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Beehive Archive

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on [KCPW](#) and [Utah Public Radio](#).

Exile at Topaz

Thousands of Japanese Americans were forced into exile in the Utah desert during World War II.

Two months after the December 1941 attack by Japan on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued *Executive Order 9066* mandating the removal of all persons of Japanese ancestry, regardless of their citizenship, from the Pacific coast of the United States. Ultimately 117,000 Japanese Americans, two thirds of them native-born citizens, faced removal to ten hastily constructed concentration camps scattered across the interior West.

At the time of her family’s removal, Yoshiko Uchida was a 20-year old college student at Berkeley. Her father was detained by the FBI and the family given ten days to evacuate. With only vague instructions about what they could bring, Yoshiko helped her mother and sister dispose of their home and belongings.

They were no longer the Uchida Family, but instead family #13453. Initially held at the Tanforan Racetrack, the Uchidas lived in a horse stall until transferred by train to the Topaz Relocation Center, fifteen miles west of Delta in the remote Utah desert. The camp wasn’t finished, and Yoshiko remembered that her family shivered without heat during their first month there. The internees finished building their own barracks, but the crude structures never could keep out the cold or the relentless “swirls of dust that crept into [their] eyes and mouths, noses and lungs.”

For the next three years, Topaz was home to 8,000 internees from the San Francisco area. Initially, they were watched closely, but restrictions eased after armed guards shot a man to death just for standing near the fence. Most residents went about life the best they could. The children attended school while adults worked around the camp. They cultivated gardens and organized social activities. More than 100 young men from Topaz volunteered to serve in the American military. Some internees were eventually permitted to leave for jobs or schools further inland. Yoshiko left in 1943 for graduate school in Massachusetts.

Topaz closed in 1945 with the end of the war, and its residents left to rebuild their lives.

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