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RECORDS MANAGEMENT FINAL REPORT  
Washington, D. C.

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Collins ✓

The War Relocation Authority was established by Executive Order 9102, dated March 18, 1942. Since the evacuation of the Japanese-Americans and Japanese aliens was from the west coast states, headquarters was established in the regional office at San Francisco and a skeleton force was on duty in Washington, D. C.

The War Relocation Authority was a program which sprung into existence suddenly -- with so much to be organized with so little help, the organization of a Mails and Files set-up was delayed. Definite instructions or Mails and Files thinking was forgotten in the rush of other business. The Regional Director at San Francisco was insistent that a strong Mails and Files be set up, and it was because of his interests and insistence that the San Francisco office forged its way ahead to organize an efficient Mails and Files unit.

It was not until May 1942 two months after the establishment of the War Relocation Authority, before the setting up of a Mails and Files system in the San Francisco office got under way. The Stenographer's Manual, as issued by Office of Emergency Management was distributed in an effort toward uniform preparation of all communications.

In June 1942 a mimeographed manual dated May 30 was distributed to the Regional staff and to the projects within the region with copies furnished the Denver, Little Rock and Washington offices, indicating the procedure to be followed in those offices. (See Exhibit I -- Manual of May 30)



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After a short trial period, representatives of the Regional Office Mails and Files unit visited the Gila, Tule, Manzanar, Central Utah and Minidoka projects to discuss with the office managers the manual and code outline and go over details of office management in an effort to set up central files systems that would correspond to that in effect in the Regional Office at San Francisco.

Up to this time no concrete instructions were yet issued by the Washington Office. However, general instructions on correspondence and a style manual were issued which were somewhat patterned after the San Francisco Regional Office's Manual of May 30. This was Administrative Instruction No. 15, dated June 30, 1942.

Coincident with Mails and Files representatives visiting the projects, another representative came to Washington bringing along a copy of the May 30 manual with a view to introducing it, with any necessary revisions and additions, as a uniform method of handling mails and files throughout the Authority. This suggestion met with opposition, and as a result, Washington issued an outline on October 9, 1942, patterned closely after the one used in the Agriculture Department. This outline was distributed to all offices in the Authority causing conflict and confusion. The projects in the San Francisco region were instructed to follow the outline as issued by San Francisco since they had up to this time been following the procedure.

On December 15, 1942, the War Relocation Authority was re-organized and the operations of the San Francisco Regional Office



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ceased. The head of Mails was transferred to Washington and became head of the Office Management Section. This Section consisted of Mails and Files, chauffeur service, office space, office supplies and forms, furniture and equipment, mimeographing and distribution services.

Because of lack of personnel and gross misunderstanding of procedure, this Section was not functioning properly. Divisions and sections were not cooperating with central files, records material was scattered throughout the various offices. The Reports Division was keeping copies of instructions, administrative notices, policy statements and all other documents which should properly have been in central files. Complaints were many as a result of this inefficiency. Mail was not being answered properly as there was no file control and needed information was not readily accessible.

On July 12, 1943, the Head of the Reports Division in a memorandum to the Executive Offices, realizing that immediate action should be taken to correct the deplorable condition of the file control system, made recommendation for the establishment of a Records Management Section.

At this point, a representative of Central Administrative Services was assigned to make a survey of the Records of the War Relocation Authority. From this survey it was recommended that the Authority establish a Records Officer position -- the officer to be responsible for the records management of the entire Authority, field as well as headquarters.



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In late September of 1943 the Records Management Section was established and a Records Officer appointed to head this Section. Many of the office manager duties heretofore performed in this Section were transferred to the Procurement Unit, and the Records Section was left with the responsibility for the records program. The Security files which had been maintained by the Archivist in the Reports Division were transferred to the Records Officer. All material which was maintained by the Archivist also were transferred to the Records Section with the exception of the library material and the photographic file. Files in the offices of the Authority were cleaned out and the material transferred to the Records Section for inclusion in the central files.

