

ArchivesNews

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Japan Town – Steveston in the 1930s

The following article was written by Social Media Coordinator John Campbell. To read other articles, see *Outside the Box*, the Friends of the Richmond Archives Blog, at www.richmondarchives.ca.

Richmond has a long and rich history of Japanese immigration and settlement. Various places around Richmond, Sea Island, Don Island and, in particular, Steveston were areas where Japanese immigrants lived, worked, raised families and contributed to the diverse cultural blend of our city.



Steveston looking west along Moncton Street from No.1 Road around 1940. The majority of the businesses along this street were operated by Japanese-Canadian entrepreneurs at the time.

City of Richmond Archives photograph RCF 274.

Japanese immigrants (Nikkei) arrived in Steveston around the time that the English Cannery opened in 1882 and by the 1900s made up a large portion of the Steveston population. Mostly male and mostly fishermen, they were accommodated in bunkhouses built by the canneries. During the fishing season Japanese “Bosses,” who had control of twenty or thirty boats, would negotiate contracts with the canneries for them and take care of their needs such as food, clothing and other services in return for a percentage of their wages.

Although the original intention of many of the men was to return to Japan after working in Canada, many decided to stay permanently. Some returned to Japan to

find wives, others had their families back home arrange marriages with suitable women, the so-called “Picture Brides”. Bunkhouses were unsuitable for married couples, so canneries built small houses to accommodate families.



A group of Japanese girls pose for a picture in traditional May Day dress outside the Steveston Japanese School ca. 1926.

City of Richmond Archives photograph 1978 1 36.



The Steveston Fuji baseball team played in the Vancouver Japanese League with the Asahi Giants, Powell Drugs and Union Fish teams.

City of Richmond Archives photograph 1977 7 12.

The Nikkei population grew, the men fishing and their wives working in the canneries and raising families. They diversified, expanding into boatbuilding, buying property, farming and starting businesses. People joined Faith communities, formed sports teams and created a rich community life.

Contending with discrimination and exclusion, The Japanese Fishermen’s Benevolent Society was formed in 1897 to protect the interests of the Nikkei fishermen and the community. A 1906 decision by the Richmond School Board to ban children of non-property owners effectively deprived most of the Nikkei children of an education and resulted in the construction of the Steveston Japanese School. To ensure that the health needs of the community were met, the Japanese Fishermen’s Hospital was built, Richmond’s first.



The Japanese Fishermen’s Hospital on No.1 Road in Steveston, ca. 1915.

City of Richmond Archives photograph 2006 39 47.

Japan Town – Steveston in the 1930s *(continued)*

By the 1930s the Japanese population had grown to account for two-thirds to three quarters of the total population of Steveston, approximately 3500 people. Nikkei owned businesses and stores of every description lined Moncton Street from No.1 Road to Third Avenue. Grocery stores, meat and fish markets, hardware and general stores, a bicycle shop, the River Garage, a billiard hall and clothing stores operated by Nikkei entrepreneurs could be found on both sides of the street. Five confectioneries (candy and chocolate shops) satisfied those with a craving for sweets.

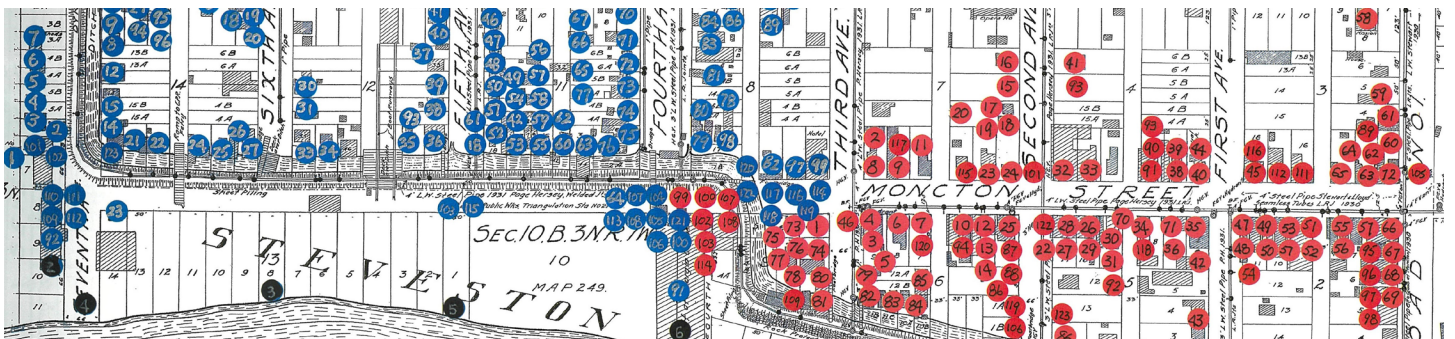


Hepworth Building – [ca.1913]. Photograph depicts a corner view of the Hepworth Building. Hamaguchi Grocery was located in this building at 54 Moncton Street.

