

Right to Education – Responsibility to Educate
The Story of America’s Okie Immigrants and the
Arvin Federal Emergency School

Senior Group Exhibit
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Process Paper

During the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, one-fourth of the population of the Great Plains of the United States migrated to California to seek opportunities in the agriculture industry. Farm Security Administration camps were built in California to house laborers and their families, known as “Okies”.

Okie children were denied their *right* to an education when schools segregated them, put them at the back of the room or denied them entrance. Kern County Superintendent of Schools Leo B. Hart recognized the community’s *responsibility* to educate **all** children and used federal funds to open the Arvin Federal Emergency School in 1939. It was successful and locals soon demanded their children be included. The school eventually merged with the Vineland District, and ceased to be an emergency school.

We chose this topic because we wanted to learn about something in our county with a national impact. It was challenging to find information on this subject, because people in Kern County remain reluctant to talk about the negative public reaction to these displaced Americans.

We began our search at the California State University, Bakersfield, archives. We then spent many Saturdays in the county library’s local history room, finding information describing the influx of immigrants and the locals’ reactions. During a site tour of the school and camp, we interviewed former students. The video in our display is from the personal collection of Dale Giles and is not available in any archive or museum.

Shocked about the locals' negative reaction to Okie migrants, we sought information on their perspective. Research helped us understand that times were tough for everyone and locals were worried about newcomers using up resources.

We decided to prepare an exhibit from wood paneling to resemble the materials used in the actual school. We used a symbolic road patterned after Route 66 to tie the elements together. The truck is symbolic of the vehicles used by most families when they migrated. The road signs with summaries in our own words make it easy for people viewing the exhibit to follow the story line in order. Each section is a different color, visually separating the concepts. School items included in the exhibit are from the county school's collection.

Because we were limited to 500 words, we used quotes from our research to tell the rest of the story, being careful to use quotes that moved the story along.

This project relates to the theme of **Rights and Responsibilities** because Kern County schools initially failed in their *responsibility* to provide Okie children their *right* to an education. The Arvin Federal Emergency School resulted in a legacy that transformed the way educational services were, and continue to be, delivered to migrant children nationwide. The *right* of all children, legally here or not, to an education was affirmed by the struggles Okies faced in the 1930's. The acknowledgement of society's *responsibility* to provide an education to all children has opened the schoolhouse doors for all children in America today.

Primary

Interviews

Bailey, Cheryl. Email Interview. 20 April 2014.

Former Arvin Emergency School student Cheryl Bailey informed us that Leo B. Hart felt personally responsible to provide educational opportunities to all children residing in his county. Even though the migrants were living in tents and railroad cars, they were still within his county and it was therefore his duty to educate them. She recalled his interaction with the students with a happy nostalgia.

Blanton, Kelly F. Personal Interview. 2 April 2014.

Kelly Blanton moved from Texas to the Shafter Farm Labor Camp during the early years of the Dust Bowl. He described the conditions in the camp and helped us understand how hard life was for people at that time. He said the hardships he experienced early in his life motivated him to work hard and get the best education he could afford. He eventually became the Kern County Superintendent of Schools and helped preserve the legacy of the Arvin Federal Emergency School, which was a Kern County Superintendent of Schools program.

Combs, Edgar. Interview by Michael Neeley. California State University, Bakersfield

Archive: California Odyssey Project – Interviews of Dust Bowl Migrants. 2 April 1981.

This interview in the California State University Archive collection helped us understand the historical context of our project. Edgar Combs came to California during the Dust Bowl and lived through some hard times, including discrimination in schools. He did not attend Arvin Federal Emergency School, and so we were able to compare his experiences with the former students from Arvin Federal, allowing us to draw conclusions about the superiority of the emergency school.

Freeman, Freddie. Email Interview. 20 April 2014.

Freeman remembers the emergency school fondly. The airplane was a major highlight of his school years, along with the swimming pool. Those two amenities made him and many other students excited to go to school every day.

Garner, Jay. Phone Interview. 14 April 2014.

Jay Garner discussed the memories he had of the Arvin Federal Emergency School, also known as Sunset School. He was six when he began attending the school in 1941. He said the school was a great place to learn. He didn't realize it was a special place until much later. It was just a normal school to him since he had never gone to another one. He thought all schools had airplanes and swimming pools. The airplane classroom made an impact on him that led to an interest in aviation his entire life.

Garrison, Sharron. Personal Interview. 15 April 2014.

Born and raised in the Arvin Federal Camp, Sharon told us about her life in the school and describes the special emphasis the staff placed on electives. The teachers wanted the students to learn life sustaining skills along with academics. They learned how to slaughter animals, grow crops, type, sew and cook healthy meals. She said the teachers connected with the students in a very personal manner to engage them in their studies.

Guthrie, Woody. Interview by Bob Field Jr. April 1940. Television.

Guthrie was recorded by RCA Records in 1940 in order to bring attention to the Dust Bowl and the migration to California. He explained that the Dust Bowl had many origins. A big factor was a surplus of crops after World War I ended, and the government no longer needed to feed the soldiers. Then the stock market crash, inflation, and drought led to further destruction and forced many families to migrate west in search of better opportunities.

Hart, Leo B. Interview by Gerald Stanley and Susan McColgan. California State University Bakersfield Archive. 2 February 1977.

Leo B. Hart shared his unique experience as an educator and administrator during the Okie migration in this interview now stored in the CSUB archive. He understood the negative impact that the current schools had on the new children and the community. The emergency school was established as a temporary solution to provide a much needed education for the beaten down migrants.

