

KOKORO KARA

"from our heart"

AUTUMN 2020



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Guard Tower at dusk
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Check out the Newsletter page on our new and improved
website to read all past issues of *Kokoro Kara*!

www.heartmountain.org/newsletter



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KOKORO KARA

Volume 9, Issue 2

Editor/Designer: Kate Wilson

Have an idea for an article?

Would you like to be a contributing writer? We're interested! Write to Kate Wilson with your story ideas—these could include a profile of a former incarcerated, a specific aspect of the Japanese American experience before/during/after the war, or an act of kindness from a non-incarcerated, just to name a few.

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Change of address?

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HEART MOUNTAIN'S SILVER LININGS: PUSHING BEYOND THE PANDEMIC TO FIND NEW AUDIENCES AND ALLIES

CHAIR SHIRLEY ANN HIGUCHI

In this challenging year, we have managed to reach beyond the uncertainty surrounding the world to find new audiences and allies. It continues to make me optimistic about our future, particularly as we launch the fundraising to build the Mineta-Simpson Institute at Heart Mountain.

This month, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked us to submit a proposal for them to support programming about Japanese immigrants to the United States, particularly those with a connection to Heart Mountain, through a series of podcasts, videos, and online presentations that will run in the first three months of 2021. If their support comes through, it will be our first official collaboration with the Japanese government, and it represents another step in our relationship with them, which started with their embassy in Washington.

At our July 2019 Pilgrimage, Ambassador Shinsuke Sugiyama and his wife Yoko brought a delegation from their embassy, including Minister Kenichiro Mukai and his wife Midori, who has since collaborated with us on the Mineta-Simpson Institute. They were grateful for our hospitality and they extended invitations for other events at their embassy, which we always enjoy attending. Ambassador Sugiyama told our pilgrimage and audiences at the embassy that all Japanese people need to know about the incarceration.

In November 2019 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited me to travel to Japan to speak to students and to visit Saga Prefecture, the region on the island of Kyushu from which my grandparents Iyekichi and Chiye Higuchi left to immigrate to the United States in 1915. That trip enabled me to meet with Japanese government officials and increase the awareness of Heart Mountain and the incarceration to a wider range of people.

While in Japan, I met with Sumiko Aikawa, my

grandmother's niece, which inspired the last chapter of my new book, *Setsuko's Secret: Heart Mountain and the Legacy of the Japanese American Incarceration*. I also met with several of the Japanese doctoral students who once studied with my father, Dr. William Higuchi, at the universities of Michigan and Utah. I believed it was important for them to understand the background of their mentor and how the incarceration experience developed my father's outlook and commitment to help others. His students were grateful for the support he and my late mother, Setsuko, had provided while they were studying in the United States.

One of those students, Dr. Kenji Sugibayashi, is now the president of Josai International University in Chiba, a suburb of Tokyo. He and Professor Maria Shiguemi, who is of Brazilian and Japanese descent, organized an online seminar featuring me and Heart Mountain board member Sam Mihara. We talked to the students about the incarceration and about *Setsuko's Secret*.

The success of that October 30 event, which drew an audience from around the world, has led us to schedule another seminar for the Day of Remembrance in February, which marks the 79th anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066. Josai International University has also agreed to partner with us on other programming, alongside the Japanese government and other institutions. They will be a productive and regular member of our international outreach.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic continues



to hit multiple parts of the country and world, the development and distribution of new vaccines gives me hope that we will eventually be able to travel and meet with the people we love and care about. When that happens, the relationships we have started and nurtured through constant calls, emails, and teleconferences will flower into an even better series of events that will further our mission and strengthen our foundation.

We are playing a long game, one marked by patience and planning. The results are not often immediate, but they are real and long lasting. I'm encouraged by what we've done so far and where we're going.

Stay inspired!

Shirley Ann Higuchi

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started." —Mark Twain

The Heart Mountain Institute is now the Mineta-Simpson Institute at Heart Mountain

When the Foundation's board of directors established the Heart Mountain Institute in 2018, the lives and legacies of Secretary Norman Mineta and Senator Alan Simpson were very much on our minds. The wisdom and values of these two men, plainly visible in their long political careers and their close personal friendship, inspired us to imagine what lessons the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation might be able to teach to future generations.

As we further developed our vision for the Institute, we realized that this obvious and powerful influence on our work needed to be made official. We are pleased to announce, then, that the Heart Mountain Institute is now the Mineta-Simpson Institute at Heart Mountain. The name change doesn't change the institute's mission, but recognizes the galvanizing effect of the work by Secretary Mineta and Senator Simpson on behalf of Heart Mountain and the nation.

The Institute will also continue to develop programming that extends the Foundation's reach beyond our museum and historic site in Wyoming. We kicked off many of those programs this year, and

received a National Endowment for the Humanities CARES Act grant to continue our efforts. Next year promises to be another banner year for our efforts, as we build new partnerships and collaborations and prepare for our first-ever NEH supported workshops for educators nationwide.

At the heart of the Mineta-Simpson Institute is the development of a new wing of Heart Mountain Interpretive Center, which will be used to host the workshops, programs, and conferences that use the lessons learned from Heart Mountain's history to help us shape a better world for tomorrow. As 2021 progresses, watch this space for more announcements about this exciting new project.

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THE LEMONADE ISSUE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DAKOTA RUSSELL

I suppose it's not surprising that this issue of *Kokoro Kara* has taken on a distinctly medical tone. Over the course of 2020, we have all learned more about the spread of disease, the inner workings of our hospital systems, and the process of developing vaccines than we ever intended to. But this year has also been about taking the rottenest of lemons and squeezing them into a tolerable glass of lemonade. In that spirit, I think you'll find the contents of this issue both refreshing and enlightening.

On page 19, you'll find a preview of our upcoming exhibit, *History Often Rhymes*, which explores the history of race and disease in America, up to and including COVID-19. This exhibit will be a first for us, premiering both in physical form at the interpretive center and online on our website in early 2021. I also encourage you to peruse registrar Brandon Daake's exploration of the Heart Mountain hospital, as told through artifacts and photos in our collections, in the latest "Dusted Off" on page 33. Finally, you can join me as I dive back into the story of Heart Mountain's appointed staff, this time profiling the camp's teachers and nurses, on page 25.

Before you begin, however, I want to make a note about the format of this issue. Although we tried to offer ample notice, some of you may have been surprised to find *Kokoro Kara* in your email rather than your mailbox. With reduced visitation to the interpretive center this year, we had to make some difficult budget cuts. Making this issue digital-only was among the hardest. While I hope you enjoy the convenience of reading the magazine online, I know many of you—like me—will miss the print edition. Rest assured that we will be returning to print in Winter 2021, and have already started planning some great stories for the coming year.

Though it may not be like other years, I still wish the very best to you and yours this holiday season. See you in the new year.



Heart Mountain Treasurer Claudia Wade Honored by Wyoming Publication

Claudia Wade, longtime board member and treasurer of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, was honored in September as one of the Wyoming Business Report's Women of Influence for 2020. Wade was recognized in the Hospitality, Travel and Tourism category, one of fifteen nominee categories recognizing influential women across the state of Wyoming. Wade has been promoting Cody/Yellowstone for over 30 years as executive director of the Park County Travel Council. She is a native of Wyoming and serves on the Wyoming Travel Industry Coalition in addition to her service to Heart Mountain. Wade is also the 2006 recipient of the Governor's Big WYO Award for her leadership and service to the hospitality and travel industry.

Thanks to the CARES Act grant we received from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Foundation is pleased to welcome two new members of the Heart Mountain team, who will be working on special projects for the duration of 2020.

Welcome!

