

CHAPTER 4

ENEMY ALIENS

Japanese-Canadian Citizens Lose Their Rights

Although the RCMP had been registering all Japanese-Canadian males over sixteen years old since March 1941, the government's racist policies escalated following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Curfews were imposed, and "dangerous possessions" were confiscated. Of the more than 23,000 nikkei in Canada at the time, over 75 per cent were Canadian citizens. All were designated enemy aliens by government regulation. As enemy aliens, they had no rights to freedom, trial by jury, presumption of innocence, or other rights we take for granted today.

Notice to male enemy aliens

Once the *War Measures Act* was invoked, all people of Japanese descent were labelled enemy aliens. An official poster from February 7, 1942 tells all male Japanese Canadians eighteen to forty-five years old to leave a 100-mile-wide "secure zone" along the west coast of BC.

**NOTICE TO ALL
MALES
OF JAPANESE RACIAL ORIGIN**

Every MALE person, 18 years of age or over, of Japanese racial origin now in the district or vicinity of the cities of Vancouver, New Westminster, North Vancouver and the towns of West Vancouver and Steveston must report at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Barracks at 33rd Avenue and Heather Street, Vancouver, B. C., between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon as follows:

JAPANESE NATIONALS.....March 27, 1942
NATURALIZED CANADIANS.....March 30, 1942
CANADIAN BORN.....March 31, 1942

Unless in possession of a permit to remain in the defense area issued by the British Columbia Security Commission. Failure to comply with this order will entail a penalty of five hundred dollars fine (\$500.00) and one year imprisonment.

By order:
AUSTIN C. TAYLOR,
Chairman,
B. C. Security Commission

Mary Haraga:

"I celebrated my 'sweet sixteenth' birthday by reporting to the RCMP office. There I was fingerprinted, photographed, and issued an 'alien' registration number. My card bore the stamp 'Canadian born.' It was a confusing time. For me, the worst part was being declared an enemy alien by my own country. I was a patriotic Canadian but I had the face of the enemy. It was the first time in my life that I had felt rejected."

Receipt for gun seizure

All firearms owned by Japanese Canadians were seized by the authorities. This receipt records the confiscation of two "ancient shotguns."

BC POLICE No 1437
DEFENCE OF CANADA REGULATIONS
RECEIVED from [illegible]
the following described item:
Type [illegible]
Make [illegible]
Calibre [illegible]
Other Marks and Defects [illegible]
Date [illegible]
Place [illegible]
To be returned to the owner. If not returned within the time specified, the property shall be disposed of as directed by the court.



NOTICE

TO ALL PERSONS OF JAPANESE RACIAL ORIGIN

Having reference to the Protected Area of British Columbia as described in an Extra of the Canada Gazette, No. 174 dated Ottawa, Monday, February 2, 1942:-

1. EVERY PERSON OF THE JAPANESE RACE, WHILE WITHIN THE PROTECTED AREA AFORESAID, SHALL HEREAFTER BE AT HIS USUAL PLACE OF RESIDENCE EACH DAY BEFORE SUNSET AND SHALL REMAIN THEREIN UNTIL SUNRISE ON THE FOLLOWING DAY, AND NO SUCH PERSON SHALL GO OUT OF HIS USUAL PLACE OF RESIDENCE AFORESAID UPON THE STREETS OR OTHERWISE DURING THE HOURS BETWEEN SUNSET AND SUNRISE;

2. NO PERSON OF THE JAPANESE RACE SHALL HAVE IN HIS POSSESSION OR USE IN SUCH PROTECTED AREA ANY MOTOR VEHICLE, CAMERA, RADIO TRANSMITTER, RADIO RECEIVING SET, FIREARM, AMMUNITION OR EXPLOSIVE;

3. IT SHALL BE THE DUTY OF EVERY PERSON OF THE JAPANESE RACE HAVING IN HIS POSSESSION OR UPON HIS PREMISES ANY ARTICLE MENTIONED IN THE NEXT PRECEDING PARAGRAPH, FORTHWITH TO CAUSE SUCH ARTICLE TO BE DELIVERED UP TO ANY JUSTICE OF THE PEACE RESIDING IN OR NEAR THE LOCALITY WHERE ANY SUCH ARTICLE IS HAD IN POSSESSION, OR TO AN OFFICER OR CONSTABLE OF THE POLICE FORCE OF THE PROVINCE OR CITY IN OR NEAR SUCH LOCALITY OR TO AN OFFICER OR CONSTABLE OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE.

4. ANY JUSTICE OF THE PEACE OR OFFICER OR CONSTABLE RECEIVING ANY ARTICLE MENTIONED IN PARAGRAPH 2 OF THIS ORDER SHALL GIVE TO THE PERSON DELIVERING THE SAME A RECEIPT THEREFOR AND SHALL REPORT THE FACT TO THE COMMISSIONER OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE, AND SHALL RETAIN OR OTHERWISE DISPOSE OF ANY SUCH ARTICLE AS DIRECTED BY THE SAID COMMISSIONER.

5. ANY PEACE OFFICER OR ANY OFFICER OR CONSTABLE OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE HAVING POWER TO ACT AS SUCH PEACE OFFICER OR OFFICER OR CONSTABLE IN THE SAID PROTECTED AREA, IS AUTHORIZED TO SEARCH WITHOUT WARRANT THE PREMISES OR ANY PLACE OCCUPIED OR BELIEVED TO BE OCCUPIED BY ANY PERSON OF THE JAPANESE RACE REASONABLY SUSPECTED OF HAVING IN HIS POSSESSION OR UPON HIS PREMISES ANY ARTICLE MENTIONED IN PARAGRAPH 2 OF THIS ORDER, AND TO SEIZE ANY SUCH ARTICLE FOUND ON SUCH PREMISES;

6. EVERY PERSON OF THE JAPANESE RACE SHALL LEAVE THE PROTECTED AREA AFORESAID FORTHWITH;

7. NO PERSON OF THE JAPANESE RACE SHALL ENTER SUCH PROTECTED AREA EXCEPT UNDER PERMIT ISSUED BY THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE;

8. IN THIS ORDER, "PERSONS OF THE JAPANESE RACE" MEANS, AS WELL AS ANY PERSON WHOLLY OF THE JAPANESE RACE, A PERSON NOT WHOLLY OF THE JAPANESE RACE IF HIS FATHER OR MOTHER IS OF THE JAPANESE RACE AND IF THE COMMISSIONER OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE BY NOTICE IN WRITING HAS REQUIRED OR REQUIRES HIM TO REGISTER PURSUANT TO ORDER-IN-COUNCIL P.C. 9761 OF DECEMBER 16th, 1941.

