



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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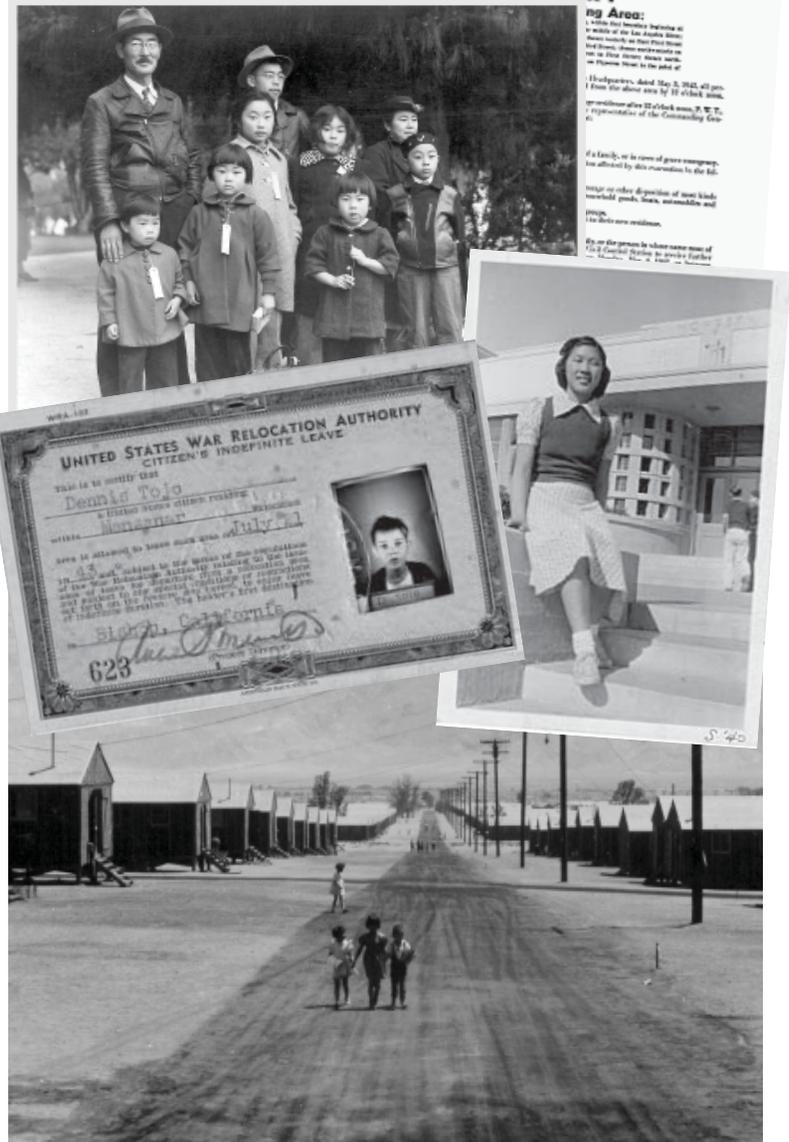
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# Manzanar



## ID Card

WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY  
 WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION  
 Presidio of San Francisco, California  
 May 3, 1942  
**INSTRUCTIONS  
 TO ALL PERSONS OF  
 JAPANESE  
 ANCESTRY**





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.



## LIFE IN A MANZANAR BLOCK

### 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)

## **GILA RIVER**

**Location:** Southern Arizona

**Environmental Conditions:**

Located in the desert, temperatures reached 125 degrees, with summer temperatures consistently over 100 degrees. Dust storms were also a frequent problem.

**Opened:** July 10, 1942

**Closed:** Canal Camp: September 28, 1945

Butte Camp: November 10, 1945

**Max. Population:** 13,348 (November 1942)

**Demographics:** Internees primarily came from Fresno, Santa Barbara, San Joaquin, Solano, Contra Costa, Ventura and Los Angeles Counties via Turlock, Tulare, and Santa Anita Assembly Centers. 3,000 individuals came directly to Gila River.

