

Japanese Internment Camp and Remembrance Site

Just hours after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, approximately 1,291 Japanese American community and religious leaders were arrested by the FBI without evidence of wrongdoing. In January 1942, the arrestees were transferred to detention camps in Montana, New Mexico, and North Dakota where they remained until 1945; many were prohibited from communicating with their families.

On February 19, 1942 President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, with the intention of preventing espionage. The order forcibly removed Americans of Japanese ancestry from their homes, and established military zones in California, Washington and Oregon; states with large populations of Japanese Americans. Canada and Mexico forcibly removed residents of Japanese descent from its west coast, and Peru, Brazil, Chile and Argentina sent its Japanese population to the United States.

According to the National Park Service, the Department of Justice began sending Japanese Americans from various cities in the West to a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in Santa Fe, starting in January 1942. The camp held an initial population of 750 to 800 men, and by 1945 more than 2,000 men, which included German and Italian men who were not U.S. citizens, also interned at the camp.

By February 1942, over 110 thousand Japanese people were confined at internment camps throughout the nation. A total of six thousand were held in New Mexico at camps located in Santa Fe, Fort Stanton, Lordsburg, and the Old Raton Ranch in Lincoln County. The Santa Fe camp was the largest and held more than 4,500 internees between March 1942 and April 1946.

The FBI searched the private homes of thousands of Japanese American residents on the West Coast, seizing items that were considered contraband and freezing financial assets. The incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II, is one of the most egregious violations of American civil rights which impacted the lives of 120,000 people. Japanese American residents who lived along the eastern and western coasts, who were evacuated and placed in incarceration, lost their homes, businesses, and friends.

On April 20, 2002 a stone monument with a plaque was placed at the top of the hill at the Frank S. Ortiz dog park in the Casa Solana neighborhood and memorializes the history.

The plaque reads:

“At this site, due east and below the hill, 4,555 men of Japanese ancestry were incarcerated in a Department of Justice Internment Camp from March 1942 to April 1946. Most were excluded by law from becoming United States citizens and were removed primarily from the West Coast and Hawaii.

During World War II, their loyalty to the United States was questioned. Many of the men held here without due process were longtime resident religious leaders, businessmen, teachers, fishermen, farmers, and others. No person of Japanese ancestry in the U.S. was ever charged or convicted of espionage throughout the course of the war.

Many of the internees had relatives who served with distinction in the American Armed Forces in Europe and in the Pacific.

This marker is placed here as a reminder that history is a valuable teacher only if we do not forget our past.”

Congress first appropriated funding in 2009, for the Japanese American Confinement Sites (JACS) grant program (Public Law 109-441, 120 Stat. 3288) for the preservation and interpretation of U.S. confinement sites where Japanese Americans were detained during World War II. The law authorized up to \$38 million for the entire life of the grant program to identify, research, evaluate, interpret, protect, restore, repair, and acquire historic confinement sites. The sites would be used for present and future generations to learn about the history and gain inspiration from the stories of survival, ingenuity, and perseverance of those who suffered incarceration.

Japanese American Confinement Site grants are awarded to preserve and interpret U.S. Confinement Sites where Japanese Americans were detained during World War II. The grants are awarded to organizations and entities working to preserve historic Japanese American confinement sites and their history, including: private nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and state, local, and tribal governments, and other public entities.

Through a federal grant, a website was created to provide education about the Japanese American Confinement Site in Santa Fe. Several videos are available online as educational resources, and the New Mexico Japanese American Citizens League, whose mission “is to promote, protect, and fight for the civil and human rights of ALL PEOPLE in and outside of New Mexico,” encourages the awareness of the Japanese culture in the communities of Santa Fe and Albuquerque through festivals and educational initiatives.

Colorado’s Japanese Internment Camp

In 1994, a site formerly known as Granada Relocation Center or Amache Camp in Southeast Colorado, was listed as Amache on the National Register of Historic Places, then became a National Historic Landmark in 2006. On March 18, 2022, the Amache site was designated a national park to preserve its history of operating as a detainment camp for Japanese-Americans during World War II. It opened in 1942 with more than 10,000 people incarcerated until 1945.

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland stated the reason for designating the site as a national park stating, “As a nation, we must face the wrongs of our past in order to build a more just and equitable future.”

National Park Service Director Chuck Sams provided a statement on the sites’ designation saying, “It’s essential to continue to protect this space and speak about the painful chapter of American history. It is our solemn responsibility as caretakers of America’s national treasures to tell the whole story of our nation’s heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.”

The Amache Preservation Society was formed by a high school social studies teacher, who maintained and restored the site with volunteers that included Grenada High School students who not only cared for the property, but also educated others about its significance. The principal of the public schools in Amache, John Hopper stated, “It’s important to preserve the space and talk about mistakes our country has made in the past. We don’t ever want to repeat these poor choices in the future.”

Sources:

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5. New Mexico Japanese American Citizens League: [NMJACL Home](#)
6. [Japanese American Confinement Sites Program \(nps.gov\)](#)
7. [Education Resources | Japanese American National Museum \(janm.org\)](#)
8. [Teacher Resources \(museumoftolerance.com\)](#)
9. [America Just Got a New National Park - Drivin' & Vibin' \(drivinvibin.com\)](#)

Oral histories: [Santa Fe - NJAHS Digital Archives](#)

Photos:

1944: [Japanese-Americans at the Santa Fe Internment Camp, New Mexico - Palace of the Governors Photo Archives Collection - CONTENTdm Title \(unm.edu\)](#)

Video: [Moments in Time | Remembering the Santa Fe Japanese Internment Camp | PBS](#)