



Sept. 7, 2021

Dear Topaz Museum Board President Jane Beckwith and Board Members Lance Atkinson, Scott Bassett, Lorelei Draper, Rick Okabe, Hisashi Bill Sugaya, and Teresa Thompson:

The U.S. Department of the Interior has designated the Topaz Relocation Center (“Topaz”) as a National Historic Landmark (NHL), the nation’s highest and most coveted historic status. Topaz is one of the most important historic places in Utah and the United States. It is of international historic significance. More importantly, Topaz is hallowed ground for Survivors, Descendants, and the Japanese American community.

At Topaz, the Wakasa Monument and its memorial site were created in 1943 by an Issei landscape team. The Monument was built as an act of defiance, memorializing the murder of James Hatsuaki Wakasa by a military sentry. When U.S. government officials ordered that it be destroyed, inmate builders buried it, leaving a small part of it showing.

In September, 2020, using a copy of a map drawn in 1943, two archaeologists discovered the buried monument, perhaps the most significant archaeological find in the Japanese American concentration camp sites since the end of WWII.

The following month, in October, 2020, a 14-member committee was established, including the Topaz Museum Director, two board members, archaeologists, four National Park Service representatives, a historian and Japanese American community members. They met to discuss the care and handling of this historic discovery.

The committee members (except for the museum directors) were therefore stunned that the Topaz Museum Board unearthed the Monument on July 27, 2021 in a crude and unprofessional procedure and without notification to or consultation with the broader Japanese American community of Survivors and Descendants.

The Wakasa Monument and the memorial landscape were disturbed by the Museum in violation of basic standards of archaeological practice. The reckless manner in which the Monument and memorial site were treated is a violation of the Topaz Museum’s own mission statement: “To preserve the Topaz site and its World War II history.”

The Museum ignored three separate offers of grant assistance that would have enabled a proper historic and cultural resource study of the memorial site. Inexplicably, the Museum decided to use funds from a grant for trash removal to carry out the artifact’s unearthing.

The Japanese American Citizen League's largest district, representing 31 chapters in Northern California, Western Nevada, and the Pacific, wrote to the Topaz Museum Board on Aug. 5, 2021:

"The preemptive removal of this memorial stone denied our community a ceremony of blessing, remembrance and reflection, a ritual that is very much a part of Japanese American culture. Robbed of this ritual, we are left feeling that this sacred memorial site has been irreparably desecrated.

"We find it troubling that the Wakasa Monument was unearthed and removed using the services of a contractor hired to clear trash from Block 42. An archaeologist was not present."

In a considered response to the Topaz Museum's mistreatment of the Wakasa Monument and its memorial site, the Wakasa Memorial Committee was formed by Topaz Survivors, Descendants, members of the Japanese American community and allies. Our mission is to protect the Topaz memorial site, the monument, and NHL.

With this writing, the Wakasa Memorial Committee presents certain measures to the Topaz Museum Board to remedy the problems that the Museum's actions have given rise to:

1. Recognition of the Wakasa Memorial Committee and its Advisory Council.

That the Topaz Museum formally recognize the Wakasa Memorial Committee and its Advisory Council and establish a mutually acceptable system of regular communication with the Wakasa Memorial Committee in a Memorandum of Agreement.

2. Apology for Desecration of the Memorial Site.

That the Museum issue a public apology for its actions on July 27, 2021. The Museum has apologized for excluding Japanese Americans from the historic unearthing of the monument but has not acknowledged that the Museum's rash and unprofessional removal of the Wakasa Monument has disturbed the memorial site and ignored basic standards and protocols established for the protection of nationally important historical and cultural artifacts.

3. Archaeological Assessment and Release of Video and Photography.

That an independent and expert assessment of the memorial site and the Wakasa Monument shall be undertaken and all unedited video, photos and other recordings of the July 27, 2021 excavation be released to the Wakasa Memorial Committee in order to achieve full transparency about the events on that date.

4. Partnership and Consultation with the Wakasa Memorial Committee.

That the Museum collaborate with the Wakasa Memorial Committee to preserve, curate, and interpret the monument and NHL site in accordance with wishes of Survivors, Descendants, and Japanese American stakeholders and in accordance with best professional practices. Furthermore, that the Topaz Museum agree to take no

further action that may in any way impact the Wakasa Monument or its memorial site without first consulting the Wakasa Memorial Committee and securing prior written agreement that the action be taken. The Topaz Museum and Wakasa Memorial Committee will jointly agree on the final plan and appropriate stewardship for the memorial site, monument and archaeological materials.

