

Sources for the study of the treatment of Japanese Canadians, 1941–1950



The Japanese Canadians, carrying just a few of their belongings, went to the interior camps by truck or train. (C-46350)

The attack on Pearl Harbour by the Japanese on December 7, 1941, not only expanded Canadian participation in the Second World War to include the Pacific theatre, but also had severe repercussions on those Japanese who had emigrated to Canada. Canadian politicians viewed Japan's quick, successful invasions of the South Pacific countries with increasing trepidation. Pressured by British Columbia politicians, who had long harboured anti-Oriental feelings, the Mackenzie King government began to enact measures that would forever change the lives of Japanese Canadians.

Registration of all Japanese-born and later all Japanese Canadians, as well as the impounding of their fishing vessels

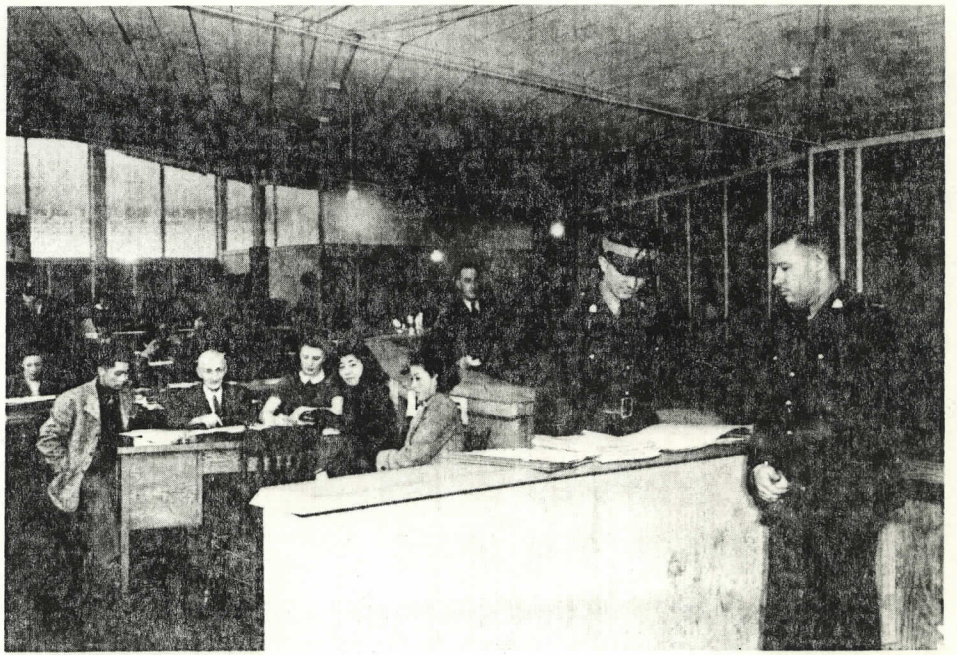
by the Royal Canadian Navy during that fateful December, foreshadowed future events. On February 24, 1942, the Canadian government ordered the removal of all Japanese Canadians from the coastal areas of British Columbia and their resettlement in camps located in the interior. At the same time the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property established a Vancouver office to sequester all of Japanese-Canadians' real and personal property, including securities, businesses, homes and household effects. The British Columbia Security Commission looked after the Japanese Canadians during the first year of relocation; thereafter, the Japanese Division of the Department of Labour assumed this responsibility. During the

war, much of Japanese-Canadians' property was sold or liquidated by the Custodian. After the war, over four thousand people were "repatriated" to Japan. Most Japanese Canadians, however, remained in Canada although the community was broken up and scattered throughout the B.C. interior, the Prairies, Ontario and Quebec. In 1950, the Royal Commission on Japanese Property Losses (Bird Commission) awarded limited compensation to some Japanese Canadians who had lost property during the war.

Today ethical questions on the justice of Canada's wartime internment policy, as well as the issue of compensation, have surfaced. If the Japanese Canadians pursue their claims for compen-

sation, their principal sources for validating these claims will be the historical records of the Canadian government in the custody of the Federal Archives Division.

