

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

CENTRAL UTAH RELOCATION CENTER SITE (TOPAZ)

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz) Site

Other Name/Site Number: Topaz/42MD1793

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 10500 West 4500 North

Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Delta

Vicinity: X

State: UT

County: Millard

Code: 027

Zip Code: 84624

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: ___

Public-State: ___

Public-Federal: X

Category of Property

Building(s): ___

District: ___

Site: X

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

0

1

1

0

2

Noncontributing

2 buildings

0 sites

1 structures

3 objects

6 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: Japanese Americans in World War II Theme Study

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ Entered in the National Register
- ___ Determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ Removed from the National Register
- ___ Other (explain):

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DEFENSE Sub: Military Facility/Relocation Center

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: Monument/Marker
DOMESTIC Sub: Single dwelling
VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: No Style

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Concrete, Wood

Walls:

Roof:

Other: Stone, Concrete, Wood

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Introduction

The site of the Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz) is nationally significant as the location of one of the ten relocation camps created for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. After President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, the U.S. military forcibly removed more than 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast and detained them in a system of assembly and relocation centers. Carried out in the months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, these actions reflected wartime hysteria, racist sentiment, and the military's inability to gauge the loyalty of Japanese Americans. Topaz is significant under Criterion 1 for its association with U.S. military history (World War II on the Home Front), politics and government (the relocation decision), U.S. constitutional law (the protection of civil liberties during wartime), ethnic heritage (Japanese American history), and social history (history of minorities in the U.S.; history of civil rights). The period of significance, 1942-1946, spans the wartime use of the site. Three factors distinguish Topaz from other relocation centers. First, two internees, Fred C. Korematsu and Mitsuye Endo, were involved in landmark court cases that challenged the exclusion and relocation of Japanese Americans on constitutional grounds. Second, Topaz exemplifies the efforts of Japanese Americans and WRA authorities to make the best of a difficult and undesirable situation, resulting in what historian Sandra C. Taylor has termed a state of "uneasy coexistence." Third, Topaz exemplifies Japanese Americans' cultural response to relocation. Internees engaged in a variety of artistic endeavors in order to pass the time and ameliorate the oppressive conditions. Musicians, writers, landscape architects, and other artists created beauty and found outlets for expression under the most difficult of circumstances, thereby enriching the life of all internees and creating a lasting record of the Japanese-American experience at Topaz.

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance

Someone named it
Topaz . . .
This land
Where neither grass
Nor trees
Nor wild flowers grow.
-- Yukari¹

Current Appearance

The site of the Central Utah Relocation Center, or "Topaz," as it was commonly known, is located in the Pahvant Valley, which forms part of the Sevier Desert in west-central Utah. It is located approximately 140 miles southwest of Salt Lake City and about sixteen miles northwest of the town of Delta in Millard County (see Figure 1). Topaz Mountain, the center's namesake, lies nine miles to the northwest. None of the buildings that originally existed in the built-up portion of the center are extant. The road network, footpaths, evacuee landscaping, a loading structure, a trash dump, remnants of the sewer system, ditches, barbed wire boundary fence, and concrete building foundations have survived. These resources provide a clear sense of the original extent and its layout (see Sketch Map).

Native vegetation has re-established itself throughout the site (Photographs 1 and 2). Greasewood is the most common plant species. The topography is completely flat. The site lies in what was once the bed of Lake Bonneville and is home to jackrabbits, coyotes, snakes, and scorpions. The June 1943 issue of *Trek*, the

¹ Yukari is the pen name of Iku Umegaki Uchida. This *tanka* (thirty-one syllable Japanese poem) was translated by her daughter Yoshiko Uchida in her book *Desert Exile* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), 121.

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relocation center's literary magazine, concluded that "the general appearance is that of a vast wasteland."² In his book *The Price of Prejudice*, historian Leonard Arrington painted a vivid picture of the camp's setting:

Surrounded on all four sides by mountains, the barren valley in which it was located is 4,600 feet above sea level. The climate ranges from a boiling 106 degrees in summer to a frigid 30 degrees below zero in winter. The rainfall averages between 7 and 8 inches per year. One characteristic of the area is the wind, which keeps up a seldom interrupted whirl of dust. Another is the nonabsorbent soil, which, after a rain, is a gummy muck, ideal as a breeding ground for mosquitoes.³

The nominated property encompasses a total of 728.4 acres lying within Sections 19, 20, and 30 of Township 16 South, Range 8 West, Salt Lake Meridian. Section 20 contains 614 of the original 640 acres of the developed area of the Central Utah (Topaz) Relocation Center. To the west are 114.4 acres that encompass areas associated with the camp's trash dump and sewage system septic field. The Topaz Museum owns 614 acres of the historically built-up portion of the camp in Section 20. The Japanese American Citizens League (the Mount Olympus, Salt Lake City, and Wasatch Front North chapters) owns one acre of the site in the northwest part of Section 20. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers 114.4 acres of the site west of the built-up portion of the camp in Sections 19 and 30, which contained the original septic field for the sewage system.

Artifacts associated with the wartime use of the camp can be found throughout the property. Recent archaeological surveys and fieldwork performed for this nomination have confirmed the extent, richness, and variety of cultural resources present.

Fieldwork and photography undertaken for this nomination documented representative and significant features of the site. Types of extant features are discussed below; photograph numbers refer to descriptions in the photographic log at the end of this section.⁴

Site Features

Roads

The original graded gravel surface roadways of the camp are clearly visible and maintain their historic alignments. All are drivable except for a few segments that are overgrown with greasewood or have been damaged by minor washouts. The road system is easily discernable on aerial photographs of the site and displays the grid pattern characteristic of a relocation camp (see Figure 20). The dark gray gravel used to surface the roads during World War II serves to differentiate them from the lighter alkaline soil of the site (Photograph 3). Roads delineate each of the forty-two regular blocks in the evacuee housing area, as well as the functional areas in the northern section of Topaz. County roads, also important during the life of the camp, border each side of Section 20.

Foundations

Virtually all of the concrete foundations of the Topaz buildings are still present. When the wooden buildings were demolished or sold after World War II, the frame superstructures were unbolted, leaving the underlying concrete foundations in place. The existing foundations are visible on recent aerial photographs of the site and the different

² Leonard J. Arrington, *The Price of Prejudice; The Japanese-American Relocation Center in Utah During WWII* (Delta, UT: Topaz Museum, 1997), 4; *Topaz Times*, September 17, 1942, 2; Taylor, *Japanese American Internment at Topaz* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 90; "Topaz," *Trek*, June 1943, 17.

³ Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 22.

⁴ Representative features photographed for the nomination were selected based on the survey work performed by SWCA and on suggestions provided by Jane Beckwith, president of the Topaz Museum. Similar examples of foundations, paths, roads, and other landscape features are found throughout the site.

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foundation types are readily identifiable (see Figure 20). At ground level, it is somewhat more difficult to obtain an overview of the layout of foundations due to the tall vegetation that covers much of the acreage and the extremely flat topography.

Evacuee barracks, recreation halls, and most administrative buildings at Topaz did not have concrete foundations, but their locations are still evidenced at the site by a general absence of vegetation within the original building footprint. In some cases, the wood posts and pads on which barracks rested are still present (Photograph 4). The extant gravel path system within blocks (discussed below) also identifies building locations (Photograph 5). In addition to their central location, dining halls in the evacuee housing areas are recognized by their solid, rectangular slab foundations (Photograph 6), while laundry/latrine foundations can be located by their H-shaped, solid slab construction (Photograph 7).

The warehouse area in the northwestern part of the site is readily identifiable by its twenty-one large concrete slabs (Photograph 8). The locations of guard towers on the periphery of Section 20 are evidenced by the groups of four concrete pylons that were used as piers for the towers' legs (Photograph 9). A low, stone wall southwest of the main entrance to the camp helps mark the location of the main U-shaped administration building (223, 224 and 223-A) (Photograph 10). The concrete slab foundation of the fire station (227) is located a short distance south of the main administration building (Photograph 11).

Foundations of special building types also remain at the site. Buildings in the hospital area are distinguished by their raised concrete slab foundations offset along a central axis (Photograph 12). The remains of the boiler house (301) north of the hospital, are one of the most readily visible features at the camp. The projecting concrete walls of the coal bunker extend well above the greasewood (Photograph 13), while the slab foundation of the plant is adjacent to the east. The rectangular concrete slab foundation of the tofu factory (318) is clearly discernible east of the laundry foundation (Photograph 14). The sturdy concrete sewage pumping structure is a notable feature along the west side of Greasewood Way (Photograph 15). It pumped sewage through an underground conduit to the septic tank field to the west.

Pedestrian Paths

The system of gravel paths within blocks is still clearly evident (Photograph 16). The soil of the camp, which produced fine dust in dry weather and slippery mud in wet periods, necessitated the construction of surfaced walks. The paths connected barracks to the mess hall, recreation building, and bath/latrine building within each block. Short paths led to the doorways of each barracks. The gravel pedestrian paths extended to the edges of each block and connected to adjacent roads to facilitate movement between blocks. In a number of locations the paths have stone borders which extend for some distances (Photograph 17). In some places, "paver" stones have been used to create flat, surfaced areas adjoining the gravel paths (Photograph 18).

Gardens and Other Landscaping

In addition to the features such as pedestrian paths, evacuee-created landscaping within the residential blocks reflected a wide variety of design elements. Many features occupied areas between the barracks and the gravel pedestrian paths. Stones and decorative tree forms were brought to the camp and used to construct rock and flower gardens. Examples of ponds, fabricated with stones and concrete, still exist (Photographs 19 and 20). In Block 36 there is an evacuee garden plot surrounded with the remnants of a low wood picket fence (Photograph 21). In addition to landscaping in the housing blocks, decorative features were also installed around recreation halls, the civic center, other community buildings, and the administration area. The Buddhist Church site features a gravel path bordered by stones and a rock garden area with a number of large stones (Photograph 22).

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Other Features

A large area of hot and cold plant beds was located east of the tofu plant in Section 20, and many remnants of the plant frames, which were made out of wood ammunition boxes, are still present (Photograph 23). The dug out interior and bermed walls of the root cellar remain in the area south of the warehouses. One unusual feature, a low mound of smooth concrete dated October 8, 1942, and bearing the names of several nine- to eleven-year old boys living in the camp, is located in the south central area near the guard tower at that location (Photograph 24).⁵

Camp Trash Dump

The camp trash dump was located in the northeastern portion of Section 19 west of the camp proper (Photograph 25). The area is characterized by trash scatters and long mounds of soil which contain buried trash. Types of trash present include U.S. Quartermaster Corps crockery, Japanese ceramics, construction debris (wood, paint cans, tar paper), and various other domestic trash (cans, tins, glass bottles). A 2005 archaeological survey found that "the dump has been vandalized to a small extent, but large portions remain intact with subsurface deposits." The survey concluded that "further work in this area could provide a better understanding of the daily lives of the evacuees."⁶

Sewage Septic Field

Also west of the camp in Section 19 is the septic field for the sewage system (Photograph 26). Rectangular excavations denote the former locations of six large redwood septic tanks (Photograph 27); the tanks themselves were salvaged. A short effluent drainage ditch extends west from the northern end of the septic tank field, while another extends for more than a mile to the southwest.

Contributing/Noncontributing Status and Resource Count***Contributing Resources***

The nominated property contains two contributing resources (See Table 1). The entire developed area of the center included within the boundary of the nominated property has been classified as a contributing site.⁷ The roads, barbed wire perimeter fencing, concrete foundations, landscaping, paths, trash dump and trash scatters, sewer system, and other components discussed above, are considered to be part of the site and are not counted separately in the list of contributing resources. The site possesses a great richness and variety of cultural remains reflecting the three-year occupancy and high population density of the camp.

The property also includes a contributing structure, an earth and timber loading platform (Photograph 28) in the western portion of the camp. This is the only standing structure that survives from the World War II era.

Noncontributing Resources

The nominated property contains three noncontributing resources. All are small in scale and do not have a strong presence. The noncontributing resources are discussed below.

⁵ Two of the boys whose names are inscribed in the concrete were contacted, but they could not remember this marker or its creation. Tommy Nihei noted that most of the boys were from Block 9 and speculated that they had inscribed wet concrete with their names, the date, and "Topaz" "just for the heck of it." Tommy Nihei, telephone interview by author (Thomas), November 30, 2005; Ben Yamanaka, telephone interview with author (Thomas), November 29, 2005.

⁶ Joelle McCarthy, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Topaz Waste Disposal Survey, IMACS survey form, 42MD1793, October 17, 2005.

⁷ The exact number and location of features has not been determined, as a complete survey of the site has not been undertaken.

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A flourspar processing structure built of earth, concrete, and timber is located at the northeast corner of the property. It was built as part of a flourspar mining operation in the 1950s. The structure is classified as noncontributing since it was erected after the period of significance for the camp.

A modern house and an associated shed are located in the southeast portion of the property on land currently owned by the Topaz Museum. The house is a low, one-story, gable roof frame building (Photograph 30) that was moved to the site in 1993. The shed is a small gable roof frame building; it was erected sometime after 1993. These resources are classified as noncontributing since they were erected after the period of significance.⁸

Two memorials and a graveled parking area are located west of the main gate of the camp. Each monument has a concrete slab foundation surmounted by a low concrete dais with an angled top to which metal interpretive panels have been affixed. The monuments and the metal flagpole were installed between 2002 and 2005, after the period of significance for the camp. Therefore, they have been classified as noncontributing resources.

Table 1
EXTANT RESOURCES AT THE CENTRAL UTAH RELOCATION CENTER

| Historic Name of Resource | Resource Type | Year Built | Contributing Status |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Central Utah Relocation Center Site | Site | 1942 | Contributing |
| Coal Loading Structure | Structure | 1942 | Contributing |
| Flourspar processing structure | Structure | 1950s | Noncontributing |
| Revel property house | Building | 1993 | Noncontributing |
| Revel property shed | Building | Post-1993 | Noncontributing |
| Monument | Object | ca. 2002 | Noncontributing |
| Monument | Object | ca. 2002 | Noncontributing |
| Flagpole | Object | ca. 2002 | Noncontributing |

Since the mid-1990s, the Topaz Museum has acquired approximately 614 acres of the total 640 acres of Section 20. According to Jane Beckwith, the museum president, the goal of the organization is to acquire the remaining acreage and remove all non-historic buildings from the site.

Historical Description

In its entirety, the Central Utah Relocation Center originally covered approximately 19,000 acres.⁹ It included extensive irrigated lands that were acquired with the intention of making the camp largely self-sufficient in terms of food supply. The general layout of the center was similar to other relocation camps.¹⁰ A built-up area,

⁸ The 1971 U.S.G.S. "Smelter Knolls East, Utah," quadrangle map shows no buildings within Section 20, while an ortho-photo quad for 1993 appears to show the Revel property house but not the shed.

⁹ The War Department in *Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast*, reports "approximately 19,000 acres." Historian Sandra C. Taylor cites both 19,000 and 20,000 acres. In the WRA's *Welcome to Topaz*, a figure of 17,483.51 acres is given. Sandra C. Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert: Japanese American Internment at Topaz* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 108-09 and 160; U.S. War Department, Headquarters Western Defense Command and the Fourth Army, Office of the Commanding General, Presidio of San Francisco, *Final Report: Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 250 (hereafter cited as U.S. War Department, *Japanese Evacuation*); U.S. War Relocation Authority, Central Utah Relocation Project, *Welcome to Topaz* (Topaz, UT: U.S. War Relocation Authority, ca. 1943), 3.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, the principal sources for the following description of the camp were: U.S. War Relocation Authority, "W.R.A. Construction Map," Topaz War Relocation Project, Topaz, Utah, June 6, 1945; U.S. War Assets Administration, "Report of Appraiser of Surplus Property, War Relocation Authority, Topaz Project, Topaz, Utah," December 20, 1946, Record Group 210, Box 7; and "Central Utah Relocation Center, Topaz, Utah, Fixed Assets Inventory," October 15, 1945, Record Group 210, Box 16, in the files of

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sometimes referred to as “the city,” was located in Section 20 (the west central portion of the overall property). It included approximately 664 buildings and structures (exclusive of small sheds and outbuildings) as well as roads, pedestrian paths, and utility systems (water, sewer, telephone, and electrical) (see Figure 2). Some portions of the site along the western, eastern, and southern edges were not intensively developed.¹¹ Access to this area was thorough the main entrance gate on 10500 West 4500 North.

The developed area was laid out in a grid of streets forming blocks in a north-south oriented rectangle. Principal east-west streets were named for precious and semi-precious stones. Hence, the relocation center included (from north to south) Alexandria, Malachite, Tourmaline, Topaz, Jasper, Agate, Opal, and Cinnabar avenues.¹² The main north-south roads were named after “trees and shrubs growing in the City and its vicinity” and included (from west to east) Greasewood Way, Elm, Sage, Tamarisk, Juniper, Poplar, and Willow streets, and Cottonwood Way. The administrative, hospital, and support areas in the northern portion of the camp included three shorter east-west avenues (Crystal, Obsidian, and Zircon) and four north-south roads (Tule, Cactus, Ponderosa, and Lotus). Dust from the roads proved to be such a problem that they were surfaced with dark gray gravel obtained from deposits in the vicinity.¹³

Most of the facilities at Topaz were constructed in 1942. Buildings within the camp were of modified military construction. Most were simple, one-story buildings sheathed in one-inch lumber and clad with smooth coat black asphalt roll roofing with wood battens on twenty-four-inch centers. After the War Relocation Authority (WRA) assumed control of the camp, it undertook a building campaign that resulted in the construction of staff housing; additional administrative buildings; an auditorium, a shop, and a science building at the high school; service buildings in the garage area; nurses’ quarters in the hospital complex; and food production and storage buildings (including a tofu plant, a bean sprout shed, a root cellar, and a hot and cold frame area). Most of these buildings were erected in 1943-44. Some facilities were composed of dismantled former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) buildings transported to the site from other locations in Utah. In early 1943, for example, three CCC buildings at Black Rock were dismantled and brought to Topaz; in December 1943, authorities obtained twelve CCC buildings from Callao. The camp also had at least sixty-seven small buildings that served as sheds, storage, privies, and other uses. Many of these were prefabricated plywood Works Progress Administration (WPA) buildings.¹⁴

The camp’s Landscape and Gardening Section engaged in energetic efforts to lessen the effects of the harsh environment. Thousands of trees and shrubs were planted throughout the developed area of the camp. Land south of the hospital was planted in barley and sweet clover, and flower beds were placed between hospital buildings. Evacuees also engaged in extensive landscaping of barracks areas. A system of open irrigation ditches was constructed to bring water to the blocks within the camp. Among the “abnormal conditions” recognized by the camp’s landscapers were the poor drainage of the alkaline clay soil, freezing winters and scorching summers, and the difficulties of open ditch irrigation. Artist Chiura Obata assessed the landscape in the first part of 1943: “The

the Federal Archives and Records Administration, Lakewood, Colorado (hereafter cited as WRA, “Report of Appraiser” and “Fixed Assets Inventory”); and U.S. War Relocation Authority, “U.S.E.D. Construction: Buildings,” Topaz War Relocation Project, Topaz, Utah, June 4, 1945, Record Group 210, in the files of the National Archives, Washington, DC.

¹¹ Sandra C. Taylor states that “at its high point there was a total of 408 buildings at Topaz.” This figure was found to be inaccurate when tabulations were made from camp maps and building lists. If one counts small sheds, the number grows to approximately 731. Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 93.

¹² Although the street names never became as popular with the residents as the block designations for providing direction, they are used in this nomination as a convenient way of locating building areas and describing the NHL boundary.

¹³ Some of the gravel came from the Oasis area, south of Delta. *Topaz Times*, November 12, 1942, 1, and WRA, “W.R.A. Construction Map.”

¹⁴ *Topaz Times*, January 13, 1943, 1; October 6, 1943, 2; December 2, 1943, 2.

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spring has come, but here in Topaz there is not even one green, growing plant. Everything is like it is drawn with a grey brushstroke.”¹⁵

Developed Area

During the historic period, there were six principal areas within the built-up section of camp: Evacuee Housing; Administrative Buildings and WRA Housing; Hospital Complex; Warehouse and Industrial; Military Police Complex; and Motor Pool and Lumber Yards. All of Section 20, except for the Military Police area, was surrounded by a four-foot high fence composed of four strands of barbed wire and four-inch cedar posts. The compound was ringed by seven guard towers spaced one-half mile apart. The functional sections within the built-up area are discussed below.

Evacuee Housing Area

The southern three-quarters of the grid, south of Malachite Avenue, comprised the housing area for evacuees. Separated from the administrative area by an open strip of land, this portion of the camp contained forty-two blocks; thirty-three were used for evacuee housing, while the remaining nine blocks were used for special purposes (see below). Evacuees began moving into the housing areas in September 1942.

Each residential block followed the same layout: two columns of six rectangular evacuee barracks along the eastern and western edges; a rectangular mess hall and an H-shaped combination laundry, bath, and latrine building in the center; and a rectangular recreation building at the end of one of the columns of barracks. Within a block, the barracks were numbered one through twelve, with six apartments within a barracks designated by letters, A through F. Blocks in the residential area were designated by a four-digit number; for example, Block 7 was designated as 1100. A typical apartment designation was 1103-B Willow Street, providing the illusion of a normal city address. Figure 3 illustrates the configuration of a typical Topaz block that was common to most relocation centers, while Figure 4 is a photograph of a representative barracks. Figures 5 through 8 constitute a panorama of photographs taken of the entire camp from the water tower at the eastern edge of Topaz.¹⁶

Buildings at Topaz and other relocation centers were modified theater of operations construction developed by the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) in consultation with the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command and the Office of the Chief of Engineers. Unmodified theater of operations facilities, designed for use by young, unmarried, male troops, were considered too primitive for the task at hand since they were generally unheated and had no floors. The modified design resulted in temporary buildings that were inexpensive, avoided the use of critical war materials, and could be assembled quickly. Despite such upgrades, newspaperman Bill Hosokawa concluded that the camps “provided only for the most Spartan type of living.”¹⁷

The creation of gravel paths between barracks and other buildings within the residential blocks began in January 1943. Locations for paths were staked by the Landscape Department, and gravel was trucked to the camp from deposits in the vicinity. The graveling project continued for several months in 1943 on a block-by-block basis. Stones were brought from the surrounding desert and mountains to create borders for a number of the paths. In addition to the paths, the evacuees engaged in considerable landscaping in the areas between barracks and paths. Rock gardens, concrete and stone pools, driftwood, barrel planters, flowers, shrubs, and areas “paved” with flat stones, were created. In 1976, Yasuo William Abiko, a block manager at Topaz, recalled: “We all built small

¹⁵ *Topaz Times*, December 3, 1942, 1; April 22, 1943, 3; May 6, 1943, 3.

