

JACL TRI-DISTRICT CONFERENCE, DAY OF REMEMBRANCE DINNER AND DEDICATION OF PINEDALE ASSEMBLY CENTER MEMORIAL IN FRESNO (Photos by John D. Hix)

On the weekend of February 14 through February 16, 2009, the Central California District Council and the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial Project Committee co-hosted the JACL Tri-District Conference and Day of Remembrance Dinner and the dedication of the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial. The Tri-District events were held at the Clovis Veterans Memorial District facilities in Clovis.

On Saturday, participants visited the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture in Hanford. In the evening, they were treated to a screening of the movie, American Pastime, after which Kerry Nakagawa held a question and answer session.

The first of three Tri-District plenary sessions on Sunday was on the Pinedale Assembly Center where former internees told of their experiences. Professor James Hirabayashi and Kiyoko Sato were among the 4,823 Japanese Americans interned at the Pinedale Assembly Center. Hirabayashi was fourteen when his family was relocated from Washington. He recalled how he found it exciting as a teenager to take the train ride to Pinedale. He talked about his brother, Gordon, who spent six months in county jail for violating curfew.

Kiyoko Sato, from Sacramento, was eighteen when she was sent to the Pinedale Assembly Center before being sent to the internment camp at Poston, Arizona. She wrote a book, Dandelion through the Crack, about her experience.

Rev. Saburo Masada whose family lived in Caruthers before being interned at Fresno Assembly Center and Jerome, Arkansas, recalled the army truck coming, and remembers the exact day they pick them up.

Professor Lane Hirabayashi of UCLA and son of Jim Hirabayashi, and Marielle Tsukamoto who is an educator and administrator in the Elk Grove School District were also on the panel.



Top row: Professor Lane Hirabayashi, Dale Ikeda, Marielle Tsukamoto. Seated: Kiyoko Sato, Professor Jim Hirabayashi, Rev. Saburo Masada.

The panelists in the second session were five of the attorneys who were on the legal team who litigated what became known as the Corum Nobis Cases. In 1942, Fred Korematsu, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Minoru Yasui challenged the curfew and exclusion orders issued to persons of Japanese descent on the west coast, with their criminal cases making it to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court upheld the lower courts ruling.

In 1983, a legal team filed Coram Nobis Petitions on their behalf challenging the validity of the Supreme Court Decision. They argued that the government had suppressed and altered information important to their cases that would affect the decision of the high court. As a result of the team's efforts, the Supreme Court's decision was found to be faulty and the cases of Korematsu, Hirabayashi, and Yasui were vacated.

Don Minami, Prof. Lorraine Bannai, Don Tamaki, Karen Kai, and Robert Rusky, members of the legal team were on the panel. This was the first time since the ruling 25 years ago that the attorneys would gather as a group to discuss the significance of the decision.



Standing: Prof. Lorraine Bannai, Dale Minami, Don Tamaki. Seated: Karen Kai, Robert Rusky

On July 11, 1980, President Jimmy Carter had signed into Law the formation of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians Act that would investigate the necessity of the internment of persons of Japanese Ancestry during WWII. The Commission found that the evacuation was motivated largely by racial prejudice, wartime hysteria, and a failure of political leadership. The Coram Nobis Cases came about in the middle of the movement and was instrumental in the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, that would be signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on August 10, 1988. The Civil Liberties Act of 1988 provided for a formal apology from the United States of America and financial compensation to those interned.

The third session included individuals from the levels of U.S. Congress to the local level, including Secretary Norman Mineta, John Tateishi, Floyd Mori, Ken Yokota, Joanne Kagiwada, and Kamal Abu Shamsieh. Norman Mineta, Congressman from San Jose at the time, was a driving force behind passage of H.R. 442, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which officially apologized for the injustices endured by the Japanese Americans during World War II. Ken Yokota was District Redress Chair during the redress campaign.

John Tateishi was appointed to chair the JACL's National Redress Committee in 1978, a campaign that would last ten years, and culminated with the successful signing of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. He was the JACL's National Executive Director for seven years until his retirement in 2006.

Floyd Mori is the National Executive Director of the JACL, a position he has held since the retirement of John Tateishi.

Joanne Kagiwada grew up in Fresno and became the Washington D.C. representative for the Japanese American Citizens League during the appropriations phase of the Redress campaign. She was present when the first letters of apology were presented to the oldest Japanese Americans in the Fresno area during a ceremony in the Great Hall of the Department of Justice.



