

CHAPTER 2

LIFE IN CANADA, 1860s–1900

Experiencing Racism

Anti-Chinese discrimination has its roots in China. As far back as the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the Chinese controlled trade with foreigners and limited them to ports like Hong Kong and Macau. Beginning in the mid-1800s, however, foreign countries moved into the interior and other ports. Cities like Shanghai were divided into French, American, British, and Japanese concessions, or sectors, where Chinese laws did not apply. Unable to halt foreign occupation, China became regarded as a weak and inferior nation. Any Chinese who went overseas were treated with as much disdain and disrespect as their homeland.



Political Cartoon

This 1879 political cartoon shows a “heathen Chinese” having his queue pulled by Amor De Cosmos, who later served as the second premier of BC. By 1881, there were 4,383 Chinese in the province — 99 per cent of all Chinese in Canada — where anti-Chinese sentiment was the most severe.



Legislated Racism

Between 1878 and 1899, the government passed twenty-six laws to restrict the Chinese as much as possible. Racist laws, regulations, and policies against them soon exceeded one hundred. This sidewalk sign in Vancouver rallied white males to vote, a right denied to the “Mongolian and Chinese race” due to their lack of “British instincts or British feelings or aspirations.”

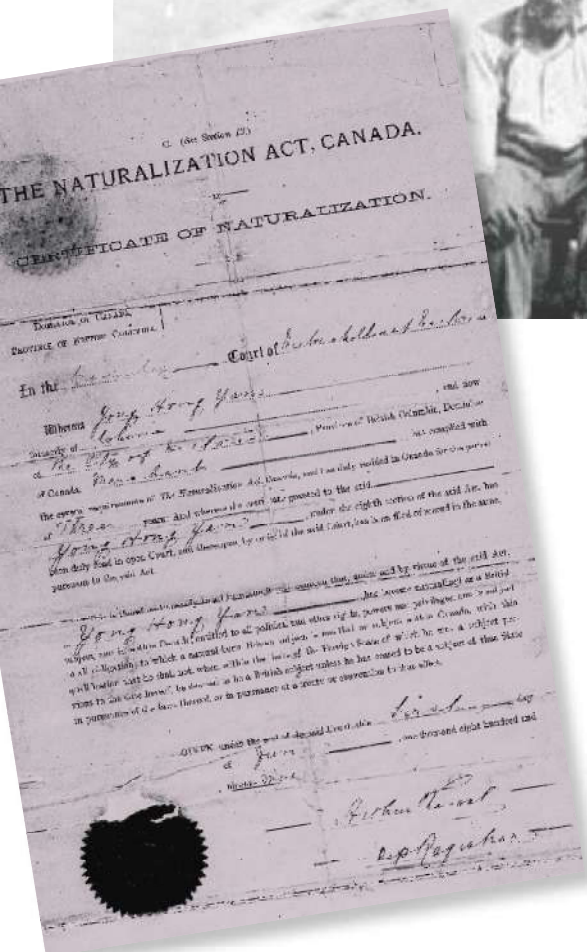
It's All Their Fault

After the gold rush ended, jobs were hard to find. The Chinese were singled out as unfair job seekers, because they worked for lower wages, lived more cheaply in rundown homes, and had no families to support and feed in Canada. They were also accused of not contributing financially to the country's economy, because they sent their earnings to China instead of spending their money in Canada.

Blaming the Chinese for problems in BC became a powerful tool for citizens, politicians, and the media to keep them isolated socially, economically, and politically.

Chinese Need Not Apply

In 1878, Chinese workers could not be hired for public works in BC, like road and bridge construction. They were also banned from working in underground mines.



Naturalization

Anyone who wanted to become a British subject had to petition the courts — a process called naturalization. Judges had the power to reject requests. In 1899, Judi Michelle Young's father, Yong Hong Yan was among the less than 5 per cent of Chinese who were naturalized.

Judi Michelle Young:

"[Naturalization] was extremely rare at that time . . . He thought it meant Canadian citizenship . . . but it really meant very little."

Building the Railway

When BC joined Canada, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald promised a trans-Canada railway to join the newest province with the rest of the country. The land between Port Moody and Eagle Pass was mountainous, making the railway project challenging and dangerous. BC had no more than 400 men available for such work. Between 1881 and 1884, 17,000 Chinese men were recruited to work on the railway. They received a daily wage of one dollar that paid for their food, equipment, and lodging. White workers did not have to pay for these expenses and had higher daily wages of \$1.50 to \$2.50.



Labourers Needed

Despite strong objections from citizens, politicians, and labour organizations, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald approved the hiring of Chinese labourers for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). “Either you must have this labour or you cannot have the railway.” As much as Chinese workers were deeply resented, they were nonetheless desperately needed.

Either you must
have this labour
or you cannot
have the railway.



Chinese Railway Workers

Andrew Onderdonk, an American contractor who was hired for the project, had experience in the US with Chinese railway workers. Much to the dismay of the citizens and politicians of BC, he proposed their hiring. The Workingmen's Protection Association unsuccessfully petitioned the government to not use “Mongolian labour.”



Work in Gold Mountain

Recruiters signed up workers in China. Eager to go to Gold Mountain, thousands made their way to the port of Hong Kong. For the ship fare, some borrowed money from their relatives or fellow villagers. Others signed contracts and borrowed money from the recruitment contractors. Many were only in their early teens, young boys who usually found work as tea boys serving tea for the railway workers.

Desperate Times

Judi Michelle Young's father and his brothers were among the first railway recruits. "China was going through a very difficult famine . . . they had to leave the country one way or another."

 Listen to Judi Michelle Young talk about her father's employment with the CPR at www.tinyurl.com/rcwheadtax01.



All Aboard

These young Chinese men are aboard a CPR ship en route to Canada. They were ill-prepared for the harsh Canadian winters in their light cotton pants and cotton footwear. For up to two months, they endured the voyage from Hong Kong to Victoria, BC, tossed by the waves of the Pacific Ocean. Seasick, miserable, and alone among strangers, they lived below deck, shoulder to shoulder, knee to knee, in cramped conditions with closed hatches and bad ventilation. The only times that they had fresh air was during their meal times of rationed rice and tea.