¹⁶ The block layout used at Topaz was also used at the Granada, Heart Mountain, Jerome, and Rohwer relocation centers. Somewhat different arrangements were employed at the other five centers. *Topaz Times*, January 8, 1943, 1.

¹⁷ U.S. War Department, *Japanese Evacuation*, 264; Bill Hosokawa, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans* (New York: William Morrow, 1969), 343.

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Japanese gardens everywhere. The army-style camp was transformed into livable conditions during those four years (see Figure 8)¹⁸.

Evacuee Barracks/Apartments

The most numerous type of building constructed at Topaz was the evacuee barracks; 420 were built at the camp, and approximately 396 were used for residential purposes.¹⁹ Measuring 20' x 120', each gabled roof building was typically divided into six apartments.²⁰ Faced with large numbers of smaller families than anticipated, officials divided a number of barracks into smaller apartments. Each building had three vestibule entries on one of its longer sides, with each vestibule providing access to two apartments, and twenty-five six-light windows. The interior walls were lined with gypsum wall board. The floors were covered with tempered pressed board. The barracks did not have concrete foundations, as they did at some other relocation centers. Instead, they were supported by a series of wood post piers on wood pads. Wallboard was placed as skirting around foundations in an attempt to curtail air infiltration.

The interior furnishings supplied by the government for evacuee housing were meager: a single, bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling; a coal-fired stove; a partially-completed closet; and steel army cots, each with two blankets. It was left to the "family's ingenuity to build furniture and shelves from scrap lumber, arrange for the privacy of its members and make these bleak little boxes livable." Yoshiko Uchida described her first impression of the living quarters: "We found that our room contained nothing but four army cots with mattresses. The inner sheetrock walls and ceilings had not yet been installed, nor had the black potbellied stove that was left standing outside our door. Cracks were visible everywhere in the siding and around the windows, and although our friends had swept out our room for us before we arrived, the dust was already seeping into it again from all sides."²¹

Mess Halls

The mess hall and kitchen located between the columns of evacuee apartments in each block was 40' x 100' in size, with a shallow gambrel roof and a concrete slab floor. Each rectangular building could accommodate 250 persons seated at long wooden tables with benches. The buildings contained serving counters, coal-fired ranges, and hot water heaters.

Laundry and Latrine Buildings

The laundry and latrine building, also in the center of each block, was a roughly H-shaped structure on a concrete slab foundation, composed of two 20' x 100' legs and a 20' x 20' crosspiece. One side of the building served as the laundry and contained a 20' x 82' room with eighteen, two-compartment laundry sinks and space for ironing boards. The laundry side also contained an 18' x 20' office area, where information notices were posted and where the block manager could be contacted. The bath side of the building included separate men's and women's shower and toilet areas. The middle portion of the building had a connecting corridor and a 15' x 20' heater room with two 720-gallon, coal burning hot water heaters.

Recreation Buildings

Each block contained a 20' X 100' gable roof recreation building, located in the northeast or southeast corner of the block. The recreation buildings were similar in construction to the barracks and were built without concrete foundations. The buildings housed such activities as ping pong and table games, as well as reading facilities. The

¹⁸ Some gravel was obtained from a site five miles northwest of Topaz. *Topaz Times*, January 8, 1943, 1, and April 10, 1943, 1; Undated and unsourced newspaper clipping (Yasuo Abiko quote), in the Alice Kasai Manuscript Collection, Number 1091, Box 74, File Folder 4, University of Utah, Marriott Library, Special Collections, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁹ Another twenty-four barracks were used for classroom purposes in Blocks 8, 32, and 41.

²⁰ The six apartments included two that were 16' x 20', two sized 20' x 20', and two that measured 24' x 20'.

²¹ Hosokawa, *Nisei*, 342; Yoshiko Uchida, "Topaz, City of Dust," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Summer 1980): 234-243.

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recreation buildings were also used for various special purposes. By block, such uses in 1943 included: Blocks 1 and 2, open; Block 3, community education; Block 4, girls' clubroom; Block 5, sewing school; Block 6, *judo, goh, shogi*; Block 7, art school; Block 8, grade school gym, Buddhist Sunday School; Block 9, preschool; Block 10, recreation ward #1; Block 11, internal security, field office; Block 12, co-op store (dry goods); Block 13, preschool; Block 14, Catholic and Seventh Day Adventists churches; Block 16, public library; Block 19, canteen; Block 20, recreation ward #2; Block 22, Protestant church; Block 23, community welfare; Block 26, co-operative services (shoe and radio repairs, banking, cleaners, mail orders); Block 27, preschool and Sunday school; Block 28, Buddhist church; Block 29, crafts; Block 30, community welfare; Blocks 31 and 32, high school gym and movies during the evening; Block 33, inter-faith council and block managers' headquarters; Block 34, recreation ward #4; Block 35, sewing school; Block 36, recreation ward #3; Block 37, nursery school; Block 38, block recreation hall space; Block 39, Songfest; Block 40, Japanese library; Block 41, grade school gym and auditorium; and Block 42, Scout lodge.²²

Special Function Blocks

Nine blocks in the evacuee area served special functions and in some cases departed from the typical layout described above. In three blocks the standard evacuee housing buildings were used for classroom purposes. The eastern halves of two blocks were used for elementary schools: Block 8 was the location of the north elementary school known as Mountain View and Block 41 housed the south elementary school, known as Desert View. Early plans called for the construction of two elementary school buildings, one in Block 15 on the western edge of the housing area and one in Block 21 on the eastern edge of the housing area, but this did not take place. The two blocks remained largely undeveloped, although a bean sprout shed was built in the 1943-44 period in the southwest corner of Block 15.²³

All of Block 32 served as the junior and senior high school. Initial plans had anticipated construction of a large high school facility in the center of camp in parts of Blocks 17, 18, 24 and 25. The centerpiece of the school was to be a gymnasium/auditorium. Covered passageways were to connect the gym to nine wings containing classrooms, a library, and special purpose buildings. In February 1943 construction started on the gymnasium/auditorium (H-1),²⁴ the largest building ever erected at Topaz. The building was dedicated that December (see Figure 9) and described by the *Topaz Times*:

A seating area of 80' by 96', a stage of 40' by 20' size and dressing rooms on both sides of the stage comprise the auditorium facilities. Part of the seating area will also serve as a standard high school basketball court of 48' by 84' with spaces of 15' along both side-lines to accommodate spectators.²⁵

The gymnasium also included locker and shower rooms, equipment rooms, and three large indoor sports rooms behind the stage for such sports as volleyball and badminton. The sprawling high school plan was never realized. Only two other high school buildings were actually erected at Topaz: the science building (H-3) in the northwest corner of Block 24 and the shop building (H-2) in the northeast corner of Block 25.

Two religious buildings were also located in the central area of camp. The Buddhist church (Building 133) was situated near the southwest corner of Block 17 (see Figure 10). The Protestant church (Building 134) was located

²² Recreation hall uses changed over time. For example, the Buddhist and Protestant churches eventually obtained their own buildings in the center of the camp. *Topaz Times*, January 29, 1943, 1; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 18-19.

²³ Bean sprouts were raised as early as December 1942 in the Block 28 laundry building. *Topaz Times*, December 30, 1942, 1 and February 13, 1943, 3.

²⁴ In this section, numbers or letters and numbers in parentheses refer to the unique building identification assigned by the WRA.

²⁵ *Topaz Times*, February 20, 1943, 1.

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along the eastern edge of Block 18. Both of the churches, each measuring 20' x 120', were former CCC buildings which had been dismantled and moved to the camp.

Administrative and WRA Housing Area

The northern quarter of the "city" (north of Malachite Avenue) was devoted to administrative, storage, hospital, and other support functions. The main entry from the county road was near the centerline of Section 20 and became Tamarisk Street inside the camp. There was a small sentry house (225) in the center of the road and a larger gate house (229) to the northeast (see Figure 11). Some buildings in this part of the camp were of more substantial construction than buildings in the evacuee housing area; for example, a few buildings were clad in wood horizontal siding rather than tarpaper over sheathing. The interiors of some of the more substantial buildings, had wood floors, forced air heating, and bath and toilet facilities inside living and working quarters rather than in a separate building.

Administration Area

On the west side of Tamarisk Street, southwest of the main gate, was the Administration Area where the civilian WRA employees and their evacuee assistants worked. This portion of the camp contained the two principal administration buildings (223 and 224) which were later joined by a corridor (223-A) to form a U-shaped complex. A still extant low stone wall lay to the east adjacent to a parking area along Tamarisk Street. To the south, on the west side of Tamarisk, were the post office (226), the fire station (227; see Figure 12), and the engineer's office (228). West of the fire station and engineer's office were the finance office (130), the placement building (131), and the agriculture office (132).

WRA Staff Housing Area

Originally, WRA staff lived in Blocks 1 and 2 of the residential area.²⁶ By January 1943, staff housing was under construction on both sides of Cactus Road between the administration buildings and the Warehouse Area. Included were four-unit staff apartments (201-213) and four staff dormitories (215, 217, 219, and 221). The quarters occupied by the project director's family featured a shed roof with wide front overhang, drop siding, and corner windows with awnings (See Figure 13). Support buildings for the housing area were also located here: the recreation hall (200), a laundry (214), the officers' mess hall (220), a warehouse (216), a post exchange, and a beauty salon (222).²⁷

Hospital Area

East of the camp's main gate was the Hospital area between Obsidian and Zircon avenues and Ponderosa and Lotus roads (See Figure 14). The sprawling fifteen-building complex was linked by covered and/or enclosed walkways and included the following: an administration building, doctors' quarters, nurses' quarters, a pediatric ward, three wards for adults, a surgery, an obstetrical ward, an isolation ward, an outpatients' building, a mess hall, two warehouses, and a morgue and disinfecting building. Clad in white asbestos shingles, the hospital contrasted with the black tarpaper exteriors of most of the other evacuee facilities. The hospital buildings were of more substantial construction and had central heating supplied by steam from a boiler plant. The buildings had wooden floors and the interior walls were finished with wallboard.

The boiler plant (301) and laundry building (302) were located north of the hospital on the north side of Obsidian Avenue. The coal-fired boiler plant featured two 250hp Sterling boilers and a 50-foot-long, 52-ton capacity coal

²⁶ At least one barracks in Block 2 was used for administrative functions. In December 1943, the Placement and Transactions units moved into Barracks 11.

²⁷ *Topaz Times*, October 3, 1942, 2, December 14, 1943, 1, and January 21, 1943, 1.

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bunker that was fed by a belt elevator. The 150-foot brick smokestack of the boiler plant was the tallest structure in the area and served as a visual landmark at the camp.²⁸

Warehouse and Industrial Area

West of the Administration Area, near the northwest corner of the camp, was the Warehouse Area, which occupied the western two-thirds of the block bounded by Alexandria and Crystal avenues, Greasewood Way, and Cactus Road. Twenty-one rectangular warehouses (101-121) were located here. Building 109 was a refrigerated warehouse with refrigeration and ice-making equipment. The warehouses had shallow gambrel roofs, walls sheathed with 1" lumber and clad with roll roofing, and concrete slab floors.

Immediately south of the warehouse area lay an "industrial area" bounded by Crystal and Malachite avenues, Greasewood Way, and Elm Street. This section was largely undeveloped, with the exception of a root cellar (136) near the northwest corner. Construction of the root cellar began in December 1943. The structure extended 3.5 feet below grade and had bermed earth walls nine or ten feet above ground; the roof was covered with dirt and straw. The cellar stored cabbage, celery, and root crops such as potatoes, carrots, and *daikon*.²⁹

Motor Pool/Lumber Yards Area

Several lumber yards and the motor pool area were located in the northwest quadrant of Section 20, along the west side of Greasewood Way north of Topaz Avenue (See Figure 15). The northernmost component was the surplus equipment yard, which included buildings 72 and 73 and a number of small WPA plywood sheds. Immediately to the south were lumber yards 1, 2, and 3, which encompassed the paint shop (70) and lumber shed (71) and more sheds. The garage area was the most southern of the support facilities. Among its eleven buildings and several sheds were the following: gasoline station (57); main garage building (58); garage paint shop (59); blacksmith shop (60); tractor repair shop (Building 61); tire repair building (Building 62); repair shop buildings (63 and 64); and dispatchers' building (65).

Military Police Compound and Guard Towers

Near the northeastern corner of Section 20 was the Military Police Area (See Figure 16). The sixteen-building MP compound contained a canteen and office (T-2), a mess hall (T-1), a recreation hall (T-3), a dispensary (T-7), a garage (T-5), a warehouse (T-4), officers' quarters (T-6), a U.S.O. Building (T-16), barracks (T-8 through T-10, T-12, and T-13), and two latrine/shower buildings (T-11 and T-14). Like the hospital area, the buildings in the Military Police Area were clad with white asbestos shingles.

Seven guard towers were placed around the perimeter of Section 20, at corners and along the sides. The 8' x 8' guard towers had shallow gable roofs and were elevated fourteen feet off the ground. They were accessed by ladders, and the cross-braced legs rested on concrete pylons. The towers were equipped with searchlights and manned by military police guards armed with machine guns. Security included three sentry buildings, four gate houses at entrances to the camp, and floodlights mounted on poles in open areas along the perimeter. The boundaries of the project were marked with red warning signs in English and Japanese posted every one-hundred yards. The main gate controlled motor traffic and the gate house also regulated passage into and out of the facility. Strict rules were issued to evacuees regarding access to areas outside the camp. Masaru Kawaguchi commented, "You definitely knew that you were in a jail because they had the soldiers up there with the rifles."³⁰

²⁸ *Topaz Times*, January 21, 1943, 1, and July 2, 1943, 8.

²⁹ *Topaz Times*, December 4, 1943, 1.

³⁰ Masaru Kawaguchi, San Francisco, interview by Brett S., Marshall H., Robbie D., April 27, 2005, <http://www.tellingstories.org/internment/mkawaguchi/summary.html> (accessed December 20, 2005).

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Other Resources**Tofu Plant and Plant Frames**

The tofu plant (318) was located east of the laundry building on the north side of Obsidian Avenue. The plant, constructed of materials salvaged from former CCC buildings, was built in 1943-44 (see Figure 17). East of the tofu plant lay an open area that contained hot and cold plant frames. Two hot frame plant beds and six cold frame plant beds were built in early 1944.³¹

Water System

J. Clifford Petersen contracted to drill three wells on the eastern edge of the camp to provide a water supply. Water was pumped to the massive water tower on the eastern edge of camp in Section 21 that supported four 125,000-gallon redwood tanks, which together were said to be the largest wooden water tanks in the world in 1942 (see Figure 18). The eighty-five-foot-high tower was used by camp photographers as a vantage point for panoramas of the center. Pump houses and a chlorinator building were also located there. A 1946 report noted that “the water is very soft, but is highly corrosive to metal, resulting in a very rapid deterioration of pipe, fittings, and particularly valves.” Spiral weld pipe installed in the northern and western areas of the camps failed within two-years and had to be replaced. Miné Okubo noted that the alkaline water in the evacuee housing area had a strong taste at first, and historian Leonard Arrington wrote, “All reports indicate that the water was almost undrinkable.”³²

Loading Platform

West of Greasewood Way opposite Block 8, in the southern part of the motor pool area, was an earth and timber loading structure. An earth ramp surfaced with gravel permitted vehicles to drive to the top of the structure. A surplus property appraisal report for the camp listed a “platform for car and caterpillar loading,” using timbers buried in soil to create a ramp for loading. A 2002 archaeological report states that the platform “appears, at least in part, to have served as an area for loading coal for distribution to the evacuee barracks throughout the camp.”³³

Sewage System

Topaz was equipped with a sewage disposal system consisting of concrete and clay tile pipes buried sixteen to twenty feet underground. The pumping station (401) was located in the west-central area of the camp, west of Greasewood Way and Jasper Avenue. An underground conduit with a series of manholes extended 1,976 feet due west from the pumping station into Section 19. The conduit terminated at a north-south pipe that distributed effluent to six large buried redwood septic tanks. Shallow trenches extending to the west, and a deeper trench extending southwest, drained the effluent from the septic tanks into a dry river bed to the west. The latter ditch was constructed in the spring of 1943 to “eliminate the pond of sewage water west of the City.”³⁴

Recreational Facilities

Recreational facilities were scattered throughout the evacuee housing section. In the center high school area, Block 24 had a football field in its northern portion and a baseball diamond in the southwest corner. By April 1943, there were twelve baseball fields throughout the camp, four each in Blocks 15 and 21, the planned elementary school sites. Twenty-one blocks had basketball courts, and there were six tennis courts; none of the

³¹ The materials for the tofu plant came from CCC buildings at Callao, ninety miles northwest of Topaz. *Topaz Times*, October 6, 1943, 2.

³² A separate, shorter water tower is shown in photographs but is not listed on real property inventories. It may have provided water storage until the large water tower was completed in January 1943. WRA, “Report of Appraiser,” Box 3; Okubo, *Citizen 13066*, 142; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 24.

³³ Ellis, “Site Documentation and Management Plan for the Topaz Relocation Center,” 39.

³⁴ *Topaz Times*, April 8, 1943, 4.

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basketball or tennis courts were surfaced. By November 1943, playground equipment had been installed in Blocks 15 and 21 and opposite Blocks 28 and 41.³⁵

Outside of the evacuee housing area south of Blocks 37 and 38, an improvised ice skating rink was constructed in December 1942 and January 1943. In March 1943, construction began on a nine-hole golf course in the southwest corner of Section 20 opposite of Block 22 (see Figure 19). G. Matsuno, a golf course landscaper, led the effort, with work being performed on a voluntary basis by residents interested in golf. The “greens” were packed soil. A picnic area in the section to the east was being planned in early 1943. Located in a grove of eleven poplar trees, plans for the site called for the planting of hundreds of willows and tamarisks and the construction of open barbecue pits and tables and benches. Work on a combined ice rink, oval cinder track, and football field in the northern portion of Block 24 started in December 1943.³⁶

Camp Trash Dump Area

The camp trash dump was located along the eastern edge of the northeastern section of Section 19, lying immediately west of the built-up area of the camp. Trash was apparently brought by truck and deposited at the dump. Successive layers of trash were buried with soil.

Outlying Areas

The outlying agricultural lands to the north, northeast, and south of the developed area of the center (which are not included within this NHL boundary) were intended for use in raising a variety of farm crops and livestock. Prior to federal occupation, some of the land had been in private ownership and was used for growing crops and as grazing land. Existing agricultural facilities were incorporated into the center’s farm program, which included the raising of vegetable crops, feed crops, beef cattle, poultry, and hogs. A hog farm located in Section 15 featured pens, troughs, and a slaughterhouse. Two brooder houses equipped with stoves were built in Section 14. An egg-laying plant included twenty-four adobe hen houses and a warehouse. The adobe bricks were manufactured at the camp. Four granaries were completed in August 1943.³⁷

Officials contemplated creating a cemetery for the camp located “to the southeast of the City proper.” Land was set aside for this use in 1942, but the plan was never carried through and no burials took place. Instead, the cremated remains of those who died were stored until the end of the war.³⁸

Integrity

Although none of the buildings in the built-up portion of the camp are extant today, the property retains many of the qualities it possessed during the period of significance and powerfully reflects the conditions that internees faced from 1942 to 1945. Evidence of wartime use and occupation can be seen on the landscape throughout the site, particularly in the remaining concrete foundations; the extensive system of roads, ditches, and pathways; the rock and concrete-lined gardens and ponds; the guard tower bases; the remnants of the barbed-wire perimeter fencing; the wood and concrete foundation piers; the wood fences and stone walls; scattered milled lumber, tarpaper, and wallboard; piles of coal; and a myriad of artifacts of daily living, such as broken ceramics and glass, cans, stove pipes, and other refuse. The property appears essentially as it did following the removal of the buildings by the WRA in 1946. These remnants of the camp meet the integrity standard described in the National Park Service report on Japanese American relocation sites, *Confinement and Ethnicity*: “That is,

³⁵ *Topaz Times*, April 8, 1943, 6, and August 5, 1943, 1; November 23, 1943, 3.

³⁶ *Topaz Times*, January 12, 1943, 1, December 21, 1943, 2, March 11, 1943, 1, March 13, 1943, 5, March 5, 1943, 1.

³⁷ *Topaz Times*, November 11, 1942, 1; March 27, 1943, 1; August 5, 1943, 1; August 10, 1943, *Agricultural Supplement*, September 14, 1943, 2.

³⁸ *Topaz Times*, September 30, 1942, 4.

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although most buildings have been removed or destroyed, there remains a wide range of artifacts and features which evoke the distinct aspects of confinement and ethnicity.”³⁹

Although the property is not nominated under Criterion 6, recent investigations have confirmed that extensive archaeological resources are present at Topaz. In 2002, the SWCA Environmental Consultants undertook an archaeological study of most of the developed area of Section 20. Fieldwork and photography undertaken for this nomination by Front Range Research Associates, Inc., in 2005 relocated many of the features identified by the SWCA study. Sheri Murray Ellis, SWCA senior project manager, concluded that:

the site clearly retains substantial numbers of features that reflect its important role in American history. These features include things such as rock and concrete ponds, elaborate gardens and garden borders, decorated or personalized stoops, and concrete monuments. Personal and unique artifacts that reflect individuals are also present within the site. All of these elements contribute to the overall potential of the site to be actively interpreted for visitors and to become a valuable tool for educating the public about this ominous aspect of our collective history.⁴⁰

An October 2005 survey performed by U.S. Bureau of Land Management archaeologists, concluded that the camp trash dump and sewage disposal facility retain integrity. In December 2005, National Park Service NHL Program Archaeologist Charles Haecker, examined a substantial part of the eastern portion of Section 20 (not included in the SWCA study) and found “significant cultural remains that are directly associated with the internment camp,” with comparable features to those found in the western portion of the section.⁴¹ These studies concluded that Topaz continues to convey its national significance as one of ten Japanese American relocation centers created during World War II.

