

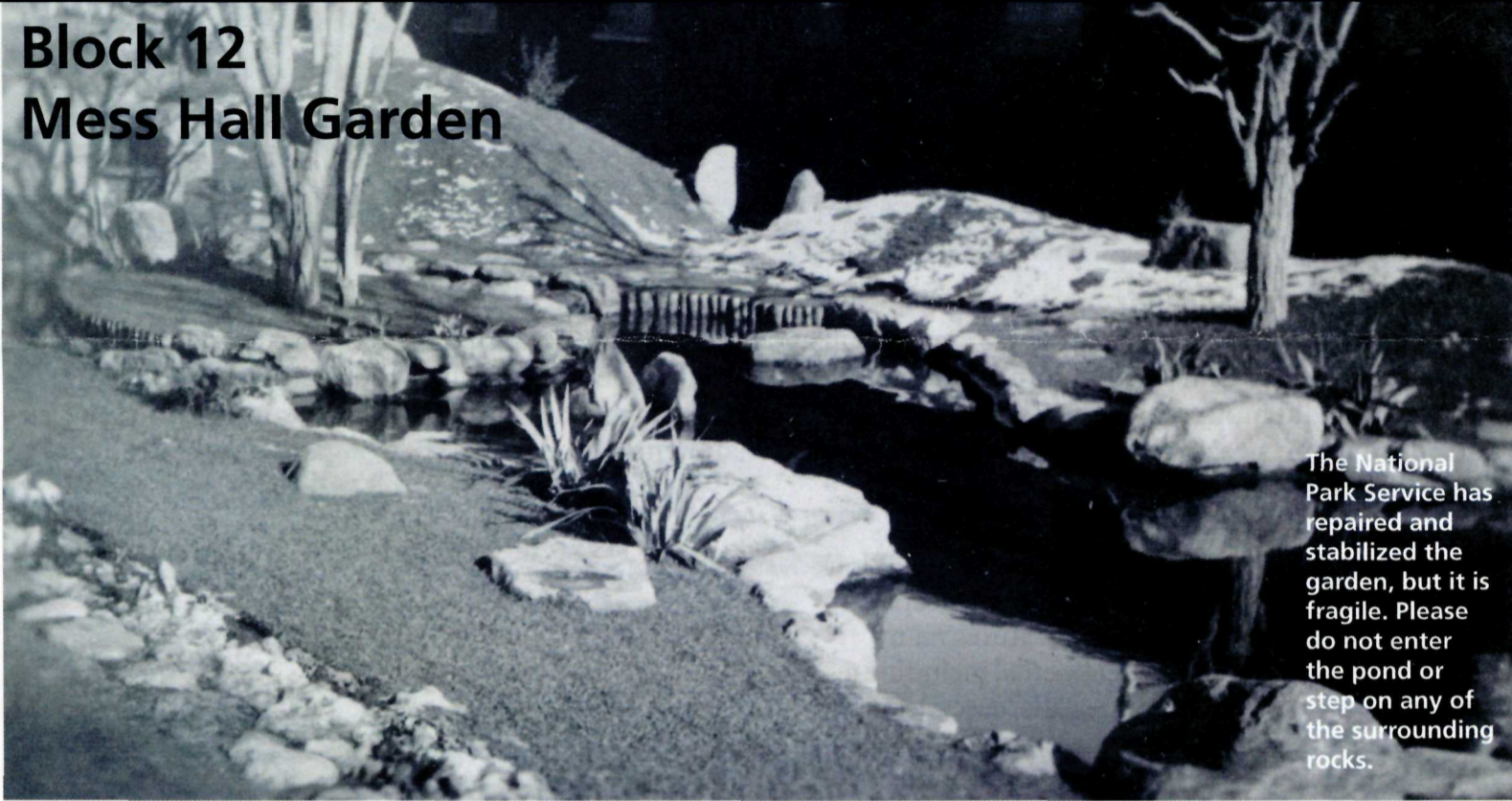
Manzanar

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Manzanar National Historic Site



Block 12 Mess Hall Garden



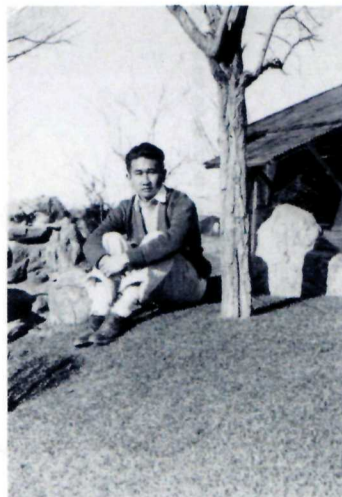
The National Park Service has repaired and stabilized the garden, but it is fragile. Please do not enter the pond or step on any of the surrounding rocks.

