Manzanar Cemetery, Winter 2002.

This booklet was developed by the park rangers at Manzanar National Historic Site in partnership with the individuals profiled and their families.

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3/08

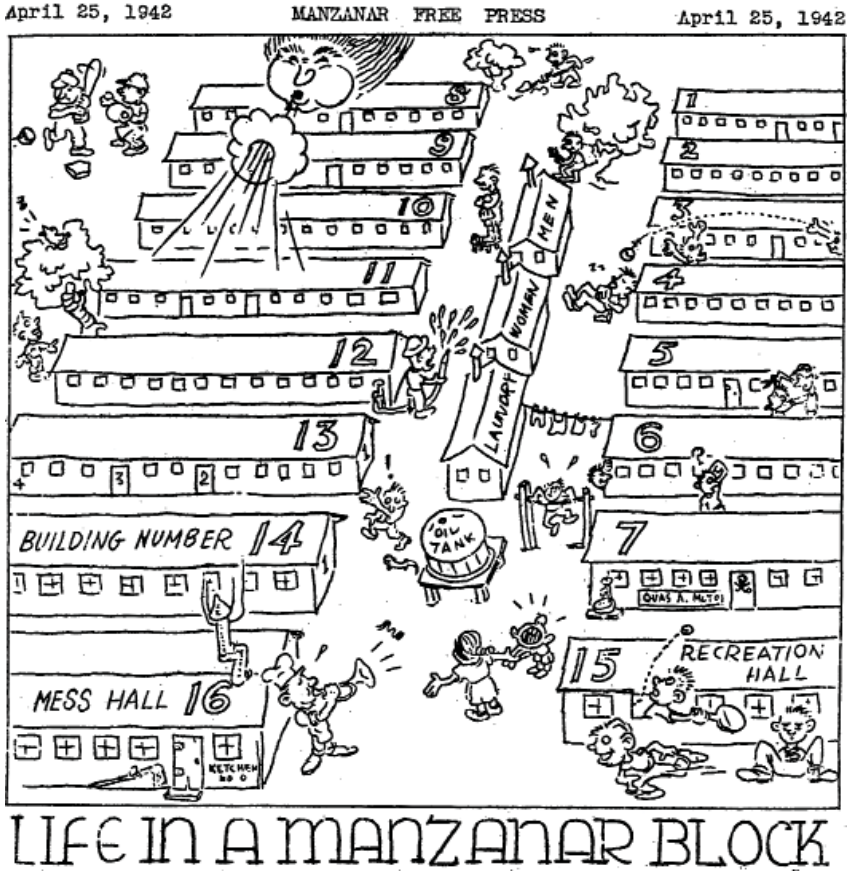
EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Manzanar

ID Card

In 1942 the United States Government ordered over 110,000 men, women, and children to leave their homes and detained them in remote, military-style camps. Two-thirds of them were born in America. Not one was convicted of espionage or sabotage.

In this booklet, you will read the story of a person who lived this history, in his or her own words.



Wind and Dust

This wind and dust I have to bear
How hard it blows I do not care.
But when the wind begins to blow –
My morale is pretty low.
I know that I can see it through
Because others have to bear it too.
So I will bear it with the rest
And hope the outcome is the best.

-- George Nishimura, age 16 (1943)

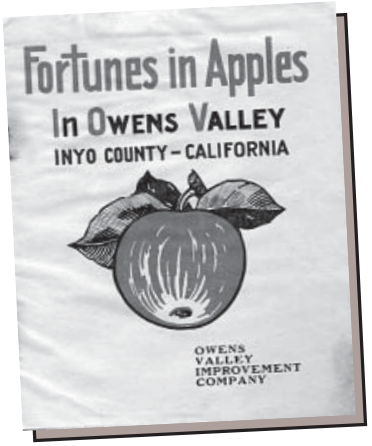
MANZANAR Free Press

MANZANAR

Location: Inyo County, California, at the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada.
Environmental Conditions: Temperatures can be over 100 degrees in summer and below freezing in winter. Strong winds & dust storms are frequent.
Acreage: 6,000
Opened: March 21, 1942 as a Reception Center and June 1, 1942 as a War Relocation Center.
Closed: November 21, 1945
Max. Population: 10,046 (September 1942)
Demographics: Most internees were from the Los Angeles area, Terminal Island, and the San Fernando Valley. Others came from the San Joaquin Valley and Bainbridge Island.

ARTHUR LOREN WILLIAMS, JR.
Camp: Manzanar, CA
Address: Apt. D-5
Administrative Housing

My grandfather Arthur F. Williams and his three brothers moved from Bradford, Pennsylvania, to work in the California oil industry around 1900. My grandfather bought an apple ranch from his brother Leroy in 1912. It was located at Manzanar, in the Owens Valley. The family lived there until moving to southern California in 1916.



After a tour in the U.S. Marines, my father started in the oil industry, but soon changed to law enforcement, taking criminology classes at the FBI school and UCLA. He became traffic control officer and head of motorcycle officers in Redondo Beach, California.

My mother's family were railroad people from Colorado. She pursued her education, and got a degree in dietetics at Battle Creek, Michigan. She met my father while working as a dietitian at Sawtelle Hospital, in southern California.

I was born in Los Angeles in 1928. My brother was born in Torrance in 1938. I went through grammar school and junior high in Redondo Beach. In grammar school, there was a Japanese American student named Katsumi, who I considered one of my two best friends. When we went to junior high, we were separated.

My life was centered around our family, school, friends, my paper route and enjoying the beach. My father took us on yearly hunting and fishing trips to the Owens Valley. Many times we camped out at Manzanar. There were no buildings there. It was barren, with neglected apple orchards. There were little concrete flumes, and my dad would direct water to the farm he once lived on to try and keep the trees alive.