### **Interesting/unusual facts**

\*The Gila River Indian Community objected to the selection and use of their land for a Relocation Center.

\*The center was divided into two camps, Butte and Canal. The two camps were about 3.5 miles apart and included a total of 1,181 buildings.

\*Gila River was so hot that the barracks had to have two roofs to protect people from the heat!

\*Only one guard tower was erected at the Gila River Camp and it was torn down because of staffing limitations. Within six months, the perimeter barbed wire fence around each camp was removed.

\*Japanese Americans at Canal Camp built model ships for the U.S. Navy to use in military training.



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## **HARRY YASUMOTO**

**Camp: Gila River, AZ (Canal Camp)**

**Address: 10-9-C**

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My paternal grandfather immigrated to Hawaii from Japan in the late 1890s, on an indenture of servitude, a contract whereby an immigrant's passage was paid by an employer or labor contractor, in exchange for work until the debt was paid. When my grandfather had to return to Japan on an emergency, about 1903, his oldest son came over to fulfill the remainder of the contract. This was my father Takejiro Yasumoto.

After working off the debt in the sugar cane fields, my father moved to California and worked as a railroad trackman, eventually becoming foreman of a crew. He returned to Japan to marry my mother, Chieko, and they arrived back in California about 1915. They decided to go into farming, eventually settling on a 40-acre grape vineyard near Sanger, California, in Fresno County. By that time, their family consisted of sons Jack, John and myself, and daughters Kathleen and Nellie.

When war came, I was in the fourth grade at a two-room school for grades one through eight. I also went to a Sunday school, where we spent mornings learning to read and write Japanese, with religious services in the afternoon. I first learned of the bombing of Pearl Harbor over someone's car radio during a Sunday school lunch break. Being so young, I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was or the significance of the attack.

Word spread that we should destroy books, phonograph records and other items with Japanese content; also not to possess firearms. My father got rid of his shotgun. An FBI agent did investigate us at the farm, even running a metal detector over a broad jumping pit that my brother John and I had dug, to see if we had anything buried.

Enemy submarines had attacked the California coast, and there was a fear of sabotage. President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in February 1942, giving the U.S. Army authority to evacuate all people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. Those living west of Highway 99 were sent to assembly centers. We lived on the east side of the highway, and were not immediately affected. I remember visiting friends in the Fresno center, talking to them through a chain link fence.

We were allowed to finish our school year before being relocated, but my older sister Kate, a senior, could not attend her graduation ceremonies because there was a curfew. All people of Japanese descent had to be in their homes by 8 p.m. My sister and other graduates in a similar situation were finally given an opportunity to participate in their high school graduation exercises on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the evacuation, in 1992.

Our family was ordered to a relocation camp in August. Before we left, I sold my new bicycle for \$25. I then purchased a government war bond for \$18.75 to help the war effort. I still have it. I also collected and combined

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**I sold my new bicycle for \$25...then purchased a government war bond for \$18.75 to help the war effort.**

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tin foil wrappings from empty cigarette packages into a round object the size of a softball to be

many did not return to California. The experience made me realize there was a need to become more involved in our society, and become a responsible and visible member of it. Therefore, I become involved in the community whenever the opportunity presents itself.

It was comforting for all living former internees to receive a letter of apology from President Bush, with a "redress" check for \$20,000, in the 1990s. My parents did not live long enough to receive it. It was they who really suffered most from the internment. In 1995, I used my redress check to establish, in their memory, a Yasumoto Scholarship at Cal, my alma mater. Annually, I am invited to Berkeley to present the leadership scholarship to a deserving student. It provides the opportunity to relate the "camp" story to future leaders who, hopefully, will become vocal and active when and if another unjustified mass evacuation of a group is proposed.

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**A scholarship is established for future leaders, who hopefully will oppose any more unjustified mass evacuations.**

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in the summer of 1945. Many internees returning to Los Angeles and San Francisco were not hired in offices or shops, and also came to Fresno for agriculture work.

