

A Half-Century of Service:
The Watsonville Japanese–American Citizens League,
1934–1984
By Sandy Lydon

This short history of the Watsonville Japanese–American Citizens League has been prepared to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the organization's founding in 1934. For fifty of the almost one hundred years that immigrants from Japan and their descendants have lived and worked in the Pajaro Valley, the leadership of that community has come from the American-born generation (Nisei), and their primary organization, the JACL. Though the name of the organization changed over the years and it was inactive during the community's World War II internment in Arizona, the Watsonville Japanese–American Citizens League played a vital role in the history of the Japanese community in the Pajaro Valley.

Issei Pioneers in the Pajaro Valley

Beginning with the first appearance of Chinese farm laborers in the Pajaro Valley in the summer of 1866, immigrants from Asia played a major role in transforming the one-crop, wheat-dependent valley into the diversified farming region it is today. From 1866 to 1890 the Chinese were the dominant labor force in the region. Following the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which prohibited the continued immigration of Chinese laborers into the United States, the Chinese population in the Pajaro Valley steadily declined as death and emigration whittled away at the Chinese community.

After Japan relaxed laws prohibiting emigration in 1885, Japanese farm laborers began to replace the aging Chinese in the fields of Hawaii, California, Oregon and Washington. The number of Japanese living in the Pajaro Valley grew from a handful in 1890 to over four hundred in 1900, and the young, energetic men soon filled the slots being vacated by Chinese in agriculture as well as finding employment as domestics, laundrymen, wood choppers and railroad workers in the Monterey Bay region.

Despite simmering anti-Japanese sentiment (particularly after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905), discriminatory laws, and the painful process of adjusting to a new land, the Issei [first-generation] pioneers carved a tenuous niche in the economy of the Pajaro Valley. During their first two decades in the Pajaro Valley the Issei learned that one of the keys to their survival in the less-than-hospitable valley was to form organizations for protection and mutual aid.

Though farm labor contractor Sakuzo Kimura is often credited with being the first Japanese immigrant to live in the Pajaro Valley, there is some evidence that he was preceded by a number of Japanese individuals. In 1887, the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* reported that two Japanese nurserymen were taking care of a plantation of several thousand orange trees and grape vines near Porter Gulch and in 1889, the *Watsonville Pajaronian* noted that a Japanese woman who dressed

"American style and talks good English" was living in Watsonville's Chinatown (located on the Monterey County side of the Pajaro River in Pajaro), but that she refused to be interviewed by reporters. By 1890, there were nineteen Japanese living in Santa Cruz County with one living in Monterey County.

An agricultural revolution was under way in the Pajaro Valley when the Japanese arrived. Sugar beets were replacing wheat as the valley's dominant crop, and in 1888 Claus Spreckels built a huge sugar manufacturing plant in Watsonville. Chinese sugar beet contractors dominated the industry during the early years, but by the mid-1890s, Japanese contractors were offering contract rates lower than the Chinese, and slowly but surely, the Japanese began to replace the Chinese in the sugar beet fields in the Pajaro Valley. By the time Spreckels moved the plant to Salinas in 1898, Japanese beet workers were doing the majority of the sugar beet crop in the Pajaro and Salinas Valleys.

The United States census taken in 1900 listed almost one thousand Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region (235 in Santa Cruz County and 710 in Monterey County). The occupations listed—cooks, laundrymen, fishermen, missionaries, railroad tie cutters, and woodchoppers—dispel the myth that early Japanese immigrants to the Monterey Bay Region were all farmers or farm laborers. For example, Gennosuke Kodani, one of the early immigrants on the Monterey Peninsula, was a trained marine biologist who had come to the central coast to develop the abalone diving and canning industry. Over ninety percent of these early immigrants were male, a pattern followed by most immigrant groups to the United States—the men came early, to create a base, and then the women were brought over to reunite the families.

A census of 135 Japanese families living in the Pajaro Valley in the 1920s listed the provinces in Japan from which each of the Issei pioneers came. The following chart shows the provinces from which the majority came:

- 1) Yamaguchi 24%
- 2) Wakayama 16%
- 3) Fukuoka 12%
- 4) Hiroshima 12%
- 5) Kumamoto 12%
- 6) Okayama 4%
- 7) Fukui 3%
- 8) Kagoshima 2%

(The remaining 15% were scattered from different provinces.)

