

# Landscapes of Injustice



Research News and Project Updates

Fall 2016

## Message from Project Director

Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross

*Landscapes of Injustice* is now just about half-way through its first “phase,” when most of our energy focuses on archival digging, oral history interviewing, and land title-searching. I’ve been reflecting lately on the people doing much of this work: our Research Assistants. The RAs on *LoI* are graduate and undergraduate students from 8 different universities, stretching from Kingston, Ontario to Victoria, British Columbia. About two dozen students work on the project every year and approximately 75% of the project’s budget is devoted to their training and support. Students work directly with leading researchers and museum professionals. They do archival research, conduct interviews, design and manage complex databases, translate documents, create maps, communicate across disciplinary boundaries, connect with communities, analyze and report research findings, speak to the media . . . the list could go on and on. Our students do everything that the project does.

As part of the project, students learn an important history and acquire practical skills. They engage questions of social justice, democracy, and activism. They learn how to find their own place within a team comprised of people with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and capacities. Those who are not of Japanese-Canadian ancestry, a majority on our project, learn how to engage historical injustice as active allies—to contribute to excavating harms perpetrated against a particular community while also communicating respectfully with and learning from members of that community. Students of Japanese-Canadian origin have told me that they are discovering new ways of understanding the history of their own families and building new communities within which they can explore this past. The project does, and should, continue to search for ways to enhance student experiences with the project. But it can also, I think, be very proud of what the RAs are already accomplishing and learning.



*Legal History* RA Monique Ulysses at Library and Archives Canada, July 2015 (Photo credit: Kaitlin Findlay)

## Scholarship + Activism forum

Kaitlin Findlay

This November saw the launch of the RA Committee’s online Scholarship + Activism forum. The website emerged from discussions at the 2015 *LoI* Spring Institute about the relationship between scholarship, activism, and social justice. It features interviews, reflections, and a reading list of related materials. The RAs are sharing a post weekly for November, beginning with two interviews from within the *LoI* collective, former *Legal History* RA [Monique Ulysses](#) and Project Director [Jordan Stanger-Ross](#), and outside, with [Karen Kobayashi](#).

## Community Council Update

Vivian Rygnestad

The Community Council is pleased to welcome Terry Watada to our group. Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Terry has been actively involved with the Japanese-Canadian community across Canada since the 1970s. He is a theatre performer, musician, speaker, and human rights activist. Terry has written extensively about the JC community's experiences and people in the forms of poetry, fiction and non-fiction novels, and edited anthologies. For his efforts and dedication Terry has won many awards including the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal and the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) Merit award for volunteering. He was also the recipient of the Dr. Gordon Hirabayashi Human Rights Award at the 2015 NAJC AGM. We look forward to working with Terry and know that he will be a valuable member of the Community Council.



Photo credit:  
Terry Watada

We thank the cluster leaders for keeping us informed via emails and Skype. This helps us in continuing to provide support and guidance when needed, as well as being a strong voice to and from the JC community.

I thank *Landscapes of Injustice* for the opportunity to attend the NAJC AGM in September in Calgary where I had an opportunity to highlight the work and importance of the Community Council to the Landscapes project. In addition there were many conversations with the attendees about the project that often uncovered interesting stories. It was an excellent opportunity to meet and to inform delegates about the research being conducted into JC history.



Photo credit: Josie Gray

## Notes from a Research Assistant

Josie Gray

Over the summer, I worked in the Victoria branch of the Community Records Cluster as a data encoding and research assistant. Under the supervision of Stewart Arneil, Ariel Merriam and I learned how to use XML (Extensible Markup Language). Over the course of the summer, we transcribed and marked thousands of historical documents with XML, which will allow information from those documents to be processed and analyzed by software in ways that would not be possible by human intelligence.

For quite a while, I have been entertaining the idea of going into publishing after graduation with a plan to work my way to an editorial position. In July, a coop position as an Open Textbook Technical Writer with BCcampus was released for the fall semester. It seemed like a good stepping-stone towards a future career in publishing so I looked into it. The job description asked for applicants with experience in editing HTML and CSS code. I did not have that, but I applied anyways and played up my XML experience that I had been developing with *Landscapes of Injustice*. To my surprise, I got an interview. During the interview, although I admitted to no experience with HTML, I regularly referred back to my work with *Landscapes of Injustice* and my experience with XML to answer most of the questions. In addition, I was able to draw on writing and editing experience I have developed during my history undergraduate degree. I received a job offer fifteen minutes after I left the interview.

