

# NARRATIVE TEXTS

## Japanese Texans

The story of Japanese arrivals to Texas is one of the most varied in terms of reasons or motives. Japanese Texans came by choice, invitation, as relocated businesspeople, through government order, and as forced prisoners.

In 1902, because of overpopulation in Japan, Sadatsuchi Uchida toured the Gulf Coast with an eye to emigration possibilities. As a result, two prominent Japanese families successfully set up rice farms. These efforts attracted other Japanese, and although the rice market failed 15 years later, many stayed, some switching to truck farming.

Another small wave of Japanese families arrived in Texas from the West Coast, driven away by hostility there. They settled mostly in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties in the lower Rio Grande Valley, while some chose El Paso and Bexar Counties.

These arrivals were welcomed, but by 1920 the American Legion post in Harlingen told Japanese immigrants to stay away, and the following year the Texas legislature passed a law prohibiting the owning or even leasing of land by foreign-born Japanese.

World War II brought a strong, illogical, but certainly understandable reaction against Japanese immigration and also against individuals of Japanese descent living in the United States. The Bexar County Japanese were particularly noticeable in a military city.

During World War II, nearly 6,000 “alien” Japanese arrived as prisoners, called internees, in three federal camps in Texas: Seagoville, Kenedy, and Crystal City. Many of these Japanese were former West Coast residents, and at the close of the camps, a few made Texas home. Some stayed because their properties on the West Coast had been confiscated and sold.

After 1950 the Japanese population turned urban, and assimilation increased. Many of the individuals coming to Texas were “war brides,” Japanese women who had



*Seito Saibara's new (1904) house on his rice farm near Webster*



*Rice workers on a farm near the Texas coast wearing traditional Japanese rice-straw hats, 1905*

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married American servicemen. For a time, Japanese women in Texas greatly outnumbered the men, and the women themselves formed clubs to teach each other how to deal with a very different land.

The ban on Japanese naturalization ended in 1952, and immigration laws were relaxed; but in general, the Japanese did not target Texas as a new home.

Many recent arrivals have been sent to Texas by Japanese firms establishing branch operations in urban centers. In 1997 in Houston more than 100 Japanese companies were represented, and persons working for these firms outnumbered Japanese Texans descended from earlier settlers.

Today the second and third generations of Japanese Texans—the *nisei* and *sansei*—are concentrated in Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio.