

## New England JACL History

The New England Chapter, covering the six New England states, has a relatively small and widespread membership. The chapter was founded in 1948, with activities centered on WWII internment claims and naturalization of the Issei. After a hiatus, the chapter was reactivated in 1979 to respond to the unique needs of a widespread Japanese American community. Michael Adachi and Harvard students Glen Fukushima, Alex and Laurel Kimura were instrumental in the reactivation. Under President David Sakura, the new chapter developed an extensive pan Asian network of community activists and organizations to cooperate and support our common issues and concerns. One of the chapter's first activities was to co-sponsor Asian Pacific American Heritage week, contributing an internment camp photographic essay by chapter member Tetsuo Takayanagi. In local television appearances, several members reflected on their internment experiences.

During the 1980s, the chapter focused on redress and the chapter was at the forefront of building local public interest in the internment. The Chapter Redress Committee, under the leadership of Kei Kaneda, was active in bringing the hearings of the Presidential Commission on Wartime Evacuation and Internment of Civilians to Cambridge. The hearing was later credited with being extremely influential in the passage of redress legislation since it brought nationally noted scholars such Harvard professors Lawrence Tribe and Alan Dershowitz into play. The hearing was co-hosted by Harvard University and had panels of noted speakers discussing constitutional issues of the internment. After the Commission hearings, chapter members – including May Takayanagi, Eji Suyama, Kiyo Morimoto and Gary Glenn – were especially active in the legislative process for redress. On August 10, 1988, the bill authorizing redress payment to Japanese Americans was signed by President Ronald Reagan.

The chapter continued to bring people together and promote the common bonds and issues of the Japanese American community. In 1997, University of Massachusetts Professor Paul Watanabe discussed Asian American political fund raising and its impact on the AA community. In 1999, the chapter co-sponsored a screening of *Rabbit in the Moon* at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In 2000, the chapter co-sponsored a reception for the playwright Philip Kan Gotanda before the performance of his play *Sisters Matsumoto* at the Huntington Theatre in Boston. Also in 2000, it brought together a panel of Nisei veterans talking about their experiences during World War II at Harvard's Kennedy School. In 2001, JACL member Erica Harth held a book signing, together with some of the contributors, for her book, *Last Witness*, a collection of reflections on the internment.

At the same time, NE JACL has reached out to the larger community, with particular attention to other Asian American and ethnic groups. It has invited and joined with other Asian American organizations to observe annual Day of Remembrances in February. In 1998, for instance, NE JACL joined with other co-sponsors for a *Day of Remembrance: Redress, 10 years later*, which featured the video *Meeting at Tule Lake* and a panel

discussion with three chapter members instrumental in gaining support for redress: Kei Kaneda, May Takayanagi and David Sakura.

Two Japanese American Congressmen have made appearances at NE JACL events: The late Congressman Robert Matsui spoke at a forum in 2001 at the Kennedy Library that was later broadcast on CSPAN. Future chapter Co-President Ken Oye moderated the forum. Congressman Mike Honda spoke about national security and civil liberties with Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank at a JACL forum at MIT in 2003. A video of the talk is posted on the MIT web site.

In the aftermath of September 11, NE JACL addressed concerns for the loss of civil liberties and prejudice. For the 2002 Day of Remembrance commemoration, the chapter invited a number of community groups to co-sponsor a forum on *Civil Liberties under Threat*. Speakers from the Arab American, Asian American, Muslim, Sikh, African American and South Asian communities shared their experiences. For 2003, the chapter held a series of one act play readings: Rosanna Alfaro's *Don't Fence Me In*, about one family's internment experience; *Curfew*, set in the West Bank town of Ramallah; and *Under Cover*, an exploration of what it means to be "interned" behind a symbolic veil. For 2004, the Day of Remembrance examined a relatively little known saga of the Japanese Latin American Redress Experience with Grace Shimizu, of the Campaign for Justice: Redress NOW for Japanese Latin Americans. More recent Day of Remembrance events have included a showing of *Going for Broke* followed by a conversation with two Nisei WWII veterans, Susumu Ito and Tetsuo Takayanagi in 2007. The program was moderated by Paul Watanabe. The 2008 Day of Remembrance program featured a showing of *The Lost Village of Terminal Island*, follow by a presentation by Margie Yamamoto about her family's experience being evacuated from Terminal Island.

In addition to these special forums and Day of Remembrance events, NE JACL has sponsored cultural and entertaining events. In 2008 there was a tour of *The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment* at the Benton Museum on the University of Connecticut campus. *Bento and Baseball* was a day-long summer event that featured the film *American Pastime* (baseball in the WWII camps), a Japanese tailgate lunch, and a Lowell Spinners baseball game. In past years the chapter has sponsored picnics, potlucks and speakers on topics ranging from immigration to Japanese art.

Past presidents of the chapter have included (in chronological order) David Sakura, Kei Kaneda, May Takayanagi, Robert Maeda, Gary Glenn, Margie Yamamoto, Steve Nishino and current co-presidents Ken Oye and Margie Yamamoto.