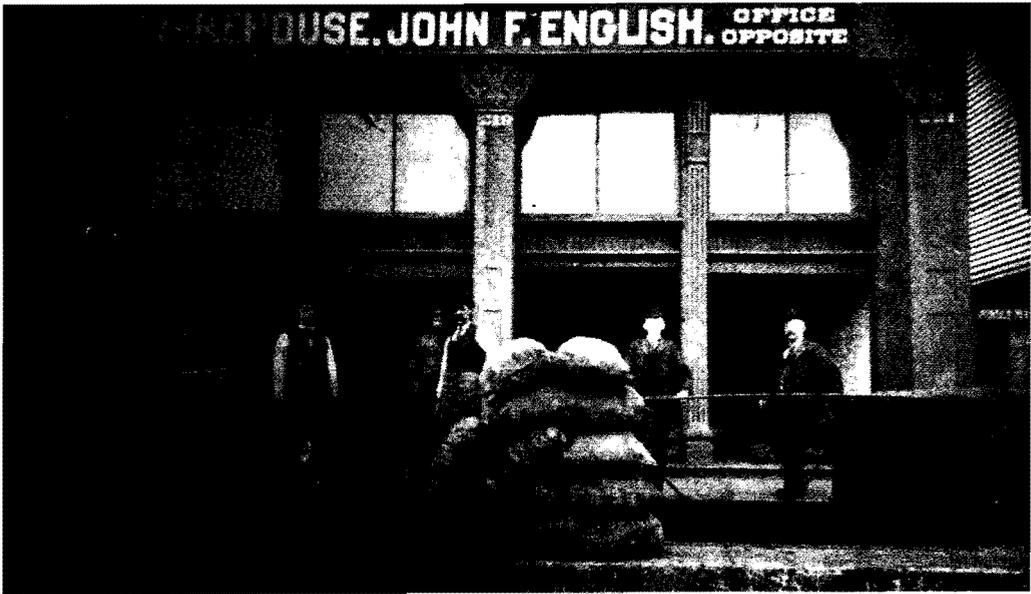
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John F. English Warehouse in San Francisco, 1894, showing Shima's Potatoes.

Editorial Comment

I have been your volunteer Editor for four years, working pretty much on my own initiative within broad policy guidelines. My objective has been to produce a quality publication for your enjoyment and for the benefit of the members of the Historical Society. I hope that I have succeeded.

Look forward for the new energy and changes generated by new Editorial Leadership in 1993.

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