

Spring 2024 Japanese Hall Newsletter



Updates:

Exhibits Installation

Grand Opening

Japanese Hall Veterans Project

Cherry Blossom Curtain in use at Japanese Hall in 1934.

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.

Exhibits installation began in March and April

Folks from Upland Exhibits spent a week in March and another week in April installing exhibits at Japanese Hall. To see the exhibit boxes and artifacts in place is amazing and a huge testimony to the amount of work that both Upland and folks involved with the Japanese Hall project have put in to realize this museum.

Vickie Sakurada Schaepler and Diane Sakurada Mercer were at the museum during the installations and they submitted these photos. You can get a feeling for how the museum will look by examining the items around the workers.



Jocelyn Wilkinson (left) prepares an exhibit as Diane Mercer watches.



Mark Andres maps where items are to be installed.



Left to right Jakob Graber, Dan Miller, Isaac Enth and Seth Rudeen unpack a display.



L to R: Jakob Graber, Dan Miller, Mark Andres, Isaac Enth and Seth Rudeen.



Mark Andres and Jocelyn Wilkinson put items together for the display boxes.



Jocelyn Wilkinson prepares an item to be installed in a display box.

Upland Exhibits Work Enhances Japanese Hall's Story

Submitted by Anthony Esau, Head of Design, Upland Exhibits

Based in Newton, Kansas, Upland Exhibits designs and fabricates exhibitions for a variety of cultural and educational organizations nationwide. Nebraska is home for several of our partnerships, including Willa Cather Foundation, History Nebraska, Omaha Children's Museum, and now, Japanese Hall.

Every project is different, but they each have a passionate core of people pushing forward to make visions into realities. From the moment Vickie Schaepler reached out, we knew the Japanese Hall had a champion for its cause. We love to work with passionate people because their commitment guarantees the hard work necessary to create a quality exhibit.

While we've worked on immigration stories before, Japanese immigration to Nebraska was new to us. We were particularly struck by the stories of those who dedicated themselves to the improvement and growth of their new communities—whether through establishing businesses, hosting community activities, or advocating at the state, regional, and national levels—even in the face of extreme, explicit discrimination.

These stories are the exhibit's defining trait and provided us with our biggest challenge as we worked to balance them with the physical demands of an exhibit. With the Hall itself as a

preeminent artifact, we purposefully designed and constructed exhibit components to preserve as much visibility of the restored interior as possible.

We also developed the Story Hub—an interactive, multimedia space featuring Story Cards. Several of the Story Cards have integrated NFC technology (a new approach that we developed specifically for this project!) that triggers audio and video clips to play on the Hub's media player. This space expands on stories from the main exhibit as well as providing a way to incorporate new stories as they come to light.

The Upland team is proud to have collaborated with the Japanese Hall Committee to help preserve the legacy of Japanese immigrants in Nebraska and the High Plains!

May 31 Is the Deadline for Banquet Reservations to be Received

Note we must receive your reservations and payments for the banquet by May 31 as we need to confirm with our venue and caterer on June 1. If you are mailing your reservation, please account for postal service delays. It's best to use the online reservation system at <https://legacyoftheplains.org/japanese-hall-grand-opening-tickets-online/> clicking on the "book now" button.

Here is the schedule for Grand Opening Day:

We are excited to announce the Grand Opening of Japanese Hall will be Saturday, June 8, 2024, at the Hall's location on the Legacy of the Plains Museum campus in Gering. All activities at the Museum will be free of charge that day. All times are Mountain Daylight Time.

The schedule of events is not solid, but here's a brief schedule to help your planning.

9 a.m. Legacy of the Plains Museum and grounds open (free)

10 a.m. Japanese Hall Ribbon Cutting (free)

10:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. Games, art projects, other family activities (origami, samurai helmets, calligraphy, games)

11 a.m. Omaha Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) dance troupe. The Omaha chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League has had a JACL Dance Troupe for most of the past 60 years, passing down some traditional dances and interspersing more recent Japanese dance songs. The current troupe has five elementary-age children who are fourth and fifth generations from Japanese immigrant ancestors. Their performance will include lessons and educational information.

