Settler Colonialism and Japanese Canadian History

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Report prepared for Landscapes of Injustice
September 2017

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I. Executive summary

This report's central contention is that we cannot fully understand, explain, and represent the history of Japanese Canadian people in the first half of the twentieth century – including their experiences with state-administered violence and injustice during the Second World War – without taking seriously the inextricable relationship between this history and the history of settler colonialism in Canada. More specifically, with the primary concerns of the Landscapes of Injustice project in mind, we argue here that the forced removal of Japanese Canadian people from the coast, their internment, and the forced sale of their property during the war were intrinsically part of the Canadian settler colonial project.

To develop this discussion, the report first offers an overview of our main concepts and arguments, and explains why these matter in scholarly and public narratives about Japanese Canadian history. Then, drawing on Landscapes of Injustice research, the report explores these arguments using a range of primary sources that reveal and explain the settler colonial implications of Japanese Canadian history in this period. Each of these issues deserves more attention than we can give it here, but we hope that our examples demonstrate the relevance and importance of our arguments. Overall, we seek to outline how and why the public-facing work of Landscapes of Injustice might engage with the close relationship between its primary subject and the wider history and ongoing present of settler colonialism in Canada.

II. Overview

What is settler colonialism?
A definition

By settler colonialism, we mean a specific formation of power that works toward several key aims:

- The dispossession of Indigenous peoples and their removal from the majority of the land.
- The (anticipated or attempted) elimination of Indigenous peoples, whether through physical violence, cultural assimilation, the termination of distinct legal status, or other means.
- The resettlement of the land with non-Indigenous people who intend, individually or collectively, to stay forever, and the assertion of a settler sovereignty that enables them to claim a right to ownership and belonging there.
- The establishment of a new political, legal, economic, social, and cultural order that privileges some non-Indigenous people (in Canada, especially white settlers) and excludes and/or exploits the labour of others (in Canada, especially people of colour) in order to sustain the larger system.

Through these elements – dispossession, elimination, resettlement, and structural inequality – settler colonial projects (and their proponents) aim to restructure places entirely, into the indefinite future. In this way, settler colonialism should be understood as an historical and contemporary phenomenon, with both deep roots and ongoing practices.

By this definition, Canada is a quintessential settler colonial country. Its very existence is predicated on the removal and ongoing erasure of Indigenous people from their land, the long-term resettlement of non-Indigenous people on that land, the assertion of Canadian sovereignty and control, and the sustenance of a settler political, legal, economic, social, and cultural order. In the territories now known as British Columbia, for instance, the foundations of a settler colonial society were laid in the mid-nineteenth century, with radical changes that included (among many others) the mass immigration of non-Indigenous people who intended to settle for the long term, the establishment of a reserve system that sought to confine Indigenous people to a miniscule percentage of the land, and the passage and enforcement of land and immigration laws that generally favoured white settlers. As many early-twentieth-century settler politicians and commentators put it, the ultimate goal or assumed future for Canada was as a "white man's country." Even as its specific forms have changed over time, this form of white settler colonialism continues to undergird the country today – a building block and an organizing principle that structures Canada's systems of governance, law, and property; shapes its social relationships; and informs its very place on the land.

Note: Our definition and historical understanding of settler colonialism owes much to a number of scholars and activists. One useful introductory source is Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Fernwood, 2015).

What does this have to do with Japanese Canadian history?
Our arguments

Because settler colonialism has been so fundamental in structuring Canada, we understand it to be a critical influence on the experiences, relationships, and very possibilities of life for everyone who has resided (or tried to reside) in this place. But beyond this general point, this report develops a more specific set of arguments about the particular impact of settler colonialism on Japanese Canadian people to the mid-twentieth century. As we assert, attention to settler colonial logics and structures helps to explain the existence and contours of the Japanese Canadian community; the tools available to the Canadian state in dealing with this community; and the arguments made by Japanese Canadian people in resisting or negotiating the state's actions. Overall, we contend that it is impossible to understand fully the forced sale of Japanese Canadian property in the war without understanding its wider context in Canadian history, and in particular the ways that the principles, ideas, and tools of Canadian settler colonialism underpinned and enabled it.

Why does this matter?
Contributions to scholarly and public discussion

It addresses a major gap in the prevailing historical narratives about the Japanese Canadian community and about settler colonialism in Canada. Scholarly and public representations of Japanese Canadian history tend to consider the development and trajectory of this community in comparative isolation from the history of others. At the same time, settler colonial studies and Canadian colonial historiography tend to focus on binaries between white settlers and Indigenous people, or between the settler state and Indigenous people, with only recent and minimal attention to non-Indigenous people of colour. As such, the existing literature on Japanese Canadian history has paid very limited attention to settler colonialism, while the scholarship on settler colonialism has been virtually silent on the Japanese Canadian community. The few exceptions to this pattern have not yet significantly impacted the prevailing historical narratives.[1] In this sense, we believe that a critical and deep analysis of settler colonialism in Japanese Canadian history would be radically new, addressing what we consider to be a major gap between fields that precludes a full understanding of either area, and with the potential to tell an important and different story of Canada itself.

It resists the dominant "model minority" framing and offers a better way to understand state injustice. Virtually all public historical representations of the Japanese Canadian community conform to the so-called "model minority" myth. These interpretations emphasize the community's hard work, loyalty, stoic

[1] Two exceptions are Andrea Geiger, "Reframing Race and Place: Locating Japanese Immigrants in Relation to Indigenous Peoples in the North American West, 1880-1940," *Southern California Quarterly* 96, 3 (2014): 253-270; and Mona Oikawa, "Re-Mapping Histories Site by Site: Connecting the Internment of Japanese Canadians to the Colonization of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada," *Aboriginal Connections to Race, Environment and Traditions*, eds. Rick Riewe and Jill Oakes (Winnipeg: Aboriginal Issues, University of Manitoba, 2006), 17–26.

fortitude, and efforts to build cultural bridges and carry on in the face of racism. We respect and recognize that this narrative has played an important role in defending the Japanese Canadian community from discrimination, including as a valuable tool in the campaign for redress, but we also believe that it is too restrictive, simplistic, predictable, and problematic as an historical interpretation. Among its many problems, these narratives insist on representing Japanese Canadian people as perfect or respectable victims of undeserved state injustice. In so doing, they do not only underplay the long history of Japanese Canadian resistance; they also risk implying that other people – for example, those who resist state oppression more openly, who do not or cannot seek to be part of a respectable settler citizenry, or who fail to conform to expectations of so-called civil behaviour in other ways – deserve state or social marginalization, dispossession, oppression, or violence. From our perspective, the definition of injustice should never be understood as (or implied to be) dependent on the apparent goodness or potential redemption of the people being targeted, and historians must be careful not to reinforce existing and troubling binaries of deserving and undeserving victims. To be clear, we do not advocate here for an historical interpretation that would suggest that Japanese Canadian people deserved what happened, or that would obscure the level or impact of state violence on the community. Rather, we seek a better and more critical framing of state injustice itself, which offers more nuanced narratives of Japanese Canadian experiences with racism and discrimination. In other words, we seek histories that do not require us or others to be perfect, or to fold ourselves into settler colonial values in order to deserve justice and dignity. We believe that, by advancing a new, more expansive, more complicated, and more critical interpretation of state power, an analysis of settler colonialism and Japanese Canadian history offers one way forward in this respect.

