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Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation Celebrates Withdrawal of of Japanese American Incarceration Artifacts from Public Auction

The Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation (HMWF) is pleased to report the withdrawal of the Japanese American incarceration items from the Allen Eaton collection, which were slated for public auction Friday, April 17, 2015, in Lambertville, New Jersey.

Within hours after legal counsel for the HMWF communicated their intent to file a lawsuit, the Rago Arts and Auction Center announced that the auction items would be withdrawn.

“The Foundation and the many people who have supported us in the last few weeks are thrilled that the immediate risk to the collection has been averted, and we are appreciative of the wider Japanese American community’s concerns,” said HMWF Chair Shirley Ann Higuchi. “We now turn to the challenge of securing the future care of the collection and protecting it in collaboration with all concerned Japanese American-related institutions.”

The Foundation’s effort began in late-March with requests for alternatives to a public auction. The HMWF first asked for the donation of the items, then for the private sale of the items to appropriate non-profit organizations, and finally, for a postponement of the auction. When these suggestions bore no fruit, the HMWF secured pledges from its board members and friends to make a substantial cash offer—one that far exceeded the estimated auction value of all the incarceration-related items. When even this offer was not accepted, the HMWF felt compelled to continue the effort through legal means. A number of supporters rallied around the effort, with several Japanese American-related organizations submitting letters and messages of support over the last few days.

“I am heartened by the solidarity shown among the Japanese American community to bring this issue to light,” said HMWF Executive Director Brian Liesinger. “It spurred us

on in our effort to do right by the collection and the incarcerated who created the artworks.”

The HMWF enlisted the New Jersey firm Lite DePalma Greenberg to handle the case. The law firm had this to say about the result, "We're very pleased that our legal efforts on behalf of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation led directly to the withdrawal of these unique and culturally valuable artifacts from auction. We hope that the consigner of these items accepts the Foundation's previous offer to purchase the artifacts for more than their fair market value, so that they can be preserved and displayed for the public to see and learn from, as intended by Allen H. Eaton and the Japanese incarcerated."

The items had been passed down to Eaton's heirs after his passing and eventually ended up in the hands of a family friend, who decided to send it to auction. Eaton accumulated the collection toward the close of the World War II Japanese American Confinement Camps with the help of incarcerated. In 1952, he published the book *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire*, which featured many of the items planned for the public auction.

“As a former incarcerated, I am very proud of the role that the HMWF took in bringing about the cancellation of the auction of these precious items,” said HMWF Board Member Sam Mihara.

The HMWF is intent upon continuing its efforts to secure these items and assure their proper stewardship. We hope the owners of the collection will be open to our good faith willingness to provide generous and fair compensation in order to bring the collection back to the Japanese American community.

To read the formal legal complaint, go to http://heartmountain.org/pressreleases_17_4287335041.pdf

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The Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation manages the Heart Mountain Interpretive Center on the site of the former “Heart Mountain Relocation Center.” The National Historic Landmark site is devoted to memorializing the experiences of more than 14,000 Japanese Americans incarcerated there during World War II with a museum, gallery, archive, original camp structures, war memorial and memorial walking trail. It is located between Cody and Powell on Highway 14A. For more information, call (307) 754-8000 or visit www.HeartMountain.org.

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