The Security files were completely rearranged and set up in folders by subject matter. Considerable time was spent in locating missing material and getting it in the files and in revising the file code to fit the work. The records transferred from the San Francisco Regional Office were closed out as they were occupying space needed for current file material. It was at this time that the War Relocation Authority started working with the National Archives in working out schedules for the disposition of records from the San Francisco Office no longer of use. The National Archives furnished the War Relocation Authority with material from other governmental agencies on records management activities.

Early in 1944 it was announced that the first relocation center was to be closed -- this was the Jerome Relocation Center at Denson, Arkansas. In April of 1944 the Records Officer was sent



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to Jerome to make a survey of the files material and to make recommendations for the guidance of the office manager for the actual closing of that center. This was a most difficult assignment because at this time concrete instructions or procedures had not been devised for the disposition of records. A tour of the various offices throughout the center revealed that there was almost complete duplication of material in all the offices. Individual evacuee records had to be consolidated so that the records would be transferred with the evacuees to whichever other center they were to be sent. June of 1944, the time set for the closing of the center, found nothing accomplished toward the cleaning out, consolidation, packing for transfer of the files as had been recommended in the Records Officer's report on the survey made in April of 1944. A hurried last minute trip to the Jerome Center by the Records Officer was necessary because of the failure of the Jerome staff to carry on this work. It took the Records Officer a month of manual labor, and because there were no disposal schedules, it also took good common sense and on-the-spot decisions as to the material which was to be destroyed and which was to be retained for the records.

With all the difficulties encountered at the Jerome closing fresh in the minds of the Records Officer and the Executive Officer, the first step taken on their return to Washington was the scheduling with Archives of the many medical forms used in the center hospitals. This too was a most difficult job because of the reluctance of the Health Division to concede to the disposition of many of their records.



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Due to the experience with the closing of the Jerome Center, it was suggested to the Director of the War Relocation Authority that traveling positions in Records be established and that representatives of the Records Section be sent to the various other centers for the purpose of strengthening the central files with a view to the eventual closing of the other centers. An orientation course was developed in the Washington office to familiarize the representatives with procedures on closure and the varied problems which would probably encounter them at the centers.

In July of 1944 the first traveling position in Records was established. The Records Officer and the Files Analyst then began an all-out program on the scheduling of field records. Administrative Notice #199 dated December 16, 1944, was prepared which called for an inventory of all War Relocation Authority field records. The important object of this survey was to establish clearly the identity of WRA's records in order for the Records staff to establish a practical policy and procedure to control the orderly disposal and/or retirement of WRA records. Informational material was distributed throughout the Authority on the functions and services performed by the National Archives.

During this same period the Records staff made a review of all forms used by the Authority and memoranda were prepared to the various division and section heads in the Washington office asking for their recommendations on the disposition of the records. An



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effort was made to discuss the records with the people who had created them and understood them in order to ascertain their administrative, legal, research, or other value. Due to lack of interest and the pressure of other work, many of the original recommendations given the Records Officer had to be changed. Disagreement between various officials concerning the retention periods and the ultimate disposition of the records caused many delays. After months of steady work with the various officials and on the basis of the information thus obtained and the knowledge gained from the field survey, disposal schedules were prepared covering a majority of the records. Many delays were encountered in obtaining clearance for the schedules -- under the pressure of more important and urgent business concerning relocation, War Relocation Authority officials laid the schedules aside and sometimes forgot them entirely.

During the entire time the Records Officer and the Files Analyst were working toward the preparation of the schedules. Dr. Lewinson of the National Archives devoted much time and gave invaluable assistance in the actual preparation of the schedules, suggested retention periods, and type of instructions to be issued which would be most effective in order to carry out an orderly records program.

In December of 1944 the first manual release was issued covering the aims of the records management program, legal requirements, definition of records, disposition of non-record material and the responsibilities for the organization, management and



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disposal of records at the various levels of organization. Also during December Ruth Hogan, the Files Analyst, made field trips to the Rohwer Center and the Little Rock office.

