

**Communities Negotiating Preservation: The World War II Japanese  
Internment Camp of Amache**

**Jennifer Otto**

## **Negotiating Preservation**

The addition of multiple voices within preservation efforts can serve to create a broader perspective of the work at hand, although problems may arise when individuals of differing opinions attempt to work together towards a common goal. Numerous distinct groups have collaborated over the years in order to preserve the former World War II Japanese internment camp located near Granada, Colorado. These groups include the Japanese American community, the student based Amache Preservation Society, and the town of Granada. Each has contributed unique resources to the project throughout the years, but they have needed to learn to work together in order to negotiate the management and preservation of this National Historic Landmark site.

The Granada Relocation Center, more commonly known as Amache, was one of ten relocation centers that housed Japanese Americans during World War II. It was the smallest of the camps and the only one located in Colorado. The relocation of individuals of Japanese ancestry from the west coast into these centers was a result of the hysteria felt by the American public after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Executive Order 9066, signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in February of 1942, forced the Japanese American citizens to leave their homes and the majority of their possessions behind (Wei 2005). They traveled to desolate areas of the country to live behind barbed wire in crowded barracks. With the end of the war in 1945 came the closing of these internment camps and the return of the Japanese Americans to a more normal existence.

This land at Amache was largely ignored for over forty years, with the exception of small groups occasionally visiting in order to reflect on the internment experience. The

camp, however, was far from forgotten. Preservation work is being carried out at Amache today, largely due to the efforts of the Amache Preservation Society (APS). This group is made up of students from Granada High School through a class started by a local history teacher more than 15 years ago. The APS is responsible for the majority of upkeep and maintenance at the site and has also spent time educating the majority of presentations given to organizations in both Colorado and Kansas. This work has been accomplished over the years in conjunction with the Denver Central Optimist Club, a group of Japanese Americans that has also shown great dedication to the preservation and interpretation at the site. Cooperation with the town of Granada has also been necessary, as it owns the land on which Amache rests. These three community groups bring forth multiple perspectives and missions to the preservation taking place at Amache, which can often cause tensions and conflicts to arise. Open communication and collaboration therefore become imperative in order for long-term preservation efforts to be successful. Preliminary steps have already been taken, and long term goals have also been identified to help these efforts stay on track (Ellis 2004). Numerous other groups and individuals have taken a considerable interest in Japanese internment and the current state of affairs at Amache as well, placing the camp well on its way to achieving the ultimate goal of preservation.

### **Japanese American Relocation during World War II**

Public opinion toward Japanese Americans in the United States was at an all time low after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. There were widespread feelings of anger and fear of the unknown directed towards Japan that transferred over to individuals of Japanese

descent in the United States (Smith 1995; Taylor 1993). Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 19, 1942, was a direct response to these sentiments, citing military necessity for the action (Hayashi 2004). This order mandated that Japanese Americans residing in the western United States be relocated from their homes. They were first moved to fifteen temporary facilities located in California, Washington, and Oregon, until ten permanent relocation centers could be established by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) throughout seven western states (Smith 1995).

The state of Colorado housed one of these permanent facilities, near the small town of Granada in the southeastern portion of the state. The governor of Colorado at this time, Ralph Carr, expressed willingness to house as many Japanese Americans as necessary, a racially tolerant attitude not shared by any of his political counterparts which ultimately caused him his political career (Harvey 2004; Hosokawa 2005). The acquisition of land for Granada differed from that of the other relocation centers because it was not federal land. The government purchased the undeveloped 10,500 acres from private owners, forcing local farmers and ranchers off their land and causing early resentment towards the camp (Hosokawa 2005; Simmons and Simmons 1994). Construction began on the Granada Relocation Center in June of 1942, and the first residents of the center began to arrive in late August before the camp was even completed. The entire complex consisted of 569 structures, 348 of which were barracks for habitation (Ellis 2004). A total of over 7,000 Japanese Americans came to Granada Relocation Center by late October of 1942, with a peak population of 7,318 making it the smallest of the internment camps (Burton et al 2002).