Location

Built in a remote, undeveloped area in west-central Utah, the location of the site powerfully reflects governmental authorities’ successful effort to isolate relocated Japanese Americans from the rest of the country’s population during World War II.

Design

The original design and layout of the center is clearly discernible. The site clearly reflects the imposition of a rigid, right-angle grid on an otherwise undeveloped and almost featureless landscape. The network of gridded roads and pedestrian paths connecting buildings within blocks is still intact. The use of dark gravel surfacing on the roads and paths at the center has preserved them and helps to clearly distinguish them from the lighter soil of the site. The regimented rows of concrete foundations serve to differentiate functional areas within the camp and testify to the original planned layout of the camp and its similarities to the other relocation centers. Surviving examples of evacuee landscaping in the housing blocks (such as ponds and rock gardens) illustrate the determined efforts of residents to bring elements of Japanese landscape design to their new environment. The barbed-wire perimeter fence and concrete guard tower foundations are symbolic of the role the camp and the military played in the relocation of Japanese Americans.

³⁹ Jeffery F. Burton, Mary M. Farrell, Florence B. Lord, and Richard W. Lord, “Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of World War II Japanese American Relocation Sites,” *Publications in Anthropology* 74 (Tucson, AZ: Western Archeological and Conservation Center, National Park Service, 1999, rev. July 2000), ch. 1, 1.

⁴⁰ Sheri Murray Ellis, “Site Documentation and Management Plan for the Topaz Relocation Center, Millard County, Utah,” SWCA Cultural Resources Report No. 01-154A, prepared for the Topaz Museum Board, Delta, Utah, with funding from the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Topaz Museum Board, Salt Lake City, Utah: SWCA, Inc., Environmental Consultants, January 13, 2002.

⁴¹ Charles Haecker, NHL Program Archaeologist, National Park Service, Santa Fe, New Mexico, e-mail message to Kara Miyagishima, National Park Service, Denver, Colorado, December 28, 2005.

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Setting

The setting of the Topaz Relocation Center is essentially unchanged from the World War II era. It remains isolated and has been largely unaffected by modern development. The surrounding area is covered in native greasewood (to the north and west) and is used for cultivated fields or grazing (east and south). Visitors to the site are immediately struck by the vastness of the surrounding landscape and the mountains rising in the distance.

Small portions of the eastern and southeastern parts of Section 20 have experienced some changes in the postwar period. The northeastern corner, including the former military police compound, was affected by fluorspar mining processing activities in the 1950s. The southeastern portion of the nominated property contains a postwar house and shed. Between 1976 and 2005, a one-acre area west of the main entrance to the camp was developed into a commemorative site honoring the historical significance of Topaz and the service of evacuees from the camp in the armed forces. The small memorial site, with appropriately scaled monuments, is designed in a simple and dignified manner. These elements have a minimal presence within the 728.4-acre nominated area.

Materials

The wood superstructures of the buildings that covered the developed part of the relocation camp are gone, but their concrete foundations remain, as do graveled road and path systems, networks of ditches, and remnants of evacuee landscaping. The foundations are durable evidence of the presence and arrangement of buildings at the camp. The placement of gravel on road surfaces and paths within blocks, was an important feature of the camp given the nature of the soil, which weather turns to dust or mud. The remaining landscaping features, such as rock gardens, concrete and stone ponds, low stone walls, and stone borders along paths, reflect the efforts that evacuees engaged in to ameliorate the harsh environment of the camp, as landscaping materials had to be transported from the surrounding desert or more distant mountains.

Workmanship

Government buildings at the relocation camps did not incorporate a high degree of craftsmanship, but instead were expedient, temporary, low-cost facilities that could be quickly readied for use. At Topaz this was reflected in the substandard pipes used for the water supply system, the lack of concrete foundations for barracks and other buildings, the initial absence of interior finishes, and the use of black asphalt roll roofing for the exterior cladding of most buildings. The emphasis on standardization rather than individuality was manifested in the overall layout of the camp and the unvarying dimensions and alignment of buildings on the landscape, which is still visible in the foundations present at the desert site. Greater creativity is found in the extant evacuee landscaping, which exhibits various designs, approaches, skill levels, and uses of materials in the construction of ponds, rock gardens, borders, and walkways.

Feeling

The draft National Historic Landmark Theme Study “Japanese Americans in World War II” succinctly describes the feeling that the Topaz relocation camp site evokes:

Granada and Topaz look very much as they did when the barracks and other buildings were removed in 1946. The size of the camps and the regimentation imposed on the evacuees by the military can be clearly read in their intact layouts, where historic foundations, roads, and walkways still survive. Taken together, these elements give a good sense of what a wartime relocation center would have looked like. As so much is gone, it is particularly important to recognize those elements that remain.⁴²

⁴² National Historic Landmarks Program, *Japanese Americans in World War II* National Historic Landmark Theme Study (draft) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2005), 43.

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The vastness of the isolated desert setting, and features such as the barbed wire fence, the grid of roads and paths, and the undisturbed topography and vistas provide visitors with an understanding of the history of the site.

Association

The important association of Topaz with the history of the relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II, was recognized by its initial listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. The site provides a direct link to the historical events of the relocation camp era and is sufficiently intact to provide an immediate and tangible sense of that association to visitors. As one of ten relocation camps, Topaz represents important associations with the larger relocation process, which shaped the lives of Japanese Americans and exemplified the dilemma of civil liberties in wartime.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: ___ Locally: ___

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A X B ___ C ___ D ___

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):

A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G ___

NHL Criteria:

1, Exception 3

NHL Theme(s):

IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
6. Military Institutions and Activities

Areas of Significance:

Military
Law
Politics/Government
Ethnic Heritage; Asian, Japanese American
Social History

Period(s) of Significance:

1942-1946

Significant Dates:

1942, 1945, 1946

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Daly Brothers (general contractor), San Francisco, California
U.S. War Relocation Authority

Historic Contexts:

VIII. World War II
D. The Home Front
1. Japanese Americans in World War II

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INTRODUCTION

The site of the Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz) is nationally significant as the location of one of the ten relocation camps created for the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. On February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. Citing “national security” as its justification, this order authorized the U.S. military to forcibly remove persons of Japanese ancestry from areas designated as military zones on the West Coast. Carried out in the months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, these actions reflected wartime hysteria, racist sentiment, and the military’s professed inability to gauge the loyalty of Japanese Americans to the United States. Topaz is significant under Criterion 1 for its association with U.S. military history (World War II on the Home Front), its association with politics and government (the relocation decision), U.S. constitutional law (the protection of civil liberties during wartime), ethnic heritage (Japanese American history), and social history (history of minorities in the U.S.; history of civil rights). It meets the registration requirements specified in the draft National Historic Landmark Theme Study “Japanese Americans in World War II.” Topaz represents Property Type 2: “Properties Associated with Relocation, Relocation Centers and Related Facilities.” The period of significance for the property begins in 1942, the year of its construction and opening, and ends in 1946, the year when the War Relocation Authority dismantled the buildings at the site. The built-up area of Topaz was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. The draft National Historic Landmark Theme Study “Japanese Americans in World War II” recommended that Topaz “should be considered for possible National Historic Landmark designation.”⁴³ To date, four relocation camps have been designated as NHLs: the Manzanar Relocation Center in California (1985); the Rohwer Relocation Camp Cemetery in Arkansas (1992); the Granada (Amache) Relocation Center in Colorado (2006); and the Tule Lake Relocation Center in California (2006); and the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming (2006). In addition, the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho became a National Monument in 2001. Both Manzanar and Minidoka are units of the national park system.

The nominated property includes nearly all of the developed area of Topaz as well as the camp sewage field and trash dump to the west. These resources strongly convey the historic significance of the property and allow for a full appreciation and understanding of the original scale and layout of the camp. Considerable evidence of the wartime occupation of the site remains. Among the surviving physical remnants are the gravel road and path system, concrete and wood building foundations, scattered concentrations of historic artifacts, and extensive evacuee landscaping. These features illustrate the regimentation imposed on the residents, the intensive use of the site over more than three years of operation, and the efforts by the evacuees to ameliorate the harsh living conditions. Like Manzanar and Granada, Topaz includes most of the original built-up section of its site, much more than some of the other relocation centers. The draft National Historic Landmark theme study “Japanese Americans in World War II” examined the current integrity of all ten camps and determined that Topaz and Granada “look very much as they did when the barracks and other buildings were removed in 1946.” The study concluded that Topaz’s extant resources “give a good sense of what a wartime relocation center would have looked like. As so much is gone, it is particularly important to recognize those elements that remain.”⁴⁴

Although not charged with any crimes and without benefit of judicial hearings and due process of law, the evacuees at Topaz were among more than 120,000 Japanese Americans who were uprooted from their homes and businesses in 1942 and taken under armed guard for detention in a system of assembly and relocation centers. Relocated Japanese Americans who sold their assets were unable to obtain fair market value and suffered an aggregate economic loss estimated at \$400 million in 1942 dollars. Typically, “neighbors, like scavengers, swooped down on the Japanese communities and offered outrageously low prices for homes, businesses, cars, and

⁴³ National Historic Landmarks Program, *Japanese Americans in World War II*, 63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

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other personal property,” although kinder people offered to store some belongings for their friends.⁴⁵ The U.S. government justified the confinement of Japanese Americans on the basis of military necessity and fears about the loyalty of persons of Japanese descent.

Topaz operated from September 1942 until October 1945. The Utah facility was the eighth of the ten relocation centers to open and the fourth earliest to close. The peak resident population for Topaz occurred in March 1943, when 8,130 persons were present, and the camp was the fifth most populous community in Utah. Most of the evacuees at Topaz came from northern California, particularly from counties in or near the San Francisco Bay area. Nearly two-thirds (62.3 percent) of the persons interned at Topaz were American-born citizens.

The War Relocation Authority (WRA), a federal agency created in March 1942 to administer the relocation program, simultaneously operated the camps where Japanese Americans were held and actively encouraged them to resettle outside the West Coast to pursue jobs or higher education. Although the WRA initially hoped to create a “normal” living environment through the establishment of relocation schools, churches, self-government, recreation, and business enterprises, it almost immediately concluded that “a large degree of abnormality” pervaded every aspect of camp life. The exclusion from the Pacific Coast states was lifted in early 1945, and a portion of the Japanese American community returned; although by then many people had entered military service or settled in other parts of the country. The relocation had profound and lasting impacts on the lives of Japanese Americans, including their health, financial well-being, education and employment, family structure, assimilation into American life, and geographic distribution.

Several factors distinguish Topaz from other relocation camps. Landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases challenging the constitutionality of the exclusion and relocation of Japanese Americans involved two persons held at Topaz: Fred C. Korematsu and Mitsuye Endo. Korematsu defied the exclusion order and tried to continue living and working in Oakland, California. Following his apprehension by authorities, he challenged the constitutional validity of the exclusion of Japanese American from the West Coast. The Supreme Court in *Korematsu vs. U.S.* (1944) upheld the exclusion of Japanese Americans as a “military imperative,” with Justices Murphy and Jackson writing strongly-worded dissents. Ms. Endo’s case arose after she was dismissed from her job with the State of California and relocated to Tule Lake and then Topaz. While conceding her loyalty, the government argued that she was required to go through the WRA leave procedures prior to resettlement. In *Ex Parte Endo*, decided in December 1944, the Court held that “admittedly loyal” citizens could not be deprived of their liberty and held in relocation centers. The decision effectively threw open the gates of the relocation camps.

Second, despite some protests and incidents of violence, Topaz exemplified the efforts of Japanese Americans and WRA authorities to make the best of what was a difficult and undesirable situation and to maintain a relatively quiet atmosphere that historian Sandra C. Taylor termed “uneasy coexistence.” Of the ten relocation centers, Topaz was a “quieter” camp. The WRA administration at Topaz recognized that the highly skilled and educated Japanese American populace would demand respect and had identified rights at the assembly centers that they intended to preserve. The population of the camp was basically conservative, and the community council and administration tried to get along. The greatest unrest, including organized protest, resulted from the shooting death of elderly internee James Hatsuki Wakasa by a military guard and issues associated with military recruiting, loyalty questions, and the government’s segregation of perceived troublemakers. Following these episodes, and with the decline of the camp population due to resettlement, the growing sense of the inadequacy of the entire relocation program, and the increasing demoralization of the evacuees, the administration at Topaz became more lenient, allowing the Japanese Americans relatively greater freedoms. As Taylor concluded, “The Topaz manner of resistance was rarely violent, as its history was to show, but it did include opposition to what

⁴⁵ John Tateishi, *And Justice for All: An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps* (New York: Random House, 1984), xix.

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was perceived as unwarranted authority. The community forged by the Japanese Americans at Topaz was a peculiar blend of self-government and individual initiative coupled with submission to a Caucasian authority that was, if ultimately absolute, rarely dictatorial or coercive.”⁴⁶

Third, Topaz exemplifies Japanese Americans’ cultural response to relocation. Faced with incarceration at an isolated desert site, an emphasis on cultural expression addressed realities of life in the camps perceived by Japanese American leaders: the obligation to document what was happening for future generations; the desire to ease stress and uncertainty by creating elements of a normal life within the abnormal environment; and the need to encourage creative expression, buoy the spirits of the incarcerated, and provide positive activities for passing the hours. More professional artists were confined at Topaz than at any other camp, including those who had studied at the prestigious California School of Fine Arts. From the beginning stages of their removal from California, many of the artists believed that since cameras were outlawed they should employ their talents to document what was happening to their people. Persons such as Miné Okubo, Chiura Obata, George Matsusaburo, Hisako Hibi and others, produced hundreds of drawings and paintings illustrating camp life. In addition, journalistic and literary endeavors such as the relocation camp newspaper and the literary magazine produced at Topaz, carefully recorded both day-to-day occurrences and the general atmosphere and provided an alternate outlet for creative expression. The artists, musicians, and writers at Topaz believed they had an obligation to provide their fellow internees with ways of coping with the chaos and finding elements of beauty within the harsh confines of the camp. In response, they created classes teaching a myriad of arts and crafts to persons of all ages and abilities. Many of the crafts produced utilized materials found on the camp site and many of the drawings and paintings used the camp and its setting for their inspiration. The desire to create beauty out of the difficult environment also found expression in the elaborate manipulation of the natural setting, an activity bolstered by the large number of professional gardeners and landscape designers interned at Topaz. These efforts within the camp provided an important and lasting record of relocation center life and the Japanese American response to it.

EXCLUSION AND RELOCATION

The Relocation Decision and Its Implementation

The crippling of the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Fleet and the attendant loss of lives at Pearl Harbor, galvanized public opinion against Japan and unleashed long-simmering prejudices against the West Coast Japanese American population. In the aftermath of the December 7, 1941, attack and the country’s declaration of war, the Department of Justice incarcerated more than 1,500 Japanese American community leaders who had been previously identified as possible threats to national security in the event of war. While no criminal charges were pressed against these individuals, they were removed to relocation camps.⁴⁷

Although supporting more targeted actions to identify persons of questionable loyalty, both U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle and Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover, opposed the wholesale removal of Japanese Americans. However, politicians, pressure groups, and the public, especially in California, agitated for stronger steps against residents of Japanese ancestry. Prejudice and discriminatory practices against persons of Asian heritage had long been an element of California society.⁴⁸ Politicians raised the specter of sabotage and

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 105.

⁴⁷ Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 148; Raymond Y. Okamura, Isami A. Waugh and Alex Yamato, “Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II,” in *Five Views: An Ethnic Site Survey for California* (Sacramento, CA: California Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of Historic Preservation, 1988), 174.

⁴⁸ See Okamura, Waugh, and Yamato “A History of Japanese Americans in California,” 170-73.

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fifth column activities, and on February 13, 1942, the West Coast congressional delegation asked that all persons of Japanese descent be removed from the region.

In response, on February 19, 1942, President Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order Number 9066, authorizing the designation of military areas from which “any or all persons might be excluded.” On 2 March 1942 General John L. DeWitt, commander of the Western Defense Command, identified the western portions of California, Oregon, and Washington, and the southern part of Arizona, as Military Area Number 1. DeWitt informed the press that these groups would soon be excluded from the designated area and advised Japanese Americans to consider voluntary relocation. He told a congressional committee in 1943 that “A Jap’s a Jap. They are a dangerous element . . . There is no possible way to determine their loyalty . . . It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen; theoretically he is still a Japanese and you can’t change him . . . by giving him a piece of paper.”⁴⁹

While a few thousand Japanese attempted to voluntarily relocate, growing hostility from the public and authorities of inland states led federal authorities to adopt an organized, mandatory removal. The Wartime Civilian Control Administration (WCCA), a civilian agency of the War Department, was created on March 11, 1942, to establish temporary facilities where those removed from designated areas could be held. The WCCA created fifteen “assembly centers” at former racetracks and fairgrounds for evacuees in the western part of California, Oregon, and Washington. On March 18, 1942, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) was established within the Department of the Interior to create and administer a system of relocation centers. The evacuees remained in the assembly centers for a period of from six weeks to six months, while ten relocation camps in seven (mostly western) states were constructed: Gila River and Poston in Arizona; Jerome and Rohwer in Arkansas; Manzanar and Tule Lake in California; Granada (Amache) in Colorado; Minidoka in Idaho; Central Utah (Topaz) in Utah; and Heart Mountain in Wyoming. By the end of 1942, approximately 120,000 persons of Japanese descent had been removed from their homes and placed in the camps.

The Tanforan Assembly Center

Most of the people from the San Francisco Bay area who eventually were confined at Topaz were sent first to the Tanforan Assembly Center, which operated from April 28-October 13, 1942.⁵⁰ Tanforan, located in San Bruno about fifteen miles south of San Francisco, was one of fifteen assembly centers hastily set up on the West Coast at racetracks and fairgrounds for use until more permanent inland centers could be constructed. Tanforan had opened in 1899 and champion thoroughbred Seabiscuit raced on its track in the 1930s. At its height, Tanforan held 7,816 persons in an area surrounded by a fence topped with barbed wire and guarded by armed military police. The Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) ran the center.⁵¹

The harsh conditions at Tanforan prepared the Japanese Americans for what they would encounter at the Central Utah Relocation Center. Evacuees had no idea where they were being taken as they left their homes, were processed at “civilian control centers,” and boarded buses for transfer to temporary assembly centers. Artist Miné Okubo wrote that when her bus crossed the Bay Bridge, “Everyone stared at the beautiful view as if for the last time.” When the first groups arrived at Tanforan, the 180-building facility was incomplete and lacked adequate supplies. The evacuees found themselves housed in hastily erected barracks and converted

⁴⁹ U.S. War Relocation Authority, *The Relocation Program* (New York: AMS Press, 1975; originally published Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 1.

⁵⁰ A modern shopping center, “The Shops at Tanforan,” is located on the site of the assembly center today.

⁵¹ *San Francisco News*, April 3, 1942; U.S., WRA, *WRA: A Story of Human Conservation* 9 (New York: AMS, 1975; orig. pub. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 22; *San Francisco Examiner*, October 6, 2005; Brian Niiya, *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History*, updated ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2001), 126; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 69 and 126.

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horse stalls (See Figure 21). Tsuyako “Sox” Kitashima remembered, “As we stepped inside, the sight of horse manure laying on the floor and horse hairs stuck to the rough, whitewashed walls stunned us.”⁵²

Life at Tanforan was carefully scripted by government planning and regulations. Items considered “contraband” at the assembly and relocation centers included not only weapons, ammunition, bombs, and explosives, but also radio transmitters and short-wave receivers, cameras, and “certain types of books, photographs, maps, and drawings.”⁵³ Written materials were examined by authorities, and publications could be censored. A standard form of government for the camps was inaugurated, with block representatives elected to a community council granted advisory responsibilities. Churches were established, including Protestant, Buddhist, and other denominations. Long lines were required to access mess halls where food was inadequate in quantity and initially almost inedible. No concessions were made to cultural preferences or special diets. Laundries and showers were few in number and short of hot water. Diarrhea became epidemic due to unfamiliar and inadequately prepared food. The small number of bathroom facilities were designed with a lack of privacy that most found embarrassing.

Stress was a constant factor of life and contributed to medical problems for many people. Haruko Obata remembered her initial feelings at Tanforan: “That one time I cried so much. That was the only time I cried; it was awful.” Evacuee Tsuyako Kitashima expressed the view of many: “Life at Tanforan remains the most grim period of my life.” Topaz historian Sandra C. Taylor, observed that many evacuees concurred that their time at Tanforan was the most difficult of the entire relocation experience: “This was a prison city, different from a jail in that the keepers promised self-government, allowed education and recreation, and provided entertainment. They talked about how the incarceration was for the inhabitants’ own protection, but the lack of civilized accoutrements dramatized the difference between the keepers and the kept.”⁵⁴

Despite a multitude of hardships at Tanforan, important associations and activities initiated at the assembly center would be moved successfully to the relocation camp in Utah. As the evacuee-produced newspaper, the *Tanforan Totalizer*, commented in its final issue, “Time, work, patience and perseverance have transformed . . . a rather gloomy, muddy, inconvenient converted racetrack into the semblance of a living community of business, social, spiritual, educational, recreational, and leisure time activities.” Entities such as the community council, library, sports program, churches, cooperative enterprise, newspaper, and medical unit germinated at the former racetrack.⁵⁵

Among the most notable events at Tanforan was the founding of an art school with adult classes by a group of sixteen artists led by Chiura Obata. Obata (1885-1975) had studied painting in his native Japan before moving to San Francisco in 1903. He was a founder of the East West Art Society, which promoted understanding between cultures through art. A respected professor at the University of California at Berkeley for ten years before the war, Obata was an influential artist. His wife, Haruko, was one of the first San Francisco teachers of *ikebana*, the traditional Japanese art of flower arrangement. Chiura Obata believed that an art school would provide important learning activities for young people and “maintain one spot of normalcy,” in the lives of evacuees. The popular Tanforan school served about six hundred people, and when transplanted to Topaz drew even more students.⁵⁶

⁵² Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 26; Tsuyako “Sox” Kitashima and Joy Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist: The Sox Kitashima Story* (San Mateo, CA: Asian American Curriculum Project, 2003), 42.

⁵³ WRA, *Relocation Program*, 14.

⁵⁴ Obata quoted in Kim Kodani Hill, *Chiura Obata’s Topaz Moon* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2000), 27-29; Kitashima, *Birth of an Activist*, 45; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 63-81.

⁵⁵ *Tanforan Totalizer*, September 12, 1942, 1.

