



**PERSONAL NARRATIVE REPORT
of
RELOCATION PROGRAM OFFICER**

**MINIDOKA RELOCATION CENTER
HUNT, IDAHO**

BY:

**VICTOR V. McLAUGHLIN
RELOCATION PROGRAM OFFICER**

TERM OF SERVICE:

September 16, 1942, to December 14, 1945

9-16-42 to 12-16-42 - Teacher

12-16-42 to 7-1-43 - Health & Physical Ed. Advisor

7-1-43 to 1-1-44 - Leave officer

1-1-44 to 11-1-44 - Asst. Relocation Program Officer

11-1-44 to 4-1-45 - Act. Relocation Program Officer

4-1-45 to 12-14-45 - Relocation Program Officer

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University of California, Berkeley**

**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OFFICE FOR EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT OFFICE MEMORANDUM**

FROM: Mr. V. V. McLaughlin, Relocation Program Officer
Term of Service: September 16, 1942, to December 14, 1945
SUBJECT: Narrative Report on the Relocation Division

In writing this narrative report on the Relocation Division, the history of this division seems to fall in four distinct periods:

- I. Transition from evacuation and assembly centers to project life and relocation.
- II. Registration program, army enlistment, and leave clearance.
- III. Change over of the Relocation Division from Employment Division to Outside Employment and Family Interviewing Program.
- IV. Final organization and center closure operations.

In the first period, a period of uncertainty and confusion for the residents after having been uprooted rather suddenly and forced to leave their homes, their arrival in this more or less desolate part of Idaho did not add to their already downcast spirits. However, almost immediately the need for seasonal workers developed and early in September recruiters arrived from the Amalgamated Sugar Co., the Utah Idaho Sugar Co., and the Franklin Sugar Co., to recruit workers to harvest the fall crop in Idaho, northern Utah, eastern Oregon, eastern Washington and Montana. The residents came forth with a splendid response and about 1700 workers were sent to the harvest fields in the states mentioned above. This same year late in the harvest season a very urgent call for help came from the Idaho Falls area where cold fall rains had made harvesting impossible and very cold weather threatened to freeze the potato crop before it could be harvested. This project sent over 200 workers to fill the rush order and these boys saved what later turned out to be a very important potato crop.

This early period had another far reaching result in that it gave the residents a much needed period of readjustment, improved public relations by acquainting thousands of people with an almost unknown Japanese American, and the good relations created by these early workers paid dividends as time went on in many and satisfactory offers for the farmer residents of this center.

Of this group of early seasonal workers quite a number found permanent employment and did not return to the center. This was especially true of the Alaskan group.

From the very outset of this project under the Project Director, Harry L. Stafford, and his assistant, Phillip Schaffer; the way was pointed toward relocation and residents were urged to seek their future elsewhere than in the project. Hence, the first steps were made in the direction of relocation, and relocation was given "top billing" almost from the beginning of the project.

In reviewing this first period it might be said that there was little time for organization and not much was developed. However, I feel that this was an important period in setting the future of the residents and turning their attention away from evacuation toward the future. It was often said in the early days "there is nothing to be gained by looking back. The future, and the future only, holds promise."

The second phase of the development came early in 1943 while the division still was hampered by project employment in addition to outside employment. This was the registration and army enlistment program, the first real steps toward relocation. However, prior to the registration program, an extensive interviewing program had been started in an effort to place the residents in suitable jobs on the outside. Before this program had progressed very far it was set aside for the registration program which was given wide publicity and informational meetings were held in every block throughout the project. The fact that this project showed 100% registration was due in no small part to the gallant efforts displayed by the Project Director and his top assistants in carrying the program to the people so that they had a complete understanding of all it entailed. Registration was carried out and completed without any difficulty. It must also be mentioned here that the best evacuee leadership was obtained and they had no small part in making this registration a complete success.

