

The Didactic Function of Reconstruction: Making the Past Present at Manzanar



Claire Cancilla  
Professor Jorge Otero-Pailos  
Historic Preservation Theory and Practice

In the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains, nestled in the Owens Valley of California, sits Manzanar, a National Parks Service (NPS)-run National Historic Site. The sweeping beauty of the mountains belies the ugly history of the site that exists in their shadow. Manzanar was a concentration camp<sup>1</sup> organized by the United States government during World War II to incarcerate Japanese and Japanese-Americans, most of whom were from California.<sup>2</sup> The NPS reconstructed several buildings on the site and turned the prisoner-built auditorium into an education and interpretive center. While reconstruction can be a controversial form of preservation, these community-led reconstructions and adaptations at Manzanar were necessary to serve the social purpose of didactic preservation, teaching visitors about the site's history by anchoring the past to the present through physical structures.

From 1942 to 1945, Manzanar held more than 10,000 internees in a compound that included approximately 800 structures. After the camp closed in 1945, internees dismantled many of the structures, including the barracks, so they could use the wood for crates to ship their possessions.<sup>3</sup> The government sold other structures, including former barracks<sup>4</sup> and the camp

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<sup>1</sup> The term "concentration camp" to refer to government-created camps for Japanese and Japanese-Americans in the United States during World War II is controversial. The NPS typically uses the terms "war relocation camp," "internment camp," and "confinement camp." Recent scholarship, however, argues that these are improper phrases that obscure the severity of experience in the camps and hides the questionable legality of the camps themselves. Japanese-American advocacy and commemorative organizations (including the Japanese American National Museum and the Manzanar Committee) use the term "concentration camp." I have opted to use concentration camp in this paper to conform with the terminology used by those groups most impacted by government-initiated incarceration.

<sup>2</sup> Ladino, Jennifer K. "Mountains, Monuments, and Other Matter: Environmental Affects at Manzanar." *Environmental Humanities*, 6, no. 1 (2015), 132.

<sup>3</sup> National Park Service, Pacific West Region. "Cultural Landscape Report: Manzanar National Historic Site," 82.

<sup>4</sup> A *Newsweek* writer describes what happened to Manzanar barracks: "Today, many of the barracks remain around Inyo County. Several have become part of the Lone Pine Budget Inn, a one-story mustard affair by the side of the highway. For about \$60 a night, you can sleep with the ghosts of Manzanar...Another barrack became part of a Catholic church in Independence. I saw no sign indicating the provenance of the wood for what was now known as Zegwaard Hall." From: Nazaryan, Alexander. "75 Years Later, Internment of Japanese Remains Stain on American History." *Newsweek*.

auditorium. Today, the site contains only two reconstructed barracks, a reconstructed mess hall and guard tower, latrines, and the rehabilitated and adaptively reused auditorium.

The preservation history of Manzanar is lengthy and complex, involving numerous stages of preservation decisions. The site is unusual because of its isolated location and its uncomfortable role in American history. Consequently, the most challenging preservation decisions preceded the relatively clear-cut reconstruction and rehabilitation, based on historic plans, of Manzanar's structures. The most difficult decision was likely the initial decision that the government would preserve Manzanar at all, when its story did not represent a triumphal moment in American history. To gain support for the preservation of Manzanar, project proponents<sup>5</sup> had to decide how to portray history at the site, ultimately opting to memorialize the experience of former Manzanar internees while also expressing the cultures and losses of the area's Native American and pioneer communities. An additional set of difficult decisions surrounded the necessity and scope of reconstruction of site structures. The decision to reconstruct Manzanar involved an extensive process of navigating differing values from a myriad of stakeholders. Once those choices were made, however, the existence of the original building plans resolved most issues of structure and materials, assisted by ongoing archeological investigations<sup>6</sup> that continue to inform the site's preservation.

### *Stakeholder Influence in Manzanar's Designation and Reconstruction*

Former Manzanar prisoners were the driving force behind the site's preservation. In

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<sup>55</sup> Project sponsors and stakeholders, including the National Park Service, Japanese Americans represented by the Manzanar Committee, local residents, politicians, and Native Americans, are identified and discussed below.