The first Japanese immigrants to the Pajaro Valley lived in Watsonville's Chinatown just across the river from the town, but after several years, boarding houses sprang up at the north end of Main Street, on Brennan Street and on Lake Avenue, while a small Japantown grew on the south end of Union Street. By 1902, the editor of the *Watsonville Pajaronian* termed the movement of the Japanese an "invasion." "The ease with which the Japanese have moved in (to Watsonville) is agitating some of the Chinese . . . such a movement should be discouraged." He concluded with the observation that "the quarters of the Asiatics should be outside of our city's limits." Despite the editor's concerns, Watsonville's Japantown grew steadily during the first decade of the twentieth century, and by 1910 the following businesses and stores were located there: four Labor Clubs, two churches, one Japanese Association, three branches of Japanese newspaper companies, four grocery and general merchandise stores, ten boarding houses, five ryoriya (Japanese eating places), one restaurant, four barber shops, six pool halls, four Japanese bath houses, three watch repair

shops, two photo studios, two taxis, two clothing stores, one laundry, one shoe shop, one tofu-ya (tofu store), two bicycle shops, two candy stores and two medical doctors.

Religious and social organizations were formed by the pioneer immigrants during this period to help ease the difficulty of adjustment in this new land. Westview Presbyterian Church had its beginnings in 1898 while the Buddhist Temple was founded in 1906. However, it was the unusual legal status of the Japanese immigrants which led them to start a general organization—the Nihonjinkai (Japan Society or, as sometimes translated, Japan Association).

The Watsonville Japan Society

According to United States immigration law dating back to 1790, immigrants from China and Japan were ineligible to become naturalized citizens of the United States. Thus, though some of the Issei living in the Pajaro Valley had been living in America since the late 1880s, they continued to be citizens of Japan. Children born to Issei couples in the United States were American citizens, but the Issei were prevented from acquiring United States citizenship. As Japanese citizens, the Issei continued to have obligations to the Japanese government, one of which was military service; during the Sino-Japanese War (1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1905), the Japanese government drafted many of the overseas Japanese. A number of the Issei living in California returned to Japan to join the Japanese army, but some of the older Issei who had already established families and acquired responsibilities in the United States were reluctant to return to Japan. The process for deferring Japanese military service involved filing periodic applications with the Japanese Consulate in San Francisco, and it was the need for legal assistance in matters involving the requirements of Japanese citizenship which led the Issei to form the Japan Society in Watsonville around 1910. The Society's primary purpose was as a legal aid organization, assisting the Issei not only with military matters but with matters of immigration.

The Japan Society also performed important social and cultural duties for the largely single male Issei population, holding picnics and providing a forum where the members could meet and discuss common problems. As the number of children grew in the Japanese community, the Japan Society sponsored a Japanese language school.

As anti-Japanese legislation at both the federal and state levels increased, the Japan Society's importance grew in the community. Following the restriction of Japanese immigration in the Gentlemen's Agreement (1907–1908), the Japan Society assisted its members in acquiring the necessary documents to travel to and from Japan as well as assisting in the entry of picture brides. Japan Societies throughout California lobbied (unsuccessfully) against passage of the California Alien Land Law in 1913, and following the passage of the law, Watsonville's Japan Society found it necessary to put their property in the name of one of the Nisei [second generation] as the Issei could no longer legally own property in the Pajaro Valley.

Members of Watsonville's Japan Society also saw the importance of fostering good will among the white population of the Pajaro Valley. During the period 1910–1920, the Japan Society began entering a float in Watsonville's Fourth of July parade, a tradition which has continued in the Japanese community to this day. Following the 1920 parade, the editor of the *Watsonville Evening Pajaronian* mused:

Seems strange does it not that it remained for the Japanese whom we are endeavoring to get stopped from coming here, or owning lands in our midst to put on such a fine patriotic float as the "Birth of the Flag," in the parade on our Fourth of July celebration. It was a very fine effort and showed much artistry.

When the Japan Society discovered that they had not been paying their fair share towards the education of their children in the Watsonville public schools (due to the Alien Land Law), they donated several thousand cherry trees as a gesture of thanks to the community.

Much has been written about the success of the Issei despite the persistent social and legal discrimination they faced in the United States during the early years of the twentieth century. We all need to be reminded, however, that the

success came at a very high price. Dozens of Issei suicides are recorded in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties before World War II, attesting to the difficulties which faced the Issei pioneers in this strange and often hostile land. The Issei knew better than anyone the difficulties which faced their Nisei children if they were to find a place in the American mosaic, and it was this concern which inspired them to help their children organize the first Nisei organization in Watsonville in the early 1930s.