Out of the registration program came the enlistment for army service. About 350 Minidoka residents enlisted. This program was just a bit slow in getting started due to a reticence on the part of the young men here to step forward, but a few of the older group, most of whom were married, led the way. Outstanding of the older Nisei group were the Sakura brothers; the Yanagamachi brothers; "Chick" Uno; Michio Shinoda; Dick Setsuda; and Tomi Takayoshi, a 40 year old who was accepted for military service only because of his desire to become a part of this movement. There were also many others who went all out for this program and though they were not accepted, nevertheless, they were no small part of the program. Among these must be mentioned James Sakamoto; Charles Takahashi; Clarence Arai; and Dr. Paul Suzuki, an alien. Quite a number of volunteers from Minidoka made the supreme sacrifice to prove that their loyalty was not a mere matter of words, but was something forceful, something real, and their American citizenship was dearer than life itself. To the boys and young men who so ably and willingly put the enlistment program over, Minidoka and America owes a deep

debt of gratitude.

This program of enlistment and registration set the pace for the future of relocation at Minidoka. It was the turning point in the whole history of Minidoka as this program had been carried to a successful conclusion, no other program could baffle either the residents or the administration.

In leaving this program it must be said that the only sad feature of it all was the fact that the enthusiasm of the volunteers was not matched by Selective Service or the Army. Delay after delay in the processing of the papers caused many to question the good faith of those in authority. Our relations with the local Selective Service Board were very pleasant, but it carried little beyond that.

Relocation showed very encouraging trends during April, May, June, July, and August of 1943.

A carry over from the second period to the third period of change over of the Relocation Division from Outside Employment was the Leave Clearance Program. This grew to rather large proportions as some 1200 leave clearance cases were heard and transmitted to Washington. At first, clearance came through slowly and irregularly, but as the Washington office became geared to the program the situation grew less troublesome.

The hearing board was composed of five members with four alternates all of whom were kept occupied a good part of their time with hearings. It was extremely fortunate that all during the leave clearance procedure we had an excellent group of evacuee stenographers who were able to carry on the task of keeping the cases up to date and transmit them to Washington regularly. The writer of this report headed the leave clearance board and received excellent cooperation from all members of the hearing board appointed by the Project Director.

Shortly after the inception of the leave clearance hearings, we received by transfer from Tule Lake about 1600 residents, with about as difficult records as the writer has ever seen. Lack of records, mixed-up records and all sorts of entanglements nearly derailed the hearing board for a short time. However, with the need for seasonal workers, at height the Tuleans were allowed to go out for group work while their records were straightened out and upon their return from work, hearings were completed in short order for this group. The opportunity to go outside and earn a little money had a wholesome effect in the Tuleans and no trouble either in the field or in the project was encountered. The situation would have undoubtedly been worse if these people had been refused leave because nearly all of them were and had been frustrated in their attempts to reestablish themselves.

In leaving the leave clearance program it might be said that for those cleared, it was a success; but for those held it seemed an utter failure since none of those were ever removed to Tule and they remained here as a constant source of trouble and dissatisfaction.

All during this time of registration and leave clearance, the Relocation Division was gradually evolving from Employment Division and Outside Employment. It was gradually taking form of a Relocation Division with all its attention turned to the actual reestablishment of residents in new life outside.

During 1942-1943, the Relocation Division was occupied for the most part with group work leaves and a sincere effort to untangle all the difficulties in clearance. However, in 1944, with the greater part of the seasonal workers in the armed forces or relocated, it was becoming clearly evident that seasonal leave would become another war casualty and trial indefinites was instituted to furnish a substitute for group work. The trial indefinite leave was not popular in this center because of the attractive farm offers in this area and the distance to points where trial indefinites were allowed. This was a leave issued to the Mid-Western and Eastern States for six months, giving the holder the option at the end of the period of taking indefinite leave or returning to the center.

Late in the spring of 1944 the family interviewing program began; quite humbly at first for a large program which was to be the greatest program instituted by WRA. This came on the heels of the reinstatement of the Selective Service for all citizens of Japanese descent, which took many of the remaining young men.

No astounding results were noticeable from the interviewing program until early January of 1945 although much ground work had been done in 1944 and the low point of relocation for that year was October. A steady rise from that time until October 1945 was noticeable.

