Cultural Heritage & Sustainability Committee
Minutes
Monday, June 6, 2022
5:30pm – via Zoom

Committee Members (4 required for quorum): Gary Barbaree, Jeremy Chan, Lucy Fisher, Benh Nakajo, David Takashima, Rosalyn Tonai
Other Board Members: Jaclyn Funasaki
Guests: Patrick Hayashi, Karen Kai, Nancy Ukai

I. Call to Order

Co-Chair Lucy Fisher called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

II. Approval of Agenda

David Takashima moved, Benh Nakajo seconded approval of the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

No public comment.

III. Approval of Minutes of May 2, 2022 CHSC meeting*

Benh requested clarification on the posting of the minutes. Draft minutes will be posted together with meeting agendas. Final minutes, approved by the committee, will be posted at the next committee meeting. The draft minutes were corrected to reflect that Fukuoka is the next city for the Japantenna Project.

David moved, Benh seconded approval of the amended minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

No public comment.

IV. Staff reports

A. Update from Dr. Emily Murase, Executive Director

1. Japantenna

Emily reported that Fukuoka City of Kyushu will be the focus of the Japantenna pop-up storefront July 22-24 and July 29-31. She shared the project budget Japantenna budget Fukuoka city.xlsx. Kim Ina, who staffed the pilot Kagoshima pop-up last fall. will be hired as a paid consultant. The event will be held in the Kinokuniya Building of the Japan Center Mall, in the storefront that formerly housed Day 2 Nite Glam, next to the currently vacant acupuncture office. Emily announced that the Japantenna Steering Group has reached out to the JET Alumni Association, the Fukuoka-Oakland Sister City Association, and the Fukuoka Kenjinkai.

Lucy asked about the video of the pilot project. The video can be accessed here: Japantenna | ジャパンテナ. She wanted to hear the key lessons garnered from the

pilot project. Emily stated that 1) the connections to the Kagoshima kenjinkai, high school students studying Japanese, and other volunteer staffers were very rewarding, 2) visitors really wanted to buy items that were on display in the storefront, and 3) it would be helpful to expand promotions by other merchants.

No public comment.

B. Update from Susie Kagami, Cultural District Project Manager
Susie provided an update on the KOHO Co-Creative Arts Hub Launch Party scheduled for Thurs, 6/23, 5 - 10 pm @ Japan Center East Mall, Japantown. Details and RSVP here https://kohosf.com/. Susie reviewed the lineup, including a celebrity tattoo artist, the DJ Umami (SF Warriors DJ), and Queer Taiko. She encouraged everyone to come to the event.

No public comment.

V. Unfinished Business

1. Cultural Asset Liaisons: Hokka Nichi Bei Kai and Benevolent Society

Gary explained that the committee was focused on cultural assets and organizations, including Kinmon Gakuen, Hokka Nichi Bei Kai, and the Japanese Benevolent Society. Lucy and Gary have contacted individuals who have existing relationships with these organizations. Yuki Nishimura agreed to be the liaison with the Hokka Nichi Bei Kai. Brandon Quan will be the liaison with the Japanese Benevolent Society. Gary will reach out to Richard Hashimoto to see if he would be the liaison for Kinmon Gakuen.

Benh recounted a very successful committee visit to the Hokka Nichi Bei Kai. He asked about membership in the Nichi Bei Kai. Susie stated that she is not yet a member. Emily shared that she recently joined the organization.

No public comment.

2. Review/Update JCHESS (2013)

Gary stated that there were 200 organizations listed in the 2013 Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy report which is now 10 years old. Staff has recommended that this list be updated. Susie explained that she became aware of this need during the redistricting process when the boundaries of Japantown were being discussed. Lucy suggested that a full discussion be scheduled for the August committee meeting.

No public comment.

VI. New Business

1. *Recommendation to JTF Board for Jaclyn Funasaki to Join the CHS Committee

Benh moved, Gary seconded the motion to approve the appointment of Jaclyn Funasaki to the Cultural Heritage Committee. The motion passed unanimously.

No public comment.

2. Discussion Items

a) Whether/how to proceed with Wakasa Memorial Stone committee

Lucy asked Melissa to introduce guest speaker Nancy Ukai, a descendant of Topaz inmates, and her colleague Pat Hayashi, a survivor of Topaz prison camp. Nancy is a Berkeley-based researcher who was a key leader in the protest that ended the controversial 2015 auction sale of Japanese American incarceration artifacts (the "Eaton collection"). She is the Director of "50 Objects/50 Stories of the American Japanese Incarceration" and active in Tsuru for Solidarity, an organization dedicated to justice for immigrants. Pat served as Associate Vice Chancellor of UC Berkeley and later retired from his position as Associate President under UC President Dick Atkinson. During his career, Pat challenged the SAT college entrance exam as a fraudulent, racist test. This work laid the groundwork for the University of California and California State University systems to make a seismic shift in college admissions policies and abandon the SAT as a college application requirement.

Supporting links

Rago Auction:
https://www.cnn.com/2015/04/15/us/japanese-american-auction-uproar/index.html
Tsuru for Solidarity: https://tsuruforsolidarity.org/
50 Objects: https://50objects.org/
Wakasa Memorial Committee: https://wakasamemorial.org/
Wakasa Committee Letter to the Topaz Museum
Letter from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to the Topaz Museum

Nancy gave a slide presentation on the Wakasa Monument. She noted that this is an Issei (first generation Japanese immigrants) story, a story about the Topaz incarceration camp and all of the wartime prison camps that held Japanese Americans, and an untold story in US history.

