

Palo Alto's Japanese-American Community

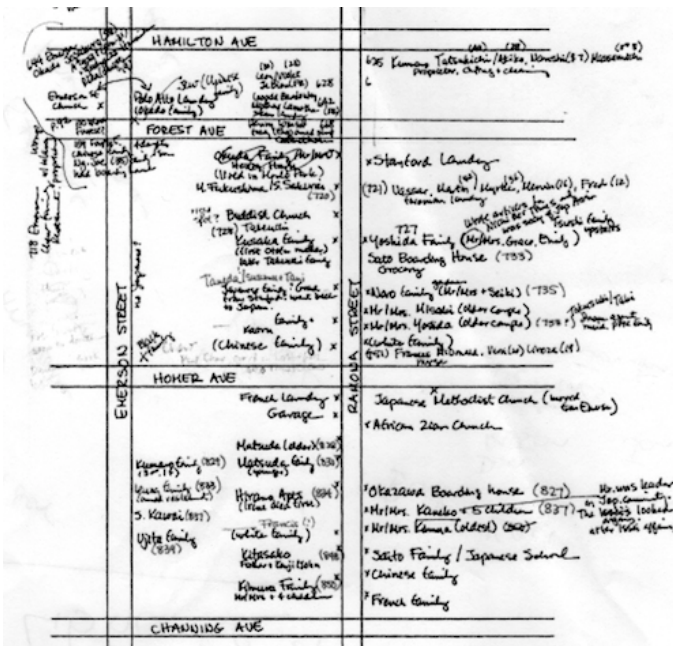


The Japanese Association of Palo Alto marches in a Dedication Day Parade in 1941 just months before being deported.

The following is adapted from Matt Bowling's "Japanese-American Internment: Palo Alto's Deported Patriots," which appeared in PAHA's "Palo Alto Remembered," published in 2012, and from Palo Alto High School's February 17, 2016 Verde article, "Interned: The Local History We Can't Let Ourselves Forget."

In the months that followed the surprise Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, America braced itself for a potential follow-up attack on its own shores. It was in this environment that a range of hostile reactions from suspicion to outright racism were directed towards the Japanese-American community. Some leaders and media outlets questioned Japanese loyalty, a group of California farmers sought economic advantage, and under pressure, the government slowly began to move toward a policy of outright internment based on ancestry.

In Palo Alto, the small Japanese-American community of 144 individuals began to worry about their future. In March of 1942, all of them were ordered to register their property at Police headquarters on Bryant Street. In April, an 8 p.m. curfew was imposed exclusively on Japanese Americans, and by the middle of June there was not a single Japanese American left in Palo Alto.



The heart of the Japanese community in pre-World War II Palo Alto lived on these two blocks between Forest and Channing Avenues, mainly on Ramona Street. Map courtesy of Pam Hashimoto.

Immediately following Pearl Harbor, many of Palo Alto Japanese Americans feared the worst and some even pleaded their patriotism. Arthur Okado, long-time resident and President of the Palo Alto Japanese American Association, released a statement to the *Palo Alto Times*, saying "We the members of the Japanese-American community, having lived in Palo Alto and Menlo Park throughout 40 years... wish to make our stand clear. Without reservation, we are loyal to this, our country, the United States of America."

Members of the association had purchased some \$2,700 in defense bonds and seven of their men were serving in the Army. Still, 10 weeks later, Mr. Okado was arrested by FBI agents, along with three other Palo Altans on suspicion of belonging to an "alien Japanese organization." It wasn't until February 1945 that he would return home to Palo Alto cleared of all suspected wrongdoing.

According to researcher Pam Hashimoto, the young "Nisei generation kind of bridged two worlds...[w]hen they went home, they were Japanese, and when they went to school, they were American. They became very adaptable and they did a lot of translation for the parents."

Yet, "[a]ll their friendships seemed to be in the Japanese-American community," and contemporaries recalled a strong divide and lack of integration between Japanese-Americans and the white community of Palo Alto, even at Paly. Discrimination existed but was not very open, but with the war coming, racial tensions increased.

The Palo Alto Japanese-American community had feared internment for almost four months before the government forced it to relocate, leaving property, businesses, pets and friends behind.

Although some of the Palo Alto community, including religious groups and the Red Cross assisted the Japanese-American community on evacuation day, the separation was no less painful, especially for the youth.

As one observer reported, "These are kids that people had known at Jordan and Paly, and they had to leave...[T]here were just tears. These were your friends, and they were being uprooted and sent off to some gosh awful place no one knows."

