



The BC Government and the Dispossession of Japanese Canadians (1941-1949)

By John Price

JUNE 2020



CCPA
CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
BC Office



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June 2020

This report was first published as a six-part series in the *Times-Colonist* of Victoria, November–December, 2019.

Part 1: Righting a historical wrong for Japanese Canadians

Part 2: After Pearl Harbour, province campaigned to uproot Japanese Canadians

Part 3: B.C. went out of its way to make life miserable for Japanese Canadians

Part 4: Young people paid high price for B.C.'s exile of Japanese Canadians

Part 5: How B.C. stole the lives of 22,000 Japanese Canadians

Part 6: The final straw: Japanese Canadians offered an impossible choice

This report is a co-publication with the National Association of Japanese Canadians. The National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) was founded in 1947 and is a Canada-wide organization that represents Japanese Canadians and Japanese Canadian member organizations. The NAJC supports the development of our communities and a strong Japanese Canadian identity. We strive for equal rights and liberties for all persons, and in particular for racial and ethnic minorities.



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Cover photo: Grade one students studying in tar paper shacks, New Denver, circa 1943. Courtesy of Library and archives Canada, C-067492.

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The CCPA–BC is located on unceded Coast Salish territories, specifically the lands belonging to the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and sə́lilwətaʔt /Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

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JOHN PRICE is professor emeritus (History) at the University of Victoria and the author of *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire and the Transpacific*; *A Woman in Between: Searching for Dr. Victoria Chung* (with Ningping Yu) and co-editor of *(Un)Settling the Islands: Race, Indigeneity and the Transpacific* (with Christine O'Bonsawin), a special volume of the journal *BC Studies* (No. 204, Winter 2019/20).

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The opinions and recommendations in this report, and any errors, are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers and funders of this report.

A NOTE ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is based on a series of opinion pieces written by John Price and run in the *Victoria Times Colonist* in December of 2019. The original publication date in April 2020 was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic also slowed down processes for the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC). The NAJC used the time to conduct provincial stakeholder engagement to further develop and clarify its recommendations. These specific asks will be presented to the BC government at upcoming meetings.

It was also not long after the impacts of COVID-19 hit that Canadians also began reporting increases in anti-Asian racism. Now, as we prepare to publish this report in June of 2020, the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the latest incidents of police violence against Indigenous people in Canada have triggered a wave of protests and public discussion about anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, and focused attention on the role of state policy and violence in upholding systemic racism and white supremacy.

As a research institute committed to social justice, we believe that public policy is an essential vehicle for dismantling systemic injustices—including in relation to the coercive power of the state and state violence against Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, economic and gender inequalities, migration and citizenship, poverty, race-blind data collection, housing and food insecurity, and inequities in health and education, among others. We know our work is far from done: we have a responsibility to document, challenge and propose solutions to racism and white supremacy. This co-publication is an effort to raise awareness about the history of anti-Asian racism and dispossession in British Columbia and the impacts that history still has today. Thank you to John Price, Lorene Oikawa and the NAJC for inviting us to collaborate on this project.

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Introduction

IN 2012, THE BRITISH COLUMBIA LEGISLATURE ADOPTED A MOTION introduced by Naomi Yamamoto, the first person of Japanese heritage elected to the provincial legislature, to apologize for events during World War II when “Japanese Canadians were incarcerated in internment camps in the interior of BC and their property seized.”¹ Celebrated by some, the motion also had its critics, and now the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) has asked the BC government go beyond the 2012 motion, fully acknowledge its own responsibility, and adopt initiatives that would assure the events of that era are never repeated. In this exclusive series, we examine what the NAJC is asking for and why. The series drills down into the provincial government’s role in the 1941–49 period, highlighting the impact on Japanese Canadians and illustrating why the community may indeed have a strong case. These articles rely on the foundational research conducted by Ken Adachi, Ann Sunahara, Roy Miki, Mona Oikawa, and others, as well as on research conducted in Library and Archives Canada, the BC Archives, the City of Victoria Archives, University of McGill Archives, local newspapers, and interviews with Japanese Canadians to whom the author is indebted. The research is in preparation for a new book, *Beyond White Supremacy: Race, Indigeneity and Pacific Canada* (forthcoming). Full disclosure of BC government documents related to the uprooting remains elusive.

1 Canada. *Debates of the Legislative Assembly, 7 May 2012 (Hon. N. Yamamoto, BC Liberal)*. <https://www.leg.bc.ca/content/Hansard/39th4th/H0507pm-02.pdf>.

1. Redress: Again?

The provincial 2012 resolution offered its regrets for what happened, but failed to acknowledge its own role in the devastation of the community, or to provide any measures of redress.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF JAPANESE CANADIANS (NAJC) has asked the British Columbia government to fully account for its actions that led to the uprooting, dispossession and exile of Japanese Canadians from the coast from 1941 to 1949, and to negotiate an appropriate agreement to assure the events of that era are never repeated.

The NAJC presented the result of community consultations in a report titled *Recommendations for Redressing Historical Wrongs Against Japanese Canadians in BC* to Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Lisa Beare, on November 14, 2019.

The report makes five key recommendations:

1. **Enhance public school education in British Columbia.** Japanese Canadian history should be embedded in the mandatory core public elementary and high school curricula and be available online. Professional development opportunities should be available for teachers at all grade levels on the Japanese Canadian experience. Academic grants should be established for research and the development of teaching tools and a digital library on Japanese Canadian history.
2. **Take concrete steps to combat racism and discrimination.** We encourage the BC Government to create an independent body to review and assess the BC Government's existing anti-racism strategy in consultation with affected communities and service providers. The independent body should also develop and coordinate BC-based anti-racism programs, services, and education resources, as well as developing policies to counter growing incidents of hate-motivated actions and speech.
3. **Raise public awareness through memorialization.** Funding should be provided to sustain the maintenance and operations of new and existing museums (especially the Nikkei National Museum), historic sites, and monuments, and to reclaim historic community spaces. To further reinforce memorialization, an official commemorative day should be established to celebrate the franchise and free movement granted to Japanese Canadians in 1949, accompanied by the construction of a physical memorial.
4. **Create a Japanese Canadian community legacy fund.** Establish a fund administered by the Japanese Canadian community to support community development programs, activities, and needs such as: seniors' care and housing, community wellness and healing programs, community gathering programs to rebuild fragile communities, scholarships for post-secondary students of Japanese Canadian descent, and anti-hate initiatives.

5. **Deliver a formal apology acknowledging the BC government’s role.** We seek a formal acknowledgement of the wrongs committed by former BC Governments that led to the injustices faced by Japanese Canadians who suffered in mind, body, and spirit, and a sincere apology to those surviving Japanese Canadians directly affected by the injustices of incarceration, forced displacement, dispossession, and exile. The apology should be delivered by the BC Premier in the Provincial Legislature and the wording developed in consultation with the Japanese Canadian community.²

“The National Association of Japanese Canadians is seeking swift action and partnership from the BC government to implement the measures recommended in the report. Implementation of the redress measures are fundamental steps in the reconciliation process with Japanese Canadians and will assist the province to move forward as a welcoming and inclusive society,” states the NAJC.

Federal sanctions against the community are well known and in 1988 the federal government provided redress, but unfortunately the provincial government’s role remains shrouded even though it passed a government apology in 2012.

The provincial 2012 resolution offered its regrets for what happened, but failed to acknowledge its own role in the devastation of the community, or to provide any measures of redress. Even worse, the government failed to consult the NAJC beforehand.

Community disenchantment with the provincial motion culminated in a NAJC decision to take action to address the problem.

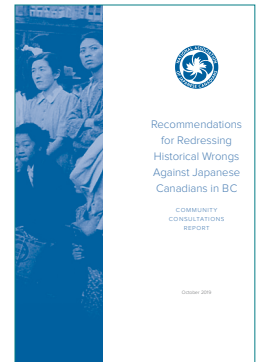
NAJC president, Lorene Oikawa, is ready:

We look forward to negotiating with the BC Government on the next steps for meaningful measures to redress the violation of rights and financial and other losses for 22,000 Japanese Canadians, and to address the intergenerational impacts of government actions. By helping to ensure a degree of justice for Japanese Canadians, the BC government can help safeguard against any such future injustices.³

For the past five months, a Redress Steering Committee has held extensive consultations with communities in British Columbia and across the country. It has also coordinated an online consultation forum to determine what might be included in a submission to the provincial government regarding appropriate measures it might take to help move the healing process forward. A small grant from the BC government assisted the largely volunteer effort.

