

# TOPAZ TIMES THE CITY

October 2021

Published by the Topaz Museum Board

## Topaz Stories Exhibit coming to Utah State Capitol Building — Jan. 18 – Dec. 31, 2022

As anti-Asian violence erupted across the country earlier this year, revealing the extent to which Asian people in this country continue to be “othered” and “demonized,” the Topaz Stories Committee launched the Topaz Stories website, sharing more than sixty stories from Topaz survivors and their descendants as a reminder of the human consequences of hate. You can read the stories at: [www.topazstories.com](http://www.topazstories.com).

The project is ongoing, so if you have a Topaz Story to share, please contact Ruth Sasaki, editor and webmaster, at [topazstories@gmail.com](mailto:topazstories@gmail.com). She reports that the site has been visited by people from over twenty countries to date.

With assistance from Max Chang and Brad Westwood with the Utah Department of Culture and Community Engagement, an exhibit featuring thirty stories from the Topaz Stories project will be mounted in the Utah State Capitol Building in Salt Lake City from January 18 – December 31, 2022. The exhibit, designed by Jonathan Hirabayashi, will appear on the Capitol’s 3rd-floor mezzanine. A reception in Salt Lake City will be held at a later date to be announced.

In addition, plans for a public event are in the works. If you are interested



1. James and Dan Hirano, “Father and Son.” 2. Evacuation notice in San Francisco. Dorothea Lange. NARA #536017, “Left Behind.” 3. Yae Yedlosky, Grace Mori Saito Tom, Setsuko Asano Ogami, and Kaz Oyamada Iwahashi, “Friends Forever.” 4. Amy and Jeanie Takagi, “Topaz Birth.” 5. Norm and Pat Hayashi, “Every Little Moment.” 6. Tomiko and Shigeru Sasaki, “Life Goes On.”

Family photos. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

in attending a weekend event in spring 2022 that will include a trip to the Utah State Capitol to view the Topaz Stories exhibit, followed by a visit to the Topaz Museum and the Topaz historic site, please send us your name and email address for updates.

Attendees will be responsible for their own hotel arrangements, and RSVPs will be required for the Delta and Topaz portion of trip, with additional costs for transportation and

meals. For more information on this trip, please send us a note to [topazalumscommittee@gmail.com](mailto:topazalumscommittee@gmail.com).

The Museum thanks the Topaz Stories Committee members for their work, in addition to Ruth and Jonathan, Ann Tamaki Dion, Kimi Hill, Barbara Saito, Ken Yamashita, and Kay Yatabe. Thanks also to those who have made donations to the exhibit and especially to those who contributed stories.

# Remembering 9/11/1942

While the Delta Volunteer Fire Department was hoisting an impressive three-story American flag on Main Street to commemorate the 20th anniversary of four coordinated attacks on the United States on the morning of 9/11/2001, Boy Scout Troop 146 from South Ogden, Utah was filing into the Topaz Museum to remember the day Topaz opened, September 11, 1942.

Troop 146 outdoor activity coordinator, Brian Ballard, said the group had wanted to schedule a visit in 2020, but the museum was closed, so they requested to come this year.

After visiting the museum, they traveled to the camp for a flag ceremony to honor the Japanese Americans who began arriving at the desert camp on this day 79 years ago.

Ballard said the boys recognized the importance of the ceremony and will treasure the gift of the flag that has flown at the Topaz site.

Later in the day, a group of clergymen from five Protestant congregations gathered at the museum as part of their program, "Trek to Topaz," coordinated by Michael Santarosa from the Mountain Springs Community Church in the Cottonwood Heights area of Salt Lake City.

Santarosa planned the Trek as part of the pastors' study of "historic and current racial injustice and how Christians



are called to acknowledge, remember, and lament these injustices as well as change directions and repair broken relationships."

After a tour of the Topaz site, they held a meeting on the mess hall foundation of Block 42 voicing their reactions to the visit, singing *Amazing Grace*, and listening to the sermon of Pastor "Mo" Marlin Lynch III, founder of the Kingdom Huddle congregation.

He began by calling everyone "My Family" and saying, "There's only one race and that is the human race." His message touched on the Four "Rs" or Relationships, Reconciliation, Repair, and Repentance. He ended by encouraging everyone to be united.

# Protecting the Wakasa Monument

What would you do if you had a treasure buried on your property and discovered that its location had been published?

That was the dilemma facing the Topaz Museum Board when the exact location of the Wakasa Monument on the Topaz incarceration site was made public.

On April 11, 1943, 63-year-old James Hatsuaki Wakasa was shot and killed by a military sentry while walking his dog inside the Topaz concentration camp. His crime? The government claimed he was trying to escape outside the barbed wire fence that confined his fellow Japanese American prisoners.

