

FIRST DRAFT

Japanese-American roots in valley long predate Pearl Harbor attack

In the wake of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese in this country — even those who were U.S. citizens — came under suspicion. Those on the West Coast began to move east, at first voluntarily, then by government edict.

A significant number ended up in Colorado and on the Western Slope. But they weren't the first of their background to move here. Japanese-Americans had been living in western Colorado, including the Grand Valley, at least since the first decade of the 20th century.

They were often farm laborers or operated their own farms. Some owned restaurants or shops.

The Hayashis were such a family. Tom and Kotono Hayashi, both natives of Japan, moved to the Grand Valley in 1920, operating a combination pool hall and barber shop at 209 Colorado Ave.

Within a few years, Kotono took the state exam to become a barber herself, the first woman barber licensed in western Colorado.

Over the years, the Hayashis also managed a restaurant, operated a truck farm on Orchard Mesa and raised a family. Their descendants continue to be involved in the community today.

Even so, Pearl Harbor changed life dramatically for most Japanese-Americans wherever they lived. Those living in California, Oregon and Washington experienced the greatest disruption.

On Feb. 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order No. 9066 authorized the removal of anyone deemed a threat to national security in a designated military zone.

On the West Coast, it resulted in the forced removal and incarceration of hundreds of thousands of Japanese-Americans.

Through February and March 1942, those from the West Coast were allowed to evacuate voluntarily. Many came to Colorado because they knew other Japanese families that lived here.

Others came because Colorado Gov. Ralph Carr was the only governor in the U.S. to publicly welcome Japanese-Americans, as well as people of German and Italian descent.

"They are as loyal to American institutions as you and I," Carr declared. "Many of them have been born here — are American citizens, with no feelings of loyalty" to the countries where their ancestors lived.

Many Coloradans vehemently opposed Carr's invitation. But Daily Sentinel articles indicate little opposition locally.

In fact, fruit growers and sugar-beet farmers, desperate for laborers after so many young men had joined the military, publicly supported bringing Japanese laborers into the area.

The Grand Junction Rotary Club passed a resolution in support of importing Japanese-American laborers from the Amache Relocation Camp in Granada on the Eastern Plains.

In 1943, several hundred Japanese laborers from the Amache camp and from internment camps in Arkansas came



Mrs. Kotono Hayashi, the first woman barber licensed in Western Colorado, practiced her trade in the combined poolhall-barber shop the family owned at 209 Colorado from 1924-30. This picture is dated April 21, 1926.

COURTESY OF KAREN HAYASHI

This 1926 photo of Kotono Hayashi appeared in The Daily Sentinel in 1976.



COURTESY OF KAREN HAYASHI

Oliver Hayashi in his Army uniform. He was a member of the famed 442nd Regiment made up entirely of Japanese-Americans.

to the Grand Valley. Along with German prisoners of war from Pueblo and temporary workers from Mexico, they came to Mesa County to work as agricultural laborers.

Hate-filled incidents toward them were common throughout the West, including in Colorado. And there were a few in Mesa County. At least one store in Grand Junction posted a sign reading: "No service to Japanese."

A Japanese-American woman named Annie Shinoda, ice skating on the Gunnison River with her children and taking pictures of the outing, was arrested. They skated near where the Army was testing uranium for the first atom bombs, and authorities feared she was a Japanese spy.

She was released and her camera returned when an examination of her film revealed nothing but skating children.

A 1944 letter to the editor in the Sentinel suggested Japanese-Americans living here had been secretly supporting the Japanese war effort even before Pearl Harbor.

American soldiers deployed to the Pacific Theater "aren't fighting to live (as) neighbors to Japs when they come home," the writer said. She suggested anyone who would sell property to Japanese "hasn't a son or anyone he holds dear in this war."

"They did face discrimination," said Kay Hayashi, granddaughter of Tom and Kotono. "My father (Oliver Hayashi) said that because he was born and raised here, peo-



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PHOTO

The Amache Relocation Camp near Granada, Colorado, as it appeared shortly after it opened.

ple stood up for him."

But other Japanese-Americans in Grand Junction and elsewhere faced more discrimination. Hayashi's maternal great-uncle, Jitsuji Aoki, operated a successful noodle factory in Oakland, California, prior to the war. He lost the business when he and his family were sent to an internment camp in Utah. "It was a lousy, lousy deal they gave us," wrote Annie's husband, Paul Shinoda. His family voluntarily moved to Colorado from California early in 1942.

He noted that the constitutional rights of Japanese-Americans had been ignored. "We had the right to the pursuit of happiness. Going to camp and being evacuated didn't fit that."

But it wasn't all prejudice. Sentinel articles and ads from the war years show people rented and sold property to Japanese-Americans and actively sought Japanese families to help on farms.

However, other articles, describing local men who were killed or taken captive in the War in the Pacific, may well have fueled anti-Japanese sentiment locally.

Even so, Japanese-Americans served this country in a variety of ways. In the summer of 1943, about 80 Boy Scouts from the Amache Camp (There were apparently Boy Scout troops in the camps) were sent to Durango to dismantle a Civilian Conservation Corps camp from the 1930s and reassemble the buildings at the Amache camp.

Also, the Sentinel announced that "the Grand

Junction army office has received authority to enlist American-born women of Japanese ancestry for the WAC," the Women's Army Corps.

In February of 1943, the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was formed exclusively of Japanese-Americans born in this country. It became the most decorated unit in Army history based on its size and time of service. One of those who joined was Oliver Hayashi of Grand Junction.

He participated in the rescue of the Lost Battalion — a unit of Texas infantry surrounded by Germans in France in October 1944. Hayashi's K company began the rescue effort with nearly 20 men. All but 20 were killed or wounded.

After the war, many evacuees who came to Colorado, such as Paul and Annie Shinoda, returned to their pre-war communities on the West Coast. Others remained.

Sources: "She made it as barber, pool hall operator," by Alice Wright, *The Daily Sentinel Colorado West* magazine, April 11, 1976, courtesy of Karen Hayashi; other historic editions of the *Sentinel* at www.newspapers.com; "Asians in Colorado" by William Wei, courtesy of Dick Lewis; "Paul Shinoda, 'volunteer' evacuee, Grand Junction, Colorado," included in "And Justice for All: An Oral history of the Japanese American Detention Camps, Compiled by John Tateishi, courtesy of Jacob Richards."

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