



Foundation Document Overview

Manzanar National Historic Site

California



Among the hardships of Manzanar, the wind and dust storms were some of the most unforgiving and unforgettable. Artist Kango Takamura painted this windy street scene in March 1943. NPS / Tanaka Family Collection. 3-5-1943

Contact Information

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Park Description

Manzanar National Historic Site was established by Congress (PL 102-248) on March 3, 1992, to “provide for protection and interpretation of historical, cultural, and natural resources associated with the relocation of Japanese Americans during World War II.” While Manzanar is best known for its wartime history, its layers of the past echo the larger themes of American history, including displacement of native peoples, the settlement of ranchers and farmers, water wars, and the consequences of prejudice.

It was—and is—a place of significance for the Paiute and Shoshone peoples who have lived in this valley for centuries. After 1860, the US Army killed some Paiutes and drove others out of the valley, though many eventually returned. In the early 1900s, farmers planted thousands of apple and other fruit trees in the town of Manzanar (Spanish for “apple orchard”), just as the city of Los Angeles was building an aqueduct to carry the valley’s water 200 miles south. In the mid-1920s, Los Angeles bought out Manzanar’s farmers. By 1934 the town was abandoned.

Following Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, newspapers, politicians, and labor leaders lobbied for action against people of Japanese ancestry, intensifying long-standing anti-Japanese prejudice on the West Coast. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, authorizing the military to forcibly exclude “any or all persons” from the West Coast. The army applied the order to everyone of Japanese ancestry, including more than 70,000 US citizens. Half were under the age of 18. Ultimately, the government deprived 120,000 people of their freedom by forcing them to relocate.

Those exiled to Manzanar were largely from the Los Angeles area. They were from cities and farms, young and old, rich and poor. Most had never been to Japan. They had only days or weeks to prepare. Businesses closed, classrooms emptied, friends separated. The US government incarcerated a total of 11,070 people at Manzanar between March 21, 1942 and November 21, 1945. They lived within a 540-acre housing section, divided into 36 blocks. Military police manned eight guard towers and patrolled the camp’s barbed-wire perimeter fence. People crowded into barracks apartments, ate in communal mess halls, washed their clothes in public laundry rooms, and shared latrines and showers that afforded almost no privacy. Within these conditions, 188 couples married, 541 babies were born, and 150 people died.

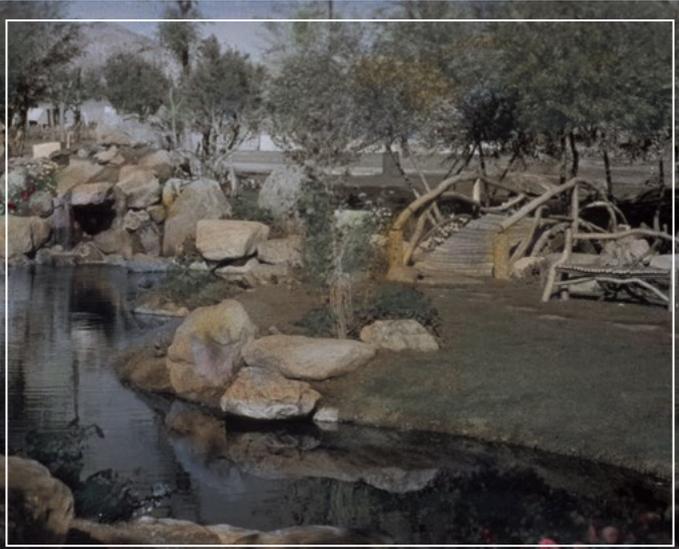
The camp closed in November 1945, three months after World War II ended. The government sold most of the structures and equipment as surplus. Buddhist and Christian ministers returned each year to the Manzanar cemetery to remember the dead. In 1969, a group came to the cemetery on their own pilgrimage. With the formation of the Manzanar Committee, this pilgrimage grew into an annual event attended by thousands. In 1972, the Manzanar Committee lobbied to have Manzanar recognized as a California State Landmark. Later efforts resulted in the site’s 1976 listing in the National Register of Historic Places and its 1985 designation as a National Historic Landmark. The advocacy of the Manzanar Committee resulted in the establishment of Manzanar National Historic Site in 1992.

