

“Life would be so wonderful if all this hatred and racial discrimination was abolished from the Earth. Believe me, this war has taught us all a great deal.”

- Louise Ogawa, age 18,
in a 1944 letter from Poston to Clara Breed

Immigration was a controversial issue in the 1920s. It is a controversial issue today. The Japanese were not the first immigrants to face the loss of their civil rights. And they will not be the last.

The purpose of this exhibition is to honor the contributions, and the resilience, of Chula Vista’s Japanese community. The exhibition is also intended to generate a thoughtful discussion on the importance of tolerance in a diverse society – and to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.



Acknowledgements

This exhibition is sponsored by the Friends of the Chula Vista Library and the Friends of the Heritage Museum in partnership with the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs and artifacts are the property of the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego.

The exhibition and its related activities are partially funded by California Reads, a program made possible with support from Cal Humanities in partnership with California Center for the Book.

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Museum Hours

Noon to 4 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday
Noon to 3 p.m. Saturday

Group tours are available by appointment. For more information, contact the Museum at 619 427-8092 or through the Friends of the Chula Vista Library website: www.thefcvl.org.



Chula Vista Heritage Museum
360 Third Avenue, Chula Vista, CA
June 2012 - May 2013

Working the Land

Chula Vista's Japanese community has a long and rich history, beginning with the first immigrants who arrived in 1905 as laborers in the citrus orchards and nearby salt works. As the community grew, the Japanese used their expertise in farming to develop a thriving celery industry, which allowed the city to claim the title "Celery Capital of the World."

Defending the Land

The Japanese success brought national attention to Chula Vista, but it also brought rising resentment from Caucasian farmers who feared the Japanese-grown celery would flood the market and lower prices.

The state's Alien Land Laws prohibited Japanese immigrants from owning or leasing land, and Chula Vista - which was the focus of two cases that reached the U.S. Supreme Court - soon earned a reputation as the "heart of the anti-Japanese movement."

Through the efforts of local growers Tsuneji Chino and Fred Stafford, the two sides came



together in 1932 to form the Chula Vista Celery Union, allowing the local industry to thrive amid the depths of the Great Depression.

Forced from the Land

But with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the lives of America's Japanese changed overnight. The FBI arrested community leaders and held them in the county jail. Homes were searched for contraband; local newspapers called for the immediate removal of Japanese living on the West Coast.

On February 19, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the "evacuation" of all Japanese from Washington State to California. By April 1942, Chula Vista's Japanese community had disappeared.

Most of the 450 Japanese from Chula Vista spent the duration of the war in Poston, a hastily built "internment camp" in the Arizona desert. There, they created new homes in the rustic barracks and a new community inside the barbed wire.

Reclaiming the Land

With the end of the war, the Japanese left the camps and returned home, along with the soldiers who had served in the highly decorated, all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Chula Vista had changed dramatically during the war, and new homes had taken root in the old celery fields.

Although many Japanese had lost their homes, farms and livelihoods, they slowly rebuilt their lives. Local farmers pioneered innovations in plastic-covered row farming and drip irrigation; other Japanese pursued careers in medicine, business and education. In 1981, Chula Vista adopted Odawara, Japan, as a Sister City, and in 1994, the city elected its first Japanese American Mayor.

Chula Vista's Japanese community was, once again, a part of the land.

