



D E N S H Ō

The Japanese American Legacy Project

PRESS RELEASE

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DENSHO BEGINS 2009 NATIONAL INTERVIEW INITIATIVE In collaboration with community partners and Manzanar National Historic Site

SEATTLE, January 15, 2009 – Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project announces that in 2009 it will expand its collection of video life-history interviews to include national, diverse perspectives of the World War II experiences of Japanese Americans. Working with local community partners and the Manzanar National Historic Site, the Seattle-based nonprofit organization is extending its visual history interview program from the Pacific Northwest to capture the life stories of Japanese Americans unjustly detained during World War II in all ten incarceration camps run by the federal War Relocation Authority (WRA). In order to identify notable interviewees with exceptional life stories, Densho is collaborating with local organizations, or community partners, in key cities around the country. Densho will also continue its successful partnership with the National Park Service at Manzanar National Historic Site, in California’s Owens Valley, where 10,000 Japanese Americans were detained. As part of the Densho Digital Archive, all the interviews will be publicly accessible, free of charge, online at www.densho.org.

In 2009, Densho (meaning “to leave a legacy”) will produce for its online collection 80 video interviews from eight to ten communities around the country. Each interview will be fully transcribed, catalogued, indexed, and digitally preserved. At the same time Densho will add thousands of historical photos to its digital archive. The archive currently holds over 300 transcribed and indexed visual histories and nearly 10,000 photos and documents about the Japanese American experience before, during, and after the World War II mass incarceration. Tom Ikeda, Executive Director of Densho, says, “We’re proud of what we’ve accomplished in the Pacific Northwest, and we will continue our commitment to documenting our home region’s Japanese American stories, even as we look forward to helping other communities preserve their historical legacies.”

The national Densho collection of visual histories will preserve diverse and relatively undocumented perspectives of the Japanese American experience, including early immigration, prewar communities, World War II internment (of immigrants) and incarceration (of U.S. citizens), opposition and resistance to the wartime measures, renunciation of citizenship, postwar resettlement, and the

campaign for redress. Densho also interviews Japanese Americans who were not in a detention facility and non-Japanese Americans who played roles in the incarceration process, such as guards, teachers, and administrators in camps.

In 2008, Densho partnered with the Japanese American National Museum to video record life histories in Denver; with the Topaz Museum (for the former WRA camp in Utah) in Salt Lake City and Berkeley; and with the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) chapter in Watsonville and Santa Cruz, California. Rick Okabe reports, “The Topaz Museum has been very pleased with the work done by Densho. We never considered anyone other than Densho to conduct our interviews. We wanted to document the internees’ experiences at Topaz in a detailed and dignified manner.”

In 2009, Densho will visit non-West Coast areas such as Chicago, Phoenix, and Minneapolis/St. Paul to record memories of what are called the resettlement years, after Japanese Americans left the camps. Steve Ozone says, “The Twin Cities JACL is grateful to have this opportunity to work with Densho to add our community’s perspectives to the Densho online oral history collection.” In collaboration with the National Park Service and Manzanar National Historic Site, Densho will produce and webhost video interviews of Japanese Americans and others who were impacted by the many World War II confinement sites.

The Densho visual history collection has garnered awards for its adherence to Oral History Association guidelines, high production quality, and accessible Internet access. Densho encourages use of the historical resources to increase awareness of our country's diverse history, to stimulate critical thinking, and to help ensure that democratic principles are upheld now and in the future.

For more information about Densho’s national interview campaign, or about becoming a community partner organization, contact Tom Ikeda at 206-320-0095 or tom.ikeda@densho.org.

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