

LOOK TOWARD THE MOUNTAIN, EPISODE 3 TRANSCRIPT

ROB BUSCHER: Welcome to *Look Toward the Mountain: Stories from Heart Mountain Incarceration Camp*, a series about life inside the Heart Mountain Japanese American Relocation Center in northwestern Wyoming during World War II. I'm your host, Rob Buscher. This podcast is presented by the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation and is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

ROB BUSCHER: The third episode titled "A New Normal" will explore the routines and coping strategies that Japanese Americans adapted during the first months of incarceration as they began adjusting to their new circumstances living behind barbed wire at Heart Mountain.

INTRO THEME

ROB BUSCHER: The prisoners at Heart Mountain had been ripped from their previous lives on the West Coast. They now lived in Spartan conditions amid the wind and the dust of northwestern Wyoming, in barracks with no indoor plumbing and archaic pot-bellied coal stoves for heat that provided little respite from the harsh winters of the mountain plains. After the traumatic experience of forced removal and subsequent time spent living in the temporary assembly centers, Japanese Americans desperately sought to establish some kind of normalcy as they adjusted to their present circumstances. That meant trying to reestablish some of the familiar routines from their lives before the war.

ROB BUSCHER: For parents and children alike, a return to formal schooling at Heart Mountain would provide a most welcome first step towards normalcy. Fulfilling a dual purpose of eliminating the need for childcare, school would free up the parents of child incarcerated to work in camp, providing further structure to their new microcosm of society.

ROB BUSCHER: Prior to the war, the Issei generation of Japanese immigrants worked in mostly manual labor positions such as farmers, gardeners, and shopkeepers. The Issei believed that education would enable their children to surpass their achievements in the United States, and often prioritized their children's education over other material comforts.

ROB BUSCHER: Concerned parents worried about their children falling behind in school when they were eventually allowed back into mainstream society, and educational programs started even before a formal school curriculum was established at Heart Mountain, in the assembly centers at Santa Anita and Pomona. Emily Higuchi, who was five years old when her family was sent to Santa Anita, remembers taking classes in the track's grandstands. Another student there was young George Takei of Los Angeles, the future actor, whose family went from Los Angeles to Santa Anita and then to the camp at Jerome, Arkansas.

ROB BUSCHER: Younger students had the most to lose from a break in their education, so camp officials at Heart Mountain opened the elementary school first. It opened on September 30, with 205 students in grades one through six huddling in a single barracks. The partition walls inside the barracks that housed

the school did not reach the ceiling, so noise from one class cascaded into another, making it difficult for students to hear their instructors. Some classrooms lacked blackboards, and even basic school supplies were scarce to be found. Students were jammed into the small classrooms so tightly that they could barely move between the desks, as Nobu Shimokochi remembers.

NOBU SHIMOKOCHI RECORDING FROM DENSHO: They pushed in, what, about twenty-four chairs with arms on 'em into a room, and some of those rooms were so small that it was really a tight fit. I remember in one of those rooms I dropped my eraser. The chairs were so close together I couldn't bend over to pick it up. And erasers were hard to come by, not only that, but they cost a dime if you could find one. Well, a dime was worth a lot back in those days, especially when your parents earned only nine cents an hour, you know. Well, anyway, what I did was when the bell rang, we went out the door, and I stayed right near the door as everybody went out. And the last person went out, I went in, picked up my eraser, and ran out before the next class moved in.

ROB BUSCHER: In addition to overcrowding, the schools also faced the challenge of finding enough skilled teachers in sparsely populated rural Wyoming. Many of the teachers came from hundreds or thousands of miles away to teach in the camp. Some came because they felt an affinity for Japanese culture and had taught abroad in Asia before the war. Others were Quakers, a pacifist Christian denomination who advocated for fair treatment of Japanese Americans since the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. John Nakada remembered the commitment of these teachers with admiration.

JOHN NAKADA RECORDING FROM DENSHO: Most of the teachers there were from the peace organizations that were against the war and so they were Quakers, lot of Quaker teachers. And then people from the Amish country in Pennsylvania, I don't know if you heard of them, but they were peace oriented too and those two organizations didn't think that was right for us to be put in camp because they were against war. And so as an eleven, twelve year old I never heard of peace organizations but that's the first experience I had with peace organizations so that was a learning experience for me, that was amazing. And the one thing I remember about school is we were in a concentration camp but every morning we had to say the pledge of allegiance to the flag even being in a concentration camp. You know, the words to the pledge allegiance to the flag? You know, it's crazy.

ROB BUSCHER: The turnover rate was high among teachers who came from outside Wyoming, as many were dissatisfied with the local conditions. Some left for military service, others from the stress of being so far removed from their homes. Incarcerates with teaching credentials also worked in the camp schools, but they often left for jobs elsewhere in the country when opportunities became available. Between October 1942 and December 1943, the teacher turnover rate was 42%, and it exploded to 203% for the last eighteen months Heart Mountain was open.

ROB BUSCHER: One of the teacher transplants was Clarice Chase of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. When the war began, she worked at a resettlement house in Washington, D.C. Two of her friends mentioned that she might be interested in the War Relocation Authority schools at the various camps.

CHASE FRIEND VOICE OVER: These kids have grown up as Americans, and now they are behind bars. They are going to lose their faith in democracy, unless they have people who understand.