**LISTEN TO
THE AUDIO**



James Pon:

"[My grandfather] said, 'First I'll go to Canada and work on the railroad, then I'll go to Gold Mountain to pan for gold.' My grandfather knew of the dangers involved because some of the villagers who had gone to Gold Mountain had never been heard from again."

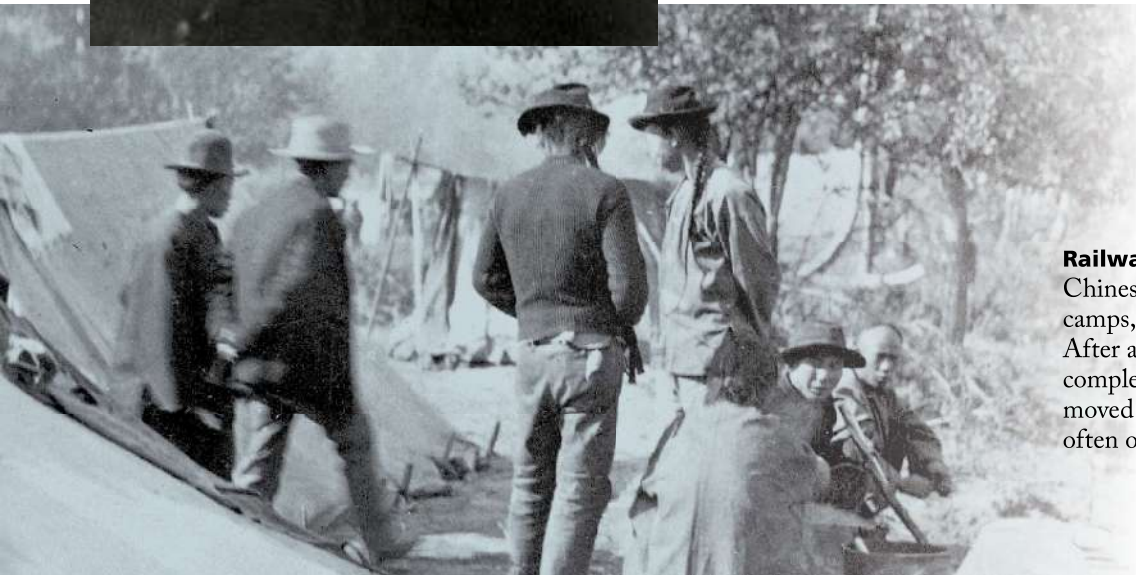


Far From Family

James Pon's grandfather, Pon Hincheng, who was born in Taishan, Guangdong province, left his family to work on the construction of the CPR. After its completion, he was forced to stay in Vancouver because he couldn't afford the ship passage home. He had sent his savings to his family in China. By the early 1900s, he had saved \$200 from his earnings running a laundry to bring over two of his sons, including James's father, Soon Long Pon.

James Pon:

"He was far from his family
. . . faced hostile sentiments
and worked night and day to make
completion of the railway possible."



Railway Camp

Chinese workers were segregated into camps, like this one in Kamloops, BC. After a section of the railway track was completed, they dismantled their tents and moved on foot to the new work section, often over forty kilometres away.

From San Francisco

Sid Chow Tan's great-grandfather, Chow Sing Tan, came to BC from San Francisco and brought along his son, Chow Sing, to work as a labourer for the CPR.

Sid Chow Tan:

"My grandfather [Chow Sing] was brought to Canada in 1919 by my great-uncle. That uncle worked on the railway, and his father who brought him over to work on the railway was here during the California Gold Rush."





Hard Day's Life

Chinese men, who made up three-quarters of the workforce, were assigned the most dangerous and back-breaking tasks. They built over 600 bridges, like this one. There was little comfort from the freezing temperatures, loneliness, homesickness, and daily diet of rice and dried salmon. The lack of fresh vegetables and fruit contributed to malnutrition.

Ultimate Sacrifice

Hundreds of Chinese workers died due to accidents, explosions, cold weather, rock slides, cave-ins, illness, harsh living conditions, scurvy, and malnutrition. An estimated 600 Chinese died — one for every mile of railway track — although actual figures are likely higher.



No Chinese Invited

On November 7, 1885, at 9:22 a.m., the western and central sections of the transcontinental railway were officially joined at Craigellachie, BC. The driving of the last spike is the greatest symbol of Canada's unity. The motto, *A Mari usque ad Mare*, refers to a country joined from sea to sea, the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. The CPR, completed six years ahead of schedule, would not have been built without Chinese labourers; however, none were invited to this historic event.