Community meetings were held in Burnaby, Kamloops, Vernon, Kelowna, Nanaimo, Victoria, Vancouver, and New Denver as well as in Toronto, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Calgary, Ottawa, and Edmonton. The cross-country consultations were necessary because the majority of over 20,000 Japanese Canadians who were uprooted during the war never returned to BC.

The federal government addressed its wrongdoing in 1988 after a long campaign by Japanese Canadians and their allies across the country. Art Miki and Maryka Omatsu, negotiators of the 1988 Federal Redress Agreement, stepped up to co-chair the BC Redress Committee on behalf of the NAJC.



THE NAJC CONSULTATION REPORT COVER. THE REPORT'S CONTENTS WILL ONLY BE RELEASED AFTER BEING SUBMITTED TO THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT.

The cross-country consultations were necessary because the majority of over 20,000 Japanese Canadians who were uprooted during the war never returned to BC.

2 National Association of Japanese Canadians. *Recommendations for Redressing Historical Wrongs Against Japanese Canadians in BC: Community Consultations Report* (Vancouver: National Association of Japanese Canadians, 2019), 3. Available at: http://najc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NAJC_BC_Redress_report_only20191031.1421.pdf.

3 Correspondence with Lorene Oikawa, November 12, 2019.

BRIAN MULRONEY AND
ART MIKI SIGN THE 1988
REDRESS AGREEMENT.
MARYKA OMATSU IS
SECOND FROM THE RIGHT.
COURTESY NIKKEI NATIONAL
MUSEUM, 2010.32.27



Many people in the province remain ignorant of the virulent racism that was the culture of BC for much of its past. Not only did the BC government dispossess First Nations, it alone passed over 170 anti-Asian measures.

Omatsu believes many people in the province remain ignorant of the virulent racism that was the culture of BC for much of its past. Not only did the BC government dispossess First Nations, it alone passed over 170 anti-Asian measures.

“Still,” says Omatsu, “in perusing the BC education curriculum for reference to the Japanese Canadian experience, there is very little. Often all it says is that Japanese Canadians were interned as were Ukrainians and Germans.”⁴

Though Ukrainians and Germans suffered from discrimination, the dispossession of Japanese Canadians was on a different level, says Omatsu.

“Our communities were destroyed and people came through this experience traumatized, with accelerated loss of language and culture and a 90 percent inter-marriage rate...that trauma of this magnitude has intergenerational impact is accepted as fact.”

Raising redress issues can pose dangers. A recent opinion piece supporting BC redress prompted this anonymous response: “What a laugh. How long are Japanese Canadians going to milk this issue? Have they no shame?”⁵

Such resistance is not new to Mary Kitagawa (Murakami). Uprooted with her parents and siblings from Salt Spring Island, she led a long campaign to have the University of British Columbia address its responsibility for kicking out Japanese Canadian students: “First of all, I found out that UBC administrators knew nothing about the Japanese Canadian experience,” she says.

“I more or less had to educate them, and it took a long time.”

She’s unsure whether things are better: “Whenever we speak, people are stunned that such a thing occurred. A lot of people, especially young people, are unaware of what happened.”

Recent research suggests she and the NAJC may have a case.

4 Maryka Omatsu, in discussion with the author, September 29, 2019.

5 Jordan Stanger-Ross, “Japanese Canadians Deserve Justice,” *Globe and Mail*, September 20, 2019, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-japanese-canadians-deserve-justice-from-bc/>.

The only major study on redress education, by Dr. Alexandra Wood, concluded that educational efforts were lacking and that “the federal and provincial government must work harder to demonstrate that their apologies are more than empty pledges, and to counter charges that multiculturalism policies whitewash the past.”⁶

Masako Fukawa, a well-known writer and educator who lobbied the provincial government to provide a learning resource about the Japanese Canadian experience recalls she had “a running battle with the then deputy minister of education to get them to fund such a resource.”

Eventually they did, Fukawa says, but problems remained: “Teachers have a lot of say regarding what is taught in the classroom and they teach what they themselves have been taught, so unless we work with them the education just won’t happen.”

Ignorance surfaced during the recent election when Maxime Bernier’s People’s Party of Canada misused a photograph of Japanese Canadians boarding a train in Slocan, prompting the National Association of Japanese Canadians to respond:

This photo depicted in Mr. Bernier’s video is not a moment of welcoming new Canadians. It is a moment depicting Japanese Canadians being derided and subjected to sweeping, merciless political violence. We remain puzzled if Mr. Bernier endorses such actions or if this was an error as a result of ignorance to past injustice by the Canadian government.⁷

The NAJC hopes that legacy measures suggested in their submission to the BC government will help overcome the ignorance.

“Only a negotiated agreement between the Government of BC and the NAJC will resolve this long standing historical wrong,” states Omatsu. “Just as the Japanese Canadian community did not accept the 2012 apology, which was written without formal consultation, the Japanese Canadian community will reject a ‘take it or leave it’ offer.”



THE MURAKAMI FAMILY OF SALT SPRING ISLAND BEFORE BEING UPROOTED. MARY MURAKAMI (KITAGAWA) IS SEATED IN THE MIDDLE. COURTESY OF SALT SPRING ARCHIVES, 2004005024.

6 Alexandra L. Wood, “Challenging History: Public Education and Reluctance to Remember the Japanese Canadian Experience in British Columbia,” *Historical Studies in Education*, 25.2 (Fall 2013), 81.

7 Alex Miki, “Japanese Canadians Respond to Maxime Bernier,” *National Association of Japanese Canadians*, September 26, 2019, <http://najc.ca/japanese-canadians-respond-to-maxime-bernier-september-26-2019/>.

2. BC engineers a coup



VICTORIA-BORN POET
EIKO HENMI (ETHERIDGE),
CIRCA 1980. FORCED FROM
THEIR VICTORIA HOME, SHE
AND THE HENMI FAMILY
ENDED UP IN MONTREAL.
COURTESY OF MCGILL
UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES.

ON DECEMBER 7, 1941, the Japanese imperial air force bombed Pearl Harbor.

Soon after, Ottawa passed regulations that required all Japanese nationals and anyone naturalized after 1922 to report to the Registrar of Enemy Aliens. Further measures included the arrest and internment of 38 Japanese designated potential threats to national security, the impounding of nearly 1,200 fishing boats operated by Japanese Canadians (only Canadians were permitted licenses), and the shuttering of three Japanese-language newspapers.

The provincial government ordered the closure of 59 Japanese-language schools in the province.

To many people, then and now, these measures were only to be expected—it was war and British Columbia faced Japan’s imperial forces across the Pacific. To Victoria-born poet Eiko Henmi, however, it was a “terrible ordeal which started for many of us on December 7, 1941.”⁸

Japanese Canadians complained that the initial and subsequent measures far exceeded those taken against Germans or Italians after Canada declared war on Germany and Italy in 1939: “There is some foundation to the complaint,” conceded undersecretary of state Norman Robertson, even at the time.⁹

After the initial restrictions, the federal government was reluctant to take further measures. It saw little security threat and was leery of further trampling on the rights of the Japanese Canadian minority since nearly two-thirds of approximately 23,000 were citizens.

However, over the next 11 weeks Ottawa radically shifted its view. On February 24, 1942 it introduced the first in a series of laws and regulations that forcibly evicted all Japanese Canadians from the coast, moved them into detention camps, confiscated and sold off their properties, and attempted to permanently banish them from the province.

8 Eiko Henmi, “Centennial Year - 1977,” (MG4247-31-Part 1, McGill University Archives, Montreal), 1.

9 In response to accusations about racism towards Japanese Canadians, Norman Robertson, the undersecretary of state for external affairs wrote “it must be admitted that there is some foundation” to the complaint of discrimination. Norman Robertson to Mr. MacNamara, June 5, 1942, (Library and Archives Canada, MG 27 III, B-5, Vol. 25, 67–25 (3)).

What happened in those 11 fateful weeks?

Japanese Canadian researchers such as Ken Adachi, Ann Sunahara, and Roy Miki, among others, have illuminated the events that led to this uprooting. Close scrutiny of these crucial 11 weeks reveals how the BC government was a key instigator in a policy coup that redirected federal policy, and forever changed the lives of Japanese Canadians.

