

# A beautiful glimpse of life after internment for Japanese Americans in Portland

By Pamela Ellgen  
The Asian Reporter

The Oregon Nikkei Endowment (O.N.E.) is currently featuring a stunning collection of black-and-white photographs captured by Frank C. Hirahara between 1948 and 1954 of the Japanese-American community in Portland. Approximately 150 photos from the more than 1,000 images in the collection are featured through June 15 in a display called “Capturing a Generation through the Eye of a Lens: The Photographs of Frank C. Hirahara, 1948-54.” The photographs were donated to the Oregon Nikkei Endowment by Frank’s daughter, Patti Hirahara, and provide a compelling story of this time in history.

During those tentative years following the internment, families returned to their homes, businesses reopened, and a generation of young Japanese Americans came of age. As if experiencing springtime after years of winter, children playing on the beach and couples cuddling in vinyl diner booths smile at the camera, their radiant expressions shedding light on the rebirth that happened during those pivotal years.

Until now, this story remained untold, explains Todd Mayberry, O.N.E.’s director of collections and exhibits. “This is part of filling in the story,” he says. “It’s important to know what they lost and what they came back to.”

Hirahara was an avid amateur photographer who graduated from Washington State University in Pullman and worked



**HISTORIC PHOTOS.** “Capturing a Generation through the Eye of a Lens: The Photographs of Frank C. Hirahara, 1948-54,” a collection of never-before-seen photographs taken of Portland’s Nisei (second-generation Japanese Americans), is on view at the Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center through June 15. Hirahara (left photo, developing photos in a darkroom) captured hundreds of photographs depicting beach trips to the Oregon coast (right photo), community picnics, teen socials and dances, wedding receptions, and life in the heart of Portland’s Japantown. (Photos courtesy of the Oregon Nikkei Endowment, Frank C. Hirahara Collection)

as an electrical engineer for the Bonneville Power Administration and occasionally found paying photography gigs. He was an active member in the Oregon Camera Club and developed and printed all his own work.

While he lived in Portland, he attended many Nisei community events and captured a blossoming social scene; church socials, parades, and picnics dominate the

collection. Perhaps he was looking for love — several of the photographs are of beautiful young women — or perhaps he was simply maintaining connections established in the internment camps or reconnecting those torn apart by them.

Many of the exhibit’s photographs depict quintessential Portland moments, such as the Rose Parade and Rose Festival princesses posing in the Rose Garden at



Washington Park. A few images capture members of the Oregon Nisei bowling league at the Hollywood Bowl, where on any given Friday night one could expect to find the lanes full. Incidentally, after more than 50 years as a community landmark, the bowling alley will close permanently this month. In response, O.N.E. last month sponsored an event for members of the community at the alley. The organization also held a screening of *Witness: The Legacy of Heart Mountain*, a documentary exploring the legacy of the people who were incarcerated at the internment camp, in conjunction with the Hollywood Theatre.

The identity of many people in the photographs is unknown, but with the help of many volunteers and even visitors to the exhibit, the Oregon Nikkei Endowment is in the process of filling in the names and stories. In the center of the exhibit, binders rest on tables where visitors can identify

*Continued on page 13*

**May 7-13, 2014**

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<p><b>Tuesday, May 6</b> 6:30-8:30 p.m. Rosewood Initiative 16126 SE Stark St. Portland Line 20-Burnside/Stark will get you there.</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, May 13</b> 6:30-8:30 p.m. Parkrose High School Library 12003 NE Shaver St. Portland Line 22-Parkrose and Line 71-60th/122nd will get you there.</p>
<p><b>Wednesday, May 7</b> 6:30-8:30 p.m. Reynolds Middle School Cafeteria 1200 NE 201st Ave. Fairview Line 77-Broadway/Halsey will get you there.</p>	<p><b>Tuesday, May 20</b> 6:30-8:30 p.m. Ron Russell Middle School Library, 2nd Floor 10822 SE Bush St. Portland Line 9-Powell Blvd and Line 17-Holgate will get you there.</p>
<p><b>Thursday, May 8</b> 6:30-8:30 p.m. East County Health Center 600 NE 8th St. Gresham MAX Blue Line and most bus lines serving Gresham Transit Center will get you there.</p>	<p><i>If you require an interpreter or other communication aids at a meeting, please call 503-802-8200 or TTY 7-1-1 (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays) at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting.</i></p>

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**TRIMET**

**The 2014 AR Foundation banquet airs on Portland Community Media on cable channels 29 & 30 in May:**

- Monday, May 5 at 2:00pm (channel 30)
- Sunday, May 11 at 8:00pm (channel 29)
- Friday, May 16 at 8:00pm (channel 29)

For more information, call (503) 288-1515 or visit <[www.pcmu.org](http://www.pcmu.org)>.