



George Nishimura

Gila River: Community Council Historical Report. G. Nishimura's's Personal Narrative

[ca. 1945]

Community Council Historical Report

by George Nishimura

Chairman, Butte Community Council

May, 1944 - August, 1944

Community Government Organization

Maintaining an elective form of government but streamlining procedures the council adopted a readjusted form of community government which showed no radical change from its former set-up. The outstanding feature of the new council is the strengthening of the executive board with delegated authority to act for the council in all matters except legislation. Any action taken by the board must, however, have the unanimous approval of the members of the board present. The Council may rescind any action taken by the board.

The establishment of a recreation association in the Butte Community was unanimously approved. The resolution calls for an association (a) to assist in carrying out a comprehensive program of community activities within the center; (b) to plan and manage revenue for center-wide programs; (c) to act as an advisory party to the Community Activities Section and (d) to sponsor such events promoted by private organizations within the center to raise funds upon proper recommendations of the project director.

— 2 —

A petition asking for nisei rights in the Army and an early return of constitutional guarantees was sent to the President of the United States of America. It was drafted and signed by 620 loyal American citizens of Japanese ancestry who are about to be inducted into the Armed Forces of the United States. It pleads for three constitutional privileges: (1) for equality of opportunity in all branches of the services; (2) for the discontinuance of the assignment of Japanese-Americans to segregated units; (3) and for an early return of the constitutional guarantees which have been temporarily denied them as a result of evacuation from the West Coast. The most earnest consideration to the pleas embodied in this petition was requested so that these boys may serve in battle with their fellow Americans against the enemies of their country and their ideals, without discrimination and without fear of their future in America.

River's Honor Roll Monument, the only one of its kind in any relocation center, was unveiled and dedicated on April 23, 1944 in honor of the boys in the services, with a simple but impressive ceremony on the monument hill.

The Butte Community Council Chairman was chosen by the council to accompany the Community Analyst to help

— 3 —

facilitate the movements in Jerome Relocation Center. On June 15, 1944, the first of the four contingents to be transferred to Gila from Jerome arrived on this project. The last Jerome trainload arrived on June 27th which brought to about 2,000 the total number of residents who have transferred in the four movements from the Arkansas Center.

Thirty-four privates of the U. S. Army, the first group of Gilians to report for active duty under the reinstated selective service laws left Rivers on May 18, 1944.

The establishing of a Juvenile Code was necessary and a code was drafted and passed by the council on August 28, 1944. With the tendency in the rise in Juvenile Delinquency made it necessary that steps be taken to decrease and control the growing evidence of delinquency.

Evaluation

As the war drags on, the magnitude of destruction, suffering, and confusion which it has caused is more and more brought up in the center. We are beginning to realize more clearly that scores of difficult domestic and economic problems will remain unsolved when the fighting is over. Few people aware of this grim fact will be willing to accept the situation inactively. Even young people realize that

— 4 —

they must explore new ways of living and social thinking to become well adjusted in an age of radical and rapid changes. If order is to follow chaos, if lasting peace is to take the place of unmitigated violence, the powers of cooperation and good will must be applied to the fullest extent.

It was necessary that we study the social and economic problems and to gain practical experience by working for a period of time on urgent community projects with outside groups. In the long run it must be maintained by learning to deal in constructive ways with our internal problems of economic insecurity and racial intolerance.

To these tasks our utmost energy and our best thought are dedicated. Yet to sustain us in this task it was important that we shape a picture of the kind of world in which we hope to live, to spur us on and redeem this prodigious effort. It called for understanding, good will and cooperation to outline this picture and to work toward its realization. Plans and programs to achieve this goal must grow out of our common purpose and with democratic participation in planning by all of us. This is being done, I am sure, as proven by the fine and cooperative relationship between the Administration and the residents in its policies and

— 5 —

operations. The gradual and steady flow of relocators also stresses the progress being made in accomplishing this task.

We look forward to securing, through planning and cooperative action, a greater and better future for the people of the Japanese Ancestry. Great changes have come since the days of evacuation, yet too few corresponding adjustments have been made in our provisions for human freedom. We want the right to work, usefully and creatively through the productive years; the right to fair pay, adequate to command the necessities and amenities of life in exchange for work, ideas, thrift and other socially valuable services; the right to security, with freedom from fear of old age, want, dependency, sickness, unemployment and accident; the right to come and go, to speak or to be silent, free from the spying of secret political police; the right to equality before the law, with equal access to justice in fact; and the right to rest, recreation, and adventure; the opportunity to enjoy life and take part in advancing civilization for personal growth and happiness.

How far we shall get with the task we are working for? There can be no complete or final answer to this question that will be everywhere agreed, everywhere valid, everywhere

— 6 —

accepted. The only significant answer, it would appear, would be that given by an individual anxious for himself to estimate the record as the basis for determining how far he shall, in such ways as may be open to him, place his own energies at the disposal of this great task, to facilitate and further its mission along the road into the future.