



## Archaeology Research at Colorado's Japanese American Internment Camp

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At Denver Botanic Gardens, 2013 has been a year of celebrating Japanese art and culture. With expansions to the Japanese Garden (Shofu En), dedicated in June of this year, we were primed to showcase the close ties we've shared with the Japanese American community over the years. Focusing on cross-cultural influences, we invited two bamboo artists to create site-specific sculptures throughout the grounds—Tetsunori Kawana from Japan and Stephen Talasnik from the United States.

Named *Kizuna: West Meets East*, the installation has proven to be one of the most successful art exhibits the Gardens has mounted to date. It will remain in its entirety through November 4, when portions will be disassembled. The remainder will be a highlight during the Gardens' annual Blossoms of Light winter display.

In conjunction with the art installation, we've featured several speakers who have been able to expand on the profound influence Japan has had on the West. Speakers included Christy Bartlett, director of the Omotesenke Foundation; Ron Otsuka, curator of Asian Arts at the Denver Art Museum; Ebi Kondo, curator of the Japanese Garden at Denver Botanic Gardens; and Dr. Bonnie Clark, professor at the University of the Denver and director of the archaeology excavations at Amache—the Japanese American

internment camp in southern Colorado.

Detailing some of the artifacts and oral histories of her community-based research and focusing on the gardening activities of the camp, Dr. Clark titled her talk "Growing Autonomy: Gardening at Japanese American Internment Camps." Internees were moved from their homes in California in 1942 and relocated to a barren landscape whose only embellishments were military buildings. Almost immediately, the inhabitants at Amache began improving their environment. Not only were the gardens a way of beautifying the area, but they were also cultural expressions that are a real testament to the defiance of the internees.

Archaeological evidence reveals three different types of gardens: entry gardens, communal gardens, and vegetable gardens, all demonstrating techniques that are specific to Japanese methods. Entry gardens, found in the front of barracks and delineating outdoor and indoor space, included such things as small, symbolic bridges and stones that were evocative of mountainscapes. Evidence of a strolling garden design, similar to Denver Botanic Gardens' Shofu En, is seen in the communal gardens. The crew found a very small pond with a plant in the center, which alludes to the island paradise found in many Japanese gardens. Screening strategies that are used to create the illusion of expansive space are seen in the alleys of trees that are common at the site. Small gravel is also found in many garden areas, likely creating Japanese dry gardens. Their agricultural

skills also affected the surrounding farms and ranches, giving rise to the first celery crops in the area and ultimately changing the farming techniques of the locals.

Sources for some of these alterations are part of the research of the project. Vials of seeds at the site suggest that internees may have packed seeds to bring with them. Gravel, ornamental rocks and riparian plants were likely collected at the Arkansas River located 3 miles north of camp. Mail order through the Sears Roebuck catalog was also a seed source. A surprising discovery is evidence of a ginger-like plant; the durable rhizomes were likely mailed from Hawaii, possibly from friends and family who were not interred. Soil analysis reveals some of the amendments used at the site: eggshell, tea leaves, coffee grounds and perhaps manure. The mess hall and surrounding agricultural endeavors would have been the highly valued sources for these materials.

The improvements to the soil and environment at Amache are still detectable today. After the camp closed in 1945, residents of the near-by town of Granada transplanted many trees and shrubs. As Dr. Clark asserts, "By insisting on a livable environment, the internees transformed not just the camp, but the region as well."

The Amache Preservation Society, a volunteer organization associate with the Granada High School, maintains the collections and promotes research at the site. To learn more, visit [www.amache.org](http://www.amache.org) or [portfolio.du.edu/pc/port?portfolio=amache](http://portfolio.du.edu/pc/port?portfolio=amache).