

Japanese maple and cherry Trees  
planted along site exterior and  
throughout tree wells

Historic reconstruction of  
Tanforan horse stalls

"They Wore Their Best"  
Photo exhibition

Internee's names

New paving stones

Tanforan map

Benches

Existing walls

Donor's tags

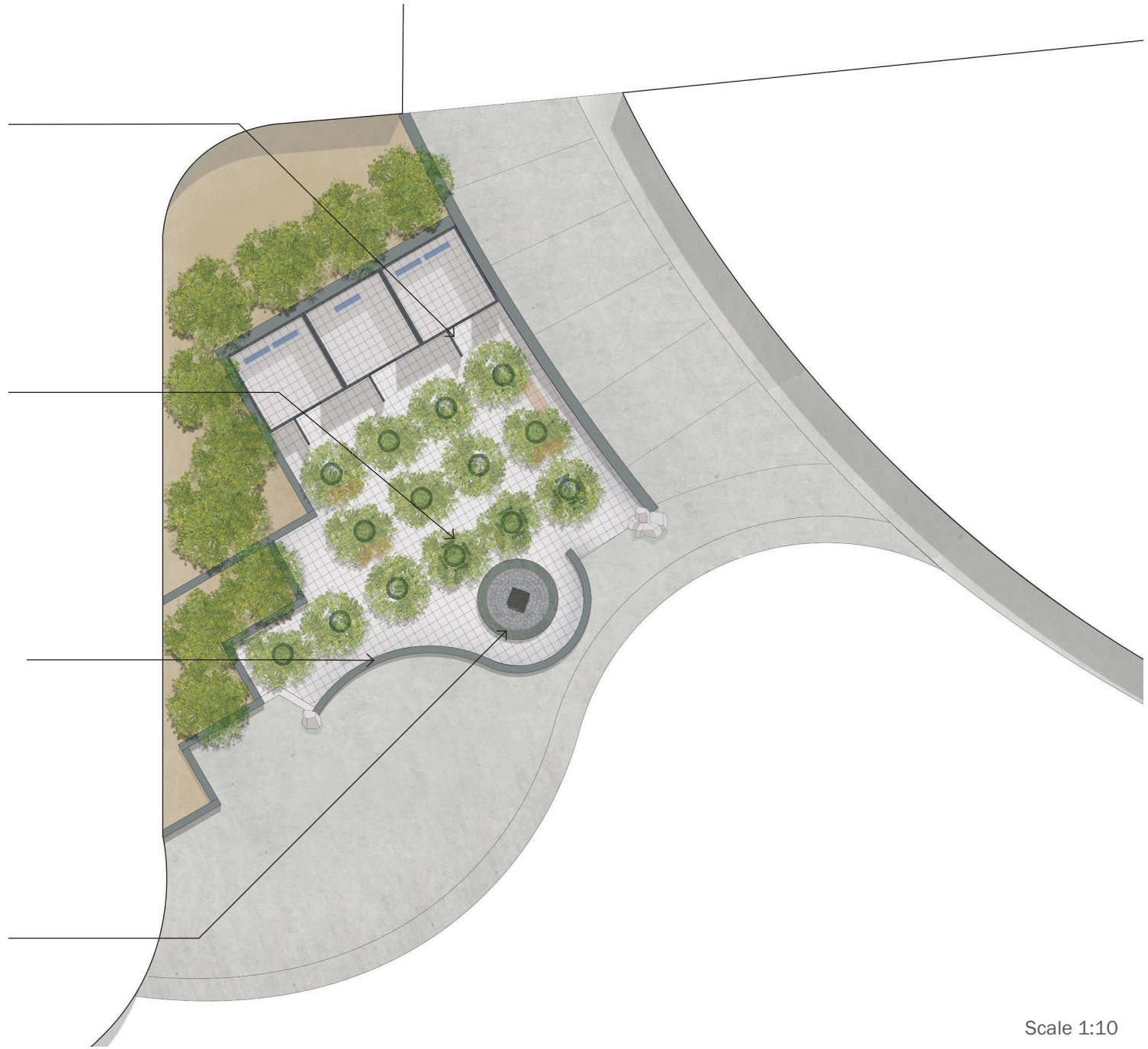
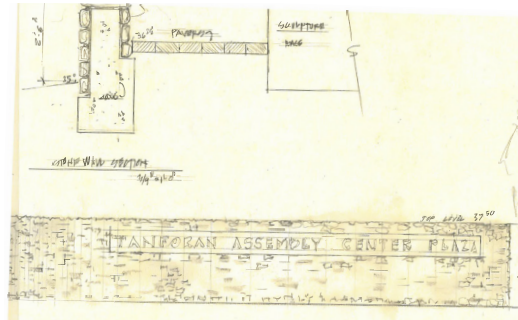
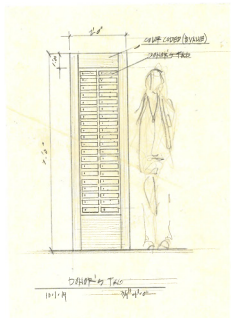
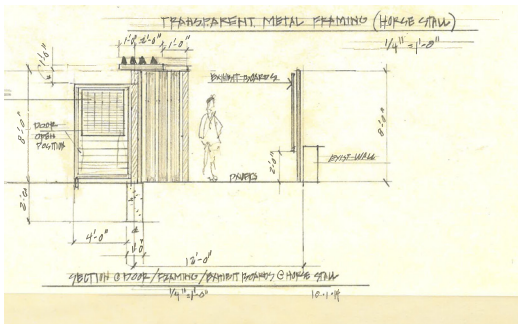
Sculpture on Pedestal

