Fifty years ago, Aya Iwasaki (Fujii), '48, arrived on the OSC campus two months ahead of her parents' return from government-imposed exile in Eastern Oregon, where her family was sharecropping in a designated "free zone." Aya, whose sister Kate Iwasaki attended OSC at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor, said she felt "petrified" to be returning to the Willamette Valley on her own. "I sure was gutsy, looking back on it," said Fujii, adding that she soon felt at home when she saw former classmates from Hillsboro.

Unlike most other families subject to evacuation, the Iwasakis did not live in an internment camp. Instead they volunteered to help thin and harvest beet and onion crops in a farm labor camp located near the farm of the Hashitanis, a Nyssa family that had graduated two sons, Roy and Ray, from OSC just as the evacuation began.

Although a few Japanese-American servicemen receiving military training preceded Aya Iwasaki's arrival, she was among the first half-dozen or so non-military Japanese-American students to enroll at OSC in 1945-46, at war's end. In the next two years, five of the 42 students whose studies at OSC had been disrupted by the evacuation began to trickle back. Returning were Shigeru Hongo, '48; Masao Kinoshita, '49; Robert Masao Yoshitomi, '50; Tom Tomomi Namba; and Tsukasa Milton Sakuma.

The May 1942 evacuation of all West Coast persons of Japanese ancestry to assembly centers and internment camps touched the lives of Oregon Staters in a variety of ways. Of the 42 students of Japanese ancestry enrolled in 1941-42, only two had been born in Japan, and one of these reportedly did not learn of her status until she was 18. The American-born students, called Nisei, ultimately were excluded from Military Areas No. 1 and 2 along with the immigrant generation, known as the Issei, who were denied U.S. citizenship until 1952.

Although their parents generally stayed behind in the camps, most of the former OSC students scattered to Midwestern and Eastern cities to resume their schooling or to work. Some eventually joined or were drafted by the military, which had rejected them not long before, and a few were among the surge of students using G.I. Bill benefits after the war.

Three members of a Hood River family whose history is intertwined with OSC, the evacuation and military service were among the returning G.I.'s in 1948-49: Gene Asai, '51, a high school sophomore at the time of the evacuation, and brothers Richard, '52, and Masaaki, called "Half," all enrolled at OSC in 1948-49 on the GI bill. Half and Taro "Tot" Asai, attended OSC in the late 1930s and were among the 16 Nisei soldiers whose names were removed from the Hood River County Courthouse honor roll by the local American Legion post, stirring a national controversy that led to
restoration of the names. After the war, Half died in his senior year of injuries suffered in a car accident.

Another brother, Masami "Min" Asai, who attended OSC in 1939-40, was one of three young Japanese Americans sent to test whether it was safe for others of Japanese ancestry to return to Hood River. Min was suddenly drafted after local authorities became aware he would tell Hood River families to come home. Like many of the Nisei Staters, the Asai family sent many of the next generation to their alma mater. Ten members of the third or "sansei" generation of Asai's family graduated from OSU.

Pearl Harbor: First reactions

Dan W. Poling, then a political science instructor and assistant dean of men, recalls two Japanese-American students in his 8 a.m. class on December 8, 1941. "Those kids had their heads down and they never looked up. I know they were very distraught." Poling said he counseled the students to stay in school and wait for instructions.

Editorial reaction from the Barometer on December 9, 1941 was sympathetic: "There surely is no rankle in the hearts of the students, who are now so ready to fight the Japanese empire, against these American students of Japanese ancestry." Noting that some American-born students of Japanese ancestry already had left school feeling that other students would connect them to Japan's actions, the editorial said other students recognized the Japanese-American students' allegiance to America and wished they would stay. The Corvallis Gazette-Times remained silent on the status of these students for several months, but the tone of editorial and news pages was much less friendly toward Japanese Americans.

