DUSTING THE PEACH BOWL: AGRICULTURAL MIGRANTS, CAMP MANAGERS, AND LIFE IN THE MARYSVILLE AND YUBA CITY RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION AND FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION CAMPS, 1935-1943

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by Luke Widener Summer 2013
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by

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ABSTRACT

DUSTING THE PEACH BOWL: AGRICULTURAL MIGRANTS, CAMP MANAGERS, AND LIFE IN THE MARYSVILLE AND YUBA CITY RESETTLEMENT ADMINISTRATION AND FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION CAMPS, 1935-1943

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In 1935 the newly created Resettlement Administration began constructing the first of twenty-five migratory farm labor camps intended to provide immediate assistance to the so called “Okies,” the dispossessed rural southwesterners fleeing from the dual crises of the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. These federally built and operated camps carried President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal relief program to destitute migrants seeking employment as farm laborers in the valleys of California. The migratory labor camp in Marysville, the first of the camps to be completed, began operation on October 12, 1935, marking the beginning of a great experiment on the part of the federal government regarding the rehabilitation of American citizens who roamed California searching for any type of employment.
Under the Resettlement and Farm Security administrations, residents of the Marysville camp and its successor in Yuba City attempted to construct their own community on their own terms. This goal sometimes led to conflict with reform-minded camp managers who preferred their own methods of community-building. These managers prescribed an array of solutions to the problems that agricultural laborers faced, such as unionization, communal purchasing, and the abolishment of the “rugged individualism” that so many migrants adhered to. In the end, camp inhabitants utilized the democratic processes within the Marysville and Yuba City camps to create a unique society based on rugged individualism and cooperative action.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The popular memory of Great Depression California does not revolve around the unemployment rate of its citizens despite that fact that twenty-nine percent of the state’s workforce (700,000 individuals) found themselves without jobs in 1933.¹ Nor does it recall the state’s bankers, factory owners, or soup kitchen operators as the primary actors of the 1930s. Instead, Depression-era California is primarily remembered as the destination of hundreds of thousands of desperate rural Americans fleeing the poverty and environmental disasters of the Southern Great Plains. These “Dust Bowl” refugees, the so-called “Okies,” dominated the state’s depression narrative as they flocked into its cities and valleys searching for employment. Finding jobs in the fields of California’s Central Valley, the migrants brought national attention to the state’s agricultural working conditions and its refusal to grant aid to needy nonresidents amid economic turmoil. Thus, California’s popular image in the history of the Great Depression is that of what appeared to be a foreign land for the needy and jobless. In 1935, the federal government extended Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal to these refugees and established the first in a string of migratory labor camps at Marysville, and transformed their saga from one of desperation to one of hope.

In the 1930s California provided seasonal employment for 250,000 agricultural workers. However, many California farms differed from the ideal 160-acre yeoman family farms envisioned by Thomas Jefferson and had since the state’s inception. Unlike the majority of other states, California joined the Union with a peculiar system of pre-existing property ownership. “Through the instrumentality of the Mexican land grants,” Carey McWilliams observed in 1935, “the colonial character in Spanish-California was carried over, and actually extended, after the American occupation.”

Individual ownership of huge swaths of land defined this “colonial character,” to the extent that by 1871, 516 Californians owned 8,685,439 acres of land. Landowners initially planted their holdings with wheat, and grew the crop until profits fell off in the 1890s. Meanwhile, following the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869 and with subsequent aid of the refrigerated freight car, developed in 1888, as well as greater accessibility to irrigation, California growers turned to specialty crops such as oranges, grapes, hops, sugar beets, lettuce, and peaches to increase their profits. The change reduced the average California farm from 462 acres in 1880 to 397 in 1900 as smaller farms emerged – historian David Vaught noted in his revisionist essay of Carey McWilliams’ work that a few incredibly large farms and ranches skewed the average significantly, obscuring the fact that in 1910 one quarter of California’s farms occupied less than twenty acres, while one half occupied no more than fifty – and sent the demand

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for harvest labor soaring since specialty crops required extra laborers to harvest, sort, pack, can, and, with regards to orchards, prune.\(^5\)

In this manner, different areas of California’s valleys greeted southwesterners with what historian James Gregory explained as “geometry…only occasionally interrupted by signs of human habitation,” or with communities of smaller, more traditional farms.\(^6\) Regardless of the size of their agricultural endeavors, California farmers demanded large numbers of mobile seasonal workers to harvest their crops. However, the demand fluctuated with the season and the crop. Historian Kevin Starr noted that a thousand-acre peach ranch required thirty workers during most of the year, 200 for pruning, 700 for thinning, and “nearly two thousand for the harvest.”\(^7\) White, non-Hispanic “bindlestiffs” and transients had provided the backbone of California’s agricultural labor needs, while farmers traditionally turned to racial and ethnic minorities to supplement this force, beginning with Chinese labor in the 1870s, then Japanese, Filipino and Mexican throughout the next six decades.\(^8\) Such workers, predominately males, showed up during the harvest, worked, and then disappeared, presumably to rejoin their families or wait out the winter in the cities. However, each group came with its own drawbacks. Starr observed that the Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1892, and 1902 reduced the numbers of Chinese laborers, while the Japanese organized for reasonable wages – according to Starr, “the Japanese rarely lost the advantage in harvest negotiations” – the

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\(^6\) Gregory, 53.
\(^8\) Michael Magliari, “Review of Street, Beasts of the Field, and Review of Street, Photographing Farmworkers in California,” Pacific Historical Review 74 (May 2005): 306.
Filipinos sought out the company of white women, and the Mexicans joined labor unions, a tendency that led to nasty strikes in 1933 and 1934. The white native-born American migrants from the Southwest came with their own baggage as well, namely they brought their families, intended to settle down among the locals, and expected to enjoy the “American standard” of living.

However, the Oklahomans, Texans, Arkansans, and others who came to California during the Great Depression did not settle as they had intended. According to James Gregory, their forebears who had migrated to the Golden State during the 1910s and 1920s came in response to the “pull-factor” of California, drawn to the temperate climate, career opportunities, and sheer excitement of starting over anew. These travelers arrived with money and settled primarily in the cities, to the extent that Gregory credited them with transforming Los Angeles “from a sleepy village into a raging metropolis.” The migrants of the Great Depression, however, traveled to California primarily on account of the “push-factors” at work in the Southern Great Plains. Often referred to as “dust bowlers” and assumed to be tenant farmers, these individuals moved West because the conditions in their home states could not sustain them. Some moved because of the dust storms that hit the region between 1933 and 1935, but many more did so because of floods, sustained drought, cotton reductions resulting from the Agricultural Adjustment Act, or were simply “tractored off” the land. Once uprooted, many of the southwesterners responded to the “pull-factor” that had enticed those before them. Nor

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9 Ibid, 62-68.
10 Gregory, 8.
were all migrants sharecroppers. Merchants felt the sting of the depression nearly as strongly as the sharecroppers, as did tradesmen who found few willing to pay for their services. In fact, in a state such as Oklahoma, where ninety-percent of the residents of certain counties applied for relief in 1934, everybody felt the sting.

Those who came to California under these conditions did so in search of employment. Although the state did not have enough permanent jobs to accommodate all these searchers and sent handbills throughout the country indicating as much, California’s yearly agricultural demands for workers rose from 50,000 in the winter to more than 200,000 in September, and these jobs were largely anybody’s for the picking.

However, certain hurdles confronted the newcomers. As southwesterners took up agricultural work in California, they entered what James Gregory referred to as “one of the sharpest class structures found anywhere in American society.” Migrants competed with Mexicans, Filipinos, and each other as farmers lowered wages in response to the widened pool of workers, high operating expenses, and, during the first years of the 1930s, low gross returns on their crops. During harvests locals viewed the workers as susceptible to unionization and, therefore, dangerous, as any collective action or strike threatened to leave produce rotting in fields rather than carried off to market. After harvests, workers who lingered became potential relief burdens to the community, and their run-down ditch bank camps the spawning grounds of disease. California agriculture

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12 Gregory, 14.
13 Clarke A. Chambers, California Farm Organizations: A Historical Study of the Grange, the Farm Bureau and the Associated Farmers, 1929-1941 (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1952), 3; Starr, 63.
14 Gregory, 58.
15 Chambers, 31-32.
typically provided 150 days of work for those who followed the crops, but after the harvest season, laid off migrants had to get through the winter months on their previous earnings, scrounge up odd jobs, and secure what assistance they could. California’s State Relief Agency, however, required that applicants reside within the state for a year before they became eligible for aid. Thus, many southerners found themselves unwanted in an unfamiliar land, devoid of constant employment or even temporary aid.

Yet every year more came. Between 1930 and 1934 more than 300,000 individuals from throughout the United States migrated to California. Southwestern states alone provided California with 57,000 migrants in 1935, 105,185 in 1937, and 80,200 in 1940. By the end of the decade, 1,200,000 people had migrated to California, including 100,000 from Oklahoma alone. While some sought out kin who had settled in the cities earlier in the century others had none, and found only the ditch bank camps erected by others.

These ditch bank camps offered little to their inhabitants in the way of shelter and security. Historian Walter Stein noted that the camps along the Yuba and Feather rivers near Yuba City and Marysville “disturbed” an unidentified author, who then moved South only to find these camps “clean and respectable” compared to those in Kern County, which he described as “fester sores of miserable humanity.” John Steinbeck visited ditch bank camps as well and attempted to describe a typical settlement. “From a
distance it looks like a city dump.” Migrants built their homes out of cardboard, plywood, canvas, and any other acquirable materials and obtained water from either a nearby river, irrigation ditch or roadside spring. These conditions, coupled with the inability of migrants to obtain aid or steady employment, wreaked havoc on the human condition. Steinbeck noticed a correlation between the different states of degradation of the camp occupants and the time that they had resided there. The newcomers still tried to maintain standards of cleanliness. They swept their dirt floors and dug holes for the outhouses. But their faces betrayed what Steinbeck described as “absolute terror of the starvation that crowds in against the borders of the camp.” Others fared worse, such as one woman who lost several children. “This woman’s eyes have the glazed, far-away look of a sleep walker’s eyes. She does not wash clothes any more. The drive that makes for cleanliness has been drained out of her and she hasn’t the energy.” What troubled Steinbeck the most was that eventually, all of the camp’s inhabitants would reach this state. “This is what the man in the tent will be in six months,” Steinbeck assured, “what the man in the paper house…will be in a year, after his house has washed down and his children have sickened or died, after the loss of dignity and spirit have cut him down to a kind of subhumanity.” In this manner many southwesterners, who left desperate situations in their home states, attempted to ride out the economic storm in California until conditions changed or, at the very least, until the next season brought better luck.

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21 Ibid, 27.
22 Ibid, 30.
23 Ibid, 30-31.
Even if the residents of these camps managed to maintain their dignity, they could not avoid the diseases that their living standards fostered. Poor nutrition, combined with exposure to the elements, contaminated drinking water, and filth spread by flies traveling to and fro between the migrants and their open latrines sapped their health during all times of the year. A survey conducted at three different camps in 1937 by the Bureau of Tuberculosis of the State Health Department discovered eighty-four cases of tuberculosis among seventy different families.24 Between July 1936 and June 1937 the State Bureau of Child Hygiene examined 1,000 migratory children and found that 831 of them suffered from a total of 1,369 ailments ranging from poor muscle tone and decalcified teeth to rickets, diarrhea, and respiratory infections.25 Likewise, the Bureau of Public Administration at the University of California, Berkeley, noted that in 1936 “approximately 90 per cent of the reported cases of typhoid fever in California occurred among rural migrants.”26 Steinbeck observed the effects that other, presumably less serious diseases, had on the inhabitants of the roadside camps. “The county hospital has no room for measles, mumps, whooping cough; and yet these are often deadly to hunger-weakened children.”27

Amid these conditions concern for agricultural migrants in California mounted among the state’s inhabitants. Steinbeck wrote several articles about the migrants that eventually culminated in his literary classic The Grapes of Wrath in 1939, in which Steinbeck chronicled the journey of a fictitious southwestern family to

24 Bureau of Public Administration, 1939 Legislative Problems, No. 4: Transients and Migrants, by Victor Jones (University of California, Berkeley, 1939), 46.
25 Starr, 230.
26 Bureau of Public Administration, 1939 Legislative Problems, No. 4, 46.
California and the hardships that they encountered in the state. That same year, journalist and political activist Carey McWilliams wrote *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* describing the methods that California farmers employed to maintain a class of laborers that required little public assistance and minimum pay. The gatefold cover of the first edition of *Factories in the Field* claimed, “This book tramples out the vintage of facts whence came John Steinbeck’s ‘The Grapes of Wrath.’ It tells the bitter truth about a form of fascism that is operating in California to-day, where brown-shirted vigilantes ride herd on 145,000 unfortunates in 3500 labor camps.”

Others joined the fray. Paul Taylor, an economics professor at the University of California, Berkeley, publicized the plight of tenant farmers in the Southwest as well as agricultural workers in California in numerous articles and public speeches. “The migrants,” according to historian Charles J. Shindo’s summary of the main thrust of Taylor’s message, “had not caused the poor wages and unsanitary conditions in farm work; rather, they illustrated the existence of these conditions.”

Taylor frequently teamed up with Dorothea Lange, a photojournalist who provided pictorial evidence to support Taylor’s claims. With Taylor or alone, Lange traveled the migratory routes in California and documented the conditions of agricultural workers with her camera. Lange snapped her most famous photograph, *Migrant Mother*, at a pea-pickers camp in Nipomo, California. Rains had destroyed a majority of that year’s pea crop, stranding 2,000 migrants who depended on the harvest pay to move on to other camps. It was not as though Florence Thompson, the woman pictured in the photograph, and her family

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28 McWilliams, dust jacket cover [1939 edition].
30 McWilliams, 312.
could move on if they wanted to; they had sold the tires of their car for food, and were subsisting on frozen peas and birds caught by her children when Lange arrived at the camp.\textsuperscript{31} Although most admirers of \textit{Migrant Mother} did not know these details, Thompson’s weathered face and worried eyes, reminiscent of the “absolute terror of the starvation” that Steinbeck observed in a different camp, conveyed to thousands of Americans across the country the vulnerability of agricultural migrants in California.

The federal government desired to help the agricultural workers as well, and hired reformers like Taylor and Lange to contribute to the cause. However, some New Deal legislation passed by the Roosevelt administration aggravated the situation of the southern sharecropper and ignored the agricultural migrant. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, which curtailed farm production within the United States in an effort to restore the ratio of crop prices and general prices to their 1909-1914 “parity” levels, motivated the owners of cotton farms in the Southwest – where cotton prices fell by half in three years, bottoming out at seven cents a pound in 1932 – to pull their lands from production in favor of government subsidies.\textsuperscript{32} As historian Jerold S. Auerbach noted in his essay “Southern Tenant Farmers: Socialist Critics of the New Deal,” farm tenants played no role in the “AAA contracts between landlords and the Secretary of Agriculture” or the “local administration of the act,” and received no subsidy payments from the government.\textsuperscript{33} Since they no longer needed their tenants to grow crops, landlords simply evicted them. As agricultural workers, southwesterners who traveled to California to follow the crops found themselves excluded from additional New Deal

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{31} Shindo, 50. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Gregory, 11-12. \\
\textsuperscript{33} Jerold S. Auerbach, “Southern Tenant Farmers: Socialist Critics of the New Deal,” \textit{Labor History} 7 (Winter 1966): 4-5.}
programs. The Roosevelt administration exempted agricultural workers from the National Labor Relations Act (1935), which granted federal recognition of industrial laborers’ right to unionize; the Social Security Act (1935), which set up old-age pensions to benefit laborers after retirement; and the Fair Labor Standards Act (1938), which established a forty-hour work week for laborers as well as “time and a half” pay for those who exceeded forty hours. President Roosevelt held no grudge against agricultural workers, but placing these additional monetary burdens upon large farmers threatened to offset any profits gained by his Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 and would have been politically disastrous in farm states.

When the federal government did address the plight of agricultural workers, it did so largely through the Resettlement Administration and its successor, the Farm Security Administration. However, rural migrants initially found aid through the Federal Transient Service, a branch of FDR’s Federal Emergency Relief Administration that succeeded President Hoover’s Emergency Relief Administration established in 1932. Between 1933 and 1935 the Federal Transient Service spent nine million dollars in California, building shelters and providing direct relief for out-of-state transients. The state of New York, the second largest beneficiary of the Federal Transient Service, received only six million dollars. Before its termination in September 1935, the Federal Transient Service provided some form of relief to 77,118 individuals in California, nearly fourteen percent of all persons aided by the agency within the United States. However, President Roosevelt, like Herbert Hoover before him, disavowed direct relief as “a subtle
destroyer of the human spirit” in 1935, and established instead the Works Progress
Administration, a five-billion-dollar program that put needy Americans to work in a wide
array of fields, such as building infrastructure, teaching classes, sewing, and beautifying
public spaces with murals.\(^{37}\) Once again, however, many migrants found themselves
barred from this opportunity by the WPA’s one-year-residency requirement.

On the other hand, the Resettlement and Farm Security administrations
provided relief to migrants in California regardless of the duration of their residency in
the state. On a national scale, the Resettlement Administration addressed rural poverty.
The RA’s director, Rexford Tugwell, initially intended to use the administration to
achieve long term agricultural reform by retiring 100,000,000 acres of substandard farm
land from production and relocate the land’s inhabitants to newly built “greenbelt” towns
near large cities that offered more diverse employment opportunities than farming.
Although Tugwell failed to achieve this vision, he succeeded in retiring 9,000,000 acres
of land and built three greenbelt communities in the vicinity of Washington, D.C.,
Cincinnati, and Milwaukee, all at the cost of $36,000,000.\(^{38}\) The Resettlement
Administration’s primary activity turned out to be extending loans and grants to small
farmers, at a more substantial cost of over $900,000,000.\(^{39}\) However, as far as
agricultural migrants in California were concerned, the RA’s establishment and oversight
of a string of migratory labor camps throughout the state – the RA actually only ran two
camps, but set the process in motion for the establishment of eight more by the Farm

Security Administration – constituted the agency’s most important activity. By 1941, the

\(^{37}\) Leuchtenburg, 124.
\(^{38}\) Bernard Sternsher, *Rexford Tugwell and the New Deal* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University
Press, 1964), 268; Leuchtenburg, 140.
\(^{39}\) Sternsher, 268.
FSA had established thirteen of these camps and maintained six mobile camps that traveled to from harvest to harvest. In addition to housing, the migratory camps also provided access to toilets, showers, laundry facilities, and clean drinking water to agricultural laborers at a minimal cost – typically ten cents a night, although families who lacked the funds could work off their debts. Just as important, they allowed migrants to ride out the winter with dignity and under the caring eye of camp managers.

The first of these camps, built in Marysville, placed federal assistance within the heart of California’s peach region. Situated in the middle of the Sacramento Valley, Marysville marked the northernmost point of the typical migratory route that the state’s agricultural workers traveled during the harvest season. In 1934, Paul S. Taylor compared the migration schedules of fifty Mexican agricultural laborers with those of fifty “whites.” While Taylor found that the Mexican migrants generally stayed between Imperial Valley and Fresno, or in other words, California’s San Joaquin Valley, he discovered that the whites journeyed farther north. Taylor concluded the following:

The American whites, starting from diverse areas in Imperial Valley, move out earlier than the Mexicans and go as far north as Marysville for the peach harvest. Then they move south again for grapes and cotton….It is not infrequent, for example, that two trips are made to the Marysville area, one for thinning peaches, and a second for the harvest; between times, Brentwood [east of San Francisco] offers opportunity to pick apricots.

A year after conducting this survey, Taylor and Dorothea Lange treated Lowry Nelson, the regional representative for the Rural Rehabilitation Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, to a tour of ditch-bank camps in Southeastern

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40 Starr, 236.
41 Bureau of Public Administration, 1939 Legislative Problems, No. 4, 7.
California, “with special attention paid to entrance points to the Imperial County at Yuma, Arizona.” According to historian Kevin Starr, “Lowry returned from the trip convinced that the federal government had to get into the business of migrant camps. Finding a disallocated $20,000 in his budget…Nelson wired Washington for permission to use the money to build two camps.” Marysville, the popular destination of white laborers in Taylor’s 1934 study, received the first camp. Arvin, in Kern County, received the second.

