

# El Milagro: A Historic Context

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HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATES, INC.



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# Abbreviations

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1. Community Council of Idaho (CCI)
2. Farm Security Administration (FSA)
3. Resettlement Administration (RA)
4. Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA)
5. War Food Administration (WFA)
6. War Relocation Authority (WRA)
7. Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

# Timeline

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- 1939: Farm Security Administration (FSA) constructs the camp approximately two miles south of Twin Falls.<sup>1</sup>
- 1940: Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp opens in April.<sup>2</sup>
- 1942: The first Japanese American laborers arrive at the camp in June; the first Mexican laborers arrive at the camp that same year.<sup>3</sup>
- 1943: War Food Administration overtakes administration of all FSA labor camps.<sup>4</sup>
- 1947: Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association acquires the camp.<sup>5</sup>
- 1988: Idaho Migrant Council, Inc. (now Community Council of Idaho), purchases the camp.<sup>6</sup>
- 1990: Camp name changes to El Milagro.<sup>7</sup>
- 2018: Community Council of Idaho secures funding to begin new construction at El Milagro.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Perry Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox, Idaho Historic Sites Inventory Form, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, revised 2019, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 4.

<sup>3</sup> “Beet Workers to Go to Idaho,” *Valera Wasp*, May 30, 1942; Data and Observations on Specific Farm Labor Sites: May 30, 1943, in Burley; Folder: 201.3 Idaho; Box 24: Intermountain Area, Salt Lake City, UT 001 to 203.8; Entry 47: Field Records; Records of Regional and Field Assistant Director’s Offices, San Francisco: Subject-Classified General Files, 1943–1946; Record Group 210: War Relocation Authority; National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC.

<sup>4</sup> Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Phil Sahn, “The Other Side of Town,” *Times-News* (Twin Falls), September 13, 1992.

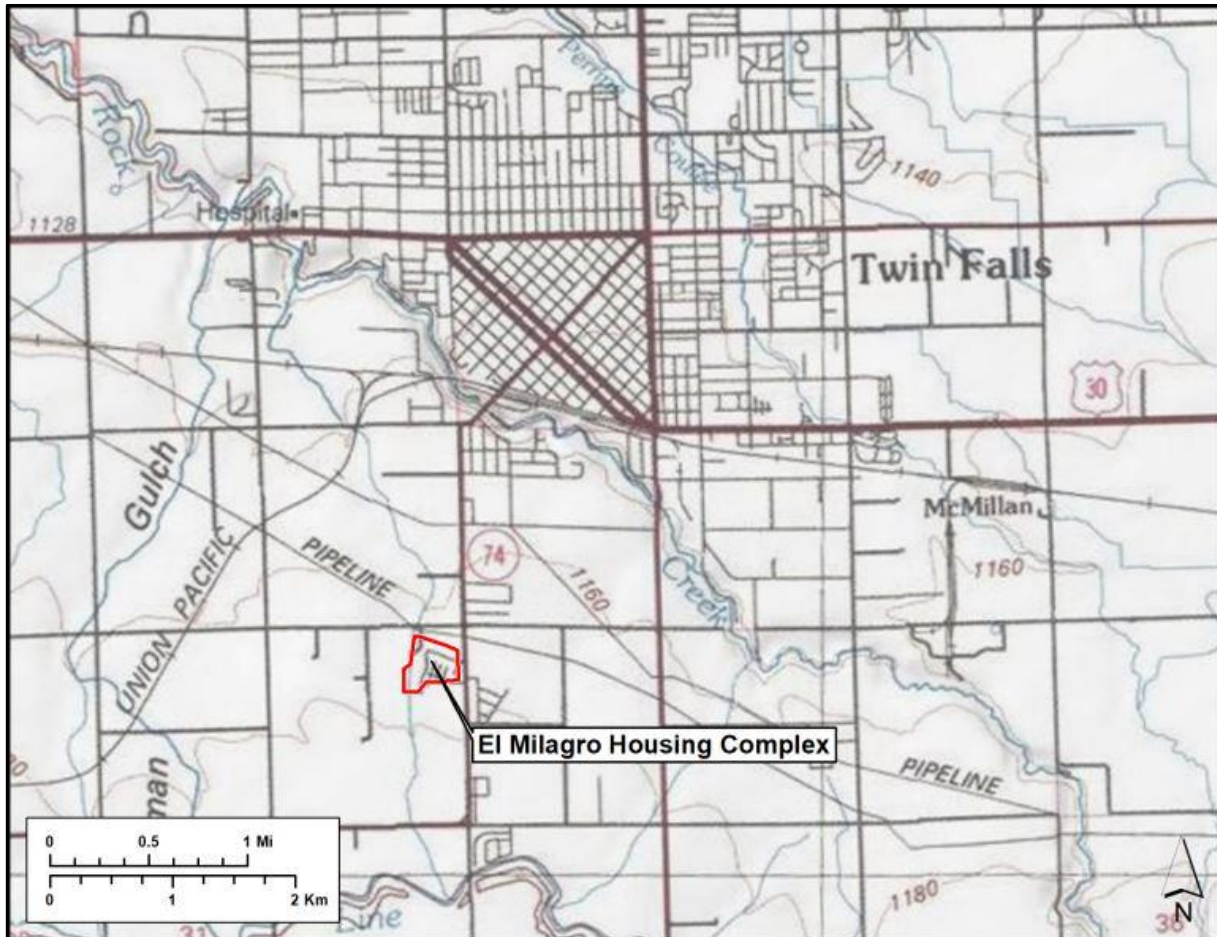
<http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Jane Rodriguez, Idaho Migrant Council, Inc., to Thomas Green, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, August 21, 1990.

<sup>8</sup> Community Council of Idaho, “2018 Annual Report” (Caldwell: Community Council of Idaho, 2018), <https://communitycouncilofidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2018-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>.



# Location



*El Milagro Housing Complex Location*






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**Topographic Overview**  
Date: 12/10/2020

Coord./Project	Datum	Scale
<b>NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N Transverse Mercator</b>	<b>NAD83</b>	<b>1:60,000</b>
Township/Range	Quadrangle	
<b>T10S R17E</b>	<b>Twin Falls, ID</b>	

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NRCAN, GEBCO, NOAA, Increment P Corp.



<h2>El Milagro Housing Complex Location</h2>	<b>Aerial Overview</b> Date: 12/10/2020		 HISTORICAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.		
	Coord/Projection	Datum		Scale	
	NAD 1983 UTM Zone 11N Transverse Mercator			NAD83	1:3,000
	Township/Range	Quadrangle			
	T10S R17E		Twin Falls, ID		
<small>Service Layer Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors          Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community</small>					
					

Historical Research Associates, Inc., Seattle, WA

# 1. Early Idaho History and the Development of Twin Falls

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## Indigenous People

Twin Falls, Idaho, is in the traditional homelands of the Shoshone-Bannock and Shoshone-Paiute peoples. Since time immemorial, people from what is now the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes have lived in the area spanning parts of modern-day Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and Canada. The modern Shoshone-Paiute, comprising members of Western Shoshone, Northern, and Malheur Paiute Indians, have similarly lived in areas of modern-day Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon since time immemorial.<sup>9</sup>

The U.S. government forced these Indigenous groups into reservations so their land could be occupied by the many white and Euroamerican people who wanted to move west. The Shoshones and Bannocks were confined at that time to the Fort Hall Indian Reservation in 1867 and the Shoshone-Paiute to the Duck Valley Indian Reservation in 1877.<sup>10</sup>

## Non-Indigenous Settlement of the Region

White people first traveled through southern Idaho in the early nineteenth century, exploring opportunities for fur trading and, later, mining. White resettlers began arriving in greater numbers to the Twin Falls region, later known as the Magic Valley, in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Most came via the Oregon-California Trail, which traversed southern Idaho, following near the Snake River. Approximately 500,000 people traveled westward on the 2,000-mile route from Missouri to Oregon and California by 1870, following many Indigenous trails. These travelers were part of the United States' movement of settler colonialism, migrating westward to find new opportunities and claim land already occupied by Indigenous people.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, "Culture and History," accessed December 2, 2020, <http://www2.sbtribes.com/about/>; Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation, "Our History," accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.shopaitribes.org/spculture/>, accessed December 4, 2020; *Smithsonian Magazine*, "Idaho – History and Heritage," accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/idaho-history-and-heritage-177411856/>.

<sup>10</sup> Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, "Culture and History"; Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation, "Our History"; *Smithsonian Magazine*, "Idaho – History and Heritage."

<sup>11</sup> The Magic Valley comprises Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka, and Twin Falls Counties.

<sup>12</sup> Eugene S. Hunn, E. Thomas Morning Owl, Phillip E. Cash Cash, and Jennifer Karson Engum, *Ćáv Pawá Láakni – They Are Not Forgotten: Sabaptian Place Names Atlas of the Cayuse, Umatilla, and Walla Walla* (Pendleton, OR: Tamástlikt Cultural Institution, 2015); Jackie Gonzales and Morgen Young, *Overlanders in the Columbia River Gorge, 1840–1870: A Narrative History* (National Park Service (NPS) National Trails, 2020) 25,

The primary southern route of the Oregon Trail in Idaho passed through what became Twin Falls. While many of the thousands of overlanders continued on to destinations in Oregon and California, others stayed, or returned to settle in the Twin Falls region. More people also came to Idaho Territory after gold was found in north Idaho in 1860. By 1870, prospectors had small operations searching for gold along the Snake River in the Twin Falls area. Homesteaders were attracted to free land available through U.S. government land grants; however, the arid landscape in the Twin Falls area delayed settlement in large numbers until irrigation projects changed the landscape in the early twentieth century. Between 1900 and 1910, people organized and platted the communities of Buhl, Filer, Hansen, Hollister, and Twin Falls, and established Twin Falls County.<sup>13</sup>

As the agricultural industry became well established, communities in the Magic Valley continued to grow. Population census records over time are not precise for this area because seasonal laborers are often not accounted for. By 1990, the Twin Falls County population was more than 53,792 and the city of Twin Falls more than 28,204. That number has increased over time, with 86,878 countywide and 50,197 in the city in 2019.<sup>14</sup>

## Economic Development of the Region

Population growth in the Twin Falls area came hand in hand with economic development. While mining and timber development were prevalent in other areas of Idaho, these industries were not dominant in the Magic Valley. Cattle and sheep ranching provided income for some, as ranchers drove herds through the area and established ranches near Twin Falls.<sup>15</sup>

The agricultural industry became the dominant economic driver of the region. Like many arid areas, the development of regional agriculture was due in large part to reclamation efforts in the early twentieth century. Prior to this, some regional farmers had success with farming in and around the Snake River Canyon, but water was unreliable. Much changed following the federal passage of the Carey Act of 1894, wherein the government provided free land to settlers in arid areas after private investors built the necessary infrastructure to harness the water. The Twin Falls Land and Water Company formed in 1900 to build the Milner Dam and canal system, transforming the landscape. The dam and canals opened in 1905, and the area known as the Twin Falls Southside

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[https://www.nps.gov/oreg/learn/historyculture/upload/HRA\\_Columbia\\_River\\_Narrative\\_History\\_Final\\_200917-reduced-size.pdf](https://www.nps.gov/oreg/learn/historyculture/upload/HRA_Columbia_River_Narrative_History_Final_200917-reduced-size.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Perry Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox, "Historic Agricultural Resources of Twin Falls County, Idaho," Multiple Property Documentation Form (Idaho State Historical Society, 2020) 7–8, 17; National Park Service, Oregon National Historic Trail Topographical Map, accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/oreg/planyourvisit/maps.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts, United States," accessed December 4, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045219>.

<sup>15</sup> Bauer and Jacox, "Historic Agricultural Resources of Twin Falls County, Idaho," 8–9.

Irrigation tract was soon available for reliable water supply.<sup>16</sup> With arable soil and railroad infrastructure in place to ship goods, the agricultural industry had a strong foundation.

Local crops and farming methods evolved over time. Successful crops in the Twin Falls area included fruits, vegetables, and grains. Among these, potatoes, sugar beets, beans, and corn were prevalent, with potatoes and sugar beets being the dominant crops. Farming methods evolved from horses and hand tools to plant and harvest manually, to mechanized equipment, including steam-powered threshing machines.<sup>17</sup>

Keeping agricultural production high required more labor than was readily available. Mexican people, part of Idaho's labor force since the late nineteenth century after first coming north for trading and animal trapping, then working in fields and railroads, were recruited by large agricultural operations. (See Chapter 7 for more information on the Latino<sup>18</sup> population in Idaho.) The agricultural industry thrived during World War I with the aid of Mexican workers, recessed in the 1920s, then grew again in the 1930s after farm laborers from the Dust Bowl states arrived in the Twin Falls area.<sup>19</sup>

The demand for adequate numbers of farm laborers to meet industry needs was an ongoing part of the early years of Twin Falls' development and continues in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>16</sup> Paul Smith, "The History of Twin Falls," accessed December 2, 2020, <https://www.tfid.org/Search?searchPhrase=history>.

<sup>17</sup> Bauer and Jacox "Historic Agricultural Resources of Twin Falls County, Idaho," 18–19.

<sup>18</sup> This context uses the term Latino rather than Latinx, following current practice of the Community Council of Idaho. Modern historical scholarship often uses the term Latinx in reference to people who live in the United States and have ancestral and cultural ties to Latin America. Latinx is an inclusive and gender-neutral term that replaces Latino and Latina.

<sup>19</sup> Bauer and Jacox "Historic Agricultural Resources of Twin Falls County, Idaho," 19–20; Nicole Foy, "We do not like the Mexican.' Racist chapter of Idaho history revealed by new research," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), December 20, 2019, [www.newsbank.com](http://www.newsbank.com); Cydney McFarland, "Growing Hispanic population part of Idaho's history," *Idaho State Journal* (Pocatello), August 15, 2015.



