Fumi Tamagi (née Moriyama) and three others picking sugar beets in Shaughnessy, Alberta, circa 1943. NNM 2000.15.3
Contents

Welcome to Nikkei Images

Nikkei Images is a publication of the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre dedicated to the preservation and sharing of Japanese Canadian Stories since 1996. We welcome proposals of family and community stories for publication in future issues. Articles should be between 500 – 3,500 words and finished works should be accompanied by relevant high resolution photographs with proper photo credits. Please send a brief description or summary of the theme and topic of your proposed article to lreid@nikkeiplace.org.

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When my sister Atsuko was visiting from Japan, we would gather at my parent's home and look through their old photo albums. When we came to the photos of Mom and Dad as a young couple, my sisters would tease them about their courtship. To Mom, they would suggest that she must have gone for Dad because he was such a good looking fellow. Mom would blush and stammer a bit and say that she decided to marry him because she heard from others that he was honest, good to his parents and hard working. Also, she knew that all of the other families who wanted her to marry their son, were only interested in her teacher's salary. They would then tease Dad, saying that he must have gone for Mom because of her big beautiful eyes. Indeed, Mom was teased at school for her large round eyes. Her classmates called her "Medaka". Dad said that he did well in school, but was not at the top of the class. He knew that if he married Mom, he would have smart children. We should all be thankful that he was wise enough to marry such a smart woman, to which Mom would reply, that one would think that he was picking a racehorse instead of a wife. And we would all laugh.

My father, Kohei Shimozawa, was born in the village of Nishioi, north of Odawara City, in Kanagawa-ken, Japan on December 15, 1905. My mother, Kimie Mizuno, was born in the village of Iizumi, about five kilometers south, on November 27, 1910. Odawara has expanded over the years so that the farming villages of Nishioi and Iizumi are now neighborhoods of Odawara.

Kohei's father was born Kametaro Inouye. The Shimozawa family had no male children, so he married my grandmother, Kiku Shimozawa, as an adopted son or yoshi. They had five children. Ryohei, the oldest son, daughter Yoshi and second son Kohei were born before Kametaro left to work in Canada in 1909, when Kohei was four years old, leaving Kiku and three children in Nishioi. The two youngest sons, Masashi and Takaharu were born after Kametaro returned from Canada in 1916. Ryohei, the oldest, followed his father's path to Canada in 1917 at age 19. He returned to Nishioi after the war in 1947 to assume his role as the head of the Shimozawa family.

Kohei finished Grade 8 and two years of agricultural college. He left for Canada in 1925 at the of age twenty. Dad told me why he decided to leave home for Canada. His father Kametaro had co-signed a loan for a nephew, who had reneged on repayment. The family would lose their ancestral home and land unless the debt was repaid. His father and his older brother Ryohei had gone to work in Canada to clear the debt. Ryohei had been in Canada for eight years, but had become caught up in a life of gambling and drinking and was not helping his family. Also as the second son or jinbo, Dad would end up working for his older brother for the rest of his life, unless he struck out on his own. Mom told me that Dad always remembered how much he hated making the walk to the bank, carrying the money from the family's hard earned savings to make the regular payments. I think that this is why I have never seen him drunk. He never gambled and he paid cash for anything he bought, large or small.

Mom's mother was born Teru Iwase, who married Mosejiro Mizuno. Mom had seven siblings. Her only sister Naka was two years older. Her oldest brother Shinichiro was born in 1906 and came to Canada at about the same time as my father Kohei. The other brothers were Masamitsu, born in 1912, who looked
Two days later, Dad received a beautifully written letter from Kimie, saying how sorry she was that he was not able to meet her sister Naka and that he must come again. Dad made a second trip to Izumi. Kimie was there, but her older sister Naka was nowhere in sight. Dad was invited into the house, where she asked him all about Canada and what it was like to live there. According to Dad, they spent hours around the hibachi talking late into the evening and by the end of their meeting, they had decided to marry. I asked Dad how it was that Mom was allowed to marry against the wishes of her mother. Dad replied with a smile, saying that I should know that Mom can often get you to a place where she wants you to go.

Mom and Dad were married on April 1, 1931. That being April Fool’s day would always be amusing to their children. Dad told me with a chuckle, that before the wedding, he was approached by his former school principal, who asked him if he was sure that he knew what he was doing by marrying such a smart woman. Dad said that he told him not to worry, that he knew what he was doing and could handle her.

Dad could not get a travel permit to bring his wife to Canada, so he left Japan on May 27, 1931. His father Kametaro had recovered from his illness. Mom was now pregnant with Atsuko, who often proclaims that she was truly a honeymoon baby. Dad was now married, so he had to find a permanent job to support his family. It was fishing season, so he went to Claxton for the last time. After the season, he got off the boat at Ocean Falls and started work as a jitney driver at the Ocean Falls Paper Mill. His job was to load huge rolls of paper onto the ships at the dock. He lived in the Japanese men’s bunkhouse, worked long hours and saved his money. His older brother Ryoei followed him to Ocean Falls. Dad found work for him at the paper mill and tried to keep him on a straight path.

