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A “Land You Could Not Escape yet Almost Didn’t Want to Leave”: Japanese American Identity in Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

McKenzie Tavoda

For the 11,000 Japanese American citizens and Japanese immigrants, the struggle to maintain some semblance of their livelihood was far from easy within the confines of the Manzanar Relocation Center in California’s arid Inyo County desert. Whole families were forced to relocate without knowing what would become of their businesses and homes.¹ *Issei*, who were first generation immigrants from Japan, were not allowed to become American citizens and struggled to keep their families together as their *Nisei* children, second generation Japanese and legal citizens, grew up culturally divided between their parents’ ethnic ties to Japan and their desire to be truly American. Once in the camps, many Japanese people navigated precariously along this dividing line. Through the culturally rooted art of gardening, they expressed their Japanese ancestry in the face of racial discrimination and war hysteria. These organic representations affirmed that in the midst of the negative social conditions within the camp, they remained respectful Americans motivated to find inspiration in a challenging environment. They kept striving to keep their families and communities bound through cultural depictions of their heritage.

While prior scholarship on Japanese American Internment during World War II has been prolific, few researched the role that the natural environment played within the camps and the impact it had on the internees. Some scholars have supposed that the environment was chiefly a negative influence, like Connie Chiang, but few have studied the resourceful accomplishments of the internees in designing and cultivating gardens that reflected both their ancestral identity and contemporary American sensibility.² Scholars such as Kenneth Helphand argued that the gardens were strictly an act of defiance. Others like David Neiwert lay claim to the Japanese immigrant enclave losing its sense of community during internment.³ This paper will discuss how the internees were able to convert their space from a form of social discipline into one of personal power and communal restitution through the gardens.⁴

The most comprehensive work to focus on Japanese garden techniques and interpretation of symbolism is *Sakuteiki*. Translated by Jiro Takei, it was written during the Heian Period almost 1000 years ago, this text describes the styles of each of the gardens found in Manzanar validating that they were time-honored portrayals of Japanese gardening tradition.⁵ Because their provenance can be established, I contend the gardens were a cultural act of defiance against the environmental and mental conditions that the internees were enduring, not the camp authorities. Historically, a challenge that scholars have faced is a strong reticence on the part of the elder internees to share their experiences, as most *Issei* felt shamed by their wartime internment and chose to never speak on the subject. This left the task of remembrance to their *Nisei* children, who grew up in the camps, to recount the experiences of all their family members. Through an amalgamation of interviews and photographic evidence, together with excavations, the efficacy of these differing interpretations can be assessed as they relate to the significance the gardens played in the lives of the internees.

McKenzie Tavoda

In Executive Order No. 9066, issued as an umbrella statement in February of 1942, President Roosevelt directed authorities “to prescribe military areas in such places... from which any or all persons may be excluded.”⁶ General John L. Dewitt, Commander of the Western Defense during and after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, ordered the exclusion of all citizens and immigrants of Japanese ancestry.⁷ By April of 1942, all people of Japanese descent were remanded to Assembly Centers bringing only what belongings they could carry. Families sent to Manzanar were just four hours from Los Angeles, but a world away in many respects. The site, in the water-deprived Owen’s Valley, was leased from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power who had controlled the region since the 1920s to supply water from nearby Owens Lake to the city.⁸ The Sierra Nevada Mountains provided an imposing natural barrier to the Pacific Coast. Manzanar had stiflingly hot and dusty summers, freezing winters, and little natural shelter from relentless winds.⁹ The impact of the environment selected by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) was arguably more oppressive than the military police, guard towers, or barbed wire fences.¹⁰ The environment itself became the primary form of discipline imposed on the Japanese Americans sent there.

As social theorists have suggested, the architecture of a space can contribute to controlling people beyond the physical, emotional, and intellectual, and can be exerted often without conscious knowledge. The design of Manzanar exemplified that theory as the monotonous rows of barracks, the utility poles, and the desolate dirt road convey a sense of containment and order reveals that the basic design of the camp mirrored that of a penitentiary. While the mountains provided an awe-inspiring vista, other than a few stands of trees, the foliage within the camp had been razed to dirt. Upon the internees’ arrival, the camp, with its makeshift barracks and other outbuildings, was completely devoid of nature. The contradiction of being trapped in the tedium of rows of wood, wire, and concrete, within the greater setting of endless sky and beautiful mountains was undeniable. This may have hastened the internees’ desire to reassign some sense of the natural world to their space of confinement. This application, presented under the guise of a “relocation center,” was employed as a political tool to divide and control the internees and keep them docile.¹¹ The existence of eight guard towers surrounding the perimeter of the camp, with a police department established next to the main entrance, mimicked devices used to control the behavior of conventional prisoners. The socio-economic divisions in the community were transferred to the camp through the assignment of barracks which separated families based on the neighborhoods they hailed from in Los Angeles. This strategy would impose what Paul Rabinow described of as a “scheme of discipline.”¹² Fencing and security measures established that there would be authority within the camp and, where self-control was lacking, unconscious control could step in. Despite their new home looking and feeling like a prison, the internees almost immediately took the space and made it their own. Using themes derived from family and community, they made their barracks more homey and their “neighborhoods” more comfortable. The gardens greatly contributed to this transformation and enhanced their quality of daily life. The internees were not fighters in the traditional sense, and they remained surprisingly composed about their situation. A former internee recalled her mother often saying, *shikata ga nai* or “it cannot be helped.”¹³

However, almost immediately upon their arrival, they began to challenge the tenets of the social organization set in place to control them. Though the camp structure dictated obedience, creativity emerged as the internees began to reshape the imposed living conditions to meet their needs for self-expression and community affiliation. The ancient art of Japanese gardening, as well as the contemporary garden motifs found at Manzanar can be referenced due to the very traditional and conservative nature of the styles and technique. *Ishi wo taten koto* translates as “the art of setting stones,” but connotatively means gardening or garden making.¹⁴ The importance of stones in Japanese gardening denotes ancient ties to Buddhism, which holds reverence for stones as sacred and almost lively entities.¹⁵ The argument could be made as a reference for the symbolic representation of Japan, a mountainous island nation. Just as early gardeners of Japan took inspiration from their rocky surroundings, this

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

creative vision could be replicated in the rocky California desert. As detailed by Richard White, natural history and human history are so closely linked that the two cannot be fully understood without each other.¹⁶ As the ecological qualities of the Owens Valley affected the Japanese Americans, they consequently affected the natural environment. The harsh aspects of the ecosystem in which they were placed compelled the Manzanar gardeners to assert their dominance over it while reassigning it cultural merit. In the Manzanar camp, hours from the nearest city, isolated, they battled the environment daily, the human and the natural world converged with the internees determined to take control.¹⁷ The people of Manzanar prevailed and the results of these labors ranged from lush picturesque gardens and plots of fresh vegetables to beautiful flowers adorning individual yards.

At Manzanar, there were countless examples of the people taking control of the space in which they were forcibly confined, revealing that while they were peaceful throughout their confinement, yet they were not passive in their being. By selecting such a desolate place, the WRA and the US government were able to isolate the supposed threat and quell the war hysteria of the racist majority. As a December 8th editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* stated, "We have thousands of Japanese here... some, perhaps many, are good Americans. What the rest may be we don't know."¹⁸ The WRA also felt they could support the war effort by using the internees as a labor force and initiated several programs with the hopes of agriculturally reforming the region.¹⁹ Enforcing their stay in that particular environment and masking labor for the war with jobs in the camp might have negatively linked the internees to the nature surrounding them. Instead, their energies converted the environment from one with little human contact to one rich with a new environmental history.²⁰ The skills that Japanese men had acquired in their prewar careers were put to use, transforming the barren landscape both in and outside the barbed wire. The resulting sceneries created in the camps exemplified the Japanese belief in *Gaman* or "perseverance and fortitude;" a reflection of their resilience despite having endured discrimination for decades.²¹ Some families set right to work on "Hobby Gardens" as camp authorities encouraged internees to grow their own vegetables in order to leave more of the commercially grown food for the troops.²² A resident-led three-acre victory garden was established where families borrowed assigned plots, larger than the spaces available to them outside their barracks, for growing food from which "three thousand crates of vegetables" were produced monthly, for both Manzanar and the war effort.²³ An article in the *Manzanar Free Press* exclaimed that "lots will be allocated, vegetable and flower seeds, tools and enough irrigation water will be provided... grow your own vegetables for vitamins, flowers for morale, gardening for recreation."²⁴ If the gardens were an act of defiance, this type of patronage from the authorities would have incited noncooperation among the internees, yet from the start, vegetable, flower, and Japanese gardens became very popular. Numerous commercial fields were established by the WRA within the fence and just outside the confines of the camp and were maintained by the work of many internees.