ROB BUSCHER: Chase detailed her experience in personal papers now held at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Her writings trace the path of someone whose dedication to service outweighed the concerns of her family and friends. One coworker at the settlement house said she should stay, "where it is safe." Chase's brother warned her not to tell their mother about where she was going to work. Once Chase arrived in Cody, she realized the depth of the anti-Japanese prejudice.

ROB BUSCHER: An article in the October 31, 1942 issue of *The Sentinel* named eight incarcerated teachers who were teaching in camp schools at that time. Only one remained at Heart Mountain until 1945. The rest left for jobs outside camp, for military service, or to attend college elsewhere in the country.

ROB BUSCHER: The high school opened in early October, in six buildings that made up half of block 7 while construction on a permanent high school building was underway. More than 1,200 students registered for classes in the junior and senior high schools. Eventually, a total of 2,394 students were enrolled between

all grade levels at Heart Mountain. Students took classes in twenty-five subjects ranging from US and general history to advanced mathematics and science. Takayoshi Kawahara, who earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Southern California was the sole Nisei teacher in the camp high school.

ROB BUSCHER: Students in the upper level grades at Heart Mountain experienced considerable stress. While some had attended schools with Japanese American students back home, many were used to being at the top of their class, compared to the majority of white students whose parents put less emphasis on grades. They now found themselves competing with an entire class of students whose parents believed education was their salvation.

ROB BUSCHER: The competitive nature was heightened by a ranking system for students developed by camp administrators who rated the students by groups based on letters of the alphabet. The most talented students were in the A category, while others were rated in categories B, C, and D. Richard Murakami remembers how they ranked students in the Heart Mountain school.

RICHARD MURAKAMI RECORDING FROM DENSHO: And I said, when we went to Heart Mountain, I said, "Did you know that in Heart Mountain they separated the classes based upon a person's grades or their intelligence?" He said, "No, I didn't." I says, "What class were you in? You were in, what, A Class, B Class, C Class?" "I was in a class with all C people." I said, "Oh, yes, you guys don't know that. I know that." "How do you know?" I said, "I could tell." See, one thing, I eventually became an auditor, and auditors analyze things. I still do analyze things. I said, "I

know that, I could tell." "How do you know?" And I says, "Think about the guys that were in class with you guys, they're all A students. I was in the C class." So I kind of knew that then, so maybe that's all the more I didn't study. I really didn't start studying until I went to college. I guess that was my way of rebelling without really knowing it, without really knowing it.

ROB BUSCHER: Ted Hamachi was one of his school's better students before the war. That changed when he got to Heart Mountain.

TED HAMACHI RECORDING FROM DENSHO: I was sort of like an A student when I was a freshman at Covina High School, and I studied to make that grade but when I went to camp and we had no textbooks, the teacher lectured. And the hardest part about how I experienced geometry, without a book, you have to learn the axioms and the prepositions and stuff like this and I'm a slow learner, but once I catch on it's okay. But I had a real tough time being a geometry student. You gotta have a book and read it once, and then you don't understand, you read it a second time you get some more meaning, and the third time you sort of start to understand it. You didn't get that when you're a student at Heart Mountain. The teacher had the book and you had to learn from what she tells you and that didn't work too keen. I flunked chemistry. I remember not wetting the tube to shove through the cork, you're supposed to wet it so it'll be lubricated and here I'm pushing it in dry and that tube broke so the teacher had to come and clean it up and tape it up, it bled pretty good.

ROB BUSCHER: Stanley Hayami was a high schooler in Los Angeles before he and his family were incarcerated. He kept meticulous diaries filled with his thoughts and original artwork. Hayami also worried about the stiff competition in school.

STANLEY HAYAMI VOICE OVER: I think if I worked a little bit harder, I might be able to get all A's. I always got all A's. Of course, the competition is harder here.

ROB BUSCHER: John Nakada also remembered the stiff competition.

JOHN NAKADA RECORDING FROM DENSHO: You know the school I went to in grammar school was small. Two grades. Here it was just one grade and there were forty, fifty people like in one grade. That was just a different experience. I had a hard time in school because the competition was real terrible. I guess lot of the people are pretty smart, I felt I wasn't that smart so I had to really study to even get by.

ROB BUSCHER: In addition to ranking students by letter groups, the schools also used a psychological scale to determine their progress. Detailed records for each incarcerated were kept by the camp administration and can be found in the War Relocation Files at the National Archives. The Jones Personality Rating Scale was used to determine each student's placement in classes, although some categories had little to do with academics. For Setsuko Saito of San Francisco, school administrators noted her "personal grooming and physical appearance" with the highest rating of "attractive personal appearance and exceedingly careful of appearance." She also scored in the highest categories for dependability, cultural

refinement, leadership, industriousness, mental alertness, thoroughness, and the ability to get along with others, in which she was rated “sociable, responsible, tactful, and adaptable to new situations.” Records such as these show that school was being used not just as a place to learn, but also as an avenue for government officials to study incarcerated in the controlled environment of a prison camp.