Florence Yogi (Fugami) a Hawaiian home economics junior, was one of the students who felt the need to leave OSC after the fall term. "It was just like something had just punished us." She stayed with friends in Portland and married George Fugami, a Multnomah College student, in before entering the Portland Assembly Center.

Other former students of Japanese ancestry interviewed by the Stater had varying experiences on and off campus immediately after Pearl Harbor. Some reported no problems, and some reported feeling stunned and a bit uncomfortable. "I don't think the people in my dorm changed
at all," said Kay Kiyokawa. "They still talked to me." Robert Yoshitomi said his "fellow students knew how I felt and treated me pretty good."

Three students were evicted from a private boarding house because of their ancestry, and one, Frank Saito, said he ended up sleeping on a church basement floor. Taro Miura, evicted from the same boarding house along with Saito and Victor Shimizu, recalls finding a place in another boarding house, after college officials tried and failed to persuade the owners to reverse their decision.

Saito also reported that some students "spit on me and shoved me" on campus the day after Pearl Harbor. "I don't understand. Yesterday they were my friends, and today they are my enemies." But Saito carefully balances such stories with pleasant OSC memories, like ice cream at the campus dairy and weekend excursions.

Wild rumors were flying. Kinoshita said a fellow boarder's mother called with the "news" of massive West Coast bombings. He said he experienced "no discrimination" from town folk but added, "people would stare at you and give you a dirty look."

Loyalty letter

Within a few days of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese-American students signed a letter to acting president Dr. F.A. Gilfillan, submitted by Kay Nakagiri and Lena Kageyama, expressing "our unswerving loyalty to our country, the United States of America, and to all her institutions." The letter noted that students wished to continue "our normal program subject to the new duties of citizenship imposed by war," and added that they "will deeply appreciate any opportunity to prove our mettle and our devotion to the College and to our State and Nation."

Kinoshita remembers that the letter was read aloud at a convocation. "A lot of people clapped, which made me think things were going to be okay."

Dr. Gilfillan responded with praise and thanks for the students' declaration of loyalty and offered the following: "In recognition of your avowed purpose and to the end of helping you attain it, I wish to assure you, on behalf of the College, of every facility possible in preparing you as a loyal American citizen."

The "loyalty letter" reached an educator who had worked with students of Japanese ancestry and who appreciated an important aspect of Japanese culture. A few years before Pearl Harbor, Dr. Gilfillan corresponded with former pharmacy graduate students Leo Kiyohiro and Chieko Otsuki. The
letters discussed their mutual research projects and the progress of his Japanese garden. Gilfillan kept Otsuki’s academic papers and books for her and spent several years trying to get them back to her after she and her father were deported to Japan during the internment.

OSC efforts

Dr. Gilfillan generally endorsed the work of University of California President Robert Gordon Sproul, who wrote a letter and memorandum urging investment of time and money to keep students of Japanese ancestry in school to ensure their development as loyal Americans. In a letter to the chancellor, Gilfillan described Sproul’s administrative plan as excellent but suggested that the financial provisions would more study. Sproul’s proposal was submitted to the congressional Tolan Committee, but ultimately these efforts were undertaken not by the federal government but by individual academics, foundations and church groups, notably Quakers. The Student Relocation Committee, later known as the National Japanese American Student Relocation Council (NJASTC), arranged placements in Midwest and Eastern schools that showed willingness and where no federal agency posed security objections. OSC Dean of Women Buena Maris was OSC’s representative on the initial committee, while Dr. Othniel Chambers, head of the psychology department, served on the council.

In the short term, all that the OSC administration could do was provide travel letters and attempt to clarify the sparsely worded declarations issued by the Western Division Military Command of General John L. DeWitt. Clarifications from the military consisted largely of one-word answers to a series of questions posed on March 27 regarding an 8 p.m. curfew and its effect on students using the library and attending late classes, a one-mile radius restricted zone around the Corvallis armory, travel restrictions and the like. The reply, received in early April, said students could stay only until the evacuation, the time of which would be announced “in the near future.” The armory restriction apparently did not stop Ed Yada and Kinoshita, who were in ROTC, from attending classes and participating in ROTC activities as they had before Pearl Harbor.

