

Karl Matsushita. Presenter's Script.
JTF's Cultural Heritage and Sustainability Committee. Monday, May 3, 2021

1. Heading

Several years ago, RAFU SHIMPO published an article about our Library on the front page with heading "Best Kept Secret in Town."

2. building and gate.

On the corner of Sutter & Octavia in San Francisco Japantown, there is a 13-story building, Nihonmachi Terrace.

3. building walk

4. outer entrance.

Right of the entrance there is a gate which leads to the Library

5. inside.

The "secret" is that this humble facility holds the largest collection of publications related to Japanese in America:

Hawaii, California, Mainland.

This collection includes over

45,000 books

1,500 boxes of JA vernacular newspapers (complete original print editions)

4,000 boxes archival documents:

government, organizations, individual personal files

ephimera and booklets

DVD & CD music recordings:

78-rpm, 45-rpm, LP, audiotape reels and cassettes

films: 8mm, 16mm, videotape

periodicals: journals, magazines

6. books, misc

The Library collects all categories relating to Japanese Americans such as

(1) History

(2) Literature

written by Japanese Americans

and others who wrote on Japanese Americans

(3) art

(4) cultural activities

such as tea ceremony, odori, flower arrangement

(5) children's books

written for JA children

7. Sunset Magazine 1907: cover and article title page

(1) our oldest book was published in 1892

(2) the San Francisco Japanese American vernacular newspapers yearbooks in nekan (?) was published in 1910

(3) Japanese American vernacular newspapers start 1916

As shown, "Sunset" magazine in 1907 describes San Francisco Japantown's daily life of its residents.

8. Sunset: buildings

Thos photos from this (Sunset) article includes Japantown buildings including the original Benkyodo Store

9. JACL boxes

One major collection is archival documents from the National JACL Headquarters.

This collection starts from 1928

Undoubtedly this collection is a definitive Japanese American history with original documents.

The National Historical Publication and Records Commission of the National Archive supported cataloguing (the JACL archival collection) as one of the national treasures. The Finding Aid is available on the Library website.

10. JACL camp newspaper

In this collection include most of the original internment camp newsletters. The Library also has separate collection of Assembly Center newsletters.

11. JACL LEC

The JACL Legislative Education Committee collection contains documents which tell how Japanese American Redress was won.

Community rally by itself is not enough.

It took old-fashioned politics to do the job.

Meaning, you need money to lobby, like all corporate lobbyists.

Then one needs Congressmen to fight for the piece of government money.

LEC raised the money, and 4 Japanese American Congressmen combined their political IOUs to get the legislation passed.

This collection is the story-behind-the-scenes.

11b. JACL LEC

From the Library's documents collection and other sources, we discovered many unknown aspects of Japanese American history.

For example:

1. Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered preparation for building Japanese American Concentration Camp in 1936.

2. Navy Intelligence had compiled a list of Japanese American organizations to be investigated in preparation for war, also in 1936.

3. Legal Department of Department of Justice (DOJ) declared that "Loyalty Question" to Japanese is illegal.

In fact, only Japanese Americans in Camps were forced to declare their loyalty position.

4. General DeWitt issued a proclamation that federal government will care for real property of Japanese internees until they return from Camp.

5. Issei fought Anti-Alien Law vigorously.

They raised money and campaigned in mass media and in court.

They even rallied the Japanese government to support their cause.

6. A group of Issei nursery owners hired a "hot shot" lawyer in San Francisco and formed a corporation. That corporation kept their nursery running while they were in Camp. When they returned from Camps all properties, including their personal houses, were just as they left.

12. church

The religion is the heart of Japanese American community.

Our collection includes Japanese American church anniversary books and other church publications describing who's who and history of their churches.

13. cookbooks & monographs

The community church and organization cookbooks include 260 books from Toronto, Philadelphia, Denver, Albuquerque, Hilo, Maui, and 11 from San Francisco.

What's interesting about these books from all over the country is that each area has unique touch of its own.

