

Introducing Our New Topaz Museum Executive Director

by Dianne Fukami

With great fanfare, the Topaz Museum Board is pleased to announce the hiring of Meg Hutchins as its new Executive Director. Meg brings more than a decade of museum and public history experience, along with a M.A. in Historic Preservation and Museum Studies from the University of Delaware.

Most recently, Meg served in leadership roles with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs for the State of Delaware, where she managed multidisciplinary teams and oversaw the stewardship, interpretation, and engagement of statewide historic, archaeological, architectural, and artistic collections. During her tenure, she led major institutional initiatives involving collections management, exhibitions,

strategic planning, community engagement, and organizational development.

Prior to her work with the State of Delaware, Meg served as Museum Studies Program Coordinator at the University of Delaware and as Museum Director of The 1890 House Museum in Cortland, New York, where she gained experience in nonprofit management, small museum administration, fundraising, education, preservation, education, and visitor and volunteer engagement.

Meg's career has been defined by building strong teams, guiding institutions through periods of growth and change, and fostering meaningful connections between museums and their communities. The Board is excited to welcome her leadership as the Topaz Museum continues to advance its mis-



Meg Hutchins

sion and expand its impact.

Please join us in welcoming Meg as she settles into her new role starting July 13 and travels throughout Utah and California to meet Topaz Museum supporters and community partners.



Dean Hirabayashi, Topaz Museum Board member, stands with Jane Beckwith and Senator Karen Kwan, who sponsored a recognition of Jane's work on Topaz at the Utah State Senate chambers.

Utah Legislature recognizes Topaz Museum founder Jane Beckwith

Topaz Museum founder, Jane Beckwith, was honored by the Utah Legislature on February 17, 2026 for her longtime commitment in preserving 639 of the 640 acres of the original Topaz incarceration site and the history it tells.

The presentation on the floor of the State Senate was made by Senator Karen Kwan. It was stated that for decades Jane has served without salary, guided by a conviction that preserving the history of Topaz was both a moral obligation and an essential part of Utah's heritage. The citation praised Jane's extraordinary leadership and congratulated her on her retirement.

A Pilgrimage of Remembrance

More than 230 survivors, descendants, presenters, volunteers, and community members gathered in Salt Lake City and Delta for the 2026 Topaz Pilgrimage weekend of remembrance.

Held May 1–2, the pilgrimage began with a Thursday evening introduction to the Irei Project at the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple before continuing with a full day of programs in Salt Lake City.

Friday opened with a performance by Shasta Taiko and a welcome from Topaz Museum Board Co-Chair Dianne Fukami, followed by a fireside conversation between museum founder Jane Beckwith and journalist Wendy Hanamura. Together they explored the stories behind many of the museum's most treasured artifacts and the families who entrusted them to the museum.

Throughout the day, participants attended presentations on preserving Salt Lake City's historic Japantown, the lasting impact of incarceration across generations, the Nisei Students Relocation Commemorative Fund, the Topaz Toddlers project, Keetley Farms, and the future of the Wakasa Memorial Stone. The evening concluded with a



Justin Roberson, whose grandparents lived on Block 35, read an excerpt from *Topaz Stories* for the audience.



The culmination of the Pilgrimage was the closing ceremony at the Topaz site.

community dinner and a moving performance by Bonbu Stories.

On Saturday, pilgrims traveled to Delta, following the historic route once taken by those incarcerated at Topaz. Visits to the museum and the former incarceration site brought the weekend's stories into sharp focus. Guided tours led participants through the remaining camp landscape. For many descendants, it was an opportunity to stand where their own family members once lived.

At the Topaz Museum, visitors explored the galleries, reflected at the Wakasa Memorial Stone, and many participated in the Ireichō name-stamping project before gathering for lunch and fellowship.

The pilgrimage concluded with a remembrance ceremony at the incarceration site. Shasta Taiko performed, and Rev. Duncan Ryūken Williams of the Irei Project led those gathered in honoring Topaz survivors and those who died while incarcerated. Survivors spoke the names of loved ones who have passed, followed by the reading of ev-

ery person who died at Topaz, including James Wakasa. Standing together on the very ground where these lives unfolded, participants shared a powerful act of remembrance that embodied the purpose of the pilgrimage.