It is timely, responsible, essential, and just work for the present moment. Among the many discussions of history, commemoration, and justice today, we are particularly attentive to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, which underscore that the work of understanding and addressing Canadian settler colonialism is the responsibility of all Canadians and Canadian institutions, including universities and museums. In this light, we share a conviction that the public work of this project is a critical, necessary, and under-acknowledged opportunity to engage meaningfully with settler colonialism and its relationship to Japanese Canadian communities. Our hope is that such work could encourage Japanese Canadian people (as well as other Canadians) to engage more proactively with the history of settler colonialism in this country, to understand their complex position within this past and present, and to wield the power of their experiences for more just ends today.

A note on sources

The following discussion focuses on primary sources drawn from Landscapes of Injustice research. We have included references to these sources in each section, as well as copies or excerpts of them in the appendix. Throughout the report, we have also included references to a small number of secondary sources that are directly relevant and significant to our analysis. However, the report does not contain a full list of related and recommended readings. We can provide this upon request.

III. Discussion

PART 1.
Before the war: settler dreams, settler possibilities

To begin this discussion, we first suggest that one cannot adequately explain how and why Japanese people arrived and settled in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries without attending to the ideas, assumptions, policies, and conditions of settler colonialism. In short, these defined the very possibility and parameters of Japanese people's immigration and settlement, and shaped their complicated place as racialized settlers with precarious access to property and exclusion from many state-defined rights. As the remainder of the report explains, this wider settler colonial context laid the groundwork for state and community actions during the Second World War. To set the stage for this, the first section draws from Yasutaro Yamaga's memoir, *My Footsteps in British Columbia*, as one example that points to some key elements in this history.

In the summer of 1908, Yasutaro Yamaga arrived in Canada, an immigrant aspiring to become a successful agricultural settler in the west. As he later wrote in his memoir, he "came to Canada with a dream of becoming the owner of 5000 acres of golden field of the Canadian Prairies." In particular, he explained, he had been "[l]ured by Japanese paper writeups by Mr. Jiro Inouye, who stated that the strawberry growing was so profitable that a fellow could save [ten] thousand dollars in ten years." (p. 1) Yamaga's memoir highlights many important aspects of early Japanese migration to Canada, including the significance of transnational information networks and communication technologies for facilitating chain migration. Critically, it also suggests the power of shared settler colonial ideas in drawing Japanese people to Canada. Indeed, Yamaga's dream appears only possible because of settler colonialism. In the memoir, he drew on language and ideas typical of settlers who imagined their futures as "pioneers" in Canada, forging prosperous and promising lives on otherwise empty and available land. In particular, his dream of 5000 acres of agricultural future erased Indigenous people from the land, ignored any contested claims to sovereignty or territory, and re-imagined Canada as a settler space of individual possibility and prosperity into an indefinite future.

At the same time, it was not only Yamaga's dream that owed much to settler colonialism. The very possibility of his migration and settlement also rested on the existence of Canadian policies and laws that furthered its settler colonial aims. For instance, the country's immigration laws and practices enabled and regulated immigration to Canada. For Japanese people, racialized border control shaped the community's size and demographics, including gender and age, particularly after the so-called Gentleman's Agreement of 1907 and the institution of a *shashin kekkon* (picture bride) system. Meanwhile, Canadian land laws and treaties were intended to open up land for potential settlers, including Japanese people, even as the latter were also excluded from basic citizenship rights in the service of creating what many politicians and commentators called a "white man's country."

In this sense, it is critical to recognize that, from their very first arrivals in the 1870s, Japanese people participated in a Canadian settler colonial project that dispossessed Indigenous communities, resettled the land, and restructured the social and political order. Immigration and land laws structured their migration and settlement. Japanese Canadian people's own settler colonial ideas and assumptions – the possibility of land ownership and settlement, the promise of belonging and new starts on empty land – enabled them to dream of a long-term future in Canada. The settler economy, including agricultural ventures or resource extraction on alienated Indigenous land, promised them wealth and success there. And as they acquired land and engaged with this system of power, they drew some benefits from it as settlers.

At the same time, however, it is also critical to recognize that Japanese Canadians also experienced significant marginalization, exploitation, and oppression in this system. Settler colonial ideas and tools made it possible for the Canadian state simultaneously to include and to exclude them, to put structural conditions on the promises of settlement for them, and to withhold their full belonging in the settler polity. In this respect, while Japanese Canadians acted and benefited in some respects as settlers, they were also racialized as other – imagined as always or possibly alien, and therefore with precarious and conditional settler belonging and access to property.

In these conditions, many Japanese Canadians sought to prove their worth and worthiness as Canadian settlers, fighting discrimination by claiming belonging, seeking to disprove racism, and building cultural bridges with white settlers. Again, Yamaga's memoir underscores this point – something that clearly shaped his later remembrance of the early Japanese Canadian community. Reflecting on the vicious and growing early-twentieth-century "anti-Oriental movements," for instance, Yamaga explained:

> "Assimilation" was the chief topic among Japanese leaders in those days. The language barrier was fundamental in preventing mingling with the occidental neighbors. However this problem could not be solved over night. I began to believe that an assimilation to the foreign land must begin with the understanding of the religion of the land. With the kind help of my christian [sic] friend, Mr. William Hall, who operated a story in Haney then, and his sister Miss May, we started a Sunday School (non-denominational) with a motto "the melting pot of racial problems in Christ". (p. 7)

This effort, he claimed, had been successful in bridging the communities and combatting the growing racism. Similarly, describing a 1932 "Chicken Salad Dinner social" hosted by the Haney Japanese Fruit Ranchers' Association, he suggested that the program "brought us together to the top of happiness and peace so that there could not be seen a speck of racial hatred among the audience." (p. 8) Likewise, he explained the 1924 creation of a Parent and Teachers Association – half Japanese and half white – had enabled them to pursue "a common objective: to bring up good Canadian Citizens." (p. 11)

Again, Yamaga was far from alone in emphasizing these efforts; they are common features in historical narratives about the early Japanese Canadian community. Taken together, they suggest one option, limited but available, pursued by this racialized minority in fighting for worth and belonging in a settler colonial system that both exploited and excluded them. As we will suggest again in the

third section, this was an understandable set of objectives as the community sought success, rights, justice, and fairness – but it was also one that took for granted and reinforced the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and foreclosed alliances with them in favour of arguing for belonging in settler Canada.

See Appendix, Source A (p. 13): Yasutaro Yamaga, *My Footsteps in British Columbia*, UBC Rare Books and Special Collections, Yasutaro Yamaga fonds, box 1, file 1.

