

Field Notes: St. Louis

September 14, 1943
Shibutani

General

I went down to the cafeteria of the Y Hotel, and found out that Ed Yoshikawa was passing through on his way to Chicago. He was working there and had gone home to see his parents in Rohwer. He dropped in at the Hotel to see Henry Kusama who was working here. He was leaving on the train tonight. I ran into him as we were eating and he was with Dick Shimasaki and another young fellow who were also headed for Chicago.

Ed Said, "The camp was dull as anything. All the young people are gone, and it's no fun anymore. We hit there when there was some activity because of the segregation, but otherwise it's dull as hell. We had a peaceful camp. We didn't have any trouble at all except with the Hawaiians. They were the ones who got arrested after Pearl Harbor and they're really pro-Japan. I think that they just took a notion to beat up a few Nisei before they headed for Tule. There are only some young girls left--just high school kids. In a way, they're just right for breaking in, but I don't want to do it in Rohwer where you might get in dutch."

Dick remarked, "Chicago is a hell of a place. The only good thing about it is that everybody minds his own business and doesn't ask if you're a Jap or not."

About 10:30 at night Tsuyoshi Itano came in looking for the fellows. They rushed over to the station to see them off, but came back in about a half hour and said that they couldn't find the fellows.

Field Notes: St. Louis

September 15, 1943
Shibutani

General

I went out to dinner with Ken Iwata. While we were eating, he remarked, "I don't think that evacuation was so bad for the Nisei, after all. I know that it gets you mad to think about it, but just think about all the good it has done. It was hard on the old folks, but it's giving us more opportunities than we ever had before. All the Nisei are getting to travel around and they are getting to see the country. They have better jobs than they ever had before. Just think, a lot of guys are getting away from their families for the first time, and that's good for them. I'm satisfied with things as they are. It's not so bad. I'd like to finish school, but if I don't I'd like to get into the Air Corps."

While we were eating in the Chinese restaurant, I happened to look up and caught the eye of a fellow sitting in the middle of the room. It was George Kaneda from Stockton. We both jumped up and rushed to each other. It was really swell to see him again after all these years, although we never did get along so well. He said that he was working in Chesterfield with about 80 other fellows. "The place ain't so good, but what the hell! I'm earning a living and it's better than camp. I can't think of other places to go until my whole family goes somewhere. It's not too bad out there. We come in town now and then and raise hell, so it's not too boresome."

Ken remarked later, "I'd like to go to Marquette. There aren't any good schools open in engineering. I'm taking 26 units now at the U. because I want to be sure to get out. I think it's better for me to get my training now rather than after the war because you can't tell what's going to happen then. I want to have something to offer when the war is over."

Interview: St. Louis
Sept. 11, 1943
Shibutani

Mr. Arno Haack

"I think the situation is much better here in St. Louis than in Chicago and I suspect that one reason why this is so, is that the WRA policy is sound even though the director's personality is not. Whatever else may be said about Mr. Kennedy, whom I gather you know by now is very unpopular among the nisei, you can say this for him, he is very careful in checking on jobs and then makes sure that it is satisfactory before going ahead to make arrangements. He is also very careful about the kind of people that he allows to come here. You see, the basic difference in WRA policy between here and Chicago is that the aim here is not to get everybody out of the centers but to do an exceptionally good jobs on those few who are out. Doing a good job includes not only occupational adjustment but also housing and social adjustment. On this score I think that Mr. Kennedy is doing an exceedingly good job.

"My group here consisting of the Church Federation and the YMCA, is handling most of the housing while the WRA is doing all the job placement. I think that the major problem here is housing and it is not so much because of discrimination against the nisei. The main thing is, and I think that most people will agree with me, that furnished rooms were always rare in St. Louis. There are plenty of unfurnished rooms and houses for sale, but that is not what the resettlers want. There are all kinds of places for sale, but I fear that the real estate agents might complain if the nisei bought houses. I am interested in trying to get the nisei attached to St. Louis so much that they will stay here after the war. I want them to like it here and think of it as their home. As far as buying is concerned, I think that there may be some difficulties. When Professor Obata

first came here he had some difficulty in finding a house. I don't know what it was, but it was extremely difficult for me to get a place for him. We finally found a house which was not quite up to his demands but satisfactory nonetheless, and we had a little difficulty with the real estate man. When I found out that a real estate company was handling the negotiation, I went to see the real owner and talked to him myself. When I had explained everything, the real owner said he didn't care who bought the house and told the agent that. When Obata bought the house they thought that there might be some trouble with the neighbors, so I found two people in the neighborhood who were active church members and asked them to be responsible for taking Obata around and introducing him to the neighbors. Those two people did an excellent job and so far as I know, Obata is now quite happy, working as a commercial artist.

