

CASE FILES: The Custodian of Enemy Alien Property records

By Michael Abe

One of the legacies of the Landscapes of Injustice (LOI) project that I'm most proud of is the database for the documents acquired during the research phase of the project. This database includes the following:

- digitized Fishing Vessel Disposition Committee records of boat sales
- land titles of properties forcibly sold in Steveston, Vancouver's Powell Street, Salt Spring Island, and Haney as well as other documents from more than 20 archives and repositories from across Canada and the UK
- family case files from the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property and Bird Commission files, digitized at Library and Archives Canada (LAC)

The Case Files Project

When LOI began its research, about ten percent or 1,500 individual case files created by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property were available to the public. Further investigation by the project with Library and Archives Canada developed into an agreement to open and digitize the remainder of the case files. Permission was granted to LOI to use them in their database.

I have seen firsthand the emotional impacts of the contents of these files, which provide tremendous detail about the experience of Japanese Canadian families during the 1940s. As the Project Manager of LOI and a third generation Japanese Canadian, I participated in discussions of whether and how to make these sensitive records available online. The entire research collective consulted extensively on this topic; these discussions included representatives from the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Vancouver Japanese Language School & Japanese Hall, Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre and the Landscapes of Injustice Community Council. After more than a year of considering their specific contents and the challenges they raise, there was consensus and encouragement that these difficult records should be shared, due to the significance of the materials for future scholars, educators, the general public, and the Japanese Canadian community in

particular. While I know that these records are sometimes triggering, I support this decision, especially because it reflects careful due process by key experts in our community.

This addition to the database has already had a remarkable impact on the Japanese Canadian community, both those who had experienced the internment era first-hand and their descendants. LOI research assistants and project members worked hard to handle these case files, separating them, adding metadata, and preparing for their integration into the research database. Officially launched in March 2021, it became a significant resource for researchers and for family members and descendants affected by the forced uprooting and displacement from their homes, lives, and livelihoods. In its first year, it had over 60,000 visits.

With a few keystrokes, Japanese Canadian community members can now run a search on a family name and download a copy of documents related to that family member. Their discoveries have generated a myriad of emotions, and the information they have found has helped confirm stories that had been passed down through the generations. Or, in the case of others, shed light on their past with information that had not been spoken of for generations.

Between 2020 and 2022, I have had the privilege of organizing six sessions held online, several of which

Japanese Words Glossary

Nikkei – person of Japanese descent (e.g., Japanese Canadian)

Issei – first generation

Nisei – second generation

Sansei – third generation

Yonsei – fourth generation

ojii-san – grandfather (formal)

jii-chan – grandfather (colloq.)

obaa-san – grandmother (formal)

baa-chan – grandmother (colloq.)

hafu – mixed heritage

hapa – also used for mixed heritage

Kibei – Nikkei sent back to Japan by their parents for schooling before the Second World War

were hosted by the NAJC. I also collected written accounts from community members. We were grateful for the opportunity to glimpse into their past and share their findings and feelings.

The questions we asked in these sessions were simple:

- Briefly, what did you know about your family history previously?
- What were some initial reactions you or your family members had upon receiving the family case files?
- Were there things that you found that surprised you? Or confirmed or filled in gaps in stories you had heard? Please share any examples if you could.
- Do you have any comments on the value to the community now that the records are easily accessible?

The answers and stories were varied and, in some cases, lengthy and involved. Some stories led to new connections, and some revealed the provenance of objects that had been in the family for years. But they all helped

bring generations of families closer to understanding their heritage and reinforced the decision to make the files more accessible and available.

We have collected stories and recordings from more than 24 Japanese Canadian community members, from second to fourth generation, and many of them are preserved on our website in the Touched by Dispossession section at <https://www.landscapesofinjustice.com/touched-by-dispossession/>.



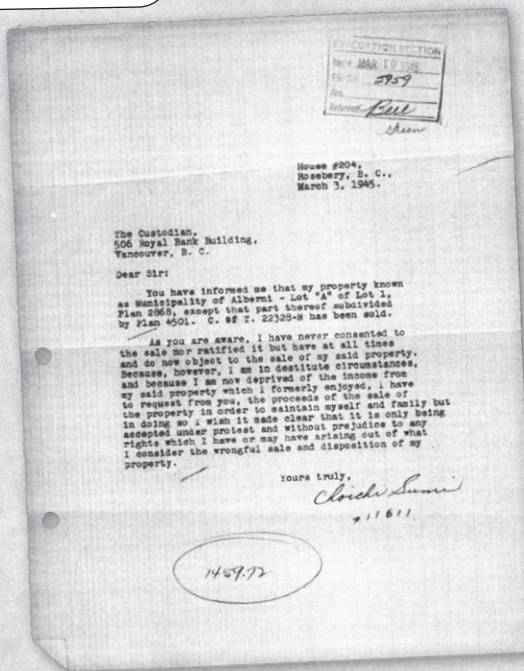
Michael Abe is a third-generation Japanese Canadian (Nikkei Sansei), born and raised in Ontario. After spending six years in Japan, Mike and his wife, Izumi, have been living in Victoria, BC (since 1993). They have two children, Kento and Natsuki. Michael was the project manager of Landscapes of Injustice, a major research project headquartered at the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives at the University of Victoria (UVic) that focused on the dispossession of property owned by Japanese Canadians during the 1940s. He is the past president of the Victoria Nikkei Cultural Society (VNCS) and former newsletter editor. He also spearheaded the Gambare Nippon Support Japan 2011 group that raised funds to aid victims of the earthquake and tsunami in 2011. Michael is the co-chair of the VNCS Heritage Committee with daughter Natsuki, a recent history graduate from UVic.

Reconciling the Past with Music and Visual Arts

By Annie Sumi

"In 2019, my friend Brian K. (a Sansei) and I were commissioned to create a musical work for the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. Our process took many pathways, but the foundation of the work was energized by the collective research provided by Landscapes of Injustice, which allowed us to read handwritten letters, lists of auctioned goods, re-location papers, and more. The night I summoned the courage to read these documents, I felt the words stir the cellular memories in my body. I read my great-grandfather's handwritten letter aloud:

'As you are aware,' he wrote, 'I have never consented to the sale of my property. Because, however, I am in destitute circumstances, and because I am deprived of the income of said property, I have requested of you the proceeds of the sale to maintain myself and my family.'



Letter detailing chattels belonging to Choichi Sumi.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_117_c3_05959_sumi-choichi

"Tears fell from my eyes as I felt the protest in this request. I let them fall. And keep falling. In further reading of the documents, Brian and I discovered that his baa-chan was able to reclaim her Singer sewing machine from the Office of the Custodian. This precious heirloom had been in Brian's basement acting as a mini-stick hockey net throughout his childhood, but because of this archival documentation, the sewing machine suddenly became part of his baa-chan's living memory."

Annie Sumi is a mixed race Yonsei musician/artist.

Excerpted from *Reconciling the Past with Music and Visual Arts* by Annie Sumi (online at <https://bit.ly/3in8lqT>).

Meeting My Ojii-san (Granddad)

By Laura Saimoto



M.V. May S boat. Photo: Courtesy Laura Saimoto

"When I first opened my grandfather's case file (which contained about 500 pages) from the Office of the Custodian, there was a handwritten number: 9609. What did this mean? It dawned on me that 9609 was my grandfather's internee number, assigned by the Office of the Custodian.