For more on Japanese people's understandings of Canada, settlement, community, and a settler future, see Andrea Geiger, "Reframing Race and Place: Locating Japanese Immigrants in Relation to Indigenous Peoples in the North American West, 1880-1940," *Southern California Quarterly* 96, 3 (2014): 253-270; and Eiji Okawa, "*Japaneseness* in Racist Canada during the First Half of the Twentieth Century," manuscript in progress. There is a large scholarship on Canadian racialized border control and the making of white men's countries. See, for instance, Enakshi Dua, "Exclusion through Inclusion: Female Asian Migration in the Making of Canada as a White Settler Nation," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 14, 4 (2007): 445-466; and Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

PART 2.
During the war: state power

This longer history of Canadian settler colonialism became particularly critical for the Japanese Canadian community during the Second World War. In this section, we gesture towards some of the many ways that the state's actions in this context were enabled and driven by its existing settler colonial ideas and practices. These included the state's long practice of dispossessing non-white peoples and making land available for white settlement (including, in this specific case, veterans); the state's interest in withholding or withdrawing rights from people of colour, making their belonging and inclusion in settler Canada conditional, precarious, or impossible; and the state's maintenance of an exclusive and racialized understanding of settler-citizens' rights, and the close connections it drew between this citizenship and property ownership. It also included the state's use of tools long central to its practice of settler colonial power, such as mapping, physical force, and the quantified valuing of individual property. In short, we see the dispossession of Japanese Canadian people as a part of a larger process of dispossession and resettlement on Canada. This was a project at the heart of Canada, broadly dependent on the removal of racialized bodies from demarcated, valued, and surveyed land, and the opening of that land for the settlement of (the right kind of) white inhabitants. In this context, for those whose belonging in settler colonial Canada was precarious, their access to property was also rendered precarious. For Japanese Canadians, these conditions came to a head during the Second World War.

In the service of "a white man's country"

While there is much more to be said about state power and settler colonialism, this section highlights two examples of the ideas and tools at work in the dispossession of Japanese Canadians during the war. First, we might reflect on the racialized understandings of settler Canada expressed by Ivan Barnet in one of his many letters to Gordon Murchison. Writing from Vancouver on 2 June 1942, Barnet shared with Murchison his view on the future of Canada, and the place (or not) of Japanese Canadians within it. He explained:

> I still feel that when the necessity arose to move the Japanese out of the Defence Area, we would be making a big error if we ever permit these people to establish themselves in Canada again. It will mean a hardship to many of them but, as a Nation, they saw fit to overrun lands of other Nations. We must maintain this Pacific Coast as a white man's country, and again educate the white man to realize that he can make a comfortable living in any of the occupations which the Japanese has been peacefully but aggressively dominating. (p. 5)

Here, Barnet efficiently repeated and reinforced several key settler colonial ideas. Ignoring his own national history of "overrun[ning] lands of other Nations," and thereby maintaining settler innocence in the face of the logical conclusions of his argument, Barnet insistently repeated the much older discourse about Canada as a "white man's country" in the making, an idea with roots in the nineteenth century and lingering forms in the twentieth. At its heart, this national aspiration required the erasure of Indigenous people as well as the exclusion of racialized people like Japanese Canadians, in order to make possible the white settler future imagined here. As he pursued the valuation and dispossession of Japanese Canadian property, in other words, Barnet's work was informed and underpinned by his assumptions that Canada should still aim to be a white man's country. This required not only the dispossession of Japanese Canadian people in the war, but also their ultimate removal from the settler polity altogether.

See Appendix, Source B (p. 14): Ivan Barnet to Gordon Murchison, Vancouver, 2 June 1942, LAC, RG 38, vol. 403, file V-8-10, part I, digitized part 5.

Maps, dispossession, and settler colonial state power

Ideas, of course, were not the only factor in the removal and forced sale of Japanese Canadian property. In this project, state actors drew on a range of tools, typically ones already honed in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. While there are many ways to demonstrate this point, we highlight here the importance of mapping – a process, instrument, and type of source that permeates the Landscapes of Injustice archive. As Nicole Yakashiro suggests elsewhere, these diagrams were used to delineate, legitimate, and make supposedly permanent the government's claim to the land for (white) soldier settlers. At the same time, as appraisers walked onto these properties and mapped them, Japanese Canadians were torn from them. In this way, these maps were tools to alienate people from place, literally pushing them aside and facilitating their replacement as their labour and personal stories became mere marks on the page.

The violence of the state's exhaustive land surveys, plotting of properties, and control over space through technologies like mapping is not contained to the dispossession of Japanese Canadians in 1942. At its heart, Canadian settler colonialism depends on the controlling, demarcating, surveying, and settling of lands. Maps like these have been foundational in the nation's historical and ongoing erasure of peoples excluded from Canada's white settler society – a project that began and continues with the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Maps are technologies of the settler state that enable an ongoing process of colonization. They make invisible the people who built their lived lives on these lands. They mask the lived experiences and their meanings by dividing, fragmenting, and labelling a family's livelihood. They erase histories and futures of belonging. And, ultimately, they replace, or purport to replace, with a different order.

Taken together, these points underscore the importance of older settler colonial ideas and tools in shaping and enabling the Canadian state's dispossession of Japanese Canadians in the war. The larger project to dispossess and remove people of colour, and to make property and land available for white settlers, informed this project. Indeed, put into this wider context, the forced sale of Japanese Canadian property is not so much an aberration or an incident as a logical continuation of an ongoing, consistent pattern at the very heart and very foundation of Canadian history.

See Appendix, Source C (p. 19): Yakashiro Bird Commission case file including map, LAC, RG33-69, Volume 39, File 779.

See also Nicole Yakashiro's project on the Yakashiro property, Landscapes of Injustice, 2017. This section's arguments also owe much to the discussions about colonial power in Daniel Clayton, *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); and Cole Harris, "How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, 1 (2004): 165-182.

PART 3.
During and after the war: Japanese Canadian responses

Japanese Canadian people responded to their forced removal, relocation, and dispossession in the war in a wide range of ways. In this section, we demonstrate that among these responses, Japanese Canadian people drew actively and strategically on the language and ideas of settler colonialism in order to navigate their experiences with state oppression. In particular, a *New Canadian* article suggests the significance of racialized ideas about Indigenous and settler people for making sense of the resettlement experience, and a protest letter underscores that Japanese Canadians relied on settler colonial ideas of land and productivity in order to make their cases for rights as propertied and deserving settler citizens.

Race and the representation of "resettlement"

How did Japanese Canadian people represent their forced removal from homes and livelihoods on the coast? In their eyes, what were the consequences of dispossession, internment, and relocation for their individual and collective aspirations to a future as Canadian settlers? The *New Canadian* newspaper offers one source for considering these questions. In article after article, the paper represented the resettlement process and other wartime experiences as speaking volumes about race, citizenship, and settler potential in the Japanese Canadian community.

As one example, a 23 January 1943 article called "Relocation's Other Side" imagined Japanese Canadian people as responding to their forced relocation either by being settlers (with property, place, and hope for the future) or by being something more akin to "Indians" (imagined as broken, dispossessed, and unproductive, without hope for the future). More specifically, it suggested:

> It would be idle to pretend for a moment that the great bulk of the evacuees now located in the interior towns are good 'resettlement' material today. Too many, especially the older folk who saw the fruits of years of toil swept away, and many younger folk, too, have suffered such damage to spirit and morale that they are closer to being 'Indian reservation' material.

For the unnamed writer, this "Indianness" was a temporary condition that "Japanese resettlers" could leave behind, but only if their affective and material circumstances changed from dispossessed to settled. This depended on the Canadian state, other settlers, and Japanese Canadian people themselves. The article explained:

> But their spirits can be revived and their morale can be repaired, if some hope and assurance for a happier future is held out to them. The success of resettlement depends on the individual, no doubt, but from a general point of view, it depends too upon genuine opportunities for the future which will make toil and struggle and courage worthwhile and fruitful.

