



Do You Remember Mananzar? . . .

From 1862 to 1946 Mananzar was successively a settlement of cattle ranchers on George's Creek, a community of fruit ranchers on Shepherd Creek and a Japanese relocation camp. Now it has returned to sagebrush. A few trees and ghosts of trees mark where apple, pear and peach orchards once flourished. An assembly hall and two stone sentry boxes are all that remain of the relocation camp. Not all—back against Williamson is a monument with Japanese characters which read Memorial to the Dead and around it are graves of those who died here, exiles in their own land.

The settlement at George's Creek took its name from a Piute Indian, Chief George, who had a rancheria on the creek north of the Alabama Hills. About 1861 cattlemen began to drive their herds into the valley to take advantage of its rich grazing lands and after 1862 they took up permanent residence at Bishop Creek

(Bishop), Big Pine, Little Pine (Independence), George's Creek and Lone Pine. The name George's Creek was applied to all the land between that creek and Shepherd Creek, a short distance to the north.

George's Creek in those days was a cattleman's dream—acres of meadow grass, abundant water and nearby mountains where cattle could be moved for summer pasture. The ranches had alfalfa fields, kitchen gardens and small fruit orchards. Horses were kept for ranch work, to ride herd, and to pull the family buggy for occasional trips to town—eight miles to Independence, eight miles to Lone Pine. Cattle were the important commodity. In summer they were driven into the Sierra where a member of the family or a hired hand kept watch over them. These mountain meadows were leased from the government and each cattleman put up some kind of shelter on his lease. Cattle drives tested the skills of the most capable cowhands. Late or early storms might scatter the cattle and many dangers lurked in those high meadows. To bring down the herd in the fall with no losses required constant vigilance.

George's Creek was a separate community until Manzanar was settled, then people discarded the old name for the new. In 1906 the Owens Valley Development Company bought the Shepherd ranch on Shepherd Creek and divided it into small fruit ranches. The developers named their subdivision Manzanar (Place of the Apple) and the sales pitch must have been convincing, for by 1920 Manzanar was a flourishing community with many small ranches planted with apple, pear and peach trees.

From the beginning the scales were weighed against the ranchers. They were too far from Los Angeles, their nearest market. Good roads were non-existent and fruit had to be shipped by

rail or truck without modern refrigeration. Late frosts could wipe out a whole year's work, but still the growers were optimistic; a school, a store and a packinghouse were built. And (this I remember most pleasantly) there was a stand by the highway where an elderly couple sold fresh-pressed apple juice on hot Sunday afternoons. There was much neighborliness. Dances were held on the second floor of the packinghouse and any good day was an excuse for a picnic. Over fifty children attended the grammar school and a busload of high school pupils came to Independence. Despite worries and hardships, Manzanar days are a happy memory for many who lived there.

There is no doubt that when the City of Los Angeles bought up the Manzanar properties the purchase money was a life-saver for more than one of the ranchers. But it was a sad time for those who saw their years of hard work come to nothing, their beautiful trees pulled out by the roots or left to die. Slowly Manzanar disappeared. Only a few trees remain to blossom and bear fruit year after year while the desert presses ever more closely about them.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor stunned Owens Valley. Our boys went away to war, we stayed close to our radios, we grew used to the "my friends" of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. But life went on as usual, for there were jobs to be done, houses to tend. Then, one day, we saw strange men in our town. We didn't know when they had arrived, or why. We were uneasy; something was going on—what? We soon found out. Six miles south of us, on the old Manzanar properties, a city was rising. Barracks for homes, schools, hospitals and mess halls were being built where apple, pear and peach orchards had so recently flourished. Sentry boxes marked the entrance, towers for searchlights and armed guards stood at the four corners, and a strong barbed-wire fence surrounded the whole.

What prisoners were to be kept in this camp? Not our enemies, captured in battle, but our own United States citizens, whose only crime was their Japanese ancestry. Pearl Harbor had triggered this strange phenomenon, but resentment of the Japanese had been festering in California for many years. Those who had neither the will nor the ability to succeed watched enviously as these newcomers established successful businesses and truck farms. They were the first to raise their voices for relocation, knowing that once the owners were gone these businesses and farms would be "up for grabs." After Pearl Harbor, many who had been friendly toward the Japanese were quick to believe rumors of intercepted radio messages and of arrows marked on the land pointing to defense plants, or newspaper warnings that the west coast would soon be a battlefield under a combined attack from within and without. The Issei, or first generation Japanese, could have been suspected of loyalty to Japan, but the second generation Nisei and the third generation Sansei had known no other homeland. It has since been affirmed that not one conviction of sabotage or espionage by a Japanese American citizen was obtained.

In 1940 the Japanese American Citizens League wrote as its creed. "I am proud that I am an American of Japanese ancestry, for my very background makes me appreciate more fully the wonderful advantages of this Nation. I believe in her institutions, ideals and traditions . . . I trust in her future . . . I am firm in my belief that American sportsmanship and attitude of fair play will judge citizenship and patriotism on the basis of action and achievement, and not on the basis of physical characteristics." After Pearl Harbor the following telegram was sent to President Roosevelt: "In this solemn hour we pledge our fullest cooperation to you, Mr. President, and to our country. There cannot be any question. There must be no doubt. We, in our hearts, know we are Americans, loyal to America. We must prove that to all of you."

