

The 1919 Ninoshima Camp Exhibition and its Postcards

by Harold Krische

Context

Japan was involved in World War I as a member of the Allied Powers and declared war on Germany on 23 August 1914. A strategic methodical campaign supported by vastly superior numbers resulted in the surrender of the German forces defending the colonial concession at Tsingtau (Qingdao) in China on 7 November 1914. Approximately 4,700 German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war were subsequently transported to 16 camps in southern Japan. Some of these camps were older, having been used during the Russo-Japanese War, and included makeshift temple facilities and old army barracks. Few anticipated that over 5 years of internment was to follow.

Several key elements contributed to the cultural, social and political dynamics that helped shape experiences in these camps. These contextual elements included, but were not limited to:

- ▶ Japan seeking recognition amongst the rank of first world countries, thus being mindful of international expectations and treaties including guidelines of the Hague Convention regarding prisoner treatment;
- ▶ Japan conquering, occupying German territory, and interning German prisoners & civilians, introducing a unique racial-cultural dimension;
- ▶ German society strongly embracing nationalism, patriotism and cultural constructs (as evidenced in the colonial structure of Tsingtau);
- ▶ The “Golden Age” of the postcard affording a valued communication device, one favored by German society as it could reflect circumstances and ideology.

The Ninoshima Camp and its 1919 Exhibition

The Ninoshima Camp, located on a small island across the bay from Hiroshima, opened on 19 February 1917. This camp accommodated all 545 prisoners from the Ōsaka Camp that was being closed, in part, due to deteriorating conditions. Continuity of camp culture was largely maintained and experienced even further growth as key officials overseeing the Ōsaka Camp were also transferred to Ninoshima. The Ōsaka Camp had featured publication of a Camp newspaper, concert performances, athletic competitions, a soccer team, educational programs and printing facilities for prisoner use. These endeavours continued in the Ninoshima Camp, but also included facilities for horticulture, bread-making, sausage making, processing of spirits, printing and tennis. Prisoners actively engaged in the afforded opportunities and demonstrated active pursuit of life-long learning and a willingness to share their expertise, even if just to alleviate the potential monotony of camp life.

By 1918, some of the Japanese camps had organized exhibitions of prisoner handicrafts and skills including paintings, theatre/music performances and other handiwork. In early 1919 prisoners from the Ninoshima Camp made a proposal to Camp Commander Suganuma for a major exhibition of prisoner projects, works, accomplishments and handicrafts. The Bussan Exhibition Hall in Hiroshima was booked for 9 days in April of 1919 to host the Ninoshima Exhibition. Reports indicate that up to 16,000 Japanese citizens attended the exhibition. POW Arthur Woserau, an architect who was not interned until September of 1915, took on the role of exhibit chairperson, and POW Wilhelm Haupt, a book printer by trade, accepted responsibilities for the coordination and production of an exhibition program. Haupt himself exhibited a camp printing press and some of the many camp publications. A competition was held for designing the program cover and the postcards that would commemorate the event. Each program and each of the six official exhibition postcards were struck with a violet eight-sided rectangular bilingual (Japanese and German) handstamp (**Figure 1**, page 699) prepared for the exhibition.

The two outer Japanese characters of this handstamp designate 廣島 (Hiroshima). The central portion reads (right to left) 似島俘虜 / 製作品展覽會 (Ninoshima Furyo / Seisakuhin Tenrankai or “Ninoshima Prisoner of War Works Exhibition”). The German script below the double horizontal lines translates as “Exhibition of Prisoners of War Ninoshima Camp / Hiroshima Spring 1919”.

The Exhibition Program, comprising 33 numbered pages, affords rich insights into camp life, including interests, commercial activities, hobbies and available educational programs. A translation of a segment of the Arthur Woserau program “Forward” provides a useful context:

None of the prisoners anticipated that the labor and endeavours of their efforts would become before public eyes and thus the exhibition affords excellent insight into the diligence and spirit of our camp. Nevertheless, these insights remain limited given the 8 weeks of preparation time. Moreover, considering that most of the objects were made of older materials, often with limited tools, they represent also the hard-will to work against adversities and thus even the smallest work should not be denied recognition.