The Watsonville Citizens League Formed (1934)

Nisei living in San Francisco had talked about forming an organization which would serve their particular needs as early as 1919, but it was not until the late 1920s that the movement gained sufficient momentum and interest to sustain a state-wide organization. In 1928, San Francisco Nisei formed the New American Citizens League in which it was stated that "citizens of Japanese ancestry had many difficult problems confronting them which must be solved sooner or later." The Nisei at that meeting agreed that they would still have to rely on the Issei for guidance, but "ultimately, the real solution would have to be made by the second generation members." By the early 1930s, similar Nisei organizations (though their names vary) were formed in Fresno, Seattle, San Jose, Salinas and Monterey.

In Watsonville, the impetus for a Nisei organization came from leaders of the Japan Society, and during the early 1930s, Hatsusaburo Yagi, Ippatsu Jumura, Ennosuke Shikuma and Ennosuke Fukuba encouraged the younger Nisei to form an organization similar to those being formed elsewhere in the state. Statewide Nisei leaders were invited to Watsonville in 1934, and after a meeting at which Dr. Thomas T. Yatabe, Walter Sakamoto and Susumu Togasaki came and explained the purposes of such a Nisei organization, Watsonville's Nisei decided to organize. After some discussion about an appropriate name for the organization, it was decided to call it the Watsonville Citizens League. Approximately 35 members were involved in the formation of the organization, and the first officers were Tom Matsuda, President; Bill Shirachi, Treasurer; and Sam Hada, Secretary.

The Watsonville Citizens League (1934–1941)

During the first seven years, the organization was primarily a social club. The Japan Society passed the building of the float to the Nisei organization. The floats emphasized patriotic themes, and using hundreds of fresh flowers, the Citizens League designed floats involving George Washington, the Declaration of Independence and Commodore Matthew Perry's opening of Japan.

Three short years following the formation of the organization, the Watsonville organization hosted the 2nd Biennial Convention of the Northern California District Council of the Japanese American Citizens League. Held at the Resetar Hotel in September, the convention was chaired by Dr. Harry Kita from Salinas, and twenty-four chapters gathered in Watsonville to discuss topics ranging from the Science of Agriculture to Voting and Civic Participation. The highlight of the convention was a trip to Seacliff Beach.

The activities of the Citizens League continued to be primarily social during the late 1930s, and the Japan Association continued to provide the over-all leadership of Watsonville's Japanese community. Events developing in Asia and the Pacific dramatically altered Watsonville's Japanese community; the younger Nisei found themselves suddenly thrust into positions of leadership.

War

No one in the Watsonville Japanese community was prepared for the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor or the events which quickly followed. Several days following the attack, Ichiji Motoki, Secretary for the Japan Association issued a statement to the people of Watsonville pledging that the "local Japanese will give 100 percent support to any measure which calls for loyalty and duty on the part of Americans." Despite those assurances, the FBI moved quickly to arrest and imprison the Issei leadership. The first man arrested was Hatsusaburo Yagi, President of the Japan Association, and soon

all the leaders of the Association were arrested except Motoki, who was determined to be a paid employee of the organization and not an elected leader.

Through the remainder of December 1941 and into early 1942, as the United States government tried to decide what to do about the Japanese communities on the west coast, a number of the Japanese families in Watsonville prepared to move inland. Louis Waki remembered that the automobile wrecking yards were filled with members of the Japanese community looking for parts with which to build trailers. Joe Morimoto began building a trailer to carry him and his family's belongings to Fresno, but the trailer was never finished.

Several weeks following President Franklin Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 which gave the military commander on the Pacific Coast the power to remove "any or all persons," General John DeWitt issued permission to Japanese along the coast to move inland voluntarily. With their bank accounts frozen, few members of the Japanese community along the coast had the resources to consider such a move, but when word of the voluntary evacuation plan came to Watsonville in early March, 1942, the community met to consider moving inland.

