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R. Spicer
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San Francisco
ACTIVITIES - EVACUEE PROPERTY DIVISION

AUGUST 4, 1942 - JANUARY 1, 1945

The Evacuee Property Division of the War Relocation Authority rendered monthly reports from August 1942 to January 1945 when it was absorbed in the Relocation Division. All copies of these reports are now in Washington. They embodied a narrative discussion of progress, of problems arising and the steps taken to meet them. In addition detailed statistical tabulations were submitted with the reports. They should be referred to for specific facts or figures, or other details. This summary is intended as a review of the background, formation and activities of the Division to January 1, 1945.

When the military ordered the evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry from specified areas of the West Coast, certain arrangements were made by the Commanding General with the Secretary of Agriculture and the Treasury. Among such arrangements was that the Federal Reserve Bank would handle the transfer of properties of evacuees of industrial, commercial, residential and personal nature. Similarly the Farm Security Administration was named by the Secretary of Agriculture to handle the transfer of agricultural holdings. The foregoing transfers were from the Japanese alien or citizen owners or leaseholders of real property to caucasian operators. The decision rested with the Japanese-Americans

as to whether the transfer was to be by sale, lease or sub-lease. Funds were provided to the Farm Security Administration from the budget of the Chief of Staff and the Emergency Fund of the President. These funds were for the purpose of making one year loans to substitute operators, who could not secure funds otherwise, to pay the evacuee owners or leaseholders for the value of growing crops or farm machinery, etc. Continuity of food production and fair and equitable dealings were insisted upon by the Commanding General.

The Federal Reserve Bank established some 40 warehouses in California, Oregon and Washington early in March 1942 for the free storage of household goods and personal property of the evacuees. These warehouses were strategically located with respect to the evacuee population so as to afford the maximum possible convenience in placing their goods in Government provided storage. The fact that this service was available without cost was widely publicized and evacuees were urged to take advantage of it in order to insure the safety of their goods.

The Federal Reserve Bank and Farm Security Administration completed their assignment by the end of June 1942. During July of that year documentation of their action was accomplished by these agencies.

The War Relocation Authority was established by Executive Order March 18, 1942. During the last half of July 1942 the Regional Office of WRA in San Francisco prepared to assume its responsibility to continue to preserve and protect the lawful property interests of the evacuees.

Accordingly an Evacuee Property Division was established in the Regional Office August 4, 1942. Area offices were immediately set up

in Seattle to cover Oregon and Washington; in San Francisco to handle Northern California; in Los Angeles for Southern California and Arizona. These offices were staffed with Evacuee Property Officers experienced in handling agricultural and commercial property. These offices forthwith handled the property matters both new cases and those inherited from the Federal Reserve Bank and Farm Security - except transportation and warehousing activities. These latter were the concern of the Transportation Division (which was headed by an officer of the Army Quartermaster Corp) in the WRA Regional Office.

In January 1943 the Transportation Division became a Section of the Evacuee Property Division. A procedure Manual was established governing the operations of the enlarged, coordinated division.

After evacuation had been completed, the contents of the 40 warehouses were progressively consolidated into eight in the three states. This was accomplished by first shipping to projects or points of relocation in the east, goods requested by their owners. Reduction of storage places to fewer, larger warehouses close to the Area offices, made for greater economy and efficiency of operation.

Contraband which had been in the custody of the Army, was transferred to the Evacuee Property Division of WRA April 30, 1944. Thereafter the division returned to the owners such items as were properly requested.

The activities of the Evacuee Property Officers were wide in scope. All action was predicated upon written requests of the evacuees involved. It ranged from collection of small indebtednesses to them to the sale or leasing of farms, hotels and other business property of

very considerable value. In order to accomplish these things it was very often necessary for these Property Officers to overcome marked and stubborn prejudices. In fact from the inception of the property program it was necessary to do much public relations work. The foundations were thus laid for the relocation program which followed.

Soon after the division got under way it was found that more direct lines of contact between the property officers in the field and the evacuees in the centers were necessary. Accordingly provision was made for an Evacuee Property Officer in each center. These men while administratively under the Project Directors received direction and technical guidance from the Chief of the Evacuee Property Division in San Francisco. The establishment of the offices in the centers greatly facilitated handling of property matters.

The matter of bonding of property men and auditing of their financial transactions is covered in the Manual.

Many hundreds of thousands of dollars in property transactions were handled by the division. There is no question but that the division saved for the evacuees many thousands of dollars which would otherwise been lost. The policy which dominated the activities throughout was "to preserve and protect the lawful property interests of the evacuees".

Russell T. Robinson
Chief, Evacuee Property Division



In reply, please refer to:

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
461 Market Street
San Francisco 5, California

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, OFFICE
~~WITCOMB HOTEL BUILDING~~

July 5, 1944

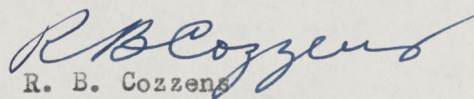
Dr. Dorothy Thomas
University of California
Berkeley, California

Dear Doctor Thomas:

In accordance with your request we are making available to you a copy of the Report of Activities of the Evacuee Property Office of War Relocation Authority, July 1942 to December 1943.

The material in this report is, of course, restricted. However we have no objection to your using it in connection with the study you are conducting. Will you please acknowledge receipt of the report by signing the duplicate copy of this letter and return the report to this office when it has served your purposes.

Yours very truly,


R. B. Cozzens
Assistant Director

