JAPANESE CANADIAN INTERNMENT SITES OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1942–49)

GREENWOOD: THE FIRST JAPENESE CANADIAN INTERNMENT SITE

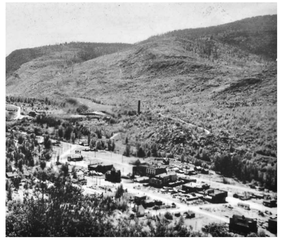
Population: 1,200

Incorporated in 1897, Greenwood had a population of 3,000 in 1899 and became a thriving copper mining town in the early 1900s. By 1918, the boom was over and by the 1940s, Greenwood was in decline, with only about 200 residents.

In 1942, Greenwood became the first internment camp at a time when no other town would take in Japanese Canadians from the coast. When the order to leave the 100 mile exclusion zone was issued, the Franciscan Sisters and Friars who ran the Japanese Catholic Mission in Vancouver and Steveston played a pivotal role in the forced exodus. Parishioners asked the Sisters to find them a safe place to go, so Father Benedict Quigley sprang into action. Learning that the mayor in Greenwood would "not refuse to accept Japanese Canadians", Father Quigley travelled to Greenwood to meet with then Mayor W.E. McArthur Sr. After several town meetings, a vote was held. To make the vote unanimous, the Franciscan Sisters and Friars promised to be 100% responsible for the welfare of the Japanese Canadians and the safety of the community. That was the clincher. Greenwood needed more people and the exiled needed a safe haven.

A street view of Greenwood
NNM 2010-23-2-4-747

On April 26th, 1942, a CPR train arrived at Greenwood Station, carrying the first group of Japanese Canadians forcibly relocated by the Canadian government under the War Measures Act. With the strong support of Mayor McArthur, the Franciscan Sisters & Friars and the United Church Women's Missionary Society laid the foundation to accommodate them. Japanese Canadian carpenters and plumbers prepared the old town buildings for accommodation and built four large public bathhouses ('ofuro'). Families moved into empty hotels and commercial buildings. Rooms were crowded, with communal kitchens and shared plumbing. Partitions were built for families to have their own space and each family shared the one large stove on each floor and sink for washing. Some buildings even had a flush toilet on each floor.



City of Greenwood in 1940
Photo courtesy of Chuck Tasaka

Education and Community Life

By September 1942, the impact of 1,200 new residents was immediate and significant. The community scrambled to find solutions for housing, education, employment, food supplies and other goods. Immediate demand for food overwhelmed the two or three existing stores, so many planted their own vegetable gardens. The Red Cross supplied rice and soy sauce. Several sawmills and forest-related jobs provided work for the men.

The United Church set up a kindergarten, while the Franciscan Sisters set up the Sacred Heart School (SHS) for grades K-8 in the vacant fire hall, which they partitioned into four classrooms. Established early, thanks to the Sisters and Friars, SHS, which was mostly nikkei students, organized many activities for children: tumbling and glee clubs, choir, concerts and picnics were extremely popular. Grace Namba and Madeleine Bock organized CGIT (Canadian Girls in Training). Hockey, baseball and Shigin (chanting) clubs also sprang up. The Greenwood School (majority Caucasian students) was forced to make major adjustments to accomodate 400 new students. The City provided a 20-bed hospital in the old Armstrong Hotel. Dr. J. Burnett, Dr. H. Kamitakahara and Dr. G. Ishiwara provided medical and dental care for the entire community, while the hospital provided jobs for young nurses' aides.

Sacred Heart School, Greenwood 1944, NNM 2011-83-1-42

Arrivals of Internees from the coast to Greenwood, 1942, NNM 2011-83-1-33

At first, education and community activities were mostly segregated. The process of social integration was gradual and happened through church, community events, food and sports. Church was packed every Sunday because all Catholics, both nikkei and local residents, went to Sunday mass to worship. Mayor McArthur encouraged nikkei participation in the annual Labour Day celebrations. This was taken to heart. Ladies dressed in kimono were part of the parades, Japanese float themes won prizes and the nikkei ladies made homecooked 'Japanese food' for these celebrations, including the popular Cumberland-style chow mein, maki and age sushi, as well as the popular the karinto (Japanese cracker snacks).

Sports played a major role in community integration. There were three nikkei hockey teams: the Hep Cats, Bruins and Tigers. Each had a sprinkling of caucasian players. Baseball was also big, with the nikkei team led by two former Vancouver Asahi players, Jim and Joe Fukui. Bleachers were filled to capacity. The majority of the players were nikkei, but several local folks also played on the team. While there was no formal league, games with Grand Forks and other neighbouring teams were also arranged. Lastly, Greenwood had both a men's and ladies' basketball league, whose games were held in the old hockey sports arena.

Overall, Japanese Canadians contributed greatly to Greenwood life. They introduced traditional Japanese dancing and singing. Local businesses benefited from more customers. Skilled tradesmen such as carpenters, plumbers, electricians, watch repairman and masons became available. They made significant contributions to sports and recreation. Greenwood once again became a vibrant community, with parades, sports clubs, school events, church banquets and small businesses in town. In time, the initial anxiety of the local residents turned into acceptance of the newcomers.