⁵⁶ Hill, *Topaz Moon*, xiv, xvi, 4, and 37.

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Central Utah Relocation Center Site Selection

In addition to the assembly centers such as Tanforan, more permanent relocation camps were established in locations that met specific criteria. The four major requirements outlined by officials were: a site with the possibility of extensive agricultural development and associated year-round employment; a location a “safe distance” from important installations such as power plants and water systems; the availability of federally-owned land and other acreage for purchase; a location near a railhead; and adequate water and electricity for the development. As later noted in Topaz’s *Trek* magazine, the criteria pushed the government officials to examine “wilderness” type settings.⁵⁷

On February 6, 1942, the *Salt Lake Tribune* announced that the federal government was evaluating Utah as a site for “alien enemy camps.” Western Millard County initially was examined but rejected due to a perceived lack of adequate water. The *Millard County Chronicle* later reported that federal agents had checked and mapped sites in the area of Delta early in 1942 without knowledge of the landowners. Millard County residents Homer and Nels Petersen felt the locale was well-suited for a camp and traveled to San Francisco to assure authorities that both acreage and water were available. The Petersens had acquired most of the water in the vicinity of Abraham, Utah, a small community located west of the town of Delta bordering the Sevier Desert, where a large undeveloped expanse of public and privately-held lands was available. Mostly unsuccessful attempts had been made at cultivating the area, “a bleak and windy plain,” designated by such names as “Valle Salado” (Valley of Salt) and the “Big Alkali Flat.”⁵⁸

In April a government inspection team arrived in Delta to examine the proposed site. Officials found that the location met their needs; arranged to purchase almost twenty thousand shares of water in the Abraham, Delta, and Deseret Canal companies; and planned to combine federal, county, and private lands for a relocation camp. Millard County owned a substantial part of the acreage which had reverted to it for failure to pay taxes. The site, officially selected in June 1942 and known as the Central Utah Relocation Center, included about 1,400 acres of federal land, approximately 8,840 acres of county land, and about 9,760 acres of private land. Local residents were informed that a relocation center, initially projected for ten thousand inmates, would be built northwest of Abraham and include an estimated six hundred buildings. Plans called for the entire camp to be fenced with armed guards patrolling the perimeter. Government officials envisioned that following the war the facility would become a rehabilitation site for soldiers who wished to farm and a scientific test facility for crops. The *Millard County Chronicle* observed, “Abraham has long been one of the smallest towns of the state, but by this increase it now takes its place as the fifth town in Utah for population.”⁵⁹

Attitudes Toward Japanese Americans in Utah

Japanese Americans had been living in Utah for many years before the creation of the relocation camp; the first individuals settled in the state during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among the pioneers were Mormon converts, miners, and railroad workers. The development of the sugar beet industry drew field laborers to Box Elder County in 1903 and a sugar beet processing plant that opened in Salt Lake County in 1916 also stimulated migration. Depressed agricultural prices in the 1920s resulted in Japanese American farmers switching from sugar beets to truck products and fruit-raising. Others moved to urban areas to establish a variety of businesses; Salt Lake City developed its own *Nihonmachi* (Japanese Town). Many Japanese

⁵⁷ WRA, WRA, 20; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 3.

⁵⁸ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 108; Robert C. Anderton, “Central Utah Project, Topaz, Utah, 1942-45: A Study,” 1969, Manuscript No. 217, on file at the University of Utah, Marriott Library, Special Collections, Salt Lake City, Utah; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 21.

⁵⁹ Anderton, “Central Utah Project;” Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 37; WRA, WRA, 22; Edward L. Lyman and Linda K. Newell, *History of Millard County* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah State Historical Society, 1999); *Millard County Chronicle*, June 25, 1942 and July 2, 1942.

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Americans returned to the West Coast during the Great Depression, and the 1940 census found that the *Nikkei* (person of Japanese descent) population in Utah had declined by almost one-third to about 2,210.⁶⁰

As Sandra C. Taylor observed, Utah's Japanese-American community represented many general traits of minority settlements around the country: "It was self-contained and self-sufficient, with its own places of worship, shops, and restaurants." Persons of Japanese descent were tolerated but not made to feel especially welcome. Following Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans living in Utah feared that the delicate balance of their lives within the larger community would be disrupted by large migrations of *Nikkei* to the state or the creation of a relocation center there. Despite these apprehensions, they assisted in relocating *Nikkei* from the West Coast to several Utah communities. For example, in Honeyville, a two-story building that had been used by Japanese Americans for a variety of purposes was divided into apartments for voluntary evacuees and a program to help newcomers find work was created. A group of about 130 voluntary resettlers led by produce dealer Fred Isamu Wada, leased land and established a farming colony at Keetley, Utah, in 1942. The colony, the largest group of voluntary resettlers outside the West Coast, became a place where those relocating could stop while traveling to other destinations.⁶¹

In January 1942, Governor Herbert B. Maw gathered county representatives to discuss the concept of Utah accepting voluntary evacuees from the West Coast. Maw, an official in the Mormon Church who was regarded as a liberal Democrat, had called for fair treatment of local Japanese Americans at the start of the war. At the meeting all but two county commissioners in attendance opposed such settlement, and resolutions passed reflecting fears that private lands might be taken by the federal government for a relocation camp. When California Rep. John H. Tolan contacted western governors regarding relocation proposals, Maw voiced opposition to such plans, concerned that persons considered dangerous on the West Coast would also pose a threat in Utah.⁶²

After creation of the War Relocation Authority in March 1942, the agency held a conference of western officials in Salt Lake City the following month to discuss concerns about evacuees' civil rights and ways to use their manpower in public works, agriculture, and industry. Governor Maw proposed that each state receive a quota of evacuees, whom it would handle in its own way. Western governors were generally in accord that if Japanese Americans were sent to their states, the federal government would bear the full burden for their care, safety, and future relocation. Most officials wanted those relocated to be housed in guarded concentration camps. However, representatives of the sugar beet industry suggested that the employment of Japanese Americans could mitigate effects of the wartime labor shortage in the fields. In March 1943, when Utah's legislature attempted to prevent aliens ineligible for citizenship from buying or leasing real estate, Governor Maw vetoed the measure with support from the sugar companies. Leonard Arrington found that Utah relocation camp workers "saved enough beets to make nearly 300 million pounds of sugar."⁶³

⁶⁰ Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 15; Sandra C. Taylor, "Japanese Americans and Keetley Farms: Utah's Relocation Colony," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Fall 1986); Leonard J. Arrington, "Utah's Ambiguous Reception: The Relocated Japanese Americans," in *Japanese Americans From Relocation to Redress*, ed. Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitano, rev. ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 93-94.

⁶¹ Frederick M. Huchel, *History of Box Elder County* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah State Historical Society, 1999); Mike Sudlow, "Utah's Role in the Japanese Evacuation of 1942, With A Special Look at the People of Camp Topaz," Research Paper, 1973, on file at Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah; Niiya, *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History*, 61 and 239-40; Taylor, "Japanese Americans and Keetley Farms."

⁶² Only one governor, Colorado's Ralph L. Carr, responded that the Japanese Americans would be welcome in his state. Carr was defeated in a 1942 campaign for the U.S. Senate. See Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 15-16.

⁶³ *San Francisco News*, March 2, 1942 and April 3, 1942; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 27-29.

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In addition to the Central Utah Relocation Center, the WRA also operated a prison camp in Utah for Japanese Americans following a riot at the Manzanar Relocation Center in December 1942. A “temporary isolation facility” was established at Dalton Wells, a former CCC camp thirteen miles north of Moab, and operated from January 11 to April 27, 1943. About forty-nine persons of Japanese ancestry were held at the Moab Isolation Center. The desert camp was used to imprison those from the ten relocation camps who were considered “trouble makers” for protesting their confinement. Conditions at the isolation center were harsher than those at the relocation camps: “The prisoners in these camps were separated from their families, provided with nothing to do, and burdened with sentences of indefinite and perhaps infinite length.” The WRA later moved the operations of this camp to the Leupp Reservation in Arizona.⁶⁴

Construction and Opening of the Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz)

Relocation camp construction placed a premium on speed, efficiency, and economy. The first WRA director, Milton Eisenhower, emphasized the lack of quality inherent in such work in testimony before the Senate, noting that the construction was so cheap he was unsure it would last the duration of the war. Work on the Central Utah camp began in June 1942, and the first residents of the “mushroom city” arrived in early September. The San Francisco firm of Daley Brothers received the contract for construction of the facility from the Salt Lake District of the Mountain Division of the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Captain Dryer, from Fort Douglas in Salt Lake City, was assigned to oversee the construction. The California firm announced it would utilize local laborers and equipment whenever possible in the project. Many of those hired were farmers who had no training or skill in carpentry. The construction included salvaged supplies, such as materials obtained from the CCC camp at Mt. Pleasant, Utah.⁶⁵

Beginning in late June, 640 acres which were to be the developed heart of the relocation camp were leveled and cleared of brush. Revised plans called for a facility to accommodate nine thousand persons. The first building completed was the headquarters for the U.S. Engineers who were supervising the project. The hospital complex was the first group of evacuee buildings to be undertaken. Other buildings considered essential to the running of the camp were then erected. The building of Topaz cost \$3,929,000 initially, and the WRA expended about another \$1 million on further construction after it opened. More than eight hundred persons working twelve hours per day, six days per week completed the camp. In late July the camp offices opened at the center, and on August 1 the WRA inspected the facility. A railroad spur from Delta to the town site was contemplated but never built. On August 20, the *Millard County Chronicle* reported a post office with the name “Topaz Branch, Delta, Utah” had been approved for the camp. One of the local landmarks, Topaz Mountain, inspired the name, which became the popular designation for the relocation camp.⁶⁶

The WRA moved into the camp on August 27 with Charles F. Ernst serving as project director (See Figure 22). Ernst held a meeting to outline the policies and introduce administrators in Delta on September 7 at a gathering described as “the official launching of the camp.” The *Millard County Chronicle* reported that Ernst told local residents that the Japanese Americans who would be arriving were “the cream of the crop. They have been

⁶⁴ Burton et al., “Confinement and Ethnicity,” ch. 14; Richard A. Firmage, *History of Grand County* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah State Historical Society, 1996); Niiya, *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History*, 258.

⁶⁵ The term “Topaz carpenter” is still used locally to refer to an unskilled builder since “anyone who showed up with a hammer” was hired to work. A number of former CCC buildings were brought to Topaz. In January 1943, the *Topaz Times* reported three CCC buildings from Black Rock were being dismantled to use at the camp and the WRA was negotiating to obtain others. In October 1943, twelve buildings from the CCC camp at Callao were dismantled to be used for buildings at Topaz. Deborah Gesensway and Mindy Roseman, *Beyond Words: Images from America’s Concentration Camps* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), 76; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 3; *Millard County Chronicle*, June 25, 1942; Anderton, “Central Utah Project,” 5; U.S. National Park Service, *Confinement and Ethnicity*, ch. 3; *Topaz Times*, January 12, 1943, and October 6, 1943, 2.

⁶⁶ The *Millard County Chronicle* reported that several collectors provided envelopes for canceled stamps from Topaz on the opening day of the branch. *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 3; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 92; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 23; Anderton, “Central Utah Project,” 8; *Millard County Chronicle*, June 25, 1942, August 20, 1942, and October 29, 1942.

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taken mainly from the Bay area, in and around San Francisco, and represent a very high type of Japanese.” The director indicated that the evacuees would work on farming and defense projects, such as making camouflage nets and brooms to help the war effort.⁶⁷ On September 8 a contingent of ninety-seven military police arrived at Topaz.

On September 11, a volunteer group of 214 Japanese Americans from Tanforan came to assist with weather-proofing, transportation, setting up kitchens, preparing the hospital, and other activities to ready the camp for the remainder of the evacuees. *Trek*, the camp magazine, later noted, “. . . the arrival of the advance contingent of volunteer evacuee workers from Tanforan Assembly Center signaled the birth of Topaz as a living community.” The volunteers included such workers as doctors and nurses, clerks, truck drivers, and laborers. George Gentoku Shimamoto supervised the advance party who assisted with completion of the project. At the first mass meeting between the evacuees and the administration, Rev. Taro Goto, a Methodist minister and a leader of the advance group, dedicated the camp “to the glory of almighty God and to the uplifting of his kingdom.”⁶⁸

Trek later contained an article by Taro Katayama that described the early days of the camp:

Asked what the infant city was like, those first residents might have, with some justice, summed it up with one word—dust. For dust was the principal, the most ubiquitous, ingredient of community existence at the beginning. It pervaded and accompanied every activity from sleeping and eating and breathing on through all the multitude of other pursuits necessary to maintain and prepare the city for those yet to come. It lay on every exposed surface inside the buildings and out and it rose in clouds underfoot and overhead on every bit of exposed ground wherever construction work had loosened the hold of greasewood roots on the talcum-fine alkali earth. It obscured almost every other consideration of communal life just as, when a wind rose, it almost obscured the physical fact of the city itself.⁶⁹

Evacuees at the assembly centers such as Tanforan were aware that they would be moved further inland from those locations. During the summer of 1942, anxieties had grown as rumors spread about where they would be sent. Sandra C. Taylor found that, due to its desert climate and temperatures which could range from 30 degrees below zero in the winter to 106 degrees in the summer, Topaz ranked rather low in desirability among the evacuees.⁷⁰ During the period before they learned their final assignment, some people were allowed one last visit to their former homes to check on their businesses or belongings. Once again officials did not announce where the Japanese Americans would be relocated, but after the first group left word spread about their destination.⁷¹

The two-night trip to the Central Utah Relocation Center was accomplished in groups of about five hundred, aboard old trains with features such as gas lamps and velvet upholstery. The swaying cars resulted in many cases of motion sickness exacerbated by the fact that windows remained closed with shades drawn from dusk to dawn. One stop was made as the trains crossed the desert in Nevada to allow the travelers to exercise their legs and breathe fresh air, but a barbed wire enclosure and armed guards limited the movements of the travelers. When they crossed near Salt Lake City at night, the evacuees were allowed to look out the windows at “the

⁶⁷ There is no evidence that defense products were produced at the camp. *Millard County Chronicle*, September 10, 1942.

⁶⁸ *Tanforan Totalizer*, September 12, 1942; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 4; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 3; *Millard County Chronicle*, September 3, 1942; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 92; *Topaz Times*, September 17, 1942, 1.

⁶⁹ *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 3.

⁷⁰ On July 27, 1943, the thermometer rose to 105 degrees at Topaz.

⁷¹ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 86.

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lake, shimmering in white moonlight.” The first group of 502 regular evacuees arrived in Millard County on September 17 and the last evacuees entered on October 15, 1942 (See Figure 23).⁷²

Background of Evacuees

Topaz was the eighth of the ten relocation centers to open and the fourth earliest to close, remaining in operation just 1,147 days. The “forced growth” community, as *Trek* referred to it, posted the third shortest days in operation of the ten camps. The peak resident population for Topaz occurred on 17 March 1943, when 8,130 persons were present. Table 2 shows trends in the camp’s population during its course of operation.⁷³

Close to two-thirds (62.3 percent) of Topaz residents were American-born citizens; 37.7 percent were foreign born. In terms of age, 31.8 percent of Topaz residents were under twenty years of age at the beginning of 1943; 63.8 percent were twenty through sixty-four, and 4.4 percent were sixty-five and older. The population pyramid forming the “tree” on the masthead of the *Topaz Times* vividly illustrated two age bands corresponding to the *Issei* and *Nisei* within the center.⁷⁴ In terms of their place of former residence, Topaz residents overwhelmingly came from California (96.2 percent), with 2.6 percent from Hawaii, 0.5 percent from other states, and 0.7 percent of unknown origin. Most of the California evacuees came from the northern part of the state, particularly from counties in or near the San Francisco Bay region: Alameda, 3,679; San Francisco, 3,370; San Mateo, 722; Santa Clara, 135; and Contra Costa, 129. Twenty-four other counties sent fewer numbers of residents to Topaz. In terms of city size, 72.1 percent of Topaz inhabitants came from medium to large cities (cities between 25,000 and 999,999 in population). Nearly 17 % of residents came from smaller cities (between 2,500 and 24,999 persons), while less than 10 % came from places with less than 2,500 people. Most of the urbanites were from cities in the Bay Area, East Bay, and Peninsula; only 248 of the persons sent to Topaz were identified as farmers.⁷⁵

Table 2
Central Utah Relocation Center, Trends in Resident Population, 1942-1945

| DATE | RESIDENT POPULATION |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| October 1, 1942 | 5,801 |
| January 1, 1943 | 7,901 |
| July 1, 1943 | 7,351 |
| January 1, 1944 | 7,304 |
| July 1, 1944 | 6,081 |
| January 1, 1945 | 5,922 |
| July 1, 1945 | 4,447 |
| October 1, 1945 | 1,855 |

NOTE: The resident population excludes persons on short term and seasonal leave. SOURCE: War Relocation Authority, *The Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description*, Table 6, 18.

In all, some 11,212 persons came into the custody of the Central Utah Relocation Center during its years of operation. Most evacuees came from the assembly centers (8,258) or were transferred from other permanent relocation centers (2,046, of which 1,731 came from Tule Lake). The remainder of persons who passed through Topaz were assigned from Hawaii (228), the Department of Justice (76), voluntary residents (43), assignees to center (28), or came from the WCCA via seasonal work (5). There were also 384 births at Topaz. Looking at the manner of departure from Topaz, most residents left the camp for relocation purposes (9,070), while 1,635

⁷² Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 104; Henry Tami, “Year’s End,” *All Aboard* (Spring 1944): 5.

⁷³ *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 2; U.S. War Relocation Authority, *The Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), Table 1, 9.

⁷⁴ *Issei* refers to first generation immigrant Japanese Americans while *Nisei* refers to their children born in America.

⁷⁵ WRA, *The Evacuated People*, Table 37a, 100, and Table 19, 61-66; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 16.

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were transferred to other relocation centers (1,491 to Tule Lake). Other destinations included: enlistment in the armed forces, 177; Department of Justice Internment facilities, 85; institutions, 37; and Japan, 18. In addition, 139 persons died at Topaz.⁷⁶

The WRA's Community Analyst at Topaz, Oscar Hoffman, found that the Japanese Americans at Topaz were mostly well educated and successful in their careers, factors which he believed would influence their attitudes toward the administration of the camp. As Sandra C. Taylor judged, "The Nikkei had identified and obtained rights at Tanforan that they did not intend to lose." They would expect competence from their administrators more than less urbanized and less educated groups. In addition, they placed a high value on education and would demand adequate schooling for their children. Taylor observed, "The divisions between Issei and Nisei created a larger schism than the minor tensions between populations from differing assembly centers or Hawaii; the generation gap affected everything from food preference, language, and custom to attitudes about the war."⁷⁷

Administrative Structure and Self-Government

The U.S. War Relocation Authority administered the Topaz Relocation Center. During its years of operation two directors served the camp: Charles F. Ernst (1942-1944) and Luther T. Hoffman (1944-1945). Charles Ernst, a Harvard graduate and settlement house worker, had experience in assisting with unemployment relief in Seattle. He worked for the Red Cross before joining the War Relocation Authority in August 1942. Although Sandra C. Taylor found many of the evacuees to be "simply indifferent" to the director, Yoshiko Uchida remembered him as "kind and understanding" and Tsuyako "Sox" Kitashima called him "quite compassionate." Staff members also had varied impressions of Ernst. Topaz teacher Eleanor Gerard Sekerak felt that he was "dignified and imposing but warm and considerate." She judged him "an excellent administrator, undaunted by the bureaucratic paperwork from Washington." On the other hand, Community Analyst Oscar Hoffman and Roscoe and Gladys Bell (Mr. Bell was chief of the Agricultural Division at the camp), described Ernst using words such as "status conscious," "standoffish," and "aloof." Ernst supervised Topaz from the beginning of its operations through the turmoil of 1943 and the challenges of accelerating the relocation program until June 1944.⁷⁸

Ernst resigned his position in order to take a job with United Nations Relief and Administration and was replaced by Luther T. Hoffman, who had been a bureaucrat with the Bureau of Indian Affairs prior to the war. Before moving to Topaz, Hoffman served as assistant chief of the WRA Relocation Division. When Hoffman took office, WRA Director Dillon Myer wrote camp residents, "I have made an effort to find a man who knows your problems first hand, who is experienced in administration and who possesses the humanity of his predecessor." Presiding over the final year of operation of the camp, Hoffman's greatest challenges lay in encouraging its residents to leave the facility and in closing it down.⁷⁹

The agency's mostly Caucasian civil servants headed sections within the administrative structure assisted in the operation of the camp programs by a workforce of evacuees. The administrative unit was located in the north-central section of Topaz. When first constructed, Administration Building A (223) included the following

⁷⁶ The armed forces enlistment number cited by the WRA apparently included only those who went *directly* from Topaz to the armed forces. Arrington reported that 451 persons who resided at Topaz served in the armed forces during World War II. WRA, *Evacuated People*, Tables 3 and 4, 11-14; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 48.

⁷⁷ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 104 and 110-11; Dennis M. Ogawa and Everts C. Fox, Jr., "Japanese Internment and Relocation: The Hawaii Experience," in *Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress*, ed. Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitanom (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1991), 136; *All Aboard* (Spring 1944).

⁷⁸ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 100-01; Sekerak, "A Teacher at Topaz," 39; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 25-26; Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 110; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 51.

⁷⁹ *Topaz Times*, June 7, 1944, 1; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 102.

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offices: procurement, mail and files, transportation, personnel, food services, Western Union, switchboard, and carrier service, as well as those of the deputy and assistant directors. A second administrative building (Building B or 224) included the office of the project director, assistant director, community services, project attorney, project reports, community welfare, education, and statistics division. The relocation and employment officer was housed in an annex corridor connecting the two buildings. West of the fire house was the relocation office, which included services such as employment, student relocation, and ration books. A fiscal and timekeeping unit was housed in a building west of the post office. Barrack 10 in Block 1 was the city hall where the community council met. Other administrative buildings included offices of the agriculture unit and those of the architects and evacuee property.⁸⁰

About two hundred civil servants worked at the camp which cost about \$5 million per year to operate. Tsuyako "Sox" Kitashima noted that some of the Caucasian personnel befriended the evacuees and empathized with them: "These individuals knew what we were up against and tried to make our lives a little easier." Once quarters became available, some employees lived with their families at Topaz, went to the camp churches on Sunday, and sent their children to the camp schools. The remaining Caucasian workers lived in nearby towns.⁸¹ The military police unit, which included at any time between three to five officers and eighty-five to one hundred men, lived in a separate compound in the northeast corner of the developed area of the camp. Their functions included manning the guard towers, controlling the main gate, checking the credentials of those entering and leaving, and inspecting packages for contraband. The MPs did not participate in the internal policing of the camp.