How the internees shaped the space of their confinement in Manzanar almost immediately defined their relationship with the environment around them.²⁵ The layout of the camp was designed to enforce discipline within the space, yet at Manzanar, the residents immediately began to reassign positive meaning to their apartments as a place of respite for families. Homes in the camp were made meaningful as people defined family space within the communal barracks like building furniture from scrap wood. They transformed the insides of their homes to reflect those they had left behind and then set to alter the outside spaces from dirt lots into pleasant gardens. Through these gardens, they undertook efforts to make their environments a reflection of self. This freedom of expression became a means to combat the restrictions of the camp. In addition to the many small personal gardens, at least ten larger internee-built gardens were created at Manzanar, typically undertaken as group projects by several men within a block.²⁶ Though they believed, or hoped, their camp life was temporary, they chose to beautify the spaces outside their homes for the enjoyment of themselves and their community. The gardens were thought of as "quality spaces" for the internees, expressions of their Japanese culture, molded to fit in an environment that was not favorable for them.²⁷ These public gardens converted a space of regulation into a

McKenzie Tavoda

place of relaxation, akin to a plaza, in which people could sit, watch, and be watched by others, rather than a prison-like panoptic space in which people were separated and alone.²⁸ Transforming the outside space was a “culturally relative” political statement by the Japanese Americans.²⁹ The gardens that flourished in the parched earth, with water features that included carp from the nearby springs and granite from the Sierra Nevada’s, affirmed that the Japanese and their ancestral culture would survive in Manzanar through adaptation. Just like the gardens, the internees could endure and flourish by positively reshaping their environment to meet their needs for self-expression, pleasure, and community.

One such family to do so were the Arais. Jack Hanshiro Arai entered Manzanar with his wife Alice and two sons, Kenji and Geoffrey, while a third, Eizo, was born in the camp, and the eldest child, a daughter, Madelon.³⁰ As an adult later in life, Madelon reflected on her family’s time in the camp and what she remembered her parents experienced as adults versus her own experiences as a ten year old. Her father, Jack, was no stranger to farming or gardening as he worked in produce wholesaling up until the war and was even familiar with the climate challenges of the Owens Valley having farmed for several years in Texas as a young adult.³¹ A resourceful man, Jack immediately volunteered for the monitored groups organized to complete projects in the nearby towns, there he discovered carp and perch in the Inyo-White mountain lakes, inspiring his idea for a fish pond outside his family’s barrack.³² Madelon recalled that at ten, “... before I knew it they were in front of the house digging it out. [laughs] and then before I knew it they arrived with the concrete, and then before I knew it there was boulders all around there.”³³ Life was idle in the camp, children were bored, homemakers cleaned and did laundry daily just to keep busy and men struggled to find odd jobs. Many people began hobbies to find some sense of purpose, so when Jack started constructing his pond, friends and neighbors were eager to help. This strengthened the community in multiple ways as families that had felt isolated from the implicit and explicit control of the camp came together to contribute to the project or watch it come to fruition.

Located at the northern-most end of the camp, Block 33 was built near an established grove of crabapple trees. Here grass was planted and Jack was able to order water lilies for his pond, these features produced a lush setting, a stark contrast to the rocks and brush just beyond the fence.³⁴ While other gardeners at Manzanar made hills, stones, waterfalls, or rockwork as their focal point, the Arai pond itself was the dominant feature due to the unique presence of the fish. From its source, a small stream of water trickled down a cement causeway lined by very small stones before spilling into the large surface of the pond. Since the garden was set between two barracks, there was a limited amount of space for Jack to work with. Jack was experienced and understood the tradition of creating shallow ponds to ensure that his fish would not grow to be too large and cumbersome, making his pond wide but not too deep.³⁵ The garden was built at a low ground level so as not to impede the view of the horizon line of the water, in accordance with *Sakuteiki*, and with very small rocky islands in the middle of the pond.³⁶ Aesthetically pleasing for visitors, these islands also provided an enticing environment for the fish because underneath the water, the islands had tunnels for the fish to explore. This garden was designed to be a peaceful place for all who wanted to enjoy a natural escape from their hot and stifling apartments. Jack built benches for passerby to “pause and reflect,” but often had to chase children away who attempted to catch the fish.³⁷

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens



38



39

Besides providing a welcoming space for the community, Madelon fondly remembered how her father taught her about respecting the environment. After befriendng the camp’s Military Police, Jack was able to take his daughter to trap rabbits outside the fence from time to time; they would bring back their catch to make “home cooked” meals, which were a welcome alternative to mess hall dining. They would later bury the entrails and after a month or so Jack would uncover the site to recover the earthworms that it had produced.⁴⁰ He then used these to feed the fish in his pond. He created his own ecological impression while working with the landscape he and his family were forced to live in. Resourceful and industrious, he chose to benefit from cultivating his environment rather than fighting against it. By employing his intellectual labor as a human he affected the instinctual labor of the fish in his pond, thereby inextricably connecting himself to the environment.⁴¹ His fish actually became the definition of the family’s pond.

Jack was just one example of the many individuals who sought to civilize life in the camps, remaining productive and building a community amid these harsh conditions. His family’s fishpond played a key role in changing the previously barren Manzanar Relocation Center. The vision and resourcefulness of one man to contribute to the well being of his family and keep himself busy touched the lives of other residents, creating a supportive social

McKenzie Tavoda

setting for a confined people unsure of what the future held for them. Through his garden and fishpond, Jack Arai conveyed and validated the ideals of *Gaman* for his family and friends: working together meant staying together.

Like the Arais, the Nishi family found themselves in the Manzanar Relocation Center in 1942. Kuichiro Nishi, along with all other immigrants from Asia following the Immigration Act of 1917 were classified as alien immigrants.⁴² This meant that Kuichiro could live and work in the United States, but could not gain citizenship. His Nisei children, however, were born in the United States and therefore were automatically citizens. His son, Henry, remembered his father's prewar nursery and landscape business, which laid the foundation for Kuichiro's contribution to the dusty backdrop of Manzanar. Kuichiro was one of the many men detained by the FBI the very day Pearl Harbor was attacked. This was commonplace for men like Kuichiro who had established strong connections within the Japanese American community. For Kuichiro these connections stemmed from his nursery and his leadership role in the Japanese Chamber of Commerce.⁴³ He was first taken to Terminal Island and then to Fort Missoula in Montana, where he remained until spring of 1942.⁴⁴ Luckily, his many connections vouched for his loyalty and helped him to return to his family, who were already settled into Block 22 in Manzanar. While other families had made entry or dooryard gardens to personalize their homes in the first year of internment, Kuichiro immediately set to work on a garden of grander scale near his barrack.⁴⁵

Henry remembered his father as "knowledgeable as to what types of plants would do well in certain areas whether it be northern exposure, southern exposure...types of soil."⁴⁶ Kuichiro, along with his brother Akira, who had looked after the family while he was away, partnered up with Harry Ueno to plan the garden in the firebreak outside of Block 34.⁴⁷ This location was ideal in bringing the internment community closer through a shared space that everyone could enjoy. Even though the authority of the space, reinforced by the bells set to ring for every meal, controlled families' lives, the garden space enabled them to establish some self-governance, as many would arrive early to enjoy the pond rather than just submissively lining up for meals. There was more to this garden than an act of defiance aimed at camp authorities. The WRA had already encouraged gardening to help control the dusty landscape, and even paid the designers. Requests for the cement necessary to construct the gardens were granted despite heavy restrictions on this material.⁴⁸ Gardening in Manzanar was clearly not a rebellious act. However, the Issei did try to peacefully incorporate aspects unique to their cultural identity into their garden designs. By altering the landscape they established a certain control over their physical environment. While the WRA's selections for Relocation Camp sites were clearly intended to establish dominance and impose self-discipline, the reconfiguration of the land by the internees illustrated that they would make the most of the unjust situation by asserting their will over the space itself.

