

April 11, 1955

Internal Memorandum - San Francisco

Evacuation of the Japanese

In looking for items, events or incidents which were peculiar to the twelfth district, I stumbled on the part which the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco played in the evacuation of the Japanese from Pacific coast territory. This is an incident which, thirteen years later, is half forgotten, but it was highly important at the time.

It will be remembered that the Japanese attacked at Pearl Harbor in December, 1941. An immediate consequence was distrust and fear of the large Japanese population on the west coast by many residents there. Small riots appeared in various places, and in spite of the fact that part of the Japanese population were native American citizens, there was a mounting state of panic and hysteria. The Federal Government finally decreed that Japanese, even including the native American born, should be evacuated from the coast region and sent to concentration camps in the interior. The responsibility for this unpleasant task was given to the Civil Control Administration which worked through the Federal Security Agency, the Farm Security Administration, the Works Progress Administration, and the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco as the fiscal agent for the United States.

The first move, so far as the Bank was concerned, came with a telegram from the Treasury dated March 5, 1942, less than three months after the Japanese struck at Pearl Harbor. The evacuation was completed from Military Area number 1 in June of 1942 and from Military Area number 2 in August. Responsibility for the whole affair was then turned over to the War Relocation Authority.

The part which the Federal Reserve Bank played was, in substance, confined to problems of property belonging to the Japanese who were evacuated. The Bank had little to do with Germans and Italians, Although they were residents of the district, these people were not evacuated as a group as were the Japanese. The Bank was "clothed

with full authority to act without reference to Washington." Its services were continually available to the Japanese who were urged but not compelled to make use of them.

The operation was a considerable one. The total number of Japanese concerned came to 108,000, to which were added some 2,000 "not registered" and 132 in Alaska. In the head office zone alone there were 52,501, in Los Angeles, 39,271, in Portland, 4,823 and in Seattle, 11,671. These people had to leave their homes, drop their businesses, settle their debts or arrange for their settlement, move their furniture or put it into storage, and go to the concentration camps hastily set up for them.

The Bank operated through centers hastily set up and through member banks. Its chief job seems to have been to avert as much as possible the hardships which inevitably followed such a course of action. The report of what they did is contained in a volume, mimeographed and bound, titled "Evacuation Operation - Pacific Coast Military Areas 1942, Report of the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco." In this, in addition to a small and modest account of the work done, are a number of exhibits, including letters from Japanese groups and individual Japanese which picture the Bank's work. In many cases, member banks accepted powers of attorney from their Japanese customers and handled their real estate. There were difficulties with automobiles. Evacuees were allowed to take their cars with them or they could sell them or store them privately or in the Bank's custody or sell to the Army through the Bank's facilities. Again and again the Bank was called upon to redress attempted gouging of Japanese in unfortunate situations.

Looking back at it now, Mr. Earhart thinks that the white populations on the coast behaved with extraordinary lenience and kindness against a people whose government was making active war upon the United States forces. He admits that it may not have looked that way to ^{Americans in the} the east, but is quite sure that the situations of the two territories were so different that it would be extremely hard for one to understand the other. He is satisfied that the Bank did all that could possibly be done to safeguard

the property of the Japanese, and certainly the exhibits in the mimeographed volume testify to much gratitude for a kind of help and sheltering advice which was given.

For details of this thing, the Bank's record is valuable and should be consulted.

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