Figure 1-1. A steam shovel digs the North Side Canal from Milner Dam, ca. 1906. *Twin Falls Public Library, Clarence E. Bisbee Collection, PC-2084.*



Figure 1-2. Hand-drawn horse team clears sage brush, ca. 1910. *Twin Falls Public Library, Clarence E. Bisbee Collection, 172.*



Figure 1-3. Workers near the Twin Falls Livery and Feed Barn, ca. 1910. *Twin Falls Public Library, Clarence E. Bisbee Collection, 1910.*



Figure 1-4. Twin Falls City Park, high school, and the county courthouse, 1912. *Twin Falls Public Library, Clarence E. Bisbee Collection, 1033.*



Figure 1-5. The Idaho Department Store, Twin Falls, ca. 1910. *Twin Falls Public Library, Clarence E. Bisbee Collection, GB52.*



Figure 1-6. Agricultural warehouses in Twin Falls, 1941. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-038938-D.*



## 2. Farm Security Administration

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### Overview of the Farm Security Administration

#### *Resettlement Administration*

Created by executive order in April 1935, the Resettlement Administration (RA) was one of many New Deal programs established to combat the Great Depression. It existed as a standalone agency outside of any federal department and focused on assistance to poor farmers impacted by the Depression. Among its charges were providing low-interest loans to farmers so that they could purchase better land, restoring farmlands to productivity through soil rebuilding and other conservation projects, and overseeing a range of resettlement programs. The latter included moving urban workers to rural communities, establishing communal farms for displaced rural families, and building camps for migrant farm laborers from the American Midwest and South.<sup>20</sup>

Many of the RA's resettlement programs were denounced by conservatives as socialist experiments. To counter such opposition, RA director Rexford Tugwell created the Information Division in July 1935 to publicize the need for the agency's programs and their successes. The Historical Section, within the Information Division, consisted of a documentary photography program, directed by Roy Stryker and staffed by numerous photographers.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Farm Security Administration*

Facing continuing attacks from conservatives for his supposed leftist ideology, Tugwell resigned in November 1936. The RA was absorbed into the U.S. Department of Agriculture the following year and renamed the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The FSA continued many of the efforts of the RA, as well as beginning new initiatives such as working with farmers' debtors to prevent farm and home foreclosures, introducing medical care programs to rural regions, and providing education about nutrition and hygiene to laborers. The programs were successful, with one study estimating that between 1937 and 1941, farm families participating in FSA-sponsored activities saw their incomes increase by 69 percent.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> F. Jack Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 30, 32, 34; "The FSA-OWI," Photogrammar, accessed October 26, 2020, [http://photogrammar.yale.edu/about/fsa\\_owi/](http://photogrammar.yale.edu/about/fsa_owi/).

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Natanson, *The Black Image in the New Deal: The Politics of FSA Photography* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 58.

<sup>22</sup> Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 195; "History of USDA's Farm Service Agency," United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency website, accessed October 23, 2020, <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/about-fsa/history-and-mission/agency-history>.

The FSA continued the migratory labor camp program created by its predecessor. Under the RA, the program had begun to provide emergency housing to individuals and families displaced by dust storms in the Midwest during the 1920s and 1930s. Many were tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and laborers. The FSA built and maintained two main types of camps: permanent, year-round camps and mobile, tent camps. Both types of camps provided housing, health care, educational opportunities for children and adults, and community recreational activities. By 1940, the FSA had constructed thirty-seven permanent labor camps, including one in Twin Falls. Collectively, these camps housed 35,000 people, approximately 7,500 families. The FSA constructed permanent camps in areas with high rates of agricultural employment. Each camp could house hundreds of people. Laborers in these camps either resided in barracks-style buildings, divided into apartments, or small houses. Permanent camps had facilities for health care, education, recreation, laundry, showers, and toilets. The FSA also operated mobile camps. Also known as camps on wheels, their locations changed depending on where agricultural work was needed. Laborers lived in canvas tents, set up on individual wooden platforms. Specially built trailers provided mobile camps with power and water. Each camp also had a laundry room, showers, toilets, an infirmary, community tent for recreation and religious services, and often a commissary. Some camps, either permanent or mobile, could house upwards of 1,000 people.<sup>23</sup>

Another program that continued from the RA to the FSA was the Historical Section. While it was initially intended as a minor effort by the RA, it became the most impactful activity of the FSA. When first appointed section director, Stryker ordered the program's photographers to document only rural life, such as farmers, laborers, land, crops, and machinery. These images were meant to bring attention to those people in need of agency assistance and document agency accomplishments in rural rehabilitation and resettlement. But within a few years, both Stryker and his staff became interested in photographing all aspects of American life. Appearing in popular magazines and other publications, the photographs of the Historical Section helped create the image of the Great Depression in the United States. In September 1942, the photography program transferred to the Office of War Information, and Stryker and staff became part of broader wartime propaganda efforts. Between 1935 and 1944, the photography program produced approximately 175,000 black-and-white film negatives and 1,600 color photographs.<sup>24</sup>

## Evolving Role

The onset of World War II led to changes for the FSA. The agency played a significant role in the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans. As the federal government began

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<sup>23</sup> Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 195; Louis Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading: Japanese Americans and Beet Sugar in World War II," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 90, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 133.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 196–97; Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 164, 166; Natanson, *The Black Image in the New Deal*, 4; "Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives," Library of Congress website, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa>; "Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Color Photographs," Library of Congress website, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsac>.

the mass removal of 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast in March 1942, the FSA worked to ensure that agricultural production would continue in California, Oregon, Washington, and Arizona. FSA personnel oversaw the purchase or rental of Japanese American-operated farms by primarily white operators. Nearly half of the Japanese American working population forcibly removed had been engaged in agriculture.<sup>25</sup>

The forced removal contributed to a worsening agricultural labor shortage in the United States. Much of the farm workforce from 1941 had departed for wartime industrial jobs or military service. Leaders of the sugar beet industry in western states led demands to the federal government for replacement labor sources. At the start of the war, sugar was recognized as a vital commodity. In addition to food use, sugar beets were converted into industrial alcohol and used in the manufacturing of munitions and synthetic rubber. Due to the war with Japan, the United States was no longer importing sugar from the Philippines or Java, as both were now under Japanese occupation. In response, American farmers increased their sugar beet acreage by 25 percent. By the spring of 1942, thousands of workers were needed to cultivate the labor-intensive crop. Sugar companies, farmers, and state and local officials all submitted requests to the War Relocation Authority (WRA), the federal agency in charge of the incarcerated Japanese Americans, to utilize these individuals as a labor source. The WRA ultimately agreed and allowed hundreds of Japanese Americans to move from the Portland Assembly Center in Portland, Oregon, to an FSA mobile camp site in Nyssa, Oregon, in May 1942 to work in the region's sugar beet fields.<sup>26</sup>

The establishment of the first Japanese American farm labor camp during the war marked another change in the FSA's duties. Prior to the war, the FSA, through its migratory farm labor camps, had provided housing and health services to migrant farm labor families. The national labor shortage led the FSA to utilize its permanent and mobile camps as housing for a range of workers. These included Japanese Americans recruited from temporary assembly centers and concentration camps; Mexican, Jamaican, and Bahamian laborers imported through agreements with their respective governments; and German and Italian prisoners of war. In 1943, the War Food Administration (WFA), a newly established federal agency, overtook all FSA farm labor activities, including operation of the camps. When World War II ended, the WFA folded and sold many of the labor camps. The FSA, meanwhile, consolidated with the Emergency Crop and Feed Loan Division of the Farm Credit Administration to become the Farmers Home Administration in 1946.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Lawrence I. Hewes, Jr., *Final Report of the Participation of the Farm Security Administration In the Evacuation Program of the Wartime Civil Control Administration Civil Affairs Division Western Defense Command and Fourth Army Covering the Period March 15, 1942 through May 31, 1942, 1942*,

[https://oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb009n99p1&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire\\_text](https://oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb009n99p1&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire_text).

<sup>26</sup> "The History of Japanese American Farm Labor Camps," Uprooted: Japanese American Farm Labor Camps During World War II website, accessed October 26, 2020, <http://www.uprootedexhibit.com/farm-labor-camps>; Morgen Young, "Nyssa, Oregon (detention facility)," *Densho Encyclopedia*, October 16, 2020, [http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Nyssa,\\_Oregon\\_\(detention\\_facility\)](http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Nyssa,_Oregon_(detention_facility)).

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Federal Office of State Extension Service to Arthur A. Schupp, Executive Secretary of the Farmers & Manufacturers Beet Sugar Association, April 8, 1943; Folder: Farm Labor 9-1 Sugar Beets; Box 15; Entry 1: General

## The FSA in Idaho

The FSA's administrative structure had six levels: headquarters in Washington, DC; twelve regional offices; state offices in most states; district offices within states; county offices in most counties; and a project office for each project, including migratory labor camps. Region XI, headquartered in Portland, oversaw FSA activities in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.<sup>28</sup>

The FSA built two permanent camps in Idaho: Caldwell in 1938 and Twin Falls in 1939 (See Chapter 3 for more information on both camps). The Caldwell camp also stored equipment for all FSA mobile camps in the state. In 1942, that equipment included 681 tents, 878 tent platforms, 100 privies, and 2 clinic trailers. The locations of the mobile camps changed depending on where agricultural labor was needed. In 1942, mobile camps were located in Blackfoot, Jerome, Nampa, Paul, Rexburg, Shelley, and Wilder. In June 1942, the FSA overtook operation of a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Rupert. Known as both Camp Paul and Camp Rupert, the Bureau of Reclamation had maintained the site from July 1939 to May 1942.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 2-1. FSA managers meet at Caldwell, Idaho, 1941. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-039179-D.*

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Correspondence; Record Group 224: War Food Administration; National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD; Leonard J. Arrington, *Beet Sugar in the West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), 143; Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942–1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 32; “*History of USDA’s Farm Service Agency.*”

<sup>28</sup> Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 244–245; National Archives and Records Administrations, Records of the Farmers Home Administration, accessed on March 16, 2021 <https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/096.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Walter A. Duffy, Regional Director, FSA, Portland to Major W. W. Williver, Executive Director, Washington State Defense Council, Seattle, February 23, 1942; Folder 505 Relocation Alien July 1941 to June 1942; Box 7; Entry 123: Office of the Director, Correspondence; Record Group 96: Farm Security Administration; National Archives and Records Administration, Seattle, WA; J. DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, September 30, 1946, 15; Fiset, “Thinning, Topping, and Loading,” 133.

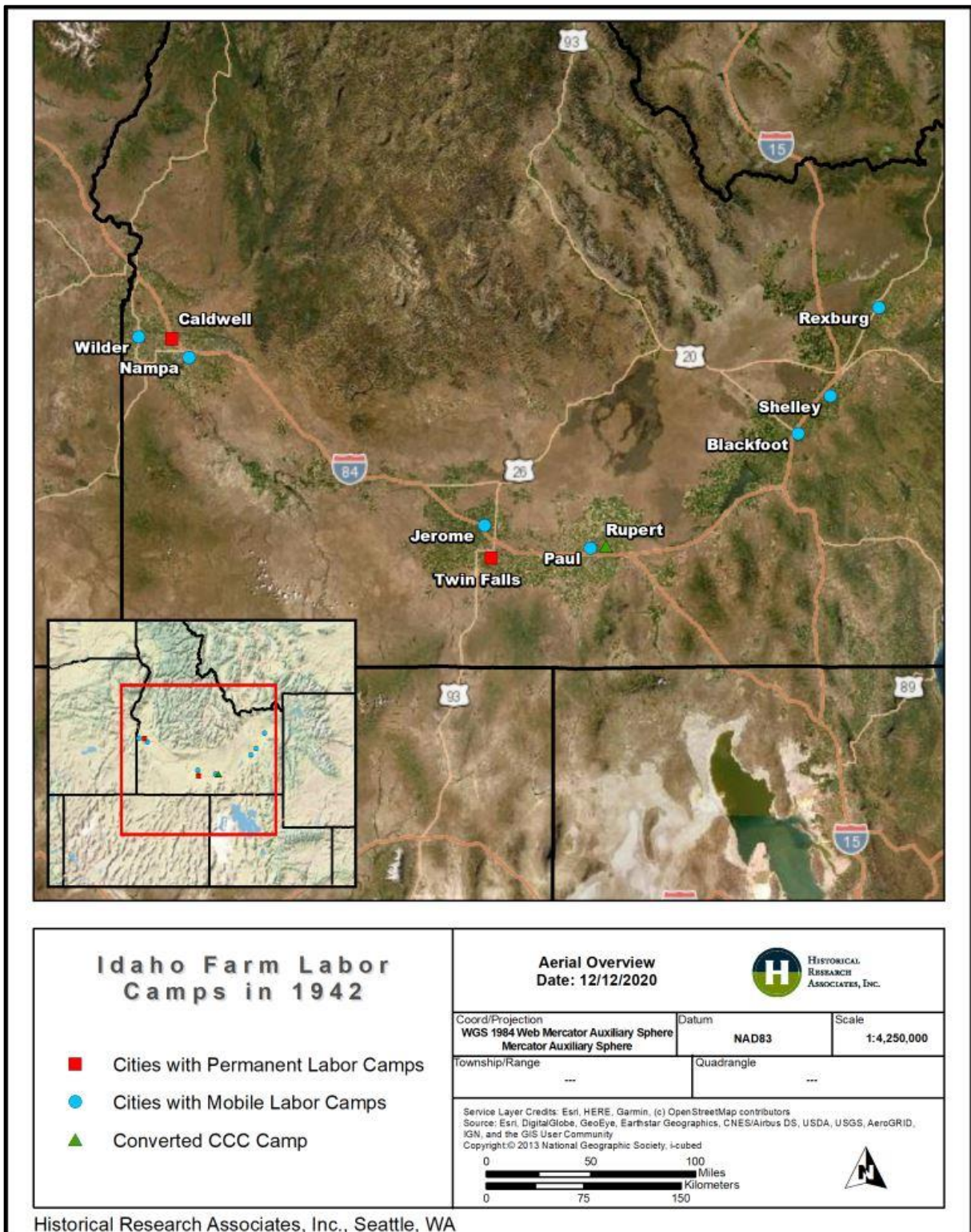


Figure 2-2. Locations of FSA farm labor camps in Idaho in 1942.

The FSA's Historical Section captured some twelve hundred photographs of Idaho. Russell Lee produced nearly 80 percent of these images during various trips to the state between 1940 and 1942. He was the most prolific of all FSA photographers, taking more than five thousand images during his seven-year career with the agency. When the United States entered the war, Lee was working in California. In April 1942, he began documenting the forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans for the FSA, eventually capturing nearly six hundred images. Lee photographed families making final preparations at their homes, farms, and businesses before their removal. He documented people at train stations waiting to be transported to the Santa Anita Assembly Center. He also shot images of the Salinas Assembly Center. That summer, Lee took photographs of four FSA camps that were primarily occupied by Japanese Americans—Nyssa in Oregon, and Twin Falls, Rupert, and Shelley in Idaho. The previous year, Lee had documented the FSA camps in Caldwell and Wilder. His twenty-nine images of the Twin Falls camp provide the best historic documentation of the site and its occupants (See Chapters 3 and 6 for additional images).<sup>30</sup>



Figure 2-3. Sign outside the FSA mobile camp in Wilder, Idaho, 1941. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-039175-D.*

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<sup>30</sup> Morgen Young, “Russell Lee,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, June 16, 2020, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Russell%20Lee;> “The FSA-OWI,” Photogrammar.



