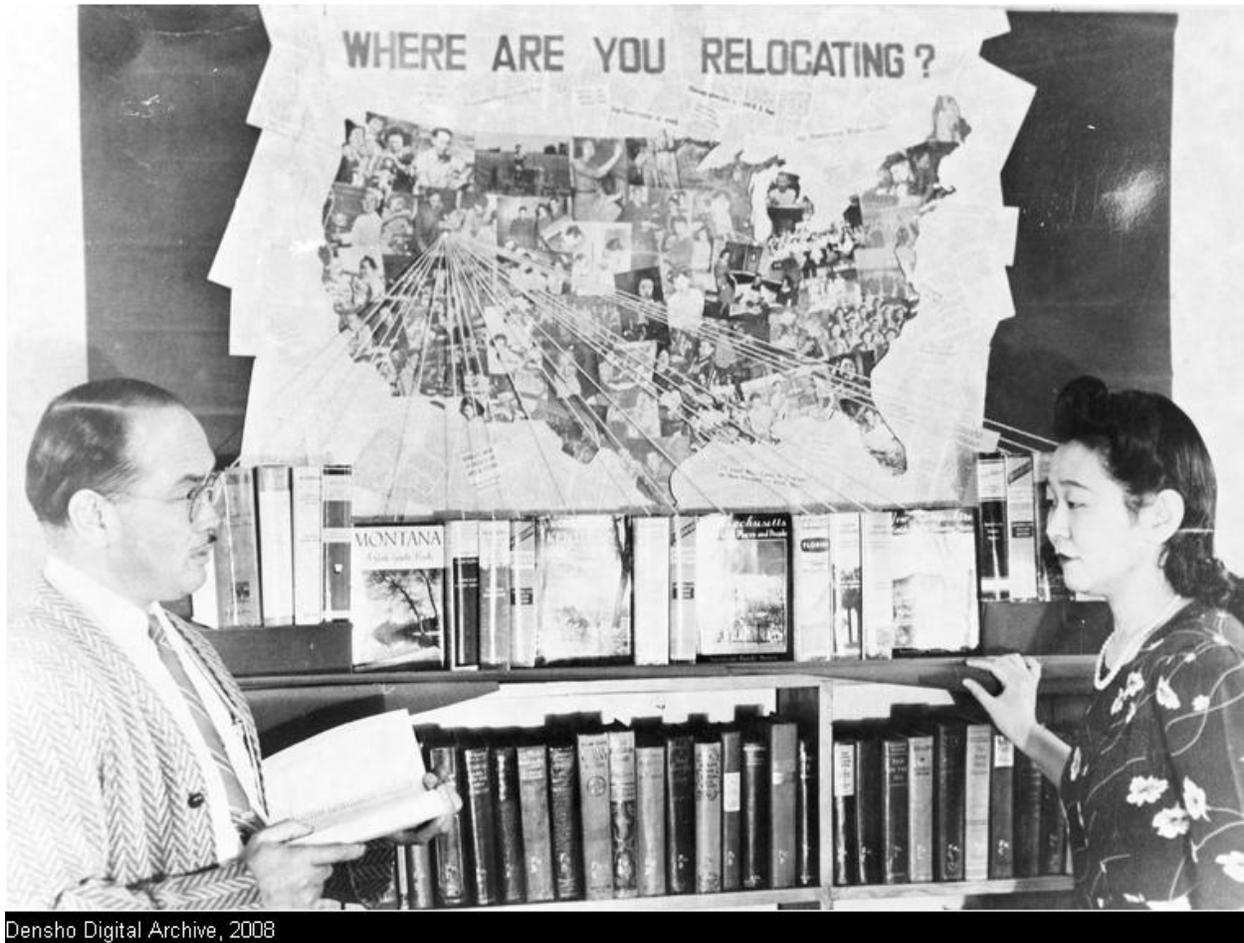


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“A Word to the Wise Will Be Sufficient”: The Role of Libraries in the War Relocation Authority
and the War Relocation Authority Relocation Camps of the Japanese-American Internment
During World War II



Densho Digital Archive, 2008

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“The library staff wishes to encourage the students and faculty to make use of reading resources to the utmost. To obtain the greatest use of the library, it is necessary for all concerned to cooperate fully in the simple matter of being sure books are charged when taken from the library, and in seeing that they are returned on time. There is also the matter of being courteous at all times. Therefore, the library requests that any individual who may take a book from the library without having it properly charged, will return it at once. We have no doubt that in the three or four cases where books have been taken in this summer, the individuals concerned have the best of intentions of returning the books eventually. In the meantime, however, others are being deprived of their use. We trust that a word to the wise will be sufficient. Just see that the books are returned.”

