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WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

CENTRAL UTAH PROJECT

Topaz, Utah

THE PROVO LABOR CAMP

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PROJECT REPORTS

HISTORICAL SECTION

Chief, Russell A. Bankson

THE PROVO LABOR CAMP

The acute farm labor shortage in Utah County called for action. Accordingly a cooperative arrangement was made between the United States Employment Service, the War Manpower Commission, and the Farm Security Administration in which it was agreed that Farm Security would transfer a mobile farm labor camp from Safford, Arizona, to the city of Provo, located on property owned by the city nine blocks south of the town's center. The camp was transferred during the early spring months.

Mr. William Mildenhall of the U.S.E.S. discussed with Mr. Rex Lee, Relocation Supervisor of the WRA, Salt Lake City the possibilities of filling this camp with Japanese evacuee labor.

During the last week of April, Mr. Mildenhall visited the WRA project at Topaz and discussed this matter with Mr. James F. Hughes, Assistant Project Director; Mr. Claude Cornwall, head of the Employment Division, and Bob Iki, who was then working in the relocation office.

On April 30, Mr. Iki arranged a trip to Salt Lake City in the interest of finding employment for the evacuee volunteers who had been rejected as they did not meet the physical requirements of the combat team. He went to Provo with Mr. Lee on May 1, hoping that arrangements could be made to employ these men and others in the Columbia Steel Mill, then under construction nearby.

During the latter part of April, the possibilities of employ

ment with the mill had been investigated by Mr. Lee. However, subsequent mass meetings of a small minority of the steel mill workers in protest against hiring of evacuee labor forced a temporary halt to this plan.

While Mr. Iki was in Provo, he visited the labor camp, met the camp manager, James Bartlett, and became enthusiastic about the prospects. Upon Mr. Iki's return to the center, Mr. Hughes arranged for a delegation from the Topaz City Council and the block managers to go up and look over the situation. Those who formed the delegation were; Frank Yamasaki, James Hirano, Tamotsu Sakai, Dave Saito, representing the block managers; and Mas Oishi and Masaaki Sakakihara, the Council.

After their return, a meeting was arranged on May 3 in the project which gave an opportunity for Mr. Mildenhall, Mr. Harold J. Mower of the agricultural employment division of the U.S.E.S., representatives of the War Manpower Commission and the farmers of Provo to meet with the Council and the block managers. The details of the camp were explained and the work opportunities in Utah County were announced.

A week later, on Tuesday, May 11, a meeting was called in Block 32 in Topaz with an attendance of about 200 persons. At this time the same group of visitors from Provo explained the opportunities of the Provo camp to the people of Topaz.

Details of the camp set forth at this time by Camp Manager Bartlett revealed that each tent was provided with a wooden floor, four cots, a table, two benches, straw mattresses, and a kerosene

two-burner stove.

He added that cooking would be done on a family basis, but that if the residents so desired, a central dining kitchen would probably be provided.

Other speakers on the program were: S.R. Boswell, Utah County agricultural agent; Clark Allred, District Supervisor of the F.S.A.; Ivan Burr, head of the Fruit Growers' association; Mr. Mildenhall and Mr. Mower.

The message was interpreted to the Japanese-speaking group by James Hirano.

Recruitment for the camp was slow at first. Six people, however, went up with the thought in mind that they would find work, see how it went, and then report back. Their favorable report increased the interest in Provo and a second group was recruited. It was expected that a school bus would be provided for transportation; but instead, an open truck was sent down on May 24. This was very discouraging to the group which had been recruited. However, 23 persons went to the camp.

On May 27, a Utah and Idaho sugar truck was sent to pick up workers. It was decided that this form of transportation was untenable, so the truck returned empty.

There was at this time a severe rainstorm followed by snow which made work impossible with the result that many of those in the camp were left unemployed for a few days. The report of this situation also had a detrimental effect on the recruitment of workers. There were also some differences of inter-

pretation of wages and other misunderstandings.

On June 11, Mr. Hughes went to Provo and met with the representatives of the U.S.E.S. and representatives of the farmers' association. At this meeting, arrangements were made for a basic wage rate. It was agreed that Japanese would receive without any question the government-approved scale for cannery workers. Mr. Hughes received assurances also that there would be a continuity of work and that Japanese would not have periods of idleness. Definite arrangements were also made for passenger transportations by buses rather than trucks previously sent.

It was agreed at this time that Mr. Frank Yamasaki, a Topaz resident, would be loaned to the camp to act as agent for the residents in negotiating with the farmers for work opportunities. Mr. Yamasaki, was also to keep Topaz informed of conditions at the camp, such as the availability of cots and mattresses. Due to the difficulty experienced by the F.S.A. in securing equipment, up-to-date information was necessary for the workers' welfare.