Mom moved back to Izumi to live with her parents. She commuted to Odawara to teach Junior High while her mother looked after Atsuko. During this time, Dad was a prolific letter writer, and they wrote to each other frequently.

The years passed and by 1937, Atsuko would soon start school. Dad told Mom that Ocean Falls was not an ideal place for Japanese to raise a family. His intention was to return to Japan, when he had made enough to be independent and provide a comfortable life for his family. Mom’s relatives urged Mom to rejoin her husband, who had now been away for six years. Mom made the fateful decision to leave Atsuko in Izumi and travel to Canada alone. It was a decision that would bring pain and regret to Mom for the rest of her life and a profound feeling of abandonment to Atsuko for most of her life.

I keep recalling Atsuko’s poignant telling of the last day she saw her mother in Japan. She went with Mom and some relatives to the train station in Odawara. One of Mom’s relatives asked Atsuko if she would like to go with her to a nearby store to select a present for herself. When they returned to the platform, her mother had boarded the train and the train had departed for Yokohama. Atsuko was five years old. She would not see her mother again until she was twenty years old and would meet her father for the first time.

Mom arrived in Vancouver on April 8, 1937. She spent one week in Pitt Meadows with her brother Shinichiro and his wife Tsuruko, then departed for Ocean Falls.

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It is Justice We Want (Part 1)
by Kam Teo

Introduction
Tashme, Christina Lake, Greenwood, Lemon Creek, Slocan, Harris Ranch, New Denver, Rosebery, Sandon, Kaslo, . . . Petawawa, Angler, . . . The names of these internment and prisoner-of-war camps in the interior of British Columbia and north-western Ontario are etched in the memories of Japanese Canadians as places of humiliation, shame, and, ultimately, resilience and regeneration. In the popular mindset, the assault on Japanese Canadians’ civil liberties ended after the war but this was not the case as the Canadian government operated “hostels” in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec into the late 1940s. A hostel was a mid-point hub between internment camp and freedom. That said, Japanese Canadians were not permitted to return to British Columbia until 1949. Ultimately, it is the purpose of this work to shed light upon a little-known part of Canadian history by looking at one hostel located five miles south of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, from 1946 to 1948.

Dedication
I would like to thank Tom Seki for his generosity of spirit and grace in telling me his family’s story in Moose Jaw, SK. This article is dedicated to Tom Seki, his family, the Moose Jaw hostel internees, (the Murakamis) and, ultimately, to all Japanese Canadians and their descendants that were impacted by this shameful chapter in Canadian history. Finally, I welcome additional information from Japanese Canadians who were in Moose Jaw from 1946-1948 or their descendants. Thank you. I can be reached at kamwteo@gmail.com.
Moose Jaw “Hostel”: 1946-1948

In 1946 Moose Jaw (77 kilometres west of Regina) was a city of 22,590 residents and was recovering from the economic devastation visited upon it during the Great Depression. However, by the summer of 1946, there was an economic boom. There were “five hundred applications for living accommodation, many conversions of single dwelling units into multiple living accommodation, one hundred and sixty wartime houses built and occupied and at least one hundred private homes constructed since 1941.” In fact, the economic growth in this agricultural-based economy spurred on by the economic expansion in Canada was sustained well into 1946. City officials trumpeted that employment had “reached a new high.” The Canadian military also had a direct economic and cultural influence on the city. During the Second World War, the city became home to the Moose Jaw Royal Canadian Air Force which employed 1,500 to 2,000 individuals.

Political change was also taking place in Saskatchewan; in 1944, Tommy Douglas (1904-1966), leader of the provincial Canadian Commonwealth Federation (CCF) was elected premier. One historian noted, however, that Douglas, “remained uncharacteristically silent” on the challenges Japanese Canadians faced during the Second World War as he ran for political office. Once safely in the Saskatchewan legislature, Premier Douglas began to show tentative political support for Japanese Canadians. In October 1945, the Liberal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King government passed Bill 15 which extended some of its wartime power, including the right to decide “entry into Canada, exclusion and deportation and revocation of nationality.” Bill 15 made “reparatiation” legal. To be sure, the word “reparatiation” used by the King government was a misnomer as most Japanese Canadians before Pearl Harbor were Canadian-born (or naturalized citizens) with most not knowing any other country except Canada. Still, in December 1945 the Douglas government informed Ottawa that it would permit a “fair share” of Japanese Canadians (how many was not stated) to make their province to officially extend such a welcome to Japanese Canadians. That said, in 1945 the Japanese Canadian population in Saskatchewan was the smallest of any Prairie province at 153 while Alberta and Manitoba had 2,961 and 1131 respectively. A month after agreeing to take in unspecified numbers of Japanese Canadians the CCF government backed up their political rhetoric by seeking legal counsel to look at the viability of challenging the constitutionality of “reparatiation.” This Saskatchewan constitutional challenge in January 1946, though unsuccessful, attained the support of church groups in the province.

