

Testimony for HR 3747 – Study for Eagledale Ferry Dock at Taylor Avenue, Washington State
U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

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On March 30, 1942, American history was made in Washington state when 227 Bainbridge Island men, women and children of Japanese ancestry – most of them U.S. citizens - were escorted by armed U.S. Army soldiers and solemnly walked down Taylor Avenue to the old Eagledale ferry landing.

With only six days notice and only allowed to bring what they could carry or wear, they boarded the ferry Kehloken and said goodbye to Bainbridge Island, starting on a lonely journey with an unknown destination and fate.

They were the first of more than 120,000 Japanese-Americans to be forcibly removed from their homes on the West Coast and experience three years of unconstitutional imprisonment.

Not all were imprisoned. Some were unjustly arrested, some moved away and others served in the U.S. military, but all were forbidden to remain.

Their only crime – being Nikkei, persons of Japanese ancestry.

The Bainbridge Island WWII Nikkei Exclusion Memorial Committee, a joint endeavor of the Bainbridge Island/North Kitsap Interfaith Council and the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community, has been working to establish a memorial that will honor the people and families who experienced this tragic moment in American history tell a lasting story for future generations.

We have entitled this proposed memorial Nidoto Nai Yoni (Knee-doe-toe Nigh Yoe-knee), or “Let it not happen again.”

Currently there are national monuments at the Minidoka and Manzanar concentration camps in the distant deserts of Idaho and California. While these two sites can clearly tell the story of a time in our nation's history when constitutional rights were ignored, these camps by design were placed in very remote places and are not easily accessible.

That's not the case here. Bainbridge Island is a short and pleasant ferry ride just six miles west of Seattle in Puget Sound, and this important story can be told at the Nidoto Nai Yoni Memorial within easy reach of many more people.

Indeed, for those discovering or wanting to learn about this period in our nation's history, since the first steps away from freedom began at the old Eagledale ferry landing, the Nidoto Nai Yoni Memorial is the literal and symbolic starting point for the existing national monuments at Minidoka and Manzanar.

Our vision is non-controversial and has received statewide, bipartisan support including the governor and unanimous resolutions from the state legislature, county commissioners and city council, and it is the top legislative issue for the National Japanese American Citizens League.

Clearly, the historic significance of the site is beyond question. History always recognizes “first places” and the mere mention of them tells the story – Kitty Hawk, Plymouth Rock – and we are confident that a study by the Department of the Interior would clearly show that Bainbridge Island’s Eagledale Ferry landing is one of those important first places in American history.

We believe the study could be done in record time. Most – if not all – of information that the Department of the Interior will need is already well documented and readily available. Indeed, a comprehensive study of the site was completed a few years ago by a team of University of Washington researchers as part of an effort to designate the site as a National Landmark. However, since little of the original site integrity remains today it would likely not qualify for landmark status.

Our committee has also developed some dream conceptual designs of what we hope this national memorial could someday be, with the help of nationally recognized architect and fellow Bainbridge Island resident John Paul Jones,

A final point. Far too often, society creates monuments and memorials long after the people who experienced that moment in history are no longer with us to be honored.

We have a unique opportunity on Bainbridge Island to create a national memorial that will honor those who suffered, cherish the friends and community who stood beside them and welcomed them home, and to inspire all Americans to safeguard constitutional rights for all by embracing the spirit of our proposed memorial, Nidoto Nai Yoni, or "Let it not happen again"