Community Council

At all relocation centers residents were asked to participate in the management of community affairs, although the project administrators retained ultimate power to make decisions and veto proposals. The Community Council was part of a plan for government at Topaz approved by the majority of evacuee voters. In early October 1942, a representative of each block was elected to serve on a temporary Community Council, the "policy-forming and fact-finding body." In 1943, residents elected a permanent council and approved a Topaz Constitution that established legislative and judicial branches of government. The unpaid representatives were provided with full-time salaried secretaries. The Community Council discussed facility programs and special issues and established committees to carry out its mission. Regulations were enacted, solutions to problems were presented to the director, and licenses were granted to community enterprises. Members of the council cooperated with the project director "in promoting the general welfare of the residents" and acted as a liaison between the administration and the residents.⁸²

Life at Topaz

Arriving by train at the small farming community of Delta, the evacuees were greeted by Reverend Goto and other officials and transferred to buses for transportation to Topaz. As they disembarked from the train, the travelers were handed the first edition of the *Topaz Times*. Miné Okubo wrote, "We chuckled as we read, 'Topaz, the Jewel of the Desert.'" Yoshiko Uchida remembered that the area around Delta gave them hope, "for we were passing pleasant little farms, green fields, and clusters of trees. After a half-hour, however, there was an abrupt change. All vegetation stopped. There were no trees or growth of any kind except clumps of dry greasewood . . . the surroundings were now as bleak as a bleached bone." The camp itself also presented a stark

⁸⁰ WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 5.

⁸¹ Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 24; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 51; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 98.

⁸² The entire council resigned in November 1943 after its chairman, Dr. George Ochikubo, was questioned by the FBI about remarks made during a council discussion. *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 9; *Topaz Times*, September 26, 1942, 1, December 10, 1942, Supplement, and November 20, 1943, 1; WRA, *Relocation Program*, 6-7; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 13.

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impression: "The bus made a turn into the heart of the sun-drenched desert and there in the midst of nowhere were rows and rows of squat, tar-papered barracks sitting sullenly in the white chalky sand."⁸³

Artist George Matsusaburo Hibi described the site: "The surroundings are very lonesome and somewhat look like a dead old battlefield. When we can find a little green grass in our living Center, it looks to us as if a green diamond. In another word, everything is dried up and gray-colored in this plateau; it seems even so our evacuees' hearts too." Miné Okubo viewed the setting as "a desolate scene." Toyo Suyemoto Kawakami, whose family was among the last to leave Tanforan, recalled being greeted at Topaz: "A small band of uniformed Boy Scouts stood in the hot sun and played on their brass instruments. When I heard them blare out the strains of "Hail to California," the song of my alma mater, I was suddenly homesick for Berkeley." Children struggled to understand the sudden changes in their lives. Haruko Obata and a number of other former evacuees recalled one child reacting to the strange place by saying: "I don't like Japan. I want to go home to America."⁸⁴

The desert environment was extremely different from that of the lush Bay Area that the evacuees knew. Upon her arrival at Topaz, Yoshiko Uchida noticed that everything was covered with white, powdery dust. "In the frantic and hasty construction of this barracks city, every growing thing had been removed, and what had once been a peaceful lake bed was churned up into one great mass of loose flourlike sand. With each step we sank two or three inches deep, sending up swirls of dust that crept into our eyes and mouths, noses and lungs." A number of solutions for the dust problems were attempted, including plowing, planting, irrigating, and spreading gravel. "But nothing was successful; the elements won out," reported Miné Okubo. Dust storms could be so bad that workers were instructed to return to their homes. Despite the dust and sometimes mud, some were able to find beauty in the desert sunrises and sunsets, the evening stars in the sky, and the moonrise. Haruko Obata noted, "Everybody was always complaining, but Chiura would say, 'Just look around.'" Others were just happy not to be living in horse stalls permeated with the smell of manure.⁸⁵

Most of the camp residents had only experienced temperate climates and had never seen snow. Teacher Eleanor Gerard Sekerak remembered how both she and her students rushed to the windows to watch their first snowfall at Topaz in October 1942. When the snow melted, residents were confronted with the thick, sticky mud characteristic of the area. Miné Okubo described how people soon began making tall *getas* (traditional wood clogs) to keep their feet dry. As the *Topaz Times* observed, "The novelty is over; snow now means slush underfoot in warmer weather and hazards endangering dignity and comfort in colder temperatures. Thus, the transition from sunny Californians to seasoned Utahns."⁸⁶

When the evacuees first arrived, there were no landmarks within the landscape of the camp, resulting in much confusion (See Figure 24). Toyo Suyemoto Kawakami remembered, "Although we had grown accustomed to the barracks in Tanforan, this permanent camp was a strangely desolate scene of low, black, tar-paper buildings, row on row, through each block." Since all of the blocks initially looked alike, residents sometimes became disoriented at night and entered the wrong barracks. In time, evacuees individualized each of the blocks with landscaping, streets were given names, and signs provided directions.⁸⁷

⁸³ Courtney Goto, "Missionary Mason: A Granddaughter Celebrates a Pioneer of Japanese American United Methodist Churches," n.d., http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news (accessed 2005); Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 120; Yoshiko Uchida, "Topaz, City of Dust," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Summer 1980); Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 105-106.

⁸⁴ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 122; Kawakami, "Camp Memories: Rough and Broken Shards," 27; Hibi and Obata, quoted in Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 52 and 90.

⁸⁵ Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 109; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 184; *Topaz Times*, January 22, 1943, 1; Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 56; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 92.

⁸⁶ Sekerak, "A Teacher at Topaz," 41; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 161; *Topaz Times*, December 5, 1942, 2.

⁸⁷ Kawakami, "Camp Memories," 27.

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Kawakami described her initial impression of the housing that would be hers for the foreseeable future: “The first sight of our rooms was dismal—no furniture, unfinished walls and ceiling, and a two-inch layer of fine dust on the floors and windowsills.” Those in the last groups to arrive were not even assigned to barracks, but had to sleep in dining halls, laundries, and hospital corridors until more buildings were completed. Yoshiko Uchida remarked, “Once again the Army had sent the Japanese Americans into crude, incomplete, and ill-prepared camps.” Completion of buildings with wallboards, ceilings, and stoves, known as “winterization” in the camp, began on September 19 and was completed by December, except for laundries.⁸⁸

At Topaz several generations of a family could be crowded into one barracks apartment, and there was a scarcity of rooms for accommodating small families of two and three (See Figure 25). In some cases these families were forced to share quarters with others for a while. For example, Miné Okubo and her brother lived in their one-room “apartment” with a bachelor whom they hadn’t met before. The lack of partitions and the flimsy nature of the construction resulted in sound carrying throughout the buildings. Tsuyako Kitashima observed, “Whether we ate, argued, cried, laughed, or defecated, we did it in the company of others.” The lack of privacy was experienced in many daily activities, which caused the *Topaz Times* to present one lighter side of the situation: “And a word to the men. We bet they don’t know that every word they speak in their showers can be heard through the walls in the quiet cubicles where the girls bathe.”⁸⁹

A number of problems in the hastily-created camp became apparent as evacuees began moving in. Open water main ditches were easy to fall into, especially at night, so residents were asked to keep their porch lights on until morning. Supplies began to run short by the time the third group of evacuees arrived. The 513 people who entered camp on October 1 spent the first night without mattresses and blankets. Aside from their army cots, the residents had no furniture in their new barracks. The government expected the evacuees to build their own furniture with scrap lumber left over from construction of Topaz and from the new Remington Arms plant in Salt Lake City. Officials designated some wood for such purposes, and other building materials were simply appropriated in “nocturnal raids” by the residents. Miné Okubo wrote, “With the passage of time and the coming of cold weather, stealing no longer became a crime but an act of necessity.” Families without members skilled in carpentry were at a disadvantage in acquiring furniture. The WRA reported that by the end of 1942 it had abandoned the idea of creating a “normal” life for the evacuees and “was squarely facing the fact that a large degree of ‘abnormality’ was an inherent element in the whole pattern of center life.”⁹⁰

Residential Blocks

The “basic unit for political action” at Topaz was the individual residential block, representing a population of 250 to 300 people. Each block had a paid manager and an assistant who were responsible for the general welfare of their residents, including the distribution of supplies, maintenance of the facilities, and supervision of improvements. They assisted with special projects, such as planting vegetables to supplement meals, insured the regular distribution of coal, and supervised winterizing of barracks. The managers, most of whom were *Nisei*, served as the liaison between the administration and the residents, responded to individual problems, and attended center-wide meetings. The meetings were a vehicle for discussing the problems of each block and finding ways to improve the quality of life. Within each block were facilities specifically used by its residents, such as the dining halls, the laundry and latrine/bathroom facilities, and buildings used by the entire community, such as recreation halls.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Kawakami, “Camp Memories,” 27; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 94; Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 111; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 5.

⁸⁹ *Topaz Times*, October 10, 1942, February 2 and 6, 1943, 5; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 49.

⁹⁰ *Topaz Times*, September 26, 1942; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 5; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 23; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 137; *Topaz Times*, September 26, 1942; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 95; WRA, *WRA*, 105.

⁹¹ Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 35; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 135; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 8; Kitashima and Morimoto,

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Dining Halls and Food Service

After initial inadequacies, meals at Topaz reflected some improvements over the ones offered at Tanforan.⁹² Dishes and eating utensils were provided by the center, and while the main entree was served cafeteria-style, side dishes were placed on the tables, and tea was served individually.⁹³ Lack of refrigeration for some of the first food prepared resulted in diarrhea and other stomach ailments. The average cost for feeding each evacuee per day was reported to be thirty-seven cents, reassuring the country that the camps would not be overfeeding their residents. The dining hall staff consisted mostly of evacuees of the block in which it was located. Like other Americans, the residents of Topaz dealt with the rationing of meat, coffee, sugar, and other commodities. Evacuees complained about being fed an excess of organ meats such as liver, heart, tongue, and tripe, and too few fresh fruits and vegetables. Fish was served twice weekly, and some meals were meatless. Milk was restricted to children, those with health problems, and the elderly. Menu planners had difficulty satisfying both the *Issei*, who preferred Japanese style food and the *Nisei*, who liked American style meals.⁹⁴

Waiting in line was a major fact of life at Topaz, especially in relation to mealtimes. Miné Okubo wrote, “We line up for mail, for checks, for meals, for showers, for washrooms, for laundry tubs, for toilets, for clinic service, for movies.” The longest lines were for dining. One evacuee remembered that life in the camp revolved around the mess hall hours, because if residents did not eat at serving time they did not get fed: “In the mornings they ring a bell and everybody goes in and gets in a line to eat breakfast and the same thing happens at noon and the same thing happens in the evening. So most of my time you listen for the bell.” Miné Okubo described the rushed meals, which were a detriment to family life: “Everyone ate wherever he or she pleased. Mothers had lost all control over their children.” Dining at communal tables also affected family life at Topaz as older children often took meals with their friends rather than their parents. Masaru Kawaguchi recalled, “. . . the family kind of broke down because you never ate together anymore.”⁹⁵

Laundries and Latrine/Bathhouses

Women spent considerable time in the laundry buildings which came furnished with washboards as well as clotheslines for indoor and outdoor use. Miné Okubo recalled, “There was plenty of hot water and the alkaline water made washing easy.” Men’s bath facilities included four showers, while women’s baths had four tiny bathtubs in addition to showers, an improvement over the equipment at Tanforan. Although there were no tubs in the men’s buildings, Okubo reported, “Later the desperate old men repartitioned the walls so that one of the tubs was on their side of the shower room.”⁹⁶

Landscaping

In September 1942, under a section entitled “Beautification,” the *Topaz Times* reported, “A program for community beautification, calling for trees, shrubberies, lawns and athletic fields, is now being formulated by the City’s landscape designers under the direction of Roscoe Bell, chief of the agricultural division.” A master plan called for creating a “miniature park” in each block opposite the recreation hall and allowing each block “expression of individual initiative and taste” in determining the appearance of its landscape. In the center of the developed area, camp planners envisioned creating a civic center with special landscaping where important community buildings would be located, such as the offices of the community council, a high school, an

Birth of an Activist, 49 and 51.

⁹² In September 1942 Brandon Watson, chief project steward, announced, “. . . the food was not to blame for the abdominal ailments now common among the residents here.” See *Topaz Times*, September 30, 1942, 2.

⁹³ In May 1943, family-style dining was inaugurated in the mess halls.

⁹⁴ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 96; *Millard County Chronicle*, June 25, 1942; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 6; *Topaz Times*, February 16, 1943, 2; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 42; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 7; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 142-143.

⁹⁵ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 86 and 89; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 97; Kawaguchi, interview.

⁹⁶ WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 7; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 159-60.

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auditorium, a gymnasium, stores, and other buildings. Several Japanese American landscape architects worked on plans for the camp.⁹⁷ A number of evacuees were professional gardeners and greenhouse workers so it is not surprising that substantial effort was expended to beautify the camp setting, both by individuals and the community (See Figures 26 and 27). In many instances, the landscaping was rather elaborate and projects often reflected Japanese symbolism and sensibilities. For example, Reiko Oshima Komoto recalled, “The neighbor across the street somehow managed to make a pool with local fish swimming in it. How he obtained the cement and the fish, I have no clue.”⁹⁸

The landscape artists of Topaz visited private gardens and the high school in Delta to study what type of plants could grow in the area prior to planning the grounds surrounding the administration building and hospital. To bring more vegetation to the desert landscape, trees and shrubs were specially ordered or transplanted from the mountains. The administration initially acquired ten thousand cuttings for shrubs, thinking that vegetation would help solve the dust problem.⁹⁹ Hot beds, transplanting fields, and a garden house were constructed to help with propagation of landscape plants as well as vegetables. Residents from local communities also donated trees and plants for the camp. A 1942 Arbor Week celebration resulted in the distribution of thousands of willow saplings to be planted at the blocks, the apartments, and areas surrounding the blocks. Yoshiko Uchida recalled, “The young trees looked too frail to survive in the alkaline soil, but we all felt anything was worth trying.” Larger trees brought to camp included Siberian elms and Utah junipers which were sent by the Forestry Department of Utah State Agricultural College and placed near the administrative and hospital buildings and in the proposed civic center area. About one thousand tamarisk shrubs were transported from Clear Lake about forty miles away. In December 1942, *Trek* observed, “The most notable external additions to the city scene . . . are the trees of various kinds planted.” The Landscape Department sponsored a garden show of plants gathered locally and arranged into *bon-sai* and *hana-ike* in the same month.¹⁰⁰

Miné Okubo wrote that the residents were surprised in the spring when “green began to appear in the trees and the shrubs, especially those planted near the washrooms.” The *Topaz Times* reported beautification went on day and night. Residents considered the building of roads, transplanting of vegetation, and creation of picturesque rock gardens “essential to the civilized life.” Evacuees used stone to mark gardens and pathways, and interestingly-shaped rocks were a major decorative component in gardens. Since the site of the camp contained predominantly very small rocks, larger ones were found in the mountains and brought to the site. One immense rock, weighing about four tons, was found in the hills west of Topaz and trucked back to be used as a monument in the hospital area. Beginning in January 1943, a “unified gravel walk system” between all buildings was created to aid in beautification and minimize mud, forming “door-to-door pathways.” Residents created a ten-acre picnic ground adjacent the east fence. Children played in sand pits dug in each block and the school areas, although playground equipment was not installed until the fall of 1943.¹⁰¹

Small gardens were a major component of the developed area. Almost everyone participated in establishing victory gardens. As described by Miné Okubo, “Some of the gardens were organized, but most of them were

⁹⁷ Tom Takai, Don Akamatsu, and Joe Korematsu were among those who designed the landscape.

⁹⁸ *Topaz Times*, September 17, 1942, September 2 and 30, 1942, 3; Jane Beckwith, Delta, Utah, interview by authors, October 7, 2005; Reiko Oshima Komoto, “Japanese Internment Camps: A Personal Account,” www.uwec.edu/Geography/Ivogeler/w188/life.htm (accessed November 14, 2005).

⁹⁹ Various solutions to the dust problem were tried, including, in 1943, planting barley and clover south of the hospital. *Topaz Times*, September 30, 1942, May 4 and 6, 1943, 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Millard County Chronicle*, December 10, 1942; Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 125; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 24-25; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 5; *Topaz Times*, October 28, 1942, 1, November 17, 1942, 3, December 3, 1942, 1, December 30, 1942, 1, April 22, 1943, 3.

¹⁰¹ Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 149; *Topaz Times*, December 5, 1942, 12, October 24, 1942, 5, January 8, 1943, 1, March 10, 1943, 1, March 20, 1943, 1, November 23, 1943, 3.

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set up anywhere and any way. Makeshift screens were fashioned out of precious cardboard boxes, cartons, and scraps of lumber to protect the plants from whipping dust storms.” A fifteen-acre community garden was also established. In the evenings residents lined up for “bucket brigades” to carry water between the laundries and the gardens. Yoshiko Uchida found that, in the end, these gardens were not entirely successful: “Our desert remained a desert, and not even the industrious Japanese Americans could transform it into anything else.”¹⁰²

One element of the landscape did not beautify the setting but reinforced the fact that the Japanese Americans were prisoners of the camp. In October 1942 evacuees were assigned to build a four-strand barbed wire fence around the developed area, and watch towers were erected in notched out areas on the outside of the enclosure. The *Nikkei* recognized the irony of having to fence themselves in, but felt they had no other choice. When evacuees questioned visiting WRA director Dillon Myer about the need for the fence, he replied that the army was free to do whatever it felt was necessary for the evacuees’ protection. On November 11, 1942, a fence around the entire project area was completed, and the boundaries of the project were marked with red warning signs. Director Ernst warned, “Under no circumstances should anybody ever attempt to leave or to enter the Center by crawling through the fence.”¹⁰³

Health and Hospital Facilities

The close living quarters, harsh climate, and stress related to camp life and the pressure to relocate, affected the health of most, if not all, evacuees. Yoshiko Uchida wrote, “None of us felt well during our incarceration in Topaz. We all caught frequent colds during the harsh winter months and had frequent stomach upsets.” Adjusting to the strongly alkaline water and the dining hall food, many residents suffered from what was referred to as the “Topaz trots.” The WRA found that Central Utah and the Jerome camp in Arkansas were the only centers which experienced epidemics. The *Topaz Times* reported a “widespread attack of intestinal flu” in late September 1942 and an epidemic of grippe and a case of polio in May 1943. Influenza infected 1,400 people in December 1943 and 1,100 during January 1944. Topaz doctor M. A. Harada described his own diminished health at Topaz, which included “insomnia, anorexia, and a constant feeling of fatigue.” Sandra C. Taylor observed, “Topaz seemed to have a lot of illness, for many people reacted to the strains in community life by becoming physically or even mentally ill.”¹⁰⁴

Due to its isolated location, it was necessary to establish a complete medical facility at Topaz. A nurse was assigned to each residential block and residents were instructed to consult her first when health care was needed. If the case required skills beyond those of the block nurse, the patient was referred to the medical, dental, or eye clinic. The hospital unit consisted of medical wards, an out-patient department, a surgery, a public health department, warehouses, staff quarters, a dining room, and a laundry. The chief medical officer of the camp was a WRA employee, although much of the remaining staff consisted of evacuees.¹⁰⁵ The hospital was dedicated on October 18, 1942, when one wing was functional but the rest of the facility was unfinished. Although completion of the hospital facilities was a priority, certain wings of the main building did not open until a central heating system was operating and work continued on the associated boiler house and laundry into 1943.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 102; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 96; Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 125.

¹⁰³ *All Aboard* (Spring 1944): 5; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 155; Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 118; *Topaz Times*, November 10, 1942, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 114; WRA, *WRA*, 105; *Topaz Times*, September 26, 1942, May 6, 1943, 1, June 12, 1943, 3, December 14, 1943, 1; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 97, 111, and 178.

¹⁰⁵ Jane Beckwith states that two African-American nurses worked at Topaz.

¹⁰⁶ WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 7 and 19; *Topaz Times*, October 24, 1942, 5; *Millard County Chronicle*, October 22, 1942; *All Aboard* (Spring 1944): 5; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 6.

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Schools and Educational Programs

Residents of Topaz considered its educational system one of the most important features of the camp. About three thousand students were served by the schools, which produced about one thousand high school graduates. The education program at Topaz was divided among preschool nurseries, elementary schools, a junior-senior high school, and an adult education program. Four preschools were established to assist mothers who wished to participate in jobs and other activities of the center (See Figure 28). Mountain View and Desert View elementary schools served students through grade six, while the combined junior and senior high school served grades seven through twelve. The curriculum standards of the state were followed and due to difficulties in securing qualified teachers, a training program was initiated for evacuee instructors.¹⁰⁷

John C. Carlisle, an associate professor from Utah State Agricultural College in Logan, served as the superintendent of education for the camp during the first months of its existence. Carlisle believed that only the schools could provide a sense of a normal American community for those living in the unnatural atmosphere of Topaz. Although original plans called for opening the schools on October 19 there were delays due to unfinished buildings and a lack of supplies and the schools were not operational until December 1942. Classes crowded into the barracks that served as schools with tables and benches as the primary pieces of furniture and books and supplies were very delayed in arriving.¹⁰⁸

Eleanor Gerard Sekerak applied for a teaching job at Topaz after a friend informed her that the relocation camp in Central Utah was “in desperate need of teachers.” Sekerak noted, “I had no illusions about what I would find at Topaz; Lorne Bell [supervisor of the education program] had warned, ‘This is an internment camp with barbed wire and military police.’” The WRA instructed Sekerak to take warm clothing to wear and not to expect “gourmet meals.” On the drive to Topaz, Sekerak was also informed about two elements of the environment she never became accustomed to: dust storms and mud. Arriving at the camp, she found that the school buildings were “far from complete.” Sekerak struggled with the irony inherent in life at Topaz: “As I faced my first day I wondered how I could teach American government and democratic principles while we sat in classrooms behind barbed wire!”¹⁰⁹

Due to wartime supply shortages, construction of the Topaz High School auditorium and gymnasium, intended to be the first of several secondary school facilities, did not begin until February 1943 and continued until the end of the year. A science building was not completed until December 1944 and thereby served the camp only a few months. School spirit was an important feature at the Junior-Senior High School, which selected school colors (green and gold) and a mascot (the ram). The high school classes published a yearbook (*Ramblings*) and a mimeographed newspaper (*Topazette*). School organizations included the Boys’ Association, which raised and lowered the flag and presented it during the pledge of allegiance, and the Girls’ Association, which offered an after-school program of athletic activities. Students participated in science, junior mechanics, language, and home economics clubs. All students enrolled in the Junior Red Cross, and the Student Forum discussed issues of concern to Topaz. The entire camp celebrated the graduation of high school students and evacuees created scholarships to help deserving pupils with college expenses.¹¹⁰

High school education at Topaz included some unusual activities, such as in May 1942, when all the seniors and their teachers spent time in the fields planting onions and celery to mitigate the agricultural labor shortage. Some students felt Topaz High was inferior, lacking adequate teachers and equipment and failing to offer

¹⁰⁷ *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 8; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 42; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 16; Anderton, “Central Utah Project,” 11.

