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NEWS RELEASE

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The Yasui Family: An American Story Opens June 13 at the Oregon Historical Society

This original exhibition on one Oregon family examines questions of citizenship and belonging in America.

Portland, OR — June 9, 2025 — Opening Friday, June 13 at the Oregon Historical Society, the original exhibition [*The Yasui Family: An American Story*](#) examines relevant questions about citizenship, immigration, and belonging through the lens of one Oregon family.

“The history of the Yasui family is both unique and similar to the experiences of other immigrants to the United States, and it truly reflects the complexity of the American story. All of us at OHS are very grateful that the Yasui family has entrusted us with their compelling collection of family history, thereby allowing us to share an incredibly timely story of the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship,” said OHS Boyle Family Executive Director Kerry Tymchuk.

PRESS TOUR: Please join us for an exhibition tour with Barbara Yasui and Maija Yasui on Thursday, June 12, at 9am. Please RSVP to rachel.randles@ohs.org.

PRESS KIT: Download press images at bit.ly/yasuipress.



Members of the Yasui family with friends, circa 1925. OHS Research Library, Yasui Family papers, Coll 949, box 40, folder 2.

Members of the Yasui family were among the millions of immigrants who came to the United States seeking new opportunities during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The exhibition follows in particular the story of Masuo Yasui, who immigrated to the U.S. in 1903 at the age of 16. He joined his brothers and his father working for the Oregon Short Line, where he stayed for two years before moving to Portland. While many Issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants) saved money so they could create a better life if they returned to

Japan, Masuo saw few prospects in returning and instead chose to pursue his own ambitions in America.

In 1908, Masuo moved to Hood River, a city which had an established community of Japanese immigrants who came to the valley to work in agriculture and logging. Along with his brother Renichi Fujimoto, Masuo opened the Yasui Bros. Co. store, which carried a mixture of Japanese and western goods — examples of which are on display in the exhibition inside an immersive storefront. While they were not the first store in Hood River to carry Japanese goods, they were the most successful.



The exhibition features cases of products for sale in the Yasui Bros. Co. store that was in operation in Hood River for 34 years.

Racism and oppression were common, yet Nikkei (Japanese immigrants and their descendants) like the Yasui family persisted in establishing roots in Oregon, starting families and businesses, and shaping the social and economic fabric of the communities where they lived.

However, life for people of Japanese descent drastically changed when the Empire of Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, flaming existing anti-Japanese propaganda and inciting further violence and exclusion.

The day after the Pearl Harbor attack, the U.S. Treasury Department shut down the Yasui Bros. Co. store. Renichi was briefly allowed to reopen the store for a month-long liquidation sale before it was closed completely on April 18, 1942, after 34 years in operation; it never reopened.



This small trunk (OHS Museum, 91-97.303) held Renichi Fujimoto's belongings during his incarceration at Minidoka.

Under the authority of the Alien Enemies Act, Federal Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Army agents detained pre-selected “enemy aliens,” mainly Issei community leaders such as Masuo Yasui. Although not officially charged with a crime, Masuo was arrested five days after the Pearl Harbor attack.

Several weeks later, on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt signed [Executive Order 9066](#), which authorized the U.S. government

to forcibly remove over 110,000 Nikkei — including U.S. citizens — from their homes and send them to concentration camps, often in remote areas. Life in the camps was

physically, mentally, and emotionally harsh, and Nikkei remained there for the majority of World War II. After the war, many members of the Yasui family returned to Oregon, although some incarcerated chose not to return home due to persistent racism in their communities.

In the decades after incarceration, Japanese Americans fought for restoration of their civil rights, monetary compensation, and most importantly, an apology from the U.S. government. Thanks to the tireless work of activists, including members of the Yasui family like Masuo's son, [Minoru Yasui](#), the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was passed. It included a formal apology and \$20,000 in monetary compensation to every surviving U.S. citizen or legal resident of Japanese ancestry incarcerated during World War II — though by then, many former incarcerated had already died. For his attempts to challenge the constitutionality of wartime curfew, Minoru was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2015, the only Oregonian to receive the award.



Minoru Yasui (third from right) with members of his coram nobis legal team. OHS Research Library, Yasui family papers, Coll

Like many families, generations of the Yasui family have preserved their traditions, history, and ongoing legacy. It is through their [photographs and personal correspondence](#), [business records](#), and [belongings](#) — many now in the care of the Oregon Historical Society — as well as firsthand accounts that historians have insights into the lives of Japanese immigrants and their families in Oregon during the twentieth century.

“Most Americans have immigration as part of their family history, and I hope that visitors can see parallels from their own experiences and those of their families in the Yasui story. The Yasui family’s commitment to activism and bettering their community is not only a source of inspiration but is a call to action to fight for justice and equality,” said OHS Curator of Exhibitions Megan Lallier-Barron.

The Yasui Family: An American Story is on view at the Oregon Historical Society from June 13, 2025, through September 6, 2026.

The Oregon Historical Society’s museum is open daily in downtown Portland, from 10am to 5pm Monday through Saturday and 12pm to 5pm on Sunday. Admission is free every day for youth 17 and under, OHS members, and residents of Multnomah County.

About the Oregon Historical Society

For more than 125 years, the Oregon Historical Society has served as the state's collective memory, preserving a vast collection of objects, photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral histories. Our research library, museum, digital platforms, educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon's history open and accessible to all. We exist because history is powerful, and because a history as deep and complex as Oregon's cannot be contained within a single story or point of view.