



# Nikkei Images

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Volume 1 Number 1

January 1996

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Newsletter of the Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives Society, Vancouver, British Columbia

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## A Welcome from your Board of Directors

The members of the Board of Directors of the Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives Society are pleased to offer a formal welcome to our charter members in this, our inaugural year. We are proud of the strides that have been made toward our goal of a permanent museum and archives facility, and look forward to meeting all of our members as opportunities permit.

The Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives has been established to collect, preserve, study, exhibit, and interpret historical artifacts and archival material covering the history of Japanese Canadian society from the 1870s through World War II to the present day. As an educational facility it serves the entire Canadian community; as a repository it also serves the Japanese Canadian community in preserving and protecting valuable heritage materials.

The JCNM&A was created through the dedicated volunteer efforts of members of the Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizens' Association (JCCA). Beginning in 1981 with the acquisition of important historical material, the volunteer Japanese Canadian History Preservation Committee of the JCCA grew into the Japanese Canadian Archives (1993). The efforts of this group led in turn to a proposal, in 1994, for a full national museum and archives facility, to be housed in the multi-use National Nikkei Heritage Centre (NNHC). This elegant facility will soon be built in Burnaby, B.C., on land that has already been acquired by the NNHC Society.

Vital initial funding was granted to the JCNM&A Society through the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) from the Redress Settlement (Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation), and through additional grants in support of accessions and interpretive programs. Funds have also been raised through special events and activities coordinated by the JCNM&AS volunteers, as well as through donations from our members. Our Society has applied for charitable status.

As our Society's official printed "voice," *Nikkei Images* will grow as we grow. It will tell of our efforts to preserve the cultural heritage of Japanese Canadians, and it will strive to improve Canadian public awareness of the history of Japanese Canadians, to the betterment of understanding. It will tell sad stories and happy ones, stories of struggle and stories of success. As is the goal of the museum and archives, this newsletter will tell of everyday happenings as well as of major events. It will speak about all kinds of people, and will invite all to participate by contributing their stories.

The JCNM&AS has already conducted over 350 taped oral history interviews, and has collected more than 1500 photographs and other images and over 20 metres of shelved textual material. Our temporary office is located in the JCCA building at 511 East Broadway in Vancouver, where we house our functioning Archives. The Archives are already consulted on a regular basis by film-makers, textbook authors, research scholars, students, and members of the general public. Plans are under way to begin the collecting of museum artifacts, so that we can work toward displays for our new NNHC premises, to be opened in 1997.

We, the Board of Directors, offer warm greetings and best wishes to all for the coming year.

*Frank Kamiya*, President  
*Eric Sokugawa*, Vice-president  
*Suzi Nitta Petersen*, General Secretary  
*Judy Inouye*, Recording Secretary  
*Ray Ota*, Treasurer

*Wes Fujiwara*  
*David Fujiwara*  
*Yosh Kariatsumari*  
*Art Miki*  
*Mary Seki*  
*Norman Tsuyuki*

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Volume 1, No. 1  
January, 1996

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(JCNM&AS Advocacy Committee)

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## MEMBERSHIP

Subscription to *Nikkei Images* is free with your yearly membership to the JCNM&AS

Family \$25.00  
Individual \$20.00  
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## *introducing our new logo*

The cover of our newsletter and the masthead to the left introduce the new logo of the Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives Society, designed by Jerry Foster, of Surrey, B.C.

Mr. Foster chose a traditional form of logo, rather than a more contemporary, "slick" corporate design. The focus on a traditional idea represents the concept of a museum visually. His design uses traditional Japanese "mon" motifs in a simple, rhythmic, and visually pleasing way. The result is unforgettable — the goal of an effective logo.

The design uses maple leaves, the symbol of Canada, in a circle, the symbol of Japan, to collectively show that the two countries and cultures have come together as one. Strengthening this idea, the outer circle and the outlines of the leaves form a single unbroken line.

Our special thanks are offered to Mr. Foster for his efforts in designing the logo, and for his explanation of the rationale behind it.

The Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives Society gratefully acknowledges the support and financial assistance of members, donors, volunteers, the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation, the National Association of Japanese Canadians, the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association of Greater Vancouver, and the British Columbia Community Archives Assistance Program.

**The Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives Society** is a non-profit society dedicated to the creation and direction of the Japanese Canadian National Museum & Archives. The Society has a board of directors (see page 1) and four working committees. The committee membership is as follows:

- (1) **Advocacy:** Yosh Kariatsumari and Suzi Nitta Petersen (co-chairs), Minnie Hattori, Eric Sokugawa, Mary Seki, Norm Tsuyuki, and Frank Kamiya;
- (2) **Program:** Eric Sokugawa (chair), Frank Kamiya, Lana Panko, Minnie Hattori, Bev Inouye, Naomi Sawada, Judy Inouye, Susan Sirovyak, and Pearl Williams;
- (3) **Human Resources:** Wes Fujiwara and Norm Tsuyuki (co-chairs), Naomi Sawada, Mary Seki, Pearl Williams, Minnie Hattori, David Yamaura, and Frank Kamiya;
- (4) **Finance:** Ray Ota (chair), Norm Tsuyuki, Judy Inouye, Suzi Nitta Petersen, and Frank Kamiya.

The Society has three employees:

Michael C. Wilson, Project Director  
Shane A. Foster, Archivist and Archives Program Coordinator

## A Brief History of the Canadian Nikkei

by Audrey Kobayashi

**N**ikkei history in Canada began when people of Japanese origin established a niche within the system of primary industries that supported the British Columbia economy during the late 19th Century. Although Japan had had some contact with Canada through shipwrecks along what was to be the British Columbia coast during the earlier part of the century, the first immigrants (Issei) to Canada arrived unofficially during the 1870s, soon after Japan's opening to the world by the Meiji government in 1868. The first immigrant of record was Manzo Nagano, who jumped ship in New Westminster in 1877 and later ran a general store in Victoria. The anniversary of his arrival was celebrated as the Japanese-Canadian Centenary in 1977. He was probably, however, one of hundreds who arrived on fishing boats, as stowaways, or across the border from the United States.

The early Issei left a country undergoing massive economic, social and political change. The Meiji "Revolution" had created a modern state, including a rapidly growing economy, a strong military, and a literate society with raised material expectations and strong motivations. The base of the new society was agriculture, seen as an exalted profession whence derived both honourable social customs and debilitating taxes that financed the modern state. The lofty claims of the Meiji government encouraged the values of a liberal economy, but hid the reality of poverty resulting from the vagaries of economic development and uneven crop yields, combined with increased population growth. For many, the rewards of the new era were not readily achieved. Ambitious households, anxious to continue the line of their ancestors, did what they

could to secure a viable farming interest, including sending available members — women and men — to work under contract in industrial jobs.

Emigration to Canada was an extension of this transformation from an agrarian to an industrial labour force. Indeed, emigration to Hawaii or North America often made a return to the village possible for those who owned or inherited land, but the vaunted agrarian life could not provide for everyone. Second and third sons and others who did not stand to inherit property usually moved permanently. Conditions in Canada were better than in one of the growing Japanese cities, however, where wages were low and employment unsteady.

*The early Issei left a country undergoing massive economic, social and political change.*

The major employment for the Issei was in the sawmills. About 1883, there is a record of a Takezo (surname unknown) who was the first Issei to work at the Hastings Mill. He died in 1889, also the first to die in Canada. By then,

the Issei crew numbered 200 at Hastings Mill, headed by Yasukichi Yoshizawa, later to be known as "Indian Yasu" because he bought and sold salmon from the aboriginal people on the Skeena River. Over the next two decades, Issei grew to become the largest ethnic group in B.C.'s sawmills.

The second largest source of employment was the fishing industry. In 1887, Gilhei Kuno, from the impoverished village of Mio in Wakayama, visited the West Coast. Seeing the potential for salmon fishing, he arranged for others from the village to come to Canada, and the village of Steveston at the mouth of the Fraser River became their new home. Although conditions were often difficult and they were constantly opposed by the white unions, the Nikkei fishing and canning industries spread out along the coast of British Columbia and thrived until the uprooting during World War II.