— *Amachi Hi-It*, February 29, 1944¹

I. Introduction

Libraries have, throughout the ages, anchored themselves as the physical and intellectual cornerstones of communities. They have inspired thought, fostered knowledge creation and dissemination, and provided shelter for inquisition for generations. The philosophy, principles, and ethics of library and information studies are similarly a cornerstone for the study of our field as a profession. Even though as a modern profession libraries hold the ideals of information access and freedom, libraries were once as tools of, as Michael H. Harris cautioned in *History of Libraries in the Western World*, influential “religious, political, and social ideologies have motivated individuals and groups to aggressively support the development of libraries” used to imprint their specific ideology on the masses.² A prime example of these phenomena occurred during World War II in the War Relocation Authority’s Japanese-American Assembly Centers and Relocation Camps. From 1942 until 1945, over 120,000 American citizens of Japanese ancestry were forced from their homes and established lives in the Zone of Exclusion thanks in

¹ “Requests Made By Library Staff,” [*Amache*] *Hi-It*, WRA Amache Relocation Camp, February 29, 1944, Volume 3, Issue 5, 4, accessed through Densho: The Japanese-American Legacy Project.

² Michael Harris, *History of Libraries of the Western World*, 4, reprint ed. (Scarecrow Press, 1999), 6.

no small part to a wave of zealous xenophobia disguised under the auspices of protection and patriotism in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Despite being uprooted from their established lives, the *Issei* and *Nisei* exhibited a sense of 我慢³ and created communities of their own in the assembly centers and internment camps or, as the War Relocation Authority termed them, the relocation camps. Many of the physical, intellectual, and spiritual establishments of their home communities continued into their temporary homes in these centers and camps, including the neighborhood and school libraries. These libraries, staffed often by former *Issei* and *Nisei* librarians, provided a sense of community and normality to the internees. They stocked books on subjects ranging from pleasure reading to manuals on the new jobs many of the internees found themselves taking on in both English and Japanese. Consequently, the War Relocation Authority established their own libraries of materials in their district offices, stocking the shelves with books on subjects ranging from psychological analyses of the Japanese people to studies of racial politics.

Throughout the Fall 2014 semester, this project evolved from beginning to end. It started by first seeking to address the role of libraries and information access in a select few of the War Relocation Authority's Relocation Camps as case studies based on the structure of the camps (e.g. the prison camp at Tule Lake versus the lower security at Topaz and Rohwer). As the research process progressed and archival material emerged, along with the discovery of the lack of scholarship on libraries in the camps, it became apparent that the project had the potential to encompass even more than simply the role of libraries within the camps. By analyzing

³ 我慢 (gaman) translates to the trait of enduring and persisting despite adversity. For further explanation on the connection to the Japanese-American internment, see Brian Niiya, *Japanese American History: An A-to-Z Reference from 1868 to the Present* (VNR AG, 1993), 143.

newsletters from the WRA Assembly Centers and Relocation Camps, the literary magazines produced by three of the Relocation Camps, and the digests issued by the War Relocation Authority for their district offices, the role of libraries in the Japanese-American experience during World War II begins to come together.

II. Scholarly Significance

The Japanese-American internment during World War II is an often side-stepped subject. Public knowledge and understanding of this period of American history is shallow at best and there is a distinct lack of academic research into many of the facets of the internment experience for both the Japanese-Americans and the employees of the War Relocation Authority. This holds especially true in the field of library and information studies; there is a fundamental lack of any academic research on the role of libraries in the War Relocation Authority. Granted, there are texts concerning correspondence from children in the camps back to their teachers and librarians on the West Coast but nothing exists to this date directly studying the role and function of libraries on both sides of the internment experience. This project sought to investigate the function and role of libraries in the internment camps and provide the foundation for a larger work introducing the aforementioned societal role of the internment camp libraries into scholarly conversation.

As mentioned prior, the historiography on the Japanese-American experience during World War II centered mainly on the larger issues of internment, such as the violation of citizens' rights, the racism, and the policy-laden history developed in the interim. Initial histories of the internment experience, published in the subsequent decades following the camps' closure, focused on the reasoning behind the internment rather than the experience of internment. Most

sources took a very broad-based approach to analyzing the internment rather than researching the smaller, more minute details that illustrated the micro-histories developed in these camps. Brian Hayashi's 2004 book *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese-American Internment*, driven by a desire to uncover the more of the micro-histories of the internees based on his graduate research, was one of the first major works based on stories of the internees rather than strictly government documentation. Hayashi, Professor of Cultural Coexistence and International Studies at Kyoto University, asserted that when addressed in this manner rather than giving into the typical tropes of the stoic yet loyal internees, "the history of the internment becomes more than just a civil rights lesson; it is also a consideration of how the 'rules of governance' extended far beyond the barbed wire fences."⁴