ROB BUSCHER: Dorothy Thomas, a University of California sociologist, secured grants from several foundations to launch her study on the effects of incarceration on Japanese Americans as it was happening. Her Japanese Evacuation and Resettlement Study was criticized for ethical lapses by some of its field workers, but nevertheless, provides a treasure trove of valuable information about the incarceration, including how schools were meant to be used as an “Americanizing” factor for the incarcerated.

ROB BUSCHER: Childhood incarcerated Setsuko Saito experienced this “Americanizing” firsthand. White teachers at Heart Mountain attempted to give her an English name, as they did many of their students. In her official school records, “Shirley” is written in the upper right hand corner of the documents. Setsuko rejected it at the time, but later named her daughter Shirley Ann Higuchi, who is now the chair of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation.

ROB BUSCHER: Not all students responded well to their new environment, with some using school as an opportunity to act up in defiance of their present circumstances. Mits Koshiyama was one such student, who would later become one of 63 young men at Heart Mountain to resist the military draft and later be

tried in the largest federal trial in Wyoming history. Prior to becoming a draft resister, Koshiyama remembered challenging authority in school.

MIT'S KOSHIYAMA RECORDING FROM DENSHO: A funny thing, when I went to school there, nobody talked about the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the deprivation of our constitutional rights. You know, we were taught school like a normal school, like on the outside. Probably wrote compositions "Why I'm proud to be an American," too. Isn't it ridiculous, but that's the way it was. I do remember a student writing, "Why We Are Prisoners in a Concentration Camp." I remember that. I thought, "Gee, that kid there is really bright and has a lot of courage to write a composition like that. But everybody else is, "Why I'm proud to be American," and you know, waving the flag and everything. Kind of ridiculous, but that, that's the way people thought in those days. This one kid wrote about the Constitution and the deprivation of our rights. And I said, "Wow." You know? That put a kind of a seed in my mind, too. We're taking this evacuation and incarceration too lightly. It actually is a deprivation, like this student says, of our constitutional rights. Probably didn't hit a lot of people, but, because I had, because I went to detention and learned about the Constitution and all that. It really hit me, because I knew this kid was right. Why were we there? We didn't do anything wrong. We were denied due process of the law, which is supposed to be a God-given right to all Americans, and I just couldn't understand it. Why more people didn't fight it. Like the *coram nobis* cases. There was only three, three out of 120,000 that refused to be evacuated. You would think if everybody believed in the Constitution and all that, there'd be a bigger percentage.

ROB BUSCHER: Many of the older Nisei incarcerated had already graduated high school and were studying in West Coast universities before they were put behind barbed wire. For a community who had dedicated much of their young lives to higher education, the sudden loss of this pathway to their preferred careers caused great concern. It was impossible to replicate the university environment with its degree of specialization within the camp environment, so the Nisei college students found themselves at an impasse. To address this issue, the Quakers advocated for a program that would allow Japanese American college students to leave camp and continue their studies at campuses outside of the military exclusion zone.

ROB BUSCHER: Milton Eisenhower, the first head of the War Relocation Authority, saw this as a major barrier to building trust with the Nisei incarcerated and their families who had sacrificed much to afford their education. On May 5, 1942, Eisenhower contacted the American Friends Service Committee, a non-profit advocacy organization affiliated with the Quaker Church, to create the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council. Eisenhower had the support of one of the incarceration's chief architects—Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy. On May 21, McCloy wrote Clarence Pickett, the executive secretary of the Friends Committee, about his support.

JOHN McCLOY VOICE OVER: "Anything that can legitimately be done to compensate loyal citizens of Japanese ancestry for the dislocation to which they have been subjected, by reason of military necessity, has our full approval. In particular, the suggestion for the establishment of a committee of distinguished educators to work out a program of university education in other parts of the

country for Japanese American citizens evacuated from the Pacific Coast, meets with my hearty approval.”

ROB BUSCHER: With that, McCloy authorized the transfer of the Nisei students to universities around the country. Unsurprisingly, one of the first East coast institutions to accept and actively recruit Japanese American university students was Swarthmore College, a small liberal arts school founded by Quakers in the Philadelphia suburbs. College President John Nason was a Quaker and American Friends Service Committee member who was appointed national chair of the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council and pledged to lead by example, welcoming the first Japanese American students to Swarthmore in Fall 1942. Overall, about a dozen or so students of Japanese descent attended Swarthmore as a direct result of this program.

ROB BUSCHER: Heart Mountain’s leaders encouraged students to apply for relocation and celebrated their acceptance to outside universities with great fanfare. By July 1943, a combined total of 949 students had left the 10 WRA camps for college in 38 states; 92 of whom came from Heart Mountain. One was Albert Mineta, the older brother of Norman, the future politician. Albert Mineta went to Drew University in New Jersey and eventually became a doctor. Another was Marjorie Matsushita, who left Heart Mountain for Hamline College in St. Paul, Minnesota.

MARJORIE MATSUSHITA SPERLING RECORDING FROM DENSHO: The Quakers were very, very wonderful, and they really contacted many of the colleges and universities to make sure that they would be able to take Japanese students. And

they set up a network, and so were ready to choose and pick. And so, but then before you were able to leave, I had to be, you know, clearance from the FBI and the army and the navy. So it took about a month before we got clearance and left at that time.

