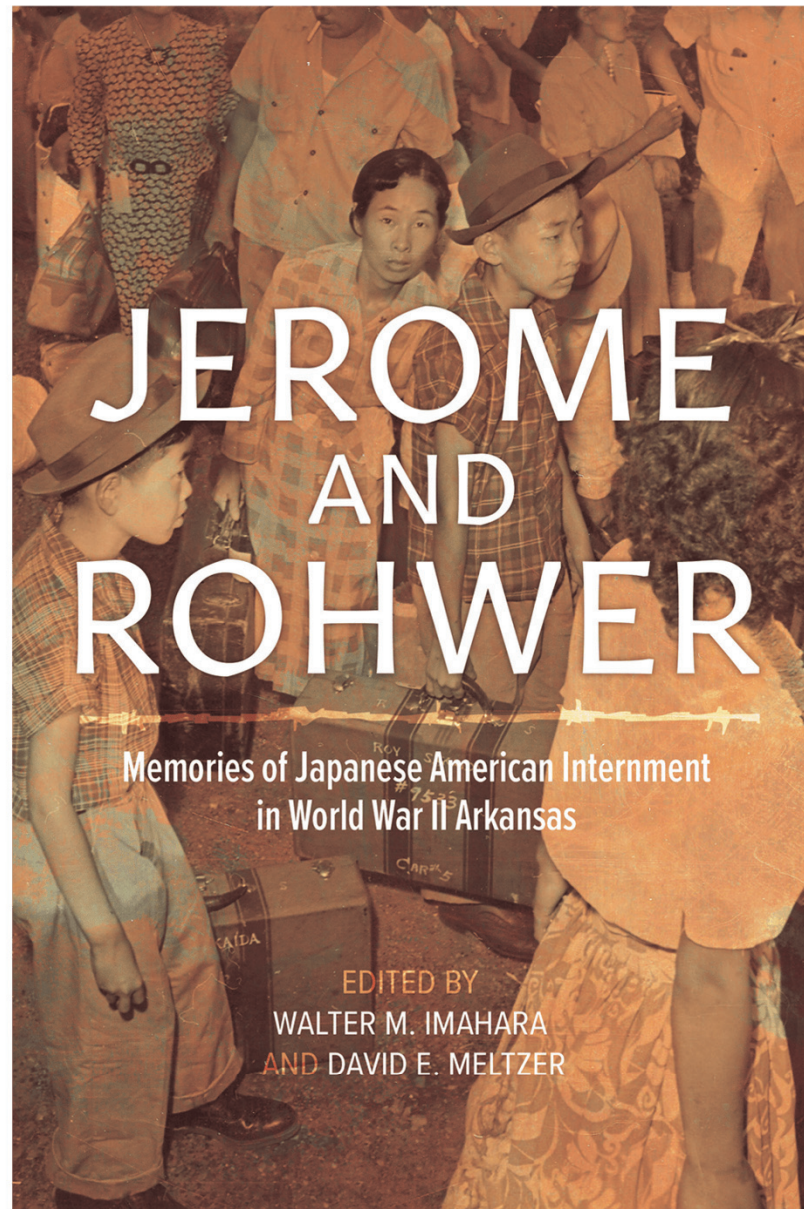


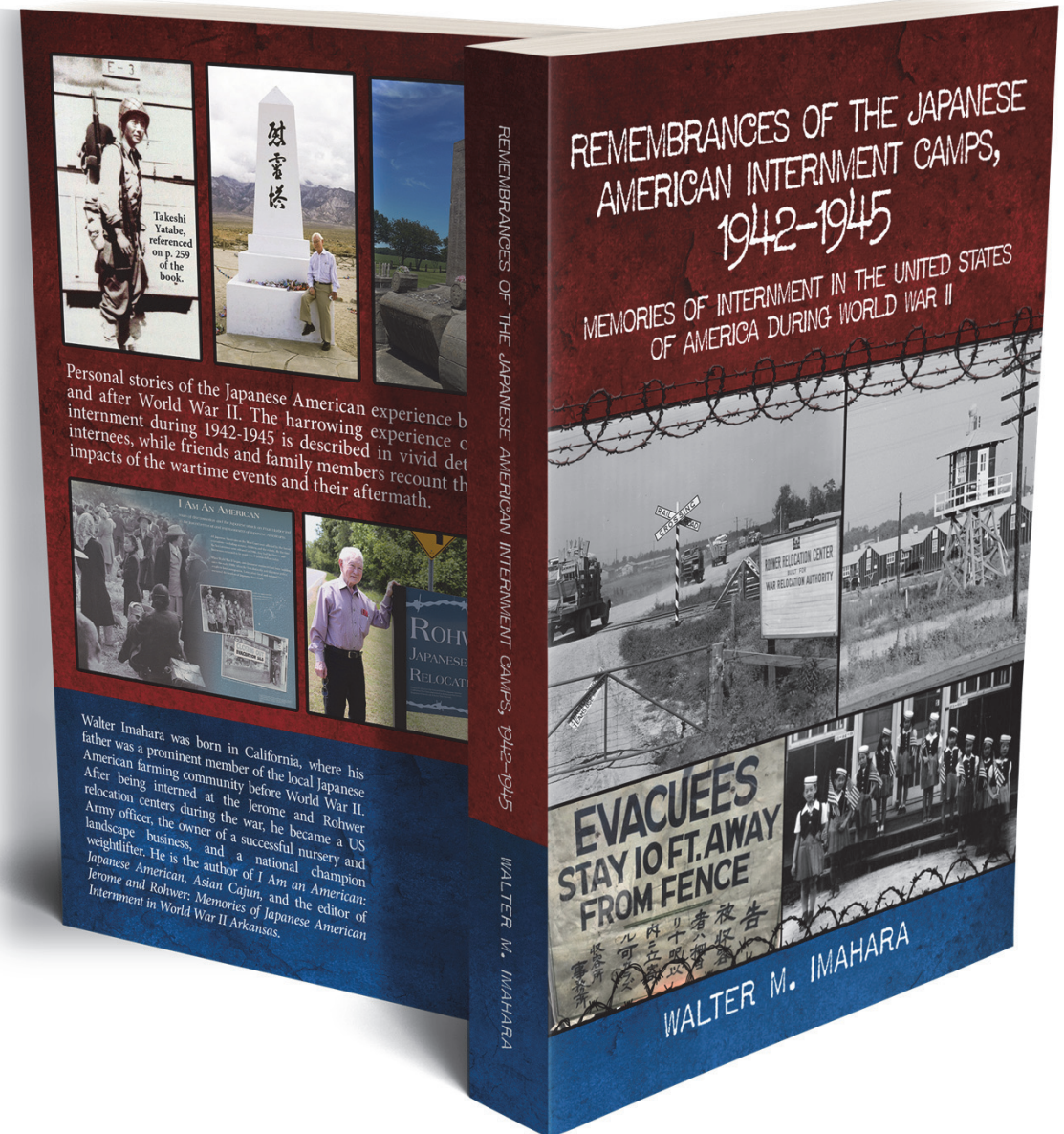
The Internees Speak: Remembrances of Jerome and Rohwer