Within the past fifteen years, work concerning the role of education and schools within the internment camps have entered into the scholarly conversation. Through these newer works, one can see few mentions of the role of libraries in these camp communities. Dr. Yoon K. Pak, Associate Professor of Asian American Studies, Educational Policy Studies, and Center for Global Studies at the University of Illinois, delved into the nuanced history surrounding education within the internment camps using Seattle's Japanese-American population in her 2002 publication, *Wherever I Go I'll Always be a Loyal American: Schooling Seattle's Japanese Americans during World War II*. The narrative Pak constructed included letters and memoirs collected by Ella Evanston, a former Seattle schoolteacher and librarian whose classroom population was heavily Japanese-American.⁵ Pak utilized letters written by Evanston's former

⁴ Brian Hayashi, *Democratizing the Enemy: The Japanese American Internment* (Princeton University Press, 2000), xiv.

⁵ Yoon K. Pak, *Wherever I Go, I Will Always Be a Loyal American: Seattle's Japanese American Schoolchildren During World War II*, (Routledge, 2002), 1-4.

pupils in the assembly centers and internment camps to illuminate the role that education played in their daily lives.

As of the time of this publication, one book exists that addresses the role of librarians in the community of internment, yet this novel is geared towards a much younger audience. Joanne Oppenheim, a prolific children's writer, took the life and impact of Miss Clara Breed, the children's librarian at the San Diego Public Library, and crafted a masterful juvenile non-fiction book based on the letters Clara Breed received from her students entitled *Dear Miss Breed: True Stories of the Japanese-American Incarceration During World War II and a Librarian Who Made a Difference*. Oppenheim's work provided a solid few of the primary sources surrounding Breed, an outspoken opponent of Executive Order 9066 and the internment, and her relationship with her students interred in Poston, Arizona but, yet again, it is geared towards a school-age audience rather than an academic perspective.⁶

III. Research Methodology and Findings

Despite a lack of current scholarly discourse on the role of libraries within the internment camps, a wealth of primary source material exists on the subject. Densho, the Japanese-American Memory Project based out of Seattle, Washington, has digitized numerous documents on the internment experience as well as documented oral histories of dozens upon dozens of internees, among other primary source documents on the Japanese-American experience.⁷ Among these primary source collections are scanned in copies of most, if not all, of the newsletters issued by each of the thirteen War Relocation Authority camps and assembly centers. These include:

⁶ Joanne Oppenheim, *Dear Miss Breed: True Stories of the Japanese American Incarceration During World War II and a Librarian Who Made a Difference*, (Scholastic, 2006).

⁷ Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, "Densho Digital Archive," <http://www.densho.org> (Accessed September 12, 2014). Hereafter, this source will be known as Densho.

- *Gila News-Courier* (Gila River, Arizona)
- *Granada Pioneer* (Granada, Colorado)
- *Heart Mountain Sentinel* (Heart Mountain, Wyoming)
- *Jerome Communiqué* (Jerome, Arkansas)
- *Denson Tribune* (Jerome, Arkansas)
- *Manzanar Free Press* (Manzanar, California)
- *Minidoka Irrigator* (Minidoka, Idaho)
- *Poston Chronicle* (Poston, Arizona)
- *Rohwer Outpost* (Rohwer, Arkansas)
- *Topaz Times* (Topaz, Utah)
- *Tule Lake Tulean Dispatch* (Tule Lake, California)
- *Tule Lake Newell Star* (Tule Lake, California)⁸

While the newsletters are scanned in and generalized information (e.g. article titles, brief synopses of contents, etc.) on each entry is included in the digital archives entry, the documents are not indexed fully nor are they digitized in a manner by which one can search the entirety of the text.

