A STATEMENT ON HANDLING OF EVACUEE PROPERTY

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY

May, 1943
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When Pacific Coast residents of Japanese ancestry were evacuated from military areas in 1942, they left behind them a reported $200,000,000 worth of real, personal and commercial property. To assure full use of this property in the national war economy and to protect the property rights of evacuees, the Executive Order which established the War Relocation Authority contained a section authorizing assistance to evacuees in the management and disposal of their properties. This authorization does not mean that WRA was empowered to act as receiver of, to warrant title to, or to sell or otherwise dispose of evacuee-owned property without the owner's consent. Persons evacuated from the West Coast still retain all their former property rights. WRA acts merely as an intermediary between the owners and the individuals or agencies with whom they are conducting business. Evacuees are assisted in putting into operation decisions at which they arrived by their own free will.

Because of the rapidity with which evacuation was conducted by the Wartime Civil Control Administration, property matters had to be cared for at a corresponding rate of speed. Initially the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and the Farm Security Administration undertook the evacuee property program pursuant to a request from Lieut. Gen. John L. DeWitt. By letter dated March 25, 1942, the Director of the War Relocation Authority delegated to the Treasury Department all authority of WRA with respect to the management and disposal of evacuee property.
The Farm Security Administration, under agreement with the Treasury Department, took over the agricultural aspects of the evacuee property program, and the Federal Reserve Bank assumed responsibility for handling urban property problems. Warehouses were leased by the government for the storage of household goods.

As soon as evacuation was completed, the War Relocation Authority assumed its delegated authority regarding evacuee property, and the Evacuee Property Office was established to carry on the program. The main property office is set up in San Francisco, and two field offices are maintained at points where there is the greatest concentration of evacuee-owned property. These offices are equipped to handle property problems of all kinds. Among the services they render are arranging for the rental or sale of both agricultural and commercial properties, establishing contact between evacuees and persons who wish to conduct business with them, effecting settlements of claims for or against evacuees, checking inventories of stored personal goods, auditing accounts rendered to evacuees, and adjusting differences arising out of inequitable, hastily made or indefinite agreements.

Field offices and the areas they serve are as follows:

**Whitcomb Hotel Bldg.**  
San Francisco, Calif.  
Room 955, 1031 So. Broadway, Los Angeles, Calif.  
Main property office; also serving northern and central California, Nevada, and Utah.

Southern California, including San Luis Obispo County and all area below the Tehachapi Mountains and the State of Arizona.

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Farm Property

Prior to evacuation, Japanese farm operators in the Pacific Coast owned outright or had a financial interest in approximately $7,000,000 worth of farm equipment and machinery. To prevent any unnecessary storage or disposal of this equipment during the war period, the government directed major attention immediately to helping evacuees dispose of it in a manner which would assure its most efficient use. Evacuees were encouraged to sell or lease their equipment in conjunction with their land when it was turned over to substitute operators. In other instances, sale or rental agreements were negotiated with other operators in the locality insofar as was possible. Some evacuees, who had not finished paying for their equipment turned it back to dealers, sometimes at a loss. Storage was discouraged in every instance. That this policy was largely successful is borne out by a survey made by the Farm Security Administration during May, 1942. As of that date, in that portion of the military area already evacuated, field agents reported there were only 13 farms with undisposed of equipment, valued at approximately $11,655.

Toward the end of 1942, rumors began to circulate on the West Coast that large quantities of evacuee-owned equipment were either lying idle in storage or rusting away in the fields. For example, it
was reported to one of the service organizations in the Salinas Valley that 500 pieces of farm equipment were stored in that area. A representative of WRA, with the assistance of the local Chamber of Commerce, implement dealers, and other persons of the community, went to Salinas immediately, and their combined efforts uncovered a total of five - not five hundred - pieces of equipment.

In addition to promptly investigating specific reports of idle equipment owned by Japanese-American families, WRA has been making a planned survey of farm and automotive equipment both in the field and at relocation centers. All through the Pacific Coast states implement dealers, county war boards, agricultural commissioners and other persons who might have factual knowledge have been contacted by WRA field men. Newspapers have cooperated by publishing announcements asking anyone with knowledge of idle evacuee-owned equipment to notify WRA or the United States Department of Agriculture county war boards. Project Evacuee Property Officers at relocation centers are, by means of questionnaire, interrogating evacuees regarding the whereabouts of any farm equipment which they may have left behind, and are offering to help them dispose of it. As of April, 1943, these procedures have uncovered a total of 195 tractors, and 497 pieces of miscellaneous equipment, including harrows, plows, discs, and small tools.