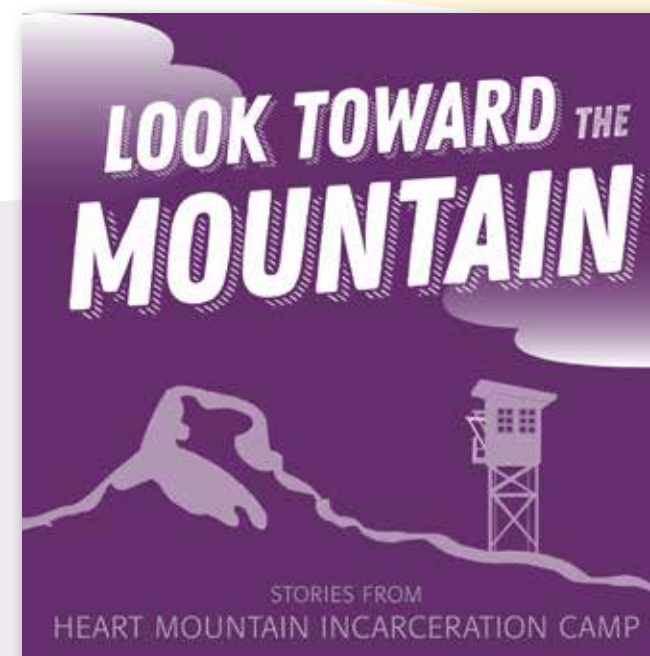
Rob Buscher



Rob is the head writer and host of our new podcast, Look Toward the Mountain. Rob is a film and media specialist, educator, arts administrator, and published author who has worked in nonprofit arts organizations for over a decade. Rob serves as President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League and chairs the editorial board of Pacific Citizen, the organization's national newspaper. Rob has spent the past several months researching, writing, and recording episodes of the new podcast, showcasing unique and compelling stories from Heart Mountain. The first episodes will be released in early 2021.

Kaitlin McGrath

Kaitlin joined Heart Mountain in August as a digitization specialist. She is a recent graduate of the Museum Studies Program at the University of Kansas, where she studied collection management. She moved from Michigan to Wyoming this year to work at Heart Mountain digitizing documents and photographs from the collection. By the end of her four-month term in December, she completed scans of 42 boxes of materials from the Frank Emi Collection, and created accompanying finding aids and metadata.



New Podcast Coming Soon!

Look Toward the Mountain Stories from Heart Mountain Incarceration Camp

Join us as we explore the Heart Mountain experience through a series of interviews and discussions in our brand new podcast. Watch your inboxes for more details soon!

In Memoriam

Grant Bulltail (1940–2020)



John Grant Bulltail, Apsáalooke (Crow) culture-bearer, educator, orator, writer, strong family man and proud descendant of many chiefs including Chief Plenty Coups, Chief Pretty Eagle, and Chief Plays With His Face, went to the Other

Side Camp on October 1.

Grant's early years were spent at the family home north of Crow Agency, Montana, where his family engaged in horse and cattle ranching. Since childhood, he was a member of the Sacred Tobacco Society, eventually coming to carry the positions of Pipe Lighter and Lodge Erector, the highest positions of the Society. Because of his vast knowledge and active participation in Crow culture he was a vital resource

to community members and scholars, and served as a Crow Culture Committee member for over ten years.

Grant was well known to those who love Heart Mountain as the spiritual center of the Return to Foretop's Father seminar, an annual multi-day event held in the shadow of the mountain. The event, and Grant's teachings and worldview, are captured in the documentary "Return to Foretop's Father." The film was screened at the 2019 Heart Mountain Pilgrimage, where Grant was a special guest speaker.

In 2019, Grant received the highest possible honor from the National Endowment of the Arts Division of Folk and Traditional Arts with a National Heritage Fellowship for storytelling. In early 2020, he worked with Visiting Curator Nina Sanders at the Field Museum in Chicago as a consultant to her project, *Apsáalooke Women and Warriors*, a large exhibition of historic and contemporary Crow art.

Solly Ganor (1928–2020)



Solly Ganor, Holocaust survivor and author, passed away in his home in Tel Aviv, Israel on August 19. Solly was born on May 18, 1928 in Lithuania, and spent his boyhood in the city of Kaunas. In

1939, Solly first met Chiune Sugihara, the vice-consul for Japan in Lithuania. Sugihara would go on to help over 6,000 Jews escape Europe during World War II. Although Sugihara attempted to help Solly and his family flee, they were trapped when the Nazis invaded.

Solly and his father were eventually sent to Lager X, a satellite of the Dachau Concentration Camp in

Germany. After months of forced labor and near starvation, Solly was led on a death march in 1945, after the Nazis learned of the approach of American forces.

During the march, Solly collapsed into the snow and resigned himself to die, only to be rescued by Clarence Matsumura and the Japanese American soldiers of the 522nd Field Artillery Battalion. Clarence had only recently been released from Heart Mountain to enter the Army. In 1992, Solly and Clarence were reunited at an event in Jerusalem, and Solly was inspired to write his memoirs, *Light One Candle: A Survivor's Tale from Lithuania to Jerusalem*. Heart Mountain board secretary Aura Sunada-Matsumura Newlin is the great grand niece of Clarence Matsumura.

In 2019, Solly gifted the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation the publication rights for *Light One Candle*, which will be reprinted in 2021.

Lane Ryo Hirabayashi (1953–2020)



Lane Hirabayashi, one of the most renowned scholars of Japanese American incarceration, passed away at the age of 67 on August 8. Over his life, Lane produced a massive body of work on the history of the incarceration, including over thirty articles and nine books. He was a member of the faculty at San Francisco State University, the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of California

Riverside, and UCLA.

In addition to his academic work, Lane was a tireless supporter of numerous organizations within the Japanese American community, including the National Coalition for Redress & Reparations, the Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress, the Gardena Pioneer Project, the East West Players, the Japanese Community Youth Council, the Harada House Museum, and the Japanese American National Museum.

Lane served as an advisor to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation during the development of Heart Mountain Interpretive Center and its permanent exhibit.

Helen Marie Kuwahara (1931–2020)



Helen Marie Kuwahara, age eighty-nine, peacefully passed away on September 11, 2020 to join her husband Denis. She was born April 9, 1931 to Helen Marie Hanton and Francis John Hanton in Oil City, Pennsylvania. She is survived by her siblings Edith Kuwanoe & Fredrick Seabold, son, Jan (Sandra), daughters Ann (Robert), Susan and Beth (Chris), and five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Helen was a registered nurse working in the psychology field. A committed member of St. Gabriel's Catholic Church, she was actively involved with volunteering at the Church.

She enjoyed traveling with her husband, quilting, gardening and was an avid reader. She and her husband Denis were proud to support the Japanese American Confinement site at Heart Mountain, Wyoming and educate others about the important historical relevance of the site. Helen was the daughter-in-law of former Heart Mountain incarcerated and legendary cartoonist Bob Kuwahara.

Terry K. Takeda (1942–2020)