<sup>66</sup> "Archaeology at Manzanar is part of a much larger effort by [NPS archeologist Jeffery] Burton and others to involve former internees, descendants, and local communities into archaeology and preservation so the lessons of Japanese internment in the USA are not forgotten or diminished. While archaeology uncovers the physical proof of past events, their voices and memories powerfully testify to the meaning of those events." From: Moyer, Teresa S. "Community archaeology and the National Park Service's Second Century." *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage*, 157.

1969, the Manzanar Committee started an annual pilgrimage to Manzanar, led by Sue Kunitomi Embrey. Embrey, a Los Angeles-area teacher who had been evacuated to Manzanar as an 18-year old,<sup>7</sup> attributed her drive to preserve and protect the site to the memory of her mother. "My mother was a very staunch Buddhist and she would always say, 'Those poor people that are buried over there at Manzanar in the hot sun—they must be so dry. Be sure to take some water [as offerings]," Embrey told an interviewer in 2004. Embrey's mother " always thought it was important to go back and remember the people who had died."<sup>8</sup>



Figure 1. Sue Kunitomi Embrey at the Manzanar Pilgrimage in 2000<sup>9</sup>

To honor the dead, and to help to educate the public about the concentration camps, the Manzanar Committee decided to seek the designation of Manzanar as a California Historic Landmark. In 1969, the property owner, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, offered the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) the opportunity to lease 4.33 acres of the site,

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<sup>7</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry During World War II," 821.

<sup>8</sup> Conway, Chandra. "Interned But Not Forgotten: New Museum Chronicles Japanese American Life at Manzanar." *Human Rights Reporting*: The Journalism School, Columbia University (Spring 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Bahr, Diana Meyers. *The Unquiet Nisei An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey*, 128.

including the cemetery area and front entrance to Manzanar.<sup>10</sup> Warren Furutani of JACL was also a Manzanar Committee member, and he convinced the Manzanar Committee to take on the lease.<sup>11</sup> Embry, and other members of the Manzanar Committee documented the site's history to support an application to the California Parks and Recreation Department for the site's designation as a state Historical Landmark. The state named Manzanar as California Historical Landmark #850 in 1972. Two years after Manzanar's designation as a State Historical Landmark, Ryoza Kado, who had supervised the original construction of the two rock sentry houses while incarcerated at Manzanar, placed a plaque on one of the sentry houses. Seven other Japanese Americans who were incarcerated at Manzanar and helped erect the sentry posts were present for the ceremony as well.<sup>12</sup>

Manzanar was nominated as a National Historic Landmark in 1985 as part of the Secretary of the Interior's study of sites associated with the Pacific Campaign of World War II, which identified historically significant sites relating to the Pacific front.<sup>13</sup> The NPS, an influential shaper of public history, compiled a feasibility study for preservation of the site, ultimately deciding that it warranted NPS intervention.<sup>14</sup> In January 1991, California Congressman Mel Levin introduced a bill to establish the Manzanar Historic Site<sup>15</sup> and in May 1991, California Congressman George Miller, with 19 co-sponsors, introduced a bill to "authorize a study of nationally significant places in Japanese American History."<sup>16</sup> A hearing on the two bills was held before the subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands of the House

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<sup>10</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry During World War II," 822.

<sup>11</sup> Bahr, Diana Meyers. *The Unquiet Nisei An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey*, 125.