By the time of Pearl Harbor, a racist state dominated the coast.

Among BC's first legislative actions after confederation in 1871 was to disenfranchise the majority of BC inhabitants—approximately 40,000 First Nations and Chinese—while enfranchising all white males. A minority of white, male settlers had seized power.

The BC legislature proceeded to dispossess First Nations of their lands, refused to discuss treaties, successfully lobbied for federal restrictions against Asian immigration, and added South Asian and Japanese Canadians to those prohibited from voting.

When Tomekichi Homma challenged the ban on voting in 1900, the BC government refused to accept two lower court decisions overturning its voting ban. Instead, the BC government alone appealed to the judicial committee of the Privy Council in London without federal backing. The ban was upheld.

British Columbia had become a province like no other.

When Japan, a Pacific power, declared war, racist ideologues on the coast including Hilda Glynn-Ward, author of the infamous novel *The Writing on the Wall*, Sidney D'Esterre of Comox, and others raised the cry to round-up Japanese Canadians.

But they were met with opposition. The first-wave feminist Nellie McClung had begun to work with Japanese Canadian writers in the 1930s and defended them: "Canadian Japanese are not to blame for the treacherous attack on Pearl Harbor... We must have precautions, but not persecutions."

Muriel Kitagawa, a writer for the English-language newspaper *The New Canadian* recorded: "The majority of the people are decent and fair-minded and they say so in letters and editorials."¹⁰

Eiko Henmi and Victoria's Japanese Canadian community had gone out of the way to prove their loyalty to Canada. The Japanese Tea Garden in Gorge Park, built by the Takata family, had become a favourite, the community celebrated the visit of King George in 1939, and had raised funds for the war effort.

Nevertheless, BC premier at the time, John Hart, head of the newly formed Liberal-Conservative coalition, initiated the move to uproot: "When Attorney-General Maitland and I were in Ottawa before Christmas [1941], the seriousness of the Japanese problem was discussed with federal authorities, and officials were urged to remove the menace of Fifth Column activity."¹¹

Hart said he was consulting defense officials and had made direct representations to Mackenzie King, the prime minister. Hart and many others in his coalition cabinet wanted all people of Japanese heritage out.



TOMEKICHI HOMMA SUED THE BC GOVERNMENT FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE. HE LOST HIS CASE AND DIED IN A DETENTION CAMP IN 1945. THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT HAS DONE LITTLE, IF ANYTHING, TO COMMEMORATE THIS CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER. COURTESY OF NIKKEI NATIONAL MUSEUM, 2013.55.4.

On February 24, 1942 it introduced the first in a series of laws and regulations that forcibly evicted all Japanese Canadians from the coast, moved them into detention camps, confiscated and sold off their properties, and attempted to permanently banish them from the province.

¹⁰ Muriel Kitagawa, *This Is My Own* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985), 71.

¹¹ "BC Gov't May Act in Japanese Problem," *Vancouver Sun*, January 5, 1942, 13.

JAPANESE TEA GARDEN
AT THE GORGE, CIRCA
1915. BUILT BY THE TAKATA
BROTHERS AND A FAVOURITE
SPOT FOR VICTORIANS,
INCLUDING EMILY CARR, THE
GARDENS WERE DESTROYED
AFTER THE TAKATAS WERE
UPROOTED IN 1942. THE
VICTORIA NIKKEI CULTURAL
SOCIETY IS WORKING TO
HAVE IT COMMEMORATED.
COURTESY OF ESQUIMALT
CITY ARCHIVES, V986.18.6.



The BC government was a key instigator in a policy coup that redirected federal policy, and forever changed the lives of Japanese Canadians.

A turning point came in January, when BC cabinet minister George Pearson led a delegation to Ottawa to meet with federal officials. At Victoria's behest, the head of the BC Provincial Police, T.W.S. Parsons, accompanied Pearson to Ottawa where they lobbied hard for the forced eviction of all Japanese Canadians (citizens and residents).

Pearson and his delegation ran into opposition. Lt. Gen. Maurice Pope, vice chief of general staff, Hugh Keenleyside, Henry Angus, and Escott Reid of External affairs, and RCMP commissioner S.T. Wood all opposed their agenda that, according to the minutes of that meeting, included ridding the province of all Japanese Canadians who they considered "untrustworthy," and a "menace to public safety."¹²

Unable to force through mass evictions, Pearson warned the federal government not to expect "the Government of British Columbia to be enthusiastic or very effective," in selling federal policies in BC.¹³

Maurice Pope, vice-chief of the Canadian Army recalled that after he and others had expressed few security concerns regarding Japanese Canadians in BC, "all hell broke loose. I thought for a moment that my former friends might charge across the table to man-handle me. Their rage was a sight to behold."¹⁴

12 Conference on the Japanese Problem in British Columbia Minutes, January 8–9, 1942, Library and Archives Canada, RG 117, Vol 1, 2 (part 1), 6.

13 Ibid., 8.

14 Maurice A. Pope, *Soldiers and Politicians: The Memoirs of Lt.-Gen. Maurice A. Pope* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 177.

Escott Reid recalled that when he heard these views he felt “that this was surely the way the Nazis talked about Jewish Germans.”¹⁵

Such resistance to mass removal of Japanese Canadians incited Hart, Pearson, Maitland and others to develop a concerted campaign to force the federal government’s hand.

On January 14 the federal government began to concede to provincial pressure, announcing new measures including the forced removal of Japanese nationals.

John Hart congratulated the federal government on the measures and clarified the provincial role: “The government of this province made strong representations to the Dominion government in connection with the Japanese resident in British Columbia. Attorney-General Maitland and myself took the matter up personally in Ottawa when in Ottawa before Christmas, and since our return further representations have been made by letter.”¹⁶

In opposition, Grace MacInnis, newly elected Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) member of the legislature, asserted that certain coalition members offered race hatred as a substitute for democratic practice and urged the provincial government to work for democracy.¹⁷

Undaunted, the BC attorney-general, R.L. Maitland stated in the legislature: “I do not feel safe with the Japanese on this coast...I am rather sorry that our position is not so well appreciated at Ottawa.”¹⁸

Battle losses during the war may have incited prejudice among some in BC, but it was people in positions of power and influence that fomented the policy coup. The provincial government’s words and actions gave license to racist ideologues, municipal governments, and editorialists—fusing what had been a diffuse and contested racist campaign into a coordinated, multi-level effort.

T.W.S. Parsons, the head of the provincial police force who had gone to Ottawa, wrote to provincial attorney-general R.L. Maitland, supporting mass removal of all Japanese Canadians. Maitland contacted federal cabinet minister Ian Mackenzie with the information.¹⁹

Premier Hart, responding to a Victoria City Council resolution demanding mass removal, assured council that “every effort has been made by the Provincial Government to have Japanese aliens moved from vulnerable zone.”²⁰

The province set the tone, encouraging demands where few existed. Canadian soldiers in Victoria continued to bring their uniforms for cleaning to Japanese Canadian-run businesses, a fact that so disturbed the Women’s Auxiliary of the Canadian Forestry Corps that they demanded the removal of “all Japanese wherever born, irrespective of age or sex,” and an end to patronage of Japanese businesses.²¹

The campaign escalated with threats of violence from ideologues. Though there were only isolated cases of violence or intimidation, the threats created a new notion—Japanese Canadians had to be “saved” from violence, generating a brilliant rationalization—what was needed was a mass “evacuation.”

By the time of Pearl Harbor, a racist state dominated the coast.

15 Escott Reid, *Radical Mandarin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1922), 163.

16 “Premier Hart Pleased by Action on Japanese,” *Vancouver Sun*, January 14, 1942, 1.

17 “Woman MLA Cautions BC on ‘Race Hatred,’” *Vancouver Sun*, January 16, 1942, 4.

18 “BC Government to Create Permanent Postwar Committee,” *Victoria Daily Times*, January 31, 1942.

19 As cited in Patricia Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), ft. 79, 328.

20 John Hart to M.F. Hunter, Esq., February 16, 1942, Special Communication Received, City of Victoria Archives, BC. CSR 13.

21 “Women Seek Removal of All Japanese,” *British Daily Colonist*, February 14, 1942, 5.

The government issued a proclamation expelling all people of Japanese heritage, regardless of gender or age, from the coast. It was the beginning of the end for thriving Japanese Canadian communities in BC.

The only problem? Japanese Canadians felt no need for evacuation.

