

Plaque unveils history of Japanese, others detained at WWII Griffith Park camp

By TAKESHI NAKAYAMA
Nichi Bei News
Contributor

LOS ANGELES — Griffith Park's Travel Town Museum, which offers fun train rides for birthday parties, business meetings and also shares railroad facts, has a little-known ugly history — it contained a World War II prison camp that held Japanese, as well as German and Italian immigrants, whom the United States government arrested on charges of being “potentially dangerous enemy aliens.”

That history was unveiled in a ceremony held at Griffith Park on April 20 with the introduction of a large plaque telling the stories of the prisoners, including Katsuo Nagai, typesetter at the *Rafu Shimpō* newspaper, and Italian fisherman Ralph Averga. Nagai was arrested for his alleged affiliation with the Hollywood Japanese language school, while Averga was removed from a fishing boat in San Pedro, according to the plaque.

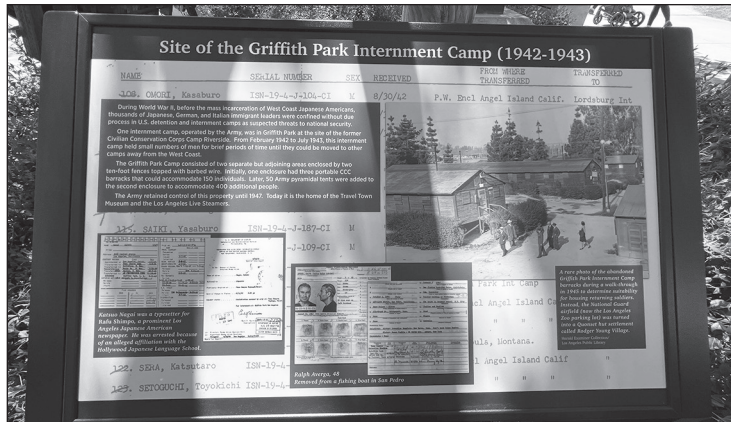
The city of Los Angeles decided to recognize this racist history with a plaque showing one of the few photos of the park's one-time barracks. It was approved by the Board of Recreation and Park commissioners. Information on the Griffith Park's camp came from research conducted by Russell Endo, a scholar in the history of concentration camps, and Linda Barth, a Griffith Park historian.

Government Overreach

The outbreak of World War II led to President Franklin Roosevelt authorizing the arrest — without due process — of “potentially dangerous” Japanese, German, and Italian immigrants. “The FBI and other agencies used their custodial detention lists, compiled in the 1930s, to arrest thousands of people,” explained Endo, a retired professor of sociology and Asian American studies at the University of Colorado.

“These men weren't prominent individuals. They were regular people ... We wanted to show the extent to which the government overreached its authority and went after everyone,” he emphasized via e-mail. Some specific groups were targeted, such as Japanese language school teachers (accused of being enemy propagandists) and Japanese and Italian fishermen.

Detainees first went to camps like Tuna Canyon Detention Station or to Department of Justice facilities, as far inland as Montana or New Mexico, according to Endo. Prisoners considered security threats were sent to internment camps run by the Army. The Griffith Park



REMEMBERING — The city of Los Angeles installed a plaque at the Griffith Park on April 20 to remember the Japanese, German and Italian immigrants who the U.S. government arrested and imprisoned during World War II without due process. photo by Russell Endo

camp was the only one in Southern California. Its two enclosed areas, with 10-foot barbed wire fences, could accommodate 550 prisoners.

Endo's research found there were 101 Japanese, 21 Germans and 4 Italians at Griffith Park; but he thinks the total of Griffith Park prisoners is higher. “The *Issei* at Griffith Park were from the Los Angeles area, and from Santa Barbara County. After Griffith Park, most of these *Issei* were transferred to camps in North Dakota and New Mexico.”

The Griffith Park prisoners were primarily older adults, and their families were “devastated by the sudden loss of men who were usually the breadwinners,” added Endo, who revealed that members of his family were imprisoned during World War II at Tuna Canyon, Santa Anita, Jerome, Ark. Rohwer, Ark. and Manzanar, Calif. “When these men were arrested, they and their families did not know why or where they were going and for how long.”

As he learned about the scope of the government's actions, Endo, who grew up in the Los Angeles area, said he felt “a mixture of emotions: anger about the injustice and great sorrow for the personal and family tragedies that resulted.”

Area Thrown into Panic

Community activist Kathy Masaoka revealed in a telephone interview with the *Nichi Bei News* that her grandfather Soshi Kadota was among the 265 mostly *Issei* men arrested in three days — Feb. 18-20, 1942 — from the Santa Maria-Arroyo Grande area and sent to various camps. Kadota, a farmer, was part of the first group of 77 Japanese immigrants imprisoned at Griffith Park. After he was taken away, his wife and 10 children had to sell the farm and were incarcerated at Gila River, Ariz.

“There were four Japantowns in Santa Barbara County that were thriving — in Santa Barbara, Lompoc, Guadalupe and

Santa Maria,” Masaoka pointed out. “It was the second biggest raid of Japanese on the West Coast. The Japantowns were all completely shut down within three days.”

