

## **The Pahkar Singh Murders: A Punjabi Response to California's Alien Land Law**

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The California Alien Land Law, enacted in 1913 and amended in 1920, was devised to prevent the leasing and owning of agricultural land by all "aliens ineligible to citizenship." Though intended primarily to block Japanese immigrant farmers, the law also affected immigrants from India. The Indians, like the Japanese and others, fought the imposition of the law in the courts. While extralegal actions did occur, one Indian farmer, Pahkar Singh, responded with a dramatic and violent act, one which had a lasting impact upon California's Imperial Valley because it divided local society along lines of race, class, and territorial rivalries.

Asian Indian men from farming communities in India's northwestern province, the Punjab, began coming to the western United States early in the twentieth century. Their numbers were small (between two thousand and six thousand from 1900 to 1950), and most found work in California agriculture. Originally they intended to return to India or send for their families. The United States, however, passed discriminatory laws which limited and, finally, barred immigration by Asians. While some

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returned to their families in India, many Punjabi men chose to stay and settle in California's agricultural valleys, where they leased or acquired farm land. Here they were all known as "Hindus," although about 85 percent of them were Sikhs and another 10 percent were Muslims. Some became citizens of the United States. However, citizenship then was based on race, and the United States Supreme Court in 1923 declared Asian Indians to be Caucasian but not "white persons" in the popular meaning of the phrase.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Punjabi men became "aliens ineligible to citizenship" and subject to California's Alien Land Law which directly threatened their livelihood.

Punjabi farmers were active in all major agricultural areas of California, but the largest number settled in the Imperial Valley. There, in the state's southeastern corner along the border with Mexico, the inauguration of the western hemisphere's biggest irrigation district in 1911 had created a new frontier in California agriculture. Many Punjabis were among the pioneers who developed this immensely productive agricultural area, growing cantaloupe, cotton, and lettuce. They moved rapidly into the leasing and ownership of farm land. In 1919, Punjabis leased 32,380 acres within the valley. This acreage represented slightly more than one-third of all California land leased and owned by Punjabis at the time.<sup>2</sup>

The year after the Alien Land Law took effect, a dramatic murder case in the Imperial Valley illustrated the difficulties this law posed for Punjabi and other Asian farmers. Headlines of 2 April 1925 announced "Hindu Murders 2 in Rage—Attacks 3rd."<sup>3</sup> The article told of how a fortune in lettuce grown by Pahkar Singh on a field he had leased by verbal agreement had been taken from him by two Anglo agents of a shipping company. As lettuce was being packed and hauled to town from his fields, Pahkar Singh confronted the agents—Victor Sterling and John Hager. Sharp words led to violence. Pahkar Singh shot both agents and then split open their heads with an axe. The Mexican packers and an Anglo truck driver were the only witnesses. Then Singh drove to Calipatria, seeking the third man who allegedly had cheated him, William Thornburg. He found Thornburg in his office. According to later accounts, just before attempting to shoot Thornburg, Singh shouted, "They can't hang me any higher for killing you too."<sup>4</sup> But Mrs. Thornburg, a large woman eight months pregnant, shielded her husband from his assailant. Pahkar Singh threw down his gun and sur-

rendered to the sheriff, telling him on the way to jail that he'd done it "because they robbed me."<sup>5</sup>

The murdered men and Thornburg were white. They were also respected townsmen active in local business circles and clubs. Pahkar Singh, an immigrant, was one of two or three hundred Punjabis who had settled in the valley after 1910. The case was thus a sensation, eventually polarizing opinions and disrupting economic and political relationships in the valley for many years.

The murders had been preceded by several years of increasing prejudice against the Hindu and Japanese valley farmers. This prejudice was related to the notoriety that Hindus gained as litigants. Although an Imperial Valley Hindustanee's Welfare and Reform Society had been formed in part to arbitrate disputes, Hindus frequently went to court. Partnerships, both written and verbal, broke up with partners filing against each other: thirty-one such cases (and twenty-seven more involving Anglos and others in dispute with Hindus), appear in the Imperial County General Index from 1915 to 1919.<sup>6</sup>