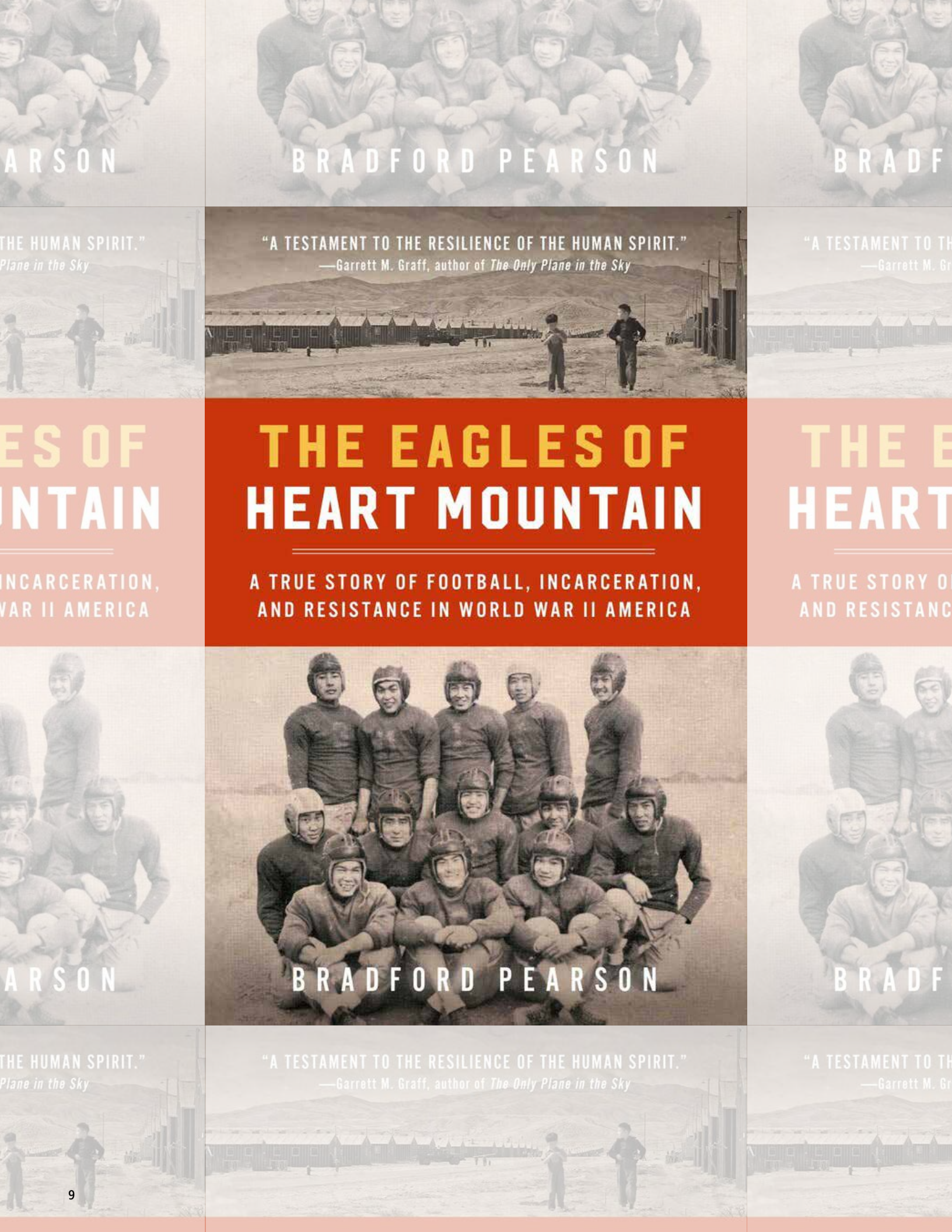


Terry K. Takeda, of Anaheim, California, was to have celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary on September 24, with his wife Patti Hirahara, but he unfortunately passed away on April 28, 2020.

Terry was a graduate of California State University, Los Angeles with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mathematics. He had a 34 year career with the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power where he was an Energy Analyst and retired in 2009.

He was a brown belt in Judo, a founding member of the 1st Annual Marina/Gardena Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) 8K Run in 1986, the recipient of the Venice/Culver JACL George Inagaki's Community Service Award for outstanding community involvement in 1993, and a board member of the Greater Los Angeles Singles JACL in 1994. He was also an avid golfer.

Terry was only a baby when his family was sent from Los Angeles to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Relocation Camp. He believed in preserving the Japanese American legacy and was supportive of his wife's many projects across the country.



BRADFORD PEARSON is the author of the new book *The Eagles of Heart Mountain* that focuses on the Heart Mountain football team. He is the former features editor of *Southwest: The Magazine*. He has written for *The New York Times*, *Esquire*, *Time*, and *Salon*, among many other publications. He grew up in Hyde Park, New York, and now lives in Philadelphia.

Kokoro Kara chatted with Bradford about his choice to bring readers into the world of the Japanese American incarceration through the lens of football, his conversations with descendants of Heart Mountain Eagles, and his favorite story from his year's-long research.

KK = Kokoro Kara **BP** = Bradford Pearson

KOKORO KARA: The story of the Heart Mountain football team turns out to be a surprisingly powerful and emotional lens for examining the larger history of Japanese American incarceration. Why did you decide to approach the subject from this direction?

BRADFORD PEARSON: Well, it didn't start out that way. If you look at my book proposal there's a chapter or two about Japanese American history, with some sprinkled through later chapters as well. But when I started digging into the players' backgrounds I knew that it would be a disservice to the book if I didn't really explore the story of nikkei in America.

When I first got my book deal I didn't write anything for probably four months; all I did was read. I'd sit on my couch and read books about Japanese American history, Wyoming history, sports history, and agricultural history, and try to figure out how all these parts could come together to tell the story of the Heart Mountain Eagles. (Mike Mackey's Heart Mountain books were especially influential in my own book.) I'd watch and read oral histories of those incarcerated in the camps, and flip through hundreds of photos to figure out what daily life was like at Heart Mountain.

I came to view the book as a kind of Trojan horse. If I could convince a reader to pick up a book about football and World War II, I could fill it with the history of racism and xenophobia that led up to it. It was really important for me to not only honor the people I write about in the book, but the thousands of Issei and Nisei who came before them.

KK: In your book, readers get to know very closely some of the young men who played for the Heart Mountain Eagles. Since most of those players have now passed on, how did you go about crafting these intimate portraits?

BP: Back in 2013 I visited the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center on a press trip, and noticed a small mention of the Eagles' story on a display. The idea sat in my head for a few years until one person set the whole book in motion, and that's Babe Nomura's daughter, Janet Morey. I found Jan's email, sent her a totally out-of-the-blue message, and for reasons I'm still unsure of, she agreed to speak with me. I'm not sure why she trusted me with her dad's story, but everything snowballed after our first conversation. She reached out to Horse Yoshinaga's sons and vouched for me, and did the same for Keiichi Ikeda. Jan and her husband Jack welcomed me into their home on reporting trips to Los Angeles, and opened up their family archives for me to dig through.

Horse's sons Paul and Tim did the same, and I was lucky enough to interview Keiichi in person at the Japanese American National Museum. Bunny Ogimachi talked to me for hours on end about her late husband, Mas, and what teenage life was like at Heart Mountain.

One of my favorite stories about reporting the book happened at the Heart Mountain Pilgrimage in 2017. I was sitting in the audience flipping through a Heart Mountain High School yearbook when someone asked what I was looking for. I told them about the project, and they looked at me and said, "Oh, I think Stan was on the football team." Within minutes I met some of Stan Igawa's children—DaVee Lopez, Erin Sauder, and Ian Cayetano. They passed along a copy of a short, beautifully detailed memoir Stan had written before his death, which was incredibly helpful in writing not only about Stan's family history, but also the sugar beet industry.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the Heart Mountain archives, where I found oral histories from Horse, Stan, and Tayzo Matsumoto, and the National Archives, which still has the War Relocation Authority files on every player. Densho's oral history archive was invaluable as well.

I wouldn't have written this book without the approval of the players and their families. I wake up every day honored that they let me tell their stories.

KK: Another impressive aspect of this book is the action. Readers really feel like they are on the ground watching these gridiron clashes unfold. What's it like to essentially call a football game that happened over 75 years ago?

BP: That was a little tough. I'm a football fan, but I never played football growing up. So after I wrote all the chapters that featured games, I sent them to journalist Ben Montgomery, a friend of mine who also happened to play college football. He made sure I didn't look too dumb writing about a sport I'd never played.

The details themselves, though, came from the *Heart Mountain Sentinel* and the camp's high school newspapers. The *Sentinel* had a really well-staffed sports section, which meant that they not only covered the games, but also wrote scouting reports on the players and the opposing teams. Every week's edition featured a round-up of the previous week's game, a preview of the next week's game, and a column critiquing the team. I couldn't believe how detailed each story was.

I ended up building a 210-page, hand-typed document with the text of all the newspaper stories I thought I'd use. That way I could search it for a specific player or date or opponent and make sure I didn't miss something.

The newspaper stories were helpful for building the scene beyond just the plays, too. What was the weather like that day? How would that affect the ball, the players' stamina, or how hard the ground was? How big was the crowd? The *Sentinel* usually mentioned crowd size, so I always included it to help the reader visualize what it might have been like to be there.

Politically the *Sentinel* was little more than a WRA mouthpiece by the end, but I have no complaints about the sports section!



KK: You've been researching this book for several years now, traveling the country, digging in archives, and talking to the people who were there. What are some of your favorite stories you've uncovered?

BP: The story that stands out to me the most is something no reader will probably ever know.