A turning point came on February 23 when CCF leader Harold Winch made a special trip to Victoria to meet with John Hart.²² Together they phoned federal cabinet minister Ian Mackenzie in Ottawa to demand the mass removal of all people of Japanese heritage from the coast. The provincial CCF had abandoned the nascent anti-racism of Grace MacInnis and efforts by the federal party to obtain the franchise for Japanese Canadians.

The next day, the federal cabinet met and passed Order-in-Council P.C. 1486 empowering the cabinet to expel anyone, including Canadians, from the coast, now designated a protected area.

Two days later the government issued a proclamation expelling all people of Japanese heritage, regardless of gender or age, from the coast. It was the beginning of the end for thriving Japanese Canadian communities in BC. As curfews were imposed, Eiko Henmi responded in *The New Canadian*:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day.
The bowing Japs wind slowly out of sight,
The refugee homeward plots his weary way
And leaves the world to darkness and the whites.²³

From their positions of power, the BC premier, cabinet members, and government officials had helped coordinate a campaign that encouraged racist demagogues, editorial writers and municipal councils to pressure Ottawa and scapegoat Japanese Canadians for Japan's war.

The BC government's successful campaign for mass displacement was only the beginning of its involvement—more was to come.

22 "Winch Insists Japs' Removal Be Immediate," *Victoria Daily Times*, February 23, 1942, 13.

23 Cinderella, "Femme-Fare," *New Canadian*, February 27, 1942, 4.

3. BC polices the camps

YOSHIO JOHN MADOKORO HAD BEEN A FISHER as long as he could remember. He and his family lived and worked out of Tofino. A Canadian born in Steveston, he had taken up fishing at 15 after his dad died. His fishboat was impounded along with hundreds of others soon after Pearl Harbor.

In his recollection of those years, Madokoro recalled being forced to leave Tofino: “By the time the *Maquinna* came in it was toward evening. We were all standing on the dock. It is vivid in my memory. I was saying goodbye to my white friends and watching the families. People would come up to me because I was the secretary and they would say, “Can I take my camera?” And I would say, “How should I know? Sure, go ahead, take it”.²⁴

“In Port Alberni, the Provincial Police were waiting for us at the docks,” continued Madokoro, “they took us to the local police station. After they checked their lists, something that would become routine to us, we were loaded on the CN train to Nanaimo. We were becoming more known as anonymous numbers and less as individual members of a community. You know that is what really hurts even to this day: we were stripped of our identities and treated as “undesirables” even though we had not committed any crime. Our crime was being Japanese Canadian! Canada has a funny way of dealing with its own citizens.”²⁵

As Yoshio Madokoro recalled, the British Columbia Provincial Police (BCPP), a provincial agency, was involved from day one in the uprooting. Nor was the province’s involvement restricted to its police force—it was also a key player in the British Columbia Security Commission, set up to supervise the uprooting. And whenever necessary, the province intervened directly with the federal government to impose their policies.

The British Columbia Provincial Police

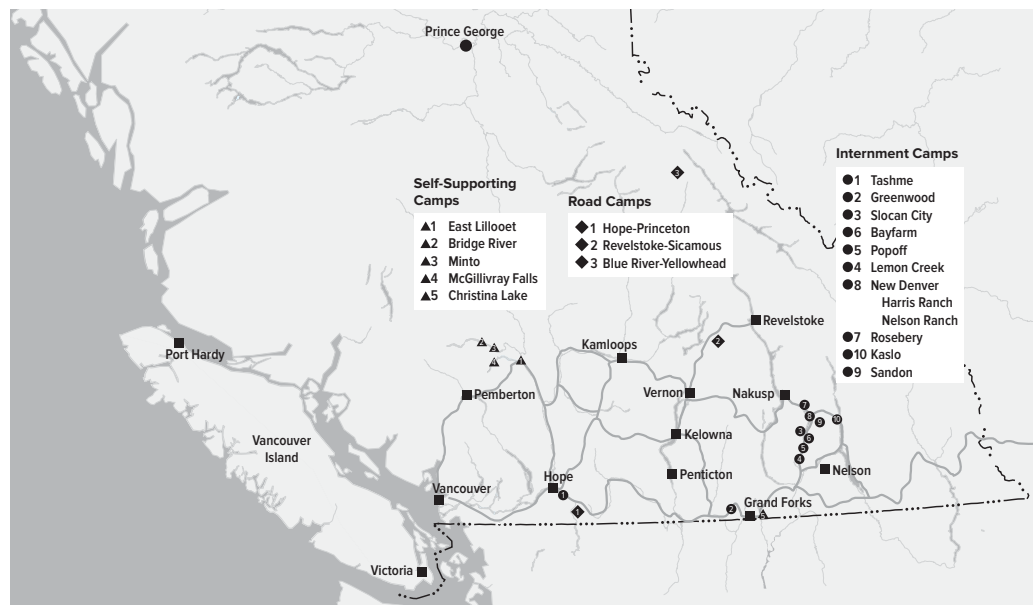
Founded when the province was still a British colony, the BCPP expanded to a force of over 500 officers in 120 detachments before it was disbanded in 1950. As recounted previously, the head of the BCPP, T.W.S. Parsons had accompanied provincial labour minister George S. Pearson to



YOSHIO JOHN MADOKORO AND MARY MIKI KIMOTO MARRY IN TOFINO CHURCH, 1938. MADOKORO FAMILY PHOTO.

24 Yoshio John Madokoro, interviewed in Bob Bossin, *Settling Clayoquot (Sound Heritage Series 33)* (Victoria: Province of British Columbia, Ministry of Provincial Secretary and Govt. Service, 1981), 64. Available at: <http://centre.nikkeiplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2006-Volume-11-No.-4.pdf>.

25 As recounted in “Yoshio ‘Johnny’ Madokoro,” edited by Dennis Madokoro, *Nikkei Images*, Vol. 11, No.4, Winter 2006.



We were becoming more known as anonymous numbers and less as individual members of a community. You know that is what really hurts even to this day: we were stripped of our identities and treated as “undesirables” even though we had not committed any crime. Our crime was being Japanese Canadian!

Ottawa in early 1942 where he backed the provincial government’s position to clear the coast of Japanese Canadians.

Upon his return to Victoria, he wrote to the provincial attorney-general, R.L. Maitland, to press for the mass removal of Japanese Canadians, a message that Maitland then forwarded to Ottawa.²⁶

Shortly after the federal government acceded to the province’s campaign for mass uprooting, Maitland wrote to the RCMP assuring them that provincial and municipal police forces would fully cooperate in forcibly removing Japanese Canadians from their homes.

According to Lynne Stonier-Newman, author of *Policing a Pioneer Province*: “The uprooting proceeded methodically. The RCMP handled most of the work in Vancouver and New Westminster, and the BCPP organized the exodus from Vancouver Island and the Coast”²⁷

Yoshio Madokoro recalled: “When we got there, they took us to Hastings Park and what they gave us was a horse’s stall. You’ve never seen anything like it, just a horse’s stall. We had to do our own cleaning up and everything. What a smell!

From Hastings Park, the BCPP “assumed almost all responsibility for policing the Japanese nationals and citizens as they were transferred to the interior.”²⁸

According to former BCPP officer, Donald N. Brown, thousands “were interned in various camps in the interior of British Columbia—all under the control of the BCPP.”²⁹

The BCPP, at the direction of the province, had become an integral part of the uprooting from start to finish. But the province’s role did not stop there.

26 As cited in Patricia Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), ft. 79, 328.

27 As cited in Lynne Stonier-Newman, *Policing a Pioneer Province: The BC Provincial Police, 1858–1950* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1991), 219.

28 According to Lynne Stonier-Newman, *Policing a Pioneer Province: The BC Provincial Police, 1858–1950* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1991), 320.

29 Donald N. Brown, *Why: The Last Years of the British Columbia Provincial Police* (Burnaby: Pacific Forensic Science Consultants Services Ltd, 2000), 2.

The British Columbia Security Commission

Provincial appointees were key figures in the British Columbia Security Commission (BCSC), established in March 1942 to supervise the uprooting and establishment of the camps.

At the top, the province agreed to the appointment of BC Provincial Police assistant commissioner T.S. Shirras, one of a triumvirate of commissioners to head the Security Commission.

The Security Commission's advisory committee included provincial attorney-general, R.L. Maitland; minister of labour, George S. Pearson; and the leader of the CCF, Harold Winch.

