

JAPANESE AMERICANS IN INTERNMENT CAMPS 1942 - 1946 PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF THE WRA CAMPS

INTRODUCTION

They say that a plan is worth 10,000 words. These plans were prepared to record the historical sites and the physical layouts of the actual camps. If these plans are displayed as visual aids, the students will be able to comprehend the overall picture of the relocation period.

LOCATION MAP

The maps and legends are self explanatory and would raise the student's curiosity.

The first question is where were the ten permanent projects located. The map shows the ten project sites; however there were some projects which had more than one camp site.

There were 13 separate camp sites. The two projects in Arizona had multiple camps; Poston had three camps and Gila River project had two camps. Each camp was self-sufficient and operated independently.

ISOLATION CENTERS

In addition to the 10 permanent War Relocation Authority (WRA) projects, there was another type of permanent camp. These camps were called isolation and detention centers. These camps held the "high risk" personnel. The personnel were picked up by the FBI, Naval Intelligence, and Immigration authorities immediately after Pearl Harbor and through December 30, 1941 and placed in four centers; Ft. Leupp, Arizona, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Crystal City, Texas, and Bismark, North Dakota.

The personnel considered for high risk of espionage or sabotage were the following categories:

1. Shinto priests
2. Prefecture leaders; a social and welfare organization
3. Japanese language teachers; each moderate sized ethnic community had a Japanese school.
4. Labor leaders
5. Veterans of the Japanese Imperial navy and the army.

There were 2,700 personnel who were placed in these isolation centers and usually remained in the center until the cessation of the war; some were allowed to join their families in the relocation centers.

ASSEMBLY CENTERS

While the permanent centers were being designed and constructed; a period from March 1942 - October 1942, the Japanese were rounded up and held in the detention which were called Assembly Centers (A. C.) The round up began in late February 1942 and completed April 1942.

There were three types of Assembly Centers. The most noted type were the race tracks; Tanforan in the Bay Area and Santa Anita in the Los Angeles area.

The second type were those located at the county fair grounds. These included Salinas and Puyallup which was located outside of Tacoma, Washington.

The third type, which very few people know about were located in migratory farm labor camps. This type was the most primitive, with substandard public health facilities. Today the labor camps has not improved, they are still of minimum health standards.

During this period an advance party was selected from each Assembly Center to proceed to the permanent relocation centers and prepare for the arrival of the internees. As each ward or about nine blocks were constructed at the permanent centers, the Assembly Centers were notified and about 2,000 peoples were moved to the permanent centers. The wards were completed every three weeks and the entire camp construction took four months.

PERMANENT RELOCATION CENTERS

Each centers was about the same size with a population between 8,000 to 10,000.

The project area consisted of a large tract of land usually over 3,500 acres. The project consisted of two areas ; the farm area and the core area.

FARM AREA

The farming operation was one of the easiest tasks to set up at each of the ten relocation projects. During this period the Japanese in the United States were predominately in the agricultural related industries, including farming, nurseries, floral trades and therefore very apt at farming techniques.

Each center started vegetable farms, poultry farm, and hog production for the use by the mess halls.

Beef and dairy production were not undertaken because of cultural aversion to this type of work. In Japan people in beef and slaughtering occupation were considered outcast or "eta" and even today they avoid people associated as Burakumin.

The farm was in production within four months and a variety including Japanese types of vegetables were produced.

CORE AREA

The core area of each center was one mile by one mile or 640 acres. Within this space were two areas; the administrative area and the internees residential area.

ADMINISTRATIVE AREA

This area includes the military police (MP). The military police were responsible for the main gate and the security of the outside of the camp. The internees area had a perimeter fence of barbed wire and the MP patrolled the fenced area by guard towers located in strategic points. The guard tower usually had search lights for night patrols. The interior of the camps were patrolled by the internal security force which consisted of the camp personnel.

The Administrative area consisted of the office area and the housing for the Caucasian staff. The staff included the project director, assistant director, and his department heads. The departments included: agriculture, education, hospital, engineering, maintenance, fire, internal security, transportation, supply and warehousing and recreation.

INTERNEE AREA

The internees lived in the block. This unit was managed by the block manager and 90 % of all activities happened at the block level. The typical block was the same for all centers; it consisted of two rows of six or seven barracks or apartment units on both sides of a utility core. The utility core consisted of the men and women toilet facilities, showers, laundry room, ironing facility, and sometimes the mess hall. The recreation hall was on the perimeter of the block.

BARRACKS (APARTMENTS)

The barracks consisted of 20 feet by 100 feet which were divided into rooms of several sizes, depending on the family size, the usual sizes were 16 feet, 20 feet or 25 feet. Therefore the largest room sizes were 20 feet by 25 feet. The room partition was from the finished floor to the underside of the truss or 8 feet in height. The area above the partition was open and therefore noise could be heard from one apartment to the next. The major complaint was lack of privacy and the smell from cooking or making of liquor from the adjoining units.