DATED AT OTTAWA THIS 26th DAY OF FEBRUARY, 1942.

To be posted in a Conspicuous

Curfew imposed

This 1942 notice to "all people of Japanese racial origin" warned of a new curfew that had been imposed, as well as the government seizure of personal possessions.

NAME OTA (Yoshi) MacDonal
 AGE 42 HEIGHT
 MARKS OF IDENTIFICATION
 OCCUPATION Housewife
 Signature

Vancouver July 25th, 1941
 (Date)
 JAPANESE NATIONAL
 Issuing Officer
 S.C.M.P.

The Bearer, whose photograph and specimen of signature appear hereon, has been duly registered in compliance with the provisions of Order-in-Council P.C. 117.

Registration for all

Right after Canada declared war on Japan, all Japanese citizens sixteen or older and those who became Canadian citizens after 1922 had to register with the Registrar of Enemy Aliens. Two months later, the registration was extended to everyone of "Japanese racial origin," regardless of their citizenship.

Akira Horii:

"Japantown came to a standstill bringing with it economic hardship and a halt to social life. There were no late ball games, judo practices, concerts, or visiting; no 'hanging out' by the young nisei or listening and dancing to jukeboxes at a café. We were warned that breaking the curfew could lead to severe punishment, including being sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in a place no one had heard of - Angler, Ontario."

Radios were taken away

Radios, like this one now in the New Denver Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre, and cameras were confiscated from all Japanese families beginning in February 1942.



Normal Life Comes to a Halt

The day after the Pearl Harbor attack, the *War Measures Act* was invoked, and the lives of more than 21,000 Japanese Canadians were changed forever. Many lost their jobs, their fishing boats were seized, and Japanese-Canadian cultural institutions and newspapers were closed. School children were shunned by their playmates of the day before. Japanese-language lessons were stopped, social life ended for teenagers, university students couldn't continue with their studies, and community gatherings ceased. Some were called racist names they had never heard. Akira Horii was in fifth grade when he heard the news about Pearl Harbor. "The local newspapers and radio stations kept repeating that there were Japanese spies ready to help the enemy when they invaded us. The *Vancouver Sun* said that... 'nobody could separate the sheep from the goats. We are in a war and the only safety lies in our adopting the totalitarian methods of the totalitarian countries of our enemies.'"



Royal Canadian Navy on-board

Here, a member of the Royal Canadian Navy seizes a Japanese fishing boat. Akira Horii's father, Ryotaro, had just had a new boat built at the beginning of the war in Europe, but it was seized by the government and later sold.

**“1,200
Japanese
fishing
boats were
seized”**



Japanese-language schools closed

Japanese-language schools, like this one in Cumberland, were immediately shut down.

**Japanese fishing boats seized
(opposite page)**

On December 8, 1941, 1,200 Japanese fishing boats were seized from their owners by the government. The authorities feared that the boats could be used by spies or those loyal to Japan to contact offshore Japanese military. There was no evidence whatsoever for these fears — not at the time, and not subsequently.





