

## NEWS RELEASE

February 4, 2009

Lori Wood, **Salinas Public Library**

Phone: 831-818-5033 [woodlori@sbcglobal.net](mailto:woodlori@sbcglobal.net)

Public information: 831-758-7311

Library site: [www.salinas.lib.ca.us](http://www.salinas.lib.ca.us)

**IMAGES AVAILABLE**

## **Two Community Stories Events in February Explore Salinas' *Times of Trial***

**Great Depression & Okie Migration in Salinas  
Life in Salinas During WWII & the Japanese Internment in Salinas**

**Part of the SALINAS STORIES program - Times of Trial: 1935-1959**

Unpaved, unlit streets in the Alisal. Backyard Victory Gardens. Blackouts in Salinas streets. Ration books. Dances at the USO. Barracks in the mud at the Salinas Assembly Center. Two Community Stories events at the Salinas Public Library in February explore Salinas residents' experiences during times of trial in Salinas: The Great Depression and Okie migration, and World War II. *What was it like?* These events will be informal opportunities to share stories and personal reminiscences of the times with people who experienced these events first-hand. They are part of the SALINAS STORIES program as it explores "Times of Trial" in Salinas, from 1935-1959. SALINAS STORIES is a collaboration of the Salinas Public Library and the National Steinbeck Center.

[Sunday, February 15, 2-3:30 pm at Cesar Chavez Library: Community Stories of the Great Depression and the Okie Migration in Salinas. Free.](#)

Participants will share personal and family memories of Salinas and the Alisal during the 1930s. Many of the 3500 mid-westerners who came to the Salinas Valley during the Great Depression to escape the Dust Bowl settled in East Salinas, where they were eventually able to buy a small plot of cheap land—with no electricity, water or gas—for \$200, with \$50 down. The community, called "little Oklahoma," was later renamed "the Alisal." In the 1930s, "The streets were unlit and unpaved—it was wide open fields and cow barns. Everybody had rabbits and chickens, and there were Okies everywhere," says musician Larry Hosford, whose mother was an Okie. Hosford grew up in the Alisal, and has written songs about the Okies and Salinas. Hosford will

perform his own songs of Okies and the Depression, as well as songs by Woody Guthrie, which, along with John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath," helped bring the Okies' plight into the American consciousness.

Salinas resident Bill Ramsey, now an owner of Mann Packing, remembers growing up in the Alisal during the Great Depression: "Life was simple. Nobody had anything." The Ramsey family came after the crash of 1929. After his father lost his business, the family had driven from Texas, "nine kids and two parents in one car." Ramsey said, "My mother and dad never cried much about what they had lost." Ramsey's sister kept a journal of the experience through the eyes of a 12-year-old, "that would have rivaled Steinbeck."

Larry Hosford, Bill Ramsey, and Jim Gattis will join other community members in sharing their stories of Salinas during this time, followed by an open mic session where members of the audience can join in. [\[Images available of Salinas and Alisal during the 30s\]](#).

Depression-era snacks will be provided—foods that were introduced or became popular across America during the Great Depression, including Kool Aid, Ritz crackers, Toll House chocolate chip cookies, and Rice Krispie treats (as well as some sensible snacks).

A selection of 1930s Conjunto music will be played before and after the event. This distinctive musical style was born out of American agriculture in the days when much farm work throughout California was done by migrant American-born Latinos. While much of the farm labor in Salinas in the 1930s was accomplished by Okie and Filipino laborers prior to the Bracero program in 1942, this music would have been heard over the fields surrounding Salinas during the Great Depression and is an important and evocative part of the artistic heritage of Latino culture in California during this time.

[Saturday, February 21, at John Steinbeck Library: The Home Front - Memories of World War II Salinas. Free.](#)

[1:30-3:00 pm, Life During the War](#)

[3:30-5:00 pm, The Japanese Internment & Salinas](#)

[Part I: Life During the War.](#) Salinas residents Lorraine Lowe, John Struve, Agnes Tebo, Dorothy Heer, and Olive Bungard will join other community members in sharing their stories of

Salinas during this time, followed by an open mic session where members of the audience are welcome to join in.

In the year leading up to the dramatic attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, while America had begun fortifying itself against the threat of the war in Europe and Americans watched war dispatches from distant shores, most Americans still did not feel that the war concerned them personally. In Salinas, life continued as usual. Unbeknownst to Salinas resident John Struve, whose family has co-owned Struve and Laporte Funeral Home since 1927, he was to witness many of the important moments in Salinas' World War II history.