Marysville (population 5,760 in 1930), and its sister city, Yuba City (population 3,606), which lay directly across the Marysville’s western boundary, the Feather River, acted as the respective county seats for Yuba and Sutter counties. Due to the area’s intense cultivation of peaches, locals referred to this portion of the Sacramento Valley as the “Peach Bowl.” In 1936 WPA fruit acreage surveys found that peaches led Yuba County’s fruit production with 3,213 acres under cultivation followed by prunes with 1,820 acres. The same surveys revealed that Sutter County cultivated 17,987 acres of peaches followed by 8,737 acres of prunes. Other significant crops in these two counties included almonds (289 acres in Yuba, 3,832 in Sutter), grapes (292 acres in Yuba, 2,726 in Sutter), pears (905 acres in Yuba, 470 in Sutter), olives (909 acres in Yuba, 66 in Sutter), and walnuts (769 acres in Yuba, 1,391 in Sutter). This abundant output of peaches – Sutter County claimed to lead the world in canning peaches in 1931 –

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42 Starr, 235.
43 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
left its imprint on the two counties’ need for seasonal workers.\textsuperscript{47} The Yuba-Sutter area required few laborers during the winter and early spring months, with an estimated combined need of 1,000 on November 1; 2,400 on January 1; and 200 on March 1. These jobs primarily consisted of pruning the various fruit trees while they sat dormant. During May, peach thinning began, and the combined labor requirements of both counties jumped from 1,950 on the first of the month to 5,400 two weeks later. Thinning lasted roughly one month and by June 15, the Yuba-Sutter area required only 1,800 seasonal workers. The next peak came on September 1, when the area required 9,200 workers to harvest peaches and prunes. This period lasted from late-August to mid-September and by October 1, seasonal laborer needs dropped back down to 2,300.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, Yuba and Sutter counties’ dependency on agricultural workers fluctuated from 200 to nearly 10,000 throughout the year, although more migrants traveled to the area than were needed.

When migrants settled in the Yuba-Sutter area they typically located themselves along one of the area’s two major rivers, the Feather River and the Yuba River. These two rivers merged at Marysville. During the winter of 1935-36 a representative of the California State Relief Administration gathered information for a report on transiency in the area. The representative observed several ditch-bank type camps in the area. One consisted of two dozen shacks built of “linoleum and cardboard cartons,” half of which “had stove pipes projecting from them.”

In another place a group of a dozen or more tents and cabins built on trailers occupied by families. One water faucet and one privy were available for the group. Most of the persons living in the shacks were making use of the river water for cooking and drinking as well as washing. Along the river men

\textsuperscript{47} Wooldridge, 441.  
\textsuperscript{48} Hurley, 62.
were cooking and washing, rolling their bundles, some working in friendly groups and others making a point of getting as far as possible from everyone else.\textsuperscript{49}

The representative noted the contrast between the living standards of these people and the local town residents. Within one hundred feet of this camp stood “trim, little cottages with flourishing vegetable gardens or yards full of chickens and turkeys.”\textsuperscript{50} Thus the need for migrant relief starkly presented itself, but besides the federally-run migratory camp established in the area earlier that year Marysville offered little.

The same representative who observed these camps conducted a survey of the relief institutions within the city. The Salvation Army maintained a three-story building that provided shelter for those who needed it at the rate of ten cents a night, although those without the funds could chop wood in lieu of payment. The representative found the living quarters, upon inspection, to be without lighting, “extremely dirty and unsanitary, and the whole place a bad firetrap.”\textsuperscript{51} The local chapter of the American Red Cross lacked any staff members, but maintained a supply of clothing that county welfare workers could disperse to the needy.\textsuperscript{52} Besides giving out clothing, the Yuba County Welfare Department busied itself with referring migrants to other agencies. The representative observed that “all transients or non-residents asking relief [from the Yuba County Welfare Department] were referred to the local office of the State Relief Administration. Sick transients were cared for in the County Hospital only in cases of

\textsuperscript{49} California State Relief Administraton, \textit{Transients in California}, by M.H. Lewis (San Francisco: California State Relief Administration, 1936), 113.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 115.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
The representative found the California State Relief Administration office in Marysville deficient as well. “The whole place,” he noted, “was in confusion…No one in the office was familiar with local resources. Workers in other agencies in the community stated that there had been so many changes in the SRA staff that they never knew who was in charge.” More important though, the SRA office failed to meet the needs of those sent to it. Of the 434 transients who applied for relief between December 16, 1935 and January 26, 1936, the agency accommodated only thirteen. Clearly, the majority of migrants in the area could not depend on aid from the Marysville community. Luckily for them, the federal government had recently built a migratory labor camp purposed with picking up the slack.

The following chapters document the activities of this camp and its successor in Yuba City. Camp newspapers (as well as community newspapers from Marysville and Yuba City), manager reports, bureaucratic correspondence, and a couple of academic theses written during the operation of the camps provide the primary-source foundation that this thesis rests upon. These resources span the breadth of nearly eight years – from August 1935 to early 1943 – the same period that the Resettlement Administration and Farm Security Administration oversaw the migratory camps.

John Steinbeck introduced the American public to the New Deal migratory labor camps in a seven-day series featured in The San Francisco News in 1936. Although the articles touched upon a number of subjects that pertained to the fruit tramp lifestyle that so many Southwestern migrants turned to during the hardships of the Great

53 Ibid, 114.
54 Ibid.
Depression, Steinbeck portrayed the migratory labor camps at Marysville and Arvin as places of respite that provided their inhabitants with physical and spiritual renewal. Migrants within the camps rediscovered their dignity, defined by Steinbeck as “a register of a man’s responsibility to the community,” through various groups and activities such as the Good Neighbors Committee, the central committee, dances, and improved prospects of employment. Brief and sincere, the articles outlined the important aspects that the two camps held in common – clean, healthy, self-governed, stabilizing, and helpful to the migrant – but steered clear of detailed analysis of either camp, their procedures, or camper behaviors. Steinbeck wrote to enlighten his audience of the existence of the camps, their potential and public worth.

Three years later Russel Fred Hurly, a student pursuing his degree in social work at the University of Southern California, investigated the migrants living at the Marysville camp and a neighboring squatter camp for his thesis, “The Migratory Worker: A Survey of Marysville Federal Migratory Camp and the ‘Pear Orchard’ Squatter Camp, Yuba City.” Hurley concerned himself with the personal information of the residents of both camps, and surveyed the heads of families regarding their place of origin, age, family size, children employed, reason for migrating, prior occupation, race, education, and years spent as agricultural migrants. With the exception of the migrants’ responses regarding their place of origin, in which inhabitants of the squatter camp overwhelmingly claimed to be from Oklahoma while those in the federally run camp claimed to be from

57 Ibid, 38-44.
California, the results of his polls revealed little difference between the two groups.\footnote{Hurley, 77, 95.}

Unfortunately, Hurley failed to inquire further regarding this issue. However, he noted the clean demeanor of those in the federally run migrant camp compared to the others and, like Steinbeck, lauded it as a model for private growers and other government agencies to adopt.\footnote{Hurley, 106.} Unlike Steinbeck, however, Hurley virtually ignored the role and importance of the camp manager and various camper committees within the camp. As the title of his thesis suggested, Hurley set out to obtain information about migrant workers, and the Marysville Migratory Labor Camp offered him a convenient place to do so.

In 1943 another thesis, written by Sylvan Jacob Ginsburgh for an M.A. in Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley, explored the Marysville camp’s successor in Yuba City. Unlike Hurley’s work, “The Migrant Camp Program of the F.S.A in California: A Critical Examination of the Operations at the Yuba City and Thornton Camps” focused specifically on the two camps and compared the physical characteristics of both. Rather than extoll the federally run migrant camps as positive influences on the migrants and California in general as Steinbeck and Hurley had done, Ginsburgh attempted to supply observations that could be used to improve camps. Ginsburgh’s observations reflected how far the migratory situation had progressed since the inception of the camps seven years earlier. He concluded that the metal housing structures of both camps lacked any “merit” besides being fireproof and economical in
design. He criticized the apartments at the Yuba City camp for having thin walls and stairs, as well as “the fact that apartments do not offer the type of housing likely to be available for the migrants in the rural communities in which they would eventually settle.” Instead, Ginsburgh proposed two-bedroom houses for the campers, like those in the Thornton camp, that allowed families more privacy and room for private gardens and chicken coops. No longer did access to clean water and showers suffice to improve the condition of agricultural migrants. Ginsburgh viewed federally run migrant camps as permanent features in California, although Thornton’s dwindling population of six families residing in the camp’s metal shelters spoke of a different fate for the program.

After Ginsburgh’s thesis the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps retreated from the public mind for a couple of decades. World War II provided decent factory and other defense-related jobs for those who had been reduced to fruit tramping during the Great Depression, thereby diminishing the importance of the camps. Thus the subject of the federally run migrant camps switched from the hands of social scientists and journalists to historians. In the early 1970s Walter Stein revisited the camps in general in an essay titled “A New Deal Experiment with Guided Democracy: The FSA Migrant Camps in California” (1970) and a book titled California and the Dust Bowl Migration in 1973. While these two endeavors invoked the Marysville and Yuba City camps to illuminate the nature of the Farm Security Administration camps in general, Stein failed to note the unique traits of the two camps that distinguished them from the

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61 Ibid, 108.
rest. Unlike the other FSA camps in California, the Marysville and Yuba City camps allowed residents to vote on any issue of internal governance, never adopted an FSA written constitution, and lacked the religious conflict between “Holy Rollers” and camp management that, according to Stein, typified all of the camps. Given that all three assertions composed the brunt of Stein’s argument that the FSA’s experiment in democracy and rehabilitation had failed, a thorough reevaluation of the Marysville and Yuba City camps became necessary. However, most historians either continued Stein’s method of lumping all of the FSA camps into the same interpretive stew or ignored the Marysville and Yuba City camps altogether.

Despite these tendencies, historical interest in the Marysville and Yuba City migrant camps generated two more studies in the decades following Stein’s initial foray. In 1997 Jeanette Gardner Betts wrote a thesis at California State University, Chico, for her M.A. in Geography titled “Women’s Role in Migration, Settlement and Community Building: A Case Study of ‘Okies’ in the Migrant Farm Workers’ Camp, Marysville, California.” Betts provided what she termed a “Herstory” of the Marysville camp and analyzed migrant women’s roles in making the decisions to migrate to California and building up communal bonds once they arrived. Betts cited, as proof of the latter, the part played by women campers as newspaper contributors, Sunday school teachers, organizers and members of the Happy Hour Club, camp nursery and Good Neighbors Committee, Home Hygiene course students, and organizers of various potlucks, holiday gatherings, and landscape improvement ventures. “The role women played in the

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63 Stein, 168-176.
building of the community inside the Marysville farm workers’ camp,” Betts concluded, “is an example of the role women have played throughout history but were invisible to those who documented the story.”65 In this manner the history of the Marysville migrant camp writ large provided a glimpse of women in general in their roles as family heads and community builders.

But what about a historical study of the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps to explore the lives of the dispossessed agricultural worker during the Great Depression, or a ground level examination of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal at work in California? In 1999 Craig Scott Piper attempted such a study, with an added emphasis on the bureaucratic procedures of building the camps and the philosophy of the camp managers. Written to obtain a doctoral degree in History at Mississippi State University, “New Deal Migratory Labor Camps in California, 1935-1942: Three Case Studies,” investigated the Marysville and Yuba City camps, as well as the more famous one in Arvin. Piper asserted that Tom Collins, Marysville camp’s first manager, understood the migrants’ plight, accepted their “idiosyncrasies,” and managed accordingly.66 However, sometime between Collins’s tenure and the founding of the Yuba City camp in 1940, camp managers no longer accepted their campers’ habits and lifestyles but sought to acculturate them into the modern age, or as Piper put it, “the California main stream.”67 While Piper remained vague as to what caused this transition, he theorized that the Farm Security Administration had moved past Collins’s vision of aiding the unfortunate, and instead focused on rehabilitating those whose lifestyles appeared backwards.

65 Betts, 50.
66 Craig Scott Piper, “New Deal Migratory Labor Camps in California, 1935-1942: Three Case Studies” (PhD diss., Mississippi State University, 1999), 94, 158.
67 Piper, 158, 170.
Unfortunately, Piper did little research regarding the function of the Marysville and Yuba City camps and played fast and loose with the facts that he did manage to piece together. In general, Piper set Tom Collins on a pedestal as the pioneering camp manager in Marysville and cast Frank Iusi, manager of the Yuba City camp, as his antithesis. Piper stated that Collins established and edited the newspaper of the Marysville camp, the *Marysville Camp News*. However the paper did not originate until August 1937, nearly two years after Collins left Marysville. Piper credited Collins with the camp constitution that anchored the communal spirit of the migrants in Yuba City. However, the migratory camps in Marysville and Yuba City never adopted a constitution, a unique feature that should have been picked up by Piper. Even if they had adopted one, Piper’s assertion that the phrase “to ‘promote the general welfare’…illustrated that a strong sense of community still existed within the camps,” remained dubious at best. In his treatment of the Yuba City camp in particular, Piper largely ignored documents of interest generated by camp. In reference to the camp newspaper, published weekly for nearly three years, Piper cited only seven issues. Of the monthly manager narrative reports, Piper cited just one. In this scattershot manner Piper constructed a speculative and occasionally fictitious study of the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps that failed to demonstrate any of the meaningful traits of the camps and their inhabitants.

Piper’s recent mistakes and the generality of Walter Stein’s 1970 study of the FSA camps cannot be left unchallenged and thereby permitted to confuse those interested

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68 Ibid. 95.
69 Ibid. 156.
70 Ibid.
in the history of the federally run migratory labor camps at Marysville and Yuba City. These two camps demonstrated the capacity in which camp managers altered the relationship between their camps and the local community. Migrants took advantage of the FSA’s emphasis on the democratic process and self-government within the camps and incorporated their own brand of “rugged individualism” into their society but did not hesitate to act collectively to benefit their children or improve the living standards of the camp when they could not do so on their own. These migrants also demonstrated a willingness to abandon the negative aspects of rugged individualism – antisocial behavior and technological ignorance – while they politely, and sometimes not so politely, ignored the attempts of camp managers to reform their behavior beyond this. The camp histories that follow confirm John Steinbeck’s belief that once migrants rediscovered their “responsibility to the community” and possessed the means to move away from the squalor of the ditch-bank camps they would build their own communities and contribute to the state like other migrants who had come to California before them.
CHAPTER II

CAMP STRUCTURE, PURPOSE, AND AN ACCOUNT OF THE YUBA CITY CAMPERS IN OREGON

On May 27, 1940, inhabitants of the Farm Security Administration Migrant Camp in Yuba City gathered to meet with a representative of the Farm Placement Service of Oregon regarding employment opportunities in the state’s sugar-beet fields. Hopes ran high as the agricultural workers speculated that pay rates might range anywhere from $6 to $14 a day, a substantial amount compared to the thirty cents per hour paid for thinning California peaches.71 “Peach thinning is just about over,” the camp newspaper reported, “so we can expect another lull, until picking time, unless we hunt up an apricot job some place.”72 However, with 848 people residing in the camp, the odds of employment in the apricot orchards dimmed in comparison to the promise of beets.73

Frustration on the part of the campers characterized the preceding months. A late-February flood had forced the migrants out of their old camp in Marysville into a new, unfinished FSA migrant camp in Yuba City.74 Meanwhile, a power struggle that raged among campers for control of the Voice of the Migrant, the camp newspaper, in February gave way to a struggle for control of the camp council during the months of

71 “Our Oregon Trek,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker (Yuba City, CA), June 4, 1940; Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, June 4, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for May, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
72 Voice of the Agricultural Worker (Yuba City), May 28, 1940.
73 “Camp Statistics,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, May 28, 1940.
74 Voice of the Migrant, March 8, 1940.
March and April. Throughout the course of these struggles, campers also attempted to find any form of employment, working odd jobs such as emergency levee repair and, occasionally, dam construction, while high winds cut the anticipated peach thinning season short. Camp manager Frank Iusi accommodated the campers by allowing them to work off their daily ten cent rent fees but, with camp funds running low, suspended the practice in May.

With rent due, campers needed employment. One camper present, Mrs. Flemon Robbins, recalled the May 27 meeting in a camp paper article. According to the Missouri native, the Farm Placement Service representative painted a promising picture:

The wages--that depended on the individual. How fast can you work? One-half acre to an acre per day--good, then two of you or more in the family could work together and do better, maybe the three or four of you could get two acres. The wages $8 set by the government for standard wage--some paid $9--$10 per acre. Good--then a family might make $10 to $12 even $15 a day--Now the beet thinners – we are authorized to furnish you gasoline and oil for your cars up there.

Their hopes confirmed, campers prepared for a trip north.

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77 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

78 “Our Oregon Trek,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, June 4, 1940.
Sixteen cars, carrying roughly fifty people, left the Yuba City Migrant Camp for the beet fields of Oregon the next day. The Yuba City migrants paired off in groups of two or three vehicles, allowing for mutual assistance when the inevitable car problems arose. The first misfortune struck Mrs. Robbins’s group near Redding. She recalled,

One car door of the Morehead car came open. A girl four years old was thrown out on the pavement with a terrific force, skinning her arms, elbows, knees and ribs to the raw, bleeding flesh. The mother was frantic. They had no first aid. She was too nervous to hardly care for the child. I gave her my kit, did the best we could and we were soon rolling on.\textsuperscript{79}

Following their government issued maps, the migrants made their way through the Sierra Nevada Mountains but the rough mountain roads took their toll on the worn tires of the caravan. One car and trailer flipped over when it sustained three flat tires simultaneously. “That 36 miles of heavy gravel,” Robbins noted, “had chewed up many a tire and caused many flats with us all.”\textsuperscript{80} The migrants reached Alturas in the evening after the designated fueling station had closed, forcing them to spend a chilly night in the town. Two days later, the group arrived at its destination.\textsuperscript{81}

As promised, the farmer that Mrs. Robbins encountered offered $9 per acre thinned. However, the migrants soon discovered the difference between thinning peaches and thinning beats. “Soon your back ached.” Mrs. Robbins explained, “No matter, get down on one knee, down on both knees, crawl along on all fours, sit a while, milker fashion, up again, down again, trembling, aching, but try.”\textsuperscript{82} The farmer did not provide water, forcing volunteers to travel half a mile to the nearest source. Robbins and her

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
husband thinned two rows of beets by the end of the day, but an acre consisted of twenty and one-half rows. Their first day’s payment: ninety cents.\textsuperscript{83}

The next day the migrants weathered a storm in their tents and revaluated the situation: “Kerosene—20¢ a gallon, bread too was 15¢ per loaf. Cheapest bacon 35¢ per pound [and] milk 10¢ a can.”\textsuperscript{84} Additional costs included the hoe required for thinning, priced at eighty-five cents, and daily camp dues of ten cents. Although the possibility of financial gain looked dim, the Robbins family pondered their alternatives. They debated working the hay fields for $2 a day but had no place to camp nearby. Strawberry picking, traditionally carried out by women, offered some employment but the price of the fuel required to travel to two different crops offset any expectation of profits. “On every side you heard it,” Robbins recalled. “As soon as they could get the money they were all coming home.”\textsuperscript{85}

The storm reinforced their conclusions. “Those tents were like great eagles wanting to try their wings…as water came running to the middle of the floor.”\textsuperscript{86} Robbins missed the security of home: “We thought of our metal houses back at the Yuba Camp, the nice smooth floors, the building bolted down, not threatening to fly away and the screen doors and windows.”\textsuperscript{87} Robbins’s one-room home, like the others in Yuba City, rested on a concrete floor and sported corrugated steel walls. The walls offered little insulation during summer and winter and the concrete floors often grew damp, but those

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
who had weathered the seasons in tents or ditch-bank camps recognized their strengths.  

Sore and disappointed, Robbins once again found herself in a tent.  

Storm or no storm, Robbins disliked the Oregon camp.  “An old irrigated alfalfa field,” she described it.  “The alfalfa was two foot high and growing into the tent.” Although Robbins neglected to identify the camp’s location or name, her descriptions suggest one the many temporary migrant camps operated by the Farm Security Administration on the West Coast, built to provide basic amenities to migrants during the harvest.  The toilets, “dry toilets,” stood at the edge of camp, “through grass and weeds waist high.” The stationary laundry tubs, washboards, hand-wringers, and fire-heated irons provided to the migrants lacked the appeal that the electric washing machines and electric irons generated in Yuba City.  The showers, housed in a moveable trailer, offered no privacy once campers entered.  The camp’s nurse, described by Robbins as “the one good item of the camp,” visited migrants returning from the fields and handed out “liniment and sympathy.” The nurse treated the four-year-old Morehead girl, injured in her fall from the car, for broken ribs and tended to her 104-degree fever.  

The Robbins family left camp the next morning, using funds put away for a new tire to finance their fuel.  The June 6, 1940, issue of camp paper, newly renamed "Voice of the Agricultural Worker," featured Mrs. Robbins’s two-and-a-half page narrative.  

