

Winter 2022 Japanese Hall Newsletter

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Nebraska

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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.

Thoughts from the Executive Director, David Wolf

The addition of the Japanese Hall to the Legacy of the Plains Museum is extremely important in a number of ways. First, it tells an important story that is integral to the history of the area. The contributions of the Japanese Americans are deep and wide ranging, which include excellence in agriculture, business, military, and cultural. If we do not preserve this history, it will disappear. Second, it offers another attraction to encourage people to come to the museum. We already boast an impressive collection of artifacts, stories, and buildings. The Japanese Hall offers something different than anything around the area, and we believe it will draw visitors to our museum. Finally, I love stories. I love to tell them, and I love to hear them. The Japanese Hall Project is full of stories that need to be told, and I am excited to be a part of telling them.

Renovations Update: Opening Delayed

The building renovations are nearly complete, but our opening has been delayed due to delays with the exhibit company, Root House Design. With an anticipated completion date of early 2022, we hoped to have a grand opening celebration in April 2022. The company has not started fabrication of exhibits and with concerns of supply chain delays, our original opening date was postponed. Much still needs to be done and with several deadlines missed we have decided to wait to set a time for the grand opening celebration. As discussed in our Fall edition, the design company is hard at work on the six zones with hopes to open this summer.

We are also awaiting a decision on the “shovel ready” grants from the State of Nebraska to add a second entrance to the basement so we can use it for exhibits and meetings. This is an integral part of being able to tell the story of the Hall and important to utilize the space to full capacity. This grant was written after the State Fire Marshal deemed the need for a second exit. This exit will be located in the back of the museum and allow us to make the building completely ADA accessible and not detract from the original Hall design. More to come in our future newsletters.

Outreach Update

Japanese Ambience Festival, Lauritzen Gardens, Omaha, NE: On October 2nd and 3rd, volunteers of the Japanese Hall and History Project brought Japanese American history to Omaha from faraway Gering, NE. Information was provided based on additional research on Japanese history in Omaha and assembled by Sharon Isshi-Jordan and Heather Fryer. Also, displays provided by Boys Town on the work of Father Flanagan during WWII, were used. Stories abounded while visitors strolled through displays, exhibitions, and performances at the beautiful Lauritzen gardens including the

Marjorie K. Daugherty Conservatory. Sword, bow and arrow demonstrations, the Kokyo Taiko Drums, and Koto Performances added to the event. There were activities to entertain all age groups.

The team from the Japanese Hall brought a variety of displays from early immigrants, WWII including Ben Kuroki, the 442nd RCT, Military Intelligence Service and more. The museum had some special items including an unusual Samurai doll that gave a special touch to the displays and a program from a soldier who was stationed in Fukasawa Japan after the war along with additional items that intrigued visitors. The weather was beautiful, and many were ready to escape the confines of home during the pandemic and enjoy a stroll through beautiful Ikebana arrangements and intricate Bonsai displays. We had non-stop visitors throughout the two days learning about Japanese history throughout Nebraska.



Photo of Koto performer



Photo of Team in Omaha Sharon Ishii-Jordan, Anita Marcus, Diane Mercer and Vickie

Fundraising Update: We are pleased to announce we have met our challenge grant with the Peter Kiewit Foundation to complete our exhibits. Thank you to all who have contributed to make Japanese Hall a reality. Any additional donations made to Japanese Hall will be placed in a reserve fund, to pay for ongoing utilities, maintenance, an endowment, and special projects. This includes a Veterans Memorial designated by the Western Nebraska Young Men's group in the courtyard and development of our archives/meeting area. More information to follow as these projects are completed.

Accessioning/Artifacts Update: We have quite a few artifacts from several donors. We have been able to use them to help create new displays. At the Harvest Festival we had a display specific to Japanese American farming including many old pictures from the 30's and 40's. We also set up a display at the Japanese Ambience Festival at Lauritsen Gardens in Omaha. Recently we have

worked on a Veterans' Exhibit. We are looking for photographs of veterans or other photos. We have some photos of veterans, but we do not know who they are.

Legacy of the Plains Update: David Wolf – Executive Director reported that at the last Annual Meeting of Legacy of the Plains Museum an announcement was made for a new 2-million-dollar renovation and additions to the grounds campaign. Part of this plan is a park planned next to Japanese Hall with playgrounds, tables, and outside bathrooms. It also includes a hiking trail, biking trail and several other features. The museum is currently recruiting more volunteers.