24" stone wall with plaza name

Rock installation



Scale 1:10



Scale 1:10



# They Wore Their Best... The Japanese-American Evacuation and After Photographs by Dorothea Lange and Paul Kitagaki, Jr.

### Establishing Roots

**J**apanese Americans have been in the US for over 100 years. Like most immigrants, they came to America seeking better lives for themselves and their families. After arriving in California in the late 1800's as laborers, farmers, and students, they worked in the fields, homes, and shops fueling the West Coast economy. As more women arrived through the 1920s, households took hold.

Through their industriousness and innovation, they adapted techniques from their homeland—applied them to their adopted country and realized their hopes and dreams in their American-born children, the Nisei.<sup>1</sup> Through school and civic activities like Boy Scouts and Blue Jays, Nisei youth were introduced to the larger community and to democratic values. The Nisei had succeeded in American influences brought into the home, about courtship, communication, and personal freedoms. At times, traditional parental expectations collided with their children's American ideals.

The greatest test for Japanese Americans, would be their experience during World War II.

*"It was only natural that we would respect parental ties and follow the decisions the Issei mapped out... Yet, we were also American citizens, such as dances, parties, and independence to marry someone of our own choosing."*

—MARIKO SUYUN<sup>2</sup>

### Wartime CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

**N**ews of the bombing by the Japanese Imperial forces on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941 shocked America. For about 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast of the US, and several thousand Japanese, Latin Americans, the attack at Pearl Harbor triggered actions that forever altered the course of their lives. Years of anti-Japan hostility, and economic competition against Japanese Americans were further intensified by Japan's military aggression in the Pacific.

The attack spread panic and fear in the hysteria, everything Japanese was linked to treachery of Japan. The public could not differentiate the FBI under the Enemy Alien Program, begin arresting the Issei and other "enemy aliens" deemed as "dangerous persons". These heads of households, community leaders, teachers and newspaper publishers, and clergy were imprisoned in separate Justice Department internment camps throughout the US. These actions shocked the Nisei who had grown up believing strongly in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights taught to them in American schools.

Never charged with a crime nor afforded a trial, persons of Japanese ancestry were subjected to arrest, frozen bank accounts, curfew, restrictions and exclusion, and eventually separated from their homes and imprisoned en masse in detention camps for long as five years.

<sup>1</sup>Issei is Nipponese (1901), courtesy of OCCAS (Office of Cultural and Community Activities). This exhibit was produced by the National Japanese American Historical Society, Inc. for the National Council and Citizens' Group of Japanese-Americans.  
<sup>2</sup>Source: *Issei's Comments, The Story of Japanese-Americans in the United States*, edited by YUKIO, SUMI, SUMI, SUMI, San Mateo Chapter, JACI. (San Mateo Chapter, National Japanese American Historical Society, 1993).  
<sup>3</sup>Source: *Issei's Comments, The Story of Japanese-Americans in the United States*, edited by YUKIO, SUMI, SUMI, SUMI, San Mateo Chapter, JACI. (San Mateo Chapter, National Japanese American Historical Society, 1993).  
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### How Did This Happen? "Rac hysteria, war prejudice, and failure of political leadership."

—US COMMISSION ON THE WARTIME  
RESIDUALS AND INTERMENT OF CHINESE,  
THE CHINESE CAUSES WHICH LEAD TO THE  
INTERMENT OF JAPANESE AMERICANS<sup>1</sup>

### Eviction

**Gen. John L. DeWitt** was given full authority to implement Order 7036. Under the direction of Col. Bert Davidson, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) opened 66 offices on the West Coast to undertake the removal of all people of Japanese ancestry.

*"My sister comes home with a tag with a number on it... I think it's quite traumatic... I think it's demeaning."*

—DORIE 'DORIE' KAWAOKA<sup>2</sup>

Relocation was voluntary but failed. On April 1, 1942, instructions were posted along the West Coast, officially ordering all persons of Japanese ancestry to report for removal or face punishment.