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89 “Our Oregon Trek,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, June 4, 1940.  
90 Ibid.  
91 Ibid.  
92 Ibid.
of the journey. The piece concluded: “Thankful to be back, grateful for the many courtesies extended us here, and for the thoughtful, efficient management that makes the Yuba City Camp a harbor of peace after going down the Oregon beet trail with the Oregon Farm Placement Bureau beet caravan.”93 Having left an unfinished Yuba City camp divided by factions, filled with inhabitants unable to find work, and traveled to a region that offered substantially improved employment opportunities, Flemon Robbins returned and found a “harbor of peace.” The Farm Security Administration migrant camp at Yuba City allowed Mrs. Flemons to enjoy dignity and security, and when her experiences in Oregon threatened these two things the camp provided a third benefit: home.

The question arises: what amenities did Yuba City migratory camp, and its predecessor at Marysville, offer to migrants that made them feel at home? The answer differs regarding the two camps. Neither camp structure remained static and residents enjoyed or disdained different camp features that varied over the years. Therefore, an understanding of the camps’ physical qualities is necessary to evaluate the material and psychological support that the migrant camps offered their occupants.

As the first federally-run migrant camp built in the nation, the Marysville camp’s structure reflected some of the initial goals of the Resettlement Administration in California. The RA desired to directly improve the living conditions of migrant laborers by establishing federally-run camps throughout the state and contribute indirectly to the improvement of privately-run camps by providing a standard that farmers and migrants

93 Ibid.
alike could judge other camps by.\textsuperscript{94} The filthy ditch-bank and squatter camps that many migrants resided in loomed large over the issue. At the California Conference on Housing of Migratory Agricultural Laborers in November 1935, one RA official claimed, “The living conditions for thousands of these men, women, and children are only too suggestive of China and other backward countries. In America their standard of living is intolerable.”\textsuperscript{95} Fred Russel Hurley, a graduate student who visited one such squatter camp located in Yuba City along the banks of the Feather River, observed families living in “delapidated[sic] automobiles,” sleeping on beds of driftwood, and obtaining their water for cooking and washing “several yards away” from a pipe that emptied the city’s sewerage into the river.\textsuperscript{96} The Marysville migratory camp addressed issues like these by requiring campers to have tents to live in, as well as providing them with showers, wash tubs and washing machines, and clean, consumable water.\textsuperscript{97} The RA also sought to ensure that campers remained free from the influence of vigilantes, peddlers, and agitators.\textsuperscript{98} Although state and county laws applied to the campers within the camps, federal ownership of the land prohibited bands of locals from expelling migrants from their dwellings whenever they pleased, and allowed camp managers to ban peddlers and others likely to take advantage of the campers from the premises. Regarding agitators,

\textsuperscript{94} Resettlement Administration, “Statement of Regional Office of Resettlement Administration on Possible Establishment of Migrant Camps” (lecture presented at the California Conference on Housing of Migratory Agricultural Laborers, Santa Cruz, CA, November 18, 1935).
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Jeanette Gardner Betts, “Women’s Role in Migration, Settlement and Community Building: A Case Study of ‘Okies’ in the Migrant Farm Workers’ Camp, Marysville, California” (Master’s thesis, California State University, Chico, 1997), 40.
\textsuperscript{98} Resettlement Administration, “Statement of Regional Office of Resettlement Administration on Possible Establishment of Migrant Camps” (lecture presented at the California Conference on Housing of Migratory Agricultural Laborers, Santa Cruz, CA, November 18, 1935).
the agency stated, “No more fertile soil exists for spreading unlawful propaganda than in squatters’ or jungle camps,” and pointed to clean, regulated camps as the answer to this problem.\(^9^9\) Lastly, the RA considered the camps “part of a broader program of rehabilitation and resettlement” that “constitute[d] a first rung in a reconstructed agricultural ladder, which [migrants] can ascend in traditional American fashion according to their abilities.”\(^1^0^0\) While they built the camps to achieve these purposes, the RA justified their efforts based on the New Deal mantra that the government needed to step in and help needy citizens when private attempts to do so had failed. “Can a government,” one RA official asked regarding the migrants in California, “interested in its own stability and the welfare of its people, continue to tolerate present conditions, which feed unrest and undermine its prestige?”\(^1^0^1\) The official pointed to the Agricultural Adjustment Agency, the Federal Land Bank, the Production Credit Association, the Bank of Cooperatives, and other government efforts that presumably benefitted the farmers and stated, “It is therefore entirely just that some direct assistance from the government be extended to the farm laborers, who constitute more than 57 per cent of all persons gainfully employed in agriculture in California.”\(^1^0^2\) The RA provided this direct assistance in the form of migratory labor camps like those at Marysville and Yuba City.

As the most essential feature of the two camps, housing improved steadily in quality. Sylvan Jacob Ginsburgh, a University of California, Berkeley student writing his thesis on the Yuba City camp, noted this evolutionary trend in the old Marysville camp:

\(^{9^9}\) Ibid.  
\(^{1^0^0}\) Ibid.  
\(^{1^0^1}\) Ibid.  
\(^{1^0^2}\) Ibid.
“The first campers on the original site pitched their tents on the bare ground. In January, 1936, wooden platforms, fourteen by sixteen feet, were erected. This improvement proved to be more convenient and more healthful….In August 1938…cement platforms replaced the wooden ones.”\(^{103}\) The innovations did not stop there. When residents moved into the Yuba City camp in early 1940, they found 208 one-room, corrugated steel structures waiting to house them.\(^{104}\) After weathering the first storm in these new shelters, campers realized their downside. One camper described them as draughty, leaky, dim-lit, and “immediately[ sic] reflect[ive of] the outside temperature.”\(^{105}\) The camper concluded, “At best they can prove to be little more than another experiment.” Another camper put it more severely: “I hope he [the camp designer] doesn’t have a very long life if ho[sic] is going to spend the rest of it building camps like this one…”\(^{106}\) Afterward, campers nicknamed the metal shelter portion of the camp “the chicken coop.”

Camp housing culminated in the apartments of the Yuba City facility. Unlike their corrugated counterparts, the apartments offered residents running water, toilets, showers, refrigeration, and electricity.\(^{107}\) Situated in fourteen buildings of six apartments each, the eighty-four apartment units featured three-and-one-half or five-and-one-half rooms.\(^{108}\) Camp managers initially required applicants to demonstrate regular employment and one year of residence in the county, but dropped the residency.

\(^{103}\) Ginsburgh, 45-46.
\(^{104}\) Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, July 12, 1940, “Diagram and description of all real property owned by Farm Security Administration,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; Ginsburgh, 48.
\(^{105}\) “Metal Shelters vs. Tents,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, March 29, 1940.
\(^{106}\) “The Rains Came,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, March 29, 1940.
\(^{107}\) Ginsburgh, 51.
\(^{108}\) Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, July 12, 1940, “Diagram and description of all real property owned by Farm Security Administration,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; Ginsburgh, 51.
stipulation in November 1940 to boost eligibility rates. One year later camp manager Frank Iusi exclaimed, “There is no doubt of the apartments being filled. At this present date…we only have 6 vacancies.” At the same time, Iusi also noted “4 excellent applications that are being processed.”

Although the apartments’ private toilets, showers, and running water broke down communal ties among the campers, their absence in the rest of camp reinforced such ties. Each camp unit featured one utility building, divided into male and female sections, that housed shower facilities, flush toilets, and dressing rooms. While women enjoyed more shower heads, nine as opposed to the men’s six, men enjoyed the absence of laundry equipment and the expectations that accompanied them. Regardless of their gender, campers enjoyed the showers and circulated tall tales that reflected their initial shock of having access to such facilities. Tom Collins, the first manager at the Marysville camp, investigated claims that one woman, having been struck with a burst of hot water, “took to the hills” and had not been seen since. Other tales included a camper, who had not bathed in three months, unable to enter his tent because his dog did not recognize his scent and another who found he could not walk in clean skin. Regarding the latter, campers claimed “it was necessary to get some mud and rub it over

109 Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., November 4, 1940, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
111 Hurley, 67.
his legs before he was able to walk."\textsuperscript{113} Another, more illustrative example of the migrants’ appreciation for the shower units came from Collins as well. He observed a woman emerging from the utility buildings after showering three times in one morning. On the third occasion she exclaimed, “If you knew how good a bath felt, with hot water running down you, you’d live in the bath for a week.”\textsuperscript{114} Having experienced all sorts of substandard living arrangements as they followed the crops, migrants quickly acclimated to luxuries of indoor plumbing and showers.

Migrants also showed signs of appreciation for the laundry facilities provided by the Resettlement and Farm Security Administrations. Although the showers and toilets of the utility buildings remained relatively unaltered throughout the duration of the Marysville and Yuba City camps, campers upgraded the laundry facilities when their camp funds allowed. Each utility building in Marysville began with cement laundry tubs and one electric washing machine, but due to the latter’s popularity, the number of washing machines eventually grew. For example, between the months of May and August, 1940, inhabitants of the Yuba City purchased six more.\textsuperscript{115} Washing machines operated at a rate of ten cents per thirty minutes and camp rules required users to sign in for specific time slots.\textsuperscript{116}

Maintenance and upkeep fell upon the campers residing in the designated units of the utility buildings. This obligation did not guarantee clean and orderly camp

\begin{flushleft}\\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.\\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.\\textsuperscript{115} Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, July 9, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, September 10, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.\\textsuperscript{116} “Second Washing Machine Installed Late Thursday,” \textit{Marysville Camp News}, September 10, 1937.\end{flushleft}
facilities but it did bring peer pressure upon messy individuals. One anonymous camper complained about “campers who are too lazy to go to the office and get their rolls of toilet paper, and use newspapers instead, leaving them on the floor.”

Another camper frequently relieved herself on the floor. After she “failed to respond to friendly counsel” Tom Collins brought her back to her mess and required her to scrub it with sand and water. Collins recorded the event in a weekly report and added, “Every push of the broom she wailed to high heaven or elsewhere….The management complimented her on the good job (and it was) and asked her why she cried and screamed. Amusing her answer, for she was so sincere about it---‘Mister yer kent get way frum yer own dirt.’”

Other campers simply shirked their clean-up duties. However, chronic failure to clean these buildings carried serious consequences, as demonstrated in November of 1940 when Yuba City camp manager Frank Iusi, with approval of the camp council, evicted the negligent family of Hugh T. Smith.

While camp utility buildings served daily routine living purposes, the community building hosted a variety of special public services. Every week campers held Sunday school and church services, camp council meetings, Young People’s Club meetings, dances, and movie screenings. Public services included a nursery and, at Yuba City, a juvenile library consisting of donated books, and an adult library stocked by

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119 Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., November 18, 1940, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
120 Hurley, 68.
the Sutter County Library. The Marysville camp had also featured a library, located in the management building that consisted chiefly of donated materials.

Besides finding entertainment in the shelter of the community building, campers also enjoyed an assortment of outdoor activities. Both camps sported baseball diamonds and staged showdowns between the camp team and other local groups. Horseshoe pits occupied the adults while a playground, featuring slides, swings, teeter-totters, and sand pits occupied the youth. After the 1940 flood forced campers to move to Yuba City, they returned to retrieve the playground equipment and brought it to their new location. In February 1938 a resident suggested that the Marysville camp manager utilize surplus rope and, in his words, “fix a boxing arena so the campers may settle their disputes there.”\(^{121}\) A ring was soon built and, although nothing indicated that campers ever entered it to settle their differences, the youths (and possibly adults) in both Marysville and Yuba City regularly enjoyed the boxing rings. Camp papers reported that the migrants arranged and fought anywhere from ten to twenty bouts on Saturday afternoons during the month of March 1941.\(^ {122}\)

Both the Marysville and Yuba City camps maintained isolation units to treat and quarantine campers suffering from communicable diseases. The units provided the afflicted families with their own shelter, toilet, and wash bowl, while all isolated families shared laundry equipment.\(^ {123}\) In addition to offering treatment to infected campers, the unit acted as a buffer between the healthy and the suspect for both the inhabitants of the

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123 Hurley, 68.
camp and the local community. In the midst of an impetigo outbreak the camp paper reassured residents that “all new families coming into camp…are being examined by the nurse before being permitted to camp up in camp. If the new families arrived in the evening, they are required to spend the night in the isolation unit.”

Likewise, Marysville health authorities required the camp to utilize its isolation unit when they felt impetigo and pink eye threatened the local community. The camp paper noted that, as a result, “some twenty camp families had to move within camp.” In an amusing reversal of roles, one family, the Porters, refused to leave isolation after contracting measles in the camp, fearful that they would catch something else from the camp population.

However, isolation did not always work in practice since the management failed to erect barriers between the isolated individuals. Upon arriving to the isolation unit one day, camp nurse Joy Crain reported, “I found the patient with the possible scarlet fever playing with the child with the whooping cough. This is a frequent thing in isolation.”

Invaluable in their purpose and utilized on a regular basis, the isolation units were among the many important features that set the federally-run migrant camps apart from their ditch bank counterparts.

Meanwhile, other, less notable, structures dotted the landscape of the migrant camps as well. The majority of these served some type of storage purpose while others served various public uses. Water towers supplied water to both camps. Likewise, both

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125 “Impetigo and Pink Eye Isolated by Order of City Health Department,” *Marysville Camp News*, October 2, 1937.
camps featured wood working shops and sewing rooms containing available sewing machines. Campers performed automotive repairs in the well-stocked camp garage while a night watchman, whom the migrants called “Sherlock,” operated out of a concrete, six-room guard house.\textsuperscript{128} Other buildings may have existed. Russel Fred Hurley’s description of the Marysville camp noted a delousing unit on the camp grounds.\textsuperscript{129} This structure never appeared in camp manager narratives, maps, or newspaper articles and was either the subject of misidentification or of little importance to the camp population.

Prior to acceptance into the Marysville FSA Camp, the head of each migrant family signed a revocable camper permit. The first sentence of this permit stated, “This camp is for your health and comfort.”\textsuperscript{130} The permit continued to list the on-site amenities available to residents, such as hot and cold water, flush toilets, cook stoves, and safe playgrounds.\textsuperscript{131} Of the twelve items listed, the first ten were preceded by the adjective “clean.” FSA and camp management officials understood that the Marysville Camp offered more to migrants than an alternative to the squalor of ditch-bank camps and the privately-owned accommodations offered by farmers. The FSA camp functioned as a mechanism to rehabilitate its inhabitants and reintegrate them into society. Camp managers expected to see the physical manifestation of this transformation in the form of cleanliness. In August 1937, the editor of the camp paper, a camper himself, urged newly arrived peach pickers to do their part: “The managers have told each of us that there are 5 requirements for living in camp: 1. 10¢ a day, 2. work maintenance of one hour per week,

\textsuperscript{128} H.P. Hallsteen to H. W. Rogers, June 5, 1941, “Maintenance Request for Incidental Structures,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{129} Hurley, 64.
\textsuperscript{130} Hurley, 104.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
3. our share of bathhouse clean-up work; 4. keeping our lot clean, 5. watering trees on our lot.”

While the editor omitted several other requirements placed upon residents, four of the five listed directed the new arrivals to maintain basis standards of cleanliness and appearance.

To reinforce this expectation of cleanliness, managers of both Marysville and Yuba City camps conducted weekly inspections of the area around the lots in each unit and published their findings in the camp newspaper. A typical report listed the overall state of cleanliness for the week, boiled down to the number of lots per unit considered “very good,” “good,” “fair,” “unacceptable,” and the manager’s advice for the upcoming week. Those whom camp managers deemed their lots unacceptable also received notices to improve or face eviction, but remained anonymous in the paper. Camp managers rarely evicted campers for unkept lots, but on occasion followed through with their threats.

Like the camp itself, expectations of cleanliness did not remain unchanging. In February 1942, Yuba City camp manager Frank Iusi began a more invasive practice of inspecting the interior of camp resident cabins. Iusi initially began the inspections in an effort to quell an outbreak of measles afflicting the camp, but made the practice permanent during the following months and extended his inspections to the apartments as well.

No other migrant camps employed this method and Farm Security

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133 “Two Families and One Individual Dismissed From Camp This Week,” *Marysville Camp News*, September 10, 1937.
134 Milen C. Dempster to Myer Cohen, n.d., “Cabin Inspection at Yuba City,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, March 10, 1942, “Monthly Narrative
Administration officials pondered its merits. Acting Chief of Community & Family Services and former Marysville camp manager Milen C. Dempster wrote to Assistant Regional Director Myer Cohen: “We conclude as follows:

1. That Mrs. Coe [Assistant Supervisor, Community and Family Services] is correct in reporting that there are many families living in deplorable filth in the camps.
2. That Yuba City is perhaps the only camp really clean inside and out.
3. That their weekly inspection of cabins is succeeding both as a demonstration and as a habit-forming process.
4. That it was not achieved by stimulating the residents to express their desire for it through the democratic process, but was imposed from above.”

Dempster needed to reconcile the imposition of home inspections with the ideals of self-governance and the democratic process that the federal migrant camps supposedly existed to promote. He therefore continued, “In thinking of general application, two questions arise:

1. Could residents generally be stimulated to desire this weekly inspection, and request it?
2. Would it be invading the privacy of the home?”

Dempster offered his answer in the next line.

I believe that, with a careful approach, our able managers could succeed in stimulating the campers not only to want it, but to vote for it and support it. If the inspection can be kept in the mood of a friendly visit for the protection of health and the discovering of contagious diseases, and not be mandatory; the feeling that privacy was intruded upon could be kept at a minimum.

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136 Ibid.
Dempster’s phrase “and not be mandatory” is confusing. Did he mean that, if such inspections were democratically approved, they would apply only to those who invited the inspectors in, or did he mean mandatory in the sense that mandatory inspections should not be practiced without consulting the constituencies of the camps first? In any event, Dempster seemed to favor the inspections and looked for additional reasons to carry them out: “When furniture is provided in the shelters, an added justification for the weekly visit is thereby added.”

Frank Iusi initially began in-home inspections to stop the spread of measles but, in his capacity as camp manager, always looked for ways to draw his campers out of their substandard conditions. He believed their initiative did not suffice. Upon announcing his inspections to his superiors Iusi explained his reasoning: “We feel there isn’t much value in rehabilitation if we don’t start out with a reasonable degree of living sanitation.” Iusi never defined “reasonable,” but the outwardly cleanliness of the lots, the utility buildings, and the function of the isolation unit failed to meet his standards.

The Resettlement and Farm Security Administration migrant camps of Marysville and Yuba City provided the physical amenities that migrant agricultural workers sorely lacked during the Great Depression. Rehabilitation, however, meant different things to the migrants and managers. A closer look at the Marysville and Yuba City federal migrant camps reveals that residents regularly exercised initiative to better themselves and that their understanding of rehabilitation emphasized economic improvement. The managers, on the other hand, varied in opinion as to whether the

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
migrants could improve their status or required the guiding hand to rise out of their conditions.
CHAPTER III

CAMP MANAGEMENT

“I take the stand that a Man’[s] tent is his farm…so long as he does not disturb his neighbors or go to extremes.”138 With these words Tom Collins, the original manager of the Marysville migratory labor camp, described his relationship with the camp residents. During the seven years between Collins’s commitment to camper privacy and Frank Iusi’s mission to accelerate camper rehabilitation by conducting in-home inspections five managers ran the Marysville and Yuba City camps, beginning in the summer of 1935 and continuing through the end of 1942. These managers implemented their own objectives while in charge and, in doing so, altered the nature of the two camps. Of the five, four will be discussed here, in order of their tenure at the camps: Thomas “Tom” Collins, Charles Eddy, Milen Dempster, and Frank Iusi. Other than a few notices in the local newspapers, the fifth, Harold I. McGrath, left few traces in the historic record. McGrath served as camp manager between Charles Eddy and Milen Dempster during the last half of 1936 and into 1937.139

The Marysville and Yuba City camps changed dramatically between 1935 and 1942 as they accumulated capital and manpower that benefited the residents. Whereas

139 “M’Grath Takes Over Reins at Migrant Camp,” Appeal-Democrat (Marysville, California), July 16, 1936, evening edition.
the term *evolution* should be used to describe the gradual changes of the two camps, it is incorrect to apply it to the changes in management. Each manager consistently displayed one of two philosophies: the first presumed that campers had the capability to improve themselves on an individual basis through hard work, financial prudence, and the stability that the migratory camps offered. The second regarded migrants as a class that lacked the intrinsic qualities to progress beyond their immediate circumstances; requiring socialization or rehabilitation to be imposed upon them by the well-intentioned social betters in the Farm Security Administration. For this latter group’s intent and purposes, rehabilitation meant three things: the abolition of lethargy, perceived by managers to inhibit the migrants’ ability to improve; the correction of the “rugged individualism” displayed by the migrants; and the transformation of unwholesome individuals into residents benefitting the state. To an extent, these two philosophies also influenced the role that managers envisioned themselves playing as intercessors for migrants in an unfamiliar, and potentially hostile, community.