Figure 2-4. A farm family eating dinner in the tent in which they live at the FSA mobile camp in Wilder, 1941. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-039200-D.*

# 3. The Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp: 1939–1946

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## Development

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) oversaw construction of the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp in 1939. It was one of two such camps built by the federal agency in Idaho, with the other located in Caldwell. Its original purpose was to provide housing to farmers and their families displaced by dust storms in the Midwest during the Great Depression. With the onset of World War II and the subsequent agricultural labor shortage, the purpose of the camp changed. The FSA began housing a diverse group of farm workers in the camp, including Japanese Americans, Mexicans, and Jamaicans.<sup>31</sup>

The potential of a federal farm labor camp being built in Twin Falls was first reported in late March 1939. During a Twin Falls city council meeting, a city clerk informed the council that he had been contacted by an FSA engineer regarding use of water for a project. The same clerk also reported that the FSA engineer had reached out to Idaho Power Company about bringing power to the project site. Grace and J. H. Seaver shared during the meeting that they had been approached by the federal agency regarding acquisition of their orchard, located two miles south of the city of Twin Falls.<sup>32</sup>

On May 4, 1939, Grace Seaver sold sixty acres in Section 29, Township 10 South, Range 17 East to the Department of Agriculture for \$9,500. Later that month, the FSA requested bids to build twenty-five houses, two hundred wooden shelters, and other supporting structures. The agency eventually issued a \$229,048 contract to R. Goold & Son of Stockton, California. Construction ran from July to December 1939. Anticipating more housing would be needed, the FSA issued a second request for bids in March 1940. Dolan and Buck, also of Stockton, won with a \$56,091 bid to construct additional houses and other ancillary buildings.<sup>33</sup>

Architect Burton D. Cairns designed the buildings, and Garrett Eckbo designed the landscape architecture for the Twin Falls camp. Both worked for Region IX of the FSA in San Francisco, along with district engineer Herbert Hallsteen and regional engineer Nicholas Cirino. Cairns and Eckbo were involved in an automobile accident in Tigard, Oregon, on December 15, 1939. Cairns, the driver, died instantly and Eckbo sustained serious injuries. Eckbo continued to

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<sup>31</sup> Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 4; “Varied Dwelling Facilities Mark \$229,048 Camp,” *Idaho Evening Times*, December 8, 1939; “23 More Homes for Farm Camp,” *Idaho Evening Times*, March 23, 1940.



work for the FSA until 1942. Vernon DeMars replaced Cairns as district architect. The Twin Falls camp may have been one of the last FSA projects designed by Cairns.<sup>34</sup>

## Physical Description



Figure 3-1. Aerial image of Twin Falls Labor Camp in 1946. USGS 1CI0000080038, 1946, *Earth Explorer*.

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<sup>34</sup> Barbara Perry Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox, Idaho Historic Sites Inventory Form, “Comfort Station – Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-19402, 2019, 3; Marc Treib and Dorothée Imbert, *Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscapes for Living* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 121–22; Pacific Coast Architecture Database, “Burton Donald Cairns,” accessed November 24, 2020, <http://pcad.lib.washington.edu/person/4620>.

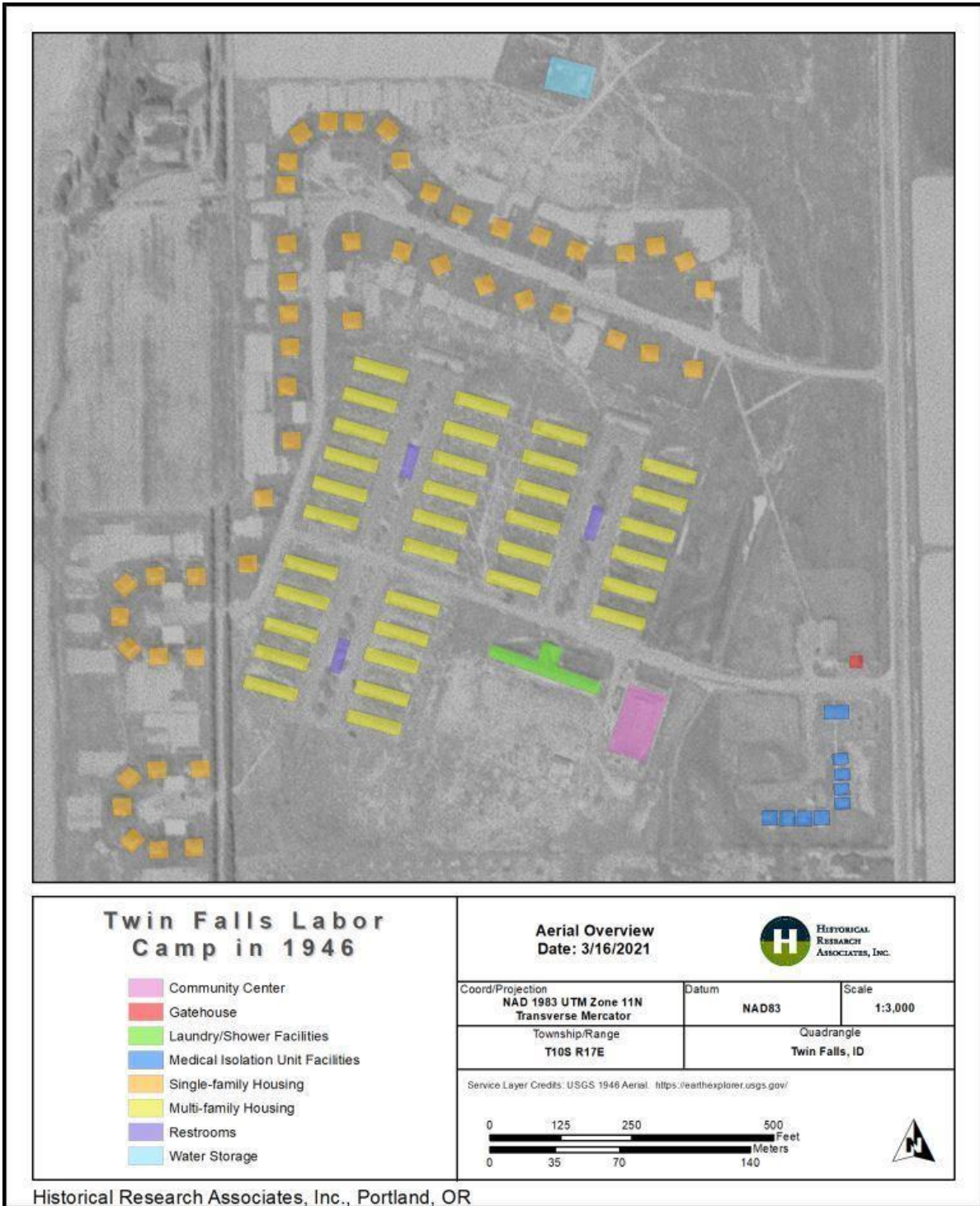


Figure 3-2. Identification of Twin Falls Labor Camp buildings in 1946.

Located two miles south of Twin Falls, at 1122 Washington Street South, the main street, Labor Camp Road, was designed in a U-shape and provided two access points to the camp. It was originally unpaved. Upon completion of the first phase of construction, in late 1939, the camp consisted of twenty-four farm labor houses, thirty-six barracks-style buildings, a manager's house, a community building, a central utility building with showers and laundry, three comfort stations with toilets and wash basins, a health clinic (called the "isolation ward"), a water storage and supply system, a sewage system, a gatehouse, and recreational facilities, including a baseball field and two basketball courts. The community building provided space for an auditorium, mess hall, school, and nursery. The FSA completed a second phase of construction in the spring of 1940, building twenty-three additional farm labor houses, twenty-three tool sheds, several garages for the houses, and other facilities.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 3-3. FSA photographer Russell Lee took a series of images of the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp in July 1942. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073766-D.*

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<sup>35</sup> Bauer and Jacox, "Comfort Station – Migratory Farm Labor Camp," 83-19402, 3; Bauer and Jacox, "Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp," 83-15919, 4; Letter from Walter A. Duffy, Regional Director, FSA, Portland to Major W. Williver, Executive Director, Washington State Defense Council, Seattle, February 23, 1942; Folder: 505 Relocation Alien July 1941 to June 1942; Box 7; Entry 123: Office of the Director, Correspondence; Record Group 96: Farm Security Administration; National Archives & Records Administration, Seattle, WA; Jean Dinkelacker, "Complete Farm Labor 'City' Taking Rapid Form: Varied Dwelling Facilities Mark \$229,048 Camp," *Idaho Evening Times*, December 8, 1939.



Figure 3-4. The camp, photographed in 1942, included two types of housing—barracks-style buildings and small houses. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073771-D.*



Figure 3-5. The camp had forty-seven small houses or cottages. Each house had a kitchen, living/dining room, two bedrooms, and a bathroom. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073761-D.*

Each farm labor house included a combined living and dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom, laundry facility, running water, and electricity. Each house was identical in design, with the living/dining room and kitchen in the front of the house and the bedrooms and bathroom in the back. The only plan variation was the location of the kitchen on either the right or left side of the living/dining room. The houses were painted a variety of colors, including buff, sand, light yellow, and gray-green, all trimmed in white. Each house had a front lawn and small garden plot in the backyard. This type of housing was typically reserved for families who lived and worked in the Twin Falls area year-round.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 3-6. There were thirty-six barracks style buildings in the camp. Each building was divided into six apartments. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073774.*

The camp had six rows of six barracks-style buildings, or row shelters. The shelters were clad in California redwood board siding and had side-gabled roofs topped with cedar shingles. Each building was divided into six apartments, which could house up to four people per unit. Every apartment had an exterior entrance, with a screened door. The row shelters were centrally located in the camp. They lacked running water, so residents used laundry and shower facilities in a separate building. Comfort stations, situated between the buildings, contained toilets and wash basins. The row shelters typically housed seasonal workers. Due to the lack of running water and insufficient insulation, the FSA closed the buildings after harvest season in the fall and opened them again during planting season in the spring.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Barbara Perry Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox, Idaho Historic Sites Inventory Form, “House 1—Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-19323, 2019, 3; “Varied Dwelling Facilities Mark \$229,048 Camp.”

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Perry Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox, Idaho Historic Sites Inventory Form, “Shelter 51—Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-19373, 2019, 3; Bauer and Jacox, “Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-15919, 4; “Varied Dwelling Facilities Mark \$229,048 Camp.”



Figure 3-7. A Japanese American camp resident on his way to the showers, 1942. Note the push-out shutters on the back of a row shelter. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI*



Figure 3-8. The apartments in the barracks-style building lacked indoor plumbing. Camp residents used comfort stations located between the rows of barracks. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073758-D.*



Figure 3-9. Each apartment measured fourteen by sixteen square feet. Note how this Japanese American resident personalized his apartment with cut-outs from the *Times-News*. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection,*



Figure 3-10. Each apartment was furnished with a pair of bunk beds, small table, and two chairs. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073768-D.*

## Occupants and Lifestyle

By June 1940, forty-one families were living at the Twin Falls Migratory Labor Camp. They were, presumably, all white families. James Tanaka, who lived at the camp from 1943 to 1949, recalled these families as originating primarily from Arkansas and Oklahoma. However, most migrant farmers living in the Northwest arrived from Missouri, Kansas, North Dakota, and South Dakota.<sup>38</sup>



Figure 3-11. Camp residents play Go, a Japanese board game, in 1942. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073765-D.*

Japanese American farm workers first moved into the camp in June 1942 (See Chapter 6 for more information on Japanese Americans). They arrived as part of a broad effort, executed by federal, state, and local government officials, as well as private interests, to address a national agricultural labor shortage. By the mid-1940s, a diverse group of people provided farm labor in Idaho, including white migrants from the Midwest and South, Japanese Americans, Native Americans, Mexicans through the federal Bracero Program (See Chapter 7 for more information on Latino laborers), Jamaicans, German and Italian prisoners of war, conscientious objectors, and local men, women, and children. The make-up of residents at the Twin Falls camp reflected this

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<sup>38</sup> Letter from J. O. Walker, Director, Resettlement Division, FSA, Washington, D.C. to Walter A. Duffy, Regional Director, Region XI, Portland, July 15, 1940; Folder: 913-Attitude Toward Project; Box 12; Entry 123: Office of the Director, Correspondence; Record Group 96: Farm Security Administration; National Archives & Records Administration, Seattle, WA; Morgen Young Interview with James K. Tanaka, Los Angeles, CA, April 18, 2014, <http://www.uprootedexhibit.com/their-stories/#/?profile=221>.



diversifying of Idaho's labor force. In October 1943, camp residents included 250 Japanese Americans, 175 whites, 100 Mexicans, and 50 Jamaicans.<sup>39</sup>

Japanese Americans who lived in the camp in the 1940s resided in either apartments in the barrack-style buildings or small, single-family homes. Typically, single individuals, mostly men, resided in the apartments, with two to four people per unit. Seasonal laborers utilized the barracks, as the buildings were not suitable for winter occupation. Families lived year-round in the houses.<sup>40</sup>

A September 1942 article in the *Minidoka Irrigator*, a weekly newspaper published at the Minidoka concentration camp, located approximately twenty-two miles northeast of Twin Falls, described the camp as follows:

Residents live in barracks which have been divided into one-room quarters, 14 by 16 feet, with cement floors. Steel double-deck beds, two pairs to each room, are furnished. The camp also supplies a metal utility table and two folding chairs. A small wood-burning kitchen stove for heating and cooking is placed in each living unit. The camp is supplied adequately with both cold and hot running water, a huge laundry room, clean, modern toilets and showers. In addition, there is a spacious recreation hall and a library. An up-to-date clinic with a trained nurse also is available for FSA residents. It stands as a separate unit near the entrance of the well-landscaped environment.<sup>41</sup>



Figure 3-12. Beginning in 1942, the Twin Falls labor camp was occupied primarily by single Japanese American men. As the War Relocation Authority began to encourage family unit resettlement away from the concentration camps, an increasing number of Japanese American families began to reside in the camp. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-027753 D*

<sup>39</sup> Idaho Agricultural Labor Market Report, week ending October 16, 1943; Folder: Region XI: Idaho: 1943; Box 14; Entry: 199 Farm Labor Market Reports, 1941–1943, Region XI; Record Group 211: War Manpower Commission; National Archives & Records Administration, College Park, MD; Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Tanaka interview.

<sup>41</sup> “80 Nisei Farm Workers Used at Twin Falls,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, September 18, 1942.