Holbert, Fay. Telephone Interview/ Personal Interview. 9 February 2014 and 15 April 2014.

Holbert provided a first-hand account of her time in the Arvin Federal Camp. She remembers it as a good time with plenty of food and shelter. Holbert gave us contact information for W. C. Stampes and Earl Shelton. During the personal interview she gave us a site tour of the original library and recreational house at the camp. An authentic tin house used by families still stands as a reminder of the years of the Dust Bowl.

Luttrel, Mike. Phone Interview. 16 April 2014.

Born and raised in the Arvin Migratory Camp, Luttrel attended the school until he was 18 years old. He recalls the camp as a close community who took care of him and his two brothers when his mother was injured and his father was killed in a car accident. He said the camp and school were excellent places for a child to grow up.

Shelton, Earl. Personal Interview. 15 April 2014.

Earl Shelton discussed with us the circumstances that led him to the camp including several issues with the only car they had, lack of money, and a single dad struggling to raise his children. Once Shelton arrived at the camp he felt fortunate for food, shelter, friends, hot showers and flush toilets. He was one of the first students to attend the Arvin Federal Emergency School, which means he helped build it. He even helped dig the swimming pool.

Smith, Thomas. Interview by Michael Neeley. California State University Bakersfield Archive: California Odyssey Project-Interviews of Dust Bowl Migrants. 4 March 1981.

In this interview available in the CSUB archive, Thomas Smith describes his experience as a Dust Bowl migrant. His descriptions of life during that time helped us understand how hard it was for some of the children to move from place to place during their childhoods. Many children were so poor that they went without adequate meals and didn't have shoes to wear.

Stampes, Gwen. Personal Interview. 16 February 2014.

Gwen Stampes is the wife of one of the former students from the school. She had a completely different experience than her husband. Gwen was born after the Okie influx had occurred, and after the emergency school had been merged with Sunset School. She described how W. C. Stampes has worked hard over the years to preserve the history of the Arvin Federal School. She helped us understand the huge impact the school had on her husband.

Stampes, W.C. Personal Interview. 16 February 2014.

Stampes became a student of Arvin Federal in 1944 after he moved from Texas. He remembers fondly the airplane classroom and interactions among students and teachers who were positive influences on his life. Even today he is grateful for the school's impact on him and society. He was very excited about our project and met with us for over an hour, showing us clippings and photographs from that time period. He also showed us home movies collected from former students to give us a greater understanding of how the teachers helped them with all aspects of their lives. Included in the movies were lessons on manners, how to grow and cook food, how to design and sew clothes, how to make cosmetics, students and staff building the swimming pool, and the plane landing on the school's athletic fields. This interview really increased our understanding of the impact this school had on these immigrant children.

Stone, Eval Murmduke. Interview by Kathy Durham. California State University Bakersfield Archive: California Odyssey Project-Interviews of Dust Bowl Migrants. 9 March 1981.

In this interview Stone described his life as a migrant child in the Bakersfield area. He said education was not considered a top priority in his family. Lack of money and food made working the top priority. Every person old enough to walk in his family was considered old enough to work. Food was scarce. He said that as a child he didn't realize the extent of their hardship and was able to maintain good spirits and a carefree manner that adults were unable to have. His information helped us with the historical perspective of our project.

Strickland, Elizabeth. Email Interview. January 2014.

Elizabeth Strickland is an author of two of the books we used when researching our project. She told us about the hardships the Okies faced and how resilient they were in overcoming their beginnings. She and her family would travel to California to work in the summer, and then return to Oklahoma in the winter. She said it was a hard way to grow up, but she now treasures the memories from those times. She said they might have been poor, but they were self-sufficient and relied on each other.

Thorner, Juliet. Interview by Michael Neeley. California State University Bakersfield Archive: California Odyssey Project-Interviews of Dust Bowl Migrants. 18February 1981.

A Kern County teacher and nurse at the time, Thorner described how happy she was that Leo B. Hart opened a school for this vulnerable population. She said that people were living everywhere, under bridges, in ditches, in their cars, in tents, in the open, in garages, sheds, etc. Unsanitary living conditions, malnutrition and exposure to the elements made a lot of people very sick. She was glad the school stressed skills for daily living, because she realized these people were here to stay. She wanted them to be healthy and develop healthy habits. She believes this school is one of the only good things to come from the Depression.

Zaragozal, Joe. Interview by Michael Neeley. California State University Bakersfield Archive: California Odyssey Project-Interviews of Dust Bowl Migrants. 5 February 1981.

California State University of Bakersfield's online archive provided us access to this interview of a former migrant child. He described his life in the labor camps of California and how all the people in his family old enough to walk were expected to pick cotton. Every person's contribution was needed to make enough money for the family to survive.

Articles

Beals, Carleton. "America's Shantytown on Wheels." *Forum*. January 1938.

Starting after WWI, people living in Hoovervilles travelled from California to Washington, DC, gathering citizens and veterans to ask the government for relief and aid. Soon after, migrants left the Great Plains of the United States, including Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas, in pursuit of a better life in California.

"Better Schools to be Sought for California's 'Migratory' Children." *Shafter Press*. 11 January 1929.

This article informs the public of the upcoming discussion regarding the education of the new children. It brings attention to the inadequate school hours and quality of education occurring in Kern County.

"Dust Bowl Refugee Survey Finds San Joaquin Valley Camp Squalor Ridden." *LA Times*. 21 July 1937.