"We don't have anyone doing any defense work here. We had one fellow who got his master's degree in architecture here for a test case. He applied for a job at a defense plant and was turned down by the man who was in charge of internal protection. When I went to see this man, he told me that he personally did not care whether this young nisei (Arthur Iwata, see Field Notes, Sept. 12, 1943) went to work at the plant or not, but he was afraid of something else. He pointed out that the plant was full of crack pot super-patriots who were just short-sighted enough to get mad. He said that he could not afford to have any trouble in the plant because they were behind in schedule anyway and therefore did not want to do anything that would cause friction among the personnel. Now, when a man is turned down for a reason like that and not out of blind prejudice, I think that I was justified in accepting the refusal.

"I think that a good deal of what we see depends upon what we are looking for. If we start on the assumption that everything will be all right, we won't make the error of misinterpreting things for something ~~idea~~ diabolical. You take the case of this young architect. He could easily have taken that instance as racial discrimination and could have been very hurt, but when I explained it to him he understood perfectly.

"We are planning to have a program of assimilation through large organizations. We will have many committees and each committee will be responsible for their own group of evacuees. We shall try to disperse them on the basis of common interests. The nisei here are, on the whole, of a very high calibre. We have had good publicity through a series of good contacts. There was one bad editorial but when I went to see the man who wrote it, I found out that the whole editorial board was against him so I managed to patch things up right away. Because of this publicity I think that acceptance will be fairly easy."

Field Notes : St. Louis
Sept. 11, 1945
Shibutani

Arthur Iwata

"I sure had a helluva time after graduation. I got my master of architecture here but I can't get any better ~~than~~ job than the lousy one I have now. I went all over and wrote to the WRA, all over the east, but they got me this crummy job as a draftsman. Hell, a high school graduate could do this work. And here I am with a master's degree doing the same job for 50 cents an hour.

"I was a test case, you know. I was the first man to try for a defense work here in St. Louis. I had all the qualifications of the job, but I was refused because of race prejudice. I don't know what's wrong with this damn WRA. One reason why I can't go ahead is that they're so damn slow in getting a joint board clearance for me. Arno would really go to bat for me if the clearance came. But Kennedy is so damn slow that I guess it's no use. I talked to some of the other fellows but they say they're not even going to try because they know better. This country is full of hypocrites. They talk about fighting for democracy and they won't give a qualified man a job. I'm not asking to be manager, I know I just got out of school, but I should be able to get a better job than just drawing."

Apparently Iwata and Mr. Haack did not quite understand each other. If Iwata's life history is desired, I can write it up since I've known him since childhood.

Field Notes: St. Louis

September 12, 1943
Shibutani

Arthur Iwata

"Did you know that I got stuck in jail here? I took a picture of the smoke stack on the campus and it turned out that there was a cyclotron under it. After I got arrested I realized what a damn fool I had been and realized my error. It was really nothing but I can understand why some people would get excited about it. I was held for four hours in the County jail. The interesting thing came up when I was booked. When we got to the black "White or Colored", the guy didn't know what to put down. He left it blank and later got hell from the captain for it. The captain didn't know what to do either and they left it blank.

"I guess St. Louis is as good a place as any. My main problem now is to take care of the family. I guess the folks are going to stay in although I don't know for sure. My sisters want to go out to go to school, but I don't want them to come here because there are too many Nisei here already. I don't think it's so good to have too many in one place. I think there are about as many Nisei here as anywhere else in the country. Others schools have smaller quotas, don't they?

"After the war I guess I'll stay here if it's O.K. But I think that I want at least a decent chance to get ahead. I'm not going to hang around here to be kicked around like we have been. I told you about my job didn't I? It's just racial discrimination and that sort of thing doesn't help any.

"We have race problems here too. I feel sorry for the poor Niggers; they get tossed around a lot. The Jews are after us. Did I tell you about the Jew that tried to throw us out of our place? They went to the real estate company and told them that the neighborhood for for Caucasians only, and the company tried to talk to the lady who took us in. The lady backed us up and told them she would fight it out with them, and nothing more happened after that. It's the Jews, that's what it is."

Field Notes
Sept. 10, 1943
Shibutani

Theodore Ono

"I'm really at a quandry and don't know what to do. I've talked to all my friends and I've been in to see Arno (Mr. Haack) a couple of times but I still can't make up my mind. Maybe you can help me.

"I got an offer from Albion, Michigan to do some social work. And I have to answer right away because if I take the job, they want me to start working immediately. I'm supposed to lead a bunch of kids in athletics and get some advance training while I'm there. Most people advise me against taking it because they found that the school was not accredited. But I really don't care about the accrediting because I'm in econ and don't intend to make social work my career anyway. I can't get into a decent law school so I just want a job for the time-being until the war is over. I think I'm kind of lucky because I have no training in social work but they're offering me the job anyway. It's going to pay \$80 a month plus room and board. And I think that's pretty good. There's only one thing that's keeping me back, and that is, that there are so many people here who are so nice to me that I hate to leave. It's really nice here in St. Louis and if I can, I'd like to get a job here. The bad thing is that I have to make up my mind right away. That's why I don't know what to do.