For example, sukiyaki recipe in New York is different than ones from Phoenix or Ontario, Oregon.

Organization publications include anniversary books, annual dinner program, newsletters and flyers.

The San Francisco archival collections include

1. Cherry Blossom Festival

2. Ayumi Project

3. post-war re-organization of San Francisco chapter of JACL and JARF (Japanese American Religious Federation).

4. San Francisco activism in fight against San Francisco Redevelopment. For example, CANE.

5. Our CANE - the Citizens Against Nihonmachi Eviction - is key story behind what is S.F. Japantown today, changed the course of Japantown development

One of the keys to contemporary Japantown history is our CANE collection. Citizens Against Nihonmachi Eviction first fought Nisei merchants to prevent Issei living in J-Town from being evicted. That battle at S.F. Redevelopment ultimately led to J-Town today.

14. newspaper I

Our holding of Japanese American vernacular newspapers is most comprehensive and largest of its kind.

As all our collection, we collect systematically.

At the peak of ethnic vernacular newspapers operations, we were receiving 28 different newspapers from Hawaii, Canada, and Mainland.

We emphasized newspapers because we abide by our motto:

“Today’s News Is Tomorrow’s History”.

15. newspaper II

When Hokubei Mainichi and Nichi Bei Times ceased operation, both papers gave the Library their entire collection, including complete sets of newspapers, documents, photographs, and other assets.

Those who know most of our community trusted us to preserve the written legacy of Japanese American history.

We are very honored.

16. lecture

Over the last 52 years, Library provided many programs to our community.

The monthly lecture series on Japanese American Studies research was started by our parent organization, the Center for Japanese American Studies, in 1969.

We brought prominent researchers and specialists to keep our community up-dated in the latest research.

The photos show prominent church ministers discussing the future of Japanese American churches.

All these programs were recorded for future research.

17. mochitsuki

Mochi-Tsuki is one tradition that we started under Center for Japanese American Studies in 1969.

This tradition has been going on for 51 years continuously.

Unfortunately, 2020 had to be cancelled for the first time due to Pandemic. We will be back next year.

Our Mochitsuki is unique in that anyone can walk-in, have fun pounding, doing chagiri and of course eating fresh mochi, and it’s free.

Many people from Sacramento and other areas come on a regular basis. It was community spirit in action.

18. conclusion

In comparison to other Japanese American institutions, museum and historical society are in the business of “story-telling”.

They collect materials that they can use for exhibition and produce books.

Mr. Oka’s Collection is primarily Japanese language. He told me that it’s about 85% Japanese. The JANL library is 95% English.

Basically, the Library is in an information business.

We aim to collect all aspects of our community information and be able to retrieve it.

I do want to point out that each institution has their own unique contribution to the community.

We do not compete with each other.

Hidden Treasures in the JANL Archives

Over the almost half century of the Japanese American National Library's existence, it has amassed an amazing amount of material about the Japanese American experience. In fact, the Library's collection now fills four storage rooms all the way to the ceiling. A significant portion of this collection will be invaluable to future scholars. What follows are two examples from the under researched resettlement era when the Issei and Nisei were trying to reestablish their life trajectories after the disruptive wartime years.

Robert Cullum was the head of one of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) offices setup to help Japanese Americans reestablish themselves, specifically the one in Cleveland, Ohio. Several thousand former incarcerated relocated to this area in an attempt to restart their lives. One of Cullum's duties was to document how the newly arrived Japanese Americans were accepted and to see how their adjustment might be eased. To do this, he spoke with mayors, police chiefs, sheriffs, and other authorities throughout the Midwest. He also recorded how the local people reacted to the newcomers. An analysis of the many documents (four boxes) in Cullum's collection would provide a rich picture of the conditions former incarcerated faced during their early resettlement years and how they accommodated to them.