During this visit the records program was discussed in detail with the office manager and other staff members at Rohwer and the old Field Assistant Director files in Little Rock were completely weeded of non-record material and the balance shipped to Washington.

Early in 1945 the exclusion orders were lifted and the primary emphasis of the entire Authority was more than ever on relocation. In order to assist Relocation Program Officers in drawing up relocation plans, Manual Release 179 dated March 7, 1945, was issued calling for a central individual file for each resident at the center. In April of 1945 Miss Hogan was sent to the Gila and Poston centers for the purpose of impressing on center personnel the importance of early planning, looking to the time when centers would begin to close. Even as early as this, we realized that everything was important at the centers -- except records. They appreciated all the work that was done during the visit but always felt records work was something that could be left until last -- and as soon as the Records representative departed, all work stopped. Another File Analyst was added to the Records Staff during this period and with the approval of disposal schedules by Archives and Congress, Manual Release No. 194 dated May 25, 1945, was issued. This release covered all records authorized for disposal up to that time and primarily covered individual evacuee



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records. In brief, the procedure outlined in this release called for the gathering by the Statistics Section of all Sections' records pertaining to an individual evacuee who had left the center prior to the effective date of the release. Upon consolidation in the Statistics Section, after non-record and authorized record material had been disposed of, shipments were to start to Washington. Exceptions were made of certain welfare forms and Internal Security case records. This program encountered snags -- Evacuee Property cases were being audited by the Field Examination Section, and offices were apprehensive about forwarding their cases to Washington and reluctantly agreed to do so. Relocation Centers and Area relocation offices not audited by the Field Examination Section were instructed to retain their files. The effective date for shipments to begin was tentatively set for October 1, 1945. The Examiners were slow in audited evacuee property cases, and most of the centers and area office retained their files until center closure at which time they were included in Statistics' collection of individual records.

After much discussion and correspondence, the University of California Library at Berkeley, California, was designated the primary repository for War Relocation Authority documentary records on the evacuee phase of our program -- the first copies going to the National Archives and all surplus copies to Berkeley. Administrative Notice No. 314 dated October 4, 1945, was issued, listing the types of material to be shipped to the repository and designated clearing



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houses for certain restricted material before shipment to Berkeley. This release gave instructions regarding method of shipment, collection of material, and also stated the terms of the transfer. The University of California Library agreed to service other libraries until January 1, 1948. Individual records of evacuees were to be deposited only in the National Archives and none were made available to the repositories. The Columbia University Libraries of New York City was designated the repository for documentary records of the Fort Ontario Refugee Shelter. Individual records were also precluded from shipments to the Columbia Universities.

In May of 1945 completed individual exclusion case files were called into the Washington Office from Boston, Seattle, Cleveland, Little Rock, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York for consolidation and future transfer to the National Archives.

Manual Release No. 197 dated July 23, 1945, was issued dealing with the disposition of Engineering records. Original engineering and architectural plans of buildings and utilities at each center were to be forwarded to Washington and upon termination of the Authority, transferred to the agency taking custody of the respective centers. Large scale detail drawings, obsolete and extra copies were authorized for disposal, and certain drawings were to be left with the center custodian. Manual Release No. 197 also outlined the procedure dealing with preparation and storage of



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record material on the centers.

Manual Release No. 199 dated August 8, 1945, listed the bulk of Finance forms authorized for disposal and indicated the time for disposal for these forms. The schedule supplemented the exhibit issued with Manual Release No. 194. Finance Sections were urged to take immediate steps to prepare their inactive record material for storage.

Manual Release No. 205 covered disposition of existing personnel record material in centers, field offices and the Washington office. This release, issued September 3, 1945, instructed Personnel Management Sections at all centers to handle current inactive personnel files for employees whose services are terminated as follows:

1. Dispose of personnel correspondence, including confidential, as covered in Section 20.8.77.
2. Dispose of record material authorized in this release, and non-record material in accordance with Manual paragraph 20.8.32A.
3. Consolidate remaining material in each employee's personnel folder.
4. Arrange inactive personnel folders in alphabetical order for shipment to Washington.
5. Prepare a transmittal letter in an original and two copies listing by surname all employees whose files are being sent.



