Finding aid for the Jack Muro Photographs

Collection number: 2012.2

Japanese American National Museum
Los Angeles, California

Processed by:
JoAnn Hamamura, Gary Ono, Lauren Zuchowski
Date Completed:
December 2015
Encoded by:
Lauren Zuchowski

© 2015 Japanese American National Museum. All rights reserved.

Descriptive Summary

Title: Jack Muro photographs
Dates: ca. 1942-1947
Bulk Dates: 1942-1945
Collection number: 2012.2
Creator: Muro, Jack, 1921-
Collection Size: 1.0 linear feet
Repository: Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Los Angeles, California 90012

Abstract: Jack Muro was 23 years old when he was incarcerated at Amache in Granada, Colorado. In 1943 he learned about photography from a family friend and throughout his time at Amache took pictures of his friends, the camp, and the surrounding area of Granada. Muro created an underground dark room underneath his barrack, which is where he developed all of his work.

Physical location: Japanese American National Museum. 100 North Central Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90012

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

Publication Rights
All requests for permission to publish, reproduce, or quote from materials in this collection must be submitted to the Collections Management and Access Unit at the Japanese American National Museum (collections@janm.org).

Preferred Citation

Acquisition Information

Biography / Administrative History

Jack Yoshihira Muro was born on December 3, 1921 in Winters, CA of Yolo County. His parents, Tokoichi Muro and Koito Funai, farmed peaches and apricots as sharecroppers in Winters. They were originally from Wakayama-ken. Jack’s older sister, Sakiyo Kawashima, was adopted by his aunt, Yamamoto, at a very young age and Jack was raised as an only child. Jack moved to Los Angeles after graduating from Winters High School to work with his uncle, Kazuo Funai, at a produce market in Downtown Los Angeles. His parents soon followed, where they moved into a home on 7th and Alvarado in the former Westlake Park neighborhood. Jack remembers walking to work on the day of Pearl Harbor and recalls feeling strange as people were staring at him and his uncle, prior to their knowledge of the attack.

After the outbreak of World War II, Jack and his family voluntarily moved back to Winters, which was outside of Military Zone 1. They stayed at a ranch with other relatives and friends, living in tents and working on the farm until they were forced to go to Merced Assembly Center. At Merced, Jack and his friends worked at painters, painting the outhouses which were slabs of wood with holes cut in them for open pit toilets. Their family was then taken to Amache where Jack worked in...
engineering, auto repair, the warehouse, as a waterwork tender, truck driver, and delivered mail for the post office. Jack did whatever job he could so he would not "get stuck" in one occupation.

It was in Amache that Jack met photographer Tosh Matsumoto, who was born in 1920 in the United States. He was the first photographer of Japanese descent to become a member of the New York Photo-League and exhibited there in 1949. Matsumoto’s work was included in the 1950 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art called In and Out of Focus, and again at MoMA in 1953 in their exhibition, Diogenes with a Camera II. Following these exhibitions, Matsumoto withdrew from the artistic scene and was never known to exhibit his work again. Tosh and Jack were distant relations through marriage. It was from Tosh, who was several years older than him, that Jack learned photography and how to mix the chemicals and compounds used to develop film. It was also through Tosh that Jack acquired the catalog from which he ordered his camera from a photography supplier in Des Moines, Iowa.

Jack dug his 6-foot deep darkroom directly underneath his bunk, which was located in the corner of the barrack that he shared with his parents. He ran electricity from the single light bulb in the center of the barrack to power his enlarger and safelight. The darkroom was dug by hand, but it was sand and therefore was not difficult to dig. The darkroom was 6 feet deep, which was just enough for him to stand in. The hole to his darkroom was covered by a board, which he would remove and replace when he had to get in and out. He bought his film in bulk and would cut it himself, loading the cartridge by hand. When ready to develop, under the safelight he would remove the film and then begin the various steps to develop the film. He did not have a negative holder and therefore some of his film has curled due to the heat of the lamp. Jack also built his enlarger using a coffee can, bulb, and the removable lens from his camera. Jack tried to take pictures of the various activities that occurred in camp, subjects that he found important, and those that could be used as record to preserve the Amache experience.