Recently this Division revised its unpublished guide to the sources for the study of Japanese Canadians. Concentrating on the events during and just after the Second World War, the guide has pulled together references to these events from the holdings of the Division. The most significant record groups include: the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property (RG 117), which holds case files of over 18,000 Japanese Canadians and business records of companies once owned by them, as well as the records of the Custodian's Vancouver office; British Columbia Security Commission (RG 36/27); Labour (RG 27); Royal Commission on Japanese Property Losses (RG 33/69); Privy Council Office (RG 2); RCMP (RG 18); National Defence (RG 24); and External Affairs (RG 25), which includes numerous files on such subjects as registration, repatriation, family relief, rations for internees, expenditures and visits to the camps by the Spanish Consul's representative designated under

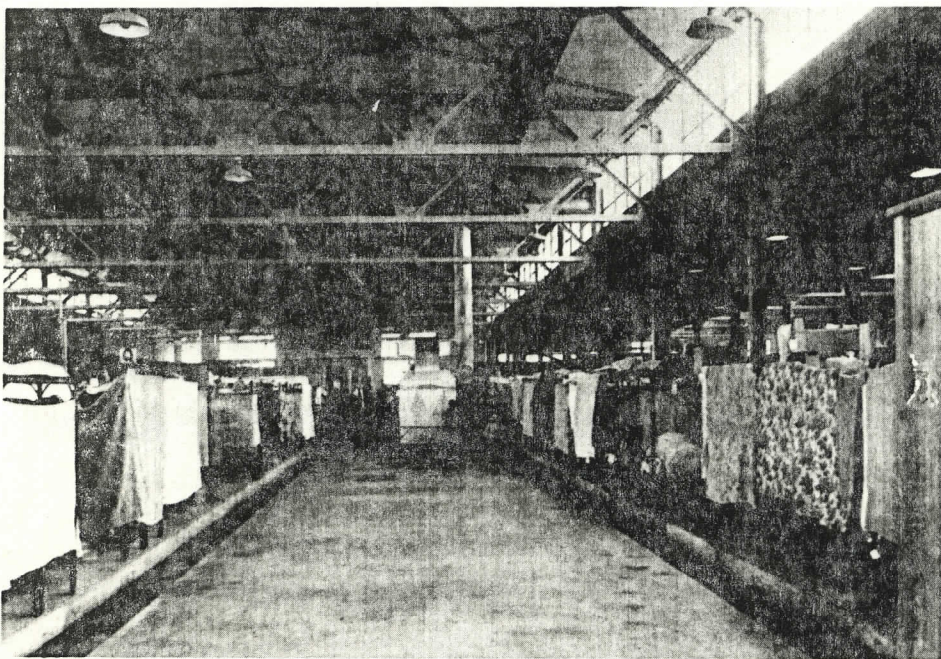


Hastings Park, Vancouver, Building "B", July 15, 1942. Japanese Canadians register with the RCMP, and declare their financial status and their property to representatives of the Custodian of Enemy Property. (C-44958)

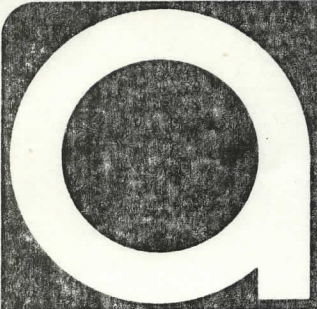
the Geneva Convention to investigate the treatment of Japanese aliens in Allied countries. While these represent the most important sources, it is

interesting to note that many government departments and agencies were involved in some aspect of Japanese Canadian affairs. For example, researchers may find relevant material in the records of such diverse bodies as Health and Welfare, Transport, and Surveys and Mapping Branch. Where there are blocks of files on the topic, only a general description of the records is provided and the researcher is referred to the appropriate finding aids. Nevertheless, the guide provides detailed information for most of the record groups. The guide does not at present give the access status of each volume of records, since the review process would make the guide obsolete very quickly. Access Control Lists, also maintained by the Division, provide current access information on these records. Researchers can consult the unpublished guide, "Sources for the Study of the Treatment of Japanese Canadians, 1941-1950," in the public reference area of the Federal Archives Division.