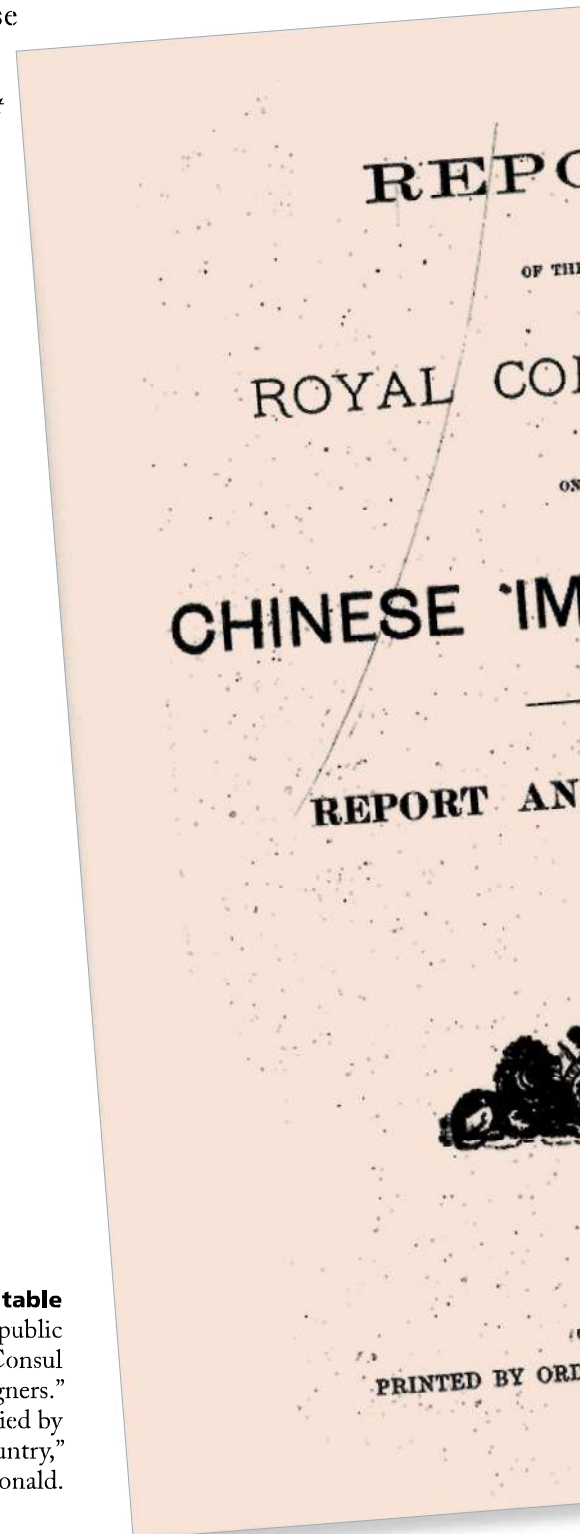
The Head Tax

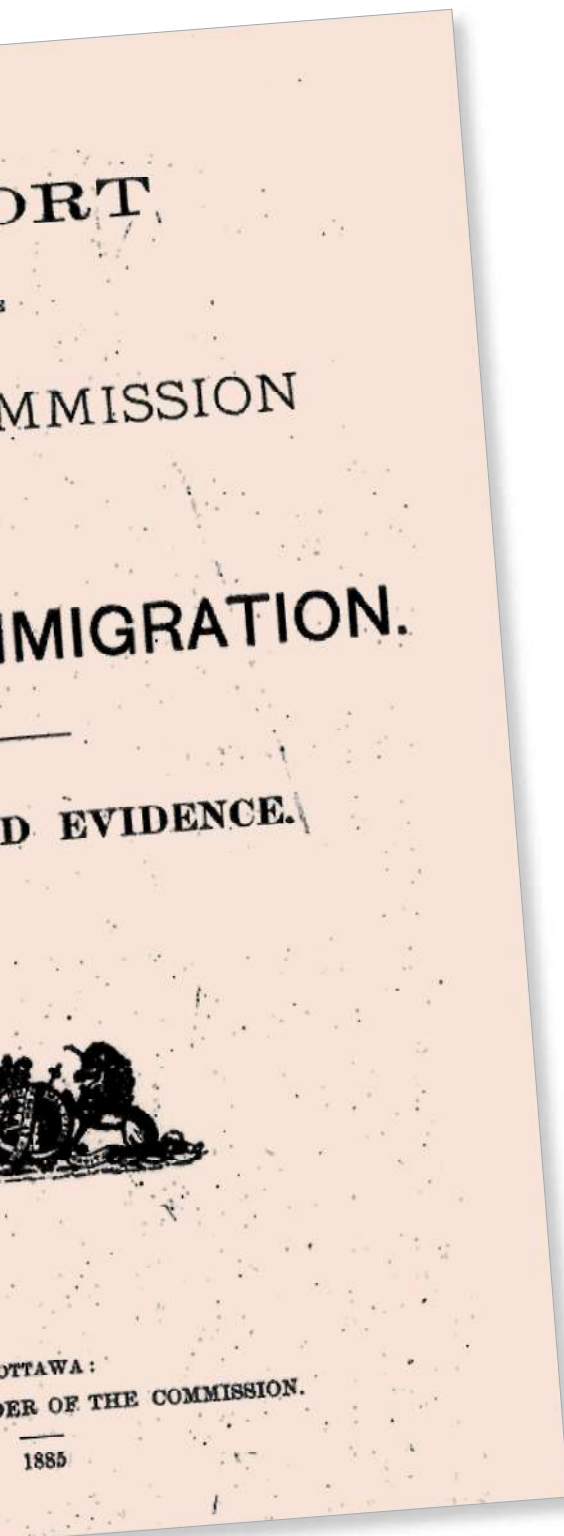
From the moment of the driving of the last spike in 1885, Canada turned its back on the Chinese. With a failing economy in BC and thousands jobless, they became scapegoats for the unemployment problems. In 1885, a public enquiry, the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, gathered information on how to deal with the “Chinese question.” It resulted in the first anti-Chinese immigration law, *An Act to Restrict and Regulate Chinese Immigration into Canada*. A \$50 head tax was to be paid by Chinese immigrants, the only group singled out by racial origin in this manner. The intention was to discourage any more Chinese from coming to Canada and bringing their wives and children. The average Chinese labourer earned \$225 a year and saved only \$43 after paying for food, clothing, rent, and other living expenses. The \$50 head tax was a heavy financial burden.

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Foreigners Not Suitable

The Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration reported that the Chinese were a public menace to Canada’s social and moral life. While a handful of witnesses, like the Chinese Consul General, spoke in favour of the Chinese, the majority viewed them as “perpetual foreigners.” “I do not think that it would be to the advantage of Canada or any other country occupied by Aryans for members of the Mongolian race to become permanent inhabitants of the country,” said Prime Minister Macdonald.





Tax payable
by Chinese
immigrants.

Exemptions.

Certificate
proving
exemption.

