

About Honolulu Myohoji: 1930-1939

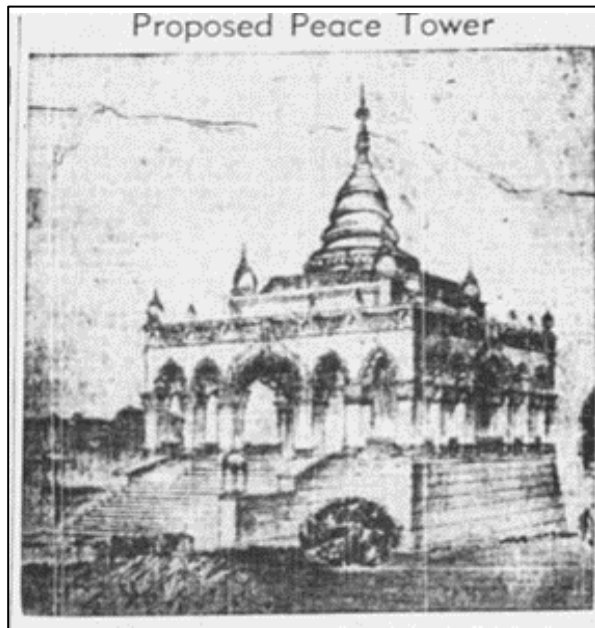
By Joy Gold, Member

Special thanks and acknowledgment to Rev. Eijo Ikenaga for his historical account of the Temple, which came from his review of memorandums between Charter Members Mr. Heigo Fuchino and Mr. Koichiro Miyamoto and discussions with senior members.

Our Temple began with what seems to be a coincidence, which Buddhists believe does not exist. It is said that all things are interconnected and lead to a spiritual path. That path began in December 1930, when Rev. Nishuu Kobayashi, a minister of Kenpon Hokke-shu and a member of the Education Ministry of Japan, stopped in Honolulu on his way to Japan after taking emigrants to Brazil. He first stayed with Mrs. Hibino, also a believer in Kenpon Hokke-shu.

On January 30, 1931, Rev. Kobayashi gave the first lecture on Hokekyo in the home of Mrs. Tatsuo Hasebe, which drew more than 60 people. The following quickly outgrew Mrs. Hasebe's home, and a cottage on Laimi Road in Nuuanu was bought for \$15,000. By October 6, 1931, it was registered with the state as "Hawaii Hokekyoji Kyodan."

During the years that followed, it seems Rev. Kobayashi already had visions of a Peace Tower. In 1936, Mr. Takahata, then living in Rangoon, India, offered the Busshari to Rev. Kobayashi with the intent to enshrine it in the Peace Tower on Nuuanu Street. The Busshari is the sacred relic of Gautama Buddha, also known as Shakyamuni Buddha. This was an act of confidence that the Peace Tower would someday enshrine it.



The peace tower to (be) built by the Hokekyoji sect of Buddhists in Hawaii is of Indian style. Heigo Fuchino is the architect. Photo and Information Courtesy Honolulu Star-Advertiser

Contributions of five cents each from the public---333,333 persons---were sought to defray the cost of bringing back the Busshari and building the Peace Tower at 2767 Nuuanu Street to house it. The number 333,333, according to the teachings of Buddha, means infinity. The names of all contributors will be recorded and preserved in the Peace Tower. The Mission hoped that the tower would contribute to world peace, be a tourist attraction, and be a mecca for people of the Buddhist faith. (Source: Honolulu Star-Advertiser)

Members of the Mission volunteered to donate according to the practice of Ichiji Isseki, one kanji character for one rock or one dollar for each stone. This was based on the 28 Chapters of the Lotus Sutra. For example, Chapter 1 may have 4,182 characters, Chapter 2 may have 4,929 characters; and Chapter 16 may have 2,032 characters. A donor choosing Chapter 16 would write each character on a stone and donate a dollar. The total Chapter 16 donation would be \$2,032. By December 31, 1937, \$73,115 was donated.