The barrack construction consisted of a foundation on concrete piers with a 2 x 6 floor joist and a 1 x 10 subfloor and a tongue and groove finish flooring. The walls were 2 x 4 stud wall with no interior finish and on the exterior with 1 x 10 sheathing and a building paper. The roofing consisted of a 2 x 4 roof truss with 1 x 10 sheathing with a roofing paper. The barracks did not have any insulation at any of the camps. The building materials were hard to obtain during this period.

Each apartment had two sets of windows and a door. Some ingenious residents built a vestibule to protect the entry door from the severe weather.

The apartment was furnished with a single light bulb, a coal burning pot-belly stove for heating and cots for beds. The furniture was made by the tenants from scraps of lumber left from the construction.

MESS HALL

The mess hall was essentially double the barracks size or 40 feet wide by 100 feet. On one end was the kitchen and open dining area in the remaining space. The kitchen stoves and ovens were fueled by the coal. All personnel took their meals at the dining hall. The kitchen staff were the residents of the block.

During the initial few weeks the family ate together, but soon the family unit broke down and different groups would eat in their section, teenage boys were in one area and the adult men were in another.

BOILER ROOM

In the core area was the boiler room which heated the water for the toilets, shower, laundry and the mess hall. Because the unit could not produce enough hot water, the occupants were allocated time slots for the laundry and showering activities.

In addition to producing hot water, the boiler room was the activity center for the older men. The room provided areas for the Japanese game of go and shogi a form of chess and checkers. In addition, in the collective group, there was always a production of liquor which the inhabitants engaged in. The raw materials were potato and sweet potato. These ingredients produced a form of vodka and a rum. The men enjoyed their drinks in the boiler room where after a few drinks a round of karaoke type songs were sung. The camp life was characterized as monotonous and lackadaisical.

RECREATION HALL

Because of the close quarters and also nothing to do in the camps, the recreation section of the administration made an effort to provide organized activities.

Each block had a barrack which was used for recreation. The hall was used for club activities and for meetings. About once a month some organization would throw a dance for the ward.

BLOCK MANAGER

The key to running a orderly operation was the block manager. He controlled, all the administrative functions and was the direct link with the administration. Some of his duties included; mail operation, issuing passes, sick calls, issuance of supplies and most of all mediating disputes.

There were two types of manager; the nisei and the kibe. In general the nisei were more open and friendly toward the internees, while the kibe were more authoritative. The backgrounds of each type were decisively different and later created considerable difficulty for the internees.

THE WARD

The next level of organization was the ward. This unit consisted of nine blocks separated by the fire breaks. There were three functions at the ward level.

The ward was in charge of fire control for each of the blocks within the ward. There were usually three or four fire stations scattered throughout the camp. Each fire station provided protection to two or three wards.

The internal security were performed at the ward level. The individuals were older men in ill-fitting uniform with an arm band and usually walked around the blocks acting like someone with authority. Later this group received a nick name as 'inu' or spies for the administration.

The third function of the ward was to provide daily supplies to the mess hall. A truck from the motor pool assigned to the ward would go to the warehouse area, pick up and deliver the daily ration to each of the mess halls. The meals at each center was the same except for the local variation in vegetables. The menus were prepared one month ahead of schedule.

The ward also had a dump truck which picked up the coal supply and delivered it to the blocks on rotating basis so each block received the coal once a week. The coals were delivered to the mess hall, boiler room and at the end of each block. Each family was responsible to pick up the coals for their pot-belly stove.

HOSPITAL

The hospital served the entire camp and was directed by the administration but operated by an internee staff of doctors and nurses. The supplies and equipment were insufficient and outdated but the staff did their best for the patients.

SCHOOLS

There was one combined junior and senior high school at each center staffed by Caucasian and Japanese personnel. There were usually two or three elementary schools at each center. In general the education and attendance were excellent as the Japanese had high respect for the teachers .

CANTEENS

There were stores similar to '7-11' stores located in several areas of the center. They were operated under the Co-op system. The problem was that no one had any money to spend in the camps as the banking accounts of the internees were frozen by the government immediately after Pearl Harbor.

UTILITIES

The electricity was obtained from the local utility company and distributed through overhead wood pole lines.

The domestic water was obtained from a series of deep wells , filtered through a plant and stored in elevated storage tanks.

Each project center had its own sewage treatment system and a disposal field.

EMPLOYMENT AND SALARY

The project management budgeted money to employ as many people as possible in order to keep every one busy. The wages were set at minimum level in order to create as many positions as possible. The wage levels were:

1. Professionals, block managers \$19/month
2. Skilled, foreman, teachers \$16/month
3. Unskilled labor, farm , kitchen \$12/month

OTHER CENTERS

The uniqueness of the Arizona centers were that both centers Poston I, II, & III and Gila River (Canal & Butte) were on the Indian Reservation lands and were administrated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the first year of operation and then switched over to the War Relocation Authority (WRA).

Heart Mountain located in Wyoming had the only layout with a super block arrangement. A super block is a layout which is two or three times as long as a normal block. This concept was fashionable during the 1930s with the city planners as being more efficient in land use.