Without giving too much away, there's an important player who is ruled ineligible for the Eagles final game of the 1943 season. The problem, as a writer, was that I couldn't figure out *why* he was ruled ineligible. The *Sentinel* didn't mention why, or the high school paper. No one I interviewed knew why either. It bugged me for months, because I knew the reader would want to know. I couldn't have this huge gap in the book.

Then, one day, I was interviewing the player's wife when she mentioned that her husband had once been in a drama class at Heart Mountain, and that they'd put on a short play. Ah! A clue! I found the player's high school transcript in the National Archives, then compared it to his pre-camp transcript. Since this player had been failing English class when he left California, he needed to make that up in order to graduate at Heart Mountain. So he took one class, drama, in order to graduate.

Unfortunately, according to Wyoming high school rules, every player needs to be enrolled in *three* classes to play a sport. That's when it clicked for me.

In the book, I write this scene as if all this information was readily available, when in fact it took months of gathering tiny, seemingly unconnected facts to finally figure it out. Like everything in the book, it wouldn't have been possible without the willingness of the player's family to sit for hours and hours and answer my questions. I'm so indebted to the entire Heart Mountain community for the time and work they put in to help me tell this story. 🙏

The Eagles of Heart Mountain is available now through the www.shopheartmountain.org (click to visit site) and bookshop.org (click to visit site)



A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE *TADAIMA!* JAPANESE AMERICAN COMMUNITY VIRTUAL PILGRIMAGE

Due to COVID-19, all annual pilgrimages to the WWII Japanese American confinement sites were canceled this year. These pilgrimages provide educational and community building opportunities for descendants of the camps and the wider public. Recognizing the ongoing significance of these pilgrimages, **Kimiko Marr** (Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages) and **Hanako Wakatsuki** (National Park Service) spearheaded a nine-week virtual pilgrimage with over 50 organizations providing daily content, over 2,500 registered participants, and tens of thousands of unique site visitors. This was coordinated by a committee of sixteen individuals with only six weeks of preparation time before the event kicked

off. *Tadaima!* brought together many of the unique traditions of each site with new content: online exhibits, workshops, performances, lectures, panel discussions, a film festival, a book club, a community archive, first-hand testimonies, and more to create wide-ranging opportunities for learning, sharing stories, and building community. Spread across nine themed weeks, the virtual pilgrimage featured both pre-recorded and live-streamed content as well as opportunities to engage with presenters and gather virtually as a community. **Mia Russell** (Friends of Minidoka) sat down with Kimiko and Hanako to take a look back, discussing the origins of the summer event and their experiences making it happen.



Kimiko Marr | Co-founder of Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages (JAMP) and co-chair of the Tadaima! Community Virtual Pilgrimage.

Hanako Wakatsuki | Acting chief of interpretation at Pearl Harbor National Memorial, chief of interpretation and education at Minidoka National Historic Site (a National Park Service [NPS] site), co-chair of the Tadaima! Community Virtual Pilgrimage, and member of the Heart Mountain Advisory Council and active volunteer for Heart Mountain efforts.



Mia Russell | Executive director of the Friends of Minidoka (a non-profit organization that works to support education, research, and historic preservation of the WWII Japanese American incarceration experience, focusing on the Minidoka National Historic Site in southern Idaho).

MR = Mia Russell

KM = Kimiko Marr

HW = Hanako Wakatsuki



MR: Tell us more about camp pilgrimages and the work you do with Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages (JAMP).



KM: Pilgrimages started about 50 years ago in the early 1970s, with Manzanar. A group of young (at the time) Sansei went to the Manzanar site, which was pretty much just a monument out in the middle of the desert in eastern California, and felt some sort of connection and healing being there together, cleaning up the monument, commiserating and discussing their family experiences that their parents had not really discussed with them. These pilgrimages have now grown into larger events, with 5 of the 10 original sites hosting pilgrimages every year.

I went to my first pilgrimage four years ago, to the Minidoka pilgrimage, and knowing nothing about them, was blown away. I felt so safe and accepted in that environment, and happened to room with Marissa (Fujimoto), who went on to join me in founding Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages. Our original idea was to film oral histories at the different pilgrimages, and also to capture what each site looks like today. It has now grown into the filming of multiple generations, so it's not just an oral history of a survivor, it's them telling their story with their family around them. JAMP was very lucky to receive an NPS Japanese American Confinement Sites (JACS) grant to travel around to the different pilgrimages, which has been integral to communicating with the wider public the importance and value of these events.



MR: How did the idea of Tadaima! first form?



KM: In the last couple of years, I established pilgrimages to Rowher and Jerome in Arkansas. These are the first pilgrimages that take place in the calendar each year, in

April—in 2020 of course, that is when things were really amping up with the pandemic in the United States. I had to make the difficult decision to be the first pilgrimage to cancel, obviously not wanting to risk anyone’s health. Then it was a domino effect, with the other organizations canceling their pilgrimages for the rest of the year. After the third or so cancelation, I thought “we can’t go a whole year without any sort of event,” not wanting to lose those precious opportunities of interacting with the elders in the community, and knowing that waiting a year or even six months would not guarantee that we could make this happen again for some people. So I pursued the idea of doing something online, something small, just showcasing each confinement site, what it looks like today, encouraging people to learn more and eventually visit. Speaking with Hanako, she jumped at the idea and wanted to help so we got it started with that discussion in late March, and incredibly, we premiered in the middle of June with a nine-week program full of content.



MR: This was an unprecedented event for the National Park Service in terms of the scale, the duration, and the level of community engagement. Can you give us some perspective from the NPS—what does community-led programming look like to you, why was this something you were willing to prioritize, and what was the impact for you and your programs in terms of community engagement?



HW: This was a huge, but ultimately very rewarding undertaking. The main basis for this all coming together was the collaboration amongst a vast array of organizations and community members, individuals, and groups alike. As a public historian, I felt that this was such a powerful experience. From the NPS perspective, we don’t necessarily have the best relationship with communities of color, but being able to partner with JAMP and our other coalition partners was a wonderful opportunity to provide communities of color with their own voices to tell their stories in meaningful ways (not being interpreted through the government’s lens).

We saw the positive impact it had on the community while it was in progress throughout the summer, and we’re still seeing that people are using this as an important resource. For example, a faculty member of Brown University is using this as part of her curriculum to teach her students about the Japanese American incarceration. At the conception of this idea in March and the beginning of the programming in June, I don’t think we realized what we were creating, but this now seems to be the largest secondary resource repository for this subject matter, which is incredible for the community, now and for future generations.



MR: How did you organize 100 years of Japanese American history into these nine weeks of programming? What was your framework for delivering so much information?



HW: Kimiko originally wanted a 7-10 day event, and then I started thinking about how I would organize all the things I wanted to focus on in this story, basically planning my dream pilgrimage. So I broke it into themes, taking a holistic approach, starting with

immigration and ending with the aftermath of the confinement sites to the current day. I was also keen to focus on stories that hadn’t really been told before, including the aspects of incarceration abroad.



KM: We also wanted to make sure that we highlighted the parts of history that led up to WWII and the bombing of Pearl Harbor, recognizing that that particular event did not occur in a vacuum and wanting to make sure we provided that context for people new to the subject.



MR: I think we were all surprised and pleased at the success of gaining more and more viewers as the weeks went on. Reaching such a large audience, how did you think outside of the box to reach new audiences and what tips do you have for other folks in terms of promoting their programs to audiences globally and to multiple generations?



HW: I think a lot of it is just partnership, partnership, partnership—working with other groups to spread a wide net, take advantage of different mailing lists and audiences that would be the focus of specific organizations, utilizing the skill sets and interests of people in these different organizations, and their work seeking out other people with similar interests and skills helped spread the net far.



KM: It was also helpful to reach out through social media to engage younger Sansei crowds, and then the establishment of the Nikkei Rising group (made up of around ten people aged in their early 20s) made a huge difference in engaging the younger generations and finding a way to make this story accessible to younger people. You have to go to the areas and platforms where people exist to engage with them, like different forms of social media and email, building more into this virtual environment and getting people to first of all watch the content. Once people were there, we worked hard to provide a variety of content (including art, dance, music, photography, etc.) so that there would be something for everyone with which to engage. The fact that there were different ways of interpreting and telling the story allowed people to access and relate to the information in different ways. Not everyone is necessarily interested in attending a lecture, but they may want to watch a film or see a song performed that someone wrote, so that’s why we tried to have as many different types of programming as possible to get as many people interested in watching as possible.