321 exhibition entries, representing over 100 different POWs, are identified in the program with many items designated as available for sale to the public. The program also indicates that the scope of camp education consisted of:

- 46 “POW teachers” developing and providing educational courses, taken by 73% of the camp POWs;
- 47 different courses, ranging from 3 to 52 participants per class;
- Popular courses such as German, Japanese, Mathematics, Chemistry, Machinery, Government, Geography and Bookkeeping;
- Specialty courses, including Electronics, Engines, Agriculture, Economics & Jurisprudence.



Figure 2a - Ninoshima Exhibition program cover (front)

The winner of the competition for the program cover design, depicted in **Figure 2a** (front) and **Figure 2b** (back) was POW Marine Artillery gunner Gustav Wilhelm. Wilhelm had 16 exhibit entries in the exhibition, was the designer of two of the official exhibition postcards, and was one of several POWs known to have run a printing press in the camp. While relatively little is known about Gustav Wilhelm, evidence of his artistic work suggests that he was prolific. Many of his works display the vertical boxed “GW” as seen on the back cover of the program (**Figure 2b**, lower right). Wilhelm designed other camp postcards that commemorated holidays, collaborated in such printing with POW Alois Holona and produced a small portfolio consisting of 10 different character sketches of fellow POWs.

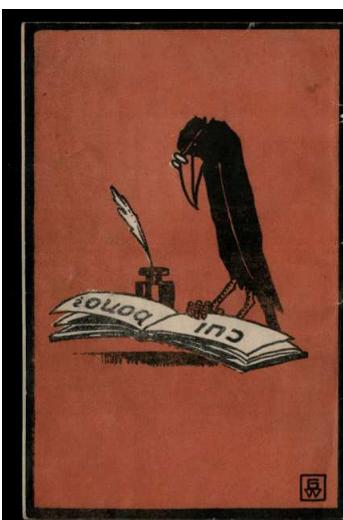


Figure 2b - Ninoshima Exhibition program cover (back)



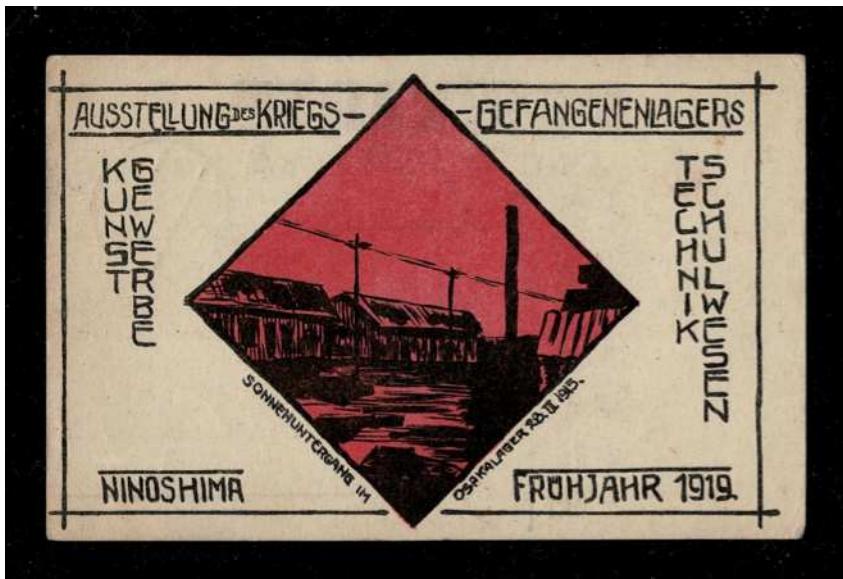
Figure 1 - Ninoshima Exhibition handstamp

The Six Exhibition Postcards

The foreword of the Program identifies the names and titles of the six postcard designs selected to advertise and represent the Ninoshima Exhibition. Ludwig Seitz, in his monumental 1998 German publication on the “Mails of the German POWs in Japanese prisoner of war camps, 1914-1920”, illustrates these six postcards and two of the address sides of these cards. References to the Seitz illustrations have been used to facilitate identification of key variations that Seitz indicates could exist.

Exhibition card #1 (Seitz #39a), designed by POW Joseph Brilmayer, depicts a sunset from 28 March 1915 in the Ōsaka Lager (Ōsaka Camp) and acknowledges the four main exhibition categories consisting of: Kunst (Art), Gewerbe (Handiwork), Technik (Technology), and Schulwesen (Education). The front of this card is depicted as **Card #1 picture side** and its back as **Card #1 address side**.