ROB BUSCHER: Many adult incarcerated also filled their time at Heart Mountain with continuing education classes. Although this was a significant change for many who had little free time outside of their family and work obligations prior to the incarceration, the adult education program provided some much needed routine to their recently turbulent lives. Nancy Ukai, project director of 50 Objects Stories website offers the following commentary on art created in the adult education program.

NANCY UKAI INTERVIEW: For many people, this was the first time they had free time in their life. Because before they were just working so hard to get a foothold and make a living, whether it's farming or running a shop. Or, you know, whatever. And so to have this kind of enforced leisure time, this time when you're imprisoned, you have no freedom. And there were these education classes sort of to quell people and keep them occupied. And so, you know, you don't get these rebellions on your hands.

NANCY UKAI INTERVIEW: These art classes were taught and also you know there were artists to such as Matsusaburo Hibi and Chiura Obata who wanted to use art at for example at Topaz as a way to give people a sense of their own humanity and to allow them to express themselves in a time when you know your name has

been taken away your property's been taken away your freedoms been taken away.

NANCY UKAI INTERVIEW: And so in that regard. These things are really expressions of agency and creativity and I don't like to only think of it as art. Because number one art can be auctioned. There are art auctions, all the time. But when you think of it only as art. Then you take away the historical context, the things that these, the fact that these were made while people were incarcerated because of their race in an atmosphere of hatred, of fear, paranoia, profiling, scapegoating - and so to only look at the beauty that's on the surface is to really ignore the tragedy and the trauma that's embedded within the artifacts.

ROB BUSCHER: Many of the adult program teachers had been leaders in the Japanese American cultural or business communities before the war. Shingo Nishiura designed buildings and planned cities prior to incarceration. Artists like Benji Okubo and Robert Kuwahara created beautiful art that adorned the Chinatown and Little Tokyo neighborhoods in Los Angeles and Japantown San Jose. All three were instrumental in creating the Heart Mountain Art Students League, where they taught courses in painting and other fine arts subjects.

ROB BUSCHER: One of the most popular adult classes was taught by master embroiderer Isaburo Nagahama, who was 76 when he was forced from his home and studio in southern California. Allen Hendershott Eaton, an art collector and historian, noted Nagahama's popularity in his 1952 book, *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire*.

ALLEN EATON VOICE OVER: Nagahama was surprised at the latent talent that was brought to the surface. Prior to evacuation, most of these women had been engaged in more strenuous, practical pursuits, trying to maintain an economic foothold in the United States, and therefore had little opportunity or time for recreation. One of the first early examples of needlework was done by a Japanese woman who had spent most of her time since coming to America working in a truck garden.

ROB BUSCHER: Nagahama had a fascinating and atypical history in the United States. Born in 1866, he immigrated to the United States in 1885 and ended up in New York City. There he married a white woman, had children, and moved to California, which is where he and his family lived when the war started.

ROB BUSCHER: Mary Shige Homma was another instructor in the adult program, and gave workshops teaching fellow incarceratedees how to make artificial flowers. She and her husband, Peter Yorozu, also made furniture. One piece of particular note was a chair made from rare pieces of wood scavenged from the camp perimeter. This piece would later be known as the Homma Chair, which would play a central role in the 2015 fight over the Rago auction of art produced in the incarceration camps, much of which came from Heart Mountain. Had the auction proceeded as planned, it would have dispersed these works to private owners around the country. Thanks in part to the advocacy efforts organized by Nancy Ukai and other community activists, the collection is now held at the Japanese American National Museum.

NANCY UKAI INTERVIEW: A friend walked across the room, we were staying with friends and gave me a copy of The New York Times that morning the paper edition said, "Hey, look at this, you might be interested." And it was, you know, "Japanese American Internment Art Goes on Auction," which was very curious to me because although you see various Japanese camp artifacts on sale individually, to my knowledge, I had never heard of an auction, which gives, kind of elevates the status of the things, and also it was called the Allen Eaton object and was in the New York Times. So that was curious, and puzzling, and troubling because, you know, everything was going to be sold tagged priced.

NANCY UKAI INTERVIEW: Um, but then what happened was in two weeks or so at the end of March, the entire 450 or so artifacts went online and you could see the descriptions, you could see a picture of the object, and you could see the starting bid price, and what the estimated price was. And then people started to identify, for example, their family members and photographs, it became evident that nameplates, which had names on them. You might be able to research back to the original barracks and the owner and possibly the person who carved it and then it became a whole different kind of issue and project and protest.

NANCY UKAI INTERVIEW: And by selling them to the highest bidder, making them into commodities that just created outrage among a group of us who said, "Wow. If we don't do something, who is?" You know, it's up to us as a community to step up and say, at least try and stop the auction. So we didn't tell Rago you got to cancel it, we said at least postpone it because the duty of an auctioneer is to research the provenance of these things. What's the ownership chain? Who made it? How did you acquire it?

NANCY UKAI INTERVIEW: If you buy a Picasso at a garage sale, you can't just turn around and flip it at an auction. You've got to confirm that, you know, it's something that was legally obtained and that you can therefore resell it. He did none of that, Rago. And so we were just saying, "Let's pause it, give us time to research it. This is our history, don't sell it." I mean, there's a lot of issues, there's moral issues, legal issues. And finally, two days before the auction in April, he took the lots out of a much larger all day auction and eventually the Japanese American National Museum acquired the entire collection.

