

# SACRAMENTO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

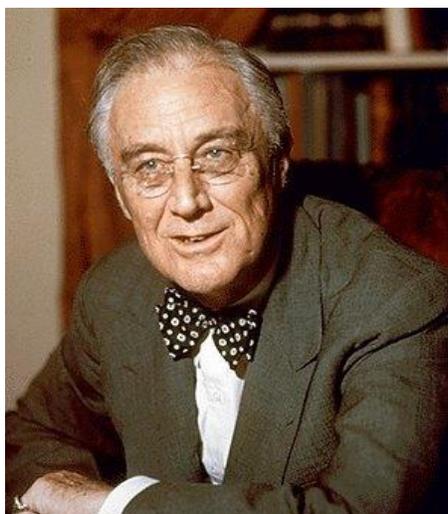
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Father John E Boll, Diocesan Archivist

No 17

## THE INTERNMENT OF THE TAMAKI FAMILY In Tulelake during World War II

By Father John E Boll



One of the most egregious, myopic and unjust decisions made by the United States Government during World War II was Executive Order 9066 issued on February 19, 1942 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt when he accepted the argument of “military necessity” and turned the “Japanese problem” over to the U.S. Army. Soon after, the **War Relocation Authority** (WRA) was created and the Army supervised the massive displacement of Japanese Americans to temporary detention centers and then to ten inland concentration camps under the administration of the WRA.

From March to November 1942, over 120,000 Japanese Americans were moved to concentration camps. Regulations specified that anyone with as little as one-sixteenth part Japanese ancestry must be imprisoned. The Assembly Centers were Puyallup, WA; Portland, OR; Mayer, AZ; and in California, Marysville, Sacramento, Tanforan, Stockton, Turlock, Merced, Pinedale, Salinas, Fresno, Tulare, Santa Ana and Pomona.

Relocation Centers where these Japanese Americans were incarcerated for four years were Manzanar, CA; Tulelake, CA; Poston and Gila, AZ; Minidoka, ID; Heart Mountain, WY; Granada, CO; Topaz, UT; and Rower and Jerome, AK. In Addition, the U.S. Justice Department operated internment camps in Santa Fe, NM; Bismarck, ND; Crystal City, TX; and Missoula, MT.

On March 22, 1942, the first large contingent of Japanese, aliens and citizens, were moved from Los Angeles to Manzanar Assembly Center in Owens Valley, CA. On May 27, the first internees reached the Tulelake Relocation Center in Modoc County, CA. During the next four years, some 24,000 Japanese were interned in the Tulelake Center until it was officially closed on March 29, 1946. This prison was built on a large parcel of land near Newell, about 10 miles from Tulelake, covering 7,400 acres. It had 1,036 barracks to house the people, 518 latrines and 144 administration and support buildings. During the four years of imprisonment, 1500 babies were born in the camp and 330 people died.

### The Tamaki Family

Jean and Lilly Tamaki’s mother, Natsuyo Gotan, born on March 28, 1888, left Hiroshima, Japan in February 1910 and arrived in Seattle, WA at the age of 21. She came to America to marry Mr.

Takasaki. This was an arranged marriage which was common among the Japanese at this time. The Takasakis lived in Sacramento and owned a strawberry farm on the property where Jean Tamaki and her sister Lilly live today. The Takasakis gave birth to three children, Calvin, Virginia and Harlan. Mr. Takasaki died after about 10 years of marriage, leaving his wife Natsuyo with three children to raise.



Within a couple years, Natsuyo married Gentaro (George) Tamaki whose wife had died a few years before. Jean and Lilly were born from this union during the time the family lived on 16<sup>th</sup> Street in Sacramento. This brought the number of children in the family to five. The Tamaki family had a fruit stand at their house but could not make a living at this occupation. The family moved to their property on 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue in South Sacramento and lived in a small house on the property. George was hired by the Sacramento Produce Company south of Broadway.

