JAPANTOWN HISTORIC SITE MAP
& Alameda Japantown Art Walk Performance Schedule
September 17, 2021  5:00-8:00PM

ALAMEDA JAPANTOWN  Alameda Marketplace
1650 Park Street  •  NO PERFORMANCE

TONARIGUMI (NEIGHBORHOOD)  Alameda Free Library
1550 Oak Street  •  5:00–5:30pm
Rhythmix Welcome
Introduction to Japantown Historic Markers by Michael Yoshii
ODC/Dance “May’s Letters” Choreography: Kimi Okada with
Brenda Way

BUDDHIST TEMPLE OF ALAMEDA
2325 Pacific Ave  •  6:00–6:45pm
Ensohza Minyoshu & TaikoPeace (Japanese folk and dance music)
Ikebana Installation by Jane Suiei Naito

BUENA VISTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2311 Buena Vista Ave  •  7:00–7:45pm
Maze Daiko (Taiko fusion)
**Tonarigumi - Alameda’s Historic Japantown Neighborhood** is a project to raise awareness and reclaim the memories of the past, to remember the Issei elders and all they endured, and to be uplifted by the strength and resilience of a community. Four markers are being created to share a forgotten history of Alameda’s Japantown and impart a lesson from the past: to embrace diversity and advocate civil liberties for all people.

**The Japantown Art Walk** is a collaboration between Rhythmix Cultural Works, the Buddhist Temple of Alameda, Buena Vista United Methodist Church, the City of Alameda Free Library and Economic Development and Community Services Department, to honor the City of Alameda’s rich cultural history.

Before WWII, when its population was forcibly moved to internment camps solely because of their ancestry, Alameda’s Japantown was centered on north Park Street close to where Buena Vista United Methodist Church and the Buddhist Temple of Alameda remain today. Utilizing the cultural arts, the Japantown Art Walk commemorates the Tonarigumi project by highlighting locations where residents once lived and businesses thrived.

The Japantown Art Walk is part of the Rhythmix Island City Waterways® project that celebrates Alameda’s rich cultural past and present.

*Buddhist Temple of Alameda stage show, circa 1950’s.*
Imagire sewing school graduates, 1620 Park Street, circa 1925.

Isle City Garage owner George Rokutani, circa 1950’s.
Traces of a small and close-knit Japanese American community remain, yet little is known of the Japantown that once thrived in Alameda. At the turn of the 20th century, the Issei, first generation Japanese immigrants, came to Alameda as "sojourners", seeking a better life, with a dream of making their fortunes.

In response to the growing number of Japanese immigrants and local restrictions on where they could eat, shop, or get a haircut, Japanese-run businesses began to surface on Park Street. By 1912, Alameda Japantown consisted of barbers, bathhouses, hotels, restaurants, grocers, tofu shops, laundries, bicycle shops, a doctor, a tailor, and shoe repair shops.

The six-block radius from Eagle to Lincoln Avenue and Park to Oak Street that began as an ethnic enclave for bachelors, expanded as the men sent for wives from Japan. Local businesses increased in the mid-1920s with nurseries and floral shops to support the Japanese in gardening and landscape work.

The journey for the Issei was filled with many hardships. They faced anti-immigration laws in the 1920s, increased animosity toward Japanese in the 1930s, and the incarceration of all persons of Japanese ancestry from 1942 to the end of World War II. Despite the erasure of Alameda Japantown, the Japanese Methodist Church South and the Buddhist Temple opened as hostels in 1946, offering hope for the returning Japanese, and a promise to revitalize the tonarigumi, neighborhood cohesiveness, that exists today.

*Riding Horseback on Park Street, circa 1910.*
Mochitsuki (mochi pounding) at the Takeda home brings the neighborhood together in preparation for the Japanese New Year.

ATK (Alameda Taiku Kai) baseball team, 1936.
With the growth of the Japantown businesses, the tonarigumi, or cohesive neighborhood, began to flourish. Japanese language schools were established for the neighborhood children, to reinforce language skills and practice cultural values.

In response to racist bans that prohibited “orientals” from attending white schools in San Francisco, the Alameda Japanese Grammar School was established in 1908. Located at the Japanese Methodist Church, the fully accredited school provided instruction in reading, writing, composition, arithmetic, calligraphy, Japanese ethics, history and geography.