City of Richmond Archives photograph 1985 41 1.

The density of the Japanese Canadian population in Steveston is very obvious when looking at the meticulous research done by Haruji (Harry) Mizuta who, using maps from the 1936 Waterworks Atlas of Richmond, marked the locations of Nikkei homes and businesses from the Scottish Canadian Cannery in what is now Garry Point Park to the Winch Cannery at the foot of No.2 Road. This is especially true with the map he marked as #30-2 1930s – Gulf of Georgia Cannery and Old Steveston Town – Steveston BC.

The growth of “Japan Town” came to a sudden halt with the forced relocation of Japanese Canadians from the Coast of British Columbia. Families were uprooted, stripped of their property and moved to areas where they had to start over and rebuild their lives, often in harsh circumstances. Steveston became a virtual ghost town with so many of its residents suddenly gone. In 1949 when Nikkei families were permitted to come back to the coast, those who decided to return rebuilt their lives and community again. Today the legacy of Japan Town is a cherished and honoured part of Steveston’s and Richmond’s history.



Japanese Hospital. Photograph depicts a group of nurses and patients on the front steps of the Japanese Hospital in Steveston.

City of Richmond Archives photograph 1978 14 11.



Steveston United Church. Photograph depicts a large group of Japanese-Canadian children who were graduates of the kindergarten class of Steveston United Church, shown outside of the church with their teachers and Reverend and Mrs. Mizuno.

City of Richmond Archives photograph 1978 31 45.

Below is depicted a map, created by Haruji (Harry) Mizuta illustrates the quantity of Nikkei homes and businesses, marked by blue and red dots, in Steveston during the Thirties.

City of Richmond Archives Reference Files.

"Bringing the Box to You" New Archival Educational Kits

Following successful completion of a school-based extended practicum, all teacher candidates in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of British Columbia participate in a three-week community field experience program. This spring, the Archives welcomed two teacher candidates to work on building educational kits which will be loaned out to Richmond schools.

Elementary School Kit



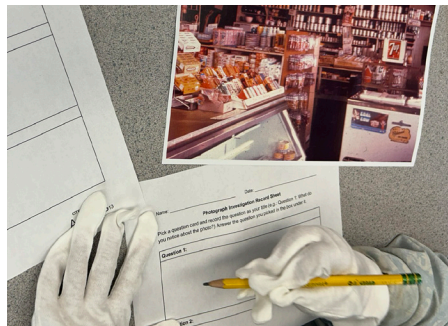
Whiteside Elementary grade 2 students wear archival gloves while exploring a replica of a 1917 Hong Wo General Store ledger.
City of Richmond Archives photograph.

Callee Yuen, elementary school teacher candidate, built an educational kit called "Bringing the Box to You: The History of Richmond's First Superstore - the Hong Wo General Store." The kit includes two detailed lesson plans with handouts as well as teacher guides and references. An interactive PowerPoint version of the lesson plan was also designed for teachers.

With thanks to Whiteside teacher Mme. Joanne Dennill, Callee was able to visit a local classroom of grade 2 French immersion students to test out the kit and lesson plan. Knowing that people from the Archives were coming for a visit, the children were so excited that they returned early from their recess break! The kit didn't disappoint and was a hit with the kids. The students were excited to learn about Richmond's history and to find out more about the City of Richmond Archives.



Callee Yuen with the kit she designed outside of Whiteside Elementary School.
City of Richmond Archives photograph.



Whiteside Elementary grade 2 student analyzes an interior photograph of the Hong Wo Store.
City of Richmond Archives photograph.

Callee had the following to share about her placement at the City of Richmond Archives:

"I am a teacher candidate from UBC doing my Community Field Experience (CFE) here at the City of Richmond Archives, and it has been a wonderful experience. I have learned so much during my short three weeks here, and I was thrilled to be part of a fantastic project called Bringing the Box to You. It was exciting and fun to build an elementary school kit on the Hong Wo General Store for the City of Richmond Archives that can be brought into classrooms."