They Almost Went to Idaho

With removal of the Issei leaders by the FBI, the Nisei leaders of the Watsonville Citizens League assumed leadership of Watsonville's Japanese community. Faced with an uncertain and threatening future, the Watsonville Japanese met to consider the government's offer to move voluntarily into the interior of the United States. Word had reached Watsonville that a large apple orchard called the Mesa Orchard was for sale near Caldwell, Idaho. After a lengthy discussion the Japanese community decided to investigate the apple orchard, and should it prove suitable, the entire Japanese community would move there. Those community members able to afford it would put up what money they could; those who did not have the cash would work off their obligation once the community resettled in Idaho.

A committee of several Nisei was commissioned to drive to Idaho and examine the property. Since Nisei were still able to travel (Issei were restricted in their travel by that time), the men made the long trip to Idaho carrying with them the responsibility for the future of the entire community. Meanwhile, the community began building trailers and wagons in preparation for the move.

Mesa Orchard consisted of several hundred acres of apples, thirteen buildings including an apple dryer, packing house, seven two-bedroom houses, and some old farming equipment and trucks. The soil, however, was much less than suitable for apple production. Joe Morimoto recalls that "the soil was nothing but rocks, and you could see the roots of the apple trees growing in and around them." A veteran apple packer, Joe Morimoto saw that the apple trees were much smaller than those in the Pajaro Valley, and the prospects for a crop that would support the entire Watsonville Japanese community were not good. The men drove back to Watsonville carrying the burden of the bad news about the Mesa Orchard.

The community met to hear the report, and after hearing the description of the property, the Japanese community decided not to purchase Mesa Orchard. A year later the community's good judgment was borne out as Morimoto heard that the 1942 apple crop at Mesa Orchard was extremely small. "It was a good thing we decided not to go," says Morimoto, "because that orchard would have killed us."

With the deadline for voluntary evacuation fast approaching (only 4,831 of the 114,222 persons of Japanese ancestry migrated voluntarily), the Watsonville Japanese community under the leadership of the Watsonville Citizens League decided to face whatever fate was in store for them from the federal Government. They did not have long to wait.

In April, 1942, General John DeWitt began issuing orders that all persons of Japanese ancestry were to be moved to camps located in the interior. On April 27, 1942, the first group of Watsonville Japanese left for the Salinas Rodeo Grounds where they would live until early July when the group was transferred to the permanent camp at Poston,

Arizona. In all, 1,301 people of Japanese ancestry were removed from Santa Cruz County, the preponderant number (71%) American citizens.

The Watsonville Citizens League was dispersed by the move to Arizona. With half the organization residing in Camp I and the other half living three miles away in Camp II, the Citizens League ceased to meet. However, individual members of the organization continued to provide service to the community wherever possible. Harry Yagi, War Relocation Authority coordinator in Poston, returned to Watsonville in May, 1945, and opened an office to help returning evacuees find housing and employment as they returned to the Pajaro Valley.

The national JACL was also weakened by the wartime incarceration. Many of its leaders were imprisoned in different camps, and the Nisei community was divided over the policy of cooperation which the organization had adopted toward the government's relocation policy. Despite a sizable decrease in national membership during the war years, the national JACL continued to work tirelessly to end the wartime detention through lobbying, legal work, and the publication of the organization's newspaper, the *Pacific Citizen*.

Return to Watsonville

The War Relocation Authority began closing the concentration camps in early 1945, and with the assistance of WRA staff members such as Harry Yagi, the Japanese communities began to trickle slowly back to the Pacific Coast. By August 1945, seventy-seven Japanese had returned to Watsonville, but public sentiment was negative toward their return. In September, 1945, the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture did a survey in which it asked its members their opinion about the return of the Japanese to the Pajaro Valley. In response to the question "Do you believe the return of the Japanese may have harmful results both to the Japanese and to our own citizens, from a social standpoint?" the membership voted three to one in the affirmative. When asked "Will local people employ persons of the Japanese race?" the vote was five to one negative. Though the community at large may have had reservations about the return of the Japanese, a number of individuals (T.S. MacQuiddy, Dr. O.C. Marshall and attorney John C. McCarthy, for example) extended assistance to the Japanese community as it hesitantly returned to Watsonville in the fall of 1945.

For the next three years, the Japanese community tried to put the pieces of the community back together again, but it was a difficult process. Families had been separated, leased farmland had been lost, belongings had been sold or destroyed, and educational careers interrupted. It has been estimated that over one-third of the Japanese families living in the Pajaro Valley in 1941 did not return to Watsonville. Thus, the community did not return intact and some of the pre-war Watsonville Citizens League leadership had to be replaced. The first priority for the Japanese who returned to the Pajaro Valley was to put together their shattered lives, so there was little thought immediately following the war about resuming the Watsonville Citizens League.