A related collection is that of John A. Gorfinkel, an attorney who helped Japanese Americans file claims against the government for the economic losses they suffered due to their removal from their West Coast homes and subsequent incarceration. The collection (three boxes) includes financial records related to the former incarcerated' assets such as bank and other legal documents. One example of the cases documented in the collection is that of four insightful Issei nurserymen from the East Bay who hired a lawyer to create a corporation that operated their businesses during the War. With this legal structure in place, when they returned after the War, they were able to essentially takeover their businesses where they had left off. Another case included in the Gorfinkel files is a divorce case where the husband claimed all the family assets. The records document the actions his spouse and three children took to contest this outcome.

Brief about JACL-LEC and JACL records in the JANL Primary Document Collections

This brief document was drafted on 10 March 2021 as a sample of how JANL might describe various primary document collections to communicate the richness and extensiveness of the JANL holdings. This was submitted to the JANL Board as an initial draft for their review and discussion. It was designed to be expanded and further developed with details as needed, depending on purposes and audience.

Rita Takahashi, 10 March 2021
Revised 22 May 2021

The Japanese American National Library (JANL) has the primary documents and archival records of the Japanese American Citizens League – Legislative Education Committee (JACL-LEC). Before its closure, the JACL-LEC Board of Directors voted to designate JANL as its depository for all its records. Consequently, between 1988 and 1991, the JACL-LEC sent boxes of records and artifacts to JANL for permanent preservation. Former JACL-LEC directors, Rita Takahashi (Acting Executive Director, 1988-1989 and Associate Director 1987-1988) and Joanne Kagiwada (Executive Director, 1989-1991) oversaw the release of records to JANL. Both boxed the records and sent them directly to JANL during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In addition to the complete primary JACL-LEC documents and artifacts, the JANL also houses records from the National Headquarters of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). These materials include many documents that pertain not only to redress, but to other civil rights agendas covering multiple time periods of the organization (from pre-World War II to post-Japanese American redress). It includes JACL's redress and range of civil rights efforts that were exerted in Washington, D.C. by JACL and JACL-LEC lobbyists and representatives.

For example, the JACL Washington Representative's (Rita Takahashi) range of civil rights work with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCRR) during this redress period (1987-1989) are included. Further, records of the JACL and JACL-LEC include contacts with African Americans to address early African American redress congressional efforts (by U.S. Representative John Conyers (D-MI) and other African Americans).

The JACL-LEC collection is rich with materials associated with all phases of the Japanese American redress movement, including efforts more than 10 years before final passage of the **Civil Liberties Act of 1988**, the actions that led to passage of the Act, and the ongoing work for *authorization* for redress through the *appropriations* of funds and developments of budgets to make monetary redress possible.

Records are rich with community and national initiatives from pre-redress to post-redress periods. It includes ongoing actions leading to the congressional action and national law leading to the establishment of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilian (CWRIC). It also addresses the CWRIC hearings and redress initiatives that were held throughout the U.S. in the late 1970s through 1980s.

JANL collections include advocacy and activism directed toward the three branches of U.S. Government, not just legislative. For example, it includes the class action lawsuit that went through the courts by William Hohri and other Japanese Americans and “Ronins,” and details the actions that were taken to get President Ronald Reagan to sign the redress bill into law.

The archival records housed at JANL about redress and a range of other civil rights agendas are broad-ranged, extensive, and intensive. They reveal answers to many questions about redress, including:

1. **What? What** actions were taken to make redress passage possible? **What** alternative action plans were considered and developed to enhance success?
2. **Who? Who** was involved in making Japanese American redress a reality? **Who** stepped in at critical moments at the local, state, national, and international levels?
3. **When? When** did all these efforts occur? When were communities and politicians interconnected in redress efforts?
4. **Where? Where** did all the elements come together? Where did specific events, programs, and actions occur, and with what impact?
5. **Why? Why** were the action plans constructed in the way they were? **Why** did the redress bill include individual monetary redress and broader community benefits?
6. **How? How** were national community efforts coordinated and communicated before the prevalence of internet and the worldwide web? **How** do you explain and evaluate multiple factors leading to the passage of Japanese American redress?