The Planning Committee extends its sincere gratitude to the presenters, performers, volunteers, sponsors, and community partners, especially the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple, whose generosity made this meaningful weekend possible.

Photos from the 2026 Topaz Pilgrimage are available at topazmuseum.org.

Your gift to the Topaz Museum helps preserve the Topaz site, its stories, and its legacy. Donate at topazmuseum.org/donate.



Jill Cornell came from New York with her husband, Jim, for the Pilgrimage. Her mother's Takahashi family was in Topaz.

Announcing \$200,000 Challenge Match



By now it is common knowledge that for more than 40 years, Jane Beckwith talked with Japanese Americans who were held in Topaz in order to preserve the history of the Topaz War Relocation Center. Her vision transformed a grassroots preservation effort into the nationally recognized Topaz Museum, where visitors are encouraged to confront this difficult chapter of American history with honesty, empathy, and a willingness to learn.

The Jane Beckwith Education Fund honors that legacy by supporting educational

programs, school resources, public dialogue, and community engagement that encourage historical understanding and civic learning.

Your gift helps ensure the experiences of the people of Japanese ancestry incarcerated during World War II continue to educate future generations—and remind us why these injustices must never be repeated.

Now, every gift can go twice as far. An anonymous donor has pledged to match all contributions to the Jane Beckwith Education Fund, dollar for dollar, up to \$200,000.

Help us meet this challenge and double your impact by making a gift today at topazmuseum.org/donate.

Topaz Museum joins National advocacy efforts in Washington, DC

The Topaz Museum is a member of the Japanese American Confinement Sites Consortium (JACSC), a national network dedicated to preserving American concentration camp sites, artifacts, and the stories of Japanese American incarceration during World War II. Together, members work to protect these places and ensure future generations understand this history.

In April, consortium members gathered in Washington, DC, to advocate for continued federal support of the National Park Service's Japanese American Confinement Sites grant program. Since its creation, the program has awarded more than \$80 million to over 300 preservation and education projects in 24 states, including several that have helped the Topaz Museum preserve its collections and share the history of Topaz with visitors.

Representing the museum, Dean Hirabayashi met with members of Congress, congressional staff, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Department of the Interior to emphasize the importance of preserving these nationally significant sites and the stories they hold.

The meetings were encouraging, and shortly afterward the 2026 grant application process was approved. While continued funding is never guaranteed, advocacy remains essential. By working together through JACSC, organizations like the Topaz Museum help ensure these places—and the lessons they teach about civil liberties, democracy, and the consequences of prejudice—are not forgotten.

Friends of Topaz Museum update

"Topaz Stories: Echoes in the Present" was at the Monterey JACL on March 28. About 60 people were present to hear Topaz stories read by Norm Hayashi, Kimi Hill, Naomi Kubota Lee, Ruth Sasaki, and Kyoko Nozaki, who flew in from Kyoto.



The *Topaz Stories* project under the capable leadership of Ruth Sasaki has preserved family lore and made the history accessible online.

The video of the event is posted on the Monterey JACL's Facebook page: Topaz Stories: Echoes in the Present at Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) in Monterey, CA

The Topaz Toddlers Art Project has been on display at the Berkeley Cen-

tral Library throughout July, with a reception and presentation on July 25.

This is an exhibit of the art, stories, and history of the young preschoolers incarcerated at Topaz, headed by Dana Shew. There is a search ongoing for more Topaz toddlers. You can read about this project and view the exhibit online at www.topaztoddlers.com.

Pilgrimage Moments



Kimi Kodani Hill talks with Karen Tei Yamashita. Karen's new book *Questions 27 & 28* is now in its second printing.



Margo Holman and Patricia Schena, both docents for the Topaz Museum, renewed their friendships with Dana Shew and Joy Iwasa, co-chair of the Pilgrimage.



The Buddhist Temple's gymnasium held the pilgrims for lunch and various programs.



Bonbu Stories, an Asian American arts collaborative, uses music to tell stories and build connections. *Bonbu Stories* believes in the power and value of vulnerability, authenticity, and interconnectedness.



