



# Foundation Document Overview

## Minidoka National Historic Site

Idaho and Washington



### Contact Information

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# Description

On January 17, 2001, Minidoka Internment National Monument was established through a presidential proclamation as the 385th unit of the national park system, preserving and protecting 72.75 acres of the original 33,000-acre Minidoka War Relocation Center in Jerome County, Idaho. The U.S. Congress later passed Public Law 110-229 on May 8, 2008, expanding the national monument to 388 acres, changing the name to Minidoka National Historic Site, and adding the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Memorial in Washington State to the national park unit. In 2014, Congress passed Public Law 113-171, renaming the memorial Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial. Collectively, these two locations, 700 miles apart, make up the Minidoka National Historic Site. They offer the opportunity to interpret the historic events and lives impacted by the exclusion, forced removal, and unjust incarceration of Nikkei during World War II.

## Minidoka – Idaho

In the high desert of south-central Idaho, Minidoka National Historic Site manages 388 acres of the original Minidoka War Relocation Center site. The surrounding landscape is characterized by rolling hills of sagebrush, farms, and fields used for agricultural production and a network of irrigation canals and ditches. Minidoka is northeast of Twin Falls, a population center of approximately 100,000 people.

During World War II, Minidoka War Relocation Center was one of 10 camps operated by the War Relocation Authority. Construction of Minidoka began on June 5, 1942, and the first incarcerated Nikkei arrived on August 10, 1942, while the camp was still under construction. Minidoka contained more than 600 buildings, which included administrative and warehouse buildings, 36 residential blocks, schools, fire stations, and a hospital. Each residential block contained 15 buildings: 12 barracks, a recreational hall, a mess hall, and a lavatory-laundry building. Minidoka's population peaked at 9,500, with more than 13,000 Nikkei from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California passing through its gates until it officially closed on October 28, 1945. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, plots of land, buildings, and even furniture that once made up Minidoka were given away in lotteries by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to returning World War II veterans as homesteads and farms. The irrigated fields and agricultural landscape remain as an enduring legacy of the Nikkei communities once incarcerated at Minidoka.

Minidoka was formally listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 18, 1979. With designation as a unit of the national park system in 2001, the historic site of Minidoka was protected for future generations and interprets its important civil rights lessons and the stories and lives of the individuals incarcerated there from 1942 to 1945.

As a unit of the national park system, Minidoka – Idaho is co-managed with Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, with administrative offices located in Hagerman, Idaho.

## Bainbridge Island Memorial – Washington

On the shore of the Puget Sound, the Bainbridge Island Memorial recognizes and honors the first Nikkei to be excluded and forcibly removed from their homes in 1942 under the authority of Executive Order 9066. Grassroots efforts to remember the legacy of the exclusion of the Nikkei community from the West Coast resulted in creation of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial, entitled *Nidoto Nai Yoni* (Let It Not Happen Again). The memorial is on Taylor Avenue at the original site of the former Eagle Dale Ferry Dock on Bainbridge Island, where on March 30, 1942, 227 men, women, and children (two-thirds of them American citizens) were forcibly removed from the island. They were sent to Manzanar War Relocation Center in the Owens Valley of California. In 1943, 177 individuals would later be transferred to Minidoka War Relocation Center.

With the passage of Public Law 110-229 the Bainbridge Island Memorial became part of Minidoka National Historic Site. The memorial is collaboratively managed by the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial Association, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum, City of Bainbridge Island, Bainbridge Island Metropolitan Park & Recreation District, and the National Park Service. With its location on the West Coast near the large urban population of Seattle, the Bainbridge Island Memorial is ideally located to share and interpret the exclusion and forced removal of Nikkei communities during World War II. Although the Bainbridge Island Memorial is part of the Minidoka National Historic Site, NPS administration is through Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Seattle.



## Purpose



The reconstructed Guard Tower stands as a symbol of incarceration. Photo: NPS.