The Granada Relocation Center was fully functional as its own city and included a hospital, schools, several stores, a post office, a fire department, and numerous churches (Wei 2005). The post office was actually the reason the camp began to be called Amache, as a distinction was necessary between the town of Granada and the relocation center. The name of Amache, suggested by a local Granada citizen, was that of the Cheyenne wife of John Wesley Prowers, a settler to this area in Colorado and for whom Prowers county is named (Burton et al 2002; Harvey 2004). Camp Amache also had extensive farmland that produced a large volume and variety of products and helped it to be self-sufficient, including vegetables, beef, dairy, poultry, and hogs (Harvey 2004; Hosokawa 2005). The camp benefited because the land had previously been used as farmland, and it was easier to implement agricultural programs here than at the other relocation centers (Burton et al 2002).

Life at Amache was vastly different than what most of the Japanese Americans were accustomed to before internment. The environmental conditions varied from hot and dry in the summer to bitterly cold in the winter, weather that many of these internees from California were not prepared for. The loss of privacy was a difficult issue to the residents of Amache as well, having to contend with close living quarters and community bathrooms (Simmons and Simmons 1994). The structure of the family also deteriorated as the result of meals in common mess halls. Traditional family meal time was no longer an easy task to undertake, and children began to view their parents in a less authoritative manner (Harvey 2004). The internees did what they could do make life and the conditions at the camp more tolerable by participating in various organizations and other social activities. These included various Japanese and American sports, the publication

of a local camp newspaper called the *Granada Pioneer*, landscaping, Boy and Girl Scouts, and the American Legion (Simmons and Simmons 1994). Even with all of these activities to take part in, Amache and the other internment camps were still artificial communities that the residents had no choice but to be a part of.

Families were forced to deal with these less than ideal conditions as internees at Amache for over two years. The first individuals were allowed to leave the camp in January of 1945, and the last eighty-five departed on October 15 of the same year (Burton et al 2002). Structures from Amache were dismantled and sold to local towns and schools after the official closing of the camp on January 26, 1946 (Ellis 2004). The camp was left deserted and the town of Granada purchased land from the main section of the camp. It has primarily been used by the town for its water supply and cattle grazing through the present day.

#### **Preservation Work at Amache**

Pilgrimages to Amache began in 1976 to commemorate the memory of the internment and now take place every spring. These pilgrimages are a time for former internees of Amache and other camps, their families, and other community members to gather and reflect on the internment experience. Members of the Denver Japanese American community chartered the Denver Central Optimist Club in 1979. This group has been responsible for much of the preservation and commemorative activities that have taken place at Amache over the years. In 1983 the members decided to erect a memorial for both the 31 soldiers from Camp Amache that died in battle during World War II, as well as to the rest of the individuals that lived and died at Amache (Burton et al

2002; Shikes 2001). Members of the Optimists discussed the idea with the Granada town council prior to its construction, a meeting that turned into a shouting match over the wording on the memorial (Shikes 2001). The sides eventually compromised, but this example is indicative of the early relationship between the two groups. The Optimist Club has remained involved with the camp since this occasion, making annual pilgrimages every May and assisting with raising money for endeavors at the site such as archaeological investigations and other preservation work (Ellis 2004). The group received a grant from the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund in 1998 to resurface roads, install interpretive signs, and restore the cemetery. Although the group technically disbanded in 2005 due to decreasing member numbers, many of these individuals reorganized as the Amache Club which remains involved with the preservation process through fundraising and other activities (Hosokawa 2005).

Close work has also taken place with the Amache Historical Society of Woodland Hills, California, an organization composed of former Amache internees living in California, to accomplish preservation efforts at the site. This group formed in 1978 and has been integral to the organization of Amache reunions taking place throughout the western United States over the years, including at Amache itself in 1998. This particular reunion drew over 500 participants, demonstrating the importance of this activity to former internees and their families. The Amache Historical Society has also been responsible for the preservation of objects and photographs related to life at Amache. They are dedicated to preserving the history and remains of Amache, which has clearly been displayed through their efforts over the years.