¹⁰⁸ *Topaz Times*, September 17, 1942, 3; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 120.

¹⁰⁹ Sekerak, “A Teacher at Topaz,” 38-41.

¹¹⁰ *Topaz Times*, February 17, 1943, 1, February 20, 1943, 1, June 10, 1943, 4, December 21, 1943, 1, and January 13, 1945, 1.

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needed courses. Eleanor Sekerak conceded that the limited experience of some of the teachers at Topaz resulted in apprehension among families that the students would not receive adequate instruction and academic preparation.¹¹¹

Adult Education Programs and Camp Arts and Crafts

Adult education, viewed by the evacuees as “one of the most interesting features of the academic scene,” was offered to people who had graduated from high school, wished to pursue vocational classes, or wanted to supplement their regular schooling. As one observer noted, the music, art, and basic English classes were “transferred almost bodily from Tanforan.” Dr. Laverne Bane, formerly of the University of Utah, administered the program, which included 150 classes serving all age groups. More than three thousand residents attended adult education classes at Topaz. Afternoon and evening classes included such studies as art, basic English, bookkeeping, cabinet making, first aid, Japanese language, mathematics, typing, artificial flower making, basket making, carpentry, flower arranging, music, sewing and needlecraft, and junior college courses. By 1943 the music school alone was serving about six hundred students, with half of them under the age of eighteen. The school’s director stated that the purpose of the program was to offer the community “an opportunity of enjoying beauty through artistic expression.”¹¹²

Topaz had the largest number of professional artists of any of the relocation camps, among them Chiura and Haruko Obata, George Matsusaburo Hibi, Hisako Hibi, Miné Okubo, Yonekichi Hosoi, Masao Mori, Ibuki Hibi, Suiko Mikami, and Masao Yakubi. Chiura Obata is credited with inspiring much of the effort to encourage and subsequently preserve camp art. He, Miné Okubo, and others viewed their art as a way to document life in the camps since cameras were outlawed. Haruko Obata explained: “The University people said [Chiura Obata] should go East, but he wanted to go with the rest of his people. He thought the people would need help, so he should go along. . . . Partly because no cameras were allowed, he wanted to record all the events—everything that happened, every day.” Miné Okubo, art editor for the *Topaz Times* and the *Trek* literary magazine, echoed this concept: “There wasn’t any photographing allowed so I decided to record everything.” She later published some of her more than 1,500 sketches in a 1946 memoir of life in the camp, *Citizen 13660*.¹¹³

Chiura Obata believed that art in the lives of his people had become more important than ever before particularly since they were in such a desolate location: “It is not for the mere existence of teaching technique, but also to foster infinite inspirations, emotions, and peaceful thoughts in people, young and old.” As artist and sculptor Ruth Asawa assessed, the contribution of the teachers and artists “helped to create something positive out of the internment experience.” Obata’s Berkeley students formed an important part of the cadre of art teachers who taught at Topaz, and they continued to produce their own work. After Chiura Obata left Topaz in April 1943, George Matsusaburo Hibi, who had studied at the California School of Fine Arts, continued to direct the school. According to art curator Timothy Anglin Burgard, the camp art produced by Chiura Obata and other Japanese Americans has “. . . long served as a powerful and lasting testament to the perseverance of the human spirit when confronted by unreasoning prejudice.”¹¹⁴

People found creative expression through arts and crafts a relaxing and positive activity. Eiko Katayama believed her father [Yonekichi Hosoi] “would have died in camp if it weren’t for his art. . . . He would just sit

¹¹¹ Henry Tami, “Year’s End,” *All Aboard* (Spring 1944): 20-21; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 259; Sekerak, “A Teacher at Topaz,” 40-41.

¹¹² Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 128; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 17; Adult Education Department, “Summer Program,” June – August 1944; *Trek*, December 1942, 9 and “Adult Education,” February 1943, 25-26; *Topaz Times*, November 28, 1942, 4.

¹¹³ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 129; Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 16, 18, and 69.

¹¹⁴ Timothy Anglin Burgard, “The Art of Survival: Chiura Obata at Tanforan and Topaz,” in *Chiura Obata’s Topaz Moon*, ed. Kimi Kodani Hill (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2000), xi, xvi, and xviii; Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 23 and 159.

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down and do these sketches in an hour. Without this, he would have died . . .” Her father, who had studied at the California College of Arts and Crafts, produced “a series of drawings, one for each block in Topaz, illustrating a unique aspect of that block, accompanied by a philosophical poem/prayer for peace.”¹¹⁵ Others who lacked previous formal training expressed their creativity through arts and crafts with the encouragement of the school. Miné Okubo recalled that “everybody in camp displayed their talents. They made use of everything in camp. Rocks, pebbles, fruit wrapping, seeds, cardboard, fence, anything they could find.” Tsuyako Kitashima remembered, “People created incredible objects from sagebrush roots, discarded orange and food crates, automobile springs, onion sacks, and shells.” Many people collected the tiny shells found on the site, which they fashioned into floral jewelry. Since only sunflowers grew in the desert, paper flower-making was enjoyed widely. Haruko Obata taught traditional flower arranging using crepe paper flowers and items found in the landscape. The school held its first arts and crafts show shortly after the evacuees arrived, on October 16, 1942, an exhibition that included more than five hundred displays. Evacuees showed such items as wood vases and desk sets, stuffed animals and dolls, handmade clothing and hats, elaborate carvings, and jewelry made from a variety of materials. Leaders of the art school held the exhibit in the hope it would convince the administration to support and provide funds for their program. The last art exhibition was held in June 1945 (see Figure 29).¹¹⁶

Although the government outlawed the possession of cameras by Japanese Americans in the relocation centers, Masaharu Dave Tatsuno secretly filmed aspects of everyday life at Topaz during his three-year incarceration. The footage was later edited into a forty-eight minute film, “Topaz,” which was placed on the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress in 1996, one of only two home movies to be so honored. Tatsuno (1913-2006) ran the Japanese department store founded by his father in San Francisco before the war and managed the cooperative store while at Topaz. With the assistance of the store’s Caucasian supervisor, Walter Honderick, who was also a fan of home movies, Tatsuno had his camera smuggled into the camp and hid it in a baby shoe box. He purchased film while on buying trips for the store and had it processed outside Topaz. Tatsuno believed that one of the most important scenes he recorded was of his brother wearing his army uniform visiting his family in the relocation camp. Upon his death in February 2006 the *New York Times* commented that Tatsuno’s home movies “offer a rare documentary portrait of life in American internment camp during World War II. . . .”¹¹⁷

Libraries and Publications

The library had been one of the most popular facilities at Tanforan, and the move to Utah did not diminish the residents’ desire to read. The Topaz Public Library was considered the best in any of the relocation camps. Although it took some time to open the building due to delays in getting the roof tarred, stoves placed, and the interior walls sheet rocked, the library became operational on December 1, 1942. The initial core of the collection included more than five thousand books from the assembly centers and those donated by friends of evacuees, California schools, colleges, and libraries. People at Topaz also provided books and magazines for the library, and the collection reached more than seven thousand items. In addition, the Salt Lake County Library at Midvale supplied a changing group of books for residents to check out. In 1943, the college libraries at the University of Utah and University of California at Berkeley authorized interlibrary loan services for the Topaz Library. Demand for library services was so high that attendance reached about 450 persons per day and the facility remained open twelve hours daily. In addition to the main library in Recreation Building 16, there

¹¹⁵ Katayama quoted in Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 159.

¹¹⁶ *Topaz Times*, October 17, 1942, 2; *Millard County Chronicle*, October 22, 1942; Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 22; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 169; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 53; Hill, *Topaz Moon*, 67 and 85.

¹¹⁷ *New York Times*, February 13, 2006, A21; Erin Kimura, “Dave Tatsuno, Creator of “Topaz” Video, <http://www.scu.edu/SCU/Programs/Diversity/tatsuno> (accessed November 3, 2005).

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were two others for elementary school students, a library with Japanese books, and a high school library. Reiko Oshima Komoto found “the one life-long activity I acquired in camp was the love of reading.”¹¹⁸

Two publications documented life at Topaz, provided a voice for literary and journalistic endeavors, and kept residents informed of events and programs. The *Topaz Times* (15 September 1942-31 August 1945) greeted those arriving at the camp with the headline “Welcome to Topaz,” and a tongue-in-cheek article that explained, “Here we say dining hall, not mess hall; Safety Council, not internal police; residents, not evacuees; and last but not least, mental climate, not morale.” The founders of the newspaper later reported that “they took especial pride in the ways they avoided censorship through clever words and phrases.” The newspaper, edited by Henri Takahashi, started as a tri-weekly publication (later daily) and had sections in both English and Japanese. One of the popular features was the Jankee comic strip created by former Hollywood animator Bennie Nobori. The *Topaz Times* “printed all the news the administration wanted printed,” according to Sandra C. Taylor. She found that there were few instances of censorship except during the crisis resulting from the killing of James Wakasa.¹¹⁹

Art and literature were combined in *Trek*, the camp magazine (See Figure 30). The first issue of *Trek* was presented to evacuees on Christmas morning 1942. Some of the camp’s most talented writers and artists worked on the publication, including Toshio Mori, Miné Okubo, George Sugihara, Masao Yauki, Jimmy Yamada, and Toyo Suyemoto. Three issues of the magazine were published before many of its young editors relocated. The WRA guidebook, *Welcome to Topaz*, called *Trek* “the best of all relocation center magazines,” and noted some demand for its issues came from the outside world. As Topaz Museum president Jane Beckwith notes, “Every author in those three magazines is distinct. There is nothing like the three *Trek* magazines from any of the [other] camps.” Toshio Mori edited a fourth and final magazine entitled *All Aboard*, which included much discussion of relocation matters. Many Japanese Americans sent to Topaz later produced celebrated literary works. Miné Okubo produced what has been cited as “the first serious creative writing by an Asian-American” with her *Citizen 13660*, a graphic memoir of life at Tanforan and Topaz. Toshio Mori’s book of short stories about Japanese-American life, *Yokohama, California*, delayed by the evacuation, was published to much acclaim in 1949. Yoshiko Uchida became a popular children’s author after leaving camp, writing such books as *Journey to Topaz*, as well as her memoir of camp life, *Desert Exile*.¹²⁰

Employment and the Consumer Cooperative

The WRA indicated that the agency would provide jobs and vocational training for “able-bodied residents who want to work.” Recognizing that they might be living at Topaz for some time, many evacuees who were able to work found jobs to pass the time, contribute to the community, and, as Tsuyako Kitashima expressed, to “keep their sanity.” Dining hall employees constituted the largest group of workers in the camp followed by maintenance workers and those involved in project administration, employment and housing, and health and sanitation. Other categories of occupations with large numbers of workers included police, transportation and supply, community services, agriculture, fire department, and education. As early as October 1942, many workers were finding jobs outside the camp and a shortage of maintenance workers was already crippling planned projects. By the following January, the labor shortage was critical with workers needed in both agriculture and public works, and in June 1943 residents were told that the lack of farm laborers could affect

¹¹⁸ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 122; *Topaz Times*, November 24, 1942, January 3 and 29, 1943, 1; Kawakami, “Camp Memories,” 29; Laura R. Merrill, Director of Libraries, “Letter to [Logan] *Herald Journal*,” July 13, 1944, <http://digital.lib.usu.edu/cgi-bin/getimage> (accessed 2005); Komoto, “Japanese Internment Camps.”

¹¹⁹ *Topaz Times*, September 17, 1942, 2; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 134; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 155 and 206.

¹²⁰ Mori (1910-1980) produced six novels and many short stories about the lives of Japanese Americans. WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 10; Niiya, *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History*, 283; Jane Beckwith, Topaz, Utah, e-mail message to author (R. Laurie), February 19, 2006.

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dietary standards in the dining halls. All divisions of the camp and school students were employed in farm planting in 1943.¹²¹

WRA officials had originally considered having the evacuees work on camouflage nets or silk production, but neither enterprise was undertaken. As at all the camps, carpentry and furniture repair shops and food processing facilities to produce Japanese foods were sources of employment at Topaz, with furniture-making for the community buildings being a principal enterprise. In an effort to satisfy the palates of evacuees, a tofu plant was erected that produced 1,500 pounds of tofu per week, enough to meet demand at all the dining halls. Smaller agricultural experiments were conducted to test the feasibility of specialized crops. Hi Korematsu, head of the Agricultural Research Department, led a project to grow bean sprouts in a laundry prior to initiating large-scale production of the plants to supply dining halls. The sprouts were grown successfully, and production of 1,800 pounds per week began in December 1942.¹²²

The pay scale at Topaz followed the standard in place at all relocation camps, with wages ranging from \$12 to \$19 per month, depending upon the professional nature of duties, difficulty of work, and the amount of supervision required. The WRA established low wages so that Japanese Americans would not make more than a U.S. Army private. Most workers earned \$16 per month and very few were paid a monthly rate of \$12. Initially, the standard work week was forty-four hours, and it increased to forty-eight hours at the end of 1942. By mid-1943, 75 % of those able to work were employed. Unemployment compensation was provided to those who could not find work.¹²³

From the beginning, administrators and local officials assumed that some of the evacuees would find work in Utah's farms and other sources of private employment. The camp's Employment Division assisted in helping Topaz evacuees locate higher paying jobs outside the camp, working in Delta businesses and in beet fields, apple orchards, and other types of farms across the West. The *Millard County Chronicle* indicated that all qualified *Nikkei* males would be encouraged to register for farm work or other outside jobs as soon as they arrived at Topaz. The first labor group to exit the camp left on September 25, 1942, to work on a local ranch, while the first group of sugar beet workers left camp for Cache County on October 2, 1942. Employers of seasonal labor were required to provide housing and transportation, as well as pay prevailing wages. Historian Frederick M. Hutchel reported that evacuee field workers were "welcomed with open arms" in Box Elder County. Many local farmers viewed use of Japanese laborers as a patriotic duty with the assumption that the workers would return to their original homes after the war. As camp residents were mostly urbanites some regarded agricultural work as both a means of contributing to the war effort and a new experience of rural life. One of those who left to do carrot-bunching was a former circus worker who said, "I heard about the carrot job and so I thought it would be fun. I don't even know what a carrot looks like when it's growing, but I know I'll enjoy this work."¹²⁴

Cooperative Enterprise

Japanese Americans provided their own source of employment in the camp's cooperative business. The concept of establishing cooperative stores operated by evacuees had grown at Tanforan, where seminars on the subject were offered. Topaz Consumer Cooperative Enterprises, Inc., included a membership of more than five

¹²¹ WRA, *Relocation Program*, 5; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 49; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 34; *Topaz Times*, October 28, 1942, January 28, 1943, June 1 and 15, 1943, 2, June 22 and 26, 1943.

¹²² WRA, *WRA*, 100; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 40; *Topaz Times*, December 5 and 30, 1942, 10, February 16, 1943, 2; *Millard County Chronicle*, November 12, 1942, and January 7, 1943.

¹²³ *Tanforan Totalizer*, September 12, 1942; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 7; WRA, *The Relocation Program*, 5; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 34; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 157.

¹²⁴ *Millard County Chronicle*, September 10, 1942, and November 5, 1942; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 5; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 28; Hutchel, *History of Box Elder County*; *Topaz Times*, October 27, 1942.

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thousand evacuees and employed more than five hundred persons. Each member paid \$1 to belong to the organization which occupied all or parts of several buildings and encompassed a wide variety of goods and services, including: a general canteen selling groceries, hardware, drugs, and periodicals; dry cleaning; banking; a Sears Roebuck mail order facility; a dry goods, clothing, and shoe store; an administration canteen stocking tobacco, magazines, fruit, and sodas; a beauty parlor and barber shops; and a photo department. The co-op opened on October 29, 1942, selling dry goods and providing services to the community and conducting \$2,700 in business the first day. Gross monthly sales totaled more than \$40,000. A major problem during the co-op's early months of operation was that of demand exceeding supply. Miné Okubo noted, "The canteen was like a country store where people gathered to discuss family and community problems. There the rumors of the day were circulated and notes exchanged on many subjects." The co-op also sponsored the showing of movies every weekday evening and often on weekends.¹²⁵

Farm Program

Much of the almost twenty thousand acres of land acquired to create Topaz was intended to be developed for agricultural uses, producing the camp's food. Outside the developed "city," the relocation camp site included agricultural fields, networks of irrigation ditches, a cattle ranch, a chicken farm, a turkey farm, a hog farm, a farm workers' kitchen, and an equipment storage yard for farm equipment. Although the WRA hoped that the camp would become as self-sufficient as possible it soon became clear that initial delays and the diminished number of able-bodied evacuees would seriously affect this goal. Possession of the farm acreage purchased for the center was not gained until November 1, 1942. By December, more than two thousand acres of land had been prepared for agricultural use, fences and animal shelters had been erected, canals and ditches had been completed, and a small number of cattle and hogs had been acquired. This farm preparation included the manufacture of thousands of adobe bricks used for building hen houses. However, until 1943 the farm workers had no equipment except used items requiring repair.¹²⁶

In the spring of 1943, over forty varieties of vegetable seeds were acquired and evacuees planted such crops as corn, cabbage, cauliflower, tomatoes, garlic, potatoes, onions, cucumbers, spinach, beans, squash, radishes, and asparagus, as well as grains and alfalfa to feed the livestock. Although plans originally called for sugar beet planting, the labor shortage in beet fields outside the camp caused the cancellation of this program. Six hundred chicks were purchased as an initial step in producing eggs and meat at Topaz in March 1943. The lack of manpower due to military recruitment and relocations soon made it necessary for high school students and women to help with the farm work, especially harvests. As soon as the closure of the camps was announced the farm program was minimized, no vegetables were planted, and most farm workers were assigned to other tasks. In February 1945 more than thirteen thousand acres of the farm's land was advertised for lease to farmers. In all, Topaz's farm program produced more than \$500,000 worth of agricultural products, equaling about 10 percent of all the food eaten at the camp (See Figure 31).¹²⁷

Churches

Churches were the first community-wide organizations established in the camp and their weekly services were its largest social activities. The three major religious denominations at Topaz were Protestant, Buddhist, and Catholic, and the camp also included several smaller religious groups. Only the observance of State Shintoism was banned, as it had been at the assembly centers. CCC buildings moved to the site were utilized for religious services, as well as newly-built church buildings.

¹²⁵ *Tanforan Totalizer*, September 12, 1942; *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 7; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 40-41; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 164; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 11.

¹²⁶ *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 4; *Topaz Times*, October 24, 1942, 1; Colleen Elizabeth Cox, "Desolate Keep: A Study of the Physical Environment of Topaz, Utah," honors thesis, University of Utah, Department of History, June 1963, 32.

¹²⁷ *Topaz Times*, March 27, 1943, 1, April 13, 1943, August 1, 4, and 10, 1943, *Agriculture Supplement*, January 10, 1945, 1, February 21, 1945, 1; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 37-38.

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The Topaz Buddhist Church held weekly services, which were led by one of six reverends and Bishop Ryotai Matsukage. The church kept in contact with churches located at the other nine internment camps, and also those in the “free zone” (communities outside of the camps), by disseminating notices and publications for church use.¹²⁸ In March 1943, a two-day Buddhist conference was held, and a four-day *Hana-Matsuri* to celebrate the birth of Buddha complete with the distribution of artificial cherry blossoms, was planned for the following month.

The Topaz Buddhist Church became the headquarters for the Buddhist Mission of North America (NABM), the largest religious institution for Japanese Americans prior to World War II. The Buddhist Church remained a strong institution throughout the war. Sixty-eight percent of Japanese American internees were Buddhist.¹²⁹ In 1944, Buddhist ministers and lay representatives met at Topaz to discuss the future of the NABM. These meetings led to a reorganization of the NABM institution and several significant changes. The NABM changed its name to the Buddhist Churches of America and leadership roles, originally held predominately by the *Issei* generation, transferred to the *Nisei* generation. Under this transformed institution, new *Nisei* ministers conducted services in English instead of Japanese, further closing the gap between religious and generational differences.

Churches played a key role in maintaining the spiritual and social life of Japanese Americans in camp. An Inter-faith Ministerial Association coordinated religious activities in Topaz. Tsuyako Kitashima found that religious services attracted standing room only crowds: “It seemed we were all in need of spiritual guidance and comfort.”¹³⁰

Recreation

The WRA encouraged “a broad and varied program of recreational and other leisure-time activities.” Traditional Japanese sports and pastimes were encouraged if they had no political components. Sports were very important to the evacuees even though they had to buy their own equipment to play. At Topaz, the program initially was hampered by the fact that most of the recreation halls were needed for more pressing purposes, such as schools, stores and offices. Open acreage within the camp was set aside for recreational pursuits and sports opportunities included football, basketball, tennis, volleyball, sumo wrestling, and the favorite - baseball (See Figure 32). Each block fielded its own baseball and basketball teams for competition within the camp. Touch football games occurred in open areas. An ice skating pond was built on the south side of camp providing some sport during cold days. However, the ice quickly melted and skating was never a popular activity. In California many residents had belonged to golf clubs and evacuees created a nine-hole golf course and a related Topaz Golf Club in 1943.¹³¹

Other Aspects of Camp Life

Events and Celebrations

Despite the abnormal setting, births, deaths, weddings, and the common events of life continued at Topaz, as did special celebrations. The first birth occurred on 22 September 1942. The first wedding was held in November 1942. The camp included land allotted for a cemetery which was never used. Persons who died at

¹²⁸ Eiko Irene Masuyama, comp., *Memories: The Buddhist Church Experience in the Camps, 1942-1945* (Los Angeles, CA, 2003), 108.