On June 11, 1946, Moose Jaw residents learned in the Moose Jaw Times Herald that “within a few days” approximately “500 to 1,000 Japanese [Canadians]” would be located in billets at the air force base situated five miles south of city limits. Walter Dawson of the federal Labour Department – and soon to be supervisor of the Moose Jaw hostel – informed Moose Jaw residents that Japanese Canadians would be transferred from the “Pacific Coast.” It is curious and unknown as to why Moose Jaw or Saskatchewan was chosen to hold Japanese Canadians or whether it was a decision made only by Mackenzie King or in conjunction with his cabinet. Logistically, the city was on a Canadian Pacific Railway mainline which made it convenient to move people and supplies. The air force base was also available to hold large numbers. Politically, it may have been a combination of the highly public condemnation of the Liberal government’s negation of the human rights of Canadians by Tommy Douglas as well as his willingness the previous December to accept a “fair share” of Japanese Canadians into the province. The latter point was noted by federal minister of Labour Humphrey Mitchell in a letter dated June 12, 1946, to Douglas, who only learned from newspapers of the arrival of internees.

“We have completed arrangements for taking over a number of buildings at the Moose Jaw Air Station to accommodate temporarily a number of Japanese [Canadian] families relocating to Saskatchewan. The object will be to have these families reside in these buildings until they can be absorbed into general employment and housing accommodation can be located for them. . . . We know that your Government is sympathetic with the difficulties which confront people of Japanese origin living in Canada and we shall be very grateful for your cooperation and assistance.”

Regardless of Ottawa’s unilateral establishment of internees in Moose Jaw, it was now time for the Saskatchewan government to act on its stated support of Japanese Canadians. Unintentionally, however, Douglas invited Ottawa to use Saskatchewan to implement its policy to ethnically cleanse Japanese Canadians away from British Columbia.

Moose Jaw Mayor Fraser McClellan immediately protested the impending arrival of Japanese Canadians to Moose Jaw to Humphrey Mitchell (Federal Minister Responsible for Japanese Canadians) on the grounds that the housing situation in the city was “acute” due to the sizable number of war veterans and “other citizens already in the community. McClellan urged Mitchell to use air force buildings in other parts of Saskatchewan “not adjacent to larger urban centres.” Two days later, the mayor attempted to quell the furor by explaining to City Council that the presence of Japanese Canadians was a fait accompli. “We have no say as to who comes here.” He also reminded city residents that the internees “were citizens of Canada.” Alderman J. Hampson responded that “Japs” would saturate the Moose Jaw labour market. Thundered another city councillor, “they should be put back where they came from.” The racist and bellicose language was uttered in spite of the fact that Moose Jaw was in an economic boom.

In an effort to minimize protests by local residents, hostel supervisor Walter Dawson announced on June 19, 1946, that a maximum of 240 residents – rather than the earlier announced 500 or 1,000 internees – would be arriving in Moose Jaw. It is unknowable if the earlier announced 500 or 1,000 internees was a feat to gauge public opinion or a legitimate number that had to be pared down to 240 due to the racist uproar from city politicians. Dawson engaged in further damage control claiming that some of the Japanese Canadians were also veterans who “fought for the Dominion.” One important fact left unsaid by Dawson: 127 POW internees were to be transferred from the Angler, Ontario, prisoner-of-war camp and were scheduled to arrive in Moose Jaw.

Kendo Sensei Moto Matsushita, Moose Jaw Saskatchewan, ca 1947 NNM 2010.23.2.4.517

Kendo Sensei Moto Matsushita, Moose Jaw Saskatchewan, ca 1947 NNM 2011.68.1.71

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Tensions between the hardened Angler POW camp ganbariya and Tashme families was an expected result of Canada’s continuing ethnic cleansing policy. Angler internee Takeo Nakano (and an issei non-ganbariya), upon deciding to leave the Ontario POW camp in November 1943 was spat upon and cursed by an internee identified only as “M.” Asserts Nakano, “M” verbally attacked him: “So you are going to leave [Angler] and work for Canada in wartime, are you? I suppose you don’t know that that will aid the war effort against Japan.” Concluded the bitter ganbariya, “Still, I know a traitor to Japan when I see one.” According to Nakano, “M” was one of the ganbariya sent to Moose Jaw in 1946. Tom Seki also recalled similar scenes though his experience was different from many nisei in Moose Jaw: he worked as a translator and clerk at the Moose Jaw detention of the RCMP. Seki believed that the ganbariya were “stubborn people” and that because he worked for the RCMP he was, thus, caught in the middle. Some of the issei “took their anger out on me.” The presence of internees in Moose Jaw was a key component of the King government’s post-war strategy to further violate civil liberties by deporting Japanese Canadians to Japan as well as prohibit their return to the Pacific Coast without due process of law. In line with Ottawa’s continued nullification of Canadians’ civil liberties, the Moose Jaw internees temporarily located in this prairie community had travel restrictions. Japanese Canadians at the hostel were “at liberty” to travel 50 miles for employment for no more than 30 days “without an RCMP travel permit.” Meanwhile, it quickly became clear to Constable Cooper that the internees from Angler and those from Tashme segregated themselves into different cliques, with the former, “still bitter, and non[:] cooperative.” upon arrival in Moose Jaw. Nevertheless, the whirlwind of change was such that by the third week of July, “about 36 of the [245] camp residents” had “volunteered” for repatriation to Japan.” Those interned in Moose Jaw that wished to go to Japan left Vancouver on August 2 on board the S.S. General Meigs. The “voluntary” reasons for deportation to Japan after the war were varied. Because of racism, some felt they had no home in Canada. For others, family obligations were a large factor: many nisei that went to Japan with their elderly issei parents did so out of familial obligation.

