



Photo by Brian Buroker

Topaz Museum, 55 West Main, P.O. Box 241, Delta, Utah 84624 www.topazmuseum.org

June 30, 2025

Dear Topaz Museum Friends:

It is with humbling gratitude and utmost respect that the Topaz Museum Board honors founder Jane Beckwith's request to step down from her leadership position after decades of tireless dedication to document and teach about the World War II story of the Topaz concentration camp and lead the community-wide movement to build the Topaz Museum. We are happy for Jane that she will now be able to relax and enjoy family time; on the other hand, she has been the bedrock of the Topaz Museum for more than three decades and her oversight will be greatly missed.

"I feel extremely lucky that for years I was able to listen to the stories of Japanese Americans who suffered through Topaz. Whether they were there for a few days or three years, they shared their private histories and encouraged the Topaz Museum Board's work to build a museum to preserve their experiences and educate the public. These Nisei are mostly gone now, but parts of their lives remain in the videos or exhibits of the Topaz Museum. We continue to honor them by telling visitors that Topaz was wrong because it violated the Constitution, and it was not humane," said Jane.

To say there would be no Topaz Museum without Jane Beckwith is a gross understatement. The seeds of the museum began when she was an English teacher at Delta High School in Utah, and in 1982, assigned students to find Deltans who had memories of Topaz, located 16 miles northwest of the town. Research from her students led to stories that had been buried for decades, prompting townspeople to talk about the past and donate artifacts they had received from people they knew at Topaz. Soon those treasures were joined by other historical items donated by the Japanese Americans who had been in Topaz, including more than 150 pieces of

artwork. The growing collection, housed in Jane's home in Delta, evolved into the idea of the Topaz Museum as early as 1989. Working with the Japanese American community to fundraise and collect more history, the Topaz Museum opened in 2017, an 8,000-square foot building with an education room, library, curatorial area, gift shop, and 4,000 square feet of exhibit space. On the museum grounds is also half of an actual recreation hall from Block 42 donated by a Delta family who bought it after Topaz closed.

Equally important to Jane and the nascent museum board was the acquisition of the one square mile of the Topaz incarceration site. In 1993, the Board began buying the land, parcel by parcel, resulting today in full ownership of 639 of the 640 acres; the one acre is owned by Utah JACL chapters where the Topaz monument welcomes visitors. Topaz is the only World War II Japanese American confinement site that is owned in its entirety and stewarded by a non-profit board, so its existence and sustainability are not dependent upon state or federal government policies.

Visiting the museum and the incarceration site with Jane is an experience like no other. Many incarcerated have returned to find closure, and Jane has accommodated nearly every request for a personalized tour. Visitors hear the stories behind the intricate shell jewelry, Topaz Art School artwork, and homemade furniture donated to the museum. Walking amid the greasewood brush and dust in the Utah desert at the site itself, Jane knows the stories of the now-gone barracks and the families who lived there, and one can imagine the rock gardens, baseball fields, and churches as she describes them. Interacting with visitors, hearing their stories, and sharing her knowledge have been one of her favorite parts of working at Topaz.

Her personal connection to Topaz goes back to World War II when her grandfather and father, publishers of the local newspaper, hired linotype operator Harry Yasuda, to work with them three days a week. After the paper was printed on Wednesdays, Harry returned to Topaz to join his family. Jane's mother told her stories about the Yasuda family and attending weddings and dances within the barbed wire camp. Those memories passed down to her daughter, made the indelible impression that Topaz was not fair or just.

Jane has never considered herself the "executive director" of Topaz, choosing instead to dedicate herself as a volunteer. In 1987, she traveled to Hiroshima to teach in a public school to better understand the cultural roots of the Japanese American community and the destruction of the war.

After she returned to Delta and the Topaz Board was able to buy more acreage, the Topaz site was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2007. The board has received numerous federal, state, and local grants to preserve and educate the public about the lessons and legacy of Topaz. She and the board have received many awards and honors for the work they have

done to preserve the site and create the Topaz Museum, a memorial to all those who endured Topaz.

Believing that it was morally wrong to benefit financially from the Japanese American incarceration, Jane never took a salary, and additionally supported the Topaz Museum with her own generous donations. Because of her mindful budgeting and successful fundraising from the board, the financial future for Topaz is robust enough to be able to hire a staff Executive Director to lead the organization and take over the myriad of tasks that Jane has devotedly overseen for more than 30 years.

She will be a crucial part of the transition period and we hope that afterward, she will still find time to occasionally lead visitors through the incarceration site so they can experience the power of her accumulated knowledge and benefit from all the anecdotes and memories that Japanese Americans have shared with her throughout the years.

Although no one will be able to replace her, a job posting for the Executive Director position will be distributed soon.

Sincerely,

Ann Tamaki Dion and Dianne Fukami
Co-Presidents, Topaz Museum Board