"I had heard stories about my grandfather but had never met him. Both he and my grandmother died before I was born. I had seen family photos of his four seiner boats and of his house and car in Steveston before the war. Like every granddaughter, I wanted to know more about who my grandfather was.

"Then I thought, what could these government documents tell me? As I read every page, tears began streaming down my face. Like any government authority that aims to systematically erase a people while telling themselves they are doing nothing wrong, they took meticulous, detailed records. The internment and dispossession of Japanese Canadians was a machine of organization and administration, and everything was documented.

"Kunimatsu also took meticulous business records of his assets. He knew the power of information and documentation—not just costs and revenues, but insurance for replacement costs, valuations, appraisals, landlord-tenant arrangements with notarized lease agreements, depreciation, etc. He understood what Canadian

business, financial, and legal structures were built on. He understood what citizenship was built upon.

"In 1948 he and other Japanese Canadians sued the Canadian government via the Bird Commission. These are extraordinary records of Japanese Canadian activism, of my grandfather's activism. They did not just directly challenge the government for the confiscation of their properties and forced sale of their assets, but also challenged the devaluation of their assets and the low compensation they received for them. For my grandfather, these assets included their house in Steveston, his four boats, and his car.

His greatest asset was his 60-foot [18.2-metre] seiner, the *May S*. Kunimatsu received compensation of just \$8,057.50 [approximately \$100,000 in 2022]. "In the end, the Commission conceded that the boat had been undervalued by ten percent of its actual value. It was

not so much the percentage that was important—these Japanese Canadians knew the value of their assets and stood up for them. They affirmed their own value, whatever the outcome. My grandfather did not become

a victim. He did not give up. He used the rules of his victimizers to expose their moral bankruptcy. His dignity shone through the details on every page.

"Kunimatsu chose to follow a path of activism, not through destruction but by living the solid principles of citizenship, community leadership, by living by the values of humanity, justice, and entrepreneurship. Case file 9609. That's Kunimatsu Saimoto, my grandfather."

M. V. "MAY S"	
CONSTRUCTIVE COST (BUILT IN 1927)	
Kishi Bros. Boat Works for Hull	\$6,100.00
Vancouver Machinery Depot Ltd. for Engine	\$,719.00
do. for Extras	178.35
Steveston Machine Shop for an auxiliary Engine and installation	2,085.65
Steveston Sheet Metal Works for Tanks etc.	\$40.00
Edward Lipsett for ship chandlery	150.75
Meleman, McFeely for Accessories	2,089.88
Akimoto Hardware Co. for ship chandlery	385.85
T. Howard for Blacksmith jobs	109.00
Mikado Transfer for Carriage charges	155.50
Sub-Total	\$16,597.00
Additional Cost (Installation in 1930)	
Celtic Shipyards for Pilot House	250.00
Control installations, etc.	
TOTAL COST	\$16,847.00

Construction cost of M.V. May S boat. Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg33-69_volume_12_file_0211_saimoto-kunimatsu

After a version of this article also ran in the *Globe and Mail*, Laura Saimoto received an email from a stranger from the United States who was the daughter of Laura's aunt's best friend from childhood. The girls had grown up together in Steveston in the 1920s and '30s. Laura connected with this woman, Elizabeth Toomey, and from there an extraordinary story of two soul sisters unfolded as she related how that friendship changed the course of her mother's life.

Heroism in the Everyday: Soul Friendship

By Laura Saimoto



Aunt Nobuko (left) recuperating in New Denver.

Photo: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_33-69_volume_12_file_211_saimoto-kunimatsu

"My Auntie Nobby (Nobuko) was born in 1921 in Steveston, the eldest of 10 children. She contracted TB during the war, and she spent a greater part of the internment recovering at the New Denver Sanatorium for Japanese Canadian patients while her family lived in Minto, a self-supporting internment site. She did not have an easy life, as she always had health issues probably related to her TB. She was very skilled with her hands; she taught me how to knit and crochet. She was a kind, gentle soul, who never complained.

"The thriving fishing hamlet of Steveston had a population of about 8,000 in 1925 when my aunt Nobby and Diana Burdett became friends. They were four years old. My aunt's first language was Japanese, and she didn't speak English. Diana didn't speak Japanese. Despite this, they became best friends.

"Diana went to school with my aunt at Lord Byng Elementary in Steveston. She was the only little white girl in the Japanese language class that was held after public school was over. She was there to learn Japanese with my aunt. Apparently, the Japanese teacher did not acknowledge Diana in class but did not kick her out either. My aunt and Diana would snack on *onigiri* [Japanese rice balls], and Diana would regularly come over to play at the Saimoto family home.

"Diana's father, Owen Burdett, had tried to help my grandfather keep the family home by leasing it from him during the war for \$10 per month [approximately \$170 in 2022]. At first it was to prevent looting, and then to prevent the forced sale. In the end, the house was sold in about 1946 or '47. My uncle recalls Mr. Burdett visiting the family up in Revelstoke in 1947, where they had relocated after living in Minto. He remembered seeing Mr. Burdett's sad and stoic face as he walked up to their house. He knew Mr. Burdett had very bad news. Although ultimately Mr. Burdett's

attempt to save the Saimoto house was not successful, it was an extraordinary act of friendship, courage, and kindness to the Saimoto family...

"Even through the war years, my aunt and Diana continued to write letters and exchange photos. One of these was a photo of my aunt recuperating at the sanatorium. It was heartwarming to know that my aunt did not feel alone at New Denver. And despite the noise of war, internment, racism, and post-war life, Diana and my aunt remained friends during the war and until their deaths—two little girls learning each other's languages and culture, seeing each other only as soul friends.

"There are more twists and turns. Because Diana had learned Japanese as a little girl, she eventually worked as a translator for the US Occupation forces in the Intelligence Service in post-war Tokyo. Her daughter



Diana Burdett and Nobuko Saimoto, circa 1937, age 16.

Photo: Courtesy Elizabeth Toomey

Elizabeth shared with me some immediate post-war photos of Japan, which her mother took. I'm now helping her to translate the captions for these extraordinary photos.

"In the movies we expect heroism to be bold, flashy, and action-packed. In real life, heroism can be quiet acts of every day courage, of love and generosity, of going upstream when the mainstream current flows downstream. In the increasing angst of racial tensions today, my aunt and Diana, came to remind us of the heroism of 'soul friendship.' "

Laura is a Sansei (third generation) and heritage activist who spearheaded the Japanese Canadian Highway Legacy Signage initiative.

Excerpted from *9609 Meeting My Ojii-san* by Laura Saimoto (online at <https://bit.ly/3IsFrpk>) and "Heroism in the Everyday: Soul Friendship" by Laura Saimoto (online at <https://bit.ly/3qKNKXB>).

Rage at the Plunder



Morio Sanmiya's home and business on Cordova Street, Vancouver, picture taken April 9, 1943.

Photo: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg33-69_volume_67_file_1317_sanmiya-morio

"Our documented family history focuses on Koichiro Sanmiya, who held the first malt and sake license in British Columbia. While researching our family after his untimely death in 1931, I found a property at 640 E. Cordova listed under M. Sanmiya in 1936. Was M his widow, Morio (my Issei great-grandmother) or Marmuro, their first Canadian-born son (1915-1944)?

