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1

Introduction

During public presentations about the gardens at Amache, Colorado's World War II Japanese American confinement camp, I am often asked how people incarcerated there accessed plant materials. The pages to come suggest many answers to that question, but one of them is contained in a jar recovered from the site in 2008. That was the first summer of the University of Denver's biannual archaeology and museum field school. The participants were a diverse crew: a former Amache incarcerated and his grandson, volunteers from the local high school, undergraduate and graduate students, and professionals like me, a professor of anthropology. We represented the most important stakeholders for this project: those with a personal or family tie to the site, local residents who know the region and are the site stewards, students learning how to study the tangible past, and scholars gathering data for their research. Both onsite and in the museum, we each had something to gain, and working together meant drawing from everyone's skills and commitments.

Two dedicated graduate students, April Kamp-Whittaker and Dana Ogo Shew, were pursuing thesis research at Amache while overseeing the museum



FIGURE 1.1. Jar of saved seeds collected at Amache, 2008.
 Courtesy, DU Amache Project.

and archaeology work as crew chiefs. We worked together to create field and museum protocols to meet management and research goals. While April focused on children and childrearing in camp and Dana on changing conceptions of femininity, my focus was the camp's landscape and its gardens in particular (Clark, Kamp-Whittaker, and Shew 2008). Because much of their day was devoted to overseeing crews, the graduate students' research often took place in the late afternoon or evening. After an evening field excursion, April excitedly handed me an artifact she and Dana had found during their survey: a jar filled with seeds (figure 1.1).

The seeds contained in that jar are squash or perhaps gourd seeds. Both are among the kinds of plants former incarcerated recall being grown in camp gardens, and historic photographs capture some of the varieties produced in camp (figure 1.2). Among the donated items being documented at the museum that summer were gourds decorated with a variety of seeds (figure 1.3). Both the gourds and the seeds on them were grown at Amache. Some varieties of squash like *kabocha* are commonly grown in Japan, but the seeds in this jar could also represent species more easily acquired in the United States, such as pumpkins.



FIGURE 1.2. Historical photograph of squash and melons at the Amache Agricultural Fair, fall 1943. *Courtesy, Amache Preservation Society, McClelland Collection, Granada, CO.*



FIGURE 1.3. Decorated gourd from Amache, now in the collections of the Amache Museum. *Courtesy, DU Amache Project.*

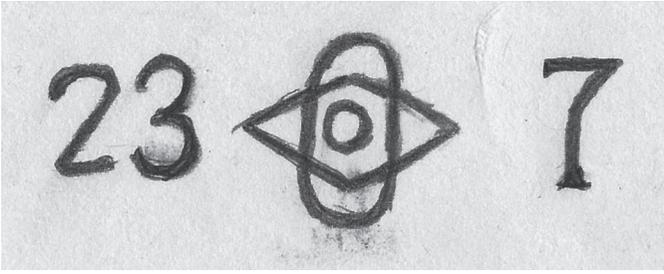


FIGURE 1.4. Drawing of the maker's mark found on the base of the jar of saved seeds. *Courtesy, DU Amache Project.*

We found the jar itself quite tantalizing. Now a part of the permanent Amache collection, the base bears a maker's mark embossed there during manufacturing. The distinctive shape is associated with one of the primary bottle manufacturers of the twentieth century, the Owens-Illinois Glass Company. Surrounding the company symbol are numbers that represent the year the bottle was made and the location of the plant (figure 1.4). A quick look at a reference book (Toulouse 2001) told us that the jar was manufactured in 1937 in a plant in Los Angeles. Most jars of this sort contain food items that would not have lasted on the shelves even half of the five years that transpired between their manufacture and the outbreak of World War II. It seemed likely, then, that this jar was brought to camp by one of the thousands of incarcerated sent here from the Los Angeles area. If that was the case, then perhaps it came the way we found it: full of seeds. Regardless, it told us that at least one incarcerated was in the habit of saving seeds and did so at Amache. A headline in the Japanese-language section of the Amache newspaper stating "Oriental Vegetable Seed Needed" (*Granada Pioneer* 1943a) suggests that individual was not alone.

Why Archaeology? Why Gardens?

Conducting archaeology at a site within living memory would seem counterintuitive. Not only are there survivors who remember the experience of their confinement, there are reams of government documents to be found in archives, in libraries, and online. There are also period records created by incarcerated, from letters to photographs to art. Even with this rich documentary and oral record, archaeology reveals a different story, finely textured

with the material evidence of daily lives and the landscapes in which they were lived. The jar of seeds is a good example of how historical archaeology can contribute new insights into even well-known historical periods. It is among the many finds at Amache that reveal strategies and networks of action, drawing us into a story that would otherwise go untold.