In the internees’ initial months in Moose Jaw, it was the issei that generally stayed within the confines of the hostel while the nisei ventured into the community. Certainly, language proficiency and familiarity with Canadian culture also played a part in one’s ability to assimilate. In many ways, the experiences of Tom and Mary Seki (who were 25 and 23 years of age respectively) in Moose Jaw is illustrative of the Japanese Canadian experience during and in the immediate years after the Second World War. In the spring of 1945 internees in Tashme, British Columbia were coerced into making a difficult choice by Ottawa, “repatriation” to Japan or move east of British Columbia. The Sekis remained in Canada while their parents chose Japan. Moose Jaw was chosen as a “midway” point between BC and Ontario as Mary was pregnant at the time. The young couple took part in many social functions that were offered. Individual members of the [Canadian Commonwealth Federation], . . . Rotary Club, YWCA, YMCA, [and the] United Church invited the nisei to many Moose Jaw gatherings. Moose Jaw-native Fumiko Endo Greenaway, who was a teenager at the time, also recalled visiting with friends at the hostel which meant that teenagers had similar opportunities to have some semblance of social life.

Even so, the post-war economic boom in Moose Jaw meant that the vacancy rate was very low in this small prairie city: a double-edged sword for Ottawa in its efforts to disperse Japanese Canadians. In fact, according to RCMP Sergeant Albert Minty, there appeared to be “considerable employment for Japanese [Canadians]” if housing could only be attained in the city. At this point, only one family that found work had left the hostel and moved into Moose Jaw. However, employment for Japanese Canadians were limited to temporary work and the service industry as some men provided labour at surrounding farms and restaurants. Some men also served as “section hands” on the railroads surrounding Moose Jaw. The greatest demand, however, was for “domestic help” though unfortunately for the Moose Jaw “project” there were “few [Japanese Canadian] girls old enough for this kind of work.”
By mid-November, with the onset of what was for many of the Japanese Canadian internees a first prairie winter, the Labour Department’s strategy to use Moose Jaw as a “relocation centre” appeared to be having success. Since July 1, there was “a total of 424 admissions to the Moose Jaw hostel with 54 having found employment in Saskatchewan while another 144 finding jobs in other provinces. Another twenty-five settled in the city. But whether located at the hostel or within the city limits Japanese Canadians were determined to rebuild their lives with a handful taking part in an “Economic Losses Survey” commissioned by the Japanese Canadian Committee for Democracy (JCCD). The Toronto-based JCCD promoted this survey on November 21, 1946, sending a Canada-wide call asking Japanese Canadians to fill in the survey to gather information on property losses during the war. The purpose of the survey was a first step in seeking financial reparations from Ottawa for the loss of property. The person first to request the forms in Moose Jaw was Philip Murakami in December quickly followed by Sukeyi Takasaki and Kenseki Kitagawa. In spite of the presence of over 400 hundred internees, only a dozen in Moose Jaw took part in the JCCD survey. A transient existence due to continuing dispersal and an uncertain future meant that filling a survey to seek financial restitution was not a priority.

January 1947 began with a “workplace” strike by the 19-member Japanese Canadian kitchen staff at the hostel, all of whom were employed by the Department of Labour. It appears that there were three “ringleaders” in this strike, and, according to RCMP Sergeant Humphrey Mitchell, “one internee was scared into remaining off work.” Toshio Haga, Hideko Hama, and Hideo Matsuyama were former internees from the Angler POW camp that resisted a change in the hours and conditions of their employment. The internees formed a “workers” union and attempted to negotiate a change in their working conditions. The strike continued until January 11, 1947, also marked the first time that Japanese Canadians spoke publicly about their plight in Moose Jaw. Tom Seki spoke on behalf of his fellow internees to the Moose Jaw Rotary Club asking for “fair treatment and tolerance” from the assembled residents. The expectations of Japanese Canadians in their new home were modest: “... all we wanted was freedom...” Speaking for himself and his hostel contemporaries to establish friendships in the city, “I am hoping and praying that from now on,” Euro Canadians should “judge us by our individual acts and not by our race, color, or creed.” Seki also presented his fellow internees as equally Canadian as any Euro Canadian born in Canada, a task he undertook by taking part in speaking engagements throughout Saskatchewan.

