

Report, Semiannual Report of the War Relocation Authority, for the period January 1 to June 30, 1946, not dated. Papers of Dillon S. Myer. (Note: Pages 3-8, 11-16, and 21-26 were missing when this document was scanned).

XII Mr. Myer

SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

January 1 to June 30
1946



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
Washington, D. C.

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CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1
TULE LAKE.....	3
Relocation of Residents Not Detained.....	3
The Renunciant Hearings.....	4
The Repatriates.....	5
Deportees and Segregated Parolees.....	6
The Last Day.....	6
Closing.....	7
THE REFUGEE SHELTER.....	8
THE RELOCATION PICTURE.....	11
Public Attitudes.....	11
Welfare.....	12
Housing.....	13
Employment.....	14
Evacuee-Community Adjustment.....	14
Closing of Field Offices.....	15
RETURNS TO HAWAII AND ALASKA.....	16
EVACUEE PROPERTY.....	17
LEGAL.....	19
Litigation.....	20
Deportation Proceedings.....	20
Evacuation Claims Legislation.....	21



LIQUIDATION.....	22
Property.....	22
Personnel.....	23
Liquidation Unit.....	24
REPORTS AND RECORDS.....	25
EPILOGUE.....	27
CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS.....	28

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INTRODUCTION

On June 30, 1946, the War Relocation Authority came to its official end. It was created by Executive Order No. 9102 on March 18, 1942, as an emergency war agency, and for four years and three months was responsible for the care and resettlement of 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry who were brought under its jurisdiction as a result of the military evacuation from the West Coast in the spring of 1942. The total cost to the Nation was \$158,412,000.

During its term of existence the WRA administered ten relocation centers for the evacuated people and the Emergency Refugee Shelter at Fort Ontario, Oswego, New York, for a group of refugees from Europe. The last six months of 1945 had seen the closing of eight of the nine remaining WRA centers, and the dispersal of the residents over most of the United States.

During the first six months of 1946 events inevitably continued to point to the closing down of WRA. On February 4 the last group of refugees left the Shelter to go to Canada and reenter the United States as regular immigrants. At Tule Lake on March 20 the final trains pulled out for different destinations—Department of Justice internment camps and American communities—leaving the last center empty of evacuee residents. On May 15 the last of the field offices which remained open terminated their job of giving service to the relocated people.

Another event of importance occurred on April 29 when there was introduced in the Senate a bill to establish an Evacuation Claims Commission which would provide a means whereby people of Japanese ancestry might receive compensation for actual losses which were incurred as a result of the evacuation.

Compared with the previous hectic periods of WRA, its last six months were relatively quiet with the remaining members of the staff working on liquidation problems and final reports. The exodus of personnel from WRA to other employment had begun in the fall of 1945 as phases of the program were completed and programs and projects ended, but the separations came at a much accelerated rate during the winter and spring of 1946, until on June 30 only a small number remained as part of a liquidation unit in the Office of the Secretary of the Interior to take care of the remaining fiscal, personnel and property matters.

The centers were closed and turned over to other agencies. The people who had been their involuntary inhabitants were becoming re-adjusted to the new communities in which they had settled. Some of the last to leave were still in the process of obtaining jobs and housing, others found themselves by this time well integrated and settled in the places of their choice.

assume all responsibility for the residents from the time they left the Shelter gate. The assumption of this kind of responsibility by a private agency, and the close and successful relationship between it and the Government, constituted a rather unique arrangement.

It was provided that the refugees would enter the country by way of the United States Consulate at Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, to which place they were transported by bus. Although there are yearly quotas for all the countries represented by these refugees, the regulations state that not more than 10 percent of the total quota of any nationality may be admitted in a single month. The January and February quotas took care of most of the immigrants, with the exception of 88 persons, chiefly Yugoslavs, who were to enter the country on temporary permits pending quota admission in March. It was necessary to use these three months so that refugees still in Europe could begin coming in as soon as processed there by the newly established United States Consulates.