Judith Roberts-Moore
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Women's Dormitory, Hastings Park, Building "A", July 15, 1942. The women attempted to gain privacy for themselves and their children by draping blankets around the bunkbeds. (C-47107)



Religious Archives

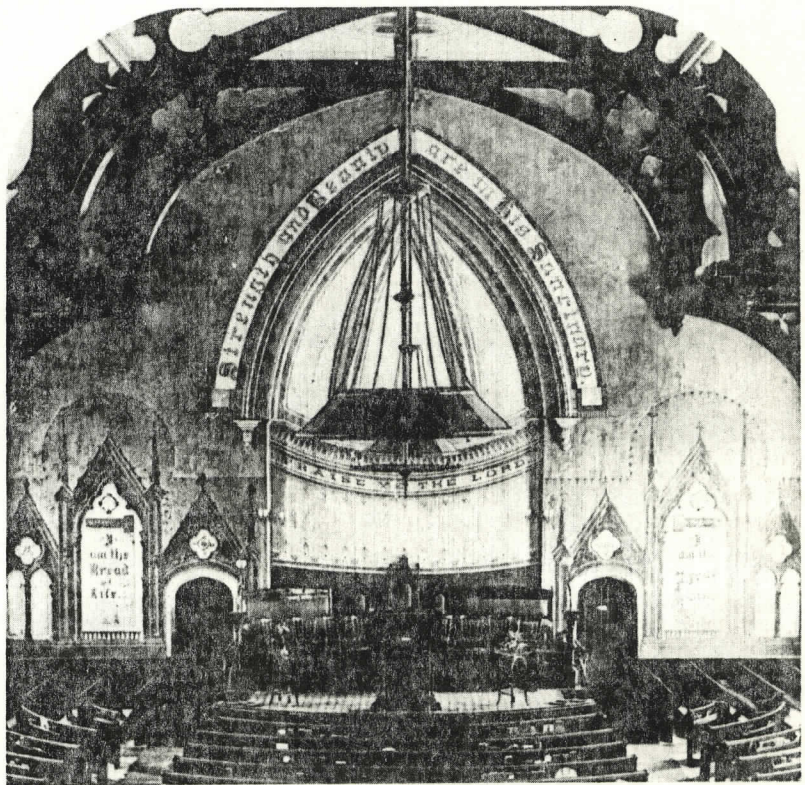
Nave gazing

The advantage that photography has over many other forms of documentation is that it provides much information that no one was aware of when the photograph was being taken. It is thus possible to use photographs to study attitudes Canadians had to religion in past decades.

Nineteenth-century Canadians' interest in religion greatly differed from that of our late twentieth-century secularized society. Then religion permeated society, shaping and moulding it, governing the way people thought and acted.

The extent to which religion formed part of society's fabric could literally be seen on the skyline. The church building traditionally was a focal point not only of the religious life of a city or town but also of its architectural visage. The church or cathedral dominated its surroundings, and could be seen from fields afar, pointing towards the heavens. The size of the structure inspired awe and led imperceptibly to a reinforcing of the impressiveness of the religious activities carried on inside the building. Thus the place of worship was a religious monument, and the physically central place that this monument took in the town reinforced the central place that religion had in the social and cultural life of the town.

Much that is nowadays a function of the state was once done by religious groups: education was carried on by teaching brothers and sisters, or sponsored by a particular sect at the post-secondary level; hospitals were run by



*Detail of a stereo view of the interior of Knox Church, Stratford, Ont., c. 1880.
Photographer: Anonymous. (PA-139148)*

such orders as the Grey Nuns; and everywhere charities and aid to the impoverished were organized and undertaken to a greater or lesser degree by churches.

The secularization of social life, in part a result of increasing urbanization and industrialization, can be seen in the changing skyline of the cities. During the nineteenth century the church spire, while still a major reference point for the central city's inhabitants, gradually disappeared into the shadow of down-

town office buildings. The workers in the manufacturing industry, living in the suburbs out of sight of the city centre, might have had their local church as a focal point, but it had little of the grandeur of those downtown.

Canadians' interest in religion and the way in which monuments towered over the community are well recorded in photographs. The Christian religion has long had an interest in the visual representation of the sacred and historical events and places relevant to it,

