Finding aid for the Claire (Tsuyuko Fukumitsu) and Isao Suzuki Papers

Collection number: 2003.2

Descriptive Summary
Title: Claire (Tsuyuko Fukumitsu) and Isao Suzuki papers
Dates: 1913-1999
Collection number: 2003.2
Collection Size: 7.3 linear feet
Repository: Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)
Los Angeles, California 90012
Creator: Suzuki, Claire (Tsuyuko Fukumitsu)
Creator: Suzuki, Isao
Abstract: This collection contains artifacts, photographs, and papers pertaining to Claire (Tsuyuko Fukumitsu) and Isao Suzuki’s family history, childhood, their incarceration at Tule Lake during World War II, and their post-war business careers.
Access
By appointment only. Please contact the Collections Management and Access Unit (collections@janm.org). Advanced notice is required.
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
[Identification of item], Claire (Tsuyuko Fukumitsu) and Isao Suzuki papers. 2003.2, Japanese American National Museum. Los Angeles, CA.
Acquisition Information
Gift of Yukie Kawase.
Processing Information
This collection was processed by staff at an earlier date. The finding aid was written in 2018 by Mariah Sander.
Biography History
Tsuyuko and Yukie Fukumitsu grew up in Ogden and Brigham, Utah where their father worked various jobs on sugar beet farms, in restaurants, and for railway companies such as Western Pacific. When Tsuyuko was five and Yukie, was three, their mother, Tazu Fukumitsu, took them to Hiroshima to live with relatives and receive a Japanese education. While Yukie shortly returned home, Tsuyuko remained in Japan until she was fifteen years old. When the Fukumitsu family moved to Nevada, Tsuyuko attended an intensive English language program for four years. The family moved to Sacramento in 1935, and would lived there until 1942 when they were incarcerated in the Tule Lake concentration camp. During this period, Yukie had a child with her husband and Tsuyuko taught sewing classes. Tsuyuko was accepted into fashion design school. Isao Suzuki was born in 1917 and grew up in Montebello, California, close to Los Angeles. He attended primary school in Japan from 1928 to 1937 and graduated from Montebello High School in 1939. He was deported to Santa Anita temporary detention center in 1942 and transferred to Jerome incarceration camp in 1943. At Jerome, he was employed as a manager for Block 5, the same block where his family resided. He was paid $19 per month, common for the WRA’s artificially low wage scale that prevented inmates from earning more than soldiers and white employees. When the WRA issued the loyalty questionnaire in early 1943, he was deemed “disloyal” for answering “no” to one of the questions and transferred to Tule Lake in May of 1944. When the camp closed in 1946, he lived in Cleveland, Ohio until he returned to Montebello in 1948. He would live and work in Los Angeles area for the next several decades.
Tsuyuko Fukumitsu and Isao Suzuki married on November 27, 1949. The couple lived and worked in Los Angeles during the post-war era. From the 1950s to early 1960s, Isao operated a Snowbird Ice Cream store, a chain that would later become Baskin Robbins, and Tsuyuko ran the store at night. During the day, Tsuyuko worked as an assistant for fashion designer Dorothy O’Hara. After O’Hara fell ill and could no longer run her business, O’Hara’s husband encouraged Tsuyuko to pursue her own company. Tsuyuko and Isao established Claire & Ken, Inc., which they named after their respective English names. Their manufacturing business officially opened in the mid-1960s, operating out of a warehouse built in Buena Park,
California. O’Hara, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Georgette Trilere hired the company to produce their clothing designs.

Scope and Content of Collection
This collection contains correspondence, photographs, albums, scrapbooks, diaries, documents, and artifacts that relate to Isao and Tsuyuko Suzuki’s early lives, their incarceration at American concentration camps during WWII, and their post-war business careers. Kawase owned the empty box of fingertip service cards and compiled the family photograph album included in this collection.

Arrangement
The collection is organized into the following series:
   Series 1: Tsuyuko (Fukumistu) Suzuki collection
   Series 2: Isao Suzuki collection
   Series 3: Wayne M. Collins citizenship documents and correspondence
   Series 4: Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act compensation documents
   Series 5: Fukumitsu and Suzuki photographs

Indexing Terms
Japanese Americans--California--Evacuation and relocation, 1942-1945
Tule Lake Relocation Center
Jerome Relocation Center (Ark.)
Santa Anita Assembly Center (Calif.)
Cleveland, Ohio
Redress for historical injustices
Japanese American women teachers
Fashion Design
Sewing
O’Hara, Dorothy

Related Material
The museum holds other collections that document Tsuyuko Suzuki’s life as a Kibei Nisei, her study of sewing techniques in Japan, and contain her annotated scrapbooks.
Tsuyuko (Fukumitsu) Suzuki collection