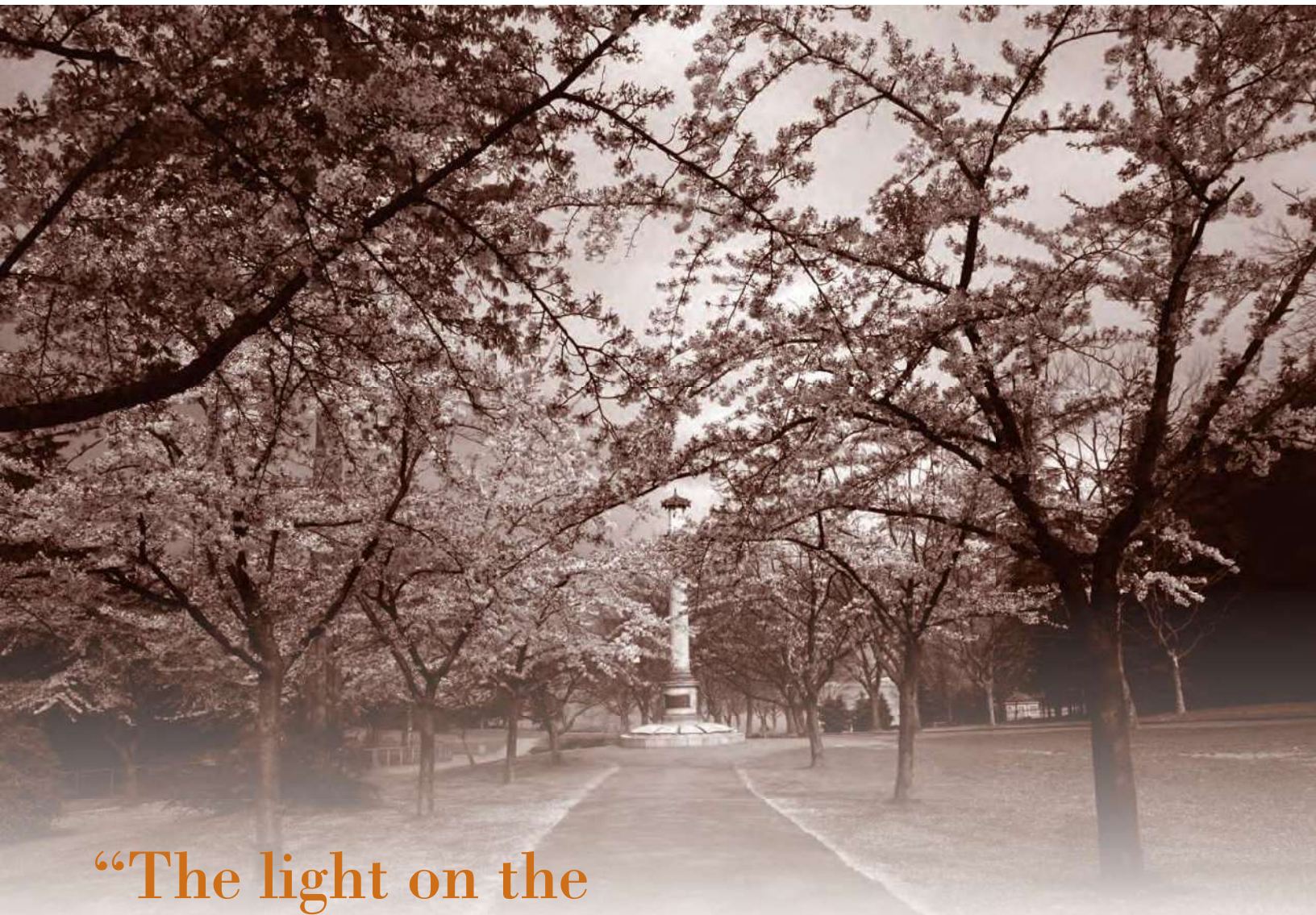
Proud of their patriotism

This Canadian Pacific Railway poster proudly states the number of its employees enlisted to fight in World War Two. However, it makes no mention of the number of faithful employees who were fired simply for being of Japanese descent.

Fired!

These Japanese-Canadian porters who worked for the CPR were immediately fired after Pearl Harbor. Many other industries also fired their Japanese-Canadian employees, causing great financial hardship within the community.





“The light on the memorial was turned out.”

Lights out

In Vancouver's Stanley Park, a war memorial commemorates the Japanese-Canadian veterans of the First World War. Following Pearl Harbor, the light on the memorial was turned out, showing extreme disrespect to men who had fought for Canada.



The New Canadian

Early Japanese immigrants to Canada could read and write only in Japanese. Beginning in 1896, a weekly Japanese-language bulletin was published by the Vancouver Japanese Methodist Church to warn readers of anti-Japanese attitudes in local communities. In 1907, this became the first Japanese-language daily paper, *Canada Shimpō*. Other Japanese-language newspapers followed and in 1938 the first English-language Japanese-Canadian newspaper, the *New Canadian*, began publication. It was aimed at keeping up the morale of Canadian nisei, the children of the Japanese immigrants. The newspaper encouraged nisei to persevere in achieving their goals in Canada despite the hardships. It also spoke up for their rights and supported their fight for equality. The *New Canadian* was against all racism, regardless of the ethnicity of the people it was aimed at. Before Canada's declaration of war on Japan, the newspaper was produced from its offices in Vancouver as an English-only paper.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the three Japanese-language newspapers were shut down by the government. The *New Canadian* was allowed to continue but its content was censored. The Canadian government used it to inform the Japanese-Canadian population about new rules and policies, such as curfews and evacuations, and other restrictions. With the closure of all Japanese-language newspapers, the government realized that their directives were not reaching the issei, or first-generation immigrants; a Japanese editor was hired and a new Japanese-language section added to the *New Canadian*.

The *New Canadian* became an important link between members of the widely dispersed Japanese-Canadian population. It kept people in touch with each other. Readers could get news of friends and family in other internment camps. The newspaper was a lifeline for many during the internment years and afterward.

英米の綱紀 問題(二)

◇グレイゴリー事件

前記のハーディング内閣の内閣、フオールズの告白なるものは、其後、到着せる報道によると、急に中止

の「紳士道」なるもの、近狀に對し、少からざる懸念を懐かしむる事となる。(未完)

外に、鳥の子女史、泰正、孤鹿、なきいふ既に定評のある方々の出品が、ホースが、見物物をアツと云

務省官吏中に、右の如き腐敗官吏を吐せる事、單に、英米の官達のみならず、又實に、世界の人人に、全く意外の感心を興へざるを得ざるものなのだ。

お手本に、一紙キゲンで、二分間に速成したものだといふ評判であらうが、夫れにしても、彼の多藝多才には、全く驚嘆させられます。



TAIRIKU NIPPO
(THE CONTINENTAL DAILY NEWS)
PUBLISHED BY
TAIRIKU NIPPO SHA, LTD.
213 & 215 CORDOVA ST. E.
VANCOUVER, B. C.

電ハ晩 發 堂 六 壹 本
話街香社 行八ケ 四 紙
シ二 市 式所 弗 月 定
〇五 東 社 武 七 價
六 カ 山 拾 拾 金
五 ド 報 五 五 仙
社 社 仙

One of the first Japanese-language newspapers

The *Tairiku Nippo* was a mainstream Japanese-language newspaper. It was begun in BC in the early 1900s by Etsu Suzuki, an established journalist who had immigrated to Canada from Japan. In 1924 he left that paper to start a socialist paper called the *Minshu*.



Two languages

This 1942 edition of the *New Canadian* told its readers about the new curfew that was being imposed on them. Notice the two languages — English and Japanese — written side-by-side so that both issei and nisei could understand the government's new orders.



Staff forced to leave the coast

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, when Japanese Canadians were evacuated from the coast, the *New Canadian* and its editors were forced to move from Vancouver to Kaslo, BC, where they published the newspaper until the end of the war. Censors forbade the paper from criticizing the government and government policies. Editors had to walk a fine line between supporting the civil rights of their readers and being used as a voice of the government that was oppressing them. This picture shows the staff in 1943.



Tom Shoyama, editor

Tom Shoyama, a graduate of UBC, became the editor of the *New Canadian* in 1939 and remained until 1945, when he was recruited for the Canadian armed forces. He is pictured here in Kaslo, BC, in 1944. In later years Shoyama reflected on his wartime role at the paper: "Our people were filled with such great feelings of fear, dread, bitterness, anger, and resentment. And we all wondered what the future held for us. To try to create some stability and to try to fill in that huge gap of the unknown was the role of our newspaper."



Working the linotype machine

Junji Ikeno operated the linotype machine, which printed the words onto the paper. He is shown here in the Kaslo publishing office in 1944.