6. Every person of Chinese origin, irrespective of allegiance, shall pay into the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Canada, on entering Canada, at the port or place of entry, a tax of five hundred dollars, except the following persons who shall be exempt from such payment, that is to say:—

(a.) The members of the Diplomatic Corps, or other Government representatives, their suites and their servants, and consuls and consular agents;

(b.) The children born in Canada of parents of Chinese origin who have left Canada for educational or other purposes, on substantiating their identity to the satisfaction of the controller at the port or place where they seek to enter on their return;

(c.) Merchants, their wives and children, the wives and children of clergymen, tourists, men of science and students, who shall substantiate their status to the satisfaction of the controller, subject to the approval of the Minister, or who are bearers of certificates of identity, specifying their occupation and their object in coming into Canada, or other similar documents issued by the Government or by a recognized official or representative of the Government whose subjects they are;

(d.) In the case of a person of Chinese origin who is the personal attendant or servant of a British subject visiting Canada, the tax payable under the first subsection of this section may be refunded to the person paying the same, upon his furnishing satisfactory evidence that such Chinese attendant or servant is leaving the port of entry with his employer or master, on his return to China, if within twelve months of the date of his arrival in Canada, and upon returning to the controller of such port the certificate granted under section 13.

2. Every such certificate or other document shall be in the English or French language, and shall be examined and

106

endorsed

Head Tax

The \$50 head tax drastically reduced Chinese immigrants from thousands to 212 in 1886. Although the head tax, later increased to \$100, then \$500, was deliberately set to deter immigration, the push factors to leave China were so strong that the numbers climbed back up. Even a strongly worded flyer from a Chinese organization in Victoria failed to discourage them. "There are now about 20,000 Chinese in Canada who are unemployed . . . They can get no work . . . to save themselves from cold and starvation."

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Transportation for Thousands

The *Empress of China* was one of the Canadian Pacific class of ocean liners that transported thousands of immigrants across the Pacific Ocean beginning in 1891. There were three generations of *Empress* liners that were also used to deliver mail, silk, and tea. Although these luxury ships dominated first-class travel across the Pacific, the Chinese travelled as third-class passengers below deck in steerage.

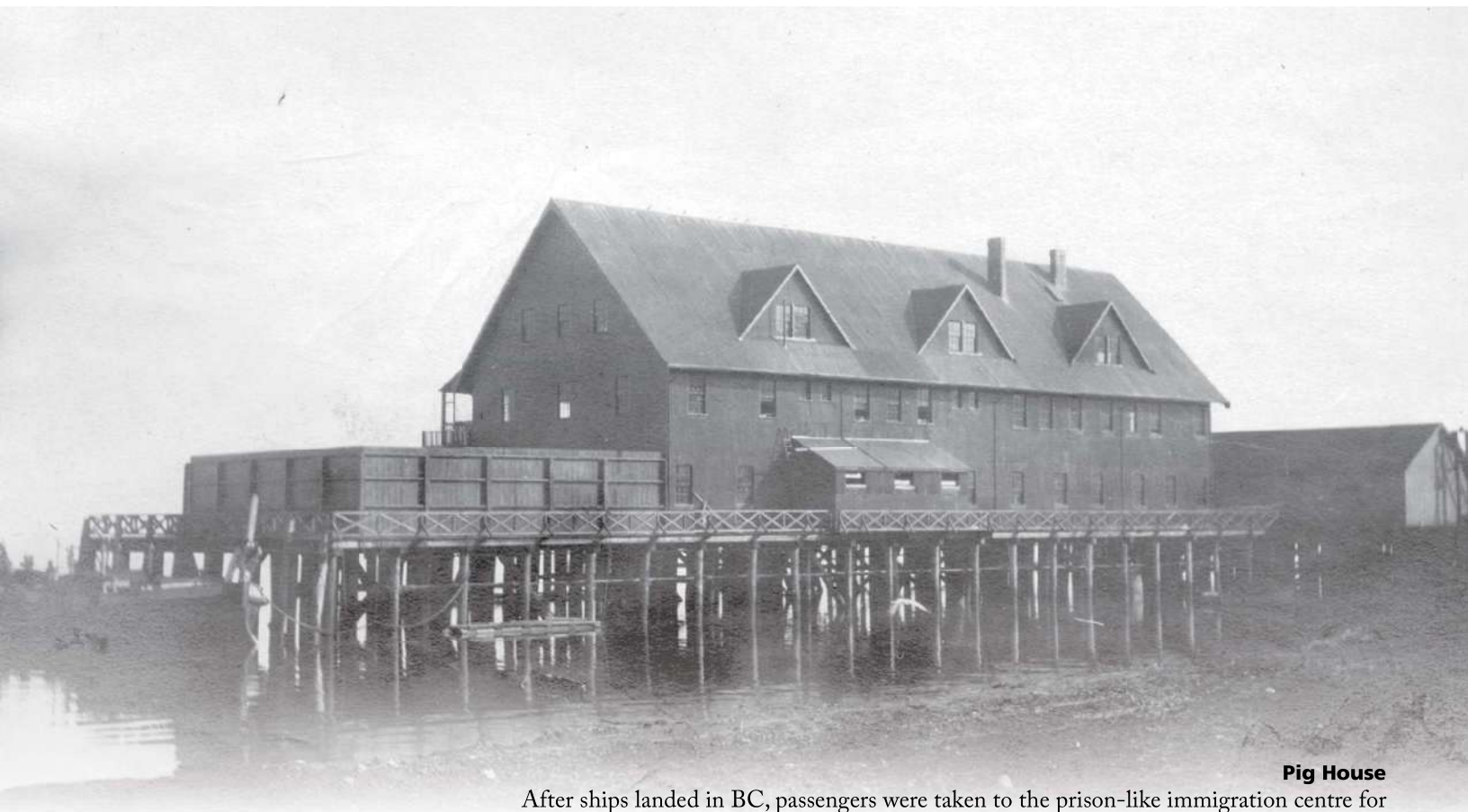
Albert Lee:

"My grandfather arrived in 1906 and he had left the village by ox cart through mountains and [by] crossing rivers. It took a week or so to arrive in Hong Kong and then he would have stockpiled some food and supplies for a three-week voyage across the Pacific Ocean. Once he arrived in Vancouver, he would go to Chinatown and stock up again. It would take another week or ten days to take the train right across Vancouver to Halifax."