Japanese residents around the Santa Maria area were “thrown into a panic because almost every *Issei* man was picked up, every family was affected,” she reported. “My grandfather was taken to Santa Barbara jail for about a couple of days ... to Griffith Park for one night, then shipped out to Bismarck, North Dakota. His family didn't even know where he went.”

“I've lived near Griffith Park for over 30 years, but I never knew that my grandfather was held there,” said Masaoka, 74, who lives in nearby Silver Lake. “I could walk to Griffith Park. We didn't know about a detention center there.”

Masaoka pointed out that her grandfather's arrest on Feb. 19, 1942, was a very significant day for Japanese Americans — the date of FDR's Executive Order 9066, which led to the expulsion of all *Nikkei* from the West Coast and their imprisonment in concentration camps.

Illuminate WWII Injustices

Kyoko Nancy Oda, whose family was imprisoned at Poston in Arizona in May 1942, also attended the event.

“I became aware of the Department of Justice camps in 2013 when I was asked to give testimony about Tuna Canyon to the L.A. City Council. I often wondered what happened day by day to the Japanese and Japanese Americans. I was a UCLA East Asian studies history major in 1970 but knew only about Tule Lake Concentration Camp and Manzanar,” she stated in an e-mail.

Oda, an organizer for the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Coalition, commented, “We believe history will repeat itself if we don't educate people about Tuna Canyon and other camps regarding the injustice that the

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SFSU names Grace Yoo dean of College of Ethnic Studies

San Francisco State University has named Grace Yoo the dean of its College of Ethnic Studies effective July 1, 2023. She currently serves as a professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State.

“Yoo has worked in higher education for over 30 years, 27 of which have been at SF State,” its Website states. “She began as an Asian American Studies lecturer faculty member in 1996 and 18 years later became chair of the same department, serving in that role until 2018 ...

Yoo “also held a number of positions at SF State, such as the inaugural director for both the Race, Empowerment and Justice Project in the College of Ethnic Studies and the First-Year Experience Initiative. In the latter role, she facilitated the implementation of First-Year Seminar, led faculty development efforts on the First-Year Experience, created the First-Year Experience Peer Mentorship program and produced several University reports examining first-year retention during COVID-19 ...

“The U.S. Department of Education awarded her SF State's first Asian American and Native

American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) grant. This grant and subsequent ones have totaled over \$5 million for culturally responsive outreach, student support and faculty development to decrease equity gaps and increase college access, retention and graduation rates.”

Yoo has a bachelor's degree in social sciences from University of California, Irvine, her master's degree in public health from Loma Linda University and her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California, San Francisco. Her research expertise is in social support and health among immigrants, women of color and Asian Americans. Yoo's book “Caring Across Generations: The Linked Lives of Korean American Families,” co-authored with Barbara Kim, won the Best Book Award from the American Sociological Association Asian/Asian American section.

Yoo replaces Amy Sueyoshi, who became SF State's provost and vice president for academic affairs in July 2022. Catriona Rueda Esquibel, associate dean of the College of Ethnic Studies, has served as interim dean.

Berkeley JACL chapter presents scholarships and awards

RICHMOND, Calif. — The Berkeley chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League awarded scholarships to four high school seniors and two college undergraduates, honored its Pioneer Award recipient and recognized its Youth Leadership recipient during its April 30 awards event held at the Richmond Country Club.

The four high school seniors received scholarships in recognition of their academic achievements, community involvement, school activities, work history, JACL involvement, written essay, letter of recommendation and group interview.

Jacob Flores (Castle High School, Kaneohe, Hawai'i) will attend Oregon State University as a business administration major. He received the George/Yoshimi Nakamura memorial scholarship.

Cynthia Lee (Castro Valley High School, Castro Valley, Calif.) will attend California Polytechnic State University as an environmental science major. She received the Terry Yamashita memorial scholarship.

Nicholas Sandford (Head Royce School, Oakland, Calif.) will either attend George Washington University in Washington, D.C. or the United States Military Academy at West Point in New York as an international relations major. He received the Bea Kono memorial scholarship.

Kaitlyn Yasumura (Carondelet High School, Concord, Calif.)

will attend Scripps College (Claremont, Calif.) as an undeclared major with an interest in pre-med. She received the Dan/Kathleen Date memorial scholarship.

The chapter also awarded scholarships to two college undergraduates:

Lindsey Kojima, a junior at the University of California, Berkeley, is a nutritional sciences major. She is from Culver City, Calif., and graduated from Culver City High School in 2020.

Nina Takahashi is a freshman at UC Berkeley majoring in film and Japanese. Takahashi, who is from Beaverton, Oregon, is a 2022 graduate of Southridge High School.

Kaz Mori received the chapter's Pioneer Award. Mori (one of the first Japanese American high school principals in the East Bay area) was honored for his dedicated service to the Berkeley chapter. The award honors those with the vision, compassion, and energy to lay a foundation for building the strong Japanese American community and nurturing future leaders.

Danielle Yuki Yang received the chapter's Youth Leadership Award. She was recognized for serving as UC Berkeley's *Nikkei* Student Representative to the Berkeley JACL chapter to plan the annual Day of Remembrance and NSU visits to incarceration camps. She served as the editor of the chapter digital newsletter, the *Berkeley Blast*.