Working with BCcampus' Open Textbook project, I edit textbooks to ensure they are accessible for people with disabilities - most specifically those with visual, auditory, and physical disabilities. These textbooks target first year post-secondary classes with high enrollment and are openly licensed, which makes them free to use, change, and share all around the world. I am learning so much about HTML, digital publishing, Creative Commons Licensing, and web accessibility. This experience has been a positive step towards my desire to eventually go into publishing and it is all thanks to the experience I gained in XML while working with *Landscapes of Injustice*!

# Reflecting on Loss in the Classroom

By Kate Jaimet

What is value? What is loss? Those are the questions that Teacher Resource cluster co-chair Greg Miyanaga wants students to ponder in his Landscapes of Injustice project, which addresses the dispossession of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War.

Miyanaga — who won the 2006 Governor General’s History Award for Excellence in Teaching for his previous work on Japanese-Canadian internment — is part of a team of researchers collectively called “Landscapes of Injustice” which is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Their seven-year project seeks to discover, document, and communicate the stories of more than 21,000 people of Japanese ancestry who had their homes and possessions taken away when they were forced into internment camps.

Miyanaga is developing a role-playing game that allows Grade Five students to experience the feeling of losing their homes, as they learn about the wartime events. “Because we’re talking about ten-year-olds, I’m just trying to give them a broad idea of the issue,” he said. “The big question is: What is value? What do you value? And what is loss? How do you deal with that, when you lose what you value?”



Photo credit: Rebecca Blissett

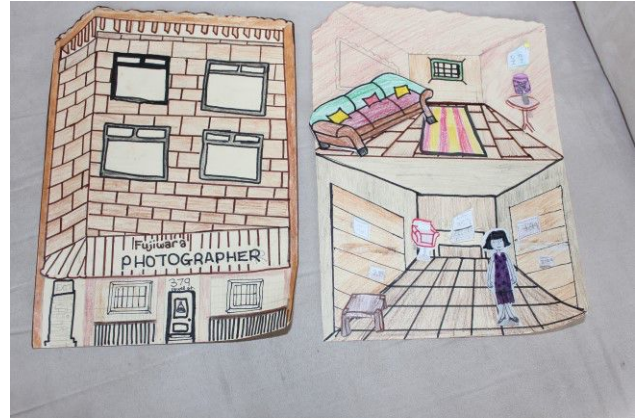


Photo credit: Greg Miyanaga  
Student’s work from the class of Lindsay Hill

The “gameboard” in Miyanaga’s project is a bulletin-board map of Powell Street in Vancouver, where many Japanese Canadians lived and owned businesses. Each child will receive a property card with an address, a picture, and a description of a business. Students will recreate the businesses and residences on the map/gameboard, and pin the cutouts of family members and possessions they accumulate into these scenes.

“The students are going to use their own families as a model; so they’ll live upstairs with their family and they’ll have a business downstairs,” Miyanaga explained. “Each lesson will start with headlines from 1941, like “Yankees Win World Series,” to give them an idea of what’s going on at the time. Then one day, we’ll let the kids know that the Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbour. The next time they come in, their businesses and possessions will still be there, but the ‘people’ will be on a different bulletin board — in tents, in the mountains. As the war goes on, their possessions will disappear.”

Miyanaga’s project is still at the conceptual stage, but when it’s completed, the intention is to make the game — and other learning resources developed through Landscapes of Injustice — available to educators across Canada.

*Note: This article was first published by The Canadian History Society.*

# National Association of Japanese Canadians AGM

Michael Abe

The National Association of Japanese Canadians Annual General Meeting took place in September in Calgary, Alberta. The NAJC and host organization, the Calgary Japanese Community Association must be commended for a very smoothly run program with excellent content. Delegates were offered sessions in the Heritage, Business Network, Human Rights and Young Leaders streams all led by qualified and interesting facilitators, providing a wonderful opportunity to learn, share and network.