*The purpose of MINIDOKA NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to provide opportunities for public education and interpretation of the exclusion and unjust incarceration of Nikkei—Japanese American citizens and legal residents of Japanese ancestry—in the United States during World War II. Minidoka National Historic Site protects and collaboratively manages resources related to the Minidoka War Relocation Center in Idaho and the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial in Washington State.*

## Significance

Significance statements express why Minidoka National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

### Human, Civil, and Constitutional Rights

- **Fragility of democracy in times of crisis:** Minidoka National Historic Site is a compelling venue for engaging in a dialogue concerning the violation of civil and constitutional rights, the injustice of exclusion, forced removal and incarceration of the Nikkei community, the history of racism and discrimination in the United States, and the fragility of democracy in times of crisis.
- **Relevancy:** Minidoka National Historic Site encompasses sites in both rural Idaho and near Seattle, Washington, that offer a unique setting to reflect on the exclusion, forced removal, and incarceration experience of the Nikkei community and its relationship to contemporary and future political and social events.
- **Patriotism, citizenship, and choices:** Minidoka National Historic Site provides a forum for understanding how Nikkei demonstrated citizenship and patriotism through individual choices, which affected families and communities. Choices reflected a range of responses including serving valiantly in the military, supporting the war effort on the home front, and protesting the civil injustice.



Japanese American families wait at the Eagledale Ferry Dock on Bainbridge Island on March 30, 1942. Photo: Museum of History & Industry, Seattle Post Intelligencer Collection.

# Significance



Japanese American family forcibly removed from their home on Bainbridge Island. Soldiers removed their dog from the truck because families were not allowed to take pets with them. Photo: Museum of History & Industry, Seattle Post Intelligencer Collection.



Local community leaders joined center staff and residents in dedicating a flagpole on April 20, 1942. Photo: National Archives and Records Administration.

## People

- **Nikkei legacy:** Minidoka dramatically changed the lives of those incarcerated, had a profound and enduring impact on the Nikkei community, and continues to be a place of significance in American history.
- **Impacts on western agriculture and local communities:** The establishment of Minidoka War Relocation Center during World War II had a major and continuing effect on the social and economic fabric of southern Idaho communities.
- **Bainbridge Island community:** Bainbridge Island was, and remains, an example of an integrated and resilient community where many local ties to the excluded Japanese American neighbors remained strong during the war years and beyond. This bond was supported by the efforts of the *Bainbridge Review*, which was one of the few media sources to be outspoken about the injustice of the exclusion, forced removal, and incarceration.



Hiro Nishimura, a World War II veteran, stands next to his name on the replica Honor Roll. The historic Honor Roll listed nearly 1,000 Japanese Americans from Minidoka who served in the US military during the war. Photo: Minidoka Pilgrimage Planning Committee 2011.

## Place

- **Minidoka War Relocation Center:** Minidoka War Relocation Center was a hastily constructed, densely populated, large-scale facility in an isolated and unforgiving landscape. Within 10 years Minidoka was transformed from sagebrush steppe to the seventh-largest city in Idaho during the incarceration period and then to a rural homesteading community after the camp closed.
- **Exclusion Order Number 1:** With only six days' notice, 227 Nikkei residents from Bainbridge Island, Washington, were the first of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry in the United States to be excluded and forcibly removed from their homes under the authority derived from Executive Order 9066.

## National and Global Stage

- **World War II:** Minidoka National Historic Site offers a tangible and personal connection to important historic events of World War II on American soil and provides opportunities to understand the profound impacts of this global conflict on life in the United States.
- **Redress:** In 1988, the U.S. government formally determined that the exclusion and mass incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II was the product of war hysteria, a long history of racism, and a failure of political leadership. Living survivors received presidential apologies and reparations on behalf of the nation. The creation of the Bainbridge Island Memorial and its inclusion within the boundary of Minidoka National Historic Site are significant steps in the redress process to promote public education about civil liberties, freedom, human rights, and justice.

# Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Historic Structures, Cultural Landscapes, and Archeological Resources:** Minidoka contains several historic structures and features, cultural landscapes and viewsheds, and archeological resources on the site of the former Minidoka War Relocation Center in southern Idaho. These fundamental resources are associated with the period of incarceration (1942–1945) and include fire station No. 1, the warehouse area, swimming hole, root cellar, and the camp dump.

- **Environmental Setting:** Minidoka’s remote location in the high desert of Idaho provides an immersive setting that is fundamental to the visitor experience. Views of open fields and distant mountains create a sense of isolation on a vast landscape where Minidoka once stood. Built in 1909, the North Side Canal was constructed as a main irrigation canal from the Snake River, bringing water for agricultural production to the region and influencing the layout of Minidoka. The smell of high desert sagebrush contributes to this environmental setting. Extreme changes in temperature, the arid environment, and high winds that the people at Minidoka experienced are part of the environmental setting that are felt today. Experiencing this environmental setting allows visitors to better understand and connect to the daily lives at Minidoka.

- **Museum Collections:** The museum collections at Minidoka National Historic Site provide insights into the complexity of the exclusion, unjust incarceration, and its effects on individuals and society. The museum collection contains excavated archeological collections, manuscripts, oral history, gifts of artifacts that survivors and families have donated to the park, and associated records related to Minidoka. The Bainbridge Island Historical Museum currently holds many objects in trust and serves as an archive.



The names of Minidoka servicemen who lost their lives in combat during World War II are inscribed on this plaque dedicated in 1990. Photo: NPS.

- **Cultural Traditions:** Nikkei cultural traditions, values, and attitudes are essential to understanding how Nikkei experienced and reacted to incarceration and life within the camp. These include concepts of *gaman* (perseverance), *shikata ga nai* (it cannot be helped), *giri* (duty), honor, family, loyalty, and nationalism.
- **Commemoration and Healing:** Minidoka and the Bainbridge Island Memorial provide places for engagement, reflection, and healing. These sites provoke connections to individuals affected by the World War II exclusion, forced removal, and unjust incarceration, and serves to commemorate those who survived this difficult chapter of American history.
- **Public Understanding, Education, and Involvement:** Educating and engaging the public in understanding the history of the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, the fragile nature of civil rights, and the need to protect civil and constitutional rights in the United States is essential to both Minidoka and the Bainbridge Island Memorial. Working with partner groups, including the Friends of Minidoka, Bainbridge Island Historical Museum, and Denshō Project, is important to achieving goals of fostering public awareness and support for Minidoka National Historic Site. At Minidoka, special events such as the pilgrimage and the civil liberties symposium connect the public to the history that occurred here and its significance today. The Bainbridge Island Memorial is adjacent to a large urban population, providing an ideal location to promote greater public understanding, education, and involvement.

## Fundamental Resources and Values

- **Memorial at Bainbridge Island:** The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial honors all of the 276 Japanese Americans who called Bainbridge Island home at the start of World War II. This includes individuals forcibly removed on and prior to March 30, 1942, and those who left before the implementation of Executive Order 9066. Built of old-growth cedar, granite, and basalt, the memorial wall bears their names, as well as five large terra-cotta friezes along the wall depicting scenes of removal, incarceration, and returning home after the war. The memorial also includes a pavilion area, a temporary ranger station, and a short walking path that provides opportunities for reflection.
- **Cultural Landscape at Bainbridge Island:** The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial is on Taylor Avenue, which once led to the Eagledale Ferry Dock. Visitors to the memorial walk in the footsteps of those Bainbridge Islanders who were removed from their homes on March 30, 1942, and taken to the ferry for transport to the Manzanar War Relocation Center. A massive cedar tree that bore witness that day still stands, providing a powerful link to the past. The sights, sounds, and smells of the island environment provide an immersive experience for visitors in this cultural landscape.