In 1983, the Commission on the Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians concluded: “Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity. . . . The broad historical causes that shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria and a failure of political leadership.”

Today, the National Park Service preserves 814 of the 5,415 acres that comprised the Manzanar War Relocation Center. The historic site includes the housing area, the administrative area where War Relocation Authority (WRA) staff lived and worked, the military police compound, the chicken ranch, the hospital site, and the cemetery. Most of the buildings are gone, but many features remain, including historic orchards and numerous Japanese gardens and ponds.

Other features are buried, yet come to life through historic photos, artwork, archives, and hundreds of oral history interviews. The National Park Service restored the former camp auditorium to serve as a visitor center and park headquarters. A restored World War II-era mess hall and two reconstructed barracks in Block 14 (adjacent to the auditorium) feature exhibits on daily life and the many changes and challenges people faced at Manzanar. The National Park Service has also reconstructed one of the eight guard towers, along with the barbed-wire fence that surrounded the living area. More than 80,000 people visit the national historic site each year.

Manzanar became a national historic site because people whose lives had been affected by it vowed that such an injustice should never happen again, to any group in this country. A visit to Manzanar is an invitation to consider our Constitution and the protections it promises at a place where—not so long ago—they were largely ignored.



Kuichiro Nishi, Tak Muto, and others designed and built Merritt Park, the largest community garden in Manzanar. Colorized photo: Toyo Miyatake Studio.



Though Manzanar's 440 acres of farmland are now mostly fields of sage and rabbit brush, the surrounding wide open, isolating landscapes of the Owens Valley remain almost exactly as they were during World War II. Photo: Library of Congress / Ansel Adams.



At the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage, representatives of the camps carry banners in a procession ending at the cemetery monument. Photo: Gann Matsuda / Manzanar Committee.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

