

From Inside and Outside the Barbed Wire: New Mexico's Multicultural World War II Internment Stories

A public Symposium, "From Inside and Outside the Barbed Wire: New Mexico's Multicultural World War II Internment Stories," will be held on Saturday and Sunday, April 21-22, 2012, in the auditorium at the New Mexico History Museum/Palace of the Governors, 113 Lincoln Avenue, Santa Fe. Saturday times are: 10:30 a.m.- 4:30 p.m.; Sunday times are: 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m., with book signing following.

A New Mexico Centennial year event, this unique Symposium is co-sponsored by The New Mexico History Museum, The Historical Society of New Mexico, and The New Mexico Centennial Board, with a generous grant from the New Mexico Humanities Council. The New Mexico Community Foundation serves as the Committee's Fiscal Agent.

New Mexico, in its seeming remoteness during the mid-twentieth century, had a significant but little-known role in America's World War II internment history, given the fact that at least three facilities-- at Lordsburg, Fort Stanton, and Santa Fe --imprisoned Japanese resident aliens and American citizens from 1942-1946 over the course of the war. The Symposium will explore the experiences of the internees held in Department of Justice camps, focusing especially on the Santa Fe Internment Camp, which held a total of 4,555 men, no women or children. The Symposium will also examine the impressions such camps had on visitors and communities surrounding them. "In other words," says Dr. Gail Okawa, one of the conference organizers, "this Symposium will seek to explore the human experience on either side of the barbed wire —through lectures, film, and performance."

Symposium sessions will also examine the controversy over the City of Santa Fe's decision to establish the Historical Marker, because of resistance from New Mexico National Guardsmen who returned from fighting in the Pacific--especially those who survived the Bataan Death March and Japanese Imperial POW camps. The fate of those New Mexicans will be contrasted with the little-known relationship of New Mexico National Guard troops fighting in the European Theater with the now-famed U.S. Army segregated Japanese American unit from the mainland and Hawai'i. Some in that 442nd Regimental Combat Team had fathers in the SFIC. Other sons of internees served in the Pacific in the U.S. Army Military Intelligence Service, whose translations helped to shorten the war.

Topics will draw on such humanities disciplines as history, oral history, literature, life-writing, art, and religion for both content and analysis. For example, historical sources for the presentations will come from archival materials, such as correspondence in English and Japanese, poetry, drawings of life in the camp, daily newspapers produced within the camp, diaries, and personal accounts describing food, clothing, buildings, sports, games, music, theater, and academic pursuits, in addition to photographs of persons, places, activities, art, artifacts, and crafts. Additional sources of information include such archival documents as formal reports by internment camp commanders, government documents, official reports by the Spanish consul, and newspaper accounts. Oral histories gathered by volunteers reflect perspectives of those who were outsiders--internee sons, guards, ministers, service providers (groceries, wood, etc.), observers, children--and will be part of the "Outside the Camp" session.

Presenters draw from New Mexico, Arizona, California, Hawai'i, and Washington. They include co-chairs Nancy R. Bartlit and Dr. Gail Y. Okawa, Dr. Richard A. Melzer, Brian Minami, Dr. Nikki N. Louis, Colonel Joe Ando (USAF ret.), Bill Nishimura, Carol Robertson-Lopez, Mollie Pressler, and Kermit Hill. Nishimura is a survivor of the SFIC and several presenters are descendants of SFIC internees. Author Dr. Tai Kreidler, Director of the Southwest Collections Library, Texas Tech University, and Executive Director of the Western Texas History Association.

“The historic Symposium will be a rare chance for the community, scholars, and internee descendants to learn who the civilian [detainees and] internees were, how they passed their time, and how they were treated during wartime,” says Nancy Bartlit, Committee co-chair and member of the original Historical Marker Committee.

Organized by The Committee to Preserve New Mexico's Internment History, its purpose is to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the dedication of the Santa Fe Internment Camp (SFIC) Historical Marker, located at the Frank S. Ortiz Park, Santa Fe, and to raise public awareness of the internment experience in New Mexico. The two-day event will cost \$15.00, and a limited number of discounted tickets for students will be available only at the box office. Tickets can be purchased through the Lensic Theater Box Office, 505-988-1234, or www.ticketssantafe.org/tsf/content/about_tsf.

For more information about this program please contact members of the Committee to Preserve New Mexico's Internment History: Michael Hice, michaelhice@earthlink.net, 505-466-1256; Nancy Bartlit, NBartlit@aol.com, 505-672-9792 ; or Dr. Gail Okawa, gyokawa@yahoo.com or visit this web site at: <http://nmcentennial.org/events/from-inside-and-outside-thebarbed-wire>.

Article courtesy of The Committee to Preserve New Mexico's Internment History: Co-chairs Nancy Bartlit and Gail Okawa, with Michael Hice, Associate Partner/Public Relations.