

# A time of transition, challenges, and unbelievable growth

## *Museum founder retires, job search begins*

In June the board announced museum founder Jane Beckwith's decision to step down from her leadership position. We are forever indebted to Jane's four decades of tireless dedication and vision purchasing the Topaz incarceration site and building the Topaz Museum to document and teach the World War II story of Topaz.

Jane said, "I feel extremely lucky that I was able to listen to the stories of Japanese Americans who suffered through Topaz. Whether they were here 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."

Under Beckwith's leadership the Board purchased 639 acres of the 640 acres of the Topaz site. One acre is owned by the Japanese American Citizen League chapters of Utah. Since Topaz closed, several houses had been placed on the site, but now



Yae Wada, who was a young married woman in Topaz, and Jane Beckwith enjoyed the exhibit Topaz Stories at the Utah State Capitol.

they are all removed.

To move the museum forward the Board has been conducting a nation-wide search for an executive director.

The search committee includes Japanese Americans, Deltans, Utah Museum Field Service advisors,

representatives from Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, Japanese American National Museum, and the Japanese American Citizens League. The Executive Director job announcement and description were issued in July, and the committee is close to completing its work.

*Ireichō, The Book of Names* will be in Utah May 1-2 during the Topaz Pilgrimage. The book lists over 125,000 people of Japanese ancestry who were in the 75 camps during WWII. Visitors can witness the names of those who are listed by stamping the names. See story on page 7

# Board of trustees holds retreat in Delta

In July all members of the Topaz Board met in Delta for the annual retreat, constituting a 100% turnout. Enriching activities included an Open House at the museum for the Delta community, with musical performances by the Delta Middle School drum line.

Two days of work sessions, and a special side trip to Vans Dance Hall, a hidden treasure in Delta, gave a new perspective to board members regarding the town of Delta. The former dance hall was a popular place of entertainment from the 1920s to the 1950s and provided an attraction with otherworldly charm. Billy Van, the proprietor, and his live orchestras hosted couples from all around the state on a regular basis.

Now the building shows serious wear and tear, but enough of its former décor remains to give a deeply nostalgic look at the town's past.

The Topaz Museum trustees also held a dinner for the volunteer docents current and past—each docent shared stories about the importance of telling the Topaz history with museum visitors. They especially focused on teaching students about this rich history and greeting visitors from all over the world.



The historic Vans Dance Hall in Delta features some unique and nostalgic décor.



Dianne Fukami and Chris Hirano near the donor wall at the Topaz Museum



Barb Hedani-Morishita and Kay Yatabe, Topaz Museum Board members were part of the Vans Hall tour.



Board members at the close of the retreat.

# San Jose hosts Topaz Museum exhibit of 'Topaz Stories'

On August 10 Topaz Board Co-President Dianne Fukami and board members Chris Hirano, Joy Iwasa, Barbara Hedani-Morishita, Patricia Wakida, and Dick Hirayama visited the Japanese American Museum of San Jose (JAMsj) along with former Topaz incarceratedees and their friends. They were greeted at the Topaz Stories exhibition by JAMsj Executive Director Vanessa Hatakeyama and Topaz Stories editor Ruth Sasaki.



Topaz Stories editor Ruth Sasaki speaking at Japanese American Museum of San Jose about the exhibit with Vanessa Hatakeyama and designer Jonathan Hirabayashi.



Mr. David Andrade brought the Delta Middle School drumline to perform at the Open House.



An Open House visitor lifts his son up so he can see the exhibit of arrowheads found by people in Topaz.

## Day of Remembrance Save the Date!

*February 15, 2026*

Minidoka will mark Day of Remembrance 2026 at Seattle University on Sunday, Feb. 15. Details on partners, performances, screenings to come!

## Minidoka Pilgrimage Save the Date!

The annual Minidoka Pilgrimage will be held from the evening of Thursday, July 9 through the morning of Sunday, July 12 in Twin Falls and at the Minidoka National Historic Site. Registration for attendance will open on March 01 — please see their website and FB page for an exact time and link.

**Your donations to the Topaz Museum are a powerful way of preserving Topaz and its stories and heritage.**

# Jane Beckwith receives Notarianni Award

The Topaz Museum Board is proud to announce that Jane Beckwith was honored at the Utah Museums Association (UMA) annual convention held in September in Kanab, Utah and awarded the prestigious 2025 Phil Notarianni Award. This award is given to an individual who has shown exceptional dedication, provided lengthy service, or an intense and tangible commitment to Utah's museum community.