The first group left the Shelter on January 17, the last on February 4. Of the 982 refugees who had come originally as refugees, 14 had died and 69 had voluntarily repatriated or emigrated. During the life at the Shelter there were 23 children born, whom the Department of Justice recognized as United States citizens. Thus there were 922 persons, of whom 899 were aliens, who were residents of the Shelter at the time the first group left. On the day the Shelter closed the status of the 899 aliens was as follows: 765 were granted entrance in the United States as quota immigrants; 88 awaited immigration under the March quotas; 19 were given temporary permits because they were adjudged inadmissible—mainly because they could not meet the health requirements of the immigration laws; 19 were given temporary permits while awaiting voluntary repatriation and 8 while they awaited emigration to a country of their choice.

It was necessary for the private agencies to work fast in helping the people to make their relocation plans. However, in most cases, quite satisfactory plans were decided upon. Some of the people had close relatives who agreed to take them in, some had specific job offers they wished to accept, and others became the responsibility of private agencies in various communities who had agreed to provide for them while the new immigrants looked for housing and employment. The National Refugee Service and cooperating agencies had pledged that none of these immigrants would become a public charge.

There were 573 of the total who chose to go to New York State, of whom the majority centered in New York City. The remainder went to more than 70 communities in 19 widely distributed states and the District of Columbia. Although some would undoubtedly encounter difficulties, by and large the group promised a very satisfactory adjustment—and some



EVACUEE PROPERTY

During previous periods the main transportation of evacuee property had been from the centers while the heavy relocation of the people was in process. During the first half of 1946, the property of the people relocating from Tule Lake continued to be forwarded to the addresses designated by the owners, with the WRA paying the cost of shipment. However, the main movement of property was out of the West Coast warehouses to the new relocation addresses.

Inevitably small amounts of minor possessions had been left behind at all the centers as unclaimed or unidentifiable. Every effort was made to locate the owners. Where this was not possible the lots were sent to the WRA warehouses on the West Coast where these efforts were continued. At Tule Lake only approximately \$100 worth of stored furniture had to be so handled.

A deadline of February 28 was set as the last date on which requests would be accepted for shipment of property at Government expense from either WRA or private warehouses on the West Coast. The date of March 15, which was later extended to April 15, was set as the last time that an evacuee owner would be able to claim his goods, but after February 28 the owner had to make his own arrangements and bear the cost of shipping. However, in the case of people relocating from Tule Lake and in cases where the area supervisor determined that there was genuine hardship, he was given authority to ship such goods at Government expense after the deadline date. Although April 15 was the deadline for removing property from the warehouses, it was announced on March 1 that people who were still living in temporary quarters, and who were unable to receive their goods, could request the area supervisor to transfer stored property to a private warehouse, for which the WRA paid storage costs up to June 30, 1946.

The bulk of the property from the warehouses was shipped without trouble. Where property had not been claimed, every effort was made to locate the owner. Descriptions of the unclaimed property, and the names and previous addresses of the owners where known, were published in the bi-lingual papers. After April 15 the area supervisors were instructed to hold auctions of the property that was unclaimed, for which the owner could not be located or identified, or for which the owner had refused shipment. However, it was possible to arrange with an interested church group in Seattle to hold the material for one year, and to make the same arrangement in Los Angeles with another church group to hold it for six months. If the owners could not be located at the end of that time the property would revert to the church. The residue which remained to be disposed of was, in Los Angeles, less than one percent of the bulk which had been stored there. About the same number of lots remained in the other two areas. In all three

areas most of the unidentified property remaining was composed of contraband articles which had been picked up by the Army and turned over to WRA.

In San Francisco the auction was held on April 29. The number of individual lots sold was 328 and the total sale price amounted to \$4,250.50. The money was turned over to the United States Treasury where the rightful owners are entitled to make a claim for it.

The evacuees had suffered a considerable amount of property damage and loss as a result of the evacuation. The WRA handled many inquiries during this period from owners who had returned to their homes and found that their property had been vandalized. Property was also lost and damaged while it was in storage and in transit from one place to another. In cases where the owner knew who had taken the property, the individual allegedly responsible could be sued in the courts, but in the majority of cases there was no evidence to prove who was responsible. In cases where the loss or damage was due to negligence on the part of the WRA, the Authority began to accept claims to be processed under the provisions of the Small Claims Act. It was anticipated, however, that payment of the suits would take a considerable amount of time. Another recourse was for an evacuee to ask his Congressman to introduce an individual relief bill. In spite of these two methods of handling claims growing out of the evacuation, there appeared to be little possibility that many evacuees with indemnifiable losses would be able to receive compensation for claims unless a special evacuation claims procedure should be established by the Congress. (See Legal.)