The garden's official name was changed several times from Rose Park, likely to honor Kuichiro's specialty in roses before the war, then to Pleasure Park, and lastly Merritt Park after the camp director, Ralph P. Merritt.⁴⁹ If the internees were as defiant as some would argue, it was highly unlikely they would have named the largest park after the man who was enforcing their stay inside the barbed wire. Ralph Merritt was well known for his understanding nature and relaxed enforcement of the rules. For many internees it was quite easy to get permission and passes to visit areas outside the camp, such as girl or boy scout trips, fishing groups, or gardeners going in search of natural supplies like rocks and fish for their ponds. He was known to encourage the planting of lawns, gardens, and flower and vegetable plots to stave of the dust and heat.⁵⁰

Although many aspects of security were tight at first, Merritt eventually slackened on matters such as allowing photographs to be taken in the camp. Miyatake, who had concealed a camera lens amid his belongings, at first, covertly took images with his homemade camera; however, he was eventually given permission by Merritt to freely take photographs within the camp. Another telling example of Merritt lending support to the internees was

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

during a small expansion of Merritt Park. Kuichiro and several of his men were given a pass to find a large pine tree at the base of the Sierras, about seven miles from camp. This group may have included a man named Kiichiro Muto who worked on his own garden in Block 15 and was also a primary contributor to Merritt Park.⁵¹ Unfortunately, some of the crew wandered off, most likely to do some fishing, and were found by the Military Police “outside the designated area.”⁵² Merritt gave the men a lengthy and stern lecture about how they potentially jeopardized the whole system of Manzanar since the Military Police had orders to report all security violations to their headquarters in Fort Douglas, Utah.⁵³ Merritt was concerned about Kuichiro’s standing in camp, as a well-respected member of the community, and his own reputation as director, because he was closely linked to the park project by name.⁵⁴ In the end, Merritt decided to mitigate any repercussions by keeping the hearing informal and left the all the charges off-the-record. Kuichiro Nishi’s only punishment, in order to appease the police, was to report to the Chief once a week and state, “here I am. I am obeying all rules and regulations and one week from today I will be here again.”⁵⁵ Breaking security measures, under the military rule of the internment would have been rational cause to deem the crew “troublemakers” and those given that label could have been sent to the camps even further inland. Instead, Merritt took a compassionate stance, understanding that the internees already had such little freedom; there was no need for him to make their situations worse.

The Japanese Americans imprisoned at Manzanar combatted the harsh environment and social discipline of the penitentiary-like setting through their gardening endeavors; the people in charge were not their target. As stated by the editors of *The Manzanar Free Press* in October of 1942, “Six months ago Manzanar was a barren, uninhabited desert. Today... original, decorative ideas attest to the Japanese people’s love of nature and ingenuity in reproducing the beauty of nature in miniature.”⁵⁶ Akin to one of the earliest and most traditional Japanese styles of gardening, called *Sakuteiki*, Merritt Park was comprised of a “figure-eight” concrete pond with a wooden bridge that accessed a small island on one side of the pond.⁵⁷ Surrounded by plants and a large tree, the park was about 25 by 110 feet.⁵⁸ Rocks, a prominent feature in the garden, encircled the base of the tree and outlined the pond. Kuichiro even placed a large rock that resembled a turtle poking its head out of the water; rocks were his specialty. His son recalled that “he was always critical of the placement of rocks... studying... [the] important thing about rock work [was] having a natural visual.”⁵⁹ The garden contributed to the camp community as a well-known backdrop and became the setting for many family and group photographs.⁶⁰



61

McKenzie Tavoda



62

Images captured by Toyo Miyatake and Ansel Adams of the park, and reimagined in the images above, reveal the distinct viewpoints of the two photographers, one as a captive member of the community, the other, looking in from outside the confines of the camp. The framing of the photographs offered the viewer an opportunity to see through the lenses of Miyatake and Adams. Ansel Adams, invited by Merritt to photograph the camp, was instantly affected by what he witnessed therein and set out to relay this message to an American audience he believed was disconnected from the realities of the internment.⁶³ From the *etic*, or outside perspective, the framing of Adams' *Pool in Pleasure Park* set the still pond and lush garden foliage in the foreground, and led beyond to an expanse of dead space in the background hemmed in by a vast mountain range.⁶⁴ Adams staged his photograph to convey the isolation of the camp and the impermeable mountain walls, offering the viewer a sense of the injustice therein. Toyo Miyatake's photograph of the same park was taken from the opposite side of the pond and this *emic*, inside perspective, dramatically altered the message.⁶⁵ The focal point is a backdrop of trees that encircled the garden with a mountain view peeking through.⁶⁶ The lines of the photograph draw the eye toward cultural symbols inherent to the park and the wooden bridge and bench beside the waterfall. His wife, Hiro Miyatake, colored the photo to emphasize the green vegetation and indications of pink roses.⁶⁷ The photo was meant to highlight the Japanese features of the park and the addition of color dramatically accentuated how the internees altered and beautified "their world" despite the harsh realities of camp life.

Merritt Park was not only the largest garden, it also offered the distinct stone and wood features that typified key aspects of traditional Japanese gardening. With its expansive grounds and meandering walkways, it was modeled after a Japanese Stroll Garden.⁶⁸ This garden followed the pattern of the Mountain Torrent Style as well, which relies on the use of many stones along the edges of ponds and inside them.⁶⁹ This style was likely selected because granite stones from the towering Sierra Nevada range behind Manzanar were abundant. The island required a wooden bridge to cross to it and was built in the Forest Style; flat with a few small trees and rocks placed at their roots and covered in grass.⁷⁰ The garden represented the clash of two very different environmental worlds. Manzanar sat beneath the densely forested and granite peaked Sierras in a dry desert valley. To mimic this aesthetic, the stones surrounding the largest features of the park jutted dramatically upward from the flat plains of the landscape.

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

Through the utilization of Japanese styles of gardening, Kuichiro, his brother, and the other designers and constructors of the Merritt Park garden eloquently portrayed the struggle between the internees and the landscape in which they were forced to live. Though the WRA’s remote placement of the camps reinforced the ethnocentric control the United States government held over them, the internees chose to cultivate their personal space in a fashion that was culturally acceptable and self determined. As a demonstration of their fortitude, a rock at the entrance of Merritt Park was inscribed in Japanese “to the memory of fellow Japanese Immigrants who, although ushered to this place with the breaking of friendly relations between the two countries, have come to enjoy this quiet, peaceful place.”⁷¹



72

Just as other internees had remembered the Manzanar experiences of their parents, so too did Arthur Ogami. His father, Nintaro Ogami, was one of the only Japanese gardeners in Whittier, California, prior to the war. Nintaro’s talent was so well regarded that his family lived on the Mayor of Whittier’s property as his personal gardener for many years and the Mayor looked after the family’s personal items during their internment.⁷³ Among their many effects was a treasured family heirloom: a judo sword that Nintaro had brought from Japan in 1917.⁷⁴ At the time they were sent to Manzanar, the Ogami family consisted of Nintaro, his wife Tane, and their four children, of which Arthur was the second oldest.⁷⁵ Nintaro managed to bring some of his tools into camp; a hammer with his name carved in the handle and a pair of pruning shears that were unforgettable to Arthur for the way they pinched his hand when he used them.⁷⁶ He recalled the care and great skill his father took in pruning trees and bushes, as many people in Japan viewed it as an art form. For instance, he knew exactly how to prune each type of pine tree based on how many needles each branch produced.⁷⁷

McKenzie Tavoda

Arthur was already 23 years old at the time of internment and he recalled, “my feeling was that I'm here temporarily and that I'll make the best use of living in Manzanar, and when the time comes that I have to leave Manzanar that I will seek something for work and pursue that direction.”⁷⁸ While his family was held in Manzanar, Arthur did what most young residents did: work. He spent his time doing odd jobs offered by camp authorities or outside companies, such as hauling in freights of people's belongings and later harvesting beets.⁷⁹ Some work sent internees outside the confines of the camp; the “beet topping” was one such job where groups of workers were sent at the companies' expense to their farms to provide cheap labor. Arthur's furlough job required his group to travel by train to Great Falls, Montana where he worked for two months.⁸⁰ By the time he had returned in November 1942, his father had made himself a name with camp officials at Manzanar. Nintaro had been assigned to design and landscape a garden for the Manzanar hospital; he was provided a construction crew and even a truck with permission to drive to the foothills of the Sierras to bring back trees and rocks.⁸¹ For this garden, Nintaro mostly adhered to *Sakuteiki*, using the natural rock as an integral component to its aesthetic; Arthur recalled the tenets of what his father believed:

You have to build in your mind as to how that rock – how do you feel about that rock? What does the rock tell you? That's not like a _____, it's just that something in your mind tells you that this rock should be placed a certain way, at a certain angle. There are times that he could place a rock, it could be upside down, or it could be lopsided, and you may not notice that then. It's just a feeling. It's a transformation of what the rock is transformed into yourself. It's something that doesn't come naturally.⁸²

While images of the pond located within the hospital garden are almost non-existent, photographs of the recent excavation reveal flat-bottomed streambeds and a pond, which somewhat deviate from the traditional Japanese style of pools with rounded or bowl-shaped beds.⁸³ The rocks layered as the walls of the pond, are flat and stacked upon each other to resemble “a shape of piled boxes.”⁸⁴ A concrete pathway curves around the pond and stops upon meeting the stream as it flows from a waterfall located to the north of the garden, yet the path picks up again as though uninterrupted by the water. This garden was heavily wooded by comparison to the rest of the camp as the trees were probably left to provide privacy for the hospital and added shade for patients and visitors. During their time in Manzanar, the entire Ogami family became connected with the Manzanar hospital. His mother and sister worked there as did his younger sister, Grace, who worked in the blood laboratory.⁸⁵ Arthur was working as an orderly at the hospital and was only able to accompany his father on a few of his mountain trips, but was appreciative of the care taken to beautify the outside space of the hospital. The garden provided temperate pathways where patients could take walks; the paths were even made accessible for wheelchairs. This environment enhanced healing and comforted the patients. In his design, Nintaro incorporated grass lawns on the front and sides of the hospital; flowerbeds were planted around the doctors' and nurses' quarters. With his expertise in trees, he transplanted locust, birch, poplar, pine, and pear trees from other parts of the camp and outside the barbed wire.⁸⁶ Both Arthur and his father contributed to the benefit of the patients through the landscape and the positive environment of the hospital. Arthur often planned parties for the employees and patients, borrowing a friend's PA system and specially ordering food from the Food Warehouse Supervisor to give the more able-bodied patients picnics and something to look forward to.⁸⁷

