

**CAPTIVE ON THE
U.S. MAINLAND:
Oral Histories
of Hawai‘i-born Nisei**

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa**

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Second row, Evelyn Matsui, Charles Nakamura, Sr., and Clara Tobar.

Third row, Masayoshi Wakai, Alice Watanabe, and Tetsui Watanabe.

Fourth row, Charles Yamashiro.

COH photos except:

Sadami Hamamoto courtesy Hamamoto family.

Alice and Tetsui Watanabe courtesy Watanabe family.

INTRODUCTION

This project, *Captive on the U.S. Mainland: Oral Histories of Hawai'i-born Nisei*, focuses on the wartime experiences and observations of young Japanese Americans who were removed from their places of study, training, or employment on the West Coast and incarcerated in assembly centers and relocation camps.

The project is one inspired by the late Sidney Kosasa, noted for his founding of the ubiquitous ABC Stores of Hawai'i.

Sidney Kosasa was born in Hawai'i in 1919. He attended local schools before attending the University of California at Berkeley where he earned a degree in pharmacy. In 1942, under Executive Order 9066, Kosasa, like other West Coast residents of Japanese ancestry, was held in an assembly center. Later, he was held at Tule Lake War Relocation Center. Upon his release from Tule Lake in 1943, Kosasa began his career as a pharmacist in Missouri. After one year, he returned to Hawai'i. In 1949, he formed a family corporation and opened a pharmacy of his own. In the 1960s, he opened his first ABC Store. In 2001, at the time of his interviews with the Center for Oral History (COH), there were sixty stores in operation.

In his interview Kosasa spoke of racism, the uncertainties that followed December 7, 1941, his incarceration, the postwar years on the US Mainland, and his return to the islands. While speaking about his incarceration, he noted the presence of Hawai'i-born dockworkers, students, and medical professionals at Tule Lake. (See *An Oral History of Sidney Kosasa*, COH, February 2004.)

Several books have focused on the wartime incarceration of prominent Hawai'i issei, nisei, and *kibei* who were generally older and established in the fields of: business, culture and arts, education, government, and religion. These persons were taken from their homes, held locally and/or removed to Mainland camps. As a result of this focus, the public knows about confinement sites and the incarceration of Hawai'i Japanese almost solely through the experiences of these persons.

The experiences of Sidney Kosasa and of others he spoke about from Hawai'i are unknown or unfamiliar to most of the public.

Captive on the U.S. Mainland: Oral Histories of Hawai'i-born Nisei allows students, researchers, and the general public to learn that the history of wartime incarceration includes not only the older, more established Hawai'i Japanese taken from homes in the islands, but younger Hawai'i Japanese, on the West Coast, striving to realize the American Dream in 1941.

Project Interviewees

At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941, there were over 3,000 Japanese American students enrolled in institutions of higher learning in California, Washington, and Oregon. Among these students were some from Hawai'i, including men and women seeking not only bachelor's degrees, but advanced degrees for which training was not available in the islands.

In addition to college students, there were Hawai'i-born Japanese Americans who were living with relatives, completing their high school education, studying at vocational schools, or working on the West Coast.

In 1942, these Hawai'i-born youths and young adults, along with other persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast, were incarcerated in various camps by Executive Order 9066.

Included among the project interviewees are: five enrolled in institutions of higher learning, two in high school, one in a vocational school, and two employed.

The following is a brief description of the interviewees, in alphabetical order:

Sadami Yada Hamamoto: In 1941, she left her island home to live with her older brother, Yutaka Sam Yada, who had a young family and farm in Lodi, California. She helped care for a nephew, helped on the farm, and started her senior year at Lodi High School. During the war, she was incarcerated at Stockton Assembly Center and Rohwer War Relocation Center. Released in 1944, she worked as a live-in maid in Cleveland. In August 1946, she returned to the islands where she raised a family and held various clerical/administrative positions.

Edward Hiroshi Hamamura: A 1937 graduate of Kaua'i High School, he attended the University of Hawai'i, 1937–1940. Pursuing a degree in dentistry, he enrolled at the University of Southern California. In May 1942, he was ordered to go to Santa Anita Assembly Center where he was held for several months, followed by another period of incarceration at Amache (Granada) War Relocation Center. Released in 1943, he resumed dental school at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Returning to the islands in 1946, he established a dentistry practice. Edward Hamamura passed away on June 24, 2010.

