

February 27th will probably just be another day to you, unless it's your birthday or anniversary -- or if you are of Japanese ancestry. For Japanese it is the anniversary of that bleak day in 1942 when Japanese living in the Columbia Gorge area had to report to the stockyards in Portland for processing and transfer to detention camps.

Following Pearl Harbor emotions in some areas quickly got out of hand. The Hood River Valley, with a substantial number of Japanese engaged in orcharding and other agricultural activities, was one of the "hot spots" on the Pacific Coast. Most Issei, first generation Japanese, and Neisei, the second generation, had been generally accepted in the valley as industrious, respected neighbors. Pearl Harbor, however, made each and every one of them suspect and feelings got out of hand, fanned by an energetic American Legion post.

Masui Yasui, respected leader of the Japanese community because of his successes in the mercantile and orchard business, was seized within a week of Pearl Harbor and denied the chance to supervise his business affairs or be with his family until-----
----- . Two other Japanese men were also whisked away. And, beginning on the fateful February 27th, their families were taken to the dismal internment camps set up by the government. A heartbreaking part of this was that, in general, their properties had to be sold at a great loss or put in the hands of caretakers who "skimmed the cream" and let the properties deteriorate.

in too many cases

The classic book "Stubborn Twig" authored by University of Oregon professor Lauren Kessler recounts the bitter persecution Hood River Valley residents heaped on their Japanese neighbors, both during and after World War II. Even though I lived just across the Columbia, I had no idea of the depth of the race hatred until I recently read this book. Maybe

I was so preoccupied with my own leaving for Navy duty that I was unaware of the depth of anti-Japanese hysteria at work on the south shore of the Columbia.

It was quite a different story on the north shore. Several Japanese families who lived and farmed in the Bingen-White Salmon area were not the targets of such general or bitter hatred. In fact, letters found in the effects of the late George Kida were quite revealing. Mrs. George Pyatt who, with her late husband, had given their ranch properties to the Kida family in appreciation of their long years of service to them, wrote an impassioned letter to government officials asking that the Kidas be spared the indignity of incarceration. Her letter was somewhat self-serving as she, an aging invalid, needed the continuing care of Kay Kida.

Interestingly, Mrs. Pyatt's request was reinforced by a petition signed by 63 neighbors, including some White Salmon businessmen, attesting to the Kida's loyalty and requesting deferment for them. It was to no avail and the Kidas and their son went off as scheduled to detention camps. Mrs. Pyatt, deprived of her caretaker, died a lonely death at Medical Lake.

Fortunately the Kidas had a willing neighbor, Al Johnson, who took care of their properties while they were away and, unlike many of those of Japanese ancestry, they came back to their land and resumed their lives among friendly neighbors.

Another example of the north shore difference was recounted recently by Merna DeBolt who writes a regular column entitled *Museum Musings* for the Skamania County Pioneer. She pointed out that John Dickey of Dickey Farms was asked by four of the Japanese families farming at Dallesport to take over

their productive truck gardens during their exile. He did and the four families -- Toda, Makino, Magaki and Akito -- came back to well maintained properties after World War II. Merna knows this story well for she, as a Columbia High School student, worked for the Dickeys on these Japanese-owned farms.

So we see that the Japanese on the north shore of the Columbia felt a far more compassionate response than did their kinsmen in the Hood River Valley. While most of this occurred in Klickitat County, neighboring Skamania County has now honored the Japanese with a major cultural exhibit at the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center in Stevenson. The Japanese are honored there for their contribution to building of the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway lines and the part Japanese labor played in the building of the five tunnels on Highway 14. It is obviously a part of putting this sad chapter in American history behind us.