Another move eastward

In 1945, the *New Canadian* and its staff left Kaslo and moved east to Winnipeg. Pictured here from left to right are Harold T. Mayeda, Rev. K. Shimizu, Junji Ikeno, editor Kasey Oyama, E. C. Banno, Japanese-language editor Takaichi Umezaki, and assistant editor Noji Murase. The *New Canadian* eventually moved to Toronto and ceased publication in 1985.

HOW DO YOU TELL A JAP FROM A JAP?

The Decision to Intern

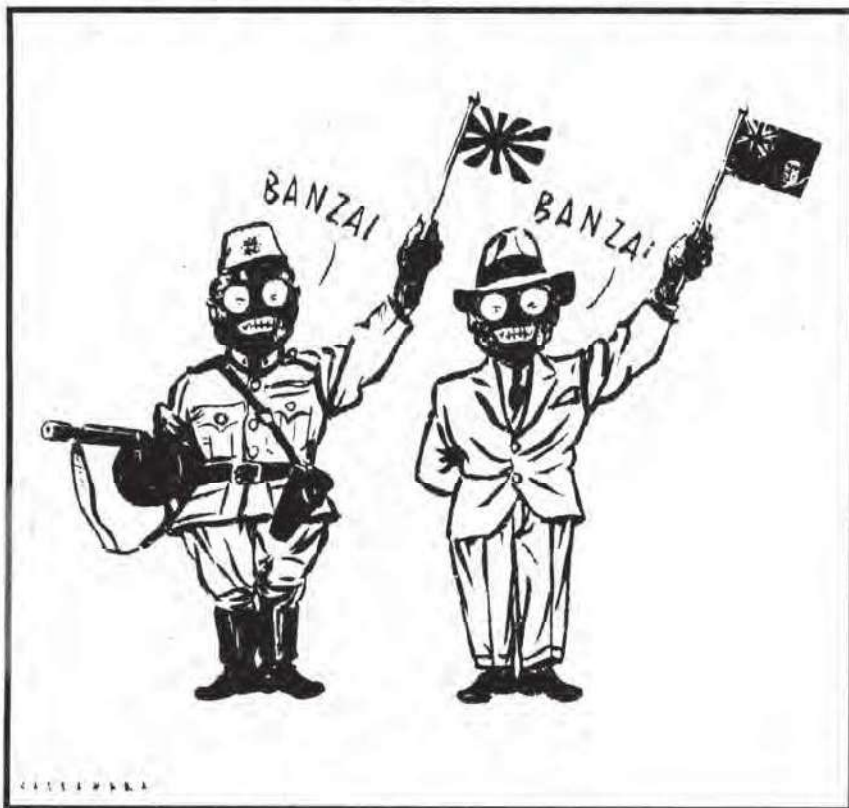
Japanese Canadians were banned from living within 100 miles (160 km) of Canada's west coast. Their boats, radios, and cameras were taken away, as were basically all their civil rights. But for some, that wasn't enough. Politicians in British Columbia, headed by MP Ian Mackenzie, campaigned to have all people of Japanese descent interned — removed from their homes and held separate from the rest of the population. The government in Ottawa didn't believe it was necessary. A meeting held by the Department of External Affairs revealed that both the RCMP and the military representatives agreed that Japanese Canadians did not pose any problem. Still, Mackenzie fought on and eventually convinced Ottawa to impose internment in BC.



Pushy politicians

British Columbia MP Ian Mackenzie, pictured here, led a BC delegation of Liberal and Conservative politicians to Ottawa, where he demanded the removal of Japanese-Canadian men from the coast. He lied about receiving hundreds of letters from the public that supported his demands. In reality, only a few letters were received, and some supported the Japanese Canadians.

HOW DO YOU TELL A JAP FROM A JAP?



Who's who?

The *Vancouver Sun* printed this cartoon in June 1943. It plays on the fears of those who believed it was impossible to separate Japanese Canadians who were loyal to Japan from those that were loyal to Canada.



Prime minister played politics

Prime Minister Mackenzie King, seen here, did not believe that Japanese Canadians were a security risk. If he followed the advice of his senior civil servants and military advisors, the internment would never have happened. Mackenzie King saw that internment could help his party's popularity in BC and help him gain support for his policy on conscription. He didn't care about the consequences for the Japanese-Canadian minority or the terrible injustice he was committing.