Destitute, no fuel, no food,
we borrow money to go abroad.
No matter what we say or do,
The customs men won't let us through.
Like convicts, locked up in some
island cell,
We rail against this unjust hell.

Many poems, like this one, were carved
on the walls of the immigration centre
to express feelings of frustration,
shame, and disbelief at being locked
up like criminals.

After ships landed
in BC, passengers
were taken to
the prison-like
immigration centre
for processing.



Pig House

After ships landed in BC, passengers were taken to the prison-like immigration centre for processing, including a medical examination, and secured in rooms with windows covered by iron screens and bars. Charlie Quan remembers being “locked up like a pig in a cage” for one month and being humiliated in what came to be known by the Chinese as the pig house. Immigration officials forced him to stand naked for half an hour “for really no reason at all.”

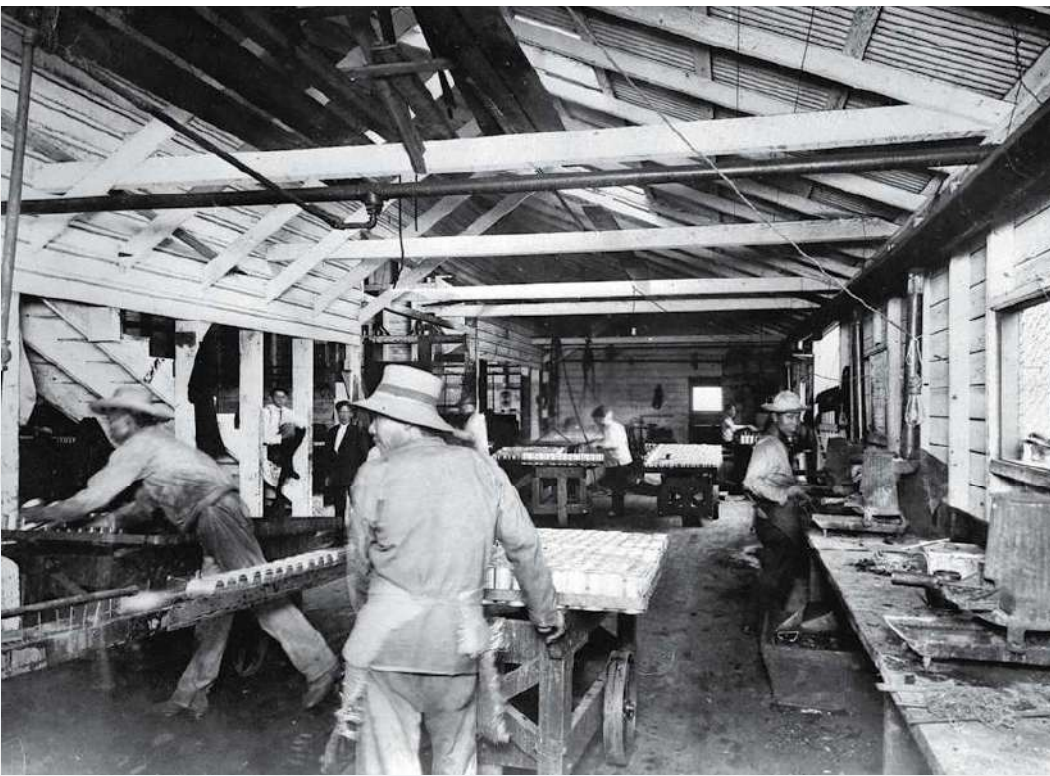
A Working Life

Unemployed railway workers needed to find new jobs. Barbers, butchers, and café owners, who relied on selling their services to the railway workforce, lost their businesses too. Several thousand Chinese returned to China; however, many more could not afford to buy the return ship fare that had been promised to them by Andrew Onderdonk. They stayed in BC where they found work as coal miners, farm labourers, gardeners, grocers, cooks, or domestic servants. Others moved east, settling in towns and cities along the railway, and opening laundries, grocery stores, and cafés. Some worked in mines, on farms and cattle ranches as cooks, and wherever else work could be found.



Logging in Demand

As the demand for lumber grew, logging and sawmill operations, like the Hastings Sawmill in Strathcona, BC, were established in record numbers. Many Chinese and Japanese workers found employment in the logging industry, where they harvested timber and hauled it to the mills.



Iron Chink

Chinese workers were needed for fish canneries, like this one in Nanaimo, because salmon was a valuable export of BC. The work was unpleasant and smelly, especially during the hot summer months. The fish were gutted and cut up, then packed, cooked, and sealed in cans. When a machine was invented to mechanize the process, it was named the “Iron Chink,” after the Chinese workers it was designed to replace. The word “chink” is a racist, offensive term referring to someone of Chinese ethnicity. Gim Wong worked, as a nineteen-year-old, at a cannery on the Skeena River in BC. He was paid 17½ cents an hour while non-Chinese men earned 35 cents.

Gim Wong:

“There was no negotiating. We accepted it. Every penny counted.”

Gulf of Georgia Cannery

In the early 1900s, 10,000 men, 6,000 of them Chinese, worked in canneries along the Pacific coast. The Japanese worked mostly as fishermen while the Chinese were employed exclusively in the fish canneries. Unless they were British citizens, the Chinese were not allowed to make their living from fishing. The Gulf of Georgia Cannery was the centre of BC’s salmon fishery. Located in Steveston, where the second largest population of Japanese people lived, it was designated a National Historic Site of Canada to commemorate the history of Canada’s west coast fishing industry.





Coal Mining

Between 1881 and 1925, coal was the primary fuel of the Western world. The coal mines on Vancouver Island provided 50 per cent of Canada's coal exports and relied on Chinese workers. In 1986, a memorial was erected in Cumberland to commemorate the Chinese and Japanese miners who were killed in accidents.