Walter Imahara and David E. Meltzer

2022



2025



- *Jerome and Rohwer* (2022): First book-length collection of remembrances by former Jerome and Rohwer internees and their families
- *Remembrances of the Japanese American Internment Camps, 1942-1945* (2025): Remembrances by former internees of nine of the 10 internment centers, along with their families and associates

Timeline for *Jerome-Rohwer*

- **2019:** Imahara begins to solicit stories from friends and acquaintances who were interned in the camps; expands search to participants in the annual Pilgimages. We edit the stories and assemble them into manuscript form.
- **January 2020:** We contact University of Arkansas Press to see if they might be interested in publishing “a manuscript that [we] believe to be an unusual--if not unique--historical document related to Arkansas during the Second World War.”
- **March 2020:** *Letter from the Editor-in-Chief:* “The University of Arkansas Press would be honored to publish this collection as part of its ongoing effort to bring awareness, reconciliation, and humanity to both the injustice and the perseverance of the Japan American community that survived this experience.” Formal contract signed April 8th.

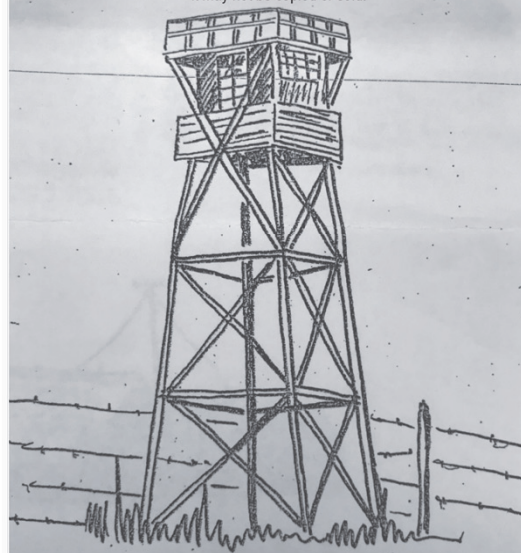
Timeline for *Jerome-Rohwer*

- **2020-2022:** Lengthy editing process begins, working for complete stylistic consistency and maximum accuracy of the final printed pages. Collaboration between University of Arkansas editors and Meltzer which extends for almost two years.
- **December 2020:** With agreement from the University of Arkansas press, Imahara and Meltzer publish special preliminary proof copies of the book for distribution to those who contributed stories and their families. Cover art by Amy Metz Hebert. All production work done “in-house” by Imahara and team; publication via Lulu self-publishing. (Not for sale to the public.)

"For here we admit a wrong; here we reaffirm our commitment
as a nation to equal justice under the law."
~ President Ronald Reagan, on signing the Civil Liberties Act in 1988



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Former internees of the
Jerome and Rohwer
wartime relocation centers
recall their experiences of
living behind barbed wire
under armed guard.

REMEMBRANCE OF JEROME-ROHWER

remembrance of
**JEROME
ROHWER**



memories of
**INTERNMENT IN
WORLD WAR II
ARKANSAS**

EDITED BY
WALTER M. IMAHARA

Remembrance of Jerome-Rohwer: Memories of Internment in World War II Arkansas

Edited by Walter M. Imahara

Associate Editor:
David E. Meltzer
Arizona State University

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Cover Design: Amy Metz Hebert

Back Cover Drawing: Lily Imahara Metz

Back cover photo: Imahara family and neighbors in Camp Jerome. *Courtesy Imahara family.*

Front cover, top photo: Jerome Relocation Center, Denson, Arkansas, 1942. *Tom Parker, War Relocation Authority, National Archives Collection.*

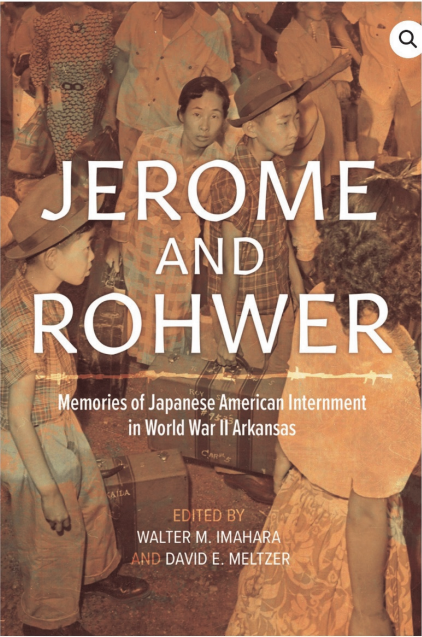
Front cover, bottom photo: Guard tower at Jerome Relocation Center, Denson, Arkansas, 1944. *Extract from a photo by Charles E. Mace, War Relocation Authority, National Archives Collection.*

Timeline for *Jerome-Rohwer*

- **February 2022:** *Jerome and Rohwer* is published by The University of Arkansas Press.



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Jerome and Rohwer

*Memories of Japanese American Internment in World War II
Arkansas*

Edited by Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer

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About

Not long after the attack on Pearl Harbor that drew the United States into World War II, the federal government rounded up more than a hundred thousand people of Japanese descent—both immigrants and native-born citizens—and began one of the most horrific mass-incarceration events in US history. The program tore apart Asian American communities, extracted families from their homes, and destroyed livelihoods as it forced Japanese Americans to various “relocation centers” around the country. Two of these concentration camps—the Jerome and Rohwer War Relocation Centers—operated in Arkansas.