Communications Update: Our goal is to help track the efforts of the Advisory Council, and update progress in quarterly newsletters. The Spring 2022 newsletter will start a program of building outreach into the community – we will use Facebook and other sorts of media messaging.

Japanese Graves of Western Nebraska Featured Story

By Julie Ushio



Photo: Japanese graves in Mitchell, NE cemetery

There is a tradition in Japan of *ohaka mairi*, (the

visiting and caring for the graves of one's ancestors and relatives). Within the close-knit Japanese communities in western Nebraska, this tradition continued and extended to caring for graves of all Japanese, many who were buried away from home without family to care for their graves. Issei women walked the cemeteries to discover forgotten Japanese graves and later, decorated each with flowers every Memorial Day. When the Issei women passed away, their Nisei daughters continued to honor and remember.

I became a part of this tradition about twelve years ago when I joined the Friendly Circle, the women's group at the Scottsbluff Japanese Hall. Every Memorial Day I joined Kay Hara, Mick (Miyeko) Hara, and Charlene Kishiyama Brougham to decorate graves at Fairview Cemetery in Scottsbluff and Sunset Memorial Cemetery. Other women from the Friendly Circle volunteered to place flowers on Japanese graves at two cemeteries in Mitchell, as well as cemeteries in Gering, Morrill, Torrington, Alliance, and Minatare.

During the years I participated, I put together notebooks with a picture of each grave, its location, and other relevant information. The list was initially compiled from one typewritten list that had been compiled over the years for graves at Fairview and Sunset Memorial. The list was numbered with locations such as "seventh tree by the fence" but over the years, trees had been cut and a few gravestones disappeared. Luckily one year, Leann Sato (the daughter of Roger and Nancy Sato), was working at Fairview Cemetery during the busy weeks prior to Memorial Day, and with the support of the cemetery director, Leann went into the cemetery records and compiled a list of graves. Cross referencing this list to the Friendly Circle list laid the foundation for the database. Subsequent visits with Mick Hara to all the other cemeteries over the years, helped me to locate and photograph the other graves (along with hearing some fascinating stories of families and people interred).

The largest number of Japanese graves is at Fairview Cemetery in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. There are at least 140 graves. One of the challenges of some of the Issei graves were headstones written in Japanese but volunteers Akemi Sato Glass and Koji Clark provided translations. The earliest grave in Scottsbluff goes back to at least 1909, but the cemetery director said that cemetery records from the early 1900's are incomplete. There are two graves on the original Friendly Circle list with names, but the gravestones are no longer standing and the names are not listed in the cemetery records, so earlier graves might have predated 1909.

Many of the early graves of the Issei at Fairview Cemetery are clustered together, most likely due to the fact that at the time they were buried, the graves lay on the outskirts of the cemetery. Graves of the Nisei, Sansei, and Issei who lived into their 80's and 90's, are interspersed with other graves throughout the cemetery, reflecting the assimilation of the Japanese into the community. The one Nisei buried in the veteran's area at Fairview is Harley Tanaka, the only Nisei from Western Nebraska to die in World War II. Harley was a member of M Company, 442nd Regimental Combat Team. He was in the same company as my father, Sam Ushio, and my father was in the honor guard at Harley's burial.

Fortunately, although the gravestones of the early Issei were relegated to the margins of the cemetery, some of their obituaries were included in the local newspapers. A few were quite lengthy, giving us a glimpse into these forgotten lives. The death of a young man in a car that overturned when joyriding outside of Haig, Nebraska. The sudden deaths of several Japanese men, women and babies during the winter of 1918 due to Spanish influenza. A tragic collision when a train struck a car stalled on the tracks, killing an Issei father and his baby. The mother of the baby was badly injured but survived. I've always been drawn to stories of the past as well as family genealogy which is why

I've been assembling this database of Japanese graves. Perhaps in the future when descendants of the Japanese who lived in the area come to *ohaka mairi*, they will find the graves, and perhaps some stories too.

The notebooks of Japanese Graves in Western Nebraska have been donated and are now a part of the Japanese Hall collection at the Japanese Hall Museum.