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"I don't think that the Negro problem is related at all to the problem of nisei. It may be a difference in degree but it's so great a difference that there is very little in common. The discrimination against the Negro is much more set and I can't see anything in common. Doi doesn't agree with me, but I think he's crazy."

Field Notes: St. Louis
Sept. 11, 1943
Shibutani

George Sakaguchi

"December the 7th was a nightmare for me. I was working with a construction crew on an air base in Fresno. We were working on Sundays because we had to bget the work done and I was standing around with a bunch of fellows waiting for a treuk to come back. We were just bull shitting is around there when one of the guys said, "Turnon the radio, George," Just as I turned it on, the news came over about the Japs attacking Pearl Harbor. Boy, I just froze where I was. I couldn't believe it. And all the people gathered around and listened. God, I felt like hell. We couldn't work for a while but pretty soon the foreman came up to me and told me that I'd better lay off and told the other guys to go back to work. I stood around for a while when the Captain came along in a jeep and asked me what the hell I was doing there. I told him I worked there and he got mad as hell and kicked me off. I went home and my family had already heard the news and everybody was sick.

"I used to go around with four hakujin fellows and so the next day the five of us went and volunteered for the air corps. We were all called in January and now the four other guys are overseas, one's a captain and the other three are loodies. When I was taking my basic training everybody was all right to me, but one day after about three months the commander of the field came in and told me that there was one instructor who refused to teach me to fly so he said he had to let me go. They gave me an honorable discharge and put me on reserve. Hell, the other reserves are getting paid and I haven't gotten a ~~darn~~ cent. I'm not going back unless they take ~~me~~ into the air corps. I got my basic tra ning and that's all I'm interest~~ed~~g in doing."

Field Notes: St. Louis
Sept. 11, 1943
Shibutani

Saturday Night Dance

George and I arrived at the Christ Church about 8:30 and after registering with the girl on the first floor, took the elevator up to the third. There were a few nisei and Caucasians around and the one Caucasian man, who was on the committee, was taking the other Caucasian around to get them to mix with the nisei. The Caucasians all seemed to be church people and they were exceedingly friendly. I noticed cliques of nisei standing around on the east side near the walls and talking. Some were playing ping pong in a side room while other groups monopolized the bridge tables and were playing cards. The girls stood around among themselves until more men arrived and broke up the group. By 10 o'clock there were about 50 nisei, 20 of whom were girls. Doi and a few others who were on the committee, were mingling in and introducing all the newcomers to the various groups without much success. The dancing began about 10:30 to the music of a phonograph, with both soft music and jitter-bugging. The Caucasians sat together and talked and three of the Negroes remained very much to themselves. One Negro girl was dancing with a nisei. I talked to several of the people to whom Doi introduced me and asked them during the course of conversation why they came. And the most common answer was "curiosity".

Matsu Mayewaki, a distant relative of Tomi's, showed up. She was the only girl wearing a hat and heels. She stated that she liked St. Louis very much and that this was the first time that she had come to the dance. She stated that she did not care to dance and came merely out of curiosity.

At 11 o'clock the girl in charge put out the lights and after a series of groans and cat calls everyone left in small cliques.

Field Notes: St. Louis

September 13, 1943
Shibutani

George Sakaguchi

"Doris quit work today after four months. There was nothing wrong with the job and she says so. She just had words with the lady and I guess they had quite a beef. Just before she left the house, the lady said, 'Well, Doris, I wish you a lot of luck.' Doris turned around and said, 'You don't really mean that, do you?' Then they had a big fight. God damnit, Doris is just like a little kid. She thinks she's grown up, but she isn't. She doesn't know about the responsibility she has.

"Doi thinks that she is tired of menial jobs and wants to get places, but I think it's her own damn fault. She just thinks she's grown up and she's just a little kid, that's all.

"When I found out about this I called up the boss and told him, 'Well, I guess you hate all Japs now, don't you.' He was nice. He said he understood and said, 'You'll come over anyway, won't you? I want you to know that we are still friends and we'll be looking forward to seeing you again.' I felt better after that. I didn't want Doris bitching up the chances of other Nisei around here. That kind of thing might wreck our reputation.

"The Jews are the ones you have to watch out for. Those ku-ichi's are no good. They live on and look after their own skins; they don't give a damn about anything else."

(The Nisei refer in a derogatory fashion to the Jews as ku-ichi. Ju is the Japanese word for "ten". Ku means "nine" and ichi means "one". Nine and one make ten or ju (Jew).)

Field Notes: St. Louis
Shibutani

Dick Sato

Sept. 11, 1943

"I just got out of welding school and I have to have a job pretty soon because my finances are running low. I know of a place in Chicago where I could work for \$1.50 an hour but I've been there and know what ef a helluva place it is. That's why I want to try to get a job here in St. Louis first and if I can't get one, maybe I'll try somewhere else. It's really swell here and I don't want to leave if I can help it."

Sept. 13, 1943

"I just talked to a guy about a job and I got one here. It only pays 85 cents an hour and it's the same kind of work but I took it. I'm glad I'm going to be able to stay here."