

# National Historic Landmarks of Arkansas

## Rohwer Relocation Center



*Japanese American internees watch as train leaves Rohwer Relocation Center.*

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# National Historic Landmarks of Arkansas: Rohwer Relocation Center

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## **Executive Order #9066**

The Rohwer Relocation Camp at Rohwer, Arkansas, (of which the 24 concrete headstones, two entrance markers, and two tall concrete monuments found in the Memorial Cemetery are contributing resources to the Rohwer National Historic Landmark) was constructed by the federal government in the late summer and early fall of 1942 as part of the response to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Executive Order #9066. This order empowered the United States military to prescribe military areas of strategic importance within the borders of the United States and to exclude persons from those areas at the discretion of the Secretary of War. Under this order, more than 110,000 Japanese aliens and Japanese-Americans were relocated from the three Pacific Coast states — California, Oregon and Washington — to 10 relocation camps within the western and central regions of the United States.

The Rohwer Relocation Camp Memorial Cemetery features exquisitely detailed and distinctive funerary monuments, which were designed and erected by the evacuees themselves during their internment; of the three relocation camp cemeteries that survive, Rohwer is singularly significant as the largest, the most elaborately detailed, and the most unique. As such, the site is significant under National Historic Landmark Exclusion Five for “[a] cemetery that derives its primary national significance from ... an exceptionally distinctive design or from an exceptionally significant event,” under National Historic Landmark Criterion One for its direct association with the federal government's Japanese-American relocation policies during World War II, and under National Historic Landmark Criterion Four for the distinctive and exceptional artistic design elements of the funerary monuments in the cemetery and their exclusive relationship to the Rohwer internment.

## **Background**

The devastating surprise attack on the American fleet at Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941, by the Japanese Navy and the subsequent panic that was most acutely felt on the west coast precipitated a series of decisions and events by both federal civilian authorities and the United States military that would profoundly affect the lives and fortunes of more than 110,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans residing along that coastline during the Second World War. The decision by the federal government to discriminate against an entire race of people — most of whom were American citizens — solely on the basis of unfounded suspicions regarding their patriotism during wartime and their physical proximity to what was considered a threatened and vulnerable area has since been widely criticized by many legal and social scholars as one of the darkest and most shameful periods in the history of both the United States and the Constitution, which ensures the fundamental rights of democracy and equality to all citizens. To whatever degree the decision to remove all persons of Japanese descent from the West Coast and incarcerate them in camps was the result of a genuine and relatively legitimate fear of military invasion, its presumptions of genetically inherent disloyalty and treachery were rooted in earlier anti-Oriental and specifically anti-Japanese sentiments that can be traced to the middle of the 19th century and which must be considered in order to understand fully the reaction that followed Pearl Harbor.

The first significant wave of Oriental immigration to the West Coast of the United States did not occur until 1849, when the first Chinese arrived at the same time as the Gold Rush. Despite their Oriental “color” and features, they were not initially mistreated, and their unusual costumes and hairstyles were considered yet another contribution to the cosmopolitan atmosphere that pervaded

San Francisco during the Gold Rush. In fact, the economic boom then in progress in Northern California made any additions to the labor force welcome. Yet the crowding and competition for the richest ore deposits that increased during the brief tenure of the Gold Rush caused more than a few of the white miners to grumble about protecting American gold for Americans (meaning white Americans). The Foreign Miners' License Laws of 1850 and 1852 were especially aimed at the skilled and industrious Mexican and Chinese miners; these, coupled with the 1854 California Supreme Court decision *People v. Hall*, which set the precedent of rejecting the right of a Chinese to testify against a white, were harbingers of things to come.

This relatively favorable situation continued until 1869, when the abundance of cheap Oriental labor and the stiff competition for jobs that had caused occasional friction within the mining industry was magnified to acute proportions by the release of more than 10,000 Chinese laborers by the Union-Central Pacific Railroad upon the completion of its western leg. The resentment felt by white workers was to some degree understandable, as the glut of Chinese laborers lowered wages that had previously been raised by the scarcity of workers.