Struve was about 18 on the day in February 1941 that he joined the crowd at the Southern Pacific station on Market Street to bid goodbye to the 107 young men of the Salinas Tank Corps as they left Salinas. It was a happy occasion. Many of these were Struve's friends, young men just out of high school who had joined Salinas' National Guard unit (converted just four months before to an Army tank battalion) with the understanding that they would be gone for just a year, and would not serve during war. [\[Several images available of the Salinas Tank Corps boarding that train\]](#). They proceeded through training and were stationed in the Philippines, told that they would be in service only until the regular Army had built up its armored forces. On December 1, 1941, the same day the USO building was completed in Salinas (the first of its kind in the nation), the Salinas Tank Corps was deployed around Clark Field in the Philippines. No one knew that Clark Field, along with Pearl Harbor, was about to be struck in surprise attacks by Japanese bombers as the U.S. was drawn into World War II. No one could have known that these 107 young Salinas men would later be caught in the Bataan Death March, and that only 47 would return to Salinas.

Like much of America, Salinas residents were shocked that America had been attacked, and life in Salinas was instantly changed by the United States' entry into World War II.

Agnes Tebo and her husband were in Salinas the Sunday of Pearl Harbor. She recalls, "We owned this restaurant in Salinas at the corner of Market and Monterey Streets. It was a Sunday morning. We got this news. I didn't believe it. I thought it was some kind of *rumor*. Of course it was frightening, because we hadn't had a war in such a long time—We weren't expecting a *WAR*. I was afraid to go home that night. We had to drive home in the dark. The streets were almost empty, and everyone was driving with their lights off. We had to get home any way we

could.” Many Salinas residents prepared for the worst. “We closed down the restaurant within six months. I didn’t really want a restaurant—that was my husband’s idea. And we didn’t know if someone would come over and take what we had. I didn’t know how prepared we were or how unprepared we were. I was frightened. When you say, ‘We’re at WAR,’ I didn’t know what to make of this. This was really something. It scared the heck out of us.”

John Struve was at Hartnell College the day after Pearl Harbor. Struve recalls, “The place was like a riot. People were running right out of the school. I’d ask, ‘Where are you going?’ and they’d say ‘I’m joining the Navy!’”

Instantly Salinas mobilized its citizens and its spirit to join the war effort. Blackouts began in Salinas immediately. Olive Bungard, in high school in Salinas when the war started, remembers the blackouts in town, when all houses were required to cover their windows so that Japanese planes could not target Salinas by night. Bungard lived on Carmel Avenue, and her mother joined other neighborhood women and patrolled the neighborhood to be sure it was completely dark. “We were always cautioned that the Japanese would land in Monterey and march into Salinas. We expected them every day, and every day we looked for them, but they never came.”

While Bungard was not one of the “Dancing Draftees,” the women who volunteered regularly to dance at the USO to provide cheer for visiting soldiers, she occasionally attended dances at the USO and volunteered to serve snacks to troops as they passed through the Salinas train station. Everyone was expected to support the war effort. “You did what you were asked to do,” she recalls. [\[Image available of dancing at the Salinas USO\]](#).

Bungard remembers her mother’s Victory Garden, and the rationing during the war: “We *all* had Victory Gardens. She planted it because she was supposed to. She could only grow chard. So she grew chard.” She remembers that, in a family of two growing girls, “my father needed to give up his shoe rationing for the rest of us.”

Salinas Resident Lorraine Lowe, whose father owned the Sausal Market in Salinas during war rationing, recalls, “Because meat was rationed, my father would have to get up really early and make a lot of phone calls to get meat to supply the store. He’d go out and come back with a truck full of beef halves.” Real butter was scarce. Lowe remembers the wartime margarine, which

came in two parts—a mass of colorless fat, and a small capsule of yellow food coloring. “You would mix the color into the white margarine and mold it into squares. It looked like butter and you fooled yourself,” Lowe says. She remembers one of her father’s customers, the superintendent of schools, coming to the Sausal Market. “He would be ecstatic just to get a cube of butter.” [\[Image available of a ration card of a Salinas resident\]](#).

Olive Bungard remembers the day in April 1942 when the Allied troops on the Bataan Peninsula—which included the brothers of many of her friends—surrendered to the Japanese forces. “When it fell, we all felt it, because we didn’t know if they were dead or alive.” This began over three years of painful uncertainty for many Salinas families, who did not know whether their boys had survived the battle and the following ordeal. News of the Bataan Death March had reached Salinas, and the uncertainty and distress of these families continued until the 47 survivors were released from Japanese prison camps at the end of the war in summer 1945. John Struve remembers that “they were still gaunt when they arrived home in Salinas.” A bomber pilot during the war, with the Battle of the Bulge under his belt, John Struve found himself back in Salinas on the day the war ended on August 14, 1945. “I was back in the States to train for the Pacific, and had the war not ended I would have been sent to Japan.” He, along with other Salinas residents, was ecstatic. Struve remembers Salinas’ Main Street that week. “There was a party in Salinas for a week. There were bands playing, people in the street. No one wanted to work.”