Despite the Ogamis' vital contribution to Manzanar and its hospital, the family's time there was cut short. As Issei, Nintaro and Tane still considered themselves Japanese after the outbreak of war and with the devastation of their internment, they decided that they would eventually return to Japan. The Ogamis were just one example of the many families who believed that living in the United States was not worth what the government and the WRA had done to them. They faced a precarious future with no guarantee of safety or stability for their families. For many, the opportunity to leave presented itself when they were given the loyalty questionnaire by the WRA. The infamous question number 27 asked the Nisei men if they would be willing to serve in the American military and

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

was followed by question 28, which asked if they would swear allegiance to the United States and foreswear Japan.⁸⁸ This created a conundrum, as the Nisei, born in the United States, had never sworn loyalty to Japan and therefore could not “foreswear” it. As for the Issei, unable to hold United States citizenship, they felt that if they abdicated their Japanese citizenship they would essentially become people with no country. In order to keep the family together, Arthur was instructed by his parents to answer “no-no” to each question, despite his wishes.⁸⁹ The family unit was the last intact normalcy for many internees, it was equally as important to the Ogamis, and Arthur complied, respecting his parents’ wishes. From Manzanar, the family was sent to Tule Lake, near the California-Oregon border, the holding camp for the agitators and disloyal. From there the family was deported to Japan where his parents remained until their deaths. Arthur was able to eventually return to the United States in 1952 and reinstate his citizenship.⁹⁰



91



92

Photos of the hospital garden by Toyo Miyatake and Ansel Adams offer [a](#) differing perspective and provide clues to each artist’s conceptualization of camp life. Miyatake’s photo captures a realistic moment in time while Adams’ photo portrays the setting of the hospital garden in a posed idealistic light. Miyatake’s image centers on one figure, hat in hand, a seemingly candid shot.⁹³ The hospital complex, tiered garden, and stone steps extend behind him. Miyatake was careful to include the nearby shadow of an imposing electrical post. This line, along with the man’s shadow directs the viewer’s eye toward the steps of the garden. The photo shares the simple image of a gardener in the camp. The known subject was Mr. Ioki, who was fondly remembered by his son Susuma as a “well built and

McKenzie Tavoda

generally happy person” and a contributor to the hospital garden project.⁹⁴ He shared that his father was “well liked in the community, in the nursery business,” a flowerbed nursery that specialized in gardenias.⁹⁵ Once in Manzanar, Ioki grew chrysanthemums and other flowers around his family’s barrack, as he was provided seeds through his “leads to the Ball Seed Company.”⁹⁶ Miyatake’s portrait of Ioki was almost certainly meant as a representation of the people in Manzanar who contributed to the well being of the camp. In many of his images, Toyo Miyatake exposes real people in their daily life and roles within the community.

In contrast, Adams’ photo of *Nurse Aiko Hamaguchi, patient Tom Kano* poses an impeccably dressed nurse pushing a man in a wheelchair on the pruned upper lawn of a tiered garden.⁹⁷ The duo seem headed to join several visitors in the foreground enjoying conversation on a bench designed for just that purpose. Compared to the landscape photographs by Adams, this image appears staged and unrealistic with posed subjects that do not convey any personal narrative. Though this exemplifies Adams’ etic perspective as an outside viewer into Manzanar life, it also illustrates how he believed the surrounding natural beauty had curative powers on the internees’ disposition. Reflecting on his time in Manzanar he stated, “I believe that the acrid splendor of the desert, ringed with towering mountains, has strengthened the spirit off the people of Manzanar... I am sure most have responded, in one way or another, to the resonances of their environment.”⁹⁸ The framing of the tree and the stance of the young man draw the viewer to the interaction of the subjects, highly idealized, they are young, well dressed and the lighting is impeccable. As with several other photos in this series, Adams sought to convey a story to the viewer, this time it was of the hospital and Nurse Aiko. As she shared with Adams during the shoot, “only after evacuation have I come to realize the false sense of security I enjoyed before the war.”⁹⁹ The paradox of the internment is glaringly evident through the civility and affable nature of Nurse Aiko and the other subjects in this photo. Upon analysis, this image is subversive, in that Adams, dismayed by the internment staged this positive image to convey the irony of the unjust treatment of the peaceful civilians held against their will.

The Block 12 Mess Hall garden, a favorite of internees during their captivity, sadly lacks any reference to its original designer. Many historical facts during the Relocation were lost over time, a case of too much data that was not well recorded. This garden most likely had multiple designers and contributors, as was the case with other gardens constructed as group projects. Though designers’ names were not documented, the garden was popular and fondly remembered as a welcoming grassy knoll for children to play on before mealtime. Central to community life, it became a common backdrop for photographs, such as one of the Block 12 mess hall staff; in the photo, the garden becomes the focal point with the staff barely visible.¹⁰⁰ The unknown photographer was probably an average internee that owned a camera. The evidence of amateur photography in the camp provides a necessary contrast to those of the professionals. While artists use design elements of composition, angle, and staging to portray a specific meaning, photos such as the one of the Mess Hall 12 staff are purely recreational. However, this did not mean that intentional significance could not be interpreted; the choice of centering the garden in the foreground and the staff in the background revealed the significance of these gardens to the average internee.

The Block 12 garden incorporated elements of these traditional gardens. Due to the limited space between the mess hall and the next barrack, this pattern was popular among the mess hall gardens. Its layout was long and narrow with a water feature running from its northern end and collecting in a pool at the southern end. *Sakuteiki* dictated that water should flow southward to “wash away all manner of evil” and most of the Manzanar gardens reflect this.¹⁰¹ This feature was almost fifty feet in length and a sizeable grassy area was put in place beyond the hourglass shaped pond.¹⁰² Although these mess hall gardens had similar Japanese motifs of rock features surrounding the pond and a stone border surrounding the perimeter of the garden, what set Mess Hall 12 apart was the intriguing use of the stones within the pond to generate whimsical characteristics in the flowing water. Where the water first enters the pond, the cascading water flow sits atop a high-elevated hill that has not been

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

found in the other gardens of Manzanar, this feature forced the water to rush down the stream much faster. Like Merritt Park, Block 12 shares elements of the Mountain Torrent Style, which is marked by the use of stones to control the movement of the water while other styles use almost no rocks at all.¹⁰³ The abundance of rocks within Manzanar and the surrounding landscape, from the gravel to the mountain ranges, may account for this style’s popularity with the internee gardeners.



104

In the photo of four girls playing in *Block 12 Mess Hall Garden* by Ansel Adams, the elevated hill is the predominant garden feature.¹⁰⁵ The garden stream is narrow, designed to make the water flow more quickly while the “cascading rock” elements contrastingly slow the flow of water.¹⁰⁶ The large leaning rock that the youngest girl reclines on is visually anchored by the “standing” straight rock on the other side of the stream.¹⁰⁷ As described in *Sakuteiki*, “waterfalls appear graceful when they flow unexpectedly from narrow crevices between stones half-hidden in shadows.”¹⁰⁸ Adams makes the details of the girls interacting with the garden the focal point. The Manzanar hospital can barely be seen in the distance yet some iconic details, like the electrical post, are still present; evidence that the girls are in a grassy oasis within the confines of an internment camp. At that moment in time, they seem almost protected by the branches of the black locust tree above them. Through archeological evidence, it is known that a grove of apple trees stood directly west to this garden and the mess hall, yet Adams chose to angle the photograph in one of the few directions of open space behind the garden.¹⁰⁹ This was most likely done to dramatize the girls against their background, rather than having a shaded orchard behind them. All four girls do not show their faces; instead, they look down at the stream as the water cascades down the rocks. In many of Adams’ photographs of Manzanar, the images appear to be staged or framed to relay a message to his audience. The peacefulness conveyed in *Block 12 Mess Hall Garden* epitomizes Adams’ reflections about how the internees dealt with their confinement as taking strength from the natural beauty of the world beyond the camp and applying it directly inside.