Figure 3-13. Residents of the Twin Falls camp washing dishes, 1942. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073757-D.*



Figure 3-14. James Kazuo and Toshiko Tanaka with their dog Blackie, circa 1947. The building behind them was their two-bedroom house in the Twin Falls camp. The window on the left was James's bedroom. *Japanese American National Museum, 2001.179.7.*

James Kazuo Tanaka arrived at the Twin Falls camp in the spring of 1943, at the age of eight. He moved with his parents, James Kenso and Toshiko Tanaka, from Minidoka. His father had harvested sugar beets that previous autumn and lived at the Twin Falls camp. The entire family participated in the 1943 and 1944 sugar beet harvest seasons, residing in barracks at the Twin Falls camp between the summer and autumn, and returning to Minidoka in the winter months. Upon securing permanent farm work in early 1945, the Tanaka family moved into one of the houses at the labor camp. They remained there until 1949 and eventually settled in Los Angeles.<sup>42</sup>

When he first moved to the camp, James met other Japanese Americans, including families and individuals. He also met white migratory laborers from the Midwest, who he described as members of the camp's more permanent population. These laborers had likely lived in the camp since before the war. He briefly attended school in the camp's community building before starting classes at Bickel Elementary School in Twin Falls.<sup>43</sup>

During a 2014 oral history, James shared some of his memories of the camp:

The farm labor camp had total freedom. There were some agricultural fences around, but you could crawl between or under or over them and go pretty much anywhere ... We were able to go into town. My main reason for going into town, other than purchasing clothes, was my Saturday matinee movies for a quarter. Usually a cowboy western, with a short serial, so you'd have to go back next week to see the next part of the serial...I'd either hitchhike or when I got a bicycle, I could ride into town.<sup>44</sup>

Prior to the end of the incarceration of Japanese Americans by the federal government, in early 1945, Japanese American residents in the Twin Falls camp were permitted to visit the city of Twin Falls, but only with supervision from either FSA personnel or local police. Though there was no barbed wire nor guard towers like Minidoka and other concentration camps, the Twin Falls camp, as with other farm labor camps, was still a site of confinement for Japanese Americans. During the war, camps had curfews and no Japanese Americans were allowed to leave the premises without escort from camp personnel, local authorities, or their employers.<sup>45</sup>

There was at least one known instance of violence against Japanese Americans living in the Twin Falls camp. In July 1944, the *Manzanar Free Press* reported that five white teenagers from the nearby town of Buhl attacked a group of Japanese Americans in Twin Falls. The incident was condemned by local authorities. In response to the attacks, sixty Japanese Americans from the Twin

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<sup>42</sup> Tanaka interview.

<sup>43</sup> Tanaka interview.

<sup>44</sup> Tanaka interview.

<sup>45</sup> "Tired of Waiting, This Jap Medic Student Glad to Work," *Times-News* (Twin Falls), June 3, 1942, <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; Roger Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trail: Japanese Americans in World War II* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 74; Letter from Jane K. Chase to Bishop Daywell of the Episcopal Diocese of Oregon, November 23, 1942, Jane K. Chase Papers, Idaho State Archives, Boise.

Falls camp and forty from the Rupert camp returned to the Poston (Arizona) and Manzanar (California) concentration camps, respectively, in protest.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 3-15. Some Japanese American families lived in the Twin Falls camp until the late 1940s. The Toyooka Family—Jim, Fran, Janet, and Ronald—pictured outside their house at the camp during the winter of 1946–1947. *Fran Toyooka.*



Figure 3-16. Janet and Ronald Toyooka at Twin Falls camp, 1946–1947. *Fran Toyooka.*

## Comparison to Other Farm Labor Camps

The FSA built and maintained two types of farm labor camps—permanent, or year-round, camps and mobile, or tent, camps (See Chapter 2 for more information on the FSA in Idaho). Burton D. Cairns, Garrett Eckbo, and other staff at the Region IX FSA office in San Francisco designed two permanent camps in Idaho—Twin Falls and Caldwell. The San Francisco office also designed permanent camps in Arvin, Brawley, Ceres, Coachella, Firebaugh, Gridley, Marysville, Mineral King, Shafter, Thornton, Tulare, Westley, Winters, and Yuba City, California; Yamhill,

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<sup>46</sup> “Idaho Seasonal Workers Beaten by Buhl Youth at Twin Falls,” *Manzanar Free Press*, July 8, 1944.

Oregon; Granger, Walla Walla, and Yakima, Washington; Agua Fria, Baxter, Casa Grande, Chandler, Eleven-Mile Corner, Glendale, and Yuma, Arizona; and Harlingen, Robstown, Sinton, and Weslaco, Texas.<sup>47</sup> As the only other permanent FSA camp in Idaho, the Caldwell camp provides the best direct comparison to the Twin Falls camp.<sup>48</sup>

The FSA built a camp in Caldwell in 1938. Like Twin Falls, it was built originally to house primarily white farmers displaced by the Dust Bowl. By the early 1940s, the camp also housed Jamaican, Japanese American, and Mexican laborers.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 3-17. The small houses at the Caldwell camp, photographed in 1941, were similar in style to those at the Twin Falls camp. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF33-013032-M4.*

Like the Twin Falls camp, the Caldwell camp included small houses and barracks-style buildings. The exterior of these buildings appear to have been identical to those at the Twin Falls camp.<sup>50</sup> The Caldwell houses were identical, each containing a kitchen, living room, bathroom, and two bedrooms. They were also furnished, with beds, tables, chairs, and couches. Every house had a small lawn, garden patch, and garage space. Only families were allowed to live in the houses.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Treib and Imbert, *Garrett Eckbo*, 121–22. HRA cannot confirm how many, if any, Region XI FSA camps are extant.

<sup>48</sup> HRA acknowledges there were other permanent or semi-permanent camps administered by the FSA in Idaho, including Burley and Rupert. However, as these camps only had barracks-style buildings and did not also contain small, cottage-like houses, HRA does not consider them as comparable to the Twin Falls camp as Caldwell. It appears that all buildings from the former Rupert camp have been removed. Available information on the present physical status of the former Burley camp was inconclusive. “Historical Marker Placed at WWII POW Camp Rupert,” *Times-News*, August 31, 2012, updated March 20, 2013, [https://magicvalley.com/news/local/historical-marker-placed-at-wwii-pow-camp-rupert/article\\_ca518126-6807-539c-bc9b-af8327ead5a4.html](https://magicvalley.com/news/local/historical-marker-placed-at-wwii-pow-camp-rupert/article_ca518126-6807-539c-bc9b-af8327ead5a4.html).

<sup>49</sup> DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> HRA reviewed photographs of buildings at each location. Construction drawings were not available for comparison.

<sup>51</sup> DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 16–17.



Figure 3-18. The barracks-style buildings at the Caldwell camp, 1941. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF33-013043-M3.*

The barracks-style buildings were divided into six apartments each. Each apartment included beds, table, chairs, shelves, and a stove for cooking and heating. The buildings lacked running water. A separate building housed showers and laundry facilities, and comfort stations between the barracks contained toilets and wash basins. These buildings were meant to house seasonal workers and were not occupied during the winter.<sup>52</sup>



Figure 3-19. The barracks-style buildings at the Caldwell camp, 1941. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-039194-D.*

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<sup>52</sup> DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 15–16.



Figure 3-20. The barracks-style buildings at the Twin Falls camp, pictured in 1942, are nearly identical to those at the Caldwell camp. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073767-D.*

The camp maintained a small commissary, which sold items such as milk, meat, and other groceries to camp residents. The camp's community building served multiple functions, including movie theater, mess hall, and school. In 1946, the camp school included Japanese American, Mexican, Black, and white students. High school-aged students attended a local high school.<sup>53</sup>

During the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Caldwell camp stored equipment for all mobile FSA camps in Idaho. This included tents, wooden tent platforms, privies, and health clinic trailers. The exact locations of the mobile camps changed every year, as the FSA located laborers where they were most needed.<sup>54</sup>

The War Food Administration (WFA) overtook administration of the Caldwell camp, along with all other FSA labor camps, in 1943. After the end of World War II, the federal government dissolved the WFA and sold many of the farm labor camps. The Caldwell Housing Authority acquired the camp in 1950. Now known as Farmway Village, the site continues to house agricultural laborers. Many are Mexicans, working in Canyon County through the H-2A temporary agricultural visa program.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 18–19.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Walter A. Duffy, Regional Director, FSA, Portland to Major W. W. Williver, Executive Director, Washington State Defense Council, Seattle, February 23, 1942; Folder 505 Relocation Alien July 1941 to June 1942; Box 7; Entry 123: Office of the Director, Correspondence; Record Group 96: Farm Security Administration; National Archives and Records Administration, Seattle, WA.

<sup>55</sup> The Governor's Migratory Labor Committee, "A Report on Idaho Migratory Labor Camps"; Nicole Foy, "South Idaho migrant camp residents reflect on heritage," *Idaho Press*, October 20, 2018; Caldwell Housing Authority, "About CHA," accessed December 15, 2020, <https://chaidaho.org/about-us/>.



Figure 3-21. FSA photographer Russell Lee documented the Wilder camp in 1941 and the Shelley camp in 1942. He did not photograph some of the other mobile camps in Idaho, such as Blackfoot, Jerome, Rexburg, and Paul. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-039038-D.*



Figure 3-22. The mobile camp in Shelley housed Japanese American laborers in 1942 and 1943. By 1944, it primarily housed Mexican laborers through the Bracero Program. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073778-D.*





## 4. The Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp: 1947–1987

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### Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association, Inc.

When World War II ended, the U.S. government ended all operations of the War Food Administration (WFA). Subsequently, many of the labor camps then operated by the WFA were relinquished to organizations wishing to operate them. In July 1947, Darrell H. Moss, director of the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor camp, announced that the federal labor program was ending and that all camp tenants would have to leave by September 25 of that year. This included approximately 500 White, Japanese American, and Mexican residents.<sup>56</sup>

As agricultural laborers were still needed in the Twin Falls area through the end of the harvest season that year, the federal government and local interests struck a deal. The U.S. Extension Service, Amalgamated Sugar Company, and Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association agreed to continue to operate the camp and place laborers where they were most needed through November 30, 1947.<sup>57</sup>

Amalgamated Sugar Company was only involved in operations for a short time, as soon the Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association acquired the camp.<sup>58</sup> The Association was one of five such groups established in Southern Idaho in 1943. Their role was to ensure farm owners were responsible for their own harvests and had obligations in obtaining labor to complete the harvest. They were cooperative organizations that farm owners paid fees to join. Membership money paid for the workers' food and lodging. (Rental fees paid by laborers were supposed to pay for camp maintenance.) The Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association oversaw the camp's maintenance and operation for the next forty years.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bauer and Jacox, "Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp," 83-15919, 3; "Farm Labor Camp Will Serve Area Through Harvest," *Times-News*, July 18, 1947, <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; "New Law Brightens Labor Camp Future," *Times-News*, July 24, 1947, <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; "Tenants Ordered to Vacate Camp," *Post-Register*, July 10, 1947.

<sup>57</sup> "Tenants Ordered to Vacate Camp"; "Farm Labor Camp Will Serve Area Through Harvest"; "New Law Brightens Labor Camp Future," 1.

<sup>58</sup> It appears that the initial three-way agreement transferring ownership from the federal government to Amalgamated Sugar and Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association did not involve a purchase. It is likely the Twin Falls County Farm Labor Association assumed ownership and operation without purchase. "New Law Brightens Labor Camp Future."

<sup>59</sup> Bauer and Jacox, "Historic Agricultural Resources of Twin Falls County, Idaho," 24; Harry A. Elcock, "Farmer Sponsored Labor in Idaho, 1943," in *Proceedings of the Eastern Slope and Intermountain Regional Meeting*, American Society of



Figure 4-1. Excerpt from the *Twin Falls Times-News* detailing planned closure of the camp in 1947. *Twin Falls Times-News*, July 18, 1947.

## Physical Description

When the Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association took over ownership, the campus included the original thirty-six barracks-style buildings and forty-eight farm labor houses. The latter included the original forty-seven houses plus the building that originally served as the camp manager's house. The Association rented the apartments in the barracks-style buildings for \$1.40 per family unit, per week. The camp had 216 total apartments, six per building, with a total capacity of 864 people. The Association rented the farm labor houses for \$3.55 per week. Allowing for four people per home, the single-family houses had a capacity of 192.<sup>60</sup>

Occupants of the camp fluctuated each year. By 1961, some of the barracks-style buildings were no longer housing laborers. The camp's capacity had declined from 1,056 to 831. All of the single-family houses were extant, but a state report from that year stated that only ten out of the original thirty-six barracks-style buildings were used as residences. In 1965, the Twin Falls Camp was the largest of seventy-three camps in southern Idaho, housing 1,210 of the approximately 10,000

Sugar Beet Technologists, 1944, <https://bsdf-assbt.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/FarmerSponsoredLaborinSouthernIdaho1943.pdf>; "Farm Labor Camp Will Serve Area Through Harvest"; "Tenants Ordered to Vacate Camp."

<sup>60</sup> "Farm Labor Camp Will Serve Area Through Harvest."

migrant workers in the region. By 1976, capacity had declined to 400. At that time, rent ranged from \$14 to \$20 per week.<sup>61</sup>

Reports and remembrances indicate that the camp's physical conditions deteriorated in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1976, camp improvements included some electrical rewiring, roof repair, and work in the bath facilities. Twin Falls community member Sister RoseMary Boessen recalled the camp being beautiful in the 1970s, then falling into disrepair in the 1980s. Though topographical maps indicate twenty-two of the barracks-style buildings were removed by 1979, subsequent historic resources surveys reflect that all but seven of the original barracks-style buildings remained in place.<sup>62</sup>



Figure 4-2. Aerial image of the camp in 1953. USGS, A010904305380 1953.



Figure 4-3. Aerial image of the camp in 1978. USGS, 1VERJ00010182 1978.

<sup>61</sup> The Governor's Migratory Labor Committee, "A Report on Idaho Migratory Labor Camps," Boise: Employment Security Agency, 1961; Jim Adams, "Migratory Labor Survey Reveals Progress Made On Facility Improvement," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise) November 21, 1965: 45, <http://www.newsbank.com>; "Twin Falls Labor Camp Complaints Answered," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise) June 22, 1976: 22, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

<sup>62</sup> Annette Jenkins, "Bias Claim Spurs Probe of Labor Camp," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise) April 29, 1975:24, <http://www.newsbank.com>; Pat Marcantonio, "Gradually, a miracle reshapes El Milagro," *The Times-News*, September 1, 1996; U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Twin Falls Quadrangle, 1979, <https://livingatlas.arcgis.com/topoexplorer/index.html>; Bauer and Jacox, "Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp," 83-15919.



