

The “Here Lived” Project: A Digital Testament to the Unjust Incarceration of Berkeley’s Japanese American Residents During World War II

By Michael Several

After moving to Berkeley in 2020 and purchasing a house on Stuart Street, I read *Berkeley: A City in History* by Chuck Wollenberg. On page 83, he wrote that Dwight Uchida, the father of children’s book author Yoshiko Uchida, rented a house on Stuart Street. I was hoping that we had purchased the house. I looked in the 1940 census and discovered the Uchida family did not live in our house but lived right across the street. I then purchased Yoshiko Uchida’s memoir, *Desert Exile*, which describes her life through the time of her family’s incarceration in an American concentration camp for Japanese and Japanese American residents during World War II. The book includes photos of the house, and I saw how little it had changed. I began wondering who else in my neighborhood was imprisoned during the war because of their Japanese ancestry. I also wondered if there was a way the racially motivated injustice of the imprisonment might be remembered by remembering the people who were imprisoned and where they lived.



Nine years before moving to Berkeley, in 2011, I discovered the Stolpersteine (“stumbling stones”) on a trip to Berlin. Beginning in 1992, Gunter Demnig placed small brass plaques, Stolpersteine, in sidewalks next to places where Jews had lived or worked. Demnig’s project has now resulted in over 100,000 plaques installed throughout Europe and has been expanded to places where all victims of the Nazis are recognized. Though each plaque has limited information, it is enough to preserve the memory and restore the presence of people who are now gone. After “*Hier wohnte*” (“Here lived”), the Stolpersteine plaques have the person’s name, year of birth, deportation date, and date and place where they were murdered.



Knowing that installing similar plaques in front of houses in Berkeley where people who had been incarcerated had lived at the beginning of World War II was beyond my capability, I decided to create digital Stolpersteine, providing in list format information comparable to what is on the brass plaques. In my digital Stolpersteine, after the street address and the words “Here lived,” are the names of all the people who lived at that address, their year of birth, their place of birth, their occupation, the month and year their imprisonment began, the camp or camps where they were imprisoned, and the release date and their destination when they were released.

The information I compiled is now in a database. Its title, “Here Lived,” was suggested by Nancy Ukai, who pointed out that the first words of the individual Stolpersteine, “*Hier wohnte*” (“Here lived”), is language I adopted for my digital Stolpersteine because the two words convey so powerfully the sense of memory and loss. As a standalone document, the database is a **guide** to the approximately 260 locations in Berkeley where residents of Japanese ancestry were living when they were unjustly imprisoned during World War II. It is also a **memorial** to the more than 1,100 people who were unjustly imprisoned, and it is a **record** of the history of each individual’s unjust imprisonment.

Because the information in the database is limited, reading the entries may need some instruction. The place of birth implies the citizenship status of the person. A person born in Japan was an “alien” because he



or she was ineligible for citizenship. A person born in any territory governed by the United States was automatically a citizen under the 14th Amendment. Most of the people listed in the database were born in Japan or California, with a smaller number born in Hawaii, and a smattering born in other places in the United States.

If the location of imprisonment in my document has more than one place, the sequence replicates the sequence of places where the person was imprisoned. For example, an entry that says “Topaz, Tule Lake” means the person was first at Topaz and then transferred to Tule Lake. Assembly centers, such as Tanforan, are not included in the database that will be part of the exhibit, but will be added later when the database is updated.

The information in the database is the basis of two major components of the Berkeley Historical Society and Museum exhibit on the history of the Japanese American community in Berkeley. BHSM volunteer George Petty created a design that presents the information in tight, clear, concise entries. With the help of other volunteers, these entries were mounted on boards that, when seen together, show the magnitude of the imprisonment. An alphabetized, numbered index of each name enable viewers to locate individuals on the display, which is organized by addresses. Elina Juvonen tapped into the database to create an interactive digital map that enables a visitor to click a specific map point and see who lived at the address, the information about the person that is in the database, the text of any oral histories that were taken, and family photographs. These two components make the exhibit a model for what other communities can do when they remember the unjust imprisonment of their Japanese and Japanese Americans residents during World War II.

https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g187323-d14002086-Reviews-Stolpersteine_in_Berlin-Berlin.html