Community associations, or kai, provided mutual support for Japanese from the same prefecture or hometown, such as the Hiroshima Kenjinkai and Fukuoka Kenjinkai. The Nihonjin Kai, Japanese business association, and Tanoshimi Kai, credit union, were established. Most importantly, the Christian church and Buddhist temple provided spiritual grounding and support for the tonarigumi, sponsoring athletic teams and numerous activities for all ages including pageants, picnics, recitals and cultural celebrations.

Alameda Taiku Kai (ATK), or the athletic club, provided a sense of pride and camaraderie for the whole town, competing against other Japanese community teams and college teams visiting from Japan. The ATK Diamond, built at the northwest corner of Walnut Street and Clement Avenue, was graded and tended by the Japanese players on land offered rent free by James Rolph, a former mayor of San Francisco. A grandstand was built in 1916 and the team played ball there every Sunday until the outbreak of World War II.

Young women in kimono, circa 1952.
The Buddhist Temple of Alameda had its beginnings in 1906 as a branch of the Buddhist Church of Oakland, when ministers from Oakland came to Alameda to officiate at funerals and other religious services. In 1916 the Alameda group became an independent temple under the name Ashi Bukkyokai. That year marked the official establishment of the Buddhist Temple of Alameda under the auspices of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha Hong-wanji. Its first minister was Rev. Chijo Shinozaka, with a membership of sixty families. Ten ministers have served the temple in the ensuing years.
In 1919, a Victorian mansion was purchased from a former mayor of Alameda. With the addition of a social hall in 1926 and periodic remodeling since then, the original structure has served the church well over the many years.

Prior to WWII, the Japanese community was concentrated in the blocks around the temple. During the war, the US Navy took over the temple as an employee and enlisted personnel training facility. After the war, when members began returning to Alameda, the temple became a temporary hostel for the displaced families. The war dispersed many members to other parts of Alameda and the Bay Area. Currently, the temple is expanding to meet the needs of its changing membership.
Gathering after Sunday church service, circa 1954.

Halloween at Buena Vista UMC, circa 1955.
BUENA VISTA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

What began as a night school run by two missionary women, expanded to include support for job placement and housing. This prompted a move to a two-story building at 2312 Encinal Ave that would also serve as a boarding house. By 1903, the Alameda Japanese Methodist Church South was established, and a Japanese pastor was appointed to nurture the faith of the growing Christian community. In 1907 the church established itself in a Victorian house, fondly named “Mary Helm Hall” at 2311 Buena Vista Avenue.

By 1911, a brown shingled building with a sanctuary on the upper floor and a Japanese language and Sunday school on the first floor was built behind the parsonage. Fully equipped with a stage and projection area, the fellowship hall, added in 1927, hosted screenings of Japanese films, recitals, cultural events and community performances.

In 1941, concerned for the growing animosity between the U.S. and Japan, the Alameda Japanese Methodist Church hosted a public forum on race relations that was attended by 80 young people from around the Bay Area. A few weeks later, on March 1, 1942, Alameda was forced to evacuate its Japanese residents, sending them to a temporary Assembly Center at the Tanforan Racetrack in San Bruno, then on to Topaz internment camp in Utah for the duration of World War II. After the war, the church served as a temporary hostel for returning Japanese families. In the 1960’s, a new chapel and parsonage were built, with the church office building added in 1973. Buena Vista United Methodist Church, celebrating 112 years, continues to serve as a welcoming place for a multi-ethnic and multi-generational congregation, a sanctuary for newcomers, and a vehicle for faith-based social justice.

Halloween party game at Buena Vista United Methodist Church, circa 1955.
JAPANTOWN ART WALK PERFORMERS

ODC/DANCE
www.odc.dance

Founded in 1971 by Artistic Director Brenda Way, ODC/Dance was one of the first American companies to incorporate a post-modern sensibility into a virtuosic contemporary dance technique and to commit to interdisciplinary collaboration and musical commissions for the repertory. ODC/Dance Company’s ten outstanding dancers perform its imaginative repertory for more than 50,000 people annually. Past highlights include numerous appearances at the Joyce Theater in New York and sold out performances at the Kennedy Center.

“May’s Letters” is inspired by letters written by choreographer Kimi Okada’s mother while she was in Tule Lake internment camp.

ENSOHZA MINYOSHU
www.ensohza.org

Ensohza Minyoshu is a Japanese folk performing ensemble based in the San Francisco Bay Area. They perform music and dance that evokes the festival spirit and character of Japan’s diverse rural communities.

