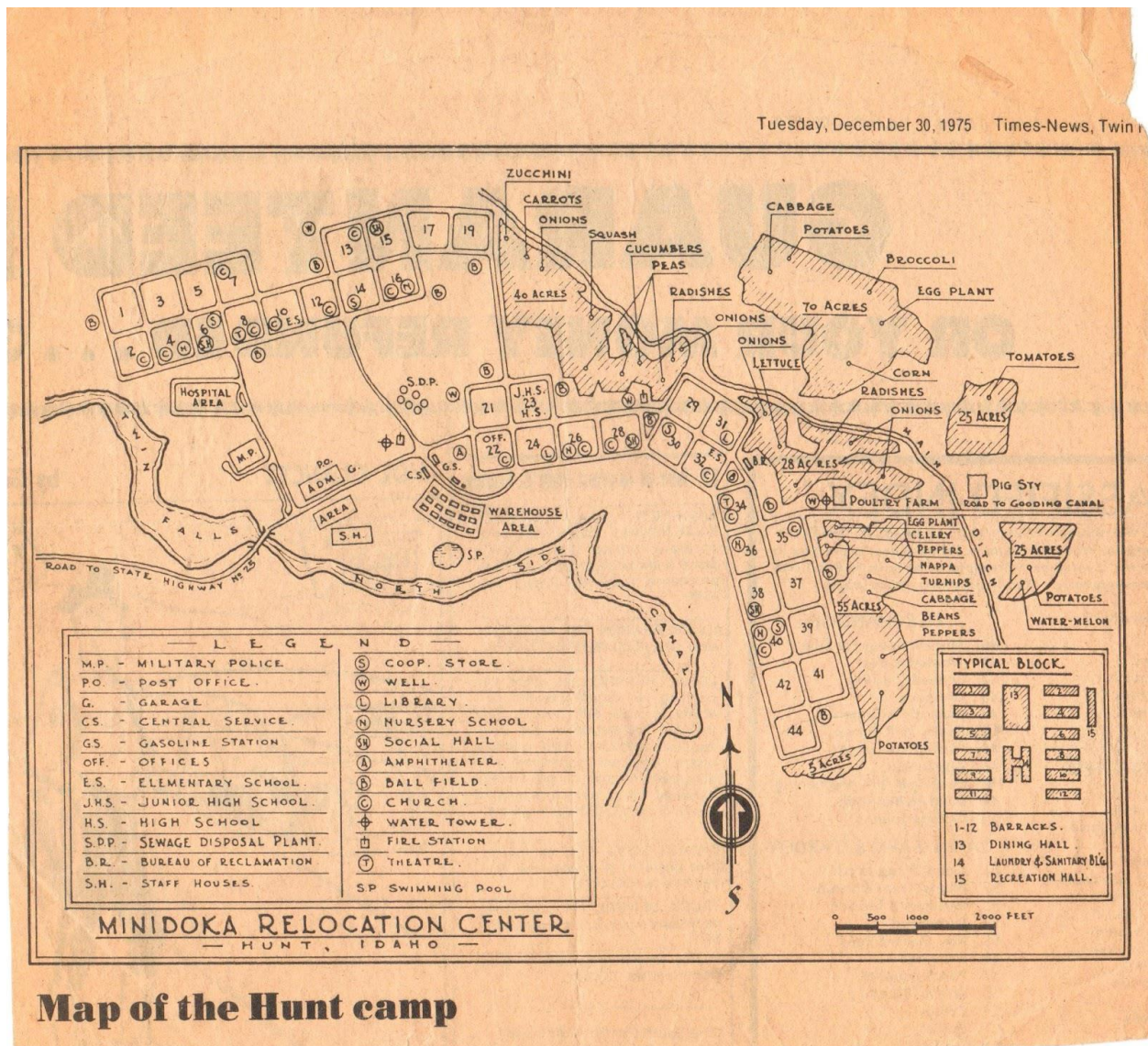


Minidoka: An American concentration Camp (known as Hunt Camp during WW2)

What: A camp that was set up for the Japanese Americans who were forced to leave their homes on the US west coast, mostly in Washington, Oregon, and Alaska. It is one of 10 camps authorized by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) in the months after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

Where: The camp was built on 33,000 acres near Hunt, ID; approximately 15 miles east of Jerome and 15 miles north of Twin Falls

When: Opened August 10, 1942, closed October 28, 1945



A note on terminology

During World War II, Minidoka and other similar camps were referred to as “relocation centers” (the “Map of Hunt Camp” shown above is an example). Since the war, there has been an ongoing debate about what to call these camps. In addition to relocation centers, they have been called internment camps, incarceration camps, prison camps, and concentration camps. [Denshō](#), an organization with a mission “to preserve the testimonies of Japanese Americans who were unjustly incarcerated during World War II,” asks us to “think critically” about the euphemisms used by the U.S. government during the 1940s” and suggests that “concentration camp” more accurately represents the historical events. This website will follow this suggestion, which is also consistent with the National Park Service webpage on the [Minidoka National Historic Site](#). An important point is that using different terminology does not change the history or the living conditions of the camps.

Historical context

On February 19, 1942, two months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, President Franklin Roosevelt signed [Executive Order 9066](#) in order to provide “every possible protection against espionage and against sabotage ...” The order does not specially name Japanese Americans. But on the US west coast, Japanese Americans were a prominent and easily identifiable ethnic group. The order was quickly implemented. On March 29, 1942, [Lieutenant General John DeWitt](#) issued Public Proclamation No. 4, beginning the forced relocation of Japanese Americans from large areas of the west coast, often with only 48 hours advance notice. Over the next 6 months, more than 122,000 individuals were relocated, first to temporary camps and then to isolated and guarded camps in California, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, and Arkansas administered by the War Relocation Authority (WRA).