Now called the "Hokekyoji Mission of Hawaii," the Temple sent Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi and two nuns, Chiryu Oishi and Chimyo Nishimura, to India on May 29, 1936, to escort the Busshari back to Honolulu. Five months later, on October 19, 1936, they arrived home on the President Taft from Japan. They carried the Busshari in a silver miniature of the Rangoon Pagoda. Rangoon was still considered part of India under the British Empire at that time. The Rangoon Pagoda, or the Shwedagon, is Rangoon's most sacred Buddhist pagoda. It contains relics of the four previous Buddhas of the present Kalpa. These relics include the staff of Kakusandha, the water filter of Koṇāgamana, a piece of the robe of Kassapa, and eight strands of hair from the head of Gautama Buddha.



Encased in a small silver pagoda, a portion of the remains of Buddha were brought to Honolulu today by two Buddhist nuns and Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi of the Hokekyoji mission. The remains were brought back from India and will form the central shrine about which will be built a \$60,000 pagoda, dedicated to world peace. In the above photo from left to right are: Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi, Chiryu Oishi, holding the silver pagoda, and Chimyo Nishimura.

Photo and Caption Courtesy Honolulu Star-Advertiser

Nichiren-Shu followers announced a procession for the nuns and Bishop Kobayashi's day of arrival. Led by the Royal Hawaiian Band for most of the way, the parade would leave Pier 8, march up Bishop Street to Beretania Street, take Fort Street and proceed along School Street to Nuuanu Avenue to the Temple at the corner of Laimi Road. The nuns join the procession by riding on a white elephant.

A few weeks later, on November 4, 1936, a Lantern Parade with five floats marked the safe arrival of the Busshari with the two-day celebration of the Hokekyoji Mission, the ancestral origin of Honolulu Myohoji. The route began at Banyan Street, Palama, went waikiki along King and Beretania Streets and turned mauka on Nuuanu Avenue to the Temple grounds on Laimi Road. Chiryu Oishi and Chimyo Nishimura led the parade, riding on a white plaster elephant and wearing robes given to them by a high priest in India.

White elephants and elephants, in general, are considered auspicious and guardians of Buddhists. There is a legend that Queen Maya, who ruled northern India, now Nepal, over 2,500 years ago, dreamed of a white elephant entering her womb. Queen Maya believed that this meant her baby would be an influential leader—an understatement because she gave birth to Prince Siddhartha, who later became the Enlightened One.

At our Temple's altar, Boddhisattva Fugen, one of the original attendants of Shakyamuni Buddha, sits on a white elephant. He is often depicted on a white elephant with six tusks, representing overcoming the attachment to the six senses. The first five senses are commonly known—seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching. The sixth sense is complex. Briefly, it is consciousness and leads to judgment and actions.

The elephant symbolizes that all obstacles can be overcome through Buddhism. Fugen made ten vows to practice Buddhism and protect all who teach the Dharma. Fugen represents action and behavior are as equally important as thought and meditation.

In 1939, the daily newspaper wrote about the old religious treasures in the Hokekyoji Temple. Among those mentioned was a piece of stone carving from an ancient temple estimated to be 2,500 years old. The circumstance of how the Temple received this carving is unknown. It is thought to be from Bodh Gaya, India, one of the holiest Buddhist sites where Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment under the sacred Bodhi Tree and became the Buddha.



Photo Courtesy Honolulu Myohoji

At the top of our altar, another Busshari looks over us. It is said that this Busshari is one of the 9 grains of Buddha's bone. India's President Nehru presented it to the Venerable Rev. Nittatsu Fujii with the request to revive Buddhism in India. Venerable Fujii was a renowned peace advocate. On April 8, 1954, it was received by our former President Yoshio Arai at the distribution ceremony at Hanaokayama Peace Pagoda in Kumamoto, Japan.

We are grateful to be in the presence of two Shakyamuni Buddha relics, which are part of the pure essence of the holy being. Worshipping the Buddha's relics is the original practice of faith for Buddhists.

About Honolulu Myohoji: 1939-1940

By Joy Gold, Member

Special thanks and acknowledgment to Rev. Eijo Ikenaga for his historical account of the Temple, which came from his review of memorandums between Charter Members Mr. Heigo Fuchino and Mr. Koichiro Miyamoto and discussions with senior members.

