Southern California Flower Market Papers

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Southern California Flower Market Papers

Collection number: 90.26

Japanese American National Museum
Los Angeles, California

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Descriptive Summary

Dates: 1920-1948
Bulk Dates: 1931-1934
Collection number: 90.26
Creator: Southern California Flower Growers, Inc.
Collection Size:.50 linear feet3 artifacts
Repository: Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Abstract: The Southern California Flower Market Papers consists primarily of financial and legal documents pertaining to the tax exempt status of the corporation. The collection also includes documents created by Golden Sky Investment Company in relation to the Southern California Flower Market.

Physical location: Japanese American National Museum, 100 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90012

Access
By appointment only. Please Contact the Collections Management and Access Unit by email (collections@janm.org) or telephone (213-830-5615).

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Acquisition Information

Biography / Administrative History
The floral industry has a long history in California, beginning in 1886 in Oakland, California with the commercial growth of chrysanthemums. In the early twentieth century flower growth and sales began to take root in downtown Los Angeles, shaping what would one day become an epicenter for floral sales around the world. The first nursery opened in Los Angeles on West Jefferson and shortly after the first wholesale floral market opened, Vawter Carnation Fields, at 522 South Spring Street. At this time, Los Angeles was largely a farming community with a population below 100,000. The center of floral sales in the city was downtown at First Street, Second Street, and Spring Street. Flower growers would travel by the electric railway system with bundles of flowers to sell in downtown Los Angeles. By 1910 Los Angeles had 38 retail florists, including five owned by Japanese immigrants while an additional 30 to 40 Japanese flower growers informally sold their flowers outdoors on South Broadway near Sixth Street.

The California Flower Market was incorporated in January 1912 as a shareholder collective comprised of 54 Issei flower growers as the first shareholders. Originally located at 421 South Los Angeles Street, the California Flower Market soon moved to Wall Street in January 1913. The market was originally 20 feet wide and sixty feet deep. Membership to the California Flower Market was initially limited to Japanese immigrants and had membership dues of $25.00. This
member of the Southern California Flower Market. In 1913 the California Alien Land Law was passed, which prohibited those who could not obtain U.S. citizenship from purchasing land. Many of the Japanese flower growers worked from leased land. On February 6, 1914 the California Flower Market became officially incorporated as the Southern California Flower Market with 23 directors. By 1915 membership was no longer Japanese only but shareholders remained in the Japanese American community. At the same time that the Issei flower growers were forming what would become the Southern California Flower Market, European immigrants created the American Florists Exchange, which became incorporated in 1917.

In 1920 the state of California approved a bill to close the loopholes of the 1913 Alien Land Law that ultimately forbade the leasing of land to Japanese immigrants. On April 1, 1922 the city of Los Angeles regulated that nurseries could not be built in residential areas, a decision seen as discriminatory against the developing Japanese American businesses. In 1923 the Alien Land Law was further revised to ban all agricultural contracts with Japanese immigrants and owners of farmland. Throughout this time the Southern California Flower Market continued to flourish despite these obstacles and expanded its location on Wall Street to accommodate this growth.

In 1928 the all-Nisei Golden Sky Investment Corporation was formed and by 1932 an addition to the flower market formally began with the financial support of Golden Sky. On January 1, 1933 the Southern California Flower Market and Golden Sky signed a 40 year lease. Throughout the 1930s the Flower Market continued to grow, with a membership count of 159 in 1934. In the late 1930s the Southern California Flower Market purchased more lots on Wall Street to provide additional parking.

The attack on Pearl Harbor led to the immediate arrest of several flower growers of the Southern California Flower Market. On January 26, 1942 an entirely Nisei nonprofit organization, Southern California Floral Exchange, was created to take over operation of the Flower Market. After the signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 many flower growers were sent to Manzanar. By March 31, 1942 the accounts of the Flower Market were closed and the building subleased to United Wholesale Florist with the assistance of attorney J. Marion Wright and real estate agent Frank Kadeltz. In January 1945 Japanese Americans were legally allowed to return to the West Coast and by November 1945 the Southern California Flower Market opened a temporary office in an apartment of the San Pedro Firm Building. On January 1, 1946 the Wall Street location was formally returned to the Southern California Flower Market but it did not officially reopen until September 1946. On August 2, 1950 the for-profit Southern California Flower Growers Association (known informally as Flower Growers, Inc.) was incorporated and officially replaced the Southern California Flower Market. Despite this change the market continued to be known as the Southern California Flower Market. In December 1952 Flower Growers, Inc. purchased land previously leased by the Southern California Flower Market on Wall Street. During the early 1950s the market continued to grow and purchased land on Maple Avenue. Floral crop sales increased in California during these years and the California ornamental industry was valued at close to $94 million by 1957. In 1962 the Flower Market grossed $25 million in annual revenue. In May 1963 construction began on Maple Street for a new million-dollar building.

By 1970 Japanese Americans produced 65% of the flowers grown in California and in 1972 overall flower sales generated $20 million in revenue. Expansion and growth continued into the 1980s, along with the first signs on Latinos entering the flower market. In the late 1980s the Flower Market began making public sales rather than only selling to those with a retail certificate. These public sales required the payment of a retail sales tax and the Flower Market’s preferential treatment to florists led to other outlets that were more welcoming to the public. In the late 1990s the Flower Market had a 30% vacancy but a change in management approaches brought new anchor tenants, Mayesh and Gelson’s, to the market. Additionally, the Flower Market invested in a 34-unit apartment building in Sawtelle and an office complex in Garden Grove.

The Southern California Flower Market still operates at full occupancy today despite the constant restraints and obstacles faced by its founders during the twentieth century. The ambition and ingenuity of the Flower Market’s founders helped to create a flower empire. Although the Flower Market is not the same as it was in the early twentieth century, there are still a few fourth generation Japanese American flower growers selling at the Flower Market. Today the Los Angeles Flower District is a six block marketplace consisting of nearly 200 wholesale flower dealers and is the United States’ largest wholesale flower district.

Scope and Content of Collection

This collection largely documents actions taken by the Southern California Flower Market regarding its tax status. It is important to note that the collection is almost entirely pre-war materials and includes tax returns, financial statements, tax returns, by-laws, articles of incorporation, letters, and artifacts. The materials are typewritten copies of originals maintained by the Southern California Flower Market.

Arrangement

The collection has been arranged into the following series:

Series 1: Southern California Flower Market Tax Documents
Includes tax returns, affidavits, claims, protests, and reports primarily dealing with fiscal years 1928-1931.
Series 2: Correspondence
Correspondence between accountants and lawyers on behalf of the Southern California Flower Market usually regarding efforts to achieve tax exemption.
Series 3: Notes
Notes on finances and taxes.
Series 4: By-Laws and Articles of Incorporation
Various iterations created by the Southern California Flower Market.
Series 5: Newspapers
Southern california Flower Market News (Volume 2 Issues 1-10).
Series 6: Artifacts
Includes a "no-smoking" sign in Japanese, one Southern California Flower Market Imprint seal, and one Junior Floriculture Scrapbooks.
Series 7: Golden Sky Investment Company Documents
Includes by-laws, articles of incorporation, power of attorney, and various resolutions created by Golden Sky thoguh its work with the Southern California Flower Market.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Southern California Flower Market
Southern California Flower Growers, Inc.
Golden Sky Investment Company
United States. Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service
Japanese Americans
Los Angeles (Calif.)