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WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

CENTRAL UTAH PROJECT

Topaz, Utah

CIVIC CLUB VISITS TOPAZ

by

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HISTORICAL SECTION

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CIVIC CLUBS VISIT TOPAZ

Special emphasis has been placed on development of a better understanding on the part of Utah communities through contacts between these communities and residents and staff of Topaz. Frequently these contacts are made through groups from Topaz visiting a community, especially the athletic teams from our high school, groups from the Community Activities Section and etc. On other occasions school groups, Boy Scouts, adult groups or individuals are invited to visit the center.

When it was learned that the officers of the Associated Civic Clubs of Southern Utah were to hold their quarterly meeting in Delta on Saturday, April 22, concluding with a banquet in the evening, School Superintendent LeGrande Noble, a member of the Lions Club in Delta and active in making arrangements for entertaining the delegates, was asked by Project Director, Charles F. Ernst, to invite the clubmen and their ladies to visit the center sometime during their weekend at Delta.



The response was quick and enthusiastic from the Executive Secretary of the Organization, Mr. T. N. Jensen of Richfield, Utah, who states that most of the delegates, even though residents of the southern part of the state, had never visited Topaz and had very little conception of what the center was like.

They set aside a period between 5 and 8 o'clock in the evening to make the round trip from Delta. Immediately, Mr. Ernst called together a group of the staff members and residents to arrange an itinerary for the visitors, numbering approximately 75 persons, occupying 15 automobiles. A reception committee was formed to greet the visitors at the gate, but instead of going through the center in caravan style, it was decided that a staff member or resident, acting as host and guide, would be assigned to ride in each visiting car, learning from the occupants of that car what points they would be most interested in, and seeing to it that they visited those points.

Among the places of interests listed were the tofu manufacturing plant, the extensive green houses and hot beds, the hospital, public schools, auditorium, library, warehouse sections, bean sprouting beds and churches.

The caravan appeared at the main gates promptly at



5:30 P. M., where staff members assigned themselves to the individual cars, and the tour was started with each car being guided to whatever points the host or visitors suggested. Each guide was instructed to see that the visitors, to whom they were playing host, were delivered to the Administrative Rec. Hall at 6:45 P. M. promptly, to be greeted by Director Ernst.

It will probably best illustrate the effect of this visit by accompanying in spirit, one car of visitors on their inspection trip. The guide took them first to the tofu manufacturing plant, where the superintendent had opened up the building and was present to explain the process. No person in this small group had ever heard of tofu before. The story of its making and wide-spread use among the Japanese interested them greatly.

From this plant they were led to the greenhouses, where it was explained that the buildings had been erected from discarded lumber and roofed with cloth salvaged from flour sacks. As most of the guests were from rural communities, agriculture was of considerable interest, and they were amazed at the fine stands of plants ready to be transferred to the field.

From here they were taken through sections of the hospital and permitted to look into the wards.

Next they moved down to the high school area and visited



a school room, where they showed surprise at the completely American atmosphere, with pictures of national heroes tacked on to the walls, the American flag in evidence, and displays of students' art work and classroom paper laid out for inspection.

Their final stop was at the civic auditorium, where a center-wide program was to be given later. Already the large auditorium was filled to capacity with spectators, and it gave the visitors an unusually good opportunity to see the manner in which entertainment was presented to the residents of the center, by the residents themselves.

Throughout the trip the visitors kept up a steady barrage of questions about the residents, residents' life and the activities of the center. Several of them were frank to say that they had previously been extremely prejudiced against the center, but that after the visit their ideas were completely changed, as they viewed the various points of the center and listened to the various stories of the evacuation and relocation.

These sentiments of many of the visitors were summed up in a statement by one woman who said that she was always thinking of Topaz as some "terrible place", where a lot of Japanese people were "interned". However, she knew now



how false this understanding was, and that she felt so sorry for the good American citizens who had to live like this. She said that she was going back home and tell her friends the truth.

After the guests had been greeted in the Administrative Rec. Hall, by Mr. Ernst with a brief statement of WRA policies and Topaz Center activities, he asked if there were any questions. This was the signal for many hands to go into the air, and it seemed that everyone had intelligent questions to ask the Director. These ranged over every conceivable subject through evacuation, segregation, center operations and relocation.

At the conclusion Mr. Sanderson of Hurricane, Utah president of the Association, responded for the visitors. He said that it had been one of the most enlightening contacts that the group had ever made and that he was sure that all of the delegates had altered their opinions about the relocation center, and that they would go back to their home towns with a different attitude. This was seconded by Secretary Jensen.

The 75 visiting delegates represented the Lions Club, Kiwanis, Rotary, Provo Chamber of Commerce and Lehi Commercial



Club from the following Utah communities: Richfield, Nephi, Mount Pleasant, Fillmore, Delta, Hurricane, St. George, Price, Springfield, Kanab, Cedar City, Beaver City, Spanish Fork, Payson, Provo, American Fork, Lehi and Salt Lake City.

It was felt by Mr. Ernst and other members of the staff that this was probably one of the most worthwhile public relations efforts which has been made in some time at Topaz, inasmuch as the visiting delegates represents practically every community in the entire southern half of the state.