

# THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER AMACHE PROJECT

Volume XIV Spring 2023

## Message From the Co-Director

~ Dr. April Kamp-Whittaker, Assistant  
Professor of Anthropology, California State  
University, Chico

I am honored to have my first opportunity to write this segment of the DU Amache Project Newsletter. It has been a pleasure to be part of this project since 2008 and slowly work my way through the ranks. An even greater honor has been seeing the changes and excitement of the past year – there is so much energy surrounding Amache right now and many updates to be found in this newsletter.

For the first time since 2018 we were able to hold the DU Amache Field School and host the Community and Public Open Houses. The community open house was the largest ever and we were able to gather and celebrate Amache's new status as a National Historic Site. We cannot be more thankful for all the support we continue to receive. Every year we have the opportunity to welcome new students and volunteers. In this edition of the newsletter Cami Sample shares her experience attending the field school as one of our high school interns.

We are also in the process of supporting the work of the National Park Service as Amache transitions to becoming one of their park units.

Dr. Clark has written a short update to share on where we are in this process and how the DU Amache Project is contributing to this effort moving forward. Archaeological research at Amache during the 2022 field school was influenced by this transition and our goal of documenting all of the residential blocks. Salvador Valdez-Ono provides an overview of survey in Blocks 10G (the High School), 12F, and 7E and excavation of the 12F mess hall garden. This overview is complemented by an article from DU masters student Megan Brown, who has been researching preschools at Amache.

As always, we look forward to hearing from you and welcome your thoughts and feedback as we move forward into the Year of the Rabbit. It has never been more of an honor to collaborate with all of you in preserving this important place.



Kuni Homma Hasegawa and Dr. April Kamp-Whittaker with the drawing Kuni made as a little girl at Amache, 2022 Open House

## Field School Update

~ Salvador (Chava) Valdez-Ono, Ph.D. Student, University of Maryland

The 2022 research at Amache marks 14 years since the first DU Amache Project field school. I first began as a volunteer of the project in 2014 alongside my grandfather Gary Ono who is an Amache survivor, and have since been back 3 more times: in 2018 as a student volunteer, in 2021 as crew, and in 2022 as a crew chief.

This season marked the highest visitation the field school has seen, likely due to the designation of Amache as a National Historic Site earlier in the year and our four-year hiatus. Turnout to both the Amache community and general public open houses was up in numbers and totaled over 100+ on our Amachean open house date. The increase in public knowledge of Amache is one major goal of the project and seeing so many friendly and invested people gathered to appreciate the site and story around it was truly special.



Community Open House Participants, Summer 2022.  
Courtesy of Gary Ono

The archaeological group this year consisted of both new and returning volunteers and was notably a family affair. Crews included two sets of relatives: a mother-daughter team and a grandmother-grandson team. Our other high school interns were following in the footsteps of siblings who had volunteered for our two-week 2021 field season (Make sure to check out Cami's article later in the newsletter.) These newer faces, alongside our long-term volunteers, all contributed significantly to a successful field season. Alongside the volunteers, field school students from numerous universities around the country came to learn the core concepts of archaeological methods and community-driven fieldwork.

The archaeological research involved surveying three barracks blocks: 7F, 10G, and 12F. These blocks all held some sort of significance in the camp's running; 7F containing the silkscreen shop, 10G containing the Amache High School, and 12F containing a beautiful pond and gardenscape.

Throughout the survey, we found evidence of garden features in each block, and volunteers identified a feature unknown to us in 10G: a basketball court inside the school's courtyard, discovered in photos at the Amache museum and later confirmed in the field. 12F was also the site of the summer's excavations, with research in two related mess hall features: a garden bed and a pond. We were also visited by two scholars from the University of Florida who brought LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) equipment and scanned both the pond feature and artifacts held in the museum. This will allow for digital access to these important resources.

With these new developments in access and the reach of Amache and its story, the field school continues to expand its impact. We hope to be able to continue working with the site and the Amache stakeholder community for years to come!



Crews excavating the 12F Mess Hall Garden Pond.  
Courtesy of Jim West.