Traditional Japanese gardening does not typically advocate high hills, as they could potentially obstruct views of the pond or views beyond the garden. Constructed atop a flat plain, the hill shown in Adams’ photograph is so high, it almost completely hides the barracks behind it. The angle of Adams’ photo further dramatized this vantage point by photographing the girls from a low point at the base of the hill. Even more interesting is that judging from

McKenzie Tavoda

the perspective of the photograph, Adams undoubtedly had to hop onto the small flat island in the pond to get the shot. The endeavor to place the barracks almost completely behind the girls indicates a deliberate effort to literally, and possibly figuratively, put Manzanar behind them. By doing so, he placed the young girls in a peaceful setting, removed from the daily stresses of the camp. The gardeners of Manzanar found personal strength through designing and creating something inherently beautiful from the parched earth and creating spaces where the community found solace through experiencing nature just outside their apartments.

Other parts of the Block 12 mess hall garden, not shown in Adams' work, detail how unique this particular garden was. Several abstractions within the garden manifest symbols found in Buddhism, such as the three rocks sitting at the top of the waterfall, which denote the Buddhist Trinity or the three main deities in Buddhism.¹¹⁰ Just out of the bottom frame of the image sat a large rock, which was strategically placed to divide the stream's flow of water around the sides of the island, called *mizuwake-ishi*.¹¹¹ The rock represents the ancient ideology of the earth as lord and water as servant, "if earth permits it, water will flow, but if earth prevents it, it will not."¹¹² Other stones in the pond influenced the flow of water and held symbolic meaning. A water turning stone, or *meguri-shi*, sat at the bend to the left of the divided stream and prevented the water from flowing gently, instead causing it to ripple as it moved.¹¹³ Following excavation the stones remain to detail the story of the garden. Two stones extend up from the depths of the pool, one, meant to symbolize a crane, while the other resembles a turtle. While the turtle rock that sits in Merritt Park's lakebed was constructed to thoroughly reveal the animal's shape, these rocks are more abstract. The two thin and tall rocks representing the crane denote youth, and the round rock just above the surface is the turtle that portrays old age.¹¹⁴ These representations reflect a similar sentiment to what Nurse Aiko expressed as her false sense of security before the reality of her internment and the war. What the people of Manzanar knew as their normal lives before the war would never be found again. Yet despite this abrupt change and tremendous loss, time passed by and the natural cycle of life continued in the camp as babies were born (the crane) and people died (the turtle).

Another interesting facet of the Block 12 garden was the relationship of the wood to the stones. In some ponds, like the Arai pond, stones surround the edges, yet the stones lining the pool of this garden are broken into sections, divided by wooden posts curving along the shore. Even more fascinating is where the curves of the pond face each other, the opposite shore is symmetrical and the mediums mirror each other; where there is stone or post on one side, there is the same on the other. Once the stream divides at the tip of the teardrop shaped island, posts guide the left stream while the right side is of stone, lining the island garden, half post and half stone. These characteristics are strikingly deliberate yet cannot be strictly interpreted by any definitions of symbolism found in *Sakuteiki*. However, aspects of the gardener's inspiration can be seen in the Forest Isle motif.¹¹⁵ This evidence of a blend of gardening styles, or at least, a less formal interpretation of the Japanese techniques, might reveal the different styles of a group of designers coming together in one landscape. This fresh take on the traditional Japanese garden may have contributed to the allure of the Block 12 Mess Hall Garden. This popularity enthralled photographers to immortalize images of the garden and these photos have provided additional documentation vital to research efforts today.

This sense of pride for the gardens of Manzanar was further evidenced by the competitions held between the blocks for the most elaborate or beautiful ones. The knowledge of these competing gardens became so commonplace that ultimately a contest was sponsored by the *Manzanar Free Press* to determine the best block garden once and for all. On the front page of the October 8, 1942 newspaper, the *Free Press* asked, "Which is the most beautiful garden in Manzanar? This question will be answered by... the Japanese department of the Free Press... evoking unprecedented interest among garden lovers."¹¹⁶ While the contest was open to all, the ballots were found in the "Japanese section" of the paper. This may have been because that specific department put on

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

the contest, yet it implied deference in that the contest was directed towards the Issei who had grown up in Japan. As well, they had the cultural background to commend the gardens for adherence to traditional attributes and knowledge of the celebrated gardens in their home country.

The Block 34 Mess Hall Garden, designed in the Dry Garden Style, was found to be the only one of its type at Manzanar, containing a number of unique components. It was designed by Mr. Kubota, Mr. Kayahara, and Mr. Murakomi, who like the Ogami family, had a close connection through his work at the hospital.¹¹⁷ The garden’s distinctive foundation was created with a scattering of many large red rocks from the Inyo-White Mountains around the garden, rather than completely encircling it.¹¹⁸ These rocks, known for their volcanic primordial color, are a sharp contrast to the soft gray of the Sierra granite.¹¹⁹ There was a pond in this garden, atypical for a Dry Garden according to *Sakuteiki*. However, water features were popular at Manzanar because they were refreshing to the eye and made the intense summer temperatures feel a little cooler. The pool’s characteristics differed from the other gardens; plain cement shores and only a few large rocks lightly graced the edges of the water surrounded it. The pond was a wide and shallow gourd shape, which provided a calm glassy surface to mirror the rocks and sky above.¹²⁰ In the camp-wide garden contest mentioned before, Block 34 was named the top winner. Known as *San Shi En*, which literally translates from Japanese as “three four garden,” Block 34 was titled as “most appealing to the judges’ eyes.”¹²¹ The interesting style, elusive garden designers, and ambiguously straightforward name all suggest the mysterious nature of this garden. Located in the farthest northwest corner of the camp, the mess hall garden neighbored the hospital garden, yet was very different in style and composition.



122

Although this garden seemed to beckon the residents of Block 34 and the employees of the hospital, who frequented the mess hall for meals and this space between shifts, the above photo represents a similar photo taken at the time of internment.¹²³ The photo was discovered by Willie Tamura, whose father, Berry, was interned at Manzanar and collected photos of the camp, including the works of Miyatake.¹²⁴ It is unknown if the photo was taken by Miyatake, another resident, or Berry himself, yet it offers that similar “personal” experience of camp life that amateur photographers in the camp often reflected and what Miyatake also stylized in a more professional manner. The fence is actually highlighted in the foreground because the image was shot at waist-level rather than eye-level, almost as if a young internee was trying to peer past it to view the refreshing vegetation behind. Though slightly inhibiting, this fence actually reflected the ideology of working in conjunction with nature, as the tree branches are fitted alongside posts in their natural state. This border, perhaps illustrates the designers’ vision of their park as a deliberate work of art. The other gardens at Manzanar openly welcomed all residents to enjoy them and children to play in them.

McKenzie Tavoda

As the garden contest winner, the *Manzanar Free Press* stated that the Block 34 garden was characterized by “the principle of geologic stones” which mirrored the mountains behind it; this illusion had been achieved by using very high standing rocks with small round rocks in the foreground graduating to small pebbles to mimic the base of the tall mountain range.¹²⁵ A long and narrow island divided the water as it came down from the hill; Block 34’s island was flat with several large jagged rocks jutting from the shore of its southern end, unlike the islands found in other Manzanar gardens, which featured trees. This barren island is indicative of the tradition of Cloud or Mist islands, seen as long wisps of land in the water, unobtrusive to the rest of the landscape scene.¹²⁶ Though the garden was designed in the Dry Garden Style, lush grass was planted probably because the WRA encouraged lawns “so that Manzanar’s dust troubles may become a thing of the past.”¹²⁷ The fence suggests that the garden was only allowed to be admired from afar. However, the community of Block 34, proud of the designation as the best garden in the camp, awarded each designer a watch purchased with funds raised by the residents.¹²⁸ The Block 34 Mess Hall Garden was a collaboration by three individual gardeners each bringing their own distinct style to the project. The resulting garden was unique; an homage to both traditional Japanese gardening techniques and the aesthetic charm of their home country.