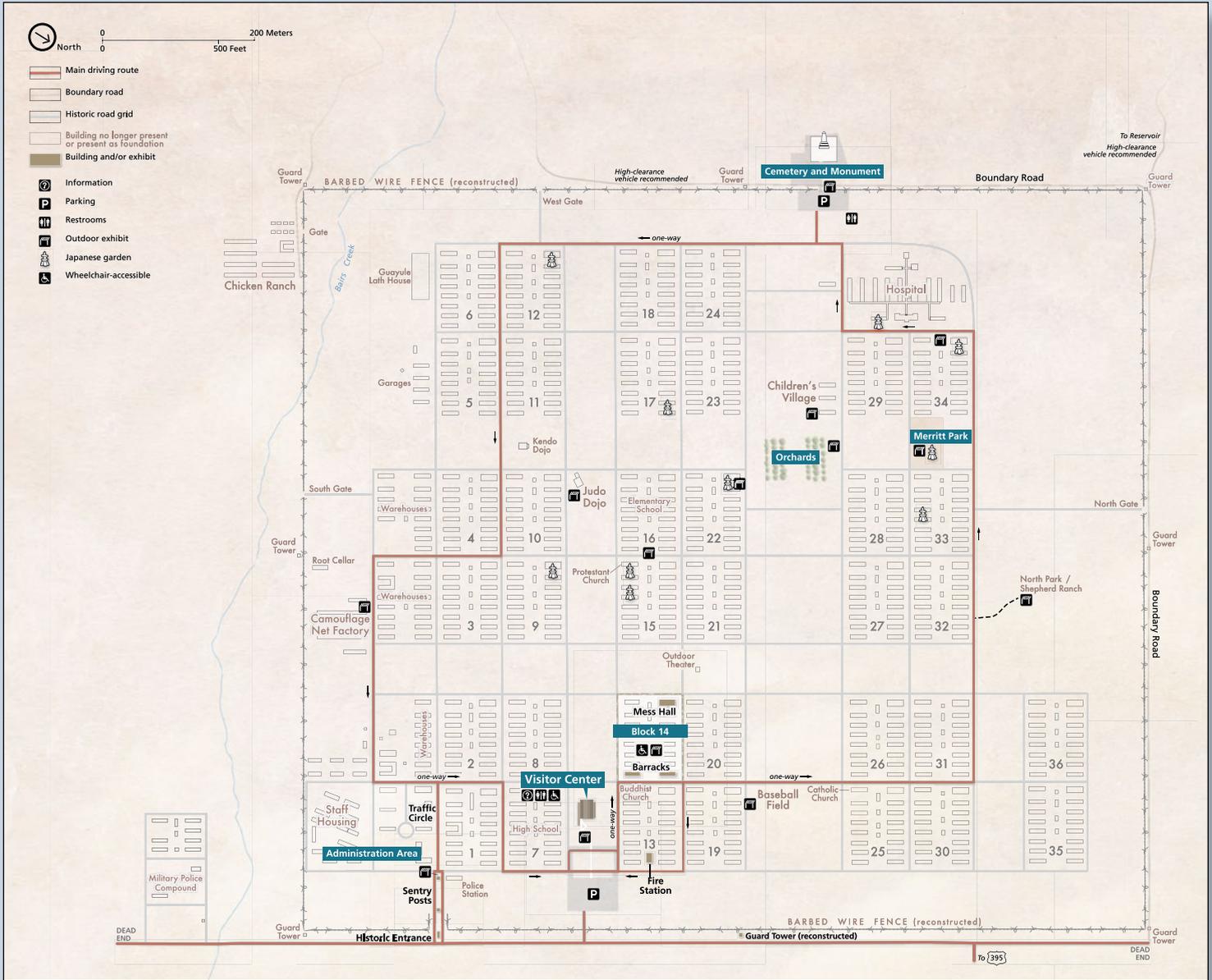
- **Historic Resources:** Manzanar National Historic Site protects thousands of remnant features that provide visitors with a tangible connection to the wartime incarceration. Historic structures include an auditorium, two sentry posts, and a cemetery monument. Historic features include, but are not limited to, Japanese gardens and ponds, building foundations, inscriptions in concrete, and orchards and other historic vegetation. Buried historic resources include basements and trash dumps.
- **Stories and Collections:** Museum collections, oral histories, and archives record the incarceration of Japanese Americans and subsequent efforts to recognize and remember Manzanar. These collections document the diversity and complexity of people's experiences and perspectives, past and present.
- **Cultural Traditions:** A spectrum of cultural values, practices, and identities influenced the way Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants experienced incarceration under the US government during World War II. Some values helped people to persevere and endure, while others moved people to protest and resist. In many instances, American and Japanese cultural values and identities blurred and melded into new and distinct cultural values and identities. At Manzanar, both American and Japanese cultural practices, like baseball and judo and the creation of Japanese gardens, left lasting remnants on the landscape. New cultural practices, like the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage, have developed as a result of the World War II incarceration.
- **Environmental Setting:** Defined by two prominent mountain ranges and expansive viewsheds, the dramatic setting of Manzanar National Historic Site and adjacent areas is largely intact. Historic and contemporary water use and land ownership by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) have significantly influenced the landscape and environmental setting, resulting in the incidental preservation of the wide open spaces and undeveloped land that characterize the Owens Valley.

- **Pre-World War II History:** Archeological resources, cultural landscapes, documents, and oral histories reveal thousands of years of human life at Manzanar. Owens Valley Paiute lived here for centuries. Many of the natural resources and landscape features that sustained them remain, along with other traces of their lives. For decades in the late 1800s, the Shepherd Ranch encompassed much of the Manzanar site, leaving building foundations and other structural elements. In the early 1900s, farmers came in search of "Fortunes in Apples." Numerous town-era features remain, and dozens of trees survive in remnant orchards.
- **Public Engagement:** Learning opportunities raise public awareness about the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans and keep the story of Manzanar alive and relevant. Interpretive and volunteer programs provided by the National Park Service, along with partner efforts such as those of the Manzanar Committee and the Eastern California Museum, motivate visitors to become stewards and foster a constantly expanding circle of interest in preserving Manzanar's resources and lessons.



In April 2011 at age 100, Fumiko Hayashida and her daughter Natalie Hayashida Ong returned to Manzanar for the first time. On March 30, 1942, a photographer captured the iconic image of Fumiko and Natalie leaving Bainbridge Island for Manzanar. Photo: © Mario Gershom Reyes.