## *The Perseverance of Play*

~ Megan Brown, M.A. Candidate, ~

University of Denver

“Children should be seen and not heard” is a well-known and outdated adage that has played into many aspects of how childhood has been viewed through a historic lens. While children were “seen” in the archaeological record, their voices were muted, replaced by preconceived notions or theoretical standpoints that ignored a child's place within society. Historically, these active societal agents were not heard despite evidence of their presence. Finding children in the archaeological record can be easy when one knows what to look for.

When I started the master's program at DU in 2019, I knew I wanted to work at Amache, but the pandemic intervened. In the summer of 2021, I served as a crew chief for a small all-volunteer crew who resurveyed a sample of units in one of the primary dumps, field-checked trees recorded from aerial photographs, and tested out a new survey database by surveying Block 9K. During our work, a pattern began to emerge. I was able to conduct an oral history with Carlene Tanigoshi Tinker, who attended preschool at Amache. She went to the 11F preschool, which was held in the recreation hall building that had been reinstalled on site and was being rehabilitated. 9K, the block that we surveyed, was also a block that had a preschool.

With consultation with Dr. Bonnie Clark, it became clear what I should focus on for my thesis: preschoolers.

The majority of those who were incarcerated at Amache were children. There were five preschools that were created and held within the recreation halls of blocks 7K, 9K, 9E, 11F, and 11H. The creation of these smaller institutions fell to the community, primarily the mothers. My study was an analysis of the landscape and material culture of the five residential blocks within Amache that had designated preschools.



Milk and graham crackers being served to nursery school children in a block recreation hall. Courtesy of Denver Public Library Special Collections. Photograph by Tom Parker.

I then compared these blocks with preschools to residential blocks without preschools to determine if there were any patterns and discernable differences between the two study areas. I used multiple avenues of analysis, including archaeological methods, spatial analysis, the interview with Carlene, and archival research. Archaeologically, the artifacts that I was particularly looking for were toys. These objects are spread throughout Amache and my findings indicated that the distribution was not statistically higher in blocks that had preschools. Children were free to roam Amache and play wherever they could. It is my hope that the findings of this research will provide insight into how young children left a discernible impression on Amache through their agency in the community as a whole as well as assist in the interpretation of the site, particularly the 11F recreation hall.



Exterior of rehabilitated 11F recreation hall.



It is important to not only acknowledge the resilience of the adult Japanese American incarcerated, but their children and how they thrived despite enduring such an experience. Reflecting on my methods and findings, it amazes me how many objects and paperwork have been preserved by families and museums over the years. Primary sources are invaluable for preserving personal experiences and firsthand accounts of history. This project has not only opened my eyes to a point in American history that has been swept under the rug, but of the incredible resilience of a group of people who made the best out of a terrible situation.

### *A Lesson in Gaman*

*~Cami Sample, 2022 Descendant High School Intern*

Gaman—enduring the seemingly unbearable with patience and dignity. This word has been used by my grandmother during challenging times all my life, but I never truly understood its meaning until last summer when I participated in the University of Denver’s Amache field school.

On June 12, 2022 I awoke early in the morning of the first day of field school and inventoried my packing list one last time. As I sorted through the bug spray and other camping equipment I was filled with mixed emotions. Trepidation—camping has never been one of my passions and the idea of living in a tent for weeks was not particularly enticing.

Nervousness—I wasn’t sure I would be accepted by this college age group assuming they wouldn’t want a high schooler tagging along. And most importantly excitement—I had known about Amache for years, the birthplace of my grandmother, and was eager to see the place where she spent the first 3 years of her life.

When I arrived at the University of Denver, I was welcomed by the crew. Dr. Bonnie Clark and her team’s enthusiasm was contagious, dissolving any feelings of worry that I had. I was also struck by how passionate all the participants were. Despite coming from varied backgrounds and different ages we became fast friends over muffins and coffee before departing.

When I arrived at Amache I was struck by the intense heat and wind. Amache is located in a desolate prairieland in the Southeast corner of Colorado. Like all internment camps, it is located where the land was cheap—almost uninhabitable. I got out of the van and looked around imagining how my great grandparents felt arriving at this place that would become their home—not just for a few weeks like myself, but indefinitely.