The WRA property offices on the West Coast had handled a good many real estate cases for evacuees, such as those involving sale, purchase, and lease of property. This type of property management was no longer available after February 1.

Important to the aliens who had been interned by the Department of Justice was the announcement by the Treasury Department on March 14 that persons who had been interned but later released or paroled were restored to unrestricted use of their money and other assets which had previously been blocked. Specifically excluded from the benefits of the order were former internees who were under deportation orders.



LEGAL

This period was one of varied activity for the Office of the Solicitor. In addition to the usual service rendered to all divisions of the agency, this Office had the supervision of all legal phases of the dissolution of the centers. This included the adjustment of center contracts; the disposal of surplus property; and unfinished center evacuee legal business, such as the settling of small estates where no will had been left by the deceased, and the disposition of valuable papers left in the hands of project personnel and unclaimed.

Evacuee property matters, such as requests for information, claims for property lost or damaged, and procedures for handling unclaimed evacuee property in WRA warehouses, have all necessitated consideration in the Solicitor's Office. Inasmuch as some of these losses might be reimbursed under the Small Claims Act, a memorandum was prepared describing the provisions of the Act and the proper procedure for establishing claims.

Two of the relocation centers, Colorado River and Gila River, were constructed and maintained on Indian lands pursuant to memorandums of understanding between the Director of the WRA and the Secretary of the Interior. The Colorado River Indian tribes were unwilling to sign the lease which was intended to be secured, and in February 1946 the Tribal Council made a claim asking for rental adjustment. It was the opinion of the Solicitor that the WRA could disclaim any liability for rental since the WRA had made permanent improvements far in excess of the reasonable rental value of the land. At the other center, the Tribal Council of the Gila River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community had signed a land use permit. An adjustment in rental of land used by the WRA was requested by the Authority in the fall of 1945 because of a shortage in the basic water supply during the year 1945, and in February 1946 the Solicitor prepared a memorandum indicating that such an adjustment was within the language of the agreements. This dispute was brought before the Departmental Board of Appeals. At the time of the preparation of this report no settlement had been reached in either case.

Early in the war, the Commissioners of the City of Portland, Oregon, passed an ordinance which stated their refusal to issue business licenses to enemy aliens. After hostilities were over and the Japanese began returning to the city, the Commissioners refused to change their stand, thus denying a means of livelihood to alien evacuees who wished to reenter their former businesses or to start new ones. In the fall of 1945 the United States Attorney General indicated that he did not believe that any action under the civil rights statutes would be successful at that time, inasmuch as the persons affected were officially still enemy aliens. In a further effort to change the

Commissioners' stand, the Portland relocation committee, composed of local citizens, met with the Commission but made no progress. The WRA then turned to the United States Attorney at Portland and acquainted him with the facts. He in turn referred the case to the United States Attorney General. In view of the directive which the Attorney General issued to all United States Attorneys, instructing them to devote special attention to the protection of all persons in their civil liberties, regardless of race or color, it is possible that further action will be forthcoming.

Litigation

The State of California vs. Fred Oyama escheat case was set for argument before the Supreme Court of the State of California on June 13. A decision had not been handed down at the time of the preparation of this report. The case is of particular interest since the brief presented questions the constitutionality of the alien land law on the ground that it discriminates between people solely on the basis of race. It also alleges that the law denies due process and other constitutional rights, and asserts that the case is made invalid by the statute of limitations which requires that suits be filed within a certain number of years after the original act of transaction. The decision which is handed down may affect the more than fifty escheat cases which have been brought by the State of California against Japanese American residents.