The position of camp manager carried different responsibilities as the Marysville and Yuba City camps evolved. Neither Tom Collins nor Charles Eddy, the first two managers of the Marysville camp, mentioned the presence of any other staff member in their weekly reports besides a night watchman and playground supervisors. As a result, Collins and Eddy wore many hats. In one instance Charles Eddy spent considerable time performing groundskeeper duties: “All the doors were swelled from the late rains so I had to take them off and plane them. Even the[ ]doors on the toilets and showers in the woman’s [sic] department stuck so they all had to be refitted….I cleaned
the bowls, wash basins, and floors.”

Eddy also acted as the camp medical authority: “The manager has become quite proficient in giving advise[sic] for minor ailments.”

The manager’s only documented prescription: “three heaping tablespoons full of epsom[sic] salts in a glass of water” to correct one camper’s headache and lack of appetite. In addition to these groundskeeper and medical duties, Collins and Eddy acted as secretaries, treasurers, and middlemen between the farmers and campers, lecturers, and camp representatives. In one report Collins described his specifications for an ideal assistant: “He will have to be particularly adapted for this work, be able to thrive on it, have no other interests, have lots of reserve energy, and forget time.”

The assistant never arrived. In October 1935, shortly before moving to the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp, Collins reminisced, “It was a Herculean task, to be sure, and although it was terribly disheartening at times and at times seemingly impossible, especially working alone, I can truthfully say that I had a ‘Hell of a good time’ with the accent on the ‘Hell.’”

In order to compensate for the lack of support staff, Charles Eddy required campers to work off their weekly rents. “A new rule,” Manager Eddy reported, “was put into effect Feb. 10th, assessing each lot in camp two hours work per week as rental. The result is the campers are cutting and raking[sic] the grass and dead leaves in the grove.

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142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
and putting the grounds in first class condition.”

These weekly labor contributions, derived from a body of campers typically short on funds but possessing plenty of free time, proved practical for the management and migrants alike. Future managers of the Marysville and Yuba City camps occasionally substituted labor for rent, especially during January, February, and March when agricultural employment opportunities dwindled and families exhausted their savings from the previous harvest.

As managers of the first federally-run migratory camp, Collins and Eddy also had to respond to unanticipated problems that continuously arose at the newly established camp. The winter of 1935-1936 impressed upon management and campers the need to build tent platforms to elevate the campers above the mud. Eddy informed his superiors, “The ground is very wet and damp inside their tents,” and noted, “The men have offered to help build tent platforms if we will furnish the material.” Small items, such as a “scythe and small cutters” to trim the grass, and a first aid kit, loomed large in their absence. Even items such as playground equipment entered the list of camp needs. Manager Eddy noted that children played in the utility buildings “where they destroy toilet tissue, hot and cold water and break the doors from their hinges.”

Eddy attempted to alleviate the destruction by supplying the children with sets of jacks and

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rubber balls and went so far as to threaten three families with dismissal from the camp for their children’s behavior.\textsuperscript{149}

Throughout 1935 and 1936 Marysville camp managers attempted to iron out the early wrinkles of the camp, perform a wide array of tasks, and serve the campers. Given these pressing and immediate demands, Collins and Eddy possessed little time to devote toward the transformation of their migrant tenants into progressive, rehabilitated citizens. Moreover, neither seemed inclined to do so. Rather than take on roles as conduits of modernity, these men endeavored to improve the economic situation of camp inhabitants and provide some semblance of normalcy during the unusual hardships of the Great Depression.

The laundry and shower facilities contributed greatly to this latter goal, but the managers contributed to it as well. Collins stressed the importance of making the campers feel safe. In August 1935, the Associated Farmers of Santa Rosa responded to a strike with what Carey McWilliams described in \textit{Factories in the Field} as “a Saturnalia of rioting, intimidation and violence.”\textsuperscript{150} Rather than negotiate, a mob, including the town’s mayor and several law enforcement officers, tarred, feathered and beat some of the strikers. The Associated Farmers openly engaged in warfare against their striking field hands and little time passed before knowledge of their deeds spread across the state. “Campers…were quite uneasy as a result of the work of the vigilantes at Santa Rosa,”

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} Carey McWilliams, \textit{Factories In The Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1939), 242.
Collins noted. “They feel they are safe from such in this camp, as well as safe from any outside influences which might be opposed [to] them as a ‘class’”\(^{151}\)

Prior to the opening of the Marysville Migratory Labor Camp, migrants stood little chance for redress in the event that local sentiment, or the local chapter of the Associated Farmers, turned against them. Donald Friend Fearis’s study of the Associated Farmer organization reveals the extent that the organization permeated the Yuba-Sutter area. Less than third of the local members actually farmed. The rest included the following:

Three bankers; two newspaper publishers; three realtors; three businessmen…; seven law enforcement officials including both county sheriffs and district attorneys, the Marysville and Yuba City police chiefs and the area Highway Patrol Captain; the mayor and the assessor of Yuba City; and, the heads of the Sutter-Yuba Chamber of Commerce and the Sutter County Farm Bureau Federation.\(^{152}\)

Camp managers played the middlemen between these individuals and the campers who, as a class, remained foreign and potentially dangerous to the community leaders of Marysville and Yuba City. The importance of the manager’s mediating role between these two groups never diminished during the existence of the Marysville and Yuba City migrant camps. Manager Collins established this role early on, before the official opening of the Marysville Camp, when he requested that the sheriff and police stop at the entrance of the camp and acquire the consent of the manager before patrolling through the facility. Collins did this because “one or the other was circling through the grounds


\(^{152}\) Donald Friend Fearis, “The California Farm Worker, 1930-1942” (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 1971), 263-264.
two to three times a day.” These patrols took place while news of the vigilante violence in Santa Rosa trickled in. The migrants needed security, but the presence of circling law enforcement provided little. The results of his request pleased Collins. “They [the sheriff and police] took the suggestion very nicely and now realize we can take care of ourselves.” From this point on the local law enforcement aided the camp management upon request and thereby contributed to the secure atmosphere that Collins intended to provide.

While managers maintained a secure environment for their campers, they also attempted to provide entertaining distractions. Collins rented a radio and broadcast the Baer-Louis fight for the campers, reporting a “100% turnout.” Eddy treated the campers to motion pictures one night and took advantage of the assembly to organize campers into committees charged with organizing a baseball team and a horse shoe tournament. On Easter Mrs. Eddy dyed four dozen eggs for the children and supplied prizes for those who found the golden eggs. These events occurred in addition to the weekly dances and church services held at the camp and provided inhabitants of the federally-run migratory camps opportunities that residents of the ditch-bank camps rarely enjoyed. Manager Eddy constantly strove to make the campers feel at home: “The people themselves do not come to me but I talk with them everyday and do what I can to

154 Ibid.
157 Ibid.
cheer them up.”¹⁵⁸ Both Collins and Eddy endeavored to provide the migrants with every chance to live normal lives despite their hardships.

However, migrants did not travel to Marysville to watch movies and hunt Easter eggs. They came in search of jobs. As in any agricultural community, employment opportunities in Marysville varied with the seasons. During the peach harvest in August and September campers found employment with relative ease. In September 1935 Tom Collins observed a “constant stream of growers in search of labor from the camp.”¹⁵⁹ However, the lean months extending from November to April required camp residents to search out odd jobs or move to other, more promising areas. During this period camp management aided residents in their search for employment. On March 19, 1936, when twenty-five of the forty-four adults in camp remained unemployed, Eddy received a phone call from a camper who had traveled to Thornton, California notifying him of one hundred available jobs canning spinach. Cautious about the claim’s validity and not wanting his tenants to “find themselves up against it in a strange place,” Eddy counseled the campers to select three men to travel to Thornton to secure positions for those who desired them. As a result fifteen campers obtained jobs that lasted four weeks, a respectable duration by fruit tramp standards. Eddy described this event to his superiors and added, “The above is a very good example of what this camp really means to these people. If it had not been for the cooperation and facilities of the camp the communication could not have been delivered in time for them…for the

jobs had to be filled at once.”¹⁶⁰ One month later Eddy reveled in his continuing success at finding work for the campers. “We have had the extreme pleasure of placing better than 50 men from our camp on jobs the past two weeks.”¹⁶¹

Finding employment for migrants improved their immediate financial situations, but Collins and Eddy wanted campers to move up the economic ladder. Eddy identified two examples of individuals taking full advantage of the benefits that he felt the Marysville migratory labor camp offered, and he stressed the virtues of hard work and wise money management:

One young man with a wife and two small children checked in the camp on March 25th, with out a cent to his name, he went to work the next day and has had steady work ever since. The only time he takes off is when it rains. He reports that he has deposited $151.00 in the Bank[sic] besides taking care of his family since coming here. This is considered very good indeed.¹⁶²

Eddy gave a similar example three months later. The individual cited may have been the same young man:

One man, wife and two small daughters checked out [during] the first part of the week, they had been in camp just two months and came from Idaho. He had steady work ever since they arrived. They like it so well here he bought a small piece of land just south of the City[sic] limits, dug his own well and moved out with their tent. They expect to live in it until he can build a cabin. He owned a pretty good looking Chev. car which he sold for $185 and then bought an old Ford for $20., the difference or what he made from the sale he used to purchase lumber with for his cabin. This man is very industrious and a hard worker.¹⁶³

Tom Collins took action to ensure that campers remained in good financial standing. During the peach harvest Collins gained the friendship of the heads of families “addicted to drink.” “As a result,” Collins explained, “such groups turned over to the management most of the money received in the last payment for wages, same to be kept until the group was all packed and ready to move.” In this manner Collins collected and kept $412 in an effort to preserve the earnings of campers until they moved elsewhere.

In the process of safeguarding the earnings of migrant families Collins gained insight into the mindset of those dispossessed during the Great Depression. “It is interesting to note that the groups who turned their money over to the management for safe keeping, had fear for the safety of their funds in a bank.” The manager attempted to explain that the new Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insured all funds deposited in banks, but the migrants remained skeptical. Collins grasped the opportunity to contribute to the financial understanding of the campers and lectured “three successive evenings…explaining simple rudiments of savings and banking to quite an interested group.”

Future managers of the camp enjoyed much more material and staff support than Collins or Eddy. By 1937 the Marysville camp not only boasted a first aid kit, but an isolation unit tended to by a resident nurse. Eddy’s “scythe and small cutters” gave way to three lawn-mowers and one tractor attachment unit by the summer of 1940, and

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165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 “Impetigo and Pink Eye Isolated by Order of City Health Department,” Marysville Camp News, October 2, 1937.
occupancy reports reveal that five Farm Security Administration personnel lived on site, one as a foreman and the rest working as clerks, gardeners, and maintenance men.169 While campers still met their weekly camp maintenance obligations, additions to the FSA staff freed the camp manager from the rigors of routine physical labor and lightened his clerical workload.

As the camp evolved, subsequent managers shifted their focus from individual success to group rehabilitation. Whereas Eddy praised the economic fortitude and rugged individualism of certain campers in the early days at Marysville, Yuba City camp manager Frank Iusi praised the group sentiments that led to social cohesion and shared progress. Eddy noted “extreme pleasure” in finding fifty campers employment six years before Iusi experienced “a great deal of pleasure and pride” upon inspecting the interior living quarters of his campers.170 Under Collins and Eddy, the economic improvement of migrants resulted from their own hard work and luck. When the economic status of the campers remained relatively static, later managers attempted to unify the campers under the banner of social improvement and collective action.


Milen C. Dempster and Iusi, the camp managers responsible for the transition, presided over the Marysville and Yuba City camps throughout the final years of the 1930s and the Second World War. Dempster, the first of the two, marked an immediate departure from the management styles of Collins and Eddy. A former Unitarian minister and an active member of the Socialist Party, Dempster ran for the governorship of California on the Socialist Party ticket in 1934, three years before taking the reins as the manager of the Marysville camp. Although Dempster denied taking advantage of his position to preach socialism to campers, the camp became more union-friendly during his tenure, much to the chagrin of local farmers. Unlike Collins and Eddy, who viewed campers as capable individuals down on their luck, Dempster approached the campers as an oppressed class, unable to make any significant economic gains without social adjustment and collective action.

Unfortunately, little remains of Dempster’s correspondences as camp manager. In a presentation to the Yuba-Sutter Junior Chamber of Commerce, Dempster urged the crowd not blame “radicalism” or “agitation” for the problems of migratory labor in California. Instead, he held the “industrial revolution in agriculture,” akin to that described by Carey McWilliams in *Factories in the Field*, responsible. “The ‘farm hand,’” according to McWilliams, “…has been supplanted by an agricultural proletariat indistinguishable from our industrial proletariat; ownership is represented not by physical

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possession of the land, but by ownership of corporate stock…."  

Since the owners of “industrialized” farms were not about to give up their holdings, unionization, the common method employed by industrial workers to improve their working conditions, remained as Dempster’s only recourse for the problems of the migrants.

In 1935 Collins reported “some source of pride” in the fact that he found no idle men in camp during the harvest, and in 1936 Eddy bragged, “There has not been any labor trouble or controversies, or agitation or disputes of any kind….There is no room for him [the agitator] here because these people are all happy and contented.”

Both Collins and Eddy happily supported the migrants, as individuals, in their search for wage labor. Beginning in June 1938, when the campers voted, via secret ballot, to allow union representatives to address camp meetings, clear signs of Dempster’s alternative vision began to appear. By August 1938 the camp paper resembled a union handbill. “If you are a stranger,” one article admonished, “protect yourself. Refuse to accept wages below the standard…”

Another, titled “Letting the Cat Out of the Bag,” reasoned that a worker who made $4 a day and produced $10 in goods, actually paid his boss $6 to tell him to “hurry.” In another article the newspaper’s editor asserted, “If the capitalists, Wall Streeters, Liberty Leaguers and the Anti-New Dealers put their shoulders together to the wheel and work with instead of against our great President there would be no

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174 McWilliams, 48.
177 “Some Rights of Migratory Farm Workers,” The Migrant Weekly, no date, is. 31. [Although no date is given for this edition, dates given within the articles suggest a publishing date between August 18, 1938 and August 22, 1938.]
unemployed, no strikes, and no irreconcilable disputes among our unions.” Yet another informed the campers, “Wages are determined by the number of men at the gate.” The four articles dominated the camp’s one-page paper, the last issue printed during Dempster’s tenure as camp manager.

The manager’s socialist beliefs transformed him into a lightning rod for criticism generated by farmers, bankers, and merchants wary of harvest threatening strikes. The Yuba and Sutter County chapters of the Associated Farmers interviewed Dempster four days after he addressed the Junior Chamber of Commerce and claimed that he “admitted that he believed in socialized agriculture and the socialization of agricultural labor…. The group charged Dempster with “permitting the camp…to be controlled by agitators and persons of subversive ideas, and of teaching the principles of socialism.” Although Dempster denied the latter charge, the recent vote by the camp body allowing union representatives to address the camp suggested otherwise. More damning, however, were accounts given by campers during the Associated Farmers interview and in the presence of Dempster which, according to the local paper, insinuated that “a situation [had] developed whereby the real workers of the camp have been subjugated to the activities of a radical group.”

181 Fearis, 265.
Whether or not Dempster had preached socialism in the camp no longer mattered. The Associated Farmers concluded from their interview that “the camp has entirely lost its value to the community as a source of labor and, in fact, is rapidly developing into a menace to the orderly harvesting of the coming crops.”\textsuperscript{185} Agricultural unions in California typically derived their bargaining power from being able to call a strike when the crops needed to be harvested, forcing farmers to raise wages or potentially loose that year’s crop. Since the Associated Farmers determined two months before the local harvests that members of the Marysville camp were liable to unionize under their local Congress of Industrial Organizations’ branch, or strike under the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America, an arm of the CIO, they simply refrained from hiring any campers.\textsuperscript{186} Dempster’s attempt to improve the working conditions of the migrants backfired and, for the first time, gave a distinct advantage to the inhabitants of the local ditch-bank camps over those residing in the federally-run camp.

This is not to say that Dempster did nothing but irritate the locals during his tenure as camp manager. Under Dempster campers published their first newspaper, \textit{Marysville Camp News}, and modified their camp council to allow all of the adult residents to vote on issues that affected the camp.\textsuperscript{187} The manager initiated two adult education classes, the Home Hygiene Course and the World Discussion Group, the latter of which turned out to be the only successful academic class held in the Marysville and

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Marysville Camp News}, October 30, 1937.
Yuba City camps. Dempster involved himself in the social activities of the campers as well. He attended World Discussion Group classes, performed in campers’ plays, and, when children gathered to watch the weekly variety shows put on by camp inhabitants, he treated them to colorful readings from Winnie the Pooh.

Dempster interpreted the purpose of the federally-run migratory camps differently than Tom Collins. Upon addressing the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Dempster flipped the purpose of the camp on its head. Unlike Collins, who placed himself between the locals and the campers to insure the safety of the latter, Dempster claimed to place the camp between the locals and the campers to insure the safety of the state. “These [families from the Midwest]…bring a vital problem, for the children probably will become citizens of the state in the future and their health, habits, and education must not be neglected or the state will suffer.” The manager implemented a nursery program within the camp that addressed these three concerns. Whereas the childcare provided under Collins and Eddy simply provided adult supervision for children while their parents worked, Dempster’s program emphasized “[h]ealth building, [s]ocial adjustment, correct habit forming and self help.” In the same manner that he believed migratory workers needed outside help from unions to succeed, Dempster provided a helping hand to their children.

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191 “Nursery School News,” The Migrant Weekley[sic], July 30, 1938.
Dempster’s dual focus on the individual rehabilitation and the collective unionization of migrants proved aberrational in part. Despite resolutions made by the Associated Farmers in June 1938 requesting his removal, the Farm Security Administration kept him around for five more months. Previously, during the winter of 1937, the Feather River had overflowed its banks and flooded the Marysville camp.\(^{192}\) Although the migrants had been expecting the flood and escaped without any injuries or substantial loss of property, the FSA refused to take any risks the following year and shut the camp down between December 1, 1938, and April 15, 1939.\(^{193}\) The administration transferred those who had planned to weather out the rainy season in Marysville to an FSA camp in Gridley, fifteen miles north of Marysville in Butte County.\(^{194}\) This move placed the campers under Frank C. Iusi, the manager of the Gridley camp, and ended their relationship with Dempster.\(^{195}\) In April 1939, after the threat of flooding had passed, campers moved back into the Marysville facility and Iusi moved with them, succeeding Dempster as the new manager of the Marysville camp.\(^{196}\)

Iusi, who managed both the Marysville camp (from 1939 until the camp relocated to Yuba City in the spring of 1940) and the Yuba City camp (from 1940 throughout 1943), implemented rehabilitative practices during his tenure but shied away from unionization. Iusi realized that Dempster’s socialist tendencies impaired relations between the farmers and the camp to the extent that campers enjoyed fewer employment opportunities rather than the higher wages that their collective efforts promised. Instead

\(^{192}\) “School People, SRA, Surplus Commodities, Red Cross and Citizens Helped Campers in Old School Bldg During Flood,” *Marysville Camp News*, December 24, 1937.

\(^{193}\) “History of Farm Workers’ Community,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, July 4, 1942.

\(^{194}\) Ibid.

\(^{195}\) Ibid.

\(^{196}\) Ibid.
of portraying efforts at unionization in a positive light, Iusi referred to them as labor troubles or strife.\textsuperscript{197}

Conflict between Iusi and local unions came to a head in March 1940.

“[T]here is a definite union minded group,” the manager explained, “that are concentrating their energies in gaining control of the camp government in order to achieve their own ends, and not particularly interested in the reputation of the camp.”\textsuperscript{198} Although he predicted more “militant” action during the working season, Iusi had his hands full with C.I.O. and Worker’s Alliance complaints against the Farm Security Administration policy that required campers to work during the local harvest season regardless of the wages offered by farmers, complaints that the manager described as “attempts…of their respective members…to shirk their honest and required obligations.”\textsuperscript{199} Iusi determined that the camp would neither turn into a recruiting ground for the unions nor have its reputation damaged by their actions.

Iusi undertook a public relations campaign to repair the camp program’s reputation in the spring of 1940, at a time of rising local interest in the newly opened Yuba City migratory labor camp. In April alone, before the new camp had been officially dedicated, Iusi hosted the District Conference of High School Students, a delegation of Rotarians, and an additional group of high school students; presented to a group at the nearby Chico State Teacher’s College, who in turn visited the camp the

\textsuperscript{197} Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, July 9, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{198} Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, April 9, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for March, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
following week; and took a Soroptimist Club on a tour of the local ditch-bank camps, the old Marysville FSA camp, as well as the new Yuba City camp. Regarding the latter Iusi remarked, “The contrast was so great that they could not help but express their approval of the FSA camp program.”