Prejudice had also been aroused by criminal cases involving Punjabis. Prior to the Pahkar Singh murders, there were some thirty cases between 1913 and 1924. Most were minor but a few were highly publicized—one man murdered his partners, another murdered his wife, and several men were charged with assault with intent to kill. The local press saw recurring themes, alleging that the Hindus committed perjury, that many cases involved caste and village feuds which originated in India, and that the American legal system was being misused by foreigners.<sup>7</sup> Prejudice was so strong that, as early as 1919, defense attorneys for Hindus maintained that a fair trial for a Hindu was impossible in the Imperial Valley.<sup>8</sup>

Just prior to the murders, a series of Hindu bankruptcies dramatized both the extent to which Hindu farmers had formed relationships with local creditors and the great losses suffered by Hindu cotton farmers and their creditors in the agricultural crisis following World War I. Over seventy Hindus from the Imperial Valley voluntarily filed bankruptcy petitions from 1919 to 1924. They had no tangible assets, so their many local creditors—banks, groceries, auto stores—lost some of what they had advanced.

Unable to repay the balance of \$4,943.85 on promissory notes for unsecured loans from the Southern Trust and Commercial Bank of Brawley and a \$600.00 promissory note to an absentee

landowner, Pahkar Singh was among those who filed. His debt was, however, well below the average for a Hindu filing as an individual. Although bankruptcy petitions aroused resentment, the case files also revealed that financial backing for the Hindus from local banks and individuals was quite substantial.

Despite the setbacks in cotton, the Punjabis continued to farm. Most switched to growing lettuce and again secured local bank loans and credit from businesses supplying goods and services to farmers. Even their lawyers in the bankruptcy cases accepted promissory notes.<sup>9</sup>

The Alien Land Law received much attention in the Imperial Valley newspapers. When it became applicable to the Hindus following the federal decision in 1923, the local populace expected the imminent ousting of Hindu as well as Japanese farmers. The county district attorney corresponded with the state district attorney about the legal status of cropping contracts. When such contracts were declared illegal, newspaper articles discussed when and how legal proceedings against the aliens would be initiated. California's attorney general pressed for rigorous enforcement of the Alien Land Law after the 1924 harvest season, and in Imperial County a grand jury investigation of conspiracy to evade the law began in 1924.<sup>10</sup>

This was the background of the Pahkar Singh murders. The Japanese and Hindus continued to farm, making agreements much as usual, but with growing insecurity.<sup>11</sup> Farming was a highly competitive, risky business in the best of circumstances. Not only aliens, but other small farmers found themselves at a great disadvantage, given the dominance of the agricultural industry by the big growers and shippers. Those who grew the crops did not have the power to set the price. The timing of the harvest could not be controlled—the crop had to be sold and shipped within a very brief time. Shipping costs and the price at destination could not be predicted. Only labor costs could be partially controlled by the farmer, and the exploitation of agricultural laborers was widespread.<sup>12</sup>

Lettuce was gold in 1925—the price in the East was high. Pahkar Singh's crop was worth perhaps \$50,000.00. He claimed to have spent \$14,000.00 on the 320 acres he cultivated.<sup>13</sup> But just as the harvest began, his Anglo partners claimed the entire crop and informed Singh that he would not receive his share of the money, despite their agreement.<sup>14</sup> As an alien, he had few options. His lease, verbal or written, was illegal and could not be upheld by the courts. Without legal redress and unable

to bring adequate social pressure to bear upon his Anglo partners, he resorted to violence.

The immediate public reaction was one of outrage, but public opinion changed as the facts of the case emerged. Pahkar Singh had earned a reputation as a good man and a good farmer; everyone knew that the crop was his, and that the murdered men had broken a verbal agreement. The court in El Centro had difficulty constituting a jury—it took four venires, a calling up of 109 people, to secure twelve jurors. The problems were twofold. Some prospective jurors were dismissed for racial prejudice against Hindus, others for expressing strong approval or disapproval of Pahkar Singh's action.<sup>15</sup>