Two-thousand incarcerated men attended his funeral. Weeks later a group of Issei men created a monument in his memory, which the government ordered taken down. The sentry was found not guilty of killing Mr. Wakasa at his court-martial, and the military deemed the killing justified.

For decades, no one knew the specific location of the monument until a hand-drawn map, created by an incarcerated man, was recently discovered in the National Archives. With that information, an archaeologist found what remained of the monument, a single huge stone, buried in the Topaz desert. He published the story

of the Wakasa killing and the monument, his quest to find it, and its exact location.

The Topaz Museum Board was in a quandary. If the monument was left unprotected at the Topaz site, it could be vandalized or shot at. There have been previous incidents of vandalism; the Salt Lake City chapters' monument at the site had been riddled with bullet holes, as has other signage at Topaz.

The safer option was to move the monument quickly from the Topaz site and to protect it within the confines of the Topaz Museum. However, this quick decision was made without giving Topaz

SEE MONUMENT PAGE 5 ►

# Topaz Education Program is huge success

A critical audience at the Topaz Museum are students who come from around the state. The Topaz Museum Board has developed an exceptional education program for young audiences that promotes the importance of assuring civil rights for every citizen.

In 2019 the Topaz Museum Board received an \$8,000 grant from the Great Basin Heritage Area Partnership

that provided teaching materials, lesson plans, and books related to Topaz for classrooms in Utah and Nevada. School fieldtrips to the museum and site were included in the package. Responses have been overwhelmingly positive, indicating students appreciate the fact that basic constitutional guarantees cannot be taken for granted, and we as citizens must be vigilant

Student/Teacher Visits		
Year	Visitors	# of Groups
2015	445	8
2016	734	18
2017	990	25
2018	1,198	31
2019	1,787	33
2020	2,031	18
2021	4,403	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,588</b>	<b>197</b>



Every year schools in Nephi, 50 miles away, bring junior and senior high students to the museum and Topaz site.

in protecting and caring for others regardless of race, religion, color, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Since the museum's opening in February 2015, we have met with 11,588 students and teachers from 197 different school and church groups. Average group size is sixty. Docents have clocked over 750 volunteer hours conducting tours. When COVID forced the closure of the museum for fourteen months, we developed an alternative approach to onsite visits. Our "Topaz to the Classroom" roadshow reached over 3,500 students. Due to its popularity and outreach potential, classroom presentations have been added to our education programs.

## Every gift adds value to the Topaz Museum

Since 1991, the Topaz Museum has been raising money to preserve the history of Topaz. The donations have made it possible to purchase all 640 acres of the Topaz site, to buy property on Delta's Main Street for the new Museum, restore the recreation hall from Block 42, and provide much of the money we needed to construct the Museum and build its exhibitions.

Join us in our continued work of preserving and sharing the stories of

Topaz by making a donation in any amount. Funding from our donors regularly offset costs for utilities and supplies, janitorial service, and other operational costs. Our new exhibits include the Isono model sailboat made in Tanforan, a new doll exhibit, and framing and conservation of art and photos.

Please use the enclosed envelope to remit your tax-deductible donation or go to our website [topazmuseum.org](http://topazmuseum.org) to

donate online by PayPal.

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Our sincere gratitude to those who have donated in the past, and we thank each and every one of you who join us this year in supporting the Museum.



One of two dolls made by Mrs. Kawasaki.



A treasured gift from Gail Palmer's family given to the Museum.

# Dolls donated to Topaz Museum

Sachiko Josephine Kawasaki, born in 1913, had two children, Frankie and Joseph, when she and her husband arrived in Topaz. She gave birth to two more babies in Topaz, Richard and Michael. She also made traditional dolls in camp. Her family has donated two of them to the museum.

The Wendell Palmer family lived at Topaz because both he and his wife worked there. His daughter, Gail, age 10, became friends with a girl her age. When the Palmer family left Topaz, Gail's friend gave her this doll her mother had made.



Toyo Suyemoto's oldest nephew, John Kidd and his wife Mary Linn, visited the museum and Block 4 of the site. Toyo, famous as a poet, also kept a memoir that was edited by Susan Richardson to be the book "I Call to Remembrance."



Japanese Americans from the Salt Lake City area come to the Museum periodically to help with various work projects. Pictured is half of the group who arrived early on Oct. 2. Our thanks for their willingness to help.

# Miné Okubo exhibit at Topaz Museum

*Citizen 13660*, Miné Okubo's masterpiece, is 75 years old! When it was published in 1946, it was the first full account on America's concentration camps from the perspective of a former incarcerated.