On February 27, 1946, a petition for writ of habeas corpus was filed in Federal Court on behalf of three renunciants, who at the time were still at Tule Lake, against three officials of the Department of Justice. This suit was filed by J. B. Tiets, attorney for the Southern California branch of the American Civil Liberties Union. It was alleged that these petitioners, Henry Mittwer, Yukiye Teshida, and Yoshio Nagawa, were each illegally and unlawfully imprisoned and detained by the respondents and were each threatened with deportation to Japan. The petition asked for the restoration of their liberty and for other relief. This suit was later consolidated with the mass habeas corpus suit of the Tule Lake renunciants mentioned in the previous report. These cases are still pending.

Deportation Proceedings

Another legal action affecting the evacuated people arose out of the deportation proceedings against a number of Japanese declared by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to be illegally in the United States.

EPILOGUE

This volume is the last semi-annual report of the War Relocation Authority. This series, in which there have already been six semi-annual and three quarterly reports, have been periodic factual statements to the President, the Congress, and the general public of the policies of the WRA and of the main events which have taken place during the course of the program.

The job which the WRA was created to do—to administer the relocation centers and resettle the people—has been accomplished. Persons of Japanese ancestry in the United States have proven their right to live among other Americans on an equal basis, without prejudice or discrimination. The WRA believes that the program which it carried out has contributed to better understanding of these people and to sounder and more fruitful approaches to the problems of minority groups in the United States in the future.

The United States has been forged out of many minority peoples and in connection with some of them there remains for the Nation some unfinished business—the business of carrying on the fight against discrimination against minority groups so that this country may live in unity, and so that it may take its place in the community of nations with full confidence that the democracy it advocates is really practiced.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

- January 7 - February 6 Hearing Board Officers of the Department of Justice heard the cases of 3,186 renunciants at Tule Lake Center in an effort to determine those whom it was necessary to deport to Japan and those who might remain in the United States.
- January 7 - 14 Processing of refugees at the Emergency Refugee Shelter for entrance to the United States under immigration laws was performed by officials of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the State Department, and the Public Health Service.
- January 7 - February 7 Representatives of the National Refugee Service and cooperating private agencies worked at the Shelter to aid the refugees in formulating their relocation plans.
- January 17 The first group of refugees left the Shelter to proceed to Canada and enter the United States under the regular immigration laws.
- January 31 Tule Lake finished the first phase of its program with all residents relocated who were not detained by the Department of Justice or members of the families of detainees.
- February 4 The Emergency Refugee Shelter at Fort Ontario, Oswego, New York, closed. One hospital case departed on the following day.
- February 28 Last date on which requests for Government transportation for return to the West Coast would be accepted, except for Tule Lake residents.
- February 28 Last date on which requests for transportation of evacuee property at Government expense would be accepted except in the case of genuine hardship as determined by West Coast area supervisors.
- March 13 The Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded posthumously to Private First Class Sadao S. Munemori.

March 20 Tule Lake Center, Newell, California, closed. On this day 102 people were relocated and 449 were removed to other places under the custody of the Department of Justice, with the fate of many still uncertain.

April 1 The Southern Area Office in New Orleans closed. This was the first area office to terminate its activities.

April 20 Last district offices, except for 12 on the West Coast, closed.

April 29 Evacuation Claims Commission Bill (S. 2127) introduced in the Senate by Senator Allen J. Ellender.

May 1 By this date all WRA warehouses were closed and all evacuee property which had been under Government custody was disposed of.

May 1 and 4 Last 12 district offices on the West Coast closed. These were in crucial areas where service was given to relocated evacuees as long as possible.

May 8 Medal for Merit awarded the National Director of the WRA for outstanding service in time of war.

May 15 The West Coast Regional Office and the eight remaining area offices closed: New York (East Coast Area), Cleveland (Great Lakes Area), Chicago (North Central Area), Denver (Western Plains Area), Salt Lake City (Intermountain Area), San Francisco (Northern California Area), Seattle (Pacific Northwest Area), and Los Angeles (Southern California Area).

May 15 All temporary installations leased by WRA in the Los Angeles Area closed.

June 28 The transferral of WRA records to designated depositories was completed. The depositories included: National Archives, University of California Library at Berkeley, and Columbia University Library in New York.

June 30 The War Relocation Authority was liquidated by Executive Order.