7 things to know about the Minidoka Concentration Camp

1. In many ways, the camp was unfinished when it first opened. The sewage system had not been completed which meant that inmates used outhouses; water for the kitchens, laundry rooms, and latrines was trucked in because water pipes being installed often broke; some housing blocks lacked electricity and lights; stoves were installed over time and coal was in short supply; and the camp hospital had not been completed.
2. Throughout the camp’s existence, housing was, at best, rudimentary. Housing blocks were a collection of one-room, 20x20 foot “apartments” housing a family with as many as 9 individuals. Each apartment contained cots and a coal-burning stove. Blankets hung from the ceiling separated the apartments and provided the only privacy. Kitchens, dining halls, laundry facilities, and latrines were all communal spaces.
3. Inmates showed initiative and creativity in providing for themselves and adapting to the environment. They built sidewalks between the buildings and furniture for the buildings, along with gardens that were both food-producing and ornamental. Inmates also used “greasewood,” a local wood that could be given a glossy shine because of its high oil content, to create both practical and artistic items.

4. At its peak population Minidoka was home to more than 9000 people, making it the 8th largest city in Idaho at the time. The camp was a self-sustaining community with a variety of public facilities, largely operated by the residents. These included schools, religious organizations, a 196-bed hospital, fire stations, warehouses, libraries, newspapers and a variety of service operations (barbers, etc.).
5. The camp also included a variety of recreational facilities including a golf course, softball fields, basketball courts, 2 swimming holes, and an ice skating rink. Entertainment was provided by movie theaters, handicrafts, performing arts, concerts, dances, and musical groups. Some of these musical groups provided entertainment both inside and outside of the camp.
6. In spite of the harsh sagebrush environment, the camp had an extensive agricultural program that included both growing vegetables and raising livestock. Food was provided for use within the camp and for shipment to other WRA camps. Several thousand inmates did agricultural work outside the camp. This provided a welcome opportunity to leave the camp and to earn prevailing wages.
7. Minidoka had the highest number of volunteers for the US military among the WRA camps. Many of these volunteers joined the [442nd Regimental Combat Team](#), an all Japanese American unit that became the most decorated unit for its size and length of service in US military history. Approximately 70 of these volunteers were killed while fighting in Europe, but their families, incarcerated at Minidoka, could not attend their funerals.

The legacy of the Minidoka Relocation Center

Apologies and reparations.

1948 – President Harry S. Truman signed the [Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act](#). The law allowed internees to submit claims for property lost as a result of their incarceration. But the law was largely ineffective and the total amount paid, at best, a fraction of the value of lost property.

1976 – President Gerald Ford formally rescinded Executive Order 9066.

1988 – President Ronald Reagan signed the [Civil Liberties Act](#). The law acknowledges the “grave injustice” done to incarcerated people and [President Reagan’s remarks](#) on signing the bill acknowledge the “mistake” of incarceration. The law establishes a \$1.6B fund that paid reparations to formerly interned Japanese Americans or their heirs. Eventually, more than 82,000 individuals received \$20,000 checks.

Minidoka National Historic Site. In 1946 the site was transferred to the Bureau of Reclamation; in 1979 it was added to National Register of Historic Places; and in 2001 the site was designated as the Minidoka Internment National Monument by President Bill Clinton. In 2008, the site was renamed the [Minidoka National Historic Site](#). An Honor Roll was added in 2011; an interpretive trail with 23 exhibit panels, a guard tower, a refurbished barracks building and mess hall and a visitor center were added in 2012; and in 2019, a new visitor center was built including a theater and an exhibition space.

[Friends of Minidoka](#). The nonprofit organization was incorporated in 2003 and has the goal of preserving the history of the Minidoka Relocation Center and promoting education, research, and historic preservation of the WWII experience of incarceration.

[Annual pilgrimage](#). A Seattle based group, Minidoka Pilgrimage Planning Committee, is a Seattle-based, volunteer organization that has the goal of educating the community about the experiences of people incarcerated at Minidoka. The Committee organizes an annual trip to the Minidoka National Historic Site. The pilgrimage allows an opportunity for former inmates, families, and friends from the Seattle and Portland areas to share memories, ask questions, and learn about the Minidoka experience. The Committee organizes an annual trip to the former site of the camp. The first pilgrimage was held in 2003 and it temporarily shifted to a virtual format because of safety concerns related to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

For more about the Minidoka Relocation Center

- [Japanese incarceration during World War II](#). Friends of Minidoka. A brief overview of the history and description of the camp.
- [Minidoka: An American concentration Camp](#) (2019). National Park Service: Harpers Ferry Center (video 30:01). Uses archival photographs, video, and recorded interviews to tell the story of the camp and of Japanese serving in the US military.
- Brian Niiya (2019). [10 little known facts of life at Minidoka](#). Densho.org.
- [Introduction to WWII Incarceration](#). Densho.org.

For more about the camps and Executive Order (EO) 9066

- Roger Daniels (2008). [Words do matter: A note on inappropriate terminology and the incarceration of the Japanese Americans](#) (an article in 5-parts). *Discover Nikkei*.
- Michael Ray (2018). [Executive Order 9066](#). Encyclopedia Britannica. Brief historical summary of the history and scope of Japanese internment during World War II, including locations of the 10 camps.
- [Japanese Internment camps](#) (2009/2021). History.com.

For more about the terminology

- Paul J. Springer (2019). [The term “concentration camp” in historical perspective](#). E-Notes, Foreign Policy Research Institute.
- Edward Schumacher-Matos and Lori Grisham (2012). [Euphemisms, concentration camps and the Japanese internment](#). NPR Public Editor.