



(Staff photo by Gordon King)

Mamoru and Haru Matsumura were among the few Japanese-Americans to return to the Yakima area after World War II. At the time of the evacuation, Mamoru Matsumura was an American citizen and the family land was in his name. A trustee watched over it until the family could return. It remains theirs to this day.

After internment

Returning to the Valley proved difficult for many

EDITOR'S NOTE: Fifty years ago, President Roosevelt signed an executive order calling for the internment of thousands of Japanese and Americans of Japanese descent. In the last of a two-part series, the Herald-Republic looks back at the people from the Yakima Valley who had their families uprooted and their lives forever altered.

By AUTUMN ALEXANDER
Of the Herald-Republic

The harvest-scented air of Wapato smelled like home to 20-year-old Ken Inaba and his father when they pulled

into town in August 1945.

Inaba's pioneer father personally had wrestled 240 acres of Valley land away from the tenacious sagebrush, but that was before 1942. Then, Inaba and 1,200 of the Valley's Japanese were forced into camps or inland in the name of "military necessity." Though two-thirds of them were American-born, their loyalty — based on their ancestry — was suspect after the Pearl Harbor attack.

Returning to Wapato to see what they could salvage and whether there was land available to lease for farming, the Inabas were only the second Japanese

family to venture into the farming community since evacuation. Fearing for their safety, an FBI agent accompanied them from Yakima.

If they thought there was anti-Japanese sentiment in the Valley before evacuation, it was much worse after the war, remembers Inaba, now 67.

"Why did you Japs come back where you're not wanted?" they'd say to your face," he remembers. And there were signs in most restaurants, gas stations and shops, "No Japs Allowed." He and

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his father were flatly refused service in the Hop Inn. "We just turned around and walked out," says Inaba. "Those were tough days."

Though somewhat hobbled by the alien land laws, after Inaba reached his 21st birthday that year, his family was able to sub-lease enough farm land to get a fresh start.

The days of ostracism continued, but there were a few people in Wapato who "were kind of apologetic" about what had happened to their Japanese neighbors, Inaba says.

"They told us they knew we'd had it rough, and that we could charge in their stores until we could pay," says Inaba. "We have never forgotten those people, but then again we haven't forgotten the others either. Not that we go around with a chip on our shoulders. We've forgiven, but we haven't forgotten."

Mas Wada, now 73, after serving as a Japanese language instructor for counter-intelligence agents in the U.S. Army, can't remember if he wore his military uniform back to town.

"I was overcome by the joy of coming back," Wada says. "I felt enough is enough, let's start anew. I just wanted to renew the feeling of belonging somewhere."

No one taunted Wada to his face, but when aged Frank Ono returned after ignominiously being jailed without charges for being a Japanese community leader, a townsman spit on him in the streets.

To this day, those who did come back and made it can't convince many of their Japanese-American friends from their childhoods to return for reunions.

"They say 'They kicked us out of here, why should we come back?'" Inaba says.

Many of the Japanese families who straggled back to collect their possessions often found the goods vandalized or stolen. Their former farms were, of course, lost to them. Most estimate they received about 10 cents on the dollar for the property they were forced to sell. In 1983, a presidential commission estimated the price of evacuation losses for the Japanese-Americans at \$3 billion to \$6.2 billion.

Washington state's Japanese-American

population was almost halved as a result of the war's scattering.

Only 1 percent to 2 percent of the Japanese community came back to Wapato. Still, the Valley was home for many and at least 15 families felt they had no place to go but Wapato. They camped out in the Methodist and Buddhist churches for more than a year until they could earn enough in the fields to sharecrop a piece of land.

The churches were one of the few landmarks of life as it had been. Two community leaders who believed in the Japanese, Dan McDonald Sr. and Esther Boyd, acted as trustees for the properties during the war.

Each returning family's experience was fiscally and physically hard, especially for the issei generation — those who first emigrated to America — who had withered in the camps after seeing their life's work dismantled. Still, some were luckier than others.

One of the fortunate few were the Matsumuras. Mamoru Matsumura, now

Outcasts!

The Story of America's Treatment of Her Japanese-American Minority
BY CALEB FOOTE



This publication was one of the few that objected to the treatment and relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

itself out."

Today those who returned to the Valley are successful business people, farmers and civic leaders. Wada even

over it while the family was exiled from the Valley. He and his wife, Haru, came back and began again. The farm remains theirs to this day.

Coping and healing from the war's rough surgery has taken time for the Valley's Japanese-Americans. Physically resilient, people's outsiders adapted and recovered from evacuation, but their insides were twisted like bonsai trees.

Initially, there were some Japanese-Americans who didn't want to acknowledge their roots, they'd call themselves Chinese, Wada says. And the experience of being shunned for being different changed family life permanently among the Japanese-Americans. Japanese wasn't spoken around the house by the issei — those who were American-born — to their children, the sansei — or third — generation, many of whom received very Anglicized names.

"We just kept to ourselves," says Wada. "We didn't make a nuisance. It just worked

served a stint as post commander of the American Legion in Wapato. But years later, the scars of ostracism and exile remain in varying degrees.

"It's a little like being a battered child, I think," says Kara Kondo, in her 70s, of Yakima. "You feel shamed, but you don't know why, you don't feel very open and feel somewhat guilty, yet you don't want to tell on your 'parents.'"

Most of the Valley's internees received President Bush's written apology and the \$20,000 redress check as a result of a bill passed by Congress in August 1988. As a gesture, many of the Valley's former internees accept redress as a gesture, a symbol that America is sorry.

"Though it can never make up for the indignities, the lost opportunities and how others took economic advantage," says Yoshio Hata, 72, a Wapato fruit grower, "I was delighted we got anything at all. I didn't expect it."

Still, there are those, especially of the world wars generation who don't seem to understand the significance of evacuation or redress.

"What makes me feel really uncomfortable is any resentment of the American public," said Wada, putting his hands to his heart. "But I know being invaded was such a dramatic experience, some do harbor anger."

Some members of public complain that as long as victims of the Pearl Harbor, the Japanese death marches and prisoner of war camps go uncompensated, the internees should not receive anything.

But those atrocities of World War II were those of a hostile foreign country vs. Americans. Executive Order 9066 was Americans vs. Americans, or as the late U.S. Sen. Sam Erwin called it, "the single most blatant violation of the Constitution in our history."

Wada compares what happened to the Japanese in America to what is happening to AIDS patients these days.

"Human beings in a moment of frenzy can turn on each other, making people dirty, categorizing them taking sides," he says. "We're all in a multi-cultured society, it's important to understand each other. I do think we've learned."

JAPANESE-AMERICANS

2-24-92
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