Containing several pictures of the life as an Okie, this article gives an insight into the hard, disease-ridden times. Tents and makeshift housing were common among all migrants. We were surprised to learn that many children slept on one bed at the same time.

“Dust Bowlers Worry California Business Weak.” *The Bakersfield Californian*. 24 September 1938.

Californians were concerned that the migrants would take the few available jobs from the people already living in the area. Many corrupt policies occurred because the migrants worked for lower wages in order to make any amount just to survive.

“Hundreds of New Settlers in Weedpatch Necessitate More Educational Facilities.”

The Bakersfield Californian. 6 September 1924.

With the addition of more migrant children, schools were becoming impacted and did not have the resources to supply an adequate education to everyone who was here. More school facilities were deemed necessary.

“Kern County Acquires Giant Plane for Aviation Classes.” *Fresno Bee*. 26 July 1946.

This article describes the plane which was used for classroom space and airplane mechanics. It was purchased for \$200 with money the students raised themselves, and could seat up to 30 students. Aviation mechanics and the theory of flight were taught in the plane. Girls and boys alike were allowed to take the class. If they scored high enough during the semester, they were allowed to taxi the plane down the dirt runway they had built themselves.

“Local Officials Seek \$120,000 in Federal Care of Migrant Groups.” *The Bakersfield Californian*. January 27, 1938: 13.

This article describes how community officials requested federal funds to help offset the increased cost of the services necessary to provide basic standards of living to the migratory workers and their families.

Many Transients Self-Supporting Survey Reveals." *Shafter Progress*. January 31, 1936: 1.

In an attempt to stem the rising discrimination against the Okies, the Shafter Progress began writing stories portraying the migratory workers as self-sufficient. This article showed us that both sides of the story were being presented in the local newspapers.

"Migratory Camp." *Arvin Tiller*. February 3, 1939: 4.

In this article, the plans for the Arvin Federal Emergency Camp are described. It helped us understand the conditions the migrants would experience upon arrival in Arvin.

"Migratory Camp Plans are Outlined in Report." *Arvin Tiller*. March 31, 1939: 1.

This description of the camp showed the care and concern the local community was taking to make the camp a wholesome place for the migratory families to live. This was considered an anomaly. Most of the camps were filthy and unhealthy.

"Migratory Labor Adds Many Pupils to Public Schools." *Shafter Progress*. May 1, 1936: 1.

This article helped us understand that the increasing numbers of children in the school were causing concern to the local school administrators and parents. We were able to understand the concerns raised by the local population because of the rapid increase in students.

"Migratory Pupils Serious Problem in California Schools." *Wasco News*. June 19, 1931: 5.

As schools across the great central valley of California became overcrowded, local citizens were concerned that existing students would receive fewer services and reduced educational opportunities. This article reported on those concerns.

“Migratory Pupils Swell School List.” *Wasco News*. October 3, 1930: 4.

Further evidence of the influx of students was detailed in this article. It was a huge concern to the people who had been in the valley for a number of years, even if they had previously migrated to the area. They considered the students of migratory workers inferior to their children.

“New Migratory Director Appointed Here.” *Arvin Tiller*. March 3, 1939: 1.

This article announced the appointment of Tom Collins as the new director of the Arvin FSA camp. He is considered to be one of the best camp managers. He met with John Steinbeck and is the model for the camp manager in “The Grapes of Wrath.”

“No Room for Undesirables.” *Shafter Progress*. 9 August 1935.

This article describes that when Okies arrived in the San Joaquin Valley seeking better lives they didn’t receive the welcome they desired. Many people already in Kern County did not want more newcomers. They bullied and physically assaulted the migrants to try and make them leave.

“School at Arvin Migratory Camp Teaches Varied Work.” *The Bakersfield Californian*. 21 April 1941.

Many lessons were taught at the school beyond basic subjects. Classes in common manners, sports, geography, gardening, transportation, and aeronautics, wiring, construction and engineering were daily parts of the children’s education. The innovative curriculum is one reason why locals changed their minds about the Okie school. They wanted their own children to have the opportunities the migrant students were receiving.

“Sunset School Shows Record of Enterprise.” *The Bakersfield Californian*. 12 February 1947.

The article describes this school as the most advanced and academically diverse in the county.

“Vineland School Aviation Program.” *Arvin Tiller/ Lamont Reporter*. 1946.

The AT-6 and C-46, the two airplanes used as classrooms and subjects for education, were bought and paid for by the students themselves. This aviation program promoted further education outside of traditional subjects and allowed the students to learn about changing technology.

“Work of Migratory School Praised by School Experts.” *The Bakersfield Californian*. 2 February 1939.

This article describes how the federal emergency school was successful in providing education for the Okie children when local school districts neglected their responsibility to do so.

Books

Anderson, Nels. *Men on the Move*. University of Chicago. October 1940.

Anderson discusses the migration from the Great Plains to the West. The travelers lived through long, hard routes of storms and rugged terrain, on very little and working for gas when the tank went empty. This book helped us understand the historical context of the time.

Hart, Leo B. *Our Conquest*. Kern County Schools of Bakersfield California, 1946.

In this self-published book, Leo B. Hart, Superintendent of Kern County Schools and creator of the Arvin Federal Emergency School, memorialized his intentions, interactions and lasting impacts regarding the Arvin Federal Emergency School. Authentic photos of the school and children depict the hardships the migrant families faced before the Arvin Federal Emergency School opened. This book was very important to our research. We were lucky to be able to borrow this book from the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office archive. It was not professionally published, and only a few copies exist.