The Saturday night Commemorative Banquet honouring the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Issei Volunteers in WWI was an epic event, with a detailed historical background by David Mitsui followed by stories from descendants of the WWI veterans, Laura Sugimoto and Tim Tamashiro. Author Kaye Kishibe also spoke about his research and stories from his 2007 book, *Battlefield at Last*. David is the grandson of Masumi Mitsui, one of the veterans being acknowledged and honoured that evening. He is also the incoming president of the NAJC.

Thank you to the organizing committee, Kevin Okabe, Harvey and Masaye Tanaka, Shirley Shigematsu, Russ Hironaka, Pat Jette, Cindy Nagata-McMillan, Joanne Planidin, Kiyomi Planidin Wong and Yoshiko Planidin Coates for allowing *Landscapes of Injustice* some time to give a brief update on the project.

Project Manager, Michael Abe gave a short overview of the project and its purpose, and again reinforcing the offer made at last year's AGM in Victoria that the project is committed to facilitating presentations and workshops for NAJC chapters and JC communities to help further their engagement in *Landscapes*. These could include, workshops on using oral histories to record and preserve family histories, using archival data to research and learn about the history of families and communities, presentations on legal documents surrounding the internment and dispossession or community mapping workshops to help evoke stories and memories of life before and during internment.

Vivian Ryngnestad, Community Council Chair, gave a motivating and heartfelt message from the community council and the energy that has formed between them and the project. They have developed a very good relationship and it continues to build strength as the project progresses.

The keynote belonged to Nicole Yakashiro, recipient of the 2016 NAJC/*Landscapes of Injustice* Hide Hyodo-Shimizu Research Scholarship who completed a summer of research in the Government Records research cluster. She worked at the Nikkei National Museum under the direction of Project Director and cluster chair, Jordan Stanger-Ross. Nicole reflected on her background, growing up in the Fraser Valley and what his project meant to her on a personal level, particularly the opportunity to meet and interact with other JC Young Leaders in the Vancouver area.

Her presentation, based on research of the Bird Commission claim of Vancouver Island lumber baron Eikichi Kagetsu, held the attention of the audience as she explored the concept of value in the forced sale of Kagetsu's logging empire. The complexities of valuation were illustrated quite dramatically when comparing the marked differences between the agent valuation, appraised valuation and the owner valuation of Kagetsu himself. Nicole's research is reflective of the project and asks the question, "How can we best engage our multiple ways of valuing property and place to maintain a just society that honours this diversity?"

Thank you to the NAJC for your continued support of *Landscapes of Injustice* and looking forward to the 2017 AGM in Ottawa during Canada's sesquicentennial and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the uprooting and internment of Japanese Canadians.



Photo credit: Paul Jette

## Landscapes of Injustice at the Powell Street Festival and Nikkei Matsuri

This August marked the 40<sup>th</sup> annual Powell Street Festival in Vancouver's historic Japanese Canadian neighborhood. *Landscapes of Injustice* tabled booths in the indoor and outdoor venues, spoke to dozens of festival-goers, and presented the project's headway since the previous year. Outdoors, Hide Hyodo-Shimizu Research Scholarship recipient Nicole Yakashiro challenged festival-goers to ask what different values property might have. Research assistant Alissa Cartwright presented her work developing an online database of the 1,200 Japanese-Canadian-owned fishing vessels confiscated and sold by the Canadian government in 1942 and Mikayla Tinsley talked about the timeline of the forced sale of the Tamura Building on the corner of Oppenheimer Park. On day two, our historical geographers and oral history RA ran a 'community mapping' workshop where participants added their memories and family stories to a historical map of Vancouver and the other study sites, Haney, Steveston and Salt Spring Island. The vibrant Powell Street Festival reflects the diverse perspectives of Japanese heritage and fosters connections within and beyond the Nikkei community; we were thrilled to join in this project.

We also attended the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre's annual Nikkei Matsuri in September. Over the course of the weekend, tens of thousands of visitors passed through the Garden to watch the festival events, play games, and eat the delicious festival food. We set up our table next to the museum entrance. Three years into the research project we developed 'teaser' material to communicate our activity in small bites. These teasers spark interest, memories, and further questions. The Matsuri was a wonderful opportunity to build new connections and interest in the dispossession of Japanese Canadians' property in the 1940s.