ROB BUSCHER: At its peak population of nearly 11,000 people, Heart Mountain was nearly four times the size of the nearest town of Cody Wyoming. Operating a prison camp the size of a small city was too big a job for military personnel and their civilian contractors alone. Incarcerees were given the opportunity to work jobs doing the many daily operations that kept the camp running. The WRA realized this would not only provide more structure to life in camp, but also give incarcerated a sense of mutual accountability for the wellbeing of their fellow inmates.

ROB BUSCHER: Before they could place people in jobs however, the WRA had to figure out what kinds of skills their prisoners possessed. Working with statisticians from the WRA headquarters in Washington, camp administrators conducted an occupational census shortly after their arrival. At Heart Mountain and the other camps, census takers often drew suspicion from the incarcerated, who wondered what the questions were really for. While some Nisei volunteered to work for the WRA in this project, many of the Issei prisoners resented these collaborators for their role in helping the government gather intelligence on them. Regardless of its

intent, the census helped to accommodate workers based on the skills they possessed and prior work history.

ROB BUSCHER: Before the war Yoshio Saito of San Francisco managed a store. At Heart Mountain he worked in one of the warehouses. A graduate of UCLA, Clarence Matsumura, found a job as a sound equipment operator and helped operate the movie projectors during the camp's weekly motion picture shows. He also served as supervisor for the camp's collection of animals, which they jokingly referred to as a zoo. Takashi Hoshizaki was just sixteen when he began working as a surveyor to lay out the final stretches of the irrigation channel. Although he had owned his own farm in San Jose, Iyekichi Higuchi worked as a janitor in camp, while his wife Chiye worked the mess hall.

ROB BUSCHER: In addition to the jobs within camp, many workers also found opportunity on the outside. As young men began voluntarily enlisting in the military, businesses and farms in Wyoming and elsewhere around the country experienced serious labor shortages. Without enough farmhands to harvest their crops, the agricultural industry was threatened with wholesale devastation. Japanese American farmers had dealt with a similar situation months earlier when crops began to rot in their fields as they were shipped off to the assembly centers. As a result, the California state government intervened to redistribute much of their farmlands to white landowners who would oversee the harvest of much-needed crop resources for the war effort. Many Japanese Americans were unable to reclaim their land after the war ended.

ROB BUSCHER: By the Fall of 1942 much of the unskilled labor force had enlisted, and the perilous state of Wyoming's farm industry led local governments and camp authorities to look toward the incarcerated for help. In September 1942, hundreds of prisoners left Heart Mountain to work the bean fields of Wyoming. Governor Nels Smith, who was instrumental in the government's decision to imprison Japanese Americans in camps under armed guard, wanted to maintain strict control over prisoners movements. WRA officials refused, and the workers stayed in camp until farmers bombarded Smith's office with letters and telephone calls saying they would be ruined financially if he did not change his mind. Smith, who was in the middle of a reelection campaign, gave in to the will of his farmer constituents and allowed Japanese American workers to bring in the crops.

ROB BUSCHER: The first workers left camp on September 10, and others followed suit, traveling from Heart Mountain to Powell and other farming communities throughout the state. After harvest season ended, they returned to camp. The farmers' demands also made it necessary to recruit labor from the camp's upper division schools. Dozens of Heart Mountain high school students joined their parents in the fields to harvest that year's crop of sugar beets. This delayed the start of school, interrupting the routine before it even started. Although parents were not thrilled about their adolescent children missing school, pressure came from the top of the camp administration. **C.E. Rachford**, the camp director, sent out this plea in October 1942.

C.E. RACHFORD VOICE OVER: Here is a real opportunity for boys 16 years of age and older to be of outstanding service to the nation, and at the same time to earn some spending money for the long winter months ahead.

ROB BUSCHER: That Fall, more than 1,200 Heart Mountain “colonists” as they were often referred to by camp administration, had left for the beet fields. The work was grueling and laborious. “Topping” sugar beets meant bending over a row of beets and pulling them from the ground with both hands, knocking beets together to knock off the dirt, and then cutting the tops off with a knife.

ROB BUSCHER: The WRA required that they receive the same pay as other workers, and the farmers agreed. Farmers paid \$1.05 for each ton of topped beets, and most workers averaged three tons per day, earning a total of \$3.15. Wages earned from camp jobs were capped at the weekly pay rate of a US Army private, and the work leave positions paid considerably higher. Jobs inside the camp paid either \$12 or \$19 a month, so a prisoner working in the fields could make in one week what he or she would make in camp in a month.

ROB BUSCHER: The field work was reminiscent of the early days of the Issei immigration, when Japanese workers often dominated the sugar beet fields, especially in California. For the American-born generation of Nisei, however, this was often the first time they had experienced such difficult labor conditions.

ROB BUSCHER: After the harvest, it was clear that the Japanese American labor force had rescued the sugar beet crop. The farmers were “enthused by the adaptability and speed displayed by colonist workers,” said the field

representative of the Western Sugar company after the harvest. In nearby Lovell, Wyoming, the local Commercial Club passed a resolution granting “courteous treatment” for the incarcerated and the “protection that is due any citizen of the United States.”