TAIKOPEACE
www.TaikoPeace.Love

PJ Hirabayashi is a taiko practitioner, teacher, collaborator, composer and community organizer. She is the Artistic Director Emeritus of San Jose Taiko and founder of TaikoPeace (Partnerships, Empathy, and Creative Empowerment) to spread the transformational power of Japanese taiko drumming for positive social change and a peaceful world. Roy and PJ Hirabayashi have been awarded NEA’s National Heritage Fellowship.

“Ei Ja Nai Ka” is dance, rhythm, song, and chant in celebration and commemoration of our immigrant ancestors with endless gratitude.

MAZE DAIKO
www.rhythmix.org/maze-daiko

In Japanese, the word mazeru means “to mix,” and daiko is the word for drum. Maze Daiko combines an exciting mix of world music instrumentation and global rhythms with the physical elegance and power of taiko. Their innovative sound continues to evolve by blending traditional Japanese taiko with West African drums, marimba, and European violin.

JANE SUIEI NAITO
www.facebook.com/jane.naito

Jane Suiei Naito has studied ikebana for over 20 years and holds multiple Sogetsu Teaching Certificates. She teaches ikebana here in Alameda along with classes in Moraga and San Francisco.
Thank You to our Funders, Sponsors and Partners for their generous support in this project:

**Funders**

- National Endowment for the Arts
- William Flora Hewlett Foundation
- California Arts Council
- Fleishhacker Foundation
- Alameda County Arts Commission
- East Bay Community Foundation
- Shuler-Heimburger Family Fund

**Partners**

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- Buena Vista United Methodist Church
- Alameda United Club

Special thanks to digital archivist, Brad Shirakawa.

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Christopher & Trudi Seiwald
ABOUT RHYTHMIX CULTURAL WORKS

Rhythmix Cultural Works is dedicated to building a strong, healthy community, with a foundation of diverse cultural arts and educational programming. Our mission is to bring people of all ages together to experience and explore music, dance, visual art and educational opportunities. Rhythmix seeks to build community by inspiring engagement in the arts as a way to learn about each other and the world. With a strong commitment to provide programming relevant to the local population, Rhythmix strives to promote cultural awareness, encourage participation in the arts, and support artists in the presentation of their work. Since 2007, Rhythmix has served over 150,000 visitors who contribute to the wellbeing of the local economy, raise Alameda’s visibility as a prime destination for the arts, and help make the city a place where people can be proud to live, work and play.

Rhythmix presents family-friendly events that feature artists representing a mix of contemporary and traditional arts disciplines from around the world. Performances include a variety of music genres (jazz, blues, world music, and classical), dance, comedy, family programming, and free community events. The K Gallery at Rhythmix presents six visual art exhibitions annually, along with a weekly Art Jam, where local artists create in a shared studio environment.

Since 2012, the Rhythmix Performance, Art & Learning program has served over 30,000 students throughout Alameda County with FREE arts education assemblies highlighting world music and dance traditions. Rhythmix also serves families and youth through community-based programming including its ‘Round the World Festival and biennial Island City Waterways project celebrating Alameda’s past and present cultural history.

SUPPORT THE ARTS IN ALAMEDA

Everything we do at Rhythmix is in service of creating a resilient, vibrant community, and we rely on your generosity to help us get through these challenging times. Together, we will keep Rhythmix going strong in the East Bay and beyond.

Please consider making a donation to help support FREE and affordable arts programming for our community at: rhythmix.org/donate or send a check to: Rhythmix Cultural Works, 2513 Blanding Ave, Alameda, CA 94501. On behalf of the board and staff of Rhythmix, we thank you for your support!
Rhythmix Cultural Works Presents:

**ISLAND CITY WATERWAYS®**

Coming May 21 & 22, 2022

**Island City Waterways: Uprooted**, the 3rd in a series of site-specific performances of dance, theater and music, that celebrates the history of Alameda’s unique waterfront. Island City Waterways 2022 tells the story of Alameda Point, from the rise of civilian flight, to a Naval Air Station (NAS) that staged four wars, to land being repurposed to fill the promise of a community’s future.

**Upcoming Island City Waterways Art Walks:**

- Webster Street • Friday, October 15, 2021 • 5-8pm
- Waterfront Park • Saturday, April 9, 2022 • 2-5pm
- Park Street • Friday, May 6, 2022 • 5-8pm

Subscribe to the Rhythmix newsletter for more info on upcoming events at [www.rhythmix.org](http://www.rhythmix.org).
Issei picnic while gathering Warabi (fiddlehead ferns), circa 1907-1930's.

Front cover: The Iwaihara family driving a Model T Ford near the Fernside district in Alameda, circa 1916.