

CIVIL RIGHTS AND MORAL WRONGS

WORLD WAR II JAPANESE AMERICAN RELOCATION SITES

Mary M. Farrell and Jeffery F. Burton

Mary M. Farrell is Forest Archaeologist at the Coronado National Forest in Tucson, Arizona, and Jeffery F. Burton is an Archeologist with the National Park Service Western Archeological and Conservation Center in Tucson, Arizona.

In 1942, the United States incarcerated almost 120,000 American men, women, and children in “relocation centers,” “assembly centers,” and other prison camps without formal charges or trials. The “crime” of those incarcerated was their ethnicity: all were of Japanese ancestry. Although those incarcerated retained much of their Japanese culture and heritage, over two-thirds of them were American citizens who had been schooled in the ideals of equality, democracy, and justice, as embodied in the U.S. Constitution.

By the time the last internees were released in 1946, the Japanese Americans had lost homes and businesses estimated to be worth, in today’s values, 4 to 5 billion dollars. Deleterious effects on Japanese American individuals, families, and communities were immeasurable. During World War II, the relocation was justified as a “military necessity,” but decades later, a U.S. commission determined that the incarceration of Japanese Americans was due to wartime hysteria, failed leadership, and racial prejudice, rather than any true threat to national security (Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians 1982).

The story of this shameful episode in U.S. history has been recounted in numerous histories, diaries, analyses, and legal discussions and is the focus of exhibits and memorials from California to Arkansas. Archaeology, too, can complement, and even elicit, these written and oral histories to give an added dimension to the past.

Manzanar

In 1992, Congress set aside the former Manzanar Relocation Center, located in Owens Valley in eastern California, as Manzanar National Historic Site “to provide for the protection and interpretation of historic, cultural, and natural resources associated with the relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II” (Figure 1). At the same time, Congress authorized studies to determine if other sites associated with the relocation merited special designation and protection. Although sev-

eral cultural resource management studies included recording and discussion of relocation-related sites (e.g., Rose 1992; Sawyer-Lang 1989; Tamir et al. 1993), there had been no broad-scale, nationwide overview of the archaeological remains associated with the relocation.

At Manzanar, archaeological survey determined that several significant Relocation Center features were located outside of the boundary originally set aside by Congress (Burton 1996). In 1996, Congress used the results to expand the boundary of the Historic Site to include some 300 additional acres, to incorporate these features.

The archaeological work also helped to dispel some misconceptions about the relocation. For example, some “old-timers” denied that there ever were guard towers or fences at the relocation centers; they claimed that the inmates were “coddled” while other Americans suffered rationing and shortages. The archaeological evidence at Manzanar proved these assertions to be false, without resorting to diatribe or rhetoric (Figure 2).

The archaeological studies at the camps testify not only to the national political environment but also to the “small things forgotten” of everyday life (Figure 3). It is the small things that show how the internees maintained their ethnicity, in the face of adversity. Japanese ceramics show that family heirlooms were brought to the camps even when luggage was strictly limited and military-issue “hotelware” was provided at mess halls. Lost “Go” pieces reflect the popularity of a traditional Japanese game, even while the children were playing with American-style army toys and marbles. Most pervasively, traces of internee-built rock alignments, gardens, and ponds reflect not only the Japanese ideals of order, beauty, and harmony, but also the social cohesiveness and organization required to construct such features. Taken together, these overall patterns indicate the persistence of Japanese culture and its integration with “American” culture, even in the face of persecution, even when the dominant culture had defined “Japanese” as something to be afraid and ashamed of.



Figure 1: Manzanar Pilgrimage, 2004, at the relocation center's cemetery monument.

Archaeological work at Manzanar also uncovered significant evidence of other components within the Historic Site boundary (Burton 1996, 1998; Burton et al. 2001). Presentations at public meetings for the Manzanar General Management Plan helped gain local community support for the Historic Site; residents of Owens Valley were pleased to learn more about the prehistory and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history of the site and to know that their own families' and neighbors' histories would be interpreted too. The inclusiveness provided by the archaeological evidence allowed for interpretation of the Native American and early Anglo-American history within the boundary and lessened opposition to the establishment and development of the Historic Site.

Confinement and Ethnicity

All of the relocation centers are significant in Japanese American culture for their association with a defining event that had profoundly negative effects on the community's traditions, social structure, and finances. Even today, at which "camp" one was interned often serves as part of an individual's self-identity, and all of the relocation centers are pilgrimage sites. They are also significant for all Americans as reminders of how the basic civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the U.S. can be brushed aside in times of crisis.

But what of the physical remains at the sites? Relocation centers, built to house an average of 10,000 internees each, encompassed up to over 45,000 acres, including internee barracks, administration areas, farm land, sewage treatment plants, and other infrastructure. Over the past 60 years, the relocation center land and structures have been dismantled, demolished, or converted to other uses, so archaeological investigations have been key to assessing what's left.