The workplace strike in January also coincided with the beginning of a sustained three-month period of blizzards that had no equal in 20th century southern Saskatchewan. On January 15, a teenage Moose Jaw internee wrote to a former Tashme teacher, “the winds [were] blowing the snow around so we are not able to go to school. The bus cannot come up to our airport [location of the hostel]... We have had many blizzards.” Local branches of the YWCA, YMCA, and the United Church assisted internees in January, February and March as the city (and southern Saskatchewan) withstood blizzards “blocking highways, creating havoc with the highway system and endangering fuel and food supplies” to the community. Intermee school children that managed to go to school during these months and were unable to return to the hostel were fed, housed and entertained with movies by the YMCA and YWCA. Parts of Moose Jaw saw snow piled as high as fourteen feet. The weather also halted the movements of internees that had job placements with many deciding to wait until spring before relocating to “other parts of Canada.” It must be remembered, however, that while this winter was their first on the prairies for these Japanese Canadians, they had been battered by winters in the interior of British Columbia and north-western Ontario for the previous three winters. Former Angler POW internees withstood minus-40 temperatures in north-western Ontario while those in the interior of British Columbia in Tashme, BC, weathered minus 25 temperatures with five-foot snow drifts piled up against the thinly insulated shacks that they lived in.

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By the end of May, the number of Japanese Canadians in the hostel was reduced to 97 from a total of 237 in mid-April. The Labour Department hoped, as Mackenzie King had intended, that the rounding up and sending of Japanese Canadians from the British Columbia interior to the Angler POW camp to Moose Jaw would further scatter the diaspora. There was concern that arresting the remaining internees would garner negative publicity for the Canadian government. Therefore, it was decided in late-May that the remaining inmates were permitted to remain at the hostel with no decision to be made by the Department of Labour as to their fate. Furthermore, the MP from BC, and its sole cabinet minister, the Scottish-born Mackenzie King was a major player in the internment of Japanese Canadians. The Liberal government (supported by the conservatives) were engaged in racism and misdirected vengeance and scapegoating. The Pacific Coast prohibition remained.

Nevertheless, the federal Department of Labour announced the closure of the Moose Jaw hostel for May 31, provoking an immediate response from some former internees of the Angler POW camp. It appeared that none of their cohorts were also allowed to leave for New Denver, BC, for health reasons. In an attempt to maintain group cohesion and remain in Moose Jaw, one internee stated that “he would be killed first,” before he was transferred while another claimed that he was a “former Japanese soldier and would take orders from no one but the Japanese army.” RCMP sergeant Albert Minty added a note of caution in his reporting: a number of former Angler POW internees were observed “busily sharpening knives.” The exact concerns of the Moose Jaw internees were not noted in the RCMP memorandum but it is likely that the fervent wish of many was to return to the Pacific Coast and that unity among inmates were required in order to attain this goal. Indeed, the anger of a sizable minority within the camp had intensified behind the scenes, so hinted the New Canadian, to the sole Japanese Canadian newspaper.

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The Sugar Beet Fields and Japanese Canadian Internment

by David B. Iwaasa

Nearly 4,000 of some 21,460 Japanese Canadians forcibly evacuated from the West Coast of Canada during and immediately following World War II ended up working for a period in the sugar beet fields, mostly in Southern Alberta, but also more than 1,000 in Manitoba and a small group of mostly single men in Southern Ontario. For the sugar beet growers and the sugar beet factories, the mass evacuation of Japanese Canadians from the West Coast was a ‘heaven sent’ solution to their perennial labour shortages. For the Canadian government that all Japanese, of whom there are some 24,000 in the province, be placed in camps where they could possibly be formed into labor corps….”

“This last point, suggesting that surplus labour might be available, caught the eye of the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers’ Association (ASBGA), and their secretary, Mr. W.F. Russell, sent the following to Mayor Hume, chairman of the federal government’s Standing Committee on Orientals on January 28, 1942:

“Dear Sirs: We would like some information in connection with the plan or scheme to remove the Orientals from the coast to the interior. In the beet fields in this District, we employ around 1,500 to 2,000 beet workers every year. If some scheme could be worked satisfactorily, it might be possible to utilize some of the Orientals from your territory. Kindly let me hear from you in connection with this matter.”

As an indication of the immediate interest the enquiry from the ASBGA created, the Associate Deputy Minister of Labour, Mr. A. MacNamara, sent the following letter to Mr. Russell of the ASBGA on February 17, 1942:

“Dear Sir: Unofficial advice has been placed in my hands to the effect that the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers’ Association is somewhat interested in obtaining the assistance of Japanese labour in connection with the cultivation of sugar beets. Japanese Nationals, who are men born in Japan and enemy aliens, as well as Canadians of Japanese racial origin born in Canada, are available…It strikes me that it might be possible for your Association to work out some mutually satisfactory arrangement for the employment of this surplus labour.”

Given the positive reaction from the government to the ASBGA’s initial enquiries, on March 6, 1942, a delegation was sent to Vancouver to meet with the newly established B.C. Security Commission. This meeting was a positive one. According to A.E. Palmer, who was a member of the ASBGA delegation, representing the federal Department of Agriculture, there were three reasons why they felt the Japanese should come to the interior. The need was tremendous and no other significant source of labour was in sight; the delegation felt that if the federal government deemed it necessary to evacuate the Japanese, then it was their duty to help remove them; and since the Japanese could be moved to the sugar beet fields as a family unit, the growers felt that it would be in the interests of the Japanese themselves to come to Southern Alberta.