The next month the camp held its dedication ceremony, complete with a dance routine, a play, speeches by the mayors of Yuba City and Marysville, a speech titled “What [the] Camp Means to the Women” given by camper Irene Taylor, and an address emphasizing “How the Project Helps the Community,” by the Chief of the FSA Migratory Labor Program, John C. Henderson.

Over the ensuing months Iusi addressed the Yuba-Sutter Junior Chamber of Commerce, two Rotarian organizations, and the Yuba-Sutter Men’s Open Forum, and submitted several articles to the local paper. The following harvest in August and September justified Iusi’s public relations frenzy. He observed, “We had numerous requests from the surrounding farmers for help this past season. I understand this was not true in past years as the camp in

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200 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
201 “Dedication Day Program,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, May 14, 1940.
Marysville was not looked upon with any great amount of desirability.”\textsuperscript{203} The next year Iusi reported “10 times more requests” for labor.\textsuperscript{204}

While Frank Iusi diverged from Milen Dempster’s attempts to unionize the campers, he promoted communal solutions to problems within the camp. He stressed the value of collective action and introduced a cooperative store to the camp that plowed its profits back into the camp fund and to those campers who invested in it.\textsuperscript{205} Likewise, Iusi encouraged the camp council to approve expenditures for additional washing machines, a public address system, and cannery equipment.\textsuperscript{206} The latter purchase allowed campers to can over four thousand jars of fruits and vegetables in August 1940 alone.\textsuperscript{207} During the year of 1942, the total jumped to 26,064 quarts canned for personal consumption and an additional 258 quarts for the school lunch and camp welfare programs.\textsuperscript{208} Campers responded to Iusi’s innovations and “by a large vote” rejected lowering the weekly camp dues from seventy cents to twenty-five cents in order to retain their communal buying

\textsuperscript{203} Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., Sept 10, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{204} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, August 31, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{205} Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, June 4, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for May, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{207} Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., September 10, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{208} Marian Behr to Myer Cohen, November 30, 1942, “Report of Canning 1942 Season” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
In early July, 1940, he remarked, “They [the campers] are now very concerned as to where their money goes.”

Iusi also attempted, albeit not so successfully, to reform tenants of the camp. He, like Dempster before him, organized night classes for adults that included subjects such as current events, home hygiene, parliamentary law, and welding. In June 1941, Iusi concluded that the classes “ended in a rather dismal failure…” That same month Iusi addressed a “small church gathering” in the Bull Tract, a local community of land owning or leasing former migrants that had been established by a local farmer as a real estate venture, regarding “the advantages and educational opportunities available for those who wish to lease one of our [camp] apartments.” Although the Resettlement Administration had originally established the migratory camps as a viable option for landless migratory workers, Iusi induced settled individuals to move to a federally-operated migratory camp based on his belief that the success of migrant laborers depended on their collective efforts.

Dempster and Iusi used terms such as “social adjustment” and “rehabilitation” (respectively) to describe their attempts to break the rugged individualism of the

209 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, July 9, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
210 Ibid.
212 Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, June 30, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
213 Ibid.
inhabitants in camp. The management’s attempts to rehabilitate the campers opened a
two-way dialogue between the two groups that will be explored in greater detail in the
next chapter. The management’s attempts to rehabilitate the children, however,
proceeded as the managers saw fit and illuminated the goals and expectations behind
their emphasis on social adjustment. Dempster began the trend and acted upon his belief
that “the children probably will become citizens of the state…and their health, habits, and
education must not be neglected or the state will suffer.”214 The camp paper’s description
of the camp nursery program fit Dempster’s concerns: “The Program of the [nursery]
School,” said the paper, “is fourfold – Health building, Social adjustment, correct habit
forming and self help….The School is for parents as well as children.”215 The nursery
program continued under Iusi and operated in the same manner. Mary K. Davies, head
nursery teacher, noted that the apathy of the older generation of campers infected the
youth. She observed, “They [the younger adolescents] lack the initiative necessary to
make the break from camp life to a more exacting responsible adult life.”216 Likewise,
Davies observed the transfer of rugged individualism from one generation to the next.
“In the short time they [the camp children] have been alive they have not become aware
of Social living.”217 Although she never mentioned her concern for the future-wellbeing
of the state, Davies’s intentions mirrored those of Dempster. “In the nursery school
many children are for the first time learning to be wholesome individuals functioning

214 “Farm Labor Revolution Brings Up Acute Migrant Problems,” Appeal-Democrat, June 16, 1938,
evening edition.
216 Mary K. Davies, “Yuba City Farm Workers Community Nursery School”, no date, U.S. National
Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home
Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA, 1.
217 Ibid.
happily in a larger social group. Little roamers, once lacking in self-restraint and grace, now have anchorage….”

Although less vocal, manager Iusi supported Davies’s efforts to rehabilitate the children. In a monthly report Iusi stated his intentions to move away from the “physical phase” of the nursery school program. Instead he preferred to “devote more time to ways and means of improving the philosophical phase.”

In this context rehabilitation and social adjustment accomplished three things: the correction of apathy and the perceived tendency to accept a subpar lifestyle, the abandonment of rugged individualism, and the transformation of unwholesome individuals into residents benefitting the state.

Although Iusi remained firm in his commitment of rehabilitation, he never settled on the proper way to implement it. In April 1940 the manager adopted a direct compulsory approach: “I am convinced that more can be accomplished by making them [the campers] do correct things in spite of themselves.” This confrontational method affected campers in different ways. “[S]o[ ]maybe he [Iusi] is a little cross at times…..,” one migrant explained in the camp paper. “I am afraid if we don’t begin to show him we are worthy, he is likely to begin feeling toward us like most of the farmers do.”

Another camper stated, “We have been with Iusi since he first became camp manager, and sure hope he remains the same as he was to begin with.” Iusi undoubtedly read these articles, along with others such as the poem titled, “To the Manager:”

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218 Ibid.
220 “If We Would Only Try,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, May 14, 1940.
221 “Smoky’s Opinion,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, May 14, 1940.
Some folks are never satisfied, they like to make a fuss, so if someone calls you naughty names, don’t blame it onto us.
If our front yard gets all mussed up (it sure does, I mean it), We won’t get sore and slam the door, If you ask us to clean it.222

Due to Iusi’s direct method of rehabilitation one camper questioned her worthiness, another lamented the manager’s changing personality, and another reassured him of their good intentions. However, none of these campers indicated that they had bought into Iusi’s rehabilitative schemes. Migrants who responded to Iusi’s tactics did so to keep their manager happy. This resulted in superficial change, but nothing that approached genuine reform.

The manager also adopted a forthright approach toward the camp council. The council minutes of one meeting stated, “No further business, the meeting was turned over to Mr. Iusi. He made his usual talk on complaints and advised campers how to overcome them.”223 Iusi’s “usual” talks broached a range of subjects. One issue of the camp paper began, “I had hoped to be relieved of this weekly letter to you folks for…one doesn’t enjoy giving out notices especially of a complaining type.” Iusi continued and reprimanded campers for drunkenness at the dance, youths for “monkeying around” – the manager assured everyone, “I am keeping tab of their daily actions” – and the camp baseball team for convincing the council to purchase them uniforms. The manager made this latter complaint particularly nasty:

222 “To the Manager,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, May 14, 1940.
223 “Minutes of General Meeting,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, June 4, 1940.
I realize you can get authorization for whatever you decide notwithstanding the justification, but it nevertheless makes me wonder whether or not it’s worth my time and interest to try and build up a camp fund for sensible expenditures when we have fellows who intend to show us they are not interested in anybody else or anything of merit, but their own selfish ends, and it seems like the ones who give the least to the camp fund are the ones to make the greatest demands….I don’t blame kids for they have always been known to do this, but when grown-ups who should use wise judgement[sic] don’t help matters, I feel that I have been wasting my energies in this matter.  

Although Iusi portrayed himself as the victim, his criticisms of the camp council and those desiring to spend camp funds reverberated throughout future meetings and required the manager to change his strategies. In May 1941 he began to absent himself from council meetings “to eliminate any possible restraint for folks to express their ideas.”

Assistant Regional Director Harvey M. Coverley applauded this decision and encouraged Iusi to “observe carefully…and formulate your future relationship with the community group accordingly.” With the exception of clarification purposes, Iusi stayed away from the council meetings for six months. He explained, “The trial and error method of education is going to be used hereafter in order to convince folks that they have all the freedom they desire as far as their own government is concerned.” Rehabilitation

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224 “From the Manager’s Desk,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, March 29, 1941.
226 Harvey M. Coverley to Frank Iusi, May 23, 1941, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
228 Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, June 30, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
required patience. In February 1942, Iusi began inspecting the interiors of the campers’ living quarters in a new effort to improve the migrants.

The managerial styles of Tom Collins, Charles Eddy, Milen Dempster, and Frank Iusi reflected their own solutions to the campers’ problems. Collins and Eddy responded to the immediate needs of early campers by trying to secure them jobs and provide an aura of normalcy within the camp. Dempster oversaw the unionization of migrants in an attempt to improve their working conditions and endeavored to mold their children into citizens befitting the state of California. Iusi repaired the camp reputation, urged internal improvement through cooperative action, and struggled to rid the campers of their rugged individualism. Whether or not his subjects intended to cooperate, however, depended on their own goals during their stay at the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps.
CHAPTER IV

A DESCRIPTION OF THE CAMPERS AND THEIR ROLE IN COMMUNITY BUILDING, EDUCATION AND CAMP GOVERNMENT

While the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps provided facilities intended to ease the lives of agricultural workers and camp managers offered guidance, the inhabitants of the camps shaped their community in their own manner. Between 1935 and 1942 migrants strengthened communal ties, addressed their perceived status as tramps, and pooled their resources to benefit their children and improve their financial standing. Campers achieved these ends through their participation in the democratic processes of the camp and their maintenance of a general camp fund. In some instances the results of this communal action vindicated the intentions of camp managers. In others, it contradicted them.

But who were these campers? On eleven different occasions Manager Charles Eddy surveyed the heads of families in camp regarding their state of origin and occupation prior to their becoming agricultural migrants. Out of fifty-six families, the average number that provided their state of origin, the majority indicated that they hailed from southwestern states or the West Coast. Out of the total average number of respondents, thirteen migrants named Oklahoma, twelve named California, and nearly eight named Washington, while Oregon (four), Texas (nearly four), and Missouri (three)
also consistently came up.\textsuperscript{229} Unfortunately, Eddy did not specify how he framed the question regarding campers’ origin. Respondents may have determined their answer based on the last state they held residency in or simply the last state they found work in, which may account for the large proportion of migrants claiming to be from Oregon and Washington. During the peach harvest of 1938, when the agricultural workers swelled the population the Yuba-Sutter area, Fred Russel Hurley posed a similar question to 257 families in the Marysville camp, but specifically asked for their place of origin “before entering the Marysville Federal Migratory Camp.” Campers overwhelmingly responded “California” (228) while Idaho, the origin of six families, came in a very distant second.\textsuperscript{230} The responses to Hurley’s survey reveal that, as of September 1938, migrant families who entered the Marysville camp were not fresh off the “Oklahoma boat,” so to speak, but already immersed in the California fruit tramp lifestyle.

The majority of camp residents hailed from agricultural backgrounds. Regarding campers’ prior occupation Eddy found that out of an average of seventy-eight migrants who responded to this question, sixty-nine percent (fifty-four) worked on, rented, or owned farms before they began fruit tramping. Of these fifty-four, three owned farms, eight rented farms, and forty-three worked as laborers. Other significant occupations included seven carpenters, six miners, and four painters.\textsuperscript{231} Although these results did not fit the traditional view that the majority of migrants resided as tenants or


owned small farms before they began following the crops, they correlated with Eddy’s previously stated findings that more of the camp inhabitants hailed from California, Oregon, and Washington than Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas – the states that these sharecroppers and farm owners were traditionally thought to have originated from – during the spring of 1936. Hurley found similar results. Of the 257 families that participated in his survey, Hurley found that sixty-two percent (159) owned, rented, or labored on farms “before they became migrants,” followed by truck drivers (twelve), carpenters (nine), and blacksmiths (eight). Once again, less that half of those polled (seventy nine, or roughly thirty percent) owned or lived on farms as sharecroppers. Hurley’s inquiries also revealed that out of the 257 migrants polled, only three (a school teacher and two clerical workers) held occupations that even remotely approached a white-collar job. Those migrants who did not hail from agricultural backgrounds came from factories, garages, mills, and journeyman professions. Thus workers from the Marysville camp excelled in working with their hands, although picking fruit did not constitute their primary vocation.

Although Eddy limited his survey to these two questions, Hurley delved further. Regarding race, Hurley noted 251 white men, three Mexicans, two Native Americans, and one Oriental among his sample. The races of their wives (257 listed) mirrored these proportions exactly. These families combined for a total of 527 children under the age of twenty-one, with forty-eight families having four or more kids.

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232 Hurley, 81.
233 Ibid, 82.
234 Ibid.
Fifty-six families listed none.\textsuperscript{235} Respondents indicated that sixty-one children under the age of sixteen worked in the fields with their parents.\textsuperscript{236} Of the 257 heads of the families interviewed, 142 had attended the eighth-grade or beyond, sixteen finished the twelfth grade, and seven reported no education whatsoever.\textsuperscript{237} 113 of the families had migrated for one year or less, ninety-three families from two to four years, and fifty-one for more than five years. Notably, twenty-four families reported migrating ten years or more.\textsuperscript{238}

Unfortunately, Hurley did not question the campers about their working experiences in California, because the migrants themselves said little about working in the fields and orchards surrounding Marysville and Yuba City. While campers voiced their desire to work as well as their optimism about upcoming harvests in the camp newspapers, the tumultuous busy periods of late summer that accompanied ripe peaches and prunes left the workers too tired to commit much of their experiences to writing. When the local harvests ended in September, most campers packed up and headed South to the grapes, while those who remained reestablished the dances, variety shows, and church services that had dwindled during the hubbub of harvest employment. Very few reflected about the physical aspects of the labor.

Camp managers, however, attempted to explain the work habits of camp inhabitants to their superiors headquartered in Berkeley and San Francisco. According to Tom Collins, migrants approached distant job offers with suspicion. “Must be something wrong,” the campers explained to Collins, “if they have to come so far for help with all

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid, 78.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid, 79.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid, 83.
\textsuperscript{238} Ibid, 84.
the campers they have in their own locality.” 239 Campers also disregarded jobs that offered bonuses for working the duration of the season because growers did not allow them to remain for the duration of the season. Such promises, Collins assured, proved empty: “They are discharged and the bonus never materializes.” 240 Charles Eddy observed that migrants informed each other about working conditions throughout the area. Tales of better jobs, “where the trees were smaller or the work was easier, or a better man to work for, or the job may last a little longer,” drew laborers away from their current endeavors. “But,” Eddy added, “they always will return in a day or two to get their pay.” 241 One man returned to a farm nine miles away to collect thirty-eight cents. Although his fellow campers kidded him about driving eighteen miles for thirty-eight cents, the man justified his actions on the basis of principle. He replied, according to Eddy, “he had earned it and no grower was going to get work out of him for nothing.” 242

Regarding religion, camp inhabitants voted for camp services to be conducted by a Pentecostal preacher in 1935, and switched to a non-denominational format two years later. 243 Collins suspected that the Pentecostals’ full orchestra, two drums, and “musical saw” initially swayed the campers, but migrants at federal camps throughout the state established themselves as somewhat of an eccentric bunch in terms of faith. 244 “The average Okie migrant,” historian Walter Stein asserted regarding the migrants’ religious

240 Ibid.
242 Ibid.
backgrounds, “belonged to a small, highly sectarian church of the ‘hell-fire and damnation variety.’”\(^{245}\) These traits surfaced in California. After spending time observing migrants in the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp, John Steinbeck embodied these religious tendencies in the character Lisbeth Sandry, an ultra-fundamentalist religious troublemaker in *The Grapes of Wrath* who condemned Rose of Sharon’s unborn baby to death for the sins of its mother. Sandry preferred a perpetual state of repentance to the sinful “clutch-an’-hug dancin” and skits that campers enjoyed.\(^{246}\) She quoted the complaints of her preacher: “The poor is tryin’ to be rich….They’s dancing’ an’ huggin’ when they should be wailin’ an’ moanin’ in sin.”\(^{247}\) Although no Sandrys emerged in Marysville, Manager Collins found the campers, specifically the Oklahomans, “very religious and emotional.”\(^{248}\)

These traits affected the affairs of the Marysville and Yuba City camps and the relationship between the inhabitants and the managers minimally. However, Walter Stein portrayed the religious practices of those in the camps as a source of conflict between campers and managers. According to Stein’s interpretation of the entire FSA migratory camp program, “The migrants’ religion held a prominent position on the list of items to be rehabilitated [by the managers].”\(^{249}\) Stein’s thesis did not fit the situation that existed in the Marysville and Yuba City camps. Stein drew from manager reports throughout the state and projected his combined results upon the individual camps. He

\(^{247}\) Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 437.
\(^{249}\) Stein, 168.
cited the Arvin camp, where the manager opposed faith healing on the grounds that it led to the campers’ rejection of modern medicine and subjected the camp to possible outbreaks of disease.\textsuperscript{250} In another, unnamed camp, the manager preferred to ban religious activities and make the campers attend services in the nearby town.\textsuperscript{251}

However, in Marysville, Stein twisted Tom Collins’s words to make them fit his thesis.

Unable to forbid the outright entry of the churches into the camps, several managers instead took steps to protect their campers from the more ‘irrational’ aspects of their religions through various methods of indirect interference. The Marysville camp manager, for example, attempted to dissuade Pentecostal preachers from visiting the installation by refusing to permit them to take up collections.\textsuperscript{252}

Collins, the manager Stein referred to above, never objected to the presence of churches in the camps and allowed the campers to choose whatever denomination they preferred. Nor did he specifically bar the Pentecostals from taking collections, but any denomination that came to the camp. On this matter Collins simply stated: “The management does not permit these groups to take a collection, leaving it to the individual campers to contribute if they so desire.”\textsuperscript{253} Nor do Stein’s assertions that “the average Okie migrant [prior to heading west] belonged to a small, highly sectarian church of the ‘hell-fire and damnation variety’” hold up. James M. Gregory, another historian concerned with California and the Dust Bowl migration, estimated that “no more than 5 percent” of church goers in the Southwest belonged to the Pentecostal or Holiness sects that produced the so called “holy-rollers” and “faith healers” that managers sought to

\textsuperscript{250} Ibid, 169.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.
rehabilitate. Instead, Gregory found that the majority of South-Westerners belonged to Southern Baptist or Southern Methodist denominations. John Steinbeck also portrayed the campers’ religious tendencies more accurately than Stein. He incorporated the fundamentalist tendencies of the few into one character and left to rest to enjoy their dances and plays. Some campers at the Marysville and Yuba City camps probably disliked dancing and preferred faith healing to modern medicine, but in no instances did the managers report attempts to alter these beliefs.

All of Tom Collins’s descriptions of the campers’ religious activities, as well as Walter Stein’s source material regarding the Marysville camp and religion, came from one manager’s report, submitted on September 7, 1935. Besides this report, managers of the Marysville and Yuba City camps hardly ever brought up the subject of religion. Charles Eddy referred to religion twice during his tenure as manager. In both cases he denied entrance to evangelists who intended to reside in camp while they held revival services. However, Eddy did not deny them on the basis of their religious activities, but for the same reason that he denied camp entrance to a family selling can openers later on that year. “They were not in any way interested in Agricultural [sic] work,” Eddy reasoned, “and were not eligible for admittance to the camp.” During the summer of 1940 Frank Iusi lauded the camp’s summer Bible school program. Once again, his

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255 Ibid, 192.
remarks about religion remained fairly neutral like those of the managers before him. Iusi’s greatest praise: “The children were well occupied and they constructed many worthy articles.” These three occasions, along with Tom Collins’s September 7 report, made up the thrust of religious commentary generated by managers at the Marysville and Yuba City camps. They neither promoted nor obstructed the religious activities of campers, but remained indifferent.

In the instances that campers expressed their religious views in the camp newspapers, the authors appealed to their readers to reform some type of behavior that they deemed improper. Concerned campers cautioned others against vices such as alcohol and gambling. In a poem chock-full of “hell-fire and brimstone,” resident Mrs. Hughes enlightened those fond of alcohol about their future. She envisioned Satan’s promise to the campers upon a Hell-bound train:

You have paid full fare, so I’ll carry you thru,
For its only right you should get your due.
Why, the laborer always expects his hire,
So I’ll land you safe in the lake of fire
Where your flesh will roast in the flames that roar,
And my imps torment you more and more.