The Muro family was one of the advanced party groups who arrived at Amache when the order came for small families, followed by professionals. His family moved into Barrack 6H which was part of the first block and still under construction when they arrived. The conditions were horrible, with bulldozers and dust everywhere. The Muro family housed their dog, Poochie, at a local kennel in Los Angeles and had him sent to Amache as soon as they were able to house him. He remained at Amache for about three years and did not fill up his darkroom when he left camp. Jack accompanied his close friend’s sisters to California because he did not want them to make the drive unaccompanied. Jack drove to Winters, California and picked up his own car. He continued the rest of the trip with the girls to Livingston and then drove back to Colorado to pick up his parents, stopping briefly in Winters and then finally settled back in Los Angeles. Jack kept in touch with one of the sisters, Kate Kei Tanji, because she wanted a dog and Jack had picked one up for her in Los Angeles. Jack and Kate were eventually married at the Hongwanji Temple in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles.

The Muro family was released from Amache with $50, which was all the money they had in their pocket. They got a hotel room in Boyle Heights on 1st and Boyle, where they had to live and cook. Dogs were not allowed into the hotel so Poochie had to stay in the car and live in the street. This was a hard time for the entire family. They eventually rented a house in East Los Angeles. Jack’s father worked as a gardener, one of the only jobs available to the Japanese Americans in the area after the war. Jack assisted his father for a little bit as they were settling back into Los Angeles but eventually began working as an auto mechanic while going to school. He was eventually employed with the LA City Civil Service as a construction and maintenance supervisor, where he worked for 26 years until retirement. Jack’s father continued gardening and his parents lived in Boyle Heights until they passed away.

Jack and Kate had two children, Jeanne Yoshiko Muro and Alan Yoshio Muro. Jeanne was born in the Japanese Hospital on 4th Street in Little Tokyo and Alan was born in the same hospital as his mother in Turlock, California. Jack and his family lived in Livingston when Alan was born because they were helping and living on Kate’s family farm while her younger brother was finishing school. During this time they farmed grapes, almonds, and peaches on 100 acres of land. Once Kate’s brother completed his schooling he replaced Kate and Jack on the farm. They moved back to Los Angeles once they were not needed on the farm in Livingston.

In the 1960s the family moved into the home that they still live in today. Jack created a cactus garden that reminded him of the desert landscape at Amache in his own backyard. Jack continued to take photographs after camp but ceased with his own processing and printing as he had while at Amache.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Jack Muro Photographs consists of photographs, negatives, and some contact sheets taken and printed while Muro was incarcerated at Amache. Photographs document camp life as well as the immediate surroundings around Amache, including the town of Granada, Colorado.

Arrangement

Items have been broken down based on format into the following series:

Series 1: Photographs
Series 2: Contact Sheets
Series 3: Negatives
Series 4: Artifacts

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Muro, Jack
Black-and-white photography
World War, 1939-1945
Japanese Americans
darkrooms
Granada Relocation Center--Amache (Colo.)
Concentration camps, Amache

Box 1

Series 1 Photographs Approximately 1942-1947
Physical Description: 310 photographs
Series Scope and Content Summary
Printed photographs taken by Jack Muro primarily during his time at the Amache concentration camp and the surrounding town of Granada, Colorado during World War II. There are some photographs taken pre-war in Winters, California and Los Angeles, California as well as some unidentified beach photographs. There are many images of festivals and fairs, the Amache police station, sunsets, and Jack’s friends.

Box 1

Series 2 Contact Sheets 1942-1945
Physical Description: 144 contact sheets
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series consists of contact sheets created by Jack Muro during World War II. They have been cut into individual photos and sorted by subject. There are also two over-sized scrapbook pages with contact sheets pasted to them. Some images have short comments underneath written by Jack Muro.
Arrangement
Items in this series are arranged in original order. Folder titles are based on the subjects determined by Jack Muro.

Box 2

Series 3 Negatives Approximately 1942-1945
Physical Description: 575 negatives
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series is primarily 35mm negatives developed by Jack Muro in his underground dark room. There are some 120mm negatives as well. These negatives echo the contents of Series 1 and capture daily life in Amache. Some photographs were taken before or after World War II. and include general images from Northern California like the family’s home in Winters, San Francisco, and Berkeley.

Box 3

Series 4 Artifacts Approximately 1942-1947
Physical Description: 1 negative box
Series Scope and Content Summary
This includes the original box that housed Jack Muro’s negatives.