Although most of the sugar beet growers were pleased with the Japanese coming, not everyone felt the same way. On March 8, 1942, the Raymond branch of the Canadian Legion called a meeting to discuss the situation. This occurred after the recent arrival of several Japanese families and individuals from the West Coast, mainly friends and relatives of the long-time Japanese residents in the district. The local Japanese residents gave assurances at the meeting that the newcomers had been permitted to come by the federal authorities. In Lethbridge, Alderman Rorie Knight declared, “I will have nothing to do with the Japanese—they are the most treacherous nation on earth. No word of mine will bring a Jap to this country.” However, D.H. Elton, mayor of Lethbridge stated: “we must subdue our personal feelings and stand in front of a truck filled with sugar beets in a field. Left to right, Joe, Nobe Yamada, Jiro Kamiya.

Kikue Kazama Collection
1994.99.1.4.a-c
Despite the controversy, by April it was quite definite that the Japanese would be coming to Southern Alberta. On April 7, 1942, Mr. W. Andrews of Lethbridge was appointed as the B.C. Security Commission representative in Southern Alberta. Approximately one week later, the first contingent from the Mission, B.C. area arrived and went to the Coaldale-Diamond City region. The second group consisting of 22 families from Whonnock, B.C. went to Picture Butte. The third group comprised of some 73 persons in ten families from Steveston went to Coaldale. The fourth group made up of 23 families from New Westminster went to the Raymond-Magrath district. The movement continued until, by the first week in June, the 21st group had arrived, bringing the total number of Japanese Canadians brought into Southern Alberta from B.C. to approximately 2,250 or about 370 families. Over roughly this same period, some 1,053 individuals in family units were moved to Manitoba and some 350 single men were sent to Ontario to work in their sugar beet fields.

The Japanese Canadians that had agreed to be moved to the sugar beet fields did so, for the most part, because they were promised that they would remain in family units, receive decent housing, be able to maintain a reasonable standard of living, have relative freedom of movement, and placement on farms near one another. Consequently, whole communities in the Fraser Valley volunteered for beet work. Most had made their living for years through stoop labour on their berry and vegetable farms and they assumed that beet work on the prairies would be similar. Also, while most of the first contingents were from among those with some farm experience, later groups included large numbers of fishermen and those with lumbering experience. The wide-open prairie sugar beet fields were a new experience, saying that the Hungarians [who were his previous beet workers] used only five gallons of water per day while the Japanese used sixty. Other major problems encountered by the evacuees included the lack of nearby medical facilities; the vast distances between farms and neighbours; and the lack of acreage and extra work to allow most of the families to make an adequate living.

Given that the order for mass evacuation was not officially issued until February 26, 1942 and the first Japanese began to arrive in Southern Alberta less than a month and a half later, it was not surprising that there would be some confusion and suffering at the outset. While movement to the sugar beet fields was meant to allow the Japanese Canadians to be self-sufficient, it wasn’t until the second crop year that many of the problems were addressed and an estimated 42% were forced to seek some type of relief during the first winter. As described by Tadashi Akagawa, an evacuee from Surrey,

"Thinning the beets was backbreaking work…During the growing season, only the odd weeding and irrigating was necessary. The really hard work began with the harvesting of sugar beets. I recall standing shivering in the cold November mornings staring at the seemingly never-ending rows of full-grown sugar beets…We had worked in fruit and vegetables in Surrey, but nothing was like working in the sugar beets in Alberta."8

However, as many of the initial problems began to be resolved, the individual situations of the evacuee families began to improve. Although they were still in exile, most were trying to make the best of a difficult situation. It was also a learning process for their fellow Southern Albertans as they realized that the Japanese Canadians were not subversives, and many had been in Canada longer than their Caucasian employers. The Lethbridge Herald on August 25, 1942 reflected this amazement:

"Japanese beet workers, many of them speaking perfect English are in the Taber district and are seen frequently on the town streets. Some of them have been members of Christian churches at the coast and attend Sunday services here."

While the some 1,000 evacuees sent to the Manitoba sugar beet fields also encountered many of the same difficulties of adjusting to the back-breaking work required to grow and harvest sugar beets, Winnipeg was a more cosmopolitan centre and they didn’t experience as much of the racism and discrimination that took place elsewhere, including in parts of Southern Alberta. In the case of Ontario, nisei men who had been shipped to road camps in northern Ontario in the spring of 1942 were later housed in 8 camps and hired out to sugar beet farmers in southern Ontario. But in the spring of 1943, only 2 camps were reopened, and less than 50 nisei were involved in beet labour. The sugar beet programme — at first thought capable of drawing many families in similar manner to the prairie farms — was a failure in Ontario, largely due to the ready availability of better paying jobs.9

Were the expectations of both the government and the Japanese Canadians met through the sugar beet projects established as part of the wartime evacuation? From the government perspective, the evacuees had saved the sugar beet industry. As quoted by Ken Adachi, in Alberta, "by 1945, the evacuees constituted 65% of the beet labour and were therefore an almost indispensable work force in the province." For the evacuees, despite the difficult beginnings and the brutally hard work, when the so-called “loyalty test” was taken near
The same could also be said of the Japanese Canadian population of Manitoba, remaining relatively constant through to March 31, 1949. In my own research, I noted an important concern that had hung over the evacuees from the outset was the demand by the Province of Alberta that the Japanese be removed from Alberta at the end of the hostilities and a similar condition existed in the agreement with the Province of Manitoba. While this condition was referred to as late as 1944, it is interesting that it was largely forgotten after the war ended, and no mention of this condition was made when the agreements with the provinces came to an end in 1948. It appears that the Japanese Canadians had been accepted as full members of their respective provinces. A fitting epitaph to this traumatic period in Japanese Canadian history was made by Tadashi Akagawa.