It was the anti-Chinese demagoguery of Dennis Kearney and his leadership of the Workingmen's Party that first lent an overtly racist cast to the labor issue. His rallying cry of "The Chinese Must Go," though inspired by the relatively legitimate concerns over unfair competition, contributed to the ideology of white supremacy/Oriental inferiority. The fear of "John Chinaman" spread throughout the West Coast in the decades following the Civil War, even permeating state and local government policy: in addition to the testimony of Chinese people being ruled unacceptable in court, many municipal ordinances were passed for no other reason than racist harassment. The call went out to stop Chinese immigration and soon the idea of a Chinese exclusion policy, generated by Kearney and his party, was appropriated by both the Democrats and the Republicans.

The passage of a law prohibiting further Chinese immigration into California or any other state proved problematic, a situation not helped by the view taken by the federal government in the Reconstruction period that this was largely a West Coast problem and not worthy of national policy. Furthermore, the Burlingame Treaty of 1868 provided for free immigration and neither the president nor Congress was willing to repeal it immediately. Increased lobbying for a national Chinese exclusion policy by the western state legislatures during the early 1870s resulted in the passage of such a bill by both houses of Congress that was vetoed by President Rutherford B. Hayes. Continued pressure finally resulted in President Chester A. Arthur signing a compromise, 10-year Chinese exclusion bill in 1882. Anti-Chinese sentiment remained high, however, and Congress renewed the ban in 1892. It was eventually made "permanent" in 1902 under the "progressive" administration of Theodore Roosevelt.

### **Anti-Japanese Sentiment**

By 1902, Japanese immigrants had been arriving on American soil for 12 years and had been working in Hawaii even earlier. The Japanese emperor first allowed his subjects to emigrate to foreign lands in 1884, when menial laborers were allowed to work in the Hawaiian sugar fields. From Hawaii, many then continued on to the United States. Twenty thousand had arrived by 1900 and another 45,000 arrived in the years 1903-1905 alone. The Japanese-born immigrants (called "issei," which roughly translated as "first generation") differed from other contemporaneous ethnic immigrant groups in that they nurtured a pride in their native Japan and openly celebrated traditional holidays



*Japanese American  
interns harvest a  
bumper crop of cucum-  
bers at the Rohwer  
Relocation Center.  
(National Archives  
Photo 210-GII-2)*

and ceremonial occasions. Unlike the Chinese before them, the Japanese cultivated their heritage within their communities and thereby highlighted the cultural differences that separated them from white Americans.

The idea that the Japanese threatened to “take over” America forcibly and to impose themselves and their monarchic dynasty began to capture the imaginations of much of the white populace. Though it had been brewing during the 1890s, distinctly anti-Japanese sentiment did not become public until 1900, when the increasing tide of Japanese immigration caused labor groups in particular to resume the same brand of racist anti-Orientalism that had characterized their reaction to the Chinese. This prejudice was exacerbated by the fact that labor’s attempts to include the Japanese in the Chinese Exclusion Act when it came up for renewal in 1902 was met with counter demonstrations of significant strength and vigor, the first such protests to the racist charges of genetic inferiority by any group of Oriental immigrants. Japan’s resounding victories on both land and sea over the military forces of czarist Russia in 1905 confronted American whites with the first concrete demonstration of the ability of Orientals to overturn forcibly the notion of white supremacy. As had been the case with the Chinese, the newspapers were the next to jump on the anti-Japanese bandwagon. The San Francisco Chronicle, in February of 1905, printed a front-page article beneath the headline “The Japanese Invasion, The Problem of the Hour.” In the article, the author alleged that the Japanese, in addition to being an inherently subhuman and undesirable race, were also a menace to American women (again, meaning white women) and spied for the Emperor in service to his alleged grand scheme of world domination.

As had been the case with the Chinese, it took little time for state and local officials to take up the cry. Though their efforts received little sympathy outside of the West Coast, within a week of the publication of this article both houses of the California legislature passed a resolution asking Congress to pass a Japanese exclusion bill. Later that year, two Republican congressmen from California introduced Japanese exclusion bills into Congress which, though they never got out of committee, succeeded in garnering support on the race issue alone from certain powerful Southern politicians.

Ironically, it was the belated enforcement of an ostensibly innocuous decision by the San Francisco School Board in October of 1906 that brought the controversy to national proportions. Their attempt to segregate Japanese students in the public schools as they had done with Chinese students previously drew serious diplomatic protests from the Japanese government — protests that President Theodore Roosevelt heeded. Though their obvious and reactionary bigotry caused Roosevelt to hold little regard for the California legislators, he had been aware of the growing anti-Japanese sentiment on the West Coast. Yet it required the Japanese protest of the segregation decision to get him actively involved. An investigation of the situation in San Francisco by a cabinet member resulted in Roosevelt's accurate conclusion that the issue for the Californian authorities generally was not segregation but immigration. Though Roosevelt persuaded the San Francisco School Board to revoke its segregation decision — thereby placating the Japanese government — he embarked upon a sequence of diplomatic maneuvers aimed at persuading the Japanese authorities themselves to limit the issuance of passports for laborers to the United States, thereby reducing immigration. The result was the so-called Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907-08, the first distinctly anti-Japanese national policy enacted in the United States.

