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*Brief History of Poston.*



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Poston, Arizona

Camp # 3

October 24, 1942

### The History of Poston April to October 1942, and Early History

Poston is the largest of the War Relocation Centers for the Japanese from the west coast military zone. It is in the Colorado River Indian Reservation in Arizona on the California border. It is 17 miles from Parker, a town of some 800 population. It is the third largest city of Arizona, and is named for Charles D. Poston, first territorial delegate, "Father of Arizona." It is under the administration of the Indian Service, Department of the Interior.

In 1855 Lieutenant Ives made an army report to Congress on the fertile land of the Parker Valley. Indians lived here. Up to the construction of the Boulder Dam, they planted each spring or early summer, following the annual flooding of the valley from the overflow of the river. In 1864 Colonel Charles D. Poston suggested to Congress that this "great Valley of the Colorado" be an Indian Reservation and that the government should assist the Indians in building a canal so that they might be self supporting. Congress appropriated large sums of money for the canal in 1867 and 1868 but it did not succeed. In 1898 an irrigation system by pumping was put in. This was used until the first canal was completed in June 1942.

The Hualapai Indians came in for a while from the country northeast and as far as the south rim of the Grand Canyon, but soon left. The Mojave Indians were the tribe that settled in the valley. The Parker Dam was built sixteen miles from Parker for the Los Angeles water supply, in 1939. It consumes 1/64th of the flow of the river. Headgate Rock Dam two miles above Parker is the one used for the Indian Reservation and also will consume about 1/64th. Since Boulder Dam there is no overflow.

In April 1942 Poston was a mosquito wilderness, and was cleared of trees and brush and opened with the arrival of the first Japanese on May 11. It was a city of dust, without a tree or blade of grass planted. The Parker Valley has some of the richest land in the world, being comparable to the Valley of the Nile. There are 41,000 acres of first class land, covered with overflows of silt from the Colorado River. By plans for the first year's crop, this land will be cultivated to raise vegetables covering 20,000 acres. There will be hogs raised also.

The Japanese here came from central California Mainly, San Diego, Los Angeles, Riverside, Imperial Valley, and Southern Arizona. They have been arriving in groups of 500 and 1,000 since early in May, and now number 18,000. There are some 6,000 children. The Japanese in America consist of four groups; the Issei who were born in Japan: the American born and educated in Japan - the Kibei: and the largest group, the Nisei, the American born and educated. The Sunsei are the second generation born here. The Japanese children in America have attended the Japanese language schools, held daily, after the American school hours,

At Poston the people are given work to do as far as possible. Unskilled work receives \$12.00 a month, skilled \$16.00 and executive or



professional \$19.00. Housing, food water, electricity and heat are furnished free to all, whether they work or not. The administration buildings are cooled in summer with an electric revolving fan and water. This keeps the room at about 80 degrees. The heat of summer reaches about 120 degrees. The rain fall is about three inches a year. The altitude is 470 feet above sealevel. The water supply at present for some of the camps comes from wells, where irrigation ditches are not yet complete.

Coyotes howl in the mesquite at night around clearing. There are wolves, wild cats, foxes, the hila monster, forty varieties of lizards, weasels, kangaroo rats, mice and not least - rattle snakes, other snakes and scorpions. There are crows, buzzards, and migratory birds. In the river are large turtles, and several varieties of fish. White herons are abundant along the banks, and by some of the canals, and road runners cross our paths frequently.

The reservation is 50 by 14 miles. The Japanese know they must stay within the area. The surrounding desert would not allow survival. They have no automobiles. They live as a peaceful community and the jail is not in use though existing. Of course there are concentration camps in other places where the unruly ones have been sent. Army cots have been provided and they have made furniture from the large piles of scrap lumber throughout the community, left from building the barracks. They have their own radios.

The camps are three miles apart, Camp # 1, Camp # 2, Camp # 3. The community life is well organized. There is a police force, an fire department, mess halls, for every block, and recreation halls, separate buildings for wash room, laundries, ironing rooms, and school barracks beside the barracks for families. These are divided into rooms large enough for a family. There is a large hospital at Camp # 1. The doctors are nearly all Japanese. Each camp has hospital unit. Each block has a block manager, with an office, headquarters for mail, community repairs, notices, and all general purposes. Each camp has a post office, Poston, a branch of Phoenix. There are three canteens in each camp and they are limited general stores. Moving pictures are shown outside once a week and ball games held daily in the large open spaces. There is a large open airstage with tin can light reflectors. Seats to all the performances are brought by individuals.

The school opened on October 5. Most of the rooms have tables and some are yet to come. School books have been donated for camp libraries, and there is also a public library for each camp. The school classes are through the high school, and adult school which is often carried on by the Japanese and will increase through the regular school. There are just two groups in the whole population, distinguished as Caucasians and as Japanese. We are now the "Caucasians." The Press-Bulletin is the daily paper. There are Buddhist church services.

In community life Poston where no one had resided for a period of more than a few months, new-commers soon become oldtimers.



On October 17, 18, and 19 the first county fair was held. As Camp # 1 was the first to be settled, there were exhibits of arts and crafts made in the summer as well as ornamental pieces of furniture made from the mesquite trees. There are original at Poston and resemble some of gnarled and knotted pieces imported from the Orient. The wood is extremely hard, and a light color. The bark has been removed and the very smooth and strangely shaped roots, trunks or branches give an endless variety of forms, twists and angles.

The fair showed what can be raised in a few months at Poston in private gardens. There were beautiful vegetables, melons, and a few flowers. Some have vines growing over their roof tops. Rock gardens and miniature gardens were notable at the fair, and some artificial paper flowers. Architectural plans for landscaping the community and adobe school buildings show a bright future along with the agricultural development.

Every Saturday night the school bus takes all the teachers who want to go to Parker for the evening. The stores are still open and it is our only chance to shop aside from the camp canteens. Last Saturday we went to the U.S.O. at the church which is fundamentally methodist but mostly non-denominational. The large pine wood recreation hall is made into the U.S.O. and is the one nice place in Parker to go and sit. The minister made us very welcome the Saturday night before. Last time there were new soldiers there and he seemed to be glad to have some one to help entertain them. The streets in Parker on Saturday night are filled with Indians and soldiers and sprinkling of the regular population.

Teaching at Poston seems to be an extremely interesting experience. The Japanese are industrious, ingenious and artistic. The children have attended American schools and act like Americans. They have acquired the good and bad habits of our own children. We find the Japanese teachers delightful to work with the very companionable and clever students themselves. It is a privilege for us to be away from the world-at-war and yet to be doing a war time project. All our plans are for the post war period and if peace-time subjects. We feel that our lives are constructive and that the results can begin when peace is declared, while here at Poston developments are so quick that it is sometimes difficult to keep up with them.

P.S.

At the fair another thing found only at Poston was a long line of "queens," in full length gowns made from pastel shades of curtain material, designed by the home-making classes. The queen chosen from the three camps led the line, which inspected the exhibits while the crowd inspected them. The queen was dressed in a white rayon full length gown. On one ever saw more beautiful girls that were chosen for this beauty contest. The coronation ball was held at night before the fair opened.