Japanese labour migration to Canada was well organized, and consisted almost exclusively of men. The Issei entrepreneurs, or "bosses," travelled to Japan, or worked through agents, to recruit contract labour. Each contractor

### *About the author*

**A**udrey Kobayashi is the Director of the Institute of Women's Studies and a Professor of Geography at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. She teaches courses on racism and gender, and is well known for her publications on issues of human rights, immigration, gender, and racism, and on the history of Japanese Canadians. With great energy, she has connected these issues together as a community activist, feminist, and anti-racist.

recruited mainly in a specific area of Japan, with the result that workers from the same districts, or even the same villages, were re-grouped in the Canadian workplace. Some were exploited terribly. A group of mine workers from Fukuoka lost several members to starvation and ill treatment before the Japanese government intervened. Those who fared better came as sponsored immigrants (yobeyose) to join older relatives or neighbours who could secure contract jobs for them, or provide them with jobs in small businesses or on fishing boats.

The early workers in Vancouver had lived on temporary scows in the harbour. By the late 1890s, labour contractors had also begun to buy or lease land along Powell and adjacent streets. They built boarding houses for their workers, and diversified their interests to retail and other services, including bath houses, barber shops and billiard halls. Their activities soon expanded throughout the entire province, where they obtained contracts in logging, milling, fishing, mining, railway or agricultural ventures in remote areas.

A new immigrant would be met at the dock by his employer/sponsor, most likely a ken-jin (person from the same prefecture) and be taken immediately to the house that boarded others from the same area. In this way, even relationships that had already been established in Japan became stronger, and the ken-jinkai (prefectural association) became one of the most important building blocks of at least the first generation of Nikkei. After that first night, the immigrant might return to the same boarding house many times in search of new work, or simply companionship.

During this time, very few Issei women entered Canada. Those less fortunate were imported by unscrupulous operators who used them as prostitutes. Life was more honoured, if just as difficult, for wives and relatives of entrepreneurs. They were required to support the family enterprise by running

the boarding houses, stores and camps, cooking and cleaning for large gangs of men. Many worked in remote camps where the luxury of female companionship found on Powell Street was not available. The first such Issei woman was Yo Oya, who arrived in 1887 and, together with her husband, Washiji, ran a business on Powell Street for many years. In 1889, their son, Katsuji, became the first Nisei (second generation) born in Canada.

Immigration increased after the turn of the century. In Japan, the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 had created unemployment, exacerbated by devastating crop failures in 1906. Although the extant records are contradic-

*... various official and unofficial measures were tried to limit both the numbers and the civil rights of Nikkei and others of asian background.*

tory, it is estimated that until 1905 some 15,000 men had worked in British Columbia for varying, usually short, periods of time. To maximize their earnings, they moved back and forth between Canada and the United States; others entered via the Hawaiian sugar plantations, with no official record. Between 1905 and 1907, the number was augmented by more than 4,000. Then in 1906, the United States, under political pressure, followed amendments to immigration policy with a "Gentlemen's Agreement" that served virtually to halt Japanese immigration. In 1907-08 nearly 8,000 set their destination for Canada, where the boom of sawmill building was beginning to tail off.

These labourers were deeply resented by other Canadians. From the turn of the century, various official and unofficial measures were tried to limit both the numbers and the civil rights of Nikkei and others of asian background. Virulent racism, fundamental to Canadian society, climaxed on 7 September

1907. Bolstered by a general public clamour to deny the rights and existence of asians in Canada, a mob of 5,000 attacked the Chinese immigrant area of Vancouver, and surged on to Powell Street, causing extensive damage.

After the riot, asian workers staged a general strike amidst continued racist expressions from the white public. A Royal Commission undertaken by W.L. Mackenzie King subsequently provided some compensation for physical damages, but maintained that the "problem" could be solved only by limiting the number of asian faces on Canada's streets. The result was the Hayashi-Lemieux "Gentlemen's Agreement" in 1908, which severely limited further immigration except for returning immigrants and their families, commercial and official travellers, clerics and students.