What was it like for the Salinas soldiers to come back to Salinas after the war? After the war rationing, everyday items were still in short supply. Struve remembers, “They didn’t have any clothes! They went around wearing half uniforms for months.”

[Part II: The Japanese Internment & Salinas](#). Salinas residents Janice Higashi, Paul Ichiuji and Craig Yama will join other community members in sharing their stories of the Japanese internment and Salinas, followed by an open mic session where members of the audience are welcome to join in.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 had an immediate effect on the Japanese community in Salinas. On December 8<sup>th</sup>, the Salinas Buddhist Temple was told to take down their bronze gong. Salinas resident Craig Yama recounts, “The Chief of Police in Salinas said that the Japanese community would use the gong to send signals 25 miles

away to the coast. So my dad and the minister borrowed a block and tackle from a nearby garage and lowered it into a hole in the tower.”

Within two days, the bank accounts of Japanese Americans were frozen, causing great hardship and confusion for families unable to access their money. Shortly afterward, the FBI arrested the Buddhist ministers and the Issei leaders of Salinas’ Japanese community, including Craig Yama’s father, and sent them to Bismarck, North Dakota. The younger generation was suddenly thrust into leadership positions in the community.

There was great fear in Salinas and Monterey that the Japanese military would soon attack the coast, and these fears seemed confirmed on Saturday, December 20<sup>th</sup> when Japanese submarine I-23 surfaced and chased the tanker ship *Agiworld* across Monterey Bay, firing several dozen rounds, in full view of the coast.

Curfews and restrictions on the Japanese community increased through January and February, culminating in President Roosevelt’s issuance of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, ordering the removal of all Japanese, citizens and aliens, from the coastal regions of the Western United States. Japanese families were given a short time to voluntarily move from the area, an opportunity that the family of current Salinas resident Paul Ichiuji seized. At that time, he was a high school student in Pacific Grove. Ichiuji remembers, “It was devastating to me, because I was vice president of the student body.” Because of this move, Ichiuji’s family was spared the experience of the concentration camps. Not many families were able to make the arrangements in time to move before it was too late. Japanese families were forced to sell their land, houses and personal property at pennies on the dollar.

In April 1942, exclusion orders gave the heads of all families of Japanese ancestry two days to appear and receive instructions of how their family should report to the Salinas Assembly Center, a temporary detention facility that had been hastily created at the Salinas Rodeo Grounds. Families were allowed to take with them only what they could carry. [\[Images available of Japanese families and their belongings waiting for transport to the Rodeo Grounds\]](#). Craig Yama’s family was among the 3586 people moved into the Rodeo Grounds. Yama remembers, “One by ten wooden boards, then on top of that they put asphalt. No electricity except one light from the ceiling. No running water. Community bathrooms and

shower rooms. They got a trench digger and dug a deep hole and built a building on that. Five to ten people could sit there and do their business. No privacy. Everyone complained.” They stayed for four months, waiting to see what would happen to them next. “We didn’t have the slightest idea where we were going to go. There were lots of rumors,” Yama remembers.

In July 1942, most of Salinas’ Japanese families were moved to the Poston concentration camp in Arizona. “They drove us to the railroad station and put us in these old passenger trains and drew the shades so we couldn’t look out. MPs were running around all the time. It kept getting hotter and hotter as we went south. It was 120 degrees in Parker, Arizona,” Yama recalls. Letters home reported temperatures of 119 inside the barracks and on July 28 an internee from Watsonville reported with pride in a letter home, less than a month after their arrival in Poston, “There’s still some Watsonville pride. When the people from Salinas Center got here they started fainting right and left. Mostly people from Salinas California fainted. As a whole, Watsonville people were strong. One Watsonville man died, and seven Salinas people died.” (Source: *The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region: A Brief History*, by Sandy Lydon, 1997. p. 113.)

Japanese American internees began being released from the camps in 1945. Craig Yama remembers, “The thing of it all is, when they evacuated us, we had a place to go—a concentration camp. When they decided to close the camp they gave people \$25 and railroad fare to wherever they wanted to go. But where would people go? That was worse than going into the camp, because we had no place to go. The anti-Japanese feeling in America was still pretty hot. Where would people go?” Yama recalls that the Presbyterian Church on Lincoln Avenue was made into a hostel and housed a number of returning Japanese families.