Recently restored, the Block 12 Mess Hall Garden is one of the finest gardens at Manzanar. The designer of the garden is not known, but like others at Manzanar the garden was likely the collaboration of several builders. Noted as “Block 12’s new pond” in the July 2, 1943, edition of *The Manzanar Free Press*, it was one of the last mess hall gardens built at Manzanar. The garden was divided into two sections by a concrete sidewalk constructed directly across from the main mess hall entrance. The southern one-third consisted of level grass and a single tree; the northern two-thirds was a traditional Japanese garden. Two of the essential elements of a Japanese garden, rocks and water, were readily available at Manzanar, but larger rocks such as those used in the Block 12 garden would have been brought in from outside the barbed wire security fence.

A Traditional Japanese Garden

Although they had no formal training, the Japanese American internees built many Japanese gardens at Manzanar. The gardens served a variety of purposes. To some, the gardens were a reminder of the home they had left decades ago. Some gardens were constructed to ameliorate the harsh conditions and to improve morale. Planted vegetation and water features also reduced the amount and ferocity of the dust and sand that winds kicked up. Small gardens often served as family gathering places, and large gardens, like Merritt Park, were similar to traditional Japanese “stroll gardens,” where people were invited to linger and enjoy nature. Gardens often formed the backdrop for family and group photographs, and the Block 12 garden was no exception. However, this garden was fenced, indicating that it was primarily intended as art: traditionally Japanese gardens were designed to be viewed like a painting. The direction of the water flow, from the northeast corner of the garden, indicates the garden was designed to be viewed from the southwest, where internees stood in line as they waited for meals.

During internment, the gardens were important to the Japanese American community. They remain important today as symbols of resilience: although they were imprisoned for their ethnicity, the internees built gardens that embraced their heritage. Although they were confined behind barbed wire, they built places of beauty and peace.