MR: Are you planning on doing this next year considering that COVID still isn’t under control?



KM: JAMP has applied for a JACS grant to be able to pursue Tadaima! II. If we’re successful, the grant would be awarded next summer, so Tadaima! would take place in the fall. It would most likely be four weeks, not nine weeks, because we feel like we’ve laid the foundation with the history and with Tadaima! II we can dig into the lesser known stories

and maybe talk a little more about intergenerational trauma and the effects of the incarceration. This year, so many people donated their time, energy, and resources for free or very little money, so we would really like to be able to compensate people this next time around, and this is the goal for the next virtual pilgrimage.



HW: And the National Park Service will always be a member in this endeavor!



MR: How did you adapt in response to feedback as the weeks went along and is there anything you'd want to do differently for next time?



KM: The feedback was mostly very positive. The only minor things that we kept adjusting as we went along had to do with technical glitches (which we're always learning from and continually able to improve). Also some people were frustrated that we didn't have a full schedule up, but often we were planning things up to the day before, it was just the nature of how this entire event came together. Next year however, with three full months to plan ahead, hopefully that will help provide people with a fuller schedule ahead of time so they can plan and prepare to participate in as many events as possible. We're also planning to expand accessibility to people with hearing impairments and non-native English speakers by including more subtitles wherever possible—that extra lead time will help make that happen.



HW: I agree, it will be helpful next year for us to have more time to be able to plan and more carefully curate all aspects of this event. Also, it's definitely a balancing act but an exciting one in terms of the possibilities with technology—sometimes we're catching up and just learning about what's happening with technological opportunities to present content and to engage with audiences in a more immediate way, but at the same time, technology hasn't quite caught up to other things we want to do and ways we want to be able to interact, so we'll see what new media develops even in the next year and hopefully be able to do even better for Tadaima! II. The goals and vision for this event morphed and changed throughout the weeks, but we always wanted it to be a way for people to come together and remember and heal, as is the purpose of the pilgrimages.



KM: Yes, definitely. We especially wanted to—and still want to for next year—find a way for elders or anyone who might be living alone or in assisted living or a nursing facility to access this content, because I do feel like it helps with some closure, and also just sparks conversations within families about these experiences. These people are our most precious resource and we have to engage with them for as long as we can, and if there is any way we can have younger people having these conversations with these elders, I think it is life-altering and just so valuable. If anyone has any ideas on how to reach these people who might be more isolated right now due to COVID, please contact me! (kimiko@jampilgrimages.com)



MR: I know for me looking back at Tadaima! brought up just how special it was to have that time together. It took so much work behind the scenes, and of course we all missed being physically together at the pilgrimages this summer, but the community engagement we were able to get from this incredible nine weeks of sustained programming made it all worth it, and it became its own special event. Any final thoughts, Kimiko and Hanako?



HW: I was so excited to work with such a large breadth of people from different institutions. It was wonderful to see that people didn't think we were completely crazy, and we all came together and believed it could happen, and made it happen. To me, that was the magic of Tadaima!, getting everyone so excited about it, and actually completing this truly community project. We could not have done it without all of these people and I hope that different people within the community felt like they were able to have a space, and if not, hopefully we can create a space next time.

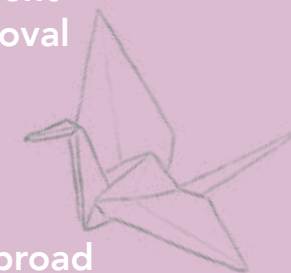


KM: We're looking forward to next year, focusing on those smaller identity stories: LGBTQ+ members and their experiences, discussions of violence in camp, more stories representing the smaller camps (Department of Justice camps) or even Jerome and Rowher which can sometimes be sidelined as they were so different from the other camps, dealing with different aspects of Jim Crow and being located in a swamp, etc. I definitely feel like this is a community-driven thing and if the community wants to see something, please let us know and we'll make it happen—we would love to hear from you! 🐦🌿

**This is an excerpt of the virtual chat Mia had with Kimiko and Hanako, to view the whole conversation, [CLICK HERE](#).*

The programming for each week focused on a particular theme

- Week 1:** Immigration & Settlement
- Week 2:** Pre-war & Forced Removal
- Week 3:** Sites of Incarceration
- Week 4:** A Question of Loyalty
- Week 5:** What is Citizenship?
- Week 6:** Resettlement
- Week 7:** Nikkei Incarceration Abroad
- Week 8:** End of War to Redress
- Week 9:** Reconciliation & Identity



The majority of the content from this nine-week event is still available on the [Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages website](#) ([click to view](#))



History Often Rhymes

COVID-19 AND THE RACIALIZATION OF DISEASE



There is an old saying: “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes.” While it is tempting to believe that something like the incarceration of Japanese Americans could never happen today, times of crisis, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, can inspire the same feelings of fear and panic that led to incarceration in 1942.

Medical Racism

American history is full of examples of people struggling to accept new immigrant groups into the national identity. People argued that because of language or cultural practices, newcomers could not really become Americans. In the early United States, Irish, Polish, Italian, Russian, and Jewish people were targeted. By the mid 1800s, Asian immigrants faced the same kind of exclusion from the American

identity. In fact, attacks were often worse because Asian immigrants were of a different race, not just a different ethnicity.

At the same time all of this was unfolding, Americans were just beginning to understand the complexities of the germs and bacteria that caused disease. Racism and medical science combined in the nineteenth century to create a new kind of prejudice—one that stated that immigrants were more susceptible to, and responsible for, spreading diseases such as polio, cholera, tuberculosis, and trachoma, throughout the country.

This medical racism caused some of the worst mistreatment of Asian immigrants to America. It began with their arrival, usually at Angel Island in California. Asian immigrants were subjected to intensive medical inspections that could take two to three weeks. Inspectors sometimes turned immigrants’ eyelids inside out with button hooks to check for trachoma, a disease often indistinguishable from normal eye irritation at early stages. These



Medical officers at Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco inspecting recently arrived immigrants.



Courtesy of Daryl Cargle

Above: While SARS is technically not named after a place and stands for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome, the fact that it originated in China sparked racial backlash against Asians all over the globe, particularly in Toronto.

Right: Plague Fire ordered by local board of health in the Honolulu Chinatown. Oahu, Hawaii, United States, 1900.

harsh inspections and their dubious conclusions were to justify the refusal of large numbers of Asian immigrants. Nearly one third of Asian immigrants deported from the United States in the late 1800s were turned away because of a diagnosis of trachoma.

Trachoma was also the excuse given by the San Francisco School Board when they attempted to ban Japanese American children from public schools in 1906, even though not a single Japanese American student at the time had the disease. Similarly, when Bubonic Plague began spreading in San Francisco's Chinatown in 1900, all of the district's Asian residents were forcibly quarantined. No restrictions were placed on white people entering or leaving the district. During another plague outbreak, this time in Honolulu, the local board of health ordered the burning of every building in Chinatown where the disease was found. The burn got out of control and destroyed nearly the entire neighborhood.

Though medical knowledge has advanced since the 1800s, medical racism is still common today.



Photo by Bertam Bellinghuser, courtesy of Ulukau: The Hawaiian online electronic library and Chaninade University of Hawaii.

Just a few years ago, a SARS epidemic sparked racial attacks against Asian immigrants, leading to boycotts of Chinatown businesses in both the United States and Canada, particularly in Toronto. This year's COVID-19 pandemic has caused yet another uptick in anti-Asian rhetoric, discrimination, and even violence.

Perpetual Foreigners

In addition to this persistent medical racism, Asian Americans today have to contend with the "Perpetual Foreigner" stereotype. This manifests in many different ways. Asian Americans are often faced with the question, "Where are you from?" Even when asked innocently, this question feeds the perpetual foreigner stereotype. It's understood that the asker doesn't expect an answer like "Los Angeles" or "Nebraska." The underlying assumption is that Asian Americans cannot possibly be Americans, and must be "from" another country, no matter how long ago their families came to America. During the wave

Right: An Issei WWI veteran reporting to Santa Anita Assembly Center in his U.S. Army uniform. April 5, 1942.