*Research Assistants Rebeca Salas and Samantha Romano at the Powell Street Festival (Photo credit: Ken Josephson)*



*Powell Street Festival (Photo credit: Ken Josephson)*

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### **Memories of Internment and Dispossession**

Saturday, January 14, 2017

1:00 – 4:00 pm

Vancouver Public Library 350 W Georgia St, Vancouver, BC

Free and open to the public

Landscapes of Injustice and the Vancouver Public Library are pleased to present the second in our "Memories of Internment and Dispossession" series.

Join us for a panel discussion with members of the Japanese-Canadian community who will give attendees the opportunity to hear their first-hand experiences and reflections on their uprooting and relocation with particular attention to how the forced-sale of their families homes and possessions impacted their experience of internment and the post-war years. A display with some of the current research from the Lol project will also be available for viewing and discussion. Further details will be posted on

[www.landscapesofinjustice.com](http://www.landscapesofinjustice.com)

## Congratulations to Dr. Heather Read

Dr. Heather Read worked for the Oral History research cluster at Ryerson University in 2015, under the guidance of Dr. Pamela Sugiman. Heather is an experienced researcher who explores intersections between material culture and identity using oral history interviews. She began practicing oral history during her Master's degree in Folklore at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, and continued her use of the research methodology during her PhD in Adult Education and Community Development from the University of Toronto. She has also done extensive community based oral history and arts work. Throughout her career so far, Heather pursued work in humanities and culture education, research and teaching. Since January 2016, Heather has been on maternity leave from LOI with her new daughter, Zoë.

Recently, Heather accepted a position at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. We'll let her tell you more about this exciting transition:

**LOI:** First off, congratulations on parenthood! How is Zoë doing these days?

**HR:** Really great, thanks for asking! She's growing bigger every day. She loves music, is crawling and dancing, and just started waving recently, which is so sweet. She climbed all the way upstairs for the first time recently. I feel so lucky to have had the chance to be with her this year. As I'm sure any new parent will say, the first chunk of time was a hard adjustment, but watching and helping her grow has been really amazing.

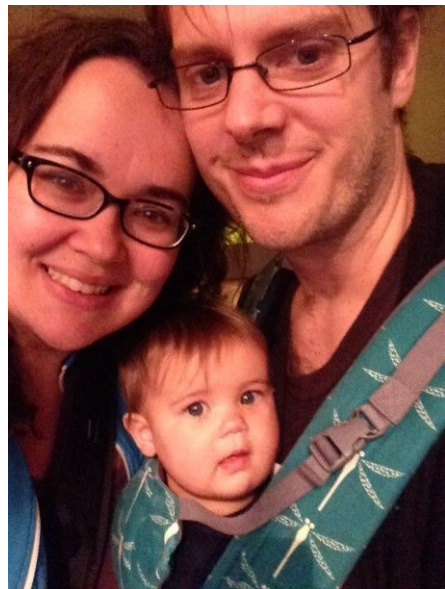


Photo credits: Heather Read

**LOI:** And further congratulations on your position at the ROM. Can you tell us a little bit about this exciting new step in your career?

**HR:** Thanks! I've accepted a 2-year position as the Rebanks Postdoctoral Fellow in the Arts and Material Culture of Colonial and Settled Canada. It's a bit of a mouthful, but in a nutshell, it means I'm going to be working in the curatorial department at the ROM, helping plan exhibitions and do research on the objects in the Canadian material culture collection there. The collection is wide ranging and contains beautiful furniture, paintings, glassware, maple sugar moulds, ceramics, and advertising prints, just to mention a few categories. In my PhD research, I explored the life stories of ceramic artists, so this position sits naturally within some of my past work. I love thinking about the stories and meaning that can get wrapped up in the objects in our lives.

**LOI:** We were very fortunate to have you as part of the LOI research collective. How was your experience and in particular in the terms of your academic interests and goals?

**HR:** I was really fortunate to be a part of the Landscapes team. Honestly, it was a hard decision to take this new job. Being a postdoctoral fellow, I got to see the project from two perspectives - working closely with one of the research leads, and also the students. I got to help shape the direction of the Oral History Cluster, and I learned so much from working with Pam. To talk about big picture things (like budgeting, managing people and research ethics) and then the nitty gritty details (like how to do a good interview) with someone who has such depth of experience was invaluable. And then to work closely with the student researchers in the Oral History Cluster, and share with them the joys and challenges of being a part of such a large project was also important learning. The LOI students are really passionate and keen.