“When we came out to the beet fields in Alberta, the people here were scared. They had heard about the Japanese whom they were at war with and thought that Canadian Japanese were terrible people. When we found out we were not part of the war, but were

Endnotes


2 The article and the following letters are from the Alberta Sugar Beet Growers’ Association Papers, Glenbow Archives, Calgary.

3 Lethbridge Herald, March 9, 1942

4 C.D. Peterson, interview by the author, summer 1972, also Raymond Recorder, Apr. 3, 1942.

5 David B. Iwaasa, quoting from the Lethbridge Herald, May 20, 1942, 70-71. The B.C. Security Commission, “Removal of Japanese from Protected Areas”, October 31, 1942 states that 2,588 were moved to Alberta, including some individual families who moved to Alberta on their own.

6 Ann Gomer Sunahara, 80, and Seiko Kinoshita, maiden name of the author’s mother, interviewed, summer 1972.


10 David B. Iwaasa, 96-97 and Ken Adachi, 282 and 416

11 N. Rochelle Yamagishi, 110.
Okuda Narrative – 2018.3.1.2.3

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December 7th, 1941, will leave forever imprints in the minds of those of Japanese origin not only in Canada, and more particularly those in BC, but also in the United States of America, and especially those in Washington, Oregon, and California. It was Sunday and like any other day of any year, with this exception: that Japan declared an out and out war against England and the United States by bombing Pearl Harbor, Manila, Honolulu, Singapore, and Hong Kong simultaneously.

It is usually my custom to tune in the radio on a special mantelpiece just above my head when I awoke, and was rudely shaken from bed by the special announcement “Pearl Harbor Bombed”. This in itself did not make me realize the fullness of the impact. I thought and hoped and prayed while I took a second breath that it was one of those Orson Welles “man from Mars” programs, but the follow up to the original announcement convinced me that what we had hoped would never come to pass had suddenly dawned upon us. My mind started to swim in a sea of bewilderment, not there and then, and for once I was lost like the herring in mid-Pacific, not knowing what to think, how to act or what to do.

I am usually a late riser but December 7th found me otherwise for before I had taken a second breath I was fully dressed and hugging closely to the radio for further information. Just then my next door neighbour比利, in penthouse #48, came barging into my room and she was just as perplexed and bewildered as I was for the news had come to her just as potent a shock as to us as our native land. We must endeavour to strike a medium between what is just and unjust, equitable and inequitable, and try to suppress our yearnings for all the civil liberties which are enjoyed by others even in times of emergencies. We must forever bear in mind that we are of Japanese origin, and therefore, must live within the limitations imposed upon us by the orders-in-council issued by the government under the War Measures Act.

But the war having come so suddenly the various orders-in-council will not be forthcoming for some time, and we must endeavour to shift for ourselves [sic] as well as we can under wartime emergencies. Being myself one of the numerous War Babies of 1914 vintage, I could not judge for myself what the limitations are and must use my own discretion in this matter.

The sea of bewilderment on which I was trying to be afloat in the forenoon, trying my damnest to keep afloat and not be engulfed by the crushing white crested waves, calmed down and I found myself afloat in the sea of bewitching anticipation in the afternoon. While I was pondering the reaction of those

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of Japanese origin it never occurred to me what the reaction of others would be once I came in contact with them. I thought to myself that sooner or later I will have to face my many accidental friends and that since our office is located in the business centre of Vancouver I must not have a guilty conscience or a chip on my shoulder and must face them as in days gone by. “Remember Pearl Harbor,” that jargon of impending war, had left a bad impression of things Japanese as the commentaries had addressed the public that Japan had sneaked from behind and stabbed America in the back. This impression that the Japanese could not be trusted, I must consider as a chip on us, and must, therefore, endeavour to override this impression when I face the music. The sea of anticipation into which I had been thrown into recalled to mind what those of German origin had go through on that 3rd day of September 1939. They being of the white race enjoying all the civil liberties of a full-fledged Canadian, their reaction may not have been as controversial as ours, but still boiled down to the same thing. Extras were rampant on that day, but strangely no extras came out on December 7th, 1941. September 3rd, 1939, though memorable, did not bring with it the reactions which were my lot as did December 7th, 1941, for although it was close to the hearts of every Canadian, it did not involve those of Japanese origin. And as we were far removed from the actual theatre of war it did not occur to us that time that though it had come to pass, it would govern our ways of life to any appreciable extent. We accepted it merely as another war, and took it for granted that though there will be certain restrictions in our own ways of life it would not affect us materially.