Secondary School Kit

Cynthia Li, secondary school teacher candidate, built an educational kit called "Bringing the Box to You: An Archives-Based Exploration of Internment from the Lens of Steveston's Japanese Canadians." The kit includes replica archival records along with two detailed lesson plans and student handouts. The teacher's guide also gives an introduction to the City of Richmond Archives and explores the differences between primary and secondary sources. A replica of the Harada family photograph albums was also created for this kit.

Special thanks to McMath Secondary School teacher Ms. Andrea Phillpotts who, at the start of the project, shared valuable information about her experiences developing lesson plans using archival records.



Cynthia Li with the educational kit she created.
City of Richmond Archives photograph.



A visit to the Steveston Nikkei Memorial Park. Left to right: Dovellevue Buie (Archivist), Karen Ng (Records Analyst), Cynthia Li (Teacher Candidate), and Bev Boyd (Volunteer).

Special thanks to volunteer Bev Boyd for scanning the Harada family photograph albums enabling Cynthia to use copies of the photographs in the educational kit.

City of Richmond Archives photograph.



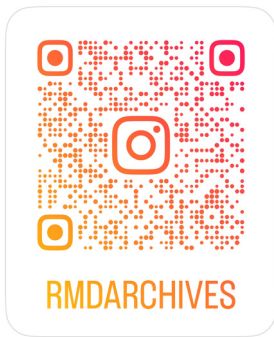
2024 Archives Tea

The annual Archives Tea will take place this year on Thursday October 17th at 1:30 p.m. Speeches will begin at 2:00 p.m. The location will once again be the Ukrainian Community Hall located at 5311 Francis Road. There will be free parking available onsite.

Guests are welcome! Please bring along friends who would enjoy in taking part in this pleasant affair. Due to limited space, an RSVP is appreciated. As always, we look forward to an afternoon of good food, excellent company, and great conversations.

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Public Reference Room Hours:
 Monday–Thursday: 9:00am–4:30pm
 Appointment recommended

Volunteer Awards

The City of Richmond Archives is so fortunate to have such dedicated and hard working volunteers. It simply is not possible to quantify the importance of the level of community support the Archives receives because of the Friends of the Richmond Archives.

Two of our volunteers received awards this year!

In May of 2024, John Campbell received an "Outstanding Impact Volunteer Award" from Heritage BC.

"Every organization wants a volunteer like John," says Britney Dack, Chair of Heritage BC. "Bringing his own unique spin to the Friends of the Richmond Archives, John's dedication to activating organization's social media is impressive. The result is a more accessible archives, and a broadening of audience who get to learn about the history of their community."

The online community also joined in to congratulate John. "Thanks John and congratulations," said Martin van den Hemel "I join many friends who have expressed their appreciation at the Friends of the Archives posts that have helped them reminisce about the 'good old days.'" Bob Ransford said: "Congratulations John! I absolutely LOVE the Friends of the Richmond Archives social media posts"

In June 2024, Jackie Brown was notified that she will be the recipient of a Heritage Award from the Richmond Heritage Commission. Working quietly behind the scenes for so many years, the award is for Jackie's extensive volunteer involvement with the Archives and for her support to establish the Dody Wray Special Project Fund. Jackie is the daughter of Geraldine (Dody) Wray. After Dody passed away in September 2018, Jackie found a sticky note written by her mother with some final requests. Specifically, Dody wished for \$25,000 to be donated to the Friends of the Richmond Archives. Jackie shared that there was no question about her mother's final wishes whether stamped by a lawyer or not. The Archives continues to be so grateful to Jackie and the family of Dody Wray for the generous donation.

Congratulations, John and Jackie!



Volunteer award recipients and Friends of the Richmond Archives Board members
John Campbell (left)
Jackie Brown (right).
City of Richmond Archives photograph.

2024 Archives Intern

Please join us in welcoming Anouska Kirby in early September. Anouska is the 2nd Archives Intern who has been hired by the Friends of the Richmond Archives. With gratitude to the Dody Wray Special Projects fund and a Young Canada Works in Building Careers in Heritage grant, Anouska will be developing a short exhibit on the history of horse racing in Richmond and describing the Harada family photographs.