I should also say that I really knew embarrassingly little about the internment of Japanese Canadians before this project. I grew up in Southern Ontario, and it basically never came up in our school systems. So, it's important to me that I now know more about this part of Canadian history, and I'm happy to have contributed to something that will teach others about this troubling aspect of our past.

And lastly - the people who've shared their stories with me and with the project. That's where it got really hard to think about leaving LOI. I am so grateful to the interviewees that I spoke with, both formally in interviews and informally in setting up interviews. I'm deeply honoured to have had the chance to listen to these people share their stories, and am saddened I won't get the chance to work with them again in the same capacity.

**LOI:** How did your experiences for LOI help prepare you for this new role at the ROM.

**HR:** I have typically approached thinking about material culture and stories and objects from a creation standpoint - asking artists why they make things, asking people why they have collected things, or decorated things, or preserved things, and so on. There's usually a thing that we can look at and talk about in many of my non-LOI interviews. The work of LOI inverted my usual perspective, and taught me a great deal about the importance and poignancy in stories of absence and loss. Being broadened is always good.

I am also more aware of how a person's experience of race affects what they are able to, and feel comfortable keeping in their homes in Canada. There were several interviewees who noted that they or their parents made efforts to disconnect from their Japanese heritage, and pass as white, after the war. So, they didn't try to get any Japanese dishes, or books, or clothes in their new living spaces. As I head off to work in a museum, where knowledge is rooted in collections of objects, I am better poised to ask questions about the social forces that shaped these collections.

**LOI:** Thank you for your time answering our questions. Do you have any final thoughts for the project and the research collective?

**HR:** I sincerely want to thank everyone and wish them good luck. To Pam, Jordan, and the rest of the research leads in particular - 7 years is a long time and this a complicated project to be a part of, on top of their other career and life responsibilities. I hope, from my end, that this isn't goodbye, too! I am going to stay in touch with the Oral History Cluster, and will keep an eye out for possible synergies with the ROM in the future. And hopefully, whatever happens, I'll be able to bring my daughter to the museum opening in a few years' time.

# The Human Experiences of the Uprooting of Japanese Canadians.

Eiji Okawa



**The Wealth of My Home** (*Wagaya no tomi*) poem (*Morishita Family Collection*, 2011.79.3.3-1, Nikkei National Museum)

The Wealth of My Home (*Wagaya no tomi*)

My house is merely ten-*tsubo* (approx. 300 square feet; read SMALL)

The yard is no more than three (approx. 100 square feet; read TINY)

Some say it's so small, that it's very cramped.

It may be cramped, but it's enough to fit my legs.

The yard might be small, but it's enough for me to look up and gaze upon the vast, azurean sky, or take a few steps and think of eternity.

The divine moon and sun shine upon this space, and the four seasons come here, too.

Wind, rain, snow, and fog all come and go, one at a time.

The joy the place brings is not slight.

Butterflies come and dance, cicadas come to sing, birds come to play and in the fall, fireflies come and chirp.

When I perceive things quietly, I come to know that much of the wealth of the universe is right here in my tiny lot.

On one spring day in Lemon Creek, British Columbia, Teiji Morishita penned this poem in his elegant handwriting. To be sure, the poem is not his creation. The writer Tokutomi Roka composed it, and included it in his bestselling collection of essays entitled *Nature and Life (Shizen to jinsei)*, which was published in Japan in 1900. The poem must have resonated with Teiji. He copied the first four lines of the poem three times, as if to memorize it by heart. Perhaps he wanted to recite it, naturally and spontaneously, as he sat in his then dwelling and contemplated on the meanings of the space that surrounded him. Maybe he wanted to share it with his peers as they socialized through the cultural medium of poetry.