Block 15 had two well-known gardens near each other and this was highlighted in 1942, when the *Manzanar Free Press* included them among the “...abundance of clever and original gardens all through the center.”¹²⁹ The Muto’s were a very large and influential family in Block 15. Fred Muto, who had worked as an internal police officer at UCLA before the relocation, was assigned as the Block 15 manager, a very well-respected job in the camp.¹³⁰ Some confusion surrounds the lineage of the Muto family; five individual families were spread between four barracks in Block 15. Born in 1880 in Japan, the patriarch, Kiichiro had immigrated to California in 1906 and married his wife, Hatsu. They had at least three sons, Fred, Takeo “Tak,” and the youngest, Senji, who had graduated from Camp Savage, Minnesota and had been serving in the Intelligence Corps of the United States Military when the war broke out.¹³¹ Kiichiro and Hatsu most likely also had a daughter born in 1916, named Kay who worked for the *Manzanar Free Press*. Takeo studied agriculture at Ohio State College and then moved to the San Fernando Valley where he owned and operated a 20-acre ranch with his father, brother, and brother-in-law for over two decades until they were forced to leave it behind.¹³²

In May of 1942, just a few months after settling into his barrack, Block 15-8-1, Tak Muto set to work on one very long Hobby Garden, with plots that would be accessible to other internees, spanning the firebreaks between blocks 11 and 17 and 12 and 18.¹³³ Prior to the war, he had been known for his horticulture and floriculture experiments in the crossbreeding of plant varieties and he continued this work in this garden.¹³⁴ With friend, Masao Tanaka, they constructed walkways along the plots and built a sundial in the middle that was not typical of a simple vegetable garden; they designated their own test plot where they could “raise seeds adaptable to the local climate.”¹³⁵ This contribution to the block communities at the southern side of Manzanar was a commendable effort. Tak was desperate to continue his work in the face of the unfamiliar climate and natural conditions of the Owens Valley. His efforts to advance the yield of the internees’ crops hints at the distressing question most in Manzanar shared: how long would they be forced to live there? At the time, he was probably concerned with how the camp would sustain itself and be able to continue feeding its 11,000 residents. This was a very legitimate fear as no one knew how long the war would continue and government rationing at the time was already impacting the amount of food being provided to the camp, which explains the WRA’s encouragement of personal gardens. Also, the heavy military diet of meat and starches was usually too much to bear for every single meal. Japanese crops were introduced to Manzanar via these victory gardens, with vegetables such as daikon, bok choy, and kabu donated to the mess halls to make meals more nutritious and enjoyable.¹³⁶ The garden space that was designed and built by Tak provided a necessary benefit to the Manzanar residents on a different level from those that were created for enjoyment. These allotments of land for personal crops returned a sense of agency to

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

families in the ability to feed themselves and their children nutritious options, rather than the monotony of mess hall meals three times a day. These plots also provided a productive and pleasurable hobby and offered some sense of freedom, which had been taken from them.

Not only did he complete the Hobby Garden project, Tak helped his father, Kiichiro, create a small family pond and garden. Their work was commended in the *Manzanar Free Press* for having “one of the most beautiful fish ponds in the center” of their garden, which was located between their barrack and the Block 15 recreation hall.¹³⁷ For this project, Tak and Kiichiro, former commercial flower growers teamed up with Roy Sugawara, a friend, who had also been a commercial gardener.¹³⁸ Together, they designed a simple, water level figure eight pond where a bridge crossed over the narrow middle as the central focal point of the garden. The bridge was a traditional simple slab style, built low and closely to the water with a slight curve at the center.¹³⁹ The minimalist design of the pond and bridge continued with the walls of the pond, made up of rounded stones laid into concrete in an attempt to use as little concrete as possible as it had become difficult to acquire.¹⁴⁰ The building of fish ponds and gardens had become so popular that the public works department, headed by Buneyoman Wada and other internees, began discouraging the use of cement, a precious commodity at Manzanar and the most sought after material for garden construction.¹⁴¹ In the same article that featured their garden, the *Manzanar Free Press* stated that the Department of Public Works “discourages the building of more ponds because of cement shortage.”¹⁴² One way designers circumvented this restriction was to invite others into the project since a limit of three bags of cement were allotted to each internee.¹⁴³

Some of the truly unique details of the Mutos’ garden were two lanterns constructed from layers of rock. As “the setting of stones should not be done thoughtlessly,” great care was taken in the creation of these lanterns.¹⁴⁴ The larger lantern sits next to the bridge towards the middle of the figure eight pond. It consists of a large stone base, one flat stone and several smaller stones create the middle section of the “lantern,” another flat stone was used to fashion a “lid” and a small upright stone completed the ornamental top.¹⁴⁵ Caddy-corner to the large lantern on the other side of the pond is a much smaller lantern, made up of three stones piled on top of each other. In traditional Japanese garden designs, lanterns symbolize bringing in light and driving out darkness, which helped to bring hope to those who had found themselves at Manzanar.¹⁴⁶ On September 29, 1942, after the completion of the garden, Tak and his wife Masako had their first child, a daughter named Carol Ann, in the camp hospital, just in time for the baby to grow up enjoying the garden her father and grandfather had built just outside their home.¹⁴⁷

While some internee gardeners at Manzanar focused on gardens in their personal blocks, some contributed their specific talents to several block gardens or other public spaces throughout Manzanar. The most noted of these people was, Ryozo Kado, an Issei man who incorporated his special talent of stonemasonry into prominent works throughout the camp. Not only did he contribute to the gardens of Block 9 and 6, but he built the several other significant projects as well. His iconic sign, with its surrounding features and rock sentry posts at the entrance to Manzanar along with the striking cemetery monument, were the only original structures that remained at the site prior to its designation as a National Park in 1972.¹⁴⁸ Immigrating to California in 1910, Ryozo, like others, had found his niche in the landscaping business. His talents however, were somewhat unique.¹⁴⁹ His son Louis, “Louie” Kado, recalled that after his father read about a famous Japanese landscaper, Mr. Nishimura, in Los Angeles, he sought to become his apprentice; one of the first basic precepts of *Sakuteiki* is “to let the exceptional work of past master gardeners be your guide.”¹⁵⁰ The two became very close and Ryozo married Nishimura’s daughter in the early 1920s.¹⁵¹ By the 1930s, he was portraying a more informal style in his gardens, dissimilar to the traditional Japanese technique.¹⁵² Several Catholic churches in Southern California commissioned his striking stone shrines and rock sculptures, and today, his work still graces those courtyards.¹⁵³ After being sent to Manzanar, Ryozo continued his passion; his artistry appeared in many of the gardens enjoyed by the internees and he constructed

McKenzie Tavoda

the iconic landmarks associated with Manzanar today. Ryozo's son proudly described how he supervised the upkeep of the gardens his father created, mostly helping on Saturdays while he attended Manzanar High School.¹⁵⁴

Ryozo also worked closely with Buneyoman Wada of the Public Works Department of Manzanar to help construct Nintaro Ogami's hospital garden.¹⁵⁵ A "neighborhood" boy at the time, George Izumi, fondly remembered "Mr. Kado" building "a beautiful rock garden up near the hospital."¹⁵⁶ He was always eager to offer his masonry skills to help others in the camp with their gardens. He contributed the stone bench and a small stream with accompanying rocks and walkways, as seen in the photographs of the hospital garden.¹⁵⁷ The recently excavated Block 9 Mess Hall garden provided a wealth of information on Ryozo's artistic talent and a poignant interpretation of the significance of the gardens of Manzanar. Armed with a simple slip of paper signed by the camp director, Ryozo and his crew set off in search of unique granite rocks, many of which were uncovered during the excavation of the Block 9 garden. Once dubbed a "wizard with rocks," Ryozo encircled the garden with a ring of small stones, beginning with a small hill at the north end that gradually sloped downward; several flowering black locust trees still stand gracefully along the length of it.¹⁵⁸ These trees were not native to California, yet adapted well to the Owens Valley. Their inclusion mirrored the adaptation of the Japanese Americans themselves in Manzanar. An elongated pond ran the length of the hill as water trickled down a gentle cascade of rocks.

Toward the southern end, the water flowed down a stream with many small stones overlapping along its banks before it spilled into a larger pond with less trees and rocks.¹⁵⁹ Metaphorical significance can be attributed to Ryozo's design as the stream splits in half during its descent, then meets back together. According to *Sakuteiki* garden tradition, this is symbolic of life, in which division and reunification occur.¹⁶⁰ For Ryozo, like all the Issei interned, this could have held several meanings. One may have been their division from their homeland through immigration, yet they could remain culturally connected to Japan. There was also the more obvious interpretation; the parting from their new lives in Los Angeles as well as hometown friends and family separated by the internment with the onset of the war. Reunification, just as the stream came back together, was their hope for the future.

Block 6, one of several gardens designed by Ryozo, was highlighted by beautiful white granite rocks from the "Sierra side" as opposed to the more desert-like Inyo red rocks, which were found close to Manzanar.¹⁶¹ Louie witnessed his father's skill and ingenuity as he "set the chisel up and we would swing a ten pound sledge and he would yell 'move it, move it' and we would move it just the right way ... boom breaks them in the right way."¹⁶² As was common in this profession, Ryozo was careful to incorporate the natural aesthetic of the rocks, not force them into something unnatural; to "look for stones that were 90 degrees so we took a square out to measure the stones because he wanted natural 90 degrees in the rocks for corners and such."¹⁶³ Other documents hint at Block 6 having a fishpond and waterfall, similar to others in the camp.¹⁶⁴ While oral interviews allude to details of the Block 6 garden, no photographic evidence has surfaced to substantiate the scope of the garden and it has yet to be excavated by the National Parks Service. Once the planned excavation is complete, more information will be unearthed to corroborate Ryozo's work within the community garden of Block 6.