The Honolulu Myohoji of today, registered on May 29, 1953, can readily be appreciated as the Pure Land, with its vibrant plants and flowers, bird song, and the murmur of the Dragon King's stream. It is a calm, peaceful place. However, a deeper understanding of the depths of the challenges of our Temple's ancestors makes it more meaningful.

In July 1939, no site was selected, and raising money for the building was not completed. Yet, the intent was to build the Peace Tower in 1940 for \$60,000. By this time, \$5,000 in nickels were received from groups and individuals from Hawaii, Japan, and the mainland. This was added to the \$73,115 collected in December 1937 from members who practiced Ichiji Isseki, donating one dollar for each character written on a stone for a chosen Lotus Sutra.

Five months later, in December 1939, the Honolulu Star-Bulletin announced the construction of a new \$200,000 temple on Nuuanu Avenue opposite Bates Street. A seven-acre tract was bought from the Honolulu Academy of Arts, reportedly for \$35,000. The Cooke Family donated \$5,000, and the Mission paid for the balance owed.

This land spanned from Nuuanu Avenue to Pacific Heights Road, and the Nuuanu Stream flowed through it. The property was rough and uneven. Some people may have laughed at this purchase, thinking the land was useless because it was covered in thick bushes and giant monkeypod trees.

On any given day, as many as fifty of the Temple's members worked alongside Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi, using hand tools to crack rocks and haul the stones and soil away.



Photo Courtesy Honolulu Myohoji

Today, the rock walls, 12 – 15 feet in height and 500 feet long, line both sides of Nuuanu Stream. It is a lasting testament to the early believers of Myohoji and their commitment to the Peace Tower.

Meanwhile, on August 24, 1940, the daily paper reported the City's discussion of a public works project directly impacting this newly acquired land. It called for a 150-foot tunnel passing under a steep hillside upon which the Temple and Peace Tower would be built. The City argued that the road was a public necessity and took precedence over the Temple's plan. Some claimed the City could save money by buying the site from the Temple rather than attempting to build a tunnel.

Hokekyoji opposed this plan and the proposed Judd Street extension, which would cut through the Temple's site for the Peace Tower and garden. Hokekyoji's opposition to the Judd Street extension immediately stirred criticism throughout Honolulu. A community member's letter to the editor said the land was bought with full knowledge of the City's plan to use the land area for public improvements. There is no need for a temple by a minority group of residents. It should be built elsewhere. Such an attempt to override public welfare and public needs by any group should not be allowed.

On October 11, 1940, Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi announced that Hokekyoji Mission agreed with the City's second proposed Judd Street extension, which divides the mauka section of the land to build the Temple. The City condemned the grounds initially set aside for the pagoda to construct the Pali Highway. The Judd Street extension will pass behind the Temple. Architect Heigo Fuchino said building plans will be altered. Instead of two buildings, one a Peace Tower and the other a temple, both will be combined into one building.

About Honolulu Myohoji: 1941-1945

By Joy Gold, Member

Special thanks and acknowledgment to Rev. Eijo Ikenaga for his historical account of the Temple, which came from his review of memorandums between Charter Members Mr. Heigo Fuchino and Mr. Koichiro Miyamoto and discussions with senior members.

World War II loomed ahead. Many are familiar with the legendary and heroic men of the 100th Battalion, 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Less has been said about how this dark time for Japanese Issei and Nissei Japanese Americans touched the lives of Hawaii's Buddhist temples, including the Hokekyoji Mission. Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi, Mr. Takeo Miyagi, Mr. Heigo Fuchino, Mr. Keiichi Okamura, Mr. Koichiro Nakamura, and Mr. Kohei Yoshimura, most of whom had been working as usual on clearing the new property, were detained by the FBI, confined at Sand Island, and then sent to internment camps on the mainland US until the war ended in 1945.

Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi was confined at the Department of Justice Santa Fe Internment Camp along with 4,555 men of Japanese ancestry from March 1942 to April 1946. Many men held there without due process were long-time resident religious leaders, businessmen, teachers, fishermen, farmers, etc. No person of Japanese ancestry in the US was ever charged or convicted of espionage throughout the war.



Photo Courtesy Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i/Joan Oya Collection

Hawaii Internees in front of the Liaison Office. Santa Fe Internment Camp, January 16, 1945.

Front Row Only (L-R): Kumaji Furuya, Shujiro Takakuwa, Mankichi Goto, Chosuke Kayahara, Suekichi Oka, Nisshu Kobayashi, Shuji Mikami, Sadasuke Hamamoto, Konin Matano, Isaku Orita, Makitaro Tamura, Minosuke Hanabusa, Giichi Sasaki, Ryosen Yonahara, Tomiji Kimura, Ninryo Nago, Shin Yoshida.

The strength and comfort of the Lotus Sutra and Odaimoku in the internment camps and the war are evident in the Japanese American National Museum's (JANM) Exhibit, "Sutra and Bible: Faith and the Japanese American World War II Incarceration." Through an astonishing array of artifacts, the Exhibit explores how Japanese Americans drew on their faith to survive forced removal, indefinite incarceration, unjust deportation, family separation, and war combat when their race and religion were seen as threats to national security.

The Wyoming Heart Mountain Internment Camp's mystery stones are a significant finding. Stones with Japanese characters were found in a buried oil drum where the camp's cemetery was once located. Once on display at the JANM, Sodo Mori, a Japanese scholar and an expert in Buddhist history, viewed the stones. Mori theorized that the stones were part of a sutra or Buddhist scripture. He'd seen similar collections in Japan dating back to the 16th century. A computer program created to compare the characters with existing sutras concluded that the characters were from the first five chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

The search for who made these stones narrowed down to a Nichiren priest. Researchers believe Rev. Nichikan Murakita, from Los Angeles, made these stones. He was at Heart Mountain until September 1942, teaching calligraphy and preaching in the camp. He and his wife were repatriated to Japan in 1943 as part of a diplomatic exchange. However, he never spoke about the stones. Heart Mountain Museum Manager Dakota Russell said that the (Lotus Sutra) stones are buried for when the future Buddha comes to teach humanity the way of enlightenment. In this fashion, the scriptures are preserved.

It's said that there are no atheists in foxholes. Yet, the armed forces did not recognize Buddhism as a religion until after 1960. This wooden hand-made dog tag from the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii is on loan for the Exhibit. Some soldiers wore this in addition to the military-issued dog tags.



The translation of the inscription reads,
"Bu Un Cho Kyu"
(Long Lasting Good Fortune As A Solider"
"Namu Myoho Ren Ge Kyo"
"I am a Buddhist"

Photo Courtesy Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Closer to home, my grandfather Matao Matono was interrogated for two or three days. I recently discovered that he was an officer and board member of our Temple for many years and a businessman, which may be the reason for his interrogation. He was accused of sending coded messages to Japan by beating the obutsudan's wooden drum. Upon his return home, he smashed his shortwave radio.

In Hawaii, Buddhists and Shintoists were restricted from practicing their religion during the first years of the war. The Army's G-2 intelligence division needed to be petitioned for meetings at temples and shrines. Most petitions were denied. The Izumo Taisha shrine was confiscated in Honolulu and declared a "gift" to the City and County of Honolulu. Buddhist leadership who were not arrested operated in an anti-Buddhist environment created by the military government and social pressure from nongovernmental groups. (Duncan Ryuken Williams, The Forgotten Internment of Japanese Americans in Hawaii)

The Laimi Temple's gate and other Buddhist temples were closed by military order in this setting. Mrs. Sugi Miyamoto, Mrs. Ichiyo Uetake, and other members were commended for watching over the Laimi Temple during these uncertain times and fear.

During this time, the new property of Hokekyoji was rented by the US Army for military use. This may have been a blessing since the loan for the land was paid off by the Army's rental. The Army also filled and leveled the ground.