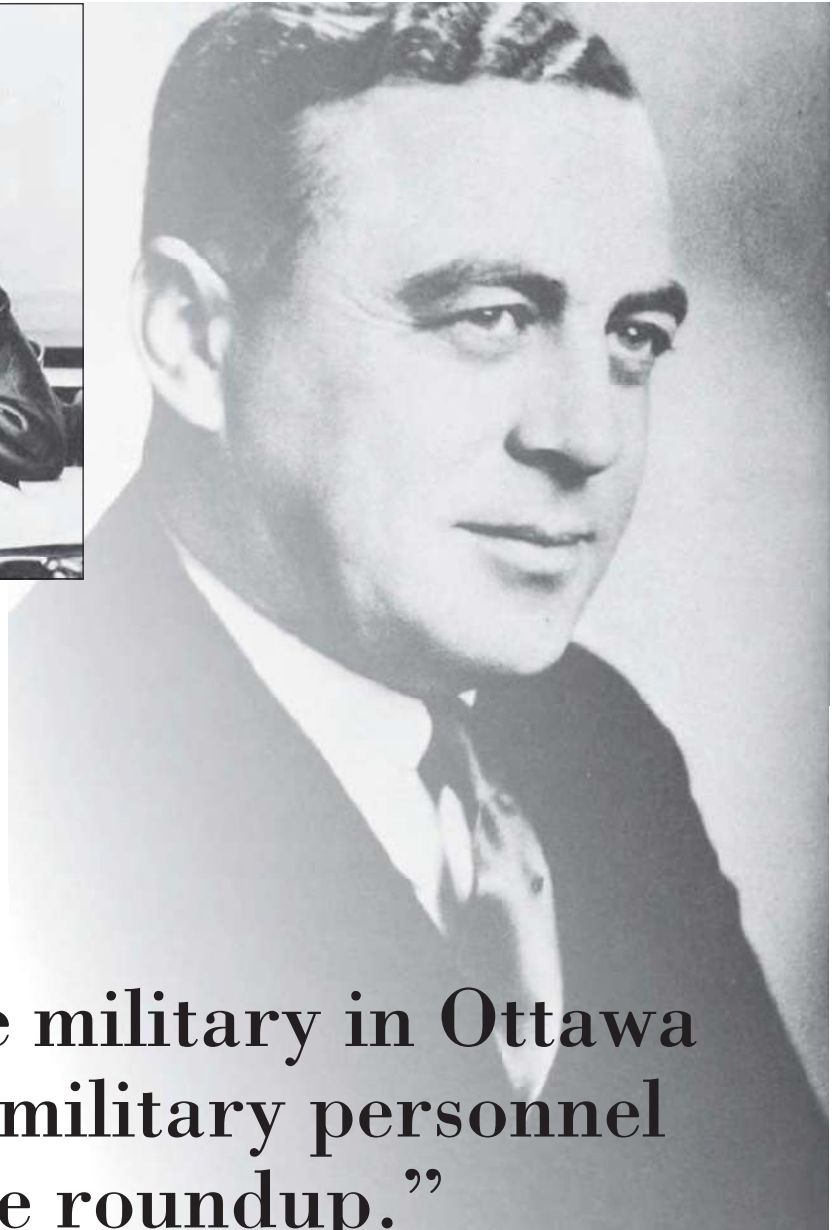
Keenleyside opposed internment

Highly ranked civil servants, such as Hugh Keenleyside at External Affairs, pictured here, opposed internment. But Ian Mackenzie pressed to have all male Japanese-Canadian citizens removed from the coast. And he didn't stop there. In the end, Prime Minister Mackenzie King decided to remove all Japanese Canadians, alien and naturalized, from the coast.



Top military were ignored

Like Ian Mackenzie, Major General R. O. Alexander was based in BC and held racist views about Japanese Canadians. He supported Mackenzie's fight for the internment of all Japanese Canadians, despite the fact that Ottawa's top military authorities felt that they were not a security risk. The head of the military in Ottawa refused to allow military personnel to be used for the roundup of Japanese Canadians in BC.



“The head of the military in Ottawa refused to allow military personnel to be used for the roundup.”

Forced Removal

In early 1942, the Canadian government ordered Japanese-Canadian families to pack up their homes and leave them in the care of the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property. Families were forced to evacuate the BC coast and could take only what they could carry. Since many of the men had already been taken away to road camps, it was mainly women and children who were being evacuated.

Mary Haraga:

"When orders came for our family to relocate, my parents co-operated and obeyed. We stored our keepsakes: photo albums, letters, and mementos in trunks and boxes and lugged them upstairs to the attic. We carefully wrapped our best dishes and placed them in the walls of our farmhouse to protect them from breakage and looting. My father said that it was safer than burying them under a tree as our neighbours had done."

NOTICE N°

You are hereby ordered by the British Columbia

Security Commission to report at Hastings Park Clearing

Station, Vancouver, B.C., on the _____ day

Get out!

This notice of evacuation ordered the Higashi family to report to Hastings Park Clearing Station. They were given three days' notice.

NOTICE N° 619

You are hereby ordered by the British Columbia Security Commission to report at Hastings Park Clearing Station, Vancouver, B.C., on the 25th day of April, 1942, at 9:00 a.m., for the purpose of being evacuated from the Protected Area of British Columbia.

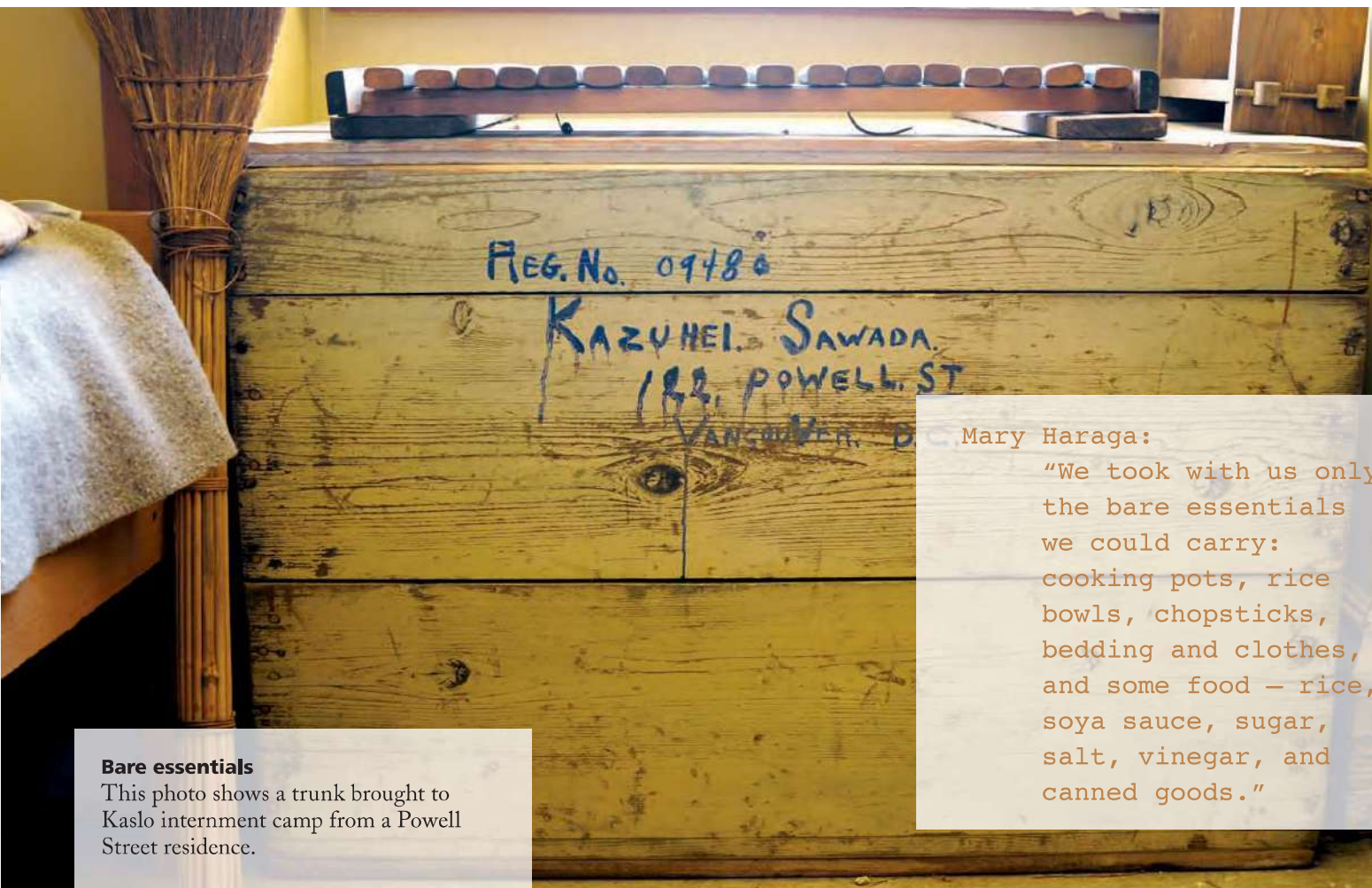
AUSTIN C. TAYLOR,
Chairman,
British Columbia Security Commission.

