



Emma Buckmaster and Executive Order 9066

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by Gilbert P. Gia
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Miss Emma Buckmaster retired from teaching in 1955. She was a beloved teacher, but for other important reasons she must not be forgotten.

Miss Emma Louise Buckmaster taught at William Penn in Bakersfield.¹ A newspaper story about her retirement after 33 years of teaching in First and Second Grades said little about her years of service,² but in 1969 a speaker at a community awards event set it right when he said, "She has won the admiration of hundreds of

¹ Buckmaster was born July 5, 1892 in Iowa and moved to California in 1898. In 1915 Emma Lewis Buckmaster graduated from the General Professional Course, State Normal School at Los Angeles, according to the 1915 yearbook *Exponent*. <http://www.archive.org/details/exponentlosangel1915stat>, her name also appears in *State Normal School, Los Angeles, List of Graduates since Publication of the last Preceding Bulletin, the Summer Class, June 24, 1915*, pg. 64. The General Professional course was preparatory to work toward the General Elementary Certificate to teach in public schools. In 1915 Buckmaster taught at Wasco, California (Bakersfield Californian, Oct 5, 1968), but she might have completed Normal School work in 1917 in Ohio and received an Ohio State Life Elementary Certificate there (The name Emma L. Buckmaster appears on pg. 144 in the *Sixty-fourth Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the State of Ohio, June 30, 1917*.)

² Bakersfield Californian, Jun 17, 1955. The Bakersfield earthquake of 1952 damaged Penn School. Emma taught briefly at Wayside School until Penn was rebuilt.

parents whose first-graders lost all fear of those beginnings in school, learning to read and to love a kind and dear teacher who will always be remembered for her kindness and devotion to children."³



Emma Buckmaster in 1955

That was high praise and rightfully so. In 1924 Emma and Miss Clara Peterson, who was principal at William Penn School, managed the costuming for a student play, and not long after that young Emma Buckmaster was chosen to present demonstration teaching for William Penn parents,⁴ and in 1927 she headed-up a patriotic Founders Day programs at the school.⁵

Emma's service was not limited to school matters. She served on the Credit Committee of Kern County Schools Credit Union,⁶ was a speaker for the Woman's Society of Christian Service of the First Methodist Church,⁷ was an elections precinct worker,⁸ was a group leader in Red Cross relief,⁹ was Treasurer of the Wesleyan Service

³ Bakersfield Californian, Sep 5, 1968

⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Jan 5, 1924

⁵ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 8, 1927

⁶ Bakersfield Californian, Feb 3, 1945

⁷ Bakersfield Californian, Apr 12, 1960

⁸ Bakersfield Californian, Oct 18, 1958

⁹ Bakersfield Californian, Jun 14, 1941

Guild,¹⁰ and was membership chairperson for the Inter-racial Creative Arts Fellowship.¹¹ A single phrase in the Kern Division, California Retired Teachers Association minutes book of 1962 reads: "Bible section Friday at Emma Buckmaster."¹² But what was Emma like? A teaching colleague said she was friendly, approachable, and unassuming.¹³



Emma Buckmaster (Bakersfield Californian, September 5, 1968)

In 1924 Emma started religious education classes at the Japanese Mission in Bakersfield. Thrity years later the Japanese-American community honored her at a banquet at the Japanese Methodist Church, but that recognition was not owing to her Sunday school service.¹⁴ The Californian explained, "When the Japanese community was evacuated to the Arizona desert during World War II, Miss Buckmaster and her aides provided 'physical and moral assistance in easing the forced selling or leasing of property. When the evacuees returned in 1945, she again went to their