Yama’s family did return to Salinas, where Kenneth Coutchie had taken care of their property. “We had to bide our time until the leases ran out and we could begin again.” Anti-Japanese sentiment ran particularly high in Salinas, exacerbated by the fact that so many of Salinas’ young men had been killed by the Japanese military in the Bataan Death March and the POW camps in the Philippines. By 1950, there were only 162 Japanese residents in Salinas, compared to 531 in Monterey.

Craig Yama recounts that, for the most part, the Japanese internees were able to bear their ordeal with a high degree of patience drawn from Japanese cultural values. “We have an expression, *shikataganai*, something that just happens to you that you have no control over, that you have to learn to accept and make the best of. Just go forward and do the best you can.”

Recommended Sources: An excellent source of information on Salinas history during the Great Depression and WWII can be found in *10,000 Years on the Salinas Plain, An Illustrated History of Salinas, California*, by Gary S. Breschini, Trudy Haversat and Mona Gudgel. For Japanese internment in Salinas and beyond, *The Japanese in the Monterey Bay Region: A Brief History*, by Sandy Lydon. Available at the Salinas Public Library.

Images for this project were generously provided by the Monterey County Historical Society. One-time use available by agreement with MCHS. Call Lori Wood at 818-5033 for images.

Times of Trial: Salinas 1935-1959

From January through March 2009, SALINAS STORIES will explore themes in the history of Salinas from 1935-1959. This era includes dramatic ***Times of Trial*** in Salinas and across the United States, including the Great Depression and the Okie migration, as Roosevelt's New Deal policies reshaped the role of government through the 1930s. Salinas' large Asian and Filipino populations faced ongoing challenges in the wake of California's Asian exclusion laws. Early labor organizing efforts resulted in conflict, and Salinas' 1936 Lettuce Strike made headlines throughout the state, stoking fears of a “Red Invasion of Salinas.” Then World War II drained Salinas of young men, while U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry were sent through the Salinas Assembly Center at the Rodeo Grounds to internment camps inland. In 1942, a shortage of agricultural workers led to the creation of the Bracero program. During these years, as John Steinbeck wrote his masterpieces and America contended with the fear of communism and questions of racial justice—from L.A.'s Zoot Suit riots in 1943 to the dramatic anti-segregation events in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955—the seeds were sown for the civil rights movement and the world we know today.

This program is part of “Salinas Stories: Cultivating Knowledge, Life & Literature,” a two-year program beginning in fall 2008, presented by the National Steinbeck Center and the Salinas Public Library. “Salinas Stories” is funded by a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and will include the Centennial year of the Salinas Public Library, founded in 1909, and celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in fall 2009. This program represents the second of four broad periods in Salinas’ history that “Salinas Stories” will explore over the coming year. Other periods will be “A City Emerges”: 1960-1985 (April-June 2009); and “Rejuvenation & Rebirth”: 1986-2009 (July-Sept 2009).

[www.salinassstories.lib.ca.us](http://www.salinassstories.lib.ca.us)

[www.salinassstories.blogspot.com](http://www.salinassstories.blogspot.com)

This project is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 122,500 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute’s mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. For more information, visit <http://www.imls.gov>.

**About the Salinas Public Library** The Salinas Public Library (SPL) serves the City of Salinas and surrounding region with a mission to contribute to a community in which people enjoy continuing opportunities to broaden their knowledge, heighten their imagination, expand their global awareness and enrich their cultural values. Services are provided through three library facilities as well as an online catalog and a variety of databases available on the website. Besides providing the traditional services, SPL also offers a Digital Arts Lab, Teen Lounge, Chicano Cultural Resource collection, free Internet access, wi-fi, multiple audio and video formats, Spanish language materials, and literacy programs. For more information, call (831)758-7311 or visit <http://www.salinassstories.lib.ca.us>.

**About the National Steinbeck Center** The National Steinbeck Center is a museum and cultural institution whose mission is to tell the story of John Steinbeck's rich legacy, and to present, create and explore stories of the human condition. The Center offers three visitor experiences. The John Steinbeck Exhibition Hall houses seven themed theaters with film clips and interactive exhibits from the Nobel prize-winning author's works. The Rabobank

Agriculture Museum explores the stories of the Salinas Valley "from field to fork." And the Center offers its own changing art and cultural exhibits and a variety of educational and public programs. To learn more about the National Steinbeck Center, call 831-796-3833 or visit <http://www.steinbeck.org>

John Steinbeck Library  
350 Lincoln Ave., Salinas  
758-7311

Cesar Chavez Library  
615 Williams Road, Salinas  
758-7345