

Autumn 2022 Japanese Hall Newsletter



Update: Progress

Opening Update

Father Kano's HOF Nomination

Welcome Scott Bambino

New Features: Web Links

Letters to Editor

PROJECT: A Japanese Hall built in 1928 by members of the Japanese community and continued to function as a Japanese Hall until 2018 has been relocated to the Legacy of the Plains Museum (LPM) in Gering, NE. Here, the history of the Japanese and Japanese Americans from Nebraska and the High Plains will be preserved

We have weathered setbacks, are not yet open, but have been making progress.

Grand Opening is delayed to 2024 with temporary exhibits to open July 2023.

Building

We thought our Japanese Hall was nearly complete, however the basement looks so good that most thought we needed to add it to the museum for displays and to show how it was originally used. The problem is we only have one exit (plus an egress window) and if we wanted to have public access in the basement a second exit is needed. Vickie applied, and after over a year of waiting was approved for a State Shovel Ready Grant for access construction.

Working with our Architect, Jack Green, and our Contractor, Russ Reisig, a plan is being put together that will construct an addition to the building on the Northeast corner that will house stairs and a lift to connect the basement, ground level and the main floor. A new entry will be

made in the kitchen (this is not a working kitchen) and at the existing east door on the main floor.

The time schedule has all concrete work being completed prior to the winter freeze and all construction finished and ready for a Summer 2023 temporary opening. At this time there is a chance the lift will not be in place, but we will be allowed to use the basement as soon as the stairway is completed. We will also need additional ADA sidewalks connecting the new exit to existing walkways and parking areas.

It continues to be an exciting time at Japanese Hall.

Exhibits

A new exhibits company joining the team

We have contacted other companies to complete the exhibits. This is necessary after we were **stunned to learn** in September, that the Colorado company, with which we had worked since August 2020, abruptly cancelled our contract without notice, and closed its doors without completing our project.

Although our goal had been to open the Hall in Summer 2023, we have determined that the scope of work is too big to meet that aggressive timeline. Plans have moved to opening with temporary displays in summer 2023 with our permanent displays opening in 2024. We are disappointed but have found ways to work around the delays.

The original company, Root House Studio, had installed the entryway exhibits in July but had not completed any other exhibits.

The good news is that the renovation to the building is completed. It's water-tight, has a sound roof, a solid foundation, and an efficient HVAC system. Thank you to John Miyoshi for shepherding this complicated project and for working with myriad contractors and tradespeople.

We are back not quite to square one but are doing some rethinking. We look forward to opening our hall and have so many stories and history to tell. We have many items that can be in the temporary displays, including items we may not be able to use when permanent displays are installed.

The entry way is ready to greet new visitors. The replica of the original theater curtain found at the hall welcomes visitors to the main hall. The curtain's Japanese kanji indicate it originated in 1929, the fourth year of the Showa emperor

(Hirohito). The original curtain was a gift from the Eagle and Broadway Cafes and depicts three-digit telephone numbers, a gift to the Scottsbluff City Theater group. We thank the professionals at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's International Quilt Museum who scanned the curtain for us. The museum has specialized cameras and tables that allow scanning such large textiles.

Peter Kiewit Foundation visits Japanese Hall



Members of the Peter Kiewit Foundation team were on hand to check on the progress of the Japanese Hall and History project. Pictured here with Vickie are Paul Tiernes, Liz Codina and Wendy Boyer. We can't thank them enough for their support, guidance and assistance since our inception.

They have been with us since the beginning providing guidance, ideas and details related to our project.

Thank you to the many foundations, donors, businesses and others who have contributed to the success of our project! We could not do this without you!

Outreach: Research, Exhibits and History gathering efforts

We have been able to expand the outreach and history gathering portion of our project. The Japanese Hall and History Project continues to share our story and talk about our past and future. We were invited to exhibit at the Japanese Ambience Festival at the Lauritzen Gardens in Omaha on October 8 and 9. We had many who expressed their interest in learning more about the Japanese American story in Nebraska and the High Plains. In addition we continue to have many opportunities to share our story. The most recent presentations have been given at the Hastings Public Library, the Seward Memorial Library and the Gering Public Library.

Also, Recently Vickie Sakurada Schaepler traveled with Donna Anderson, a PhD student at the University of California at Santa Barbara to conduct research at the Wyoming Archives. This fits into our goal to help to expand our preservation of the history within the high plains area. Donna taught at Lincoln High for five years and is doing research on Asians in the Midwest. The staff at the Wyoming archives was exemplary in finding information for us.

