

Crating Apples in Hood River

By Benjamin A. Gifford

This photograph, which shows workers packing apples into boxes, is identified by a hand-written note on the back as being “probably Hood River.” The photographer either was Benjamin A. Gifford, his son Ralph, or possibly one of the employees of Gifford’s Portland studio. Gifford took photographs in Oregon between 1900 and 1919, when he retired. During the later part of his career he employed his son and other photographers, all of whom printed under the Gifford name.

By the 1890s, Hood River Valley apples and strawberries were winning awards at fairs and expositions around the nation. In 1897, workers dug a “farmers ditch” to bring water from the surrounding hills into the valley, providing irrigation that allowed more acres to be planted with fruit.

A government census shows that apples were the main fruit grown in Hood River County in 1910, followed by strawberries and pears. A 1919 freeze, at twenty-seven degrees below zero, killed many of the apple trees and farmers replanted their orchards with pear trees.

By 1905, 600 Japanese immigrants were living in the Hood River Valley, where they worked clearing land, cutting trees, and packing fruit. By working hard and living frugally, many Japanese farmers were able to shift from field labor to farm ownership within a decade. By 1920, Japanese farmers produced seventy-five percent of the Hood River strawberry harvest. In 1942, during WWII, the U.S. Government forced all Pacific Coast Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans to go to internment camps.

Further Reading: Tamura, Linda. *The Hood River Issei: An Oral History of Japanese Settlers in Oregon's Hood River Valley*. Urbana, Ill., 1993.

Kessler, Lauren. *Stubborn Twig: Three Generations in the Life of a Japanese-American Family*. New York, N.Y., 1993.

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