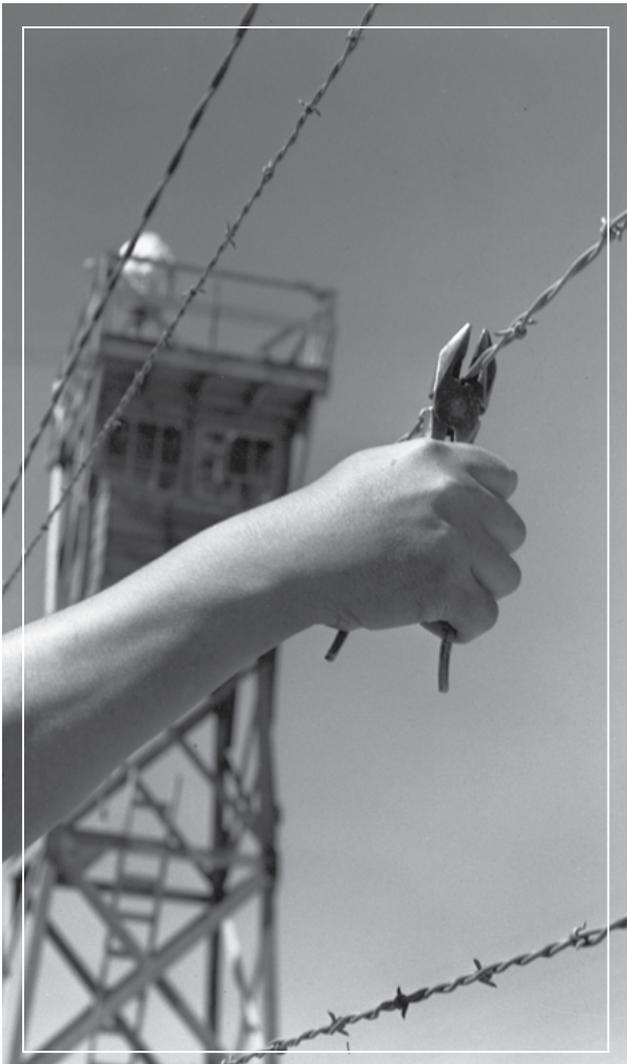
Park Map



The US government hired Dorothea Lange to photograph the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans. Lange visited Manzanar in the spring and summer of 1942. Photo: National Archives and Records Administration / Dorothea Lange.

Purpose

The purpose of MANZANAR NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve Manzanar's cultural and natural resources and interpret the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants during World War II.



This photograph of Archie Miyatake appeared as the final image in Manzanar High School's 1944 Yearbook, *Our World*. Photo: Toyo Miyatake Studio.

Significance

Significance statements express why Manzanar National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Injustice:** Manzanar was the first camp the US government built to confine Japanese Americans during World War II. It represents the injustice of uprooting and imprisoning 120,000 Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants. This violation of civil rights was the result of racism, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership, and demonstrates the fragility of democracy in times of crisis.
- **Cultural Resources:** Manzanar National Historic Site is one of the best-preserved World War II incarceration camps and protects highly intact cultural landscape resources, including an extensive collection of remnant Japanese gardens. In addition, Manzanar preserves layers of history and artifacts that reveal thousands of years of human life in the Owens Valley.



People like Lillian Matsumoto, Assistant Director of the Children's Village, tried to minimize disruptions to the daily lives of Manzanar's orphaned children, despite the realities of forced removal and incarceration. Photo: Lillian Matsumoto Collection.



The kanji characters inscribed on Manzanar's cemetery monument, built in 1943, mean "soul consoling tower." People attended religious services here during WWII. Today the monument is a focal point of the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage, serving as a symbol of solace and hope. Photo: NPS / Rose Masters.