Nancy explained that James Hatsuaki Wakasa was born in Japan and was highly educated, both in Japan and the US. Incarcerated at Topaz, the San Francisco-based chef was murdered while walking his dog on April 1, 1943 by 19-year old Private Gerald Philpott stationed at Guard Tower 8. Philpott was acquitted of murder charges in what the Assistant Secretary of John McCloy later deemed a "justifiable military action" based on counterfactual reports that Wakasa was attempting to escape. In fact, Wakasa's body was found 4 feet within the camp fence, yet, almost immediately, media reports attributed the death to an attempted escape.

In the wake of a recent uprising at the Manzanar prison camp, military authorities were prepared for an uprising and denied requests for the funeral to be held at the site of the fatal shooting and for a memorial to be erected there. Yet, inmates did erect a large

stone monument which stood for just a couple of days before it was ordered taken down and buried. Thought to be destroyed, the monument was unexpectedly discovered by National Park Service archaeologists Jeff Burton and Mary Farrell in 2020. A 14-member Wakasa Ad Hoc Committee formed 3 weeks after the monument was discovered and concluded that the monument should stay in the ground until experts could be brought in to handle the historically important finding. However, 8 months later, the Topaz Museum board dug up the monument inexpertly without engaging the Ad Hoc Committee or any Japanese American community members. Eventually, the National Park Service intervened and surveyed the original location of the buried monument. The Japanese American community held a formal ceremony in memory of Mr. Wakasa at the excavation site.

Pat explained that the shot that killed James Wakasa was the 8th bullet fired upon inmates. One theory is that prison guards fired their guns as “target practice,” not intending to kill inmates. Whatever the context, he considered the action of the Topaz Museum a desecration of a sacred site to the Japanese American community. It pains him that the monument, a precious testament to the Japanese American spirit, remains on a pallet unprotected and vulnerable to the elements.

Nancy stated that there remains community trauma about the Wakasa murder and that even her own mother was very angry about senseless death, expressed many years after Topaz closed. She further expressed that the Topaz Museum had rejected a very generous offer by Japanese American philanthropist Masako Takahashi, who was born in the Topaz prison camp, to finance the excavation. One of Nancy’s goals is to create an opportunity for the Japanese American community to engage in community-based archeology like the project at Manzanar where community volunteers are trained in basic archeological techniques to unearth artifacts from prison camp grounds. The proposed Topaz project has the support of the National Park Service and the Utah State Historic Preservation Office. Nancy described some of the conflict between the Wakasa Committee and the Topaz Museum.

Q&A: Benh thanked the guest speakers for their moving presentation. He asked if there was any writing on the monument. Pat responded that the monument was dragged by the forklift across the ground for 2 hours and any writing would have been effaced. The Wakasa Committee requested a laser scan of the monument to seek evidence of any inscriptions.

Karen Kai asked if the Wakasa Committee has approached U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland about this issue. She recommended that the JTF take a position supporting the Wakasa Committee. She noted that a large majority of Topaz inmates came from San Francisco and James Wakasa himself was from San Francisco.

Rosalyn Tonai expressed disappointment at the lack of action by the Japanese American Confinement Sites group. She raised issues related to the fact that the non-profit Topaz Museum owns the Topaz incarceration camp property. Nancy responded by stating that the situation is not dissimilar to sacred Native American sites

located on privately owned property. These property owners still have a responsibility to honor sacred sites.

In terms of next steps, Nancy invited the Japantown Task Force to serve on the Wakasa Committee Advisory Council. There were many ways to support the Wakasa Monument, including writing letters and attending community meetings.

Karen reminded the committee that the agenda item was not marked for action. Emily suggested that the Cultural Heritage Sustainability Committee could make a recommendation to the board at its August meeting in advance of a presentation at the full JTF board meeting later in August. Lucy asked the availability of the guest speakers to present again, this time to the full JTF board, and they appeared open to it.

Gary expressed his view that this was an opportunity to move forward with the important work of healing in the community. He urged committee members to reflect on the presentation and be prepared to come to the August committee meeting with ideas on how to move forward. The Wakasa monument reflected a community response to the unprovoked and tragic death.

Nancy announced that the Topaz Museum was planning a community meeting and encouraged folks to participate once a date and time are determined. Lucy asked whether Nancy could share her slide deck for posting on the JTF website.

Next steps
Since the CHSC will not meet in July, the committee decided to schedule an action on the Wakasa Memorial at the August meeting. The action will be a recommendation to the full JTF board. Emily suggested that Nancy and Pat be invited back to present to the full board in August.

No public comment.

VII. **Adjournment**
Next CHSC meeting: July will be canceled due to the July 4 holiday. The next meeting will resume in August.

NEXT MEETINGS: Mondays, 5:30 - 7:30 pm
August 1, 2022
September 12, 2022
October 3, 2022
November 7, 2022
December 5, 2022

ZOOM LINK:
Join Zoom Meeting: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82189931310
Meeting ID: 821 8993 1310
One tap mobile

+16699009128,,82189931310# US (San Jose)
+12532158782,,82189931310# US (Tacoma)