WWII ended on August 14, 1945. According to the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii, 450 internees returned to Hawaii from mainland camps on November 14, 1945, followed by 300 more returning on December 19. Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi was among those returning on the first transport. With the war's ending, the Army released the Nuuanu Avenue land. Religious activities and striving toward the Peace Tower vision resumed.

About Honolulu Myohoji: 1947-1966

By Joy Gold, Member

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In 1947, Temple members, with help from the contractor, Mr. Horii, moved the Laimi Street Temple to the new site at 2003 Nuuanu Avenue. This was done by separating the building section by section, piece by piece, and then reassembling it in the exact form on the new land.



Photo Courtesy Honolulu Myohoji
Laimi Street Temple



On July 15, 1948, Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi resigned, closing a 17-year chapter of Honolulu Myohoji. From the beginning of the Temple's history, through WWII and internment, Bishop Kobayashi nurtured the vision of the Peace Tower. At 67, he passed away on April 17, 1965. The founder of Honolulu Myohoji is interred at the Honolulu Memorial Park.

Photo Courtesy David Blewster Knight
Memorial ID 146490394

For some time, there was no resident minister. My grandmother, Rev. Chikai Nakamura, served as acting minister. Under her guidance, members continued their belief and efforts to fulfill the promise to the community about building the Peace Tower.



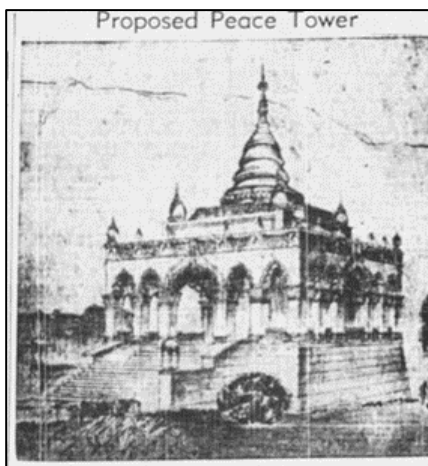
The Buddhist priestess starts her day and ends it with prayer. Kneeling at the ornate gold-leaf and red-lacquered altar, she strikes the gigantic bronze bowl which is a signal for her readiness to receive purification and truth from the presence of Divinity. She speaks no English, and her prayers are chanted in Japanese. She came to Hawaii from Japan in 1918 and took her priestess vows in 1933. Photo and Caption Courtesy Honolulu Star-Advertiser

In articles published by The Nichiren Shu News (June 2004), Rev. Eijo Ikenaga reminisced about his first visit to the Laimi Temple. It looked shabby, like an obscure paper company. It was amidst a jungle on an isolated island far from Japan.

He was then told that the Temple was questionable because it was an independent temple at the time. He was given a choice to go overseas to the Temple or not.

Upon his arrival in 1958, Rev. Ikenaga thought of returning to Japan after one year or so. However, that changed when he was deeply impressed by the Temple's followers and members whose lined faces told of their hardships working and raising their families in Hawaii. He could not leave them behind on such an isolated island. Moreover, they dreamed of building a Peace Tower in this jungle.

The enduring commitment of Myohoji's members and followers in the 1930s paved the way through their physical labor and monetary contributions during those challenging economic times. \$5,000 worth of nickels were collected, and \$73,115 was raised by the Temple member's Ichiji Isseki practice of donating one dollar for each character written on a stone for a chosen Lotus Sutra. And so, the journey towards the Peace Tower continued.



The Myohoji Peace Tower is a departure from the proposed Indian-style Temple. It is in the style of "Taho-to" or the many treasures pagoda.



Photo Courtesy Honolulu-Star Advertiser

Photo Courtesy Honolulu Myohoji

It is thought the design is inspired by Chapter 11 of the Lotus Sutra. Shakyamuni Buddha was preaching when a treasure tower emerged from the ground and rose in the air. A loud voice came from the treasure tower, speaking words of praise: "Excellent, excellent! Shakyamuni, World-Honored One, that you can take a great wisdom of equality, a Law to instruct the bodhisattvas, guarded and kept in mind by the Buddhas, the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, and preach it for the sake of the great assembly! Shakyamuni, World-Honored One, all that you have expounded is the truth!" Shakyamuni Buddha then entered the Treasure Tower and took his seat next to Taho Many Treasured Buddha.