Noon: Lunch and Learn lecture: Early Japanese Settlers on the High Plains, 1900–1940, Julie Ushio, Main Hall. When people hear about Japanese immigrants in America, they often hear about Hawaii or California. This is the story of the *Issei*, first generation Japanese, who came inland, working and settling in Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska. It will cover their early days as itinerant workers, the arrival of picture brides, establishing families, and the businesses, farms, and communities that grew up around them.

NOTE: a limited number of box lunches will be available for purchase at the museum or you can bring lunch from off-site.

1 pm. Koto performance and demonstration, Tomoko Shepherd, Main Hall. Omahan Tomoko Shepherd will perform and give lessons following her performance on koto, the national instrument of Japan.

1 p.m. Martial Arts of Medieval Japan, demonstrated and taught by Mugen Dojo, Omaha. Japanese martial arts can be divided into old and new traditions. Medieval traditions were reserved for warrior/Samurai class. Modern arts (starting in 1870) were not restricted to warriors. Today, people can pursue either or both forms. Information about Japanese martial arts will be part of the demonstration.

2 p.m. Denver Buddhist Temple Minyo Folk Dance Troupe. Minyo is a type of traditional Japanese folk music and dance originally created as people worked; it was thought the rhythms synchronized with and eased the labor physically and mentally. These songs and dances represent Japanese celebrations and legends. Dance lessons following the performance.

3 pm. Denver Taiko Drum troupe performance and demonstrations. Taiko are traditional Japanese drums. Outside of Japan, they are usually seen as large drums played by an ensemble. The performers will give lessons following their performance.

4 p.m. Festival closes.

5:30 p.m. Celebration and banquet, Gering Civic Center, 1050 M St., Gering. (Reservations required).

The idea to restore the hall began in 2012, and in 2015, Legacy of the Plains Museum board approved the relocation and renovation of the hall and exhibits to its campus in Gering. Exhibits include early Issei migration to the U.S. and to the High Plains; their livelihoods in business and agriculture; coping with racism and prejudice; experiences during WWII and other military operations; cultural, artistic and athletic activities; and the current and future state of Japanese Americans in the High Plains.

Most items in the exhibits have been donated to the museum by families. These items include heirloom dolls, clothing, dinnerware, books, paper goods and photographs. The range of items donated to the hall is huge. Items associated with the hall itself such as the Buddhist shrine, chairs and benches, photographs, theater curtains and other ephemera have been recovered or stayed with the hall.

For more information, Click on the link below and then “Japanese Hall” on top right <https://legacyoftheplains.org/>.

Japanese Hall Dedication Plaque

Submitted by Roger Hara



Thanks to Roger Hara for shepherding through a project to create a dedication plaque for the hall. A commemorative plaque is being fabricated by Herstead Monument Company and will be placed at the Japanese Hall entrance. Roger is expecting it to be installed before the Grand Opening. The idea of a dedication marker was put forward by the last officers of the Western Nebraska Young Men’s Association (a.k.a. “The Boys Club”) and will soon be a reality. The plaque gives a brief timeline of the Hall from inception to its current home at the Legacy of the Plains Museum and will be a great addition to preserve the history of the Japanese Hall.

Japanese American Veterans project aims to recognize these individuals

Submitted by Roger Hara

Roger Hara is spearheading a project to identify and recognize Japanese American military veterans from the High Plains area. While plans are not yet finalized, the goal is to create a searchable index of these individuals. While there are several online ways to find military veterans, these indexes are not limited solely to the High Plains area, He is working with LTG (Ret) Joe Peterson on a search for Nisei WWII Veterans from the great plains. Joe was the Chief Operations Officer in support of the Congressional Gold Medal Award to the Nisei Veterans of World War II. He has contacts in the National Veterans Network and Nisei Veterans Committee that have offered to help with the search. Here are links to their websites: <https://nvcfoundation.org/> <https://nvnvets.org/>

If you attend the Japanese Hall Grand Opening on June 8th, there will be staff and equipment available to scan your pictures. There will also be a History Harvest opportunity for you to provide a video recorded oral history if you are so inclined.

Roger has supplied two documents that may help you think about what kind of information would be helpful. Optional questions recommended by the Library of Congress are suggestions only and not required.

Japanese Hall Veterans Project

The Japanese Hall and History Project is collecting information on Japanese Veterans that served in the U.S. Military. If you or someone you know is a veteran of Japanese ancestry and has ties to Nebraska and the High Plains, please submit information and photographs to support this project. The plan is to have an interactive display showcasing the information and preserving the important roll Japanese played in the military.

Japanese Hall Veterans Memorial Information

Veteran's name: _____

Date and location of birth: _____

Military branch: _____

Years served: _____

Highest rank: _____

Submitter's name / Relationship to Veteran: _____

Submitter's Email _____

Phone#: _____

Short biography including ties to Nebraska and the High Plains: _____

Forms and photographs can be submitted via email to info@legacyoftheplains.org. Submit photographs in the highest resolution possible for the best results. Please put "Japanese Hall Veterans - NAME" in the email subject line.

Hardcopies and original photographs can be sent to the following. Please include return address information if requesting originals be returned.

Legacy of the Plains Museum
ATTN: Japanese Hall Veterans
2930 Old Oregon Trail
Gering, NE 69341

I certify that I am the owner of the property described or the authorized agent of the owner and hereby give, transfer, assign and deliver all of the owner's rights, title and interest in and to the property described, including any literary rights which I may possess in and to said property, to Legacy of the Plains, a nonprofit corporation, Tax Exempt #47-0724415. As an unrestricted gift, I understand that Legacy of the Plains may, at its sole discretion, sell or otherwise dispose of the property according to the Legacy of the Plains Deaccession Policy.

Signature of owner or authorized agent: _____ Date: _____

Japanese Hall Veterans Project

Optional questions recommended by the Library of Congress. This additional information will greatly contribute to the success of this project and any inputs are welcome.

Biographical details:

- Who are/were your parents and what are/were their occupations?
- Who are/were your siblings? Names and genders? Which, if any, serve/served in the military?
- What were your parents' or siblings' feelings about you joining the service?
- What primary and secondary schools or college did you attend?
- What kinds of jobs did you hold prior to entering the military?
- Did being Japanese have any impact on your time in the military?

Early Days of Service

- Can you tell us about when you went into the military? Were you drafted, or did you volunteer?
- (If volunteered) Why did you join?
- What or who did you leave behind (family, child, pet) when you left to serve?
- In which branch did you enter?
- (If volunteered) Why did you choose that branch?
- How did you get to your initial point of entry?
- What type of training or schooling did you have? (Advance Course Warrant Officer Basic, Warrant Officer Advance, Warrant Officer Senior Course, "Boot-strap" Command and General Staff College or equivalent, War College or equivalent (getting a degree either Bachelors, Masters or PhD).
- What is your most vivid memory of your time training or in school? What was the best part? What was the worst part?
- Does any particular instructor stand out in your mind? If yes, why?
- What was your first assignment after basic training?
- Did you receive any specialized training? If so, what?
- Do you recall your instructors? If so, what were they like?
- Did you qualify with equipment (vehicles, aircraft, radios, weapons, etc.)?
- (If Yes) What was training with that equipment like?
- What was the hardest part of training?
- Did you receive any promotions? Could you tell me about them?
- What was the hardest part of the military life-style for you to adapt to? Why do you think it was?
- What was the easiest part of the military life-style for you to adapt to? Why do you think it was?

Wartime Service

- Where did you serve?
- What are your recollections of that experience?
- Were you in a combat, combat support, or combat service support role? Or did the war zone make that designation irrelevant?
- (If combat/wartime) How did your combat (wartime) experience change you?
- What kinds of friendships and camaraderie did you form while serving, and with whom?
- How did you stay in touch with family and friends?
- What did you do for recreation or when you were off duty?
- Do you recall any particularly humorous or unusual events?
- Was there something you did for "good luck?"
- What was the best part of your service experience?

End of Service

- Do you recall the day service ended? Where were you when your service ended?
- Did you return home? Where were you?
- How were you received by your family and community?

- How did you readjust to civilian life? Did you work or go back to school?
- Did the G.I. Bill support your education?
- How did service change you?
- Did you continue any friendships after service? For how long?
- How did service affect the way you relate to others?
- Did you join a veteran organization?
- Do you attend reunions?