For Ryozo, his title of stonemason can be defined by a number of techniques. He was an artist with a style of his own, "his work was more like a natural style, he specialized in making gardens with a more natural type instead of the formal Japanese style."¹⁶⁵ He was sensitive to the meaning behind the placements of rocks, such as the representation of mountains versus the earth or how to symbolize an animal from a stone and using its placement to make it appear as such, he could also sculpt concrete into natural form. His artistry in fashioning wooden logs and stumps out of concrete revealed his appreciation of the natural world and became a gift he shared throughout the camp. He exerted control over his space by creating his own vision of nature in the desert of Manzanar. Rock

Manzanar Internment Camp Gardens

and concrete features have permanence; they have endured long after the wooden features of the Manzanar gardens deteriorated, “years of neglect, nor harsh weather, nor vandalism have succeeded in erasing what Kado created out of stone, cement, hardship, and desert.”¹⁶⁶ The *Faux Bois* or faux wood features of the Block 9 garden were stained red with details to mimic wood and nine of these logs line the perimeter.¹⁶⁷ In addition to the Block 9 and 6 gardens, the two sentry posts and the cemetery monument are the work of Ryozo. A teenager, Arthur Williams, whose parents worked for the camp authorities, recalled watching “Mr. Kado working at the main sentry post,” and “sculpt two cement tree stumps at the main gate.”¹⁶⁸ Ryozo’s talents were highly regarded by camp authorities and they asked him to create an entrance to Manzanar that was more welcoming and aesthetically pleasing.

One photo, taken of Ryozo’s main entrance to Manzanar is a familiar image taken by Ansel Adams in 1943, and as with his other depictions of the camp, is saturated with meaning.¹⁶⁹ In the foreground, the angle of the “Manzanar War Relocation Center,” sign draws the eye directly to the sentry post, leaving the sense that the only entrance is through this point. The camp lies just beyond the sentry post, hemmed in by the snow-peaked Sierras. The lives of the internees are held in the thin line of barracks bisecting the frame, compressed between the flat and dusty entrance and the imposing cloud-covered peaks. The font of the sign does not appear friendly, as it is suspended and secured by iron chains. The rock formations around the posts of the sign are tragically beautiful with only what seem to be desert sagebrush and multicolored rocks. Since the last families to be held in Manzanar left in 1945, Ryozo’s stone sentry posts have marked the entrance to the camp, a somber reminder and symbol to all the people passing through.



170

Another testimony to Ryozo’s craftsmanship and artistry was towards the end of internment, when the Young Buddhist Association asked him to create a cemetery monument to commemorate the time and place of the relocation for the people who never left Manzanar. As it was an expensive undertaking, Shirley Nogatmoni Okabe, whose father led the association recalled, “they didn’t want the WRA to pay for it... they wanted the people of Manzanar to pay for it.”¹⁷¹ Ryozo drew up the plans with Shirley’s father who decided the monument should say “in memorial to the deceased.”¹⁷² Internees were asked to contribute and “pay 15 cents per family for the concrete and the supplies.”¹⁷³ This was a final testimony to the Japanese Americans’ resilience and proof of self-determination while at Manzanar. If something was to be done right, it would be done by them. The memorial would be their gift to those who would not leave with them, who would not know freedom again. Adams centered his photograph of the monument, or the obelisk, painted white, gleaming in stark contrast to the dramatic mountain backdrop.¹⁷⁴ Centered at eye-level for the viewer, the solid and smooth obelisk seems to even challenge

McKenzie Tavoda

the dominance of the Sierra Nevada's, its apex pointing upward toward the heavens. The branches of the trees on either side extend toward the monument and the symmetry of the composition conveys a sense of permanence. At its base, in the surrounding sand, is the final resting place of the internees lost during the war. The fence posts and rope remain open at the front, welcoming visitors to enter and reflect. At the camp's dedication as a National Park in 1973, Ryozo returned to fit the plaque into the wall of his stone sentry post, joined by the seven men that had assisted him in its initial construction.¹⁷⁵ His artistic contributions to the camp gardens and identity are significant. He is responsible for its most venerated symbols; his work marks the entrance to the camp as well as the memorial, as the central point for the yearly pilgrimages held in remembrance of all ten camps. A young man at the time of his internment, George Izumi remembered Ryozo Kado as a role model during those contested times, and still held that "any individual that set their mind to do what they want to do, can do it, and I think Mr. Kado did that."¹⁷⁶

Of the 11,000 human beings detained at Manzanar, a small group of gardeners took back some semblance of their individual power by manipulating the desolate landscape into a place of beauty within the confines of a barbed wire fence. While it may be easy to believe people were motivated to create these gardens in defiance of an oppressive government and War Relocation Authority regulations, this does not seem to have been the case as evidenced by the positive role the gardens played in the lives of the internees. By "unbuilding" the disciplinary environment that the WRA had originally conceived as a flat and dusty space, the gardeners of Manzanar revealed a deeper relationship to the nature they encountered.¹⁷⁷ Through the application of Japanese gardening techniques to a challenging environment, each of these gardens cultivated expressions of cultural identity and provided necessary communal space that greatly enhanced the lives of the internees. In Jean Wakatsuki Houston's childhood memory, so eloquently described in her memoir, *Farewell to Manzanar*, the gardens were a space in which "you could face away from the barracks, look past the tiny rapids, toward the darkening mountains, and for a while not be a prisoner at all. You could hang suspended in some odd, almost lovely land you could not escape from yet almost didn't want to leave."¹⁷⁸ The gardeners of Manzanar were agents of change, able to enact personal authority over their confined space despite the prison-like characteristics of the camp. Rather than an act of disobedience, the gardeners of the Manzanar Relocation Center used their expertise as a means to express their freedom of self, celebrate their cultural background, and strengthen the bonds within their community by sharing parts of themselves that could never be restricted or taken.

¹Burton, Jeffery F, and Mary M. Farrell. 2014. "A Place of Beauty and Serenity Excavation and Restoration of the Arai Family Fish Pond." National Park Service U.S. Department of Interior, 1.

²Chiang, Connie Y. 2010. "Imprisoned Nature: Toward an Environmental History of the World War II Japanese American Incarceration." *Environmental History* 15 (2): 236–67. <http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.chapman.edu/stable/20749671>.

Chiang focused on the effect of the ruthlessness of the California desert on the internees and how it contributed to an overall defiance of the Japanese Americans. Chiang focused on the effect of the ruthlessness of the California desert on the internees and how it contributed to an overall defiance of the Japanese Americans. I argue that the internees did not manipulate the environment as a direct act of defiance of the authority of the camp.

³Neiwert, David A. *Strawberry Days: How Internment Destroyed a Japanese American Community*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

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⁷Dewitt, John L. "Instructions to All Persons of Japanese Ancestry." 1942. <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/sources/en-denshopd-p25-00049-1/>.

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- ¹² Rabinow, 357.
- ¹³ Wakatsuki Houston, Jeanne. 1973. *Farewell to Manzanar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 33.
- ¹⁴ Takei and Keane, 3.
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- ¹⁶ White, Richard. *The Organic Machine*. New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1995, *i*.
- ¹⁷ White, 108.
- ¹⁸ L.A. *Times*, December 8, 1941, 6.
- ¹⁹ Chiang, 244.
- ²⁰ White, *i*.
- ²¹ Helphand, 157.
- ²² Helphand, 157.
- ²³ "Victory Garden Results." *Inyo Independent*. September 11, 1942, 6.
- ²⁴ "For Better Living: Hobby Gardens Planned." *Manzanar Free Press*, May 26, 1942.
- ²⁵ Helphand, 13.
- ²⁶ During several trips to Manzanar, I was able to walk the excavation sites to analyze the gardens. The excavators are refurbishing them using photographs and archeological techniques to shed light on what they would have looked like.
- ²⁷ Lawrence and Low, 14.
- ²⁸ Lawrence and Low, 5.
- ²⁹ Lawrence and Low, 15.
- ³⁰ Arai Family Photograph, "A Place of Beauty and Serenity Excavation and Restoration of the Arai Family Fish Pond." National Park Service U.S. Department of Interior, 10.
- ³¹ Madelon (Arai). Yamamoto, interview by Erin Brasfield, National Park Service, 2006, MANZ 1113A, 77.
- ³² Madelon Yamamoto, interview by Richard Potashin, 89.
- ³³ Madelon Yamamoto, interview by Richard Potashin, 89.
- ³⁴ Madelon Yamamoto, interview by Richard Potashin, 90.
- ³⁵ Takei and Keane, 190.
- ³⁶ Takei and Keane, 189.
- ³⁷ Madelon Yamamoto, interview by Richard Potashin, 91.
- ³⁸ Reconstructed Arai Pond today filled with water for the Japanese American Pilgrimage hosted at Manzanar every April. All photos in this paper were taken by the author during her research at Manzanar.
- ³⁹ Details of the Arai Pond.
- ⁴⁰ Madelon Yamamoto, interview by Erin Brashfield, 77.
- ⁴¹ White, 89.
- ⁴² 1917 Immigration Act (39 Stat. 874) Feb. 5, 1917 Sec. 3.
- ⁴³ Henry Nishi, interview by Richard Potashin, Santa Monica, January 8, 2009, 22.
- ⁴⁴ Manzanar Committee PR, "Nishi Family Returns To Manzanar To Help Rebuild Historic Bridge At Merritt Park," Manzanar Committee (blog), May 31, 2011, <http://blog.manzanarcommittee.org/2011/05/31/nishi-family-returns-to-manzanar-to-help-rebuild-historic-bridge-at-merritt-park/>.
- ⁴⁵ Helphand, 167.
- ⁴⁶ Henry Nishi, interview by Richard Potashin.
- ⁴⁷ Helphand, 181.
- ⁴⁸ Helphand, 179.
- ⁴⁹ "Nishi Family Returns To Manzanar To Help Rebuild Historic Bridge At Merritt Park."
- ⁵⁰ "Transcript of Informal Hearing in Project Director's Office, Manzanar War relocation Center- October 25, 1943, 4pm. Page 1."