The Security Commission's plan to ship men out to work camps without their families generated resistance. Dozens of men, including Johnny Madokoro formed what became known as the Nisei Mass Evacuation Group, demanding that families be kept together. A riot broke out in Vancouver's Immigration Building with protesters pitching the contents of rooms out of windows.

Even then, the Security Commission refused to allow husbands and wives to stay together. In scenes reminiscent of Donald Trump's border policies today, families were torn apart. Johnny Madokoro ended up in a work camp in Ontario, his wife Mary and the children in the Slocan detention centre in the Kootenays.

Those that continued to protest were shipped out to prisoner-of-war camps as recounted by Robert K. Okazaki in *The Nisei Mass Evacuation Group and P.O.W. Camp 101*. Though Canadians, they were illegally detained in the camps for years, denied even basic rights under the War Measures Act.³⁰

Back in detention camps in BC, travel outside of the designated sites was banned by the Security Commission under the War Measures Act:

No person of Japanese origin at any work camp, village, farm, municipality or other area to and in which they have been duly authorized or directed to proceed shall leave such place without the authority of the Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police or Provincial Police delegated by the Commission to carry out such orders and supervision.³¹

The BC Security Commission's final report concluded that "this Commission could hardly have functioned without the assistance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the British Columbia Provincial Police," the latter under the control of the provincial government.³²

For many of those incarcerated in camps, it was impossible to make ends meet without working. Still, the provincial government refused to let detained Japanese Canadians work in the forests. Provincial secretary of state at the time, George S. Pearson, wrote to the federal government: "Re Wire October twenty-eighth reference to Japanese our government is not satisfied that it is wise to allow Japanese to work in lumber industry in British Columbia without police supervision."³³



MARY MIKI MADOKORO, DETAINED IN SLOCAN WITH HER CHILDREN AND MOTHER-IN-LAW, INE MADOKORO. CREDIT: MADOKORO FAMILY PHOTO.

In scenes reminiscent of Donald Trump's border policies today, families were torn apart.

30 Robert K. Okazaki, *The Nisei Mass Evacuation Group and P.O.W. Camp 101* (Ontario: Markham Litho, 1996).

31 As cited in Roy Ito, *Stories of My People* (Ontario: S-20 and Nisei Veterans Association, 1994), 230.

32 British Columbia Security Commission, *Removal of Japanese from Protected Areas* (Vancouver: British Columbia Security Commission, 1942), 16. Available at: <https://archive.org/details/RemovalOfJapaneseFromProtectedAreas/page/n19/mode/2up>.

33 George S Pearson, Minister of Labour, letter to A MacNamara, Associate Deputy Minister of Labour, Ottawa, November 3, 1942. (LAC, MG 27, III, B-5, Vol. 25, 70-25-A12).

The provincial government also denied education to thousands of children who remained in detention in camps in BC.

The premier, John Hart, reiterated this in a telegram to Ottawa:

Referring to our conversation regarding the proposal to employ Japanese in timber cutting, please be advised that this matter was caucused quite recently and was definitely turned down. The members were absolutely against the Japanese being employed for that purpose. I would appreciate your advising the Honourable C.D. Howe as to the result of this Caucus.³⁴

While detained in Slocan, Mary Madokoro struggled to get by, often using her last pennies to buy food for the family, including her young children. It took over two years before the family eventually reunited, in Toronto, thousands of miles away from their beloved coast. By then their Tofino home had been sold, without permission, as had Yoshio's boat.

Like many Japanese Canadians, the Madokoro family survived the uprooting but at what cost?

A decade would pass before Yoshio, Mary and the family could return to BC. When they eventually got back, in 1953, the town of Tofino refused to allow Japanese Canadians to return. So, the Madokoros bought a house in Port Alberni. Their daughter, Marlene, still lives there: "As a third generation Canadian of Japanese descent, I am proud of my grand-mothers, parents, aunts and uncles who showed integrity, strength and resilience during their uprooting and internment during WWII."

The provincial government was deeply involved in what happened to Marlene's family and thousands of other Japanese Canadians. Not only was it a main instigator in the uprooting, not only were its agencies and officials involving on a daily basis in overseeing the camps, it also denied education to thousands of children who remained in detention in camps in BC.

³⁴ John S. Hart, Premier, telegram to Ian Mackenzie, Minister of Pensions. February 17, 1943 (LAC, LAC, MG 27, III, B-5, Vol. 25, 70-25-A12).

4. Punishing the children

PERHAPS NO OTHER ISSUE CLEARLY REVEALS THE CALLOUSNESS of the BC government in regard to Japanese Canadians than its maltreatment of the communities' children.

It began the day after Pearl Harbor when S.J. Willis, BC superintendent of education, ordered all Japanese language schools shut down on authority of the Council of Public Education, a cabinet agency.³⁵

On the basis of a single complaint about Japanese Canadian kids in Duncan schools, BC education minister H.G. Perry then ordered school inspectors to undertake a province-wide investigation, indelibly marking Japanese Canadian students in the public school system.³⁶

Ironically, A.S. Christie, trustee and chair of the Victoria School Board's education committee reported "that there had been no signs of anti-Japanese feeling in Victoria's schools, and such tolerance is a credit alike to the white and Japanese pupils."³⁷

Seventy-six Japanese Canadian students attended public schools in Victoria and boys in grade six and above had been participating in cadet training. That was not to last, however.

On February 20, 1942, Perry introduced a provincial Order-in-Council stating it was "not deemed advisable under existing circumstances that any student of Japanese racial origin be allowed to wear the uniform of a school Cadet Corps," and therefore that "no such student be allowed to enroll in a Cadet Corps or to wear a cadet uniform in the Public Schools of the Province."³⁸

Similarly, the University of British Columbia expelled Japanese Canadians enrolled in the Canadian Officers Training Corps.

The uprooting that took place in April 1945 saw children torn from schools up and down the coast. Michiko "Midge" Ayukawa recalled: "I am twelve years old and should be back at Strathcona School. One day, restless and bewildered, I went for a walk with my six-year-old brother. We went to my school and sat on a low fence and I stared at the window from which my Grade Seven

The uprooting that took place in April 1945 saw children torn from schools up and down the coast.

35 S.J. Willis to Tsutae Sato Esq, as cited in Tsutae and Eiko Sato, *Kodomo to tomo ni 50 Nen* [Teaching Japanese Canadian Children for 50 Years], December 8, 1941; "Japanese Schools to Close in BC by Special Decree," *British Colonist*, December 11, 1941, 9.

36 "Study Status of Japanese," *British Daily Colonist*, December 9, 1941, 9.

37 "Tolerance is Given Praise," *British Daily Colonist*, January 16, 1942, 11.

38 Council of Public Instruction, Order-in-Council, February 20, 1942. Appreciation to Patrick Dunae who unearthed this document a number of years ago.

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS AT
PINE CRESCENT ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL, BAY FARM, BC. THE
BC GOVERNMENT REFUSED
TO PAY ANYTHING FOR THESE
STUDENTS' EDUCATION.
NIKKEI NATIONAL
MUSEUM, 2012.29.2.2.31.



The BC government announced legislation in early 1943 that would exempt the province and local governments from providing education to Japanese Canadian youth in the camps.

teacher had often looked outside. I “willed” her to spot me and perhaps wave a greeting; but to my disappointment, she didn’t.”³⁹

Shunted away from the coast and into camps, parents and volunteers scrambled to establish makeshift schools.

The BC government announced legislation in early 1943 that would exempt the province and local governments from providing education to Japanese Canadian youth in the camps.

The New Canadian, the only journal published by Japanese Canadians during the war, responded: “The British Columbia Provincial Government should continue to bear its share in educational costs, just as it had been doing for over forty years before Pearl Harbour, and in accordance with its constitutional responsibility.”⁴⁰

Matters came to a head after Humphrey Mitchell, the federal labour minister, learned of the “unqualified refusal of the Government of the Province of British Columbia to assume any responsibility, either financial, or in the matter of administrative direction, in respect to the education of children of Japanese persons evacuated from the protected areas of British Columbia to other parts of the province.”⁴¹

Mitchell communicated with Mackenzie King, the prime minister, who immediately cabled provincial premier John Hart. In the cable, and a longer letter that followed, King urged Hart to refrain from introducing such legislation, asking for the province’s assistance in establishing courses, directing work and training of teachers.