ROB BUSCHER: Gradually as people got back to work, daily routines set in and the community started to feel a sense of normalcy after many months of uncertainty amidst their swiftly changing circumstances. Through it all, there were few constants that remained. One part of life that continued on regardless of the war was birth, illness, and death - which meant that a hospital would need to be built. When Heart Mountain first opened in August 1942, its medical facilities resembled more of a battlefield first-aid tent than a working hospital.

NURSE VOICE OVER: We were giving baths in fire buckets.

ROB BUSCHER: When it opened, the hospital had only the chief medical officer, one incarcerated doctor, a senior medical student, one registered nurse, and an incarcerated student nurse. In its first few weeks of operation, even the most routine hospital procedures were deemed worthy of note given their limited facilities. The *Sentinel* dutifully printed stories about the first successful appendectomies performed at the hospital. Birth announcements were also a common sight in the paper. Bill Hosokawa, editor of the Heart Mountain Sentinel, remembered that his mother in law needed treatment the hospital could not provide.

BILL HOSOKAWA RECORDING FROM DENSHO: She noticed a growth on the side of her face and the doctors in the camp couldn't diagnose it. The treatment she received in the camp was inadequate. And, but they sent her from the Heart Mountain camp to a hospital in Billings, Montana, where they had better facilities. And they sent her up there for x-ray treatments once a month or something like that.

ROB BUSCHER: Unfortunately, the camp hospital also made mistakes given their limited diagnostic resources and treatment options during the early months. Tsunegoro Mihara was seventy when he arrived at Heart Mountain, suffering from some type of cancer. His grandson Sam Mihara remembers that the doctors thought he was over hydrated, so they cut off his fluids, essentially dehydrating and killing him.

ROB BUSCHER: Most of the hospital administrators were white Americans who oversaw a staff that turned over almost as rapidly as the school teachers. By the end of September 1942, the hospital had already lost its chief nurse and had dwindling supplies of critical medicines, which hospital administrators had to augment with out-of-pocket purchases from local businesses. The quality of care at the hospital improved over time, but it remained a topic of contention for those seeking medical care in camp.

ROB BUSCHER: Tensions also rippled between the white staff and some of the Japanese American incarceratedees who were doctors themselves. These highly educated and well-trained Japanese American physicians, who had lost their

practices because of the incarceration, often resented the less-qualified white doctors and nurses who ran the hospital.

ROB BUSCHER: Younger Nisei doctors also chafed at the authority of their Issei colleagues. Doctor Motonori Kimura, who was licensed in 1941 shortly before Pearl Harbor, criticized the skills of Doctor Fusataro Nakaya, a fifty-six-year-old Issei from Los Angeles who had received his license back in 1918.

ROB BUSCHER: Four months after the first chief nurse quit, the hospital finally managed to recruit her replacement in February 1943. Anna Van Kirk spent nineteen years in Japan as a missionary before returning to the United States where she would ultimately take on the position at Heart Mountain. In addition to her medical and administrative skills, Kirk also possessed an ability that she hid from her prisoner patients and Japanese American staff colleagues—she spoke Japanese. Fellow nurse Velma Berryman Kessel recalled.

VELMA BERRYMAN KESSEL VOICE OVER: This she did not tell anyone for several weeks since she wanted to know what the Japanese were saying about the hospital.

ROB BUSCHER: When Van Kirk's knowledge of Japanese language was revealed in the March 23, 1943, edition of the *Sentinel*, many prisoners felt they had a spy in their midst. Tensions between white hospital staff and Japanese American staff and patients increased measurably.

ROB BUSCHER: The issue reached a flashpoint on June 24, 1943 when the Japanese American medical staff went on strike. Wilfred Hanaoka, a Nisei doctor central to the strike, was transferred to Manzanar and the troubles subsided. The hospital resumed operations, although the feelings of distrust remained.

ROB BUSCHER: Despite their humble beginnings, Heart Mountain's medical clinic grew into one of the best hospitals in Wyoming during the years when the camp operated at full capacity. By 1944 it had seventeen wings, five wards, three operating rooms, 150 employees, nine doctors, ten nurses, and dozens of nurse aides. Many of the 182 people who died at Heart Mountain spent their last moments at the hospital.

ROB BUSCHER: There was a small cemetery on the outskirts of camp where the deceased could be given a Christian burial. Bereaved families held funerals in camp, and usually took the caskets with them to reburial when they returned to the West Coast. At the war's end, six caskets with the remains of unaccompanied bachelors were transferred from Heart Mountain to the Powell cemetery, where they rest today. Funerals at Heart Mountain adhered to religious traditions, especially for the Buddhists that made up about two-thirds of the camp population. This presented an added complication because Buddhists are customarily cremated, and Heart Mountain lacked such facilities. Most were cremated offsite at mortuaries in nearby Cody or Powell, and the bereaved families kept their ashes in the barracks until they could bring them home at the war's end.