Handed to HIGASHI Masakazu No. 16332
NAME Serial Number

on April 27th, 1942

by P.A. Davis
Constable, R.C.M.P.

BRING BAGGAGE
LIMIT 30 LBS. HAND
100 LBS. HEAVY



Bare essentials

This photo shows a trunk brought to Kaslo internment camp from a Powell Street residence.

Mary Haraga:

"We took with us only the bare essentials we could carry: cooking pots, rice bowls, chopsticks, bedding and clothes, and some food – rice, soya sauce, sugar, salt, vinegar, and canned goods."



Mary Ohara:

"I wanted to take my one and only doll but my mother said there was only space for necessities such as dishes, pots, pans, and bedding so I hid her in the corner of the attic and promised to come back for her soon. It was not to be."

Take it or leave it

Adults were restricted to 150 pounds (68 kg) of belongings, while children were allowed 75 pounds (34 kg) each. A variety of luggage that belonged to internees at the camp in New Denver is now displayed at the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre there.

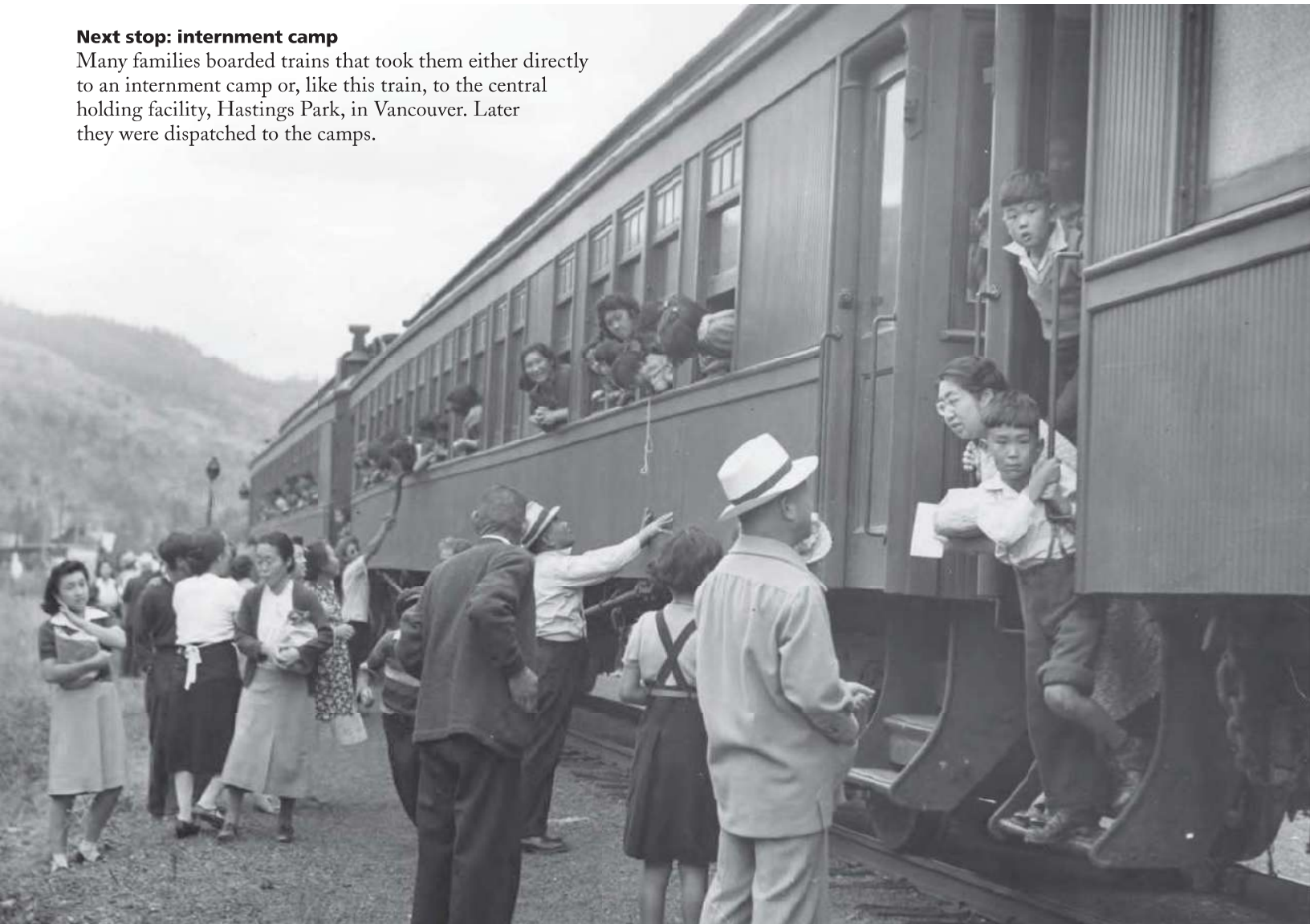
“It did not occur to me to wonder why we were leaving or where we were going.”