39 Midge Ayukawa, “Lemon Creek Memories,” *Nikkei Images*, Vol. 17, No.1, Spring 2012. Available at: <http://centre.nikkeiplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2012-Volume-17-No.-1.pdf>

40 As summarized in its editorial “Some Facts on the School Issue,” *New Canadian*, February 13, 1943, 2.

41 A. MacNamara, “Memorandum to the Minister of Labour,” February 9, 1943. LAC, MG27III, B-5, 67-29, 1.



GRADE ONE STUDENTS
STUDYING IN TAR PAPER
SHACKS, NEW DENVER,
CIRCA 1943. LIBRARY AND
ARCHIVES CANADA, C-067492.

Hart agreed to drop the legislation in return for King's promise not to press for the province's share of education funding but gave no response to King's request for provincial administrative assistance. Frank Moritsugu and the Ghost Town Teachers Historical Society concluded in *Teaching in Canadian Exile*: "the BC government refused to bear any responsibility for the education of the children moved within the province. Not only that, the BC department of education refused to even provide free textbooks for the children, or read their papers."⁴²

As a result, over 3,000 school-aged children had to make do with makeshift schools and volunteer teachers.

High school students faced even greater challenges. Because there were no qualified teachers, students could only take correspondence courses that their parents had to pay for.

Mary Keiko Kitagawa, whose family was detained in Roseberry for over two years, recalls her older sister had to walk miles from Roseberry to New Denver to get help with her correspondence courses.⁴³ The Kitagawa family scraped together the money to pay for the course—but for them and others it was an incredible hardship. "One mother sold her sewing machine rather than ask for help to buy books for her children," *The New Canadian* reported at the time.⁴⁴

Not only did the detained Japanese Canadians have to pay for correspondence courses, they were charged exorbitant fees. In the legislature CCF MLA Grace MacInnis demanded Perry explain why Japanese Canadian students had to pay nine dollars for a single course that cost others only one dollar?⁴⁵

42 Frank Moritsugu and the Ghost Town Teachers Historical Society, *Teaching in Canadian Exile* (Toronto: The Ghost Town Teachers Society, 2001), 60.

43 Mary Keiko Kitagawa, in discussion with the author, September 26, 2019.

44 "Some Facts on the School Issue," *New Canadian*, February 13, 1943, 2.

45 As cited by Patricia Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 113.

Over 3,000 school-aged children had to make do with makeshift schools and volunteer teachers.

The fact that communities banded together to meet the challenge does not exonerate the provincial government for abandoning its constitutional responsibility.

Perry said it was federal matter. Asked why he didn't ask the federal government to cover the cost, Perry declared that letting Japanese Canadians into the schools would be "selling a birthright for a mess of potage."

"I would be selling the whole school system for \$65 a kid." This was the yearly per capita amount the province was supposed to pay for each student enrolled.

Such "savings" allowed the province to project a budget surplus for 1942–43. Non-funding of the Japanese Canadian children's education over the internment years amounted to an estimated \$17 million (in current dollars).

Volunteer teachers from the community, often just out of high school, stepped in to organize basic education services for elementary schools under the supervision of Hide Hyodo (Shimizu), one of the first accredited Japanese Canadian teachers in the province.

Communities organized to build makeshift schools and many students found school classes offered a semblance of normality. The fact that communities banded together to meet the challenge does not exonerate the provincial government for abandoning its constitutional responsibility, a fact noted in a 1944 Royal Commission report:

Your Commission finds that although education is and always has been a provincial right and obligation, the Department of Education of the Province of British Columbia has refused to take any responsibility for the education of the Japanese children in the Interior Settlements although before these same children were evacuated from the Defence area this responsibility was recognized and assumed.⁴⁶

46 Canada. Department of Labour. *Report of the Royal Commission on the Welfare and Maintenance of Persons of Japanese Race Resident in Settlements in the Province of British Columbia*. [Ottawa], 1944, 10.

5. Dispossession

TORAZO AND FUKU IWASAKI HAD LIVED ON SALT SPRING ISLAND for decades. They purchased a 598-acre property on the northern part of the island, land of the Cowichan Nation then and now.⁴⁷

There they logged some of their property, cleared some of the land, farmed peas, and raised milk cows, producing seven gallons of milk a day.

The land gave them their livelihood and there they raised five children—Hideko, Mitsuko, Setsuko, Tsuruko and Ray, all of whom attended Salt Spring Central School.⁴⁸

The uprooting forced them off the island in the spring of 1942. Put on the *Princess Mary* to be taken to Hastings Park, Torazo escaped at Mayne Island—only fervid cajoling by friends and family convinced him to get back on board. It was Torazo’s first, but not his last act of resistance.

Forced to move to the town of Greenwood, Iwasaki yearned to return to his Salt Spring farm, left in the hands of the Custodian of Enemy Property as a “protective measure only.”

But he, like thousands of other detained Japanese Canadians, woke up one morning in February 1943 to find that the federal government had passed Order-in-Council 469 authorizing the sale of all Japanese Canadian property without their owners’ consent.⁴⁹ *It was a radical measure dispossessing 22,000 Japanese Canadians in a single stroke—how did it happen?*

Roy Miki in his landmark study *Redress* has documented how Ian Mackenzie, Vancouver MP and federal minister of veteran affairs, began the assault. Declaring it was “his intention as long as I remain in public life, to see they [Japanese Canadians] never come back here,” Mackenzie used his cabinet position to first propose taking Japanese Canadian farms to give to returning soldiers.

This killed two birds with one stone—stopping Japanese Canadians from returning to BC, and providing land to soldiers.⁵⁰



FORCED OFF THEIR 598 ACRE FARM, THE IWASAKI FAMILY LIVED IN THIS SHACK IN GREENWOOD. CHUCK TASAKA PHOTO.

Vancouver MP and federal minister of veteran affairs Ian Mackenzie proposed taking Japanese Canadian farms to give to returning soldiers.

47 The Iwasaki story is based on Brian Smallshaw, *The Dispossession of Japanese Canadians on Saltspring Island*, MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2017. With permission.

48 On the Iwasaki family in Greenwood see Chuck Tasaka, “Iwasaki Family of Salt Spring Island,” *Discover Nikkei* (August 14, 2017), <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2017/8/14/iwasaki-salt-spring-island/>.

49 The origins of this law are documented in John Price and Brian Smallshaw, *Questioning the Legality of the Dispossession of Japanese Canadian Land during WWII*, workbook prepared for the workshop “Challenging the Law: Dispossession and Japanese Canadians,” sponsored by the Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island Project, UVIC Faculty of Law and the Department of History, February 3, 2017.

50 Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast books, 2004), 87–110.



The BC government had early on collaborated with the federal custodian in seizing properties.

But the new law was hardly the work of Ian Mackenzie alone—it arose out of a complex convergence of forces.

Many in Victoria shared Mackenzie's determination to permanently rid BC of Japanese Canadians. In the legislature, MLA Nancy Hodges declared that all Japanese Canadians should "be returned to their own country," echoing Mackenzie and the editorial stance of the *Vancouver Sun*.^{51, 52}

J.A. Paton, MLA for Point Grey and provincial coalition member, ran an ad in the *Vancouver Sun*, asking organizations that had passed resolutions for "repatriation of the Japanese at the end of the war," to forward these resolutions to him at the legislature in Victoria.⁵³

The BC government had early on collaborated with the federal custodian in seizing properties. In August 1942, BC's deputy minister of municipal affairs, E.H. Bridgman, pressured municipalities to provide the custodian with property assessment records of Japanese Canadians.⁵⁴

Also fishing in these troubled waters was the newly established BC Rehabilitation Council led by cabinet minister H.G.T. Perry. The council was tasked with planning land use and establishing aid to returning servicemen.⁵⁵ As leader of the Rehabilitation Council, Perry went to Ottawa in early December 1942, likely participating in discussions then taking place about Order-in-Council 469.⁵⁶

Municipal politicians also chimed in. As Ann Sunahara demonstrated in *The Politics of Racism*, Vancouver city councillor George Buscombe and city planners lobbied furiously to obtain Japanese Canadian properties around Powell Street: "We don't want the Japanese to return here after the war. They are going to outbreed the whites and eventually outnumber us," stated Buscombe.⁵⁷

51 "Keep Japs Out," *Vancouver Sun*, February 19, 1943, 6b.