ROB BUSCHER: Duncan Ryuken Williams is a Buddhist priest and professor at the University of Southern California. His book, *American Sutra*, recounts Buddhist life during incarceration, particularly at Heart Mountain.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: If you can imagine one of the worst things to happen to a family was that, then once in these camps, they would lose somebody to illness. I think, especially in the beginning, the first winter and spring. So hot during the day and so cold at night, people weren't used to that kind of temperature. I think many people who are vulnerable - the elderly especially, those with some kinds of pre-existing conditions, or babies. The vulnerable, many of them became very sick or even died.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: And so for the families who lost a grandmother or a baby, having some way to ritually, ceremonially, not let their lives be just thrown away, but remembered, acknowledged was important. And so religious ritual to do that. Some kind of funeral, some kind of memorial service. In Buddhism we have usually a wake, a funeral, some kind of ceremony that follows in a regular pattern seven days afterwards, forty days afterwards, a hundred days afterwards. These series of memorial services that usually a priest would need to officiate.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: These were the kind of challenges. In the Buddhist tradition cremation became a very almost universal kind of way of not only practically having the bones, in an ash form that could be placed in different family graves. But also it was to follow this kind of Buddhist idea of the

Buddha himself being cremated. So you find among Japanese Americans in the Christian tradition there were those who insisted on burial without cremation, and in the Buddhist tradition, those who generally advocated for cremation.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: And so when those facilities were obviously not available within the confines of the camp itself, not only at Heart Mountain, but many of these WRA camps. The Buddhist priest would often need to coordinate with the WRA administration to find somewhere in the region. Sometimes, it'd be quite a few miles away, where a crematorium was - existed, to transport the body, hold a cremation. The Buddhist priests would often go under guard to these places. Maybe one family member could join them, often not. Sometimes the Buddhist priests would just do it themselves, come back with the ashes, and then hold some kind of ceremony back in camp.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: And so these are the kinds of things that were held and then usually within the Buddhist temple, there was some kind of area where some of those ashes could be held in a columbarium type of structure. That was one way to do it. And then another way was, of course, each of the camps, including Heart Mountain had cemeteries and so sometimes that was another option as well, but usually with ashes. You didn't have to do that, but with the cemetery area, you'd need to place people who either from a religious perspective or other perspective didn't want to have cremation.

ROB BUSCHER: One funeral of particular note was held in January 1943 for 48-year-old Clarence Uno, the former community organizer, World War I veteran, and USO activist who died unexpectedly in his sleep after returning from a USO meeting. When he died in camp, Clarence Uno received a funeral with full military honors that featured members of the American Legion chapters in Cody and Powell.

ROB BUSCHER: Whether they were Buddhist, Christian, or Shintoist - incarcerated held on to the religious traditions they had previously practiced in their lives before camp. Weekly religious services of many denominations were published in a regular section of *The Sentinel* and provided another much-needed routine that helped camp life feel more normal. Religious holidays were particularly significant to building the community at Heart Mountain.

ROB BUSCHER: Although typically associated with Buddhism, Obon was one religious holiday celebrated by the entire camp population regardless of faith because of its significance in Japanese culture. Held each summer, Obon is a religious festival or *matsuri*, that welcomes back the spirits of departed ancestors to the physical realm, celebrating their yearly visit with offerings of food and ritual dance. Bon Odori - traditional dances are a central aspect of the festival that are performed in groups moving in a circle around a central platform. The celebratory nature of Obon gave incarcerated at Heart Mountain and the other camps a brief respite from their present circumstances.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: Especially in camp the tradition called Nibon or Hatsubon, which means the first Obon, meaning people who had died in that prior year. You could have an ancestor like a grandparent, who died fifty years ago, they would be in this category called the ancestors. But for somebody who just passed away, let's say in that first winter into spring of '42-'43, they really had this immense wish to make sure that the Nibon or the first Obon for these ancestors would be properly held, ceremonially with the entire community kind of joining in to acknowledge these ancestors. Even the recently departed.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: And so there was a tremendous effort in '43 at Heart Mountain, as well as all of the other WRA camps to hold larger scale Obon. In many of the WRA camps, some people had already arrived in August of '42 so they had these smaller scale things then, but by '43 the whole community, thousands of people would gather for Obon, for the dance, for the celebrations, for the ceremonies, and have a moment to to have a kind of communal acknowledgement, and commemoration of those who passed.

DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS INTERVIEW: But it was also the main way that the community at-large, despite you know, indications from the administration that Christianity was a more kind of acceptable form of showing loyalty and belonging in America. I think Obon became the symbolic gathering where it was not only to keep tradition and remember the dead and ancestors, but also as a whole community showcase to the WRA that Buddhists, were not going to be afraid of gathering, were not going to be afraid to publicly express their faith.

ROB BUSCHER: During the first Fall season at Heart Mountain, camp authorities organized large Halloween and Thanksgiving celebrations with help from some of the community leaders. Although different from the ways in which they were celebrated before incarceration, familiar holiday traditions went a long way in establishing a sense of normalcy. In a letter to the Sentinel editor, Miharu Kawaguchi reflected on her first Thanksgiving behind barbed wire.

MIHARU KAWAGUCHI VOICE OVER: With Thanksgiving drawing near, I wonder what I, as an evacuee, have to be thankful for. Uprooted from my home, segregated from other fellow citizens, what little ambition I had shattered to pieces and now living from day to day in a state of indifference, there doesn't seem to be much for which I could be grateful. But when I think of the privilege of living in a free country, I am convinced that there still is a reason, to even an evacuee, for a day of thanksgiving.