Jane Beckwith, a Utah native, laid the foundation of what would become the Topaz Museum, located in Delta, Utah. Her father and grandfather ran the local weekly newspaper in town during Topaz. Growing up she heard stories from family members about the camp.

In 1982 when Jane was an English teacher at Delta High School, she assigned her journalism students to interview people in town who had worked at Topaz or had some connections to the former WWII concentration camp. The extraordinary energy and efforts by the Delta High School students led to a renewal of interest in Topaz locally, which dovetailed with a growing movement nationwide among the Japanese American community to reclaim their history and to fight for redress and reparations.

Soon, former Japanese American

incarcerees from Topaz began making pilgrimages to Delta to visit the campsite, leaving artifacts in Beckwith's care after sharing their personal stories with her and teaching her what they remembered.

Significant friendships with Nisei, especially those who were in high school at Topaz, resulted in a determined effort to preserve the history of Topaz. While working together, they began supporting the idea of creating a museum.

The site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. Then in 1976, the Utah chapters of the Japanese American Citizen League, as a Bicentennial project, dedicated a monument on one acre of Topaz land.

The Topaz Museum Board became a non-profit organization in 1996. Later, the board joined with the Japanese American Confinement Sites office within the National Park Service to establish Topaz as a National Historic Landmark in 2007. The Topaz Muse-



Jane Beckwith receiving the Notarianni Award from a UMA representative.

um Board now owns and protects 639 acres of the mile-square Landmark.

After years of fundraising campaigns, the Topaz Museum officially opened its doors in 2017. The museum welcomes nearly 10,000 visitors a year and educates thousands of schoolchildren around Utah.

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## Wakasa Stone Update

Recognizing that the Topaz Museum Board (TMB) and the Wakasa Memorial Committee (WMC) desire the same outcome of honoring the life of James Hatsuaki Wakasa and the Wakasa stone, the board, in collaboration with consultants Sarah Pharaon and Yuko Uchikawa, plans to launch a second community engagement project. This project will ask stakeholders to help design the process for engaging community members in meetings to then decide the future of the Wakasa stone.

The Topaz Museum board is inviting community members to suggest plans for subsequent meetings, which will discuss possible exhibits for the Wakasa Stone. The TMB wishes to hear ideas from the community regarding the process to create that process.

As a first step, TMB invites WMC and other stakeholders to be interviewed about their perspectives on the history and future of the Wakasa monument. After the completion of the interviews, stakeholders will come together, and with the support of our experts, begin the work of deciding together what kinds of meetings to explore ideas to honor the Wakasa Stone. This community engagement project will be launched to the general public in spring 2026.

# Friends of Topaz Museum programs in 2025

- Spring: Our gratitude to J-Sei for its continued partnership with the TM hosting our free public programming. Programs have included storytelling through the lens of filmmaker John Esaki and photographer Paul Kitagaki. Both delivered engaging lectures. Kitagaki's exhibit juxtaposed portraits of Japanese Americans taken by Dorothea Lange before they were sent to Tanforan and Topaz with later versions re-photographed by Kitagaki.
- March 30 - Ruth Sasaki and Topaz survivors and descendants Kaz Iwashashi, Joe Nishimura, Ken Yamashita, Gay Kaplan, and Sandra Yagi shared personal stories and the challenges their families faced in re-integrating themselves into the post-war era. A well-attended program was held at the Berkeley Historical Society.
- New exhibit "Topaz Stories: Children Behind Barbed Wire," was on display at the Japanese American Museum of San Jose from August 2—Nov 2 featuring 30 stories primarily about children and teens in Topaz.
- A traveling show of the Topaz Stories exhibit has been circulating throughout Utah through a program sponsored by the Utah Division of Arts and Museums. The exhibit has gone to libraries and schools for the last several years.



Hisashi Bill Sugaya and Nan Rhodes, museum board member, include Nan's grandson in a conversation about all the babies born in Topaz.



This past June 40 members of the Yano family visited Topaz on a trip that Eugene Yano organized for his multi-generational family. Some traveled by train from California to Utah, in an effort to better understand what family members experienced more than 80 years ago.