¹²⁹ Tetsuden Kashima, *Buddhism in America: The Social Organization of an Ethnic Religious Institution* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 53.

¹³⁰ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 155, 157; *Topaz Times*, March 6, 1943, 7, April 6, 1943, 4, April 19, 1944, 1, April 22, 1944, 4; *Millard County Chronicle*, October 22, 1942; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 14; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 53.

¹³¹ WRA, *The Relocation Program*, 12; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 170; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 19; Kawaguchi, interview; *Trek 1*, no. 1 (December 1942): 10; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 158; *Topaz Times*, October 17, 1942, 5, March 13, 1943, 5.

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Topaz were cremated and their ashes were held by their families until after the war when they were shipped to San Francisco. In November 1942 a four-day Harvest Festival beginning on Thanksgiving Day included a variety of entertainments, dances, and sports events. The *Topaz Times* commented, "On this first Thanksgiving Day in Topaz, let us reaffirm our faith in the creed of Americanism."¹³²

Miné Okubo recalled that the first Christmas was "sad" despite the decorated trees and special dinners offered by the mess halls. The WRA attempted to make the holiday festive through the decoration of community trees, gift exchanges, and seasonal music. A member of the American Committee on Fair Play from Berkeley, California, was permitted to come to the camp to assist in planning Christmas activities. The Language School of Boulder, Colorado, sent four boxes of presents that were distributed to children, and donations from schools around the country provided more gifts. Yoshiko Uchida recalled small greasewood Christmas trees decorating the classrooms. *Mochi*, traditional rice cakes made to celebrate the Japanese New Year, provided some "gaiety" on that holiday. Despite the effort to make the holidays pleasant, Uchida found:

No matter what I did, I was still in an artificial government-spawned community on the periphery of the real world. I was in a dismal, dreary camp surrounded by barbed wire in the middle of a stark, harsh landscape that offered nothing to refresh the eye or heal the spirit.¹³³

Pets

One of the painful aspects of relocation for many evacuees was the loss of a family pet. Surprisingly, residents of Topaz were able to have both domesticated and wild animals in camp. Miné Okubo reported cats and dogs were common and residents began keeping wild animals and birds. When Ronnie Muramatsu lost his black kitten, seven or eight look-alikes were presented as replacements. Dogs multiplied to the extent that the administration had to begin licensing. Block 41 had an informal zoo of creatures, and individuals kept creatures such as badgers and horned toads as pets. By April 1943 the Community Council became alarmed at the number of captured wild animals living in the camp and asked that all wild pets be disposed of due to health threats.¹³⁴

Interaction with Local Communities

Both evacuees and the camp administration believed that interaction with local people would bring greater understanding of the Japanese American community and contribute to the restoration of their civil rights. The relationship between Delta and Topaz became an important aspect of life in the camp. In November 1942, the two communities exchanged receptions in order to increase mutual understanding, starting with the Delta Lion's Club and High School hosting members of the Community Council. When the Deltans visited Topaz, they were taken on a tour, given a Japanese dinner, enjoyed a painting exhibition by Chiura Obata, and were entertained by children's music and dance. In the same month, Deltans conducting a huge scrap drive for the war effort asked the camp for assistance and 170 evacuees volunteered. School activities were a major source of interconnection with local citizens. The sophomore class of Delta High School and the Community Activities Section at Topaz arranged a "Hi Neighbor" program to "promote friendship between the two communities." High school athletic contests between the two towns were frequent as was the exchange of musical and theatrical performances.¹³⁵

¹³² *Millard County Chronicle*, November 19, 1942; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 24; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 96; Beckwith, interview, October 26, 2005; *Topaz Times*, September 26, 1942, 3, November 17, 1942, 2, November 26, 1942, 1.

¹³³ *Topaz Times*, December 9, 1942, 1; *Millard County Chronicle*, December 17, 1942, and December 31, 1942; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 157; Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 129-30.

¹³⁴ *Topaz Times*, February 3, 1943, 1, and April 13, 1943, 1; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 194-195; Beckwith, interview; Komoto, "Japanese Internment Camps;" Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 153.

¹³⁵ *Millard County Chronicle*, November 5, 1942, November 12, 1942, November 19, 1942, December 3, 1942, May 6, 1943; *Topaz Times*, January 29, 1943, 1; *All Aboard* (Spring 1944): 22.

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Camp Morale, Military Recruiting, Loyalty Questions, and Segregation

Many of the evacuees at Topaz adopted an attitude exemplified by the Japanese word, *shikataganai*, meaning roughly, “it can’t be helped,” or “realistic resignation.” This philosophical view contends that things beyond our means of control happen and we should live day by day hoping for improvement of our condition in the future. Miné Okubo elaborated,

After being uprooted, everything seemed ridiculous, insane, and stupid. There we were in an unfinished camp, with snow and cold. The evacuees helped sheetrock the walls for warmth and built the barbed wire fence to fence themselves in. We had to sing “God Bless America” many times with a flag. Guards all around with shotguns, you’re not going to walk out. I mean . . . what could you do?¹³⁶

At the end of 1942, Taro Katayama described the attitude of the evacuees in an article in *Trek*: “To characterize the prevailing general mood of Topaz’s population, we might begin by using such terms as ‘quietness’ and ‘settledness.’ For this has been, and still is, a ‘quiet’ project, without any of the outbursts of violence which has sporadically cropped up in some of the other relocation areas.” Katayama noted that philosophical differences existed among evacuees but open disagreement had not yet divided the residents. The strong tempering influence of the religious groups was cited as a primary factor of the camp’s character. In the winter of 1942-43, few people were actively planning relocation: “It is as if the city, confronted by the cold winter months ahead, had assumed a deliberate stability, determined to leave until spring any necessary stir about the outer world and the future.”¹³⁷

On January 14, 1943, Governor and Mrs. Herbert Maw traveled to Topaz to dedicate the camp flag pole with the Boy Scouts and induct the community council. Maw, the first governor to visit any relocation center, received a key to the city, toured the facilities, and made a personal inspection of living conditions. An evening banquet prepared by camp chefs was held for 275 persons, the members of the Community Council were sworn in by the governor, and Chiura Obata presented the state executive with a watercolor of Topaz. Addressing those assembled, Maw attempted to strike a conciliatory tone and spread “cheer and good will” with a speech entitled, “Betterness not Bitterness.” The governor expressed sympathy for the hardships and sacrifices suffered by the evacuees, which he hoped would result in “more liberal feeling” towards them in the future. However, issues arising in the new year disrupted the prevailing atmosphere of harmony and feeling settled. Military recruiting, questions concerning Japanese American loyalty, and the shooting of a camp resident, brought greater division among the population. In addition, the relocation program gained momentum.¹³⁸

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the War Department had classified all Japanese American men eligible for the draft as 4-C, or “alien status.” The Japanese American Citizens League, which had moved its headquarters from San Francisco to Salt Lake City, held a special meeting attended by delegates from the camps and passed a resolution requesting reinstatement of the draft for Japanese Americans. In November 1942, the War Department announced that *Nisei* who had a high school education, spoke fluent English and Japanese, and were physically fit could volunteer for the army. Several members of the Military Intelligence Service visited Topaz to encourage enlistment, and in December volunteers left for military service. The War Department reinstated the draft for *Nisei* men in January 1943 and on January 22, draft registration began at Topaz’s City Hall.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 71.

¹³⁷ Taro Katayama, “State of the City,” *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 2-11.

¹³⁸ *Topaz Times*, January 14, 1943, 1; *All Aboard* (Spring 1944): 6; *Millard County Chronicle*, January 21, 1943, 1.

¹³⁹ *Millard County Chronicle*, December 3, 1942; *Topaz Times*, October 14, 1942, 4; and December 8, 1942, 1.

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In February 1943, the War Department announced that a special all-*Nisei* combat unit would be created. President Roosevelt approved the concept writing, "The principle on which this country was founded and by which it has always been governed is that Americanism is a matter of the mind and heart; Americanism is not, and never was, a matter of race or ancestry." While noting that service benefited both the United States and the Japanese American population, the *Topaz Times* commented that a segregated service "deleterious in civilian life, would be equally out of place in the army." In response to questions about the segregated unit from a committee of Topaz citizens, War Department representatives stated: "The organization of your men into a separate combat team is not segregation. It is the means of making the most effective use of your strength for the good of the national war effort and for the ultimate good of all Japanese Americans."¹⁴⁰

On February 15, 1943 a group of military recruiters arrived at Topaz to interview and classify all eligible men for the Army and to encourage them to volunteer. Many in the community believed military service would be a step toward restoration of their rights just as their volunteer labor had been, while others felt that no service should be undertaken while other rights were denied. Some Topaz evacuees created Volunteers for Victory, an organization which believed military service was "a positive manifestation of our loyalty to the United States of America." The soldiers who joined the army and left camp worked to restore civil rights for those who remained inside, writing to Utah's congressional delegation: "We are volunteering . . . not only because that is the most direct and most irrefutable demonstration of our own loyalty to this country, but because by our action we feel we are contributing to the eventual fulfillment of American democratic tradition in its best and highest meaning."¹⁴¹

Another issue increasing unrest at Topaz in February 1943 was the requirement that all evacuees over the age of seventeen complete a questionnaire for leave clearance that included two controversial questions about their loyalty. Citizens of Topaz had demonstrated their patriotism many times: some had served in the military prior to relocation; the pledge of allegiance was recited at many camp events; and the camp even had its own American Legion post. Question 27 asked evacuees about their willingness to serve in the United States armed forces, and Question 28 asked them to swear "unqualified allegiance" to the United States, defend the country from attack, and "forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor or to any other foreign government, power, or organization." The questions stirred up much debate, controversy, and anger among both the *Issei*, who could not become citizens, and the *Nisei*, who felt their loyalty was being questioned or that they shouldn't serve while their constitutional rights were being abused. While the large majority of residents at Topaz answered "yes" to the loyalty question, more than five hundred responded negatively. Evacuee Tom Kawaguchi later observed that the loyalty questions ended the harmonious atmosphere of the camp.¹⁴²

Evacuees formed the Resident Council for Japanese American Civil Rights which encouraged *Nisei* registration contingent upon restoration of civil rights. In January 1944, the regular draft was reinstated for eligible *Nisei* men. The Topaz Community Council approved the action and a branch of the local Selective Service Board opened in the camp. In December 1944, evacuees held a camp-wide memorial service honoring Topaz soldiers who had become casualties on the Italian and French fronts. Topaz sent 451 men into the armed forces of whom fifteen were killed in action (See Figure 33).¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ *Topaz Times*, February 6, 1943, 1; February 9, 1943, 2.

¹⁴¹ Eligible women at Topaz also attended recruitment sessions for the Women's Army Corps. Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 171-172; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 32; *Topaz Times*, March 22, 1943; *All Aboard* (Spring 1944).

¹⁴² *Millard County Chronicle*, October 29, 1942; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 31; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 247.

¹⁴³ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 149; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 48; *Topaz Times*, December 2, 1944, 1.

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Although incidents of violence were few at Topaz, an attack on Chiura Obata clearly reflected the philosophical divisions among evacuees. One evening in April 1943, while returning to his barracks from the showers, the artist was hit in the face by an assailant causing serious injury. Apparently, a rumor had spread that Obata, who was regarded as being cooperative with the administration and who had answered “yes, yes” on the loyalty questionnaire, was associated with the FBI. After spending nineteen days in the Topaz Hospital and further time receiving medical treatment in Salt Lake City, Obata and his family were granted permanent leave to ensure their safety.¹⁴⁴ Rev. Taro Goto had also been threatened leaving the showers and was given permission to exit camp. Project Director Ernst promised to remove any person from Topaz who threatened or committed an act of violence, and a few were subsequently sentenced for assaults.¹⁴⁵

Persons believed to be disloyal or unsympathetic to the cause of the United States (including those who answered “No-No” to the loyalty questions) or those labeled dissidents, along with their families, were segregated from the general population. Tule Lake, the most self-sustaining relocation camp and the one with the most persons of allegedly questionable loyalty, became the segregation center for these evacuees. Nearly 1,500 Topaz residents were transferred to Tule Lake, and a similar number of persons from Tule Lake considered “loyal” were sent to Topaz. Eleven people who stated in their questionnaires that they were not loyal to the U.S., wanted repatriation to Japan, and would commit sabotage if given the opportunity, were sent to Leupp Retention Center, Arizona. Thirty-six persons were allowed to leave for Japan.¹⁴⁶

Sandra C. Taylor analyzed the attitude of the population at Topaz:

The Topaz manner of resistance was rarely violent, as its history was to show, but it did include opposition to what was perceived as unwarranted authority. The community forged by the Japanese Americans at Topaz was a peculiar blend of self-government and individual initiative coupled with submission to a Caucasian authority that was, if ultimately absolute, rarely dictatorial or coercive. The morale was never high and it declined with time, but most never gave in to total apathy.¹⁴⁷

Death of James Wakasa

One of the events which incited the greatest fear and protest at Topaz was the killing of an elderly resident by a guard on April 11, 1943, just before sunset. James Hatsuki Wakasa, a 63-year-old bachelor from San Francisco, was a college graduate born in Japan and a resident of the United States for forty years. Following post-graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, Wakasa was employed as a chef. He served as a civilian cooking instructor at Camp Dodge, Iowa, during World War I, thereby earning American citizenship. Although initially the administration stated that Wakasa had been shot while trying to crawl through the west fence and had ignored repeated warnings to stop (a report authorities included in the *Topaz Times*), they later conceded that he had been one to two yards away from the fence.¹⁴⁸

Evacuees offered different versions of the events. Haruko Obata believed that Wakasa approached the fence chasing after a dog.¹⁴⁹ She stated, “The guard in the watchtower shouted a warning to him, but the old man

¹⁴⁴ In 1945 Obata was reappointed to the faculty at the University of California. The *Oakland Tribune* judged that Obata “fought for American principles while at the Central Utah relocation center in Topaz and was physically attacked by anti-democratic elements.”

¹⁴⁵ *Topaz Times*, June 19, 1943, 1 and August 31, 1945, 4; Hill, *Topaz Moon*, 91-95; Goto, “Missionary Mason;” Charles F. Ernst, Project Director, “Letter to All Residents of Topaz,” June 11, 1943, reprinted in *Topaz Times*, June 13, 1943; *Topaz Times*.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 153.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁴⁸ *Millard County Chronicle*, April 15, 1943; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 137; *Topaz Times*, April 12, 1943, 1.

¹⁴⁹ The WRA report regarding the shooting noted that Wakasa was known to walk his dog in the area.

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couldn't hear him or couldn't understand the warning or something and was shot and killed." Tsuyako Kitashima heard that Wakasa had been picking wildflowers near the fence and couldn't hear well. A friend of Wakasa stated that he examined the site and saw an unusual flower on the other side of the fence, which he believed the man was reaching for when shot. As Miné Okubo noted, "Particulars and facts of the matter were never satisfactorily disclosed to the residents."¹⁵⁰

Wakasa's body was immediately taken to the Topaz hospital and then removed to the military police unit. Although the administration contacted the Millard County sheriff and attorney, military officials refused to cooperate with local officials. Fearing that the camp would react violently to the shooting, military police proclaimed a general alert, bringing out machine guns, gas masks, and tear gas. Instead of resorting to violence, the evacuees through their Community Council, demanded investigation by a special committee. Director Ernst promised a complete investigation and that everything possible would be done to ensure that "such an incident will never recur."¹⁵¹

The block where Wakasa lived made arrangements for his funeral service since he had no known family. Women crafted large paper flower wreaths for the ceremony. Although evacuees wanted to hold the funeral on the spot where Wakasa died, the administration feared it would stir emotions and chose a different location, as well as the date of the ceremony. Both workers and students were excused from their regular duties to attend the solemn two-and-a-half-hour service, which attracted an estimated 1,500 to 2,000 people (See Figure 34).¹⁵²

Topaz residents grew more fearful for their safety following the shooting. Michiko Okamoto stated, "There was no way of defending ourselves from anybody who just got trigger-happy and wanted to shoot us." A general strike among workers lasted for two weeks after the shooting and overall morale was affected for more than a year resulting in a series of smaller protests reflecting lack of trust in the administration. The guard involved in the incident was removed to face a military court martial at Fort Douglas that found him not guilty. In response to evacuees' concerns, the administration took steps to improve the safety of the camp by confining the soldiers to patrolling the boundaries, removing them from the guard towers during daytime, and mandating that they could not harm residents or conduct "unusual" surveillance in the city. During the daytime, only one soldier was to be on duty at the main gate checking arrivals. In addition, no soldiers just back from the Pacific would be stationed at Topaz. Despite these concessions, on May 22 a warning shot was fired into the ground when two residents walked too close to the fence giving rise to rumors of another "Wakasa" incident.¹⁵³

Former evacuees stated that the death of Wakasa and the Japanese American reaction to the event resulted in a lessening of control over the camp, and the director became more lenient in allowing residents to go outside. Miné Okubo reported that the rules became less rigid and many people went outside the project area to gather materials for their gardens. Some residents used this opportunity to hunt for arrowheads, collect stones, and hike around the entire project site. One man hunting shells became lost during a dust storm finding his way safely back at night. Others went fishing in the irrigation ditches about three miles from the developed area. During the summer of 1943, a summer recreational camp at an old CCC camp at Antelope Springs thirty-nine miles west of Topaz, was established for evacuees aged twelve to fourteen.¹⁵⁴ The children and others who visited the area swam, hiked, and ate picnic dinners at Oak Creek. Nearby areas frequented by residents included the Topaz farms, local communities such as Delta, the Antelope Springs camp, and the mountains.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 143; Gesensway and Roseman, *Beyond Words*, 61; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 54; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 180.

¹⁵¹ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 137-138; *Topaz Times*, April 12 and 13, 1943.

¹⁵² Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 139 and 142; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 181.

¹⁵³ Okamoto, quoted in Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 145; *All Aboard* (Spring 1944); Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 33; *Topaz Times*, April 16 and 20, 1943, and May 22, 1943, 1.

¹⁵⁴ The following year there was no summer camp due to lack of transportation and maintenance. *Topaz Times*.

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Visits to Delta became common for shopping purposes and each block at camp appointed a designated shopper to take orders and acquire the merchandise. Tsuyako Kitashima and her husband were allowed to travel to Salt Lake City to marry. Despite the administration's concessions, Sandra C. Taylor judged, "Some of the innocence and presumed good will that had existed between the interned and the incarcerators died with Wakasa and was not reborn." Some anger and disdain was pointed at the Community Council which had cooperated with the administration to avert violence and unrest.¹⁵⁵

Leaves and the Relocation Program

Administrators of the camp recognized the likelihood that the residents would need to take temporary leaves from the camp and made provisions for such permits. Short term leaves were granted for trips to visit medical specialists, negotiate property arrangements, or conduct business that couldn't be done at the center. Some left Topaz to visit relatives in other camps. Evacuees received seasonal leave permits to pursue employment of limited duration in industry and agriculture, while indefinite leave status was approved for permanent employment, college studies, and relocation.¹⁵⁶

The WRA's history of its activities published in 1946 noted:

With very few exceptions, although with varying degrees of intensity, nearly all employes [sic] of the agency in positions of responsibility concluded fairly early in the program that the relocation centers were bad for the evacuated people and bad for the future health of American democracy, and agreed that they should be abolished at the earliest practical date. This conviction eventually became so widespread and so strong that practically all other considerations were subordinated to it.¹⁵⁷

Resettlement of the evacuees to areas outside the West Coast was a priority of the administration from the day Topaz opened. People who could find outside employment or pursue their education and were not considered a security risk, were encouraged to leave. In September 1942, the WRA introduced rules governing seasonal or permanent leave for evacuees. When Dillon S. Myer visited the camp on 4 October 1942, he stated, "Our first concern is not the post-war period but the problem of relocating Topaz residents outside the center before the war is over." Myer warned that there was no guarantee that people could remain in camp after the war. He encouraged residents to ". . . scatter out to every community in the U.S. so we can learn to understand you." In December 1942, the *Topaz Times* noted that "the WRA projects are faced more than ever with the paradoxical situation of building and depleting a community at the same time."¹⁵⁸

A pamphlet entitled *Welcome to Topaz*, published in 1943, was given to evacuees to provide them with general information about the camp and a directory of services available. Project Director Ernst included a letter highlighting the relocation program noting: "It is important also that persons who come to live at Topaz are welcome to stay but they're equally welcome to go. It is the purpose of the War Relocation Authority to depopulate the relocation centers as quickly as opportunities for relocation can be found for residents." Emphasizing the WRA mission to help as many internees as possible relocate Topaz's director noted: "The gate of Topaz is open to all residents with the desire and hope of assimilating themselves into the normal American

¹⁵⁵ Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 56 and 62; Beckwith, interview, October 6, 2005; Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 202-204; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 146 and 160; *Topaz Times*, June 8, 1943, 2, June 3, 1944, 1, and June 10, 1944, 3.

¹⁵⁶ WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 20; Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 130; War Relocation Authority, *The Relocation Program: A Guidebook for the Residents of Relocation Centers* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943; reprint, New York: AMS, 1975), 1.

¹⁵⁷ WRA, *WRA*, 183.

¹⁵⁸ *Topaz Times*, October 7, 1942, 1; December 5, 1942, 2.