The newspaper stories began to show sympathy for the man on trial. A story in the *Holtville Tribune*, published in a town where Hindus were doing well, was especially favorable. The newspaper published "the real facts," giving details of the verbal lease and conceding implicitly some justice in his act.<sup>16</sup> Pahkar Singh was thirty-five years old at the time, a handsome man, educated and "a higher type than the average Valley Hindu." He had leased land and was "favorably known to lettuce and cantaloupe men."<sup>17</sup> He had come from Chuharchak village, in the Punjab's Ferozpur district, via China, arriving in Seattle, Washington in 1913 and in the Imperial Valley in 1917.<sup>18</sup> The *Holtville Tribune's* initial story, headlined "Hindu Rancher Kills Two; Batters Heads of Victims with Axe," had termed him "frenzied," with a "thirst for blood."<sup>19</sup> Later, a *Holtville Tribune* reporter found Singh in a jailhouse interview to be "an exceedingly unobtrusive and mild mannered personage." Jail officials were "loud in their praise" of Singh's conduct and declared that "so far he has acted the part of a model prisoner."<sup>20</sup>

Pahkar Singh's defense attorney at first tried to establish hereditary insanity or epilepsy, linking the murders to ones allegedly committed by his brother, back in India. A postponement was sought in order to obtain evidence. (Mail at that time took many weeks to go back and forth from India.) The postponement was denied, but fellow Sikh villagers also residing in the Imperial Valley testified about the brother's crime, the 1919 murder of his wife and children.<sup>21</sup> This defense cost him some local sympathy.

The prosecution faced many difficulties. The Mexican workers, witnesses essential to the district attorney's case, had gone on the migratory labor circuit and had to be identified, traced, and brought back. Their testimony was confused and contra-

dictory, but it clearly showed sympathy with Pahkar Singh in many instances. The first worker called said he had been working on "the Hindu ranch"; the second, asked on whose ranch he was working, said "Pahkar's, the lettuce belongs to Pahkar." Even the one Anglo witness, a driver for the shipping company, said he was "working at Pahkar Singh's ranch east of Calipatria."<sup>22</sup>

The prosecution tried to establish that the ranch belonged to Sterling, with whom Pahkar Singh merely had a cropping contract. All agreed that Sterling had cancelled the contract after learning of the state Supreme Court opinion invalidating such contracts, and that this greatly angered Pahkar Singh.<sup>23</sup> To this day Hindus in the valley view Sterling and Hager as greedy men who seized all the profits for themselves. They quote one of the Anglos as having said "one boxcar of lettuce is worth one Hindu," a remark which had been repeated to Pahkar Singh.<sup>24</sup> The prosecution tried to prove that Singh had been drunk and that the murders had been premeditated. The defense argued that Singh had not been drunk and that provocation had taken place—an argument in which one of the two murdered men had called him a "goddamn Hindu."<sup>25</sup>

The trial in Imperial County resulted in Pahkar Singh's conviction of second degree murder in the case of Victor Sterling. At this point, his attorneys secured a change of venue and the trial for Hager's murder was moved to Riverside County. They argued that prejudice against Hindus was strong in Imperial County and that the Alien Land Law had been the catalyst for the murders.<sup>26</sup> The Riverside trial resulted in a first degree murder conviction and a life sentence. His attorneys successfully appealed the conviction on grounds that the judge had been prejudiced. As a result, a second degree conviction, with its sentence of ten years to life in San Quentin, was reaffirmed.<sup>27</sup>

The Indian community rallied behind Pahkar and raised money for his defense all over the state. A fellow villager, Mota Singh, and an educated farmer, Bagga S. Sunga, took the lead. Later some Indians, backed by an Anglo landowner from San Bernardino on whose ranch Pahkar had once worked, helped Singh gain a parole. When Pahkar left prison in 1940, the six hundred dollars remaining from the defense fund was given to him.<sup>28</sup> Although he had been in jail for more than ten years, Pahkar's release attracted great interest, partly because of William Thornburg's increased prominence in the valley. After living seven years elsewhere following the murders, Thornburg had returned to the valley and established a successful produce busi-

ness in Holtville. Upon Pahkar's release, Thornburg feared that Singh still meant to kill him.

