

**Japanese American Heritage Project Rev Marvin Harada Part 1**

Q: OK, so I'm just going to read this little statement first.

REVEREND MARVIN HARADA: OK. All right.

Q: OK? Today is October 19th, 2018. The following interview is conducted with Reverend Marvin Harada at the Orange County Buddhist Church in Anaheim. This interview is part of the Japanese American Heritage Project undertaken by the Anaheim Public Library. We are very glad to be here today listening to the history of the Orange County Buddhist Church and its place in the Japanese American community. This is very valuable information for future generations, something that students don't get to learn in school. This conversation will be recorded, and the content will be used in the 2019 exhibition at the Muzeo Museum and Cultural Center. You have the right to refuse to discuss any question that you feel uncomfortable answering. If we could start with your telling us your name, where you were born and where you live now?

MH: OK. My name is Reverend Marvin Harada, I was born [01:00] and raised in Eastern Oregon, Ontario, Oregon. My father had a farm up there. And so I grew up in Oregon, attended colleges in Oregon; Oregon State, University of Oregon, and then went on to study for the ministry at a small school in

Berkeley that we have called the Institute of Buddhist Studies. And then went for further study in Japan. I spent five years there. And then I was assigned here in Anaheim at the Orange County Buddhist Church 32 years ago. It was my first assignment, and still here. (laughs)

Q: I have a similar history. I've been with Anaheim 25 years.

MH: Oh, wow. Oh.

Q: I was going to ask you how long were you associated with the Orange County Buddhist Church, and has it always been in the capacity that you're in now, which was the leader of the congregation?

MH: No, I was sort of the junior minister, serving [02:00] under an older senior minister. His name was Reverend Hirata. He really founded Orange County Buddhist Church; he was the first minister here in 1965, when it became independent from its sort of mother temple in Los Angeles. So he served here all of his career, so I started out serving under him. Then after he retired, another minister came in and I worked with him. Then he retired, and then I became the resident minister, or the head minister here.

Q: Wonderful. Can you tell us how and when the Orange County Buddhist Church was organized, and how it became -- came to be located in Anaheim?

MH: Uh-huh. Well, it started out its early days in the 1920s, 1930s, there was a Japanese community here. The closest Buddhist temple was in Los Angeles. [03:00] And the ministers from Los Angeles would go out to various communities and kind of service those communities, so they would meet in someone's home, and maybe once a month a minister would come out and they would have a little service in someone's home. Then I believe it was in the late 1930s, one of our pioneering families, the Kato family in Fountain Valley, they built a church on their farm. Now they had a facility, but still a minister from Los Angeles came out and conducted the services at the church in Fountain Valley. Then after the war, then it was moved to -- they bought a used -- I mean a church in Stanton. Orange County Buddhist Church was there for some years, but still under [04:00] the supervision of Los Angeles. Then 1965 is when we built our facilities here, and became independent from the Los Angeles temple.

Q: Do you know why this particular location? Was it just because there was a property here available?

MH: Oh, the one in Anaheim?

Q: Yes.

MH: Right here in Anaheim? Well, from what I understand, well, they decided -- the temple leaders, when they decided to

build their own church, there was quite a debate. Some wanted to build it in Stanton because it's where the previous church was. Then others said no, they looked at other properties, and well, we should maybe build here in Anaheim. It's not too far away, but I just said it was quite a debate. But they decided on the Anaheim location.

Q: Do you know what order the buildings, the current buildings were constructed?

MH: Yes. So there were three buildings built together. So the [05:00] main sanctuary, classroom building, and then the social hall. Not this present social hall, but we had a one-level social hall that was the original building.

Q: OK. How do you think that the church role in the community over the years, before the war and after the war?

MH: Uh-huh, uh-huh. It was an integral part of the Japanese community, especially before the war. Before the war -- well, before and after, especially before the war. Of course being an ethnic group, and there was a lot of discrimination against Asians, especially the Japanese. They found solace in their own community, and that's where churches and Japanese community organizations [06:00] began. Then after the war, it served the community again, because they're trying to rebuild their lives, so the churches were an integral part of that, and in a place to

raise their kids and have a lot of activities for the children, and then to learn about things on the spiritual side. So it played a very important role, pre-war and post-war.

Q: You had mentioned earlier how larger congregations -- would you mind restating that for us here?