<sup>12</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry During World War II," 822.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hayashi, "Transfigured Patterns," 53.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 827

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in late May 1991. Reflecting the goals of the Manzanar Committee, which was involved in garnering congressional support for the bill, Congressman Levine stated:

It is my hope that Manzanar will serve as a reminder of the grievous errors and inhumane policies were pursued domestically during World War II and a reminder that we must never again allow such actions to occur in this country.<sup>17</sup>

Additional advocates in favor of designation included Sue Kunitomi Embrey, Hiroshi Takusagawa, a volunteer and World War II veteran, and David Simon, who represented the National Parks and Conservation Association.<sup>18</sup>

For the Manzanar Committee and other supporters of the project, the period of historical significance was clearly the internment period, from 1940-1945. This approach generated controversy, however, especially among some World War II veterans. Acknowledging the wrongs of Manzanar complicates the memory and reputation of World War II as America's "Good War," which upset many veterans and veteran groups. One veteran went so far as to leave a voicemail message on the message machine of Ross Hopkins, the first NPS superintendent of Manzanar, saying that he traveled to Manzanar on a "pilgrimage of disgust" to urinate on the site's commemorative plaque.<sup>19</sup>

Local opposition also posed a real threat to site designation. As Dan Olson, the author of the NPS proposal for Manzanar, observed, Congress would not designate a site just because the NPS proposed it. Designation would require a "concerted lobbying effort by the [Inyo] County

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 828.

<sup>19</sup> Booth, William. "A Lonely Patch of History: Japanese Americans Were Forced to Live Here. They Don't Want it to Be Forgotten." *The Washington Post*.

Supervisors, local congressmen, or the general public.”<sup>20</sup> Without designation of the site, reconstruction and rehabilitation would not have been possible.

To overcome local opposition, Manzanar advocate Tom Bradley, the Mayor of Los Angeles, appointed Rose Ochi as a liaison to the Inyo County Board of Supervisors and the NPS. Ochi, who had worked in the Mayor’s office as Director of Criminal Justice Planning, became a strong advocate for the National Historic Site designation. In meetings with Inyo County Supervisors, she acknowledged their belief that the camp was not “part of their own history” while convincing them that a National Historic Site would have positive economic development effects in a job-starved area. She also invited Hiro Takusagawa, a Japanese American veteran of World War II, to meet with local veterans. Sharing war memories helped to erode the ill will that some veterans harbored towards all Japanese, including Japanese American noncombatants.<sup>21</sup>

To reduce local antagonism, the NPS also *initially* made two important concessions. It appeased some local critics with the reassurance that it would not restore the concentration camp to its original appearance and it provided information on the entire history of the Manzanar area, including its Native American and pioneer history in the area.<sup>22</sup> Once local opposition quieted, Congress passed the bill approving the designation, and President George H.W. Bush signed the bill into law in 1992, officially designating Manzanar a National Historic Site.

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Rhea, Joseph Tilden. *Race Pride and the American Identity*, 59.

<sup>21</sup> Bahr, Diana Meyers. *The Unquiet Nisei: An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey*, 130.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 61; See also Hayashi, Robert T., “Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar National Historic Site,” 52-53 (Noting Inyo County Assistant Administrator Paul Morrison’s 1991 testimony before the congressional committee hearing: “Nobody has mentioned that ‘Manzanar’ means ‘apple orchards.’ . . . They were part of the county’s farming industry years and years ago, and it is a Native American site. So we would like to see that the site is interpreted in its entirety with Native Americans, the Japanese that were interned there, and the farming interests of the county.”)

### *Physical Preservation Work at Manzanar*

The NPS selected Manzanar for national historical designation because *some* physical fabric remained that could evoke Manzanar's wartime appearance, which was not the case at most other concentration camps in the United States. NPS Associate Director for Cultural Resources Jerry Rogers stated: "You see very clearly at Manzanar the outline of the camp within which people were interned. The street pattern is clear. There are remnants—foundations, sidewalks, and so forth—of buildings that once stood there."<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, when the preservation and reconstruction of Manzanar began in earnest in 1992, its physical fabric had long been unprotected.<sup>24</sup> Although the Manzanar Committee had cleaned parts of the site during its annual pilgrimage, and a group of boy scouts had cleaned the camp, repaired roofs, and sealed windows, there had been no consistent, organized attempts to preserve the camp.