Strickland, Elizabeth. *Route 66 to the Fields of California*. Clark Publishing House; Tallahassee, FL, 2002.

Elizabeth Strickland gives her account of traveling from Oklahoma to California during the Dust Bowl era. Strickland and her family would spend their summers in California working in the farms and then return to Oklahoma for the winter. Eventually her family decided to stay in California. Strickland believes that this was the best decision her family made.

Swett, John. *History of the Public School System of California*. A.L. Bancroft & Company; San Francisco, 1876.

In his book, John Swett published reports and school legislation that proved the state of California had a responsibility to provide a quality education to all children. This compilation of firsthand documents provides data that supports the rights for all children to receive an education.

Swett, John. *Public Education in California*. American Book Company, 1911.

Summarizing his role in public education in California, Swett describes the latest laws and reforms developed to promote better lives for children and adults.

Documents

Blanton, Kelly F. Letter to Henry Stroud. 1999.

In a letter to his grandson, Kelly Blanton gives an account of his life in the Shafter, California labor camp after he moved from Texas with his family at seven years of age. He enjoyed school despite the constant bullying and taunts but had to work in the fields on days that he did not have school. He said he learned how to wrestle really well as a result of being a migrant student. Blanton became a teacher and later was Kern County Superintendent of Schools. This letter appeared in his retirement program when he retired from his position as superintendent in 1999.

California Education Code. Volume 2, 48200-48208. 200-201. 1920-1924.

Original wording from the California Education Code regarding the education of students appears on our exhibit board.

Christine. Letter to Her Mother. 20 September 1940.

One of the teachers of the Arvin Federal Emergency School, Christine, reported in her letter to her mother, that the students were very poor, ill behaved, and lacking in common knowledge taken by granted by others. She confidently looked forward to teaching basic manners, morals, and subjects.

Collins, Tom. Camp Newsletters and Administrative Reports: Arvin Labor Camp Reports. Lamont Branch Library. 6 June to 26 December 1936.

Tom Collins was the camp manager for the Arvin Federal Labor Camp. This collection of newsletters and administrative reports helped us understand the day-to-day life these students had, apart from school. The challenges they faced were enormous, but they still managed to have an optimistic outlook, for the most part. Most interesting in this collection was a daily log which described fights between husbands and wives, injuries, activities of the youth, and the work assignments.

Directory of Public Schools 1942-1943. Kern County California School Calendar

Teacher's Institute Program Directory of Personnel. Issued by Leo B. Hart. Superintendent of Schools of Kern County. Bakersfield, California.

Our search for a photo of the school led us to the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office archive, where we found copies of the school calendar. It was very similar to a newsletter, in that it described the actions and activities of all the districts in Kern County. One of the photos from this source is on our board.

Directory of Public Schools 1942-1943. Kern County California School Calendar
Teachers Institute Program Directory of Personnel. Issued by Leo B. Hart.
Superintendent of Schools of Kern County. Bakersfield, California.

This directory was instrumental in confirming who the employees of the school were during the critical first few years of operation. Also, a photo from this document appears on our exhibit.

Jimmy. Letter to Aunt Corene. 11 June 1938.

In his letter, twelve-year-old Jimmy told his aunt about his new home in the government camp, Weedpatch, which was also called the Arvin Federal Labor Camp. He claimed that he received breakfast for one cent, paid rent at ten cents a day, and was allowed to take hot showers. Even as a young child he was grateful to live in the camp.

Imogen. Letter to Margie. 14 February 1945.

Imogen excitedly writes about the many electives and opportunities in her new school. Classes that could lead to future careers included cosmetology, typing, farming, and mechanics inspired the children to work very hard to achieve their goals.

Livie. Diary Entry. Shafter, California. 5 October 1939.

In this short entry, fifth grader Livie wrote of one of her experiences with the teachers and students in California. She was mortified when the teacher asked the Okies what they ate that morning; which only spurred the native Californians to bully the outsiders for being poor and malnourished. The teacher also denied the children their right to learn when she ignored them from their place on the floor at the back of the class.

Map of California. Rural Rehabilitation. Library of Congress. 1935.

This map shows the agricultural aspects of California along with locations of initial Farm Security Administration migratory camps.

Mitchell, James. Letter to Mr. Hart. 6 July 1955.

James Mitchell gladly congratulated Mr. Hart on his wonderful job of creating a school that contributed to the success of so many students. He said the school changed how society viewed the Okies in a time when all outsiders were subjected to constant discrimination.

State of California Constitution. Article 9. 1850.

Article nine; section five of the California State Constitution claimed that all children have a right to an education and that it is the responsibility of the state to provide that education. We use a graphic of the Constitution on our board.

Documentaries

The Plow That Broke the Plains. FDR Presidential Library, 1936.

Providing information through first hand film, this documentary explores the disaster in the Great Plains. Drought combined with over plowing of the land from decades before left the land barren and ripe for dust storms. Intended to promote the New Deal, this documentary informs the public of the ongoing Dust Bowl. We watched this documentary early in our research to help us understand the conditions that would prompt such a risky migration for so many people.

Journal Articles

Law, William. "Problems of the Migratory Student." *California Journal of Secondary Education*. March 1934.

In 1921, a compulsory education law was enacted in California to ensure that all children could have an education, including migrant children. In 1927, local districts were given the right and responsibility to provide educational opportunities for the migrant students.