To commemorate the event, 24 of Okubo's watercolor, casein, and gouache paintings, and ink, pastel, and charcoal drawings from the Museum's collection are currently on display in our art gallery.

Okubo was living in Berkeley, California and working on the Federal Arts Program, doing mosaic and fresco murals commissioned by the Army when Executive Order 9066 was instated. Since her family lived in various parts of California, EO9066 dispersed them all



Miné Okubo's depiction of the hospital dedication at Topaz is one of the paintings on exhibit in the museum's art gallery.



This portrait of Miné Okubo was taken by Kameo Kido, a photographer in Topaz, before she left for New York City in January 1944.

over the country; her father was sent to an INS camp.

Okubo and one brother were confined at Tanforan and transferred to Topaz, where she taught art and helped found the literary magazine, *Trek*, for which she served as art director, creating the dynamic cover designs and other spot illustrations. At Topaz, Okubo and her brother shared living quarters (Block 7, Barrack 11, Room F) with fellow *Trek* staff and artist, Nobuo Kitagaki, who is the uncle of sansei photographer Paul Kitagaki.

Okubo diligently documented life in camp and produced hundreds of sketches, which are rich with human expressions, dynamic composition, and vividly

depict the chaos of day-to-day activities.

In September 1946, Columbia University Press published this astonishing body of work as a personal memoir, to strong critical review. Okubo focused on book illustration and painting during her post-war career, and died in 2001 in Greenwich, New York.

The Museum's collection includes paintings purchased directly from the artist from her studio in New York, donations of artwork from collectors, and a copy of her diary from the point when she and her brother left Tanforan and arrived in Topaz, ending on October 17, 1942.

The exhibition will remain on view until September 2022.

## MONUMENT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

stakeholders a chance for input. Some survivors and descendants had hoped for a ceremony at the monument's original site and a chance to view it there. Others wanted to witness the removal. The Topaz Museum Board recognized its serious

mistake in not notifying stakeholders and issued a public apology.

The Board acknowledges that inclusion of Topaz stakeholders is necessary and essential in future actions involving the Wakasa Monument. We have learned from this incident and are grateful for the continued support of our friends and

stakeholders who share our commitment to maintaining the legacy of Topaz.

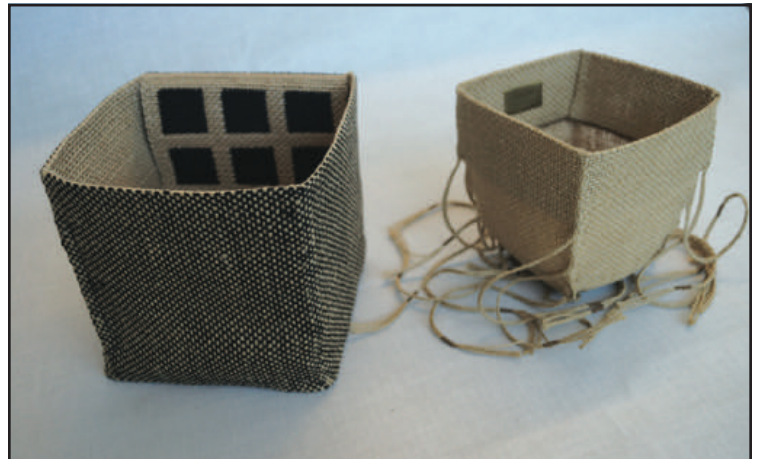
We invite your continued participation as we work together to honor and commemorate Mr. Wakasa's death and plan a memorial for him. The Board is looking forward to your input and suggestions.



Isn't this a splendid sailboat? It was made by Sadaishiro Isono in a contest in Tanforan where it won the prize, of course. Dr. Steve Isono and his wife, Liz, brought it to the museum last year. It will soon be in the museum exhibit.



Kay Yatabe was visiting the museum when Karen Shibata and Ted Haduca dropped in.



The Edwin Kitow estate donated several pieces of Kay Sekimachi's weavings. A new cabinet for them will be on display soon.

## Card of thanks to the Museum

Thank you so much for giving us a tour of the museum and the actual site of the Topaz camp. My parents passed away about 10 years ago without ever talking about any details of their lives there.

What you have been able to preserve from that time and place is invaluable to anyone who wants to know more about it. My wife, Mary, and youngest son, Scott, and I can at least picture what it was like. I don't think we could ever know exactly what they and the other internees experienced.

Thank you and your staff for the time and efforts to create what we saw at your museum. It was truly a moving experience.

Best regards,  
Rick Nagai and family

## Keep in touch

The Topaz Museum newsletter is hoping to pivot to an email format soon. The shift to digital communications will allow us to send you the news immediately and cut down our postage and printing expenses; however, if you prefer a paper copy newsletter sent via USPS, we can accommodate that request.