Current and upcoming resources on the 75th anniversary of Japanese Internment:

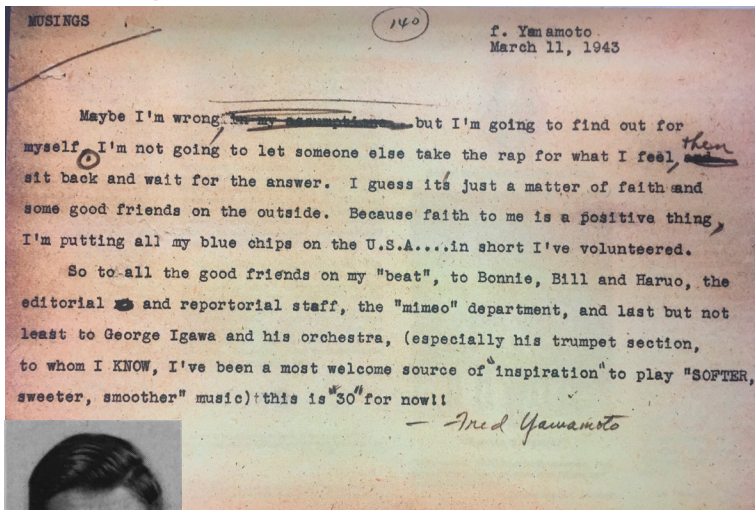
National Public Radio (NPR) ran two pieces on history and personal stories - n.pr/2kCcHEg and n.pr/2gkb9v9.

The Los Angeles Times ran one piece on the internment and a second criticizing its shameful response 75 years ago - lat.ms/2kMEz3P and lat.ms/2mg0zWa.

The Presidio of San Francisco Officers' Club will host a special exhibition on "The Presidio's Role in World War II Japanese American Incarceration," starting April 1st - bit.ly/2lFirNa

PAHA would like to thank Palo Alto High School's library and journalism departments, both of which have conducted significant research and collected important primary materials on the internment of local Japanese, and who have provided much of the content for this issue.

Scrapbook: Young Palo Altans in the camps



Fred Yamamoto, pictured left in his 1936 Paly yearbook, wrote the above note from Heart Mountain camp in March 1943 announcing his intention to serve in the Army, and his reasons for doing so. Courtesy Anna Nakai.

Dan Iwata, a former Paly High student wrote to the Paly Campanile in November 1942, seven months into his new life (and senior year) at Manzanar camp, describing the city of 10,000 people housed in hastily constructed barracks, which included a canteen, a general store and a barber shop. Socially, life was "dead" as most of the young men had been sent to work in the sugar beet fields of Idaho and Montana. He compared his school life unfavorably to that at Paly: no desks; sitting on the hard floor for 45 minutes at a time; classes from 8:30 to 4:15 with only a short break for lunch; and unheated rooms. He had fond memories of Paly and hoped that some of the Paly students would write him when they had a spare moment. Clipping courtesy Rachel Kellerman.



Younger Palo Alto Japanese Americans in front of their barracks at Heart Mountain camp. Photo courtesy of Pam Hashimoto, daughter of Kiyu Sato, a 1933 Paly graduate, who is pictured back left.

Additional Heart Mountain Resources:

Heart Mountain Digital Preservation Project - nwc.edu/library/special/hmdpp/

Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation - heartmountain.org/history.html

Former Paly Student Writes From Relocation Center

The Campanile last week received a letter from Dan Iwata, a former student at Paly Hi, now living at Manzanar Relocation Center. Excerpts of it are given below:

Block 3, Bldg. 1, Apt. 3,
Manzanar Relocation Center,
Manzanar, California
November 1, 1942

Dear Faculty and Students
of Paly High:

Today, November 1, 1942, makes exactly seven months that I've been in the Manzanar Relocation Center. Time has passed quickly for me. I remember all the fun, the good times I shared with all of you, but the fun and good times to be left "home."

DEVELOPMENT OF CENTER

The development of this relocation center from sage-brush cover to what it is today, a city of ten thousand people! Ten blocks out of the thirty-five now were built when I came on the morning of April 1942. The parts of the buildings were fabricated at one spot which was the speed of the builders. They were built at the average rate of two on hour. Today we have in Manzanar a canteen, a general store, a barber shop, and all the services you are apt to find in a community of ten thousand.

Many of the young men from this center have gone to the sugar beet fields in Idaho or Montana to aid the nation's labor shortage. At present this center is "dead" because there aren't any socials or parties going on, or recreational games, because most of the young men have gone out on the furlough work. Soon they will be returning and life in Manzanar will light up again.

POORLY EQUIPPED SCHOOL

School has gone on for three and a half weeks and we still haven't desks or enough books for everybody. We have to sit on the hard floor a whole period of 45 minutes to each class. And at the end of that 45 minutes, you'll begin to really feel the floor. School starts at 8:30 in the morning and lets out at 11:45 for lunch. And again from 1 to 4:15. That sure is a solid day of school! The education board doesn't want us to study at home because of the poor lighting condition we have in our apartments so we are required to take at least one study hall a day. You don't get as much choice of subjects over here as we did at Paly Hi. During the senior year, we are required to take the following subjects: social problems, English and world literature, and physical education. A week ago, we were dismissed for two and one-half days since the snow fell on the High Sierra Crest, which is but five miles away. It was getting too cold in the rooms.