Lily Yuriko Hatanaka: In 1941, she left Maui to live with relatives and enrolled at San Diego High School for her senior year. A few months after Pearl Harbor, she and her relatives were incarcerated at Santa Anita Assembly Center. Although attendance was suspended for her and other Japanese American students at San Diego High, she received her grades and diploma. In September 1942, she and relatives were moved to Poston III in Arizona. She was allowed to leave the war relocation center in 1943 for schooling in the Midwest—first at St. Xavier's College for Women, then at Drake University. Later, she returned to Hawai'i where she obtained her teaching credentials. She retired from teaching in 1976.

Evelyn Shigeno Matsui: Born and raised on the Big Island of Hawai'i, this 1936 high school graduate studied at Phillips Commercial School on the island of O'ahu. Eager to leave the islands, she boarded a ship to California in 1939. In Los Angeles, she attended the Marinello School of Beauty. She was incarcerated at Santa Anita Assembly Center and Heart Mountain War Relocation Center. At war's end in 1945, she and husband, John Matsui, bought a restaurant in Los Angeles. Their restaurant, Johnny's Shrimp Boat, became an LA institution. Long retired in Hawai'i, Evelyn Matsui passed away on April 23, 2010.

Charles M. Nakamura, Sr.: In September 1941, he left Hawai'i to pursue a degree in physical education and recreation at the University of Redlands in California. In May 1942, Japanese Americans in the area were ordered to Poston War Relocation Center in Arizona. He was assigned to Poston I. In 1943, he volunteered to serve with the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He later served with various units in Europe. Upon his discharge, he returned to Poston for his wife and daughter. At war's end, the family moved to Los Angeles where he enrolled in a trade school. Returning to the islands, he found employment at Waialua Agricultural Company. He retired in 1977.

Clara Tobar: Raised in the sugar plantation community of Pepe'ekeo, Hawai'i, she and husband, Sam Tobar, began married life in Los Angeles where Sam owned and operated a produce stand. During World War II, the Tobars were incarcerated first, at Santa Anita Assembly Center; followed by incarceration at Amache (Granada) War Relocation Center in Colorado. Their older son was born there. Following release from camp, they lived in Denver, Colorado for a short while; then they returned to the islands. The Tobars raised two sons.

Masayoshi Wakai: After graduating from the University of Hawai'i in 1939, he enrolled at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. From April to September 1942, he was held at Tanforan, a

race track converted to a camp for the incarceration of Japanese Americans. There, he received his diploma. In September 1942, he was incarcerated at Topaz War Relocation Center in Utah. At this camp, he was ordained a minister. About a year later, he gained his release. He went to Chicago where he was at seminary, taught Japanese language, worked for the YMCA, and counseled youths. Returning to Hawai'i in 1946, he has been a minister, counselor, educational specialist, and missionary/teacher (in Japan).

Alice Mitsuyo Watanabe: With only six more months of nurses' training to complete at St. Luke's Hospital in San Francisco, World War II interrupted her studies. St. Luke's, however, granted her a graduate nurse's certificate and arranged for her to take her state board exams later. In May 1942, she was held at Walerga Assembly Center. Almost two months later, she was incarcerated at Tule Lake War Relocation Center. At both camps, she worked as a nurse; at Tule Lake, she met and married Tetsui Watanabe. The couple was released in April 1943. After some time spent in Michigan and Illinois, they returned to Honolulu where they raised five children. Alice Watanabe passed away on January 2, 2010.

Tetsui Watanabe: Following high school graduation in Honolulu in 1931, he enrolled at the University of Hawai'i and later, the University of Chicago where he received a bachelor's degree. He received his medical degree from Rush Medical College in 1938. After completing his residency in Chicago, he returned home. But, with no openings in radiology in 1941 Honolulu, he sought and accepted a position in Los Angeles. Like other Japanese Americans on the West Coast, he was sent to an assembly center—Tulare which he helped set up. Later, he was sent to Tule Lake War Relocation Center. At both camps, he worked in the medical clinics. At Tule Lake he married Alice Mitsuyo Oka. Released from camp in 1943, he eventually returned to Hawai'i where he opened his private practice in radiology.

Charles Koichi Yamashiro: A 1939 Hawaiian Mission Academy graduate, he enrolled at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California. During World War II, he was initially held at Merced Assembly Center; later at Amache (Granada) War Relocation Center. Through the efforts of Dr. E. Cossentine, president of Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, he was released in fall 1942 to complete his BS degree there. He received a master's degree in biochemistry from the University of Utah and graduated from Loma Linda University Medical School in 1950. He completed his internship followed by residency in OB-GYN at Los Angeles County General Hospital. In 1958, he established a practice in Hawai'i where he and his wife, Naomi, raised their children.