Either way, we'd love to update your contact information and ask if you would kindly email your name, email address, and phone number to [topazalumscommittee@gmail.com](mailto:topazalumscommittee@gmail.com).

If you would like information on the Topaz Stories exhibit, send your name to the same email address.

# A letter of understanding and support from Friends of Topaz

August 30, 2021

To the Japanese American Community,

We are the Friends of Topaz, a group of predominately Japanese American descendants of World War II Topaz concentration camp incarcerated, living in the San Francisco Bay Area. We exist to support the Topaz Museum because we believe in their mission to preserve Topaz stories and to educate the greater public about this tragic chapter of American history, including the devastating impact the concentration camps had on its Japanese American survivors. We continually draw inspiration from the courage and resilience of our community, generations later.

In understanding the current controversy surrounding the Museum's decision to unearth the monument memorializing the unjustified killing of James Wakasa by a Topaz guard, here is the background. In June-July, Discover Nikkei published a 5-part article on this tragic and largely unknown story. While the article is highly informative and well-intentioned, unfortunately, the July 4, 2021 installment revealed the exact location of the half-buried monument whose location had been previously unknown to the public. This alarmed the Museum because of recent vandalism, including signage blasted apart by high-powered rifle bullets and shotgun shells, and spray painted political or racist graffiti. Because the article revealed how to find the stone, the Museum was placed in a dilemma: either ignore that the stone's location was now public and hope that nothing bad would happen, or risk that the monument, imbued with historic and spiritual meaning, would be an attractive target for wrongdoers to deface. Faced with this predicament, it decided it had to act immediately to remove the stone to the protection of the Museum. In its haste however, it failed to notify the community in advance of the removal, thereby triggering anger and leading some to conclude that it acted with callous indifference. The Museum has since profusely apologized for failing to inform the community in advance of the unearthing, but stands by its decision that it did what was required to protect this precious monument for all posterity.

We trust the work of the Museum Board and feel that it has done nothing that disrespected the Wakasa monument. In fact, the Board has made every effort to prevent any damage to the artifact or to the Topaz site. Additionally, the decision to excavate the monument was made by the entire Topaz Museum board, including its Japanese American members.

We have worked closely with the Museum for many years and have always been informed of the actions of the Board. We are encouraged



Bob Akaki and Deb Larsen like to spend two or three days in the Museum every October. This year they ran into Kimi Hill and Florence Yokoi from the Friends of Topaz.

to share our opinions; and in our experience, the Museum has always been receptive to any input or suggestions from the Japanese American community. The Friends of Topaz works very closely with Topaz Board president, Jane Beckwith, on outreach and fundraising to support the Museum and its successful work over the past 25 years. The Board has now purchased the 640 acres of the camp's original site, built the Topaz Museum in the town of Delta, hosted tours of hundreds of Utah school children, and worked with the public to educate and share our descendants' stories, in order to prevent a recurrence of a similar denial of American civil rights in the future.

The climate of vicious anti-Asian hate, where physical assaults and vandalism are real, makes it all the more necessary for the Topaz Museum to exist and do its excellent work, under the sound leadership of the Museum Board. We understand that the stone had to be protected and feel that now that it has been safely moved to the Museum's courtyard, where it can best be conserved, protected, and interpreted by visitors and scholars, a healing ceremony involving Japanese American community members and other stakeholders can proceed without further risking the site or artifact.

The Topaz Museum is for everyone. It is a story that speaks to the need for a more just America. No one group of people has full ownership over the history of a place or event, and we are grateful to the citizens of Delta for being our partners in telling our stories, after the cataclysm that brought our communities together.

Respectfully,  
Friends of Topaz



## Cary Fukunaga Day

When Cary Fukunaga's new movie *No Time to Die* was scheduled to open in Delta, we decided to celebrate "Cary Fukunaga Day" and made this banner because his father, Shuzo Anthony Fukunaga, was born in Topaz. Warren and Margaret Munson just happened to be at the Museum with three students from Delta High School, Julie Moyano, Kay Yatabe, Kimi Hill, and Florence Yokoi. The movie was great!



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8 TOPAZ TIMES 2021

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## Matsusaburo Hibi painting

The Topaz Museum recently received a Matsusaburo Hibi painting from The Theodore Masao Iida Family: Theodore, Hiroko, Carey, Eleanor, Douglas, and Allan Iida.

The oil painting of two people walking in snow at Topaz depicts the cold winters that residents suffered. It will soon be cleaned by a conservator and framed for exhibit in the Topaz Museum art gallery.

Our thanks to Ellie Mishima and her son, CJ, for delivering the painting to the museum.

