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## **Sohei (John) Hohri and Harold Landon Letters**

Finding aid created by Jose Quirarte.

Japanese American National Museum

100 North Central Avenue

Los Angeles, CA 90012

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## Finding aid for the Sohei (John) Hohri and Harold Landon Letters

**Collection number: 2019.13**

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### Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Sohei (John) Hohri and Harold Landon letters

**Dates (inclusive):** 1941-2011

**Dates (bulk):** 1941-1943

**Collection number:** 2019.13

**Collection Size:** .4 linear feet (1 box)

**Repository:** Japanese American National Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Los Angeles, California 90012

**Creator:** Hohri, Sohei John

**Creator:** Landon, Harold

**Abstract:** This collection primarily consists of handwritten, illustrated letters with the exception of a few postcards and one photograph. Sohei Hohri wrote the letters while incarcerated at Manzanar to his friend, Harold Landon. The bulk of the documents are dated from 1941 to 1943. A smaller portion of the collection is from the post-camp years, ranging from 1972 to 1982 and 1997 to 2011.

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

### Access

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### Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Sohei (John) Hohri and Harold Landon Papers. 2019.13, Japanese American National Museum. Los Angeles, CA.

### Acquisition Information

The collection was acquired in 2019 as a gift of Harold Landon.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed and initially described by Jo Ann Hamamura in 2019. Jose Quirarte added further description and created a finding aid in 2020.

### Biographical Note

Harold Edgar Landon was born on August 6, 1924 to Ed Landon and Blanche Louise (Simpson) Landon in Los Angeles, California. Harold grew up in West Los Angeles and attended Emerson Junior High and University High School. In high school, Harold participated in gymnastics, track and field, and a variety of other sports. While at University High School, Harold became friends with classmate Sohei "John" Hohri. Harold and Sohei continued their friendship, as evidenced through letters, despite Hohri's forced relocation to Manzanar in 1942. After Harold graduated from University High School in the spring of 1942, he volunteered to serve in the United States military.

Harold joined the United States Air Force and went to Iowa to fly planes. Following his experiences in Iowa, he bounced around from location to location. He spent time in Corpus Christi, Texas and San Diego, California before completing boot camp training in Chicago, Illinois. After boot camp, he joined the Navy as an artillery crewmember. He was sent to San Francisco and was prepared to deploy overseas, just as the war ended. He did a tour in the Philippines before he concluded his military service.

Following the war, Harold attended USC and studied architecture. He met his wife, Thelma Jo Bruce, at his church and eventually they wed on August 20, 1949. Harold achieved a long career as an architect and maintained his friendship with Sohei through written correspondence for the remainder of Sohei's life.

Sohei "John" Hohri was born on February 4, 1925 in Salinas, California to Daisuke Hohri and Asa (Utsunomiya) Hohri. Sohei's parents were Christian missionaries who had immigrated to the United States in 1922. Sohei was the fifth of six

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children and in 1930, after his parents contracted tuberculosis and required hospitalization, Sohei and his younger brother (William Hohri) were sent to the Shonien, an orphanage for Japanese Americans, in Los Angeles, CA. After a few years, Sohei's family reunited once again and they settled in West Los Angeles. Sohei attended University High School where he met his good friend, Harold Landon, and participated in gymnastics.

In 1942, Sohei and his family were forcibly removed from Los Angeles, in the months following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. Sohei and his family arrived at Manzanar on April 3, 1942 and were detained until August 25, 1945. While at Manzanar, Sohei taught a Sunday school class and worked with the orphanage. Sohei was also known to be a legendary storyteller and amazing artist by his friends and acquaintances in Manzanar. During his imprisonment, Sohei maintained his connection to the outside world through frequent letters to his friend, Harold. In his letters, Sohei wrote about the monotony of camp life, work, and the living conditions of his newly imposed home. He also used these letters as an opportunity to explore introspective topics, such as his faith and identity.

Following his release from Manzanar in 1944, Sohei settled in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and left in 1946 to serve in the military. Upon returning from the military, Sohei went to Chicago and graduated from the University of Chicago with a B.A. in philosophy in 1949. Soon afterwards he traveled throughout Europe and eventually settled in New York in 1956. Sohei became a librarian and curator for the New York Yacht club from 1958 to his retirement in 1989. Sohei married his wife, Valeria Engelbretson, on December 11, 2002. They were married for nearly thirteen years until Sohei's death on June 6, 2015.

### **Scope and Content**

The collection consists almost entirely of letters that Sohei Hohri wrote (usually as "John" during the 1940s) to Harold Landon, with the exception of one photograph and a few postcards. The bulk of the collection dates from 1941 to 1943 and contains letters with vivid illustrations and commentary about Sohei's experience in Manzanar. In these letters, Sohei writes about his removal, faith in God, disillusionment with America, work with the Manzanar Orphanage, friends in camp, and various activities that he participated in at Manzanar. Additionally, there are letters that capture Sohei and Harold's friendship during the post-war years, which date from 1972 to 1982 and 1997 to 2011. The content of the post-war letters includes memories from their high school days, discussions about the death of Sohei's brother (William Hohri), Sohei's marriage, commentary about his time at Manzanar, and his friendship with Harold. The letters in this collection provide a glimpse into the experience of youth at Manzanar. In his letters, Sohei chronicles his thoughts and experiences at Manzanar as a means of escaping the monotony of camp life; more importantly, Sohei uses his letters to explore and grapple with his relationship with God, his country, and his identity.

### **Related Materials**

An oral history interview with Sohei Hohri, in which he speaks about his experiences at the Shonien and at the Manzanar Concentration Camp, can be found in the Manzanar Children's Village Oral History Project, located at California State University, Fullerton. The Japanese American National Museum has other collections of former incarcerated at Manzanar and their experiences, including the Jack Iwata Collection (93.102) and a portion of the Ikemura Family Papers (2014.8, 96.478, 2007.69). The Louis Frizzell Jr. collection (2008.81) provides an extensive look into the experiences of Manzanar students through the lens of a past high school teacher of Manzanar. The Japanese American National Museum also houses the William Hohri collection (2016.113); William was Sohei's younger brother and a prominent contributor to the redress and reparations movement.

### **Arrangement**

Items are arranged chronologically.

### **Indexing Terms**

Hohri, Sohei John

Landon, Harold

Japanese Americans--Evacuation and relocation, 1942-1945

Manzanar War Relocation Center

Letters--20th century

[Item list for the Sohei \(John\) Hohri and Harold Landon letters.](#)

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