Below: Members of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team salute the American flag during training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division

of anti-Asian rhetoric that accompanied the spread of COVID-19, even fourth and fifth-generation Americans reported being told to "Go back where you came from."

The perpetual foreigner stereotype can be seen in the story of Japanese American incarceration during World War II. When the government issued orders for the removal of Americans of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast, they addressed those orders to "alien and non-alien residents." This wording implied that the American-born Nisei were not citizens at all, but only "non-alien." What's more, sites like Heart Mountain are still referred to today as internment camps, rather than incarceration or concentration camps. "Internment" is the legal term for when a government detains enemy aliens during wartime, not its own citizens.



Courtesy of the National Archives



Photo courtesy of the Miller Center, 2009.

“When those placards went up after the executive order was signed, and it said: “Attention, all those of Japanese ancestry, alien and non-alien...” I said to my brother, “What’s a non-alien?” He said, “That’s you.” I said, “I’m not a non-alien! I’m a citizen!”

—Norman Mineta,
Los Angeles Times

In the Time of COVID

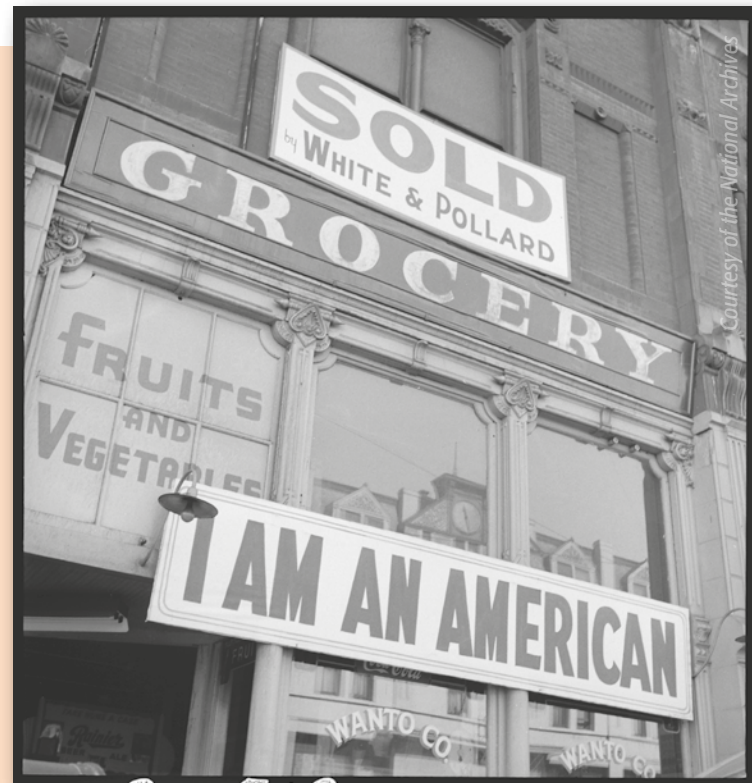
The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that these phenomena—medicalized racism and the perpetual foreigner—are not tucked safely into the past. Countless news articles and stories have tracked the surge in hate incidents that accompanied the virus’ arrival in North America. Between March and June of 2020, some 2,100 anti-Asian hate incidents were reported. These incidents have ranged from verbal harassment hurled in grocery stores to the vandalization of Asian American owned businesses to even more abhorrent physical acts, such as a woman in New York who was attacked with acid.

One reason for this uptick in violence is simply fear. When people feel they are powerless in times of crisis, they become afraid. That fear turns to anger, because

anger gives them a feeling of control, especially when they have a target for that anger, and especially when that target is a minority group. Minority groups have less power within most societies, and are less likely to be able to fight back. This is also why attacks, even during COVID, are most often focused toward women, children, and the elderly. All around the world and across history, this pattern has occurred too many times to count.

Hate incidents have also been fueled by the rhetoric surrounding the name of the COVID-19 virus. Names for historical diseases, such as the Spanish flu (1918-1919), the Asian flu (1957-1958), and the Hong Kong flu (1968) led to discrimination and violence against people associated with those places or nationalities. In part because of this, in 2015, the World Health Organization set forth best practices for naming of infectious diseases. They recommended that geographical places or cultural identifiers never be used as disease names.

Despite these guidelines, COVID-19 has frequently been referred to as the “China virus”,



A Japanese American’s store in Oakland, California, on December 8, 1942.

“

I’ve been confronted by questions about where I’m from all my life. I have stopped doing the “I’m from Chicago,” because I know that’s only going to bring the response, “No, where are you really from?”...It’s not just that my body prompts questions of “Where are you from?” It’s also that I know my status as a citizen and the way other Americans view me can be instantly changed by events in Asia.

—Anonymous, *The Atlantic*

”

“

Yes, we are American. But, you know, for so long, Asian Americans have lived a conditional existence where belonging is always promised, but belonging is never had.

—Erika Lee, *NPR*

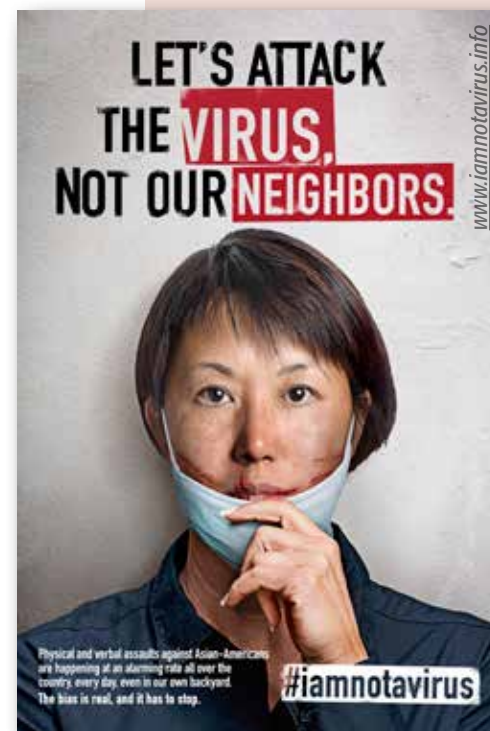
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“

You just bury your head and you move forward because no matter how hard you work, how successful you are, what friends you make, you just don’t belong. You will always be looked at as foreign.

—Jeni Erbes-Chan, *PBS*

”



#IAMNOTAVIRUS Campaign: The cornerstone of this campaign is to activate social change through intersectional storytelling, history, mental health, and civic engagement by seeing and celebrating the individuality in ourselves. It began in photographer Mike Keo’s studio as a personal portrait series as a response to the growing racist attacks against Asians seen across the globe due to COVID-19.

“Wuhan flu”, and “Kung flu” by government officials, public figures, and news outlets. These names have been used in conjunction with other slurs to harass Asian Americans during the pandemic. The use of these names by politicians and pundits has been shown to coincide with fresh waves of hate incidents perpetrated against Asian Americans.

With vaccines now on the horizon, it is hoped that COVID-19 will soon become a memory for those who have survived the pandemic. For Asian Americans, however, it will always be another chapter in the long history of the challenges they have faced while seeking acceptance in their own country. As our nation “returns to normal,” it is important to remember these events and to reflect on how we can help build a better home for all our citizens, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or where they were born.

The exhibit *History Often Rhymes*, which was funded in part by a CARES Act grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, will be featured on the Heart Mountain website and in the special exhibits gallery of the interpretive center in early 2021.

THE APPOINTED STAFF: CAUCASIAN WORKERS AT HEART MOUNTAIN PART II

BY DAKOTA RUSSELL



Most of the work at Heart Mountain was performed by the incarcerated. From the coal shovelers to the doctors in the hospital, it was Japanese American labor that kept the camp running. However, the federal government also employed a Caucasian staff of over 200 people. These staff members almost always held positions of power over their Japanese American counterparts, and received much better pay than the incarcerated, whose maximum wages were limited to \$19 per month.