**Left: Natsuyo and Gentaro Tamaki, Parents of Jean and Lilly Tamaki**

#### **The Japanese Internment**

Jean's brother Calvin was already married when the presence of Japanese in the United States became a political issue. Japanese who lived in

the city of Sacramento were ordered to move to a temporary relocation center in North Highlands. Since Jean's parents lived in the outskirts of the city, they had not received orders to relocate yet but George Tamaki decided that all the members of the family should stay together and not become separated.

Government officials told the Japanese families to take only what they could carry. Nothing could be shipped since no one knew where they were moving. Jean remembers their last Christmas in Sacramento; her family gave her a beautiful doll and baby buggy which she loved. Because she could not carry these items, doll and buggy had to be left behind as did the family dog Molly. These were painful moments and the memory of them is still the cause of pain.

#### **Thanks to May Clark**

The Tamaki family was lucky to be friends with George's employer Mr. Clark who was Caucasian. Mr. Clark died but his widow May Clark assured George that she would make sure his property taxes were paid so when the Tamakis returned they would still have their land and home. Some Japanese families brought their belongings to the Tamaki's barn to store their things during the time of internment.

### **First Stop, North Highlands**

The family spent about three months at the internment holding facility on Walerga Road in North Highlands until September 1942. They were loaded on a train headed for Klamath Falls and as they traveled, the train's window blinds had to be closed to prevent the people from seeing outside.

After arriving in Klamath Falls, the Japanese were taken by bus to Newell in the Tule Lake basin. At the Internment Camp, the people were assigned to their barracks. The Tamakis' new address was Block 34 and their barracks was next to the sewer. Life was regimented. Each barracks was divided into four family sections and each section had a coal burning potbelly stove that provided heat during the very cold winter months. Temperatures in the Newell area went well below freezing during the winter and the blowing winds lowered the temperature even further. The family members had to make their own furniture from lumber provided by the Army and the family slept on cots in their barracks quarters.



Photo courtesy of the Tamaki Family

### **Students at the Tulelake Internment Camp**

#### **Life in the Internment Camp**

Meals were prepared for the prisoners and delivered to the mess halls located on every block of the Internment camp. Jean says the food was terrible, often mutton curry stew. Her family cannot eat curry to this day. Each block of buildings had communal latrines and washrooms. The camp had schools for the children in Japanese and in English. Jean and Lilly went to the Japanese school and Japanese intern teachers taught them how to read and write in Japanese.



Photo courtesy of the Tamaki Family

#### **Jean's sister Virginia and husband Jack with their daughters Sherry and Joylene. Sherry was born in the Tulelake Camp.**

After a while Jean and Lilly attended classes in English. The Japanese teacher was not very nice to them and Jean felt this teacher and other Japanese interns discriminated against them because they were Catholic and not Buddhist. The family confronted the teacher who later apologized for his behavior.

#### **Jean and Lillian Convert to Catholicism**

While the Tamaki family was at the camp on Walerga Road in North Highlands, Jean and Lilly were introduced to Catholicism. They attended catechism classes with Catholic friends. The teachers were

Father Thomas Kirby and some Franciscan Sisters who came weekly to the North Highland camp. Father Kirby served as the Catholic chaplain to the Japanese in Sacramento during this period.

After the family was sent to Tulelake, they met Father Joseph A Hunt, a Maryknoll priest who served as the Catholic chaplain at the Tulelake Internment Camp. Father Hunt baptized Jean and Lilly on August 15, 1943 in Newell. Bishop Armstrong came to the camp on August 22 and confirmed the newly baptized converts in the camp.



Since Jean and Lilly were baptized Catholic by an Anglo priest, they felt discrimination from fellow Japanese in the camp. Father Hunt stayed at the camp until it closed and then returned to Japan to minister to the Japanese after the war ended.

#### **No Japanese was to have Idle Hands**

Japanese do not believe it is good to be idle. Consequently Jean and Lilly were always involved in something. Jean took sewing class and learned how to perform the Japanese Tea Ceremony. Lilly learned classical Japanese dancing and even performed on stage in the camp.

**Jean (age 15), top right, with Fr Hunt and friends at Crater Lake in 1946**



Items Courtesy of Jean Tamaki



Photos by John E Boll

#### **Items Made by Japanese interns at the Tulelake Internment Camp**

When people had some free time in the camp, they learned how to make brooches out of shells they found on the ground in the area. Others learned to carve beautiful things out of wood or even weave tules that grew in Tule Lake. The Japanese interns were creative and artistic.