Figure 4-4. Topographical map of the camp from 1964. *USGS Twin Falls Quadrangle Maps, 1964.*



Figure 4-5. Topographical map of the camp from 1979, incorrectly reflects building removal. *USGS Twin Falls Quadrangle Maps, 1979.*

## Occupants and Lifestyle

People living at the camp from the 1950s through the 1980s were primarily Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Individuals and families living there were typically seasonal laborers. They would move between Idaho camps, and often go out of state, following crop harvests or visiting family in other places between harvests.<sup>63</sup>

The physical conditions and services at the camp deteriorated over the years. The Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association's funding stream, made up of local farmers' membership dues, proved to be insufficient. They could not cover many of the services that the Farm Security Administration and the WFA had provided to camp residents when the camp was under their ownership. These included health care and education. Such services eventually stopped. The safety and cleanliness of the camp depended largely upon individual camp managers. Local organizations, churches, and other concerned individuals offered to assist the Association in the care of the camp and its residents. Such offers were often declined by management.<sup>64</sup>

In the 1970s, people created resources at the camp to better serve the children living there. Many seasonal farm laborers were forced to bring their young children with them to work for lack of a safe place to leave them. This led local religious groups to partner with the Twin Falls Young

<sup>63</sup> For more on seasonal workers traveling between labor sites and housing, see Jim Norris, *North for the Harvest: Mexican Workers, Growers, and the Sugar Beet Industry* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Bauer and Jacox, "Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp," 83-15919, 3.

Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in 1970 to establish a daycare center at the camp. A combined library and recreation center within the complex was present by 1971. Children could play and read there, supervised by community volunteers and employees of the YWCA. In 1975, the Idaho Migrant Council, an advocacy organization for migrant laborers in Idaho, requested \$31,000 from the Twin Falls County commissioners to develop recreation facilities at the camp. It is unknown if any of that requested was funded.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 4-6. Children writing the schedule of the Magic Valley Bookmobile, which visited the camp weekly, in 1971. *Idaho Statesman*, July 12, 1971.

Also in 1975, the Department of Housing and Urban Development opened an investigation of racial discrimination at the camp. Residents reported unequal treatment and harassment against Mexicans and Mexican Americans from the camp manager. The Idaho Migrant Council was aware of the investigation and sought better treatment for the camp residents. Later that year, Comunidad Voluntaria Mexicana, a Chicago-based farm labor organization, staged a march through downtown Twin Falls. They protested the unsanitary conditions at the camp, as well as the discriminatory practices. It is unclear what came of the investigation, though physical improvements in the spring of 1976 may have been related.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Idaho Statesman*, “Bookmobile Visits Children In Twin Falls Labor Camp,” July 12, 1971: 26, <http://www.newsbank.com>; *Idaho Statesman*, “Groups Plan Child Center For Migrants,” May 11, 1970: 28, <http://www.newsbank.com>; *Idaho Statesman*, “Play Area Fence Asked By Twin Falls Migrants,” February 25, 1975: 17, <http://www.newsbank.com>.  
<sup>66</sup> “Bias Claim Spurs Probe of Labor Camp.”; “TF Labor Camp condition protest march Saturday,” *Times-News*, May 8, 1975; *Idaho Statesman*, “Twin Falls Labor Camp Complaints Answered,” June 22, 1976: 22.

## 5. The Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp-El Milagro: 1988–2018

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### Idaho Migrant Council (Community Council of Idaho)

By the late twentieth century, the Twin Falls County Farm Labor Sponsoring Association's membership was in decline, and the need for migrant laborers had evolved. No longer able to maintain the camp, the Association sold it to the Idaho Migrant Council, Inc., for \$135,000 in 1988. Humberto Fuentes founded the non-profit Idaho Migrant Council in 1971 to provide housing and other services, as well as to serve as an advocacy organization to migrant laborers in the state.<sup>67</sup>

In 1990, the Idaho Migrant Council changed the name of the camp from the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp to El Milagro, or The Miracle, Housing Project. The council underwent a name change in 2006, becoming the Community Council of Idaho.<sup>68</sup>

Today, the Community Council of Idaho is the largest nonprofit serving the Latino population in Idaho (see Chapter 7 for more information on the Latino community in Idaho). In addition to operating five multi-family housing complexes, the council conducts employment and training programs, and operates ten Migrant and Seasonal Head Start centers in southern Idaho and three health centers in eastern Idaho.<sup>69</sup>

### Physical Description

Significant renovations and upgrades to the camp's infrastructure and housing occurred in the 1990s. Darrel McRoberts, plant manager of the Green Giant packing plant in Buhl, spoke of the "perennial housing shortage" for seasonal laborers.<sup>70</sup> He described how many temporary workers in the area would finish a harvest and look to secure housing for the next harvest before heading out of town for short vacations. He noted that if there was no suitable housing available, they might not

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<sup>67</sup> Bauer and Jacox, "Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp," 83-15919, 3; Marta Cleaveland, "Idaho Migrant Council purchases labor center," *Times-News*, May 5, 1988; Foy, "South Idaho migrant camp residents reflect on heritage."

<sup>68</sup> Letter from Jane Rodriguez, Idaho Migrant Council, Inc. to Thomas Green, Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, August 21, 1990; Bauer and Jacox, "Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp," 83-15919, 3; "Major Improvements Being Made to Old Labor Camp," *Times-News*, April 5, 1992.

<sup>69</sup> Community Council of Idaho, "About us," accessed December 17, 2020, <https://communitycouncilofidaho.org/about/>.

<sup>70</sup> Matt Smith, "Migrants face another housing shortage," *Times-News*, June 29, 1991.

return. To address this need for sufficient housing, in 1990, Green Giant, one of the main employers of El Milagro residents, provided \$15,000 in funding to rehabilitate buildings on the campus.<sup>71</sup>

More improvements were soon to come. Also in 1990, the Idaho State Department of Commerce awarded the City of Twin Falls an Idaho Community Development Block Grant to make improvements at the complex. This grant, combined with financial contributions from the City and the Idaho Housing Agency, netted \$637,418 that funded upgrades completed by 1992. These included installation of a sewer trunk line and a main water line, improving water pressure and providing pressure for fire suppression, remodeling of most of the single-family houses, remodeling of one barrack into a two-bedroom duplex for homeless families, and remodeling six barracks into twenty-four studio apartments. In 1999, the Migrant Council received a \$61,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development project to make twenty-four units at El Milagro accessible.<sup>72</sup>

Newspaper coverage of camp changes in the 1990s, including street paving due to a \$1 million block grant, indicate that in 1996, 428 residents lived in 101 houses and apartments. At that time, rent varied from \$175 to \$319 per month for a three-bedroom apartment.<sup>73</sup>

Renovations to the buildings have continued over time. In 2012, mentorship program YouthBuild El Milagro began renovating housing units on the campus. By 2015, residency at El Milagro dropped to 281 people, with eighty-four families among them. Of those families, seventeen were farmworker families.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Pat Marcantonio, "Gradually, a miracle reshapes El Milagro," *Times-News*, September 1, 1996; Smith, "Migrants face another housing shortage."

<sup>72</sup> Gregory Harbor, "Migrant Council gets grant to improve accessibility of duplex," *Times-News*, October 12, 1999:2, , <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; "Major Improvements Being Made to Old Labor Camp."

<sup>73</sup> Marcantonio, "Gradually, a miracle reshapes El Milagro."

<sup>74</sup> Denise Turner, "Volunteer nurtures El Milagro kids," *Times-News*, September 6, 2003, <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; "Migrant council hosts children's event," *Times-News*, April 28, 2004: 9, <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; Julie Wootton, "Giving Students a Second Chance," *Times-News*, May 27, 2012; <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; Community Council of Idaho, "2015 Annual Report," 2015, 15, <https://communitycouncilofidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2015-Annual-Report.pdf>





Figure 5-1. Landscape improvements at El Milagro, ca. 2018. *Community Council of Idaho, 2018 Annual Report*.

As of 2019, forty-five of the original forty-seven farm labor houses remained in the camp. Most had been altered but still retained their original footprints. None maintained their original stovepipes but instead had modern roof vents. Nearly none of the secondary structures associated with the houses, such as garages, tool sheds, and clothes lines, remained. Some houses had their original picket fences. Most had modern additions, including television antennae, satellite dishes, and storage sheds.<sup>75</sup>

Twenty-nine of the original thirty-six barracks-style buildings were extant, with twenty-seven still used for housing. Of these structures, some were single-family homes, some duplexes, and others four-plex units.<sup>76</sup>

The original gatehouse had been altered into a building for the Felipe Cabral Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program. The utility building, which once housed showers and laundry facilities, had been converted into an office for El Milagro Housing. A public meeting area and concrete basketball court now stand on the foundation of the original community building.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Barbara Perry Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox, *El Milagro Family Apartments, Twin Falls, Idaho* (Boise, ID: TAG Historical Research & Consulting, 2019), 6; Bauer and Jacox, “House 1—Migratory Farm Labor Camp,” 83-19323, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Bauer and Jacox, *El Milagro Family Apartments, Twin Falls, Idaho*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> Bauer and Jacox, *El Milagro Family Apartments, Twin Falls, Idaho*, 6.



Figures 5-2-5-5. Aerial photographs of El Milagro Housing Complex from 1992 (*upper left*), 2003 (*upper right*), 2011 (*lower left*), and 2016 (*lower right*). Google Earth Pro 2020.

## Occupants and Lifestyle

The makeup of residents of the former camp shifted overtime, as the camp became a housing complex for low-income individuals who were not necessarily connected to agricultural work. While some seasonal laborers still lived here, by 1996, manager Rudy Rodriguez said that more than 90 percent of residents stayed year-round. They attributed this to changes in the agricultural industry creating fewer jobs in the fields. El Milagro now sheltered low-income families and homeless single people, and provided emergency temporary housing, in addition to housing temporary workers. In 1999, the requirement to qualify for housing at El Milagro was earning less than the area's median income and making at least 30 percent of that from agriculture. In recent years, there has been no agricultural restriction on tenants' income.<sup>78</sup>

Changes also came to the complex as the buildings were physically upgraded. Long-time resident Josefina Valenzuela reported in 1996 that in her twenty-one years living there, she witnessed the “squalor” turn into what the *Times-News* paraphrased as “a cleaner neighborhood of flowers and *familia*.”<sup>79</sup>



Figure 5-6. Josefina Valenzuela, making tortillas in her kitchen at El Milagro.  
*Andy Sanyer, The Times-News, September 1, 1996.*

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<sup>78</sup> Harbor, “Migrant Council gets grant to improve accessibility of duplex.”; Marcantonio, “Gradually, a miracle reshapes El Milagro.”

<sup>79</sup> Marcantonio, “Gradually, a miracle reshapes El Milagro.”



Figure 5-7. Former farm laborer Antonio Ortega in his garden at his house in El Milagro. *Andy Sawyer, The Times-News, September 1, 1996.*

Various youth-focused services and programs have started at El Milagro over the years. A Head Start summer camp program started at El Milagro in 1996, when it supported eighty-four children of migrant workers, most of them from neighboring cities. In 2003, area resident Laurell Ingram began an outreach Christian ministry called Kids Klub for children living in the housing project. She and other volunteers organized clean-up projects, renovated classrooms, and hosted festivities.<sup>80</sup>

In recent years, organizations have worked to integrate El Milagro residents with the greater Twin Falls community. In 2003, the Twin Falls Magic Valley Academy of Music formed El Milagro Children's Choir, open to all children in Twin Falls, to sing and learn Spanish. In 2004, the Idaho Migrant Council hosted a public celebration of El Día de los Niños to promote Mexican culture and awareness. Another organization connecting community members with the complex is YouthBuild El Milagro, which formed in 2012 to help teens and young adults with one-on-one mentoring.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Marcantonio, "Gradually, a miracle reshapes El Milagro."

<sup>81</sup> Turner, "Volunteer nurtures El Milagro kids"; "Migrant council hosts children's event," 9; Wootton, "Giving Students a Second Chance."



Figure 5-8. After becoming homeless unexpectedly, this family, photographed in 2016, lived at El Milagro for nearly six years and were then able to purchase a home nearby. *Drew Nash, Twin Falls Times-News, June 29, 2018.*



Figure 5-9. A resident of El Milagro in their kitchen in 2018. *Community Council of Idaho, 2018 Annual Report.*

## 6. Japanese Americans in Idaho

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### Early Japanese Immigration to Idaho

Japanese immigration to the United States began in the late nineteenth century. Idaho was one of the first states in which Japanese immigrants settled. Here they found employment in railroad construction and the sugar beet industry. Sugar factories built in the early 1900s in Idaho Falls, Nampa, and Sugar City succeeded in large part because of Japanese workers.<sup>82</sup>

Japanese immigrants faced increasing forms of racial discrimination soon after their arrival in the United States. Laws passed at the federal and state levels prohibited Japanese and other Asian immigrants from becoming naturalized citizens. In 1913, California passed the country's first alien land law, which prevented aliens ineligible for citizenship from purchasing land. A decade later, Idaho passed an anti-Japanese land law that was patterned after California's. The federal Immigration Act of 1924 banned further immigration from Japan.<sup>83</sup>

Despite such racism, Japanese immigrants (Issei) and their American-born children (Nisei) created communities in the western United States. They established social and political organizations, churches, schools, and newspapers. By 1930, 1,421 people of Japanese ancestry resided in Idaho. Though they were represented in nearly every county, concentrated communities existed in the Upper Snake River region, namely Bannock, Bingham, and Bonneville Counties, and in Canyon County, adjacent to the Japanese American community in Oregon's Malheur County. The presence of Japanese American Citizens League chapters in Pocatello, Idaho Falls, Rexburg, and Boise Valley further underlined these concentrations in southeastern and southwestern Idaho.<sup>84</sup>

The 1940 U.S. census recorded 1,191 people of Japanese ancestry in Idaho. Of that figure, 36 percent were Issei and 64 percent were Nisei. The decrease in the state's Japanese American community from 1930 was due, in part, to deaths among the first generation of immigrants, some Issei moving out of state, and older Nisei leaving Idaho for educational and employment opportunities. In the pre-World War II era, Japanese Americans operated approximately 150 farms in Idaho. A 1946 study provided information on such farms in the Boise and Snake River Valleys, in southeastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho, an area known today as the Treasure Valley. The Japanese American farming community in Boise Valley was small and scattered prior to the war. Such farms produced primarily onions, potatoes, sugar beets, peas, lettuce, and carrots. The Snake

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<sup>82</sup> Densho, "A Community Grows, Despite Racism," accessed October 26, 2020, <https://densho.org/a-community-grows-despite-racism>; Robert C. Sims, "The Japanese American Experience in Idaho," *Idaho Yesterdays* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1978), 2; Robert C. Sims, "The 'Free Zone' Nikkei: Japanese Americans in Idaho and Eastern Oregon in World War II," in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Louis Fiset and Gail M. Nomura, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 237.

<sup>83</sup> Densho, "A Community Grows, Despite Racism;" Sims, "The Japanese American Experience in Idaho," 3.

<sup>84</sup> Densho, "A Community Grows, Despite Racism;" Sims, "The Japanese American Experience in Idaho," 3; DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 3.