Pahkar Singh was advised to go to Arizona by several people. Ironically, some people, and he himself, feared that William Thornburg would be the one to seek vengeance. When Pahkar indicated his plans to take up farming in the valley again, he was advised by Carl Jacobson, the head of the Brawley Bank, to start over elsewhere because of difficulties Pahkar might meet from valley residents. Jacobson also suggested that Pahkar go to Holtville and check with Imperial County Sheriff, Herbert Hughes. The sheriff confirmed that opinions remained strong and the situation dangerous. Thereupon, Pahkar, with additional help from the San Bernardino backer, went to Phoenix, Arizona to make a new start.<sup>29</sup>

Unsuccessful in Arizona, Pahkar Singh soon returned to the Imperial Valley. In 1951 he married the Hispanic widow of his ex-partner, villagemate, and fundraiser, Mota Singh, but the marriage soon broke up. His second wife, a young Hispanic woman of eighteen, bore him four sons in seven years. However, Singh's work life was less productive.<sup>30</sup> He farmed for a while with a Muslim partner in Brawley, but they lost money. He, his wife, and sister-in-law went north looking for work; they finally settled in San Jose, where his wife's sister had married an Anglo. Pahkar Singh later returned to southern California and had to go on welfare in Brawley; he died of cancer in San Diego in 1973. Many who knew him in the 1920s did not know him in these later years—the confident farmer had become reclusive and bitter.<sup>31</sup>

Many old-timers still recall the murders vividly. The account of a former partner of Pahkar Singh's, given in its entirety below, brings out sharply the resentment and anger felt by Punjabi farmers.<sup>32</sup>

Pahkar Singh had trouble with Sterling. Pahkar's crop was being harvested, he sent a car of lettuce off. He went to Sterling and said, "Give me some money."

"No money. We're going to ship it all out," Sterling said.

And little by little they did. Each time the lettuce was sent, Pahkar Singh returned, asking for money or a statement. Pahkar Singh was a smart man, he went to get a lawyer, he went to all the judges, he went to the district attorney. He told them all about it.

They all said, "By law we can do nothing. It's up to you now."

So Pahkar Singh went again and asked Sterling, "Give me a statement."

He said, "No."

Whenever Pahkar Singh went and asked, Sterling said, "Pahkar Singh, go home. We won't give you anything. Even the horses belong to us. Take your blanket, leave, go . . . , you have nothing here. All this lettuce here, this horse here, it's ours. Take your blanket and go." Sterling also told him, "You people eat grass [mustard grass, spinach]. We eat cake."

Some kind of a mean man he was, that Sterling, like an Englishman. I remember him, he talked pretty mean.

Pahkar Singh said, "You better bring a statement tomorrow."

Sterling said, "Tomorrow, tomorrow," but he didn't bring it. Sterling was mean.

Pahkar Singh went back another day, and he asked, "Did you bring that statement?"

"No, I tell you," Sterling said, "Go away, you goddamn Hindu."

So Pahkar Singh got out his pistol. Then Sterling ran.

"Stop. Don't run around the car anymore," Pahkar said.

"Don't shoot me," said Sterling.

But Pahkar said, "Too late."

Pahkar had an axe over there. Sterling fell down, and then Pahkar axed up his head.

Then another one, a second white farmer was there too, and he ran away. As he ran he said, "No, don't do it. I won't make any more shipments. I'll give you a check for the shipments."

Pahkar said, "Too late, mister. You take your check with you."

"No, it'll be all right. Don't shoot any more. I'll give you a \$25,000.00 check." But it was too late.

Pahkar shot him, then he hit him on the head.

Pahkar said, "Your \$25,000.00 check, you keep it. I don't want it anymore."

Pahkar had his car. He got in it and went to Calipatria. Another man was sitting in the office there, sitting down with his wife there. Pahkar took one shot, missed him—then his wife stood in front.

"Don't shoot me, Pahkar," she said, so he stopped.

Then the sheriff came.

He said, "What are you doing Pahkar? Here, give me that pistol. We don't want people to get shot."

So Pahkar said, "O.K., I'll give you the pistol." He said, "Don't worry about this one, go see the ones in the field, in the field, man."

Okay. The people went to the field and found the two dead men. So they took Pahkar to jail, maybe for two or three years during the trial, and then to San Quentin.

Then Pahkar came back again, and that third man was scared.

Thornburg said, "When he comes back, maybe he'll shoot me. Maybe he'll kill me now."

Then people said, "Well, Pahkar, you go away for two or three years, go outside the state."

So Pahkar went to Arizona. Then he came back and married Mota Singh's widow. Mota was from the same village in India, and his widow, Julia, was here. He married her, but there was trouble between them.

Pahkar said, "Mamaji, I killed two men. I got twelve years in jail, so I don't want any more trouble." He took his blanket and got out.