Photo by R.H. Ross, WRA '44-'46

### **Tulelake Internment Camp on a Moonlit Night in the 1940s**

#### **Returning Home After the War**

After the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, World War II soon ended and US Government prepared to close the Internment Camp. The Japanese internees were told that they would be released. Jean's father was able to return to Sacramento to check if the house and property were still intact. Squatters had moved into the house and taken over the property. George told them to move out because his family was returning from Tulelake. During that week, he cleaned the house and prepared it for his returning family. May Clark provided him with beds and a number of household items. George returned to Newell to bring his family home. Father Hunt received permission to drive his car into the camp to pick up Natsuyo Tamaki since her legs were not strong enough for the long walk from Block 34 to the camp's main gate.



Photo from book *Second Kinenhi*, Reflections on Tule Lake

### **Moving the Japanese Interns toward the Gate and Freedom**

Buses took the internees to Klamath Falls where they boarded the train for the trip back to Sacramento. A Chinese family friend met the Tamakis at the Sacramento train station and drove them to their south Sacramento home. On the way he stopped at a shop to purchase some sweets for the family as a welcome home present.



### **Jean and Lilly Return to School in Sacramento**

When the Tamakis arrived home, Jean was struck by how small the family property looked to her. Jean was 15 and Lilly was 13 when they arrived home. Father Hunt told the girls that when they returned home, they should go to Mass every Sunday and if possible, attend a Catholic school.

### **The Tamaki Girls Attend Saint Patrick Grammar School**

Father Patrick Bennett (on left) was the pastor of Saint Rose Parish and Jean and Lilly enrolled in the parish school. Jean was an eighth grader and Lilly a sixth grader. Upon graduating from grammar school, Jean wanted to attend Saint Francis High School on 26<sup>th</sup> and K Streets. However, she lived in an area covered by Saint Joseph Academy on 8<sup>th</sup> and G Streets. Jean talking with Father Bennett about her desire to attend Saint Francis High School and he gave his permission.

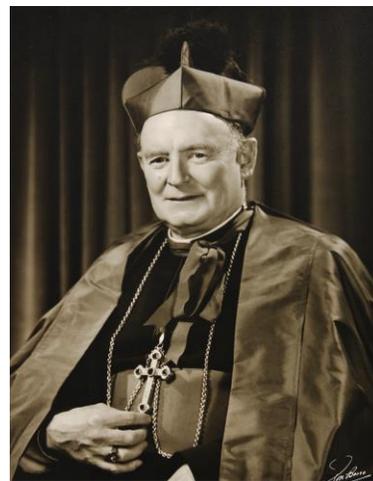
### **Saint Francis High School**

Jean attended Saint Francis High School all four years. Father Cornelius Higgins was looking for a part-time secretary and contacted the high school about hiring a student. Franciscan Sister Mary Peter Mitchell was Jean's business teacher and recommended her. Jean interviewed with Father Thomas Kirby and she was hired. She worked in the mornings part time for Father Higgins during the 1949-50 academic year. Jean remembers one time when she missed the bus at the Cathedral stop and arrived late to Saint Francis High School. Sister Monica, Jean's chemistry teacher, was not pleased with Jean being late. She felt Jean was getting special treatment and that needed to stop.

### **Jean Begins Working in the Bishop's Office**

As graduation approached, Jean needed a full time job. Sister Peter arranged an interview for Jean with Doctor Varanini. The doctor hired Jean part time on Saturdays but in her heart Jean liked the work at the chancery. Bishop Armstrong's secretary married and left her position. Margaret Ellen Hall, known as Boots, became Bishop Armstrong's secretary and Jean became Father Kirby's secretary. Another student from Saint Francis High School was hired to be Father Higgins' secretary.

Margaret Ellen Hall entered the Sisters of Mercy and left her position as Bishop Armstrong's secretary. Margaret was given the name of Sister Mary Saint John Vianney. Jean was then hired as Bishop Armstrong's secretary but not for long. Bishop Armstrong was stricken with cancer in 1956.