The Wyoming archives proved to be an excellent source of information and gave us the rest of the story for several pictures we had received in our collection. One particular story shared the story of First Sergeant Toshiro Suyematsu who according to the articles was the most decorated Nisei GI in the 442. He was from Casper, and later served for 20 years as the US Attorney for Wyoming in Cheyenne. The archives gave us the opportunity to meet Dan Lyon, who provided a tour of an area called the "Japanese Colony" and the graveyard where many Japanese were buried. Thank you to Dan and the staff of the Wyoming Archives including

Carl Hallberg and Suzi Taylor, Reference Archivists who provided the information.

Hiram Hisanori Kano's Nomination for the Nebraska Hall of Fame Current Five-Year Naming Cycle (2020-2024) Article Authored by: Stephen W. Kay



*Photo Credit:
Courtesy of
Church of Our
Savior, North
Platte, NE*

Hiram Hisanori Kano was nominated for the Nebraska Hall of Fame by Steve Kay of North Platte on June 12, 2020.

A completed nomination form along with biographical and historical material were submitted to the Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission [hereinafter referred to as "the Commission"] at that time.

The Commission consists of seven members appointed by the governor. The governor is an ex-officio member. The Nebraska Hall of Fame "was established in 1961 to officially recognize prominent Nebraskans. The Hall of Fame honors people who were born in Nebraska, who gained prominence while living in Nebraska, or whose residence in Nebraska was an important influence on their lives and contributed to their greatness."

<https://history.nebraska.gov/nebraska-hall-fame>)

The Commission found eight Hall of Fame nominees to be eligible: Grover Cleveland Alexander, Calvin Chapman, Elzada Uresba Clover, Howard Hanson, Ernst H. Hermingaus, Hiram Hisanori Kano, Malcom Little (Malcom X), and Emma Louise Pound. The Commission held hearings in Lincoln [July 18, 2022], Omaha [July 20, 2022], and Holdrege [July 25, 2022]. Steve Shively testified in support of Hiram’s nomination at the hearing in Lincoln. At the Commission hearing in Holdrege Steve Kay, Roy Yanagida, Vickie Schaepler, and Steve Shively testified in support of Hiram’s nomination. Additional material was submitted to the Commission.

On August 12, 2022, the Commission met in Lincoln and selected three finalists from the eight nominees: Malcom Little (Malcom X), Emma Louise Pound, and Howard Hanson. The following Commission members chose Hiram as one of their three finalists: Jill Dolberg [Interim Director, Nebraska History], Dr. Sara Crook [retired history professor, Peru State College], and Aaron Wyatt.

Hiram will be nominated for the Hall of Fame during the next five-year cycle (2025-2029). He is a wonderful role model. Hiram’s life’s work enhances the reputation of the State of Nebraska nationally and internationally. As President Barack Obama noted in September 2012: “In the face of adversity and extreme prejudice, Father Kano devoted himself to serving others. His abiding faith, compassion, and resilience exemplified the American Spirit, and his story will be remembered for generations to come.”

Hiram strived for racial justice, fairness, and equality. He appeared before committees of the 1919-1920 Nebraska Constitutional Convention and the 1921 Nebraska Legislature when efforts were made to prevent Japanese from owning land in Nebraska. Hiram was the leader of the Japanese in Nebraska. He was president of the Japanese Americanization Society of Nebraska

from 1920 until December 1941. Hiram served as counselor, minister, teacher, translator, and agricultural advisor to the Japanese.

Following passage of the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952, allowing Japanese immigrants to become U.S. citizens, Hiram and his wife taught citizenship classes in North Platte and Scottsbluff. In 1953 the Japanese immigrants in Lincoln County and Scotts Bluff County became United States citizens.

Stephen W. Kay was born in Omaha and grew up in North Platte. He graduated from North Platte High School, the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, and Creighton University School of Law. Mr. Kay practiced law in North Platte for 40 years and currently is a disability advocate and writer. He is a Fellow of the Nebraska State Bar Foundation and a member of the Board of Directors of the Nebraska State Bar Foundation. Thank you, Stephen for creating this article.