With its eloquent expression of the intangible riches of a tiny home, the poem itself is poignant and enchanting. But it is the context in which Teiji wrote this poem that I want to draw attention to. It was written on March 11, Shōwa 21. In our calendar system, that's 1946. By this time, he had lost his home and business. Teiji was one of the approximately 21,000 people of Japanese heritage who were evicted from their own homes and communities as the Canadian government classified them as "enemy aliens" who threatened national security. His home on East Cordova Street in Vancouver, situated beside Oppenheimer Park where the Asahi's played ball, was seized by the government office that called itself the Custodian of Enemy Property. It was later sold without his approval. His business, the Ebisuzaki store, located on Powell Street,



was forced to shut down. Like other homes, businesses, and tools and equipment of various trades that belonged to Japanese Canadians, his store was in the process of being liquidated. Teiji was left in a dire situation. He needed to support his six children and his wife Sawa by performing menial labour that his career in business had not prepared him for. Actually, on the day that he wrote the poem, he spent eight hours chopping wood.

The poem compels us to consider the experiences of Japanese Canadians when they were forcibly dispossessed and displaced in the 1940s. What was on Teiji's mind when he wrote the poem? Surely, Teiji would have had an intimate and painful understanding of the wealth of a home and what it meant to lose it all. What did it mean for Japanese Canadians to lose their homes and properties, and be forced to start their lives over in unfamiliar places? What happened to them, and how did they cope with the challenges that confronted them? How did policies that mercilessly deprived them affect their lives? How did they express themselves? What records have they left us? What do those records say, and how might they be used to deepen our engagements with our past?

These are some of the questions that I want to explore with you in a series of articles on the source materials of the Japanese-Canadian experiences in the 1940s. And I want to do so by sharing with you some of the historical documents that I have encountered in my research. The records are part of Community Records, which are documents and other types of historical materials that have been preserved by Japanese Canadians.

Last summer, I worked as research assistant for Landscapes of Injustice, a multi-year collaborative project that is dedicated to recovering and grappling with the mass displacement and dispossession of Japanese Canadians enacted by the Canadian government (please see <http://www.landscapesofinjustice.com/>). My task was to survey the Japanese-language sources that are housed in the Nikkei National Museum in Burnaby. With the guidance of Linda Kawamoto Reid, the research archivist of the museum, we found many documents from the 1940s. As I pored over the texts, I soon realized how precious they were in offering glimpses of the complex lived experiences of the past. Much of the records, moreover, were new materials that have yet to be utilized by researchers. Partly, this is because the primary focus in telling the Japanese-Canadian experiences of the 1940s has been what the government did to them, and the racist impulses that informed discriminatory policies. Given that the ordeal of Japanese Canadians were direct results of the government's blatant violation of their civil rights, this is only natural. However, there is a diverse range of source materials on the subject that can expand our understandings of the tumultuous 40s. Another reason why community records tend to be underutilized in existing studies is language. Many of the records are in Japanese-language, and in handwritings that look considerably different from what one encounters in printed materials.

Community records were produced, kept and preserved by community members for themselves. As such, they offer first-hand accounts of historical events from the perspective of the people who lived through them. This contrasts from official records of the governments that were produced and preserved by public officials for the purpose of governance and administration. While policies and government records need to be examined to uncover and scrutinize the political machinations that were carried out in the coercive uprooting, they are limited in telling us about the human impacts and experiences of that uprooting. Community records, on the other hand, tell us how people thought and acted under the duress of racist forces and policies. The records also speak to us about the dynamics within the community before, during and after the tumultuous 40s. They are remnants and vestiges of history itself.

At the same time, community records are diverse. They include not only correspondence among family and community members and subjective writings such as diaries, essays and poems, but also formal documents and pronouncements of the government, as well as correspondence with government agencies including the office of the Custodian. Indeed, community records present precious voices from that past that are indispensable for presenting a fuller picture of the history of Japanese Canadians, and more broadly of twentieth century Canada.

Further, a lot of the records were written by Issei. It was the people of the Issei generation who laid the foundation of the Nikkei community in Canada with their sweat, tears and even blood. It was they who witnessed the fruits of their long and grinding struggles dissolve by the high-handed measures of the

government. The poem, for instance, was part of the records that Teiji had accumulated through his life experiences in Canada. He landed in the country in 1920 at age seventeen. He came from Uruzu in Fukuoka prefecture, in northern Kyushu, to help with the Ebisuzaki store that was established by Masatarō Ebisuzaki. Teiji's elder sister, Hide, had married him. With his background in business, Teiji was a meticulous record-keeper. His records include those related to the management of the store in the pre-war era, the struggle of the family during the great rupture of the 40s, and correspondence and diaries in the postwar era. These materials were donated to the Nikkei National Museum by Teiji's eldest daughter, Nancy Morishita, and are now archived in the museum under the title *Morishita Family Collection* (hereafter abbreviated as *MFC*).