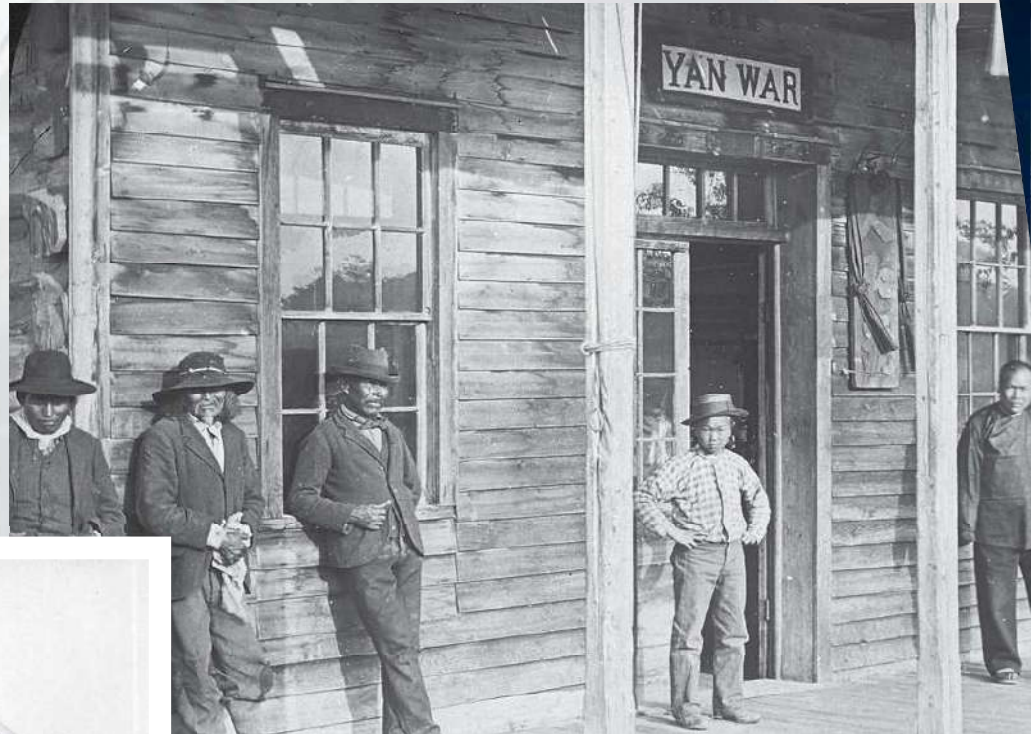


Women's Work

With the shortage of white and Chinese women, many Chinese men operated laundries to fill the demand for washing, ironing, and clothes mending. Laundries are the oldest Chinese business in Canada, the first one opening in 1861 in New Westminster, BC.

Business Partnerships

The Yan War store in Barkerville, shown here in 1890, was operated by a partnership of several Chinese men. This business arrangement allowed the Chinese to pool their financial resources, provide work for themselves, hire their relatives, and avoid the discrimination of white employers.



Grocery Stores

Vera Pon's mother, Ho See, worked at the family grocery store, similar to the Lim Gong one in Vancouver shown here, while raising her twelve children. Vera helped by preparing vegetables, taking orders, and delivering to the shops in Vernon, BC.

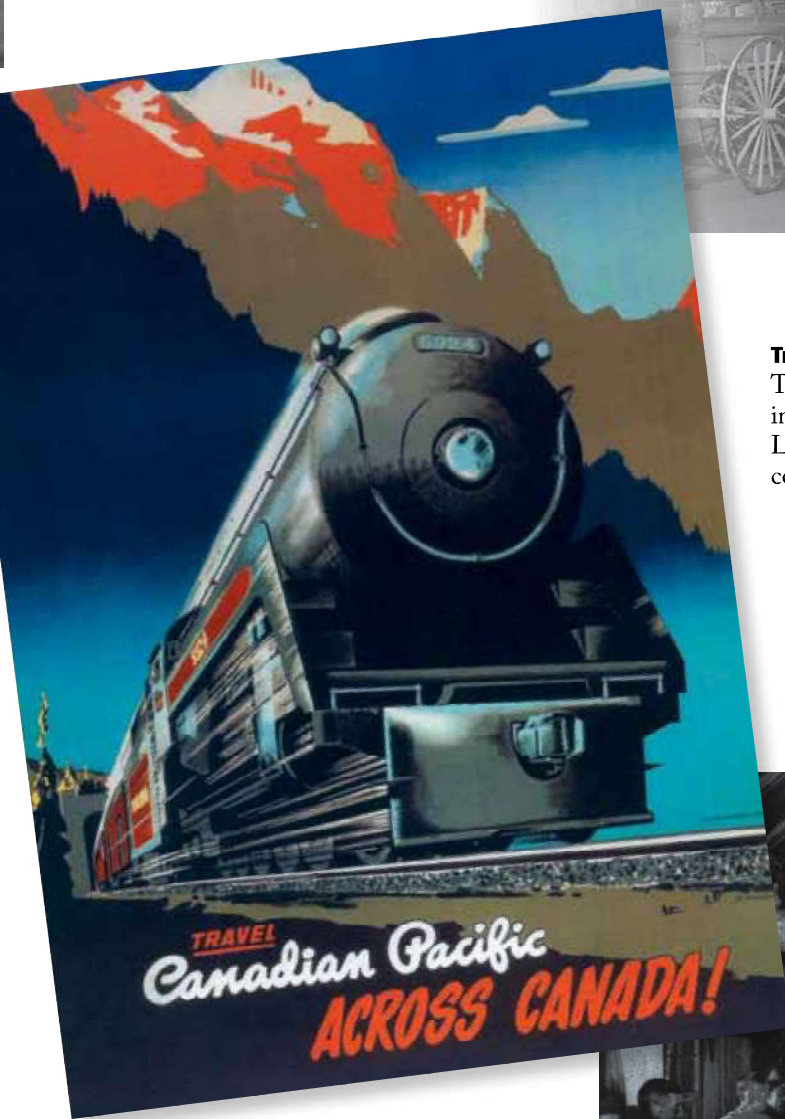
More Than One Job

Judi Michelle Young's father, Yong Hong Yan, continued working for the CPR, likely due to his fluency in Chinese and English. "He roomed and boarded these new recruits at this particular spot in Mission City [BC] . . . probably just a general store [with] fruit [and] vegetables ,whatever he was able to support his family with at that time. There had to be some kind of augmentation."