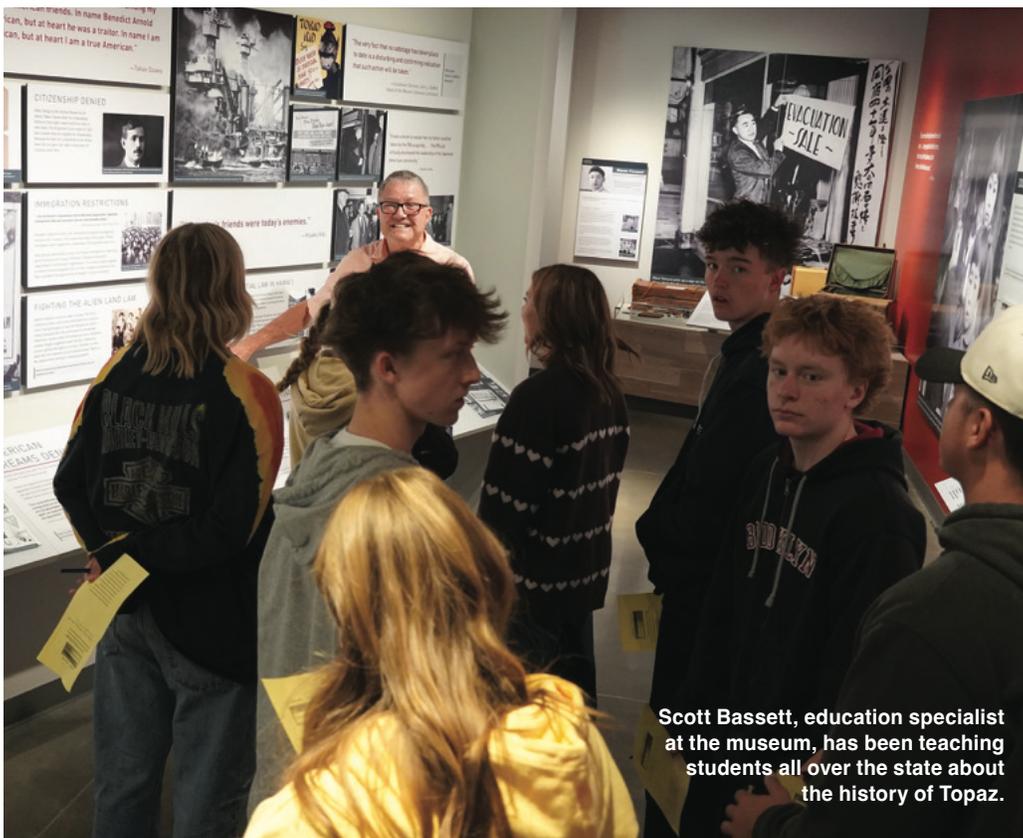


# HIGHLIGHTS this year:

- Presented at Western Museums Association Conference October 1-4, Reno, NV. Organized a roundtable discussion Q/A session “Elevating Community Stories During Challenging Times.” Patricia Wakida, TM board member served as moderator with presenters April Kamp-Whitaker, Amache; Aura Newlin, Executive Director, Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, Clement Hanami, VP of Exhibitions and Art Director, JANM, and Scott Bassett, Topaz Education outreach coordinator.
- Thus far in 2025 Topaz to the Classroom programs have been presented at 38 Utah schools, and 7,204 students taught with visits to 152 classrooms as part of the Topaz Museum sponsored outreach project. Since 2020 we have taught 30,852 students about Topaz.
- Two-year grant award with the first year award of \$8,100 from the Utah Division of Arts & Museums for general operating support grant program for fiscal year.
- National Park Services JACS grant award to review and assess the layout of the Topaz Museum for future rotating exhibits and new displays. Also, a joint grant NPS JACE award with Heart Mountain, Minidoka, Amache, Fort Missoula, and Topaz Museum was recently approved. The three-year grant includes teacher workshops and curricula for states that mandate Asian American history in schools.



- After a year of restoration, a Chiura Obata painting on silk is back home at the Topaz Museum. Thank you to the Yano family for transporting this wonderful art piece from CA to Utah.
- The museum received a grant of \$25,000 from the JA Community Foundation, for Topaz Legacies. We will capture video oral histories of Japanese Americans who were confined at the Topaz site and residents of Delta who interacted with them. The project will also record the genesis of the Topaz Museum, show its array of historical artifacts, and its unusual art collection. These videos will be uploaded to the Topaz Museum website and shared with Densho for wider access and availability.



Scott Bassett, education specialist at the museum, has been teaching students all over the state about the history of Topaz.

