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CENTRAL UTAH PROJECT

TOPAZ, UTAH

THE TOPAZ PART IN THE TULE LAKE HARVEST

by

RUSSELL A. BANKSON

PROJECT REPORTS DIVISION  
Historical Section



WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

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## THE TOPAZ PART IN THE TULE LAKE HARVEST

Even though this report has been delayed, there probably will be some points of interest contained herein for future planning of crop work at Tule Lake.

Two members of the crew who went from Topaz to Tule Lake to assist in the harvest were chosen for key positions while there, and the facts here set forth are from the reports which they have since made upon their return to Topaz.

The two are Robert Hisatomi who served as general overseer of the combined crew composed of men who came from several different projects, and Mike Maruyama former chairman of the Topaz Council, who acted in the capacity of a foreman, and who was able by his efforts to step-up harvesting to a top pace.

Briefly summarizing for the records the various steps leading up to the voluntary harvesting of the crops at Tule Lake after the general center-wide strike became effective there, the following highlights may be noted:

The call came in from the WRA offices in Washington to recruit voluntary workers who would go to Tule Lake to save the crop, which was ready for harvest, especially the huge potato crop. An active drive for workers was started in Topaz immediately. There was naturally the first reaction that perhaps this constituted recruiting laborers to act as strike-breakers. There were repercussions from this which caused considerable stir through the center, one phase eventually leading to the crisis



in the Community Council which has already been documented as Topaz H430.

However, this present documentation is not intended to go in- to the ramifications of misunderstandings, but rather to give a constructive, objective report of results.

The net result of the recruiting drive was that on October 28, 32 young men left Topaz for Tule Lake. Oddly enough, 30 of these were former residents of Tule Lake who had transferred to Topaz during the segregation movement and expressed a desire to return to assist in the harvesting of the crops to show their loyalty more strongly.

The other two, old-time residents of Topaz, were the afore mentioned Robert Hisatomi and Mike Maruyama.

The group arrived at Klamath Falls on October 30 about 9:45 PM and were transferred at midnight to the temporary camp which was set up on the Tule Lake farm with the thermometer standing at 18 degrees above zero. The tent camp was none too attractive in the way of offering comforts, especially as the Topaz contingent was the first to arrive, and thus the group which was called upon to get the camp into good order for the others. However, about an hour later, a contingent of 40 men arrived from the Poston Cen- ter to assist.

One highlight of that night was the fact that Mr. Hoover of the Tule Lake Mess Management Section was on hand with plenty of hot coffee for the shivering men.

The next day, which was Monday, was devoted to the job of



fixing up the camp so that it would be in readiness for the contingents from other centers. Actual harvest in the fields started on Tuesday, November 2.

With the designation of Hisatomi as general camp overseer, Mike Maruyama of Topaz and Joe Owashi of Poston were designated as foremen and these three, working with Mr. W. Jarrett of the Tule Lake Agricultural staff who was in general charge of the operations, laid out the work plans.

The camp was located on the farm itself, several miles from the colony and members of the work group were not permitted to enter the colony itself. On November 5, 101 men arrived from Heart Mountain, 24 more from Poston and 30 from other points where they have been on seasonal leave, for a total of 237 men actually on the job.

Room and board had previously been set at \$1.00 per day with an established wage rate of \$1.00 per hour for straight work or 15 cents per 100 pound sack of potatoes which, for a fast worker, would net him much higher wages on a long work day.

Other crops to be harvested were grain, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, beets, turnips, etc. By far the best wage was in harvesting potatoes and to even up the net income of the different workers, the groups were alternated so that all had an opportunity to try their hand at potatoes and the bigger money.

In the organization set-up of the camp 13 men were designated to work in the mess at \$1.00 per hour, with the exception of the cheff who was paid \$13.00 per day. All the workers em-



ployed were under temporary appointment by civil service.