"Our LOI files clarified that Morio bought the lot at 640 E. Cordova. She renovated it extensively, adding a building behind for a dressmaking factory. Following dispossession, she hoped to get \$6,000 [approximately \$80,000 in 2022] (initially appraised at \$5,000 [approximately \$65,000 in 2022]). Our file revealed multiple unabashedly undervalued appraisals each deducting more fees, taxes levied despite forced dispossession, and the Custodian's five-percent commission. It sold for net \$3,000 [approximately \$40,000 in 2022].

"A furniture appraiser took all the household property for \$40 [approximately \$500 in 2022]. For the Bird Commission, Morio inventoried her household property at \$409 [approximately \$5,000 in 2022]. The judge questioned how she could know the value of her household assets. As I read the files, my stomach knotted with sadness, disgust, and rage at the plunder:

"Despair. Most chilling were the index cards. Each person is reduced to a number on an index card that meticulously cross-referenced family members' numbers right down to a four-month-old child. Dehumanizingly reduced from Morio to 5150—cataloguing people, like library books. Despair at the inhumanity.

By Kate Michi Ettinger

"Disgust. My Kibei grandfather described his experience 'being treated worse than a dog' at Hepburn Farm, Ont. Disgust at the indignity.

"Outrage. Lives upended and stripped bare. Treasures devalued by forced evacuation, then plundered by opportunists. Efforts to redress wrongs laced with persisting discrimination. Rage at the injustices.

TABLE	QTY	PRICE
1 Couch leather bed	1	15
1 Leather sofa	1	5
2 Reclining chairs	2	5
1 Old Radio	1	5
1 Bridge Lamp	1	5
2 Table lamps	2	2
1 Book ends	1	5
1 Screen covered box	1	5
1 Vacuum cleaner	1	25
2 Book ends	2	50
2 Oil painting pictures	2	50
1 Large new hand painted picture	1	50
2 Mirrors	2	2
2 Chairs	2	50
1 Heat winner	1	50
Lumber	1	50
Table & Chairs	1	50
2 Heavy pots	2	50
1 Gas stove range	1	50
1 Bath tub (in basement)	1	50
2 Chairs (old)	2	50
Blue rack	1	50
1 Large Mirror	1	50
1 Wooden Cupboard	1	50
1 Office chair	1	50
1 Cutting table (small)	1	50
6 Mirrors	6	50
50 Hangers	50	50
6 Umbrellas	6	50
2 Cases	2	50
Photograph developer	1	50
2 Sewing Machine	2	50
2 Stools	2	50
Small rug	1	50

WASHERS, CHESTERFIELDS, DINING & BEDROOM SUITES

SALES OFFICE:
555 Richards Street
Vancouver 2837
Pacific 3022

RENTAL: 1947-9
DATE: JAN 4 1944
PLACE BY: [Signature]

1000 Granville Street
Vancouver 1648

Alberta FURNITURE CO.

• • 2 STORES • •

VANCOUVER, B. C.
Jan. 4, 1944

Custodian of Enemy Property
506 Royal Bank Building
Vancouver, B. C.

Re: Furniture at 640 E. Cordova Street

Dear Sir:

When inspecting the household chattels at the above address, we found that most of these have no commercial value. We would not be prepared to offer more than \$40.00 for the lot.

In our opinion the outside resale value which could be recovered after repairing and bringing it into condition, would be \$100.00.

We are enclosing herewith our amount for \$6.00 for our services in making this appraisal.

Yours very truly,
ALBERTA FURNITURE COMPANY
[Signature]
Manager

DO:LS

List of Morio's household chattels and an offer to buy it at an undervalued amount.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_117_C3_05150_sanmiya-morio

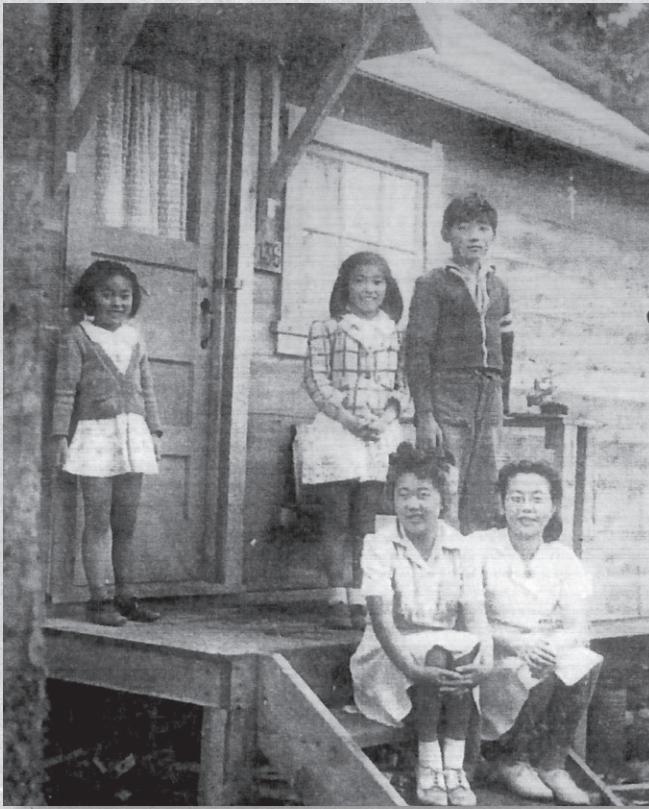
"Invisible injuries pierced spirits; scars silently passed to descendants. Shedding light on hidden histories begins healing. We discovered that Morio, remembered as a fun, kind, great cook, and loving grand/mother, was also a savvy, skilful entrepreneur. As we bear witness to injustices endured, we can also honour her more fully. We gratefully embrace her tremendous legacy of strength, courage, resilience, and grace."

Kate Michi Ettinger is a Yonsei Hafu; she participated in one of Landscapes of Injustice Sharing Family Stories events in conjunction with the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH-jhtLDPw>).

Excerpted from *Rage at the Plunder*, by Kate Michi Ettinger (available online at <https://bit.ly/3N8JrOb>).

Letters of What Was Lost

By Tami Hirasawa



Joyce Hirasawa (née Fujimagari) (front left) and siblings in New Denver, 1942.

Photo: Courtesy Hirasawa family

"My [maternal] grandfather, Fusakichi Fujimagari, was 58 years old in 1942. From the digital archives case file, I learned that his property at 204 Alpha Avenue was one acre with a newly built two-storey home (with an *ofuro* [soaking tub] in the basement and a flush toilet!), a chicken house, brooder house, thousands of flowers, many fruit trees, and a large vegetable garden.

"I found a handwritten letter from my grandfather telling the Custodian he had rented the property to a tenant for \$10 per month starting May 29, 1942 [approximately \$170 in 2022]. By October he was expecting four months' rent. '...I would be much obliged,' he wrote from New Denver, 'if you would forward the sum to me at the address above at your earliest convenience.'

"The case files show that taxes were \$60 [approximately \$1,000 in 2022] per year plus water bills, which were paid by my grandfather. He also wrote letters from Picture Butte, Alberta, in 1945 and Taber, Alberta, in 1949. The files show that, starting in March 1943, offers to purchase the property were submitted, ranging in price from \$475 to \$2,100 [approximately \$8,000 and \$36,000 in 2022].

