Property of Martha M. Nozawa

THE GIST OF IT

(A column devoted to contributors to the SURVEY GRAPHIC, Magazine of Social Interpretation, February 1943.)

Though Christmas greetings have been laid aside for some weeks now, there was one that came to the Survey office which we think worth sharing even at this date. It came from the Japanese American Citizens League, and Mike Masaoka, its devoted national secretary, and said in part: "The world has come through a strange and hard year since Christmas of last year, and the war has left no man untouched. We Nisei Americans, too, have learned much of sorrow and suffering, but we have learned much more of loyalty and friendship from you. No material yardstick can measure our gratitude." On page 41 another Japanese American expresses his gratitude. Galen M. Fisher, who writes about his friend, is secretary of the Committee on National Security and Fair Play, of which some of California's leading citizens are members. Mr. Fisher was for twenty-two years secretary in Japan of the International Committee of the YMCA; he is now a trustee of the Institute of Pacific Relations and member of the National Council, YMCA.

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JAPANESE COLONY: SUCCESS STORY

By Galen M. Fisher (Survey Graphic, February 1943)

"Eight months of hardship come to sunlight," is Fred Wada's summary of the experience of his little band of Japanese Americans, following the Pacific Coast evacuation. This story of his patriotism, so simply told here, is warmly recommended to other loyal Americans.

"The People Nobody Wants" is an easy catch phrase, but it gives a false idea of the feelings of many Californians about their evacuated Japanese neighbors. It certainly misrepresents the attitude of a growing proportion of the people in Wasatch County, Utah. In March, 1942, 130 Japanese Americans went to Wasatch County to settle on the George A. Fisher ranch at Keetley. Snow still lay in the gulleys and the ground was hard when they arrived, but within three months they had transformed the bare fields into a thriving truck garden. Their industry and friendliness, their cash payment for goods, their generous readiness to work overtime to meet the labor shortage on surrounding farms soon disarmed the suspicion of their neighbors. In ever-widening circles the word was spread that these citizen Japanese were "just like white folks" and ready to break their backs to win the war. A dynamic personality, Fred L. Wada, accounts for this success story.

When, two months after Pearl Harbor, the army ordered those of Japanese ancestry to leave the Pacific Coast, all were included--young and old, citizens and aliens alike. The deadline set by the army for "voluntary evacuation" was March 29. After that date, all had to go to guarded assembly centers. Fred Wada, citizen and prosperous produce merchant of Oakland, decided to move out of California at once, and to help a company of his fellow Japanese Americans to go, too.

Born in Bellingham, Wash., thirty-four years ago, of Roman Catholic parents, Mr. Wada was orphaned at twelve. At fourteen he had to stop school and go to work. By the time he was twenty-seven, he was president of the East Bay Food Dealers Association.

Fred Wada's brother, Bill, volunteered in March, 1941; his second brother, Ben, was drafted in January, 1942, and is now a corporal. Fred Wada himself wanted to enlist, but he has a wife and three young children. He reasoned thus: the President calls for increased output of both food and munitions; Japanese Americans are not allowed to make munitions, but they can raise food. He decided to set out, as a patriotic task, to find unused land, form a corps of Americans of Japanese ancestry, and try to break all records at raising crops. The band would not wait to be rounded up by the army, becoming expensive wards

of the government. They would go eastward of their own free will and break land like the early pioneers.

That was about February 10--just a year ago.

Mr. Wada read in a newspaper that the farmers of Duchesne County, Utah, needed labor. He went at once to Salt Lake City. At first he met only rebuffs. Even some of the Japanese long resident in Utah threw cold water on his plan, fearing that to bring more Japanese into the state would arouse public hostility toward the established group as well as toward the newcomers. The secretary of the Utah Defense Council, after hearing Mr. Wada's story, suggested that he see David R. Trevithick, director of the State Department of Social Welfare.

At the state capitol, Mr. Wada received his first real encouragement. Mr. Trevithick and his associates were enthusiastic about the plan, and promised to support it, and the welfare director offered a letter of introduction to the commissioner of Duchesne County.

Mr. Wada rented a car and drove out Highway 40, which was piled high with snow on both sides. Thirty-nine miles from Salt Lake City, he stopped to see George A. Fisher, former executive secretary of the State Land Board, now a rancher, and "mayor" of the tiny village of Keetley. Mr. Fisher was interested in leasing his ranch; he also was interested in making possible a fresh start for a group of ousted Japanese Americans. He suggested that the colony establish itself on his land, but Mr. Wada had promised to meet with citizens of Duchesne and Uintah Counties, and he felt this conference must be held before any definite plans were made.