52 "What to Do with BC Japs," *Vancouver Sun*, February 19, 1943, 6.

53 "Japanese Repatriation," *Vancouver Sun*, February 17, 1943, 3.

54 E.H. Bridgman, Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs to M.F. Hunter, City Clerk, "Re: Japanese Taxation Questions," City of Victoria Archives, October 15, 1942, CSR 13. Author thanks Jenny Clayton for finding these documents.

55 *British Daily Colonist*, June 26, 1942, 5; *British Daily Colonist*, August 11, 1942, 5.

56 *British Daily Colonist*, December 1, 1942, 11.

57 As cited in Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Displacement of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981), 104–105.



TORAZO AND FUKU IWASAKI
WITH THEIR LAWYER, RAY
MACLEOD. VANCOUVER SUN.

For their own reasons, the Custodian of Enemy Property and the federal department of labour, responsible for supervising the detained, also pushed for dispossession, the former finding it impossible to look after the hundreds of properties they were supposed to protect; and the latter hoping any funds Japanese Canadians received would help finance their own detention, lowering potential costs to the government.

And thus was born Order-in-Council 469, enacted on January 19, 1943, empowering the government to sell all Japanese Canadian properties even without their owners' consent.

The editor of *The New Canadian* labelled it indefensible except as a "dictate of a race war."⁵⁸ Indeed, Order-in-Council 469 was the latest decree in what was adding up to an exercise in ethnic cleansing—a convergence of acute racism and heartless bureaucratic values, what Hannah Arendt described as the "banality of evil."⁵⁹

Torazo Iwasaki, however, was not prepared to surrender. He joined hundreds of other Japanese Canadians who protested the dispossession, a cauldron that birthed the Japanese Property Owners' Association. The association launched a lawsuit against the government that was tried in the Exchequer Court of Canada in the summer of 1943.⁶⁰

Appointed to try the case, Justice Thorson delayed his decision four years! Before becoming a judge of the Exchequer Court, he was a member of the federal cabinet when it made the decision to uproot Japanese Canadians.

The Iwasaki family had nothing to return to on Salt Spring Island, nor did other Japanese Canadians who had all seen their property, their homes, possessions and, most importantly, their dreams—sold for a song.

58 "Another Blow to Faith," *New Canadian*, April 10, 1943, 2.

59 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (New York: Viking Press, 1964, revised and enlarged edition).

60 A collection of protest letters held by the Custodian of Enemy Property, Vancouver Office is now available through the Héritage-Canadians portal at: http://heritage.canadians.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_c9476/1?r=0&s=1. See also Jordan Stanger-Ross, Nicholas Blomley & the Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, "'My land is worth a million dollars': How Japanese-Canadians contested their dispossession in the 1940s," *Law and History Review* 35.3 (August 2017), 711–751.

The forced sale of approximately 1,700 properties, including large forest companies, farms, and shipbuilding businesses, not to mention homes and personal effects, is the single greatest case of dispossession in Canada since governments seized the lands of First Nations.

When Thorson finally delivered his judgment in 1947, he made the ridiculous ruling that Custodian of Japanese properties was not a servant of the Crown and had the case thrown out.

In the meantime, Iwasaki saw his property sold without his consent in 1946—one of the purchasers was Gavin Mouat, agent for the Custodian of Enemy Property and purported friend of the community. The nearly 600 acres sold at the ludicrous price of \$5,250.

Living in Greenwood, Iwasaki refused to cash the cheques. As the family's financial circumstances declined, he was finally forced to cash them, but purposefully noted on the cheques that his doing so was "without prejudice" to future claims.

The Iwasaki family had nothing to return to on Salt Spring Island, nor did other Japanese Canadians who had all seen their property, their homes, possessions and, most importantly, their dreams—sold for a song.

The forced sale of approximately 1,700 properties, including large forest companies, farms, and shipbuilding businesses, not to mention homes and personal effects, is the single greatest case of dispossession in Canada since governments seized the lands of First Nations.

Still—Torazo Iwasaki never gave up. In 1967 at the age of 86, he launched a lawsuit against the government, demanding the return of his land or \$1.5 million. He lost the case. On appeal, the Supreme Court declared in 1970 that the Custodian "had the power to sell and he did sell."⁶¹

Torazo Iwasaki died the following year at age 91. His legacy lives on.

The University of Victoria will soon publish *As if They Were the Enemy: The Dispossession of Japanese Canadians on Saltspring Island*, Brian Smallshaw's account of what happened to families such as the Iwasakis on the Island.

The Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective at the University of Victoria, in collaboration with the National Association of Japanese Canadians, is mapping and documenting what happened to Japanese Canadian properties at: <https://www.landscapesofinjustice.com>.

And the Nikkei National Museum is undertaking to republish a new, electronic version of Ann Sunahara's classic study, *The Politics of Racism*. Sunahara has donated her research collection to the Nikkei National Museum, available now at: http://nikkeimuseum.org/www/collections_detail.php?col_id=F1611.

61 *Iwasaki v. The Queen*, [1970] SCR, CANLII 191 (SCC), 438. Available at: <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/scc/doc/1970/1970canlii191/1970canlii191.html>.

6. The final straw

GRACE EIKO NISHIKIHAMA (THOMSON) WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD when her family was forced to leave the coast in April 1942.⁶² It would be decades before she could return.

Even today she recalls the plaid, pleated skirt and knitted sweater her mother made and that she wore for her last day at Strathcona Elementary when she said goodbye to her classmates.

She also recalls how stressed her mother was: expecting her fifth child, Sawae Nishikihama had been forced to sell the new electric stove the family had just purchased.

How do you move a family when allowed to pack only a few bags on short notice?

“My family was feeling really good living near Powell Street in those days,” says Grace. “My father went to work at his job in the fisherman’s co-op every morning in a three-piece suit. They had come to Canada with a dream but their whole life turned into a mess!”

After discussions with fisher relatives in Steveston, the family opted to go to a “self-supporting” camp at Minto. The uncles had put away some funds, but Grace’s family had little in the way of savings.

Once at Minto, her father worked in a sawmill to make ends meet. Grace recalls how happy her father was to see his children when he returned home.

Initially, they hoped to return to the coast and, as Allied forces began to take the offensive in the Pacific war, that seemed like a possibility. But then the government sold all their possessions—there was nothing to return to.

Even as the tides of war turned, BC members of the legislature agitated for a final solution to what they perceived as the “Japanese problem.”

BC deputy premier and attorney general R.L. Maitland, president of the Canadian Bar Association and a key figure in the early campaign to uproot, remained resolute—stopping Japanese Canadians from returning to the province was essential, he told the Native Sons of British Columbia in late 1944.⁶³



THE NISHIKIHAMA FAMILY IN HAPPIER TIMES. GRACE IS SECOND FROM LEFT, AGE 5. GRACE EIKO THOMSON FAMILY PHOTO.

The uprooting, dispossession and exile that had begun in 1942 was more about virulent racism than anything else.

62 The story of Grace Eiko Thomson (nee Nishikihama) is based on an interview with her on September 6, and November 29, 2019 as well as a previously published series by Norm Masaji Ibuki, “The Remarkable Life and Times of Grace Eiko Thomson,” *Discover Nikkei*, April-May, 2016.

63 “Unassailable Rights of a Citizen,” *New Canadian*, December 16, 1944, 2.



The prohibition on
returning to the
coast continued,
only to be lifted
in 1949.

In the United States, however, the Supreme Court had forced the Roosevelt government to end its policy of incarceration and many Japanese Americans began to return to their homes on the coast in early 1945.

But not in Canada.

Panicked by US developments and under continuous pressure from BC, the Mackenzie King government made a fateful decision: Anyone over the age of 16 in the camps and elsewhere was forced to sign a declaration indicating whether they wanted to be “repatriated” to Japan or move east of the Rockies.

This was a choice that was not a choice—it was an ultimatum, in fact, to stay out of BC: either go to Japan, a place most had never seen, or move east of the Rockies. Those that chose Japan would be stripped of citizenship.

It meant there was to be no return to BC.