River Valley community, on the other hand, accounted for the majority of Japanese Americans in Idaho, with an estimated population of 950 in 1941. These farmers grew mostly sugar beets, potatoes, and onions. Japanese American residents in the Snake River Valley frequently visited nearby Ontario, Oregon, which prior to the war had a Japanese community hall, Japanese restaurant, and bi-monthly Buddhist church services. The Snake River Valley in general, and Ontario in particular, were known for being friendly to people of Japanese ancestry before, during, and after World War II.<sup>85</sup>

## Forced Removal and Incarceration During World War II

The United States entered World War II following the December 7, 1941, Imperial Japanese naval attack on a U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii. Western political leaders used this attack, alongside decades of anti-Japanese sentiment, to call for the removal of Japanese Americans from the West Coast. Despite no evidence that Japanese Americans posed any threat to national security, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. This led to the forced removal and incarceration of 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, two-thirds of whom were American citizens.<sup>86</sup>

General John L. DeWitt, commanding general of the U.S. Army's Western Defense Command, soon created military zones on the West Coast from which all people of Japanese ancestry would be removed. The area included all of California, the western halves of Oregon and Washington, and the southern half of Arizona. Over the spring and summer of 1942, the U.S. Army's Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA) moved Japanese Americans living in this area into temporary assembly centers. From these centers, Japanese Americans were moved into ten permanent concentration camps operated by the War Relocation Authority (WRA). Minidoka, in Jerome County, Idaho, was one of these camps. Each camp was similar, with barracks surrounded by barbed wire and guard towers. Some Japanese Americans were sent to other sites of confinement during the war, including additional facilities maintained by the WRA, internment camps run by the Department of Justice and U.S. Army, immigration detention stations, federal prisons, and farm labor camps such as that at Twin Falls.<sup>87</sup>

In December 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court decided unanimously in the case *Ex parte Mitsuye Endo* that the federal government could not indefinitely confine American citizens of Japanese ancestry. This led the U.S. War Department to allow Japanese Americans to return to the West Coast. By 1946, the last of the WRA camps closed. Many Japanese Americans returned to the West

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<sup>85</sup> DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 3–6, 13, and 27; KGW staff, “I Wonder: Where did Treasure Valley get its name?,” November 13, 2009, <https://www.kgw.com/article/news/i-wonder-where-did-treasure-valley-get-its-name/283-89948631>.

<sup>86</sup> Densho, “Looking Like the Enemy,” accessed October 26, 2020, <https://densho.org/looking-like-the-enemy>.

<sup>87</sup> Densho, “A Community Grows, Despite Racism”; “Sites of Incarceration,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, June 12, 2013, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Sites%20of%20incarceration>; Brian Niiya, “Military Areas 1 and 2,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, June 10, 2020, [https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Military\\_Areas\\_1\\_and\\_2](https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Military_Areas_1_and_2).

Coast but found conditions much changed. Due to the forced removal, most had had to sell their properties, businesses, and homes. After the war, Japanese Americans started over. Some rebuilt their communities on the West Coast, others established new communities in the intermountain and midwestern states. The federal government acknowledged its wrongdoings with passage of the the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The act included a formal apology from President Ronald Reagan as well as redress payments of \$20,000 to every surviving former incarcee.<sup>88</sup>

## Role in Agricultural Development

### *War Relocation Authority's Seasonal Leave Program*

Nearly half of Japanese Americans on the West Coast had operated farms or worked as agricultural laborers prior to the war. Following the announcement of Executive Order 9066, business interests began requesting access to this potential workforce. Many of these requests came from sugar companies. Sugar was an essential wartime commodity. With the United States no longer importing sugar from foreign markets, due to the war with Japan, American farmers had increased their sugar beet acreage. In 1942, farmers planted more than a million acres of sugar beets, an increase of 25 percent from the previous season. Most of the existing workforce had left for wartime industrial jobs or military service. Farmers, especially in the intermountain states where half a million acres had been planted, desperately needed workers to cultivate and harvest the labor-intensive crop. Sugar companies, which contracted with farmers for the raw materials, led the calls for replacement laborers.<sup>89</sup>

WRA director Milton Eisenhower called a meeting of western governors in early April 1942. During the meeting, he hoped to finalize plans for the forced removal of Japanese Americans to inland concentration camps. He also wanted to explore possibilities of using this community as an agricultural work force. Many governors expressed anti-Japanese sentiments during the meeting, but Idaho's Chase Clark was especially hostile. He openly admitted his own racism, stating "I would hate it, even though I didn't know anything about it, after I am dead, to have the people of Idaho hold me responsible at a time like this for having led Idaho full of Japanese during my administration. I want to admit right on the start that I am so prejudiced that my reasoning might be a little off, because I don't trust any of them."<sup>90</sup> Idaho Attorney General stated at the same meeting that "all Japanese should be put in concentration camps for the remainder of the war. We want to keep this a

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<sup>88</sup> Densho, "Japanese American Responses to Incarceration," accessed October 26, 2020, <https://densho.org/japanese-american-responses-to-incarceration>; Densho, "Writing a Wrong," accessed October 26, 2020, <https://densho.org/righting-a-wrong>.

<sup>89</sup> Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading," 123–24; Morgen Young, "Oregon Plan," *Densho Encyclopedia*, March 5, 2020, <http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Oregon%20Plan>.

<sup>90</sup> WRA San Francisco Office, Report on Meeting of Western Governors, April 8, 1942, 26, Folder: Relocation of Japanese: Salt Lake City Meeting: April 7, 1942, 19, Box 7: Meetings and Conferences, Entry 2: Headquarters Records: Basic Documentation and Informational Files: Headquarters Basic Documentation: General, 1942–1946, Record Group 210: War Relocation Authority, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.



white man's country.”<sup>91</sup> Clark also advocated for putting Japanese Americans in concentration camps, but initially protested against the placement of such a camp in Idaho. He also opposed bringing any Japanese American laborers into the state, despite outcry from his constituents that such labor was desperately needed.<sup>92</sup>

Given the racist rhetoric expressed by many of the governors, as well as fears of potential violence in communities where Japanese Americans might be sent, Eisenhower decided that the WRA would not pursue any farm labor program for the time being. State and local officials, however, took further action. Oregon governor Charles Sprague appealed to President Roosevelt as such sugar beet labor was needed in Malheur County. It was only after the president directed Eisenhower to make such laborers available to western states that the WCCA and WRA allowed Japanese Americans to leave temporary assembly centers for farm work, beginning in May 1942. With the labor crisis mounting in Idaho, Clark himself relented and allowed Japanese American laborers to enter the state. In June, he provided written assurance to the WRA that the state would pay these individuals prevailing wages; provide protection, housing, health care, and food; and arrange for all transportation.<sup>93</sup>

The movement of Japanese Americans from temporary assembly centers to inland farms and labor camps marked the beginning of the WRA's Seasonal Leave Program. Between June 1942 and December 1944, the WRA helped implement more than 33,000 farm labor contracts (See Table 1). The WRA defined *seasonal leave* as agricultural work to be accomplished during a specified period of time in a specifically defined area. Most individuals and families on seasonal leave had to first be cleared by the Federal Bureau of Investigations, then they were issued permits stipulating where and for how long they were allowed to work outside the concentration camps. Once out on seasonal leave, one could apply for *indefinite leave* and permanently leave the concentration camps, though until January 1945, no one could return to the West Coast. The Seasonal Leave Program was part of the WRA's broader resettlement efforts to move Japanese Americans permanently away from the West Coast.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> WRA San Francisco Office, Report on Meeting of Western Governors, April 8, 1942, 26, Folder: Relocation of Japanese: Salt Lake City Meeting: April 7, 1942, 19, Box 7: Meetings and Conferences, Entry 2: Headquarters Records: Basic Documentation and Informational Files: Headquarters Basic Documentation: General, 1942–1946, Record Group 210: War Relocation Authority, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC.

<sup>92</sup> WRA San Francisco Office, Report on Meeting of Western Governors, April 8, 1942, 26–27; Young, “Oregon Plan”; Fiset, “Thinning, Topping, and Loading,” 125–26; Sims, “The ‘Free Zone’ Nikkei,” 240, 243, 245.

<sup>93</sup> Young, “Oregon Plan”; Letter from Milton Eisenhower to Governor Chase Clark, June 16, 1942; Folder: Idaho, Box 10: Relocation Division: Public Attitude Files, Entry 2: Headquarters Records: Basic Documentation and Informational Files: Headquarters Basic Documentation: General, 1942–1946, Record Group 210: War Relocation Authority, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC; Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II*, 28.

<sup>94</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior and the War Relocation Authority, *The Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description* (Washington, DC: War Relocation Authority, 1945), 26; Dillon S. Myer, *Uprooted Americans: The Japanese Americans and the War Relocation Authority During World War II* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1971), 133; War Relocation Authority, *The Relocation Program: A Guidebook for Residents of Relocation Centers* (Washington, DC: War Relocation Authority, May 1943), 2; Daniels, *Prisoners Without Trail*, 72, 74–75, 77.

Table 6-1. Seasonal Farm Labor Contracts Issued, 1942–1944.

Camp	1942	1943	1944
Assembly Centers	1,579	–	–
Gila River (AZ)	8	432	362
Granada (CO)	1,401	1,659	819
Heart Mountain (WY)	1,395	2,908	1,731
Jerome (AR)	–	207	36
Manzanar (CA)	1,142	640	870
Minidoka (ID)	1,850	3,822	3,022
Poston (AZ)	816	1,445	859
Rohwer (AR)	–	518	617
Topaz (UT)	686	1,381	1,150
Tule Lake (CA)	990	1,050	1
<b>Annual Total</b>	<b>9,867</b>	<b>14,062</b>	<b>9,467</b>
<b>Total Contracts Issued: 33,396</b>			
Source: U.S. Department of the Interior and the War Relocation Authority, <i>The Evacuated People: A Quantitative Description</i> (Washington, DC: War Relocation Authority, 1945).			

## Recruitment of Laborers

Sugar companies were the first to actively recruit Japanese American laborers from temporary assembly centers and concentration camps. Amalgamated Sugar Company, American Crystal Sugar Company, Great Western Sugar Company, Holly Sugar Company, and Utah-Idaho Sugar Company all utilized Japanese American labor during the war. These companies placed advertisements in concentration camp newspapers, such as those included by Utah-Idaho Sugar and Amalgamated Sugar in the *Minidoka Irrigator*. Such ads typically emphasized seasonal labor as an opportunity to escapes the confines of camp. But they also marketed the work as the patriotic duty of Japanese Americans, ignoring the fact that the federal government had unjustly incarcerated these American citizens and denied them their civil liberties. Sugar company representatives visited sites of confinement and placed recruitment notices on community hall bulletin boards and in other public areas.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Fiset, “Thinning, Topping, and Loading,” 127; “The History of Japanese American Farm Labor Camps.”



**YOU DON'T NEED TO WAIT ANY LONGER  
TO GET OUT**

Every evacuee has been looking forward to the day when he could permanently leave the relocation center that has been his temporary residence, but not a real home, these long and tiresome months.

"Some day," he has said, "I'll leave here . . . to return to my former home, or to start over in a new and friendly community. Some day I'll be a part of America again . . . to produce or fight for it."

Well, that day has come to those who will take it. . . Here's how: Get yourself a job on a farm . . . to begin with. Sign up for thinning and blocking beets; that's one of the first jobs of the season.

Pick yourself a friendly community, where a variety of crops are grown. Then work through the spring and summer, taking the crops as they come along . . . returning to sugar beets in the fall.

**HERE ARE THE REWARDS:**

<p><b>1</b> Freedom to work for yourself and your family at prevailing high wages (rates of minimum pay for beet workers are guaranteed by Federal order);</p> <p><b>2</b> Adequate housing (the Federal government requires every farmer to supply this before his offer of employment can be officially approved);</p> <p><b>3</b> A new chance to make friends for yourself and for all other persons of Japanese birth or ancestry;</p>	<p><b>4</b> A stepping stone to permanent year-round employment in agriculture, or industry;</p> <p><b>5</b> Healthful employment . . . for yourself and for other members of your family, if you have one, even down to fourteen-year-old boys and girls;</p> <p><b>6</b> An opportunity to produce more food for freedom, thereby helping America win the war and the peace to follow;</p> <p><b>7</b> A means of earning money for an education or for profitable investment, now or in the future.</p>
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 **SUGAR BEETS** are the best way out for the greatest number of evacuees. When you accept a beet contract, take one with the organization that pioneered the way for evacuee job seekers nearly a year ago; take one with an organization that can give you a wide choice of locations and climates.

Utah-Idaho Sugar Company has factories in five states from the Dakotas to the Pacific Coast. Thousands of growers in hundreds of western communities are looking for evacuee help. We can put you in touch with the right place for you. For complete information see your project employment director or write to this pioneer sugar company.

**UTAH-IDAHO SUGAR COMPANY**  
Home office: Salt Lake City, Utah. Factories in Utah, Idaho, Montana, South Dakota, Washington.

Figure 6-1. The Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, along with other sugar companies, published recruitments ads in camp newspapers. This was printed in a March 1943 issue of the *Minidoka Irrigator*. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC, Record Group 210.

# Amalgamated Sugar Co.

## NOW RECRUITING WORKERS

FOR SUGAR BEET THINNING, AND SUMMER WORK

Thinning will start about May 10th to 15th



## GOOD HOUSING AT . . .

FSA CAMP—Twin Falls, Idaho

FSA CAMP—Jerome, Idaho

FSA CAMP—Gooding, Idaho

- Restaurants are operated in all three camps.
- A limited number of women workers can be housed at Twin Falls and Gooding Camps.

## ARMY VOLUNTEERS . .

are invited to apply. Return transportation furnished as soon as called to the Army.

## THE AMALGAMATED SUGAR CO.

Territory had highest yield of Sugar Beets  
in the Intermountain Area last year

APPLY AT HUNT RELOCATION CENTER

Outside Employment Office—See Mr. Toru Araki, Representative

Figure 6-2. An Amalgamated Sugar Company recruitment ad in a May 1943 issue of the *Minidoka Irrigator* specifically highlighted housing at the Twin Falls camp. *National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC, Record Group 210.*

Representatives from the sugar companies as well as the U.S. Employment Service staffed employment offices at assembly centers and concentration camps. In these offices, individuals reviewed contracts from farmers. Such contracts stipulated the work expected, wages, and housing. A range of housing was offered, from living quarters on private farms to permanent and mobile labor camps operated by the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The latter typically afforded better living conditions than private housing, as demonstrated by one Japanese American man who reported living in a rundown shack on a farmer's property that he said was no better than a chicken coop.<sup>96</sup>

Initially it was difficult to recruit laborers, as it was unclear how local communities might receive Japanese Americans. When sugar company representatives visited the Puyallup Assembly Center in June 1942, they found a newspaper clipping outlining a speech Gov. Clark had given to the Lions Club in Grangeville, Idaho, on May 22. In what became known as the "rat speech," Clark declared that "Japs live like rats, breed like rats and act like rats. We don't want them . . . permanently located in our state."<sup>97</sup> Many Japanese Americans were apprehensive to travel to areas demonstrating such openly racist attitudes.<sup>98</sup>

The reception of Japanese American laborers in local communities varied. People who participated in the Seasonal Leave Program shared information via letters or articles in camp newspapers about their experiences. Those working in western Idaho and eastern Oregon generally reported being well received, while those working in Montana experienced blatant hostility. Some businesses, including a few in Twin Falls, refused to serve Japanese American patrons.<sup>99</sup>

But enough Japanese Americans reported back to assembly centers and concentration camps that the conditions were favorable that increasing numbers of people signed up for farm labor work in 1942 and 1943. Initially mainly men signed up for such work, but as the Seasonal Leave Program continued, more women and families left the concentration camps for agricultural work opportunities. People left the WRA facilities for many reasons: the ability to earn better wages, as they could earn more in a few days' time than in a month working in the camps; the opportunity to escape barbed wire and armed guards; and a chance to contribute to the war effort.<sup>100</sup>

Seichi Hayashida, in a 1989 oral history, spoke of his decision to sign up for agricultural labor in 1942:

...in order to get a leave, to leave the camp, you had to answer a lot of questions, and it was a temporary leave. You weren't leaving permanent. We had to come back within so many months...And since we were farmers – I was a farmer, my wife was from a farm family so – that was the only work that was really open at that time, the

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<sup>96</sup> Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading," 132–33.