"Using these handwritten letters as a reference with dates and locations of where the family lived, my 95-year-old mom shared her experiences:

When I was 16, my dad and 18-year-old brother, Jack, had already been sent to work in a road ramp in Griffin Lake, BC, with other Japanese Canadian men when we got the order to report to Hastings Park on May 28, 1942. We walked there from our house, which was next to Confederation Park. At Hastings Park we were given a metal bunk bed for the four of us girls and were told to stuff our mattress with straw. We were in the livestock building, section U. I slept in the top bunk with Anne, and Jean slept in the bottom bunk with Maggie. We hung sheets around our bed for privacy. My brothers, Tak and Yosh (12 and 14 years old) had to sleep in the boys' building. We ate in a separate building. There was also a laundry building. I remember Mrs. Fukumoto, who lived in a different section, often looked out for us.

We were sent by train to New Denver in September. When we got there, they weren't ready for us so we had to sleep in tents. It was so cold. My father had building experience—he had just finished building our house—so he and Jack were sent from the road camp to New Denver to build the shacks. Our family was happy to be together in one shack.

In 1943 we applied to work on the sugar beet farms of Alberta. We were one of the first families to leave New Denver. I remember standing on the platform when the train stopped at Iron



Joyce Hirasawa (née Fujimagari) (seated, left) and family in Taber, AB 1946.

Photo: Courtesy Hirasawa family



Hirasawa family home before the war in Burnaby.

Photo: Courtesy Hirasawa family

Springs. All the local sugar beet farmers were there looking over the families. They wanted strong boys to work their fields. We stayed in a granary on the Beeswanger farm (a German family) for one season and then moved to another farm in Picture Butte before we moved to Taber.

"I am happy that my mother remembers events and places with so much detail and was able to connect the dots on some of the discoveries we encountered in the files. When I asked my 17-year-old daughter, Naomi, about her thoughts on hearing baa-chan's stories, she said, 'I like hearing the family history because I didn't

learn anything about this in school. I also think it is very special to hear it directly from my baa-chan.'

"The Hirasawa farm, which my grandfather purchased as uncleared land in 1911 for \$2,000 [approximately \$45,000 in 2022], was sold for \$2,377 in 1943 [approximately \$40,000 in 2022] despite more than \$18,000 in improvements [approximately \$340,000 in 2022]. It had been fully cleared and cultivated and earned a net income of \$6,000 per year in the years preceding 1942 [approximately \$110,000 in 2022]. My grandfather also owned a parcel of land, purchased for \$350 [approximately \$8,500 in 2022]; it was sold to the City of Vancouver for \$75 [approximately \$1,200 in 2022]. My grandfather received \$49, after fees were deducted [approximately \$800 in 2022].

"I feel so much respect for Takejiro Hirasawa. His letters are respectful and written with great integrity in his second language—English. I am still learning new things about his losses, the injustice he faced, and how hard he worked throughout his life."

Tami Hirasawa is a Sansei and is the president of the Seven Potatoes Society in Nanaimo, BC. She grew up in Hamilton, Ontario. Prior to 1942, her father's family lived in the Strawberry Hill neighbourhood in Surrey, BC, and her mother, known as Joyce or Yukiko (née Fujimagari), lived in the Vancouver Heights neighbourhood in Burnaby, BC.



Joyce Hirasawa (centre) with daughters Patti Simpson (left) and Tami Hirasawa (right). Photo: Courtesy Hirasawa family

Excerpted from *Letters of What Was Lost* by Tami Hirasawa (online at <https://bit.ly/3Jof1jr>).

Connecting Memory with Historical Documents



The Star Confectionery building.

Photo: Courtesy Kelly Fleck

"The case files have been a way to authenticate and understand my baa-chan's (grandma Asako) memories about our family. I wanted to learn about the store Asako's parents, Hana and Matsunosuke (my great-grandmother and great-grandfather) ran in Vancouver. The store is the centre of many of my baa-chan's stories about her childhood. While she still remembers the address, she couldn't remember the store's name, so opening her files and seeing that information in front of me was like a light going on.

"In the case files, I found the store, Star Confectionery, right where my baa-chan remembered it, at 2700 Commercial Drive in Vancouver. It was a small grocery store, and connected to the back was the family home, a four-room frame house that they rented for \$15 a month [approximately \$250 in 2022].

"It was in front of the store that my baa-chan learned to ride her brothers' bike. When her brothers were busy, her father would send her off on the bike with groceries in the basket to deliver to customers. The store was also where my baa-chan learned to bake; she used to make killer pecan squares.

"My great-grandmother Hana's case files offered me a glimpse into what must have been a terrible time for the store. Documents from the Office of the Custodian detail her experience selling the business and its contents before the family was interned in Lemon Creek. At this point, her husband was at a road camp at Tête Jaune Cache, BC. Her eldest sons were also sent to road camps; Isao to Jasper, Alberta, and Yoshio to Solsqua, BC. Hana was left alone to sell the business with her seven other children, the youngest five months old at the time.

"The files detail an inspection of the store and its stock made by H. D. Campbell. Hana had valued her grocery stock at \$700 and the store fixtures at \$300 [approximately \$12,000 and \$5,000 in 2022]. My baa-chan, 12 years old at the time, remembers watching her mother go through each item in the store with a man. I'm not sure if this was Mr. Campbell or the person who ended up buying the business. Each price Hana proposed, he would counter with a lower price.

By Kelly Fleck

"Campbell's report valued the grocery stock at \$300 to \$400 [approximately \$5,000 to \$6,700 in 2022]. He wrote that the store's fixtures 'are considerably run down and are generally a shabby set-up, probably not worth more than half the amount valued at, and might bring, if a realisation was necessary, an amount of slightly over \$100' [approximately \$1,700 in 2022].

"With not much time to negotiate or leverage a better offer, Hana sold the business, stock, and fixtures for \$175 [approximately \$3,000 in 2022] before the family was evacuated three days later to Lemon Creek. After finding a buyer, she wrote to H.D. Campbell: 'I have considerably reduced my stock, and as I apparently cannot get very much for my fixtures, I am satisfied to accept this offer.'

"I told my family what I had learned over dinner one night. We were thrilled that there were things my baa-chan remembered more than 75 years later. And there was a collective sadness as we reflected on Hana's experiences.



Author Kelly Fleck's grandmother Atsuko Hamade.

Photo: Courtesy Kelly Fleck

"It is hard to look into these files and see your family assigned case numbers and the contents of their lives assigned a value much lower than what they were worth—not to mention what these items meant to them—but it's important not to look away.

"As a Yonsei, sometimes this history can feel far away. The stories from my baa-chan are fragmented pieces and snippets; she was only a preteen at the time of internment, and her parents and older siblings protected her."

Kelly Fleck is a Yonsei and editor of *Nikkei Voice*, a national Japanese Canadian newspaper. These files help ground these memories in dates and places. I encourage other Yonseis to find their family's case files and reclaim their stories. These stories are a part of us. These are the histories we've inherited.

Excerpted from *Collecting Memories of Historical Documents* by Kelly Fleck (online at <https://bit.ly/3ImQ2C4>).