*Landscapes of Injustice* is committed to disseminating its research outcomes to the public through various channels and sub-projects, such as museum exhibits, teacher resources, and media outreach. But since community records belong to the community, the findings should be shared first and foremost with the community. It is in this spirit that I endeavour to launch this article series. Please note, however, that I will not be trying to present a clear and well-organized accounts with coherent storylines. Rather, the articles will introduce selective documents and records that will be featured in part or full. The documents are raw records of events and problems that had great immediacy for the persons involved. By reading them closely, we can explore the circumstances that surrounded those persons, and imagine and reconstruct the complex experiences of our past. Because the documents deal with diverse and specific matters, I will briefly discuss the backgrounds and relevant issues. But I want to let the documents speak, and allow readers to think about history through the voices from the past.

### Teiji's Letter

Exactly a month before Teiji wrote the poem, he sent the following letter to B.R. Dusenbury at the Custodian's office in Vancouver (*MFC*, 2011.79.1.1.2g)

Lemon Creek, B. C.

February 11, 1946

Mr. B.R. Dusenbury

Administration Department

Custodian's Office

Vancouver, B. C.

Dear Sir:

Thank you very much for your recent letter. I wish to place before you my earnest request to withdraw out of my account which you hold.

You allowed me, last December, the sum of \$35.00 for my wife's false teeth. Though I am very grateful for your consideration, this was not enough to meet the dentist's charge.

This winter, until recently, I was very glad because of the mild weather. But now the winter is really here this late. It snows almost every day. My children need overcoats, warm enough to pass this winter, this severely cold weather. My children are going to school and kindergarten in old rags—each wearing ones handed down from his elders. I am very sad to see my children's shabby looking faces, partly due to the undernourishment and greatly to the insufficient clothings. I want to buy things for them, but you hold the money, all I have.

Furthermore, the deportation of Japanese to Japan seems to be in immediate future. We need to be ready. I am not wanting things which are expensive but few things for each child and for us, things we really need.

I have following six children:

Kuniko,	girl,	age 13,	Shoe size	3
Teruo,	boy,	" 11	" "	4
Hatsumi,	girl,	" 8	" "	1
Setsuko,	"	" 7	" "	12
Misako,	"	" 5	" "	7
Kimiye,	"	" 2	" "	6

They all need overcoats. They are wearing things which are beyond patching. They also need warm underwears, dresses, sweaters, stockings, shoes or boots. Whatever we brought from the Coast three years ago, are worn out now.

We will be very grateful if you can see your way and send us about \$150.00 so that we can buy things for them and for my wife and me. If you cannot send me the money, please arrange so that you will be able to send us the clothing. The sizes for children's dresses or sweaters can be judged by their ages.

My wife and I also need clothes, underwear, sweater, dress, and shoes. My wife wears size 14 dresses, size medium in underwears, shoe size 3 ½ or narrow 4. I wear size 38 clothes, shoe size 7.

There is another item you must take care for me. Before the outbreak of this war, I borrowed from my uncle, Mr. Tomizo MIYAMOTO, of 418 ½ West 17<sup>th</sup>, Cheyenne, Wyoming, U.S.A., the sum of \$100.00 in American money. Will you send the sum to my uncle out of my credit you hold. I must pay him back now before I shall be deported.

Appreciating your kindness and consideration, may I rely on your prompt action.

Yours very truly,

---

Teiji Morishita

TM\*KE

As seen here, Teiji needed new winter clothes for his children to bear the brutal cold front that struck Lemon Creek. But he did not have the cash to buy them. Understandably, the clothes that the family brought from the coast had become all worn out. Teiji was put in a helpless situation. Had he been in Vancouver, he could have easily purchased new clothes for his children to keep them warm. But his economic fate turned with the forced dislocation, and he was barely managing to support his family with the meagre wages earned through jobs offered by the British Columbia Security Commission.

