

No. 03
2021.12

HIMEYURI PEACE MUSEUM

To carry the message from Himeyuri to “generations moving further from war history”

Museum director
Choukei Futenma



Himeyuri Peace Museum is a private museum which was founded and had managed through the considerable efforts of former Himeyuri students.

After its opening, these former students as they performed the management duties of the museum began retelling not only details about the Battle of Okinawa but also their own war experiences. In the 2000s, with most of them in their 70s, they finally began a project for educating newer generations to keep their memories of the war and the Himeyuri Student Corps alive. They began with recording video testimonies, oversaw the first renewal project of the museum and then, since 2005, educating younger museum staff members.

One of feature of this second renovation is that fact that younger museum staff—who have never experienced war—led project. During the opening and renewal in 2004, former Himeyuri student founders played major roles for their creation of museum exhibitions. This was the first time that the team was made up of the staff members born after the war.

The team learned by doing to relate the Himeyuris' war experiences by asking the former Himeyuri innumerable questions and holding many discussions with them. This project became a vitally important component in the education of younger museum staff by the true Himeyuri.

The theme of this renewal project is “to the generations further from the war.”



Cutting the ribbon at the opening ceremony

It has been 30 years since its opening, and younger visitors are already of a generations with grandparents that never experienced the war and without any war survivors around them. Our goal is to create exhibitions that convey this war history to these generations. With cooperation from many people, I believe the exhibition are a fitting vehicle to carry the museum's mission into the future.

In visitors' comments to the museum, some said that “the exhibits didn't relate to me.” While it can't be helped that memories of the war are thinning over increasing decades passed, it is important to think in terms of avoiding was through repeated reflections on war experiences at every opportunity.

If there were some triggers or ways that may be found in history, the generation who never experienced war should take interest. Our role is to uncover such triggers through various means.

I hope this renewal project will have such an affect. We hope that after the COVID-19 pandemic eases, many visitors will visit and experience our brand-new Himeyuri Peace Museum.



1st

exhibition room

SCHOOLS LIFE AT HIMEYURI

A picture of Himeyuri students going school between acacia trees welcomes the visitors. This exhibition room tells how lively the students' school days were and what education they received before and during the war.



5th

exhibition room

HIMEYURI SURVIVOR AFTER THE WAR

In this room, new panel area was added to show what Himeyuri survivors felt after the Battle of Okinawa and how they found the Himeyuri Peace Museum.



HIMEYURI EXHIBITIONS



2nd

exhibition room

HIMEYURI STUDENTS AT THE FRONT

Through illustration, movies, testimonials, actual items and a diorama of the Okinawa Army Hospital, this exhibition room explains Himeyuri students' grueling duties at the battlefield.



Lobby

introductory panel

New panel explains what Himeyuri is



3rd

exhibition room

English subtitles are added to testimonial video



Video

room

New video room 2 works shown repeatedly



4th

exhibition room

Video about Ihara Third Surgical Cave is added

Online interviewing with Himeyuri survivors

After a private viewing for former Himeyuri students, online interviews were held and Himeyuri survivors Tsuru Motomura, Yoshiko Shimabukuro and Masako Nakazato answered questions from journalists.

Speaking of impressions taken from the new exhibitions, Nakazato said, “with creative uses of pictures and illustrations, the exhibitions are shown with care and I impressed that even small details became understandable.” Regarding younger generations, Shimabukuro said, “now, it’s more understandable for visitors who can’t imagine war. While I was watching, I thought this is a great help to their understanding of war.” Nakazato also answered, “it is not an easy task to tell of the war experiences to people without that experience. The new exhibitions reveal the students’ feelings. Visitors should understand how dreadful the battle was from the museum.”

Finally, to a question about the role this renewed museum has, Motomura answered, “peace is the first. I sincerely hope there will be no more war. Education during childhood is the most important. Treasure your life. Wish for a world where all are at peace. That is the main theme of this museum. I hope it will be delivered to the world.”



