

# Japanese American Museum of Oregon

*By June Arima Schumann*

The Japanese American Museum of Oregon is in Portland's Old Town, the heart of the city's historic Japantown. Originally named the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center, the museum was established by the Oregon Nikkei Endowment in 1998 to preserve and honor the history and culture of Japanese Americans in the Pacific Northwest. The museum's mission is also to educate the public about the Japanese American experience during World War II and to advocate for the protection of civil rights for all Americans.

The Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center was originally located in the historic Merchant Hotel Building on Northwest Second Avenue and Davis Street, where Japanese families once operated a laundry, bath, and barbershop. The center was started as part of the revitalization of the Old Town neighborhood and its multi-ethnic history, which includes Japanese, Chinese, African Americans, Jews, Greeks, and Norwegians. In 2021, the Japanese American Museum of Oregon (the name was changed in January 2020) moved to the Naito Center at 411 Northwest Flanders Street.

JAMO addresses issues of cultural identity, the immigrant experience, and the defense of civil liberties. Exhibits and public programs have ranged from present-day life and commerce in Japantown to early settlements in rural Oregon to the experiences of Oregon Nikkei imprisoned during World War II and the post-war redress movement. In its focus on significant chapters in American history, JAMO informs and educates visitors, including schoolchildren, about the role of civic engagement in American life.

## Sources

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