The national JACL organization, however, roared out of the war years with tremendous vigor. In a convention held in 1945, the organization formulated a set of objectives which included pushing for naturalization rights for Issei, reparations for losses incurred during the war, and repeal of the alien land laws. Under the leadership of Mike Masaoka, the JACL began a campaign of lobbying in Washington to realize those goals.

Three years following their return, their lives beginning to return to some semblance of normalcy, a committee of Watsonville Nisei held a meeting to consider the reorganization of the dormant Watsonville Citizens League.

The League Reorganized (1947–1948)

In the spring of 1947, a committee consisting of Cow Wada, Jimmy Izumizaki, Charlie Shikuma, Louis Waki, Walter Hashimoto, Frank Uyeda, Harry Mayeda, Min Hamada, Hardy Tsuda, George Ura and Shig Hirano issued an invitation to Watsonville's Nisei to form a "non-religious citizens organization" which would be a Nisei group to "carry on community services." It was not until June, 1948, that a group met to discuss the reorganization of the Watsonville Citizens League.

Like most Nisei following the war, the Watsonville Japanese Americans were still concentrating on resuming their lives, which would explain why it took a year to gain enough interest to form an organization.

Chaired by Bill Fukuba, the newly-reorganized Watsonville Citizens League included Dr. Frank Ito, William Shirachi, Harry Mayeda, Cow Wada, Min Hamada, John Ura, Bob Manabe, Louis Waki and Jean Oda. The first decision was something of a symbolic one—to enter a decorated car in the Fourth of July parade, resuming a tradition begun by the Watsonville Japan Society before the war. However, the committee also decided to purchase three subscriptions of the *Pacific Citizen* and distribute them to the local community, as well as purchase a copy of Carey McWilliam's book, *Prejudice*, for the Watsonville library. Though it may not appear momentous, the Watsonville Citizens League had begun one of its most important tasks: that of providing information about the Japanese community to the general population of the Pajaro Valley.

A second function performed by the WCL during 1948 and 1949 was to provide assistance to members of the community wishing to file evacuee claims for losses sustained during the war. The League also investigated and successfully allied itself with Blue Cross to provide health insurance for its members. Finally, the group assisted its members in re-registering so they might vote in the 1948 elections.

The reorganized Watsonville Citizens League's activities marked a subtle but important departure from the pre-war organization, as the group had expanded beyond its social-cultural concerns to political concerns. In February, 1949, the organization authorized its President, Bill Fukuba, to write letters to Congressmen Anderson and Bramblett in support of the bill to grant naturalization rights to Issei.

Though the Issei organization, the Japan Society, had not been active in Watsonville since the war, it was not until the Society's property on Union Street was formally deeded over to the Watsonville Citizens League in April 1948 that the leadership of the Watsonville Japanese community passed to the Nisei. The final vestige of the pre-war community organization was dropped in November of 1949 when the Watsonville Citizens League formally became a chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (although legally the name of the Watsonville chapter remained Watsonville Citizens League until 1964).

The Early 1950s—The Focus is Politics

During the early 1950s the concerns and activities of the Watsonville chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League closely mirrored those of the national organization. The two primary concerns of the national organization were to repeal the laws which continued to discriminate against the Issei (alien land laws, prohibition of naturalization) and to assist returned evacuees in filing claims for property lost during the war.

The procedure established by the federal government for filing claims for property lost during the war was extremely cumbersome and complicated. Though evacuees began filing claims soon after the war, the process was so long and drawn out that the final claims were not settled until the mid-1960s. The national JACL worked diligently to streamline the claim procedures and assist their local chapters. After successfully achieving what became known as the "compromise" procedure (aimed at standardizing the estimating of property value), the national organization sent one of its national officers, Saburo Kido, to Watsonville to explain the new procedures. In September, 1951, Kido spoke to the assembled Watsonville Japanese community. Following Kido's visit, Bill Fukuba and Fred Nitta were appointed to help claimants fill out the forms and send them on to Kido to be rechecked before they were filed with the federal government. Though the exact extent of the losses suffered by the Japanese in the Pajaro Valley will never be known, one government survey conducted by the Department of Agricultural Economics at the end of the war noted that 19 of the 79 parcels of land owned by Japanese in Santa Cruz County had been sold to non-Japanese; the transfer amounted to 20% of the total acreage owned by Japanese at the beginning of the war.