MH: Uh-huh. Well, it started out in 1965, when they first built here. They only had 75 families. So 75 families started this project. Then we've gradually grown over the years. We have about over 600 families [07:00] now, and about 900 members in total.

Q: (inaudible)

MH: Yeah. Yeah. But we have many more people that come here for other activities, cultural things like, let's say, learning flower arrangement, or even martial arts, like judo or kendo. We have a large youth program, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts with many more people that come here for a lot of those activities.

Q: How do you promote those, outside of the church congregation itself?

MH: Oh, just through our website, and kind of word of mouth, I guess.

Q: Do you think -- well actually, one of the things that I keep going -- I need to go back to is, both pre-war and

post-war, you're the only Buddhist church for the Japanese American population, yes?

MH: In Orange County.

Q: In Orange County. Right, yes. So [08:00] (inaudible)

MH: In Orange County. But of course in the Southern California area there, there are numerous churches or temples, but in Orange County, we're the only one.

Q: Do you have a sense of -- are communities still kind of closely knit, and kind of in -- kind of living close together? Or have they spread out more?

MH: No, they've spread out much more.

Q: Spread out.

MH: Our membership now ranges from as far south as San Clemente, and even east as far as Riverside, and then west even places like Gardena. People come from a great distance.

Q: Very. Why, yes. Obviously, like you said, you provide a lot of other programming besides the actual core mission that you have here as well.

MH: Right.

Q: Would you say that your core mission in here has remained the same, both pre-war and post-war? [09:00]

MH: Yes. The focus is always Buddhism. But it was Buddhism for the Japanese community pre-war and post-war, but now

we're -- others, non-Japanese, are discovering Buddhism and seeking Buddhism. We've been sort of warmly embracing more diversity.

Q: Well, I wondered, because you obviously don't say that in the name of your church.

MH: Uh-huh.

Q: It's Orange County Buddhist Church.

MH: Right. Right, right. Right.

Q: I just wanted to make sure that our community, when they see this, that they understand that that you're very open to outside the Japanese American community as well.

MH: Yes. Uh-huh.

Q: A lot of the churches played a role during the evacuation, (inaudible) including storing personal goods for people.

MH: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

Q: Was that something that the Orange County Buddhist Church did as well? [10:00]

MH: I don't know for sure if they actually used the church facilities to store things. They very well might have.

Q: OK. One of the reasons I asked that is because I actually came across an article in the L.A. newspaper, it might have been *The Times*, I'm not positive, that mentioned that the Buddhist church in L.A. had been broken into, so they were encouraging people that were in the camps to basically get

in contact, because I guess they weren't sure what had been taken.

MH: Oh, I see.

Q: So apparently they were storing some personal items for families at that time. I was curious to see if that was a role here as well.

MH: Uh-huh. I don't know if it was actually used for a storage facility or not.

Q: I'll have to ask maybe --

MH: Yes.

Q: -- one of the gentlemen, see if maybe they know. Yes.

MH: Right. They might know that. Uh-huh.

Q: The next part is going to be more about your tenure here. [11:00] I really would like to do that in the other location, because obviously you've had a big impact on the church facility as well.

MH: Oh, sure. Sure. OK.

Q: Thank you.

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**Japanese American Heritage Project Rev Marvin Harada Part 2**

Q: So Reverend Harada, tell us a little bit about your tenure here and the changes that have occurred with your church.

MH: OK. I was assigned here in 1986, and at that time we had maybe around 600 members. We had a lot of organizations and youth groups, but in the 32 years I've been here, we managed to grow, which forced us to enlarge our sanctuary because we couldn't fit everyone in. So we (inaudible), actually about seven or eight years ago as our 50th anniversary project, we decided to expand, enlarge the sanctuary, build a new social [01:00] hall. So we built the new social hall first, and then we used the new social hall for our Sunday services while the sanctuary was remodeled, it took about a year. So we just finally completed all of that. It's been a real privilege and honor to serve here to see our congregation grow, and also to become more diverse. We have, of course, predominantly Japanese American members, but we're now having more very diverse membership; Hispanic followers, Vietnamese, Caucasians and African American, so we're becoming quite diverse. So that's a real joy to see as well.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the beautiful altars that we see behind us.

