

Japanese Americans in the Diocese of Northern California, 1942

Carole Hom | The Episcopal Church of St. Martin, Davis

When I was kid, Grandma’s house was the center of gravity for my extended family. Every few weeks, aunties, uncles, and innumerable cousins made the journey from the San Francisco Bay area back to Watsonville, CA. My cousins and I ran around the basement and sun porch, took baths in a big ol’ clawfoot tub, watched 1960’s sitcoms on a little TV, and snarfed down Dream Cake from the Freedom Bakery.



My family home in Watsonville, CA. Image: Carole Hom

Occasionally, I wondered how an illiterate, immigrant widow raising five children during the Great Depression could have afforded a Victorian-era house. Mostly, I didn’t think about it.

I finally put the pieces together in 2011. While going through relatives’ 1941 and 1942 high school yearbooks, I remembered my mom’s vague years-old comment that “Uncle Bill bought the house from a Japanese dentist or something.”

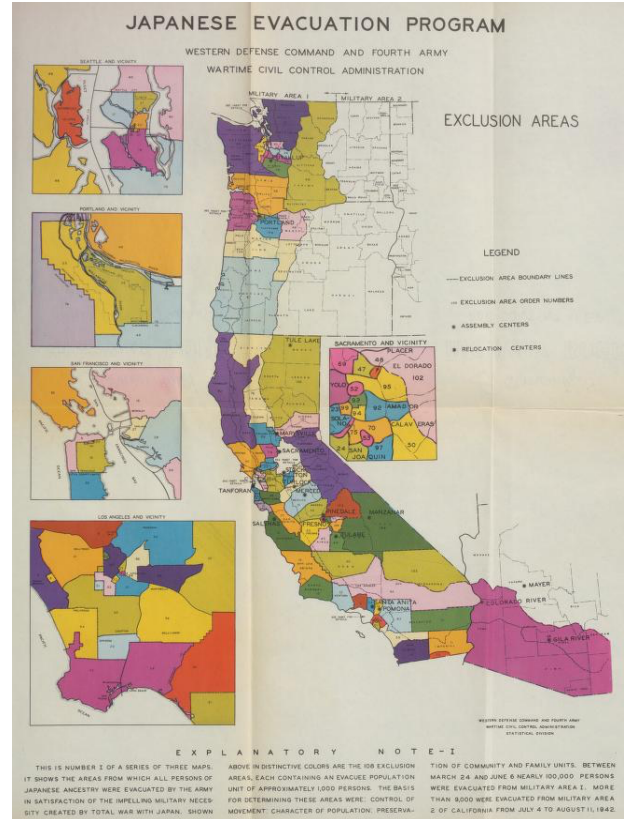
Ten years later, I learned that my mom was close but slightly off target. The house had been the residence and practice of a Japanese American physician, Dr. Kichiro Koda, who was incarcerated in 1942 following the signing of Executive Order 9066 on 19 February 1942. My family purchased the house from its white owners in 1945: the 1913 Alien Land Law of California precluded non-citizens from owning property in California, and by federal law, Japanese immigrants like Dr. Koda were ineligible for citizenship. After release from camp – also in 1945 – Dr. Koda returned to Watsonville and reconstructed his practice, most likely starting from scratch.

I include this bit of history from Santa Cruz County, in the Diocese of El Camino Real, because of my personal connection to the house. But this story undoubtedly was repeated throughout the west.

Executive Order 9066 authorized forced removal from the West Coast of all persons deemed a threat to national security. Between March and mid-August 1942, the US Western Defense Command (WDC) issued 108 Civilian Exclusion Orders aimed exclusively at Japanese Americans. Eighteen of these exclusion orders spanned the Diocese of Northern California, and according to WDC records, affected over 16,000 Japanese Americans in our diocese.

Each Civilian Exclusion Order directed Japanese Americans to report to a specific assembly center seven days after issuance of the order, bringing only what they could carry. Prior to removal, they sold houses, businesses, and personal goods for whatever people were willing to pay, often at tremendous loss.

“Some of the greater community took advantage of us and our plight by trying to buy things as cheaply as possible. One Japanese lady in town was so deeply outraged by the paltry amount offered for her beautiful set of expensive china that, rather than sell it at that price, she stood there in front of the potential buyer and threw each piece on the pavement, shattering the whole set.” – from *Everything Gone*, a memoir by Winters, CA resident Sumiko Higaki, 12 years old in 1942.



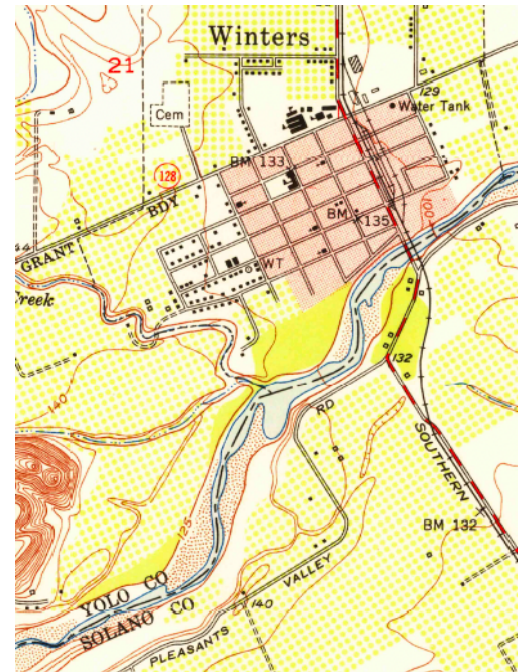
Map Insert I, Exclusion areas. From the Final Report on Japanese evacuation, 1942, J. L. DeWitt, Western Defense Command. Map Inserts II and III show assembly and relocation center destinations, respectively. See resources for source.



Moving sale, May 9, 1942, 427 O Street, Sacramento, CA. Image: National Archives and Records Administration

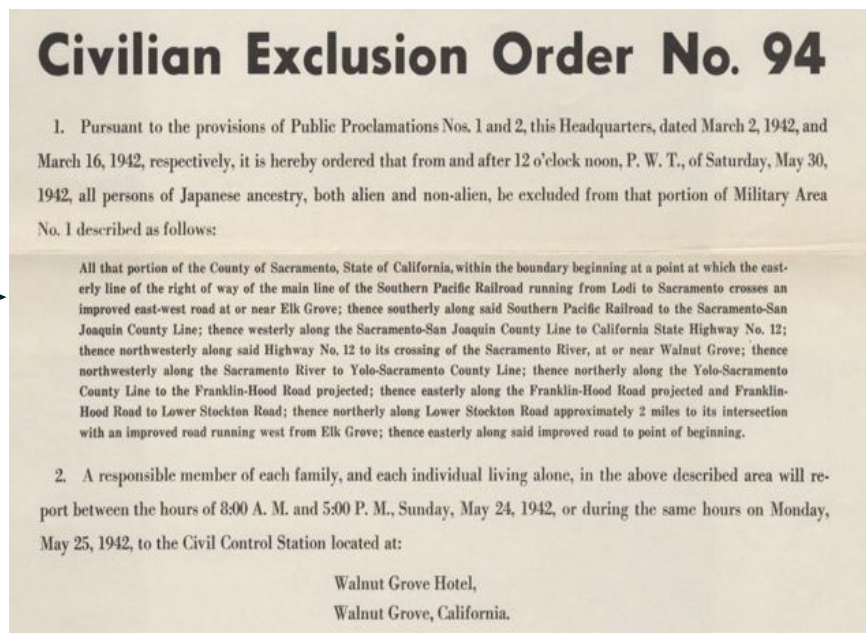
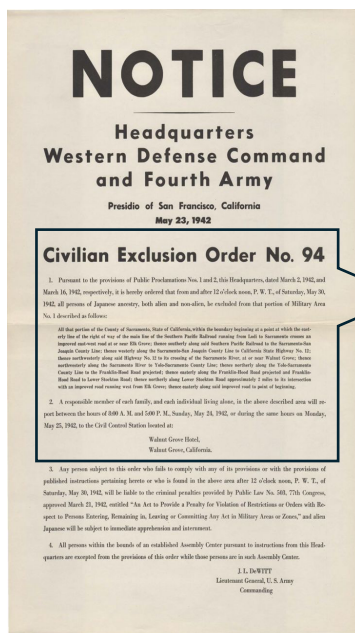
Exclusion devastated individual families. But it also affected tight-knit communities. Exclusion Orders were based on political subdivisions and roads without regard to societal or family connections.

In Winters, CA, the Japanese American community lived on both sides of Putah Creek. Civilian Exclusion Order 23, issued on 3 May 1942, ordered residents of Solano County south of the creek to relocate to Turlock, where they later learned that they were destined to go to the concentration camp at Gila River, AZ. Civilian Exclusion Order 99, 6 June 1942, sent residents of Yolo County, north of the creek, to Tule Lake, CA.



A 1953 USGS map that shows Winters, CA, with Putah Creek separating Yolo and Solano Counties

Residents of Sacramento County were divided among multiple assembly centers and six camps, depending on where they lived. For example, Civilian Exclusion Order 94 sent people from part of Sacramento County to the assembly centers in Merced or Turlock, where they subsequently were sent to camps in Grenada, CO or Gila River, AZ.