Connecting a Family's Lost Fleet to Historical Documents

By Michael Abe



Picture of a biwa, a musical instrument identified in Senkichi Fukuyama's Bill of Lading.
Photo: Courtesy Susan Fukuyama

"When reviewing documents of Susan Fukuyama's family in a Howe Sound Fishery case file dated August 20, 1942, I found a claim by Susan's grandfather, Senkichi Fukuyama, from his lawyer to a Mr. Alexander, indicating that Senkichi's boat, the *Howe Sound IV*, was requisitioned for naval services on December 3, 1941, before Canada had even entered the war. Senkichi complied and delivered his boat on December 16 but received a telegram the next day saying the requisition was cancelled. The vessel was not returned to him, however, until March 11, 1942, after which Howe Sound Fishery sold it to Charles Wilson for \$18,500 [approximately \$310,000 in 2022]. Senkichi wrote to the government, making a claim for \$1,500 [approximately \$25,000 in 2022] in lost earnings while the government used the boat for three months. His calculations show he stood to lose \$1,833.30 [approximately \$31,000 in 2022] in charter money during that time. A letter dated November 30, 1943 states that he settled for \$25 per day for 11 days, a mere \$275 [approximately \$400 and \$4,600 in 2022].

"In the Burrard Fish Company case file, one Glenn McPherson urges Mr. Frank Shears to advise Senkichi's attorney to withdraw his Bird Commission claim as they both believe that the claim is outside the terms of reference. A later letter shows the withdrawal of the \$10,276.85 [approximately \$174,000 in 2022] claim to the Burrard Fish Company and a note that concludes that the claims were outside the terms of reference. The Howe Sound Fishery and Burrard Fish Company

were co-owned by Senkichi Fukuyama and Iwakichi Sugiyama.

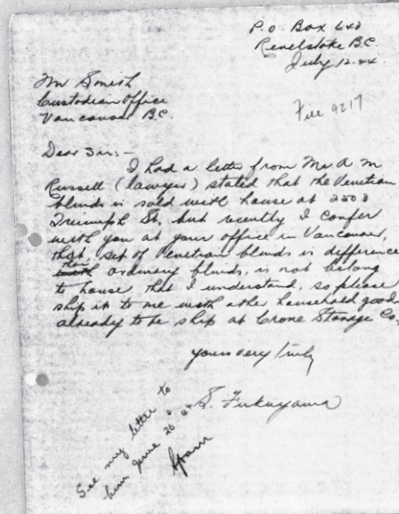
"But what struck me while talking to Susan were the smaller things that popped out at her. She has found the house on Triumph Street in Vancouver on the BC Assessment website, so she knows that it is still standing today (though worth quite a bit more than in the 1940s). She was delighted to see a photo of the house from 1943 and appreciated having a record of how it looked when her grandparents lived there.

"Susan and I also looked at the Bill of Lading for the possessions that her family shipped to Revelstoke, as they had the means to be self-supporting. Looking at the list of contents she noticed a Japanese instrument listed. 'I still have it,' she said, 'it's a *biwa* [a lute].'

"And we also came across a handwritten letter with her grandfather's signature, and she was amazed at how similar it was to her own father's. It's encouraging to see these files help Susan bring her family history to life, providing a glimpse into her past as they coped with trying circumstances."

Susan Fukuyama is a Sansei. The history of her family's boats was featured in *The Lost Fleet* exhibit at the Maritime Museum of BC in Victoria in 2019.

Excerpted from *The Lost Fleet Exhibit Launch Report: A Case Study* by Michael Abe (online at <https://bit.ly/3wnlwWn>).

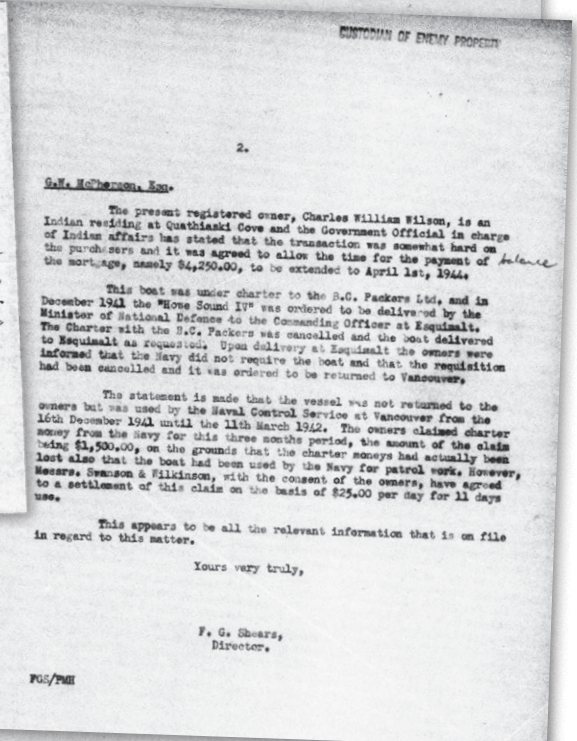


Handwritten letter by Senkichi Fukuyama.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_117_c3_09217_fukuyama-senkichi

Letter from Frank Shears to Senkichi Fukuyama.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_117_c3_09210_howe-sound-fisheries-company-limited



Treated Like a Criminal

"It has always angered me that my grandpa was treated like a criminal when he was innocent. The record of his arrest in the files is invaluable to me, as terrible as it is, because it describes this moment in a way that sheds light on my grandpa's unjust treatment. 'Receipt for his living body attached hereto' is a chilling sentence. I am appreciative of details about things like his radio and his mother's fishing net, which lend a materiality to their lives back then.

"The records concerning my family's War Savings

Accessing the Archives: Connecting the Dots

"The case files that I received have been the cement that is gluing all the loose ends together. Getting dates and addresses and correspondence has been terrific. Reading the correspondence of family members trying to get justice, reclaiming personal property and fair prices for real estate is eye-opening and heartbreaking.

As a septuagenarian I think that if you focus on the victimhood and loss of property, it can destroy you. This happened when it shouldn't have. That naturalized and native-born Japanese Canadians were treated like enemies of the state is disgusting and abhorrent. But it shows how people can rise above hate and survive successfully. If there were stories of internees not becoming integrated across Canada and having remade successful lives, I would like to hear them.

Fishing Boat Ledgers

Each record (of more than 1,100) in this collection contains detailed information about a vessel that the federal government confiscated during the dispossession.

By Reiko Pleau

Certificates, lost life insurance policies, and hospital fees were also illuminating but difficult to grapple with. With inflation, the hospital fees for my great-grandmother Kocho alone would be equivalent to over \$70,000 in 2020. The effects of forced poverty are felt in my family today."

Reiko Pleau is a Yonsei and Zoomed in from New Brunswick to tell her story at a National Association of Japanese Canadians/Landscapes of Injustice Sharing Family Stories event in 2020 (available to view at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oH-jhjtLDPw>).

By Nana Spence

"Concentrating on our differences instead of our common humanity is a huge mistake in my opinion and creates an environment in which an internment of any minority can happen again. All Canadians—and especially those who have had this in our history—need to be on guard so it doesn't happen again."

Nana Spence is a Sansei who currently resides in Victoria, BC.