Wilhelm Haupt was the likely printer of this card. The address side is consistent with Seitz 39g (Type I), giving no indication of the actual printer.

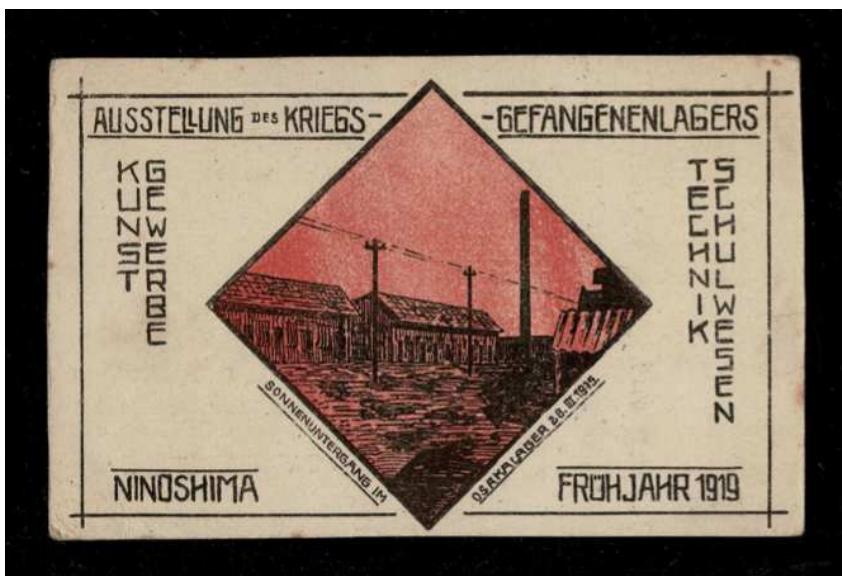


Card #1 picture side



Card #1 address side

Another printer of this same design (**Card #1 (Scholz) picture side**) is clearly identified as being R. Scholz via the central imprint on the back of the card (**Card #1 (Scholz) address side**) that reads: “NINOSHIMA. LAGERDRUCKEREI R.SCHOLZ.” (Seitz 39h, Type II).



Card #1 (Scholz) picture side



Card #1 (Scholz) address side

Three variations of the length of this imprint have been noted; respectively measuring 5.9 cm, 6.8 cm, and 7.2 cm, in addition to slight variations in the style and placement of the two vertical lines of Japanese script printed on the address side of each of the exhibition cards. These characters read 似島獨逸俘虜技術 / 工藝品展覽會 (Ninoshima Doitsu Furyo Gijutsu / Kōgeihin Tenrankai or “Ninoshima German Prisoner of War Technical and Craft Objects Exhibition”).

The Scholz printings also have variation in design elements that include greater detail and clarity of the image, an underlining of the illustration description and lightened red color. With more than one POW printing operation producing the same postcard design, it is likely that several variations of the exhibition cards exist.

Exhibition card #2 (Seitz #39b), also designed by Joseph Brilmayer, reserve lieutenant of a marine artillery division, is stated in the exhibition program to depict the “Huangho Bridge” (**Card #2 picture side**). This is what is now known as the Luokuo Yellow River Railway Bridge in Jinan City, China. It was built by the German company MAN (M.A.N.-Werk Gustavsburg bei Mainz) in 1912, during the period of German occupation. The address side of this card is pictured as **Card #2 address side**.



Card #2 picture side



Card #2 address side

Brilmayer also displayed exhibit #246 at the exhibition related to machinery involving electro-magnetics. Joseph Brilmayer, after a brief illness, died in the Ninoshima Camp at the age of 33 on 16 January 1920 less than two weeks before he was slated to return home. The author has seen this postcard printed only by Scholz and with his type II address side. Printing variations are most apparent in the bridge structure and foreshore design on the two printing types that have been noted. Rudolf Scholz was an architect but his pride in his printing expertise is reflected in the advertisement placed on page 26 (**Figure 3**, page 703) of the Exhibition Program. Scholz is known to have printed at least five of the six exhibition postcards.