Until this time, many of the men had moved back and forth between Canada and Japan, often on a seasonal basis. The new restrictions, combined with economic circumstances, made such movement difficult and many, especially those without prospects of land ownership in Japan, made the decision to remain permanently in Canada. Thence began the "picture bride" system, a variation on the tradition of arranged marriage whereby prospective partners exchanged photographs as a form of betrothal. The marriage took place in Japan in the absence of the groom, thus allowing a legal wife to enter the country. From 1908 to the mid-1920s, some 5,000 young women entered Canada in this way.

The life of such a woman was always difficult. While adapting to marriage with a man she had likely never met, she was expected to work either in a family enterprise or in waged labour. She had few choices: domestic work in homes of wealthy white families, or line work in canneries generally comprised the jobs to which non-white women had access. A few joined husbands who had managed to save enough to buy farms,

and these were considered fortunate.

With the establishment of families came a need for schools. By the turn of the century, classes were offered on Powell Street by Methodist or Anglican missionaries; later, the Nisei attended nearby Strathcona School. The largest group of early students consisted of teenaged boys, brought to Canada by fathers or older brothers, who worked during the day as apprentices or shop assistants and took English classes at night. The first Japanese language school for the Nisei was established in Vancouver in 1906. Although many chose to send their children to Japan for all or part of their educations, the number of Japanese language schools had grown to over 60 by the 1940s.

The community-building process was hastened by World War I. Smaller communities became established throughout the province, especially along the coast. High wages and a demand for labour during and immediately after World War I allowed many to become established in business, to pay off fishing boats, or to purchase agricultural land in the Fraser and Okanagan Valleys or on Vancouver Island. In particular, the Nikkei were instrumental in creating the successful berry farms of the Fraser Valley.

Some 196 Japanese Canadians also fought for the Canadian forces during World War I. Fifty-four were killed and 92 wounded. Their lives were testament to the fact that the Nikkei were by then Canadian in every sense. Yet it was not enough, for other British Columbians continued to speak of the "Yellow Peril", and deny fundamental human rights such as the franchise, and the right to purchase Crown Lands, to hold public office, to hold professional licences or to be employed in the public service. Less official means of discrimination occurred in restaurants, theatres and schools. When Chitose Uchida became the first Nikkei to graduate from the University of B.C. in 1916, she was also the first of many who would find



Japanese prospective brides on board ship, facing an uncertain destiny (date not known). *Japanese Canadian Centennial Project Collection, JCNM&A.*

that their diplomas failed to provide them with appropriate jobs.

As the economy weakened during the 1920s, public resentment became more and more open. In 1928 the Government yielded to public pressure and reactivated the Hayashi-Lemieux Agreement, with a new annual limit of 150, of whom no more than half could be female. The Japanese-Canadian population declined from that time, as many of the original Issei returned to Japan. Some had never intended to stay in Canada; others gave up hope against the tide of racism.

During the 1930s, the community became more firmly established, and continued to grow through natural increase. There were 23,000 people in 1941, of whom 22,000 were in the province of British Columbia. Fully

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17,400, or 80%, were Canadian citizens, the balance landed immigrants of Japanese citizenship. Over 50% of the population was under age 30. There were 8,300 people in the workforce, half in the areas of lumber production, fishing and agriculture. This was an established community strongly committed to Canada, their home.

Canada declared war with Japan on 7 December 1941. Few Japanese Canadians held any political allegiance to Japan, but they felt anguish to realize that hostilities existed between the two countries, and immediate fear that simmering resentment would break out into hostility against them in Canada. The events of 1941, however, showed once and for all the depth of Canadian racism and the precarious nature of the Nikkei existence.

Years of pressure by politicians and journalists had preceded the war. British Columbia politicians — Vancouver Alderman Halford Wilson, Premier T.D. Pattullo, MP A.W. Neill, Cabinet Minister and MP Ian Mackenzie — had mounted a campaign to keep Asian Canadians from the armed forces.