Project Background and Methodology

The Center for Oral History applied for and received in 2009, a Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior.

Knowing that the number of nisei who can still recall and speak about their World War II incarceration decreases with each passing year and knowing that Hawai'i-born nisei on the West Coast in 1941 composed a small minority of the mass incarcerated, an urgent need to conduct interviews was felt.

The Center for Oral History through documentary research and community contacts located twelve Hawai'i individuals who like Sidney Kosasa were on the West Coast at the time of mass incarceration.

Following phone contacts and unrecorded preliminary interviews, ten out of the twelve agreed to be tape-recorded. One potential interviewee, not wanting to recall or share memories on the topic, declined to be recorded on tape. Another declined due to privacy issues.

While three of the final ten were technically not nisei—having been born in Japan or having been born in Hawai'i to nisei parents—COH nevertheless included them in the project since they were raised and educated in the islands at a time when most island nisei were growing up.

Selection was based on the interviewees' depth and breadth of knowledge; their ability to articulate prewar, wartime, and postwar experiences, particularly those associated with incarceration; and their willingness to participate as interviewees.

COH Director Warren Nishimoto and Research Coordinator Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto jointly conducted the interviews. Nine interviews were conducted at various sites on O'ahu from 2009 through 2011; for health reasons, one was conducted via phone. With the exception of the phone interview, all involved at least two or more sessions. The project's twenty-six sessions resulted in approximately thirty-four hours of taping.

Because interviewees were asked to comment on experiences and incidents oftentimes specific to their own lives, no set questionnaire was used. Instead, a life history approach was followed, creating biographical case studies centered mainly on the backgrounds of the interviewees and the events that shaped their lives. Topics discussed include: childhood and youth in Hawai'i, the prewar experience on the West Coast, incarceration in assembly and war relocation centers, release from confinement, and postwar life. Observations and reflections on these topics were also sought.

COH-trained student transcribers transcribed the interviews almost verbatim. The transcripts, audio-reviewed by the researchers/interviewers to correct omissions and other errors, were edited slightly for clarity and historical accuracy.

The transcripts were then sent to interviewees for their review and approval. Interviewees were asked to verify names and dates and to clarify statements where necessary. COH incorporated the interviewees' changes in the final version—the version that includes all statements the interviewees wish to leave for the public record.

After the transcripts were reviewed and approved, interviewees read and signed a document allowing the Center for Oral History-University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and the general public scholarly and educational use of the transcripts.

While not entirely accurate, the aim of an oral history interview is the creation of a reliable and valid primary-source document. To achieve this end, the researchers/interviewers selected interviewees carefully, established rapport, listened carefully with empathy, asked thoughtful questions, corroborated interviewee statements when possible, encouraged interviewees to review their statements with care, and obtained permission from the interviewees to use their real names, rather than pseudonyms.

Project/Transcript Usage

This project includes: photos of the interviewees, a glossary of all italicized non-English and Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) words, and a name/place index. A biographical summary precedes each interview.

There is a series of numbers at the beginning of each transcript. This series includes, in order, a project number, tape cassette number, session number, and year the interview was conducted. For example, 55-2-1-09 identifies COH project number 55, cassette number 2, recorded interview session 1, and the year, 2009.

Brackets [] in the transcripts indicate additions/changes made by COH staff. Parentheses () indicate additions/changes made by the interviewee. A three-dot ellipsis indicates an interruption; a four-dot ellipsis indicates a trail-off by a speaker. Three dashes indicate a false start.

The transcripts are the primary documents presently available for research purposes.

The audio recordings are in storage and not available for use, unless written permission is obtained from the Center for Oral History.

Center for Oral History

The Center for Oral History (COH) is a unit of the Social Science Research Institute, College of Social Sciences, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

The only state-supported center of its kind in the islands, COH researches, conducts, transcribes, edits, and disseminates oral history interviews focused on Hawai‘i’s past. Since its inception in 1976, COH has interviewed more than 800 individuals and deposited in archives, a collection of more than 36,000 transcript pages.

In addition to providing researchers with first-person, primary-source documents, the Center for Oral History produces educational materials (journal and newspaper articles, books, slideshows, videos, dramatizations, et cetera) based on the interviews.

The Center also presents lectures and facilitates discussions on local history, conducts classes and workshops on oral history methodology, and serves as a clearinghouse for oral history research relating to Hawai‘i.

For more information, visit the Center for Oral History website at www.oralhistory.hawaii.edu.