Military authorities were less cryptic but no more lenient in replies to inquiries about individual students. Ray Hashitani was told he could return to Nyssa in late April or stay in Corvallis but could not come back for commencement if he went home; Saito was not allowed to go home to Honolulu, Hawaii.
Although one history of the evacuation indicates 75 West Coast students were placed in schools further east prior to evacuation, military authorities rebuffed one OSC effort to place students. On May 20, OSC sought travel permits for Tony Takashima and Jack Kato, who had been accepted for transfer to the University of Utah. Although the OSC telegram had identified them as American citizens, the military reply erroneously referred to them as Japanese citizens and said they could not travel.

Sports

Most former students interviewed said travel restrictions and curfews had little effect on their daily lives, and only one student reported having to drop a class. But student athletes felt the restrictions every time their teams went on the road.

Jack Chiaki Yoshihara, a member of the football team that won Oregon State's first Rose Bowl berth, may have paid the highest price of all. Because coaches were unable to overcome travel restrictions, Yoshihara did not travel to play Duke in North Carolina, where the game was moved for fear of another West Coast attack. Travel restrictions also kept Yoshihara from wrestling for OSC. Although no newspaper discussed his absence from the big game, the Oregonian noted his presence at the Portland Assembly Center. Yoshihara's Rose Bowl jacket is part of a travelling Japanese American National Museum exhibit on Japanese pioneers of Oregon. The College Nisei, by University of Washington professor and NJASTC director Robert W. O'Brien, erroneously identifies "Roy Yamaguchi" as the OSC Rose Bowl championship team member. Yoshihara is pictured in the 1942 Beaver in a team photo and alone, catching a pass, but his unique situation is not discussed.

Ed Yada, who recalls pitching in the gym with Glenn Elliot (later a big-leaguer), also got a scoring hit in the Linfield game, according to the Barometer. Kay Kiyokawa, whose short stature and pitching performances attracted crowds of townspeople in his freshman year, was offered a "last chance" shot at Utah in a home game, but that game was rained out. Kiyokawa, who remembers coach Ralph Coleman as a "fair, nice man," later played for the University of Connecticut in baseball and football. One other returning player, Carl Somekawa, was listed in the lineup against Linfield.

Barometer sports page references to the Japanese American members of the baseball team end with the Linfield story on March 28, 1942. Although four Japanese American members of freshman team are shown in the 1942 Beaver, the three who went out for varsity are not pictured or listed in the 1943 Beaver.
And then there were 14

A total of 42 students of Japanese ancestry attended OSC in the 1941-42 school year. At least six students of Japanese ancestry did not return for the winter term, based on comparison of fall and winter term lists. But four others who had not been enrolled for fall were enrolled in winter term.

By May 2, when Registrar E.B. Lemon answered an inquiry from a representative of the Japanese American Citizens League, 22 students of Japanese ancestry were registered at OSC. The Corvallis Gazette-Times reported that only 14 students registered on May 27 at the American Legion Hall, which served as the Corvallis “reception center.” No one else registered in Corvallis, since there were no persons of Japanese ancestry on the faculty and the 1940 census showed none in Benton County.

Departure

Many of the students went home that spring to help families close down farms and businesses and pack family belongings for the evacuation. Most Oregon families went to the Portland Assembly Center, but families from Hood River, Wasco and parts of Sherman counties were sent to Pinedale Assembly Center in the California desert near Fresno.

Conflicting newspaper accounts during the last few weeks of school may have been added to the uncertainty. The Gazette-Times reported on May 21 that the students would have to leave by May 22 “if they desire to join their families in evacuation.” The Barometer of May 26 reported that although remaining students were required to register on May 27, the evacuation itself would take place June 1 to June 3. The paper observed that “Oregon State students affected by the new order may, by fast work, finish the term.” The Oregonian reported May 28 that registrants at Corvallis, Eugene, Salem and Medford were to be sent directly to the Tule Lake relocation center beginning June 1, while the Gazette-Times speculated on May 29 that they would go to Portland.