That would be unfortunate because we need the lessons of the gardens and gardeners of Amache. As the displacement of peoples explodes across the globe, we can turn to Amache and its sister sites to understand how people under stress made effective places. There are lessons here for those who plan refugee and temporary worker camps or who want our prisons to be more humane.

The remains at Amache also speak to a broad public interested in history and civic justice. This place came about because of the dangerous combination of racism and fear, yet it contains eloquent expressions of dignity. When the temptation rises to single out groups as somehow less intrinsic to a body politic, Amache and the other Japanese American confinement sites remind us of the generational consequences of that act. In that vein, they are especially powerful touchstones for those who have a family history of confinement during World War II. As will be revealed in the pages to come, this work is deeply indebted to the community of former incarcerated and their families. This is not an easy heritage, and I hope my collaborators will see how much richer this work is because of their willingness to share their own and their families' stories.

Of all the topics that could be pursued at Amache, why gardens? Several answers intertwine like the morning glories once found at camp. Growing things was the primary occupation of Japanese Americans in 1940, whether they were farmers or gardeners or worked in a nursery. A focus on gardening helps us understand how they were taking that expertise and applying it to an entirely new landscape: the High Plains of Colorado. In addition, the remnants of gardens are one of the reasons the site has been recognized as a National Historic Landmark, a status reserved for the country's most significant historic locales. A focus on gardens also connects Amache to the broader experience of the World War II home front. This is particularly clear for the vegetable gardens that, both inside and outside the camp, were framed as "victory gardens." Finally, they are a way to see agency, initiative, and hope in a very dark time. Amache's gardens encourage all of us to invest in the future, to plant even if we are not ensured of a harvest.

This research came about in part because I live and work in Colorado, but Amache would be a good choice for any archaeologist. Of the ten primary Japanese American incarceration camps, it is among the best preserved, especially with regard to its landscape. There is also an active stakeholder community who works collaboratively with scholars. Finally, there is strong community support for preservation of this site and the items associated with it. They are thoughtfully managed by the people of nearby Granada, Colorado. Readers who are inspired by this work can take the opportunity to visit the site and museum.

Finding Solace in the Soil: A Preview

The title of this book, *Finding Solace in the Soil*, has a dual meaning. On one hand, it reflects a key assertion about gardens at Amache or any of the other locations where people of Japanese ancestry were incarcerated during World War II. Gardens were a pathway to solace in a time of upheaval. The title is also inspired by archaeological practice, the search for physical evidence of past human action. Like gardening, archaeology often requires digging, but our harvest is knowledge. This book tacks back and forth, focusing at times on the search for the gardens and at others on what has been found.

Much like the sediment that surrounds a buried garden, a scholar's work also exists in a matrix. This includes theories and methods that have been tested over time. When concerned with human behavior, the culture of those studied—traditions, history, belief systems—must always be accounted for. As an archaeologist, that matrix is physical, too; the discipline requires concern with the location of our finds and the physical conditions that affect their preservation. As a social scientist, the larger public context of this study is also never far from my mind. How do people interact with this history? What work does this site of heritage do today?

A concern with the lived experience of diverse populations has long been an anchor of the field of historical archaeology. The work of a generation of scholars provides a foundation for what is presented here (e.g., Deetz 1996; Singleton 1999; Wall 1991). Methodologically, it owes much to the archaeology of gardens and landscapes (e.g., Currie 2005; Malek 2013; Yamin and Metheny 1996). But because it engages with survivors, it also pushes this work into territory more typically connected with cultural anthropology (e.g., Castañeda

and Matthews 2008; Slaughter 2006). Indeed, it is part of a growing movement of work which posits that the contemporary should be as much of a concern for archaeologists as the past (e.g., Harrison and Schofield 2010; Shanks and McGuire 1996). Chapter 2 further explores disciplinary inspiration and lays out the specific methods employed in this work.

The cultural and historical context of this research follows. In chapter 3, readers are introduced to the Japanese homeland, with a focus on gardening and farming in Japan. This context serves as a foundation to better understand those who left Japan for the United States. Through exploring communities and work patterns, it evidences both global connections and local strategies.

The forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is the focus of chapter 4. It begins with an overview of the disturbing chain of events following Pearl Harbor. Then it shifts to focus specifically on Amache, one of the ten War Relocation Authority camps. It provides critical detail about the physical and social structure of the camp to frame the research done there.