The preservationists who worked to protect the site were primarily federal employees, assisted by volunteers from the Japanese-American community, Native American tribes, and local communities. The extensive NPS team of archaeologists, preservationists, and historians was led by Tom Mulhern, the Chief of Park Historic Preservation at the NPS.<sup>25</sup> The NPS reconstructed the guard tower, barracks, and rehabilitated the auditorium, based on testimony, historic photographs, archaeological evidence, and the original plans for the buildings, which still exist. Federally-funded projects must adhere to specific NPS guidelines set out by the Secretary of the Interior, following pre-approved plans that underwent significant revision after public hearings and government committees submitted comment.<sup>26</sup> The reconstructions

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<sup>23</sup> Hayashi, Robert T., "Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar National Historic Site," 58.

<sup>24</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry," 826.

<sup>25</sup> National Park Service. "General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement: Manzanar National Historic Site." August 1996. <https://www.nps.gov/manz/learn/management/general-management-plan.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



additionally followed existing historical plans, resulting in little room for individual interpretation in reconstructing the site's architecture.

The team did make significant decisions, however, about the portrayal of architecture within the context of the site's history. An Advisory Committee was established to counsel the project, made up of former Manzanar prisoners, local residents, representatives of Native American groups, and the general public. This group met and talked with NPS officials to provide input on the reconstruction and development of Manzanar.<sup>27</sup> NPS archeologist Jeffrey Burton observed that former Manzanar prisoners recommended both the reconstruction of facilities showing the difficulty of life at Manzanar, including barracks, the security fence, and a guard tower, and the reconstruction of the gardens and ponds that they had built to reduce dust and increase beauty.<sup>28</sup> The reconstruction of Manzanar was thus a collaborative project involving multiple disciplines and public input. These plans, however, differed from what the NPS originally promised, which was that the site would not be reconstructed to its original appearance. This switch is reflective of the power of Manzanar stakeholders in vocalizing and insisting on the physical representation of their experience at the site.

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<sup>27</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry During World War II," 830.

<sup>28</sup> Burton, Jeffrey. "Excavating Legacy: Community Archaeology at Manzanar," presentation at the Eastern Sierra History Conference, Bishop, CA. October 28 to 30th 2016. 9 - 10.



Figures 2 and 3. Reconstructed Guard Tower<sup>29</sup> and Reconstructed Entrance Sign<sup>30</sup>



Figures 4 and 5. Reconstructed Barracks and Restored Original Sentry Posts<sup>31</sup>

### *Contemporary Physical Reconstruction: Past as Precedent*

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) originally constructed Manzanar with expediency and economy in mind. The Army used available drawings of cantonment type buildings which were intended for rapid construction to house troops in the rear of combat zones. USACE modified these drawings for the housing at Manzanar, applying standards developed by

<sup>29</sup> "Guard Tower." National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/manz/learn/management/guard-tower.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> National Park Service, Pacific West Region. "Cultural Landscape Report: Manzanar National Historic Site." 2006. 95. <https://www.nps.gov/manz/learn/management/upload/Manzanar-CLR-LOW-RES.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Manzanar Virtual Museum Exhibit, National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/museum/exhibits/manz/imgGal.html#rem>

the Wartime Civil Control Administration and used for concentration camps across the United States.<sup>32</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Edwin C. Kelton was the contracting officer for USACE and supervised construction at Manzanar. Griffith and Company, using USACE plans, worked under the supervision of Leonard G. Hogue, the District Engineer in Los Angeles.<sup>33</sup> These entities constructed the original barracks, guard towers, mess hall, and dealt with the sewage system. After the initial construction, other structures at Manzanar were built using paid evacuee labor.<sup>34</sup>

After the camp closed in 1945, the remaining extant buildings consisted of two stone sentry posts at the entrance of the camp and one internee-built auditorium. Although Manzanar lacked significant physical remains, evidence remained of rock gardens, the camp road network, sidewalks, and foundations<sup>35</sup> and further small-scale physical elements, including fire hydrants, outdoor faucets, manholes, concrete barracks stoops and footing blocks.<sup>36</sup>

The largest structure on the site, and Manzanar's most intact original building, is the auditorium constructed by internees that served as their theater and occasional gymnasium from 1944 to 1945.<sup>37</sup> After the end of World War II, the auditorium was deeded to the County of Inyo. The county subsequently leased the property to the Independence Chapter of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), which used the structure until 1951. Inyo County then allowed the VFW to remove the south wing of the auditorium and move it the town of Lone Pine, located seven miles south of Manzanar. The building was then used by the Inyo County Road Department as a garage, shop and road maintenance center, until the NPS purchased the building in 1996 for \$1.1

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<sup>32</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry," 101.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>35</sup> Hays, "The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience," 76.