An initial search (using the term “librar*”) in Densho’s digital database returned 118 results, including 8 images, 18 non-newsletter/newspaper documents, 83 newsletter/newspapers, and 9 interview videos. After limiting the search down to exclusively wartime materials (1942-1945), the number dropped to 107 as all of the video content concerned the post-war period. The newspaper entries represented all of the aforementioned internment camp newspapers. Additionally, many of the assembly center (or WCCA) camp newspapers were present in these results, including the *Santa Anita Pacemaker*, *Marysville Arbo-Gram*, *Mercedian*, and *Stockton El Joaquin*. That in itself is intriguing; these assembly centers were often housed at temporary areas such as racetracks (in the case of Santa Anita, California) or fairgrounds (Pullayup, Washington), yet the internees established libraries as multiple assembly

⁸ Takeya Mizuno, "Newspapers in camp," Densho Encyclopedia, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Newspapers%20in%20camp/> (Accessed November 22, 2014).

centers. For example, the first issue of the Marysville (California) *Arbo-Gram*, published on May 23, 1942, detailed the opening of their library:

The library opened its doors to the reading public on May 19, 1942 in the Information building. The hours open to the public: 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM The library has magazines for circulation. Children's and adult's fiction and non-fiction books will be available. "In the future, we hope to have a reading room with small tables and chairs for children and a study hall for those wishing to study." Stated Miss Flora Terada, librarian.⁹

According to the Densho encyclopedia entry on the Marysville Assembly Center, the center opened on May 8, 1942.¹⁰ Within eleven days, Flora Terada and the rest of the internees gathered the materials and constructed a makeshift library on the grounds of the former migrant worker's camp. These assembly centers were constructed and abandoned for the larger internment camps within a scant few months. Marysville, for example, only stayed open for fifty-three days, from May 8th until June 29th.¹¹ Yet, the internees developed libraries for their use. This fact cannot be discounted; these libraries represented a sense of normality and community for the Japanese-Americans. Children withdrawn from their hometown schools could still study and read. Adults could still find pleasure reading despite living in deplorable conditions.

This push towards a sense of normalcy and community continued in the thirteen more permanent internment camps (or, as the WRA referred to them, relocation centers) that the Japanese-Americans began moving to in the summer of 1942. The first mention of a library

⁹ "Library Formed," [*Marysville*] *Arbo-Gram*, WCCA Marysville Assembly Center, March 23, 1942, Volume 1, Issue 1, 4, accessed through Densho.

¹⁰ Densho Encyclopedia contributors, "Marysville (detention facility)," Densho Encyclopedia, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Marysville%20\(detention%20facility\)/](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Marysville%20(detention%20facility)/) (Accessed November 21, 2014).

¹¹ "Marysville (detention facility)," Densho Encyclopedia.

within the newly established camps came from the fourth issue of the *Tule Lake Information Digest* (later called the *Tulean Dispatch*) on June 2, 1942. In a front-page article entitled “Circulation Library Opened. Books Donated by Modoc County Library”, the author detailed the operating hours and holdings of the library, as well as the construction process.¹² The community, yet again pitched in to develop the library as “Under the able direction of Mr. Frank Eki, chief carpenter and architect, 15 tables and 30 benches are being constructed which will provide for a seating capacity for 100 people. Upon completion, the shelves will hold 2,000 books.”¹³ Yet again, this library opened within days of the actual camp opening. Tule Lake received the first of its eventual 18,789 residents on May 27, 1942 and the library opened just six days later.¹⁴

Each of the internment camps had at minimum one library and some supported as many as six libraries scattered throughout the facilities. Manazar, located in California, housed a school library, main library, fiction library, an elementary and professional library, and two childrens’ libraries.¹⁵ Their holdings came from a variety of sources, including borrowed books from local public libraries and donations of used books and money from their residents. Materials in both English and Japanese materialized on hastily constructed shelves. These libraries were more than just rooms filled with books; these libraries represented a sense of normalcy for the residents of

¹² “Circulation Library Opened. Books Donated by Modoc County Library,” *[Tule Lake] Information Digest*, WRA Tule Lake Relocation Camp, June 2, 1942, Number 4, 1, accessed through Densho.

¹³ “Circulation Library Opened. Books Donated by Modoc County Library,” *[Tule Lake] Information Digest*, 1.

¹⁴ Barbara Takei, "Tule Lake," Densho Encyclopedia, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Tule%20Lake/> (Accessed November 21, 2014).

¹⁵ “Receive New Books for Libraries,” *Manazar Free Press*, WRA Manazar Relocation Camp, September 13, 1943, Volume 4, Number 3, 3, accessed through Densho.

the camps. Despite living thousands upon thousands of miles from the communities they called home, the Japanese-American internees developed a sense of home within these spaces.