By describing the impact and future of resettlement on Japanese Canadian people in this way, the *New Canadian* article drew on, and reinforced, racialized settler colonial binaries. It tied Indigenous people to a state of dispossession and damage, and settlers to a state of hope and success. And, reflecting the precarious place of non-Indigenous people of colour in a settler colonial society, the article situated Japanese Canadians in a liminal position between these poles, moving between settler citizen and problematic racialized other as they responded to the state's actions.

See Appendix, Source D (p. 20): "Relocation's Other Side," *New Canadian*, 23 January 1943. We are very grateful for Carolyn Nakagawa, who found and shared this source with us.

Contesting forced property sales with *terra nullius* and settler rights

In addition to its explicit discussion of race and settlerhood, the *New Canadian* article, "Relocation's Other Side," hints at another element of Japanese Canadian people's responses to their treatment during the Second World War: namely, how they protested their relocation and dispossession by arguing that they deserved access to the rights of other settler-citizens in Canada. This pattern is

even more clear in the letters written to state representatives in response to the forced sale of Japanese Canadian property. So, what arguments did Japanese Canadian people make in contesting their forced relocation and dispossession in the war? What ideas did they deem potentially persuasive in conversation with state representatives, and what language was available to them to express these ideas? Focusing on one example of a protest letter but identifying wider themes in the process, this section argues that Japanese Canadian people drew on settler colonial ideas about land, property, and rights in order to make the case that they were model or deserving productive citizens.

In August 1944, Kisaku Nishimoto wrote to F. G. Shears, Director of the Custodian of Enemy Property, to protest the sale of his properties in Maple Ridge and Matsqui. As he explained, he had been "surprised" and "appalled" at the news that his properties were sold at "far far too low costs." "I have simply been appalled at seeing such insulting figures," he declared, concluding: "I firmly protest against such indefinitely unreasonable transactions you have made and that without my legal consent." Here, Nishimoto – like so many other Japanese Canadian people – protested the Canadian state's unjust treatment of him, his property, his rights, and his future.

At the same time, Nishimoto's protest revealed the significance of settler colonial ideas for claiming rights to property in Canada. Specifically, he drew on the rhetoric of settler colonialism to describe his relationship with the land, and to make a convincing case for his rights to it as a settler. As he wrote, for instance, the land in Matsqui

> had been made productive in the highest degree from a wild, neglected land where the water had covered most of the year making it only fit for hunting ducks, by networks of ditches, tons of fertilizers and patient and hard labours, taking ten years of hard and strenuous work. It was really by sweat and blood that had made this land a highly productive one.

This argument was testament to his investment in the land, calculated in terms of labour, money, and time. At the same time, it also took for granted the principle of *terra nullius*, a key settler colonial logic used to justify the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and erase their real presence, sovereignty, and relationship to the land. By claiming his own rights – legal and moral in a settler colonial system – to the property in Matsqui, Nishimoto repeated the idea that it had previously been wild, unproductive land available for the taking, and that he had turned this supposedly empty territory into a productive, usable agricultural place of his own.

Nishimoto's letter offers one clear example of this, but he not alone in this framing. Again and again, Japanese Canadians protested the state's treatment of them by drawing on similar language to argue for their rights to property, citizenship, and belonging in a larger settler polity. Nishimoto and others may well have believed these ideas themselves. Certainly, a wide range of settlers took for granted the principles of *terra nullius*, citizenship and individual property rights, Indigenous dispossession, and Canadian sovereignty. But Nishimoto and others likely also drew on these ideas strategically, understanding them as logical and potentially persuasive for Canadian state representatives. After all, the whole Canadian system of governance and society was built on the foundational idea that settlers should turn empty, available, unproductive land into recognizably and profitably productive individual property. In this way, such ideas were not only available but also

necessary and understandable arguments for Japanese Canadian people seeking to claim legitimate property ownership and rights from a settler colonial state.

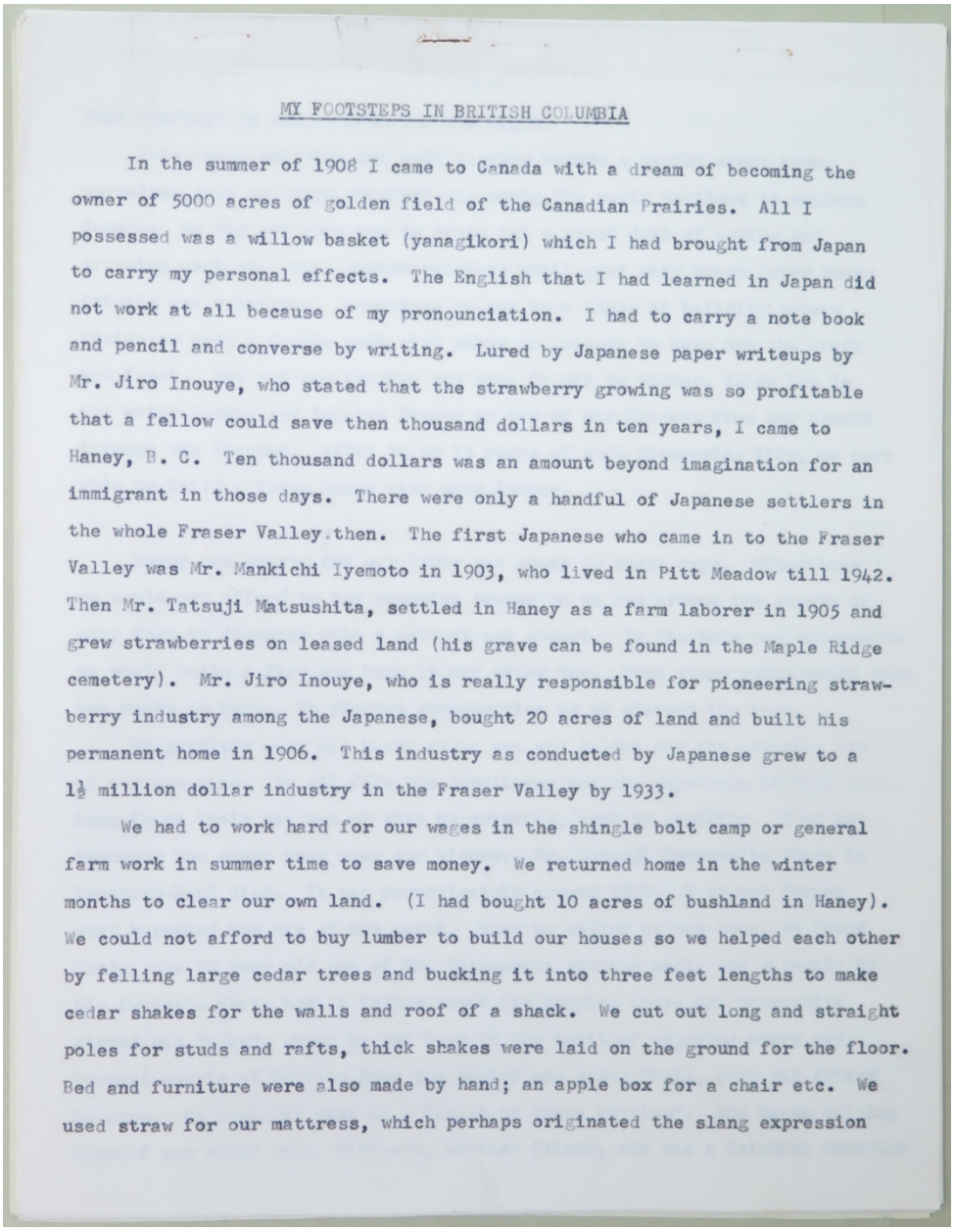
However we analyze the intentions of Japanese Canadian people, their protest letters spoke a language understandable by the Canadian state. These letters took for granted that settler property had been created out of empty and wild land, and aspired to citizenship and rights that were vested in and reliant on the settler state. This process necessitated Japanese Canadians to claim absolute ownership over their property, and to perform a kind of model citizenship as legitimate and deserving settler-citizens. In so doing, they contributed to the rhetorical erasure – as well as the continued material displacement – of Indigenous peoples, in the service of fighting for their own belonging, rights, and property. In this way, such arguments ultimately constructed justice for Indigenous people and justice for Japanese Canadian people as mutually exclusive and opposing possibilities in a settler colonial system.

