

THE HISTORIAN'S EYE

What does an historian notice in a photo from the past?

A group of children gather along one of the piers at Fish Harbor on Terminal Island (Port of Los Angeles) to try their luck at fishing in this Auto Club archives image taken about 1928. The boys—and at least two girls—appear to be of Japanese descent and probably come from families living in nearby Japanese Village. This tight-knit community, which numbered roughly two thousand by 1935, was made up of women cannery employees and the fishermen who owned and crewed the majority of the harbor's fishing vessels. The canneries were clustered along Wharf Street, directly behind the photographer's viewpoint. The children attended San Pedro public schools where they became proficient in English but spoke Japanese at home to their *Issei* (first generation) parents.

What would a historian studying Fish Harbor's history note in this photograph? For one, the poles employed by the young fishers are made of bamboo. Japanese fishermen introduced the long, flexible, and tremendously strong bamboo poles to tuna fishing in the early 1900s. Pole fishing was less damaging to the tuna meat than netting and was quickly adopted throughout West Coast tuna fisheries. And what do we know of the pier structure looming prominently above our group? Additional research reveals that this structure type came into use after World War I, incorporating an elevator and conveyor system similar to those found in grain elevators to transfer the catch from boats directly to the canneries.

The individual fates of these kids will remain a mystery, but we do know precisely what happened to Japanese Village. Located in the midst of the harbor's key defense activities, the Japanese community at Fish Harbor was among the first to be removed in February 1942 when Executive Order 9066 created a military exclusion zone along the West Coast. Village inhabitants were given only forty-eight hours to evacuate from Terminal Island, and they would never return. Japanese Village was literally wiped from the map: the Auto Club's 1944 Los Angeles Harbor map omitted the previous reference to Japanese Village after the rows of modest bungalows were bulldozed to make way for expanding the canneries.

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Children Fishing from a Pier at Fish Harbor (Terminal Island) Port of Los Angeles, about 1928. *Courtesy Automobile Club of Southern California Archives.*