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Correspondence which should be destroyed and that which should be retained at each office of the War Relocation Authority was also described. Offices were instructed to mark correspondence authorized for disposal. Personnel offices were also instructed to consolidate permanent material into an individual evacuee or personnel folder; hold with applicable fiscal transaction file in Finance or forward for consolidation into a central file.

In July of 1945 the Records Officer and Files Analyst Mrs. Black made a field trip to the Minidoka Relocation Center to assist with their records program. Manual releases were being misinterpreted and clarification was necessary. The Statistics Section was experiencing difficulty in collecting individual records. Many folders were in circulation but were being neglected in the understaffed offices. Certain sections felt their offices were exempt from the collection and were not processing envelopes.

Central Utah Relocation Center was later visited by the Records Officer and the Files Analyst where basically the same work was done. Little interest was shown towards records disposition at the centers during this time. Evacuees who had efficiently handled file systems had relocated and appointed personnel replacing them knew little of what had gone on before their arrival and cared less.



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A survey of the records program was made at the Granada Relocation Center by the Records Officer. Non-record material in storage was disposed of and Office Service functions were streamlined by changes suggested by the Records Officer, such as forwarding individual evacuee correspondence to Statistics for inclusion into their files, decreasing the number of copies made of telegrams, teletypes, etc. Marking of material in central files was also begun at this time. Relocation remained the first order of business, and after that came property disposition work, writing of final reports, and finally, the records disposition program. Evacuee property files were consolidated with contraband and transportation files and held for auditing by the Field Examination Section. Education's cumulative records, with the exception of a few centers, were collected by the Statistics envelopes. School transcripts or other school records on individual evacuees were first forwarded to the Education Section in Washington for preliminary work on them. Transcripts were held by the Education Section and forwarded to schools as requested. After War Relocation Authority expired, the remaining transcripts were transferred to the U. S. Office of Education who agreed to handle all requests and inquiries regarding credits, courses, etc. Community Analysis files which included reports and other material were shipped to the Community Analysis Section in Washington who assumed the responsibility for completing the files for National Archives for



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that type of material and for sending the available surplus of such material to the University of California Library.

Complete sets of monthly financial statements (Forms WRA-233 and WRA-234), semi-annual and annual financial statements, audit reports, monthly, quarterly and annual Combined Financial Statements and Comparative Operational Charts, Articles of Incorporation, By-laws, Agreements between Business Enterprises and WRA and other legal documents, booklets, pamphlets, souvenir albums, business or educational material that may have research value were compiled by the Washington and New York Business Enterprises Offices.

Business Enterprise records, maintained by the management of Business Enterprises in the centers, such as Journals, Ledgers, Membership Accounts and other books of original entry as well as copies of Articles of Incorporation, By-laws and other legal documents, financial statements and audit reports, were turned over to the elected trustees on dissolution of the corporation. All other records in possession of Business Enterprise management in the centers, such as invoices, vouchers of cash receipts and payments, cancelled checks, departmental transfer records and ordinary business correspondence were authorized for disposal. Co-op records at the centers which were not turned over to the elected trustees were destroyed at center closure. The Jerome Co-op records which were stored at Rohwer were destroyed when Rohwer closed.



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Transfer of individual personnel records to the National Archives upon termination of the Agency was disapproved for the reason that transfer at that date did not appear practicable. It was felt that these records would be active for about a year after termination and could not be considered non-current.

A sampling of welfare narrative records was made in each center. These were sent in separately and the survey was conducted by center welfare staff members and not by the files analysts.

The quantity of left-over records at some centers was heavy due primarily to incorrect filing, misspelling of names and insufficient identifying information. These records were sent to Washington in alphabetical order and were filed into Statistic's central evacuee files.