**Bishop Robert Armstrong**

### **Bishop Joseph McGucken named Co-adjutor Bishop of Sacramento**



Bishop Joseph Thomas McGucken arrived in Sacramento in 1957 as coadjutor bishop. Jean became his secretary and found him to be very kind and generous. She remembers when Bishop McGucken went to Japan to administer the sacrament of confirmation to U.S. soldiers, a few weeks after his return a package arrived addressed to him. Jean brought the package to his office and placed it on his desk. He seemed to be very preoccupied with something at that moment and asked Jean to open the package for him. The package contained a beautiful Japanese Madonna and child which he had purchased in Japan as a gift for her. It was the most beautiful and exquisite statue of Mary and Child that Jean had ever seen. It is encased in a glass display cabinet and displayed in a prominent place in Jean and Lilly's home.

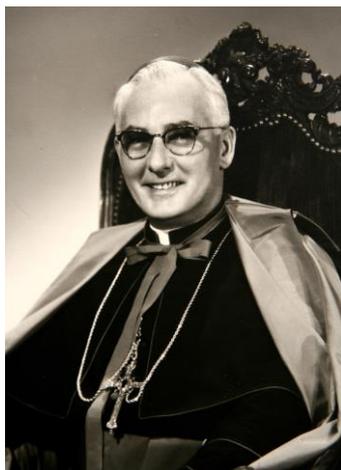
### **The Tamaki Parents Convert to Catholicism**

In the late 1950s, some years after Jean and Lilly became Catholic, George Tamaki thought it best if he and Natsuyo became Catholic as well so the family would be united in the same faith. Keeping the family together was always a strong value for George. But who was going to give Catholic instructions to the Tamakis? One day soon after, Father Joseph Guetzloe, SVD, a German who had been a missionary in Japan, stopped by the chancery office inquiring if there were any Japanese people in the area who might want to go to confession or to receive counseling? Jean thought God had sent this priest. She arranged for Father Guetzloe to instruct her parents in the Catholic faith. He baptized George and Natsuyo in Saint Rose Church on Franklin Boulevard and the whole family attended the 8 am Mass every Sunday until their death. George and Natsuyo are now buried together in Saint Mary Cemetery.



Photo by John E Boll 2015

**Madonna and Child, a gift from  
Bishop McGucken to Jean Tamaki**



### **Bishop Alden John J Bell Named Sixth Bishop of Sacramento**

Archbishop John Joseph Mitty died at Saint Patrick Seminary, Menlo Park, on October 16, 1961. Bishop McGucken was named his successor and left for San Francisco to become archbishop in early 1962. His successor in Sacramento was Bishop Alden Bell, auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, who became the sixth bishop of Sacramento in 1962. Jean says Bishop Bell was a wonderful man and a real gentleman. He was quiet in demeanor and gentle in spirit. He never raised his voice except for one time when a difficult priest called him and he became so exasperated he hung up on the priest.

Jean used to host a Christmas chancery staff gathering at her home every year. Bishop Bell would always attend. When the preparation for the party became too much for Jean and Lilly to handle, Bishop Bell took over the task of hosting the party at his home. Auxiliary Bishop John Cummins always attended too and Jean says that Bishop Bell and Bishop Cummins were good friends and had a father/son relationship.

### **Jean Tamaki Saves Bishop Bell's Life**

Jean vividly remembers that terrifying day in the chancery office when a mentally disturbed young man came to the office. Monsignor Higgins told him to leave the chancery. During the lunch hour, William Luthin returned again looking for Monsignor Higgins. Most of the staff members were at lunch. Luthin walked past the lone secretary and down the hall toward the priests' offices. It happened that on that Wednesday, Bishop Bell's day off, he returned to the office to sign an important letter before heading to the airport to catch his flight to Chicago so he could participate in the Papal Mass during Pope John Paul II's visit to the United States. The first office along the hallway was Bishop Bell's and Luthin entered and attacked the bishop with a knife. Jean heard the commotion and rushed to the bishop's office. Bishop Bell had already been stabbed before Jean pushed the attacker away from the bishop. Luthin fell over and then got up and ran out of the chancery. At first Jean thought Bishop Bell had only cut his finger. The priests who were having lunch at the Cathedral dining room were alerted of the attack and rushed over to the chancery. They took Bishop Bell to the hospital and the doctors discovered he had been stabbed and the knife wound just missed the bishop's heart.