The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial was dedicated on August 6, 2011. Photo: NPS.

## Other Important Resources and Values

Minidoka National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Natural Resources:** Minidoka is set on a rolling plain of high desert sagebrush steppe that is geologically dominated by basalt lava flows. The arid landscape supports approximately 250 plant species and dozens of animal species. Additionally, the North Side Canal along the site's southern boundary provides seasonal riparian refuge for migratory birds. Although not a naturally occurring habitat, the North Side Canal provides the only significant source of surface water in the area.
- **Post-World War II Homesteading:** Minidoka contains historic structures and the cultural landscape associated with the post-World War II era homesteading period, including the "Farm-in-a-Day" property, and agricultural uses that continue in southern Idaho to this day.



In 2004 at the annual pilgrimage, pilgrims attach paper cranes to the parasol in memory of loved ones. Photo: NPS.

# Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

## Human, Civil, and Constitutional Rights

- The exclusion, forced removal, and unjust incarceration of American citizens and legal residents of Japanese ancestry were the product of a long history of race prejudice, war hysteria, and failure of political leadership.
- During incarceration, the government forced Nikkei to respond to issues of loyalty, resulting in individual, family, and community dissension, turmoil, and division that still persist today.
- Although Nikkei were denied their constitutional rights, individuals chose to express their own sense of patriotism and civic responsibilities through a range of activities from participating in national defense in support of the war effort to draft resistance and protesting the injustice of incarceration.
- Minidoka National Historic Site provides a forum for discussing the violation of US constitutional rights and the redress movement, which resulted in an apology from the US government. The site also provides an opportunity for understanding the need to protect civil rights and liberties for all regardless of gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or national origin.

## People

- People incarcerated at Minidoka were confronted with injustice, the loss of freedom, and profound emotional, psychological, physical, and economic hardship, and they responded and adapted in various ways with distinctive combinations of Japanese and American cultural practices, values, and perseverance.
- Minidoka National Historic Site is a complex mosaic that pieces together the experiences of thousands of Nikkei and their extensive social, cultural, and economic interactions with communities and organizations throughout the United States before, during, and after incarceration.
- Minidoka National Historic Site provides an opportunity for understanding how Nikkei rebuilt their lives and communities throughout the United States after World War II.

- Bainbridge Islanders created bonds of friendship and a spirit of community combined with a strong sense of human rights and justice that helped them transcend perceptions of race before, during, and after World War II.

## Place

- The setting and location of Minidoka, with its isolation, stark openness, and distance from the Pacific Coast, are characteristic of the War Relocation Authority's site selection criteria.
- The Nikkei were forcibly removed from their homes, businesses, and communities in the lush environment of the Pacific Coast. Despite uncertainty for the future, they created a community in an unfamiliar desert environment characterized by extreme temperatures and harsh living conditions.
- The Nikkei transformed the arid landscape into irrigated agricultural fields in and around the Minidoka War Relocation Center. The present-day agricultural character of the Jerome area is the legacy of their labor during World War II.
- Although the War Relocation Authority was a civilian organization, the design and operation of the camps, Minidoka included, were similar to a military installation. Minidoka was hastily constructed; the large-scale temporary facility became densely populated with more than 9,000 people at one time.
- Postwar settlement and agricultural development by World War II veterans and others is reflected in present-day land use patterns in and around Minidoka.
- *Nidoto Nai Yoni* (Let It Not Happen Again), The Bainbridge Island Memorial, is on the site of the former Eagledale Ferry Dock to honor the memory and sacrifices of the first Nikkei to be excluded from the West Coast.
- Minidoka National Historic Site bears witness for those who were excluded, forcibly removed, and unjustly imprisoned under the authority of Executive Order 9066 and serves as a place of reflection and remembrance so this chapter in American history will never be forgotten or repeated.

## National and Global Stage

- Minidoka War Relocation Center was set within a world at war, characterized by national and personal sacrifice and hardship experienced by all Americans.