Mary Haraga:

“At thirteen years old, I was going on the train for the first time. It was so exciting. I guess I was caught up by the thrill of a new adventure so it did not occur to me to wonder why we were leaving or where we were going or why my father was not coming with us.”

Next stop: internment camp

Many families boarded trains that took them either directly to an internment camp or, like this train, to the central holding facility, Hastings Park, in Vancouver. Later they were dispatched to the camps.



Deserted streets

Steveston, once full of Japanese-Canadian fishermen and their families, was emptied during the evacuation.



Closed forever

When the Japanese Canadians were evacuated, their businesses were left empty. Powell Street, shown here, once the heart of Japantown, was left deserted.

Women and Children Held in Livestock Stables

Once the decision to intern the Japanese Canadians was made, the BC Security Commission (BCSC) needed a place to send them while their ultimate destinations were organized. Hastings Park, the home of the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver, was chosen for its space and relative security. Thousands of Japanese Canadians were housed in the Exhibition's livestock stables and other buildings while they waited to be sent "away." Mary Ohara and June Fujiyama were among the crowds of internees that had to endure the appalling conditions at Hastings Park.

Mattresses for internees

In this photo, soldiers are busy stuffing straw into mattresses that will end up on crude metal bunk beds for the internees. As Mary Ohara recalls, "when the straw was new, it smelled fresh but as it got damp and mouldy, bedbugs infested our bedding."





Sleeping in animal stalls

Women and children were forced to sleep in the animal stalls of the livestock building.

Mary Ohara:

"We were herded in like animals. I was careful not to step on the excrement that had dried on the concrete. I felt sick from the stench so I climbed as quickly as I could onto the top bunk for some air. From there I saw the hundreds of other families moving into the stalls. Overhead were swallows. They had made their homes in the rafters and were swooping down quite close to the bunks. That night and every night thereafter, I checked my bunk before I climbed in for the night."



Under guard

The prison-camp nature of the confinement of everyone of Japanese ancestry is evident in this photo of an elderly Japanese-born Canadian resident. The atmosphere was intimidating and humiliating. Many thought that they would be detained only briefly and then be allowed to go back home.

June Fujiyama:

"What a shock to arrive and find the Park surrounded by a high barbed-wire fence and guarded by soldiers who were dressed in khaki and carrying guns. I was incredulous. 'Those guns are for us?'"

A sea of beds

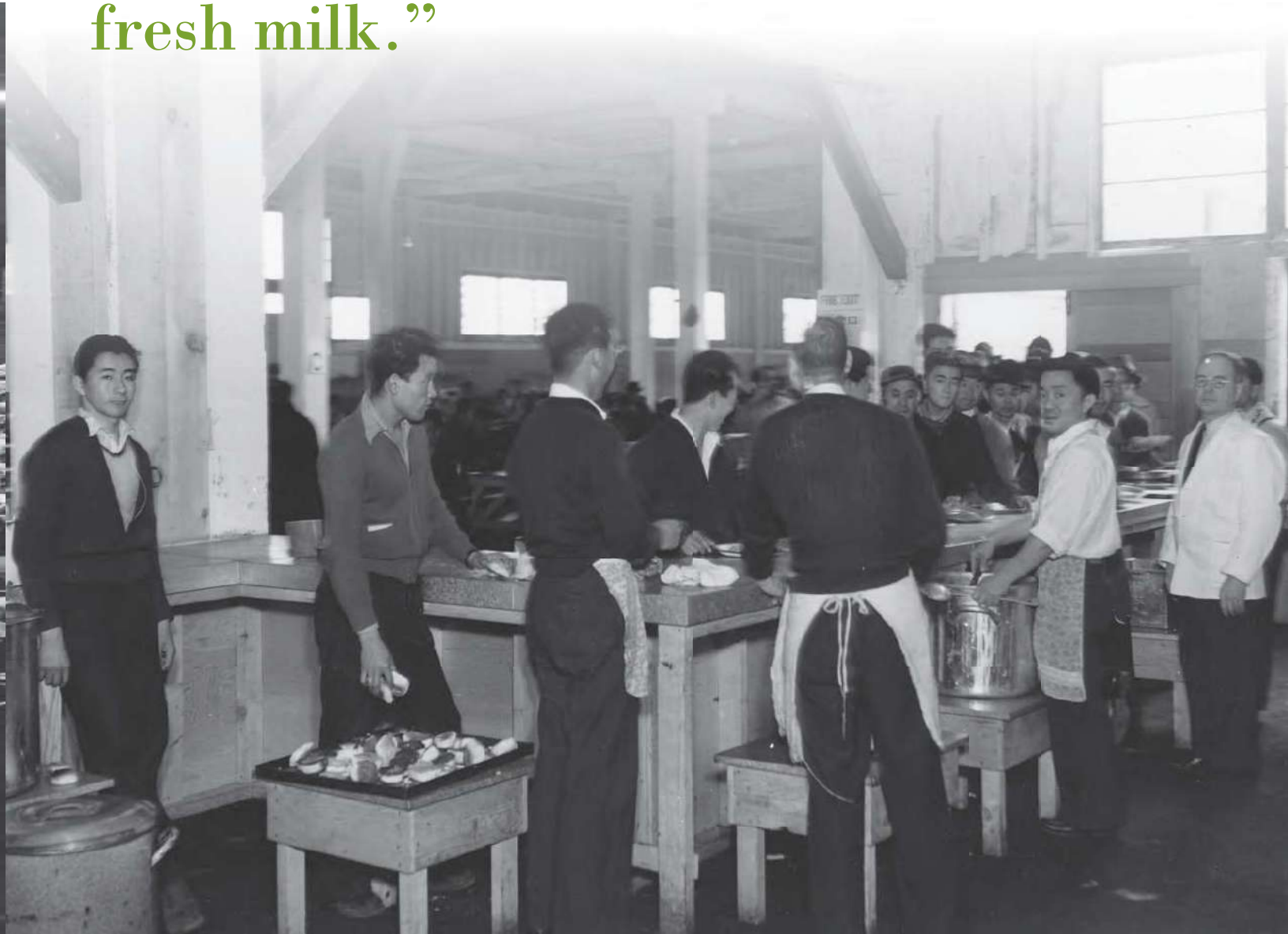
The men and boys over twelve years old were separated from the women and children and sent to different buildings. This photo shows the rows of cots where the men were expected to sleep.



