

Story of Shigekichi Kajiwara

The War Years as an Alien Enemy

Preface

This article started out simply as a documentation of my grandfather's life during the second world war. Then as the current political environment unfolded, we quickly saw the relevance of my grandfather's story and how the unimaginable can easily happen again.

The current administration has used the Alien Enemies Act to detain, deport, and imprison Venezuelans in El Salvador. We are not at war with Venezuela, and the detainees were sent without due process. This is a small group, but the administration's stated goal is to "carry out the largest domestic deportation operation in American history."

This is the same Act used against my grandfather. The use of the Act immediately after Pearl Harbor led quickly to the internment of all Americans of Japanese ancestry on the west coast, citizens and non-citizens alike. The lack of significant opposition to the Alien Enemies Act made it easier to expand the pool of people who were incarcerated.

We must challenge the use of the Alien Enemies Act. The story of Shigekichi Kajiwara is an example of the tragedy that can happen when our political leaders do not do what is right and are allowed to freely act on their prejudices.

Introduction

Shigekichi Kajiwara is my grandfather, and I remember spending time with him as a young child in Japan in the early 1950s. He lived in rural Japan a train ride away from where my family lived at the time. He was a good grandfather, and I was always happy to see him. One of my few memories is when we hiked part of the way up Mount Fuji which was not far from where he lived. My mother described him as a gentle, kind, good person, which is how I saw him.

This story starts a little before Pearl Harbor, in the United States.

It is the story of one man out of a group of Issei men who were incarcerated as an Alien Enemy starting immediately after Pearl Harbor and put in the custody of the Department of Justice/US

Army internment camps for the duration of the war. My grandfather was arrested on Dec 8, 1941, at 3:45am.

Please note that there were 120,000 men, women and children who were later interned in the ten War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps after Executive Order 9066 was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on February 19, 1942. The WRA and the Department of Justice/US Army internment camps were two different things; but they were equally tragic.

Through the remarkable efforts of Japanese Americans and others The Civil Liberties Act of 1988, was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan. It was an acknowledgement of the injustice of the war time internment and an apology from the nation. In his speech at the signing, President Reagan formally apologized acknowledging it as a "grave wrong" based on "racial prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership."

Background

Referring to the Densho Encyclopedia we were able to match documented history with my grandfather's experiences. The stated mission of Densho is to preserve and share history of the WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans, to promote equity and justice today. Aside from minor edits, the following is directly from Densho.

It states on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked U.S. military bases in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. In the hours following the attack, the FBI arrested over 1,200 Japanese immigrant (Issei) men: businessmen, Buddhist priests, Japanese language teachers, and other community leaders. According to scholars over 17,000 were ultimately interned or held under the jurisdiction of the Justice Department as Alien Enemies. Densho estimates that about 5,500 who were interned in DOJ/US Army camps were never "paroled" to WRA camps. Most of these were Issei community leaders and the majority remained in the DOJ/US Army custody for the duration of the war.

Most of these men were taken first to Immigration and Naturalization Service detention stations and then to Department of Justice internment camps to undergo hearings. Officially, these internment cases were given individual legal review, but in practice, the majority of issei were imprisoned without evidence that they posed any threat to national security. Internees were not allowed legal representation.

Before Pearl Harbor

Shigekichi was born in Japan in 1889 and came to the US in 1907. This story starts in 1941. It is important to note that by then he had been living in the US for 34 years. He had gotten married and raised five children in Seattle, Washington. By all accounts he was a productive member of society and raised a family that most people would be proud of.



Shigekichi, his wife Umeko and the five children in the mid-1930s.

The earliest document we received from the National Archives regarding Shigekichi was dated **November 19, 1941**, and it says:

“He is a Japanese citizen and principal of South Park Japanese Language School in Seattle, Washington. He was the Secretary of the Japanese Association of South Park for 1938 and 1939.

“The Japanese Association is dominated by first generation Japanese and has engaged in many activities indicating sympathies with Japan; it sponsored Japanese language schools and Japanese fencing clubs which exercise a retarding effect on Americanization of second-generation Japanese. It has also collected contributions to the Japanese War chest. The officers are almost invariably pro-Japanese.”

So, before Pearl Harbor he was on the radar. And there were confidential informants involved. The above is their summary of Shigekichi Kajiwara. There is an inflammatory mention of a Japanese war chest, but there are no details and no other reference in the National Archives file.

It is interesting to note that an important part of his life is not even mentioned. He had owned and operated a restaurant which served American diner food. He was living the American dream and had no thoughts other than being an American. Also, he is identified as the Principal of the Japanese language school. That may have been the case, but his wife was a formally trained teacher, and she ran the school.