These white staff members are a subject of fascination for many people. What kind of people chose to work inside of a concentration camp, and why? Did the experience of working in the camp change their attitudes toward Japanese Americans? For the better or the worse? This two-part series attempts to answer some of those questions, and to explore not just what the camp's Caucasian staff did, but how they thought and felt about their work.

The previous entry in this series (in the [Summer/Autumn 2019 issue of Kokoro Kara](#)) looked at the people at the top, the camp's administrators. The bulk of the staff, however, were not in management. Rather, they worked the jobs necessary for the camp to function, from mess hall stewards to plumbers to switchboard operators. These positions brought them into closer daily contact with the incarcerated and colored their perception of the camp in different ways. Two specific groups of workers—the school teachers and the nurses—left behind detailed records and remembrances that provide a glimpse of what life and work was like at Heart Mountain.

In 1943, Heart Mountain constructed a new modern high school building. Elementary students continued to go to classes in the barracks.

THE TEACHERS

With roughly 3,000 children of school age arriving in 1942, establishing an educational system at Heart Mountain was an early concern of the administration. Some critics groused about federal tax dollars being spent to educate Japanese American kids, but the government saw schooling not only as a legal requirement, but an opportunity to erase any last vestiges of Japanese culture in the younger generations. The War Relocation Authority, which ran the camps, encouraged a relentlessly patriotic curriculum, and allowed little room in the classroom for debate or dissent.

Among the first of the educators to arrive at the camp were Jack Corbett, hired as the high school principal, and his wife Clarissa, a home economics teacher. The Corbetts were living in Lingle, Wyoming when Jack was offered the job at Heart Mountain. He thought about the offer for three days before deciding to take the position. It came down to economics. "He would never let me teach" in small town Wyoming, Clarissa Corbett explained later, "because people in the community didn't feel easy about people getting two salaries." At Heart Mountain, away from such social scrutiny, both Corbetts could work.

When they arrived at the camp on August 1, 1942, Jack and Clarissa found school preparations in a state of disarray. The first incarcerated were slated to arrive mid-month, but hardly anything was ready. No dedicated buildings had been constructed for schools. Instead, the elementary classrooms were scattered into five different barracks buildings around the camp. The barracks to be used as the high school, in Block 7, hadn't even been built yet. After touring the facilities, the Wyoming Department of Education threatened to withhold accreditation, citing unsatisfactory conditions for learning.

Staffing was another sticking point with the Department of Education. The administration had hoped to supplement its Caucasian teachers with college educated Japanese Americans, but the state flatly refused to issue any incarcerated teaching

Right: Clarissa Corbett taught home economics at Heart Mountain High School.

Below: The camp included dormitories for single members of the staff, and eventually apartments for married couples. Accommodations in the dormitories were basic, but still included conveniences—like indoor plumbing—that the incarcerated did not have.



Photo by Tom Parker, Courtesy of UC Berkeley



George Hirahara, Washington State University

certificates. Politicians feared incarcerated might find teaching jobs elsewhere in Wyoming after the war. In the end, they compromised by approving only a handful of Japanese American teachers, all of whom received certificates stamped “Valid at Heart Mountain Only.”

Over the course of August, 61 more white teachers arrived at Heart Mountain to complete the faculty. Their reasons for coming varied widely. Alberta Kassing was finishing up college in Colorado when Pearl Harbor was bombed. In the wake of the attack, Kassing’s landlady tried to evict her Nisei roommate. Kassing fought back, stating that “If she leaves, I’m moving out too.” Kassing couldn’t stop the removal and incarceration of West Coast Japanese Americans, but she was determined to help where she could. In that spirit, she applied to be a math teacher at Heart Mountain.

At least one, and very likely more, of the new teachers at Heart Mountain were members of the Society of Friends, better known as the Quakers. The Society had been opponents of racial injustice in America since taking up the cause against slavery in the 1700s. They mobilized quickly in 1942 to assist Japanese Americans. The bulk of their work was focused on getting students, and later workers,

released from the camps to work and go to school in the US interior. However, a number of young Quakers also took staff positions in the camps themselves.

Though some educators had a higher moral purpose in coming to Wyoming, most were simply drawn by the promise of good pay. Elizabeth Gladden, then Elizabeth Feemster, was only one week into a job teaching at Osceola, Nebraska when she received an offer to work at Heart Mountain. The position paid \$2,000 a year, double what she was currently making. “I don’t think the school board was very happy with me,” she said later, but she resigned anyway and packed her bags for Wyoming.

Within her first year at Heart Mountain, Elizabeth met and married chemistry teacher James Gladden. The couple lived in a motel in Cody at first, but eventually moved into housing built for married couples near the camp’s hospital. “We had a fairly nice apartment,” Elizabeth said, “except ours also was not dust-proof. We had lots and lots of dust. But we did have electricity and water and a refrigerator. And all the evacuees had when they arrived was a big room.”

The poor living conditions for students at the camp presented a special challenge for educators. One kindergarten teacher at Heart Mountain realized in 1945 that none of her students could remember ever living in a proper house, only the barracks. She took them on a special field trip to her apartment, where they marveled at the indoor plumbing and tittered about the fact that she shared a bed with her husband,

rather than sleeping in side-by-side military cots like their parents.

Clarissa Corbett also realized that the camp experience had dulled the life skills teenagers in her classes would normally have acquired by their age. In 1943, the high school moved out of the barracks buildings and into a newly built facility in the center of camp. Clarissa marked out space in her new classroom for a “mock apartment” where students could practice the kind of independent living that would be expected of them when they left Heart Mountain, from cleaning to cooking to laundry.

Like most of the teachers, Clarissa admitted that she came to Heart Mountain carrying some prejudice against Japanese Americans. By the end, she vowed, “I will never have that prejudice now.” Elizabeth Gladden was likewise fearful that she would be teaching a community full of dangerous traitors, but later came to believe that the camps existed only because “California just wanted the Japanese out, and this was a good opportunity to get them out.” For Alberta Kassing, the experience was transformational. She kept in touch with her former students from Heart Mountain for the rest of her life.



Courtesy of Kathleen Corbett



Courtesy of Kathleen Corbett



George Hirahara, Washington State University

Above: Math teacher Alberta Kassing also served as advisor for one of the camp’s many youth clubs, the Junior Tri-Ys, pictured here in front of Heart Mountain High School.

Top right: Clarissa Corbett took care to teach life skills in her class that teenagers could not learn at Heart Mountain.

THE NURSES

Though not as numerous as the teachers, the nurses at the camp hospital were some of the most respected Caucasian workers at Heart Mountain. They earned that respect through the close bonds they formed with their patients, and also because they were required to live within the camp. Chief medical officer Dr. Charles E. Irwin hoped to hire twenty registered nurses to staff the hospital, in addition to the small group of licensed Japanese American nurses. In reality, he never had more than ten nurses total on staff at one time.

Medical professionals were in high demand everywhere during the war, and retaining personnel was a problem for the hospital. The doctors were almost all incarcerated, as were the nurses' aides, orderlies, and pharmacists. The registered nurses were the only group that was mostly white. Japanese American nurses and doctors were paid the maximum

rate for incarcerated, \$19 a month. White nurses doing the same work were paid \$150 per month.

Velma Kessel, of Deaver, Wyoming, was one of the first nursing hires at Heart Mountain hospital, and remained on the staff until May 1945. Kessel kept a detailed diary during her time at the camp, describing the daily activities at the hospital. The biggest medical complaint at Heart Mountain, she noted, was frostbite.

The nurse's quarters were not as well equipped as the apartments for married couples. When she arrived, Kessel's room contained only a cot with a single blanket and pillow. She pounded nails into the wall to hang her uniforms from, and asked her father to build her a vanity out of two orange crates. She found an empty nail keg to serve as a stool. Whenever she went to visit one of her fellow nurses, she had to carry her nail keg with her so as to have a place to sit.

Kessel did not comment in her diary on how she felt about the politics of the incarceration. However, it is clear through her writings that she was disgusted



The nursing corps at Heart Mountain hospital was one of the most racially mixed departments in the camp. The registered nurses were primarily white, and the nurses aides were almost all young Nisei women.