ROB BUSCHER: Nothing compared to what they planned for that first Christmas, a celebration that incarcerated of all religious backgrounds took part in. Compared to the previous year when Christmas came in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor, the mood during the 1942 Christmas season was slightly less anxious, albeit more austere. Many families lacked the financial resources to buy presents, and even if they had the money, limited choices at the camp stores dampened the typical gift-giving tradition of the holiday. Everyone in camp knew that Christmas was different this year, as the Sentinel noted.

SENTINEL EDITORIAL VOICE OVER: Christmas this year is like no other Christmas we have known. Our surroundings are bleak and many of the things we cherished are gone.

ROB BUSCHER: A group of camp administrators and prisoners tried to make Christmas the best they could. They arranged to give presents to 3500 children and youth ages 19 and younger, through a gift drive organized by the JACL. The Sentinel noted how many people from outside camp donated gifts.

SENTINEL EDITORIAL VOICE OVER: It will do one's heart good to read of their kindness. People such as them help to keep alive the Christmas spirit. The day has crept upon us almost unawares, for there is relatively little other than the cold to remind us that we are nearing the end of December. But it is still not too late to wish each of the *Sentinel*'s friends a fine Christmas and better ones to come.

ROB BUSCHER: A group led by Moe Yonemura, the former UCLA cheerleader and future soldier, coordinated celebrations featuring the boys and girls clubs. The committee also included Reverend Donald Toriumi, a leading Christian minister in the community, and Seiichiro Nagamori, an incarcerated from Los Angeles whose daughter Toshiko would later become the mother of Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Lance Ito. Toshi Nagamori Ito remembered how her fellow prisoners made a Christmas tree out of a tumbleweed.

TOSHI NAGAMORI ITO RECORDING FROM DENSHO: People gathered tumbleweed and made a Christmas tree out of it, and put the tumbleweed on one of the columns in the mess hall. And the camps, they used a lot of canned food, so the can tops were used to make ornaments. The people made chains out of red and green paper, and had it on the Christmas tree. And then they had a Santa Claus, and the Presbyterian church and Quakers sent toys for the children like crayons and coloring books and books and other things.

ROB BUSCHER: Kara Kondo also remembered the presents from outside.

KARA KONDO RECORDING FROM DENSHO: The outpouring of gifts from the outside through the churches for the residents of the camp, especially for children. And there are a couple of things I recall, I had friends in Seattle who sent me her skis, saying, "We have gas rationing, and I can't go skiing." So she sent me skis. We didn't have much snow there, but... and she sent me a box of holly knowing that I would not have holly. And these are the kinds of things that you remember. And I don't know whether I even thanked them properly.

KARA KONDO RECORDING FROM DENSHO: I remember reading a letter from a little girl who had written to the minister of the church saying, "We wanted to send something for the children in camp, but we don't have very much money and the only thing I could do was to have some chickens." And so her father had caught some chickens and sold them and so she wanted to send something to the children. And here, again, where you felt that nobody cared, the outpouring assured us that there was, there was a lot of concern and caring throughout the nation. And I think these are the little things that sustain you.

ROB BUSCHER: Incarcerees celebrated in the mess hall, said Jack Kunitomi, who was also the sports editor of the Sentinel.

JACK KUNITOMI RECORDING FROM DENSHO: Yes, we had a party in the mess hall, and, well, people made *nigiris*, and little sandwiches, something that people went outside to get. Yes, we were lucky because we had friends that went outside and were able to buy some things from the outside.

ROB BUSCHER: Various clubs inside the camp organized Christmas caroling for their fellow prisoners and even the guards. Kara Kondo remembers.

KARA KONDO RECORDING FROM DENSHO: It was a very memorable Christmas. I remember, we had a singing group, I recall, and we gave a concert, a Christmas concert. And my sister, Marjorie, my younger sister, Marjorie, had a very good voice. In fact, she had taken voice training, and she sang "O Holy Night," I remember. And that song still has so much meaning. And I can just picture when, that evening, when it was a very cold and windy evening, and I could see people coming in with their heavy pea coats and clothing, and the songs that we sang.

KARA KONDO RECORDING FROM DENSHO: And I also remember on Christmas Eve dances at the mess hall. And the people in our block had a dance Christmas Eve, and it hadn't snowed. It felt like it was going to snow, but it hadn't snowed. And "White Christmas" was popular that year. The dance was over around eleven o'clock, and we went outside and here it was, the snow was beginning to fall. And those are the kinds of memories that you have. And so "White Christmas" means

a lot, "O Holy Night" means a lot, and some of the songs that were popular in those days still has a great deal of meaning.

KARA KONDO RECORDING FROM DENSHO: I recall that I was advisor to a high school girls' group called Hijinks, and we went out caroling. And we went to the guard towers where the soldiers were stationed to guard us. And I can just picture how cold it was and the frost glistening on the barbed wire and our singing songs. And we thought we were being smart, and this poor voice that was almost choking with tears said, "Well, thank you." And how lonely he must have been up there.

ROB BUSCHER: 1942 ended with a bitter cold snap, and for many incarcerated who came from California it would be their first white Christmas. Although their present circumstances were difficult, the holiday season showed incarcerated that they could still find joy in the simple pleasures afforded in camp life. As the tumultuous year came to an end, a community began to form, united in the face of adversity from their disparate socio-economic classes, professions, and diverse regions. For the next three years this would be their new normal.

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