Starting Immediately after Pearl Harbor

Shigekichi was apprehended in early morning **December 8, 1941**, by the FBI and taken to the Seattle Immigration Station where he was remanded to custody of US Immigration and Naturalization Service. On **December 28, 1941**, he was transferred to Fort Missoula, Montana. An FBI document dated **January 13, 1942**, indicates the following:

“SHIGEKICHI KAJIWARA was apprehended at approximately 3:45 A.M., December 8, 1941. At this time a thorough search was made and only books and records of account, paid invoices and other letters all written in English, were found. Inasmuch as they did not appear to be subversive in any way, they were not taken.

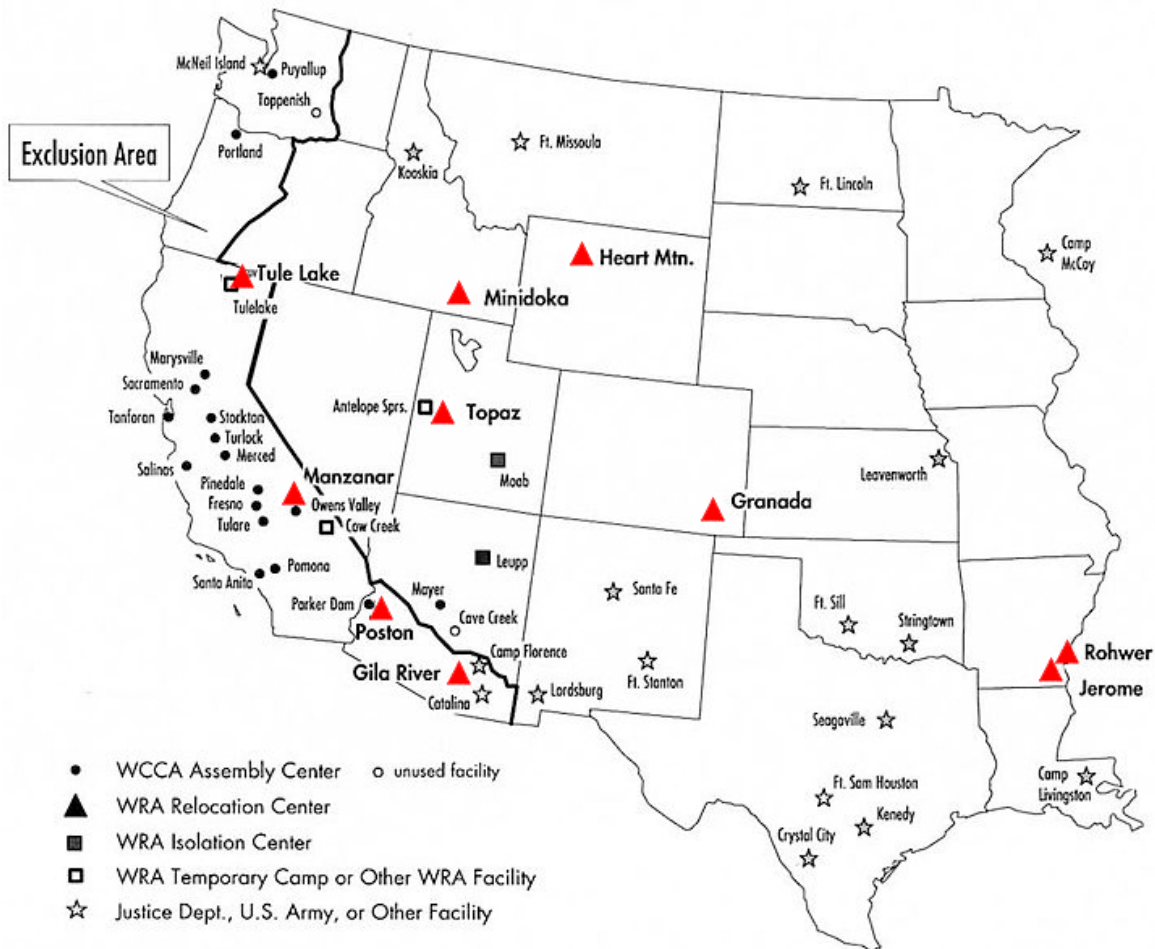
“About February 1941, Confidential Informant advised that the subject was a Japanese citizen, the Principal of the South Park Japanese Language School at 1062 Austin Street; was Secretary of the Japanese Association of South Park for 1938 and was re-elected for 1939; and that he read the "Imperial Script" at Kigensetsu on February 11, 1939.

“On August 5, 1941, in the Japanese newspaper in Seattle known as Nichi Bei Koron, there is an article entitled, ‘The Real Power of Japanese Living in the United States’, and in this article was listed all the Japanese businessmen who had an ability to have more than a 100,000 yen living standard. The subject’s name appeared on this list. It was further ascertained that he was the Principal of the South Park Language School and had held this position for over 28 years.”