Reflections

- How did your military service experiences affect your life?
- What are some life lessons you learned from your military service?
- How has your military service impacted your feelings about war and the military in general?
- What message would you like to leave for future generations who will view/hear this interview?

Conclusion

- Is there anything you would like to add that we have not covered in this interview?
- Is there anything you've always wanted to share about your service or veteran experience that you never have?
- What would you like people to know or remember from your story?
- Is there anything else we should talk about that we haven't covered?
- What do you wish more people knew about veterans?

Japanese Hall receives great publicity this spring

Both the Flatwater Free Press and KOLN-KGIN Television's Pure Nebraska program have given Japanese Hall great publicity this spring. The Flatwater stories have been republished by other news sites in Nebraska, such as the Scottsbluff Star Herald, the Lincoln Journal Star, the Kearney Hub and the Omaha World-Herald among others. Attached are links to the items published or broadcast by both organizations.

Click on the links:

<https://flatwaterfreepress.org/grand-opening-set-for-nebraska-japanese-hall-museum-exhibit>.

<https://flatwaterfreepress.org/they-had-lost-everything-nebraska-museum-tells-stories-of-japanese-americans-during-dark-chapter/>

<https://www.1011now.com/2024/04/01/japanese-hall-grand-opening-set-june/>

Thank You to All

The Japanese Hall project and committee thanks all who have donated time, talent and treasure to make this hall a reality. We had no idea of the scope when this project was conceived in 2012. Thanks to every single person or organization for contributing to our success. We are still fundraising to cover exhibit development costs and to create a long-term endowment for maintenance and future exhibits. You can help: Your donations are Tax Deductible

Donate Online: <https://legacyoftheplains.org/support-us/make-a-donation/>

Or mail a check to: Legacy of the Plains Museum
2930 Old Oregon Trail
Gering, NE 69341

Be sure to specify Japanese Hall in your donation information or the memo area of your check.

Newsletter was Edited by Kim Hachiya, Lincoln, NE, she also compiled the June 8th Events Schedule.

Newsletter Contact Information:

JHALLNews@legacyoftheplains.org

Please send us Email Addresses or Name and USPS Address to add your family and friends to our distribution List. Or mail your requests to:

Matt Sakurada:
Communication Coordinator
62180 E 313 Rd.
Grove, OK 74344

Do you have stories to share with our project? Let us know - we would like to share them.

Also, send us information you would like added to Links of Interest, as an item of interest.

Letters to the Editor can also be submitted.

Donations may be also 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. **Please Designate Your Contributions for Japanese Hall Project**.

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

<https://otcf.org/japanese-hall/japanesehall.html>

[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.

Advisory Council: LPM Japanese Hall & History Center OTCF/LPM-JH

George Behringer, Honorary Counsel of Japan, Emeritus, Omaha, NE
Katherine Endacott, Pleasant Dale, NE
Dr. Heather Fryer, Hawaii
Kim Hachiya, Lincoln, NE
Sharon Ishii-Jordan, Omaha, NE
Cathy McDaniel, Ex. Administrator, OTCF, Scottsbluff, NE
Kara Miyagishima, Denver, CO
Rick Myers, Gering, NE
Gayle Hashimoto Rojas, Scottsbluff, NE
Vickie Sakurada Schaepler, J Hall Coordinator, Kearney, NE
Andrew Schelling, Honorary Counsel of Japan, Omaha, NE
Elizabeth Stobel, Scottsbluff, NE
Susan Ugai, Lincoln, NE
David Wolf, Director of LOP, Gering, NE

Brian Croft, Scottsbluff, NE
Jane Fliesbach, Scottsbluff, NE
Dr. Don Gentry, Gering, NE
Roger Hara, Tucson, AZ
Steve Kay, North Platte, NE
Diane Sakurada Mercer, Torrington, WY
John Miyoshi, Wahoo, NE
Larry Nagaki, Phoenix, AZ
Jodi Ruzicka, Scottsbluff, NE
Matt Sakurada, Grove, OK
Paul Snyder, Scottsbluff, NE
Dr. Nathan Tye, Kearney, NE
Julie Ushio, Honolulu, HI

Other Support:

Pat and Sherry Miyahara, Gering, NE

Cindy Yamamoto, Scottsbluff, NE

Linda Thyfault, Gering, NE