See Appendix, Source E (p. 21): Kisaku Nishimoto to F. G. Shears, August 9, 1944, Image 1629, C9476, Custodian, Héritage Project.

See also Jordan Stanger-Ross, Nicholas Blomley, and the Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, "'My land is worth a million dollars': How Japanese Canadians contested their dispossession in the 1940s," *Law and History Review* 35, 3 (2017): 711-751.

IV. Appendix

Source A. Yasutaro Yamaga, *My Footsteps in British Columbia*, UBC Rare Books and Special Collections, Yasutaro Yamaga fonds, box 1, file 1, p. 1.

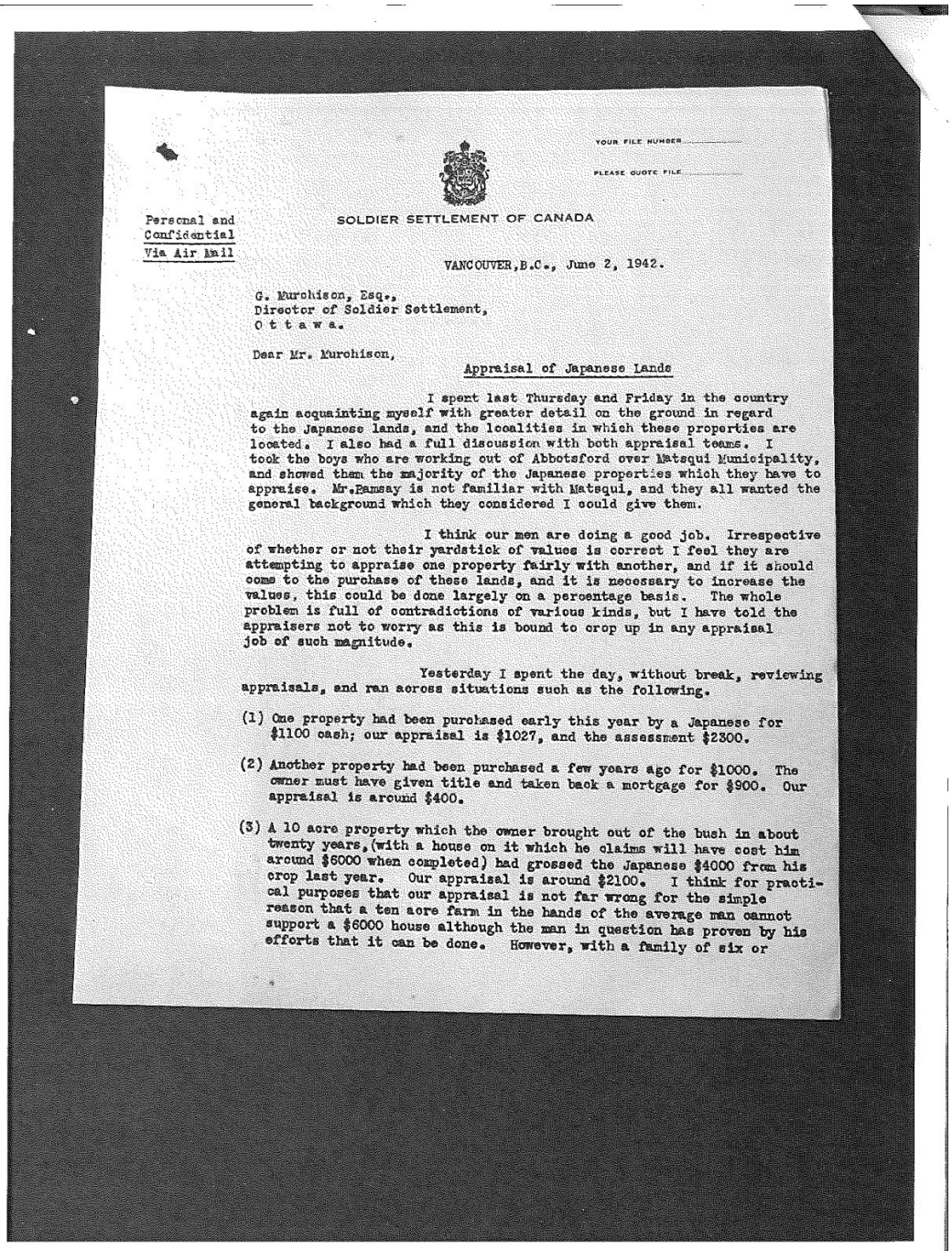


MY FOOTSTEPS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

In the summer of 1908 I came to Canada with a dream of becoming the owner of 5000 acres of golden field of the Canadian Prairies. All I possessed was a willow basket (yanagikori) which I had brought from Japan to carry my personal effects. The English that I had learned in Japan did not work at all because of my pronounciation. I had to carry a note book and pencil and converse by writing. Lured by Japanese paper writeups by Mr. Jiro Inouye, who stated that the strawberry growing was so profitable that a fellow could save then thousand dollars in ten years, I came to Haney, B. C. Ten thousand dollars was an amount beyond imagination for an immigrant in those days. There were only a handful of Japanese settlers in the whole Fraser Valley then. The first Japanese who came in to the Fraser Valley was Mr. Mankichi Iyemoto in 1903, who lived in Pitt Meadow till 1942. Then Mr. Tatsuji Matsushita, settled in Haney as a farm laborer in 1905 and grew strawberries on leased land (his grave can be found in the Maple Ridge cemetery). Mr. Jiro Inouye, who is really responsible for pioneering strawberry industry among the Japanese, bought 20 acres of land and built his permanent home in 1906. This industry as conducted by Japanese grew to a 1½ million dollar industry in the Fraser Valley by 1933.

We had to work hard for our wages in the shingle bolt camp or general farm work in summer time to save money. We returned home in the winter months to clear our own land. (I had bought 10 acres of bushland in Haney). We could not afford to buy lumber to build our houses so we helped each other by felling large cedar trees and bucking it into three feet lengths to make cedar shakes for the walls and roof of a shack. We cut out long and straight poles for studs and rafts, thick shakes were laid on the ground for the floor. Bed and furniture were also made by hand; an apple box for a chair etc. We used straw for our mattress, which perhaps originated the slang expression

Source B. Ivan Barnet to Gordon Murchison, Vancouver, 2 June 1942, RG 38, vol. 403, file V-8-10, part I, digitized part 5.



