

The Japanese Texans



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

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, under government pressure created through overpopulation in Japan, Sadatsuchi Uchida toured the Gulf Coast with an eye to emigration possibilities. Many Texas businessmen appreciated the visit, indicated that Japanese farmers would be welcome, and invited settlement efforts.

Some of the immediate leaders were prominent. Seito Saibara, a lawyer, businessman, former university president in Kyoto, and member of the Japanese parliament, came to Webster near Houston in 1902. Businessman Kichimatsu Kishi settled in Terry near Beaumont. Both brought families as well as single men and successfully set up rice farms. These efforts attracted others, and, although the rice market failed 15 years later, many stayed, some changing their investment to truck farming.

For a short time, some of these settlers wore traditional Japanese field dress and practiced their native religions. Most kept a low profile, deliberately adopting Western clothing and local beliefs.

Another small wave of Japanese families arrived in Texas from the West Coast early in the 20th century, driven away by anti-Japanese feelings there. They settled mostly in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties in the lower Rio Grande Valley, while a few 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, and the Jingu family, who had helped create the Japanese Tea Garden for San Antonio, were forced to leave. The garden was hastily renamed the Chinese Tea Garden.



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

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 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, Japanese did not immediately target Texas as a new home.



Federal High School graduates, 1945, in the Crystal Internment Camp

Recent arrivals have been sent to Texas by Japanese firms establishing branch operations in urban centers. By 1997, more than 100 Japanese companies were represented in Houston, 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.



Some of the Kimi Jingu family posing at the Japanese Tea Garden, where they lived and sold refreshments to visitors at San Antonio's Brackenridge Park, 1937.

The Japanese Tea Gardens of San Antonio

The Japanese Tea Gardens of San Antonio has a wide-ranging story involving many people and many motives for the site at today's northwest edge of Brackenridge Park.

The site was first used as a stone quarry by German masons cutting stone for downtown building in San Antonio, the Menger Hotel among them. By 1879, an Englishman, William Lloyd, teamed up with George H. Kalteyer, a chemist and druggist of German descent, to form the first Portland cement company west of the Mississippi.

At the quarry and cement plant, a small village of Mexican workers formed who also sold pottery, baskets, and food to tourists. This settlement dispersed as the cement company moved to another location, a larger quarry, as the Alamo Cement Company.

By 1917, Ray Lambert, San Antonio's parks commissioner, suggested ideas for the abandoned quarry as an oriental setting. Plans developed by him and W. S. Deleny—including a Japanese pagoda—were soon started with prison labor. Near completion, artist Dionicio Rodriguez, born in Mexico, created a Japanese torii gate in concrete, but to resemble the traditional wood.


And in 1919, invited by the city, the family of Kimi Eizo Jingu, a Japanese artist in San Antonio, moved to the gardens. Kimi and Miyoshi Jingu opened a lunch room, took care of the gardens, and raised their children. However, in 1941, all were evicted following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The gardens were hastily renamed the Chinese Tea Gardens and a Chinese family, Ted and Ester Wu, were quickly installed.

By 1984, sentiments in the United States were long past condemning all Japanese for World War II, and Mayor Henry Cisneros restored the name to the Japanese Tea Gardens. Renovation of the site was called for in the following years, including construction closures. At the public re-opening in 2008, Mabel Yoshiko Jingu Enkoji, a daughter of Kimi and Miyoshi Jingu was a prominent family representative at the ceremonies. She had been born at the Gardens.

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NAME: _____ DATE: _____ PERIOD: _____

The “push-pull” theory says that people migrate because things in their lives *push* them to leave, and things in a new place *pull* them.
Instructions: Decide what economic factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.



Environmental Push Factors

Economic Pull Factors



WORD BANK

Natural Disasters	Good Weather
More Living Space	Drought
Crowded Cities	Farmable Land

Japanese Settlers in Texas

Japan is a string of volcanic islands bordered on one side by the China Sea and on the other by the Pacific Ocean. Because of the mountainous topography, people live mostly along the coastlines. In 1903, Japan had a population of approximately 45 million living and farming a land area approximately the size of Illinois. Overpopulation and limited resources forced many Japanese to look for new places to live.

Many of the early Japanese settlers who came to Texas were educated and successful businessmen in Japan. When invited to start rice farms near Houston, they found people with money to invest and came because there was so little farm land available in Japan. These farmers settled near Webster between Houston and Galveston. Others later settled along the coast and in the Rio Grande Valley.

Nisei and sansei (second- and third-generation Japanese) still live in the Houston area and along the coast. Others, along with more recent Japanese Texans, may now be found in communities throughout the state.

Why were many Japanese looking for new places to live in the early 1900s?

What did early Japanese settlers do in Texas?

Where do Japanese Texans live today?

Digging Deeper

Using **Texans One and All: The Japanese Texans**, answer the following questions about why Japanese immigrants moved to Texas and what their life was like in the state.

List 5 reasons Japanese immigrants came to Texas.

What kind of work did early Japanese immigrants do?

Some Japanese immigrants wore traditional field dress and practiced their native religion, while others deliberately adopted Western style clothing and local beliefs. Why do you think some Japanese immigrants felt as if they needed to assimilate?

How were Japanese Texans treated during World War II?

How did the Japanese population change after World War II?

Japanese Tea Gardens of San Antonio

The Japanese Tea Gardens of San Antonio has a wide-ranging story involving many people. It has left a lasting impact on the city of San Antonio.

What was the land used for before it became the Japanese Tea Gardens?

What role did the Jingu family play in the Japanese Tea Gardens?

What happened to the Jingu family and the Japanese Tea Garden during World War II? Why did this happen?

What Japanese influences do you see in the city where you live?

Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Japanese Texans and environmental push and pull factors.