Loyalty was not taken into account. All the Japanese near the Pacific coast were divested of their money and property and moved to dreary, far-away relocation camps. Those who came to Manzanar carried only a few personal possessions. If they came by car their cars were taken away, crushed into scrap and hauled to the dump. Until the end of the war as many as 10,000 Japanese were imprisoned just six miles south of us, exceeding in number the entire population of Inyo County, yet we saw little of them. We do know that some people were haunted by the fear that the Japanese might break out of their barbed-wire prison and run amuck through the valley, looting and murdering. And we were told that more than one man slept with a gun under his bed, ready to defend home and family.

It was not easy for those who lived so near the camp to ignore it. Many of us who felt the injustice of Executive Order No. 9066 remained silent for self-serving reasons. Others were actively anti-Japanese. A respected citizen of our town phoned my husband, "You'd better be damned sure you don't sell anything to those Japs." When reminded that the Japanese were prisoners and not allowed to move about the country, he retorted, "Well, I'm just warning you. You'd better be damned sure."

Looking back, the wonder is that there were so few "incidents" in the camp. How could so many people be deprived of property and liberty and not rebel? How did they feel when medals earned by soldiers who died bravely in defense of their country were presented to the next of kin at Manzanar? Perhaps some of the credit for those relatively peaceful years should go to Ralph P. Merritt, project director of the War Relocation Authority, who took a firm stand against the "get tough" policy of his military advisors and refused to be swayed by the hysterical demands of some of the local citizens.

Ralph Merritt told this story of his first Christmas at Manzanar. On December 7, 1942, there had been a bloody riot and all the camp went underground. No children came out to play, there were no lights in the barracks, no work crews functioned. One week, two weeks, and Manzanar remained a ghost town. Then Margaret Gleason, director of welfare, suggested they give a Christmas party for the orphans in the Childrens' Village. Tucked away in a corner of that mile-square, barbed-wire enclosure, they had not been touched by the cloud that hung over the camp. All were as excited as children anywhere would be over the gifts and entered joyously into the singing of Christmas carols. Suddenly Mr. Merritt realized there was more music than just those childish voices. Stepping out into the sharp, clear moonlit night, he found a group of boys and girls who had come to join in the carols. With Mr. and Mrs. Merritt and Miss Gleason leading, the young people walked through the dark camp, singing as they went. And, one by one, lights came on in the barracks, voices called out "Merry Christmas!" and Manzanar came to life.

We passed the camp frequently and never ceased to be appalled by its prison-like appearance—the watchtowers, the searchlights playing at night, the farmers working in the fields under the watchful eyes of armed guards. One year we were invited to attend a Christmas program in the auditorium and were graciously received. Another time I went with my sister to visit one of her students from Los Angeles City College. Tears flowed freely. "Don't cry; it will all be over soon and you will be back in school." "Yes, but it will never be the same again. I'll just be a Jap."

When the war was over the Japanese were released from their prisons and allowed to return home. To what? Property and money were gone. Claims were later filed for loss of property and litigation dragged on for seventeen years, with the average rate of set-

tlement only ten percent of the amount asked. No one was ever paid for losses due to death, personal injury or mental suffering. No account was taken of the earning power lost during those internment years. When bank accounts that had been frozen were returned to their owners no interest was paid on money that otherwise might have been gainfully invested. That many never lived to recover property or money is, of course, "regrettable."

On April 14, 1973, the Manzanar Committee of the Japanese American Citizens League, in cooperation with the State Department of Parks and Recreation, dedicated a plaque at Manzanar which reads: "In the early days of World War Two 110,000 persons of Japanese ancestry were interred in relocation centers by Executive Order No. 9066, issued on February 19, 1942. Manzanar, the first of ten such concentration camps, was bounded by barbed-wire and guard towers, confining 10,000 persons, the majority being American citizens. May the injustices and humiliation suffered here as a result of hysteria, racism and economic exploitation never emerge again." Notice the words "concentration camps." The Manzanar Committee also wished to use the word "greed" in place of "economic exploitation" but was not allowed to do so.

We attended the dedication of the plaque on a cold, windy spring day, with the snow low on the Sierra, a day that must have seemed very familiar to those who spent the war years in Manzanar. We heard the speakers identify themselves and their audience not with citizens in the main stream of American life, but with the Indians at Wounded Knee and the Chicanos in the fields and vineyards, and knew that after more than thirty years the wound still rankled, the dream remained blurred. The words spoken by my sister's little student took on new significance: "It will never be the same again."

Many people say, "I remember Manzanar." But which Manzanar do they remember—the cattle ranches at George's Creek, the apple orchards and good times on Shepherd Creek, or the relocation camp during the dark days of World War Two? They were all there.