Other writers painted the consequences of their neighbors’ religious decisions more vaguely. One woman objected to manager Iusi’s removal of a councilman from the council and advised her fellow campers to take proper action. “Read your bibles and pray to our Blessed Lord to open your eyes, also let you hear. Prophecy is so plane[sic]

259 Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, August 11, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for July, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
260 “Tom Gray’s Dream,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, April 5, 1940.
today that a fool can see it.” Unfortunately this woman did not elaborate on what prophecy she referred to or what she expected prayer and scripture reading to accomplish in regards to the manager and ousted councilman. Notably, authors of religious appeals never opposed dances or children’s plays as immoral in the fashion of John Steinbeck’s Lisbeth Sandry, nor did they evoke Sandry’s worldview of “wicketness” and “sin” as behind every motive. Although one camper resembled the fictional character when she blamed the trouble of the migrants on “more full stomachs in the church than there are bended knees and broken hearts,” campers typically confined their religious advice to listing the dangers of drinking, promoting church attendance, and sharing scriptures that they found particularly inspiring.

In fact, campers talked about sports, dances, and gossip in their newspapers much more than they did religion. Campers published two newspapers, the Marysville Camp News (retitled The Migrant Weekly after July 30, 1938) between August 1937 and August 1938 and the Voice of the Agricultural Worker (published originally as the Voice of the Migrant and referred to hereafter as VOTAW) between December 1939 and November 1942. Both papers featured weekly installments covering camp sports, council meetings, and Sunday school attendance, as well as articles, recipes, poetry, and jokes written by the inhabitants of the camp. In this manner campers used both papers for their mouthpiece to reach an audience throughout the camp and, since the editor distributed complimentary copies to merchants who bought advertisements and maintained a mailing list that included subscribers in the Bay Area and Indianapolis,

261 “Are We Forgotten,” Voice of the Migrant, February 23, 1940.
262 “The Cook or the Book,” Voice of the Migrant, December 8, 1939.
Indiana, beyond the camp’s confines. However, the newspapers differed greatly in size. The *Marysville Camp News* filled up the front and back of a single 8 ½ by 11 inch sheet while the *VOTAW* typically spanned fourteen to sixteen of these pages. The *VOTAW* also featured twenty to thirty paid advertisements per issue, while *The Migrant Weekly* lacked any consistent patronage. The *VOTAW* included additional weekly columns, such as an ongoing installment of articles concerning the agricultural conditions in California titled “Pick Your Supper” and reports from the camp manager, newspaper editor, Young People’s Club, and Homemaker’s Club.

*The Migrant Weekly* and the *VOTAW* deviated from the standard newspapers of the time. Type-written and reproduced on 8 ½ by 11 inch paper by a mimeograph machine, these papers must have appeared like amateur attempts at news coverage to some, and without a doubt they were. Campers voted one of their own to the position of newspaper editor, and supplied all of the news, with exception to the manager’s reports, “Pick Your Supper,” and occasional articles written by the camp nurse or playground supervisor. Campers dropped their articles in a box located in the manager’s office while the editor went door to door to collect additional information for publication. Neither version of the camp paper contained any photographs, but the *VOTAW* usually featured a handful of drawings and cartoons submitted by residents. Although the papers lacked paid reporters, editors made up for this by awarding honorary titles such as

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263 Myer Cohen to Frank C. Iusi, August 14, 1942, “Camp Newspaper,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
264 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
265 “A Word From Our New Editor,” *Voice of the Migrant*, March 8, 1940.
266 “From the Editor,” *Voice of the Migrant*, March 15, 1940.
“Sunday School reporter” or “Playground reporter” to individual campers. The editor also utilized camp children to embellish advertisements which appeared in the paper hand-written rather than typed. The Farm Security Administration disavowed any responsibility for views contained within the papers, and left it to the migrants to regulate their own publication. Likewise, all funding for the paper came from the campers’ fund. Editors promised to print anything that the campers submitted, as long as the material was signed (campers could request to remain anonymous, but still needed to sign the request), original, and not incredibly offensive. Funded and produced by the campers, The Migrant Weekly and the VOTAW disseminated the views of the migrants in a manner that they had not enjoyed before.

The camp papers added to the sense of community in the camp. Campers poked fun at their manager, – “Seen with our own eyes: Frank Iusi cleaning the utility bldg. last Thursday nite.” – their newspaper editor, – “We notice that Pearl Hinkle has some competition in camp. Who is the lovely lady with the wavy boyish haircut,” – and each other – “Mr. Woody, is it true when you came from Missouri that they put a necktie on you and you stood on a street corner for 2 hours thinking someone had you tied up?” Reports of camper activities, such as going to the movies or recovering from an ailment, kept campers up to date on the social activities and daily lives of others. In one instance, a group of camp boys requested that adults keep little kids out of the “check

267 “From the Editor,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, June 4, 1940.
268 “VOTAW,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, April 30, 1940.
269 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
270 “A Word From Our New Editor,” Voice of the Migrant, March 8, 1940.
room,” “and give us boys at least a chance to speak to that good looking girl: Wanda H.” Whether Wanda H. intended to socialize, however, is not clear.

Some campers used their paper to change the attitudes that locals of Marysville and Yuba City entertained regarding migrant laborers. Flora Collins reminisced about her life in Oklahoma in an article titled, “I Don’t Like a Migrant Life[,] I Like Farm Life.” Collins grew up on a farm that produced 2,000 bushels of corn and 200 of “red spuds,” along with fifty acres of cotton, twenty-five pigs, nine milk cows, four mules, and fifty hens. “But by 1936,” Collins stated, “here was our average. We made 800 lbs of cotton, didn’t even harvest our spuds, made about 5 bushels of corn, had 9 hens, one pig and that’s all.” While Collins professed her gratitude for the migratory camps, she concluded sorrowfully, “We left our homes on account of sand storma[sic], and drought, that’s why we are rejected and poor.”

Another camper, Mrs. James Dunn, attempted to “set a few people on the right track” regarding the “controversy” of the migrant lifestyle. Dunn stated, “We appreciate the government building us nice sanitary camps to live in, but we all long for a home of our own and a decent job.” Mrs. Dunn, like Mrs. Collins, rejected the status quo of the migrant lifestyle. She concluded, “We rather resent people saying that this is good enough for us, for we all long and hope for better.”

An anonymous camper wondered how the local “aristocrats” would feel if they awoke to “a big puddle of water on the floor and all their clothes wet…from where their tent…leaked during the night.” While this camper appreciated the government camps – “for they give us a sanitary place to live” – they desired more. “All we people

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273 “I Don’t Like a Migrant Life I Like Farm Life,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, May 14, 1940.
274 “Migrants,” *Voice of the Migrant*, February 23, 1940.
want is a place to live in, decent surroundings, a job to provide us the necessary things in life so that we may live like all American People[sic] should live. We don’t want just what we have to have given to us, but we want to work for it.”

Although the emotions of these accounts ranged from grief and bitterness to cautious optimism, each one stressed the worthiness of migrants despite their sufferings.

However, camper contributions to the paper occasionally devolved into bickering and finger pointing. One example, submitted to The Migrant Weekly in 1938, stated, “In reply to the party in #210, if you was not so busy finding fault with my dog maybe you could find time to put your coffee grounds in the proper place, instead of in the wash tubs. Also please keep away from my lot.” Some complaints were not so petty or trivial. Mrs. Tom Dunn alleged that “A few close neighbors heard a child brutally beaten by the father the 21st….Seems to me a man who profess[sic] to be a preacher should be more kindly towards his own children.”

The line between slander and criticism, however, often remained in the eye of the beholder in the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps. Curly Porterfield, a camper/cartoonist for the VOTAW, took offense to the fact that someone had criticized his humor under the guise of anonymity. In response he guessed the identity of his critic, one Ira McCracken, whom he described as “yellow as a rotten sunflower,” a “grouch,” and advised, “If you would leave your drinking at home, and do your talking when you are sober, you might get the meaning of what I was saying.”

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277 Voice of the Migrant, February 23, 1940.
278 “Ata, Boy, Curly,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, March 29, 1940.
Articles like these placed the editor, Pearl Hinkle, in an awkward position. Elected to the editorship of the *Voice of the Migrant* on March 8, 1940, Hinkle took pride in the freedom of speech that campers enjoyed through their paper. 279 “I guess we ought to be ashamed of ourselves,” she explained to one camper, “but you see, in this free country of ours, we don’t call it ‘mudslinging,’ we call it ‘freedom of the press.’” 280 However, outsiders read the camp paper and some campers, especially those who desired to portray migrants as something more than tramps, looked down upon bickering and name-calling in the camp paper. As one camper put it, “Who wants to try to be fair to people when all they can do is throw dirt?” 281 Another camper exclaimed, “I’ve lived in five migratory camps and this is the first one I’ve lived in that the campers would criticize the camp manager, [and] the camp editor.” The camper continued, “Did you know the outsiders read this paper? We have enough mud on us without having more slung on us.” 282 On May 7, 1940, the camp council addressed the issue and temporarily banned any personal attacks in the paper and required all submitted articles to be approved by the editor as well as the council chairman. 283 The reason: campers planned to give away issues of the camp paper to the public at an open-house later in the month. They deemed a little bit of censorship necessary now and then.

Whatever the reason, the general public loved reading the *VOTAW*. Manager Iusi boasted to the FSA headquarters, “Remarks have been made by the outside public that they would rather read our little camp paper than their own town sheet.” He added,

279 “A Word From Our New Editor,” *Voice of the Migrant*, March 8, 1940.
280 *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 12, 1940.
281 “Fellow Campers,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, May 14, 1940.
282 “A Toast to Arvin,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, May 14, 1940.
283 “Minutes of General Meeting,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, May 14, 1940.
“This has come from several sources lately.” Unlike the *Marysville Camp News* of 1937 and 1938 that only featured a single paid advertisement, the *VOTAW* carried twenty to thirty ads per issue. Iusi noted that local mechanics, grocers, and bakers of the Yuba City area vied for the business of the migrants “without much soliciting on the campers’ part.” This local support led the manager to state, “I consider our public relations one of the best in the State[sic] with our surrounding community and especially the business men.” By April 1941, after seventeen months of reporting the camp news, the *Voice of the Agricultural Worker* had earned $834 from paid advertisements.

Although they contributed to the camp newspapers much less than other camp residents, children determined issues of the camp just by being themselves. As his first act as camp manager in 1935, Tom Collins organized a nursery program and playground supervision for the well-being of the eighty-two children in camp. Most of them, he noted, “were without supervision as parents were out seeking work.” The Yuba-Sutter Jr. Chamber of Commerce aided Collins by appointing a “Supervisor of Playgrounds” to oversee the children daily from nine in the morning to five in the afternoon.

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284 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
286 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
287 Ibid.
288 Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, May 9, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
manager then turned to the campers and enlisted some of the “best women” in the camp to perform nursery duties, a move that immediately freed up thirty-five mothers to work in the fields. ²⁹¹ However, roaming children remained a facet of the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps and annoyed the campers and management alike with their unregulated behavior and curious antics.

In the year following Collins’s initial attempt to keep the children occupied manager Charles Eddy reported “signs of mischief” from the children. This mischief, according to Eddy, stemmed from the “little concern some parents have in regard to their children” and “the utter lack of a desire to control them.” ²⁹² As late as 1942, head nursery director Mary K. Davies noted the “free” and “unrestrained life” of the children. ²⁹³ Campers noticed these traits as well. In 1940 the camp newspaper reported, “We have a man who wants to run for Councilman on the bill that we turn our dogs loose and tie up the kids…. ²⁹⁴ Camper Beatrice Henderson encouraged parents to actively rear their children instead of “turning them loose to train themselves.” ²⁹⁵ The camp council often found it necessary to address the actions of the younger campers. The council disarmed the children of their “bean shooters,” moved the camp trailer to a location where it could not be used as a see-saw, and pleaded with parents to keep their

²⁹⁴ “Dogs Vs. Youngsters,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, March 29, 1940.
²⁹⁵ “Sound Logic,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, May 14, 1940.
offspring from hanging off of the back of the garbage truck as it made its rounds. Camp managers responded similarly to the children. Eddy threatened campers with eviction when their children defaced the utility buildings. When the children roamed beyond the boundaries of the camp – they became mainstays at a nearby dairy farm, to the annoyance of the farm workers – Frank Iusi alerted parents to the potential health risks awaiting unsupervised children. In one instance, “two young girls” drove their parents’ Dodge to the dairy rather than walk. In another, campers observed children standing in the middle of the highway, literally daring cars to run them over. When complaints about these actions subsided, presumably in response to corrected behavior, others arose in their place.

Whether they irritated other campers or behaved themselves the younger generation sought out entertainment wherever it could be found. Under the tutelage of playground supervisors, first provided by the Yuba-Sutter Jr. Chamber of Commerce and then the Works Progress Administration, camp children constructed kites, participated in a spelling bee, played croquet and badminton, and held various competitions such as hotdog eating contests and ping pong tournaments. One particularly active supervisor, George Peacemaker, took the kids on excursions such as mountain hikes, a tour of a

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298 “From the Manager’s Desk,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, August 20, 1940.
299 “Personals,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, August 5, 1941.
300 “Notice,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, April 12, 1940.
Southern Pacific locomotive, and gold-panning in the nearby hills. Youngsters entertained themselves as well. Some children caught a gopher and, according to playground reporter Lola Fountain, brought it to the sandbox for a “nature study.” “They seemed to enjoy themselves,” she observed, “especially when they started to kill it.” One boy, having run a fish hook through his finger while fishing, petitioned the camp manager to cut it out rather than let his parents know about the mishap. According to Eddy, children got their kicks during the summer of 1936 in the relative coolness of the utility buildings. He lamented the results: “The smaller children distroy[sic] large quantities of toilet tissue, sometimes they stop up the toilet bowls.” These children, like others who resided in the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps, adapted to the camp lifestyle in their own manner and forced fellow campers and management alike to deal with their mannerisms.

The camp tenants and management sponsored various clubs and activities for the younger folks as well. From 1940 to 1942 the children enrolled in Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. Campers hosted vacation bible school for the youngsters during the summers and in 1942 formed a Liars’ Club.

303 “Playground News,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, July 16, 1940.
305 Ibid.
307 Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., August 11, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for July, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, February 7, 1942,
fourteen and twenty-five formed their own Young People’s Club. Modeled after the camp council, the Young People’s Club met weekly and conducted its business under the guidance of elected officers. The club minutes, published in the camp newspaper, remained light-hearted, in the vein of the following: “Motion made that some of the girls bake cakes. Motion made and seconded that the ladies decide for themselves. Motion Carried.” Club members responded to prompts in the camp paper as well. Asked “What would you do if you had $500,000?” club member Warren Berry desired to purchase “popsicles for the eskimos[sic]” while J.J. Scroggins vowed to buy “every peach ladder in the State[sic].” Some questions elicited more crude responses. Charles R. planned to “buy a ford T and get drunk” with his $500,000. When asked “What do you think about girls wearing slacks” Little Joe granted his approval and added, “It would even be all right if they didn’t wear anything.” Two issues regularly dominated the proceedings – how to raise money and what activities to spend the money on – followed by dancing and refreshments afterward. On one occasion the Young People’s Club put on a play titled “The Hillbilly” written by the club’s president, Claude Birchfield. After numerous performances the play caught the eye of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which treated the youngsters to an all-expenses paid trip to San Francisco and provided newspaper coverage of the excursion. Naturally, the youths returned the favor

“Monthly Narrative Report for January, 1942,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA
308 “Minutes of the Y.P.C. Meeting,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 5, 1940.
309 “What Would You Do If You Had $500,000,[sic]” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 5, 1940.
310 Ibid.
311 “What Do You Think About Girls Wearing Slacks?” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 5, 1940.
and treated the San Francisco public to a showing of “The Hillbilly” at the Y.W.C.A. auditorium.\(^{312}\)

Various groups within the camp rallied around the children to further their education. To many campers, education provided a way out of the doldrums of rural poverty. One anonymous camper observed “many children of school age…playing about the camp” during school hours. Attendance of the local elementary schools and high schools, the camper proposed, “will help to solve part of our problem and you parents will certainly be well repaid for the effort.”\(^{313}\) In the spring of 1941 another camper, Mrs. Dearing, remarked, “Maybe we can improve ourselves some….I for one believe we should get together on…our children’s needs, to keep them in school.” She suggested monthly allowances given by the FSA to parents for shoes and clothing.\(^{314}\) Although the allowances never materialized, members of the camp’s home management group vowed that August to “provide at least one complete outfit for each child for school.”\(^{315}\) In September the group reported, “The children are almost without exception bright and shining each morning as they leave for school.”\(^{316}\)

Although campers endeavored to aid the younger generation in their studies, the mobile lifestyle of the migrants interfered with this goal. Throughout the existence of both camps the economic and immediate needs of families required them to follow the crops, and this transient lifestyle prevented migrant children from attending school with

\(^{312}\) “Yuba City Youngsters to Give Homemade Production,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 21, 1941.

\(^{313}\) “School Children,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 12, 1940.

\(^{314}\) “Just Rambling,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, March 29, 1940.

\(^{315}\) “Home Management Report,” August 21, 1941, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\(^{316}\) “Weekly Narrative Report for Home Management,” September 22, 1941, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
any regularity. In August 1935, before the Marysville camp officially opened, manager Tom Collins outfitted nine families with donated clothing for school. “When the job was finally completed,” he reported, “and the families moved south to the grapes, they returned the clothing.”317 Five years later Mrs. Dearing fretted about the implications of the migrants’ nomadic lifestyle in the Yuba City camp. “What will become of our children if we continue on the move all the time[?]” she asked. “[T]hey will just become nomads, not caring for anything except their eats, no home life, no love for community, or church, or school.”318

On the other hand, the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps provided families with a community to settle down in for extended periods of time. For those families able to find odd jobs after the local harvest ended, the camps allowed children to attend school regularly in clean clothes and in the company of other camp children. In 1936 Eddy observed that the majority of camp parents sacrificed their mobility in order to provide their youngsters with stable learning environments. “Families with young children prefer staying in camp so the children can go to school. They will drive 30 miles each way to their work in order to do this.”319 Collins noticed the sacrifices that campers made in the name of education as well. According to Collins, the migrants spent significant amounts of their “meager earnings” to outfit their children at the beginning of the school year. This preparation affected the families doubly. The families purchased “clothing…school supplies, lunch boxes, [and] hair cuts” with money

318 “Just Rambling,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, March 29, 1940.
that “should have gone for food” during the midst of the peach harvest, when “every hour was valuable” and school shopping required one or more valuable workers to leave the orchards during a crucial wage-earning period. Combined with the laundry and shower facilities of the camp, the migrants’ mobile and monetary sacrifices allowed their children to attend class in a dignified manner that the children from ditch-bank and squatter camps could not. As manager Collins put it:

The day schools opened…and the manager’s office was very much like the White House lawn on the annual Easter Egg Roll. All the kiddies who had new clothing paraded around, beaming, smiling, dancing and singing. It was a great sight and I shall long remember it.

However, migrant students still suffered the consequences of poverty, and public school attendance forced the young campers to confront their low social standing. In 1936 manager Eddy described the attempt of a thirteen-year-old boy to come to terms with his family’s status in society. “He is at the age where he realizes his environment is not just what it should be. He does not know what it is all about, but there is something lacking, something that should be different.”

School attendance accelerated this realization, as James Gregory explained in *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California*. “Going to school made avoidance [of difficulties with natives] impossible and left no room for misunderstanding the demeaning social evaluation foisted on Southwesterners by California society.”

Shortly after the Farm Security Administration abandoned the Marysville camp and moved into its Yuba City

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321 Ibid.
323 Gregory, 128.
location the principals of the local schools assured FSA officials that “children of the
camp receive their education along with the community children…in order to eliminate
any class distinction as regards the camp children.”\(^{324}\) Unfortunately, class distinctions
remained apparent to the migrant and local children. “Why is it,” one camper asked,
“that our children go to school[ and] they cant[sic] be respected instead of being
colled[sic] a ‘maggie[?]’”\(^{325}\) Mrs. James Dunn, a Marysville camp resident two years
removed from school herself, described the hardships young migrants faced in school
similarly. “How do you think his[the common migrant] children feel when they go to
school dressed a little poorer than the other children[?] To be made fun of and called
dirty magats[sic] from the Migrant Camp.”\(^{326}\) Mrs. Dunn claimed that a fellow classmate
turned a “police dog” loose on her because her peer took her to be “one of those
Oakies[sic] from the Migrant Camp.”\(^{327}\) Although migrant students failed to report any
other dog attacks, some avoided school in general. Francis Smith and Thelma Allen, for
example, played hooky so often that the Yuba City District Superintendent, Chester D.
Winship, notified the Regional Director of the FSA regarding the matter.\(^{328}\)

While poverty contributed to the migrants’ status as “magats from the Migrant
Camp,” it also physically deterred children from attending class. During the harvest time
in late August and early September children joined their parents in the orchards and fields

\(^{324}\) L.T. Davies to John C. Henderson, April 10, 1940, “Yuba City School Situation,” U.S. National
Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home
Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.


