If you had visited Fire Station No. 1 at the Minidoka Relocation Center, Hunt, Idaho, you might have noticed a mounted hawk glowering down at you just to your left as you entered the station.

Much of what we know about life in the two fire stations comes from a small memoir by Norio Mitsuoka. In Nisei Odyssey: The Camp Years, he describes how the station got the hawk, traveling to Shoshone for chicken and beer at a Japanese owned restaurant, and noted the importance of “books as a source of enjoyment, knowledge, and a bond in communication.”

He describes responding to a fire alarm at Block 23, “…our crew consisting of Captain – Flax Sao and Firemen – Fred Mori, Mits Abe, Shiro Iwana and I, as driver, jumped into our boots with our turn-out suit pants folded down over the boots. Pulling up our suspenders, prepared us from the waist down. Running to the Fire Truck and grabbing our turn-out coats and fire helmets hanging there in just a few moments we were outfitted and on our way.”

The fire crew also had a victory garden. “Our victory garden furnished fresh corn along with some other vegetables…. Picking the corn right outside of the Fire Station and rushing it to a pot inside probably gave us corn the likes of which you will not find even in the best of restaurants.”

In addition to fighting brush and grease fires at the camp, the fire crew assisted local fire departments in fighting structural and wildland fires in the area. S. Shosuke recalls that when neighboring towns would ask for assistance, the crew got fifty cents an hour. He noted, “And on top of that, they liked our work so much they said, ‘You’re the best firefighting crews we’ve ever had.”

The Minidoka Irrigator and the Twin Falls Times News reported that an all-female fire crew of nine was being trained to help staff Fire Station No. 2. The Times News article noted, “They man one of the two fire stations, carrying out all duties from driving a truck to holding the nozzle of a high-pressure hose, which is a job grown men don’t master without training.”

The photo above shows seven women in front of Fire Station No. 2. They are not named and there is no mention that they are the female fire crew. We would love to have help identifying the people in the photo and if they were part of the fire crew. Please contact Carol Ash at carol_ash@nps.gov if you have information related to the photo or about the women on the fire crew.
Golf in the Desert
by Andy Dunn
Idaho State University
Minidoka NHS Intern

A golf course was promised to Minidoka residents almost from the beginning of the camp’s opening. Finally started on April 10, 1943, it was built entirely by volunteer labor. The original plans called for a 9 hole course and cover an area just over a quarter square mile, but the land for three of the holes was re-purposed for project farm land.

The remaining six holes were located in the area north of blocks 29, 31, 35, and 37. The first tee box was located by the watchtower north of block 29. The process of clearing the holes for the golf course was similar to the way they cleared the land for farming. Since farm machinery was largely nonexistent, the labor was done almost entirely by hand.

Although the course was only a par 23, it was quite difficult because the entire fairways were made of dirt and covered in sagebrush, the exact things most golfers try to avoid! Each hole had its own tee box but the greens were made out of sand. Hunt had its own 20 member golf team that traveled for tournaments in Twin Falls and Burley. Unlike the baseball teams, the golf team wasn’t very successful.

Golf club membership dues were 25 cents per year. The Sports and Recreation Programs also installed miniature golf courses throughout the camp.

Community Activities Section conducted multiple hole-in-one golf contests. Participants were allowed 3 shots for a dime. To go to the final match they had to get within 2 yards of the pin, which would win a $1 award. C.A. would give $16 to anyone that got a hole in one, $5 for closest to the pin, $3 for second place, $2 for third, and $1 for fourth. Clubs and balls were provided. There was a golf committee that ran the daily operations of the course. W. Nakamura was the chairman.


If you have information about the golf course – layout of the holes, their appearance, or other information—please contact Carol Ash at carol_ash@nps.gov or Andy Dunn at dunnandr@isu.edu.
Recent additions to the Minidoka museum collection include two small wooden boxes made by Kotaro Iwanabe in April 1945. According to the Final Accountability Roster, Mr. Iwanabe was born on August 11, 1890 and was living in Los Angeles at the time of his forced removal into a War Relocation Center.