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Jerome and Rohwer

Memories of Japanese American Internment
in World War II Arkansas



Edited by Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer

The University of Arkansas Press
Fayetteville | 2022

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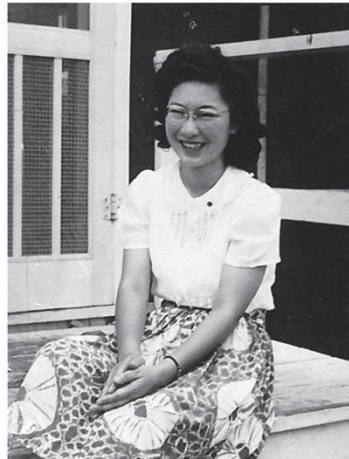


This is the only known photo that shows Walter Imahara and his entire family in the internment camps. Taken in the Jerome Relocation Center, the photo shows Walter's father James Imahara at the far right, holding Walter's sister Irene. Then, in sequence from right to left, is younger brother John, Walter himself, sister Lily, a person unknown, and Walter's mother Haruka holding his brother Jun. At the right in the second row, above James, is Walter's sister Flora; then, going right to left, are his sisters May and Jane.

we're told. Six families occupy one building, and twelve buildings form one block. Each block has its own mess hall, lavatories, and laundry.

September 1975

We had the large end room at Jerome. It had [initially] been assigned to a young couple, the Roy Shibas, with a young child. They had been told that others would be put in with them and asked us to change from a small room, which we did—gladly—and later notified the persons in charge. Our old bedroom carpet and pink priscilla-type curtains helped furnish the room. Of course, Obachan had a flower garden next to our barrack. Fortunately, our block was at the corner of camp—we could see the woods.



Yoshiko Hanato, Jerome, 1942.

October 20, 1942

We constantly see the two to three hundred people in our own block instead of the thousands that we did at Santa Anita, so the atmosphere is more home-like and it's certainly a lot better for the youngsters. . . . Water here is abundant as well as soft. Only a little soap is necessary for laundry and hardly any scrubbing is needed. Meat, meat, and more meat. Onions, potatoes, and carrots are the only seldom-seen vegetables out this way. And to think we used to complain and crab about the meatless days at Santa Anita. . . . Yukie [Yoshiko's sister] is at present working as a steno in the engineer's office. I'm helping register the school students, tabulating the subjects they wish to take and so forth in the education department. The number of teachers and curriculum are to be decided from our chart. All jobs are temporary until the camp is filled. The instructors here are very sincere and seem truly interested in the welfare of the children, so the youngsters are fortunate. All the school buildings, church, and store are to be built by the evacuees. . . . Japanese who have a degree and about fifteen to twenty units in education may be allowed to teach.

Rohwer, Arkansas

After about 1½ years people were allowed to return to their former homes. At that time my family moved from Jerome to Rohwer. (I understood that Jerome was then used for a prisoner of war camp.) People were given travel money to return to California or elsewhere. On January 31, 1945, I went to Chicago to live with Atsuko and worked at the Spiegel catalog company and then the Curtiss Candy Company. At work I could buy a box of twenty-four Baby Ruth candy bars for \$2, and it made my mother happy when I brought a box "home" with me, when I returned to Rohwer on June 2. I had returned to help take my mother, who had stomach cancer, to Utah, where my eldest brother, Tom, was working. My mother was so ill, she could not walk. On July 26 we left on a special train. When the train reached Salt Lake City on July 28, she was taken off the train on a stretcher through the Pullman window. My mother spent the remainder of her life in a hospital, where Rev. Howard Toriumi, who was fluent in Japanese, visited her every day. After she died on September 23, her body was sent to be buried in Lindsay, California, beside my father. I took my two younger brothers to live with Tom, who looked after them like a father. Then, I traveled back to Chicago to live. When some people returned home, they found their properties ransacked. Our things stored in Tom's bunkhouse were okay.

When I returned to Chicago, I lived with a dear friend, Ruth Hirose, and her sister and brother-in-law, Harry and Lucy Konda. George Enosaki started coming to see me at Harry and Lucy's home. In Chicago when George and I were dating, a couple of women yelled at us, "Go back, you damn dirty Japs!" We got married by Dr. Jitsuo Morikawa on the South Side on August 31, 1946. We had a daughter, Eileen, born at Mother Cabrini Hospital in 1949. George was commuting from Chicago to Gary, Indiana, to his prewar job at Reynolds Metals Plastics Division.



Rinko Shimasaki ready to leave camp.



Janet (top row, far left) doing the hula dance, Rohwer, Arkansas, 1943.



Janet (top row, third from right, in the dark skirt) twirling baton, Rohwer, Arkansas, 1943.

had to go to another building to use the bathroom and shower facilities. Somehow, we endured these deplorable living conditions for six months.

Jerome and Rohwer War Relocation Centers

From Santa Anita we were sent to Jerome and then to Rohwer, Arkansas. The newly constructed barracks were built for us. The conditions were not much better but at least they were clean. Coming from nice California weather, we had to get acclimated to the Arkansas weather. The summers were blazing hot and the winters were freezing cold. The men and women had their separate restrooms and shower facilities. One lady hung sheets over the stalls so we could have some privacy. Japanese people are very innovative. The women made *tsukemono* [preserved vegetables] with watermelon rinds and green tops of radishes, so we always had plenty of

some type of mustard. These mustard-coated sheets were then applied to our chest or back. I don't remember whether this cold remedy worked, but that was part of our early life.

One Christmas season, while writing a note to Santa by candlelight, my hair got singed and I remember Alice being the sister who got a towel or something to put out the fire.

On occasion, Father, who was responsible for the block kitchen, was allowed to go into town. He mentioned segregated restroom facilities in the South and that he was instructed to use the ones for the whites. He said that he felt strange about the whole situation.

As I recall, May and Jack did not stay in Jerome since they were able to find jobs (in a candy factory) in Chicago, and Dorothy went to college in Lincoln, Nebraska. Occasionally, May and Jack would send us a big cardboard box of candies and lots of different-colored marshmallows. Needless to say, that was a very big hit with us kids. To be able to get our family out of camp, Father had to find a sponsor who would take responsibility for our family. In February 1944 we moved to our first residence outside camp, in Mitchell, Nebraska.

We first stayed in the basement of a church. My guess is that it was the Sandalls' church. Phoebe remembers that, after we moved in, a cross was burned on the church lawn. Later, we moved into a converted chicken coop on a farm outside of Mitchell, which was owned by a Japanese American, Mr. Yamada. We lived on the farm until November 1944.

Life on the farm was a new experience for us. We helped with the planting, watering, weeding, and harvesting of onions, potatoes, and cabbage. I helped the watering of the crops by watching the water flow down the endless number of rows and identifying the rows in which water was overflowing on the far end. I helped pick up potatoes from the newly overturned potato plants. I remember being put on someone's lap and steering a tractor down one of the rows. The tractor was pulling a



Monty Ichinaga, 2003. Photo: Norman Yamauchi.