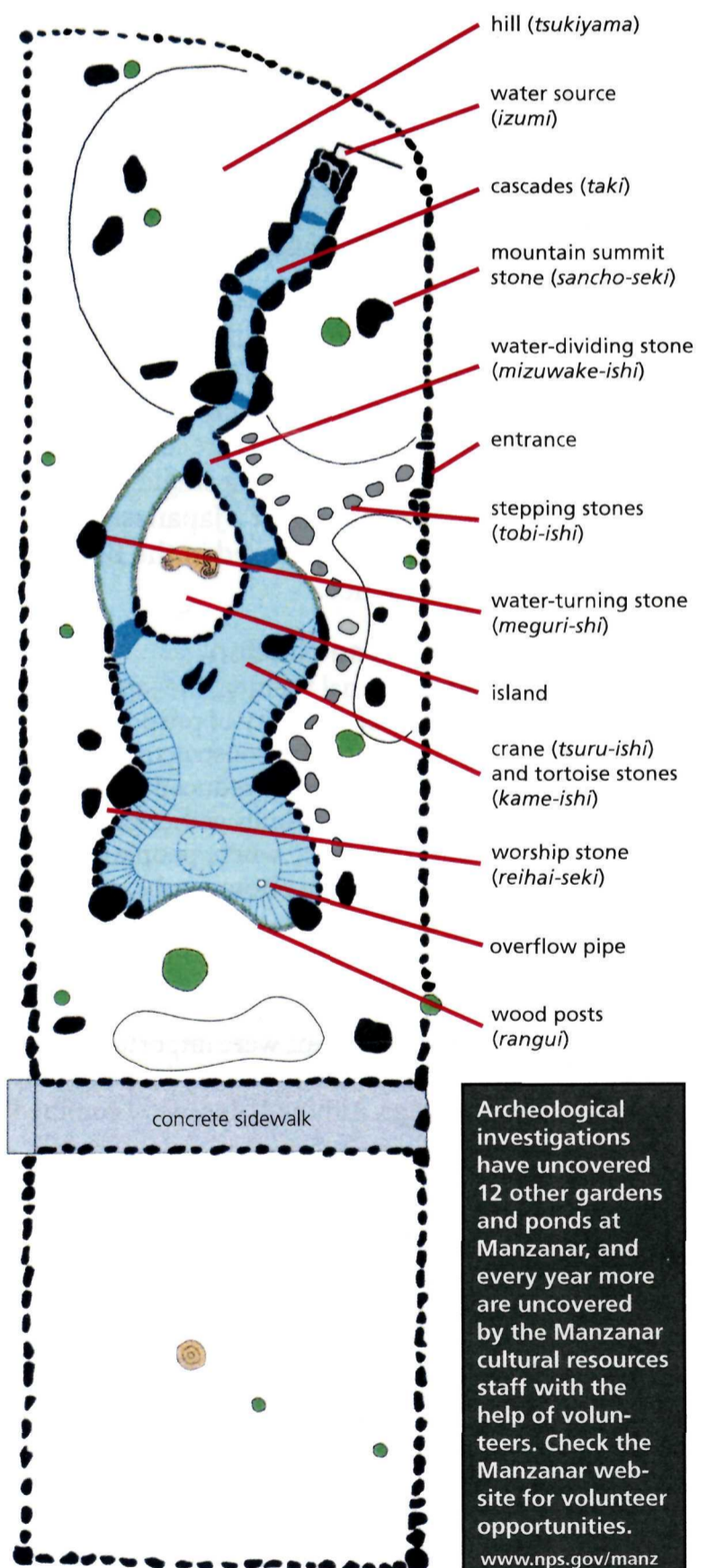
A Hill and Pond Garden

With its low mounds, the Block 12 garden is a hill garden (*tsukiyama-niwa*), traditionally considered to be suited to large areas in front of important buildings. It also has elements of the Mountain Torrent Style, in which a wild mountain stream and a small lake are represented. River boulders and stepping stones are arranged in the stream to suggest both swiftness and shallowness. Today this style of garden is referred to as “Hill and Pond.”

With its symbols of mountains and water, the Block 12 garden suggests an ideal Japanese landscape. The northern part of the garden features many traditional Japanese garden elements, including a water source or fountain, waterfalls, cascades, a stream separated by a water-dividing stone at the upstream end of an island, a large pond, and a hill and mounds created with earth and rocks. Some say that the pond itself is in the shape of a gourd; others think it mimics a druggist’s mortar (*yagen*). Within the pond are a symbolic crane, represented by two upright rocks, and a tortoise, represented by a low, rounded boulder. In an old Japanese saying, the crane (*Tsuru Sen-nen*, one thousand years) represents youth, and the tortoise (*Kame Man-nen*, ten thousand years) is the symbol of old age.

The waterfall at the northeast corner of the garden was constructed of three stones: a central waterfall stone (*mizu ochi no ishi*) and two bracketing stones (*waki ishi*), which some researchers think may represent the Buddhist Trinity. The waterfall would have been fed by a pipe connected to the water spigot outside Barracks 14. Below the waterfall there are a series of small cascades before the water divides into two streams to surround a small island. This kind of stream bifurcation is unusual in Japanese gardens, although it seems to have been popular at Manzanar: a second stream was added to the Block 34 mess hall garden sometime after its original construction, and the Block 9 mess hall garden also has two streams. Perhaps divided streams were popular at Manzanar because of their symbolism: today bifurcated streams are interpreted by former internees as the two paths one can take in life, one easy and the other difficult.

Iris was planted in holes or pockets in the concrete streambed, and the pond was surrounded by grass. Many of the trees planted still survive. Traditional *rangui* posts line the stream and pond; rocks border the pond and serve as stepping stones. Near the northeast corner of the fence, upright stones on each side of an entrance are evocative of the *Kong-ori-kishi*, two fierce warrior deities commonly found outside the entrance to Buddhist temples.



Archeological investigations have uncovered 12 other gardens and ponds at Manzanar, and every year more are uncovered by the Manzanar cultural resources staff with the help of volunteers. Check the Manzanar website for volunteer opportunities.
www.nps.gov/manz