Figure 2: Four "post holes" from guard tower foundations, Manzanar National Historic Site.

Under the Congressional mandate, the original goal of the National Park Service's (NPS) archaeological work at the former relocation centers was to gather information for future management and interpretation. At Manzanar, where most of the work has been done to date, the objectives were to document the current condition of the site and features related to the relocation center and to determine if other historical or prehistoric remains existed within the National Historic Site boundary. The information would then be used to help gauge interpretive potential of individual features and protection measures needed during the development and maintenance of visitor facilities. At the other relocation center sites, reconnaissance, survey, and some excavation would be used to determine whether sufficient features and artifacts remained to warrant National Register or National Landmark status and special treatment or protection.

The results, describing myriad mundane features such as latrine and barracks foundations as well as remnants of guard towers and fences, garnered a surprisingly wide audience. The NPS has filled over 10,000 requests for *Confinement and Ethnicity: An Overview of Japanese American Relocation Sites*. The report was placed on the NPS's website (http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/anthropology74/index.htm) and the University of Washington has printed a new edition to increase its availability (Burton et al. 2002).

Even though former internees were involved in the first stages of research, often volunteering to help identify features not listed in the documentary records, Japanese Americans have become more involved after the reports were published. The relocation still elicits very strong emotions, and many former evacuees have had difficulty talking about the experience. One woman related in a letter that she did not even know her

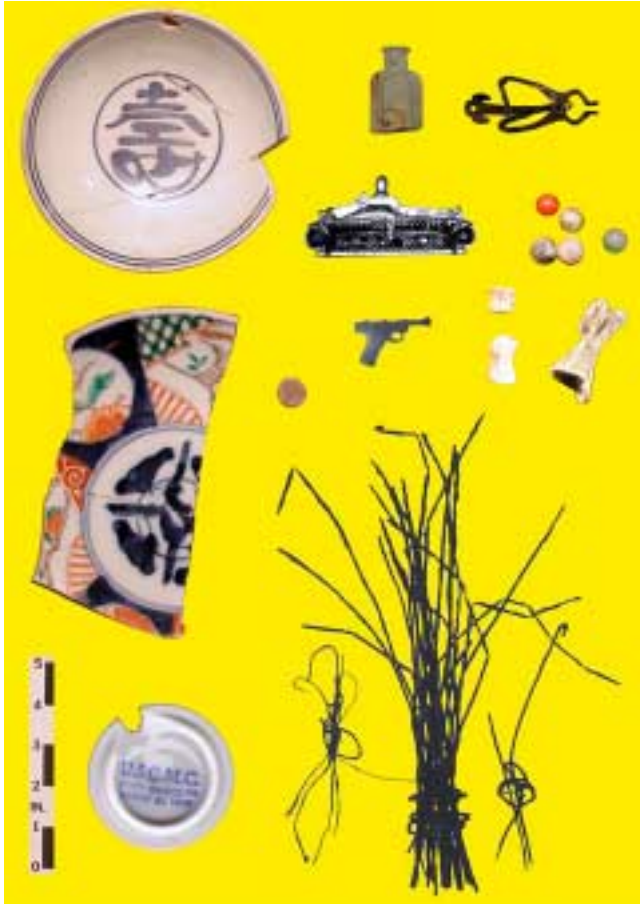


Figure 3: Sample of artifacts recovered during archaeological investigations at the Manzanar National Historic Site.

mother had been in a relocation center until they looked at *Confinement and Ethnicity* together; her mother had not told her about her relocation experience because she did not want her daughter to resent the government. The physical traces uncovered and recorded during the project have sparked memories and encouraged discussion, perhaps because they evoke the simple routines of daily living, and the transcendence of the human spirit, rather than the grand political issues and consequences.

Catalina Federal Honor Camp

The public discourse itself can lead to new evaluations of archaeological sites. The “Catalina Honor Camp,” a former prison camp on the Coronado National Forest, Arizona was recorded in the 1980s. Because the prison camp had been in continual, changing use until the 1970s, when it was demol-

ished, it was determined to be not particularly significant from an archaeological perspective. However, by piecing together historical information, we came to believe it might have been the work camp where Gordon Hirabayashi was incarcerated for his principled stand against the internment.

Dr. Hirabayashi was one of only three Japanese Americans to formally refuse to go along with the internment. As a student at the University of Washington, he defied both curfew and relocation orders and turned himself in to the FBI, confident that the courts would exonerate him and condemn the internment. Instead, the Supreme Court upheld his conviction. Because Hirabayashi had already spent several months in a county jail, he requested that he be allowed to serve the rest of his sentence in a prison camp, where he could do useful work. With the court’s permission, he hitchhiked to Tucson to finish his sentence at a road work camp there. Was the Forest Service’s Catalina Honor Camp the same prison camp where Hirabayashi served time?