<sup>97</sup> Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading," 127.

<sup>98</sup> Sims, "The Japanese American Experience in Idaho," 7; Letter from Hito Okada to Governor Charles Sprague, May 25, 1942, Marvin Gavin Pursinger Collection on Japanese American Relocation, Oregon Historical Society, Portland.

<sup>99</sup> Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading," 131; "The History of Japanese American Farm Labor Camps."

<sup>100</sup> Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading," 127–29.

first year, farm work out in eastern Oregon, western Idaho and that's why we went out, because I didn't like the life in the camp, you know being cooped up in a mile square with 10,000 other people. So, this is the reason we went out as soon as we could. I spent less time in camps than most of the people.<sup>101</sup>

Carl Nomura left Manzanar for farm work in Idaho in 1942. He first went to a mobile FSA camp in Paul and then lived in a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp turned permanent FSA facility in Rupert. In his 2003 memoir, he recalled that “a huge labor shortage developed in Idaho, Utah, Montana and Colorado as farmers lost their workers to the war effort. In desperation, the farmers were turning to us for help. We, in turn, were being offered a chance to venture outside the barbed-wire fence.”<sup>102</sup> Though he escaped the barbed wire, he did write of still being under guard while in the labor camps.<sup>103</sup>



Figure 6-3. Japanese American laborers at the Twin Falls camp made curtains out of empty sugar sacks from Amalgamated Sugar Company. The company heavily recruited Japanese Americans for much needed sugar beet labor in the 1940s. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073755-D.*

Representatives from the Amalgamated Sugar Company arrived at the Sacramento Assembly Center in California on May 28, 1942, to recruit laborers to cultivate sugar beets in Idaho. A small group signed contracts to work in Twin Falls County's 6,500 acres of sugar beets, to be paid

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<sup>101</sup> Seichi and Chiyeko Hayashida Oral History, September 7, 1989, IEPBS/History of Idaho #87, Idaho State Archives, Boise.

<sup>102</sup> Carl Nomura, *Sleeping on Potatoes: A Lumpy Adventure from Manzanar to the Corporate Tower* (Bellingham, WA: Erasmus Books, 2003), 56–59.

<sup>103</sup> Nomura, *Sleeping on Potatoes*, 59.

prevailing wages of \$9.50 per acre or forty-five cents an hour. They were given the option of living at an FSA camp or in housing provided by local farmers. On June 2, thirty-five men and one woman arrived at the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp. They were the first Japanese Americans to live and work at the camp.<sup>104</sup>

Sugar company representatives also recruited from the WRA concentration camps, once they opened in the summer and autumn of 1942. Laborers came to the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp from Heart Mountain, Manzanar, Minidoka, and Poston. Located less than twenty-two miles from the Twin Falls camp, Minidoka provided the steadiest stream of Japanese American laborers between 1942 and 1944.<sup>105</sup>



Figure 6-4. A Japanese American laborer photographed at the Twin Falls camp in July 1942. Representatives from the Amalgamated Sugar Company began recruiting Japanese Americans for the Twin Falls camp at the temporary assembly center in Sacramento, California in May 1942. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073759-D.*

<sup>104</sup> Fiset, “Thinning, Topping, and Loading,” 127; Ed. Lawson Fusao Inada, *Only What We Could Carry* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 2000), 419; “Beet Workers to Go to Idaho,” *Walerga Wasp*, May 30, 1942; “Additional 22 Leave for Idaho,” *Walerga Wasp*, June 10, 1942.

<sup>105</sup> “Beet workers leave,” *Manzanar Free Press*, October 5, 1942; “Many Leave Minidoka for Idaho Farms,” *Pacific Citizen*, September 24, 1942; “Many Residents Leave Hunt for Outside Work,” *Minidoka Irrigator*, October 23, 1943.

## Contributions to Agriculture



Figure 6-5. Japanese Americans who lived at the Twin Falls camp mainly worked with such crops as sugar beets, potatoes, and onions. These unidentified workers were photographed in July 1942. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073809-E.*

Japanese Americans contributed to agriculture across the United States. In 1942, during the first year of the WRA's Seasonal Leave Program, much of the work focused on cultivating and harvesting sugar beets in intermountain states. A June 1942 article in the *Pacific Citizen* included a U.S. Employment Service representative's declaration that Japanese Americans had salvaged Idaho's \$16 million sugar beet crop that spring. The same article noted that the laborers were not under armed guard. They were, however, under surveillance in labor camps, with movement outside of the camps restricted, and outside visitors limited. By the end of 1942, state and local officials, sugar company representatives, and farmers credited Japanese Americans with saving the sugar beet crops in Idaho as well as Montana, Wyoming, and Utah.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> "Japanese Workers Save Idaho Beet Crop," *Pacific Citizen*, June 18, 1942, 1, 7; Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading," 134.





Figure 6-6. Unidentified Japanese American who lived at the Twin Falls camp in 1942. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073811-E.*



Figure 6-7. Much of the agricultural labor was stoop work, with Japanese Americans bent over in fields thinning sugar beets or harvesting potatoes. *Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-073812-E.*

Japanese Americans also provided labor for other crops in Idaho, such as potatoes, onions, and tree fruits. In the autumn of 1943, local interests recognized Japanese Americans for saving both the sugar beet and potato crops that year.<sup>107</sup>

When the Seasonal Leave Program ended in late 1944, more than half of the participants had been able to convert their seasonal leave into indefinite leave from the concentration camps. Over the three years of the program, Japanese American laborers were estimated to have saved a fifth of the country's sugar beet acreage.<sup>108</sup>

## Post-war Japanese American Community in Idaho

Thousands of Japanese Americans lived and worked in Idaho during World War II. Many arrived on seasonal leave permits issued by the WRA, enabling them to leave temporary assembly centers and concentration camps for a period of time. Among the concentration camps, most workers came from Minidoka, but others also arrived in the state from Gila River, Granada (Amache), Heart Mountain, Manzanar, Poston, Topaz, and Tule Lake. Some individuals and families were able to secure permanent employment and worked with the WRA to convert their seasonal leave into indefinite leave.<sup>109</sup>

After the war, 3,932 Japanese Americans resettled in Idaho. Many established homes in the Treasure Valley, an area covering the Boise and Snake River Valleys, as well as Malheur County, Oregon. The Idaho counties that saw the greatest increase in Japanese American residents in the postwar period were Canyon, Payette, and Washington, with particular concentrations near the towns of Caldwell, Payette, and Weiser. These counties all border Malheur County, Oregon, whose Japanese American community grew from 137 in 1940 to 1,170 in 1950, an increase of 750 percent. Many Issei, Nisei, and Sansei (third generation) settled in the Treasure Valley after the war, finding it more welcoming than the homes they had been forced to leave on the West Coast. The city of Ontario served as a center of the Treasure Valley's Japanese American community, with Japanese restaurants and grocery stores, a tofu manufacturing plant, Buddhist temple, Methodist church, and medical practice run by a Japanese American doctor.<sup>110</sup>

The Japanese American population in the Magic Valley in Southern Idaho did not experience the same post-war growth as Treasure Valley. Between 1940 and 1950, the Japanese American community of Twin Falls County, site of the Twin Falls camp, grew from forty-six to seventy-eight. Jerome County, where Minidoka was located, gained only a single Japanese American resident during the same period, per federal census records. Though Japanese Americans

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<sup>107</sup> DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 7.

<sup>108</sup> Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading," 136; "The History of Japanese American Farm Labor Camps."

<sup>109</sup> DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 7.

<sup>110</sup> Fiset, "Thinning, Topping, and Loading: Japanese Americans and Beet Sugar in World War II," 137; DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 27–30.

undoubtedly contributed to agriculture in southern Idaho, most did not settle permanently in this part of the state in the immediate post-war years.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Sims, “The ‘Free Zone’ Nikkei,” 249.

## 7. Latino Community in Idaho

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### Early Contributions of Mexican Laborers in Regional Agriculture

Latino<sup>112</sup> people first began arriving in Idaho in the 1860s. The majority were men from Mexico, moving north to work as miners, agricultural laborers, railroad workers, mule packers, trappers, and ranchers. In 1870, the U.S. Census Bureau recorded sixty people of Latino heritage as living in Idaho Territory. Few settled in the region in the nineteenth century.<sup>113</sup>

Mexican immigration to Idaho increased in the first decades of the twentieth century. As the state's agricultural industry expanded, farmers needed laborers to meet growing demands. The federal government exempted Latino laborers from recently passed immigration laws which targeted certain nationalities, required literacy tests, and imposed other restrictions. Men were encouraged to immigrate with their families, in an effort to both prevent them from breaking work contracts and discourage integration into Idaho communities.<sup>114</sup> In an oral history, Felicitas Perez Garcia recalled moving with her husband to Shelley in 1910 to work at a sugar beet processing plant. They could not find any housing, so they eventually built their home and furnishings. She recalled, "I made my bed out of boards, and I made the covers out of corn sacks. I would sew four together. Then I got some grass, or whatever there was, and put it in the middle... I would do everything possible. We would find houses that were left empty and we would get things. I made curtains from the flour sacks."<sup>115</sup>

Demand for agricultural workers increased during World War I and sugar companies directly contracted Mexican laborers to plant, cultivate, and harvest sugar beets. The Utah-Idaho Sugar Company contracted some 1,500 Mexicans in 1918 to work in both Utah and Idaho. Shortly upon their arrival in Idaho, many laborers filed complaints with the Mexican consulate in California. They stated that their wages, housing, and availability of work were not what they had agreed to with the sugar company recruiters. In response, William McVety, Idaho state labor commissioner, investigated conditions for Mexican workers living in Twin Falls, Idaho Falls, and Blackfoot. Former Idaho governor William J. McConnell conducted additional investigations in Blackfoot. Subsequent reports did highlight racism faced by such workers, but often blamed Mexicans for the conditions they faced. Little changed for Latino laborers, who continued to be recruited by both companies and

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<sup>112</sup> This context uses the term Latino rather than Latinx, following current practice of the Community Council of Idaho. Modern historical scholarship often uses the term Latinx in reference to people who live in the United States and have ancestral and cultural ties to Latin America. Latinx is an inclusive and gender-neutral term that replaces Latino and Latina.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Malone, "Hispanic history of Idaho," *University of Idaho Argonaut*, October 16, 2014; McFarland, "Growing Hispanic population part of Idaho's history," *Idaho State Journal*, August 15, 2015.

<sup>114</sup> McFarland, "Growing Hispanic population part of Idaho's history;" Foy, "We do not like the Mexican."

<sup>115</sup> Foy, "We do not like the Mexican."

farmers in the 1920s and 1930s. Cultural activist and historian Ana María Nevárez-Schachtell found that such recruiters made promises to Mexican immigrants that they never fulfilled.<sup>116</sup> These individuals, according to Nevárez-Schachtell, “decided to take the risk and leave their families, their lands, and start a new life and come to El Norte, and they were greatly disappointed. First of all, there was no respect for human rights and the companies that offered them housing and good salaries ... it was all lies.”<sup>117</sup>

## The Bracero Program

As the twentieth century progressed, demands for agricultural labor in Idaho continued. Reclamation projects in Idaho converted millions of acres of arid land into viable farmlands by the end of the 1930s. The following decade, agricultural labor shortages plagued many western and intermountain states, including Idaho. The onset of World War II drained previous pools of farm workers, as many left for wartime industrial jobs or joined the military. In 1942, the labor crisis threatened farm production. In response, the governments of the United States and Mexico issued a series of agreements allowing millions of Mexican men to work under contract in the United States for short periods of times. In August 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order that established the Mexican Farm Labor Program.<sup>118</sup>

The Mexican Farm Labor Program was better known as the Bracero Program, the name for the Mexican workers as they labored with their arms and hands, “brazo” being the Spanish word for arm. Nationally, the program lasted from 1942 to 1964, with approximately 4.6 million contracts issued. Most were agricultural labor contracts, but braceros also worked in railroad construction and maintenance during the 1940s. Through the program, a bracero entered the United States under a six- or twelve-month contract. He was then assigned to a particular region of the country. Once a contract expired, the bracero was required to return to Mexico. There he could sign another contract and then return to the United States to work. During the war, various federal government agencies coordinated with private agricultural companies and farmers to oversee the recruitment, transportation, housing, and subsistence of workers.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Foy, “We do not like the Mexican.”

<sup>117</sup> Foy, “We do not like the Mexican.”

<sup>118</sup> Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II*, 26; Bracero History Archive, accessed November 25, 2020, <http://braceroarchive.org/about>; Jerry Garcia, “Bracero Program,” *Oregon Encyclopedia*, August 17, 2018, [https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/bracero\\_program/#.X76MFVB7lhE](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/bracero_program/#.X76MFVB7lhE).

<sup>119</sup> R. H. Cottrell, *Beet-Sugar Economics* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1952), 58; Bracero History Archive; Garcia, “Bracero Program.”



Figure 7-1. Bracero harvesting potatoes in Oregon. *Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives, P120:2734.*

More than 15,000 Mexicans were recruited to work in Idaho through the Bracero Program. They made up the largest percentage of agricultural laborers transported by federal agencies during World War II. Other groups of workers recruited to provide critical wartime farm labor included white migrants, Native Americans, Jamaicans, and Japanese Americans (See Chapter 6 for more information on Japanese Americans in Idaho). In 1946, braceros accounted for 70 percent of non-local workers in the Northwest Division of the U.S. Extension Service, an area including Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Montana, and Wyoming.<sup>120</sup>

Table 7-1. Braceros in Idaho, 1942–1947

1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
Unknown	1,779	4,434	3,728	3,241	2,434

Source: Erasmo Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II: Braceros in the Pacific Northwest, 1942–1947* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 58.