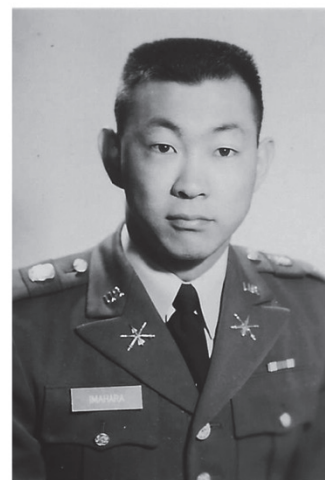
Walter, first row, fourth from right (leaning); Joanne Onda, left of Walter.

against the government. My father mentioned that if he went back, there would be no one to meet him at the train station, no place to live, no relatives, and no future. My father told us about the hatred of Japanese Americans that was still widespread in California. He heard that racist groups in California wanted to take away our citizenship, and send us to Japan at the end of war.



My mother, Haruka Imahara, at age thirty-five, in Camp Rohwer, October 8, 1944.

My parents told us we were going to New Orleans, Louisiana, to start a new life. The phrase *shikata ga nai* was used often; it meant, “it cannot be helped,” “it is what it is.” I understood later that these words meant the same thing for most of the internees: the internees left camp and they moved forward. First and foremost, my parents were going to educate their children. My father told us many times that education must be first, that education would get you a good job. My father also said, you must

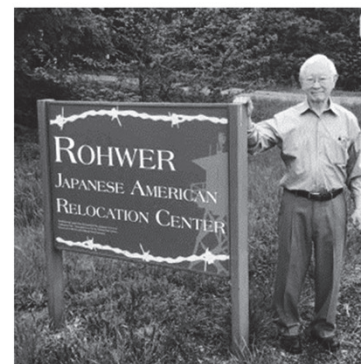


Above left: I enlisted in the US Army in 1960 and rose to the rank of first lieutenant.



Above right: Sister Lily (left), with me and Sumi.

Right: On a recent visit to the Rohwer camp site.



Addendum

My Japanese American parents’ lives were filled with customs, traditions, and values, lives that had been structured by the samurai code passed on by my grandparents, Minezo and Mika Imahara. Both my grandparents had been born in Japan and came to the US; they were first-generation Japanese immigrants and were “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” My grandparents were permanent residents of the US, but they never lived long enough to be naturalized when it became allowed by law. My parents believed in the Declaration of Independence, the US Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Of course, having been born in California, they were very Americanized. We, their children, were Americans as well.



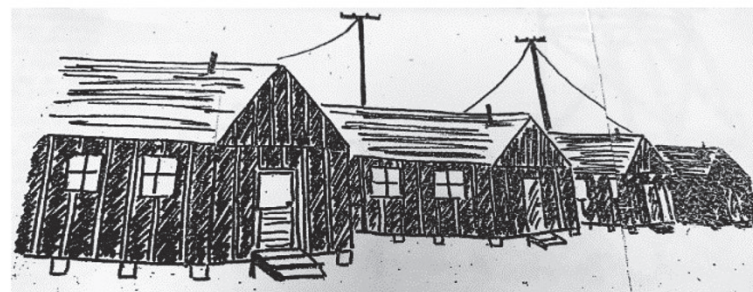
The YWCA and USO Hospitality Center at the Jerome Relocation Center. Note the smiling faces of the servicemen. Gertrude Nagata is on the far left.

went to Fort Ord. After the war began, he was sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he worked in the motor pool. About a year and a half later he was ordered to language school at Camp Savage–Fort Snelling, Minnesota. He also served at Fort Meade and Fort McClellan before being discharged at Fort McArthur in February of 1946.

I have written many stories about World War II as they were told to me by those who lived through that time. Oddly, this story was never told to me directly. Harry Nagata was a very talkative, friendly guy—and he told me many stories—but he really never discussed his time in the service with me. A lot of what I know about it comes from things my dad and sister have shared with me.

My father, Milton Nagata, felt like his younger brother was often given the worst duties—the dirtiest jobs—while serving in the army. Digging ditches. Cleaning grease pits. Latrines. Stuff no one else wanted to get stuck doing. I’ve heard that in one unit he drove mule teams—supposedly to save rubber tires and gasoline for the war effort.

Growing up in Lindsay, California, Harry Nagata was an ordinary farm boy. He went to Sunday school. Rode his bike around. Fixed up old cars and motorcycles. Later he worked in farm labor camps around the state. He was good-natured and hardworking. Harry liked American



Barracks. Sketch by Lily Imahara Metz.

I did find opportunity for my personal growth at the library, and I read to my heart’s content. Books opened a whole new world for me. We walked everywhere. A vivid image is the dirt or soil where I walked in my bare feet. The ground was so dry that the earth cracked open and left spaces that hurt my feet. I learned there can be suffering even in pleasure.

The entertainments included outdoor movies, and my favorite movie stars were Van Johnson, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, and Esther Williams. There was a stage in a large building where musicals and dramas were performed by residents. The stage was hand-painted with panoramic scenes of camp life at the top of the wall and on all sides except the stage. I watched sumo wrestling and baseball games. I participated in Obon dancing at Japanese festivals, and other entertainment, which were all fascinating and exciting to a young country girl.

I remember walking around the blocks and watching men doing woodwork, carving, polishing, and creating beautiful pieces of artwork. I remember lampstands made from cypress knees. The work was creative and original. Many years later in life, I saw a lamp made of a cypress knee with a shade at a craft show and I bought it. I enjoyed watching the ladies and young girls doing needlework, sewing, knitting, and crocheting. I watched my older sister, Flora, design a beautiful piece of needlework, which hangs today in her living room in California.

We had Christmas in camp, and we received apples, oranges, and candy canes along with milk and cookies. I remember standing on the mess hall table and singing Christmas songs such as “Jingle Bells,” “Frosty the Snowman,” and others. The mess hall, I recall, was very strange. I was used to eating in the kitchen back home with Mom cooking and serving



Above: Clearing land and chopping wood at the Jerome Relocation Center.

Right: Milton Nagata (on the right) and fellow electrician posing in front of the Jerome Relocation Center Radio and Electric shop.



facilities. One time, lightning struck a chimney or metal vent pipe on one of the buildings. The bolt came down and, not having any place to go, “danced” several feet across the floor before finding its way down a drain. It actually burned the concrete along its path, leaving a black scar. Fortunately, no one was in its way or they would have been killed. I think they put up lightning rods after that.

provided endless hours of entertainment. We were mean boys, beating rabbits out of the brush with sticks and chasing them until they were exhausted. They’d eventually just huddle there, quivering with fright and unable to move another inch.