The Gentlemen's Agreement, however, contained one fatal loophole, which proved to be its undoing as an effective means of limiting Japanese immigration. Specifically exempt from the ban on passports were laborers who had already visited the United States and the parents, wives and children of laborers already here. Thus the tide of immigration from Japan hardly diminished at all and, in fact, the influx of families placed a new concern before the West Coast authorities: the desire for land ownership by the Japanese, and ownership of prime agricultural land in particular. The natural growth of the Japanese population in California brought on by the arrival of families and the marriages of Japanese people already there further raised the specter of the Japanese "taking over" California. A sequence of political maneuvers by California Gov. Hiram W. Johnson and the California legislature resulted in the passage of the Alien Land Law in 1913, which effectively prevented the



*The Rohwer Relocation Center in Desha County Arkansas was a virtual city within itself during World War II as thousands of displaced Japanese Americans were deported to rural Arkansas. (National Archives Photo 210-CR-103)*

ownership of land by immigrants. Yet, as Johnson himself anticipated, even this law did little to change matters, as Issei farmers could either lease the land from white landholders or simply transfer their land titles to their American-born children, who were exempt from the Alien Land Law.

Once again, the true ineffectiveness of this purported legal cure-all only raised the ire of the anti-Japanese exclusionists. Yet Japan's involvement on the side of the United States against Germany in the First World War delayed any further activity until 1920, when it resurfaced dramatically through the instrument of a California ballot initiative that proposed a stronger Alien Land Act. This more restrictive version of the 1913 act prohibited leasing and sharecropping as well as land purchase; it passed by a margin of more than 3 to 1. This rising tide of popular anti-Japanese feeling (which paralleled such other popular racist movements as the Ku Klux Klan's attacks on Negroes, Catholics, and Jews), aided by such anti-Japanese organizations as the Oriental Exclusion League, finally achieved national sanction through the passage of the Immigration Act in 1924, which excluded the further immigration of all Japanese to the United States. The success of the anti-Japanese forces in spreading their sensationalist fears and racist sentiments throughout a wide cross-section of the American populace was only aided during the 1930s by Japan's aggressive military actions, as manifested through the occupation of Manchuria, the invasion of China, the withdrawal from the League of Nations and the defiance of naval arms limitations. Many white Americans believed they had genuine cause to fear the Japanese — not just as a sovereign nation and military power, but as a race.

## **Pearl Harbor**

It is against this historical backdrop that the events that followed the attack on Pearl Harbor must be understood. Furthermore, the element of surprise that enabled the attack's success was underscored by two other concurrent circumstances: Japanese diplomats had been negotiating with American diplomats regarding limiting their aggression in the Pacific Basin — ostensibly in good faith — right up until the Pearl Harbor attack, and most Americans, preoccupied with Hitler's blitzkrieg conquest of Europe, were unsuspecting of any immediate threat from the Japanese. The hysteria that resulted from the perceived threat of a Japanese attack on the Pacific Coast caused events to unfold quickly. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's declaration of war on Japan was quickly followed by a vigorous campaign of anti-Japanese propaganda from California newspapers and radio stations. The idea of the removal of all people of Japanese ancestry was proposed early on as the only dependable means of securing the West Coast, first by the local media and then by the California legislature itself. These proposals were echoed by California State Attorney General Earl Warren and Military Commander for the Western Command, Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt. Though no similar plans were seriously suggested for people of German and Italian ancestry (with whose native countries the United States was also at war) and President Roosevelt's own personal intelligence men reported that the vast majority of the people of Japanese ancestry residing on the West Coast (both Issei and Nisei, the first American-born generation) were intensely loyal to the United States, and in spite of the opinion of U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle that the forced removal of U.S. citizens by race and without trial was unconstitutional, he nevertheless signed Executive Order #9066 on February 16, 1942. This order effectively transferred the authority to the military for the removal of any persons required by "military necessity."