MH: So the altar [02:00] as you see it is the same as an altar in Japan would be. This part is different from the Temple of Japan, in that the Temple of Japan, you would have tatami mats, and people would be sitting on the floor. But of course we're not used to that over here, and it doesn't fit our American lifestyle. That's why we have pews. But the altar is as traditionally a temple is in Japan. So the middle altar is for the Buddha, the right altar is for the founder of our particular tradition of Buddhism. His name was Shinran, and he lived in the 1200s in Japan. The altar on the left is for the patriarch who sent the first Buddhist minister to America to bring Buddhism to the United States. So that's the patriarch that we honor on the left altar. It's quite ornate in gold, but it's all symbolic. There's a lot of metaphors in Buddhism. The [03:00] whole altar area is trying to symbolize the world of enlightenment, the world of truth or enlightenment. That's why it's artistically made to kind of take our breath away. And if we had a glimpse into that world of truth, we would have a sort of an "aha" moment as well.

Q: Explain about the refurbishment that we were talking about.

MH: Oh, uh-huh. The altar was very nice, but it was 50 years old, because it was put in here when this sanctuary was built in 1965. These altars, if you refurbish them every

50 years or so, they'll last hundreds and hundreds of years. Three hundred, four hundred, five hundred years. It was time to have it refurbished. So there are still those craftsmen in Japan who can do this kind of very fine art work.

Q: How long did it take for the [04:00] -- you had it sent over to Japan?

MH: We had sent it to Japan. Altogether, it was about nine months or so, but the actual work itself, I think they did it in about half a year. Uh-huh.

Q: That's amazingly intricate. Obviously very artistic workmanship. It's beautiful.

MH: Like these tables, it's kind of a lacquer table. There's, like, 16 coats of lacquer that's applied to give it that kind of sheen. I know you can't see it in detail, but there's these kind of ornamental, metal pieces. If you look closely, there's a pattern. There's a pattern of flowers, or something like that. They're not just stamped, they're handmade by craftsmen, who has a little mallet and a little carving tool, and makes the pattern in each one by one, without any kind of pattern. [05:00] It's really an amazing art form that's still carried on that builds these altars.

Q: Personally, I can't think of anything that has that amount of hand workmanship in it.

MH: Uh-huh?

Q: It raises it beyond utilitarian to fine art.

MH: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes.

Q: Absolutely, it's fine art, so, yeah.

MH: Uh-huh. Uh-huh?

Q: I had that aha moment when I walked in the door literally took my breath away. It's absolutely stunning. It's just awesome.

MH: The statue of the Buddha, maybe you can't see it that far away, you can see how smooth and beautiful it is. That's another art form. The artisans would carve the statues of the Buddhas. So they'd use chisels. They don't use any sandpaper. You know, once they get it, you would think -- one you get it in kind of a rough shape, then you'd [06:00] use sandpaper -- it's all with beveling tools and chisels to make these statues. That's a whole other amazing art form, as well. You have a craftsman that carves a statue. You have a craftsman that paints the flowers. You have a craftsman that does the little metal work, another one who applies the lacquer. So that's what it takes to create an altar like this.

Q: And the fact that it will last for hundreds and hundreds of years --

MH: Yes. Uh-huh.

Q: -- that's incredible. Yeah, absolutely incredible.

MH: So our mother temple in Kyoto, Japan is 400 years old.

Q: Wow.

MH: It's quite an amazing thing to see, too.

Q: It must be. As we get closer to our exhibit, are there photographs [07:00] taken over the years that kind of document the history of the work, church that we might be able to borrow --

MH: Oh sure, yes.

Q: -- (inaudible)?

MH: Yes. We have some old photos of, like, the ground-breaking here, and things of that nature. We have photographs we'd be happy to share.

Q: That's perfect. It's been a pleasure talking with you, obviously. Thank you for arranging for us to be able to do this filming at your church.

MH: Uh-huh.

Q: And for sharing, obviously, the sanctuary portion as well, we really appreciate it. Because (inaudible), we'll never get the opportunity to see this.

MH: Right. Right.

Q: But they'll be able to see a little bit of it, at least to improve the (inaudible). Thank you so much. Is there anything about the church and your congregation that you would like to add, that we didn't already talk about?

MH: Oh, no, [08:00] I don't think so. I think we've covered everything.

Q: Thank you so much. Thank you for getting your robes on. I really appreciate that as well. It makes it feel special.

MH: You're welcome. Nice to have you here.

Q: Thank you so much.

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