Bishop Kobayashi's long-awaited wish came true with the 1966 groundbreaking of the Peace Tower. The estimated cost was \$250,000, of which \$100,000 came from land condemned for the Pali Highway. The Hondo and Peace Tower were completed in 1967. It was time to transfer the Gohonzon, gogusoku (candle stands, senko pots, and flower vases), and other ornaments from the old Temple to the new building. This transfer of the Gohonzon through the Senzashiki ceremony was held with the Oeshiki services in October.

About Honolulu Myohoji: 1967-2023

By Joy Gold, Member

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The final phases fell into place with the arrival of Shakyamuni Buddha's statue.



Photo Courtesy Honolulu Myohoji

Shakyamuni Buddha's statue, enshrined in the Temple's Peace Tower alcove, arrived in Honolulu on October 30, 1967. It is carved from Japanese cypress by Sorin Matsuhisa, a skilled Buddhist sculptor from Kyoto, Japan.

Matsuhisa's representation of Shakyamuni Buddha uses the Dhyana mudra, a gesture of meditation, of the concentration of the Good Law and the sangha. The hands rest palm up on the lap, right hand on the left with fingers fully stretched. The thumbs face upwards touching each other. Thus, the hands, fingers and thumbs form a triangle, symbolizing the spiritual fire or the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha or community. "Jo-in" is the Japanese name of this variation of the dhyana mudra.



Photo Courtesy Honolulu Myohoji

Thirty-seven years following Bishop Nisshu Kobayashi's vision for a Peace Tower, Honolulu Myohoji's Peace Tower and Hondo were dedicated in ceremonies held on May 18 and 19, 1968. Archbishop Nittatsu Fujii of Nipponzan Myohoji and Rev. Zeryu Nakajo were invited and present, closing the circle from their 1954 presentation of the second Busshari to Honolulu Myohoji.

The work of Honolulu Myohoji did not stop there. Ten years later, the Brookside condominium's land development began. Praying for a successful project, Rev. Ikenaga decided to attend the 100-day session of Aragyō at Nakayama in 1979. At this time, the Honolulu Myohoji Board prepared a resolution to join the Nichiren Shu Order. Rev. Ikenaga hand-carried the resolution to Bishop Juken Matsumoto, the Chief Administrator of the Nichiren Shu Headquarters, which was granted.

Rev. Ikenaga's April 21, 2004 "Sogo Zaidan Sho Award" presentation in Tokyo was acknowledged by the Nichiren Shu News. This prestigious Nichiren Shu award was given to people who did great, meritorious works propagating Nichiren Buddhism. Much has been accomplished in the fifty years of Rev. Ikenaga's service to the Temple and its members.

In June 2010, after a month of assisting the retiring Rev. Eijo Ikenaga, Rev. Takamasa Yamamura was appointed to succeed Rev. Ikenaga. Working with the Temple's officers, Rev. Yamamura explored different ways to make the teachings of Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra, and Nichiren Shonin relevant. Social media use was an innovation for the Temple during the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions on Temple attendance. His Facebook Dharma talks, broadcast of services, and YouTube clips reached a global audience. Rev. Yamamura's wish is for the Temple members and followers to be engaged Buddhists or Bodhisattvas, where our actions make our community a better place.

After thirteen years of service, Rev. Yamamura left the temple in January 2023. A request for a new resident minister was placed with the Nichiren Shu Headquarters, of which we are waiting for a response. In the meantime, Honolulu Myohoji continues through the commitment and faith of the Temple's officers, Dan Liu and Dean Makinodan, who, as lay persons, lead the Sunday services and Dharma teachings.

Weekly, we enter the Pure Land through the physical representation of the temple grounds and Peace Tower. Followers and members attend Sunday services chanting the Odaimoku that releases us from suffering and provides merit to our karma. All of this is from our many ancestors who persevered for Honolulu Myohoji. May we all contribute to the good future of the Temple through our actions as Bodhisattvas.

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo