

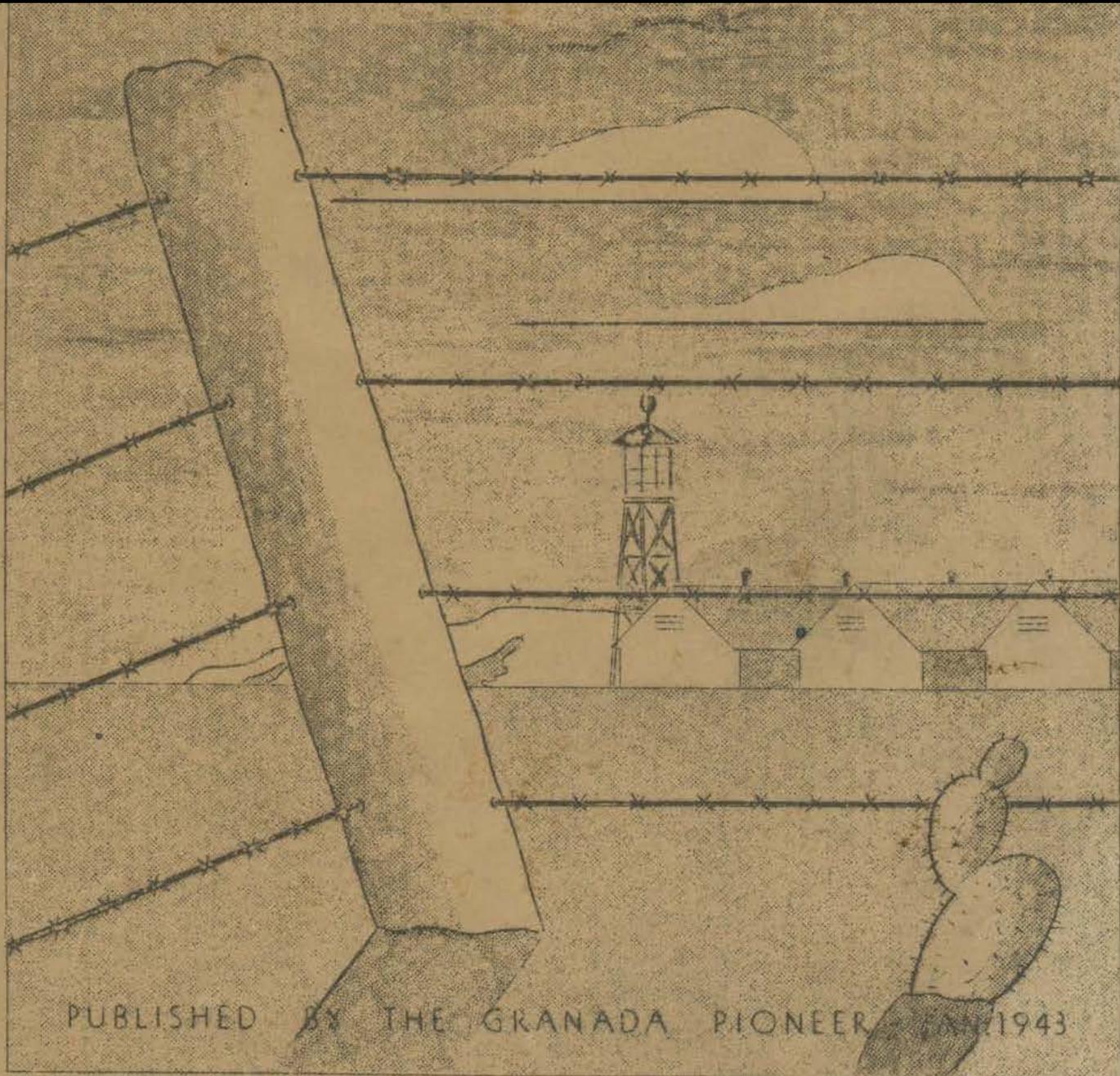
Powerful objects & difficult dialogues—
Working with the tangible history of Japanese American
incarceration

アマチ

University of Denver
Amache Project

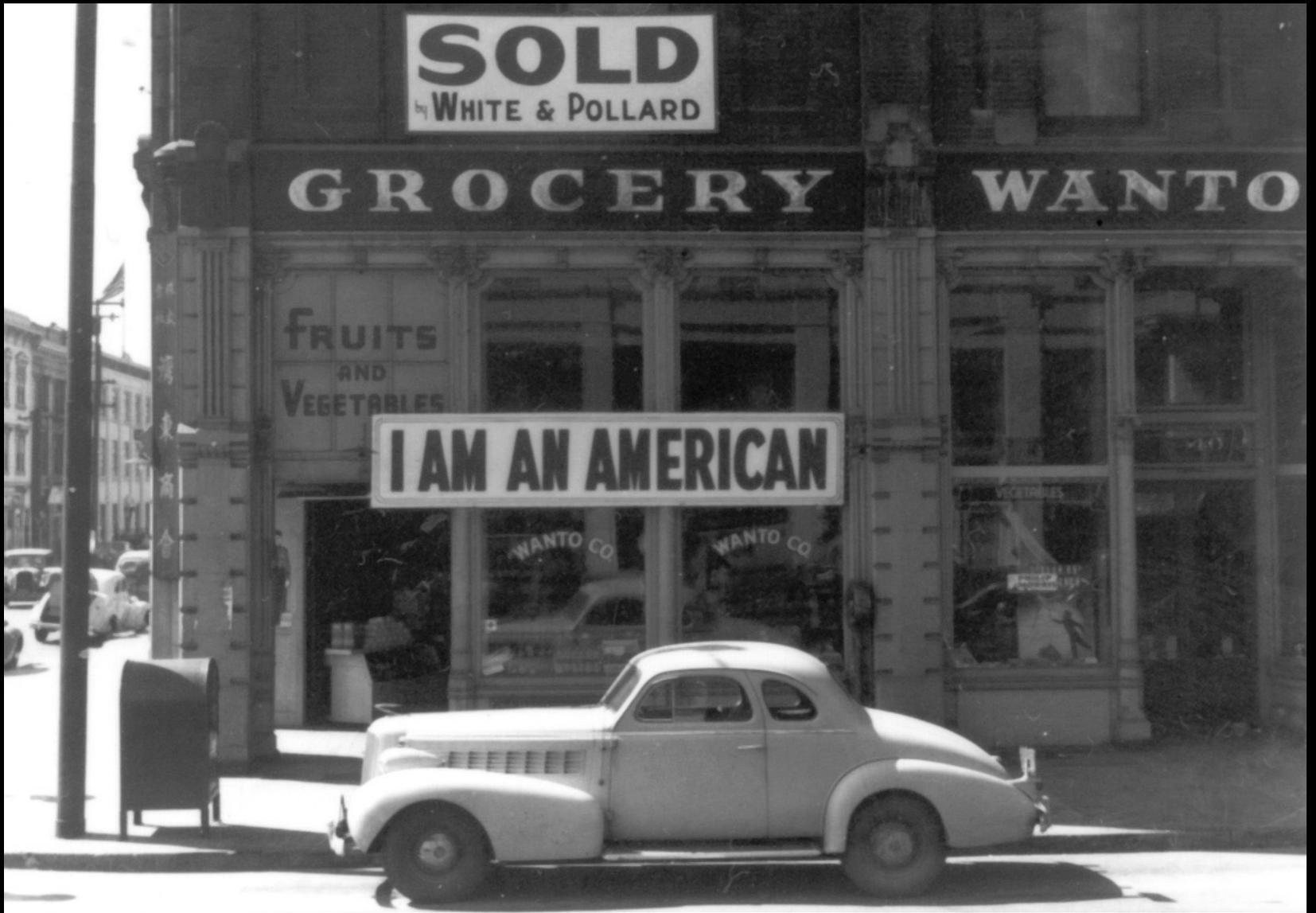


Bonnie J. Clark with contributions by Anne Amati
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Amache as depicted by artists working for the camp newspaper.

US Government Document.



Japanese American business closed when its proprietors were “evacuated” This Dorthea Lange photograph was censored by federal government who paid for her to document the internment process.



This photograph was among many in a scrapbook that was kept in storage by its owner. It was donated to the museum by her descendants. Courtesy of the Amache Preservation Society, Akaki Collection.



Volunteers and students at the Amache museum, Granada, CO, Summer 2012

Connecting the Pieces

Dialogues on the Amache Archaeology Collection

During World War II Colorado's tenth largest city was Amache, a one-mile square incarceration facility surrounded by barbed wire, guard towers, and the scrub of the High Plains. During the three years of its operation, over 10,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry lived there, yet their experience is muted in our national discourse. This exhibit is designed to encourage dialogue about this history anchored by fragments of those uprooted lives. The discussion begins with the community members and University of Denver students who curated this exhibit.



Exhibit opening, Spring 2012

It was never the right temperature in the barracks. Amache was in a desert, which meant hot days and cold nights. This translated to sweltering days and icy nights in the thinly tarpapered barracks that the Japanese Americans lived in while in camp.

The barracks were made of wooden frames on a foundation that were then coated in long, thin sheets of tar paper that covered a slice of the wall from the ground to the roof, leaving open cracks between sheets. This piece of tar paper is actual thickness, and it was the only defense against the elements for the people of Amache.

Tar paper is designed to keep out moisture. That is its purpose, not to maintain a comfortable temperature. They had no insulation. Combined with the multiple families living in close proximity, the heat was nearly unbearable. The tar paper was also little defense against the relentless wind and the sand that blew through the barracks with it.

No one was clean in Amache. In order to combat the elements and attempt to win the battle against the wind, many members of the population of Amache tried to cover the holes in the walls of the barracks with anything they could. Many nailed flattened food cans or pieces of found rubber from truck tires over the holes, but another popular option was painting tar over the cracks to seal them.

The Japanese Americans would use home-made buckets from the mess halls or other jobs around the camp and fill them with tar, then use rags or brushes to coat the cracks between the big rolls of tar paper with sticky, black tar. While none of these measures helped with the temperature, at least the sand was abated temporarily. Any way that the Japanese Americans could attempt to maintain comfort was a welcome endeavor.

Millie King and Katie King



Barracks named "Wuthering Heights" by internees, Courtesy of Amache Preservation Society



Millie Morimoto King and her mother Jane (Saijye) Morimoto in front of their barrack at Rohwer

Paper impregnated with tar and sometimes crushed rock creates a composite material used to prevent penetration of moisture and water, also known as tar paper. Sheets of rolled tar paper covered the hundreds of barracks which became home to thousands of evacuees at Amache. Two colors of tar paper—green and tan—helped organize the site and became a guide around the hundreds of identical barracks. Single layers of tar paper nailed to a wooden frame provided the only barrier between the internees and the relentless outside elements.

The War Relocation Authority began construction at Amache in June 1942 and had only finished half of the barracks when the first group of internees arrived in August. As the remaining barracks were finished, multiple internee families lived in one barrack, providing for very little privacy and comfort. The pressure to build barracks for the thousands of internees, and build them quickly, was immense. The construction proved shoddy at best, especially given high spring winds, ample snow in the winter, and extreme heat during the summer months.

These "temporary" barracks served internees for longer than a temporary time period. Families called Amache home until 1945, residing up to three years in the makeshift barracks. A homemade patching kit, made from a mess hall bucket and scrap wire, filled with liquid tar and spread with a piece of wood, provided a solution to a problem; to patch holes where tar paper siding had worn away or originally secured improperly. Only those internees who worked construction and maintenance had access to building materials, so personal relationships quickly became a resource to create a more desirable living space.

The Japanese Americans at Amache strived to create a home out of the four walls and roof they were given by building gardens, planting trees, and even naming their family's barrack as seen in this historic photo [MC 61]. These objects display the attempt to transform the internees' feeling of upheaval and displacement, into a feeling of home away from home.

Kimberly Perron

**WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY
WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION**

Presidio of San Francisco, California

May 7, 1942

**INSTRUCTIONS
TO ALL PERSONS OF
JAPANESE
ANCESTRY**

Living in the Following Area:

The County of Merced, State of California, and that portion of the County of Mariposa, State of California, lying southerly and westerly of the following roads: State Highway No. 49 from Auburn to the town of Mariposa and the junction with, and also, the paved, improved and unimproved road running in a southerly direction from the town of Mariposa through Mormon Bar and Ben Hur to Raymond, such roads being the eastern boundary of Military Area No. 1.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 51, this Headquarters, dated May 7, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Wednesday, May 13, 1942.



Amache descendant and project volunteer points to the location of his mother's barrack. Note the historic map calls it the "Granada Relocation Center."



Exhibit team meeting with student, former Amache incarcerated, and her niece, 2012

7K.1.1 Cracker Jack Toy – Rider on Horse



Example object from powerpoint shared with student & community curators



Community and student curators meet to talk about their object, a marble from Amache

Guiding questions for exhibit partner meeting:

Discuss object

- What interests you about this object?
- What important stories about Japanese American life, internment, or US history might this object help tell?
- Does either partner have a personal interest or family connection to this object, internment camps, or World War II history?
- What additional research might you each want to pursue about this object before writing your labels?

Discuss exhibit

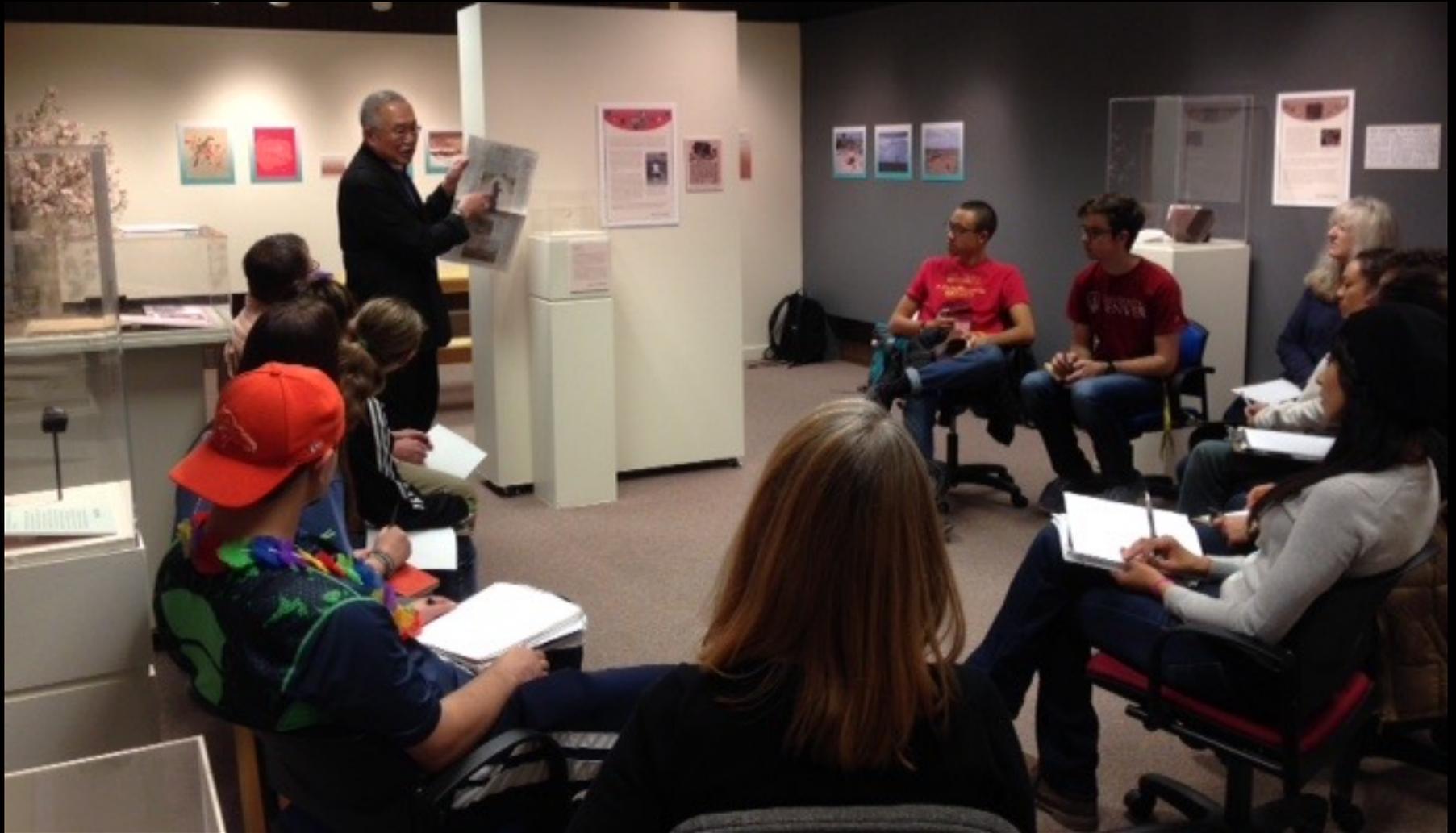
- Are there any physical features of this object that should be highlighted in the exhibit?
- What basic information should exhibit visitors be told about this object? (For example should visitors know where in Amache the object came from?)
- What is the likely key message of each partner's exhibit label?



Visitor at the back interactive wall during the exhibit open house, 2012

Former Amache
incarcerees look at
display with go
tokens collected
from the site





Poet Lawson Inada leading a workshop in haiku for student and community collaborators, 2015.

Amache Haiku Society



Visitor adds to the haiku tree, exhibit opening, 2015

Abalone
Hard to chew
But tastes like home



Piece of Abalone shell recovered
from Amache

*Echoes of lives lived lost
ghosts rise from
Amache's dusty remains*



Field photographs such as this one accompanied some of the exhibits



Setting up the interactive wall with photographs, 2017



Student and intergenerational community collaborators and their extended family, 2015



Amache survivor and Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland onsite at Amache, February 19, 2022. Image courtesy of Colorado Public Radio.



Traveling version of *Connecting the Pieces* at the Dayton, OH library, 2019.

For more about the exhibit and the Amache project visit:
<https://portfolio.du.edu/amache>