Western Defense Command, Civilian Exclusion Order 94 and enlarged excerpt. These broadsides, containing directions for exclusion, were posted prominently in the appropriate regions. Image: California State University Japanese American Digitization Project/GSUDH Gerth Archives and Special Collections.

College students, including about 700 enrolled at UC Berkeley, UCSF, UCLA, and UC Davis, were pulled from their campuses. For seniors, this occurred only a few weeks prior to graduation.

In many agricultural regions, farmers were required to report to assembly centers prior to harvesting spring crops, thus losing a year's investment in seeds, fertilizer, and labor, in addition to loss of farm equipment and the land itself. In some cases, white friends stored the goods and machinery or worked the farms of incarcerated Japanese Americans, even while incurring tremendous personal cost.



Original caption: Woodland, California. Tenant farmer of Japanese ancestry who has just completed settlement of their affairs and everything is packed ready for evacuation on the following morning to an assembly center. May 20, 1942. Photo: Dorothea Lange/ National Archives and Records Administration

However, more commonly, intruders or people who leased houses or farms from incarcerated Japanese Americans vandalized the property or stole tractors, farm implements, appliances.

The Farm Security Administration (FSA), a federal agency charged with responsibility for the agricultural transfers required by the Civilian Exclusion Orders, calculated that 231,492 acres of intensively cultivated land were transferred from 6,789 Japanese American farmers to “qualified operators.” Over 1,000 of these farms, totaling 41,680 acres, lay in the Sacramento Valley. The FSA estimated that farms operated by Japanese had an average value of \$291.94 per acre, compared to an average value of \$70.91 per acre for all California farms, making Japanese farms worth considerably more money due to their productive value. Based on the FSA data, Japanese American farmers in the Sacramento Valley lost over \$12 million dollars in crop production value alone.

Through these real estate transactions, “qualified operators” in the Sacramento Valley might have attained generational wealth at the expense of the incarcerated Japanese American farmers.

“We’ve been charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do. It’s a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown man.... If all the Japs were removed tomorrow, we’d never miss them in two weeks, because the white farmers can take over and produce everything...” – Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association, *Saturday Evening Post*, 9 May 1942

In sum, the Civilian Exclusion Orders issued by the Western Defense Command decimated the Japanese American community across California, Oregon, and Washington. Exclusion upended the lives of Japanese American families, disrupted the social structure of their communities, and shuttered churches, and an entire population lost any financial security that they had worked for decades to attain.

Future newsletters will contain more information about a loyalty questionnaire and the complex and troubled camp at Tule Lake, the aftermath of incarceration, and the response of the Episcopal Church. For a brief introduction to the incarceration of Japanese Americans, please see the first article in this series.

We plan a deeper look at the Japanese American incarceration and its implications for today in a half-day webinar planned for May 2025. Please watch for information.

The Very Rev. Cliff Haggenjos, St. John’s Episcopal Church, Roseville
Carole Hom, The Episcopal Church of St. Martin, Davis
The Rev. Ernie Lewis, The Episcopal Church of St. Martin, Davis
Jo Ann Williams, St. John’s Episcopal Church, Roseville

See these resources for a deeper dive

- [Western Defense Command memo tracking incarceration](https://cdm16855.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16855coll4/id/6906) --
<https://cdm16855.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16855coll4/id/6906>

- [Final report, Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast, 1942. J. L. DeWitt, Western Defense Command. See map inserts I-III, pp. 318-324.](https://archive.org/details/01130040R.nlm.nih.gov/page/n317/mode/2up)
-- <https://archive.org/details/01130040R.nlm.nih.gov/page/n317/mode/2up>
- [California Museum exhibit on Sacramento's Japantown](https://californiamuseum.org/exhibitions/online/kokoro/) --
<https://californiamuseum.org/exhibitions/online/kokoro/>
- [UC awards honorary degrees to WWII-era Japanese Americans](https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/uc-awards-honorary-degrees-wwii-era-japanese-americans) --
<https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/uc-awards-honorary-degrees-wwii-era-japanese-americans>
- [Sold, Damaged, Stolen, Gone: Japanese American Property Loss During WWII](https://densho.org/catalyst/sold-damaged-stolen-gone-japanese-american-property-loss-wwii/) -- <https://densho.org/catalyst/sold-damaged-stolen-gone-japanese-american-property-loss-wwii/>
- [During World War II, This Farmer Risked Everything to Help His Japanese American Neighbors](https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/during-world-war-ii-farmer-risked-everything-help-japanese-american-neighbors-180985441/) --
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/during-world-war-ii-farmer-risked-everything-help-japanese-american-neighbors-180985441/>
- [Farm Security Administration report](https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/991044926989706532) --
<https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/991044926989706532>

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