Four additional files analysts were added to the Records Management Staff. Their first three weeks were spent in Granada learning records disposition procedures. Two files analysts had spent an additional two weeks in Granada organizing the gathering of individual evacuee records. Granada was typical of the centers visited by the Records Management staff. It was necessary to consolidate as many as five sets of medical files in each of the centers visited. These files were often in both numerical and alphabetical sequences and the job of setting up one alphabetical set of files was always a long tedious task. The major part of this job was done



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in most of the centers by the files analysts. The backlog of Statistics envelopes which had bogged down in the participating offices was processed by the files analysts and the Records Officer. Meetings were held with division and section heads, and procedures were discussed relative to records disposition in their respective offices. Granada had never maintained a central files, consequently, it was necessary to consolidate each office's files under a subject code. Record material was collected from the offices, and a member of the center staff was assigned to the tremendous job of setting up a central files. Disposable lists of personnel, leave, finance, health, welfare, relocation, and statistics records were made up from disposal schedules issued by the Washington office.

After Granada two teams of two files analysts each visited the remaining centers around center closure to assist in their records program.

Inadequate staff, lack of time, and untrained personnel were a few of the factors which contributed to the slow movement of the program in all centers. In addition to supervising collection of individual records, the files analysts cleaned out office files, weeded out non-record material in storage, determined shipments to go to Berkeley, trained both appointed personnel and evacuees and maintained close supervision over the center's overall records program.



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Manual Release No. 206 dated October 10, 1945, listed the balance of WRA forms authorized for disposal by Congress, a few miscellaneous forms, and instructions for disposition of rationing records. The release also contained instructions for disposal of X-ray films and visual material, including photographs, motion picture films, slides and film strips. X-ray films for center personnel, both appointed and evacuee, whose duties brought them into close contact with patients in hospitals were retained for two years after termination of WRA. Negatives and a print of each WRA photograph, films, and film strips are deposited in the National Archives. Additional prints were shipped to the University of California Library.

On August 6, 1945, Administrative Notice No. 296 was issued listing forms which were designated as permanent at centers and field offices and which were to be preserved in one of the following ways:

1. Consolidated into evacuee record files.
2. Consolidated into appointed personnel files.
3. Consolidated into central files.
4. Prepared and stored.

Forms which had been used in lieu of any form on the list were to be retained or disposed of on the basis authorized for the comparable form.

Urban and farm property inventory cards based upon a survey conducted by a Mr. Adon Poli of Berkeley were shipped to the Washington



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office from the San Francisco Regional Office and transferred to the National Archives.

Center and Area Procurement Records were consolidated with Finance files and complete sets of records were set up in the Finance Offices.

The Records Management staff made return trips to three centers; namely, Central Utah, Colorado River and Tule Lake -- the trip to Central Utah was necessitated chiefly by the center's apparent disregard for the recommendations and instructions left by the Files Analysts and the Records Officer. Two weeks had been spent in training a member of the center staff who was to have carried on the program initiated by the Files Analysts. Lists of every form maintained by each office were made up showing their final disposition. In spite of these careful plans, the program bogged down after the Files Analysts' departure. Tule Lake was visited too far in advance of its closure and only the collection of individual evacuee records and weeding out files of the liquidated offices were attempted during this visit.

Miss Hamade and Mrs. Hirooka later made a trip to Tule Lake near its closure date during which time non-record material was destroyed in the remaining offices, and the remainder sent to Office Services for consolidation and shipment to Washington.



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The final shipment of evacuee records were made to Washington during this time.

As early as May 1, 1945, a release titled "Instructions for Closing a Field Office" was prepared outlining a general plan for closing such offices. This release, however, was never distributed and was used as a basis for a later instruction.

This later release, Administrative Notice No. 339, dated January 28, 1946, and No. 339, Supplement No. 1, dated February 13, 1946, announced the closing dates of the individual district and area relocation offices, with the exception of the New Orleans, San Francisco, Seattle and Los Angeles Area Offices. This notice explained in detail personnel reductions, placement assistance, inventory and disposition of property, records disposition, notification to vendors, and cancellation of contracts.

During the middle of March the records disposition program was begun in the Area offices by the files analysts who weeded the area supervisor's and the district offices' files and consolidated record material under a subject code.