<sup>36</sup> National Park Service, Pacific West Region. "Cultural Landscape Report: Manzanar National Historic Site." 2006. 104. <https://www.nps.gov/manz/learn/management/upload/Manzanar-CLR-LOW-RES.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Colborn-Roxworthy, "Manzanar, the Eyes of the World Are upon You," 189.

million.<sup>38</sup> The Road Department replaced the original wood floor with a concrete slab and took out the stage at the east of the auditorium to allow for a large truck door.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 6. Manzanar Auditorium Prior to its Reconstruction and Rehabilitation<sup>40</sup>



Figure 7. Renovated Manzanar Interpretive Center<sup>41</sup>

With input from the advisory committee and considering testimony from the Congressional hearing and from public meetings, the NPS chose to rehabilitate the auditorium for use as a visitors' center. The reconstruction at Manzanar is meant to serve as a direct tether to the past, one that the uninitiated visitor can understand viscerally. To further provide context to visitors, the NPS needed space for exhibits and lectures, and the auditorium provided the

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<sup>38</sup> Rhea, Joseph Tilden. *Race Pride and the American Identity*, 172.

<sup>39</sup> "Auditorium Restoration." National Parks Service. <https://www.nps.gov/manz/learn/management/auditorium-restoration.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

space needed for these interpretive functions. The auditorium is a wood-frame building with horizontal siding on the north, east, and south sides and vertical siding on the west side. It is 82 by 125 feet and 12,500 square feet in total with a low-pitched gambrel roof.<sup>42</sup> The west side has a two-story extension and a one-story wing along the north side. When the VFW owned the building, it removed an additional similar wing on the south side sometime before 1951.<sup>43</sup>

The NPS began “adaptive restoration”<sup>44</sup> on the Manzanar auditorium in 2002, using a Historic Structure Report compiled by historians, architects, and engineers from both the NPS and private firms.<sup>45</sup> The Historic Structure Report states that enough written and photographic documentation, as well as historic construction drawings, existed to restore and reconstruct the auditorium “with little conjecture.”<sup>46</sup> The team restored the north wing of the auditorium to serve administrative functions, with the interior restored to match the original floor plan.

Reconstruction of the south wing of the auditorium did not follow the original interior floor plan, as the wing is now used to house exhibits for visitors. Historical reconstruction of the floor plan was deemed “not necessary” in the Historical Structures Report because the wing was serving an educational purpose.<sup>47</sup> Exhibits are housed in the primary auditorium space, where the NPS team reconstructed the original stage. The concrete floor, added in the 1950s, was covered with wood to replicate the original appearance of the floor. A historic camp fire truck, donated by the Bishop Fire Department, is displayed in the auditorium.<sup>48</sup> The NPS completed its work,

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<sup>42</sup> National Park Service. "The History and Preservation of the Community Auditorium-Gymnasium: Historic Structure Report," 102.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid; The NPS specifically defines its project on the auditorium as “adaptive restoration.”

<sup>45</sup> National Park Service. "The History and Preservation of the Community Auditorium-Gymnasium: Historic Structure Report," v.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, iv.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 151.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 152.



including the installation of exhibits, in 2004. This interpretive structure is the first stop that visitors make at Manzanar. Like the process of designation, the reconstruction the auditorium was a collaborative process, and no single individual can be credited for the entire project.

The purpose of this reconstruction was functional and historical - to make the space useable for education exhibitions and ensure that the auditorium appeared largely as it did in 1944 -1945. Overall, the preservation of Manzanar involved little flexibility for aesthetic changes to the structure, as those changes were primarily determined by historical photographs and plans. In its essence, the construction of a concentration camp in the middle of an austere beautiful natural setting is a blight on the environment. Making the site “prettier” would defeat its didactic purpose, resulting in the sanitization of an unsightly chapter of history. The NPS aimed to reconstruct the auditorium as accurately as possible on the exterior while ensuring the interior space maintained its character but would be functional for educational purposes.