<sup>120</sup> Gamboa, *Mexican Labor & World War II*, 57–58.

Amalgamated Sugar Company recruited the first Mexican workers to the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp in 1942. It is not known if these individuals were recruited through the Bracero Program or through private efforts of the company. The workers joined others already living at the camp, including white migrants and Japanese Americans. By 1947, more than a thousand Mexicans were working in the Twin Falls area, with at least fifty living at the Twin Falls camp.<sup>121</sup>

Japanese Americans incarcerated by the federal government during World War II had provided a steady stream of agricultural laborers. Japanese Americans arrived at the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp from several concentration camps, with Minidoka providing the highest number of workers. When the U.S. military began drafting Japanese American men, the available workforce was cut nearly in half. Sugar companies, farmers, and other interests increasingly relied on Mexican laborers through the Bracero Program.<sup>122</sup>

Mexicans participating in the program faced considerable discrimination and racism across the United States. In Idaho, braceros organized strikes to protest mistreatment, low wages, and poor housing conditions. In 1945, Victor Prock, while living and working at the Twin Falls Migratory Farm Labor Camp, was arrested for being a labor agitator. He sought a one cent raise for onion topping and had tried to rally other workers around him. He was fined ten dollars. In 1946, hundreds of Mexican workers in the Treasure Valley went on strike. They protested against local sugar beet farmers who had set hourly wages twenty cents lower than the rate established by the extension service. From labor camps in Nampa, Marsing, Franklin, and Upper Deer Flat, the workers marched in the streets of Nampa and refused to work until the standard wage was met. Farmers agreed to meet the wages, but county officials threatened to deport anyone who violated the terms of the strike. The Mexican consulate in Salt Lake City intervened repeatedly on behalf of striking braceros. By the end of 1946, the Mexican government refused to send additional workers until conditions improved.<sup>123</sup>

The continuation of discrimination, as well as substandard working and living conditions, led to the closure of the Bracero Program in Idaho in 1948. The program continued nationally for another sixteen years. Like elsewhere in the United States, the program created an informal network of migration from Mexico to Idaho. Many braceros remained in the state after their contracts expired and helped grow the region's Latino community.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Data and Observations on Specific Farm Labor Sites: May 30, 1943 in Burley; Folder: 201.3 Idaho; Box 24: Intermountain Area, Salt Lake City, UT 001 to 203.8; Entry 47: Field Records; Records of Regional and Field Assistant Director's Offices, San Francisco: Subject-Classified General Files, 1943–1946; Record Group 210: War Relocation Authority; National Archives and Records Administration, Washington DC; "Farm Labor Camp Will Serve Area Through Harvest," *Times-News*, July 18, 1947.

<sup>122</sup> "Draft to Affect Farm Labor Supply in Idaho," *Minidoka Irrigator*, April 15, 1944.

<sup>123</sup> "Agitator at Camp Fined for Attack," *Times-News*, September 26, 1945, <http://www.twinfallspubliclibrary.org/newspaper/publication/TN>; Foy, "South Idaho migrant camp residents reflect on heritage."

<sup>124</sup> McFarland, "Growing Hispanic population part of Idaho's history;" Garcia, "Bracero Program."

## The Community Grows

Latino individuals and families continued to move north after the Bracero Program ended. People migrated from California and Texas to Idaho for work. Sugar companies continued to recruit Latino workers. Amalgamated Sugar Company, with factories in Nampa, Idaho, and Nyssa, Oregon, recruited Mexican families from Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to work in sugar beet fields from spring to autumn. Desperate for workers, companies would sometimes offer loans for travel expenses.<sup>125</sup>

Once sugar beet season was over, migrant families moved to the next work opportunity. Humberto Fuentes, founder of the Idaho Migrant Council, recalled the annual movement of his own family, “From Nampa, we would go to east Idaho for the potato harvest in the Pocatello and Blackfoot area. From there, we would head to west Texas where we would work for two or three weeks. Then, we would get back to the Rio Grande Valley around November or in time for Christmas. The following year, we did the same thing again.”<sup>126</sup>

This new wave of Latino laborers faced similar discrimination as the braceros before them. Latino people experienced racism in hiring processes, attaining housing, and in businesses such as restaurants and movie theaters. Esperanza Garcia first moved to Idaho in 1955. Like other Mexicans at the time, the then seventeen-year-old and her family had been recruited from Texas by Idaho farmers. For a few years, they followed migrant labor opportunities in Idaho, Oregon, California, and Texas. She and her family eventually settled in Canyon County, Idaho. She recalled that “The situation in Idaho in those years ... we often talk about the signs that read, ‘No Dogs or Mexicans allowed.’ Discrimination was very much alive. You couldn’t speak Spanish in a store. They would tell you to speak English or get out.” Mexican American Antonio Rodriguez recalls that starting in about 1959, signs went up in businesses in Nampa stating they would not serve Jews, Mexicans, or Native Americans.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Foy, “South Idaho migrant camp residents reflect on heritage.”

<sup>126</sup> Foy, “South Idaho migrant camp residents reflect on heritage.”

<sup>127</sup> Foy, “South Idaho migrant camp residents reflect on heritage,”; Thomas Murillo, oral history recorded May 13, 1991, [https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/imls\\_3/id/693/rec/6](https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/imls_3/id/693/rec/6); Antonio Rodriguez, oral history recorded November 5, 1991, [https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/imls\\_3/id/1325/rec/3](https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/imls_3/id/1325/rec/3).





Figure 7-2. Migrant workers in Twin Falls organized a migrant workers fiesta in 1957. *Idaho State Historical Society, 76-102.65a.*

In recent years, the number of seasonal laborers in Idaho has decreased. This is due in part to greater industrialization in agricultural operations, meaning fewer people are needed to get the work done in fields and factories, and because more formerly transient laborers are settling into communities. Lucinda Padilla, a migrant liaison for the Twin Falls School District, noted in 2016 that most of the families do not want their children to move and risk missing school. That year, the district’s migrant coordinator Abby Montano estimated that 80 percent of the families they served in the school district’s migrant program were becoming “more stable” and not following annual work cycles in other cities.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Julie Wootton-Greener, “Migrant Numbers Drop, but Big Needs Persist,” *Times-News*, May 29, 2016; [www.magicvalley.com](http://www.magicvalley.com).



Figure 7-3. Children of migrant workers in Twin Falls at preschool in 2015. *Clark Corbin, Idaho Ed News.*

## Latino Community in Idaho Today

Immigration from Mexico to Idaho continued to grow in the late twentieth century. Immigration from other countries in Latin American, particularly Central America, also expanded in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Increasingly, the Latino community in Idaho, like the entire United States, is made up of U.S. citizens.<sup>129</sup>

The Latino community is the fastest growing population in Idaho. According to the Idaho Department of Labor, between 2010 and 2019, the Latino population increased by 30.5 percent. Latinos account for 12.8 percent of Idaho's population, less than the rest of the country with an overall 18.5 percent Latino population.<sup>130</sup>

As of 2019, Twin Falls and the surrounding Magic Valley contain the largest proportion of Latinos in the state, with 24.7 percent. This is due mainly to farms and food processing operations that employ Latino workers. Other Idaho regions contained the following Latino populations, as of

<sup>129</sup> McFarland, "Growing Hispanic population part of Idaho's history."

<sup>130</sup> Nicole Foy, "Report: Idaho's Latino population grew faster than the rest of the state's last year," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), July 18, 2020, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

2019: southwestern, 14.1 percent; southeastern, 11.9 percent; eastern, 11.7 percent; northern, 4.5 percent; and north central, 4.2 percent.<sup>131</sup>

The Latino community has had a presence in Idaho since before it was a state. As activist and historian Ana María Nevárez-Schachtell reflected, “the Mexican worker is very much part of the state of Idaho, but regrettably the history was left out of the history books. The Mexican worker has suffered a lot of discrimination and here we are, so many years later, still struggling.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Foy, “Report: Idaho’s Latino population grew faster than the rest of the state’s last year.”

<sup>132</sup> Foy, “We do not like the Mexican.”

## 8. BIPOC Agricultural Workers in Idaho Today

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### Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in Idaho's Agricultural Industry

The development and success of Idaho's agricultural industry has depended on the labor of people of color. In addition to Japanese American and Latino workers addressed in depth in this context due to their connection to El Milagro, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color have made contributions to Idaho's agricultural growth. Records from 1943 state that fifty Jamaicans lived at the camp (some of the 550 Jamaicans the Farm Security Administration arranged to come to work in Idaho that year), and in 1946, fifteen Black individuals resided in the camp. Black farm laborers also came to Idaho from Arizona in the 1950s to work in the fields. Though initial research did not connect Indigenous peoples to El Milagro directly, Navajos came to Twin Falls in 1946 to harvest sugar beets during what the *Idaho Statesman* called a "critical shortage of harvest workers"—a shortage that threatened the agricultural industry during and immediately following World War II (See Chapters 3, 6, and 7 for more information about this shortage).<sup>133</sup> Newspaper coverage from 1970 indicates that Idaho's agricultural industry continued to be assisted by Indigenous peoples living outside of the state, with 800 Indigenous people recruited from New Mexico to move sprinklers on large irrigation projects in 1969 and 1970.<sup>134</sup>

People of color perform crucial labor in Idaho's agricultural industry, as well as working in technology, forestry, construction, healthcare, and other industries. In 2016, more than 4,000 people came to Idaho as guest workers, many of them from Mexico. Many refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Burma, Congo, Eritrea, Iraq, and Sudan, have settled in Twin Falls in recent years. A 2016 article from the *Washington Post* discussed codependency between the white residents of Twin Falls and recent refugees. While racism among some local residents has created vocal opposition to immigration and the refugee community, the agricultural industry relies on the labor of new immigrants and refugees. The article notes that employers from Twin Falls County's farms and factories said that "they would be lost without the low-wage workforce." An Idaho Dairymen's Association representative said "The one thing we hear repeatedly from different employers, they're

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<sup>133</sup> "School Students, Indians Helping In Labor Shortage," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), October 31, 1946: 12, <http://www.newsbank.com>.

<sup>134</sup> Idaho Agricultural Labor Market Report, week ending October 16, 1943; Folder: Region XI: Idaho: 1943; Box 14; Entry: 199 Farm Labor Market Reports, 1941–1943, Region XI; Record Group 211: War Manpower Commission; National Archives & Records Administration, College Park, MD; *Idaho Statesman*, "Contingent of Negroes to Arrive in May for Spring Crop Work," April 11, 1951: 13, <https://www.newsbank.com/>; *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), March 18, 1970: 28, <https://www.newsbank.com/>; DeYoung, *Japanese Resettlement in the Boise Valley and Snake River Valley*, 17.

continually short on employees... We're in a situation where we've got this workforce coming to us."<sup>135</sup>



Figure 8-1. Established in 1980, the College of Southern Idaho's Refugee Center offers many programs to assist newly arrived refugees in Twin Falls. *Pat Sutphin, Times-News, July 2017.*

## Seasonal and Low-Income Housing in Twin Falls

Many communities in the Magic Valley and elsewhere in Idaho are growing and in need of quality housing for seasonal laborers and lower-income individuals. Community Council of Idaho operates four housing complexes in southern Idaho in addition to El Milagro: Colonia de Colores, in Twin Falls; Proyecto Esperanza, in Heyburn; El Rancho Grand Estates, in American Falls; and Colonia Cesar Chavez, in Blackfoot.<sup>136</sup>

In 2018, Community Council of Idaho began an effort to redevelop El Milagro, with a goal to create a community gathering space and affordable housing. The organization has a three-phase plan to overhaul the complex, building all new housing, a professional business park for nonprofit

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<sup>135</sup> Audrey Dutton, "Farm to Cubicle, Idaho's Workforce has Thousands," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), June 16, 2016, <http://www.newsbank.com>; Chico Harlan, "In Twin Falls, Idaho, co-dependency of whites and immigrants faces a test," *Washington Post* (Washington, DC) November 17, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/in-twin-falls-idaho-co-dependency-of-whites-and-immigrants-faces-a-test/2016/11/17/f243f0da-ac0f-11e6-a31b-4b6397e625d0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/in-twin-falls-idaho-co-dependency-of-whites-and-immigrants-faces-a-test/2016/11/17/f243f0da-ac0f-11e6-a31b-4b6397e625d0_story.html); Megan Taros, "CSI Refugee Center continues services despite cuts," *Times-News*, January 14, 2020, [www.magicvalley.com](http://www.magicvalley.com).

<sup>136</sup> Community Council of Idaho, "2019 Year End Report" (Caldwell: Community Council of Idaho, 2019), <https://communitycouncilofidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2019-CCIdaho-Annual-Report.pdf>.

businesses, and a community gathering space for youth programs, health clinics, dental services, computer labs, and recreational areas. Ultimately, the project seeks to expand capacity, from 95 total units in 2019 to approximately 240 units.<sup>137</sup>

Phase I of the project, construction of sixty units of housing, was selected for Low-Income Housing Tax Credits in 2018. Community Council of Idaho estimates the cost of Phase I is \$10 million. The organization is conducting a capital campaign, seeking grants and private donations, to raise money to complete the entire project.<sup>138</sup>

The proposed redevelopment of El Milagro calls for removal of most of the original buildings at the complex. One of the bathroom facilities, known as comfort stations, will remain. This building will include interpretive signs about the history of El Milagro. Additionally, one of the barracks-style buildings will be rehabilitated or reconstructed.

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<sup>137</sup> Julie Wootton-Greener, “Nonprofit plans major upgrade at aging El Milagro House Project,” *Times-News*, June 10, 2018, [https://magicvalley.com/news/local/nonprofit-plans-major-upgrade-at-aging-el-milagro-housing-project/article\\_ae6a6e7d-d08c-5690-a9eb-0d60a0f45099.html](https://magicvalley.com/news/local/nonprofit-plans-major-upgrade-at-aging-el-milagro-housing-project/article_ae6a6e7d-d08c-5690-a9eb-0d60a0f45099.html); Julie Wootton-Greener, “Nonprofit moves forward with securing funding for \$10M El Milagro overhaul,” September 29, 2018, [https://magicvalley.com/news/local/nonprofit-moves-forward-with-securing-funding-for-10m-el-milagro-overhaul/article\\_7476df5b-f32d-59be-8f6b-41c1d271291a.html](https://magicvalley.com/news/local/nonprofit-moves-forward-with-securing-funding-for-10m-el-milagro-overhaul/article_7476df5b-f32d-59be-8f6b-41c1d271291a.html); Community Council of Idaho, “2018 Annual Report.”

<sup>138</sup> Community Council of Idaho, “2019 Year End Report”; Wootton-Greener, “Nonprofit moves forward with securing funding for \$10M El Milagro overhaul.”

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