



# Minidoka Internment National Monument

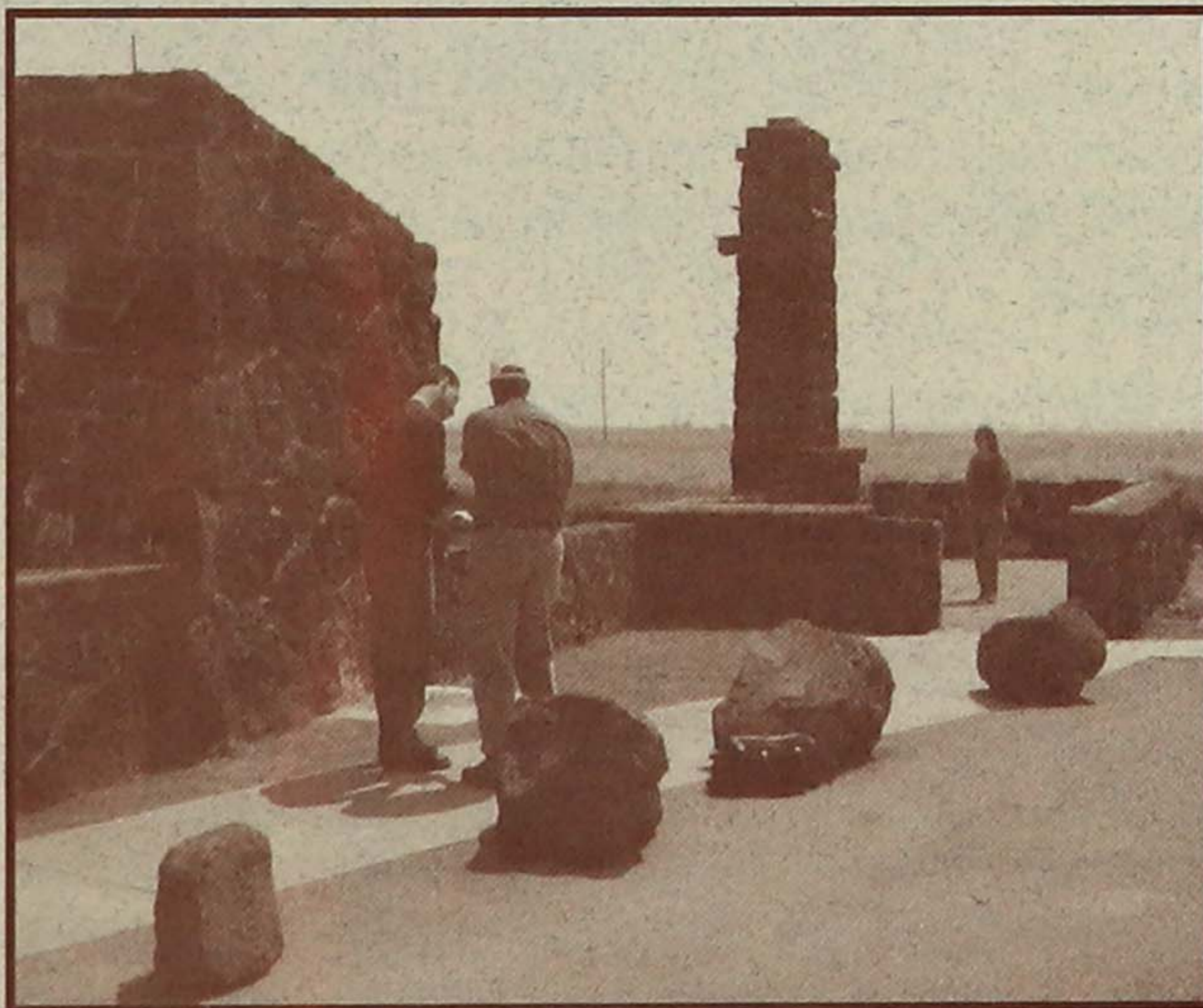


Jerome, Idaho

Residents of Block 21 (*Minidoka Interlude* 1943)

**Minidoka** Internment National Monument was established in 2001 as the 385<sup>th</sup> unit of the National Park System to commemorate the hardships and sacrifices of Japanese Americans interned there during World War II. Also known as the 'Hunt Camp', the Minidoka Relocation Center was a 33,000-acre site with over 600 buildings and a total population of about 13,000 internees held from Washington, Oregon, and Alaska. It was in operation from August 1942 until October 1945.