But note Teiji's expression, "you hold the money, all I have." He technically had the money. It was in his account that was created with the money attained from the sale of his home. But that account was controlled by the Custodian. Hence, he had to make a formal request to the Custodian to have his money released. In fact, Teiji at this time was receiving what was called monthly "remittances" from the Custodian. His home was sold at \$1,914.24 sometime before October, 1944 (*MFC*, 2011.79.1.1.4a). That sum was deposited in his account. And each month, the Custodian mailed him a \$75 cheque, as remittance that was deducted from the account, enclosed with the statement of the account's balance (*MFC*, 2011.79.1.1.2e-f). Teiji was a meticulous record-keeper, and he made sure to preserve these records.

How did the Custodian respond to Teiji's requests? Thanks to Teiji's scrupulous record-keeping practice, we know exactly how they responded. The following is a letter from Dusenbury, dated February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

Mr. Teiji MORISHITA,

Reg. No. 05057,

Lemon Creek, B.C.

Dear Sir: -

In further reply to your letter of the 11<sup>th</sup> instant, we wish now to advise that we have heard from the Department of Labour, Japanese Division here and they do not recommend that we forward to you any of your funds at the present time. Neither do they recommend that we pay Mr. MIYAMOTO as you requested.

The Department states that you have elected to live on maintenance supplied by them.

In view of the above we cannot comply with your letter of the 11<sup>th</sup> instant.

Yours truly,

(signature)

B.R. Dusenbury,

BRD/DD.

Administration Department

As indicated in the letter, Dusenbury consulted officials at another government office, Department of Labour, before making the call. These men of Canadian officialdom were fully aware of the hardship of Teiji's family, including children as young as seven, five and two. Yet they denied the family the means to obtain adequate winter clothing, a basic necessity of life. Let me reiterate that these men actually thought about the case at hand and discussed it among themselves before handing down the decision. Why did they not release the money? It was Teiji's, after all. And this was recognized by Dusenbury when he wrote that he could not

“forward” to him “any of your funds at the present time.”

The letter is alluding to the racist psyche that was institutionalized in Canadian bureaucratic offices. The keyword is “elected.” The rationale for the denial was that Teiji had chosen to live in Lemon Creek, and support his family with the low-paying jobs offered under the aegis of BC Security Commission. But we must ask, what choice did he have? Concealed in the letter are the overbearing constraints that were imposed upon Teiji’s family by the Canadian state. Let us note, too, that Dusenbury cleared himself of blame for the decision. He made it clear that the decision was not his but the other office’s.

### **The Wealth of a Home**

It is bitterly ironic that Teiji wrote the poem after the above exchange of letters with the Custodian. The wealth of his home had practically vanished. The money that he was entitled to was kept beyond his reach. What is the wealth of a home? On this, the Custodian’s answer is clear. The home was sold at \$1,914.24, and that was its worth, clear and simple. There is little doubt that this figure was considerably less than its actual value, but the assumption was that the home was reducible to a static monetary figure. As far as the Custodian was concerned, once the balance in the account had reached zero, its relation with Teiji would cease. But can we reasonably determine the worth of a home that was forcibly sold by the money made through that sale? As the poem indicates, homes have wealth and meanings beyond what can be measured in dollars and cents.

Interestingly, the poem as a historical artefact is packed with multiple messages. It was written on the back side of a letter that Teiji had written, when he was in Vancouver, to a Japanese-language newspaper that was printed locally. In the letter, he asked the paper to continue to feature his store’s ad during the first week of the coming month. There is an elucidating irony here. The wealth of his home was never static. It was generated through the entrepreneurial efforts that he and his family put into their business. His home was a result of hard work, and the wealth of his home was maintained by running the store that catered to the needs of the community. In the next article, we will look at records that show us the relations between Teiji’s store and the community, and the disruptions that were caused by the closure of the store.

Community Records and the Human Experiences of the Uprooting of Japanese Canadians  
Eiji Okawa and the Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective

This article was published in the October 2016 issue of Geppo-The Bulletin.

Please direct comments, thoughts, inquiries, and so on, to [eokawa.nikkeiplace@gmail.com](mailto:eokawa.nikkeiplace@gmail.com)

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## **Touched By Dispossession**

**We would love to hear your stories.** A section on the project website conveys stories that readers have submitted. These include firsthand account, stories from of JC neighbours as well as memories passed down through generations. The stories of people touched by the dispossession are an important resource that we hope to preserve. <http://www.landscapesofinjustice.com/touched-by-dispossession/>