On **February 6, 1942**, there was a Department of Justice Hearing, and the outcome was a recommendation for internment.

On **June 23, 1942**, Shigekichi was relocated from Fort Missoula, MT to Lordsburg, NM. Then on **June 17, 1943**, transferred to Immigration and Naturalization Service and interned in Santa Fe, NM. His incarceration has now taken him from the Seattle Immigration Station to Ft. Missoula, MT, to Lordsburg, NM, to Santa Fe, NM. Map below shows the network of WRA and DOJ/US Army camps that existed at the time.

Japanese American Confinement Sites During World War II



Source: *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites*. National Park Service. Revised July 2000.

Private letters between Shigekichi and Umeko

FBI memo dated **July 6, 1943**, documented letters that were exchanged between Shigekichi and his wife Umeko, who at this point was incarcerated at the WRA internment camp in Minidoka (Idaho) with their sons. The two daughters were in Manchuria, where they were when the war started. Shigekichi and Umeko shared their unhappiness with the situation. They were particularly unhappy about how US born Niseis who are US citizens are being treated, while more resigned about the treatment of Isseis. And they were unhappy that the youngest son had volunteered for the Army.

Another Hearing

On **December 6, 1943**, there was another hearing, and the outcome was a recommendation for continued internment. The report, however, does a good job of describing the thoughts of Shigekichi and Umeko. Apparently, Shigekichi was able to speak directly, and his thoughts are documented. From the report:

“This man presents a rather peculiar case. He was very honest in his answers and seemed to be a high-class Japanese. He entered the United States in 1907. He made 2 trips back to Japan in 1914 and 1922 to see his parents and relatives. The main examination centered around certain letters which passed between the subject and his wife since internment. The subject evidently intended to stay in America all his life and raise his family here and Americanize them. After being here more than 30 years and then being torn up and sent to an internment camp, in the light of the fact that he had conducted his home with the ideals above-mentioned, he and his wife were rather bitterly disillusioned. Unquestionably he felt that the conduct of this government was unjustified. It is his desire to go back to Japan and spend the rest of his life there because he feels that he would be free and supposedly that there would be no antagonism against him. He thinks that perhaps his wife would rather remain here with the children. He was frankly asked whether in view of his attitude he would not expect the Board to recommend his continued internment. He equally frankly replied that he might expect that. One of his sons has applied for teaching Japanese to members of the American Army and he expects that he will obtain the position. The other son, as has been stated before, expects to go into American army but not with the consent of the father and mother. The third son is with the mother at Minidoka.

“The subject was very cooperative in the examination. While we do not think that he would do anything to aid the cause of the Japanese, in view of his attitude, his present ties to Japan and his intelligence, we think it better that he remains interned and so recommend. “

Repatriation

The war with Japan ended on September 2, 1945. At this point there was nothing left in Seattle for Shigekichi, his family who had been incarcerated in Minidoka was now settled in Chicago. Shigekichi was now 56 years old. He lost his restaurant business. He lost his Japanese language school. He lost his home, and his community of friends and colleagues of 34 years. This is a man who wants out

On **September 24, 1945**, an Application for Repatriation was submitted. Shigekichi was repatriated to Japan via Seattle, Washington, on **November 21, 1945**.

Life After the War

Shigekichi moved to his family home in Oishi, Yamanashi-ken, Japan. His two daughters and their families who were living in Japan and Manchuria before and during the war, came back to the US when they were able. But for a period, they were living in Japan and the older daughter and family lived with Shigekichi in Oishi. The younger daughter (my mother) and family lived in another city in Japan but made periodic visits. His middle son who taught Japanese language to the US military was stationed for a while in Japan and was able to help Shigekichi, as well as help the two daughters in getting back to the US. By 1955 most of the family had left. Shigekichi never returned to the US and died in 1976.

A good life of 34 years in the United States was turned upside down over night. He was incarcerated for four years starting December 8, 1941, as an alien enemy. He had every intention of living his entire life in the US, but after this experience chose to return to Japan. He lived another 30 years, while during most of that time his family was in the US.



A 1971 photo of Shigekichi and a granddaughter, with a great granddaughter in Oishi with Mount Fuji in the background. An occasional visit by family.

Summary

This is the story of one man, Shigekichi Kajiwara. Densho estimates that there were 126,000 men, women and children who were incarcerated in the WRA camps and the DOJ/US Army camps. All their lives were turned upside down and each has their own story. We must tell and retell all aspects of this history, and we must connect with current events and make sure these past mistakes are not repeated.

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Acknowledgements

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