"Migrants are Becoming Voters." *California: Magazine of the Pacific* (Chamber of Commerce) October 1938: 58, 20-21.

Details on the residency status of the migratory workers appears in this journal article. It is estimated that two-thirds of the migrants who came to the Central Valley during the 1930s and 1940s remained in the valley permanently and became active voters.

Molander, Ruth Emelie. "A Study of 101 Migrant Families Receiving Assistance Under the Regulations of the California 'Aid to Needy Children' Law in Kern County in June, 1940." M.A. Thesis, University of California, 1943.

Assesses the condition of migrant families in Kern County through an analysis of records relating to their use of public assistance.

Photographs

California State University, Bakersfield Archives. January 2014.

From the database at CSUB we accessed many primary photographs of the Dust Bowl, the camps, and local life at that time. Many appear on our board.

Kern County Museum Archives. March 2014.

Lori Wear allowed us to look through the archives to pick which photos would help illustrate our project. She later scanned and emailed them to us.

Library of Congress. 13 February 2014.

The Library of Congress provided photographs for the board through their on-line archive.

Secondary

Interviews

Blakenship, Jean. Email Interview. 20 April 2014.

Jean Blankenship lived in the Shafter Labor Camp during the Depression. She discussed the hard times and described how her family lived in a tent, then a metal cabin, and finally an apartment. We gained historical perspective from our interview with her.

Butcher, Michael. Personal Interview. 2 June 2014.

As a Kern County educator starting in the 1950's, Michael Butcher was personally acquainted with Leo B. Hart, who by then was nearing retirement. He provided us information on what a humble man Leo B. Hart was. He said that Leo could be counted on to identify a problem and solve it. In addition, Leo B. Hart figured out how to educate the Okie migrant children, started the first county schools for polio victims, children in juvenile hall, students with special needs, such as blindness and deafness, and various other groups of children with special needs. He called Leo B. Hart a great man with a vision for all children in this county.

Coats, Randy. Telephone Interview. 24 January 2014.

Randy Coats works for the Housing Authority of Kern County, which owns and operates the site of the former Arvin Federal Labor Camp. From him we learned that the remaining buildings are being restored by former inhabitants of the school and camp. Plans include opening a museum to house the collection of the late Arvin librarian Doris Weddell.

Gavin, Christy. Personal Interview. 5 February 2014.

Archivist Christy Gavin took us on a tour of the current exhibit of the Dust Bowl at California State University, Bakersfield. She showed us how to access the Dust Bowl archive containing photos, newspaper articles, books, and primary interviews of Dust Bowl migrants conducted in the 1970's and 1980's.

George, Sunny. Email Interview. 20 April 2014.

George informed us of her father's experience when he came to the camp. Upon arrival he stayed in a one-room metal shed with his parents and eight siblings. One of the things he remembers the most is taking classes in the airplane and learning how to fly it in theory. He was able to taxi the plane down the runway when his grades were high enough.

Wear, Lori. Personal Interview. 19 January, 2014.

Lori Wear is the curator of special collections at the Kern County Museum in Bakersfield, California. At the beginning of our search for information on the Arvin Federal Emergency School, Ms. Wear was kind enough to talk with us about the time period of the 1930s and 1940s and the issues commonly facing people during that time. She also provided us some photos from the county collection that appear on our board.

Weddell, Doris. Interview by James Johnson. Newsweek. 6 June 2009.

Historian Doris Weddell describes the importance of preserving the migrant camp and school in order to keep the history alive. She compares this great migration to the European pilgrims from hundreds of years ago.

Weddell, Whitney. Telephone Interview. 24 January 2014.

Daughter of Doris Weddell, Whitney Weddell provided contact information for the Housing Authority and Earl Shelton. She described how her mother worked as the librarian in Arvin for many years. She “fell in love with the Okies” and did her best to preserve their experiences for future generations. Whitney Weddell said her mother collected artifacts from the time, including Dorothea Lange’s camera and photo collections. She said that when her mother died, the collection was bequeathed to the Kern County Housing Authority. She gave us the name of Randy Coats as a contact at the Housing Authority.

Archives

California State University, Bakersfield. California Odyssey: Dust Bowl Migration Archives. 9 September, 2013 – 14 May, 2014.

This archive provided numerous reports, photos, books, articles and other information vital to our research. We visited this archive periodically over the course of our research, from September 2013 to May 2014.

National Archives at College Park, Maryland. June 16, 2014.

This in-person visit to the National Archives at College Park was an awe-inspiring experience, culminating our nine months of research. We reviewed the following files: Number CF-25, Record Group 96, Boxes 206-210, Location Stack 170, Row 44, Compartment 18. Included in these files are photos, reports, letters and copies of the Arvin Migrant Camp Newspaper, “Tow Sack Tattler” which we have not been able to find copies of in even the Arvin Library. From the research we conducted at the National Archive we were able to confirm our thesis and conclusion.

Articles

Brown, Patricia Leigh. "Oklahomans Try to Save Their CA Culture." *New York Times*. 5 February 2002.

Earl Shelton, a former Okie, recalls his trip to California from Oklahoma. He is currently attempting to save his heritage in California. Arvin Federal Emergency School is now Sunset Middle School.

"Children of Illegal Immigrants Caught in Education Politics Crossfire." *US News*. August 2010.

In this article, children of illegal immigrants are experiencing barriers to receiving an education. From this article, we were able to draw comparisons between the internal migration of the 1930's and the immigration taking place today. The same fears exist, value of resources and fear of new and different cultures.