Yoshitomi said a sergeant at the bus station tried to talk him into leaving directly for Tule Lake from Corvallis, but he decided to stick with his family. Had Yoshitomi not declined, he would have been separated from his family, which ultimately went to Minidoka. Yoshitomi recalls that on his birthday, May 29, he and a few other OSC students boarded a bus to join a handful of U of O students en route to Portland.
Saito, unable to join his family in Hawaii, did not go to the assembly center. He recalls taking a bus from Corvallis to meet a train in Albany carrying Japanese families heading to Tule Lake. He sat down next to a woman who offered him a drumstick from the last chicken she had killed and cooked. "Tears came, and I couldn't eat that drumstick," Saito said.

Five of seven Japanese American seniors (Tom Arai, Roy and Ray Hashitani, Harry Iwatsuki and Tony Takashima) managed to graduate in 1942 despite the impending evacuation. The Stater could not determine whether any were able to attend commencement, which took place May 30.

Portland Assembly Center

Most Oregon families were sent to the former Pacific Livestock Exposition Center in north Portland to live for a few months in structures minimally converted for human habitation. Yoshitomi remembers the makeshift cubicles fashioned out of two-by-fours, plywood and shiplap, complete with knotholes. "You could see your neighbor," he said. "There was no ceiling so you could hear your neighbor snoring or laughing."

Toshiara Kuge, who transferred as a junior in 1939 from OSC to the U of O Medical School, was enlisted to help treat patients at the center even though he was not yet a doctor. The "little hospital" handled ailments, such as diarrhea, heat rash and emotional problems stemming from incarceration. Dr. Kuge, who later finished his medical training in Portland after the war, said one patient died of measles.

Molly M. Kageyama, '41, married Milton Maeda, '38 on May 22, 1942, in the first wedding conducted in the Portland Assembly Center. The Gazette-Times dispatch termed the wedding "more excitement ... than the day the evacuation moved in." Kageyama, a secretarial science graduate, signed the OSC loyalty letter even though she had graduated. Maeda was a junior engineer for the BPA. The article noted that the bride's father could not attend because he was held in an assembly center at Pinedale California, with other Hood River evacuees.

A USC dissertation on the Oregon evacuation notes that Ralph N. Takami, a 24-year-old who had majored in PE at OSC for three and a half years prior to the war, became the evacuees' recreation director at the Portland Assembly Center.

Life in the camps
Oregonians generally were sent to three of the ten federal camps for persons of Japanese ancestry: Minidoka, near Twin Falls Idaho; Heart Mountain, Wy.; and Tule Lake in the northern California desert. Oregon Staters interviewed for the most part didn’t stay long; they generally found work releases or enrolled at schools participating in the student relocation program. Their parents had fewer options and generally stayed at least until the exclusion was lifted.

According to The College Nisei, Northwest Nisei were disproportionately represented among the first 400 relocated. Dr. O’Brien speculates that they had more positive contacts with Caucasians and were thus were more willing to go to places with few Nisei. He also noted that Washington and Oregon had higher proportions of college attendance than their populations warranted.

Jack Yoshihara recalls arriving at Minidoka in a 1920-vintage railroad car in the middle of a dust storm to a temporary home surrounded by barbed wire and armed sentries. The barracks, although somewhat better than the assembly centers, lacked furniture and had gaps that allowed the dust to settle on everything. Yoshihara said he was fire chief for the “Georgetown” district of the camp, a job that required him to put out latrine fires now and then.

Yoshihara, who also worked in the fields and as a parcel driver at Minidoka, called the coach at Utah and landed a football scholarship at Utah and a job as a busboy. Marriage brought new responsibilities, so he worked in Detroit and other cities east of the exclusion zone. Yoshihara underwent a military physical but did not serve because of various football injuries. “I was a little guy even then,” he said of his days as an OSC end. “Most of the players outweighed me by a hundred pounds.”