Between February and June of 1942, General DeWitt effectively declared the entire Pacific Coast — the states of California, Oregon, and Washington — a military zone from which all people of Japa-



*This Rohwer Relocation Center residential structure survived into the late 1980s. (Arkansas Historic Preservation Program file photo)*

nese ancestry were to be excluded. By April, exclusion orders had begun to appear on telephone poles in all Japanese communities within this zone. These orders stipulated both the locations of the assembly centers to which the evacuees were to report and the deadlines by which they were to do so. Some were given as little as 24 hours to make their arrangements for removal, though most were given two weeks. They were ordered to dispose of all their property, make arrangements for pets, which they were not allowed to take with them, contact family and friends, and pack up all their belongings for removal to an undisclosed final destination. Needless to say, those who were not able to leave property with trustworthy white friends were frequently forced to accept only pennies on the dollar.

In March 1942, Executive Order #9102 established the War Relocation Authority (WRA) for the purpose of supervising the camps themselves and directing their construction and maintenance. This was a civilian agency distinct from the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA), which was controlled by the military and concerned exclusively with the round-up, assembly and transport of the evacuees; the WRA would assume sole control of the camps themselves. Its first director was Milton S. Eisenhower, who experienced perhaps the most difficult period of the entire operation, the forced relocation of the Japanese-Americans to the camps. He had been one of the most hopeful regarding the success of the initial policy of voluntary relocation; however, soon after his appointment he realized that forced relocation was the only possible avenue. In addition to the reluctance felt by the Japanese-Americans themselves, many white residents of the states to which the evacuees were to be moved were violently opposed to having such a camp sited among them. Though he never made public his private misgivings about the legitimacy and legality of the relocation effort, the experience obviously weighed heavily upon him. By June of 1942, he sent a letter of resignation to President Roosevelt and was replaced thereafter with Dillon S. Myer, a former Agriculture Department administrator who Eisenhower had recommended as a replacement.

By August 1942, the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast was complete, though it would take several more months before they were all transferred from the temporary assembly centers to their “permanent” homes in the actual camps. A total of 10 inland camps were established: Colorado Rivers and Gila Rivers in Arizona, Central Utah in Utah, Granada in Colorado, Heart Mountain in Wyoming, Manzanar and Tule Lake in California, Minidoka in Idaho, and Jerome and Rohwer in Arkansas. All 10 sites were chosen not only for their distance from the Pacific Coast but also for their desolation and suitability as secured, closed camps. Roger Daniels states in his book, “Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II,” “that these areas were still vacant land in 1942, land that the ever-voracious pioneers and developers had either passed by or abandoned, speaks volumes about their attractiveness.” The sites of the Rohwer and Jerome Relocation Camps were no exception. (The Jerome camp was closed in 1944, a year before the Rohwer camp was closed, and no standing structures of any kind remain.) The Rohwer camp was sited among flat cotton fields, which were part of a parcel previously purchased by the Farm Security Administration for future subsistence homesteads for low-income Southern families. It is just one of the ironies of the entire relocation effort that this land instead served as an incarceration site for a group of people who were being deprived of inherent rights and opportunities.

### **Rohwer Relocation Center**

Construction on the Rohwer camp began on July 31, 1942, under the supervision of director Ray D. Johnston. Located adjacent to the Missouri-Pacific Railroad line that brought the 10,000-plus evacuees, the Rohwer camp consisted of 500 acres of wood-frame barracks, covered with tar paper and divided into blocks with 12 barracks per block. Each block also contained a mess hall, a laundry and a combination bath/toilet building. The barracks buildings each measured 20 feet in width and 120 feet in length. Each was divided into six apartments of different sizes and housed 250 people.

Life at Rohwer shared many of the problems experienced by the evacuees in all the relocation centers. Though immediate families were not separated during the relocation process, maintaining family unity was difficult within the camp due to overcrowding, poor sanitation facilities, common dining halls, a lack of sheltered space for family gatherings, and an extreme lack of privacy overall. Also common was the severe sense of separation felt by children and adults alike. All had made friends and established close ties with co-workers in their communities on the West Coast, Japanese and Caucasian alike. The problem was especially acute for school-aged children, however, as they had left behind many classmates with whom they had established close and enthusiastic friendships. Finally, the strong feelings of anger and frustration regarding their obvious mistreatment at the hands of the federal government and the physical and psychological disorientation took a toll on all the evacuees. More than 10,000 evacuees passed through Rohwer during its existence and over two-thirds were American citizens. Yet how they chose to express those feelings and how that anger manifested itself is one of the triumphs of the Japanese-American relocation experience, and is of particular relevance at Rohwer.