Figure 8. The Visitors' Center contains a model that shows the scale of the camp <sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Matsuda, Gann. “Katari Students’ Trip To Manzanar National Historic Site, November 3-4, 2018.” Manzanar Committee Blog, November 7, 2018.

## *Reconstruction as a Didactic Tool*

The NPS' decision to restore and reconstruct any of the buildings at Manzanar is unusual and marked a turning point in NPS preservation work.<sup>50</sup> The NPS typically discourages reconstruction of its sites. Its 2001 Management Policies Plan, issued by the National Parks Service and the Secretary of the Interior, states: "No matter how well conceived or executed, reconstructions are contemporary interpretations of the past rather than authentic survivals from it."<sup>51</sup> NPS project directors therefore are only allowed to approve reconstruction if four criteria are met: there is no alternative that would accomplish the park's interpretive mission, sufficient data exist to enable an accurate reconstruction, the reconstruction occurs on the original location, and the NPS Director approves the reconstruction.<sup>52</sup>

Initially, the NPS did not want to reconstruct the site. At the 1991 congressional hearing for the site's designation, Jerry Rogers, the National Park Service Associate Director for Cultural Resources, testified that:

We would instruct our planners that there would be no reconstruction, in whole or in part, of the fencing, the guard tower or barracks, and no attempt to recreate the scene that has disappeared. In our opinion, the authenticity of the site speaks far more powerfully than anything we could create by building imitations of the historic buildings that were there.<sup>53</sup>

This line of NPS thinking reflects common thought about reconstruction in preservation. Reconstruction has been criticized for obstructing history, treating historical structures as theme park-style attractions that do not accurately represent the past. Victorian art critic and pioneering preservationist John Ruskin, for example, was an early opponent of restoration, which he viewed

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<sup>50</sup> National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, "Four Approaches to the Treatment of Historic Properties." <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments.htm>.

<sup>51</sup> National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services, "Four Approaches to the Treatment of Historic Properties." <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments.htm>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry," 828.

as the falsification of history. When discussing the destruction of buildings, he declared: “[P]ull the building down, throw its stones into neglected corners, makes ballast of them, or mortar, if you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in their place.”<sup>54</sup> Ruskin, however, did not live in a world in which sites of mass trauma and incarceration were being preserved and commemorated to form collective memory and educate an audience. Manzanar presents a direct challenge to the assertion that reconstruction is a “Lie.” The reconstruction of Manzanar is bringing truth to light, to show, “other people this did happen and it should never happen again,”<sup>55</sup> as former Manzanar prisoner George Higa put it.

Official stances of preservation organizations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century tended to conform with Ruskin’s view, equating reconstruction with deception. The 1931 Athens Charter observed “a general tendency [of countries] to abandon restorations in toto,” in part due to their lack of authenticity.<sup>56</sup> More than thirty years later, the Venice Charter of 1964 required “respect for original materials,” urging that alterations be “distinguishable from the original so that restoration does not falsify the artistic or historic evidence.”<sup>57</sup> More recent documents, however, have explicitly acknowledged the flexibility of the term “authentic.” The 1994 Nara Document on Authenticity, which was published just two years before reconstruction began at Manzanar, acknowledges that “authenticity” varies depending on context and notes that there are circumstances under which reconstruction can be an authentic form of preservation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ruskin, John. “The Lamp of Memory.” In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 162-82. (London: Smith, Elder: 1849).

<sup>55</sup> Alvarez, Fred. “Poignant Pilgrimage to WWII Internment Site,” *The Washington Post*.

<sup>56</sup> “The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments - 1931.” The Athens Charter for the Restoration of Historic Monuments - 1931 - International Council on Monuments and Sites. [www.icomos.org/en/167-the-athens-charter-for-the-restoration-of-historic-monuments](http://www.icomos.org/en/167-the-athens-charter-for-the-restoration-of-historic-monuments)

<sup>57</sup> Roberts, Bryony. “Competing Authenticities.” *Future Anterior*, Volume XII, Number 2 (2015), 4.