Dr. Hirabayashi confirmed this for us, and we began lobbying that a new campground planned for the area be named in his honor. By involving the Japanese American community, through the Japanese American Citizens League, the Japanese American National Museum, and Japanese American media, we learned that 45 other Japanese American resisters of conscience were also incarcerated there. These “draft resisters,” some of them inspired by Hirabayashi’s protest, refused to join the military while their families were held in the internment camps.

Through Dr. Hirabayashi, we also became aware of Hopi draft resisters held at the prison, because their religious beliefs and society affiliations prohibited them from serving in the military. With Dr. Hirabayashi’s help, we were able to contact some of these former inmates and learned that the courts did not consider the Hopis’ religious beliefs to be credible for conscientious objector status because Hopi religious beliefs did not conform to those of the dominant Christian culture.

This political and social context gave the prison camp site much greater significance in spite of its relatively recent history and modern disturbance. With the support of a Tucson newspaper (Erickson 1998a, 1998b), the Forest Service did dedicate the new recreation area as the “Gordon Hirabayashi Recreation Site” to recognize the prison camp’s connection with this civil rights struggle (Figure 4). The public ceremony was attended by Dr. Hirabayashi, the surviving resisters, many members of the Japanese American community, one of the former Hopi draft resisters, Congressman Jim Kolbe, Assistant U.S. Attorney General Rose Ochi, and many others interested in civil rights. There is now an interpretive kiosk at the site that discusses the history of the Japanese American intern-



Figure 4: Guests of honor at the dedication of the interpretive kiosk at Gordon Hirabayashi Recreation Site, on the Coronado National Forest. Left to right: Roger Nasevaema, Ken Yoshida, Gordon Hirabayashi, Susumu Yenokida, Harry Yoshikawa, and Noboru Taguma.

ment and of the prison camp. Even better, the dedication has inspired other researchers to pursue the resisters' stories more thoroughly (e.g., Branton 2004).

Minidoka, Tule Lake, Bainbridge Island, and Beyond

Confinement and Ethnicity was used by the White House Millennium Council to develop recommendations for the preservation and interpretation of relocation-related sites across the country (U.S. Department of the Interior 2001). Their recommendations resulted in the designation of the Minidoka Internment National Monument in January 2001. Additional archaeological work has been undertaken at Minidoka (Burton and Farrell 2001; Burton et al. 2003), and a detailed historic resources study has been completed at the Tule Lake Segregation Center (Burton and Farrell 2004). Bainbridge Island's Eagledale Ferry Dock, the site of the first evacuation, is being studied by the NPS for designation as a national memorial. The NPS is also working with the Heart Mountain Foundation to develop a management plan for that relocation center, and detailed archaeological surveys have been completed at Topaz Relocation Center (Ellis 2002) and are in progress at the Amache Relocation Center.

These broad-scale ramifications show the importance of archaeology in providing support to the Japanese American

community's efforts to have the relocation remembered, recognized, and not repeated. Yet the local and more personal implications have been as important as the national effects. Archaeology can be powerful because it allows the public to see, and feel, this important history. In this case, archaeology helped open up new instances of public discourse.

In an ideal research environment, one might expect that the oral histories would be largely completed before the archaeological work begins—knowledgeable informants could help inform research designs, to address the most practical and relevant questions. But our experience, in which most of the informant data have been elicited after the archaeological work was published, has been extremely gratifying. It is yet one more example of how important it is to get historical archaeological work out and available to the public. The first reports can elicit the interest and involvement of participants and their descendants, to inform the next stage of research and interpretation. ☐

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In general, the “claimants” to Indian ethnicity with whom I have spoken have no genealogical data or any documented link to any person who historically was identified as an “Indian.” None had ever heard of the Ciconicin, although years ago an amateur historian had tried to link the “Sikonese” (a variant spelling) with the Lenape as well as with native groups living in New Jersey. This idea of a linkage was popular when all four of the native nations originally in the Delaware drainage were called “Delaware.” The simplistic, if not racist, basis for this lumping of native nations into one group is an idea that has entered the popular mythology. This idea that all those Indians were alike can be demonstrated as fanciful by anthropologists but repeatedly emerges in the popular imagination. This perspective is mirrored by many in the pan-Indian movement, who view all Indians as a political force rather than members of separate cultures.

Concluding Thoughts

More than 15 years of ethnohistoric data gathering has produced an abundance of information on the Ciconicin. Lacking from this extensive record are linkages of natives with any specific European surnames. Among the Lenape and other peoples to the north, we have impressive records identifying specific individuals with native names who also used European-style identification. At present, I cannot with certainty identify one Ciconicin by any surname that might enable us to trace their descent to the present. The research to date has enabled us to rescue the Ciconicin from an unwarranted obscurity, revealing not only were they the northernmost chiefdom on the Atlantic coast, but the only native nation inhabiting a territory entirely within the boundaries of modern Delaware. Delineating their presence and their boundaries helps us to better shape research problems in ways that may enable us to extract further information regarding how these people merged into the ethnically and religiously diverse community that is the population of present Delaware. 📷

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