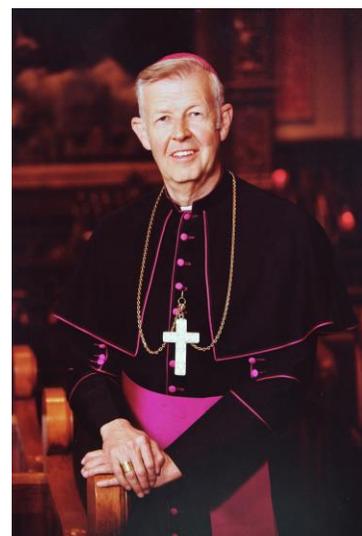
### **Bishop Bell is weakened by the Attack**

After this trauma, Jean sensed that Bishop Bell's health began to weaken. He recuperated at his home and began returning to his office in the chancery. Jean says Bishop Bell's energy level was not the same. At age 75, Bishop Bell sent his letter to Pope John Paul II requesting retirement. Pope John Paul II named Bishop Francis Anthony Quinn, auxiliary of San Francisco, as Bishop Bell's successor. Bishop Quinn invited Bishop Bell to remain in the Bishop's House on Fair Oaks Boulevard. A year after his retirement, Bishop Bell was stricken with esophageal cancer and died of this disease on August 28, 1982 at Mercy Hospital.

### **Bishop Francis Anthony Quinn Becomes Bishop of Sacramento**

Bishop Quinn became the seventh bishop of Sacramento. He was different from all the other bishops Jean had worked for before. The very first day he brought boxes and boxes of files to the office. They were stored under the Cathedral steps. She remembers one day when he was having trouble with his desk drawer, Bishop Quinn took off his coat and collar and went to work to fix the drawer. Jean knew at that moment that he was going to be a very different style bishop.

Bishop Quinn had a room divider installed in his office because he felt the office was too big for him. He had the carpets removed as well. He delegated and involved more lay people in the operations of the diocese.



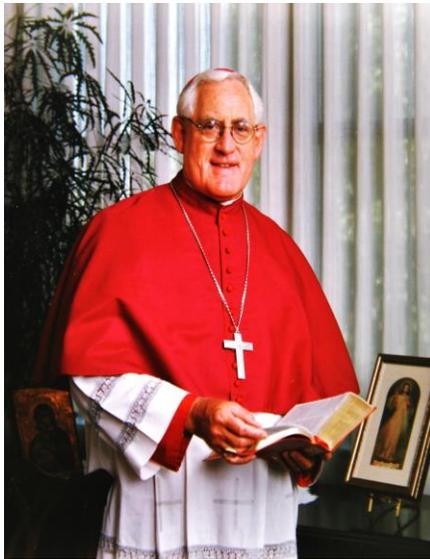
Jean would meet with Bishop Quinn every Monday morning to outline the events of the week. The bishop traveled all over the diocese by himself to visit the priests and parishes. Bishop Quinn was a people person. The things he said and did attracted people. Non-Catholics in Sacramento talked of Bishop Quinn as their bishop. When he took up residence in the cathedral rectory, he did not want to displace any of the priests living there so he decided to move into a one room bedroom in the basement of the cathedral rectory. Never before had a bishop in Sacramento lived like this.

He joined the homeless one night and slept outside in front of the Federal Building to remind Sacramento of the plight of the homeless in the city. He often walked the cathedral dog at night in downtown Sacramento and talked with the homeless and destitute along the way. These people come to see Bishop Quinn in his office and he always welcomed them. This was a totally new experience for the chancery staff. Bishop Quinn had an open door policy. If a priest came to speak with the bishop without an appointment, if Bishop Quinn was free at that moment, he always made time to see the priest.