Himeyuri survivors interviewed in the 6th exhibition room



4 Tsuru Motomura answering remoted interview

Feedback to the renewed museum from visitors

- I almost cried when thinking that everyday life was gone without trace caused by a war... just one thing. As I heard the museum was renewed, I thought “I could feel closer to the war.” I will never forget. (14 years old, Okinawa)
- Now, it is more understandable for us who are alive today. I felt the reality of an age where people were at war. (47 years old, Okinawa)
- With newly added illustrations and pictures, I could focus on seeing Himeyuri students as “ordinary women” and “students in those days” not as “sacrifices in the Battle of Okinawa.” (Okinawa)
- Larger pictures and texts helped me understand. The exhibit was impressive with realistic depictions that add empathy to situations of that time (74 years old, Okinawa)
- Compared with before, my impression is that everything is brighter. Students’ school life in the prewar days was not that different from today, and when I was in school. This was the first time I felt at peace while looking at the students’ photos after visiting the museum several times. (45 years old, Okinawa)
- The last message that “the number of survivors is gradually decreasing though, their experiences passed down to the museum staff who never experienced war” is also a suggesting to us who visited the museum.
- It seems the part of the exhibit about after the war and the commencement was full of context which should be faced by people of today who never experienced war. (Okinawa)



Journalists listening to the interview

Holding a special exhibition to celebrate the renewal opening

As a special exhibition to celebrate the renewal opening, “Stories told by belongings” and “Koshichi Taira’s photography of the Himeyuri Students” are held at the museum’s 6th exhibition room. At the time of renovation, curators asked former Himeyuri students to donate some of their school-related belongings. In this exhibition these personal possession in the museum’s collections are showcased. Included also are explanations of the owners’ feelings as well as memories and stories about the items.

At the other end of the exhibition, photographs of former Himeyuri Student Corps taken between 1981-85 are displayed. They were taken by photographer Koshichi Taira. Almost all were taken when the museum founding plan began. They were exhibited at the 2004 renewal and may now be seen again by visitors for the first time in 17 years.

*This exhibition was held by September 20, 2021.



A dictionary which is a memento of a student's father who perished during the battle



Himeyuri Students photos taken by Koshichi Taira

Special exhibition “Himeyuri and Hawaii” opens!

Himeyuri Peace Research Center has worked on an international exhibition project to tell history of the Battle of Okinawa and Himeyuri Student Corps worldwide since 2019. In 2021, the team was going to hold a special exhibition in Hawaii to convey the Himeyuri story and the various relationships between the Himeyuri and Hawaii. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the exhibition was postponed until a date sometime in the future. Instead, we decided to hold the exhibition first in our museum. This exhibition introduces the Himeyuris’ ties to Hawaii. For example, Himeyuri teacher Chiyoko Oyadomari was born in Hawaii and was Harry Shinichi Gima, a Hawaii-born Nisei of Okinawan descent, who donated funds to buy the site of the Himeyuri monument.

The exhibit is being held from October 1, 2021 to February 27, 2022. We prepared a website for this exhibition for all who can't make it to the museum. Please check out the SNS for information updates.

*This project receives subsidies from Okinawa Prefecture



Museum visitors viewing the special exhibition

New booklet is available!

A new booklet of the museum has been published. It features photos and illustrations from new exhibits that help readers can understand the flow of the museum's exhibition panels.

Full color, 48 pages
550 yen (tax included)



“An encounter at the museum which changed me”

I hope this letter finds you, members of the Himeyuri Peace Museum, all well. I am a 3rd grade junior high school student lives in Tokushima. It is embarrassing, but I had not understood what the Himeyuri Student Corps were until I entered your museum. However, there, what I learned and felt motivates me to consider peace.

My grandparents were born just before the war ended. So I never heard war experience from survivors directly. It was my first time to hold “Living Link*” with a survivor when I met Mrs. Yoshiko Shimabukuro at the museum. There is nothing more than lively voice of survivors to touch my heart, and I am very thankful such precious experience was given.

After returning to Tokushima, I found a book *Is Peace Boring?* at the prefectural library and finished reading it. Even though I am not good at reading, I read this book feverishly page by page since Himeyuri survivors are shown there. I marked with sticky notes where I thought important and save those pages as pictures.

Thanks to Himeyuri Peace Museum, I like Okinawa more than before, and want strongly to consider true meaning of peace. That summer, I believed I was changed greatly by visiting Himeyuri Peace Museum.

I don't have any particular idea what I can do for peace and my knowledge and expressive power are not enough yet. However, I would like to keep thinking what I, who never experienced war, can do to spread peace. I appreciate that you gave me power to think peace. Please take care of yourself. I wish your continued success.

*Living Link: This phrase was used by Yan Erik Dubeleman, the Director of Educational Department at Anne Frank House, while Himeyuri museum staff was interviewing with him. A short movie including this interview was played at the 6th exhibition room.