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Confidential
Via Air Mail

VANCOUVER, B.C., June 2, 1942.

G. Murchison, Esq.,
Director of Soldier Settlement,
O t t a w a.

Dear Mr. Murchison,

Appraisal of Japanese Lands

I spent last Thursday and Friday in the country again acquainting myself with greater detail on the ground in regard to the Japanese lands, and the localities in which these properties are located. I also had a full discussion with both appraisal teams. I took the boys who are working out of Abbotsford over Matsqui Municipality, and showed them the majority of the Japanese properties which they have to appraise. Mr. Ramsay is not familiar with Matsqui, and they all wanted the general background which they considered I could give them.

I think our men are doing a good job. Irrespective of whether or not their yardstick of values is correct I feel they are attempting to appraise one property fairly with another, and if it should come to the purchase of these lands, and it is necessary to increase the values, this could be done largely on a percentage basis. The whole problem is full of contradictions of various kinds, but I have told the appraisers not to worry as this is bound to crop up in any appraisal job of such magnitude.

Yesterday I spent the day, without break, reviewing appraisals, and ran across situations such as the following.

(1) One property had been purchased early this year by a Japanese for $1100 cash; our appraisal is $1027, and the assessment $2300.

(2) Another property had been purchased a few years ago for $1000. The owner must have given title and taken back a mortgage for $900. Our appraisal is around $400.

(3) A 10 acre property which the owner brought out of the bush in about twenty years, (with a house on it which he claims will have cost him around $6000 when completed) had grossed the Japanese $4000 from his crop last year. Our appraisal is around $2100. I think for practical purposes that our appraisal is not far wrong for the simple reason that a ten acre farm in the hands of the average man cannot support a $6000 house although the man in question has proven by his efforts that it can be done. However, with a family of six or

seven children who work with him, a man can keep practically all the money in the family; whereas, the man who has to do all his own work, and hire labour, might only have $400 or $500 to himself at the outside out of a gross profit of $4000. Complications are many and varied.

Last night I burned some midnight oil reading the report of the Committee on the Veterans' Act. I feel satisfied that you will run against stubborn opposition on an Act of this nature as the vast majority of people cannot visualize land being used for any purpose other than farming, despite the fact that we have hundreds of living examples before our eyes out here, especially on small holdings. As a matter of fact, a very large percentage of our settlers in the Fraser Valley do not get their living wholly from the land. In spite of this I am still struggling to quite a degree with our appraisers in any endeavour to show them that if we settled, say two thousand men in the Fraser Valley, at least one thousand, and possibly nearer fifteen hundred, will have to go on properties which in my opinion in the hands of the average man we will have to state we do not look upon as self supporting farm units; also that the individual will be at liberty, and will have to look to other sources to find part of his livelihood and means for repaying the advances. It is not that our men are not sincere when expressing their opinions. They seem to be unable to visualize that not only will we have to in the future, but at present we are using thousands of acres primarily as homes.

As an example, in all the appraisals made by Ralph Brown at Mission I doubt if he has once stated that the property is fully suitable for Veteran Settlement. He turns down practically every one for some reason or another. Other appraisers obviously are still playing with the idea of merging a number of properties into one big unit, overlooking the fact entirely that,though this may be sound agriculturally, it will not meet the problem we will have to face.

The next man who knows little or nothing about dyke and drainage charges, and has been on the bench lands, goes into the dyked districts and forthwith doubles the valuations when he finds the crops more abundant. He overlooks entirely that there may be an unpaid capitalization of $50 an acre against the land plus the maintenance charges. I have also noticed the remark from time to time that no one but a Japanese could make a success on a property. The people of British Columbia have developed a complex over the last twenty-five years that the Oriental can succeed where the white man fails. The white man is doing truck and small fruit farming successfully elsewhere in Canada, and other parts of the world, and he can do it here if he will only change his line of thinking. The difference was rather aptly expressed by Mr.Godfrey when he made the comment that, when the white man went on relief, apparently the Japanese tightened his belt, and worked a little harder to support himself and his family. The dire

necessity of having to paddle his own canoe made him better equipped to face his handicaps.

As far as I can ascertain the Japanese planted probably over one hundred acres in hops in the last two or three years, and the kiln for curing hops which was built at Mission apparently was financed by the Japanese. Most of these hops are in blocks of not more than one or two acres on the individual farms. When I found that the Haas Hop Company at Sardis was going to work most of these small hopyards I was at a loss to understand how they could be interested in these small acreages as their own yards at Chilliwack are in three or four blocks, all comparatively close together. I think they now have over 800 acres in hops. I discovered that most of the hops the Japanese have are cluster hops, and this is the variety the Haas Company is short on.

I hear that Mr.Shimek, or his Company, have an advance in the neighbourhood of $150,000 from the bank, and a number of Japanese have received fairly substantial cash payments on their leases from this source. Probably for the first time in history the Japanese have received payment for a crop in advance at a figure equal to what they would have made net if they had handled the crop themselves. A number of the people with whom Shimek has arranged leases are Mennonites of fairly recent vintage from the Prairies. Already some of them are wondering where they are going to get any money out of these crops for themselves at $100 an acre rent.

I believe that Shimek is agitating to bring in five to ten thousand pickers from the Prairies. It appears that the fly in the ointment is that the railways want the return fare guaranteed. They say that once the picking of the small fruits is over these people could then move into the tree fruit picking in the Okanagan, and the picking of hops, etc.

Some of the leases that are said to have been arranged by the Custodian do not appear to have any rhyme or reason to them. I noticed one yesterday where the tenant was to give the Custodian half the crop for the use of the property. There is about five acres of poor hay on the place which may be worth $25 to $30 standing this year. There is a good house on the property which should bring at least $10 a month. It is obvious to me that the man handling this work must know little or nothing about farming as he did not see that the rental value of this property is in the house, and not in the land.

I am enclosing a clipping taken from Saturday's "Sun". There are all kinds of viewpoints on the Japanese situation. One often wonders what is behind some of these undercurrents. As I told you when I was in Ottawa, I have refrained from contacting any of the Government organizations that are mixed up in the Japanese situation until the necessity arises, or I have instructions on the point from you.

I still hold the view that once this year's crop

is off a number of the strawberry plantations will have no further value as the labour will not be put into them to maintain them. Already the appraisers are commenting on the weed situation. One must remember that all these plantations look better today than they will again this year as, to date, we have had good growing weather. Once we get some warm weather, however, the berries will not look so bountiful on the bench lands.

I have kept in close touch with the boys in horticulture who have been studying the raspberry problem around Mission during the past eight or ten years. To date they have not been able to arrive at a definite conclusion as to why raspberries on the older ground no longer produce satisfactory canes. With this background you will see that I am not very optimistic as to the value of a raspberry plantation in the hands of a tenant. In other words, I doubt how much value there will be in the strawberry and raspberry plantations in 1943 in a number of these properties. It is for this reason that we are largely confining our values to the land. During the twenty odd years I have spent out here I have seen good raspberry plantations, without buildings, selling at $1000 an acre, and later it was difficult to find a buyer for the same ground at any price, and eventually the land got into the hands of the taxing authorities.