McKenzie Tavoda

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- ⁵¹ "Transcript of Informal Hearing in Project Director's Office, Manzanar War relocation Center- October 25, 1943, 4pm. Page 1."
- ⁵² "Transcript of Informal Hearing in Project Director's Office, Manzanar War relocation Center- October 25, 1943, 4pm. Page 3."
- ⁵³ "Transcript of Informal Hearing in Project Director's Office, Manzanar War relocation Center- October 25, 1943, 4pm. Page 3."
- ⁵⁴ "Transcript of Informal Hearing in Project Director's Office, Manzanar War relocation Center- October 25, 1943, 4pm. Page 7."
- ⁵⁵ "Transcript of Informal Hearing in Project Director's Office, Manzanar War relocation Center- October 25, 1943, 4pm. Page 9."
- ⁵⁶ "Best Garden to be Chosen." *Manzanar Free Press*, October 8, 1942.
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- ⁵⁸ Helphand, 182.
- ⁵⁹ Henry Nishi, interview by Richard Potashin.
- ⁶⁰ Helphand, 186.
- ⁶¹ Merritt Park taken from a similar angle to Toyo Miyatake's photo. Note the rock formation in the middle of the pond resembles a turtle.
- ⁶² Merritt Park taken from a similar angle to Ansel Adams. The turtle rock formation can be seen towards the left side of the image.
- ⁶³ Adams, Ansel. *Pool in Pleasure Park, Manzanar Relocation Center, Calif.* Photographic print, 1943. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/manz/item/2002695985/>.
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- ⁷³ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin. Walnut, California. Manzanar Archives. Transcript. September 9, 2004, 8.
- ⁷⁴ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 1.
- ⁷⁵ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 8.
- ⁷⁶ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 62.
- ⁷⁷ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 15.
- ⁷⁸ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 62.
- ⁷⁹ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 66.
- ⁸⁰ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 67.
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- ⁸² Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 79.
- ⁸³ Funk, Will. "The Lost Water Gardens of Manzanar." *Pond Profile*. The Water Gardening institute. July-August 2006, 94.
- ⁸⁴ Takei and Keane, 182.
- ⁸⁵ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 89.
- ⁸⁶ Burton, Jeff, et al. "Cultural Landscape Report Manzanar National Historic Site," 73.
- ⁸⁷ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 81.

- ⁸⁸ *Statement of United States Citizen of Japanese Ancestry. "The Loyalty Questionnaire."* 1943.
- ⁸⁹ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 100.
- ⁹⁰ Arthur Ogami, interview by Richard Potashin, 96.
- ⁹¹ The shallow, flattened bottom can be seen of the hospital Garden pond.
- ⁹² Details of the hospital garden shown in Ansel Adam's photo. The stone steps and tiers to the garden still exist today.
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- ⁹⁵ Susumu Ioki, interview by Richard Potashin.
- ⁹⁶ Susumu Ioki, interview by Richard Potashin.
- ⁹⁷ Adams, Ansel. 1943. *Nurse Aiko Hamaguchi, patient Tom Kano. Manzanar Relocation Center, California.* Photographic print.
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- ⁹⁹ Adams, Benti and Miyatake, 74.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Block 12 Mess Hall Garden Staff.* 1943. Courtesy of National Park Service. Manzanar Archives.
- ¹⁰¹ Takei and Keane, 191.
- ¹⁰² Helphand, 168.
- ¹⁰³ Takei and Keane, 163.
- ¹⁰⁴ In these two images of Block 12 Garden, one can see the hill highlighted in Ansel Adams' photo, the small stone outline of the garden, and the corresponding cement squares that once held up the barracks of Block 12.
- ¹⁰⁵ Adams, Ansel. *Block 12 Mess Hall Garden, Manzanar Relocation Center.* 1943. Courtesy of the Manzanar Archives and National Park Service.
- ¹⁰⁶ "A Walking Tour of Manzanar." Manzanar National Historic Site, transcripts, 14.
- ¹⁰⁷ Takei and Keane, 183.
- ¹⁰⁸ Takei and Keane, 184.
- ¹⁰⁹ Burton, Jeff, et al. "Cultural Landscape Report Manzanar National Historic Site," 154.
- ¹¹⁰ Takei and Keane, 219.
- ¹¹¹ "Manzanar Block 12 Mess Hall Garden." National Parks Service. Manzanar Archives.
- ¹¹² Takei and Keane, 175.
- ¹¹³ "Manzanar Block 12 Mess Hall Garden." National Parks Service. Manzanar Archives.
- ¹¹⁴ "A Walking Tour of Manzanar." Manzanar National Historic Site, transcripts, 14.
- ¹¹⁵ Takei and Keane, 165.
- ¹¹⁶ "Best Garden to be Chosen." *Manzanar Free Press*, October 8, 1942.
- ¹¹⁷ "A Walking Tour of Manzanar." Manzanar National Historic Site, transcripts, 11.
- ¹¹⁸ Takei and Keane, 159.
- ¹¹⁹ Funk, Will. "The Lost Water Gardens of Manzanar." *Pond Profile.* The Water Gardening institute. July-August 2006, 95.
- ¹²⁰ Helphand, 136.
- ¹²¹ "Garden Contest Won by B-34." *Manzanar Free Press*, November 5, 1942.
- ¹²² Image of Block 34 Garden with reconstructed wooden fence.
- ¹²³ *Garden at Block 34.* Photographic print. Courtesy of Berry Tamura Family Album.
- ¹²⁴ *Garden at Block 34.* Photographic print. Courtesy of Berry Tamura Family Album.
- ¹²⁵ Helphand, 136.
- ¹²⁶ Takei and Keane, 165.
- ¹²⁷ "Lawns...vs. Dust." *Manzanar Free Press*, August 12, 1942.
- ¹²⁸ "A Walking Tour of Manzanar." Manzanar National Historic Site, transcripts, 12.
- ¹²⁹ "Best Garden to be Chosen." *Manzanar Free Press*, October 8, 1942.
- ¹³⁰ "Block 15 Government Records." Transcript. Manzanar Archives, 1.

McKenzie Tavoda

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- 134 "For Better Living: Hobby Gardens Planned." *Manzanar Free Press*, May 26, 1942.
- 135 "For Better Living: Hobby Gardens Planned." *Manzanar Free Press*, May 26, 1942.
- 136 Burton, Jeff, et al. "Cultural Landscape Report Manzanar National Historic Site," 160.
- 137 "Lawns...vs. Dust." *Manzanar Free Press*, August 12, 1942.
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- 151 Louis Kado, interview by Jane Wehrey and Richard Potashin. Independence. Manzanar Archives. July 2, 2001.
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- 160 Takei and Keane, 150.
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- 167 Beckwith, Ronald J.. "Landscape Gardens and Gardeners at Manzanar Relocation Center." *Discover Nikkei*. Jan. 5, 2008. <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2008/1/25/landscape-manzanar/>.
- 168 Williams, Arthur J., 179.
- 169 Adams, Ansel. *Entrance to Manzanar, Manzanar Relocation Center*. Photographic print. 1943. As seen in *Born Free and Equal* by Ansel Adams.
- 170 A photo taken of the cemetery monument and fence posts at the Japanese American Pilgrimage in April. Every year, services for both Buddhist and Christian former internees are held at the site.
- 171 Shirley Nogatmoni Okabe, interview by Alisa Lynch. San Jose. Manzanar Archives. January 30, 2013.
- 172 Shirley Nogatmoni Okabe, interview by Alisa Lynch.
- 173 Louis Kado, interview by Jane Wehrey and Richard Potashin.
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¹⁷⁷ White, Richard, 88.

¹⁷⁸ Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki, 99.