Other organizations in Colorado supporting preservation include the Mile-Hi chapter of the Japanese American Citizen's League and the Japanese Association of Colorado. A non-profit organization called Friends of Amache is now responsible for managing the site, a group composed of representatives from the Amache Club, the Amache Historical Society, the Amache Preservation Society, and the town of Granada. These representatives have worked together to align their goals, although priorities may still differ among individuals. Some of the projects Friends of Amache is now working to accomplish include building a replica guard tower, obtaining former barracks to bring back to the site, cleaning up all the dead wood on the camp, preserving the trees planted during the internment years, and building an interpretive center. The National Park Service has also been actively involved in these discussions on the future of Amache. The establishment of these common goals attests to how far these groups have come from the argument that occurred at the first meeting of the Denver Central Optimists and the town of Granada.

Much of the preservation accomplished at the site of Amache is the result of the determination of a Granada high school teacher by the name of John Hopper (Carrillo and Killam 2004). He had lived in the nearby town of Las Animas as a child and remembered hearing his mother talk about the camp, but did not know a great deal about it. When Hopper began teaching in Granada in 1990, he realized the importance of the camp to Granada and asked high school principal Ian Debono for permission to begin a class project related to Amache (Shikes 2001). That permission was granted the following year, and as a result the student-based Amache Preservation Society formed a



few years later under Hopper's direction. For over fifteen years Hopper and his students have been instrumental in the maintenance and upkeep of the site (Ellis 2004).

The group has undertaken a variety of different activities related to Amache. This project began primarily with research about the camp and the internees that had remained in the state of Colorado, but it slowly became educational for the broader public as well through presentations given to schools and civic organizations in the surrounding area of Colorado and Kansas (Harvey 2004). The group has worked to record oral histories from all types of individuals associated with Amache, much of this accomplished during the "Back to Amache" reunion of 1998. Hopper and his students have also carried out a great deal of preservation work at the physical camp site as well, mainly through the maintenance of the site. This has included caring for the Amache cemetery, placing about seventy wooden informational signs around the camp, and planting over 200 trees (Ellis 2004; Shikes 2001). The APS also recently constructed a walking trail and worked with the town of Granada and the National Park Service to create an interpretive kiosk at the site. The group gives tours of the site upon request and manages a collection of artifacts at the Amache Museum in Granada, a small building open only by appointment. Most of the artifacts in it have been donated by former internees or camp staff, with other objects obtained through preliminary archaeological investigations (Ellis 2004). Several APS members participated in a course on collections management during the summer of 2008 to learn more about proper handling and storage techniques. They also assisted with an inventory of photographs and objects in the collection, an important step for future research purposes.

The reaction from the local citizens of Granada in regards to these preservation efforts has been mixed. While some are excited to see this work taking place, others are more hesitant to release control of the land on which Amache is located. Resentment still exists towards the government for forcing residents off their land to build the camp back in 1942. Much of the older generation in Granada did not initially realize the importance of the site, although the involvement of local students has begun to lead more adults to appreciate it (Quintero 2007). Some residents, such as former mayor Alan Pfeiffer, are worried that the National Park Service will attempt to take over all control of the former Amache site, although the prospect of increasing tourism to the area has also caused numerous others to show support for the preservation process (Shikes 2001). Others in Granada feel that John Hopper and the Amache Preservation Society have versions of the internment that are misinformed, such as the placement of barbed wire around the camp to prevent individuals from leaving the camp. They wish their views of the internment would be more prominent in the information presented about Amache, as they lived in Granada during the years Amache was open (Quintero 2007). These reactions demonstrate that while growing numbers of individuals are becoming more open and involved with the efforts taking place concerning Amache, there are still some who do not completely support the preservation activities.

The site of Amache has received increasing attention over the last few years, most recently with a National Historic Landmark designation on February 10, 2006 and its corresponding dedication on May 20, 2006 at the annual Amache pilgrimage. Before that time, the site was also listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Colorado State Register of Historic Properties in 1994 and as one of Colorado Preservation Inc.'s

most endangered places in 2001 due to looting and vandalism (Ellis 2004).

Archaeological investigations took place in 2003 in order to assess the current condition of the site and suggested Amache has some of the greatest archaeological integrity among the internment camps (Carrillo and Killam 2004; Ellis 2004). Management and interpretive plans continue to be developed for the site, including a Comprehensive Interpretive Plan and Conceptual Development Plan prepared in 2007 by the National Park Service's Intermountain Regional Office (NPS 2007).