With regards to the records program, district offices were instructed to send all records (individual, general correspondence, evacuee master files, pamphlets, newsletters, and other publications) to the Area Office taking over the territory. Prior to such transfer,



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the district office was instructed to mark all correspondence in accordance with Manual Section 20.8.77. As soon as possible after an Area office ceased to render service to evacuees, the Area Supervisors were directed to consolidate all records in the area, including those received from district offices, disposing of non-records and record material in accordance with Manual Sections 20.8.32 and 20.8.60 to 20.8.93 and Administrative Notice No. 314, and shipping the balance to Washington for further handling.

Timekeeping records, such as Form WRA-350 or Standard Form 70 or 70a, Leave Records; Form OEM 8 or Standard Form 71, Application for Leave; and SF-72 or 72a, Time and Attendance Report were to be forwarded to the Washington Finance and Supply Section when an area office closed. Pending personnel actions were to go to the Washington Personnel Management Section.

On transactions which were pending, copies of obligation documents, receiving reports, invoices, unpaid vouchers, Form WRA-29, Obligation Register for the current quarter and other papers or correspondence relating thereto were to be listed on a transmittal letter and shipped to Washington.

It was necessary for the files analysts to review the files for disposable material although each office had been instructed previously to complete this work by marking correspondence for disposition



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prior to this shipment to their respective area office. Depleted staffs made it compulsory for the files analysts to do the greater part of this work.

Later, the Salt Lake City, Denver, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles Area Offices were visited by the Files analysts who supervised the records program at each office. The Los Angeles records program which was supervised by the Files Analysts to the driving of the last nail into the last box shipped to Washington were the only files which did not necessitate processing in Washington. Other offices shipped a great deal of superfluous material and more or less, made the Washington office a dumping ground for left-over records.

Relocation office address card files on evacuees were turned over to responsible organizations upon the discretion of relocation supervisors. Extra copies of motion picture films were turned over to agencies interested in the welfare and relocation of evacuees. Care was taken to assure that the material was turned over to fully responsible groups with reasonably long-range programs for public education in this field.

The records program throughout the existence of the War Relocation Authority was on the whole good -- for an agency set up practically overnight to carry out an unprecedented program, its



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records management program was considered better than average. The records disposition program received favorable comment from Mr. Solon J. Buck, Archivist, of the National Archives.

Records were found existing for the most part in individual offices and much time was necessarily spent in weeding out such material. As previously stated, little though and supervision had been given to a mails and files system in the offices as individuals had the tendency to maintain their own records. Probably closer supervision over strict compliance to manual regulations on mails and files procedure could have been exerted by the Washington office. However, for many reasons, this was not feasible. It was not possible for the Records Officer, or Office Manager, to make field trips to the centers and relocation offices to supervise the setting up of a mails and files system. It was only during the last year and half of the agency's existence that travel into the field was performed and this with liquidation in mind. The preparation of final reports was one of the reasons for offices retaining their files until the remaining days of center closure. A great deal of backtracking was necessary because of this reluctance to surrender office records. Lack of experienced help in the field, careless disregard of instructions left with center personnel by the Washington Records Management staff because of the heavy personnel turnovers, and manual



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deviations were the major problems faced during the liquidation stages of the WRA Records program.

It is firmly believed that by an intensive effort on the part of a few, the important records are available in easily accessible order. Very little non-record material has been retained and very little record material inadvertently destroyed. Record material from the centers are now preserved in the National Archives and two to three year agency termination records are maintained by the War Agency Liquidation Unit. Oswego case files, War Refugee Board files, photographic records, both motion picture films and photographs, real property survey records, exclusion records, documentary records, and relocation area offices' files have been transferred to the National Archives. The Washington Central files will be boxed during the month of August and transferred to Archives. The boxing of individual evacuee records will also begin approximately August 1st, and will be completed by November 15th. With the exception of a few files withheld from the Washington Central files for the use of the Liquidation Unit, these individual evacuee files will represent the last of the War Relocation Authority records.