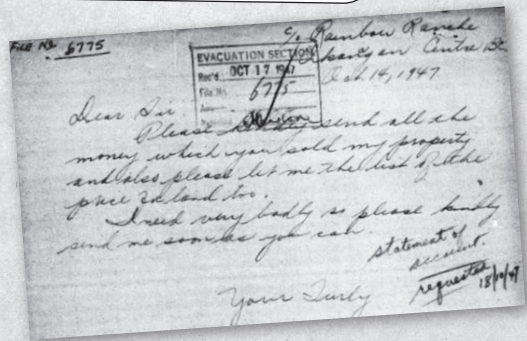
Excerpted from *Accessing the Archives: Connecting the Dots* by Nana Spence (online at <https://bit.ly/3ud9pZ7>).

Protest Letters

This collection consists of almost 300 letters sent by Japanese Canadians to the federal government protesting the forced sale of their property without their consent. Many more letters poured into government offices from Japanese Canadians, contesting the policy. The staff at the Office of the Custodian collected these examples so that they could monitor the extent of unrest and anticipate postwar legal action by the Japanese Canadians. The letters helped inform the terms of the Bird Commission.

Onus of Proof

By Sally Ito



"My great-aunt Kay and husband, Charlie Imahashi, owned farmland in New Westminster, but when war broke out, Charlie was sent to a road camp, and Kay stayed with my grandmother and her five boys until they were forcibly moved to Hastings Park. When the Custodian started creating property files for the displaced, I discovered (along with the Custodian) that Kay and Charlie's deed was still under the name of Charlie's brother, Kokichi, who had returned to Japan before the war.

"The property had been paid for in 1933, but the Imahashis didn't have any documentation to prove it. There was some correspondence about the situation in one letter from the Custodian that Kay had not responded to because she was sick with the mumps in hospital while at Hastings Park. Eventually Kay and Charlie were reunited at [the government-leased farm of Emilie and Konstantine] Popoff. There, they received notice of the sale of their property. But as far as the Custodian was concerned, the money from the sale could not go to Kay and Charlie because it ostensibly belonged to Kokichi. Kay was made to write a letter to the Custodian and provide evidence that the property had been paid for in full, as well as all the interest, and so reimbursement of the interest should not have been held back by the Custodian.

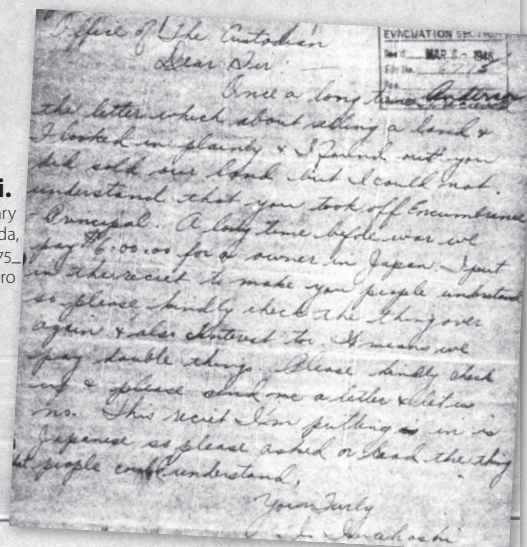
"When I saw that letter in this file, I immediately recognized the handwriting and voice of my Aunt Kay and could practically hear her saying those words. The second letter she sent really hit me hard—it was brief and to the point. By the time this problem was resolved with the Custodian, Charlie had died and the money now had to go through probate procedures—another delay—before it could be given to my aunt. It was finally given to her on November 27, 1948.

"I did not know that my great-aunt received any money for the loss of their property, so that was news to me. What really bothered me was the way in which she suffered the bureaucratic antipathy of the Custodian's office. As evidenced by *Landscapes of Injustice* and law

professors, the dispossession was a betrayal of trust; my great-aunt and great-uncle were forcibly moved off their property in BC and told their property would be kept 'in trust' during the war, but it was then sold without their consent. The onus of proof fell to them to show that they owned the land and therefore the money from the sale belonged to them. Although you could say that the bureaucracy was scrupulously detailed and the Office of the Custodian acted as fairly as possible in its

Handwritten letters by Sally Ito's great-aunt Kay Imahashi.

Images: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_117_C3_06775_1 imahashi-ichiro



work, you'd also have to admit that the dispossession was unjust and its management heartless. When you go into the details of your family's files, you will feel that heartlessness all the more keenly because you will know these names as people you loved...

"Of course, it was already terrible enough that my great-aunt and great-uncle were forced to sell their property in the first place. Then the same government authority that took their land would not pay out what they were owed because they couldn't prove ownership. To see my great-aunt's handwritten plea and the typed responses of the office was really sad and aggravating for me to read."

Sally Ito, a Sansei and writer/poet from Winnipeg, was just about to finish her book about her family, *Emperor's Orphans* (Turnstone Press, 2018), when she explored the family's case files. One of the narrators of her book was her great-aunt Kay, whose family worked at the Acme Cannery at the south-east end of the Fraser River in Richmond, BC, when she was born in 1914.

Sally shared her story at the *Landscapes of Injustice* Research Database launch (available to view at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZhamaJEH7o>).

Pleas to Save a Family Farm

"When I received both the Kunimoto and Kajiwara case files, I was curious but didn't fully grasp how emotional it would be for me to read these forms, letters, lists, and documents. My Kajiwara family's case file is only five pages long. But because jii-chan had been a farmer and community leader in Mission, BC, the Kunimoto family's files, including both the BC Securities and the Bird Commission records, are more than 200 pages.

"Shingo Kunimoto arrived in BC from Japan while still in his late teens and was a naturalized Canadian. He married in his twenties and decided farming would provide the most stable conditions to raise a family.

When the Kunimoto family were forcibly removed from their home in 1942, jii-chan was 55 years old. Shingo had raised a family of seven children, cultivated a successful berry and hops farm with years of hard labour, employed many seasonal workers, sponsored many men from his extended family from Japan to come to Canada, and had been the head of the Mission Farmer's Co-op for many years.

"Like many Japanese Canadian farmers, his farm was

dispossessed by the BC Securities Commission for veterans' land use.

"He had a good friend and neighbour, Mr. Barnett, whose wife had taught all of the Japanese children in Mission. Mr. Barnett tried to help keep jii-chan's belongings safe and later tried to help broker fair selling prices for things never to be returned.

"The hardest correspondence to read were the handwritten

ten letters. Not only because

no one handwrote in cursive long-hand anymore, but because of the eloquent and painfully humble language. One letter, written in 1944 to the Custodian's Office in the Royal Bank building in Vancouver, in which my jii-chan mentions his ailing wife, was particularly heart-breaking.

The Bird Commission files clearly demonstrate their dispossession story. I was amazed to see the range of crops they grew and to learn that my jii-chan was also a landlord and had tenants. The Custodian had valued his property at \$11,600 in 1943 [approximately \$196,000 in 2022]. Shingo Kunimoto never received any funds from the forced sale of his land, and because the land had been taken, he lost rental rights, which would have earned him about \$1,000 per year in the 1940s [approximately \$17,000 in 2022]."

Sherri Kajiwara is a Sansei and Director and Curator of the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre in Burnaby, BC.