When school began in September, I enrolled in the two-room Lone Star Grammar School. On the first

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day, three of us from the camps rode our bicycles to school. Several boys were waiting, and a few threw rocks at us. But it was not long before attitudes changed, and those returning from the camps were

assimilated in the main stream. Adults found better jobs, and I was selected Valedictorian of both my eighth grade and high school classes. When our Sanger High baseball team won the San Joaquin Valley Championship, six of the nine starters on the team were *Nisei*.

After graduating from University of California at Berkeley, I was drafted, and then worked for IBM for five years, and for the next 35 years as a real estate appraiser and property manager for Mid-State Bank.

I realize not all impacts of the camp experience were negative. Many internees were able to leave camp and relocate to the East Coast and Midwest during the war years. This allowed Japanese Americans to integrate into society elsewhere, since

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recycled into cans, utensils, etc., for the war.

We stored our furniture in a retail grocery store owned by a Japanese family who also went to camp. Somebody must have watched over it because it was still there when we returned from camp.

We were sent by train to a camp on the Gila Indian Reservation, in the Arizona desert. Our Gila River Camp had about 13,000 residents, split into two units, called Canal and Butte.

The camp was still under construction. Rows of concrete piers were set up to support barracks that would soon be built upon them. One boy, thinking the piers were grave markers, exclaimed, "Look at all the people that have died already!" His reaction was logical for a youngster. No one knew what to expect. So little information had been provided during our trip, and the camp was surrounded with barbed wire fencing and guard towers manned by military with rifles.

Our apartment, approximately 20 by 25 feet, had space for only a small sitting area after our seven cots were set up. Each barrack had four apartments. There were 12 to 14 barracks to each block. One of the barracks on our block served as the mess hall. Opposite it was a recreation hall, and each block had buildings for laundry and a men's and a women's bathroom. Some of the 27

blocks at Canal Camp were left vacant for firebreaks and recreational use. Some were used for schools, and a few barracks were used for churches, a library and a canteen that often sold ice cream at ten cents a scoop on Sunday.

Meals were served on steel trays, cafeteria-style. Breakfast was usually powdered eggs, scrambled, with toast; lunch and dinner were vegetable entrees mixed with small bits of meat and rice, which the kids called "slop." Occasionally, there was mutton or over-aged lamb, which smelled strong and tasted awful, and ruined even the slop. There was powdered milk, which tasted chalky. We never had any steak, chops or chicken in three years of our stay. However, it can be said that we never went hungry. There were always ingredients for peanut butter sandwiches available, even if the jam was always apple butter. Jello and pudding were occasional treats.

We had melons in the summer, grown by internees. It was said the vegetables produced at Gila were sufficient to feed the other nine internment camps with about 100,000 people.

My mother would bring home peanuts from her work in the fields, and we would roast them in a frying pan for a treat during the movies shown every Saturday. The movies were outdoors, and we wrapped ourselves in army blankets to keep warm. At times there were dust storms, which made our hair and faces white.

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Our first Christmas in camp was a memorable one. All the children received a gift, used but in good condition. Surrounding communities like



Baseball at Gila River, 1944

Chandler played Santa, donating many gifts to us. I always wanted to thank those who gave.

The government gave us a \$3 monthly clothing allowance, but there were no shops in camp, so we purchased clothes through mail-order catalogs.

School desks and chairs were built from unfinished lumber. We saluted the flag every morning, and had the basic subjects. I recall only one field trip, a hike in the desert to learn about plants and geologic formations. The best part of this trip was having a bag lunch, and avoiding the mess hall. The last summer in camp, I took a wood shop class, in which we learned safe use of tools and made yo-yos from broken baseball bats.

My seventh grade football team played the seventh graders of Butte Camp to a 0-0 tie in touch football. We often played tackle football on the sand lots without any helmets or pads. We also played marbles, tops, ping-pong, baseball, basketball and card games.

When the war appeared to be ending, we were allowed to return to California. The entire family worked as field laborers in another grape growing area in Fresno County