

Seattle Betsuin Buddhist Temple Arson Update

March 1, 2024 by SBBT Restoration team

At 10:00 pm on December 31, 2023, an intruder broke into the Seattle Betsuin Buddhist Temple and sought refuge in the basement. Shortly after, the individual committed arson, resulting in considerable fire and water damage to the basement area. On January 2, 2024, the temple experienced a second fire, as smoldering material reignited, causing further damage to the building. The arsonist chose an archival storage area to start the fire, where thousands of records dating from 1901 were stored. The smoke and water damage extended throughout the temple, prompting its closure to all; however, the temple continues to operate remotely. Fortunately, no one was injured.

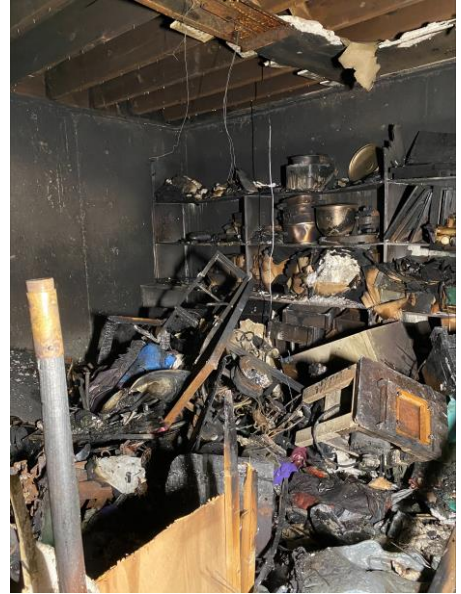
Fire, smoke, and water damage remediation efforts are underway, including removing carpets, inventorying content losses, and establishing ozone treatment rooms to remove smoke odor from permeable items. The basement (garage area) cleanup began with identifying salvageable items, discarding charred debris, and beginning the asbestos mitigation process. While many objects are damaged beyond repair, the temple's Arson Restoration Project Committee (ARPC) members continue to inventory and identify any

items that can be saved. To date, more than 24,000 pounds of contents have been discarded.

Although the Hondo and Nokotsudo managed to be unscathed from the fire, the damage from the heavy smoke and moisture resulted in the dismantling and packing of the Onaijin and Hishidoro lantern in the Hondo with the assistance from the Wakabayashi Company. All the items were loaded into a container and shipped to Japan for repair. The Onaijin is expected to be returned next year due to a backlog of work stemming from the earthquake damage to temples in Northern Japan, which occurred on January 1, 2024.

The cleaning and sorting of the kitchen, dining hall, and lower classrooms is expected to be completed soon. However, the smoke damage assessment continues. Additional restoration efforts are needed, as more damage is revealed with each layer of flooring and walls tested. Once this initial phase concludes, the temple will be better equipped to assess and establish a roadmap for other necessary repairs.

In the meantime, the temple's Archives Committee continues to work on salvaging temple documents/pictures and artifacts. To date, over 550 hours have been spent on



Where the fire started

preservation efforts.

While the situation is unfortunate, the temple sees an opportunity for renewal, rebuilding, and reaffirming the mission to share the message of the Buddha while continuing to serve as a source of history for the community.

The temple is grateful to all who have shown support, patience, and generosity. The contributions, whether in time, resources, or kind words, have significantly impacted the Seattle Betsuin's journey toward restoration. The temple is incredibly grateful to the Tacoma Buddhist Temple and White River Buddhist Temple for opening their spaces and allowing members from Seattle to join their services and programs.



Above: (left) final service before altar adornments shipped to Japan. (right) Shinran Shonin statue from the Memorial Hall. Base was lost in fire. Below: Taiko damaged in fire.



Contributions can also be made via check – please make checks payable to “SEATTLE BUDDHIST CHURCH” and include “Arson Restoration Fund” in the memo line.

The temple deeply appreciates your kindness and concern and invites you to share in the successes fueled by your generosity. The temple thanks you for contributing to a collective effort that transcends bricks and mortar.



For those interested in staying connected with the Seattle Betsuin’s recovery process, visit seattlebetsuin.org/fire for updates. If you would like to make a donation to the Arson Restoration Fund, please click the “Donate” button on the Seattle Betsuin’s fire page.