In addition to the usual services of a fire station and a separate city government, with the “city” being divided into wards for effective management and administration (organized by the civilian federal administrator, E.B. Whitaker), modern schools were also provided for the Japanese-American students. A superintendent was provided for each Arkansas camp and John Trice of Springdale was selected for the Rohwer school. (Trice later enlisted in the armed forces and was replaced by A.G. Thompson of Lake Village, who had been the superintendent at the Jerome camp until it closed in

1944.) The regular teachers were all Caucasian, though teacher aides were recruited from among the evacuees. The schools operated on a year-round basis, providing 180 days of class room and vocational instruction and one month off in the summer. An additional summer program provided work opportunities, organized recreation, arts and crafts workshops and specialized vocational training. A program encouraging active student participation in the social and economic development of the centers was instituted during the school year as part of a civics curriculum. The curriculum was directed toward meeting the accreditation requirements of both the state of Arkansas and any colleges to which the students would want to apply after their graduation. WRA policy also provided for the appointment by the project director of an advisory board of education. Its function was purely advisory, as WRA policy gave sole decision-making authority over the school to the appointed superintendent. The board was in effect a parents-and-teachers association, with the parents allowed to inform the administrators of the school of their concerns and their recommendations. The WRA valued the participation of the parents and attempted to coordinate a unity of educational purpose among the entire community.

The overwhelming impression left upon the Caucasian teachers and administrators at Rohwer was that the Japanese-American pupils were generally more studious and interested in their studies than their Caucasian counterparts. They exhibited great pride in their academic achievements, a pride that was strongly reinforced by their parents and families. The teachers who accepted assignments at Rohwer were often criticized by whites, and even the students did not always accept them immedi-



*Rohwer interns Kaneo Fujioka and Kay Horisawa designed and built the large concrete monument in the Rohwer Relocation Center Cemetery (left). A detail of the monument (right) shows the intricate detail they were able to include in the rough concrete memorial. (Arkansas Historic Preservation Program file photos)*





*Rohwer interns salute the American flag as it is raised over the Desha County relocation center. (National Archives photo)*

ately, but virtually all left with a remarkable respect for the genuine interest and willingness of the Japanese-American students to learn. The students also showed a strong proficiency for creative endeavors, which was particularly evident in the poetry they left behind. The theme that runs through the poetry composed by the Rohwer students is one of hope and an unswerving appreciation of natural beauty. Some of the poetry, however bittersweet, is patriotic.

This proficiency in the arts was neither limited to poetry nor to the children. The abundance of cypress in the Delta surrounding Rohwer made popular the art of kobo — the sculpture through hand-rubbing of fantastically shaped root growths found particularly in the root systems of the cypress. Other traditional Japanese arts at which the Rohwer evacuees excelled in spite of a paucity of materials included artificial flower manufacturing and arrangement, landscape design and gardening, mural painting, theatrical set decoration and costume design, tool craftsmanship, wood carving, weaving, tsumami (a form of picture-making using natural material which are adhered to paper), cabinetmaking and furniture manufacture (including decorative relief sculpture) and dollmaking. The creative gifts of the Rohwer evacuees have left their most poignant record within the Memorial Cemetery at the site. Set within a rectangular plot, 24 simple concrete headstones and two similar entrance markers are placed to the west of two larger concrete monuments, all of which were designed, manufactured and inscribed by the Japanese-American evacuees themselves. The headstones mark the graves of 24 evacuees who died while at the camp.