The WCCA began setting up 175 assembly and detention centers, at railroads and fairgrounds, twelve of them in California. Japanese Americans were ordered to register, given a family identification number and individual tags for family members and their luggage. Officials told families bring only what they could carry. All property, businesses, farms, household goods were heavily sold, disposed, stored, cared for by other non-Japanese, or simply abandoned.

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### Arrival at Tanforan

**T**hey came by the bus load, thousands of Japanese ancestry, dressed in their best clothes, arrived at what had been the Tanforan Race-track in San Bruno, CA, now designated the Tanforan "Assembly" Center in April 1942. It became a temporary home of 7,814 people of Japanese descent, many from American citizens. Most of its population came from San Francisco, the East Bay, and the Peninsula—including 871 from San Mateo County.

Tanforan became the second-largest assembly center in population after Santa Anita in Southern California. It was bordered by Hoar Avenue (North), Forest Lane (South), El Camino Real (West) and the Southern Pacific railroad (East).

*"I felt like a prisoner. Because you felt the barbed wire fences, the guard towers, you felt like being in a prison camp."*

—YOSHIO 'YOKI' AOKA<sup>3</sup>

As buses pulled up to the race-track, barbed wire, watchtowers, and armed guards greeted the passengers. At the entrance, they underwent an induction process that included registering all family members and undergoing searches for contraband items such as knives, cameras, and liquor. After the search, each person was subjected to a medical examination.

*"My first impression was, 'This is terrible.' After we got settled, I just walked away and walked to the grandstand and I cried..."*

—JIM KAWAMURA<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Source: *Issei's Comments, The Story of Japanese-Americans in the United States*, edited by YUKIO, SUMI, SUMI, SUMI, San Mateo Chapter, JACI. (San Mateo Chapter, National Japanese American Historical Society, 1993).  
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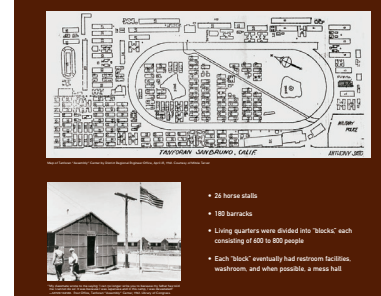
### Housing

**T**he conditions were deplorable and dehumanizing. Hastily constructed barracks were built in the center of the track and some still under construction. Common necessities, laundry rooms, and latrines not yet completed, sewage and drainage provided. For this reason, many families had to be in converted horse stables, half housed the house, the other half the back and toilet. Although the stables were white-washed prior to arrival, cleaning had been minimal. Hay, horsehair, and manure were embedded in the newly whitewashed walls. Some developed severe allergies. The stench was overwhelming. Efforts to scrub the floor and walls with warm water and soap only made the stench worse.

Tanforan "Assembly" Center administration spent an average of only 27¢ per person of the 50¢ allotted. Basic army ration were served. Cakes of meat that had often gone rancid. Medical care was understaffed and untreated. Only one registered nurse handled 3,000 people.

*"When I saw the horse stables, it was so grim... I remember saying right out loud, 'Well, if you had any doubts as to what they think of us, this is it. This filthy horse stable...'"*

—JANET MINOIA, an 11 year old internmentee<sup>5</sup>



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### Tanforan Camp Life

**W**ithin the confines of barbed wire encampments, deprived of their freedom, internmentees managed the responsibilities of daily life. In a more formal economy, the internmentees, under the sanction of the administration, set up classes to teach sports, sewing, arts and crafts in an attempt to make their desolate surroundings more habitable. For practical purposes, they sewed their four-way yards to build victory gardens, write and edit newsletters, built furniture from scrap lumber, carved bird pins from Asanti twigs, handcrafted

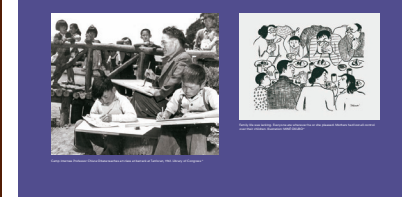
quilts, and flower bouquets from cress paper to be used in gift exchanges. In spite of their imprisonment, they still managed to see beauty and create art, to only recent times, with the passage of legislation to preserve these World War II incarceration sites, has public attention and historic validation been afforded to these seemingly mundane handcrafted items under the guise of "prison art."

In doing with their imprisonment, most of the Tanforan internmentees adopted the attitude of "Shikata-gai" — "we often could not resist complaining 'It can't be helped.'" It embodied the Japanese cultural trait of making the best of a bad situation.

Tanforan became well known for the quality of its art classes, which were taught by a prestigious faculty of artists, among them, UC Berkeley art professor Chuzo Chuzo Matsumura "George" Ishii, and his wife Hiako, and Minor Chubb, who preserved her art and illustration in her book *Quilts 1942*.

*"It's a sinful waste of human energy, ability, brains, and productivity to lock up thousands of people and force them to do nothing."*

—DORIE 'DORIE' KAWAOKA<sup>6</sup>



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