Besides hunting rabbits, we liked to fish. There were bayous, small creeks, and shallow ponds with a variety of fish—some quite large, others so strange they seemed to have belonged on another planet. I remember catching fish and taking them back to camp to eat, thinking fresh fish would be a welcome change from the usual fare. Well, those fish weren’t inedible, but the problem was they didn’t have any flavor at all.

Exploring the outdoors was far more exciting than attending classes—especially when the temperature rose. Because of moving—first to assembly centers and then to Jerome—my classmates and I had lost a lot of time from school. It was decided that we had to attend classes over the summer to make up the work we’d missed. There was no air conditioning back then. The Arkansas humidity made studying in the heat even more unbearable. I recall sweating so much that if my hand touched my paper it would become too soaked to write on anymore. Often there were terrible thunderstorms—not like anything I’d experienced in California.



A family friend stands in front of the hospital-incinerator chimney, a prominent camp feature that was hard to miss.

and better constructed. Although the camp was not yet finished, camp security in the usual form of barbed-wire fencing and guard towers with searchlights was in place. Construction and ditching operations were still in progress; the plumbers gambled all day with dice

while the camp kids did much of the actual work, mainly threading pipe, for ten cents an hour. The barracks were on open ground, with forests and swamps beyond.

We had exchanged the dry desert heat of Fresno for Arkansas humidity. In Jerome it was muggy in the summer and icy in the winter. I encountered sleet for the first time in my life and enjoyed eating the icicles that hung from the eaves. The soil of Jerome was clay, which became sticky and slippery when wet. You got taller with every step.

We entered the food chain of the abundant local insect life. I particularly recall the annoying chiggers, which targeted the most tender and sensitive parts of your body. I also encountered fireflies for the first time. We caught them in jars, but they soon quit glowing in captivity. There were many, many spiders preying on the other insects, and I entertained myself watching the chain of events when bugs became ensnared in their webs.

Reptiles were varied and numerous. I saw all four of the American venomous snakes here and was particularly warned to avoid coral snakes. Once bitten by one of these, you were as good as dead—there was no antivenin available. I took this warning seriously! The older kids used to scare us with tales of the blue racer, a snake so fast you couldn't outrun it. Worse yet was the brown hoop snake, which curled into a hoop and came rolling after you. I was suckered by these stories for a long time, and even carried a stick to beat them off if they ever attacked me. I felt quite foolish later. The only confirmed venomous bite I know of was delivered by a pet rattlesnake. Its owner had filed down its fangs and didn't realize that they would grow back. I foolishly asked Mom for permission to keep a pet



Larry, Gene, and Tim Taira.

George Teraoka

Executive Order 9066

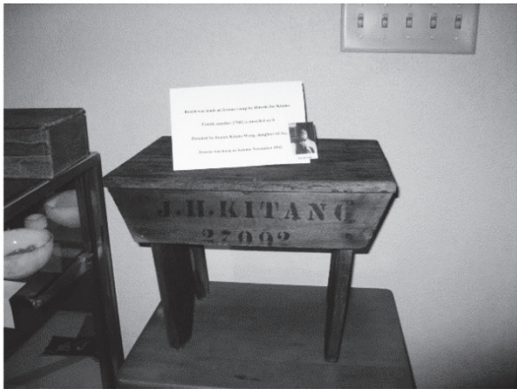
May 13, 1942, will be well remembered. It was my twenty-first birthday that our family reported to the Fresno County Fairgrounds, designated as the Fresno Assembly Center, in compliance with President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066. Since we were living on the west side of Highway 99, the dividing line in Central California, we were amongst the first of our area to be removed from our homes. It was the beginning of a new era in our destiny of life.

Fresno Assembly Center

Life in the assembly center, for most of us, created new challenges, and we sought ways to meet them. As for myself, there was one burning question that seemed to be uppermost in my mind, and that was what led to our incarceration without being guilty of any violation of public law. I frequently engaged in conversation with people that I had great respect for, and no one could give me a satisfying answer. Most shrugged their shoulders. Issei people usually commented with *shikata ga nai*; that literally means there is no other way. It's an expression of resignation and to comply.

Life in Fresno Assembly Center, despite being confined, became the challenge of finding peace and enjoyment of life. Looking for entertainment seemed like the only way to pass the time and still make life enjoyable. Many sought ways to make life meaningful. Along this line of thinking, I had a friend send me my small PA system with a record player to play dance music. Through this use of the equipment, I was frequently invited to small parties to play music. Most of us from Fresno Assembly

where you now reside, in the McGehee Internment Museum, a few miles from where you came. Visitors can see you, feel you, and reflect on the struggles and hardships Joe and Tomoye endured with hopes that freedom would never be taken from anyone else again.



The card reads: "Bench was made at Jerome camp by Hiroshi Joe Kitano. Family number 27002 is stenciled on it. Donated by Joanne Kitano Wong, daughter of Joe. Joanne was born at Jerome November 1943."



Left: Rohwer Police Station in 1944. George Yoshii seated left; Burt Clayton seated right (with cigar). Note the police badge on their shirts.

Below: Rohwer Police Station. George Yoshii is seated in the front row, fifth from left.



World War II Japanese American Internment Museum in McGehee, Arkansas.

Mayor May identified Burt Clayton, Chief of the Internal Security force, with his signature cigar. The former mayor had a family connection to local civilian law enforcement during the war and tells of visiting Rohwer as a youngster.

If anyone has documentation or memories of George Yoshii being a chief of Rohwer Police, we'd appreciate knowing for sure, and send any details to the museum in McGehee.

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Phase Two: A second book gets started

- Imahara begins work on new collection of stories from “all camps”
- Spreads the word via the 2023 Pilgrimage participants and friends
- Final publication in 2025 by Gatekeeper Press

SEEKING CAMP STORIES

for a new book, "Remembrance of the Japanese American
Incarceration Camps, 1942-1946"

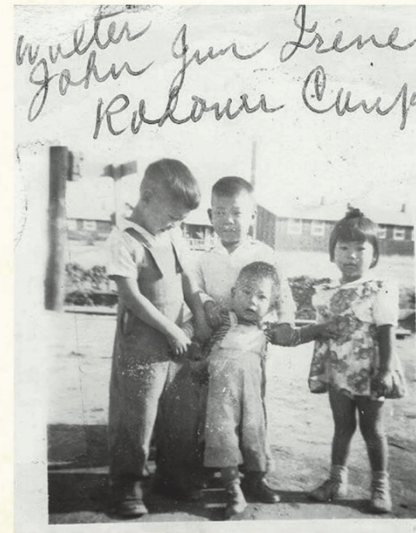
From Walter Imahara, editor of "Remembrance of Jerome-Rohwer":



Walter Imahara

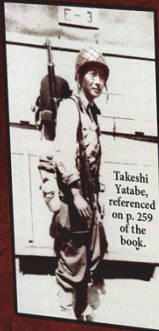
"I was a child in both camps in Arkansas and I am now living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I would like to receive your stories that we remember from camp. I would like as many of you who can remember their experiences in camp to share their stories with the rest of us."