In contrast to September 3rd of 1939, December 7th of 1941 brought with it all the bewilderment imaginable for now we were thrown into a sea of animated suspension and hyperactivity, a sea in which we must shift for ourselves as best as we can. With this thought in my mind I returned to my penthouse #47 to map out my itinerary for the days to come, and for the sudden change that will be brought about in the ways of life to which I had previously been accustomed. Around 8 in the evening, Frank and Mike dropped into penthouse #48 and so I made my appearance there. Over several cups of dipped coffee we all discussed in our varied ways what the news implied explicitly and how we were going to face our accidental friends the following morning. I had been jolted by the news. I had decided not to go to the office, but Mike, who is working in the Kerrisdale residential district, and Frank, who is working in the local bank, were intending to go to their respective jobs, I decided that I might as well make my appearance at the office.

That night, for the first time in ages, I did not get a wink of sleep. All evening I tossed in bed, thinking the whole night through, what this was leading to, for how long, and what was to be our lot. I thought about my folks in Cumberland, my younger brothers, and sisters, and how all my other friends were taking the news. I thought of my friends south of the 49th, and also of my nisei friends in Japan. I thought of my many accidental friends who too were rudely awaken (sic) by the news, and who too must be pondering over the situation. I was pondering perhaps in a different way. The panorama and sequence of events past, present, and future entered my brain. Events which were full of gaiety and sequence of events past, present, and future entered my brain. Events which were full of gaiety and
sleep did not occur to me until I began to hear the sing-
ing crescendo of the carefree chickadees whirring in
the dark morning, and then it was time to arise.

Never had I gone to the office before 10, but December
8th found me up drowsy but early and so I boarded the
#14 at the corner of Jackson and Hastings along with
Reggie Yasui, the West Coast Salesman, and Anthony
Kobayashi, Tagashira Salesman. That day being 75¢
day at the Woodward's Department Store, the tram was
packed with middle aged women shoppers and so we
there hung on to the railings, and overheard the follow-
ing conversation: “I wish those Chinese would lick the
hell out of the Japs.” I poked Reggie on the ribs and ad-
vised him what we were up against. I was ill at ease, but
considered that it was only natural that they express
their opinions outwardly. Though the conversational-
ists were strangers, that guilty conscience which I had
tried so hard to surmount got the better of me, and so...

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by the time I had reached 744 W Hastings I must have
had a long face, for Margie Black, the cigarette stand
concessioner, said, “Rosie, why do you have a long
face, instead of smiles written all over you as in the
past?” To her, I believe, the war made no difference
whatever in our friendly relationship for which I was
thankful. Tommy Muir, the elevator operator, whom I
had come to know very well during the past 4 years
advised me that he feels sorry things had to turn out
the way it had but that there is no sense in having a
guilty conscience, and that I will always be welcome
in his home. After doffing my overcoat I pondered for
awhile and made a beeline for Spencer's, where I saw
Jack Mains, Mary Martin, and others in order to say a
few words. Having known them for years through busi-
ness connections I anticipated and counted on them
to act as my advisors, and their impression was to the
effect that they were sorry Japan took the wrong road.

Words of wisdom emanated from the lips of Mains ad-
vising me that I should not take it too seriously, but that
since everyone has been keyed up to the nth degree
I should take things easy for a while. After making the
rounds of other offices I donned my overcoat and left
for home in a taxi, with a clear conscience and glad of
the fact that my acquaintances had no word of deroga-
tion against me personally.

I was in the office for only 10 minutes all told, I did not
realize then what the other members were doing for I
was the only member present though only for a short
while. That afternoon I was advised by one of my ac-
quaintances that both N & S were interned on Sunday
evening along with many others. I realized then that
many pressing responsibilities requiring investigations
and enquiries were placed upon my shoulders and for
once actually was at a loss, since the various firms were
in a delicate state of affairs.

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The majority of niseis I know are like myself, a little star-
tled to find themselves classified distinctly as of Japa-
nese origin and therefore must be treated accordingly.
It now clearly comes to mind that on December 6, 1941,
we went to bed as integrated Canadians accustomed
to Canadian customs and habits, though at times made
the pawn of political pollbaiting, only to wake up on
December 7, 1941, to find ourselves of Japanese origin.
The problems of franchise, of assimilation, of decen-
tralization, towards which we were aiming were rudely
assaulted and we were again restored to our more or
less forgotten identity: “Once a Jap, always a Jap.”

We who had been striving to get away from the “petty
insular spirit” so typical of many isseis were disturb-
ingly restored to the identity of having a strong at-
tachment to the birthplace of our forefathers. Not all
of us were disturbed by this mysticism, for there were
many among us born in Canada, nurtured in Canadian
schools, and working among Canadians, who were of
the opinion that though externally we have the features
of a Japanese that surely we will be treated as Cana-
dians; that surely the prestige which we so richly de-
serve, and which we had more or less generally won,
would not have been in vain.

We the niseis are comparable to the modern 8 cylinder
carriage and the isseis to the one lung gas carriage of
1910 vintage.

“Remember Pearl Harbor,” that note emanating from
the radio, and will persist in the circumambient ether
through time unending. Will be forever present in the
interstices of one’s selective memory. As long as civili-
ization exists on this universe.