Jean notes that Bishop Quinn always felt physically cold in the old chancery office during the winter. He would ask Jean, "When are they bringing in the beef?" At first Jean didn't know what he was talking about. Coming from San Francisco, one would think he would be used to cool temperatures but Bishop Quinn always loved the warm Sacramento weather.

Bishop Quinn was famous for buying the smallest and most inexpensive car he could find. He had owned a Renault and when it broke down he purchased a Suzuki. The Suzuki was a very dangerous car because it was top-heavy. It was by the grace of God he never had a deadly accident with the Suzuki car. Before he retired he purchased a small white Ford. Bishop Quinn always had a car that was white in color.

### **Bishop Weigand Is Appointed the Eighth Bishop of Sacramento**



Bishop William Weigand, bishop of Salt Lake City, was appointed Bishop Quinn's successor. Jean says he did not give a lot of direction to his staff on how he wanted to do things in the office, evidently because he was confident they knew what to do.

Bishop Weigand was dedicated to his ministry and a hard worker. He kept a close friendship with his mother over the years. Jean served as Bishop Weigand's secretary for two years until she retired after nearly five decades of service.

### **Lilly Tamaki also worked for the Diocese**

Lilly, Jean's sister, had worked for Cal-Western Insurance Company for a number of years. The company moved its headquarters from Sacramento to Houston, TX in 1995 and Lilly decided not to move with the company. She was hired by the Catholic Social Service Department which was then located on Newman Court in Sacramento. Later Lilly transferred to the Diocesan Development Office. At the age of 63, Lilly decided it was time to retire to begin a new phase of life.

### **Jean's Retirement**

When Lilly retired, Jean decided it was time for her to retire as well since she was 67 years of age. Neither Jean nor Lilly ever married. They have lived together in the family home they had built for their parents in South Sacramento to this day. They have always had a small white Maltese dog to keep them company and to fuss over.



Photo by Cathy Joyce

After retirement, Lilly volunteered time to be a receptionist in the Bishop's Office until 1997. Jean also volunteered time to help Bishop Quinn with his large amount of correspondence. The bishop always replies to anyone who writes to him or sends him some gift. Each Monday, Jean speaks with Bishop Quinn by telephone and he dictates letters to her which she then prepares for him. On Fridays, Jean takes the correspondence to Bishop Quinn at Mercy McMahon Terrace for his signature and then takes them at the post office. Jean says Bishop Quinn writes well, a skill he must have developed when he was editor of the San Francisco *Monitor*, the archdiocesan newspaper.

Because of her weekly secretarial work for Bishop Quinn, it hardly seems that she has really retired.

### **Luci Lu, Jean and Lilly's Beloved Maltese Companion**

Jean and Lilly Tamaki have been faithful laborers in the vineyard of the Lord for decades. Jean served five of the nine bishops of the Diocese of Sacramento. Her whole working life has been in service to the Church of Sacramento. Jean began working for the bishop at 19 years of age as a senior in high school and continues to this day at age 85. The bishops, priests and the Church of Sacramento owe a debt of great thanks to these two valiant women, Jean and Lilly Tamaki, for the service they have generously given to the Church for seven decades.

Thank you Jean and Lilly for your life of service and example of Christian life lived well!



Photo by John E Boll 2014

### **Fall Colors along the American River in Coloma**



Photo by John E Boll 2015

## Jean and Lilly Tamaki in Retirement



Photo by R.H. Ross, WRA '44 - '46

**Aerial View to Tule Lake Internment Camp**



**A barracks being moved from the camp for veterans returning to Tulelake to farm**



Photo by John E Boll 2013

## The Last Remnants of the Tule Lake Internment Camp



Photo by John E Boll 2013

## Historical Monument at the Internment Site Tule lake/Newell, California

**The Tule Lake Segregation Center  
Has been designated a  
National Historic Landmark.**

**During World War II, nearly 120,000  
Persons of Japanese ancestry were  
Incarcerated without trial or hearing.  
Those who resisted the unjust detention  
Were segregated and imprisoned at Tule Lake.  
More than 24,000 men, women and children  
Were confined here.**

**2006**

**National Park Service  
United States Department of the Interior**

**The Plaque Designating the Tule Lake Segregation Center  
A National Historic Monument**