<sup>58</sup> ICOMOS. *The Nara Document on Authenticity*. November 1994. <http://orcp.hustoj.com/2016/01/17/nara-document-on-authenticity-1994/>



The Manzanar Committee did not view reconstruction as showing a lack of respect; to the contrary, the Committee made its desire for reconstruction at Manzanar clear, influencing the position of the NPS and the professional preservationists working for the NPS. After Manzanar was designated as a National Historic Site, the NPS prepared a General Management Plan for the site. Dan Olson, a senior planner in the NPS Pacific System Support Office, led the survey. A seven-member volunteer team of Japanese American landscape architects organized under the American Society of Landscape Architects also aided in the project, as did Ross Hopkins, Manzanar's first NPS superintendent. Additional members of the Manzanar National Historic Site Advisory Commission included Sue Kunitomi Embrey, Rose Ochi, Vernon Miller, and Glenn Singley. The values of these stakeholders differed from traditional preservation dogma and were ultimately central to Manzanar's reconstruction.

Largely because of the council's input, the NPS General Plan outlined a preservation and interpretive mission for the site that aligned with the council's reconstructive and interpretive vision. The appearance of the Manzanar site would reflect the WWII relocation camp period. Among other efforts, the NPS decided to reconstruct the Camp's perimeter fence. To "enhance interpretation of the relocation center experience,"<sup>59</sup> NPS would reconstruct a barracks and guard tower and would "rehabilitate" evacuee-constructed rock gardens and ponds.<sup>60</sup> The previous language of the NPS' anti-reconstruction vision, which helped push the Manzanar designation through congress, was only offered as the minimum or no action solution.

The reconstruction decision reflects preservation challenges that might not encumber a more typical NPS historic site – one that celebrates positive events in American history.

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<sup>59</sup> Unrau, Harlan. "The Evacuation and Relocation of Persons of Japanese Ancestry," 830.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Manzanar, however, suggests that American history has not been a simple march of moral progress<sup>61</sup> and as such, necessitates physical reconstruction to affirm this historical complexity. With no physical structures, Frank Hays the former NPS Superintendent of Manzanar wrote, “it is difficult to explain visitors that [Manzanar] was indeed an internment camp.”<sup>62</sup> Manzanar’s preservation, and the choices made in representing structures on the site, are important because it demonstrates how strongly the built environment connects to historical memory. Japanese-American author Robert Hayashi, writing of Manzanar, explained the “need to have such an anchoring site for memory”:

The lack of a preserved site upon which to ground history arouses unique anxieties about the reality of what is remembered. Without the site, can I be certain this happened? That it happened as I recall? That others will accept this memory as truthful? What if they tell me it was something different?<sup>63</sup>

While no one site can tell the entire truth about the past, “a past lacking tangible relics seems too tenuous to be credible.”<sup>64</sup> Manzanar was not protected because of the quality of the architecture of its structures, which can be described as functional at best. It was protected because it is an anchoring site. The site and its buildings are tangible relics of a past that might otherwise disappear, both physically and from collective understanding of history.

The use of Manzanar as an educational space and site of commemoration demands physical structures. The reconstructed material forms, then, are the “‘silent instructor’ that makes appeals ‘at the level of the body, where things may be felt and responded to without necessarily begin verbalized or visualized.’”<sup>65</sup> Visitors respond to physical fabric, and without some

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<sup>61</sup> Rhea, Joseph Tilden. *Race Pride and the American Identity*, 60.

<sup>62</sup> Hays, “The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience,” 74.

<sup>63</sup> Hayashi, Robert T., “Transfigured Patterns: Contesting Memories at the Manzanar National Historic Site,” 59.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Rhea, Joseph Tilden. *Race Pride and the American Identity*, 58.