5. Memorial Ceremony at the Topaz site.

That the Topaz Museum and Wakasa Memorial Committee work collaboratively to plan a community-involved Memorial Ceremony for April 11, 2023, the 80th anniversary of the Wakasa homicide and the construction of the Wakasa Monument and its forced erasure.

6. Mediation between Topaz Museum and Wakasa Memorial Committee.

If either party deems it necessary, that the Topaz Museum and Wakasa Memorial Committee agree to use a professional mediator to work towards resolving the issues raised in this letter.

By this letter, the Wakasa Memorial Committee is offering the Topaz Museum a collaborative and transparent path forward to repair the adverse consequences of the Museum's actions. The Wakasa Memorial Committee seeks to ensure that Survivors, Descendants, and Japanese Americans have an acknowledged role as full partners in the preservation, curation, and interpretation of the material, cultural and textual history of Topaz as it is presented at the Topaz Museum and throughout its historic landscape.

The Wakasa Memorial Committee also wishes to ensure that our family and community history is interpreted and treated with respect and transparency, drawing on best practices, expert advice, community dialogue, and principles of inclusivity.

We are sending this letter to others in the public and private, non-profit preservation field and to the community at large. We are alarmed by the Museum's shocking and unilateral acts which damaged an extraordinary civil rights monument that embodies Japanese American memory and resistance to government violence.

The Wakasa Memorial Committee looks forward to moving ahead together with the Topaz Museum.

Sincerely,

Wakasa Memorial Committee

WakasaMemorial@gmail.com

<https://wakasamemorial.org>

Kiyoshi Ina, Topaz Survivor

Toru Saito, Topaz Survivor

Hiroshi Shimizu, Topaz, Tule Lake, Crystal City Survivor; father, Iwao Shimizu, member of 1943 Wakasa Committee

Akemi Yamane, Topaz Survivor; born at Topaz the day after Wakasa was killed
Laura Iiyama, Topaz Descendant
Patti Iiyama, Topaz Descendant
Claudia Katayanagi, Topaz Descendant
Kimiko Marr, Topaz Descendant
Mari Matsumoto, Topaz and Poston Descendant
Martha Nakagawa, Topaz, Tule Lake and Leupp Descendant
Diana Emiko Tsuchida, Topaz Descendant
Nancy Ukai, Topaz Descendant
Bif Brigman, historian, Minidoka Pilgrimage former co-chair
Karen Kiyoo Lowhurst, Heart Mountain Descendant
Chizu Omori, Poston Survivor
Emiko Omori, Poston Survivor
John Ota, Descendant of so-called "voluntary evacuees"
Barbara Takei, Tule Lake Descendant
Paul Tomita, Minidoka Survivor

Advisory Council (partial)

Tetsuden Kashima, Topaz Survivor, Professor Emeritus, American Ethnic
Studies Department and Sociology, University of Washington
Masako Takahashi, Topaz Survivor, Takahashi Family Foundation
Satsuki Ina, Topaz Descendant; Tule Lake, Crystal City Survivor
Roger Daniels, Charles Phelps Taft Professor Emeritus of History, University of
Cincinnati
Art Hansen, Professor Emeritus History, Asian American Studies,
California State University, Fullerton
Tom Ikeda, Minidoka Descendant, Densho Founding Executive Director
Roger Shimomura, Minidoka Survivor, Distinguished Professor Emeritus
Renee Tajima-Peña, Heart Mountain, Tule Lake, Gila River Descendant, UCLA
Professor of Asian American Studies, filmmaker
Karen Umemoto, Manzanar Descendant, UCLA Professor of Asian American Studies
and Urban Planning
Duncan Ryūken Williams, Buddhist priest and Professor of Religion/American Studies
& Ethnicity, University of Southern California

CC:

Mike Reynolds, Regional Director, Interior Regions 6,7,8, National Park Service
Lisa P. Davidson, Acting Program Manager, National Historic Landmarks Program,
National Park Service
Justin Henderson, Heritage Partnerships Program, Intermountain Region, NPS
Robert Nieweg, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Michelle Magalong, Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation
Jennifer Ortiz, Director, Utah Division of State History
Chris Merritt, Utah State Historic Preservation Office
Carol Kawase, district governor NCWNP, JACL
David Inoue, Executive Director, JACL
Jani Iwamoto, Utah state senator, 4th District