Travel By Train

The CPR increased the popularity of rail travel by promoting tourism in the Rocky Mountains and building luxury hotels, like Chateau Lake Louise in Alberta, for the tourists. Many Chinese were hired to work as cooks, boatmen, and bellboys.



A Cook's Life

Chinese cooks found work in homes, hotels, farms, ranches, restaurants, and logging camps, like this one. A typical day was spent preparing three meals, chopping wood for the fire, carrying water from the stream, feeding the pigs, and tending the kitchen garden.



Chinese Life

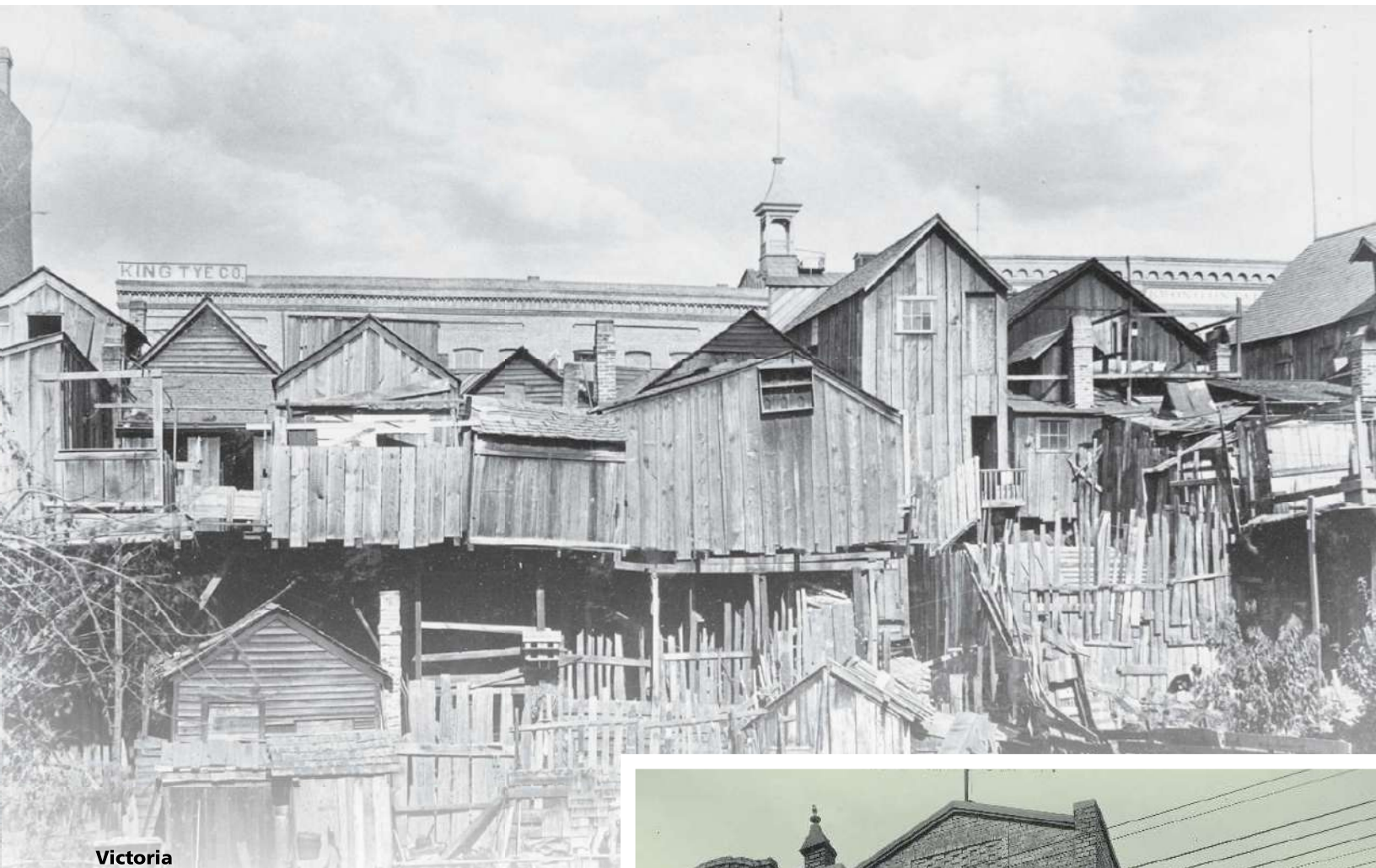
The Chinese were connected by networks of tight-knit families, because great importance was placed on kinship as the foundation of society. Like the links of a chain, they migrated around the world to join relatives who sent money to bring them to a new country. Sons followed fathers, nephews followed uncles, cousins followed cousins. Through loyalty to their families, they relied on one another for companionship, finding jobs and places to live, and lending money to get settled. The definition of family extended beyond blood relations. People who shared the same surname or came from the same village were regarded as family members.



Chee Kung Tong Association

Barkerville was settled by prospectors during the Cariboo Gold Rush. By the 1880s, half of the town's population was Chinese. The earliest Chinese association was the Chee Kung Tong, later known as the Chinese Freemasons, which provided social welfare to the Chinese in need and fought against racism. By 1900, there were more than forty Chee Kung Tong associations in BC with an estimated membership of 10,000 to 20,000 in total. The building for the Chee Kung Tong in Barkerville was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 2007.

Like the links of a chain, they migrated around the world to join relatives . . .



Victoria

Forced by circumstance, the Chinese sequestered themselves into close-knit communities, like this one in the outskirts of Victoria. White Canadians did not want the Chinese to live near them. These settlements came to be known as Chinatowns. Anti-Chinese racism justified segregation of the Chinese by municipal governments.