The monument with a tall, rectangular tablet and a star atop the bottom of a tank commemorates the

Japanese-American men who left the Rohwer camp to enlist in the American army. These men served in Italy and France with the 100th Battalion and the 442nd Combat Team, the all Japanese-American volunteer units that contained many soldiers recruited from the relocation centers. The 442nd won the distinction of suffering more casualties and receiving more decorations than any other unit of its size and length of service in the Second World War. The names of the soldiers who enlisted from the Rohwer camp and were killed in Europe are memorialized on the monument itself. The relief designs in the concrete consist of an American flag with the colors painted into the relief on the eastern side and on the western side, beneath a relief carving of an eagle, the names of those soldiers who perished in battle. The tank-shaped base of the monument also has the outline of the machinery of the vehicle cut into the concrete, as well as the numbers of the units in which the soldiers served. The other monument consists of a square base with decorative carving, surrounded by urns, supporting a tall obelisk surmounted by an eagle perched upon a globe. The base is inscribed with elegant, decorative floral patterns and a star and circle alternately at the corners. The obelisk itself appears to rise out of rocks and is decorated on all four sides by decorative carving and Japanese script. Of particular beauty are the egret and the peacock on the southern elevation, which stand beneath a tree branch and a stylized rising sun. The American eagle beneath the star on the eastern or front elevation is also noteworthy and stands as a silent testimonial to the patriotism of these Japanese-Americans. The same motif is repeated in the eagle atop the globe at the top of the monument. The eagle, with wings outstretched and ready for flight, appears to be both a static patriotic symbol and a prediction of America's triumph over the Axis powers that still threatened the world as of 1944. It is interesting to note that although the last group of evacuees did not leave the Rohwer Relocation Camp until November 1945, the threat allegedly presented by the possibility of so-called "fifth column" activity (sabotage and espionage) among West Coast Japanese-Americans during an attack was actually eliminated before the relocation camps were even fully constructed and operational. Any long-range attack capability on the part of the Japanese Navy was effectively destroyed during the Battle of Midway, which occurred on June 2, 1942. By early 1943, President Roosevelt was advised by the military that the need for the relocation camps no longer existed. Probably for political reasons (he did not want to jeopardize his 1944 bid for an unprecedented fourth term in the White House), he waited until December 17 — a full 18 months — before allowing the War Department to issue the orders to close the camps. The evacuees were shipped back to the West Coast gradually, though some chose not to return and settled elsewhere.

The most eloquent testimony to the ambivalence felt by many of the Rohwer interns regarding the circumstances of their incarceration is found in the words of Miyo Senzaki, who was a young woman of 22 when she was forced to relocate from Seattle, Washington, to Rohwer, Arkansas" in 1924:

"I remember when we saw names of kids we went to school with who died in the 442nd. We'd run over every day and see whose name would appear. Then my friend said, 'Miyo, how can you salute that flag?' and I looked at her and I said, 'I can't answer that, but I know how you feel.' From the time you're in the first grade that's what you learn, and you're so proud when you do salute that flag, and then I remember going to ball games, the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' and there was a time when I couldn't even sing that, because I didn't feel it was right.

"...I want to be proud of it, when it's flowing in the sky, to be proud to salute it, because you know that it's telling you something. But you have to live what you're taught to know the meaning of it."



*The boiler house and its looming brick smokestack still survive at the Rohwer Relocation Center site. (Arkansas Historic Preservation Program file photo)*

### **The Site Today**

The Rohwer Relocation Camp Memorial Cemetery site is one of only three extant Japanese-American relocation camp site cemeteries in the United States. A total of 28 contributing monuments remain in the cemetery, including 24 concrete gravestones, two entrance markers, and two tall commemorative concrete monuments. Two noncontributing resources, a nonhistoric monument erected in 1982 and a National Historic Landmark marker installed in 1992, are also present.

The adjacent relocation camp site features several standing structures and standing objects that date from the period of Japanese-American internment: two original buildings (including a brick smokestack), a concrete reservoir, and 27 concrete foundations. (The concrete foundations were destroyed in early 1997.) The relocation camp site also includes a total of 43 noncontributing resources, most of which are small, non-historic single-family residences and all but one of which are concentrated in the northern quarter of the site. However, because significant elements of the relocation camp have been lost and the original layout of the facility is no longer evident, the National Historic Landmark nomination is limited to the boundaries of the Memorial Cemetery.

### **Standing Structures**

Significant standing structures of various kinds remain to show that a temporary city of more than 10,000 people once occupied the open fields near Rohwer, Arkansas. The Rohwer Relocation Center, located on a roughly rectangular, 500-acre site lying to the north of the center of the community of Rohwer and to the west of Arkansas Highway 1 and the Missouri-Pacific Railroad tracks, housed Japanese-Americans who had been forced to relocate from the West Coast during World War II. Upon completion, the camp was roughly rectangular in layout, measuring 5,000 feet in length (north to south) and 3,250 feet in width, and divided into 51 blocks by 11 perpendicular streets running

east-west and north-south (though they are indicated on the plan, it is not clear that the westernmost eight residential blocks were ever constructed). The north-south streets were numbered “First” through “Eleventh” from east to west and the east-west streets were “A” through “K” from south to north. Though most of the blocks (a total of 36) were square in shape and reserved for evacuee residences — each containing 12 barracks, a recreation hall, a lavatory/laundry facility and a mess hall — other larger blocks were set aside for schools, churches, utilities and maintenance, military police headquarters, a hospital and an administration area. It is interesting to note that there was no provision in the original site plan for a cemetery.