¹⁰ Bakersfield Californian, May 7, 1940

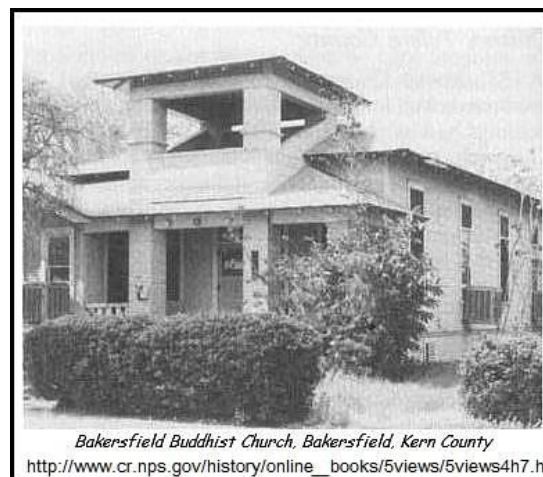
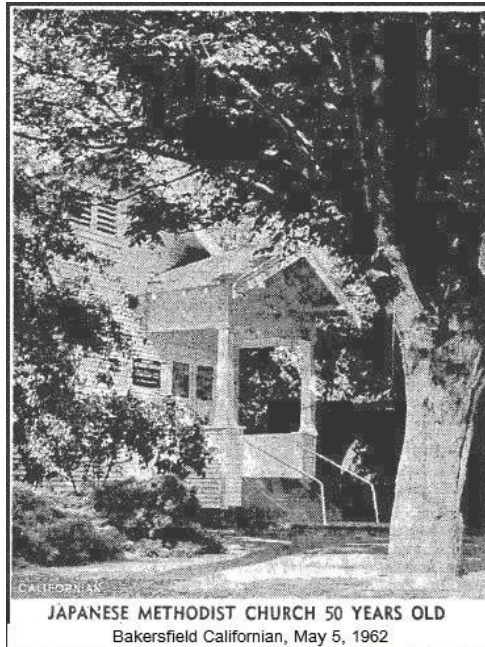
¹¹ Bakersfield Californian, Jul 13, 1948

¹² Minutes Book, Kern Division, California Retired Teachers Association, Jun 3, 1962, pg. 86

¹³ Author's 2011 interview with retired Bakersfield teacher Ruth Mahoney.

¹⁴ Bakersfield Californian, Nov 25, 1954

assistance, helping them to re-establish their homes and businesses.' Most of the Japanese community was at the banquet, and former residents from all parts of the nation who were not present were there in spirit through through their congratulatory letters and telegrams.¹⁵



The background is this: On February 19, 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. By May 1942, the Federal Government had arrested the congregants of the Japanese Methodist

¹⁵ Ibid.

Episcopal Mission at 1016 22nd Street and moved them to the Federal Relocation Camp at Poston, Arizona. The vacant church became a warehouse for the personal property of the parishioners.¹⁶ Members of both the First Methodist Episcopal Church and the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church, as well as neighbors sympathetic to the plight of their Japanese friends, supervised the structure and guarded it from harm.¹⁷

Joanne Ono Iritani recalled Sunday, December 7, 1941: " I was 12 years old, in the seventh grade, and leading a life of a farm girl. I was confused by the discussion at that Sunday night's regular evening service at our Japanese Methodist Episcopal Mission. I realized there was something threatening and frightening occurring... Rev. Dillon Throckmorton of the Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church had made a special effort to show his support of our Japanese church members at that meeting. I did not question the fact that Emma Buckmaster, who had taught in our Sunday School since 1927, and Lottie Phillips since the 1930s, would continue to be part of our church program. I did not consider the possibility that anyone would question our loyalty to our country."¹⁸

In May, 1942, Joanne and her family left their Bakersfield home and were transported to Poston.¹⁹ She recalled, "Christmas, 1942, was made pleasant for all of us by the gifts for the children from the various churches around the country. I received Swiss Family Robinson

¹⁶ The relocation also closed the Buddhist Church. Peak population at Poston was 17,814. Poston closed Nov 28, 1945 (Frank and Joanne Iritani, *Ten Visits, Revised*. Japanese American National Museum, Bertelsmann Industry Services, Inc., Valencia and Sacramento, California. Fourth Edition, 1999, ISBN 1-881161-05-6 , pg. 28).

