



## Family History Research: Incarceration Records

### Introduction

Any person looking into Japanese American genealogy must understand the history of incarceration during World War II. If your ancestor spent time in any incarceration facility during the war, you should work on gathering all the relevant records related to this time period.

Remember to keep an open mind – stories have come down from previous generations but they may not match up with the historical record. Memories can change and stories can evolve from telling to telling. You may learn something entirely new about your family's experiences.

### What records should you look for?

With the abundance of records created during the incarceration period, it can be difficult to know where to begin or how to focus your research. Start by thinking in terms of three categories: 1) government-created bureaucratic records, 2) records created by the Japanese American community, and 3) records created by the general public about the Japanese American community.

### Government Records

Between 1941 and 1946, the U.S. government generated many records documenting its treatment of Japanese Americans. These records are a good place to start because they are public records and there is a standard set generated for each incarcerated.

Each incarcerated should have the following records. We advise retrieving these first as they are fairly easy to find and access:

- [War Relocation Authority \(WRA\) Form 26 data](#) - The original paper forms are not currently available. Find the data through the [U.S. National Archives and Records Administration \(NARA\)](#) or in the [Densho Names Registry](#).
- [Final Accountability Roster](#) entry - Digitized microfilm can be found multiple places: [Densho Digital Repository](#), FamilySearch, and Ancestry (\$).
- [WRA Case File](#) - Original files located at NARA DC. You can view these records in person or request digitized copies.
- Assembly Center family records - Original files and microfilm located at NARA San Bruno and NARA DC. You can contact the archivists at NARA to view these records.

Additional records you might find, depending on your ancestor, including the following:

- WRA administrative records - The WRA created extensive records dealing with administration of the camps. You may find mention of your ancestors in these records. There is currently no easy way to research these records, so it will take some digging. Try looking at collections held by NARA and UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, which are the main repositories for the WRA materials.

- [Alien Files \(A-Files\)](#) - If your ancestor was an immigrant and received an A-number, then they should have an A-File with either NARA or U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). These files can contain information from the incarceration period and post-war.
- [Military records](#) - Most men of a certain age should have a draft registration record. These can be found on FamilySearch, Ancestry (\$), and Fold3 (\$). If your ancestor enlisted, there will be additional data and records at NARA.
- [Alien Enemy and Internment](#) records - If your ancestor was investigated as an enemy alien, there will be records related to that investigation and potential arrest. These records can be found at NARA and may also be found in WRA Case Files or A-Files.

## **Japanese American Community Records**

Just as there is an abundance of government records, there is also a wealth of materials created by the Japanese American community during World War II. Examples include the letters, diaries, photographs, artwork, and newspapers from both inside and outside the camps.

Start with your own family archives to see what you have. Then expand your search to archives, libraries, museums, and historical societies. Some major repositories to check first include: Densho Digital Repository, Japanese American National Museum, NPS sites (Manzanar National Historic Site, Minidoka National Historic Site, etc.), site museums (Amache Preservation Society, Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, Topaz Museum, etc.), local Japanese American community associations and historical societies.

## **General World War II Era Records**

Don't overlook records created outside of the Japanese American community. You may find letters, diaries, photographs, newspapers, and other documents created by non-incarcerated people that reference incarcerated Japanese Americans. For example, religious groups supported the incarcerated and you might find records in their religious archives. Local historical societies and museums around the country may also have materials. Look at the areas your ancestors may have gone during relocation. They may have traveled through unexpected areas of the country.