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## For the Love of an Ancient Art

● **Japanese-American Internment Memorial: Members of the Timber Framers Guild have brought their building expertise to Bainbridge's project.**

By Rachel Pritchett, [rpritchett@kitsapsun.com](mailto:rpritchett@kitsapsun.com)  
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Bainbridge Island

Inch by inch like a cat, Armistead Lucas Coleman II creeps in his stocking feet along the top of a gate he is building at the emerging Japanese American internment memorial.

"You right on the line? That's good," the fourth-generation Bainbridge Island timber framer calls to a helper.

With the care of a surgeon, he slowly — ever so slowly — drills the piece into place. It will be part of the gate's roof.

He is wearing surgeon-style gloves. Oil from his hands could stain the beautiful wood — Alaskan yellow cedar, untreated, never to be painted.

The helper hands him up more, each piece precut and numbered. There are no nails; the gate roof fits together like a puzzle, its hidden joinery based on a centuries-old Japanese technique.

He is part of 17 or so members of the nonprofit educational Timber Framers Guild at the Bainbridge Island Nikkei Exclusion Memorial at Pritchard Park through the end of the month to construct two such gates and a pavilion.

This is a construction site like no other.

Beautiful contours now have been carved into the rich dirt at the memorial site, which gently slopes down to the south beach of Eagle Harbor. Curved paths wind around big stands of trees, all eventually leading to the place where in 1942 some 227 island residents of Japanese ancestry stepped onto a ferry to begin their somber journey to the Manzanar and Minidoka internment camps.

The site is starting to feel ceremonial, a sacred place so quiet as it gazes into history.

The men here now — all with a heart passion for wood — have come for the rare experience of building with ancient Japanese tools and methods.

"This is the apex of architecture," said Joel McCarty of New Hampshire, executive director of the Timber Framers Guild.

Several timber framers are carefully preparing pieces of wood under a large, white tent.

Timber framer Carlos Sosa of Bainbridge Island is standing at a gen sun, or story board. It's a large piece of plywood with to-scale drawings of the pieces drawn on it with pencil. He places a length of the crystal-clear cedar on top of the drawings, planing and chiseling it to the exact shape.

Near him are men with the similar planes, pulling off micro-thin shavings from the wood, some 4 feet long.

The Asian tools they are using are of very hard steel to make a cleaner cut. The timber framers pull the knife-like saws and planes toward them, just in one direction.

When the planers are done, the wood is as smooth as glass. No sandpaper is needed.

When the two gates are accomplished, the men, many from Puget Sound, but also from California and beyond, will turn their attention to the pavilion. The 5-acre site will be open to the public later this fall, according to organizer Clarence Moriwaki. A story wall, exhibits and pier are yet to come.

Timber Framers Guild members are staying at the homes of members of the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community. Local restaurants are feeding them, and American Legion Colin Hyde Post No. 172 members are assisting. The men are here for the experience, and you can feel their love for the craft as they work.

"One, it's very unusual. We don't have a lot of high-end Japanese carpentry in our portfolio," McCarty said.

Timber framing is a method in which workers rely on a small number of stout posts and beams that lock together. Centuries-old timber framing was revived in the 1970s during a resurgence of interest in exposed structures during a back-to-the-land movement. The group works on special projects throughout the country, and members now are on Bainbridge for what they call a rare experience of building using very old, ceremonial Asian technique on the "Nidoto Nai Yoni - Let it not Happen Again" memorial.

More Information

The Timber Framers' Web site, at [www.tfguild.org](http://www.tfguild.org), has more information on that group. For more information on the memorial and the Bainbridge Island Japanese American Community, visit [www.bijac.org](http://www.bijac.org).

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Lenna Himmelstein | Kitsap Sun

Armistead Lucas Coleman II of the Timber Framers Guild installs the rafters on a traditional Japanese gate made of Alaskan yellow cedar Thursday at Pritchard Park on Bainbridge Island. Coleman was in his stocking feet in order not to damage the wood.