Surviving elements of the relocation camp proper include a one-and-one-half story boiler house and its associated brick smokestack, the hospital laundry building, a 20-foot tall round concrete reservoir, and 27 concrete slab foundations for the laundry/lavatory buildings, mess halls, recreation buildings, the fire station, and other miscellaneous facilities. (These foundations, which supplied a rudimentary understanding of the camp’s layout, were destroyed in early 1997.) Though many of the original buildings and structures were removed soon after the closing of the camp in November of 1945 (including all of the military fortifications and most of the barracks), and even more have been lost in the recent past (all three of the barracks buildings formerly adjacent to the new Delta High School, which actually housed administrative personnel and which were extant as of the listing of the site on the National Register of Historic Places on July 30, 1974, have since been removed), a total of 58 contributing historic resources, including buildings, structures and objects, are distributed evenly throughout the site. However, the loss of significant resources through demolition, removal, farming activities and new construction have damaged the property’s integrity sufficiently so as to preclude the nomination of the entire camp as a National Historic Landmark.



*A second historic monument at the Rohwer Relocation Center Cemetery honors the many Rohwer interns killed in action in Europe fighting for the United States armed forces. (Arkansas Historic Preservation Program file photo)*

## Historic Cemetery Resources

At the south end of the original site lies the cemetery, with 24 concrete gravestones and two entrance markers clustered behind two tall concrete monuments, all of which were made by the Rohwer evacuees themselves. The gravestones are small and simply detailed, each displaying the name of the deceased, birth and death dates, and a symbol inscribed in a circle above indicating whether or not the deceased was a Buddhist or a Christian.

Each of the two larger monuments is approximately 15 feet tall. The soldier's memorial — a monument to Japanese-American soldiers from the camp who were killed in action during World War II — was engineered and constructed by internees Kaneo Fujioka and Kay Horisawa in 1945. The base of the soldiers' memorial gives the appearance of a tank, with the turret being replaced by a pyramidal tablet topped by a star. Inscribed on this monument are the words "Dedicated to the men from Rohwer Center who gave their lives to America on foreign soil." On the eastern side, the relief designs in the concrete consist of an American flag with the colors painted into the relief and on the western side of the names, beneath an eagle, of those soldiers who perished in battle. The tank base of the monument also has the outline of the machinery of the vehicle cut into the concrete, as well as the numbers of the units in which the soldiers served. It is in fair condition, as some parts of the base have spalled and there are other cracks visible in the concrete.

The other monument consists of a square base with decorative carving, surrounded by urns, and supporting a tall obelisk surmounted by an eagle perched upon a globe. Commemorating the lives of the 24 Japanese-Americans who died while being forced to live in the camp, this obelisk is inscribed as follows: "May the people of Arkansas keep in beauty and reverence forever this ground where our bodies sleep." The base is inscribed with elegant, decorative floral patterns and a star and circle alternately at the corners. The obelisk itself appears to rise out of formed, concrete rocks and is decorated on all four sides with ornamental carving and Japanese script. Of particular beauty are the egret and the peacock on the southern elevation, which stand beneath a tree branch and a stylized rising sun. The American eagle beneath the star on the eastern or front elevation is also noteworthy and stands as a silent testimonial to the patriotism of these Japanese-Americans. The same motif is repeated through the eagle atop the globe at the top of the monument. This monument has also suffered some deterioration as a result of the freeze-thaw cycle, and small sections of the concrete have fallen away, but overall it is still in good condition.

Two nonhistoric markers are also located within the cemetery. The new monument to the Japanese-American 442nd Regiment of the 100th Battalion was erected in 1982 by Sam Yada, a former Rohwer internee who lived in Sherwood, Arkansas, until his death in 1991. A National Historic Landmark plaque atop a concrete base was installed after the Rohwer Relocation Cemetery was designated a landmark on July 6, 1992.

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