\(^{326}\) “Migrants,” \textit{Voice of the Migrant}, February 23, 1940.

\(^{327}\) Ibid.

\(^{328}\) Chester D. Winship to Lawrence I. Hughes, October 29, 1940, U.S. National Archives and Records
Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96,
San Bruno, CA.
in order to maximize the family earnings. In 1935 this prompted parents to request that Collins arrange night classes with the school authorities to enable their children to continue working without falling behind in their studies.\footnote{Tom Collins, “Excerpts from Reports of Thomas Collins on Marysville Camp,” September 14, 1935, carton 2, Harry Everett Drobish Papers, 1917-1954, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA.} In November 1940 Superintendent Winship visited the camp and inquired why sixteen youngsters missed the same class that day. Winship and the camp nurse visited these children’s homes and discovered that while some children suffered from “slight colds and other minor complaints,” others stayed home “because of lack of shoes and clothing – coats especially.”\footnote{“Clinic Report: Nov. 12th to 17th Inclusive,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.} During the spring semester of 1941 Winship discontinued the free lunch program offered by the Yuba City schools because of the unreliability of the supplies sent by the Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation. Once again migrant students stayed home. “As a result of this lack of hot lunches for school children,” one Farm Security Administration official reported, “many parents have kept their children from school and Mr. Winship has been able to convince many people that they are getting into serious trouble….If…the rest of the families do not send their children, he is going to request that the parents be arrested.”\footnote{Frank J. Parquette, Jr. to Ivan D. Smith, February 6, 1941, “School Lunches,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.} Unable to afford school lunches at their normal rate of five cents, migrants refused to send their children to school to starve. Whether it required parents to pull their children out of school during the harvest, deterred children without shoes and coats from attendance during the winter, or prevented the same children from
enjoying lunch with the others, poverty impeded the migrants’ attempts to provide education to their children.

Camp manager Frank Iusi predicted camper opposition to Superintendent Winship’s curtailment of the free lunch program.\textsuperscript{332} He did not, however, foresee unified action on the part of the migrants to remedy the problem. As the campers’ initial tendency to keep their children home from school disappeared, especially after Winship threatened to report parents to the police, they turned to the camp council and camp fund to solve their dilemma. Through the council campers formed a school lunch committee, applied for supplies from the Surplus Commodities Corporation, voted for a monthly twenty-five dollar stipend from the camp fund to supplement the materials received from the SCC, and made the meals themselves.\textsuperscript{333} As a result, school children stopped by the camp Home Management Center every morning and picked up lunches that consisted of “two sandwiches, a cookie, and some fruit.”\textsuperscript{334} Iusi declared that the campers made “the best of a very bad situation,” despite lacking an experienced baker.\textsuperscript{335} The campers stuck with the lunch program and extended it into the summer. The summer lunch committee, aided by the vacationing children in preparatory and clean-up capacities, served between

\textsuperscript{332} Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., December 2, 1940, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{333} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, March 7, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for February, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; “Minutes of the Meeting,” \textit{Voice of the Agricultural Worker}, March 4, 1941.

\textsuperscript{334} Jonathan Garst to Harvey M. Coverley[sic], n.d., “School Lunch Survey,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{335} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, March 7, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for February, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
200 and 300 hot lunches every day, five days a week.\textsuperscript{336} The program vindicated manager Frank Iusi’s conviction about the potential of communal action on the part of the migrants. Campers, as individuals, failed to afford the five-cent lunches provided by the school. As a group, however, campers provided for every child in their midst.

Although adults at the Marysville and Yuba City camps valued their children’s education, they exhibited less enthusiasm about attending classes themselves. Tom Collins first proposed holding regular classes in “primary civics” for the adults of the camp, but nothing came of the suggestion.\textsuperscript{337} In the autumn of 1937 Milen Dempster promised the camp council to find a teacher or professor to “get up some kind of a debate.”\textsuperscript{338} Dempster secured J.J. Collins, a professor at the nearby Yuba Junior College, to hold a weekly “World Discussion Group” in the camp’s nursery building. Collins, described by the \textit{Marysville Camp News} as possessing the “unusual ability to present things in plain common sense fashion that everyone can understand,” began by discussing the contemporary conflict between Japan and China.\textsuperscript{339} Discussion participants proposed that Collins continue on the same subject the next week and include, according to the newspaper editor, “Comparisons by class of ships, tonnage, and guns between our navies and the other world’s navies to see if our navy was strong enough to protect us.”\textsuperscript{340} Thereupon began the World Discussion Group, the only

\textsuperscript{336} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, August 8, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for July, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{338} “Minutes of Camp Meeting,” \textit{The Migrant Weekly}, October 8, 1937.
\textsuperscript{340} “Discussion Group on ‘World Today’ Had Interesting Meeting Last Monday,” \textit{Marysville Camp News}, November 6, 1937.
successful academic class held at the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps. Collins catered to the campers’ interests on a weekly basis and covered subjects such as the Social Security Act, the rise and fall of commodity prices since 1800, the history of corporations and holding companies, the Spanish Civil War, and modern rackets.  

Although discussion meetings went unrecorded, the camp paper provided an outline of one discussion, regarding Europe after the First World War, for those who missed the class.

Mr. Collins outlined three periods: 1. The period of crippling the defeated nations until England found she cannot survive herself without her best customer Germany; 2. The period of the rise of fascism, largely strengthened by the smarting of the nations who did not get theirs from the war, and 3. the present period of the race for armaments and preparation for war on the part of Europe with new alliances and secret treaties.

Campers participated in the discussions as well. In one instance campers divided over how to solve the Great Depression and formed groups that advocated either banning machines from farms, putting the unemployed to work building battleships, or doing nothing, allowing the depression to work itself out. Camper Church brought his stamp collection to one discussion while manager Dempster and camper Bailey, the camp paper informed, “both talked too much.”

In May 1938, six months after the World


Discussion Group began, the camp council voted to extend the class throughout the summer and accepted Collins’s offer to advise the council in parliamentary procedure.  

Although the discussion group disappeared from the historical record when the camp paper folded in August 1938 – Manager Frank Iusi mentioned a parliamentary law class held weekly at the camp in February 1940, but did not mention the teacher – the migrants displayed an interest in the current events and power structures of their age and a willingness to attend classes that appealed to them. 

However, other adult classes lacked the drawing power that the World Discussion Group offered. On January 10, 1938 the camp council inquired about low turnout rates for the weekly Home Hygiene Course. “It was discovered that the reason for small attendance,” the *Marysville Camp News* reported, “…was because some of the men thought it was for women only.” While advertisements that invited “all women and their friends” to the class may have contributed to this misunderstanding, camp men continued to prefer other activities. The next week no one attended the class. “The women folk were left at home and had to care for the children,” the paper explained. “The men had gone off to baseball practice.” Thereafter camp management scheduled the Home Hygiene Course so as not to conflict with baseball practice and, consequently, a handful of women joined their men the following Tuesday on the baseball diamond.

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349 “Home Hygiene Course Did Not Meet Last Week: Will Begin Sessions This Wed.,” *Marysville Camp News*, January 22, 1938.
Besides J.J. Collins’s World Discussion Group, campers only showed sustained interest in hands-on trade classes such as welding, woodworking, and home economics. The latter two classes directly affected the migrants’ living standard as they constructed cabinets and chairs for their metal shelters and apartments in woodworking and mattresses, quilts and rugs in home economics. Not surprisingly, when Sylvan Jacob Ginsburgh entered the metal shelter of a migrant family as he gathered information for his thesis about the Yuba City camp in 1942, he encountered two cabinets constructed of “large fruit crates” and walls adorned with “multicolored quilts.” Other classes, such as parliamentary law, cooperative education, first aid, childcare, and a home studies course featuring various subjects came and went without much adieu on the part of the campers. “There seems to be always a burst of preliminary enthusiasm,” Manager Iusi observed of these endeavors, “and then suddenly it drops of very rapidly.” Although the campers initially showed interest in new classes, they preferred those that immediately improved their life in the camp.

352 Ginsburgh, 49.
353 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, April 9, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for March, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; “Red Cross First Aid Course,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, March 29, 1940; Frank C. Iusi to Myer Cohen, May 4, 1942, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1942,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, May 9, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
354 Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, May 9, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
Camp life provided plenty of activities to distract potential students from classes anyhow. Migrants held dances weekly and made money by charging locals who attended admission. Locals tended to arrive drunk, however, and in one case staff members picked up forty empty whisky bottles after a dance. At weekly amateur nights campers of all ages sang songs, acted out skits, performed comedy routines, and even boxed in front of the camp population in an attempt to win best of show and whatever prize accompanied it. Various clubs and game nights arose as migrants watched films and mingled over cards, pie nights, photography, and hunting stories. Like members of any other community in the United States during the 1930s, Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camp inhabitants escaped from their every-day routines in activities that suited them.

Inhabitants of the camp also socialized over sports. The migrants laid out their own horseshoe pits, built a boxing ring, organized fishing tournaments, and held baseball practice weekly during the spring and summer. Baseball was particularly popular as it provided migrants with a chance to spar with the locals as equals. The migrants played teams fielded by the likes of Coca-Cola, local high schools, the National

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Youth Administration, a local Elks Lodge, and a local “colored” team. Frank Iusi relished the exposure that ball games allowed. The games, Iusi observed, “[have] helped to make our boys acceptable in outside communities in addition to bringing in numerous outside young people to our project at the time they play.” Although whether or not campers approached sports with the same intention is unclear, they participated nonetheless and strengthened their communal ties in the process.

Although they made household necessities in weekly classes and broke down social barriers with the locals through baseball, campers improved their community most by participating in the camp council. While camp managers implemented their own goals in the name of camper well-being, the camp council represented the inhabitants of the Marysville and Yuba City camps and their interests. The council, elected to six-month terms by residents of the camp, controlled the camp fund, appointed camper committees, determined camp rules (besides those set down by the Resettlement Administration and Farm Security Administration), and disciplined wayward campers for infractions. However, unlike the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of the United States government, the camp manager exercised absolute veto powers over any acts legislated by the campers. Despite this restraint – camp managers only once overrode the council’s will, when Frank Iusi removed a councilman due to his

360 Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, June 9, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for May, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
361 Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I Hewes, Jr., July 24, 1940, “Social Educational Activities,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
ineligibility to remain in camp as an agricultural worker – the council emerged as a means for migrants to control and improve their community as they saw fit.\textsuperscript{362}

In the early 1970s historian Walter Stein interpreted the democratic processes of the federally-run migratory camps as a failed experiment. Stein emphasized the manager’s veto, along with prefabricated camp constitutions that the Farm Security Administration doled out to the camps – camp councils simply filled in the camp’s name and signed their approval – and the limited extent that migrants actually participated in the democratic process, as proof that migrants held little real power or interest in their communities. “[The] FSA’s democracy,” Stein asserted, “was a sandbox democracy.”\textsuperscript{363} Addressing the federal migratory camps in general, Stein also stated, “The constitutional issues with which the campers were asked to deal – ice cream feeds versus mimeograph machines, for one – were trivial problems compared with the deadly struggle for existence that the migrant families daily waged when they left the camp’s boundaries.”\textsuperscript{364} Unfortunately, Stein overlooked the camp councils and democratic process in the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps. These two camps never adopted the streamlined constitution of the FSA and rarely witnessed manager vetoes. Actions taken by the camp council substantially improved the lives of migrants during their tenure in these camps and demonstrated the migrants’ ability to think beyond ice cream feeds and mimeograph machines.

Due to its status as the first migratory labor camp built by the federal government, the Marysville camp predated the uniform constitution that other FSA

\textsuperscript{362} “Minutes of General Meeting,” \textit{Voice of the Migrant}, February 23, 1940.
\textsuperscript{363} Stein, 178.
\textsuperscript{364} Ibid.
camps adopted. As a result, the camp council in the Marysville camp and its successor in Yuba City developed to suit the needs of the camp body.\textsuperscript{365} The first managers of the Marysville camp, Tom Collins and Charles Eddy, attached little importance to the council during the developmental first year of the camp. The camp fund, from which the council derived its purchasing power, especially played little role in camp affairs, as neither Collins nor Eddy mentioned it at all in their weekly reports. Collins tasked the first camp council with assigning incoming campers to their lots, overseeing the camp library, and curbing obnoxious behaviors such as “drinking, gambling, and unnecessary noise late at night.”\textsuperscript{366} Three campers, “considered leaders” and “well respected” within the camp, sat on the committee, but lacked the legislative power and access to the camp fund that camp council members later enjoyed.\textsuperscript{367} Rather than act as representatives of the campers, the three committee members acted as representatives of Collins to the campers. The council members eased the manager’s burdens. In the one noted instance that the manager sought out the committee’s consideration, regarding the relocation of campers from a crowded area of the camp to one less crowded, Collins left little room for any result besides that intended by him. “Rather than arbitrarily move these campers,” Collins reported, “the management placed the matter before the camp committee of campers. The management stressed the sanitary conditions existing in the over-crowded area, the lack of privacy, air space, etc. The committee handled the other campers very, very

\textsuperscript{365} Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., February 12, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for January, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.


\textsuperscript{367} Ibid.
nicely.” Unlike the camp council in later years that debated matters in parliamentary fashion and allowed campers to make their own motions, the early camp committee worked closely with the management and, in doing so, kept the camp running smoothly.

After Collins left Marysville to oversee the federally run migrant camp in Arvin in November of 1935, the camp committee disappeared from the records. Manager Charles Eddy never mentioned it. The only gathering that remotely resembled a camp committee meeting under Eddy’s tenure occurred after the campers enjoyed two films put on by the Director of Recreation for the Marysville School District. “It was a real get together meeting,” Eddy described, “plans[sic] were discussed for future entertainment. A committee was chosen to form a base ball team, and organize a horse shoe pitching contest.” While the outcome of this session and its small bearing on the campers’ “deadly struggle for existence” resembled Walter Stein’s description of a “sandbox democracy,” the process of the campers getting together to make decisions as a group foreshadowed the camp councils that followed in the Marysville and Yuba City camps.

After the Farm Security Administration replaced the Resettlement Administration as the overseer of the federally-run migratory camps, and in response to continued criticism that the camps provided agitators and communists with communities of migrant workers to seduce, the FSA stressed democratic participation on the part of the tenants. The camp council elected by Marysville campers to replace the representatives that had departed for other parts of the state in late September 1937 marked the transition point between Collins’s council that served the manager and the democratic institution

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368 Ibid.
envision by FSA. These newly elected representatives – three men and one woman had vied for three council seats, but because all four received the same number of votes each candidate secured a spot on the council – first established weekly meetings open to all campers, a precedent followed by subsequent camp councils in the Marysville and Yuba City camps.  

Since the Marysville camp predated the FSA’s uniform constitution adopted by other migrant camps, campers and management retained considerable flexibility in their self-government options. In 1941 Yuba City camp manager Frank Iusi noted, “This particular camp has never had a written constitution and has operated on common custom which has developed over a period of two or three years.” The campers implemented the most important change one month after the election in September 1938 and transformed their camp council from a representative based democracy, where elected council members voted on an issue, to a town hall type of democracy, in which any present adult resident could vote. News of the switch, confined to a small blurb tucked away in the corner of the camp newspaper, implicated no sense of excitement or debate. Campers simply made the change for the sake of expediency. The entirety of the article read: “Because only one member of the camp council was present and several campers came, the meeting was turned into a Camper’s Meeting.” However, the change stuck. Until August 1941, when campers voted to return their voting power to the council,

motions required a two-thirds majority to pass if voted on the night of their proposal, or a simple majority if voted on the following week.\footnote{Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., July 4, 1940, “Social Educational Activities,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.}

As in any democratic society, voter turnout varied with the issues at hand and, due to the implementation of the town hall voting system, campers wielded the power to directly affect the outcome of any decision. In this manner campers in the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps selectively participated in the democratic process. For example, eight campers attended the first council meeting of February 1938, where they discussed the dog problem in camp and debated where to purchase washing machines.\footnote{Camp Council Votes That All Dogs in Camp Must be Tied, or Muzzled, or Held on a Leash,} The attendance marked a significant jump from a council meeting three weeks earlier, when three campers convened and discussed other campers’ failures to dispose of soapy water, the role of the night watchman, and the need for new washing machines.\footnote{Camp Council Discussed Many Items Thursday, Marysville Camp News, January 15, 1938.} More important issues, such as elections, tended to bring out larger crowds. In mid-May 117 voted in the elections of a council member and a three-person recreation committee.\footnote{117 Attend Camp Council Meeting, Marysville Camp News, May 21, 1938.} Three weeks later campers gathered to vote on a rather divisive issue regarding whether or not to allow union representatives to address the camp. Despite widespread illness within the camp – officials isolated forty campers during the week of the vote – 403 campers turned out to the meeting. The results: 254 campers voted in favor of hosting speakers; 149 voted against.\footnote{Balloting Decides Labor Meeting Issue for 1938, Marysville Camp News, June 11, 1938.} In some cases, campers that attended the meetings practiced selective participation as well, demonstrated by an August 1938 meeting where
forty-three campers voted on a measure that banned outsiders from the camp dance, but only thirty-two voted in the next motion made to charge admission. During the summer of 1941 Manager Iusi complained of dwindling voter turnout “because there has been no outstanding topic for discussion.” Thus enfranchised campers rose to the occasion on certain issues, but generally left the weekly affairs of the camp to others.

Certain issues considered by the council polarized the migrant community. Campers first divided over the issue of allowing union representatives to address the camp. The *Marysville Camp News* illuminated the divisive nature of the issue in an uncharacteristic statement contained within the council minutes. The paper assured, “The discussion on this matter [allowing union representatives to speak], the voting, and the acceptance of the decision was entirely sportsmanlike by all campers.” The proceedings compelled one camper to write, “When I used the word rat the other night I was reffering [sic] to outsiders not the people in the camp.” Council members opposed to the motion vowed to host union representatives rarely and invite local farmers to speak as well. Two years after the vote the campers remained divided. Manager Iusi noted, “Another practice on the part of these campers is to form clicks[sic] with definite purposes in mind. No reason for this except that union members form one group and non-union form the other.”

379 Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, June 30, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
382 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
Campers also separated over who they deemed fit to enforce camp rules. As one of its roles, the camp the council issued fines and letters of warning to those who broke camp rules and, in more serious cases, recommended eviction. At times the council affected their constituency positively. Although he mentioned the council rarely, Collins noted, “Complaints regarding drinking, gambling, and unnecessary noise late at night all appear to be things of the past since the campers committee entered the picture.”

In other instances, however, the council moved campers to belligerency. One such case occurred in the spring of 1940 when the enforcement of camp traffic laws by council members divided the camp body over who would police them: Manager Iusi or their elected councilmen. Iusi preferred the latter as it would help rehabilitate his tenants and “teach them what law and order really means.” However, some unruly migrants preferred teaching their own lessons, especially regarding popular sovereignty. In an incredible act of irony the campers nearly abolished their own council; the FSA’s experiment in guided democracy extinguished by the will of the people. Iusi observed, “It is rather difficult for the campers to take orders or a reminder that they are not doing the right thing from any other person than the manager himself.”

But Iusi overlooked the recent activities of the councilmen. Besides patrolling the camp with whistles to blow at traffic offenders and tickets to issue during the spring of 1940, the council also banned alcohol from the camp and liberated themselves from any rent requirements in sparsely

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384 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, April 9, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for March, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
385 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
attended meetings. Some campers chaffed at these actions, while others supported the councilmen. In early April, the migrants debated the merits of the council in the camp paper. Their arguments focused on two points: the pro-council elements of camp stressed the detriment that abolishing the enforcers of the traffics laws would have on the safety of the children playing in camp, while those who opposed the council argued in favor of “100% democracy” or “pure democracy,” although they failed to note that council procedure entitled every camper to vote on any motion. The camp paper described the situation in hindsight as “700 people getting excited and falling over one another trying to get to the fight.” Despite the spirited debate, the outcome proved anticlimactic. The council move to table the issue regarding their demise “indefinitely.” The council’s act, according to one camper, “took the majority of people there, so on surprise that they didn’t even know what they were voting on.” Whatever the reason, the campers passed the motion and forfeited their chance to vote on the issue.