Above: Nurse Velma Kessel assists one of the hospital's Japanese American doctors with an examination.

Right: There was high turnover among the nursing staff, but Velma Kessel stayed at Heart Mountain for over three years.



Left: Nurses Aide Dixie Honda takes the temperature of one of the patients in Ward 7 at Heart Mountain Hospital.



An expectant mother is delivered by ambulance to Heart Mountain hospital. More than 500 babies were delivered by the camp's medical staff.

by the discrimination her Nisei friends faced. At one point, she helped obtain permission for two of her nurses' aides to leave camp and join her on a weekend trip to Billings. When they checked in at the hotel, the clerk eyed them suspiciously and asked if they were from the "J-- Camp" in Wyoming. Kessel gently corrected him that they were from Heart Mountain. Still, he required the two Nisei girls to be placed in a room with an adjoining door to Kessel's, so that she could "watch them." "Today I would tell that clerk where to go, and we would find another hotel," Kessel remembered regretfully, "but times were different then and I was a proper young lady, so we stayed."

Kessel, like most of the other nurses, sympathized with her Japanese American co-workers, but the unequal pay and treatment they received created a tense working environment. The succession of women who occupied the head nurse position bore the brunt of the anger. The hospital's first head nurse quit after only six weeks, and was replaced by Margaret Graham, a woman the Japanese American doctors described as "antagonistic, abusive, and dictatorial beyond reason." The doctors filed a complaint with the camp's administration against Graham, alleging that her behavior was driven by her feelings of racial superiority. The administration sided with Graham, but she was still incensed when she read the complaint, and resigned immediately.

After a vacancy of several months, Graham was replaced by Anna Van Kirk. Van Kirk should have been an ideal fit. She had served as a missionary nurse in Japan for nineteen years and was fluent in Japanese. Velma Kessel imagined in her diary how helpful this skill would be in caring for older patients. "It would be wonderful for the Issei to be able to converse in their native language and talk about places in Japan," she wrote. Yet Van Kirk hid her knowledge of Japanese from the Issei doctors for two weeks, so that she could listen in to what they were saying about the hospital. When this betrayal was discovered, the doctors and other hospital staff were outraged. Some of the workers organized a strike and walkout, but were mostly unsuccessful in changing hospital policies, and failed to remove Van Kirk.


THE BIG PICTURE

The administrators at Heart Mountain never let go of their desire to rationalize and justify the camp's existence. Admitting the government's wrongs would have meant admitting their own complicity in them. For the rank-and-file staff at Heart Mountain, however, it was easier to acknowledge the injustices perpetrated against the Japanese Americans—their friends and coworkers.

Even so, the gulf in pay created a distance between white workers and their incarcerated counterparts that was not easy to overcome. For some, living in the staff housing at camp became a way to demonstrate their solidarity. Some Caucasian workers, including Heart Mountain high school teachers Talbot and Mona Rudolph, even enrolled their kids in the camp's schools. These gestures, however well-meaning, did little to ease the sense of inequity.

And for every sympathetic employee like Velma

Kessel or Alberta Kassing, there were no doubt others like assistant farm superintendent Jerry King. When King resigned from his position to join the Army, administrative services officer John A. Nelson noted that, "Now [King] can express without restraint his hatred of the Japanese. Jerry disliked them very much but could hardly express his opinions too openly because of his employment at the Center."

However they felt about Japanese Americans and the incarceration, almost all white staff at Heart Mountain were drawn to the camp for economic reasons. The federal government paid good wages, so much so that cities in Wyoming complained they were losing their best teachers and nurses to Heart Mountain. Unlike the incarcerated, the staff almost always left Heart Mountain financially better off than when they arrived. Still—at least in the case of the teachers and nurses—they were also able to leave with a relatively clear conscience, believing that they had done more to help the incarcerated Japanese Americans than harm them. 

Heart Mountain, 1942.



Right: Jack Corbett, pictured here in his office at Heart Mountain, was eventually promoted from high school principal to superintendent of schools.

Below: The Corbetts often took weekend trips to Yellowstone National Park with other staff members and occasionally incarcerated who were able to obtain leave passes.



DUSTED OFF

Highlights from the Heart Mountain Collection

Seventy-five years after the last incarcerated left Heart Mountain, most of the camp was gone. Homesteaders settled on the land, the barracks were scattered to the winds, and the guard towers were torn down. However, there is one landmark that has withstood the test of time. A lone chimney made of red bricks that marks the site of the camp hospital. The setting of 548 births, 182 deaths, and 391 major surgeries over the course of its three years

of operation, the Heart Mountain Hospital was one of the key elements that made this confinement site its own functioning community. Along with the schools, the hospital was one of the few facilities that was run by a staff of nurses, doctors, nurses aids, and technicians made up of both Japanese Americans from the camp and non-incarcerated from other regions of the country.

If you or a loved one has a story they'd like to share or an artifact they'd like to donate related to the hospital please contact us at archives@heartmountain.org.



Wheelchair
HMWF 2018.049.
Gift of
Park County
Museum Board—
Homesteader
Museum

Like most other facilities in camp, supplies were scarce when the hospital first began operations in 1942. Many physicians had to use their own tools and students donated their microscopes in order to conduct some routine blood tests. Even worse, the chief medical officer, Dr. Charles Irwin, had to find swabs, needles, and drugs on the local market. It wasn't until several months after the first incarcerated began arriving that construction on the hospital was finished, and even longer before the War Relocation Authority could furnish simple things like enough beds and wheelchairs like this one, much less more complex medical supplies.

More than just beds and wheelchairs, Heart Mountain Hospital had the facilities to x-ray their patients. The staff also included pharmacists, dentists, and optometrists.

X-ray technician at Heart Mountain Hospital
HMWF 2013.031.013
Gift of Virginia Pfeifferberger Worthington



While most of the doctors practicing at Heart Mountain Hospital came from the Japanese American community in Los Angeles, they were far from a unified group. Pre-war rivalries were amplified in the close confines of the camp. What is more, some of the younger doctors found themselves stepping up to leadership roles, rankling older doctors who felt they were due more respect for having been practicing longer.

Doctor in front of Doctor's Quarters
HMWF 2013.031.010
Gift of Virginia Pfeifferberger Worthington



X-ray staff of Heart Mountain Hospital, HMWF 2013.031.004
Gift of Virginia Pfeifferberger Worthington

The hospital was one of the few institutions at Heart Mountain run by an integrated staff. However, most of the white staff members were in administrative roles—such as the chief medical officer, Dr. Charles E. Irwin and the chief nurse, initially Martha Partridge, then Margaret Graham, and finally Anna Van Kirk—and tensions often flared between administrative officials and the incarcerated staff. Graham, who had experience in prison hospitals, was seen as dictatorial and a conflict with the Japanese American doctors on staff led to a strike and her departure in February 1943. When Van Kirk arrived she resumed Graham's discipline policies. What is more, Van Kirk had lived in Japan for nearly 20 years and spoke Japanese, a fact neither she nor the WRA made public, leading to feelings that she was a spy sent to inform on the incarcerated. These feelings came to a head in June 1943 when over 100 staff members from the mess hall, ambulance drivers, pharmacy, sanitation department, clinic aids, x-ray department, and telephone operators walked off the job. The strike was poorly organized though and lacked support from the doctors, nurses, and laundry workers, fizzling out within a few days.



Doily, HMWF 2005.036.001
Gift of Cheryl Kolesien

Despite the walk-outs, tensions, and sometimes scarce supplies, there were also positive relationships that formed at Heart Mountain Hospital. This doily was made for Velma Kessel, a nurse at the hospital, by a patient named Emiko as a gift for Kessel's wedding. As Emiko was a tuberculosis patient, Kessel had to put the doily through the hospital's autoclave sterilizer before she could take it home.

In many ways the story of this hospital is emblematic of the entire story of Heart Mountain. Close confines led to contentious relationships among some while the WRA's rushed construction of the camp left it mostly incomplete when the first incarcerated

arrived. However, it could also be a place where people connected with each other as fellow humans, beyond any stereotypes. Perhaps it is no surprise that Heart Mountain Hospital embodied the community it served. 🏡

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