ENJOYED PALY

I've enjoyed going to Paly Hi with many of you, and Palo Alto memories will always linger in my mind. I hope all of you have started the school year right and continue all the way through the school year.

I would appreciate it if some of you would drop me a line or so when you have some spare moments.

And now, I have to "cram" for the English and World Literature test tomorrow so until I write again, I remain,

Sincerely,

DAN IWATA.

59 Japanese-American students from the Palo Alto Unified School District were forcibly detained and incarcerated at high security internment camps from 1942 to 1945. One of the 25 internees from Palo Alto High School, Cherry Ishimatsu, found most of her Nisei cohort to be very patriotic. "We were all raised in America, we studied American history and we knew more about American history and life than we did of Japan, which was a strange country to us."

Told that they were being interned for their own protection, Ishimatsu soon realized the illusion and injustice of the situation. One of her most vivid memories is of watching a parade of young Boy and Girl Scouts in the camp.

"I think it was very ironic," Ishimatsu says. "Here we are, all prisoners behind barbed wire fences and a military guard surrounding us, and here we have young people doing a parade with their American flags flying."

— based on reporting from Palo Alto High School's February 17, 2016 Verde article

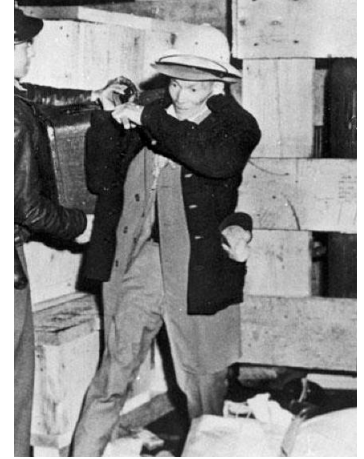
Local testimonials to Tule Lake - The “bad” camp



Japanese Americans and Nationals were all fingerprinted as part of the induction process at Tule Lake. All photos and captions courtesy the National Park Service.



Guarded like prisoners—“If they were protecting us, the guns should have been pointing outside of camp, but they were all pointed inward.”



Everyone, regardless of age, was searched for contraband whenever they left the camp.

The images above are from the Tule Lake maximum-security segregation camp, where at peak 18,700 people were imprisoned in crowded conditions, ultimately under martial law. Tule Lake was the largest and most controversial camp, where harsh treatment was met with active resistance. Having already suffered mistreatment, discriminatory laws, forced eviction and imprisonment, some 12,000 prisoners had refused to answer, or answered “no-no,” to the War Relocation Authority’s clumsily-worded loyalty questions on allegiance

and military service. Squalid housing and sanitation, unsafe working conditions, and inadequate food and medical care, plus the addition of strikebreakers from other camps, created a volatile situation which culminated in a number of uprisings. The Army responded in late 1943 by surrounding the site with tanks and then took over the camp, constructing a double, 8 foot high “man-proof” fence. A later law encouraged these inmates to renounce their citizenship, resulting in deportations during the war, and several thousand postwar stateless “aliens.”



Jimi Yamaichi, the current curator at the Japanese-American Museum of San Jose, remembers Tule Lake as “a bad camp,” primarily due to the fact that the camp was plagued by the ‘troublemakers’ from other camps, resulting in events such as the rise of the Hoshi Dan, a pro-Japanese group. Tule Lake is also known for the strike of 1942, in which Japanese-Americans internees refused to assist in the running of the camp after an old man was shot and killed for straying too close to the fence.

From humble beginnings as the son of produce farmers and an aspiring carpenter, Yamaichi was deemed “disloyal” at Tule Lake and rebelled by avoiding the draft.

As people left the camps, Yamaichi, who stayed behind to help elders pack up and leave, recalls the pain of the Japanese-American community.

“All the different people leaving camp, the hardest one was seeing old folks there carrying coffee cans like this,” Yamaichi says as he cradles an aged red and white coffee tin to his chest closely, “She values that coffee can, because that’s the remains of her husband. It’s all she cared about. A lot of them had to do without.”



Hiroshi Shimizu, who was born into internment at the Tule Lake Camp in Northern California, is president of the Tule Lake Committee and the chairman of the Day of Remembrance program in San Francisco. Shimizu recounted his experiences to Paly’s *Verde* in spring 2015, discussing his experience as a child of internment until the age of five. Shimizu is active in assisting efforts to preserve and educate the general public about what interment was like.

“[My hope is] that the country would actually learn about and realize what was done to the Japanese during world War II and take it to heart,” Shimizu said. “That would transform them into having a greater understanding of people, and a greater respect for the laws.”

— both pieces by Alicia Mies of Palo Alto High School’s *Verde*

Additional Resources on Tule Lake:

Tule Lake Committee - tulelake.org/history

Tule Lake Segregation Center, National Park Service - bit.ly/2kSnxRM