Colvin, Richard Lee. "Dust Bowl Legacy: 50 Years After 'The Grapes of Wrath,' Five Okies Remember How Their Families Struggled During the Great Migration and Endured." *Los Angeles Times*. 26 March 1989.

In this series of articles, Lee shares the memories of those who lived through the Dust Bowl. Although he commemorated many of the camps throughout the valley, he emphasized that the Arvin Federal Emergency School was the most significant and impactful school.

"Discoveries: Weedpatch Camp." *The Sacramento Bee*. 13 October 2013.

In this article, Earl Shelton reminisces on his carefree childhood in the camp. As such a young child he did not understand what he did or did not have and so was very happy just to live in a community with a school that provided such a comprehensive education.

“Discrimination Against the Okies.” Okie Discrimination. Web. 3 February 2014.

In order to stop the Okies from unionizing and demanding higher wages, many Californians struck out against the migrants. Farmers enacted harsh, unnecessary rules on field workers while paying them low wages that could not support their families. Okies became the scapegoats for any problems that occurred in California.

Fanslow, Robin A. “The Migrant Experience.” *American Folk Life Center*. Library of Congress. 6 April 1998.

As the Great Plains went through disaster, farmers decided to take their families to California in search of better agricultural opportunities. These farmers expected to own their own farms but were forced to be paid workers in order to make a living in the new land.

Green, Paul. “The Undocumented: Educating the Children of Migrant Workers in America.” *Bilingual Research Journal*, 27:1. Spring 2003.

In this article, Green describes the future economic impact of not educating the migrant students. It is in the best interest for the migrants to be educated so they become contributing members of society.

Gregory, James N. “The Dust Bowl Migration: Poverty Stories, Race Stories.” *Poverty in the United States: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics, and Policy*. Gwendolyn Mink and Alice O Connor. 2004.

Gregory reports the awful conditions of the migration west from Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas. Roughly 400,000 Okies migrated to California seeking better lives through job opportunities and better agricultural conditions.

Griffie, Susannah L. "Are Children of Illegal Immigrants Entitled to a Public Education?" *New York Times*. 6 October 2011.

In this editorial, Griffie poses a question which has haunted America for hundreds of years -- Are children of illegal immigrants entitled to a public education? She concludes that all children in the United States have a right to an education under the 1982 Supreme Court Ruling. She further opines that immigration status does not and cannot interfere with this right.

Hood, Lucy. "Educating Immigrant Students." *Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Spring. 2007. Web. 1 March 2014.

William Wayne Justice believed that children should not be denied an education on the basis of their citizenship, race, or background. Educating even illegal immigrants was important to American prosperity.

"Historic Preservation Digital Collection." Beale Memorial Library. 3 March 1998.

This pamphlet provided pictures regarding important events that occurred in Kern County from 1886 to 1974.

"Hope in a Place Called Weedpatch." *Sequoiah County Times*. 1 December 2002.

Weedpatch, also known as the Arvin Federal Camp, provided a safe haven and a true start to a new life in California. According to this article, opportunities to grow and succeed were true gifts to the migrants.

"Illegal Aliens a Drain on U.S. Taxpayers." *The New American*. 13 August. 2012.

This article shows the other side of the story and explains why some people are against using local and federal resources to educate non-citizens. This helped us understand why there is such a controversy about educating the illegal immigrants impacting schools today.

“Illegal Immigrants Cause Public School Crisis.” *Judicial Watch*. 11 March 2008.

The US government was reported to spend 12 billion dollars on educating illegal immigrants every year. In some schools in Texas and California there was a 60 percent increase in illegal immigrants in a short time span. These students were not able to meet state and federal standards due to their inadequate prior education.

“Immigration, Youth, and Education.” *Harvard Educational Review*. Fall 2011.

This article focuses specifically on the social aspects of American immigration and the several obstacles all immigrants run into when trying to get an education, job, and adequate living spaces. Stereotypes that all immigrants are criminals and drains on society enables people to feel justified in discriminating against them. The author proposes that allowing immigrants the same rights as any other person in America would not only improve their own individual lives, but also the nation as a whole regarding foreign relations and diversity in the homeland.

Japenga, Ann. “Man Who Had a Heart for the Okies: He Helped the Dust Bowl Refugees Settle In.” *Los Angeles Times*. 18 January 1987.

In this article, Ann Japenga describes how settled Californians looked down on the Okies immigrants upon their arrival. She said her research shows that many children were forced to sit in the back of the classrooms due to their smell and perceived inability to learn the same way as the other children learned. She also discusses Leo B. Hart, and how the emergency school he opened changed the lives of the students and all future immigrant children.

Kern County Historical Society. “Kern County History Publication.” *The Kern Grapevine*. January 2009.

This local announcement led us to discovering Elizabeth Strickland. From here we found her books and then contact information for our interview with her.

“Last of Arvin Federal School Burned.” *Arvin Tiller*. 2 March 1977.

This article informs the public of the loss of the last remaining section of the original school. The author recalls the background of the school, which started in a boxcar and old shed.

“Luncheon Held at School Honoring Leo B Hart.” *The Bakersfield Californian*. 21 January 1973.

Leo B. Hart was honored by the school years after his innovative ideas transformed education for migrant children. His work impacted hundreds of people from the start and he was appreciated for his dedication.

Lutz, Margaret. “History of Weedpatch Camp.” Arvin Tiller/ Lamont Reporter. 20 October 1999.