At 13, my peaceful, privileged life was gone. America entered the war. The army put up barbed wire fences and gun emplacements along the beach, only a block away. Servicemen, a rare sight before, were now living in the neighborhood. Army convoys frequently traveled the Pacific Coast Highway, only two houses away. There were blackouts at night. Occasionally, searchlights would come on, and we would think we were under aerial attack.

Our war was with Japan. There was talk the Japanese might invade. I knew we were losing this war.

I recognized there was a war with Germany and Italy in Europe, but that seemed distant. Our war was with Japan. There was talk the Japanese might invade. I knew we were losing this war. Our family got a map of the Pacific, so we could follow events. Every day, them totally out of their world, and it must have been extremely difficult for them. They came by often just to talk, and I enjoyed the conversation. When I left the hospital, however, it was back to my isolated world on the other side of the force field.

When the war was over, kids were leaving camp and going in all directions, back to the civilization they knew. I had expected to return to Redondo Beach. Instead, my father moved us to Independence. It was like being captured twice. I was extremely unhappy, and began thinking seriously how to get out of the valley. It would not happen until I graduated from Owens Valley Unified High School, in 1946, and left home to join the Navy.

When the war was over, kids were leaving camp and going in all directions, back to the civilization they knew.

My parents left two years later, taking public sector jobs in Ventura County. I took advantage of the GI Bill to go to college. Like others in my family, I started in the oil industry, as a drilling engineer, and retired 32 years later as exploration/production manager (Europe/Africa) for a major oil company. That career took me to over 50 countries, and the foundation was laid from experiences in a wartime relocation camp and a small town high school education. Along the way, I got married and have two sons and a daughter, and financed all their college

more of them to pick from. There were 10,000 people in the camp, greater than the Caucasian population in the entire Owens Valley.

I tried unsuccessfully to find my pre-war grammar school friend, Katsumi, but did not know his last name. I often wondered if he was there, but embarrassed to contact me.

My mother worked as dietitian at the camp hospital. A Japanese American lady, Esther Ando, watched over my little brother and I. We both loved her, and she was such a good cook that we often skipped meals at the mess hall. We were sad when she and her husband relocated.

I came down with measles while my parents were in Mexico on vacation. The lady who took Esther's place freaked out, and I quickly wound up in an isolation ward in the camp hospital. The chef wanted to be nice, and fixed all Japanese dishes for me, but I was not used to such food. When I came out of the hospital, I looked like a poster child ad for anorexia. I was crying for anything American.

They may have looked Japanese but they were American. Being interned at Manzanar took them totally out of their world...

The nursing aides were Japanese American, with a heavy accent on "American." They had grown up in high schools where the majority of students were Caucasian. They may have looked Japanese but they were American. Being interned at Manzanar took it seemed, I learned the name of another island, because the Japanese had just taken it. I frequently asked my father if we would ever win.

There was tension and uncertainty. Many items suddenly became in short supply. Rationing was a way of life. Soon after December 7, 1941, we paperboys were taught to fold and deliver newspapers without rubber bands. Rubber went to the war effort.

One day at school, we noticed the Japanese American kids failed to show up. There were probably six to eight in my junior high school. I wondered where they had gone, and what had happened to my old friend, Katsumi.

One day at school, we noticed the Japanese American kids failed to show up.

My father was hired to work in internal security at Manzanar War Relocation Center. He reported April 9, 1942. My mother, brother and I moved to Independence, California on May 1.

To me, this move was the pits: I lost all of my friends at Redondo Beach, and was unable to graduate with my eighth grade class; lost my paper route and the earnings it provided each week; could no longer go to the beach, which I loved. Our new house was nowhere near as nice as the one we left. There was an oil stove for heat in the cold winters, and a swamp cooler for the hot summers, neither of which we had needed at the beach.

Manzanar War Relocation Center, 1942

At Redondo Beach, I had played baseball; in Independence, I was introduced to softball, and to put a team on the field, we had to use girls. This was definitely not my idea of paradise. Worst of all, I knew no one, and spent the summer of 1942 as a stranger in this one horse town.

Manzanar was also different than I remembered from our camping trips. It was buzzing with activity, with rows of buildings going up, carpenters crawling all over.

Our accommodations at the camp were ready shortly after the December 1942 "riot' in which two internees in a crowd were fatally shot by Military Police.

I still missed the beach, but life in camp was better than in town. There were several kids my age moving in to the employee housing area, and we were all in the same boat. There was no "new kid on the block" barrier to penetrate. Everyone lived in similar housing. There was more to do, and other kids to do it with. We became very close in a short time.

We ate at the mess hall, rode the school bus to Independence, walked or biked to the aqueduct for a swim, played pool at the army camp, hung out at the airport and watched the cadets practice flying, went duck hunting in winter along the Owens River, watched some outdoor movies at the camp.

We lived inside the fence, with nothing to separate us from the Japanese, but did not often mingle. I felt comfortable in my little part of the camp, but not in theirs. It was like there was a force field separating us. It was not there to see, but it could be felt.

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On a few occasions, some Japanese American boys came down to play football on the grass next to our staff mess hall. One time, we went up and played tackle without protective equipment on the dirt firebreak, and there was a lot of hide peeled off. The word got out, and hundreds came to watch that game.

The Japanese had their own high school, and teams played each other in camp, with equipment and uniforms. I enjoyed watching some of their games. They played some rough football. One player worked at our mess hall, and coached me a little for my high school team in Independence. He had been better coached, and knew a lot more than I. Their teams were far better than anything Independence could field, but there were far