The family interviewing program was beset with many rough spots and entailed close cooperation between the Relocation Division, Welfare Section, Legal Aid, Evacuee Property, and almost all divisions. Most closely related to the entire problem was the Welfare Section which never quite seemed to fall in line with the service organization set up in relocation. From the outset, Relocation was a service division, little professionalism was ever allowed to develop within its ranks. All members were instructed to retain a sympathetic attitude toward the residents, but not to "drool" over them. The situation which developed in the Welfare-Relocation relationship was at various times made worse by Washington WRA representatives who apparently came here only to impress the Project Director and the Relocation Division of the professional attitude that had to be maintained among Welfare people; forgetting entirely that there was a task to be accomplished here; that professionalism would have to be forgotten and these people approached on a basis which they could understand. The reports made by these visitors were uncomplimentary to Relocation and only served to make relations worse and the job harder to accomplish. It was apparent from our observation here that this problem was also prevalent in other centers and also Washington where a consolidation under one head for both sections would have given more unity of thinking.

Other than the above mentioned difficulties, the interviewing program developed into a successful venture. As more staff members were added and facilities in the project more centralized, the program began to move with increasing success.

As each interviewer became acquainted with his or her people and knew their needs, the program became real service to relocatees. So that each interviewer might have a definite assignment and show definite progress, the project was zoned and two interviewers with a secretary were assigned to each zone. The real family planning took a very definite turn for the better. If this zoning plan had been followed by the Welfare Section and a counselor assigned, the lag which developed in Welfare cases would have not developed. Though there was a close working relationship between Welfare counselors and Relocation advisors, the assignment of the counselor to a definite zone came only after the Project Director laid out very definite and concise plans for the approaching closing and insisted that the Welfare counselor be given a definite zone assignment.

The final organization for the center closure was developed in early June and a full staff of interviewers was obtained. The teams worked in five zones with seven blocks to each zone. The move to place Evacuee Property under Relocation was a definite help to relocatees in that it made it much easier to take care of difficult property cases with a fuller understanding of the relocation problems. The Evacuee Property Section was handicapped by a lack of help but the overall job was accomplished with the least amount of confusion.

Of great assistance in this final planning were Robert Dolins and George Young both of whom gave the interviewers generally helpful advise and encouragement. Of course, after the visit of Director, D. S. Myer, early in February of 1945, the way was pointed for residents to make final plans although many did not think the centers would actually close, much less that all residents would be relocated. Only by constant repetition were many residents finally convinced that they would have to make plans. By September 1, 1945, nearly all families had made definite plans to relocate. Some of the excludées, segregées, and Welfare cases were the only remaining project residents who could not make plans. Relocation progress reached its climax in September. On the first of October the end was easily in sight; the reward for all the hard work done by the interviewers and counselors. Very little difficulty was experienced in the final closing operation with a minimum of forced cases.

The transportation problem was always with us but we feel that the Union Pacific Railroad gave us splendid service with only a few cancellations of cars. Approximately six cars a week were sent to Seattle and

Portland, while in mid-summer a number of pullman cars were sent East to Chicago. A special car was sent to Sacramento on October 1 for residents of that area.

Minidoka was cleared of practically all residents on October 23, 1945 with only hospital and a few late pullman cases remaining until October 27.

In retrospect, considering the huge task accomplished, it must be said that it was accomplished with fine cooperation of all appointive staff members. The function of the Relocation Staff Committee, made up of appointive staff members, was to keep all divisions and sections coordinated in the big task of relocation.

The Evacuee Commission, because of the turnover in members, was never too successful in this project, and was never backed by the Community Council mostly because this group felt that it would be political suicide to favor or sponsor relocation. However, the Evacuee Commission, even though not well attended, did serve as a medium of informational exchange. Many rumors floating about the center were successfully spiked by the group.

In the final closing, as in the registration program, every effort was made to carry the program to the people through the project paper, relocation bulletins, and meetings held in mess halls throughout the project. These meetings were conducted by appointed personnel with an interpreter throughout the project about the first of September 1945 and brought to the residents a full explanation of the closing operations in the center.

Much could be written in this report on relocation operations but the most impressive feature of this whole struggle was the fact that relocation was given top priority over all project operations and the way cleared for departure of all who chose to go. "Service" was the by-word of the Relocation Division from its very beginning. Many services were performed for residents which led to relocation or built up confidence in the residents toward the Relocation Division.

It was possible at all times to retain a fine relocation staff and a staff which worked together very congenially, and relocation was the answer to thousands of problems which confronted the residents in the project.

Signed: Victor V. McLaughlin