Editor’s Note on “The Father Kano” I knew. When I was young (until 12) I lived on a farm outside of Lyman. I went to St. Mary’s Episcopal Church in Mitchell. Father Kano was a legend that I only remember meeting a few times. He and Mrs. Kano eventually retired to Ft. Collins, CO. In 1963, we also moved from Lyman to FC. We would visit the Kano’s often, fishing, sailing, and gardening there. Addie (their daughter) was my mother’s best friend.

We worshiped together and had most of our holidays with the Kano’s. Eventually they moved a few blocks from us, and after graduation, I came home as much as possible. I still remember Ft. Kano’s sailing instructions, although I wasn’t very good. Father Kano would collect the local newspaper clippings about my family. He was especially proud to see “honor rolls” published. He even came to visit and went into the coal mine where I worked when he was 95. The safety

equipment weighed a lot but he toured the mine and later had me bring him periodic updates of the maps. He was always interested in the work I did – mostly electrical power generation.

He has been greatly missed, but never forgotten. Thanks, Steve, for doing the article and making the nomination.

Scott Gambino, Assistant Director - LOP

We would like to introduce Scott Gambino who recently joined Legacy of the Plains Museum as Assistant Director. Scott has dedicated his 8-year career to the curatorial aspects of museums. He was born in Casper, Wyoming and graduated from Casper College and the University of Wyoming with degrees in History and Museum Studies. Scott has worked for the Veterans Memorial Museum in Casper, The Historic Bishop House, Quebec-01 Missile Alert Facility, and the National Museum of Military Vehicles. Scott will be working primarily with the Collections, Archives, Storyline, and Japanese Hall Committees, and other aspects of the museum.

Mariko Nagai visits Scottsbluff area



On October 29th, Mariko Nagai of the Japanese Outreach Initiative partnered with the LPM Japanese Hall and History Project to showcase Japan and provide a morning of cultural activities at the museum. She (in middle) is shown with Anita Marcus, Diane Sakurada, Vickie, and Scott Gambino. (Cindy Yamamoto missed the photo.) She is housed at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, she gave the Panhandle a little taste of Japan, by providing information on Japan, the schools, dances and food.

About 40 individuals participated in a morning of activities which included a Tanko Bushi (Coal Mine) Bon Dance, calligraphy, learning of the some Japanese culture and the making of onigiri (Japanese Rice Balls). Everyone joined in the fun of an exciting cultural event!



Continued Features to Newsletters

A New and Continuing Feature in this Newsletter are links to web items of interest.

Links of Interest

Japanese Hall Article

<https://flatwaterfreepress.org/saving-the-story-japanese-immigrants-long-ago-made-nebraska-home-a-granddaughter-is-ensuring-we-remember/?fbclid=IwAR0TFBEIvMewWNixBFmMkbD2WCSXON241DRSFV3bq4KMYSTIk6uPVQy55k>

Link to LPM for holiday season activities

<https://legacyoftheplains.org/events/yuletide-lights-on-the-prairie/>

Letters to the Editor

Sharon Sato Dow, originally from the Scottsbluff area, now lives in Santa Fe, NM. She recently sent a note with information about Father Kano who was incarcerated at the camp in the Santa Fe area. She said that he promoted a relationship with residents of Santa Fe while in the camp, offering tea and showing artwork of other internees.

Newsletter Contact Information:

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Please send us Email Addresses or Name and USPS Address to add your family and friends to our distribution List. Also, information you would like linked as an item of interest and Letters to the Editor can be submitted.

Or mail your requests to:

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Donations may be made to: Oregon Trail Community Foundation: **OTCF-Japanese Hall**, P.O. Box 1344, 115 W. Railway Street, Scottsbluff, NE 69363-1344.

Or to the Legacy of the Plains Museum, **LPM-Japanese Hall**, 2930 Old Oregon Trail, Gering, NE 69341.

The OTCF and LPM are 501 (C) (3) Organizations. As you approach year end remember that your donations are tax deductible. Checks should be written to: **OTCF-Japanese Hall** or **LPM-Japanese Hall** for us to receive credit.

You may also contribute at the Oregon Trail Community Website at:

[Japanese Hall : Japanese Hall : Oregon Trail Community Foundation \(otcf.org\)](http://Japanese Hall : Japanese Hall : Oregon Trail Community Foundation (otcf.org))

OR --- Use this **QR** from your Smart Phone:



Thanks to Cathy McDaniel for providing this QR.

If you would like recognition or wish to donate in memory of or in honor of an individual, please contact: Japanesehall@legacyoftheplains.org for donation recognition information. Thank you for your interest in preserving this unique part of Nebraska history.

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