Beyond the basic Hindu-Anglo division of opinion about the murders, another division was between the big growers or shippers and the small-scale farmers. This division crosscut the racial one, with many Anglo farmers allegedly seeing Pahkar Singh as a hero standing up to the big growers. In those days lettuce was sold on consignment, not by F.O.B., or cash for freight on board. A shipper took produce on consignment to brokers in the east, and the farmer was totally unable to set the price. If, in the eight to ten days it took to arrive at its destination, the market rate went down, the loss was passed on to the farmer. The shipper was less vulnerable since he subtracted his costs and the packing fees (set at a fixed rate beforehand, usually according to the previous year's experience) before settling with the farmer. If there was any profit, it was split between the farmer and the shipper according to their pre-season agreement (75/25, or 50/50). The risk was especially great for the farmers, but the shippers were also at the mercy of the eastern markets.

Following the enactment of the P.A.C.A. (Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act) in 1930, cash for sales at the time of shipping began. This system allowed the farmer to negotiate a cash price at the time he delivered produce to a shipper. While pre-season agreements usually were made between farmer and shipper, delivery guarantees accompanied the F.O.B. agreement; the farmer still had to wait for his cash until the produce was sold in the East, but he could be assured of the price agreed upon at the time of shipping. In 1925, however, Pahkar Singh and other small growers were very much at the mercy of the consignment system and the shippers who were often big growers as well. Thus some Anglo farmers viewed Singh's action sympathetically—he acted on behalf of their interests.<sup>33</sup>

Yet another division was between residents of the northern and southern ends of the Imperial Valley, or in this instance, Calipatria and Brawley against El Centro and Holtville. The valley seems a small, relatively homogeneous place to outsiders, but there are strongly felt historical rivalries among its farming communities. These rivalries stemmed from the different founding dates of the various towns, the different cropping and cattle-raising patterns in the northern and southern ends of the valley, and the competition between Imperial, headquarters of the Imperial Valley Irrigation District, and El Centro, the county seat. Regional loyalties were strong because of the close relationships between the farmers and their local bankers and busi-

nessmen. Pahkar Singh had been living and farming in Brawley-Calipatria or northern end of the valley for several years and was respected in the area. During his trial internment in El Centro, Judge Griffin from Brawley went to visit him; a few years later, Carl Jacobson, the Brawley banker, visited him in San Quentin.<sup>34</sup>

Territorial divisions over the Singh case became stronger over the course of Pahkar's internment, largely because of Thornburg's respected later career in Holtville. Thus in the southern end of the valley, leading citizens tended to support Thornburg. County Sheriff Hughes who lived in Holtville gave William Thornburg a gun license as a matter of course when Pahkar Singh was released from prison. In contrast, Brawley's leading insurance agency was willing to write a big insurance policy on Pahkar Singh's life, fearing Thornburg would retaliate. After fifteen years, feelings were still so intense in the more populous southern end of the valley that upon Pahkar Singh's release the incumbent district attorney lost his bid for re-election, at least partly because of his alleged inability to prevent the release.<sup>35</sup>

In the Imperial Valley today, Pahkar Singh is still remembered, not as the older, unsuccessful farmer he became after leaving prison, but as the tall, striking Hindu whose actions polarized opinion in the valley in 1925. Some Hindus and their descendants feel Pahkar's action helped Hindus remain in farming by making Anglos afraid to cheat them; others feel the murders hurt the reputation of the Hindu farmers and damaged their relationships with the Anglos. The importance of the Pahkar Singh murders rests not on Hindu reaction to the Alien Land Law because Pahkar Singh's response was atypical.<sup>36</sup> The murders did not constitute a major landmark in Hindu-Anglo relations, since both Hindus and Anglos hold conflicting opinions about the effect of the murders on race relations in the Imperial Valley.<sup>37</sup>

The continuing significance of the murders rests on the degree to which Pahkar Singh and other Punjabi farmers were integrated into the regional economic and political system and the degree to which the Imperial Valley divided along existing lines of class and territorial rivalries. As could be expected, Hindus from all over California rallied behind Pahkar Singh during his trial. What is surprising is that local small farmers and even a banker and judge from his locality gave him support. At the time of the murders, Indian farmers had only been in the valley for about ten years. Yet Pahkar Singh had been able to develop

strong personal ties with financial and political leaders in his part of the valley. Even more surprising, and ironic in view of the instigation of the Alien Land Law by small farmer pressure, many small farmers in the Imperial Valley felt sympathy for Singh's violent action against the big growers and shippers and spoke out in his defense.