- **Landscape and Scenery:** Located in the Owens Valley between the towering Sierra Nevada and Inyo Mountains, the dramatic landscape surrounding Manzanar is remarkably unspoiled. As a result, it powerfully communicates the visual and environmental conditions experienced by Japanese Americans imprisoned at Manzanar during World War II.
- **Stories and Perspectives:** Manzanar's national significance is reflected in thousands of personal stories that illustrate the diverse experiences and multiple perspectives of individuals and communities, both inside and outside the barbed-wire fence. The government's actions profoundly affected the lives of individuals and families during the war and continue to impact subsequent generations.
- **Children's Village:** Manzanar was the only incarceration camp to operate an orphanage, called the Children's Village. The government removed some of these children from adoptive homes and placed them in an orphanage behind barbed wire, powerfully illustrating that the incarceration of Japanese Americans was driven not by military necessity but by racism.
- **Manzanar "Riot":** Manzanar was the site of the first use of deadly force by military police against incarcerated Japanese Americans. The confrontation sparked national headlines and prompted a harsh response by the US government, including temporarily heightened security at Manzanar, the creation of isolation centers, and policies that led to the segregation of individuals deemed "disloyal." The resulting segregation tore some families and friends apart and created divisions in communities that exist to this day.
- **Advocacy:** Manzanar catalyzed the earliest grassroots efforts by Japanese Americans to raise national awareness about their incarceration in the context of civil rights, proclaim that these sites of conscience merited designation, and ensure that the legacy of incarceration would not be forgotten. The Manzanar Committee and Manzanar Pilgrimage inspired others to keep the story alive, petition for redress, and protect other confinement sites throughout the United States.
- **Relevance:** Manzanar National Historic Site provides a compelling venue for discussing the history of incarceration during World War II, contemplating injustice experienced by individuals and communities today and throughout history, and applying these lessons to the protection of constitutional and human rights.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Injustice:** The mass incarceration of Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants by the US government during World War II resulted from a complex mix of political, social, and economic factors and was fueled by war hysteria, a failure of political leadership, and long-standing racial prejudice. This failure of constitutional protections was so flagrant that the US government later apologized and paid redress.
- **Stories, Perspectives, and Communities:** Manzanar's World War II history is not a single story, but a diverse mosaic of individual and collective experiences of Japanese Americans, WRA staff and families, military police, residents of neighboring towns and tribal communities, and many others whose lives were often influenced by forces far beyond their control.
- **Physical Setting:** Though mostly vacant today, during World War II Manzanar was densely crowded, with over 800 structures and more than 10,000 people confined in a 540-acre area, surrounded by armed military police and a barbed-wire fence. Within months, the army constructed eight guard towers. The stark mountain and desert landscape and the environmental conditions of the Owens Valley evoked strong and varied reactions in individuals, including feelings of isolation and forlornness, as well as consolation and hope.
- **Clashing Views:** Differences of opinion and ideology in Manzanar significantly affected daily life within the camp. While these differences were sometimes rooted in people's prewar experiences and associations, they often stemmed from reactions to loss of constitutional rights, confinement, and continued impositions by the WRA. Clashing views among Japanese Americans at Manzanar and with the WRA culminated in tragedies like the Manzanar "Riot," the consequences of which reverberated throughout all of the WRA facilities and impacted those incarcerated in them.
- **Pre-World War II Owens Valley History:** Manzanar's prewar history echoes broad themes in US history, including displacement of native peoples, land and water wars, clashing views on immigration, and the question of who is considered "American."

- **Advocacy:** Growing out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the Manzanar Pilgrimage became the focal point of efforts to learn about, reflect on, remember, and preserve this site. Both the annual pilgrimage and grassroots efforts to gain recognition for Manzanar helped to inspire and strengthen later efforts to preserve other camps. Manzanar is increasingly relevant to diverse constituencies who see their own struggles reflected in its history.
- **Owens Valley Water:** Water use, exportation, and management in the Owens Valley—especially by the LADWP—influenced major aspects of Manzanar's history, including the camp's location in the abandoned orchard town of Manzanar, its operation, the daily activities of Japanese Americans incarcerated at Manzanar, and the survival of historic orchards and vegetation following the camp's closure. The City of Los Angeles still imports water from the Owens Valley.



The ancestors of today's Owens Valley Paiute lived in permanent villages and seasonal camps along the valley's waterways. This photo, ca. 1904, shows a man and woman in front of their shelter, called a novi. Photo: Eastern California Museum / A.A. Forbes.



These two young women journeyed to the 2014 Manzanar Pilgrimage along with their peers from the Los Angeles Chapter of the Council of American-Islamic Relations. Photo: CAIR, LA Chapter.