The Constitution Room in the Topaz Museum encourages visitors to contemplate the civil rights violations caused by Executive Order 9066, "wartime hysteria, racial prejudice, and a failure of political leadership."



Russel Baba and Jeanne Mercer have performed as the *Shasta Taiko* drummers in venues all over the country. This was the first time Russel visited Topaz where his father's family lived. Tsune Baba was a community leader. The family left Topaz for Ann Arbor in 1944.



Visitors to the museum can see artwork from Topaz. This wall features four pieces by Chiura Obata, the founder of the Art School. The museum holds about 160 paintings and photos from Topaz.



Dennis Sato wears a replica of a baseball jersey artifact on display at the Topaz Museum. He was a child when he was in Topaz.



Rev. Duncan Ryūken Williams of the Irei Project led the closing ceremony at the site, inviting the participants to remember all the people who were in Topaz.

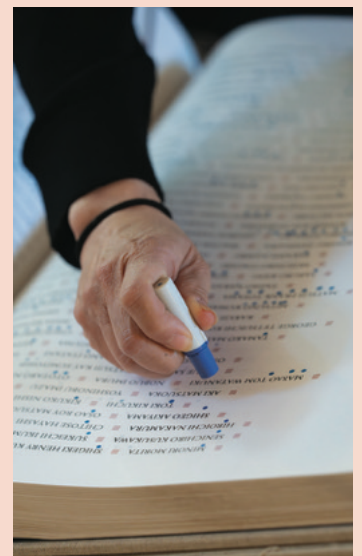
Stamping Ceremonies in Salt Lake City and Delta Ireichō at Topaz

The Topaz Pilgrimage was honored to welcome Rev. Duncan Ryūken Williams and the Irei Project. The *Ireichō*, *The Book of Names*, is the first comprehensive record of more than 125,000 people of Japanese ancestry incarcerated in America's World War II camps. During a Thursday evening program at the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple, Rev. Williams shared the vision and research behind this remarkable memorial.

Over the course of the pilgrimage, 293 survivors, descendants, and supporters stamped 835 names in the *Ireichō*.

Ceremonies took place in Salt Lake City and concluded in Delta, where participants gathered in the museum's historic recreation building, an original structure from the Topaz incarceration site, for a moving and deeply personal act of remembrance.

The opportunity to participate in the *Ireichō* was one of the most meaningful moments of the weekend. We are deeply grateful to Rev. Duncan Ryūken Williams, Karen Kano, the Irei Project, the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple, and the many volunteers whose partnership made these ceremonies possible.



The Ireicho – Book of Names project made a stop at the Pilgrimage so that people in Utah could stamp their family members names with a Japanese hanko.

Tani family reflections on the 2026 Topaz Pilgrimage

Our Tani family was honored to participate in the 2026 Topaz Pilgrimage, with 17 members of the Henry and Rose Tani family attending. The group included Henry and Rose's four living children (Dick, Steve, Christine, and Dan), along with five grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, spouses, and first cousin Beth Gibson, daughter of Yas and Lily Abiko (Henry Tani's sister). While some of us had visited the Topaz Museum and incarceration site before, experiencing the pilgrimage together as a family made it especially meaningful.

We were deeply impressed by the program organized by the Topaz Museum and Pilgrimage Committee and by the warm hospitality of the volunteers at the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple.

The thoughtful programming offered valuable insights into the history of the Japanese American community in Salt Lake City and at Topaz while creating meaningful opportunities for reflection and connection with other families. Learning about the history of Japantown, meeting Jane Beckwith, and hearing how the Topaz Museum grew from the efforts of her high school journalism students to a viable non-profit organization gave us an even greater appreciation for the decades of dedication that have preserved this important history.

Retracing the route incarcerated travelers traveled from Salt Lake City to Delta in 1942 made the journey especially moving. Learning about James Wakasa and the ongoing efforts to preserve his story added even greater meaning to our visit.

Standing where our parents were incarcerated, Block 36-3-F, was a poignant experience. We are especially grateful to



Children and grandchildren of Rose and Henry Tani gathered for the Pilgrimage, standing where they lived until the couple and son left Topaz for St. Louis.