"Those who wish to contribute your stories to us, please write 1-4 pages of your memories of your life in camp. I would appreciate your story with photo, if available, to be sent to me by electronic or print. I will ask my editor, Dr. David Meltzer, to edit the articles for printing. Once the book is published, we will send you a copy. The goal is to publish the book by Spring of 2025. Deadline for articles is December 31, 2024. All proceeds will be donated to Jerome-Rohwer Museum in McGehee, Arkansas."

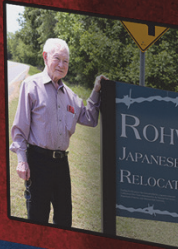


Imahara family in Rohwer

**Submissions or questions may be sent to:
waltimahara@gmail.com**



Personal stories of the Japanese American experience before and after World War II. The harrowing experience of internment during 1942-1945 is described in vivid detail, while friends and family members recount the impacts of the wartime events and their aftermath.



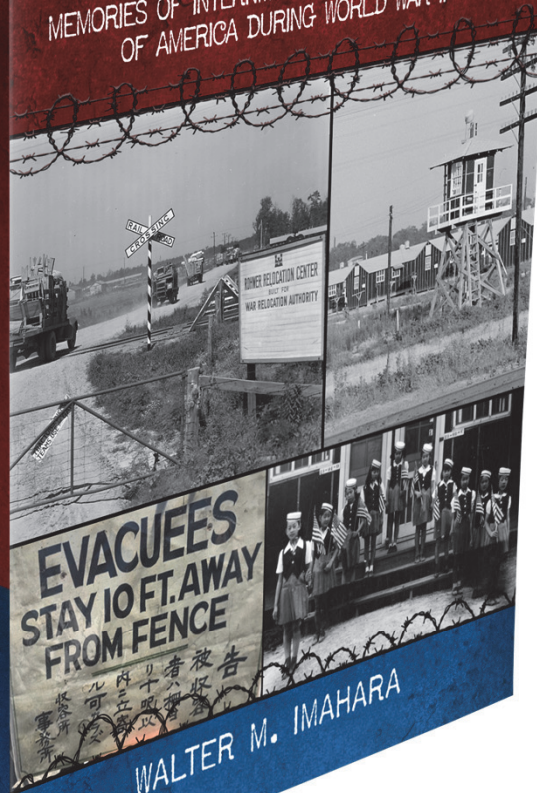
Walter Imahara was born in California, where his father was a prominent member of the local Japanese American farming community before World War II. After being interned at the Jerome and Rohwer relocation centers during the war, he became a US Army officer, the owner of a successful nursery and landscape business, and a national champion weightlifter. He is the author of *I Am an American: Japanese American, Asian Cajun*, and the editor of *Jerome and Rohwer: Memories of Japanese American Internment in World War II Arkansas*.

REMEMBRANCES OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT CAMPS, 1942-1945

WALTER M. IMAHARA

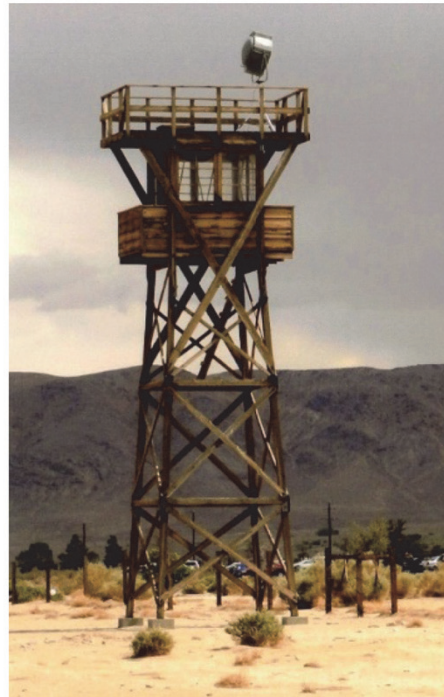
REMEMBRANCES OF THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT CAMPS, 1942-1945

MEMORIES OF INTERNMENT IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DURING WORLD WAR II



WALTER M. IMAHARA

Remembrances of the Japanese American Internment Camps, 1942–1945



*Memories of Internment in
the United States of America during World War II*

Edited by Walter M. Imahara and David E. Meltzer
June, 2025


gatekeeper press™
Tampa, Florida

Dedication of This Book to My Wife, Sumi Imahara, (Oct. 22, 1934–Mar. 31, 2024)

Author: Wanda Metz Chase

It is with great sadness that I must share Aunt Sumi's passing on Easter Sunday morning. May I share her beautiful life story?

Sumile Jeannette Matsumoto Imahara was born on October 22, 1934, to the late Shiguru (Sam) and Shizu Imai Matsumoto in Salinas, CA, where she lived with her parents, grandparents, and her two brothers.

Sumi was in second grade when Pearl Harbor was attacked, and her Japanese American family was interned and sent to Poston, an internment camp in Arizona best known for its dust storms. She attended school while in camp and did not remember it as a bad experience for herself, but she expected it was hard on her family. When they were released after the war, the family decided to move to Oakland, CA, and later to Berkeley.

Sumi graduated with a liberal arts degree from Mills College in Oakland. There was a great demand in California for teachers, so she took additional courses at San Jose State and taught in nearby schools at the same time under an intern program. She taught classes in California for two and a half years.