## City Weekly spotlights Topaz

The Topaz Museum hit it big in two categories of Salt Lake City Weekly's Best of Utah awards, a popular yearly issue. Typically, the awards hear from 15,000 voters.

Topaz took third in the category Best Utah Day Trip, with Antelope Island, and the Salt Flats in the first two places.

Best Utah Heritage Site was won by the This is the Place Heritage Park. The Topaz Museum and Topaz concentration site took second. Anasazi State Park Museum took third.

# Topaz Memories

We love hearing from our visitors and donors—many are so touching. Naomi Hiroshige donated in memory of Dr. Frank Kami and spoke about how Frank loved the museum, “Although he is no longer with us his memory and his journey will live on.”

Ron Yuen and Diane Takahashi-Yuen visited the museum in June and later wrote that “the visit was so much more moving and valuable thanks to you (Jane) and the wonderful staff. Keep up the good work! We hope to visit again soon.” Diane’s father, Kazuo Takahashi, was 17 when he and his father were incarcerated at Topaz. At the museum they were delighted to see the exit sign from Tanforan mess hall. On the last day of the assembly center’s operation, Kazuo removed the sign and had it signed by his friends. He took the sign with him as he, and countless others, were transported to Topaz.

## Save the Date: Topaz Pilgrimage 2026

*April 30 – May 2, 2026*

Mark your calendars for the 2026 Topaz Pilgrimage, a powerful journey of remembrance, education, and intergenerational honor. This year’s pilgrimage will feature compelling multi-generational stories that bridge past and present, tours of the Topaz Museum and historic site, updates and history of Japantown in Salt Lake City, moving performances, and more.

The pilgrimage will also feature a stop on the national tour of Ireichō - The Book of Names, where participants can view and acknowledge the names of those incarcerated by placing a Japanese hanko (stamp) beneath each individual’s name.

We invite you to join us for this meaningful gathering of remembrance and community.

Registration opens in early 2026. For updates and registration alerts, visit [Topazmuseum.org](http://Topazmuseum.org), follow our Facebook page, or email [friendsoftopaz@gmail.com](mailto:friendsoftopaz@gmail.com) to be notified when registration opens.



\$3,000 grant from Rocky Mountain Power Foundation for educational outreach. Jane Beckwith with docents Karen Christensen and Margo Holman and Tyson Barber from Rocky Mountain Power.

## A message to our supporters

This past year has been a challenging one for the Topaz Museum in trying to fulfill our mission to educate people about the impact of the Japanese American incarceration. With new regulations regarding vocabulary that cannot be used in educational settings and funding cuts to many of our non-profit supporters, we are living in trying times.

Yet, with the help from donors like you and foundations that align with our other mission goals, we continue to preserve and exhibit artifacts and stories from the Topaz concentration camp, the 639-acre historic site that we steward and own, free from government regulation and policy.

We are in the midst of hiring a staff Executive Director in what we hope is the beginning of future staff hires. We want to gather more stories about Topaz and expand our “Topaz in the Classroom” education services beyond physical presentations in Utah schools. We have dreams of using technology to enhance the experiences in the museum and at the incarceration site for both visitors who are able to visit us physically and those who cannot.

Please help us fulfill this vision by giving generously to the Topaz Museum, which is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, Federal Tax ID 84-1385894. We have enclosed a self-addressed envelope for donations to our museum.

Or you can give online at [topazmuseum.org/donate](http://topazmuseum.org/donate). Your tax-deductible donation to the Topaz Museum helps ensure we can preserve the Topaz site, its stories and legacy. Our work is more important now than ever before.

Thank you for your continued support.  
Ann Tamaki Dion and Dianne Fukami  
Co-presidents, Topaz Board of Trustees



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## Keep in Touch

We're taking an informal poll to see if there's interest among Topaz survivors, descendants, and friends in having an afternoon informal reunion in the San Francisco Bay Area in spring. If you're interested, please send your name and email to [info@topazmuseum.org](mailto:info@topazmuseum.org)

We want to share upcoming events and news more often with our Topaz friends by using email. Please add your email address to the enclosed envelope or send it to [info@topazmuseum.org](mailto:info@topazmuseum.org)

**Send a copy of this newsletter to your friends and family. You can find it on our website: [www.topazmuseum.org](http://www.topazmuseum.org)**

## *Happy Holidays from the Topaz Museum Board of Trustees*



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