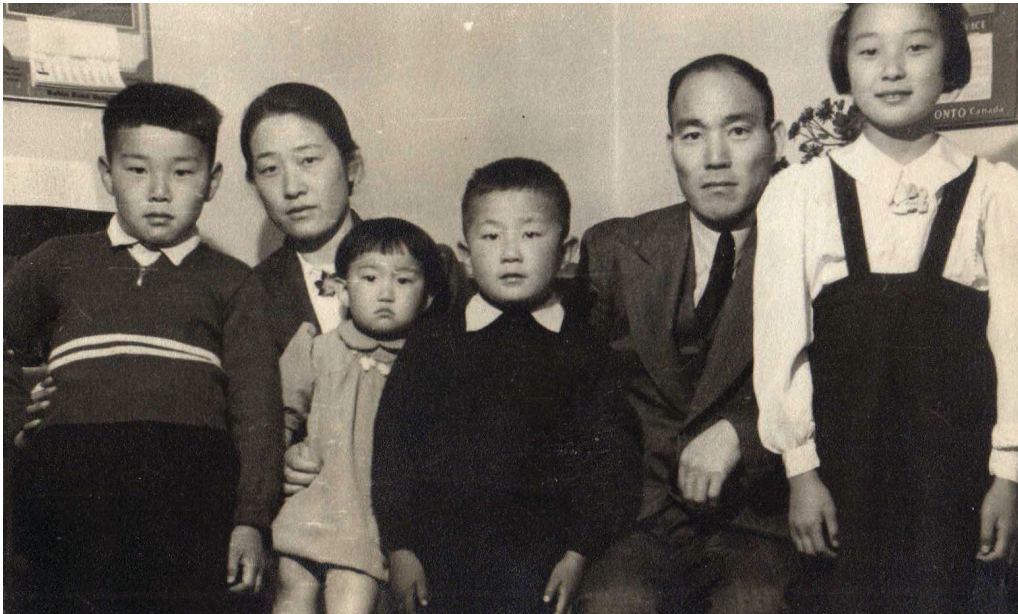
The premier, John Hart, thought that was just fine, and argued for forced deportation of Japanese Canadians at the dominion-provincial conference on reconstruction in August 1945.⁶⁴

Even with the war ending, the provincial and federal governments had declared Grace’s family and 22,000 other Japanese Canadians *persona non grata* in BC, revealing a bitter truth—the uprooting, dispossession and exile that had begun in 1942 was more about virulent racism than anything else.

The possibility of forced deportations prompted an upwelling of protest from Japanese Canadians and their friends. The Co-Operative Committee on Japanese Canadians launched a lawsuit against the War Measures Act and federal measures stripping the rights of those who opted to go to Japan.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ As cited in Patricia Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 200.

⁶⁵ See Stephanie Bangarth, *Voices Raised in Protest: Defending North American Citizens of Japanese Ancestry, 1942–1949* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).



NISHIKIHAMA FAMILY,
LEAVING MINTO FOR
MANITOBA, 1944. COURTESY
OF GRACE EIKO THOMSON.

Arguing the case for expulsion at the Supreme Court in early 1946 was none other than R.T. Maitland, BC deputy premier and attorney-general, determined to enforce Japanese Canadians into exile. Maitland and his federal associates largely won the legal battle but lost in the court of public opinion—many became concerned about citizenship rights, even in BC.

Grace's parents initially chose to go to Japan but, like others pressured to make that decision, they soon recanted and indicated they preferred to move east. In 1945 they moved to a farm near Middlechurch, Manitoba.

Grace's mother, Sawae, recorded in her diary: "Manure clinging on straw hung stuck to these walls. A bare light bulb hung from the high ceiling. I stood in the middle of this barn, which was to be home to our family of six and couldn't hold back the tears."

Like Grace's family, over ten thousand Japanese Canadians were coerced to move, a second time, to be spread out across the country. The forced dispersal gave rise to a new diaspora—Japanese Canadians whose roots are in BC but who ended up east of the Rockies.

As well, close to 4,000 Japanese Canadians were essentially deported to Japan, a country many had never seen, a travesty documented by Tatsuo Kage in *Uprooted Again*.⁶⁶

In 1947, BC's Hart government refused to reinstate voting rights of Japanese Canadians and First Nations, though Chinese and South Asian Canadians won back those rights.⁶⁷

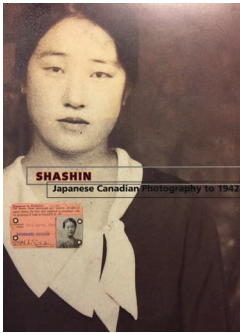
And in 1948, the new BC premier, Byron Johnson, advised the federal government not to allow Japanese Canadians to return to the coast, otherwise the Liberals might lose a by-election. As a result, the prohibition on returning to the coast continued, only to be lifted in 1949.⁶⁸

66 Tatsuo Kage, *Uprooted Again: Japanese Canadians Move to Japan after World War II* (translated by Kathleen Chisato Merken) (Victoria: Ti-Jean Press, 2012).

67 See Journals of the Legislative Assembly, February 19, 1947.

68 As cited in Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Displacement of Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1981),149.

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GRACE EIKO THOMSON
COLLABORATED WITH
UVIC'S PHYLLIS SENESE,
PATRICIA ROY, JAN GATES
AND IMOGENE LIM (VIU)
AND JIM WOLFE TO
PRODUCE THE EXHIBIT
SHASHIN THAT INCLUDES
EXTENSIVE PHOTOGRAPHY
OF THE HAYASHI, KITAMURA
AND MATSUBUCHI STUDIO
OF CUMBERLAND.



GRACE EIKO THOMSON,
THEN PRESIDENT OF THE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF JAPANESE CANADIANS,
ATTENDING A BOARD
MEETING OF THE WORLD
PEACE FORUM SOCIETY,
2006. J. PRICE PHOTO.

Not a single family from Victoria ever returned to live there; of 3,000 Japanese Canadian Islanders only about 150 determined souls returned.

Japanese Canadians were struggling just to survive. Grace and her family left the poverty of Middlechurch for Whitemouth, and then moved to Winnipeg.

Grace finished high school in Winnipeg and then went to work, attending classes at business college in the evenings—the family could not afford to send her to university.

After working for years and inspired by her creative mother, Grace finally was able to pursue her passion for art, registering at the University of Winnipeg as a mature student. She graduated in 1977 with a fine arts degree and did graduate work in Asian art history at UBC, where she gained a deeper appreciation of her heritage.

She returned to Winnipeg to work as assistant director/curator of the University of Manitoba art gallery where she began to advise Inuit printmakers. Travelling to the north regularly, she began to understand the impact of colonialism.

Her feminist consciousness also bloomed, leading her to do a graduate degree in the social history of art at the University of Leeds. Told that “another feminist wasn’t needed,” she found herself unemployed on her return.

Taking a position as director/curator of the Prince Albert gallery, Grace began extensive work with Indigenous artists in Saskatchewan. Before “decolonization” was even a buzzword, she was doing it—co-curating an exhibit “Separate Identities, Shared Worlds” with the late Bob Boyer of the Indian Federated College.

Moving to Vancouver to be with her mother, with whom she was very close, Grace took a position with the Burnaby Art Gallery where she continued cross-cultural explorations in art.

In 1995, Grace was asked to coordinate a gathering of Japanese Canadian artists from dispersed communities across the country. *Tsudoi/Gatherings* finally brought Grace home—she reconnected with her community and never looked back.

Appointed director/curator of the Japanese Canadian National Museum when it opened in Burnaby in 2000, Grace resigned that position after two years but went on to curate landmark exhibits including *Shashin: Japanese Canadian Studio Photographers to 1942* and *Levelling the Playing Field: Legacy of Vancouver’s Asahi Baseball Team*.

She later served on the board of the National Association of Japanese Canadians and was president from 2005 until her retirement in 2010.

“I really feel that, of everything that happened, I am very sad for my father. After 1942 his life was totally destroyed. He worked in odd jobs but had serious ulcer issues. He went to cooking school in 1960 and got a job in the kitchen at Misericordia Hospital. He finally found a few happy moments in later life.”

“My mother, Sawae, was quite emotional and unhappy in the last few years of her life,” recalls Grace who has recently completed her family memoir which she hopes to publish soon.

At 86, Grace Eiko Thomson (Nishikihama) remains a force to be reckoned with as she continues to write, agitate and reflect: “BC redress is long overdue—its 2019 for goodness sake!”



The National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) was founded in 1947 and is a Canada-wide organization that represents Japanese Canadians and Japanese Canadian member organizations. The NAJC supports the development of our communities and a strong Japanese Canadian identity. We strive for equal rights and liberties for all persons, and in particular for racial and ethnic minorities.



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