Standing: Consul General Y. Nagamine, Dale Ikeda, Floyd Mori, Kamal Abu Shamsieh, Ken Yokota. Seated: Carole Hayashino, Sec. Norman Mineta, John Tateishi, Joanne Kagiwada.

Kamal Abu Shamsieh is Director of the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno. He recalled how the public reacted to persons of middle east extraction after 9-11 and likened it to the repercussion towards persons of Japanese Ancestry after Pearl Harbor.

A Day of Remembrance dinner was held on February 15, 2009 to observe the 67th anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066. The dinner was started with a “Kagami-wari” sake ceremony to celebrate the completion of the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial “Remembrance Plaza” that would be dedicated the following day. Participating in the ceremony were Judge Dale Ikeda who headed the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial Project Committee, Norman Mineta, James Hirabayashi, former Pinedale Assembly Center internee, and Consul General Yasumasa Nagamine of Japan.



Prof Jim Hirabayashi, Sec. Norman Mineta, Hon. Dale Ikeda, Consul General Yasumasa Nagamine

Dr. John Welty, President of California State University, Fresno, presented the President’s Medal of Distinction to Satoshi “Fibber”Hirayama. Hiroshima attended Fresno State College in the early 1950’s on a football scholarship. Besides starring in football as a halfback, he also played baseball and set college records of 76 stolen bases in a season and five stolen bases in one game. Both records stood for more than 40 years.

Also receiving awards were Ambassador Phillip Sanchez who grew up in Pinedale, California, and was a contributor to the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial Project, Dr. Peter Mehas, former Superintendent of Fresno County Schools, Senator Daniel Inouye, and the Legal Team of Dale Minami, Professor Lorraine Bannai, Don Tamaki, Robert Rusky, and Karen Kai. Senator Inouye’s award was accepted on his behalf by Norman Mineta.

On Monday, February 16, the Pinedale Assembly Center Memorial “Remembrance Plaza” was dedicated. Despite the heavy rain, over 200 people attended the event. Remembrance Plaza contains a fountain designed by Gerald Tsutakawa and twelve storyboards. Ten of the storyboards tell the history of the Japanese since they immigrated to this country and the Japanese American history for over a hundred years. The other two storyboards give the history of the Sugar Pine Lumber Company and Camp Pinedale, the Army Air Force Training and Storage facility that occupied the area after the internment camp was closed. The town of Pinedale started in the early 1920’s as a housing area for the employees of the Sugar Pine Lumber Mill.

From May to July 1942, over 4,800 persons of Japanese Ancestry from Oregon, Washington and Sacramento and Amador Counties in California were held at the Pinedale Assembly Center awaiting the completion of permanent internment camps where they would sit out the remainder of the war. Since October 2005, a committee has been working on a memorial to the Pinedale Assembly Center. Prior to then, the Pinedale Assembly Center was obscure because the internees were not from the local area.

Judge Dale Ikeda, was Master of Ceremonies. Tom Wright spoke on behalf of the Clovis Veterans Memorial District who has been a supporter of the memorial project and who will eventually take ownership and will maintain the site. Mayor Ashley Swearengen extended her greeting from the City of Fresno and Supervisor Susan B. Anderson extended her greetings from Fresno County.

Invocation was by Reverend Roger Morimoto of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Palo Alto. Reverend Morimoto’s parents were interned at Pinedale Assembly Center.



Ribbon Cutting: Sec. Norman Mineta and Prof. Jim Hirabayashi holding scissors



Reverend Roger Morimoto

Congressman Jim Costa who, a year earlier, authored House Resolution 109 which recognizes the significance of the Pinedale Assembly Center where 4,823 Japanese Americans were sent assembled prior to being sent to permanent camps attended the dedication ceremony.

Norman Mineta, former Secretary of Commerce, Secretary of Transportation, and former U.S. Congressman was the keynote speaker. He spoke about his personal experience as a ten year old, being sent first to the assembly center at the Santa Anita Race Track, then to Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming. He spoke about the day HR 442 was debated in the House of Representatives: September 17, 1987, the 200th anniversary of the day the Constitution of the United States was adopted. Mineta spoke about how far this country has progressed in racial equality. He said, “Your children will visit this site, as well. And when they do so, remind them that while this memorial reflects on a time of great injustice, its most fundamental purpose is to show how far we have come. As I said, you cannot appreciate where you are if you do not understand...and remember...where you have been.”

The memorial plaza is sponsored by the city of Fresno, the Central California District Council of the Japanese American Citizens League, the Central California Nikkei Foundation and the Clovis Veterans Memorial District.