Japanese Canadian evacuees leaving Vancouver by train, ca. 1942. *Alec Eastwood Collection, JCNM&A, 94/69.4.029a-b.*

Their goal was achieved in 1940, when a Cabinet Committee recommended against their eligibility, not because of their ancestry, but because it was felt that violence against them would surely occur if they were admitted. F.J. Mead, Assistant Commissioner of the RCMP, stated that the

politicians had been responsible for provoking a dangerous situation where none potentially existed, an opinion that was to be upheld in the coming years

Within hours of the Pearl Harbour attack, Japanese Nationals suffered a suspension of all civil rights. They were



Snow-covered tents in internment camp, Lemon Creek, B.C., ca. 1942. *Susumu Inouye Fonds, JCNM&A, 94/63.001a-b.*

quickly detained, and most later sent to prisoner-of-war camps in Northern Ontario. All property of persons residing in Japan was confiscated. Next, however, in actions that showed the government's true racist nature, attention was turned to Canadian citizens. Some 1,137 fishing boats owned by Japanese Canadians were impounded, and suffered inestimable and irreparable damage through subsequent neglect. With cold deliberacy the government, under the auspices of the B.C. Securities Commission, put in place a plan for the uprooting and dispossession of the Nikkei community.

By February 1942, it was announced that all persons "of Japanese ancestry" must leave the "protected area" of coastal British Columbia, where more than 21,000 resided. Motor vehicles, cameras, radios and firearms were confiscated. A dawn-to-dusk curfew was imposed, and movement restricted. Hastings Park, an agricultural exhibition ground, was designated a "transit" centre, where Nikkei from all the coastal communities were collected. Once behind the barbed wire, men were separated from women and children. The "prisoners" were housed in recently vacated horse stalls, reeking of manure, with vermin-infested mattresses of straw upon which to sleep. This facility operated until September, 1942, over a very hot summer, under crowded, unsanitary conditions completely lacking in privacy. Psychological conditions were terrible as people faced fear and the separation from friends and loved ones about whom they often heard nothing. Those outside waited, hearing little, knowing not what their fates or those of their families would be, hoping that the nightmare would end. They were surrounded with public hostility. Children were taunted and young men were assaulted in the streets. Employees were summarily fired. Insurance policies were cancelled. Organizations such as the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire organized hate campaigns for their permanent removal.

Early in the summer, the trains began to roll, their windows blacked out as they carried thousands of Japanese Canadians to unknown destinations. About 700 men were sent to prisoner-of-war camps, and about 2,100 to road camps, where they were used as forced labour for roadbuilding projects. The largest group, about 12,000 which included the families of the men in the camps, were sent to concentration camps in the British Columbia interior. These were either reclaimed ghost towns or hastily erected camps, consisting at first of tents, then of shacks made of green lumber that shrank in the subsequent winter to provide little provision against the mountain cold. About 4,000 were sent in family groups to the prairie provinces, where they worked the sugar beet farms under severe conditions. Some fared reasonably well there; others were treated as slaves. There were also about 4,200 who were not incarcerated: 2,000 were already outside the designated area; 1,200 were wealthy enough to establish self-supporting camps in the interior; about 1,000 managed to join family members in Ontario and Quebec. All, of course, were subject to curfew and registration, had belongings confiscated, and were disallowed free travel.

Thus dispersed, the Nikkei resolved to wait out the war, hoping that the end of hostilities would end their conditions of apartheid. It was not to be so. In 1943, still not allowed to return to the coastal area, those who could find places to relocate East of the Rockies were allowed to do so. A strong network developed within the community to find places for its members. They were supported by a variety of religious organizations such as the YMCA, and a group of concerned citizens, The Cooperative Committee on Japanese Canadians, who lobbied the government, while arranging employment and schools, and gathering food and clothing.

Hope diminished as the Securities



Angler Prisoner-of-War Camp, Angler, Ontario, ca. 1942-1946. *Joe Hayaru Fonds, JCNM&A, 94/48.003a-c.*

Commission began selling off property and possessions. In 1944, those still in the camps were told to remove themselves permanently to the East, or sign papers renouncing their Canadian citizenship and agreeing to "deportation" to Japan. Lacking knowledge, means of support and employment, and afraid of what they would face in the East, about 10,000 signed. They were encouraged by being told that they could rescind their signatures once they had made arrangements; signing was thus a means of buying time. Many hoped that when the war would end, the papers would be irrelevant.