To beat the heat we worked in the field early in the morning and then spent our afternoons working in the museum. Our days in the field consisted of surveying and excavating. We worked to uncover many gardens that the Japanese internees had cultivated out of nothing while they were incarcerated.

We were able to visualize ponds that they created and filled with catfish from the Arkansas River. I was struck with my ancestors’ ability to endure their confinement and create a more liveable community.

In the museum I was surprised to see all the ways that the Japanese internees tried to create a semblance of the life they once had outside of the confines of the barbed wire fences. Many of them were born in America and used to the American traditions of Homecoming, Sports and Carnivals. They continued these traditions by throwing dances, sports tournaments and even put on a carnival. The museum was filled with posters advertising these events. These posters made me sad to see the life that they had lost and were trying to recreate. They motivated me to preserve and uncover their efforts.

From this experience I learned the true meaning of the word Gaman. The Japanese internees transformed the prison that the US Government created to confine them into a liveable community.

I was fortunate to see the documentary, “Amache Rose” with the crew from this summer. Watching this important film alongside those that worked at Amache, I was filled with a sense of belonging. We all were proud to be a small part of uncovering and preserving the history of the Japanese Americans.

I am stunned by how many people have no idea that this happened in the United States. I am currently working to make Amache a mandatory part of Colorado history curriculum with my involvement in the Colorado Youth Advisory Council and plan to continue to educate those around me about this history.



Cami and her dig partner, Amache descendent Ken Rivas, take a soil chemistry sample from an Amache garden.

## Du Amache & the new Amache National Historic Site

~ Dr. Bonnie J. Clark, Du Amache Project  
Co-Director

An amazing victory for the long-term preservation of the site of Amache occurred on March 18, 2022 when President Joseph Biden signed the Amache National Historic Site Act into law. Faculty, staff, students, and alumni of the project contributed to public meetings in support of the legislation, especially discussions around its significant archaeological resources. Since the passage of the act, DU Amache personnel and alumni have been working with National Park Service (NPS) staff so that plans for the new park build on the resources gathered since our first field school in 2008. The transition to NPS ownership and management will take time, and so we continue to support our community partners, such as the Amache Preservation Society.

I'm often asked what the impact of Amache's addition to the National Park System might be on the future of the DU Amache project. The NPS has an unfunded mandate for complete archaeological surveys of all of their properties, so our work will actually help the park in its mission. We've already begun consultation with staff regarding our next planned field school in the summer of 2024.

We'll work with the NPS to craft an approach that draws from our established research procedures but incorporates federal guidelines and evolving management needs.

If you are interested in supporting the site during this critical transition, here are a few ways to be involved:

- Stay informed: Updated information about the park planning process is available on the NPS website: <https://www.nps.gov/amch/getinvolved/planning.htm>. The Amache Alliance, a non-profit group of community stakeholders, maintains a list of site-related projects: <https://www.amachealliance.org/projects-3> [www.amache.org](http://www.amache.org)

- Support the May pilgrimage: Details on the dates and how you can be involved will be posted here: <https://amache.org/current-activity-news/>

- Continue to learn: The DU Amache portfolio has links to media pieces and academic publications by project personnel: <https://portfolio.du.edu/amache>



DU Amache participants at an NPS planning workshop, January 2023

## Contact us:

The DU Amache project needs you!! As we continue to move forward, we want you to be a part of our work, whether through sharing your memories or opinions, through planning future research, or through public events. If you are interested in joining us, we would love to hear from you. Correspondence can be sent to Dr. Bonnie Clark via email at [bclark@du.edu](mailto:bclark@du.edu) or at the mailing address below.

For more about the Amache Project please visit the project website at <https://portfolio.du.edu/amache> or the project Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/DUAmacheResearchProject>.

The DU Amache project will continue to update the community through newsletters and other correspondence. For additional copies of the newsletter or to join our mailing list please email [bclark@du.edu](mailto:bclark@du.edu) or send your mailing address to the address below.

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