The Monument is located between the towns of Twin Falls and Jerome, Idaho in south central Idaho. There are no facilities or services at the site and the boundaries are not well marked. Many buildings and features that were part of the center are located on private property surrounding the Monument. Please do not enter any private property. We are working to establish relationships within the community to preserve the significant remaining components of the Relocation Center and to provide visitor services.



The 73-acre Monument preserves remnant features from the original camp such as the waiting room at the entrance station.  
NPS Photo

To get to the Monument from the intersection of Interstate 84 (I-84) and U.S. Highway 93 (US 93); Travel north on US 93 for 5 miles to the Eden exit. Travel east on Highway 25 for 9.5 miles to the Hunt Rd. exit. Travel east on Hunt Rd. for 2.2 miles to the small parking area on your right.

Collection of artifacts, rocks, plants, animals, or any other object within the National Monument is strictly prohibited. Help preserve your park by taking only memories and photographs. Report violations to the National Park Service at (208) 837-4793.

## Executive Order 9066

In the 1800's, many emigrants from Japan crossed the Pacific Ocean to seek economic opportunity in America. While some originally intended to return to their birthplace, many eventually established families, farms, businesses, and communities. America became their new home, yet the pioneers (Issei) and their American-born children (Nisei) encountered various forms of racial prejudice in the United States. Congress passed laws prohibiting resident aliens from owning land or obtaining citizenship. Quotas were set restricting the flow of new arrivals. With the rise of militarism in Japan in the early 1900's, newspapers often fanned the flames of prejudice.

Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 intensified hostility towards Japanese Americans. Some newspaper columnists and politicians treated all people of Japanese ancestry as potential spies and saboteurs. As wartime hysteria mounted, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. This authorized the U.S. military to remove "any or all persons" from the West Coast, but was targeted specifically to Japanese Americans and Japanese resident aliens.

## Japanese American Internment During World War II

Following the signing of Executive Order 9066, over 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry (Nikkei) living on the West Coast were forced to leave their homes, jobs, and businesses behind and report to designated military holding areas. This constituted the single largest forced relocation in U.S. history. Temporary assembly centers were located at fairgrounds, racetracks, and other make-shift facilities. Some 7,100 future Minidoka residents were first incarcerated at the Puyallup assembly center known as 'Camp Harmony.' Despite its innocuous name, it was no summer camp. Barbed wire fences surrounded the camp, armed guards patrolled the grounds, and movement between different areas of the camp was strictly controlled. It would be four to five months before the ten relocation centers established by the Wartime Relocation Authority were activated.

## Living Conditions at Minidoka

The first internees at Minidoka arrived to find a camp still under construction. There was no hot running water and the sewage system had not been constructed. The initial reaction to the stark landscape by many was one of discouragement. Upon arriving, one internee wrote:

*"When we first arrived here we almost cried, and thought that this is the land God had forgotten. The vast expanse of nothing but sagebrush and dust, a landscape so alien to our eyes, and a desolate, woebegone feeling of being so far removed from home and fireside bogged us down mentally, as well as physically."*

The camp consisted of administration and warehouse buildings, 36 residential blocks, schools, fire stations, an assortment of shops and stores, a hospital, and a cemetery. Internees built baseball diamonds and small parks with picnic areas. Their baseball team was virtually unbeatable. Taiko drumming and other musical groups were formed, and a newspaper was published, the *Minidoka Irrigator*.

Each residential block included twelve barracks-style buildings, each divided into six small one-room apartments, a communal dining hall, a laundry facility with communal showers and toilets, and a recreation hall. Provisions within the barracks consisted of Army issue cots and a pot-bellied stove. Light was provided by a single hanging bulb. Scraps of lumber were utilized to make furniture. Coal for the stoves and water had to be hand carried. When coal supplies ran low, sagebrush was gathered and burned.

The hastily built barracks buildings were little more than wooden frames covered with tarpaper. They had no insulation. During the winter of 1942 temperatures plunged to -21 degrees Fahrenheit. Over 100 tons of coal a day was needed for heating the buildings in the camp. Spring, with its ankle deep mud and blinding dust storms, was followed by scorching heat and temperatures soaring to 104 degrees Fahrenheit. An accidental drowning in the North Side Canal prompted internees to build a swimming hole to cope with the oppressive heat.