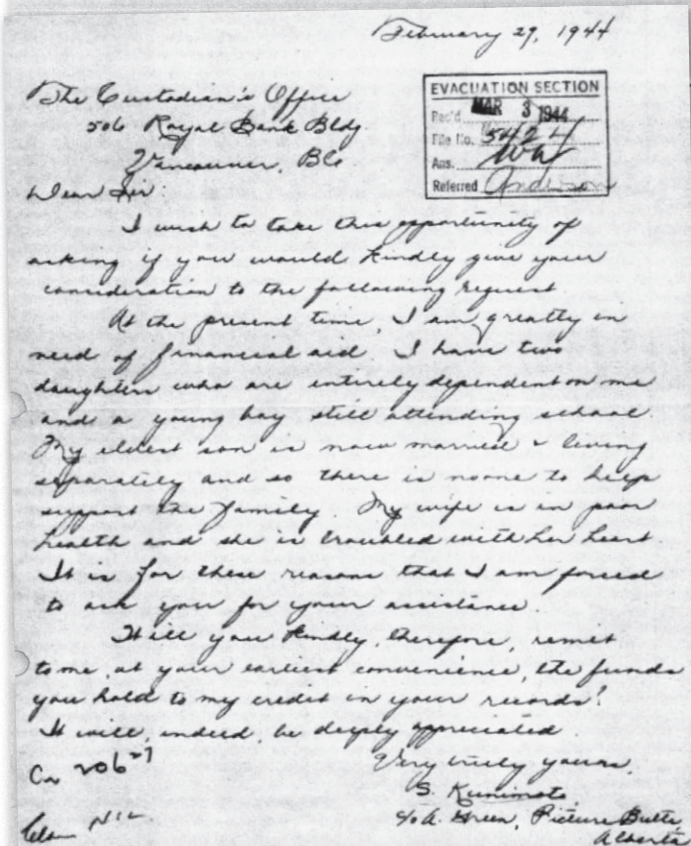
Sherri shared her story at the Landscapes of Injustice Research Database Launch (available to view at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPpNs5cKaQE>).

By Sherri Kajiwara



Sherri Kajiwara's grandfather, Shingo Kunimoto, and youngest son, Roy, circa 1928-29.

Photo: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg33-69_volume_22_file_0471_kunimoto-shingo



Letter from Shingo Kunimoto requesting more of his funds be remitted to him.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_117_c3_05424_kunimoto-shingo

Property Lost-Found in Case Files: Stitching together family (hi)stories

By Stacey Inouye



Hideo Tamaki's home in Steveston. Photo: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg33-69_volume_57_file_1135_tamaki-hideo

"The property form in the case file will tell you where [your family] lived in the 'protected area,' whether their residence was owned or rented, and a number of other things. I was shocked to learn that my jii-chan, Hideo Tamaki, had his house built when he was just 21 years old, on land his widowed mother, a midwife at the Fisherman's Hospital, had purchased for him. When he married my baa-chan, Fumi (née Akiyama), a decade later in 1941, they lived in this house on 2nd Avenue near Chatham, in Steveston. This home was sold by the Office of the Custodian.

"My grandfather filed a claim through the Bird Commission, and the report contains the court record of my grandfather's testimony and itemized list of

Q. If I may just read part of this appraisal of Coulthard, Sutherland & Company, Limited:

"This property is on 2nd Avenue near Chatham Street."

It is not right on the corner, then?

A. Not right on the corner.

Q. "The dwelling is an attractive house 24 by 30! Exterior Shingles and siding, painted brown and cream. The interior is shiplap, papered and in good condition, with sink and toilet, City light and water. Full basement on cement foundation, plank floor, heated by furnace on cement slab."

Transcript from Bird Commission case file of Hideo Tamaki.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg33-69_volume_57_file_1135_tamaki-hideo

things that were left behind—pots and pans, a 29-piece tea set, pruning shears, records and a record player, tablecloths, window curtains, and so much more. As newlyweds, they must have been heartbroken to leave it all behind and have to start again in Manitoba. The property form also showed that my jii-chan had purchased a War Savings Certificate and Victory Bonds to help Canada fund the war that caused the same government to force them from their home.

"My Inouye grandparents, Jokichi and Sanaye (née Nakamichi), were living at a logging camp where my grandfather worked as a logger for the Mayo Lumber Co. [on Vancouver Island] before he was sent to a road camp and my grandmother and their infant daughter to Hastings Park. The company allowed the Japanese workers to leave some of their belongings at the Japanese Hall in Paldi. In my baa-chan's case file was a handwritten letter requesting that her belongings be sent to her at the sugar beet farm where they were working in Picture Butte, Alberta.

"On the list [of her belongings] is a

Singer sewing machine. After reading about this in her case file, I asked my baa-chan if that sewing machine is the same one she has in her bedroom [in Toronto] today, and she confirmed that it is. Over the last 80 years, this sewing machine travelled from a logging camp near Paldi on Vancouver Island to sugar beet farms in Picture Butte and Turin, Alberta, and through a few towns in Northern Ontario before arriving in Toronto. Pretty amazing."

Stacey Inouye is a Yonsei in Ontario with family history in Paldi, Sea Island, Steveston, and Powell Street. She was of great assistance during the development of the case files for the research database.

Excerpted from *Property Lost-Found in Case Files: Stitching together (hi)stories* (online at <https://bit.ly/37P5Y3q>).



Stacey Inouye's great-grandmother's sewing machine, which journeyed from Paldi, BC, to Toronto. Photo: Courtesy Stacey Inouye

Teaching the Past to the Future

By Stephanie Kawamoto



Grade 6 class Powell Street simulation module.

Image: Courtesy Stephanie Kawamoto

“As a Yonsei who teaches Grade 6 students about Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, my family history helps to bring another level of authenticity to my teaching. I get to use documents from my family files to talk about belongings, loss, and injustice, and the students get to interact with real history—Japanese Canadian history in general, but also my own family history. The students are always shocked to learn how little money families received for their belongings after auction and to see the various fees the government used to ensure they received even less. For example, my great-grandmother arranged for the sale of her property on her own, but she was still charged for valuation and advertising. During the teaching unit, students also read from my great-uncle’s journal, look at maps and photographs, and ask me questions about my family.

“When we do the Powell Street Simulation,¹ my grandparents’ store is one of the properties shown. Students get to create it and then experience many

aspects of the internment era as my ‘family.’ The simulation is always emotional for me, especially when my great-grandparents’ business is part of it, and it’s deeply meaningful for the students.”

Stephanie Kawamoto is a Yonsei and a descendant of the Kawamoto, Koyanagi, Hyodo, and Kagetsu families. She teaches Grade 6 in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.

Excerpted from *Four Families, Four Journeys* by Stephanie Kawamoto (online at <https://bit.ly/3NaXT9c>).

Endnotes

1. In the Powell Street Simulation on the Landscapes of Injustice website (<https://loi.uvic.ca/elementary/simulation-activity.html>) students learn about dispossession through a bulletin board simulation of a Japanese Canadian community. This activity helps students understand the difference between belongings (one’s property and possessions) and belonging (having a home and being part of a community).

Family Case Files

The records include 14,562 case files and other official records created by the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property. These records document individual and corporate Japanese Canadian property holdings, including real estate and chattels. They have been specially curated and processed by the LOI digital archive team. The case files detail Japanese Canadian property loss with names of individuals and itemized lists of property and forced sales.