Acacia Trees—Voice from museum staff

My experience for the renewed exhibition

Educator Hiromi Onabe

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, starting in February, we had to rescheduled many plans. The renewal opening originally scheduled on July—at the same time as the Tokyo Olympic Games—but was postponed until the following April (2021). The museum was temporary closed over two months for the first time since its opening. We kept working remotely on the renewal project but are still not finished. To create new exhibitions, we need to consider visitors' feelings from it and their many viewpoints, in addition to those envisioned by the curators/educators. A further requirement is studying the history and evidence carefully. It is not an easy job to write even a single sentence on a panel. If non-members of our team ever attended one of our meetings, they would think our discussions were heated arguments (a little bit too much). This is how serious discussions of new text are to us.

I was thinking, somewhere in my mind, the founders had strong feelings to convey their experiences together and didn't have many difficulties to create their exhibition. However, as a member of the new exhibition project, I now can understand that arguments would be more heated if each had a stronger sense of the story she wants to tell. That is how they could share such joyful feelings after the project had been completed.

I look forward to the day this project is finished and I'm looking after my health until the renewal opening day.

*This essay was published November 2020

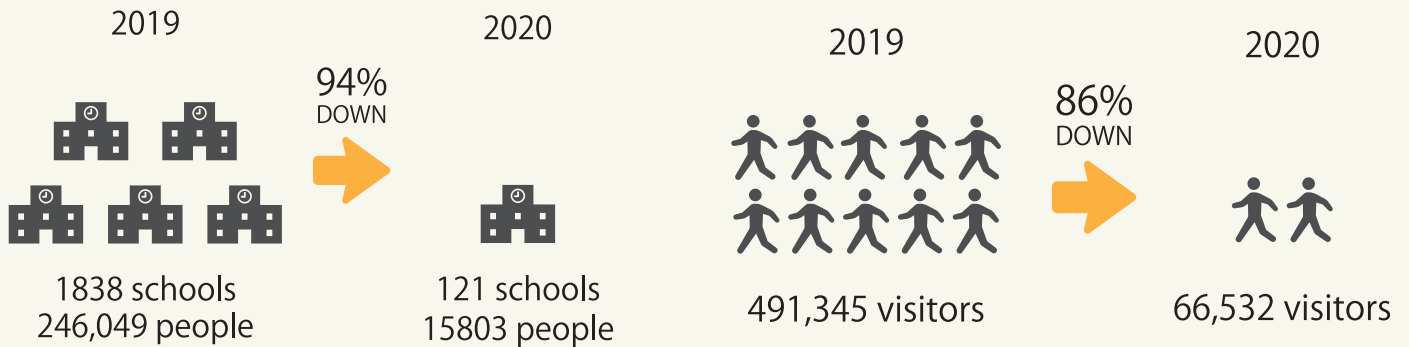
A look back at 2020 from a statistical viewpoint

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum had to temporarily close for 73 days and all travel programs had to be postponed or canceled. Our visitor numbers drastically decreased. Compared with the previous year, the visitor number has dropped by 86%.

*From April 2020 to March 2021

Number of visitors: 491,345 (2019): 66,532 (2020)··· down 86%

Number of schools: 1838 schools [246,049 visitors]: 121 schools [15,803 visitors]···down 94%



Please lend your support!

Himeyuri Peace Museum is a private museum managed by the Himeyuri Peace Foundation. Our founding comes mainly from admission fees.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of visitors decreased considerably, so now the museum faces serious challenges. In order to keep the museum running effectively as a foundation of peace education in Okinawa, we have for the first time started online donation platform

<<https://syncable.biz/associate/himeyuri/>>.

We offer our sincere gratitude for your support for the future of the Himeyuri Peace Museum.



Museum Information

Himeyuri Peace Museum was established on June 23, 1989. It is a private museum founded by former Himeyuri students. The museum preserves the Himeyuri survivors' war experiences through exhibits, including informative panels, personal effects, survivors' documents, testimonial films and a full-size replica of the Ihara Third Surgical Cave, where many among the Himeyuri Student Corps perished while hiding from the enemy.



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Hours

Open daily | From 9 am to 5:25 pm (last admission at 5 pm)

Admission Fees

Adults ¥450 / High School Students ¥250
Elementary and Junior High School Students ¥150

Directions

[By car] Approximately 30-40 minutes from Naha Airport;
approximately 20 minutes from Naha Airport Expressway
Tomigusuku IC or Nakachi IC.

[By bus] Take the #89 from Naha Bus Terminal (approximately 30 minutes)
➡ Transfer #82, #107, or #108 at Itoman Bus Terminal (10 minutes)
➡ Get off at the "Himeyuri-no-Tou Mae" stop



NEWSLETTER HIMEYURI PEACE MUSEUM No. 3

Published December 1, 2021 by the HIMEYURI PEACE RESEARCH CENTER
Content produced and edited by the HIMEYURI PEACE MUSEUM
English Translation by Emi Karimata



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