“Walking the graves” with:
Charlene Kishiyama Brougham, Kay Hara,
Miyeko Hara



A few Friendly Circle members:

Ruby Nochi, Nancy Sato, Miyeko Hara, Ruthie Tamoi, Charlene Kishiyama Brougham, and Julie Ushio



Oldest grave in Fairview Cemetery is S. Satow (Sato)

Author's BIO *Julie Ushio*, Honolulu. Born and raised in Alliance, where grandparents and uncle ran the Alliance Cleaners for 60 years. Family historian and genealogist. Gathered database and photos of Japanese graves in Western Nebraska.

Vickie's Commendation.

On November 18, 2021 a special ceremony was held in Omaha Nebraska to honor Vickie for her dedication and achievement to preserve the Japanese Hall in Scottsbluff Nebraska by Consul-General Hiroshi Tajima of the Japanese Consulate in Chicago. This year four individuals of the twelve-state region for Chicago, received the honor. They included: James E. Schellinger, Indiana Secretary of Commerce, Josephine H. Oyama-Miller, President of the Madison-Obihiro Sister Cities, Inc., Monica Mitsuko Rokuhiro, Japanese Language Teacher, Chicago and Vickie Sakurada Schaepler, Coordinator of the Japanese Hall and History Project. Vickie received the honor for her efforts in the

preservation of the 90-year old Japanese Hall in Scottsbluff, NE, to preserve the history of the Japanese Immigrants in Nebraska and the High Plains.



Consul General Tajima and Vickie



The Advisory Council members in attendance are George Behringer, Honorary Consul of Japan, Emeritus from Nebraska, Diane Mercer, Kim Hachiya, Vickie, Consul General Tajima, Sharon Ishii-Jordan, Heather Fryer and Andrew Schilling, Consul of Japan for Nebraska.

Advisors' Reasons for working on the Project. (Continuing from past edition)

George Behringer: Most of us are descendants of immigrants who bravely left their home countries and sacrificed to build a better life in America. The Japanese Hall and Museum will provide a building to memorialize the lives of the Japanese immigrants and their children and grandchildren as they prospered in America. The family stories, pictures, memorabilia, and traditions are being gathered and will be presented at our relocated and renovated Japanese Hall, so that this history is maintained and can easily be reviewed.

Matt Sakurada: I am working on the Japanese Hall and Museum project to support my Cousin Vickie as she pursues her dream of renovating Japanese Hall and preserving its history. We grew up in a close-knit Nebraska family and continued to stay in contact over the past decades. I also want to communicate to others the Father Kano I knew, having lived a few blocks from him and his family in Fort Collins for 20 years. My perspective goes beyond the legend, because to me, he was a teacher/student, leader/follower, and royalty/farmer.

Sudi Sakurada– I joined the Japanese Hall and Museum project after talking with Vicki Sakurada Schaepler about the project and her vision for preserving the history of the efforts and contributions the Issei and Nisei made to the Eastern Colorado and Western Nebraska area. This is a big part of my husbands' family story. In my career I was responsible for developing and distributing a lot of written information to large groups of people. I use skills obtained over the years to contribute to the project and help tell the story of Japanese citizen's influence and efforts to farming and community development in the High Plains.

Final Note: You may want to donate to help preserve the Hall. The success of it rests in many aspects where funding is very important. If you would like to be recognized, or dedicate a donation for special interests please contact us. japanesehall@legacyoftheplains.org, JHallNews@legacyoftheplains.org

Donation information:

Checks may be sent to

The Oregon Trail Community Foundation (OTCF), Japanese Hall Project, P.O. Box 1344, 115 W. Railway Street, Scottsbluff, NE 69363-1344

LPM-Japanese Hall Project, 2930 Old Oregon Trail, Gering, NE 69341. **Any size donation is appreciated.**

The OTCF and LPM are 501 (C) (3) Organizations.

Checks must be written to: **OTCF-Japanese Hall Project** or **LPM-Japanese Hall Project** for us to receive credit.

You may also contribute directly to the fund at the Oregon Trail Community Website at: <https://www.otcf.org/donate-to-a-fund>

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

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

George Behringer, Honorary Counsel, General of Japan, (Retired) Omaha, NE
Katherine Endacott. Pleasant Dale, NE
Dr. Heather Frye, Omaha, NE Dr. Don Gentry, Gering, NE
Kim Hachiya, Lincoln, NE
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Gayle Hashimoto Rojas, Scottsbluff, NE
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Sandra Reddish, Gering, NE
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Matt Sakurada, Grove, OK
Elizabeth Stobel, Scottsbluff, NE
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Other Support

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Anita Marcus, Lyman, NE
Cindy Yamamoto, Scottsbluff, NE

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