Each county USDA war board receives from WRA a list of all equipment uncovered in the survey of its own area, the location in which
it is stored, and the name and address of the WRA representative who is locally responsible for the disposal of the equipment. At the same time, the State War Boards are being informed of all equipment that is found.

At the time of evacuation, approximately 232,159 acres of land were farmed by Japanese-American operators in the evacuated area. Some of this land was owned by evacuees who are American citizens, and some was held under either long or short term tenure agreements. That evacuation was accomplished without any substantial crop loss is largely due to the effective work performed by the Farm Security Administration, which, until the fall of 1942, handled all farm property matters. By June 1, 1942, roughly three months after the first evacuation order, practically all farms had been transferred to substitute operators, and thousands of dollars of vital food crops had been saved.

Many of the farm tenure agreements negotiated either by the evacuees themselves or by the FSA for evacuees are still in effect. Some agreements have not worked out, however, and WRA, through its field property offices, is now assisting evacuees to negotiate new agreements.

Automobiles and Tires

In the early months of 1943, reports were published that 33,000 automobiles owned by Japanese-Americans now living in relocation centers were in storage; and that, as a consequence, the rubber in well over 100,000 tires being wasted. Very few residents of the centers still
hold title to automobiles, and the majority of those who do plan to leave shortly to accept job offers in the Midwestern states.

The estimate of 33,000 is based on the number of cars registered by persons with Japanese names with the Motor Vehicle Departments of Oregon, Washington, California, and Arizona, in the year prior to evacuation. About 5,000 of these cars were owned by Japanese-Americans who took their automobiles with them when they left the evacuation area during the period of voluntary evacuation, and about one hundred more were located in parts of the four states outside the evacuated areas. During the evacuation period, the records of the Motor Vehicle Departments show that almost 20,000 cars were transferred to non-Japanese owners. Some evacuees, having only a small equity in the cars and being unable to dispose of them before leaving their homes, turned them back to the dealers who have since sold them.

Commercial and Urban Real Property

Slightly more than half the Americans of Japanese ancestry who lived in the coastal states prior to evacuation lived in urban and suburban districts. Many either owned or were buying homes of their own. Approximately 6,000 were proprietors, managers, or officials of business concerns ranging from large manufacturing establishments to small lodging houses, retail shops, and laundries. Others were craftsmen, mechanics, or members of professions, and owned equipment with which they carried on their work. A comparatively small percentage of this property was
brought to the attention of the Federal Reserve Bank, based upon the number of evacuees who availed themselves of the services of the bank.

As an example of the scope of the holdings of evacuees, the Japanese-Americans Citizens' League reported that in the city of Seattle, Japanese operated 206 out of a total of 325 hotels, one-fourth of the laundry and dry cleaning establishments, 140 grocery stores, and 50 greenhouses.

To preserve and protect this property and to prevent huge losses in enforced sales, first, the Federal Reserve Bank, and now the Evacuee Property Office, aid evacuees in the storage, sale, lease, and operation of property.

**Personal Property**

At the time of evacuation, the government leased warehouses and offered to store the household goods and other non-perishable personal property of evacuees free of charge for the war period. Only 2,867 families took advantage of this service. Most evacuee families made the best private arrangements they could in the limited time available. Some evacuees sold their personal property completely, but the majority stored their goods with friends, in church basements, in attics, in garages, and in any other available storage place.

The Federal Reserve Bank aided evacuees in personal property problems until evacuation was completed, and since that time WRA has been
called upon to perform myriad services. Field property representatives have investigated the condition of personal property reported broken into, have checked inventories of privately stored goods and arranged for its removal to government-operated warehouses or to the evacuee's place of residence, and have arranged for the sale or other disposition of considerable quantities of small articles.

One of WRA's chief tasks now in connection with personal property is to forward household equipment, clothing, and other personal goods to evacuees who leave relocation centers for private employment. This means collecting property from the various places in which it is stored and arranging transportation by the most economical method to the point where the family is resettling. Each evacuee is entitled to one movement of personal property at government expense over and above movement to a government warehouse for storage. If he chooses to have his goods brought to him at a relocation center, he will then have to assume the transportation expense for the next himself, but if he waits until he leaves the center on indefinite leave, the government transports his personal property to his new place of residence.

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