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communities.” Relocation was touted as a way the evacuees could contribute to the war effort by finding work in areas with manpower shortages.¹⁵⁹

A major factor in the relocation effort was the formation of the National Japanese Student Relocation Council in May 1942 in Philadelphia. The purpose of the organization was to help *Nisei* students leave camp to attend college and avoid interruption of their education. Students from Topaz began relocating during the first month the camp was open, with the first group leaving on October 7, 1942. Brigham Young University and the University of Utah were among the most active institutions of higher education to enroll Japanese-American students who relocated during the war. In August 1944, the War Department lifted all restrictions on colleges for *Nisei* enrollment.¹⁶⁰

Resettlement gained momentum in the spring of 1943, when Director Ernst was authorized to issue relocation permits regardless of whether the persons involved had secured specific jobs. During 1943-1944 almost two thousand evacuees left Topaz on permanent leave. Chicago was the most popular city for relocation from Topaz during this period. A number of people also moved to Salt Lake City and other locations in Utah to pursue year-round employment. The rate of relocation subsequently declined as most of the younger, skilled, and able-bodied had already departed leaving a population dominated by the elderly and very young, the infirm, and the unskilled. According to Sandra C. Taylor, “Many Issei believed that since the government had deprived them of home and livelihood, it was now the government’s responsibility to care for them.” Some were unsure about leaving after hearing about incidents of broken promises and negative community reactions on the outside, and many didn’t want to live anywhere but the West Coast.¹⁶¹

The makeup of the camp affected the success of a variety of programs. Administrators were forced to hire increasing numbers of outside workers to perform functions in the center as more and more people departed. Sandra C. Taylor found: “Two themes marked the last year and a half of Topaz: the administration’s increased efforts to resettle the population before the war ended and a growing sense of pessimism and even desperation of the people afraid or reluctant to leave.” In the final year of the camp’s operation most of the remaining residents were *Issei*, many without the means or ability to leave.¹⁶²

Constitutional Issues and the Closure of the Camp

In a summary of the relocation program, the War Relocation Authority observed that “never before in the history of the United States had military decision dictated the exclusion of a largely citizen minority from a section of the country.” Legal challenges to various aspects of this unprecedented exclusion and relocation were brought during the war and evacuees at Topaz and the other camps, raised money to donate to the American Civil Liberties Union to support test cases on behalf of Japanese Americans. Two of the principals of these cases, Fred Korematsu and Mitsuye Endo, were relocated to Topaz. Korematsu later recalled that fellow Topaz evacuees shunned him: “All of them turned their backs on me at that time because they thought I was a troublemaker.”¹⁶³ The courts generally rebuffed challenges to the exclusion and relocation. In *Hirabayashi vs. U.S.* (320 U.S. 81, 1943) and *Yasui vs. U.S.* (320 U.S. 115, 1943) the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the validity of the West Coast 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew imposed on persons of Japanese ancestry. In *Hirabayashi*, Chief Justice Stone discussed the history of Japanese Americans on the West Coast and concluded that a wartime curfew directed toward a

¹⁵⁹ WRA, *Relocation Program*, 1; WRA, *Welcome to Topaz*, 2 and 24-25.

¹⁶⁰ R. Todd Welker, “Utah Schools and the Japanese American Student Relocation Program,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 1-18; *Topaz Times*, October 10, 1942, October 4 and 27, 1942; *All Aboard* (Spring 1944): 5; Niiya, *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History*, 70.

¹⁶¹ Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 50; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 118; *Topaz Times*, June 12, 1932, 2.

¹⁶² Okubo, *Citizen 13660*, 209; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 177.

¹⁶³ WRA, *Relocation Program*, 3; *Topaz Times*, November 18, 1944, 2; Matt Bai, “He Said No to Internment,” Fred Korematsu Obituary, *New York Times Magazine*, December 26, 2006, 38.

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particular racial group “based upon the recognition of facts and circumstances which indicate that a group of one national extraction may menace that safety more than others, is not wholly beyond the limits of the Constitution and is not to be condemned merely because in other and in most circumstances racial distinctions are irrelevant.” The unanimous opinion of the Court (with three concurring opinions) noted that “the danger of espionage and sabotage to our military resources was imminent, and that the curfew order was an appropriate measure to meet it.”

A second case arose when Fred Korematsu ignored evacuation orders, changed his name and facial features, and attempted to remain in Oakland, California. After he was apprehended by authorities, he challenged the constitutional validity of the exclusion of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. In *Korematsu vs. United States* (323 U.S. 214, 1944), a six to three majority of the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the exclusion of Japanese Americans as a “military imperative,” stating that “we cannot reject as unfounded the judgment of military authorities and of Congress that there were disloyal members of that population,... [who] could not readily be isolated and separately dealt with.” In a strong dissent, Justice Frank Murphy found that “no reasonable relation to an ‘immediate, imminent, and impending’ public danger is evident to support this racial restriction which is one of the most sweeping and complete deprivations of constitutional rights in the history of this nation in the absence of martial law.”

Justice Robert H. Jackson, also dissenting in *Korematsu*, argued that the Court’s sanctioning of the exclusion order was more dangerous than the exclusion itself: “The Court for all time has validated the principle of racial discrimination in criminal procedure and transplanting American citizens. The principle then lies about like a loaded weapon ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a plausible claim of an urgent need.” A 1945 *Yale Law Journal* article characterized the Supreme Court’s handling of the Japanese American case as “a disaster.” In assessing the 1942 decision to relocate Japanese Americans, John Tateishi concludes that “emotion, political expediency, and economic greed prevailed, and the Constitution was grossly violated. All three branches--the executive, legislative, and judicial--failed the trust reposed in them and embraced West Coast prejudices that were infused with racist assumptions.”¹⁶⁴

The decision in the *Endo* case was announced on the same day as *Korematsu*, December 18, 1944, and resulted in the closing of the relocation camps. Mitsuye Endo, a *Nisei* employee of the State of California, had been fired for being of Japanese heritage and then was relocated. She allowed the American Civil Liberties Union to represent her in a test case before the court arguing that the government had no right to detain loyal citizens without charges. Despite her potential to relocate, Endo remained in Topaz until the decision was rendered to not jeopardize the case. The Supreme Court in *Ex Parte Endo* (323 U.S. 283, 1944) found that “admittedly loyal” citizens could not be deprived of their liberty. The day before the ruling was delivered the army announced it would end its West Coast exclusion program effective January 2, 1945.¹⁶⁵

Following the Supreme Court decision in the *Endo* case and announcement of the revocation of the exclusion order, the WRA stated it would close all the relocation camps within six to twelve months. The administration’s focus at Topaz was on convincing people to leave and preparing them for a return to normal life. The remaining residents worried about discrimination, lack of jobs, and the cost of returning. Although an army team cleared all residents and they were free to move anywhere in the country, by the end of January 1945 less than half of the population had exited the camp. The final relocation period brought additional stress to the lives of the evacuees, particularly the elderly. As Dave Tatsuno recalls:

¹⁶⁴ Tateishi, *And Justice for All*, xxvii.

¹⁶⁵ Niiya, *Encyclopedia of Japanese American History*, 18-19 and 70; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 185.

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. . . you look back on it now, and all you hoped for was that you can get back, you see, and reestablish life again. And then, you know, I felt sorry for so many people, they had nothing to go back to. You see? They lost their job or whatever it was. It was a very bleak time. And so the people in camp, the uppermost worry was what's gonna happen to them after the war. . . .¹⁶⁶

In February 1945, an all-center conference of evacuees held in Salt Lake City discussed issues regarding closure of the camps and the process of return. Dillon S. Myer subsequently paid a two-day visit to Topaz, examined conditions, answered questions, and spoke to gathered residents about WRA policies. Sandra C. Taylor reported that the camp administration began providing "little squeezes" designed to encourage people to leave, such as charging for transportation into Delta to go shopping. She found March 1945, "was the beginning of the diaspora."¹⁶⁷

As the momentum to leave increased, facilities and programs were condensed. Dining halls began closing in May, and by that month Topaz was one-third its original size due to leasing of the camp's farmlands. Vocational classes closed at the end of May, and on June 1, 1945, Topaz schools ceased operation. Adult classes ended on June 30. In mid-July, Topaz residents learned that their camp would close on November 1, 1945. Farm animals were either sold or slaughtered. On August 15, the first train transporting Topaz residents to the West Coast left Delta. The last issue of the *Topaz Times* was distributed on August 31, when there were 3,319 persons still in the camp. On October 1, the Community Council held a farewell banquet in Delta. The last train for the West Coast began its journey on October 26, 1945.¹⁶⁸

Residents of Topaz responded to the closing down of camp as they had to earlier events, with acceptance, not violence. Sandra C. Taylor analyzed, ". . . its ending was in keeping with its previous history." The last group of evacuees to depart were mostly Hawaiians who were waiting for transportation, and the last community event was a Halloween and closing party attended by administrators and residents. Topaz closed as scheduled on October 31, 1945.¹⁶⁹

Disposal of Camp Assets and Topaz in the Postwar Period

A program to dispose of the assets of the ten relocation camps was undertaken and all camp property was declared surplus. The Topaz Relocation Center was turned over to the War Assets Administration (WAA) on February 9, 1946. The buildings, appraised at \$4.5 million, were taken to educational facilities or sold at minimal prices; some were used on local farms as outbuildings or moved into Delta and remodeled for housing. The auditorium was sent to Southern Utah State College where it was used for forty years. While some supplies and equipment were sold to schools and other entities, Jane Beckwith reports that those at the scene recall that office equipment was simply buried in the desert. The buildings were removed from the site by 1946 (although the brick Boiler Plant smokestack was reportedly still present in the 1950s), the land went into private ownership, and over the next several decades, greasewood reclaimed the camp. Following abandonment of the site, local residents salvaged cast iron and other materials from what remained. As Taro Katayama had foreseen in 1942, "A Topaz emptied of its human component would soon be reclaimed by the barrenness from which it is just beginning to emerge."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 188; Dave Tatsuno, San Jose, California, interview by Aggie Idemoto, January 20, 2005, Densho Digital Archive, <http://archive.densho.org> (accessed December 12, 2005).

¹⁶⁷ *Topaz Times*, February 21, 1945, 1; February 24, 1945, 1; March 3, 1945; Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 211.

¹⁶⁸ *Topaz Times*, April 17, 1945, 2; May 4, 1945, 1; May 11, 1945, 1; August 31, 1945, 1; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Taylor, *Jewel of the Desert*, 220-221.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 221; Arrington, *Price of Prejudice*, 55; Beckwith, interview, October 6 and 7, 2005; Taro Katayama, "State of the City," *Trek* 1, no. 1 (December 1942): 11.

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Recognition of the Site

In 1974, the developed area of the Topaz relocation camp was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in a nomination prepared by the Utah State Historical Society. In 1975, the Louis B. Ellsworth family donated one acre of land for a monument to be established at Topaz. The monument, designed by Salt Lake City graphic artist Ted Nagata and funded by former Topaz residents and local bicentennial committees, was a project of the Utah chapter of the Japanese Americans Citizens' League. Dedicated on October 9, 1976, the concrete and stone monument stood seven feet high and contained plaques describing the historical significance of Topaz.¹⁷¹ Tsuyako Kitashima reflected on the importance of erecting a monument at the Topaz site:

I wanted to see the historical monument erected in remembrance of the camp. . . . As we stood before it I felt a sense of pride. Here was something lasting which would teach people about the camp and its history. America's history. It stood as a testament to the past.¹⁷²

In 1982, the Congressional Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians rejected the rationale that the relocation was based on military necessity and concluded that the "broad historical causes that shaped the decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership." The commission was established by the U.S. Congress in 1980 to study the impact of the relocation and to propose remedial action. While a handful of individuals still defended the relocation decision, the commission concluded that "the personal injustice of excluding, removing, and detaining loyal American citizens is manifest. Such events are extraordinary and unique in American history. For every citizen and for American public life, they pose haunting questions about our country and its past."¹⁷³

In August 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation providing \$20,000 in tax-free reparations to each of sixty thousand surviving Japanese American evacuees. The bill included a formal apology, a review of convictions, and pardons for those who did not cooperate with the relocation. The President observed that "this bill has less to do with property than with honor. For here we admit a wrong."¹⁷⁴

An informal Topaz Museum Board was organized in 1991 as a result of a Delta family donating half of an original Topaz recreation hall. The group determined to restore the building to its condition during the war years and successfully raised more than \$50,000 from former Topaz evacuees. The restored building was dedicated in July 1995 on the grounds of the Great Basin Museum in Delta. Plans for a museum focused on Topaz heartened Tsuyako Kitashima, who commented that it "fills me with hope that younger generations of Americans will have a concrete reminder to not repeat the mistakes of the past." The Topaz Museum Board was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in December 1996 with the following mission statement: "To preserve the Topaz relocation experience during World War II; to interpret its impact on the evacuees, their families, and the citizens of Millard County; and to educate the public in order to prevent a recurrence of a similar denial of American civil rights." Delta High School teacher Jane Beckwith, a native of the town and president of the board, took a lead in efforts to remember the story of Topaz and its historical significance.

¹⁷¹ Kent Powell, "Topaz War Relocation Center," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972); *Deseret News*, October 9, 1976; Frank K. and Sadie Yoshimura Photograph Collection, Photo 1091, University of Utah, Marriott Library, Special Collections, Salt Lake City, Utah; Alice Kasai Manuscript Collection Number 1091, Box 74, File Folder 4, University of Utah, Marriott Library, Special Collections, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹⁷² Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 131.

¹⁷³ U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (Washington: U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, 1982), 35; Don T. Nakanishi, "Surviving Democracy's 'Mistake': Japanese Americans and the Enduring Legacy of Executive Order 9066," *Amerasia Journal* 19 (1993): 8. For an example of the minority who defend the relocation program, see Lillian Baker, *The Concentration Camp Conspiracy--A Second Pearl Harbor* (Lawndale, CA: AFHA Publications, 1981).

¹⁷⁴ Linda M. Rancourt, "Remembering Manzanar," *National Parks* (May/June 1993): 34.

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Today, the Topaz Museum Board publishes a newsletter, maintains a website, sponsors pilgrimages to Topaz, undertakes educational activities, and has acquired nearly 96 percent of the developed land of the camp to protect it from development.¹⁷⁵

After experiencing years of vandalism, the Topaz monument installed in 1976 was damaged beyond repair. Ted Nagata designed a new monument dedicated in August 2002 in a ceremony sponsored by the Topaz Museum Board. A second monument (also designed by Nagata) honoring Japanese Americans from Topaz who served in the armed forces during World War II, and a flagpole were installed at the camp in 2005.¹⁷⁶

In recent years, professional studies of the Topaz site have documented its historical significance and physical integrity. The draft National Historic Landmarks theme study “Japanese Americans in World War II” recommends that the Topaz Relocation Center “be considered for possible National Historic Landmark designation.” The National Park Service commissioned the preparation of this nomination.

Conclusion

Topaz is a tangible and somber reminder of the relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II. For many who endured it, incarceration proved to be a defining moment in their lives. As Yoshiko Uchida observed, “Although some Issei were shattered and broken by the experience, those I knew and observed personally, endured the hardship of the evacuation with dignity, stoic composure, disciplined patience, and an amazing resiliency of spirit.” The history of Japanese-American interment is an enduring legacy for the nation. As Ted Nagata observed, “Topaz was a tragic incident that never should have happened. Yet, it teaches us an important lesson. Prejudice and hysteria must never again blot our nation’s history.”¹⁷⁷ As one of the ten relocation centers created in the months following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Topaz is nationally significant for its association with military history (World War II on the home front), politics and government (the relocation decision), constitutional law (protection of civil liberties during wartime), ethnic heritage (Japanese American history), and social history (minorities in the United States; history of civil rights). It meets NHL Criterion 1 and retains integrity from the 1943-1946 period.

¹⁷⁵ *Topaz Times* (Topaz Museum Board Newsletter) (June 2002): 3; Topaz Museum Board, <http://topazmuseum.org>; Kitashima and Morimoto, *Birth of an Activist*, 132.

¹⁷⁶ *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 6, 2002, A1; Ted Nagata, Salt Lake City, Utah, telephone interview by author (Thomas), December 12, 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Uchida, *Desert Exile*, 148; Ted Nagata, quoted in *Desert News*, November 13, 1976, 65.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register. Topaz War Relocation Center Site, NR #74001934
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency (National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management)

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- Local Government
- University: University of Utah, Utah State University
- Other (Specify Repository): Topaz Museum, Delta, Utah

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 728.4 acres

| UTM References: | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|-----------------|------|---------|----------|
| A | 12 | 345874 | 4364744 |
| B | 12 | 348045 | 4364711 |
| C | 12 | 348020 | 4363099 |
| D | 12 | 344587 | 4362583 |

The coordinates above (in NAD 83) are those of the bounding polygon ABCD, within which the NHL boundary is fully contained.

Verbal Boundary Description

Most of the nominated area is comprised of the built-up area of the camp situated in Section 20, Township 16 South, Range 8 West, Salt Lake Meridian. The remainder of the nominated area lies in Sections 19 and 30, to the west and southwest, respectively, and consists of the remnants of the camp trash dump and sewage disposal structures.

The boundary is described as follows (distances specified in feet are based on GIS measurements and are approximate): beginning at the northwest corner of Section 20; thence east along the north line of Section 20 to the east line of Section 20; thence south along the east line of Section to the centerline of Agate Avenue (extended); thence west along the centerline of Agate Avenue to the centerline of Juniper Street; thence south along the centerline of Juniper Street to the centerline of Opal Avenue; thence east along the centerline of Opal Avenue to the centerline of Willow Street; thence south along Willow Street for a distance of approximately 660 feet; thence east for a distance of approximately 755 feet along Cinnabar Avenue to the east line (south of and parallel to Cinnabar Avenue) of Section 20; thence south along the east line of Section 20 to its intersection with the south line of Section 20; thence westerly along the south line of Section 20 to the southwest corner of the section; thence northerly along the west line of Section 20 for 2,419 feet; thence west into Section 19 for 964 feet; thence west-northwesterly for 632 feet; thence southwesterly for 5,300 feet (along the southerly side of the sewage drainage ditch and entering Section 30); thence northwesterly for 80 feet; thence northeasterly for 5,339 feet (along the northerly side of the sewage drainage ditch and leaving Section 30); thence north-northeasterly for 303 feet; thence westerly for 1,069 feet; thence northerly for 95 feet; thence easterly for 1,824 feet; thence northerly 2,196 feet to the intersection of the north line of Section 19 (a point 692 feet west of the northeast corner of Section 19); and thence easterly along the north line of Section 19 to its northeast corner (the northwest corner of Section 20, the point of beginning).

Boundary Justification

The nominated area includes most of the original developed square mile of the Central Utah (Topaz) Relocation Camp (Section 20), which contained the evacuee housing area, the administration area, the hospital and boiler plant, warehouses, the military police compound and guard towers, and service and support areas. Also

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included are the camp trash dump and sewage disposal areas, which are immediately adjacent to the west in portions of Section 19 and 30. Section 20 maintains a high level of overall historic integrity (see the extended discussion of integrity in Section 7), including the rare barbed wire perimeter fence. The boundary was drawn to include almost all extant resources relevant to the Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz) that still retain historic significance and integrity.

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PHOTOGRAPHS**Common Photographic Label Information:**

1. Name: Central Utah (Topaz) Relocation Center
2. Location: Delta vicinity, Millard County, Utah
3. Photographer: Thomas H. Simmons (unless otherwise noted)
4. Photograph Date: October 2005 (unless otherwise noted)
5. Negative on file at: National Park Service
Intermountain Support Office
12795 W. Alameda Pkwy.
Denver, CO 80225

Information Different for Each View:

6. Photograph Number, Description of View, and Camera Direction

| Photo Number | Description of View | Camera Direction |
|---------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | Overview of site and barbed wire perimeter fence from near the northeast corner of Section 20 (north of the former MP area). The concrete remains of the boiler plant coal bunker are visible at the right. | SW |
| 2 | Overview of site from intersection of Tamarisk Street and Cinnabar Avenue (between Blocks 38 and 39). | NW |
| 3 | View of internal camp road immediately south of the main entrance to camp (intersection of Tamarisk Street and Alexandria Avenue). | S |
| 4 | Series of wood pads on which barracks foundation posts rested in Block 37. Note the general lack of greasewood within the building footprint. | W |
| 5 | Evacuee barracks area in Block 22, showing building outline of barracks (lighter feature extending diagonally from lower left to upper right), rock garden remnants, and gravel pedestrian path (darker feature extending from bottom of image to right). | SW |
| 6 | Mess hall foundation in Block 30. | NE |
| 7 | Laundry/latrine concrete slab foundation in Block 22. | SSW |
| 8 | Warehouse (Building 101) slab foundation. | NE |
| 9 | Concrete guard tower (in the center of the south line of Section 20) foundations with projecting metal brackets. | NE |
| 10 | Low stone wall east of main administration buildings (Buildings 223, 223-A, and 224). | SW |
| 11 | Fire station (Building 227) concrete slab foundation. | WNW |
| 12 | Raised concrete foundation and steps of Building 310 (Mess Hall) in the hospital complex. | SE |
| 13 | Boiler house (Building 301) foundation featuring the raised concrete walls of the coal bunker. | SE |

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| Photo Number | Description of View | Camera Direction |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------|
| 14 | Concrete slab foundation of the tofu factory (Building 318) east of the laundry and north of the hospital. | NE |
| 15 | Sewage pump structure, west side of Greasewood Way at Jasper Avenue. | WNW |
| 16 | Gravel pedestrian path between barracks in Block 37. | W |
| 17 | Gravel walk bordered by stones in Block 5. | N |
| 18 | Gravel pedestrian path with stone border (to right), area of flat stone pavers (to left), and circle of stones (upper right) near the location of the recreation building of Block 22. | ENE |
| 19 | Concrete and stone pond west of the latrine/laundry building in Block 37 is an example of evacuee landscaping. | ENE |
| 20 | Evacuee landscaping in Block 11, featuring pond and stones. | E |
| 21 | Small evacuee garden plot with remnants of low wood fence in Block 36 east of laundry/latrine building. | NE |
| 22 | Gravel path (diagonal feature from lower left to upper right) and decorative boulders at the site of the Buddhist Church in Block 17. | ENE |
| 23 | Wood box debris in hot and cold frame area, north of hospital and east of tofu factory (Building 318). | W |
| 24 | Concrete monument with incised names of young evacuees, located in southern portion of the site, just north of the center guard tower. | S |
| 25 | Camp trash dump area in Section 19 north of the sewage conduit line; note long trash dump mound in background. | N |
| 26 | Overview of sewage septic tank field in the area to the west of the developed area of camp (Section 19). Photographer: Joelle McCarthy, U.S. Bureau of Land Management. | NW |
| 27 | Former redwood septic tank location in the sewage system area west of the developed part of the camp (Section 19). Photographer: Joelle McCarthy, U.S. Bureau of Land Management. | E |
| 28 | Loading platform (west side of Greasewood Way opposite Block 8). | NW |
| 29 | Monuments and flagpole in gravel parking area. | SE |
| 30 | House and shed on the former Revel property in Block 28 in the southeastern portion of the camp. Photographer: Charles Haecker, National Park Service. Date: December 2005. | W |

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