One box is approximately 10" x 8" x 10" while the other is 12" x 10" x 12." There is a small tag in the bottom of the larger box with Mr. Iwanabe’s name and date.

Each artifact in the Minidoka museum collection tells a story – about the maker, about the materials, and about the item’s function. They help describe everyday life in the camp. How the park acquired the boxes is another part of the story. They were found at the World Relief office in Seattle. Chris Liss and his supervisor recognized that these boxes had historic value and contacted the park. JoAnn Blalack, the park’s curator, is currently accessing and cataloging this set of boxes.

Wooden boxes made by Kotaro Iwanabe

Continued from page 1


Hey, you guys, take your [baseball] uniforms and whatever you have. Robert Ohki, on the eve of incarceration, 1942

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

In Next Month’s Issue

- Baseball Field Update
- Book of the Month
- Fire Station No. 1 Structure Update
- Recent Museum Collection Donation
- George Nakashima
- A Diamond Story

If you have information you would like to share or topics you would like to see discussed, please email Carol Ash at carol_ash@nps.gov.

Book Corner: Nikkei Baseball

Samuel O. Regalado

Japanese American baseball served a meaningful socio-economic role and entertainment lifestyle for this closely knit ethnic group on the wrong side of the tracks.

Fred Oshima

Nikkei Baseball highlights Japanese American players from immigration through incarceration and into the Major Leagues. Regalado states that the book is “about the game’s relationship to the Japanese community….and why the game was important in the construction of their identity.”

Chapter 1, “Baseball in Nikkei America,” describes the first major league tribute to Nisei baseball on July 20, 1996 at Candlestick Park in San Francisco. Baseball’s introduction into Japan and then Hawaii is highlighted in Chapter 2, “The New Bushido.”

In “Transplanted Cherries,”Regalado traces the growth of baseball among the Issei which resulted in baseball leagues up and down the west coast. In Chapter 4, “Baseball Is It,” the Nisei embraced the baseball euphoria and expanded its role in their communities. Chapter 5 is devoted to the “Courier League” in Seattle.

Chapter 7, “Catching Up,” notes that baseball came to a virtual standstill as the Nikkei transitioned from camp to home. It then highlights Japanese American and Japanese National players and managers who have made their mark in the Major Leagues.

Published by Univ. of Illinois Press.
Rohwer Matters Seventy Years Later

In his remarks at the 2013 dedication of the Jerome-Rohwer Interpretive Museum and Visitor Center in McGee, Arkansas, George Takei noted, “Places like the museum and the Rohwer camp exist to remind us of the dangers and fallibility of our democracy, which is only as strong as the adherence to our constitutional principles renders it...we understand how quickly cherished liberties and freedom may slip away or disappear entirely.”

George and his family were among the 8,475 people from Los Angeles and San Joaquin counties in California incarcerated at Rohwer War Relocation Center after spending time at the Santa Anita and Stockton Detentions Centers. Rohwer opened on September 18, 1942 and closed on November 30, 1945. Located five miles west of the Mississippi River, the camp was in a swampy area intertwined with canals, creeks, and bayous. Betty Matsuo recalls, “When the rains came in Rohwer, we could not leave our quarters. The water stagnated at the front steps....The mosquitos that festered there were horrible, and the authorities never had enough quinine for sickness...Rohwer was a living nightmare.”

Published twice a week, the camp newspaper, Rohwer Outpost, covered camp events and included a four page Japanese language supplement. Among the events covered were sports competitions and dances held in conjunction with nearby Camp Shelby, Mississippi, the training camp for the 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

A concrete water reservoir, two monuments, and smokestack remain from the historic camp along with a 1992 National Historic Landmark marker.

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A new dance/theater work entitled Gamen was presented by the CORE Performance Company of Houston, Texas on November 13, 2015 at McGee High School in Arkansas. The performance of contemporary dance, art, and music honored and remembered the Japanese Nikkei who were incarcerated during World War II, including at the two Arkansas Camps, Rohwer and Jerome.

Gamen was meant to interpret the human element rather than official history, inform the present and future rather than judge the past, and bring audiences to a subject that is relevant today.