This article describes the time period between 1935 and 1940 when over one million people came to California to escape the depression and Dust Bowl. The term Okies became a synonym for scum and job stealers. The Arvin Federal Emergency Camp became a safe haven for the immigrants.

Medina, Jennifer. “Legislature in California Set to Pass a Dream Act.” *New York Times*. 31 August. 2011. Web. March 1 2014.

This fairly recent article describes the California Dream Act, which gave illegal immigrants the opportunity to attend college at California resident rates. While this act provides many young adults with an opportunity for a brighter future, many consider this to be condoning illegal immigrants to stay in the US without the rights or responsibilities of a resident or citizen.

Nicholas, Flora. "Leo B Hart Saw Okie Children as 'Diamonds in the Rough.'" *The Dust Bowl Journal*. 1980.

This article explains that Hart was aware of the necessity to connect and work with the children in a way that would not offend them. He had to work through their pride and difficult past to promote a positive education so they could become productive citizens.

Nicholas, Flora. "Thank You Mr. Bancroft." *Arvin Tiller/Lamont Reporter*. 2 October 1996.

In this article, the principal of the school, Peter Bancroft, is thanked for his work in pushing the school to excel in every area possible.

Reich, Gary and Alvar Ayala Mendoza. "Educating Kids Versus Coddling Criminals: Framing the Debate Over In-State Tuition for Undocumented Students in Kansas."

Schiffman, Maryanne. "Do Children of Illegal Immigrants Have the Right to an Education in the US?" *Demand Media*. Web. 11 February 2014.

In this article the author discusses the concept of education as a right for everyone, not just citizens. It made us realize that many issues facing the Okie immigrants are still happening today with undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other countries.

Shelton, Earl. "Happy Memories of Life at the Camp." *Arvin Tiller/Lamont Reporter*. 9 Oct. 1999.

Celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Arvin Federal Emergency School, Earl spoke about his drastic change in life from Oklahoma to California. He reminisced about the lessons on airplanes and the day he, along with other classmates who had good grades, got to taxi a plane on a runway they built themselves.

“Should Public Schools Educate Illegal Immigrants?” *Beamont Enterprise*. 15 May 2011.

This article raises the question of educating illegal immigrants. In the end we realized that the California Ed. Code guarantees the right of all children in California to an education, regardless of residence or legal status.

Soltero, Carlos R. (2006). "*Plyler v. Doe* (1982) and Educating Children of Illegal Aliens". *Latinos and American Law: Landmark Supreme Court Cases*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. pp. 118–132.

This article discusses the impact of *Plyler v. Doe*, which upheld the right to an education for all children in the country, regardless of legal status.

Stanley, Jerry. “The School of Hard Times.” *Sunsentinel*. 10 April 1989.

The Arvin Federal Emergency School became known statewide for its lack of truancy and disciplinary problems. The school represented the traditional American Dream with its humble start and ongoing success story.

Taylor, Ronald. “California’s Okies Look Back on Pain.” *LA Times*. 5 October 1980.

In this article, many of the Okies described how they remain ashamed of their past and upset when they relive their migration and lives in California. Living from job to job, adequate living necessities were often ignored in order to survive.

West, Allen. “5000 Legal Students in Florida to Lose Their Tuition to Illegals.” *Allen West*. 7 April 2014.

This article provides a view from the other end of the spectrum. West discusses the impact that illegal immigrants have on Americans regarding the limited space in colleges, in this case, specifically Florida. Illegal immigrants are being seen as prioritized higher than American citizens and this has become a concern for society.

Books

Babb, Sanora. *On the Dirty Plate Trail: Remembering the Dust Bowl Refugee Camps*.

Douglas Wixson, 2007.

Babb brings the stories of the Dust Bowl back into the modern spotlight with her exploration of the camps scattered across America. She reports many first hand accounts of the camps including her own notes taken as a young journalist at the time. She publishes Dorothea Lange's famous pictures to solidify her claim that the camps were both a blessing and a sin.

Blair, Harry E. *Conservation of Our Environment*. KCSOS Archives. July 1969.

The Arvin Federal Emergency School agricultural practices are presented in this book as a good example of positive educational practices in a changing world. In addition, several different ideas are discussed regarding sharing knowledge, implementing new science programs, and giving all students a well-rounded education that includes both old and new subjects.

Boyd, William Harland. *Lower Kern River 1850-1950: Wilderness to Empire*. Kern County Historical Society, Inc. Bakersfield, California. 1997.

Government aid sent from Washington reached all the way to Bakersfield, California. President Roosevelt's first actions as president in 1933 enacted the New Deal. He quickly set about enforcing his ideas of relief, recovery, and reform in order to alleviate the dangers the Depression posed to the citizens of the United States.

Feldman, Ruth Tenzer. *Don't Whistle in School: The History of America's Public Schools*. Lerner Publications Company. Minneapolis. 2001.

This book is a compilation of histories of people who have been discriminated against in schools throughout America over the years. A chapter on the Okies helped us understand the plight of the immigrants in the 1930s and 1940s. They were encouraged not to draw attention to themselves and fade into the background. That way they would not be subjected to bullying.

Harrington, Edmund Ross. *A History of the Kern County Superintendent of Schools*. Kern County Historical Society, 1969.

A short description of each Kern County Superintendent of Schools' term of office appears in this book. The section on Leo B. Hart describes his role in the creation of the Arvin Federal Emergency School. This book had a reduced number of published copies, and we were lucky to find one in the Kern County Superintendent of Schools Office archive.