On an average the workers put in from 16 to 18 hours in every 24 which left no time for relaxation and meant that the men simply slept and worked.

The harvesting of the potato crop was completed on November 22 while limited crews remained over to finish-up the other harvest on November 26.

All the records on the harvest operations were handled by Robert Hisatomi and when the body of workers moved out on November 25 and 26 Hisatomi stayed over until December 11 so that he could close the books and report to the Cost Accounting Division.

Incidentally, 14 men, 11 of whom were from Topaz, accepted further employment on the Tule Lake farm to care for the poultry and livestock until the end of the strike.

Upon his return to Topaz Hisatomi prepared the following report of the work achieved:

CROPS HARVESTED:

54,777 one hundred pound sacks of potatoes of which 39,053 sacks were placed in government storage in Tule Lake, the remainder shipped to other centers.

7,403½ sacks of barley harvested and thrashed

9,097 crates of cabbage

8,000 crates of carrots

1,162 crates of cauliflower

1,700 crates of beets

395 sacks of turnips



250 crates of broccoli

205 crates of daikon

185 crates of parsnips

223 crates of spinach

130 crates of onions

It was estimated that the crop harvested had a market value of \$250,000.00. In all, 61 carloads of this produce were delivered to other relocation centers. The following table gives the details:

RELOCATION CENTER	POTATOES	CABEAGE	TURNIP	CAULIF.	CARROT	TOTAL CAR
Colorado River	2	2½	½	½	1	6
Gila River	8	4	½		1 3/4	14
Granada		1				1
Minidoka		7½			2½	10
Manzanar	2	3/4	3/4	½		4
Heart Mountain	2	1				3
Jerome	2	1				3
Central Utah	6	2	½		2½	11
Pacific Fruit & Prod. Co.	9					9

In summarizing the results of the crop harvest Mike Maruyama declared:

"A majority of the workers wanted to show their loyalty and realizing the necessity of harvesting this crop as a war food production measure, they were eager to give their services. Naturally a certain few put the high wages they could earn in first



place. This group was small and I can honestly say that most of the men did this hard work in long hours everyday as a patriotic duty.

"As to the Topaz contingent all except two were Tule Lake transferees to this center. Most of these needed leave clearance hearings which were given so that they might return and show to the people with whom they had formerly lived in Tule Lake that they did not approve the strike which made this measure necessary. They chose to go because this gave them a chance to show further their loyalty to America through positive action, despite the fact there was considerable pressure against their going.

"The main reason why there was not unanimous approval of their participation in the crop harvesting was the insufficient information to the residents about the whole necessity of this work. Also some elements in Topaz opposed the men going from here on the grounds that they were sympathetic with the Tule Lake strikers whom they considered had real reasons for their actions. Some threats were made against the men before they left but after having calmed down the residents of Topaz apparently thought the matter through, because upon our return our reception was favorable.

"During the harvest period there were times when the morale of the workers was low because of the tremendous strain upon them and of poor food at times and of living conditions which were not of the best. This condition was furthered by the fact that the men simply worked themselves out, with long hours at hard toil.



"Treatment of the workers at the hands of the Military Police and the WRA appointive staff was excellent.

"Each worker knew what his job was and despite the fact that he was over-worked he kept at it until the job was done because each was determined to save the crops. The fact that we had a number of experienced farmers among the workers was in our favor as they were able to guide and help us who were unaccustomed to such work.

"Many of the workers were able to earn enough to feel that they could relocate with a greater degree of security and the records show that many of these men have since relocated."

At the conclusion of his work Robert Hisatomi was given high praise by the administration at Tule Lake for his excellent work in handling the records of the venture, as attested by the following:

"To Whom It May Concern:

"Mr. Robert Hisatomi is to be congratulated on the good work he did in taking charge of the evacuees who came here to harvest the crops. He did a fine job as mediator, bookkeeper, time-keeper, etc.

/s/

George A. Hudson  
"Marketing Specialist"