At Roosevelt, the county seat, he found 350 people assembled to hear him present his scheme, and to discuss it. His limited schooling had given him only an imperfect command of platform English; nevertheless, he told his story impressively. Because of the need for more food to help win the war, he urged that a group of "good Americans of Japanese stock" be encouraged to come with him from ~~Japanese stock~~ California and settle in Utah. All but a few of the proposed colonists, he explained, "are citizens and Christians." All, he added, were hard working, law abiding, eager to cooperate in community affairs. Finally, and very persuasively, he stated that the colonists would bring an average of $1,500 for each man in cash or equipment, and promised that none would ever go on the relief rolls.

When the meeting was thrown open for discussion, the first man on his feet demanded, "What about the Japanese fifth columnists at Pearl Harbor?" At that time, the reports of sabotage by Japanese in Hawaii had not been officially denied by the Secretaries of War and of the Navy, and by the Honolulu Chief of Police, as they were later. But Mr. Wada declared

his own belief that those charges had been "cooked up by politicians and yellow journals," and added that certainly all of the people he hoped to lead to Utah were completely loyal to the United States.

A county surveyor from Ogden, who happened to be present, rose to say: "I lost two sons at Pearl Harbor, and every time I see a man of Japanese race I shiver; but after hearing your story, I'm ready to let a good many Japs from California come in here. We need them."

Another listener commented, "I'm a Legionnaire, and until I heard Mr. Wada, I was dead against any Japanese coming in here, but now I favor it."

Mr. Wada asked, "Would you be willing to wire that to Governor Maw?"

"Sure," the veteran replied.

A journalist in the audience was so impressed by the plan and by the personality of the man sponsoring it, that he telephoned the governor to urge that the Japanese colony be permitted to come into the state and settle there. At the close of the meeting, forty Utah farmers offered to let Mr. Wada lease or buy their ranches, ranging in size from 100 to 2,000 acres, as the site for the project.

After this hospitable reception in Duchesne County, Mr. Wada was tempted to settle there. There was one major drawback--it would be necessary to provide housing and other buildings on any of the available farms. He returned to Keetley for another conference with George A. Fisher. Together, the two men went over the Fisher ranch. There were 3,800 acres of good black loam, the bottom lands well suited to truck gardening, the hill slopes to raising hay and livestock. The necessary irrigation could be done at a low cost. The ranch included fifteen cottages and a large building, divided into ten apartments, all built some years earlier to house the working force of a nearby mine. The mine had curtailed operations, and for some time the dwellings had not been used except in the "dude ranch" season. Mr. Fisher offered a lease at two dollars an acre, including the buildings, and his own services as adviser to the new community.

Mr. Wada paid a $500 binder at once, though the arrangement was to be considered tentative until Mr. Fisher had made his own inquiries as to the members of the proposed colony, and secured the necessary clearance from the army authorities.

The next step was to present the plan to Governor Maw. With Mr. Trevithick and Mr. Fisher, Fred Wada explained his project. The governor was impressed, but voiced the fear

that, unwittingly, a disloyal individual might be included among the colonists. Said Mr. Wada, "Governor, if any of them make trouble or prove to be disloyal in any way to the United States, I'll be glad to face the firing squad." The governor finally stated that, while he could not allow any Japanese to settle near war industries, they could locate anywhere else in the state, "provided I can clear the matter with the county commissioners, and that the local inhabitants raise no serious objections." To Mr. Wada, this seemed a fair decision. On March 16, the governor conferred with the commissioners of twenty-nine counties. Of them all, only the commissioners of Duchesne and Uintah Counties were ready to welcome Japanese settlers. But two counties were enough for a start--Mr. Wada felt sure that, once his colony was under way, other Utah counties would be clamoring to have Japanese evacuees help meet their farm labor shortage.

Fred Wada's next task was to convince Mr. Fisher of the dependability of the proposed colonists. The farm owner was taken on a trip through three California counties, during which he had a chance to talk with many Caucasian Californians about their Japanese American neighbors. Thus the district attorney of San Benito county testified, "For the seven years I have been in this office, I never have had occasion to prosecute a single Japanese." The Oakland Community Chest executive azzi told Mr. Fisher that Japanese, to his knowledge, never go on relief. At the end of the tour of inquiry, Mr. Fisher wired Governor Maw that he was fully satisfied. He gave Mr. Wada a year's lease, with an additional four years' option.