Henshaw, Betty Grant. *Children of the Dust: An Okie Family Story*. Texas Tech University Press, 2006.

Betty Henshaw's life story is told in this book. She describes the decision process the family went through when they decided to leave Oklahoma and move to California. This book helped us understand that life could be really hard in those days, and people did what work they could to survive. They also shared clothes and made use of things until they fell apart.

Hook, Sue Vander. *The Dust Bowl*. ABDO, 2009.

This book described the author's experiences during the Dust Bowl and her family's migration to the great central valley of California. Our historical perspective was enhanced by the information in this book.

Kirkland, Jerry. *School District Origins in Kern County California*. Kern County Superintendent of Schools. 2010.

Kern County school districts began to organize as soon as the region was officially declared open in 1866. Since then, others districts have absorbed many originals while new ones have also formed. This book helped us understand the enormous number of children in the county needing an education.

Stanley, Jerry. *Children of the Dust Bowl*. Crown Publisher, 1992.

Stanley writes a historical account of the experiences of the migrant Okie children. He brings to light the discrimination conducted by schools, hospitals, and many other public locations in order to prove that native Californians did not make the transition easy. Okie children were not accepted into society and were persecuted for their origins.

Stanley, Jerry. *Children of the Grapes of Wrath: A Handmade School Saved Okie Kids for a Happy Ending*. America West. Spring 1986.

The Arvin Federal Emergency School was established only after countless accounts of bullying and discrimination forced key educational leaders to step forward. Supported by teachers and by their own hard work, the children built their own school and changed the course of their lives.

Strickland, Elizabeth. *From the Arvin Migrant Camp to the American Dream*. Elizabeth Strickland Publishing Co. 2008.

For this book Strickland interviewed over 50 Okie Immigrants, many lived in the Arvin Federal Camp and attended the Arvin Federal Emergency School. They explained that the camp was a good thing because it provided them a home as well as a community. Those who attended the school talked about the different electives and how the teachers took a real interest in the students.

Starr, Kevin. *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California*. Oxford University Press. 1996.

According to this article, the Depression led to an influx in California of migrants from the Great Plains who were escaping drought, economic failure, and constant dust storms. It described how settled Californians responded to the immigrants with hate and discrimination.

Steinbeck, John. *Grapes of Wrath*. The Viking Press. 1939.

This fictional account of the Joad family brought international awareness of the issues facing the Okies in California. The people of Kern County disagreed with the information presented in the book, declaring that it was not an accurate representation of the Arvin Federal Camp. The book was banned by the Kern County Board of Supervisors, who actually held a public burning of the book. We included this book in our bibliography because it caused great dissention in Kern County and helped us understand the contention centered around Okie immigrants.

Documentaries

American Experience: Mass Exodus from the Plains. PBS. 2013.

One quarter of the Great Plains population migrated to California during the Great Depression seeking better lives. More often than not, they were disappointed, as they had to work for meager pay and were discriminated against.

Ken Burns: *The Dust Bowl*. PBS. 2012

This was a two part series that explained what caused the dust bowl and had interviews with those who remembered the dust bowl. The second part shows how families traveled to California it was not much better. Families lived in tents on the side of the road. Jobs were hard to find leaving many families without basic necessities.

Documents

Letter to School Superintendents Nationwide from the US Departments of Justice and Education. 8 May 2014.

This letter reminded school administrators nationwide that all minor children in the United States of America have the right to a free primary and secondary education provided under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Titles 9 and 11, and Supreme Court Case Plyler v. Doe. It further instructs educators that they are not allowed to ask students about their immigration status or deny them education based on their race or origins.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. NPS Form 10-900. October. 1995.

In 1995 the Arvin Federal Camp was registered as a Historic Place due to its impact on history in regards to politics, agriculture, and social history. Only the post office, community hall, and library remained at this time but were considered very important in portraying the significance of the camp, which still stand today. The majority of the registration explains the history of the camp and its major impact on American history.

Journal Articles

Illegal Immigrants Cause Public School Crisis. Judicial Watch. 11 March 2008.

This journal article discusses the impact of illegal immigration on schools in California, Texas, Arizona and New Mexico. Some of the same concerns are raised by school administration officials as were raised in the 1930s when the Okie immigrants were arriving in California's central valley. People then and people now are worried about newcomers using up precious resources and living off the work of others.

“Unique Educational Approach Used at Sunset Elementary School: Weedpatch, California.” *California Historian*. Volume 47. No 1. 2000.

When the Arvin Federal Emergency School opened, the students were lacking in education from all aspects of their lives. The school gave lessons in manners, basic subjects, mechanics, farming, cosmetology, candle making, sewing, typing, and cooking. The students dug their own swimming pool and built their own classrooms.

Stanley, Jerry. *Educating the Children of the Grapes of Wrath*. California Historical Courier. August 1980.

Jerry Stanley writes in his book that the Arvin Federal Emergency School was started to alleviate overcrowding in other public schools and educate the Okies in the best way possible for them. He discussed the many success stories of the students from the school. He stated that in this case segregation was actually a good thing.

Weiler, Kathleen. "Schooling Migrant Children: California, 1920-1940." *History Workshop Journal* 37 (1994): 117-142.

This paper described the struggle between different groups during the great migration. Teachers, students, police officers, and city leaders all clashed as they tried to determine the best way to educate migrant children. We learned that pre-existing prejudice against the Mexican and Asian migrant encouraged an atmosphere of intolerance, which allowed the settled white people to discriminate against the immigrants from the Dust Bowl.