*Photo courtesy of Wing Luke Asian Museum*

Many living in the rural communities outside the camp thought that the internees were being "coddled," a perception that still persists today. For those inside the camp confined within barbed wire fence, with watchtowers and armed guards, the perception was considerably different.

Despite the harsh conditions at Minidoka, internees were resourceful. To create beauty in an otherwise dismal landscape, paths were lined with decorative stones and both traditional Japanese and vegetable and flower gardens were planted. Some of these impressions are still visible today, yet most traces of daily life at Minidoka are now gone.



*Internee tending a garden.*

*Library of Congress photo, Prints & Photographs Div., FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073907-D DLC*

## **Wartime Efforts**

The relocation centers were subject to the same wartime rationing as the rest of the country. Materials considered to be vital to the war effort were recycled. The camp at Minidoka was almost a self-sustaining community complete with vegetable gardens and hog and chicken farms. Japanese Americans interned at Minidoka were also an indispensable source of labor for southern Idaho's agricultural-based economy.

*"The Hunt residents were credited with possibly saving hundreds of thousands of dollars in crop losses in the local sugar beet and potato crops as well as in canneries, lumber mills, etc. in the region during the three years the center existed."*

*North Side News 8/5/82*

Internees cleared and cultivated 950 acres of inhospitable land and constructed the ditches and canals needed to irrigate them. After the camp closed in October 1945, these lands were divided into smaller farms and auctioned to the highest bidders or given to WWII veterans along with two buildings. Their names were drawn by lottery. Nisei were excluded from both the lottery and sale of the farms. Many of the buildings from the camp were also disbursed to government agencies and nonprofit organizations. Today, most of the former Relocation Center remains privately owned farmland.

## **A Question of Loyalty**

Segregation in the camps was achieved by employing what came to be known as the "loyalty questionnaire." The questionnaires were originally designed for determining suitability for military service. Two controversial questions were included. Those who answered "no" to both questions were labeled the "No-No's" and shipped to Tule Lake, California, the camp for 'dissenters.' Many at Tule Lake who answered "yes" to both questions were shipped to Minidoka, a camp for 'loyal' internees.

## **Could This Happen Again?**

It has been described as one of the worst violations of constitutional rights in American history and yet few Americans raised their voices in protest of the removal order. More than two-thirds of the internees were American citizens by birth. The system of checks and balances that was supposed to protect their rights and freedoms failed.

In 1988, the Civil Liberties Act acknowledged the fundamental injustice of the evacuation, relocation, and internment of citizens and permanent resident aliens of Japanese ancestry during World War II. A formal apology by the U.S. Government was made, as well as restitution to those individuals who were interned. And most importantly, the Act provides for a public education fund to finance efforts to inform the public about the internment so as to prevent the recurrence of any similar event.

## The 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Unit

**"You fought not  
only the enemy  
but you fought  
prejudice –  
and you have won."**

**President Truman addressing  
members of the 442<sup>nd</sup>  
at the White House in 1946**

Despite their internment, most Japanese Americans remained intensely loyal to the United States, and many demonstrated their loyalty by volunteering for military service. They were segregated into all Japanese American combat and intelligence units commanded by non Japanese Americans. Of the ten relocation centers, Minidoka had the highest number of volunteers, about 1,000 internees— nearly ten percent of the camp's total population during its peak. The 442<sup>nd</sup> combat unit fought in France and Italy alongside the 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion from Hawaii (also composed of Japanese Americans) and was the most highly decorated unit of its size in American military history. During WWII, 73 soldiers from Minidoka died while fighting for their country and two received the Congressional Medal of Honor.



*442nd Color Guard  
U.S. Government Archives*

### **For More Information:**

Superintendent / Minidoka Internment National Monument  
P.O. Box 570, Hagerman, Idaho 83332 (208) 837-4793  
[www.nps.gov/miin](http://www.nps.gov/miin) email: [MIIN\\_GMP@nps.gov](mailto:MIIN_GMP@nps.gov)

### **May We Suggest:**

Websites: [www.historicaljeromecounty.com](http://www.historicaljeromecounty.com) or [www.friendsofminidoka.org](http://www.friendsofminidoka.org)  
Visit the Minidoka Relocation Center display at the Jerome County Museum and the "restored" barracks building at the Idaho Farm and Ranch Museum (IFARM). (208) 324-5641  
Jerome County Historical Society and IFARM, 220 N. Lincoln, Jerome, Idaho 83338

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