Next to the claims procedures, the most important issue facing the national JACL was the continued inability of Issei to become naturalized citizens. Through the efforts of the JACL's Anti-Discrimination Committee, local chapters (including

Watsonville) raised funds to assist the organization in its lobbying efforts to gain naturalization rights for all, irrespective of race. In November, 1951, the Watsonville chapter raised \$675 which it sent along to the national Anti-Discrimination Committee. By early 1952, the Walter-McCarran Bill, a bill which included the naturalization rights for the Issei, was making its way through the Congressional labyrinth, and the Watsonville JACL urged its members to write letters to Congressman Jack Anderson urging him to support the bill. The bill was finally passed over President Truman's veto in June, 1952, and represents one of the most important achievements of the JACL.

In a remarkable effort to measure the strength of its membership, the Watsonville chapter conducted a census of Japanese and Japanese Americans in the Pajaro Valley in 1953, and that census provides a good measure for the recovery of the population following the end of the war eight years earlier. The census counted 1,207 Japanese in the Valley (compared to approximately 1,400 in the valley prior to the war); 23% were Issei, 45% Nisei, and 32% were Sansei (third generation). Over 60% of the families counted were involved in agriculture, while 80% listed themselves as Buddhist and the remaining 20% Christian.

Concern for the Issei and Sansei

Once the Issei were eligible for naturalization, the Watsonville chapter turned its attention to assisting those Issei wishing to become citizens by setting up citizenship classes to prepare them for their citizenship examinations. As the decade of the 1950s passed, however, the chapter became increasingly concerned for the well-being of the pioneer generation which was steadily growing older. The Blue Cross health insurance plan was one of the ways the chapter made certain that the health needs of the elderly would be taken care of. Efforts were also made to insure that the contributions of the Issei pioneers would be preserved for future generations when, in 1962, the Watsonville chapter collected over \$3,000 towards the JACL Issei History project. Eventually, 47 biographies of local Issei were collected and submitted to the national JACL for the project. Keiro dinners were sponsored by the JACL to honor the elderly Japanese residents of the Pajaro Valley. In 1971 the chapter began looking for a place where Issei and older Nisei might have meetings and gather socially. Tom Kizuka chaired the committee which looked for an appropriate site, and in July, 1971, the Hayashi Boarding House on First Street was opened as a Senior Center. The local chapter made an annual payment of \$1,000 to the Senior Center besides paying the rent and utilities for the building. In the words of Fred Nitta, the center and its activities were established to "show appreciation to the Japanese senior citizens in this valley who came to this country many years ago as poor immigrants and have worked hard under unbearable conditions to lay a firm foundation for their American-born children, Nisei, to enjoy today."

The Watsonville JACL also sponsored projects to encourage and assist the Sansei. Scholarships were established by the Watsonville JACL at all the local high schools to recognize and assist Sansei as they went on to colleges and universities throughout the country. A year-end barbecue honoring graduating seniors became a traditional way that the Watsonville JACL said congratulations to the next generation of community leaders.

A Building for the JACL

Though the Watsonville JACL acquired the Japan Society's property on Union Street in the late 1940s, it was never considered appropriate for holding meetings (the buildings were eventually demolished), and the JACL paid an annual fee to the Watsonville Buddhist Church to hold their meetings there. During the mid-1970s, discussions began about selling the property on Union Street and buying or building a JACL building in Watsonville. Eventually, the Assembly of God Church on Blackburn Street was purchased for \$55,000. Since the bank would not loan money to an organization which had no income, it was necessary for the membership to pay cash for the building. On October 16, 1977, the goal of \$60,000 for the building was set and by April, 1978, a remarkable \$71,195 had been pledged to cover the cost of the new building. The building has served as a Japanese center and home for the JACL Senior Center.

Contributions to the Watsonville Community

The Watsonville JACL did not limit its charitable concerns to the Japanese community, and the history of the organization is filled with the contributions the organization made to community organizations and campaigns. The Watsonville JACL's participation in the American Cancer Society fund-raising drives resulted in the organization receiving the distinguished Order of the Golden Sword award in October, 1975. In 1967 the JACL contributed \$628 to assist in the restoration of the bandstand in Watsonville's downtown plaza. But, perhaps the most notable community fund-raising drive came in 1965 during the establishment of Watsonville Community Hospital.