Figure 3 - Scholz Exhibition Program advertisement

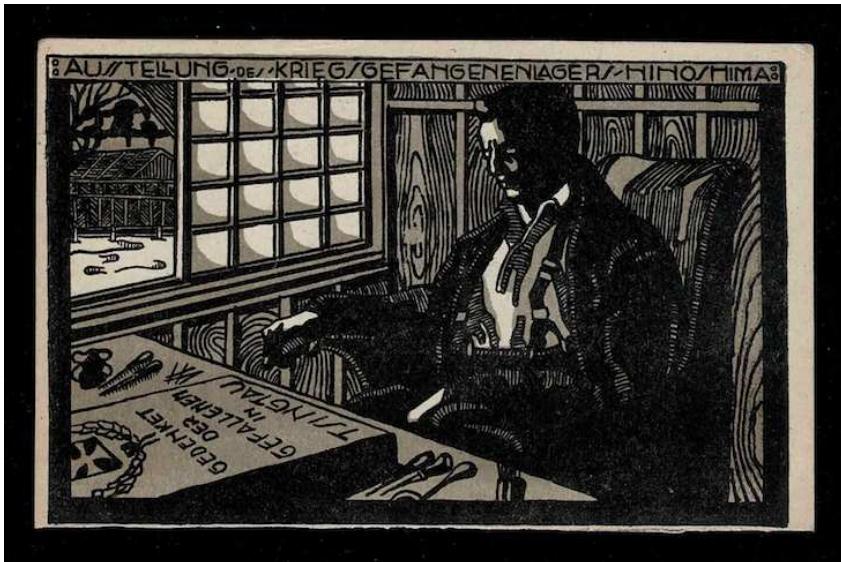
Exhibition card #3 (Seitz 39e) was designed by POW Eugen Liesenfeld and is titled “Am Arbeitstisch” or “At the Worktable” (**Card #3 picture side, Card #3 address side**). Liesenfeld, a Marine artillery specialist, designed two exhibition postcards and had several paintings featured in the exhibition. Typically, a Liesenfeld design is identifiable by small “LE” initials that are placed somewhere in the design. In this case, they appear at the lower right of the card .



Card #3 picture side



Card #3 address side



Card #4 picture side

Exhibition card #4 (Seitz 39c) is the other Liesenfeld design, titled “Totenerinnerung” or “Remembering the Dead”). It depicts an artisan completing a memorial plaque recognizing those fallen at Tsingtau (Card #4 picture side, Card #4 address side). This card was printed by Haupt, features the second type of address format (Seitz 39g), and was mailed by Arthur Woserau, the Exhibition Chairperson. At least two print runs of this design by different printers reveal minor variations in the design appearance.



Card #4 address side

Card #4 (Scholz) picture side



The Scholz printed cards (Card #4 (Scholz) picture side) depict a speckled commemorative tablet, a central wood grain panel with complete contour lines and small square windowpanes that have significant shading when compared with the Haupt printing. The address side has the Type II Scholz design.

Exhibition card #5 (Seitz 39d), featuring a Masonic symbol, was designed by Paul Schubert, Marine reserve, and titled “Felsenwille” or Rock Outcrop (**Card #5 picture side, Card #5 address side**). Schubert had five items featured in the “Art” section of the Camp Exhibition that included a portrait and a ‘study’ of POW gymnasts. This card was printed by Rudolf Scholz and comes in two variations of the address side of the card distinguishable by length of the line indicating the printer’s name (Type IIa 5.9 cm and Type IIb 6.8 cm) and the style/location of the vertical Japanese script.



Card #5 picture side



Card #5 address side

Exhibition card #6 (Seitz 39f) was called “Magister” or “The Magistrate” (**Card #6 picture side**). Gustav Wilhelm, designer of the front and back cover of the exhibition program, depicted a civil officer or judge with his exhibition postcard design. This card is noted with printing variations evident on the design of the card and on the appearance of the address side of the card. This printing has the Type I (Seitz 39g) address side.



Card #6 picture side



Card #6 (GW) picture side

A second print run of this postcard includes the boxed “GW” Gustav Wilhelm initials on the lower right corner of a card that has a notably darker violet grey background (**Card #6 (GW) picture side**). The address side of this printing differs from those previously acknowledged by Seitz (**Card #6 Type III address side**). This Type III of the address side features a different alignment of the vertical Japanese script amongst other differences. Type III of the address side of the exhibition cards has been noted on only this particular card.