It was at this stage that the writer played a small part in the story. Puzzled over the best way to organize the colony, Mr. Wada came to consult me. We talked for hours, considering and rejecting one scheme after another. I was impressed, as all who know him are, with Mr. Wada's high motives. The thought of personal profit never seemed to cross his mind. In fact, he said with unmistakable sincerity that he was ready to sink $20,000 in the undertaking. My advice to him finally was to make the colony a non-profit cooperative enterprise, and this met his mind. The way was now clear for the plan to take on reality.

In a surprisingly short time, Mr. Wada enrolled one hundred and thirty picked associates. Forty-five of them were strong, mature men, more than half of them single. There were thirty married women, twenty single women, and thirty-five children. The husbands of six of the married women still were interned. Most of the men were farmers. There were nine graduates of agricultural colleges, three merchants, three auto mechanics, a carpenter, an electrician, a plumber, a barber, a registered pharmacist, four nurses, and four gardeners. All agreed to pool machinery and stocks and to contribute a stated amount for general expenses.

It was only three days before the March 29 deadline that the first party of twenty left California, but by April 1 the whole company reached Utah. Only one colonist failed to get out of California before the "freezing date." This man owned a valuable seeding machine, so complicated that no one else in his community could keep it in repair. The neighboring Caucasian farmers begged him to stay until he finished seeding their fields. In loyalty to his friends he agreed to do so, even though he knew it meant going behind the barbed wire of an assembly center instead of leaving as a free man with the rest of the colonists. It was only after urgent appeals from many sources that he was allowed to leave for Keetley a month later. He contributed to the colony farm machinery valued at more than $4,000.

The beginning of the colony meant incredibly hard work, early and late, seven days a week. By the fifteenth of June, when I paid my first visit to Keetley Farms, there were regular rows of strawberry and potato plants in a forty-acre field that had been cleared of fifty tons of stones and roots, and the mountains of sagebrush. In addition, there were 110 acres of peas, lettuce, spinach, radishes, and babbage. In the center of the little settlement, the young men had erected a sign. On both sides, they painted FOOD FOR FREEDOM. Above the sign fluttered the American flag.

The change in the community attitude toward the colony was gradual, but definite. For the first few nights, Mr. Fisher's son served as a voluntary patrolman, to make sure no harm befell the newcomers. Then a state patrolman was stationed at Keetley, "to keep order." But when he reported that he had nothing to do, he was withdrawn. Said Fred Wada, "We have not had one single unpleasant incident."

Many factors have served to bring about harmony between the evacuees and their Caucasian neighbors. The colony has had the interested backing of the officials of the nearby New Park Mine, and of John R. O'Toole, the Keetley storekeeper. The local of the miners' union early adopted a friendly resolution of welcome to the evacuees. The Mormons, perhaps recalling the persecutions that drove their forefathers to the "Great Western Desert," have shown a marked lack of prejudice. On their part, the colonists have gone out of their way to "help out" neighboring farmers. Their trade--always in cash--has been welcome to the stores in nearby Park City, Heber, and Keetley. When Salt Lake City reported a serious shortage of domestic help, the colony permitted nine of its young women to take household positions. The most difficult good will gesture was to release a group of twenty-nine to leave the Keetley colony and establish a branch colony at Sandy, near Salt Lake City, on the urgent invitation of a large landholder there. In little, as well as big things, the colonists have tried to be good neighbors, lending a hand in time of accident or other emergency, and responding to all community appeals.

The colony's first harvest was more than encouraging. The crops were sold at top prices. By including the wages the colonists received for work on a dozen other ranches, the group was able to perform the seemingly impossible--pay the entire first year's rental, $7,000, out of earnings. Further, there was a net profit of $6,000, whichwas divided equally among all the workers--men and women, adults and minors.

The harvest in, Mr. Wada confronted the problem of winter work to occupy the colonists during the slack season and at the same time enable them to continue to play a part in the war effort. He learned that the Army Ordnance Department and the War Production Board in Utah are short of labor to handle such jobs as sorting scrap and reclaiming by-product metals from mine tailings. With George A. Fisher's aid, Mr. Wada approached army authorities with an offer to help meet this manpower need, partly with Keetley Farms colonists, partly with tristworthy cotozens of Japanese descent from the Topaz Relocation Center nearby. With the prospect that the offer would be accepted, and with plans taking shape for the use of an abandoned CCC camp to house the Japanese American war workers, and for some relaxation of curfew regulations, Mr. Wada wrote me: "I did not sleep one wink last night for joy . . . We all can be proud in the streets if this goes through, and not ashamed to face Americans. It will help us prove that our hearts are 100 per cent for America. Perhaps in the peaceful time even some politicians will invite us to go back to California because we helped win the war. Now it seems like eight months of hardship is come to sunlight."

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