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Drawing of the tower in Jerome, Arkansas. By David Norwood

Introduction

Author: David E. Meltzer, PhD

The bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Imperial Japanese Navy on December 7, 1941, precipitated a series of events that—apart from World War II itself—profoundly altered the lives of about 120,000 Japanese Americans, and which continue to have reverberations throughout present-day American society. The most immediate consequence was the forced relocation and imprisonment of all West Coast residents of Japanese ancestry, whether or not they were US citizens, in specially built prison camps in remote locations far from their homes. It was President Roosevelt himself who, just two months after the Pearl Harbor attack, signed the order that enabled this action, unprecedented and—so far—unparalleled in size and scope in American history. More than 75,000 US citizens were included in the roundup—men, women, and children of all ages, including infants—not on the basis of any actions they had taken nor of any evidence that they were likely to do so, but merely on the fear that they might somehow be a danger to a country at war with Japan *because their parents or grandparents had been born there*. US citizens of today might try to imagine a roughly equivalent situation were the US to get into a war with any of our current adversaries—Russia or China, for example—and the FBI

Camp Amache Impression

Author: Lili Yuriko Nakai Havey

In 1942 Santa Anita Assembly, California, was a swirl of black and white—black tar paper barracks with white slats, black asphalt, black-haired people, tan paper tags with numbers, soldiers with frightening black rifles, and people with ashen faces. The huge white grandstand loomed over the camp. It became our communal school. Whitewashed horse stalls lined one side of the camp offering the lingering stench of manure.

Amache Internment Camp in Colorado was starkly different from Santa Anita Assembly Center. Camp Amache was softer, calmer. The pale green and gray of the sagebrush blended into the tan earth. Tiny flashes of wings (what were these insects?) zigzagged above the swaths of muted hues. Barely visible rabbits hopped among the bushes and then froze, hoping to become invisible. The sounds were different. Instead of loud voices and shuffling footsteps, the howls of coyotes echoed from one end of the camp to the other. Crickets chirped in the fall. Occasionally, snakes warned away internees with their rattles. Most noticeably, people seemed to speak slower, softer, and not scream and yell. Then the snow. Snow! So soft, so gentle at first, and then later in the season, bursting into a full gale, sweeping everything in a horizontal blur. We stuffed cloth into the cracks along the windows and door

Camp Poston, Arizona

Author: Robert Iwamasa

I was born in Watsonville, California, on August 29, 1937. My grandfather Yonezo (Doi) Yonemura left his hometown in Fuji, Yamaguchi Ken, Japan, in 1887 to go to Hawaii. He was twenty-one years old. My mother, Makiyo (Maggie) Yonemura, was born in Moi Lili, near Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii, on September 15, 1899. My grandfather, grandmother (Rui), mother (Makiyo), and aunt (Fumiyo) left Hawaii in 1902 and settled in Watsonville, California. My father, Yoichi (George) Iwamasa, was born in Yanai, Yamaguchi Ken, Japan, on June 15, 1900, and came to work for my mother's father who raised strawberries as a sharecropper in Aromas, near Watsonville. They got married in 1923.

When Japan made a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared war on the Empire of Japan on December 8, 1941. In February 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 requiring all persons of Japanese descent, including those born here and therefore US citizens, to be evacuated from the designated area on the West Coast of the United States to be “relocated” to ten relocation camps. These camps were internment camps, where the relocated persons were restricted to remain inside a designated barbed wire interior. My mother told me that she was working in a strawberry field when

Manzanar in Three Words

Author: Clover Johnson

Manzanar? It was lonely.

—Yosh Imamoto,
former internee of the Manzanar Relocation Center

I first encountered Yosh Imamoto back in the mid-nineties when he was working for the Porterville Unified School District as a custodian. My son was in the orchestra and playing at one of the local high schools that Saturday, and Yosh was there taking care of the facilities. I remember the principal telling him how he wanted the tables and chairs arranged. I suppose Yosh caught my attention because he reminded me of my father. He was built the same way—lean and tough and a lot stronger than he looked. The man wasn't over five-four and couldn't have weighed more than a hundred and thirty pounds, but there he was moving furniture for a whole high school cafeteria by himself.

Yosh had an apartment not too far from where we lived. Eventually, he retired and I'd see him out walking or I'd run into him at the grocery store from time to time. Honestly, he looked like he could have been one of my relatives. He was slender with glasses, a bristly goatee, and thinning gray hair down to his shoulders. Cuffed blue jeans and a simple cotton shirt were his usual attire. When I talked

Memories of Heart Mountain

Author: Sam Mihara

I was a child of nine years old living in San Francisco when the government decided to remove me from my home and place me in a desolate prison camp in Northern Wyoming. But the story begins before I was born.

In the 1800s, there was hate against Asians living in the US. There were political cartoons, such as one that featured an Asian standing over a woman that he just killed, with the caption, "Yellow Peril kills white women." Just after the attack on Pearl Harbor, there was a newspaper headline stating, "Ouster of All Japs is Near." There was a billboard near my house in Japantown, San Francisco, that stated, "Bye Bye, Japs."

On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed an Executive Order that gave the power to the military to remove people. It did not name the race to be removed. Lt. Gen. John DeWitt of the Western Defense Command decided it shall be everyone of Japanese ancestry living in the states of California, Oregon, Washington, and parts of Arizona.

I remember the signs on the walls and lampposts in front of our house stating all persons of Japanese ancestry have one week

Memories of Jerome, Arkansas

Author: J. E. Ellington

Jerome, Arkansas, 1983—Japanese City Buried but Memories Linger

It's been more than thirty-five years since J. E. Ellington sat and watched the brilliant splash of color made by 10,000 Japanese exercising in their bright finery on a warm Sunday afternoon. A few of the flowers the Japanese planted in the boggy buckshot mud still survive, fragile but enduring monuments to the people who once inhabited this bleak Arkansas countryside. Ellington and his two sons buried the Japanese "city" years ago—its tar paper duplexes, community bathhouses, and dining halls. They used the foundations of food warehouses and administration buildings to make hay storage. A tall smokestack now remains, and the land is planted in rice and wheat.

Ellington was twenty-eight when the government herded 10,000 people of Japanese descent from the West Coast to this "relocation center" site. Former camp residents, who often write or bring their families to see the place where they were interned for two years, still cross his mind. It still makes him angry to think about what he saw happen. "There was no earthly reason to bring those people out of

Camp Rohwer, Arkansas: This Is My Story

Author: Fumiko Ito

This is my experience in one of the Relocation camps, which my family and I and all the Japanese on the West Coast were ordered to go after World War II began. I remember that day, December 7, 1941, when Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. No one knew where Pearl Harbor was. My family was made up of my mother, father, older sister and brother, myself, and two younger sisters. My parents owned a hotel in downtown Los Angeles, near Little Tokyo. I remember after the war started, there was discrimination against us. Many Asians wore buttons saying, "I am Chinese" or whatever ethnic background they were to distinguish themselves from being Japanese. I remember my parents destroyed anything that was Japanese, especially swords, kimonos, and photos because they were afraid to have them in their possession.