Family Associations

The Chinese relied on one another for help. They formed associations that provided services unavailable elsewhere, as well as a welcoming place to socialize and meet people.

Membership, based on political, kinship, or regional affiliations, was the backbone of Chinese communities across Canada and provided an important link to the cultural traditions of their homeland. The Lung Kong Tin Yee family association (the Toronto chapter is shown here) is one of many such associations worldwide. Its members share the surnames of four military heroes (Liu, Guan, Zhang, and Zhao) from China's historical era of the Three Kingdoms (220–280).





Political Associations

Some associations, like the Guomindang, were made up of members who shared the same political beliefs. In the early 1900s, political associations, like the Chinese Empire Reform Association, believed that China could be restored to its former prominence in the world by reforming the ruling Manchu monarchy. Others believed the government needed to be replaced with a republic. In 1911, the Manchus were overthrown and in 1912 the Guomindang became the ruling political party in the newly established Republic of China. The Guomindang held key political importance in Chinese communities in Canada until the early 1970s.



Chinese Benevolent Association

The Chinese Benevolent Association, established in 1884, took on the role of a Chinese government in Canada and helped newcomers find places to work and live. It looked after unemployed, homeless, and sick people, and settled disputes and disagreements in the community. The organization played an important role in fighting anti-Chinese discrimination and unfair treatment by Canadians. Associations, like the one above in Victoria, typically were divided into a sleeping area, kitchen, social space, meeting hall, and altar room, shown on the right with flags, flowers, and incense.



The organization played an important role in fighting anti-Chinese discrimination and unfair treatment by Canadians.



Credit Service

Chinese associations provided an essential banking service that operated like a credit union. Members pooled their money and helped one another borrow money, a system that benefited the borrowers, the lenders, and the associations.



Chinese Music

Religious beliefs, music, language, foods, and traditions were important ways of providing cultural links to China. The Chinese formed music clubs, like this church group in Victoria in 1892, and played traditional instruments. Chinese music was a popular pastime that provided much-needed relief from the daily drudgery of being in a hostile country.

Chinese Opera

Chinese opera has been a beloved art form in China for over 800 years. While there are over 300 types of opera, the early Chinese enjoyed Cantonese opera because it was the popular form in their villages. Well-known tales of romance and history were brought to life on stage by performers in the roles of warriors, villains, and generals, as the orchestra accompanied them with traditional Chinese instruments.



Lion Dance

The lion dance, as shown on the streets of Nanaimo, BC, is a tradition that dates back hundreds of years in China and figures prominently in Chinese celebrations and festivals. The lion symbolizes strength and courage, frightens away bad luck, and brings good fortune. Performed by martial artists, the lion dance is physically demanding due to its acrobatic and lively routines.

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PREFACE.

THIS Reader contains nearly 1500 different words. The Dictionary contains all the words occurring in the Reader, and some 4600 additional, or more than 6000 in all. It also has over 1500 sentences illustrating the meaning of the words. The Chinese scholar will find most of the words in the Dictionary that he will ordinarily meet with in reading or speaking.

The lessons in the Reader are graded as slowly, as the limited space, and introduction of as many new words as possible, would allow. The lessons are on a variety of subjects, and include a great many sentences used in ordinary conversation. Gospel truths have been introduced as far as practicable throughout; and the design of the whole is, not only to lead the scholar into the knowledge of the English language, but also of the truth. The Chinese portion is in the Canton dialect, which is the spoken language of this people in America, Australia and the Sandwich Islands. The object of using this dialect instead of the more elegant and simple English is, to enable the learner to express himself in the language of the people.

I. M. C.

ENGLISH AND CHINESE READER,

BY REV. I. M. CONDIT,
MISSIONARY TO THE CHINESE.

Mr. Chiu Hing

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU STREET, NEW YORK.

上海美華書館銅板

英語入門

耶穌降世一千八百



Churches

This reader was published by an American missionary in 1882 to teach English and Chinese. Churches were very active in educating and supporting Chinese immigrants. They were among the few Canadian organizations that offered assistance to the Chinese in the early years of discrimination.

Spreading the Word

Missionaries made great efforts to convert the Chinese to Christianity, not only in China but in Canada. Although Bibles were widely distributed, most Chinese could not read or write. The acceptance of Christianity did not necessarily mean that the converted abandoned their original religious beliefs. Rather, they often mixed the new faith with their traditional Chinese beliefs, including Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

Chinese Women in Canada

With few exceptions, only men left China to fill Canada's call for labourers. A mere handful of women came to Canada, limited not only by the prohibitive costs of the ship fare and head tax, but also by cultural tradition that required women to care for their husbands' parents and households. Limited in their social interactions and isolated by their gender and ethnicity, they raised their children without the support of an extended family that life in China would have offered. They often worked in their husbands' businesses.



So Few Women

By tradition, Chinese women were expected to stay at home and look after the children and their husbands' parents. In 1885, there were 10,335 Chinese men and only 157 Chinese women in Canada, a gender imbalance that was the most severe compared to other immigrant groups. In 1902, Victoria had a Chinese population of 3,283 with only 96 women. The low ratio of males to females was used as evidence that the Chinese had no intention of settling in Canada.



First Chinese Woman

The first Chinese woman in Canada was Mrs. Kwong Lee, who arrived in Victoria in 1860. Early female arrivals were usually the wives or daughters of wealthy merchants. Her husband was a successful San Francisco store owner who expanded his business of selling Chinese goods to Vancouver. Gam Young, photographed in 1896, lived in Brockton, Ontario.



**LISTEN TO
THE AUDIO**

Read All About It

The arrival of Lock Quong's wife was front-page news in the *Toronto Daily Star* on October 11, 1909, due to the rarity of Chinese women, not only in Toronto, but across Canada. In 1921, Toronto had 2,019 Chinese males, 115 females.



 Listen to Keith Lock talk about his grandmother and her publicized arrival in Toronto at www.tinyurl.com/rcwheadtax02.