The war did end, in August 1945. But its conclusion made little difference for the conditions of Japanese Canadians. On 5 October 1945, the Canadian Parliament enacted the National Emergency Transitional Powers Act, which allowed the original provisions under the War Measures Act to be continued. Japanese Canadians were told that they would never be allowed to return to British Columbia;

that they would not be given civil rights; that they must accept a pittance for their lost property (most of the proceeds having been used for their "support" while incarcerated); and that those remaining in the camps would indeed be exiled to Japan.

Until this time, no Japanese Canadian had been charged or convicted of any crime against the wartime interests of the nation. There was no evidence of fifth-column activity, and no overt expression of allegiance to Japan. Unconvicted, they were sentenced on the basis of their "race," so that British Columbia could become a province cleansed of people of Japanese ancestry.

The removal legislation was later rescinded, but not before more than 4,000 people, of whom more than half were children born in Canada, were exiled. Those not expelled were sent to other parts of Canada, where they were prevented from re-settling in close proximity to one another. After 1946, Nikkei were gradually granted the

rights of citizenship. In 1947, they were permitted to purchase real property; in 1948, they were allowed to vote federally; in 1949, they were allowed to vote in British Columbia. On 31 March 1949, the last of the restrictions under the War Measures Act was lifted, and they were allowed to travel freely and to return to live in British Columbia. This freedom was indeed a Pyrrhic victory.

### Postscript

Since the 1940s, Japanese Canadians have re-built their lives and their community. About a quarter of those exiled managed to return to Canada, starting during the 1950s. Other immigrants have come in relatively small numbers, and now make up about 25% of the current population of 65,000. Many of today's Nikkei — third, fourth, fifth, and sixth generations known as sansei, yonsei, gosei, and rokusei — are the product of intermarriage with members of other ethnocultural groups. Most of the population today is centred in Vancouver and Toronto. In contrast to their Issei forbears, contemporary Nikkei are urban and highly educated.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Japanese Canadians were too busy rebuilding their shattered lives to worry much about redress for their experiences. The Nisei generation, in addition, felt ambivalent about speaking out and perhaps risking their new-found freedom. This situation began to change in 1977, when celebration of the centenary caused a coming-together of the community, and when discussions of redress began to reach the wider community. For the next decade, the National Association of Japanese Canadians worked on behalf of their community to negotiate a redress settlement, achieved in 1988 after a difficult battle, and tremendous effort that involved the coordination of many Japanese Canadians, as well as other communities and religious, labour

and human rights groups who provided support. The War Measures Act was revoked in April 1988. The redress settlement, announced in cabinet on the 22nd of September, included an acknowledgement of injustice, individual payments of \$21,000 to approximately 17,000 people, a community fund of \$12,000,000,

revoking of criminal records of those charged under the War Measures Act, re-institution of citizenship rights to those exiled to Japan, and the creation of a Canadian Race Relations Foundation. When established, it will be a most fitting expression of the long battle for human rights that has marked the history of the Nikkei.



Yamato Photographers Group, Fifth Exhibition, Vancouver, B.C. (?), August 1, 1915. *Shokichi Akatsuka Collection, JCNM&A, 92 20.006a-c.*

### EVENTS CALENDAR

#### JCNM&AS FUNDRAISING LEAP YEAR DANCE

*Western-Klondike Theme*

Saturday, February 24, 1996 7:30 pm to 12:00 am

Capitol Hill Community Hall,

361 South Howard Avenue, Burnaby, B.C.

(at E. Hastings Street; Big "O" Tire sign on corner)

Tickets: \$16.00/person (includes buffet style hors d'oeuvres and dessert)

Tickets: Frank Kamiya, 929-4476; Suzi Petersen, 274-5102;

Minnie Hattori, 591-3177