Separate dining halls

The men's dining hall, shown here, was set up in a former industrial building. The men were kept separate from the women and children. Used to a diet with a lot of fresh vegetables, Mary Ohara remembers eating a lot of bologna at Hastings Park. "Mothers of small children were worried because there was no fresh milk." Notice the little boy who sits by himself on the far right of the photo. His father had been sent to a road camp and his mother and sister were in the livestock building. He had nobody to look after him. He got the mumps during his stay at Hastings Park but his mother was not allowed to visit him. There were also times when there were no meals.

“Mothers of small children were worried because there was no fresh milk.”



Working for the “other side”

Japanese-Canadian internees were recruited to work at Hastings Park, for kitchen and dining hall duties, seen here, and administrative jobs. For some, the jobs relieved boredom and provided a small income. June Fujiyama was hired in the office of the BC Security Commission.

June Fujiyama:

“Some nisei felt uncomfortable working for the BCSC because they were called ‘inu’ or dogs, meaning traitors for helping the government with its inhumane policies.”

Crude conditions

This cement washing room was shared by thousands of women and children. There were only ten showers for about 1,500 women.

Mary Ohara:

"They were made of animal drinking troughs – metal, with no seats or partitions. We were scared that we might fall in. The mothers stacked wooden apple boxes in front of the troughs so we could balance better. Eventually toilets were installed."



Sick and scared

Staying healthy was difficult in such dreadful conditions. The "hospital" pictured here was in a former livestock building.



Mary Ohara:

"People came down with dysentery and diarrhoea. Mumps and other contagious diseases spread like wildfire in the cramped quarters. In about the third month, I contracted mumps and had to be isolated but there was no space available in the 'hospital.' An underground storage area for coal and animal feed was emptied and I was placed in 'the dungeon' with some other children. The younger ones were scared and screamed for their mothers day and night. Going to the toilet was a nightmare and the parents begged for large tin cans from the kitchen to use as bedpans. I tried to soothe them as best I could."



School must go on

Despite the incredible upheaval of being forced from their homes and kept like prisoners under such poor conditions, parents strived to organize schooling for the children. Here a high-school class concentrates on their work in a small room under the eaves of a former industrial building.



Property Seizure

Immediately after war was declared on Japan, all fishing boats belonging to Japanese Canadians were seized, leaving many without a means to make their living. As the evacuation proceeded, cars were impounded. Land, homes and their contents, businesses, and any other possessions that could not be carried in a few suitcases or trunks were transferred to the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property. In addition, Japanese-Canadian community-owned properties, such as churches, temples, language schools, co-operatives, and the hospital in Steveston, were also seized. Initially, it was the job of the Custodian to take charge of the properties until they could be returned to their original owners. In January 1943, everything changed. An order-in-council was approved by the Canadian government requiring all the property to be sold. This came as a total shock to the Japanese Canadians. Mary Haraga recalls, “My parents believed the government when it said that their farms, equipment, homes, and possessions would be held ‘in trust.’ They did not imagine that once they were incarcerated, what had taken them a lifetime to build would all be sold or auctioned off.”

Farms for sale

Mary Haraga grew up on a strawberry farm like the one pictured here. Her family believed they would go back to their farm once the war was over.

Mary Haraga:

“Later we found out that soon after we had been taken away, our house was torn down and our 40-acre farm became part of a military air base for the war effort. Other Japanese farms were sold to veterans and some were bought by Mennonite farmers.”



Cars seized

Japanese Canadians had already been stripped of their fishing boats, cameras, radios, and binoculars. Next, their cars were taken. In this 1942 photo, a Japanese-Canadian man is having his car seized by authorities.



“Churches, temples, and language schools were also seized.”

Seized cars in Vancouver

Rows of cars seized from their Japanese-Canadian owners could be seen at the holding camp where people were required to report.



Lock, stock, and piano

Her piano was Mickey Nakashima's pride and joy before the war. Their possessions and property were all taken or sold off while the family toiled in the fields of Alberta.

“Many treasures were looted from empty homes.”



Mickey Nakashima:

“When orders arrived for us to leave, we stored our best dishes, heirloom items, furniture, and my piano in one room and boarded up the house. We all believed that we would return soon.”



A cruel system

Japanese-Canadian-owned properties, like this store, were sold off for prices far below fair market value. The proceeds of the sale were kept by the Custodian of Enemy Alien Property. The money was held in an account under the former owner's name and no interest was paid. Families could not draw more than \$100 per month from their account. Families were expected to use all their savings to support themselves while in internment. If a family had cash in their account, they were not allowed to work in the camps. It was a cruel system that made an internee pay for his own internment, using proceeds from the unauthorized sale of his possessions.

Many motives (opposite page)

The Inouye family, pictured here in their parlour in the early 1900s, lost everything too. The Canadian government gained many things from the cruel policy of selling off the property of internees. It provided cheap land for returning war veterans. In some cases, the government was taking away land from Japanese-Canadian war veterans and giving it to European-Canadian vets. The proceeds were used to help pay for the internee's expenses while in the camps, saving the government some money. And, since it deprived internees of homes to return to, it discouraged Japanese Canadians from resettling in BC. As property sales continued, some Japanese families opted to leave the internment camps for eastern Canada where they could be free to start again.



Family heirlooms gone

This display of fine china, art, and ceremonial dolls at the Greenwood Museum is just a small sample of the valued articles that Japanese-Canadian internees left behind for safekeeping when they were rounded up. Children had to leave behind special belongings that would have given them joy and comfort, including toys, dolls, and books. Some neighbours were true friends to the Japanese Canadians and held on to their prized possessions while they were away. But many treasures were looted from empty homes even before the government sold off the rest to local bargain hunters. When Mickey Nakashima was living in Montreal after the war, she told a new friend about what had happened. “I complimented my friend on the beautiful china she had used to serve the lunch. She said that they belonged to her grandmother. I told her how lucky she was to have them and how my family heirlooms disappeared from our farmhouse in Mission. I had nothing that belonged to my grandmother or my mother. My friend cried when she heard my story.”