Land Titles

The land titles collection contains legal descriptions for 7,397 real estate properties gathered from the BC Land Title and Survey Authority (BCLTSA).

Custodian Case File: 1556: Heijiro Hiraoka

By Pat Jetté

"THE BIRD COMMISSION" The Royal Commission on Japanese Claims



H. Hiraoka.
In Chief.

Q When was this taken, approximately?

A Just before evacuation.

MR. CHERNIAK: I tender this snapshot as Exhibit 8, Your Honour.

(SNAPSHOT, EXHIBIT 8.)

MR. CHERNIAK:

Q They say that the house is in good condition, clean inside and habitable for white persons; they say the probable sale value would be in the neighborhood of \$1,200.00 to \$1,500.00 if a purchaser could be found and there is a recommendation that the building should be insured for \$1,000.00 to \$1,200.00. I show you a snapshot Mr. Hiraoka, is that you standing in front of a building? A Yes.

Q What building is that? A My house, this

Name of Claimant HIRAOKA, Heijiro

Case 898

Custodian File 1556

Heijiro Hiraoka's home and transcript of Bird Commission Claim Case Number 898.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg33-69_volume_45_File_0898_hiraoka-heijiro

"I never knew my paternal Issei grandfather, Heijiro Hiraoka. With the Landscapes of Injustice database files, we have uncovered more than 400 pages of documentation related to our family, beginning with two unexpected and rare photographs that were part of The Bird Commission court transcripts. The Honourable Saul Cherniak, a Winnipeg lawyer, was our family's advocate.

"After the family was removed from the West Coast, they moved seven times, first to a Powell Street rooming house, then to Hastings Park in Vancouver. They moved to Sandon, Rosebery, and Tashme, all in eastern BC, then to Tully's sugar beet farm in Manitoba,

They corresponded with the Department of National Defense, Department of Labour, Secretary of State, Property Claims Commission, Pacific Command Canadian Royal Navy, Office of the Custodian, Japanese Section, the Japanese Fishing Vessels Disposal Committee, and other various organizations. Imagine..."

Pat Jetté is a Sansei and genealogy enthusiast living in Calgary. She enjoys researching her family's Japanese and French Canadian cultural heritage and roots.

Excerpted from *Custodian Case File 1556: Heijiro Hiraoka* (online at <https://bit.ly/354Bmdi>).

Bird Commission

The Royal Commission on Japanese Claims was created on July 18, 1947. Justice Henry I. Bird was appointed to lead the investigations on July 18, 1947, and the final report of what became known as the Bird Commission was submitted in 1950. The Commission would only consider claims 1) for property loss arising from sales made at less than fair-market value at the time of sale and 2) from loss, vandalism, or theft while in the care of the Office of the Custodian. The narrow terms of reference meant that claimants had to prove the market value of their property and/or prove that it had been damaged while with the Office of the Custodian. In the end, only 1,400 claimants were heard and \$1.3 million [approximately \$15.7 million in 2022] distributed, but this was still far less than the total amount claimed.

A First World War Vet Loses His Farm

By David Iwaasa

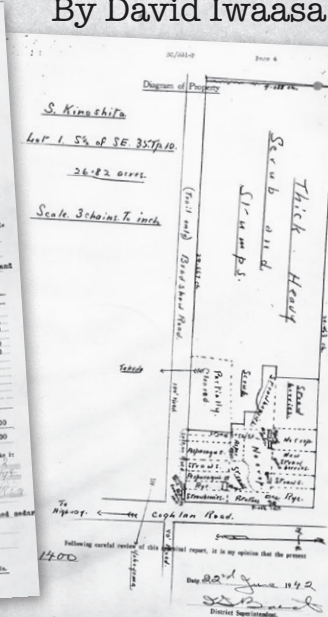
"I received the files for my great-uncle, Seiichi Kinoshita (incorrectly spelled Seichi in the archival file), on my mother's side, who was a First World War Canadian army veteran. I was impressed at how much work had gone into his farm, which started from uncleared forest land. It was apparent that their sacrifices had been immense.

"I was able to see, firsthand and for the first time, the injustice of the forced relocation. The family valued their property at about \$7,600 and the value of the crop that had been lost at \$4,248 in 1942 [approximately \$129,000 and \$72,000 in 2022]. All they received was \$1,145.80, which was a clear travesty of justice [approximately \$19,400 in 2022].

"The other members of my great-uncle's family, who knew even less about the facts of the 'evacuation,' were even more shocked at how little the family received and were finally able to understand why their father had been so bitter about the experience.

"We also didn't know that Seiichi had initially been asked to serve as a member of the veteran's guard at Hastings Park. In fact, he initially didn't believe that he would be evacuated along with everyone else. There seems to have been considerable confusion about this at the beginning.

"I also found a letter from the law firm, Campbell, Brazier, Fisher and McMaster, supporting Seiichi's Bird Commission claim. As a naturalized Canadian and First World War veteran, he had served with the 52nd Battalion overseas from 1916 to 1919 and was wounded three times in action. When he came home, he purchased 26 acres of land from the Soldier Settlement



Farm Appraisal Report of Seiichi Kinoshita's farm.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_33-69_volume_25_file_524_kinoshita-seichi

Property map of Seiichi Kinoshita's farm.

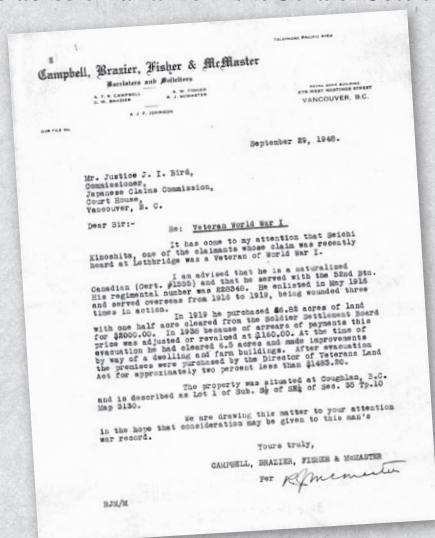
Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_33-69_volume_25_file_524_kinoshita-seichi

Board, but during the Second World War it was sold without his consent for less than his original purchase price. The letter concludes, 'We are drawing this matter to your attention in the hope that consideration may be given to this man's war record.'

"This experience of going through government records was very revealing, and the true extent of the injustice that took place is much more apparent to us all. It was clear from the statements made by former BC Securities Commission staff and by the legal counsel for the Bird Commission that no one took responsibility for the vandalism that took place and for the many chattels that were lost or stolen. The court's objective was to keep their liabilities to the minimum and to compensate as little as possible."

David Iwaasa is a Sansei and former president and current Chair of the Board of Directors of the Japanese Canadian Volunteers Association (Tonari Gumi as it's called in Japanese) in Vancouver, BC. He has spent most of his life examining his family history and knows quite a bit, especially about his father's side. However, he didn't know as much about his mother's family, and this is where the case file information from the Bird Commission proved illuminating.

Excerpted from *A World War I Vet Loses His Farm* by David Iwaasa (online at <https://bit.ly/3udAb3H>).



Letter noting that Seiichi was a First World War veteran.

Image: Library and Archives Canada, lac_rg_33-69_volume_25_file_524_kinoshita-seichi