However, the attempt to abolish the council achieved more than the polarization of the camp. The actions of the campers curbed the council members’ enthusiasm to enforce camp rules. Iusi noted the change, “Our councilmen are doing very little in the way of calling campers’ attention to infraction[s] of the camp’s rules.

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387 “Councilmen?---Yes!![article by Allie Lay],” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 8, 1940; “Councilmen?---No!![article by Don Drake],” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 8, 1940; “Councilmen?---No!![article by Pearl Hinkle],” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 8, 1940.

388 “Kamp Khatter,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, May 14, 1940.

389 “Minutes of General Meeting,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 15, 1940.

390 “The Motion Tabled, but the Melody Lingers On.,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 15, 1940.
There…exists the antagonism against one camper telling another that he has made a mistake."\(^{391}\) One camper described her feelings in prose.

Five little councilmen
Standing on the floor
Something happened,
Can’t say anymore.\(^{392}\)

Regarding Iusi she wrote:

There was a pesky manager
Who always felt so blue
He had so many campers
He didn’t know what to do.
He told them of camp rules
Until his face was red,
And cussed them all soundly
And sent them all to bed.\(^{393}\)

If the task of elected individuals policing their electors unnerved them, the fact that the camper body held the power to make motions and vote in meetings required council members to approach their duties with considerable tact. As Manager Iusi put it, “There has been a noticeable decline in these so called reminders from the councilmen due to the threat that they would be removed from office. All problems are now brought to the

\(^{391}\) Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, June 4, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for May, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\(^{392}\) “Grandma’s Nursery Rhymes,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, May 14, 1940.

\(^{393}\) Ibid.
Camp Manager and whither alone or with the council they are settled.” Although the council members still issued occasional tickets and letters of warning, the lessons learned during the spring of 1940 remained fresh in their minds. The next winter the campers attempted to write a constitution for the camp but failed, according to Iusi, because “some of the duties...to be assumed by various elective officers were distasteful and would probably create some occasional personal animosities and therefore neither the prospective candidates nor the community...desire to be faced with that problem.”

Until August 1941, when campers voted to return their voting power to the council due to low camper turnout rates, council members accommodated their constituents and maintained a low profile in their capacity as enforcers of the rules.

From time to time, however, circumstances required the camp council to evict fellow campers from their midst. Unlike the weekly council proceedings that the migrants selectively attended, camp trials spurred them into energetic participation and interest. In Marysville Manager Iusi complained, “Why should trouble be necessary to arouse enough curiosity and interest to get a good turn out to our camp meetings?”

Although council members originally acted as the jury, campers developed a specific process in January 1941 that opened the duties up to the entire camp population. Whenever the camp council determined that an individual’s behavior merited eviction, the migrants selected twenty potential jurors from the general population, placed their

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394 Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

395 Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, May 9, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

names in a hat, and drew seven. If the plaintiff or defendant objected to any of the seven individuals on the jury, campers drew from the hat again to replace the offending member. The camp body elected a judge and those on trial had the right to appoint another camper as their lawyer or attorney. In this manner the campers tried their own in cases regarding drunkenness, immorality, violence, and foul language and evicted or restored to camp their neighbors as they saw fit.

As voters in the camp council, camp residents also approved expenditures of the camp fund. Signs of appreciation for the fund first emanated from the camp body during the summer of 1940. At the council meeting of June 25, campers defeated a motion to lower the camp rent from ten cents a day to twenty-five cents a week. Pearl Hinkle, editor of the camp paper, criticized the failed attempt to reduce rent “right after we bought 4 new washing machines.” She continued, “That is just a start to what we need in camp, but without the 10¢ per day we can’t get anything…” Over the next few months campers approved the purchase of two more washing machines ($163), two public address systems ($240), a refrigerated counter ($225), and loaned five hundred dollars to the camp cooperative store. Campers used their fund to acquire items that

399 “Minutes of Meeting,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, July 2, 1940.
400 “The Right Camp Spirit,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, July 2, 1940.
benefitted their community, such as irons, fly spray, and raincoats for those who removed the camp’s trash. \(^{402}\) Even more superfluous purchases, such as uniforms for the camp baseball team or boxing gloves, punching bags, and supplies to build a boxing ring, furthered social purposes of the camp body rather than the whims of disparate individuals with money to burn. \(^{403}\)

When campers used the camp fund for smaller, more personal matters, they did so in the form of loans. According to Manager Iusi, campers developed the practice in lieu of a constitution. “There never existed the rule permitting loans, but the custom grew up just naturally. This has been of great benefit to many whose checks are delayed a few days.” \(^{404}\) Iusi did not exaggerate. For example, in April 1940 the camp fund made forty-six loans to campers. \(^{405}\) However, loans did not equate to charity. Rather, they allowed migrants to take care of their financial needs in-house. One camper, Don Drake, proposed the system after being humiliated by a local merchant when he tried to trade a radio for groceries. “Now, campers,” he proposed, “let’s do something about this. Let’s organize a fund so that we can borrow small amounts on good securities and not have to

\(^{401}\) Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, October 7, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for September, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\(^{402}\) Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, April 9, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for March, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\(^{403}\) Frank C. Iusi to R.W. Hollenberg, May 13, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for April, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
be insulted by such people.” The camp council required borrowers to repay their debts, typically two to three dollars at a time, within thirty days or face eviction. The camp paper published the names of those who departed in debt to bar them from other FSA camps – camp managers throughout the state maintained a blacklist to deny camp eligibility to problem families – and to provide incentive for others to repay their loans and avoid public humiliation.

Campers disdained handouts. Tom Collins noted one early camper who suffered from chronic malaria and refused an operation recommended by a local doctor because she considered it charity. She explained, “If I could have the operation and pay for it in installments, I’d do it.” Her daughter had died the week before giving birth due to complications from the same disease. Collins also “absolutely refrain[ed]” from using the words “relief” and “charity” when he spoke with the migrants. “They spurn it and they seemingly have contempt for persons in ‘relief.’” In January 1942, more than six years later, Manager Iusi introduced an act to the camp council intended to ease the repayment requirements of camp loans. “Just as I finished reading it,” Iusi reported, “the Chairman spoke up and said, ‘That will never do’. [sic]” The chairman then provided the manager with a migrant’s perspective on the matter. He said, according to Iusi, “We are not teaching folks to be responsible citizens if they are not expected to pay their honest obligations; whenever you owe taxes you are not given money to pay them and allowed

to have it considered as an outright gift.” With that being said, the council unanimously rejected their manager’s proposal and kept in place the system that Don Drake envisioned three years before.410 Rugged individualism, that quality of the migrants that would-be reformers despised, eluded Frank Iusi’s correcting hand. Campers simply incorporated it into their society.

However, campers of the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps offered charity in times of extraordinary hardship. In early October 1937 the Marysville Camp News reported, “As an expression of their sympathy, the camp collected $17 for the Bingaman family to help with the burial expense of their five weeks old baby girl.” The paper added, “The baby had suffered greatly.”411 Likewise, in August 1941 the camp council approved buying flowers for the Crane family, who had lost a son, and empowered the manager to “send flowers to all deaths occurring hereafter.”412 When the camp rallied around Claude Henderson after the death of her niece she remarked, “Yes, there still is hope for us poor unfortunate migrants.”413 In other cases campers exempted “widows with no sons over 15” from clean-up duties and campers over sixty without “boys old enough to pay or work it out” from paying weekly rent.414

The campers also offered loans with less stringent repayment requirements under the auspices of the Good Neighbors committee in Marysville, later renamed the Home Management Service in Yuba City. The Good Neighbors committee, which

411 “Camper’s Contribute For Bingaman Baby Funeral,” Marysville Camp News, October 2, 1937.
412 Meeting, Aug. 19, 1941,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, August 26, 1941.
413 “News,” Voice of the Migrant, August 19, 1940.
414 “Meeting, Sept 2, 1941,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, September 9, 1941; “Minutes of General Meeting,” Voice of the Agricultural Worker, May 14, 1940.
consisted of four women elected by the campers and dated back to the inception of the Marysville camp, greeted newcomers to camp, explained to them the camp rules, council, and available facilities, and appropriated money to those short on cash to be repaid whenever the family could afford to do so. During his research of the Marysville and Arvin camps, in which he closely collaborated with Tom Collins, John Steinbeck observed, “The Good Neighbors…sees that destitution does not exist….”\textsuperscript{415} He described the committee further, “These Good Neighbors are not trained social workers, but they have what is perhaps more important, an understanding which grows from a likeness of experience. Nothing has happened to the newcomer that has not happened to the committee.”\textsuperscript{416} This “likeness of experience” aided the women of the committee as they tended to families such as the Ferris family, “[a] shockingly malnourished family.” “The six months old baby, 20 months old twins and three year old boy are in the worst condition,” a Home Management report stated, “The mother is sleeping in the same bed with these four of her eleven children.” With the aid of the HMS, as they called themselves, the mother constructed cribs for her children and purchased milk by the gallon. The committee visited the family daily for a week and monitored its recovery.\textsuperscript{417} In this manner, and in order to ensure a minimum standard of living within the camp, inhabitants of the Marysville Migratory Labor Camp practiced their own form of charity.

Campers worked together and, occasionally, against each other to provide for each other’s financial needs, their children’s education, a respectable social standing, and

\textsuperscript{416} Steinbeck, \textit{The Harvest Gypsies}, 42.
\textsuperscript{417} “Home Management Report,” September 22-29, 1941, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
an improved community within the migratory camps of Marysville and Yuba City. They utilized the tools available to them, such as the camp council and camp fund, and, in doing so, maximized their collective resources. However, the migrants infused their endeavors with the rugged individualism that they took pride in. Always on a quest for their own land, steady jobs, and an acceptance as equals in the rural communities of California, inhabitants of the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps took advantage of the opportunities offered by the Resettlement Administration and Farm Security Administration but never intended to depend on them.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

On April 30, 1940 camp newspaper editor Pearl Hinkle included in her weekly newspaper column the dialogue of four youngsters whom she had driven home from school previously that week. The children pondered the implications of another world war:

Jerry: “My dad says there’s war just over those hill[s].”
Shirley: “How old is your daddy?” this to Jo Ann.
Jo Ann: “My daddy is thirty something.”
Shirley: “Mine is thirty-one. That means they’ll have to both go to war, and war is a terrible thing, because they take little babies by the feet, and beat them to death.”
Jerry: “I’ll have to get my daddy’s old pistol out.”
Bobby, who had been sitting in the car without saying anything: “Aw, a pistol won’t help you any, ‘cause they use cannons.”
Shirley: “If they shot cannons at me I’d just duck and laugh.”
Jo Ann: “Yeah, but they’ll lower the cannons and shoot you, and then you won’t laugh.”
Jerry: “Yeah, but we’ll have the Indians on our side this time, and I’ll still use my daddy’s old pistol.”

Hinkle, too, looked to the future but shaped her expectations from her experiences in the First World War. She recalled the “thrill as our boys marched away,” the broken hearts when some failed to return, as well as Red Cross donations, Liberty Bonds, and “donations for the ‘starved Armenians.’” The editor opposed the

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418 “From the Editor,” *Voice of the Agricultural Worker*, April 30, 1940.
United States’ entry into another global conflict and concluded, “I for one feel just like Mike Quinn, ‘The Yanks are not coming.’”

However, the Yanks came, beginning in March 1941 with the Congressional appropriation of $7 billion for the Lend-Lease act – the first sum of what amounted to $50 billion in American aid to the Allies during the war – and culminating with the United States’ official entry into the war in December 1941. The war effort stimulated the national economy and California, described by James Gregory as the “most important factory” in the Arsenal of Democracy, accounted for ten percent of the federal government’s war time expenditures. Agricultural migrants, who previously competed with each other for employment in California’s orchards and fields, found themselves faced with an abundance of newly created jobs in shipyards, aircraft manufacturing plants, and other defense related industries.

The sudden availability of well paid, full-time jobs siphoned laborers from their agricultural endeavors. As late as 1940 Frank Iusi reported a “more than sufficient labor supply” for peach thinning and wages of five to six cents per box picked during the harvest. A year later the manager observed a “small excess” of labor in thinning and picking due to that year’s small peach crop, while

419 Ibid.
422 “From the Manager’s Desk,” Voice of the Agricultural Migrant, May 7, 1940; Frank C. Iusi to Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., September 10, 1940, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1940,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
the normal yield of prunes caused labor shortages.\textsuperscript{423} Prune farmers initially offered eight cents per box during the harvest, then raised their rates to ten cents per box, and then again to seventeen cents, but still reported labor shortages.\textsuperscript{424} In a monthly report for December 1941, Iusi described “many places [being] in need of tree pruners” and, for the first time in his experience, that farmers were “willing to teach beginners and pay them while learning.” These gestures, however, failed to keep the migrants in the fields. “The general occupancy of the cabins,” Iusi’s report continued, “has been approximately 110 families under last year.”\textsuperscript{425} One month later, Iusi observed a “large number [of campers] vacating” the camp’s apartments.\textsuperscript{426}

The exodus of migrants from their agricultural pursuits coincided with a decline in camper participation in their camp government. Although the migrants had selectively attended camp council meetings in the past, only five percent of the total camp population attended the meetings during the summer of 1941.\textsuperscript{427} This continuous low attendance enabled fifteen votes, according to Iusi’s

\textsuperscript{423} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, June 30, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for June, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA; Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, August 31, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{424} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, August 31, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{425} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, January 13, 1942, “Monthly Narrative Report for December, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{426} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, February 7, 1942, “Monthly Narrative Report for January, 1942,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.

\textsuperscript{427} “Minutes of Council Meeting,” \textit{Voice of the Agricultural Migrant}, August 20, 1941.
estimate, to sway the outcome of any motion.\textsuperscript{428} “This,” Iusi concluded, “gave any militant minority group with pre-conceived plans an opportunity to control any piece of legislation that they might conceive.”\textsuperscript{429} To correct this threat, the manager called for the campers to surrender their voting rights to the council members and reestablish the representative form of government that the camp had practiced in years past.\textsuperscript{430} The campers complied the following week and passed a measure that delegated their legislative powers to the council by two votes.\textsuperscript{431}

However, the transition did not solve the issue of dwindling camper turnout. “The attendance at the council,” Iusi reported in January 1942, “has been very discouraging and therefore, I suggested that they move over to the Home Economic’s[sic] Building where it was much cozier and would lend toward a more round table atmosphere.”\textsuperscript{432} The manager also convinced the campers who dwelled in the apartments to contribute one dollar a month to the camp fund. This move resulted in “a marked increase in attendance by the apartment house folks” and briefly rekindled “an atmosphere of community unit[y] and equality, a very wholesome sign.”\textsuperscript{433} By March Iusi found himself again encouraging residents

\textsuperscript{428} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, August 31, 1941, “Monthly Narrative Report for August, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{430} “From the Manager’s Desk,” \textit{Voice of the Agricultural Worker}, August 20, 1941.
\textsuperscript{431} “Meeting, Aug. 19, 1941,” \textit{Voice of the Agricultural Worker}, August 26, 1941.
\textsuperscript{432} Frank C. Iusi to Harvey M. Coverley, January 13, 1942, “Monthly Narrative Report for December, 1941,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{433} Ibid.
“to take on more and more of their own governmental responsibilities…” Two months later, the manager gave up. “With work conditions extremely good and everybody making a minimum of 50¢ per hour, there is little incentive or desire to attend any type of meeting except recreational activities.” He continued, “The regular town hall meetings died a natural death when only 2 or 3 showed up.”

The camp newspaper too suffered the neglect of the campers. Throughout its heyday in 1940 and early 1941 the *Voice of the Agricultural Worker* filled fourteen to sixteen pages every week, consisting primarily of material contributed by the campers. By April 1942 the newspaper had shrunk to eight pages. The June 15 edition, published bi-weekly at this point, featured only three camper contributions from the season-high camp population of 979 individuals, and included a nearly-blank page to accommodate local merchants who had bought advertisements. Of the three pieces submitted by residents, two were jokes, and the third, ironically, criticized the paper of another FSA camp.

Although the Farm Security Administration continued to run the migratory labor camps through the middle of 1943, the purpose of the camps no longer revolved around alleviating the hardships that agricultural laborers faced as underemployed and underpaid workers. Instead, the camps struggled to supply

the amount of labor necessary for farmers to maintain their crops throughout the year.\textsuperscript{437} In May 1942, the Yuba City camp filled to capacity at the earliest point in the year that it ever had. However, the majority of campers present at this time did not seek jobs thinning peaches. Instead, they labored to construct a nearby $25,000,000 Army Cantonment Camp.\textsuperscript{438} By the time the Farm Security Administration relinquished responsibility for the migratory labor camps to the War Food Administration on July 1, 1943, FSA and WFA officials no longer worried about the deplorable living conditions of the migrants.\textsuperscript{439} Instead, they debated about how to properly supply agricultural laborers from Mexico to California’s fields and orchards in order to overcome the labor shortage that had developed.\textsuperscript{440}

That the campers eventually moved out of agriculture, forsook their camp council meetings, and stopped contributing to the camp paper did not indicate the sad end to the numerous achievements of the Marysville and Yuba City migratory labor camps. Instead, these actions taken by the campers indicated the migratory camp program’s final achievement, brought about not by the Resettlement Administration or the Farm Security Administration, but by the

\textsuperscript{437} Frank C. Iusi to Myer Cohen, June 3, 1942, “Monthly Narrative Report for May, 1942,” U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Sierra Pacific Region, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, Record Group 96, San Bruno, CA.
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid, 377-381.
improved wartime economy in California and the tendencies that campers had consistently displayed in Marysville and Yuba City to pursue more favorable economic positions and stable environments for their family.

These two tendencies characterized the actions of campers for nearly eight years in the two camps. When the Marysville camp first opened in 1935, migrants praised its shower and laundry facilities, petitioned the camp manager to arrange night classes to enable their children to attend school while working, and set about reconstructing their lives. In 1937 campers began their own newspaper, arranged their camp council around the tenet of direct democracy, and voted on issues that they deemed important, such as council elections and allowing unions to address the camp. The migrants responded to Frank Iusi’s advice in 1940 and built up their camp fund to allow greater communal purchasing power for items such as washing machines, canning equipment, and the ability to issue personal loans. They emphasized the education of the camp children, whether their own or others’, and rallied to provide new clothing for the youngsters. When parents could not afford school lunches in 1941, campers turned to the camp fund to buy supplies and made the meals themselves. They formed communal ties and socialized weekly at their dances, card nights, baseball games, and in their camp newspapers. Campers incorporated “rugged individualism” into the society that they created, whether it regarded their preference for repayable loans to hand-outs, or their willingness to chastise their council members and managers when they felt slighted. And, beginning in 1942, when hope no longer took the form of shower facilities, camp fund loans, and communally-made school lunches, the
migrants moved from the camp into full-time jobs. Their migration had come to an end.

The activities of the campers in Marysville and Yuba City, and those of their managers, require a reevaluation of Walter Stein’s assertions that the “FSA’s democracy was a sandbox democracy” and that camp managers strove to moderate the religious beliefs of their campers. The inhabitants of the Marysville and Yuba City camps directly improved their lives by participating in self-government, while their managers rarely overrode the will of the majority. Although managers attempted to guide the migrants to outcomes such as unionization and reformed behavior, Stein’s claim that religion created conflict in the FSA camps did not apply to those in Marysville and Yuba City. Instead, these two generalizations supplied by Stein should be minimized, left to the camps that they actually applied.

The migratory labor camps established by the federal government brought Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal to the desperate migratory laborers in California and provided direct federal relief to those that private charities and state aid had failed. At a glance, the camps appeared insignificant compared to the sheer numbers of needy migrants during the Great Depression. Indeed, Marysville and Yuba City’s total capacities of 1,000 and 1,200 (respectively) seemed to offer little to the hundreds of thousands of agricultural laborers in California, or even to the 10,000 laborers that the Yuba-Sutter area required every harvest season. However, during the winter season, when the need of the migrants mounted and their abilities to meet it decreased, the Marysville and
Yuba City migratory labor camps always had room for more families. The Resettlement Administration and the Farm Security Administration provided the platforms, cabins, shower facilities, and other essential amenities that allowed dispossessed Americans to emerge from the squalor of the ditch-bank camps and rebuild their lives. Camp managers endeavored to aid this process as they thought best, acting as intercessors for the migrants, locating employment opportunities, promoting unionization, encouraging communal problem solving, and attempting to reform certain traits that seemed to obstruct the campers’ success. The residents of the Marysville and Yuba City camps utilized the opportunities provided by the RA and the FSA to form a unique society infused with the migrants’ rugged individualism, yet centered around communal action and collective problem solving. Through this group action campers pooled their resources in the form a camp fund, equipped their children to succeed in school, and struggled to prove their merits as individuals worthy of the respect of California natives.
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