You will recall the area south by west of Abbotsford, commonly known as the Peardonville country. It has been built up largely with Mennonites in the past ten years who have gone in chiefly for small fruits and poultry. Some of these people obviously are now beginning to cash in on their efforts. The country is comparatively flat over a big acreage, and is largely underlaid with gravel which at some places comes almost to the surface. Other sections have six inches to a foot or eighteen inches of silt over the gravel. The surveyors are working over this area at the present time, and apparently the Air Force are making a minute check of it from the air as well as on the land. The location, in my opinion, is first class as an air field as this area is as free from fogs as any I know of in the Fraser Valley. If the air currents are good then it should make an ideal field. With bulldozers the country can be levelled in very short time as there are few ravines, and those in existence are not deep. It should make a splendid all year round field. Recently the Delta Field was abandoned. I understand that training school has been moved to the Prairies. Your knowledge of the Delta will give you an idea what some of the problems were that must have confronted them there. The field in the Peardonville area will likely take some of the holdings in which we are interested. I believe also that surveys are being made in the vicinity of Courtenay which will affect some of our holdings in that area. I understand this district is being surveyed as a training field for Commando work.

In checking up on our collections yesterday I find we have taken in as much money so far this fiscal year on due payments as

we did last year, and prepayments are slightly ahead of last year - this in spite of the fact that we are without a field supervisor on the job, and two of the office staff are putting in full time getting out plans and sketches from the Land Registry Office for the field men. Almost every day some settler pays off his loan, and I do not feel well unless I see at least one or two letters in the mail asking the amount of their total debt.

I felt that I could give you a better interpretation of our problems by a personal letter than under an official communication. I still feel that when the necessity arose to move the Japanese out of the Defence Area, we would be making a big error if we ever permit these people to establish themselves in Canada again. It will mean a hardship to many of them but, as a Nation, they saw fit to overrun lands of other Nations. We must maintain this Pacific Coast as a white man's country, and again educate the white man to realize that he can make a comfortable living in any of the occupations which the Japanese has been peacefully but aggressively dominating

The weather has been cool and showery, and the countryside as a whole is looking beautiful. Good hay crops as far as tonnage is concerned are assured. The berry crop is heavy, but dry warm weather is now required to ripen it. Some berries are being picked but on account of the excessive moisture they are moulding and rotting on the vines. The flavour will be nothing to write home about until the weather warms up.

I see no immediate serious problems cropping up in Soldier Settlement with all our staff working on this Japanese problem. I think on the whole the boys are reasonably content on the job. I authorized them to go home over the 24th of May at Government expense as I felt the cost to the Government would be less than keeping them in the hotels, and they would feel better for getting home to see their families. I am satisfied it was the right course to take as I see from the appraisals received yesterday that a number of them who stayed at the hotels worked over the weekend. I am going to suggest that those who are away from home work this weekend, and next Monday, add this time to a longer holiday on the first of July.

I hope that at the sittings of your Committee the Prairie Members can appreciate that Canada produces other products besides wheat and some livestock. Some of the Japanese greenhouse men are producing more off five acres than some of the Prairie farmers are off 3000 acres.

Yours very truly,

ITB:B

District Superintendent.

Source C. Yakashiro Bird Commission case file including map, LAC, RG33-69, Volume 39, File 779.

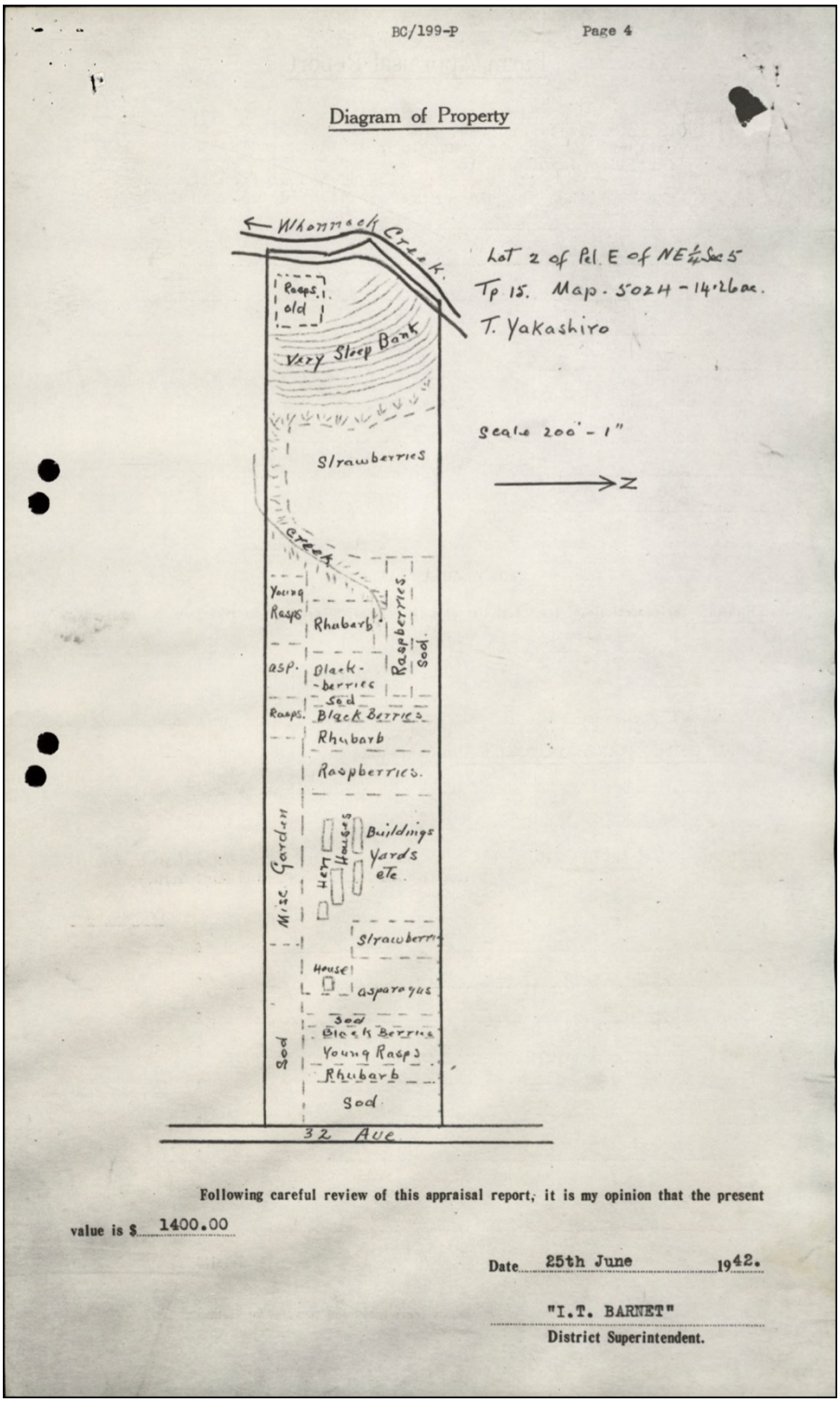

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Diagram of Property

Following careful review of this appraisal report, it is my opinion that the present value is $ 1400.00

Date 25th June 1942.

"I.T. BARNET"
District Superintendent.

Source D. "Relocation's Other Side," *New Canadian*, 23 January 1943.

Relocation's Other Side

A Nisei "re-settler", writing from the Ontario North, puts in simple, but meaningful words, what he feels is the "biggest thing" about his new life, — "With this company, it's . . . well . . . regardless of race, creed or color. You can always get a better job."