Card #6 Type III address side

All the postcards

The exhibition postcards mailed by POWs received the regular camp markings that included a camp seal, censorship markings, indication of POW mail routing markings, the SdPdG and the Ujina postmark. The cards are struck with one of two types of the straight line SdPdG (SERVICE DES PRISONNIERS DE GUERRE.) handstamp. Type I is 7.2 cm in length and is underlined (Figure 4) while Type II is not underlined and is 9.4 cm in length (Figure 5). Both are struck in violet.

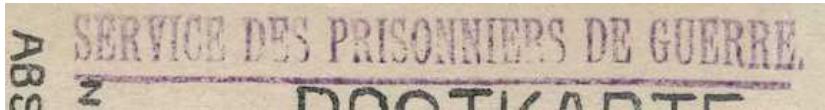
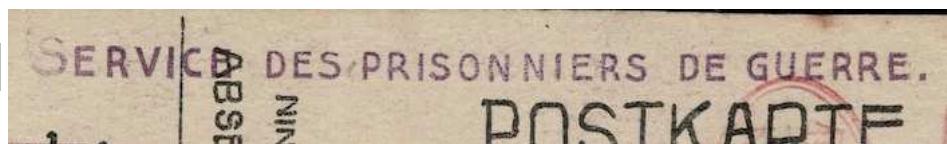


Figure 4 - SdPdG Type I

Figure 5 - SdPdG Type II



The Ninoshima Camp featured three different camp seals but only the small red oval strike (Figure 6) has been seen on exhibition cards. The marking reads 俘虜郵便 (Furyo Yūbin or “Prisoner of War Mail”) above a horizontal line and “NINOSHIMA” below. The cards were datestamped with a Ujina (字品) post office domestic comb datestamp (Figure 7), with the majority mailed to Germany, as evidenced by the 獨逸行 (Doitsu-yuki or “To Germany”) boxed red handstamp (Figure 8) on several of the postcards illustrated in this article. A number of cards were mailed to other camps and a few mailed to China, one of which was the Card #4 example pictured on page 704 with the 上海行 (Shanghai-yuki or “To Shanghai”) red handstamp (Figure 9) in the top right corner.

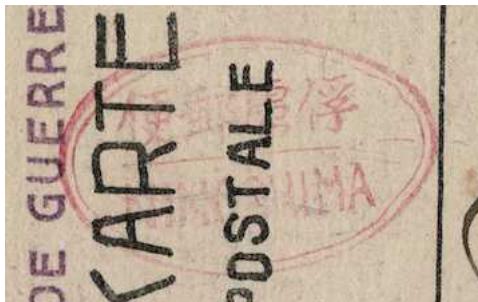


Figure 6 - Ninoshima Camp Seal



Figure 7 - Ujina datestamp



Figure 8 - To Germany handstamp



Figure 9 - To Shanghai handstamp

The additional markings on each card are the 檢閱済 (ken-etsu zumi or “censored”) red marking enclosed in an oval (Figure 10) and the small red square censor seal, most of which are illegible, although the seal of Nakamura (中村) can be discerned on Card #3 (page 703), and that of Takada (高田) on Card #2 (page 702) and Card #5 (page 705).



Figure 10 - Censored marking

It is not known if these cards were available at the Exhibition for the Japanese public but the author has yet to see any of these cards used by a Japanese resident.

The table below summarizes the Exhibition Card variations sourced by the author while researching this article. The survey is based on 19 cards.

Exhibition Card variations sourced by the author						
Card #	Seitz #	Designer	Printer	Address	SdPdG	Destinations
1	39a	Brilmayer	Haupt, Scholz	Type I, IIb	Type I, II	Germany
2	39b	Brilmayer	Scholz	Type IIb, IIc	Type I, II	Germany
3	39e	Liesenfeld	Scholz	Type IIc	Type II	Germany
4	39c	Liesenfeld	Other ⁽¹⁾	Type I, IIc	Type II	China, Japan
5	39d	Schubert	Scholz	Type II	Type II	China, Germany
6	39f	Wilhelm	Haupt, Other ⁽¹⁾	Type I, III	Type I, II	Germany

Further information on the Ninoshima Exhibition, the exhibition cards and their usages would be greatly appreciated and can be directed to me at krischefamily@shaw.ca or to the JP Editor.

References

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<http://www.cf.city.hiroshima.jp/rinkai/heiwa/heiwa008/german%20prisoners%20camp.html>

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¹ Other, including possibly Haupt or Wilhelm.