Physical Description: 3 boxes, 2 folders

Biographical Note

Tsuyuko Fukumitsu, later Suzuki, adopted Claire as her English name after Mrs. Woodward, a teacher at the English school in Nevada, called her Clara after the actress Clara Bow. When her family moved to Sacramento in 1935, she enrolled in Mrs. Toriumi’s sewing school for three years. In 1940, she attended a women’s finishing school in Japan where she learned embroidery and other sewing techniques. A year later, she returned to Sacramento and opened her own sewing school. In addition to instructing apprentices, she tailored and sewed clothing designs for clients. Shortly after she opened her school, the bombing at Pearl Harbor occurred, and the War Relocation Authority deported her family to Tule Lake in 1942. At Tule Lake, Tsuyuko taught sewing classes and organized fashion shows. In 1943, the WRA issued her an Order of Merit for her teaching. In 1945, she became a registered student of the New York Fashion Academy, taking a course remotely from camp until she was released on November 28. After that, she continued her education onsite in New York. Upon graduation, she landed a job with a wedding dress designer in Los Angeles. Later she worked for Dorothy O’Hara during the 1950s, drafting and draping her dress designs.

Scope and Content

This series consists of various artifacts Tsuyuko either produced or owned. These include a 3 ring binder sewing sample scrapbook she made as a reference for her students, a roster list for a sewing class she taught at Tule Lake, an autograph book her Tule Lake students signed thanking her and congratulating her on her acceptance into fashion design school, two Dorothy O’Hara dresses she produced, a framed embroidery landscape image she made, a gold compact case she received from Mayor Hill of Newport Beach, and a Dritz tracing paper packet.

Isao Suzuki papers 1940-1949

Physical Description: 30 folders

Scope and Content

This series consists of correspondence, documents, artifacts, and diaries relating to Isao’s incarceration and his post-war life.

File 1 Isao Suzuki correspondence 1942-1949

Scope and Content

Contains correspondence in the form of letters and postcards Isao sent to and received from friends in other concentration camps or cities during his time at Jerome and Tule Lake. Also contains correspondence addressed to the Suzuki family during the war and letters Isao received after the war. Correspondence is in English and Japanese.

File 2 Isao Suzuki diaries 1942-1946

Scope and Content

This file consists of three diaries Isao wrote about his experiences in the Santa Anita detention facility in 1942, the Jerome concentration camp in 1943, and Cleveland, Ohio in 1946. The diaries are written in Japanese, with the occasional English phrase.

File 3 Concentration Camp documents and artifact 1941-1944

Scope and Content

This file contains a directory of residents in Block 5, a WRA document announcing he was left off his block manager job, a black watercolor drawing Isao painted on the back of an exclusion order poster while at Santa Anita, and a plaque for an Ikebana instructor.
Series 3 Wayne M. Collins renunciation case documents and correspondence 1952-1959

Physical Description: 6 folders

Historical Note
Shortly after he arrived at Tule Lake, Isao filled out a form to renounce his U.S. citizenship, given the high amount of anxiety and peer pressure in his situation. He believed his application had been rejected since he wasn’t notified it went into effect until 1949, well after he had left the camp. With the help of civil rights attorney Wayne M. Collins, he successfully regained his U.S. citizenship in 1955.

Scope and Content
The file contains correspondence attorney Wayne M. Collins sent Isao regarding his case, the affidavit Isao filled out explaining his reasons for renouncing citizenship, an eight page brochure outlining events leading to renunciation, final judgement documents from the U.S. District Court in San Francisco, and a letter from the Tule Lake Defense Committee regarding their intent to send Collins a monetary gift for his services.

Series 4 Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act compensation documents 1952

Physical Description: 1 folder

Scope and Content
This series contains two documents notifying Isao and Tsuyuko that the federal government has compensated them with $530,000 and $480,000 respectively as required by the Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act of 1948.

Series 5 Fukumitsu and Suzuki photographs 1941-1945 1920-1965

Physical Description: 1 box, 6 folders

Scope and Content
Contains one family photograph album and loose photographs of Isao’s childhood, Tsuyuko’s high school, Tule Lake group photos, Tsuyuko’s Tule Lake sewing class, and the Claire & Ken, Inc. opening party. There is one 1927 photograph of Japanese friendship dolls.

2003.2.84 Family photograph album

Description
This scrapbook-style photo album, compiled by Yukie Kawase, consists mainly of photographs with some newspaper clippings, correspondence, and other mementos pertaining to the Fukumitsu family. Kawase wrote handwritten notes relaying the historical context of photographs in the album. A majority of the album consists of photographs from Yukie and Tsuyuko’s upbringing and their incarceration at Tule Lake. The latter third covers Tsuyuko’s post-war career, including her fashion design studies, job with Dorothy O’Hara, the Snowbirds Ice Cream store, and Claire & Ken, Inc. The most contemporary items are two photographs of Tsuyuko and Yukie visiting JANM in 1993 and two thank you letters addressed to Yukie from college students who received the Isao and Tsuyuko Suzuki Memorial Scholarship through the JACL.