



**BEFORE THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
FOR THE STATE OF OREGON, FOR THE COUNTY OF BENTON**

**In the Matter of Proclaiming February 19th as)
The Day of Remembrance of Japanese Americans) Proclamation No. P2024-002
Incarcerated During WWII)**

Eighty-two years ago, on February 19th, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which would strip people of Japanese descent, including Japanese Americans who were born here, of their liberty. The signing of this order followed the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States' declaration of war against Japan. This Executive Order authorized the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans living along the West Coast. The actions carried out because of this executive order by our federal government led to extreme consequences for Japanese-descended residents and left a stain on our collective history and self-identification as a land of the free.

On this day, we at Benton County acknowledge the unjust incarceration and harm done to the 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were born in the United States, and 110,000 of whom lived here on the West Coast. The majority of Japanese Americans living in our County during this time were students at Oregon State University. Within 4 days of the attack on Pearl Harbor, a group of 36 of these students wrote a letter to the school president expressing their "...unswerving loyalty to our country, the United States of America, and to all her institutions."

Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, approximately 5,000 Japanese Americans were serving in the U.S. Army, in large part through the draft. In the months following the attack, many of the units that were majority Japanese American were abruptly disbanded or reassigned to menial tasks. In early 1942, first-generation Japanese Americans were deemed '...not acceptable to the armed forces because of nationality or ancestry'. Due to several political factors.

In February 1943 the President announced the formation of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, an all-Japanese American unit with white officers. The 442nd would go on to become, for its size and length of service, the most decorated unit in U.S. military history.

One of the temporary locations that incarcerated Japanese residents was the Portland Assembly Center, which housed around 3,600 people. This center existed for four months, and by September of 1942 a total of ten permanent concentration camps were completed and built in isolated desert areas from California to Arkansas. Those who were interned at the Portland Assembly Center were moved by train to Minidoka Camp near Twin Falls, Idaho, and Japanese Oregonians from Pinedale went to Tule Lake in Northern California. The camps had barracks which were 20 feet by 100 feet, divided into five or six one-room sections. Each room had an army cot, a potbellied stove, and a single light bulb, and housed an entire family. Families were only able to bring what they could carry, and residents built the rest of the furniture and amenities they needed to survive from scrap lumber and leftover building materials.


Despite the conditions in which they lived, Japanese Americans were resourceful and stood up systems and structures that continued to bring their community together. During this time, they created their own churches, post offices, security departments, fire brigades, and recreational and educational activities for the many children in the camps. While all of these activities and internal structures were built by the incarcerated Japanese residents, they were still surrounded by armed guards and barbed wire, which were constant reminders of the denial of their civil rights.

Japanese Americans have significantly contributed to our County and state, economically and culturally. Between 1890 and 1942, there was an area in Portland called Japantown. Japanese agricultural communities developed in rural areas across our state, and by 1923, 60% of Oregon’s Japanese population was involved in agricultural work. During this period, thousands of Japanese laborers worked throughout our state. At this point, the County’s population consists of 4,642 or 5.4% Asian and Pacific Islander community members. While this is not an exact number of Japanese Americans or descendants living here, it gives us an idea of the growth and contribution this community has continuously made to our vibrant community.

THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMED that February 19th is designated as the National Day and February 20th is recognized as the Benton County Day of Remembrance of Japanese Americans Incarcerated During World War II in Benton County. All community members are urged to participate in this observance.

Adopted this 20th day of February 2024.
Signed this 20th day of February 2024.

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS



Xanthippe Augerot, Chair



Nancy Wyse, Vice Chair



Pat Malone, Commissioner