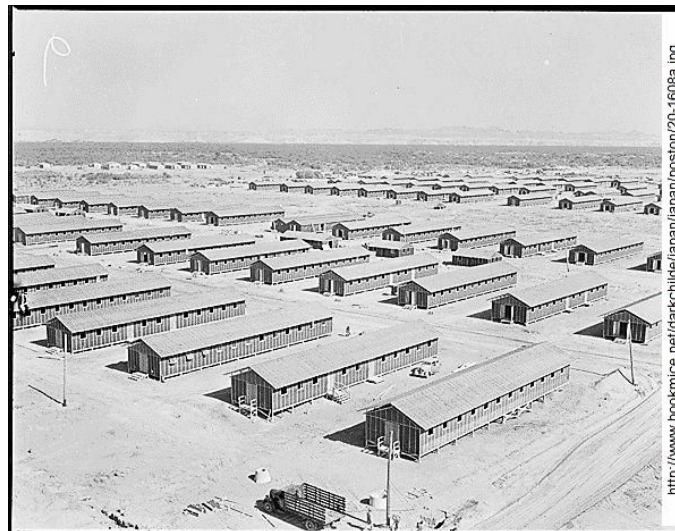
¹⁷ Ken Hooper, Kern Co Historical Society lecture, the Rice Bowl, Bakersfield, Californian, May 14, 2011

¹⁸ Frank and Joanne Iritani, *Ten Visits, Revised.(op cit)* pg. 46. Mrs. Iritani retired as a teacher in 1989 from the Bakersfield City School District.

¹⁹ The Ono family was confined to Poston from May 25, 1942 until August, 1945 (*Ten Visits, Revised, op cit.*).

from a lady in Illinois.”²⁰

In later years Mrs. Iritani made a noteworthy discovery. “During the 1970s, when I was doing research on the history of our church, I found receipts and a treasurer’s ledger of the ‘Aid Committee for Methodist Japanese Evacuation’ written in Lottie Phillips’ distinctive handwriting. A committee had been formed by members of the First and Trinity Methodist Churches to oversee the property of many Internees and both the Japanese Methodist and Buddhist Churches.²¹ In talking to a former member of that committee, I learned that Trinity Church was on the subversives list of the House Un-American Activities Committee because of their support of the Japanese community.”



(above) Poston Camp, 1943

²⁰ *Ten Visits, Revised, op cit.*

²¹ In a 2011 interview, Walter Granger told me that First Methodist Church helped establish Trinity Methodist Church, and both churches aided the Japanese Mission, later known as Japanese Methodist Church. In its Aug 29, 1922 issue, the Bakersfield Californian described the Japanese Buddhist mission as a “neat, white frame building” on N between 22nd and 23rd. Brewer wrote, “The property was purchased in 1911 for \$750. A two room building was construct in 1913 and replaced in 1916 at a cost of \$2,500. The church, then the Japanese Methodist Church, grew over the years and by the mid-1930’s had a congregation of nearly 100. During World War II, all members of the church were eventually interned but the Church was cared for by the Aid Committee for Methodist Japanese Evacuation until 1946-7 when services again resumed. A name change in the mid-1950’s went into effect with the present name ‘St. Andrews Methodist Church’ coming into being.” (Christopher D. Brewer, Historic Resources Inventory, Bakersfield, Apr 10, 1984).

Mrs. Iritani continued, "Following our internment, Emma Buckmaster was the contact person for Internee Christians and Buddhists alike. She later laughingly related the difficulty she had locating some Buddhist religious articles by saying, 'I must have gotten it right on the second try, because they didn't ask me for it again.' She corresponded with everyone—servicemen, college students, all former church people, adults and children, and even the Issei,²² although she had learned no Japanese. Emma Buckmaster was a great example of selfless Christian love. She continued her interest and support of the Japanese people until her death in 1978."²³

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have hereunto set their hands and seals this ...50th...
day of ...June....., 1952...
Emma L. Buckmaster

Above, her careful signature

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²² Issei was a name for Japanese immigrants to North America.

²³ A few days after Emma's birthday in 1949, her mother "Mrs. Grace Buckmaster, an alert and well informed resident of Whittier who is 84 years of age" was visiting Emma in Bakersfield (Bakersfield Californian, July 8, 1949). Emma Buckmaster's funeral was held in Bakersfield, but her burial was at Olive Lawn Memorial Park, La Mirada, California (Bakersfield Californian, Jan 15, 1978). La Mirada is about five miles from Whittier. Miss Emma Buckmaster's signature at the end of this article came from a City of Bakersfield document in which she ceded an easement of property to the city (www.bakersfieldcity.us/weblink7/0/)