The several versions of the murders all emphasize the catalyst role of the Alien Land Law, and the pitting of Asian against Anglo.<sup>38</sup> Today memories of the murders continue to stress the injustice of that law, but echoes of the class conflict and town rivalries still color the stories told about Pahkar Singh.

## NOTES

1. For background, see the special issue of *Population Review* on Asian Indian immigration, 25, 1 and 2, (1982), and Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, eds., *Labor Immigration under Capitalism* (Berkeley, 1984). Harold Jacoby, "More Thind against Than Sinning," *The Pacific Historian*, 11, 4 (November 1958), 1-2, 8 summarizes concisely the legal appeal of Bhagat Singh Thind for U.S. citizenship.

2. For acreage figures, see California State Board of Control, *California and the Orientals* (Sacramento, 1920). For a general overview, see my forthcoming article, "Punjabi Farmers and California's Alien Land Law," in *Agricultural History*.

3. *Imperial Valley Press*, 2 April 1925.

4. Told by Mrs. Thornburg to her son, Bill; interview with Bill Thornburg, Holtville, September 1982. Thornburg was on salary with Sterling as office manager; his role was not a decision-making one.

5. Criminal case no. 14575, Riverside County Criminal Records (including those transferred from Imperial County), testimony of city marshal Holmes, p. 19 of transcript. Other details from interviews with Betty Harris, Holtville, and Joseph Anderholt, Holtville, May and June, 1981.

6. Imperial County General Index of Civil Cases, 1915-1919, County Clerk's Office, County Courthouse, El Centro.

7. Imperial County criminal case no. 705, against Khair Din, refers to perjury; it is also alluded to in the case against Rullia Singh, case no. 773, County Clerk's office, County Courthouse, El Centro. Also interviews with Joseph Anderholt, and Keith Savage, Holtville, in May and June of 1981.

8. In civil case no. 5007 of 1919, County Clerk's office, County Courthouse, El Centro, O.V. Wilson alleged this when defending a Hindu on a rape charge. He was Pahkar Singh's lawyer in 1925.

9. Laguna Niguel Federal Archives: Bankruptcy records for L.A. District Court, Indexes 1 and 2 (1917-29). Pahkar Singh's case was no. 5167 of 1923, and his signature is a good one, in cursive English. "Pahkar" was his spelling of his first name there, and I use it instead of the contemporary newspaper version "Parker." The average individual debt was \$8,527.00, and, for partnerships, \$20,279.00 (my compilation).

10. *The Holtville Tribune*, 20 November 1923, headlined the California Supreme Court decision declaring cropping contracts illegal and speculated about its impact on local farming. For details regarding enforcement, see the excellent article by Yuji Ichioka, "Japanese Immigrant Response to the 1920 California Alien Land Law," *Agricultural History*, 58 (April 1984), 157–178. The Imperial County Grand Jury records have disappeared from the County Clerk's office, but the investigation resulted in indictment of five Japanese and three Anglo farmers in July 1925, *Imperial Valley Press*, 30 July and 4 August 1925.

11. Stories of crop seizures at harvest time are still told: interviews with Bob and Karmen Chell, Holtville, July 1981; Mary Gill, Holtville, April 1981; and Teja and Kay Dillon, Fresno, August 1982.

12. This analysis can be found in Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Field* (Boston, 1939), Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest* (Berkeley, 1982), and numerous other sources on California agriculture; oral accounts also emphasize it.

13. The \$50,000.00 estimate comes from interview with Mr. Bagga S. Sunga, El Centro, December, 1981; the estimated expense is cited in the *Holtville Tribune*, 10 April 1925.

14. *Holtville Tribune*, 10 April 1925. Pahkar Singh allegedly had filed a lawsuit against Sterling; this probably refers to civil case no. 10114, filed 27 March 1925, by six other Hindus. In this case, the Hindus sought to enforce two separate written agreements with Victor Sterling which gave them 75 percent of the gross sale of the lettuce crops, after advances were deducted, three days after delivery of the lettuce. Sterling's estate administrator conceded he had agreed to pay them 75 percent but of the net receipts only; he also contended that all lettuce had been sold at a price insufficient to pay the packing, picking, and freight charges, Imperial County civil cases, Clerk's Office, County Courthouse, El Centro.