Yada briefly played baseball in camp but was one of the first students to leave Tule Lake. He continued his agriculture studies at Nebraska and graduated on time in 1944.

Saito, a senior in pharmacy when he left OSC, was put to work assembling the Tule Lake pharmacy. Pharmacy Dean Adolph Zieffle unsuccessfully tried to place Saito at the University of Michigan (his alma mater) or the University of Iowa, but Saito was able to complete his studies at the St. Louis College of Pharmacy with the help of the Quakers.

Kuge tried unsuccessfully to relocate to another medical school. “Even if I had gotten accepted, I didn’t have a lot of money.” His alternate route out of camp was enlisting in the Army.

Florence Yogi Fugami put her home economics training to work making the dusty camp habitable with vegetable and flower gardens. “We thought, ‘Oh no, we won’t be able to plant anything’ because of the dust,” she said “Somehow we managed to make things grow.” She gave birth to her
first child at Minidoka and settled for a time in Twin Falls, where her husband had a baking job. Outside the camp, she faced discrimination at the hospital during the birth of her second child.

Military service

Most Japanese Americans were discharged from military service soon after the start of war. Others, like Masaaki and Taro Asai, remained in the service throughout the war, despite a decision in 1942 stop induction of Nisei and to reclassify them as IV-C (not acceptable for training and service because of nationality or ancestry). Then in early 1943, federal authorities decided to form a special Nisei combat team and administered a loyalty questionnaire to all camp residents 17 and older, spurring considerable debate in the camps. Nisei officially became draftable in early 1944, although some entered the service in 1943 via the draft and volunteering.

Oregon Staters who were in college at the time of the evacuation served in the Military Intelligence Service and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, known for distinguished service in Italy, where it rescued a "lost battalion" of Texans trapped behind enemy lines. Some were finished training just before VJ day and helped with post-war government in Japan, repatriations, and prisoners of war.

Kuge, who served in the medical corps of the 442nd, attributes the team’s high performance to the educational attainments of its members. "One hundred percent of the members had graduated high school and over 50 percent had some college," he said.

Saito said Nisei service in the 442nd "proved that we were good Americans and made Hawaii a better place to live after the war." Other Staters who served in the 442nd include Tom Arai, '42, and Tom Namba.

After hearing from his local draft board in 1944, well before the exclusion orders were lifted, Yada said he travelled to Portland by train without incident and spent a few days in Brooks near Salem with Caucasian friends in the family of then-state senator Ronald Jones.

Kinoshita, who was drafted while attending Bradley University, completed language school around VJ Day and thus didn’t see combat. Instead he assisted with Japanese POWs in the Philippines and inspected jails for the public safety department in one prefecture of the U.S. occupation government.

Yada’s group of college-educated Nisei had no choice but to go to language school. After nine months of training, he felt his Japanese was still inadequate. “The Caucasians were the valedictorians. They gave the speech, and we didn't really understand," said Yada, adding that Nisei
who had stayed home with their parents performed better in language school than the college-educated Nisei.

Yoshitomi was drafted just after he had arranged admission to WSU. After three months in language school, he was diverted to one of five Nisei mobile training teams that instructed other G.I.s in use of Japanese weapons. After the war, he chose to go to Germany as a quartermaster and ended up on guard duty in tense days as verdicts started coming out of Nuremberg trials.

Families return home

Some of the Nisei soldiers were still in the military and others Staters were in school or working elsewhere when their parents returned from the camps to see what was left of their farms, other businesses and homes. Situations varied tremendously and often depended on the efforts of friends and neighbors.

Kuge's family, which ran a tofu shop in Portland prior to the evacuation, "just lost everything," while Kiyokawa's family returned to a Hood River orchard that had been reasonably well maintained by a lessee who managed a fruit company and also was his former youth baseball coach. "I think we were one of the few fortunate ones because of him."