The University of Denver has become actively involved with the preservation of Amache as well. An archaeological and museum studies field school took place at the site during the summer of 2008, taking the opportunity to examine the resources on the site and use it for long range planning and interpretation at Amache. Excavations and other research will add to the knowledge of how the internees used and modified the landscape around them. The researchers used surface survey at the site to learn more about daily life in the camp blocks. Preliminary results have shown the construction of three types of gardens at Amache, including ornamental, victory, and entry garden, which may provide details of vegetation planted at Amache during World War II (Clark et al 2008).

A number of institutions also have their own collections regarding Amache throughout the state of Colorado. The Colorado Digitization Project, now known as the Collaborative Digitization Program (CDP), has provided funds for the Stephen H. Hart Library at the Colorado Historical Society, the Auraria Library in Denver, and Colorado College's Tutt Library to digitize their collections related to Amache. The Colorado State Archives also has numerous collections related to the camp, including documents of

Governor Ralph Carr. These all provide an excellent resource base to learn more about Amache itself, and larger collections detailing the entire internment experience are also available at institutions throughout the United States.

### **The Future of Preservation**

Residents throughout Colorado are largely unaware that a Japanese internment camp existed in this state during World War II. The site of Amache has begun to gain more recognition over the past few years through the preservation efforts taking place, but it is still not as widely visible to the public as it should be. The internment is an extremely important aspect of the state's history that should not be forgotten. It was a violation of basic human rights carried out as the result of fear, an event that could easily be repeated in today's society. The public needs to be reminded of these past actions in order to prevent similar situations from reoccurring in the future. The successes and failures of the collaborative process that are occurring in Granada at this time can be used as a model for collaborations at other preservation sites in the future.

Numerous distinct groups must work together in order to successfully achieve their preservation goals at the historic landmark site of Amache, a process that can often be quite difficult. There continues to be a great deal of work needed to accomplish all of the goals that have been established, but the collaborative spirit developed in recent years among the community groups has facilitated this process. Although the project has gained extensive support over the last few years, it continues to be based within the communities that originally began the preservation. These individuals realize the

importance of this endeavor, working together with a joint commitment to preserve the physical site and the memories associated with Amache.

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### *A Conversation with Jerene de Bono, Mayor of the Town of Granada*

How would you describe the role your community has had in the preservation efforts for/at the former Camp Amache internment site and in commemorating the Japanese American life and heritage at this site 1942-45?

*During the mid-1980's evacuees and their families would visit the cemetery at Camp Amache each year in May for a memorial observation, and at that time the cemetery was rather neglected. During this time Lawrence and Tiny Silva, who had kept in contact with several of the refugees, began relating the history of the camp to John Hopper a history teacher from Granada School. In 1993, Mr. Hopper started the Amache Preservation Society, which included students from the Granada School. Mr. Hopper and the students work closely with the Friends of Amache to improve the camp. It was an entire school/community effort, from the elementary and secondary students, vo-ag students, teachers, custodians, Lawrence and Tiny Silva, and various community members to improve the cemetery located at the camp. The Amache Preservation Society generally consists of 10-12 students, and these students along with Mr. Hopper present presentations to various groups throughout the year, as well as continued work on improving the camp site.*

What are the current plans for the relocation of the temporary museum in town to a permanent location at the National Historic Landmark/Camp Amache site? What are the current considerations and plans for designing a visitor center for/at the National Historic Landmark?

*Camp Amache received National Historic Landmark status in 2006. With this designation the National Park Service now will be able to assist in funding, organizing, and designing future improvements located at Camp Amache. The current plan is to establish a museum and visitor center at the main gate of the camp. The National Park Service, along with the Amache Preservation Society, and Friends of Amache has created a blueprint for a museum and visitors center. The cost for this project could well be over one million dollars. Dependent upon the progression of P.L. 109-441 that President Bush passed last year, funding would be available to begin this project.*

Would you consider these projects (museum relocation; conception, completion, maintenance and staffing of a visitor center) a continuation of the previous work/commitment of the community to the preservation efforts made so far and/or would/could they mark an extended responsibility for the National Historic Landmark site?

*All efforts toward improving Camp Amache have been accomplished through donations, grants and volunteers. A majority of donations have come from the Denver Optimist Club, Friends of Amache, Amache Historical Society, and private donations. Many tourists who have visited the museum also leave donations to help fund the Amache*