15. *Imperial Valley Press*, 4 June 1925; *Holtville Tribune*, 5 June 1925.

16. *Holtville Tribune*, 10 April 1925.

17. *Imperial Valley Press*, 2 April 1925.

18. Criminal case no. 14575, court transcript, Riverside County.

19. *Holtville Tribune*, 3 April 1925.

20. *Holtville Tribune*, 17 April 1925.

21. Criminal case no. 14575, court transcript, Riverside County. (No fellow villager had come to the U.S. since 1917, so men in the United States knew of these murders only by mail and hearsay from residents of other villages who had come since 1919.)

22. *Ibid.*, 20–23.

23. *Ibid.*, 16.

24. Interview with Mary Gill, June 1981.

25. Criminal case no. 14575, court transcript, Riverside County.

26. *Holtville Tribune*, 16 June 1925; and statement of O. V. Wilson and Edgar B. Hervey, attorneys for Pahkar Singh, in criminal case no. 14575, ". . . it is a matter of common discussion among the American citizens of said County, in connection with the aforesaid homicide, that the non-enforcement of the 'Anti-Alien Law' aforesaid was the direct cause of said homicide, thus bringing the defendant, Parker Singh into the public limelight as a law-breaker, as well as a murderer of white American citizens."

27. The Riverside verdict was reversed by the California District Court of Appeals in August 1926 on grounds of the judge's prejudice. Orders affirming

the earlier second degree verdict and denying new trials for the murders were passed: 78CA 476, 248 p. 981 and 78CA 486, 248 p. 986.

28. Wives and daughters from Yuba City to Holtville remember the fundraising and many drove to the trial in Riverside, see interviews with Mary Gill, June 1981; Nellie Shine, Huntington Beach, April 1982. Jane Singh also recalls her mother, Mrs. Puna Singh in Yuba City mentioning these events. Details of the fundraising from interview with Bagga S. Sunga, December 1981.

29. Interview with Sherman Smith and partner, Brawley, July 1981; Bill Thornburg, September 1982; Carl and Laura Lee Jacobs, Brawley, July 1981; and Herbert Hughes (with Professor C. M. Naim), Holtville, December 1981. William Thornburg, after many difficult years, established a produce business and worked with Hindu lettuce growers after his return.

30. For the tendency to marry Hispanic women see Karen Leonard and Bruce LaBrack, "Conflict and Compatibility in Punjabi-Mexican Immigrant Families in Rural California: 1915-1965," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46 (August 1984), 527-537.

31. Interviews with Mary Gill, June 1981; Nellie Shine, April 1982; and Bagga S. Sunga, December 1981; also the relevant marriage and birth certificates, Recorder's Office, County Courthouse, El Centro.

32. This man, Mola Singh, had dealt with Victor Sterling himself in 1924 and said: "I went to see Sterling and took some money in my hand, in my pocket. Then he would say, 'Come in, come in, come in.' If I took no money, he didn't let me come in. That man was trouble, he wanted a commission." Interview with Mola Singh, Selma, April 1983.

33. Interviews with Joseph Anderholt, June 1981 and 3 August 1984; Bob Chell, May 1981; Keith Savage, May 1981; and Carl and Laura Lee Jacobson, July 1981.

34. Interview with Carl and Laura Lee Jacobson; she is the daughter of the judge from Brawley, Judge Griffin.

35. Interviews with Joseph and Dorothy Anderholt, July 1981; former Sheriff Herbert Hughes, December 1981; Sherman Smith, July 1981; Joe Mallobox, El Centro, September 1982; and Raymond Ram, Firebaugh, March 1983.

36. See my forthcoming article, "Punjabi Farmers and California's Alien Land Law." It is possible that Pahkar Singh's arrest and trial showed other Punjabis that violence would not be a successful response, since they did not have political power in California.

37. My own initial hypothesis was that Anglo farmers might avoid either dealing with Hindus or breaking agreements made with them for fear of violence; interviews did not confirm this.

38. One can still argue this matter at the Sikh temple in El Centro any Sunday afternoon. At the Brawley Rotary Club in July of 1981, for example, several men recalled details poorly but explicitly connected the murders to the Alien Land Law.