The War Relocation Authority also developed libraries, but their spaces manifested out of a need to understand their captive population. Out of the 107 documents unearthed from the Densho archive, the most surprising discovery was the copies of the WRA's *Information Digest*, their internal newsletter, that referenced both the role the WRA played in the governance of these internee-ran libraries but also their own library holdings. In one of the earlier newsletters, dated November 11, 1942, the WRA detailed their most recent acquisitions for their newly-minted internal library:

A library of books and articles dealing with the evacuation and relocation program and with the Japanese people in general has been established in the Documents section, Office of Reports, in Room 628. Any member of the staff is invited to make use of these publications. Among the books available at the library are:

- "From Many Lands" by Louis Adamic, particularly the section "A Young American with a Japanese Face", Pages 185 to 226.
- "Books and Articles on Japan", Borton, Elisseeff and Reichawer, a bibliography.
- "Report of the American Red Cross Survey of Assembly Centers in California, Oregon, and Washington".
- "Our Racial and National Minorities", Brown and Roucek, particularly the section on Japanese Americans by John Rademaker, Pages 472-493.
- "New York Times Index for 1941".

John Embree, Documentarian, has also compiled a bibliography of articles published in newspapers, magazines and pamphlets between January 1941 and November 1942, many of which are on file in the library.¹⁶

In subsequent issues, the WRA went on to detail additional books purchased for their library, including works such as "Japanese in the United States" by Yamato Ichihashi, and "Race:

¹⁶ "WRA Library Established," *WRA Information Digest*, War Relocation Authority Main Offices, November 11, 1942, Issues 25 & 26, 4, accessed through Densho.

Science and Politics”, by Ruth Benedict.¹⁷ A comprehensive search for these books has yet to yield fruitful results, but that will be a component of this project moving forward.

As the WRA recognized that libraries were an integral part of the internment experience and community for the Japanese-Americans, they began to issue recommendations on the governance and contents of these libraries. Issue 45 of the *Information Digest* published on June 15, 1943, highlighted many of these recommendations:

Recommendations for developing the most efficient library service at the centers have been sent out. The method of operating school and community libraries has varied from center to center. At some projects general supervision of both school and community libraries has been exercised by a trained librarian on the Education staff, and at others Community Activities operated the community library alone.

Means are suggested for achieving the following objectives: library service for both school and community under trained supervision; establishment of a library board of evacuee representatives with responsibility for community library policy; space, staff, and suitable supplies to maintain adequate library service; and optimum use of library facilities for stimulations of education, leisure-time reading for school children, youth, and adults, and promotion of relocation.¹⁸

The final recommendation, promotion of relocation, proved to be an important point. Part of the mission behind the War Relocation Authority was the eventual resettlement of Japanese-Americans away from the Zone of Exclusion after the end of the war. The War Relocation Authority recognized the power these libraries held within their communities and sought to utilize that power to, as Harris referred to, influence thought and action through the presence of libraries. A powerful example of this phenomenon is a picture, dated January 1944 from the Minidoka internment camp in Idaho, portrayed two Nisei librarians standing in front of a display

¹⁷ “Books Added to the Library,” *WRA Information Digest*, War Relocation Authority Main Offices, December 5, 1942, Issue 28, 3, accessed through Densho.

¹⁸ “Recommendations Made for Libraries,” *WRA Information Digest*, War Relocation Authority Main Offices, June 15, 1943, Issue 45, 3, accessed through Densho.

of books on the different areas Japanese-Americans could relocate to after the camps closed within the next year.¹⁹ The internment camp libraries proved to be a vital resource not only for the Japanese-American internees, but for the War Relocation Authority as well.

IV. Future of the Project

When this project first developed, the initial goal was to construct an article suitable for publication in an academic journal focused on history and/or library and information studies, as the academic discourse on this subject is sorely missing from the scholarly conversation. As the semester wore on, it became evident that this initial research is only the veritable tip of the iceberg of information on the role of libraries within the internment camps and War Relocation Authority. In all honesty, there is easily enough information to develop this work into a full-length book investigating the role of libraries within Japanese-American communities immediately before, during, and immediately after World War II and the role of information access and bias in the image of the Japanese-Americans during the war. The next stage in this process will include development of a cohesive timeline, discovery of additional archives and sources of information, and dedicated time researching and analyzing the types of materials housed in both the camp libraries and the WRA office libraries.

Libraries have long been the bastions of information access and community building in the United States of America. If we, as a profession, wish to move forward and continue our dedication to freedom of access and assembly without the bonds of society holding our patrons down, we must understand the past and learn from it, both the positive and the negative. The role

¹⁹ *Japanese Americans at the library*, January 1942, National Archives and Records Administration, Densho, http://archive.densho.org/ArchiveAssets/archive_image.aspx?v=s&i=denshopd-i37-00044 (Accessed October 12, 2014). This image is also included on the title page to this

of libraries in the Japanese-American experience under the War Relocation Authority is part of that scholarly and institutional conversation; these libraries supported community ties and attributed to the wartime efforts to undermine Japanese-American freedoms. We must continue to look at our past to move ahead in the future.

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