Mr. Yamasaki went to Provo on June 16. This arrangement proved highly satisfactory and a school bus was sent down to the Project on June 17 and returned to Provo with 20 workers. Employment was found for all and the situation became generally satisfactory. Another group of six workers went to Provo on June 24.

F.S.A. was unable to secure cots and mattresses for additional workers. This caused another delay and at Topaz some dissatisfaction with the slow progress. This defect was partially re-

mediated by the securing of a loan of cots from Brigham Young University.

During all this time, however, the farmers were clamoring for help. They appealed to the office of Mr. Lee. This office, realizing that there would be some slowness in recruiting labor at the beginning of the camp, figured that it would be helpful to suggest to a number of unemployed workers who had come to the Salt Lake City office from the sugar beet fields, that they might find work at Provo. The result of this was that they sent down 57 men. Many of these people were forced to sleep on the ground for a short while until additional beds were provided.

It was the thought of Project Director Charles F. Ernst that the camp should not be open to all evacuees, but rather that it should be filled with workers from Topaz and that the WRA at Topaz would arrange to provide social control through the delegation of appointed staff to the camp. With this understanding, it was agreed that no more workers from other centers would be directed to Provo but would be sent to other work.

On June 28, ²⁸28 young men were notified to be ready to go by bus to Provo, as per phone conversation between the Topaz employment office and Mr. Mower's office. Notification cancelling the arrangement came at 11 a.m., before preparation had gone to far.

On Wednesday, June 30, the Topaz relocation committee met to set rules under which young men may leave the Centers for the Provo camp. The following conditions were announced:

1. Children of any age may be established as a family unit with parents.

2. Boys of any age who have graduated from high school go with the approval of their parents.

3. 16 and 17 year old boys may go with a senior member of their family, or with a guardian approved by the parents.

4. Other 16 and 17 year old males may go when an appointed WRA camp counselor has been established at the camp.

5. Any youth 18 years or over may go.

With the closing of school, there is a widespread interest among young men and women 16 years of age and upward. It is felt that the camp could be filled to capacity from this date on under the rules of control which were developed at the project. At first, it was believed that whole families might be encouraged to go to the camp but the interests in this connection have lagged. Those who show the greatest interest are the younger men and women. As yet very few young women have gone to the camp. The rules governing the release of young women are being worked out.

On July 5, Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Hart were appointed to serve as counsellors at the camp.

Approximately 75 workers, mostly young men, are signed up to go to the camp as soon as they can be granted leave to do so.

On the evening of July 6, the Topaz placement again received a call from Mr. Mower, asking that about 25 young men be ready to go by bus on July 7 to Provo.

The placement office sent a truck through the city and gathered the baggage of 23 young men who had been called previously. The baggage was piled in front of the relocation office, ready to be loaded. About 4 p.m., the placement office received a telephone

call from Mr.

call from Mr. Mower stating that the bus was not coming to Topaz. But, just at this time, it started to rain, before the baggage could be moved into the relocation office. The young men's spirits were considerably dampened both by the rain and by the fact that this was not the first, but ~~this~~ ^{THE} second, disappointment. These people finally departed at noon, July 8th.

The shortage of cots and mattresses was over come then the Topaz administration received authority to transfer 200 of each to Provo on July 7.

Charles F. Ernst, project director, accompanied by Mrs. Ernst and Mr. Lorne Bell, head of Community Services, drove to Provo on July 7, going directly to the F.S.A. work camp where they met Mr. and Mrs. Hart by appointment. He introduced them to Camp Manager Bartlett. Frank Yamaseki also joined the party. After lunch Mr. Hart arranged with the district officer of the F.S.A. to have Mr. Allred meet the party at the camp and conduct a tour of inspection.

Mr. Ernst and his party arranged with the U.S.E.S. to have their representatives meet them at 8 o'clock in the F.S.A. office. From three to six, they discussed the entire situation.

It seems that at the present time, there are 116 persons in camp, including one family, three young single women, 44 young men from Minnideka and Manzanar and the rest are men from Topaz, chiefly Nisei.

That very morning 200 cots and mattresses had arrived from Topaz and saved the night for the over-flow that had arrived from Manzanar and Minnideka.

It appears that there is plenty of work for another 50 boys and 75 women. There are enough tents, cots, and mattresses available now and further cots and mattresses will be sent from Topaz; the pay is right; the workers are sufficiently satisfied with camp; but the glaring lack is cooking facilities for providing meals.

It appears that the W.S.A. program ordinarily expected its tenants to arrange for their own individual larder and cooking facilities. Under present conditions of rationed foods and the fact that single people rather than families are at the camp, the only work plan seems to be for a co-operative cooking organization.