Jane for personally showing us the location. Although the site is now desert, seeing the mountains just as our parents saw them more than 80 years ago invited us to reflect on what they may have been thinking and feeling.

Reverend Duncan Ryuken Williams left a lasting impression through the Ireichō Book of Names and the beautiful closing ceremony. Together with the cultural performances throughout the pilgrimage, the experience honored both the hardship of incarceration and the resilience of the Topaz community.

We are sincerely grateful to the Pilgrimage Committee, the Salt Lake Buddhist Temple, and the many Topaz Museum volunteers whose dedication made this experience possible. The pilgrimage strengthened our family's connection to this history and helped ensure these stories will be carried forward for future generations.



Dan Tani visits Topaz

Retired astronaut, Dan Tani, whose brother and parents were in Topaz, was a special guest at the Pilgrimage and received recognition from a local company, Materion, that operates a beryllium mine near Delta.

Their products are mainstays in aerospace, defense, and space programs. Jody Smith, representing Materion, gave a presentation and welcomed Dan to the microphone.

Tani's story traces his path from Chicago to a career in engineering, leading to his work on the International Space Station between 2001 and 2008. He spent four months living in orbit. During his three missions, he completed six spacewalks.



Lisa Eccles of the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation talks with Elaine Werner, Sahomi Tachibana's daughter, at her exhibit in the new Museum of Utah. The exhibit will remain for two years and then the artifacts will be returned to the Topaz Museum.



Sahomi Tachibana's daughter gave the Topaz Museum unusual artifacts she used in dance performances at Topaz. Perhaps the most unusual is a mask made from a sugar beet.

Museum of Utah now open in Salt Lake City

Utah's first dedicated state history museum is now welcoming visitors on the Utah Capitol grounds in Salt Lake City. The new Museum of Utah explores the stories, people, and events that have shaped the state, with exhibits that highlight Utah's complex history. Two of the exhibits feature history from Topaz.

The Topaz Museum is proud to have contributed to exhibits featured in the

new museum. One highlights artifacts from the collection of the Utah Historical Society, while the second draws from objects on loan from the Topaz Museum, telling the story of Sahomi Tachibana, a traditional dancer who transferred to Topaz from Tule Lake in 1943.

Sahomi, her stage name, was known by friends and family as Doris Abey. She was a teenager when she put on

performances and taught students to dance at Topaz.

Her daughter has donated significant artifacts her mother used throughout her career as a dancer in New York and Portland.

The exhibit at the Museum of Utah will remain on view for the next two years before the artifacts return to the Topaz Museum and become part of our gallery.



Sewing machine and ironing board are home at the museum

We all would like to have met Gary Takahashi's grandmother. Not just because she brought a sewing machine to Topaz, but because she made her own ironing board while she was there. It was just her size, 31" high. Gary's sister, JoAnn Takahashi Jameson, donated that artifact to the Topaz Museum in March 2022.

The sewing machine made a few of our docents who are quilters wish they could take it for a test drive. It's a Singer Featherweight, which she bought at the Treasure Island Fair.

Bay Area Topaz Reunion to occur in November

The long-awaited Topaz Reunion will be held Sunday, November 8, in the San Francisco Bay Area. Details are still being finalized, but we are tentatively planning a luncheon.

To receive updates as plans are finalized, email TopazUtah@gmail.com. The reunion will also provide an opportunity for the Topaz Museum Board of Trustees to introduce new Executive Director Meg Hutchins and thank Jane Beckwith for her years of dedication to the museum.



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83 years later Tad returns to Topaz

Tad Hideshima was eleven years old when he and his family were uprooted from their home and moved to Topaz in 1942. Now he is 94, and while his legs are worn a bit, his memories are clear and sharp.

Ask him what he and his pals did when they climbed the water tower and you will be surprised by the details. He lived on Block 13-1-E and remembers helping make an ice-skating rink and buying skates from a catalog. He and his friends could jump over barrels placed on the ice.

The family of five left Topaz on the last day it was open, Oct. 31, 1945, landing in Orem, Utah. He said they had no property in California and chose to stay in Utah. When he visited the museum and site, his two daughters and grandchildren and great grandchildren came with him.



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

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

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