PROGRESSIVE PROJECT DIRECTORS

The project managers of Amache, Colorado, Rohwer, and Jerome, Arkansas were not sympathetic for keeping the internees locked up in the concentration camps. They quickly and aggressively found ways to relocate the families outside the camps. Usually they found sponsors with large agri-business to take the internees to areas where labor was in short supply. The residents relocated to Colorado, Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, and the eastern seaboard, especially to Seabrook, New Jersey.

The project manager of Jerome was so successful that the population declined from 8,500 to less than 3,000 within a year and one half. This created a less efficient camp and led to the camp closure on June 30, 1944 about one and one half years prior to other camp closures.

When the Jerome Center closed, the remaining personnel who could not be relocated were distributed to camps Rohwer and Amache. Because of early closure these records are not complete.

CAMP CLOSING

The camp closings were systematic and project directors were to file a final report of his administration. The director in turn asked his staff to write up the departments final reports before they were paid their final salary and left for other jobs. These reports are filed in the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Ca. Most reports are short because of time but there are final reports for all the centers. The most interesting is by the education section of the Amache center.

All camps closed within one and one half months time , between October 15, 1945 and December 1, 1945, except for Tule Lake which closed in May , 1946.

During July , August, and September, 1945 the internees who had residences, business, or farms quickly left as transportation was arranged. Upon return to their home , many met initial resistance from the public.

The remaining personnel in camp could not move as they did not have a home to return to. A lot of the personnel were migratory railroad or farm workers and the fall season is a bad time to be left without a job.

What took place in October, 1945 was not the happiest moment of the camp experience. The camp officials were told to close up the camp by end of October and these personnel were paid a bonus to remain until the closure. They decided to dump the remaining occupants on a train with 25 dollars and a ticket to the last place of former residence.

The closure staff called the destination and told the Japanese in the area to take care of their own people. In order to house this new influx of people, the local people opened up hostels and churches for temporary residence. The winter of 1945-46 was a period of hardship for lot of these families; however by spring as the weather turned delightful the families found both jobs and housing and slowly began the recovery from the long relocation experience. Because of these experiences the nisei generation has retained a certain bonding to each other apart from other generation.

TULE LAKE CLOSURE

Camp Tule Lake was a segregation camp from 1943 to the end. The camp housed people who were considered as disloyal and wanting to be repatriated to Japan. Many of the citizen had renounced their citizenship for one reason or by intimidation. When the time to close Tule Lake came there were lot of confusion as the residence realized that going to defeated and starving Japan was not in their interest.

The Department of Justice also made it difficult to leave the camp, even though the camp administration had written the Justice Department of letting all remaining internees go home since the war was over for six months. The only way to leave the camp was by individual petition and this cumbersome process took up a long period . When March of 1946 rolled around many internees still had not heard from the Justice Department and in the last few weeks before closure , the families were in panic.

On the last day the remaining personnel were put on a train to Crystal City, Texas and later shipped to Japan. There were over 5,000 sent to Japan and of these over 3,500 were Japanese American. These people suffered great hardship in the war torn country and from their lack of speaking the Japanese language.

In the period 1948 -through 1953, individuals were allowed to petition to regain their citizenship and many returned to the United States. They started over again and sadly were left behind when opportunity came as they did not have the education or the confidence in themselves.

POST WAR YEARS

Those that relocated to the midwest, or eastern seaboard states and inter mountain states were accepted by the public without the discrimination of the West Coast and prospered in their jobs and housing. As years went by it was around 1955 to 1960 when the parents suddenly realized that their children had come of age and was approaching the period in which their children should be meeting eligible mates. But in isolated areas there were few to be met. Suddenly they almost in mass uprooted again and returned to the west coast, especially to southern California.

The return to the west coast had cost the nisei or issei another ten or fifteen years of their productive lives. If the progressive project directors had left them in the centers until the end and let them return to the west coast they would have lost only four years. The Japanese were similar to other people, always seeking a hospitable environment for their children's welfare.

Even today the long exodus is continuing as the nisei retire from their job in the mid west and the east coast. The professionals are coming back to the west coast to retire and be buried in their old haunting grounds similar to a salmon swimming to their place of birth to gasp the last breath of air.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The author of the relocation camp maps and diagrams is an architect and a city and regional planner, a graduate of University of California, Berkeley. He conducted majority of his research through the Bancroft Library. When he was reviewing the records, the exact locations and specific sites were hard to define from the existing records. Because of his professional training, he was able to transfer written property description and located the exact locations on the United States Geological Survey (USGS) maps. The site diagrams were replications from the WRA engineers final reports.

When relocation movement began in March of 1942, the author spent the initial period at the Arboga center, known currently as Marysville Assembly Center. This was the migratory farm labor camp where Japanese from rural northern California was to spend from one to six month waiting for Camp Tule Lake to open. From September 1942 to October 1943 he resided at Tule Lake, until subjected to the loyalty questionnaire. The block where he resided was led by a nisei block manager who decided that they all should move on to other camps. The personnel of this block went to camps Minidoka, Topaz and Amache.

The author left Tule Lake in October, 1943 for Camp Minidoka, Idaho and spent the remaining two years uneventfully. On October 16, 1945 he was one of the last resident to leave the camp as the family did not have a home to return to. He stayed in a hostel until spring of 1946 and spent the remaining youth on a farm in northern California.