After setting the stage, the book shifts into the heart of its tale: the gardens and gardeners of Amache. Chapter 5 focuses on two populations whose contributions to the transformation of the camp's landscape are still very evident: nursery professionals and children. It is an exploration of intergenerational ways the raw military setting of Amache became something that looked a whole lot more like a town.

How the gardens at Amache evidence connections at multiple spatial scales is the focus of chapter 6. It begins with families and then considers connections within the barracks blocks. Especially through the materials employed, gardens also evidence community-wide connections. The scale then moves out to beyond the camp, investigating both the physical and social landscapes of wartime and how they shape what we find at Amache.

In chapter 7, I discuss the most widespread of the garden types at Amache: entryway gardens located adjacent to individual barracks. Research at the camp illuminates the wide variety in these gardens and in the gardeners who made them. Close attention to our results reveals insights into the roots of these gardens in Japanese tradition as well as often surprising innovations. During a time of material shortage and financial hardship, flexibility made tradition possible.

The final interpretive chapter draws all the research results together to answer a key question: Why did incarcerated invest so much in gardens? In

chapter 8, I posit that gardens and gardening met key needs for those imprisoned at Amache and other confinement camps. Improvements in the local environment came about by creating microclimates, reducing blowing sand, and providing better food to eat. As a dispossessed people, incarcerated needed to feel some stability, and gardening was a way to literally put down roots. Gardening was also an embodied act and thus an ideal way for physically active people to pass the time. Finally, gardening met spiritual needs of incarcerated, such as the need for beauty, for a connection to nature, and for balance.

The epilogue brings our story back to the present with the suggestion that the gardens of Amache can be thought of as *giri*, a Japanese concept with overtones of gift and obligation. They are a gift in that they provide a storehouse of knowledge about how to create beauty without waste, how to translate design principles in a new setting, and how to grow plants in an inhospitable environment. They are also an avenue to understand how people can maintain their dignity in a situation that dehumanizes them. Yet the gardens are also an obligation. We need to study and interpret them with care, and we need to preserve them as a testimony for the future.

After the epilogue are two resources the reader may find useful. The first is a taxa table, a list of the plants this research has identified as likely to have been grown at Amache. The second is a glossary of terms that may be unfamiliar to readers. It covers technical archaeology terms, words in Japanese, and terms relating to the history of Amache.

A Note on Terminology

The words used to describe the experience of the wartime removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans are exceptionally fraught (Daniels 2008). During the war, the US government employed many forms of propaganda to portray its actions in the best light possible. The terminology employed was the kind of double-speak that would have made George Orwell cringe. US citizens of Japanese ancestry were referred to as “non-aliens,” people who were not faced with a natural disaster were nonetheless “evacuated” from their homes. The temporary prisons in which they were first placed were “assembly centers,” while their final confinement camps were called “relocation centers.” The experience has been glossed as “internment” and indeed

the National Park Service, which manages and maintains three of the War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps, often employs this mid-ground term. When trying to connect with the general public, its use makes sense because it is the term with which most people are familiar.

Yet technically speaking, internment involves the lawful detaining of enemy aliens. It is a process governed by both national statutes and international law. This term correctly applies to the 8,000 or so Japanese nationals who were detained by the US Department of Justice (Daniels 2008). Not only was there a federal policy in place to detain such individuals, but detainees were given the chance for hearings in which they could be cleared and released. The remainder of those rounded up by the United States cannot technically be “internees” because they were either US citizens or were not given the chance for trial. Their experience parallels a different model—concentration camps—where ethnic or other minorities are confined without judicial recourse. This was, in fact, a term used for the Japanese American camps in some of the more frank correspondence of US officials, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt (Daniels 1972). Many Japanese American organizations, for example, the Japanese American Citizens League (2013), have endorsed a policy to refer to the WRA facilities as “American concentration camps.” Yet not everyone agrees with that policy, in no small part because when US officials used that term earlier in World War II, it had not yet become conflated with the Nazi death camps (Daniels 2008).

My conversations with survivors and their descendants suggest a similar ambivalence. One issue with calling these facilities “concentration camps” is that the choice can alienate important stakeholders both at the larger public level and within specific important groups, in particular local residents who live with these sites and the families of those who worked at the camps. In a book like this, where the goal is to open up history to as wide an audience as possible, avoiding a term that often shuts down dialogue seems prudent. So here I take a compromise position, understanding that compromise rarely makes anyone happy. Throughout this manuscript I use the terms *incarceration* or *confinement* unless citing period documents. Likewise, those who were unlawfully confined are typically referred to as *incarcerees* or *detainees*. If some are offended by my choices, I hope they understand that they were made in good faith and with full knowledge that the stakes around this history remain painfully high (Clark 2016).