**CAMP SHARP PARK** by Gary Kamiya (edited article from the San Francisco Chronicle Sept. 2022)

The 417-acre property in Pacifica owned by the City and County of San Francisco has a fascinating history — not least because during World War II it held an “alien enemy” internment camp that has been almost entirely forgotten today.

Sharp Park is named after George Sharp, who arrived in San Francisco in 1849. A wealthy lawyer, Sharp acquired the land in the 1870s before dropping dead in the courtroom in 1882. His widow, Honora, died in 1905 and left the land to her executors, who turned it over to San Francisco in 1917, with the stipulation that it be used for park and recreational purposes. Legendary Golden Gate Park Superintendent John McLaren proposed a golf course on part of Sharp’s land. Officials agreed and hired famed course designer Alister MacKenzie as architect.

The 120-acre course, formerly an artichoke farm, was dominated by sand dunes surrounding a brackish lagoon. With the help of McLaren, who planted trees, MacKenzie created an 18-hole gem. It opened in 1932 and is considered one of the finest municipal courses in the country.

But that was only the beginning of the long, strange saga of Sharp Park. During the Depression, a State Emergency Relief Administration camp was established in the canyon to the east of the course to house indigent San Franciscans. In 1933, the Civil Works Administration employed 600 men to construct the camp in just two months. Residents received food, lodging, medical care and 25 cents a day.

Then World War II broke out. Observing how the Nazis successfully used German loyalists as fifth columnists in Norway and other countries, FBI head J. Edgar Hoover lobbied the government prepare to imprison potentially dangerous foreigners if the United States entered the war — the start of an enemy alien control program that would ultimately result in the imprisonment of 31,275 people deemed enemy foreigners, most of them citizens of Germany, Japan and Italy. (This program was distinct from the better-known “relocation” program that sent 112,000 people of Japanese descent, nearly 70,000 of them U.S. citizens, to desolate internment camps.)

A month after Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Proclamation 2537, requiring non-U.S. citizens from enemy nations to register with the Justice Department. The FBI began rounding up thousands of foreigners it deemed dangerous. In 1942, about two dozen Immigration and Naturalization Service internment camps across the country were hastily built, including in the former state relief camp at Sharp Park. It was called Camp Sharp Park.

Enemy foreigners arrested in San Francisco were taken to an INS center on Silver Avenue for questioning. If found suspicious, they were sent to the INS detention center on Angel Island. On March 31, 1942, 193 foreigners, mostly Japanese, were transferred from Angel Island to Sharp Park. The San Francisco News wrote, “Within sight of old Salada Beach, where many of them used to spend Sundays fishing, taking snapshots (and possibly making note of reefs, currents and landmarks for the Japanese Navy), scores of alien Japanese today were housed in an internment camp at Sharp Park. … Opening of the camp was made necessary by overcrowding of the Immigration Station (on Angel Island) into which the FBI has been pouring a steady stream of Japanese, Germans, and Italians known, or suspected to be, members of secret groups and to have possessed weapons, explosives, signal lights, short wave receiving sets and other contraband.”

The News’ acceptance of the supposed threat posed by these enemy foreigners was typical journalistic practice during the war. In fact, it is likely that virtually all, if not all, of the men, women and children locked up at Camp Sharp Park were innocent victims of wartime paranoia.

Camp Sharp Park initially had about 10 barracks, with a capacity of 450. It was later expanded to hold as many as 1,200, although an Issei (first-generation Japanese) leader named Yamato Ichihashi wrote that during the six weeks he was imprisoned at Sharp Park there were never more than 500 people. According [to an article about Camp Sharp Park by Lewis Kawahara in the Densho Encylopedia,](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Sharp_Park_(detention_facility)/) the camp was one of a number of holding stations constructed to temporary hold enemy foreigners until they could be transferred to permanent internment camps. During the war a total of more than 2,500 German, Italian and Japanese internees were held here.

In addition to Japanese Americans, a large number of Japanese Latin Americans were rounded up and sent to be interned in the United States, following U.S. offers to Latin American countries to imprison their supposedly dangerous enemy foreigners. More than 15 Latin American countries accepted the U.S. offers and deported more than 6,000 people of Japanese, German and Italian descent to U.S. internment camps. On July 15, 1943, 119 Peruvian Japanese arrived at Camp Sharp Park, from where they were shipped off to internment at Fort Missoula, Mont.

Camp Sharp Park was not closed until 1946. The only camp structure known to still exist is a Quonset hut, used by the Pacifica Co-op Nursery School. Other than that, some stonework and concrete foundations are the only signs that a dark and little-known chapter of World War II history took place here.

*Gary Kamiya is the author of the best-selling book “Cool Gray City of Love: 49 Views of San Francisco.” His most recent book is “Spirits of San Francisco.”*