The residents, not having their own pots and pans with them at Topaz, are also unable to provide them at the work camp. Also the young people return home long after stores are closed and go to work long before they open.

Up to this date, no one has been able to locate necessary cooking utensils for the Prove camp.

The county agent, Mr. S. R. Boswell, and one of the resident young women went to Eureka, Utah, where they had been told that a restaurant had closed and wanted to sell all or nothing and would not let them pick out individual items. *WANTED TO SELL ITS EQUIPMENT. THEY REPORTED THAT THE OWNER*

It was thought that in addition to pots and pans, that the camp should have a half-ton pick-up truck for the use of the co-op. The truck could be used to go uptown and get the necessary supplies everyday and do other errands of similar nature.

The discussion went into the matter of what Mr. and Mrs. Hart would do and where the line of demarcation would lie between

Mr. Bartlett's and their duties. In general, it was felt that Mr. Bartlett would have the responsibility of running the camp, setting and maintaining standards and providing for the things which the F.S.A. plan included, such as supplies, bedding, laundry, hot and cold water, sanitation and general living conditions, not including the provision of meals.

Mr. Bartlett thought he should have no responsibility for the leisure hours nor matters involving the work of the campers.

Mrs. Hart will be especially interested in the girls' camp while Mr. Hart will work with her and also with the men.

They expect to schedule such recreation programs as are suitable. They will also develop public relations with the people of Provo to the extent that exchange of talent groups, social clubs and other organizations may take place.

They will also have in mind provisions for banking of money. At the present time everybody is his own banker. Naturally, this will not be satisfactory for any length of time.

Realization of his aptitude for the position comes with knowledge of the fact that Mr. Hart has been a member of the faculty of Brigham Young University in Provo for a great many years, serving as physical education director, and that he is well known to people all over the intermountain area, particularly the alumni of Brigham Young University.

Also being parents of three children themselves, the Harts would be understanding of young peoples' problems.

The F.S.A. camps have been set up with the idea that the occupants would be heads of families who would look after their

own families and individual work contacts, etc.

As Provo does not at the present time house families, one of Yamasaki's duties was defined as work dispatcher to make contacts between employers and employees.

This brought up the obvious point as to who was going to pay Yamasaki and provide him with a telephone necessary to take orders and to make other arrangements. At the present time the farmers call Mr. Bartlett at all hours of the day and night, an arrangement which is most inconvenient.

At 9:15 in the evening, Mr. Hart and Mr. Ernst returned to the camp where they found the boys resting after a 10-hour work day. Matters which the latter brought up at this time were:

1. More copies of Topaz Times wanted.
2. Some consideration be given to a fair salary for Yamasaki who is now employed at his regular W.R.A. wage.
3. Clarification of food set-up.
4. Increased number of showers, alarm clocks.

The boys also were quite anxious to hear the latest news about Topaz.

Mr. Ernst secured the list of kitchen utensils desired and returned to Topaz Thursday morning, called Mr. Hughes, Mr. Roy Potter, head of the Transportation and Supply Division, and Mr. Brandon Watson, Project Steward, together and they agreed they could loan the co-op the necessary utensils until the co-op secured its own.

The balance of 600 cots and mattresses will be sent to Provo from which place some will go to another camp which will be set

up shortly north of Salt Lake City.

On the matter of compensation for Yamasaki, Mr. Hughes will contact the county agent, Mr. Boswell, further. Perhaps some arrangements can be made whereby the employees and employers will contribute to a fund so that Yamasaki can reimburse himself for his services, namely himself, a telephone and the one or more assistants that he will need if the projected camp builds up to the promised 300 or more.

This is the first time that Utah has had such a camp.

Due to the shift of F.S.A. duties to the War Food Council, the camp is temporarily "without portfolio", but proceeds normally.

Meanwhile, another bus load of boys went to the camp on Thursday, July 6. Recruitment of girls is planned so that the following schedule might be followed:

About 25 girls report at Provo on July 15; another 25 July 22 and finally, 25 on July 29.

All in all, Mr. Ernst was very much encouraged by the prospects. Naturally, there was some disappointment due to the failure of the original plan of making Provo a camp for families and naturally some concern is felt over the dangers of a joint camp for young men and women and the absence of family heads.

However, the addition of the Harts to the staff of the camp helps greatly to alleviate problems which may be caused by the above situation. The couple asked that Topaz continue its efforts to interest some parents to come along with the girls.

Finally, with the idea that well-spent leisure hours will eliminate many problems, the city of Provo is arranging to set up

two softball diamonds at the edge of camp. Whole-hearted cooperation will be extended to Mr. Hart in this regard.

This will prove a welcome addition to the life of boys who must work 10 hours a day, seven days a week.