This is a simple declaration. But it deserves the deepest attention from governmental authority and from all those interested in the program of resettlement for Japanese Canadians.

It suggests, first, to what degree the success of the program ultimately will depend upon the attitude and the welcome which other Canadians are prepared to give Japanese resettlers in search of new and happier homes.

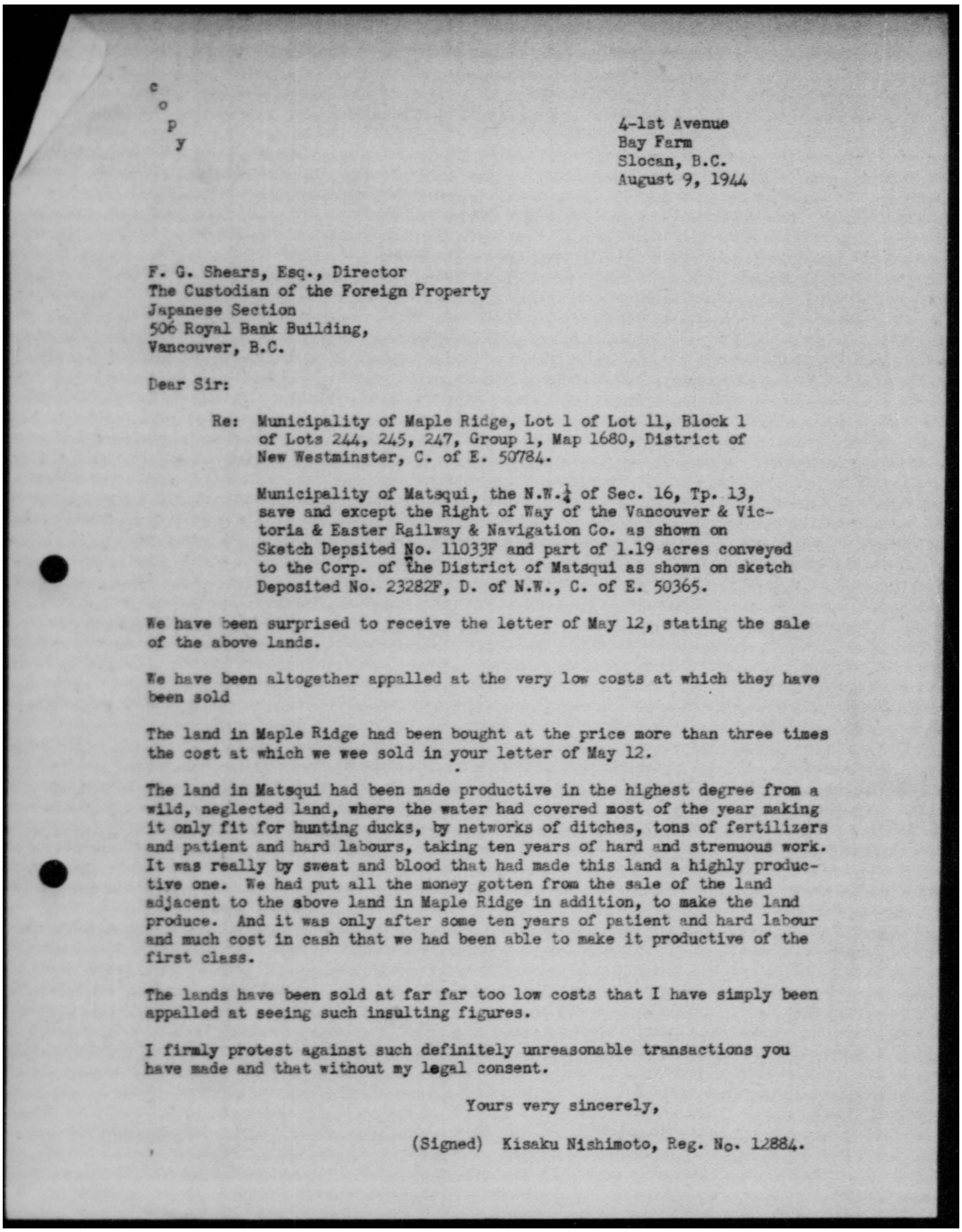
And it suggests, secondly, how important would be an assurance, as official as possible, that those who elect to return to normal society, prepared as private individuals to earn their own livelihood and contribute as citizens to the war effort, will be relieved entirely of the heavy burden of wartime restrictions now weighing upon them, and upon them alone.

Unquestionably, it is difficult for any individual or group, official or otherwise, to put an end to "de facto" prejudice and discrimination. That is a task which awaits a newer age. But it can and should be a responsibility of governmental authority to stand firm on the question of upholding and safeguarding the citizenship rights of those recognized by itself as loyal Canadians. Under this latter heading, clearly, the need for a liberal administration of existing restrictions on the lease and purchase of agricultural lands, as well as of the issuing of special permits for business enterprises, is all-important as an incentive for resettlement.

It would be idle to pretend for a moment that the great bulk of the evacuees now located in the interior towns are good "resettlement" material today. Too many, especially the older folk who saw the fruits of years of toil swept away, and many younger folk, too, have suffered such damage to spirit and morale that they are closer to being "Indian reservation" material.

But their spirits can be revived and their morale can be repaired, if some hope and assurance for a happier future is held out to them. The success of resettlement depends upon the individual, no doubt, but from a general point of view, it depends too upon genuine opportunities for the future which will make toil and struggle and courage worthwhile and fruitful.

Source E. Kisaku Nishimoto to F. G. Shears, August 9, 1944, Image 1629, C9476, Custodian, Héritage Project.



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4-1st Avenue
Bay Farm
Slocan, B.C.
August 9, 1944

F. G. Shears, Esq., Director
The Custodian of the Foreign Property
Japanese Section
506 Royal Bank Building,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Sir:

Re: Municipality of Maple Ridge, Lot 1 of Lot 11, Block 1 of Lots 244, 245, 247, Group 1, Map 1680, District of New Westminster, C. of E. 50784.

Municipality of Matsqui, the N.W.¼ of Sec. 16, Tp. 13, save and except the Right of Way of the Vancouver & Victoria & Easter Railway & Navigation Co. as shown on Sketch Depsited No. 11033F and part of 1.19 acres conveyed to the Corp. of the District of Matsqui as shown on sketch Deposited No. 23282F, D. of N.W., C. of E. 50365.

We have been surprised to receive the letter of May 12, stating the sale of the above lands.

We have been altogether appalled at the very low costs at which they have been sold

The land in Maple Ridge had been bought at the price more than three times the cost at which we wee sold in your letter of May 12.

The land in Matsqui had been made productive in the highest degree from a wild, neglected land, where the water had covered most of the year making it only fit for hunting ducks, by networks of ditches, tons of fertilizers and patient and hard labours, taking ten years of hard and strenuous work. It was really by sweat and blood that had made this land a highly productive one. We had put all the money gotten from the sale of the land adjacent to the above land in Maple Ridge in addition, to make the land produce. And it was only after some ten years of patient and hard labour and much cost in cash that we had been able to make it productive of the first class.

The lands have been sold at far far too low costs that I have simply been appalled at seeing such insulting figures.

I firmly protest against such definitely unreasonable transactions you have made and that without my legal consent.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) Kisaku Nishimoto, Reg. No. 12884.