Finding aid for the Afton Dill Nance Papers, 1942-1981

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Finding aid of the Afton Dill Nance Papers

Collection number: 2001.175

Japanese American National Museum
Los Angeles, California

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Afton Dill Nance papers
Dates: 1942-1981
Bulk Dates: 1942-1947
Collection number: 2001.175
Creator: Nance, Afton 1901-1986
Collection Size: 1 linear feet
Repository: Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)
Los Angeles, California 90012

Abstract: This is a collection of roughly 265-300 letters written by Japanese American students who were incarcerated in American concentration camps, including Heart Mountain, Wyoming and Poston, Arizona during World War II and all addressed to their pre-war teacher, Ms. Afton Dill Nance. Also included in this collection are pictures of Ms. Nance and her students, probably taken in the late 1970s to early 1980s. Ms. Nance taught English and Social Studies at Malaga Cove School in Palos Verdes, California shortly before the war. The student letter writers range from 12 to 15 years of age and most of the letters are written by Paul Kusuda from 1942-47. The letters range in topic from saying goodbye as one student informs Ms. Nance of her family's intent to repatriate back to Japan to a disillusioned teenage boy who talks of the recent Manzanar riots to teenage girls talking of their leisure activities and studies in camp, and resettlement outside of the camps.

Physical location: Japanese American National Museum 100 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012
http://www.oac.cdlib.org/items/ark:/13030/kt538nf1bb

Access
By appointment only. Please Contact the Collections Management and Access Unit by email (collections@janm.org) or telephone (213-830-5615).

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Afton Dill Nance papers. 2001.175, Japanese American National Museum. Los Angeles, CA.

Project Information
This finding aid was created as part of a project funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The project started in 2007. Project Director was Yoko Shimojo and Project Archivist was Marlon Romero.

Biography / Administrative History
Ms. Afton Dill Nance was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho on December 8, 1901. She spent her childhood living on her family's ranch and with her grandmother in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. She graduated from Long Beach High School and studied at Mills College, receiving her graduate degree in education from the University of California, Los Angeles. Shortly before the war, Ms. Nance taught 3rd through 8th grade in Manhattan Beach and Palos Verdes and also served as principal of an elementary school in Palos Verdes (possibly Malaga Cove, but could also be Miraleste School). During World War II, Ms. Nance was actively involved in the Friends of the American Way, an organization working in conjunction with the Friends of the American Way to help restore order and provide educational opportunities in the camps. After the war, she returned to California and taught at Malaga Cove School in Palos Verdes. She retired in 1965 and passed away on September 12, 1986.
Service Committee to protest the evacuation of Japanese Americans.

Through the guidance of Dr. Helen Heffernan, Chief of Elementary Education for the California State Department of Education, Ms. Nance attended a conference on Intercultural Education at the University of Chicago where she met the first African American faculty member at U Chicago, Dr. Allison Davis, an experience which she remarked, profoundly affected her. In 1948, Ms. Nance accepted a position as curriculum consultant at the California State Department of Elementary Education and remained there until her retirement 18 years later. Her notable accomplishments include her spearheading a project that helped Mexican American immigrant children in their adjustment to American schools. For instance, she organized meetings among established parents and recently immigrated families, creating a dialogue necessary for building networks to foster self-esteem and confidence among immigrant children. On September 16, 1978, a redwood tree in Humboldt County, California was dedicated in her honor— a gift of the Association of Childhood Education International. Her two college aged godchildren were present, Phyllis and Robert Naruse, children of a former student as well as a recent grandchild of another student named in her honor, Tata Afton Hirose. Ms. Nance passed away in 1986 from pneumonia.

Scope and Content of Collection

This collection contains only two series: Photographs and Correspondences.

Series 1 The first series contains only two photographs of Ms. Nance and her students. Dates unknown.

Series 2 This series is the bulk of the collection. It contains correspondences and documents. Documents are not in chronological order, rather, the original accession order is maintained. Some correspondences have objects enclosed such as ribbon from "Starr League Truck and Field boy, Rowland School, March 14, 1942, Class "A" Boys Fourth Place".

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Nance, Afton Dill
Japanese Americans
World War II
Wyoming
Arizona
California
20th century
Poston Relocation Center (Ariz.)
Heart Mountain Relocation Center (Wyo.)

Box 1-2 Series 1 Photographs

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series contains two photographs of Ms. Nance and her students. Dates unknown.

Box 1-2 Series 2 Correspondences and documents

Series Scope and Content Summary
This series is the bulk of the collection. It contains correspondences and documents. Documents are not in chronological order, rather, the original accession order is maintained. Some correspondences have objects enclosed such as ribbon from "Starr League Truck and Field boy, Rowland School, March 14, 1942, Class "A" Boys Fourth Place".