

A wall to remember: Seattle memorial for Japanese internment during WWII

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Korean War veteran Mas Koba traces over the brick bearing his name and service record before the dedication of the NVC Foundation's new Japanese American memorial wall in Seattle's Chinatown International District on Sunday.



Shigeru Momoda, of Bellevue, who served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, listens as the wall is dedicated Sunday.

Susan Shinoda was in high school when she first learned that more than 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry — two-thirds of them American born — were shipped off to internment camps as war hysteria mounted in the months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941.

Three generations of Shinoda's own family, including her father, spent several years during World War II at the Minidoka camp in Idaho. Among them was her grandfather, Michio Shinoda, who volunteered to serve in the U.S. Army's Military Intelligence Service.

"It's odd. They don't really talk about it. My family rarely talks about going to camp," said Shinoda, a 34-year-old software program manager who was born in Seattle and grew up in North Bend. "I can't imagine doing that: Your family is in camp and you're fighting for your country that's incarcerated the rest of your family."

On Sunday, she stood shoulder to shoulder with dozens of others at a new wall in Seattle's Chinatown International District memorializing people interned during the war along with those of Japanese ancestry who left the camps to serve in the U.S. military, including the highly decorated 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Roughly 13,000 people from Washington state were sent to the camps.

Shinoda and others pressed white paper to carved granite, rubbing crayons over the names of relatives, creating keepsakes to take home.

In all, about 3,000 names appear, carved in black granite and stacked to create a wall 12 feet high and nearly 100 feet long outside the Nisei Veterans Committee (NVC) hall on South King Street, just east of 12th Avenue South. The wall is divided into two parts, with sections for internees and veterans, including those who fought in American conflicts after World War II. In some instances, names appear on bricks in both sections.



Janet Matsumoto, of Kent, gets some help from her brother-in-law Butch Wright, of Issaquah, as she traces names of her family at the new Japanese American Memorial Wall in Seattle.



Janet Matsumoto traces names of her family onto a white piece of paper with crayon. About 3,000 names are carved in the black granite.

Roughly \$1 million was raised over the past 15 months through the sale of memorial bricks, many of them bought by family members for \$260 each. U.S. Rep. Jim McDermott, D-Seattle, secured \$200,000 more for the project through a federal earmark.

In the next year, organizers with the NVC Foundation hope an additional 1,000 bricks will be sold and added to the wall.

Jay Deguchi, the wall's lead architect, spoke of how a group of Japanese-American veterans was denied entrance into the American Legion upon their return to Seattle. They scraped together \$1,000 in 1951 to buy the veterans hall that "felt like home" to kids of Deguchi's generation, who grew up playing basketball in the building's gymnasium.

A few years ago, he helped renovate the old hall. When he was asked to help build a memorial, Deguchi said, "it was agreed the wall should not just honor families of the veterans but all the families" interned during the war.

"These families are the foundation, these names are the beginnings from which all things were built," Deguchi said.

For Shinoda, attending Sunday's dedication of the memorial wall was a way to honor the generations of Japanese Americans who endured racism and hardship during World War II and the years that followed: "For me, it's a tribute, a celebration of our family persevering, moving on and not letting it get to you," she said.