<sup>65</sup> Ladino, “Mountains, Monuments, and Other Matter,” 143.

reconstruction, they could “be so inspired by the location’s beauty that they miss the important story told.”<sup>66</sup> In choosing to reconstruct certain buildings at Manzanar, however, the NPS team necessarily chose not to reconstruct others and this incompleteness is also educative. The unfinished reconstruction of the camp leads to a narrative of incompleteness that forces the visitor to fill in the blanks. The aesthetics of the incomplete reconstruction of the camp encourages the visitor to use what does exist of the camp to imagine what does not exist. The reconstruction of Manzanar is thus a continuous, ongoing preservation process, not a product.

One criterion that can be used to address the success of the Manzanar preservation project is its effect on visitors. Jennifer Ladino, a scholar who visited Manzanar, provides support for the power of a physical place, even if that place is reconstructed. In the reconstructed dining hall, she sat in the “small dining area and [felt] how cramped and loud a mess hall would be with hundreds of people inside, three times a day, as thousands of meals are served.” Similarly, she stepped “inside a barracks building, an accurately sized 20-by-25-foot room with eight metal cots and a lone bulb dangling from the low ceiling, and immediately [felt] the stifling loss of privacy.”<sup>67</sup> Standing in a barren desert would likely not evoke the same feelings and connection to the past. A visitors’ survey, conducted in 2004, found that visitors believed that they learned “a lot” about War Relocation Centers (97%) and Japanese American culture (84%),<sup>68</sup> and that most visitors believed that additional reconstruction would improve a site that they viewed as “underdeveloped.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hays, “The National Park Service: Groveling Sycophant or Social Conscience,” 75.

<sup>67</sup> Ladino, “Mountains, Monuments, and Other Matter,” 143.

<sup>68</sup> Littlejohn, Margaret et. al. “National Historic Site Visitor Study: Summer 2004.” National Park Service Social Science Visitor Services Project Report, 54.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

The reconstruction of buildings at Manzanar plays a key role in increasing public awareness and understanding of government-forced incarceration. It also encourages those who experienced incarceration in the camps to remember, and to tell, their own stories. Sue Kunitomi Embrey, the Manzanar Committee member who worked so hard for its preservation, suggests that this is another important criterion to determine the success of the project. “In the beginning,” she explained, Japanese Americans “were always asking me: ‘Why are you bringing up the past? . . . There is still a lot of anti-Japanese feeling.’ I think some of them feel they now have permission to talk about it. If they don’t that history is going to die with them.”<sup>70</sup>

The need to evoke and portray the physical camp environment grows ever more important as time passes and thousands of stories may be lost. Janet Jacobs, a scholar who studies collective memory and memorialization of sites of trauma, writes about the importance of creating physical records at sites of trauma. Reconstruction at Manzanar embodies “an ethical, political act of recovery, a way of re-humanizing the individuals involved.”<sup>71</sup> Reconstructing collective trauma and national shame at Manzanar differs from other projects in that it “acknowledge[s] the horrors of the past and recognize the power of the living amidst the most unfathomable of human tragedies.”<sup>72</sup> This is why Manzanar activists worked for reconstruction – it was a vital acknowledgment by the federal government of the past that promises the continuation of the lessons of Manzanar into the next generation. The reconstruction of Manzanar transformed the profane into the sacred.<sup>73</sup>

Physical reconstruction serves as an important tool for interpretation of the past and for transmitting a message to the audience. While reconstruction may not be an appropriate form of

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<sup>70</sup> Bahr, Diana Meyers. *The Unquiet Nisei: An Oral History of the Life of Sue Kunitomi Embrey*, 133.

<sup>71</sup> Ladino, "Mountains, Monuments, and Other Matter," 132.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>73</sup> Jacobs, J. "Space and Collective Memory." *Sociology of Religion*, 156.

preservation for all projects, it is appropriate for Manzanar because its reconstruction is not primarily aimed at protecting architectural significance or preserving historic materiality. Rather, it is didactic preservation, acting as a vehicle through which to transmit the story of the past to the contemporary audience to ensure Manzanar's legacy is not forgotten. For this aim, there is no substitute for standing in the physical footprints of the past.

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