

MINIDOKA - November, 1943

Since everyone of you cannot visit us personally, may I describe something of the general life of our desert colony. The Minidoka project is only 20 miles from the city of Twin Falls, Idaho. One would never dream that there existed such a colony even from a few miles away, except for the fact that there arises into the sky two huge water towers and a tall brick smoke stack of the hospital. All of a sudden, as one rounds the bend, the project breaks into view. There is a raging irrigation canal running along the bend which is the source of all the greenery to be seen. Coming nearer there are row upon row of drab barracks similar to an army encampment.

At the entrance there has recently been erected a picturesque pass office made out of logs. Also on either side of the roadway are erected pillars made from lava rock which are so plentiful here. We enter the project.

Upon closer examination we find that each barrack is divided into six rooms of various sizes equipped with electricity and a potbelly stove. Cots and blankets were the only other original equipment. Evacuees had to build their own furniture. On closer examination of the physical equipment, you will see that the barracks are arranged in a pattern known as a "block". There are thirty-six blocks in all. Each block consists of twelve barracks lined up in rows of six on either side of the block dining hall, and a common laundry and toilet building. People eat in army fashion in the mess halls. There is a green painted recreation hall on one side of the block. In all, the project occupies 946 acres.

Since the pioneering beginnings of our colony in what seemed to be a hot searing desert over a year ago, there is appearing the semblance of an organized community. No longer are we stuffing the cracks around the window casings to keep out fine dust which would sift in to give everyone a powder bath. Water from the irrigation ditch is making the hard encrusted ground to send forth struggling blades of welcome grass. During the summer months a brilliant profusion of colorful flowers brought cheer to the drab tarpapered barracks. Transplanted trees have taken root and soon there will be shade for the children to play under.

Certain of the blocks are designated for school use. Grammar and high school are held in the same monotonous barracks as the living quarters for people. Since last year, a number of improvements have been made, equipment added, and most important, additions to the teaching staff. There are 260 pupils in the nursery schools, 805 in the elementary schools, and 1300 pupils enrolled in the combined junior and senior high school.

This community has its stores, two barber shops, two shoe repairing shops, two dry cleaning shops, two watch repairing shops, and even a fish market open once a week. Tucked away in a corner of one building is a "tofu" factory. This is a Japanese food product made from soy beans and considered an essential part of the Japanese diet. All the business establishments are operated on a cooperative basis. There are four libraries. Each week a paper called "The Irrigator" is published.

Out of what was nothing but an almost unbroken line of sagebrush and lava rock, 270 acres of land were put into production this past year. Work is being done to prepare at least 1000 to 1500 acres of land for next year. The local farms produced enough fresh vegetables to be self-sustaining during the summer months. Enough potatoes for a year was grown, root vegetables stored for the winter months, and 11,096 cans of home-grown tomatoes, weighing two-and-a-half apiece were canned during the month of October.

The Christian churches in the center are working in a federated program. Constituent members include Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Holiness, Methodist, and Presbyterian. Over 500 are enrolled in the Church School. The two English speaking services for youth average well over 300 each Sunday. There are special Japanese speaking services for parents which reach 375-400 each Sunday. Besides these, there are evening youth fellowships and midweek services.

The purpose of the War Relocation Authority is to restore family units to normal society. Every effort is extended to the goal of liquidating as many of the ten relocation centers as possible during the duration. One of the ten, Tule Lake in Northern California, has been set aside as an internment camp for "disloyal" evacuees. Those remaining in the nine other centers are free to go any place in the country except back to the Pacific Coast. Approximately 16,000 of the 100,000 evacuees have relocated thus far. Minidoka is leading all centers in the number of permanent relocation with 17% of the original 9,500. The depletion in the ranks has been filled by newcomers from Tule Lake. Relocation of family units is a slow and tedious process. Most of the parents are in their fifties and sixties and have little resources left to start anew again.

While the process of rehabilitating family units is going on, the Christian Church is busy serving in the centers. It is helping in student relocation, family relocation, ministry to those in physical need as well as spiritual need, and pointing people to the higher spiritual values of life. The plans for a community Christmas with gifts for every child has been due largely to the efforts of the Christian Church. We would not be able to do such without the strength which comes from the cooperative effort on the part of our Christian friends on the outside.

There are many other things to be said concerning our desert city. If there are questions that come to your mind please write us.

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