Watsonville desperately needed a new hospital, and a community-wide fund-raising campaign was carried out in 1965. The Japanese American Citizens League spearheaded the fund-raising within the Japanese community, and when it was finally tallied, 297 families of Japanese ancestry contributed over \$40,000 to the hospital fund. On July 30, 1965, the editor of the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* wrote a full-length editorial about those contributions and concluded, "Our community is deeply in debt of these fine citizens." In recognition of the hospital fund-raising, as well as other community-wide efforts, the Watsonville JACL was honored as 1968 Organization of the Year by the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture. The public recognition of the JACL in 1968 was testimony to the hard work and leadership provided by the Watsonville JACL, for it must be remembered that 23 years earlier the residents of the Pajaro Valley had overwhelmingly opposed the return of the Japanese community from the concentration camps.

The Campaign for Redress

The wartime evacuation continued to occupy the attention of the national JACL. The organization successfully led the fight to repeal the Internal Security Act passed in 1950 which empowered the government to arrest and imprison American citizens without due process. In 1977 the national organization began pressing for redress and compensation for the people of Japanese ancestry who had been torn from their homes and put into camps without due process. Though the claims procedures had been concluded in the 1960s, the average settlement had been 10% of the amount asked for based on the value of the dollar in 1941; the national JACL did not feel that either the compensation or the legal justification made for relocation were sufficient.

The issue of redress did not have the unanimous support of the national JACL membership; some of the members felt that the wartime evacuation issue had been laid to rest and should not be raised again. (A survey of the Watsonville JACL membership overwhelmingly supported the redress movement.) Despite the disagreement, the national JACL went forward to urge Congress to establish a commission to study the issue of redress. The commission was established by President Jimmy Carter in July, 1980, and was formally titled The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. The commission held hearings and thoroughly researched the events leading to the evacuation orders of 1942, and in June, 1983, issued its report recommending that those evacuees still living be compensated and that the government formally apologize for its actions during the war.

Opinions about the issue of redress differed, as some Watsonville JACL members felt that the subject of wartime evacuation would better be left dormant. Despite this difference, however, the local chapter voted to support the national JACL redress committee, and one of its members testified before the commission when it held its hearings in San Francisco. Also, members' written testimonies were submitted to the commission. In one of its first public gestures regarding relocation, the Watsonville JACL received a resolution commemorating the anniversary of President Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 from State Senator Henry Mello.

In February, 1984, in partnership with JACL chapters from Salinas, Monterey, San Benito County and Gilroy, the Watsonville JACL co-sponsored placement of a plaque at the Salinas Rodeo Grounds where the Japanese communities of the Monterey Bay Region were detained before being taken to concentration camps in the summer of 1942. The Watsonville chapter also sponsored a public presentation at Cabrillo College by Judge William Marutani; Judge Marutani was one of the members of the federal commission and was in the area to help dedicate the Salinas Rodeo Ground plaque. For the first time in the history of the Watsonville JACL, the organization had taken their story of the wartime

evacuation before the Santa Cruz County public, and several hundred people listened intently as judge Marutani described the hearings which had been held throughout the United States.

On June 12, 1984, the Watsonville City Council and subsequently on June 26, 1984, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, passed a resolution endorsing the findings and recommendations of the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, and urging the Congress of the United States to enact HR 4110 and S 2116.

Conclusions

It is too early to say whether the Days of Remembrance observances of 1983 and 1984 mark a new, more assertive era in the history of the Watsonville JACL. The activities dedicated to the community's senior citizens and younger generation continue apace, however, and the community-wide participation of the JACL also continues. Over the years the local chapter has had to walk between demands of a national organization which reflects a more urban, politically active national membership and the needs of a predominantly rural Pajaro Valley community. The Watsonville JACL has been able to skillfully balance the two, often acting as a conduit bringing information to its membership and the wider community while tempering some of the information for a rural audience. In doing so, the Watsonville JACL has steadily helped raise the consciousness of the entire Pajaro Valley. From its beginnings in 1934 as a primarily social organization, the Watsonville JACL has changed to reflect the changing political and social landscape, and with the health and vigor provided by divergent viewpoints, the Watsonville JACL begins its second half-century, continuing to enrich the lives of all the citizens of the Pajaro Valley.

Sources

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