On February 19, 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. I remember seeing these notices posted on the telephone poles. The evacuation order commenced the round-up of 120,000 Americans of Japanese heritage. The ten Internment camps, officially called "Relocation Centers," were in California, Idaho, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, and Arkansas. We

Memories of Topaz, Utah

Author: Jon Yatabe

In the early 1940s, my father, mother, and I lived in Redwood City, where my father raised flowers. My parents were both born in 1907 and were in their thirties. We lived in a small rental house. When the war came, and Executive Order 9066 was issued, I was four years old and didn't understand the tension in our family. When the order came to evacuate with only what we could carry, our landlord allowed us to gather the family so we could all go to the Assembly Center together.

In 1942 my family went first to the Tanforan Assembly Center in California and then to the Topaz Relocation Center in Utah. In Tanforan we were housed in horse stalls, and I was four years old but still remember the smell of straw and manure in our living area. The women constantly cleaned, and my father and uncles worked with scrap lumber to make the stalls more livable. In several months the family went together to Topaz, first by bus and then by train with the windows covered. They were uncovered in the Sierras, and I remember the beauty of a silver



Jon at 4 years old.

Minidoka War Relocation Center, Idaho

Minidoka was not finished when the first internees arrived in August 1942. Some internees helped complete the barracks, mess hall, and other buildings. The sewage treatment plant was not completed, so everyone had to use outdoor pit toilets for almost six months. Even once the latrines were finished, the toilets and showers were in open rooms. Resourceful women fashioned stalls out of cardboard or held up sheets to provide some sense of privacy.



Mura, Shorty, and Sue

Minidoka was a 33,000-acre site, but most of the 600 buildings were crowded on 946 acres. It was initially surrounded by five miles of barbed wire fencing with eight guard towers. The internees resented what the fence represented, and it limited their access to garbage disposal areas, gardens, and recreational areas. They started to sabotage the fence, so most of the fence was taken down after four months. Due to supply shortages, the guard towers were never complete nor used.

At the time of Minidoka's peak population (9,397), the camp was the seventh-largest "city" in Idaho. There were forty-four blocks. Each block contained twelve barracks, which were simple tar paper and wood shelters. Each barrack had six "apartments," each housing two to eight people. Beds were provided, but there were no other furnishings. Tables, chairs, and shelves were made by the internees.

Post-Evacuation

Author: Tim Taira

When the USA declared war on Japan, I was nine years old and in the third grade at Lincoln Elementary School in Fresno, California. Shortly thereafter, we were forcibly relocated, first to the Fresno Assembly Center (Fresno County Fairgrounds), then to the Jerome concentration camp in Arkansas, and finally to the Rohwer camp a short distance away. My experiences at this time have been covered previously in another book, so I won't repeat them here.

While reflecting on the evacuation, I became interested in the why and the how behind it all. The popular motivation is ascribed to the Imperial Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor; however, a program of this magnitude is not planned and executed in just a few short months. Research revealed that the core concepts for Japanese American incarceration were planned well before hostilities. The Pearl Harbor attack served as the catalyst for implementation. The more sinister motivation behind the evacuation was economic, the seizure of properties and businesses



Kikuo H. Taira, M.D.
(Dad)

Question 27, 28: No/Yes

Author: George Nishio's Interview with John Nishio

On July 21, 2001, I videotaped an interview with my dad, George Nishio (Figure 1), about some of his experiences during WWII. He was released from the Jerome Concentration Camp to Detroit, where he was able to get a job. While in Detroit, he was drafted in 1944 and served in the European theater (not part of the 442nd or 100th). After you read the transcript, you will understand the significance, because he adamantly held the belief that prisoners should not be drafted to serve in the army. Why would the US Army come to the US American concentration camps to recruit prisoners and people who were considered traitors? He felt that he should be able to volunteer or be drafted as a free person only.



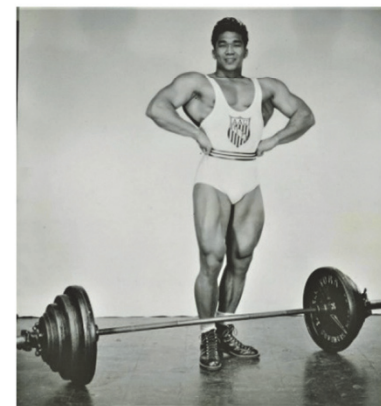
Figure 1. George Nishio, O.D., served as an optometrist at the Jerome Concentration Camp during WW II.

Tule Lake Internment Center Tule Lake, California

Author: John D. Fair

Contrary to our retrospective impressions of suffering and deprivations endured by Japanese Americans during their confinement in internment camps during World War II, Tommy (Tamio) Kono had an uplifting experience during the three and a half years he spent at the Tule Lake Relocation Camp in Northern California. It was there that he gained a sense of purpose and identity that led to his becoming a legendary Olympic champion, an international celebrity, and an inspiration to all Americans. Kono derived this motivation from his exposure to the relatively obscure sport of weightlifting during his incarceration.

Weightlifting is often regarded as the epitome of strength sports, and there seemed no reason to suspect from his background that Tommy Kono would excel in it. His parents, Kanichi and Ichimi, were descendants of farming stock from Hiroshima, Japan, who migrated

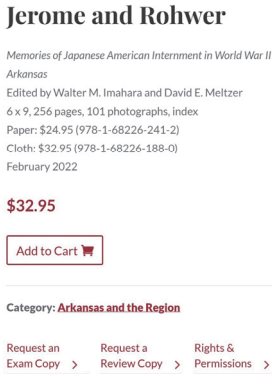


Tommy Kono

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Not long after the attack on Pearl Harbor that drew the United States into World War II, the federal government rounded up more than a hundred thousand people of Japanese descent—both immigrants and native-born citizens—and began one of the most horrific mass-incarceration events in US history. The program tore apart Asian American communities, extracted families from their homes, and destroyed livelihoods as it forced Japanese Americans to various “relocation centers” around the country. Two of these concentration camps—the Jerome and Rohwer War Relocation Centers—operated in Arkansas.

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This book is a collection of brief memoirs written by former interns of Jerome and Rohwer and their close family members. Here dozens of individuals, almost all of whom are now in their eighties or nineties, share their personal accounts as well as photographs and other illustrations related to their life-changing experiences. The collection, likely to be one of the last of its kind, is the only work composed solely of autobiographical remembrances of life in Jerome and Rohwer, and one of the very few that gathers in a single volume the experiences of internees in their own words.

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