Sisters and Friars in front of Canada Day float, Greenwood 1946, NNM 2011-83-1-54

Labour Day parade float in downtown Greenwood, 1943, NNM 2011-83-1-37

Sacred Heart School students in Labour Day Celebrations, Greenwood 1943, NNM 2011-83-1-60

Sacred Heart hockey team, Greenwood 1945, NNM 2011-83-1-83

Grand Forks (Self-Supporting)

Internment Population: 343

A self-supporting site 38 kilometres east of Greenwood, Grand Forks housed over 300 Japanese Canadians. Esumatsu Nakatani, a lay minister who moved to Grand Forks in 1939, helped his fellow internees move to and work in this community. He negotiated with the local farmers to hire and house the newcomers. Many of these farmers were Doukhobors sympathetic to the plight of the interned. The Kozo Arai and Genjiro Onodera families arrived on May 8, 1942 and began working at Sunnyside Ranch. In 1943, many Nisei (second generation) girls from Greenwood were recruited to work in the local hospital.

Apple picking, Grand Forks 1942
NNM 2017-17-2-1-39

Onion seed harvesting, Grand Forks 1942, NNM 2017-17-2-1-6

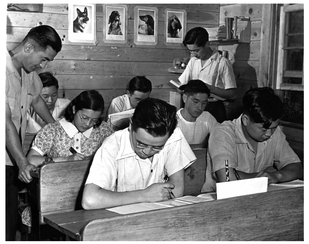
Nakantani family, Grand Forks 1942, NNM 2017-17-2-1-39

Visit of the Red Cross representative Mr. Maag to Christina Lake 1943, JCCC 2001-5-22

Christina Lake (Self-Supporting)

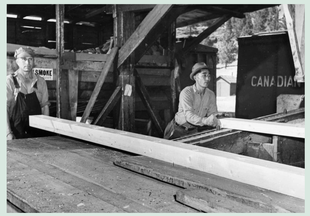
Internment Population: 109

Another self-supporting site, 37 kilometres east of Grand Forks, Christina Lake housed some 109 internees in resort buildings and the Alpine Inn. Some men found work in logging and others worked at the local Sandner Brothers Shingle Mill. Three baseball teams (Cubs, Lumberjacks and Giants) played games against teams in Grand Forks and Greenwood. The Kishi family, who had a successful boat-building business in Steveston before the war, continued their boat building business during the internment and transported the finished boats by rail to the coast. After 1949, when all government restrictions were removed, a few families such as the Hamagami family stayed on and became permanent residents in this beautiful resort community.



Students at desks in school, Christina Lake 1942
JCCC 2001-5-21

Mas Higashi in front of Alpine Inn, Christina Lake 1942,
NNM 2011-77-2-1-14



Men working in the sawmill, Midway BC 1945, JCCC 2001-3-171

Children dismissed from Midway School, ca 1943, JCCC 2001-5-68

Kakuno and Takahashi children playing in Midway, ca 1943, photo courtesy of Chuck Tasaka

Midway

Although not an official internment site, several nikkei families moved to Midway, 13 kilometres west of Greenwood. These families were attracted by employment at the McMynn Store and at Boundary Sawmill, owned by the Sherbinin family. They hired many nikkei at the mill and in the office. The Spokane Hotel became their temporary residence. Many lived and raised families there after the war, and some still live in Midway to this day.

GREENWOOD AFTER THE WAR

While other internment camps closed following the end of WWII, Greenwood continued to thrive as a small town. Many nikkei continued to live and work there. The Greenwood Board of Trade and the City of Greenwood encouraged them to remain in the community. After 1949, when the restrictions were lifted, many planted their roots, establishing businesses and shops in Greenwood, choosing to stay. Higashi Plumbing, Imai Shoe Repair and Electrical, Nakagawa Dry Cleaner and Tanizawa Greenwood Bakery are some of the nikkei businesses that were established during or following internment. The impact of the internment of nikkei on Greenwood was huge; their presence revitalized the community and their influence on community life continued for many years after 1949, when the internment ended.

Arrivals and departures during the second forced uprooting of Japanese Canadians, Greenwood 1946
NNM 2011-83-1-59

Sacred Heart School farewell party for families being deported to Japan, Greenwood 1943
NNM 2011-83-1-43

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Historical Overview

Decades of discriminatory and racist policies against Japanese Canadians in British Columbia came to a head on December 7, 1941, when Pearl Harbor was bombed and Canada declared war on Imperial Japan. Citing an issue of national security and encouraged by many British Columbian politicians and racist groups who resented the hard-won economic success of Japanese Canadians, the federal Government forcibly removed nearly 22,000 persons of Japanese ancestry outside a 100-mile (approximately 160 kilometres) Restricted Zone along the West Coast of B.C. to internment locations in the Interior of B.C. and beyond the Rocky Mountains.

On February 27, 1942 the BC Security Commission (BCSC) was created to administer the forced removal of Japanese Canadians and the confiscation of all their property, which was given to the Custodian of Enemy Property. Men were the first to be removed, and were sent to road building camps in BC, Alberta and Ontario. If they protested separation from their families, they were sent to Prisoner of War Camps in Ontario. Many women and children, left to fend for themselves, were initially sent to Hastings Park in Vancouver and detained there for several weeks to await forced relocation to the Internment camps that were being constructed around the province. Although initially promised that their homes, businesses, and properties would be returned to them after the war, in 1943, the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property sold everything in order to finance the internment.

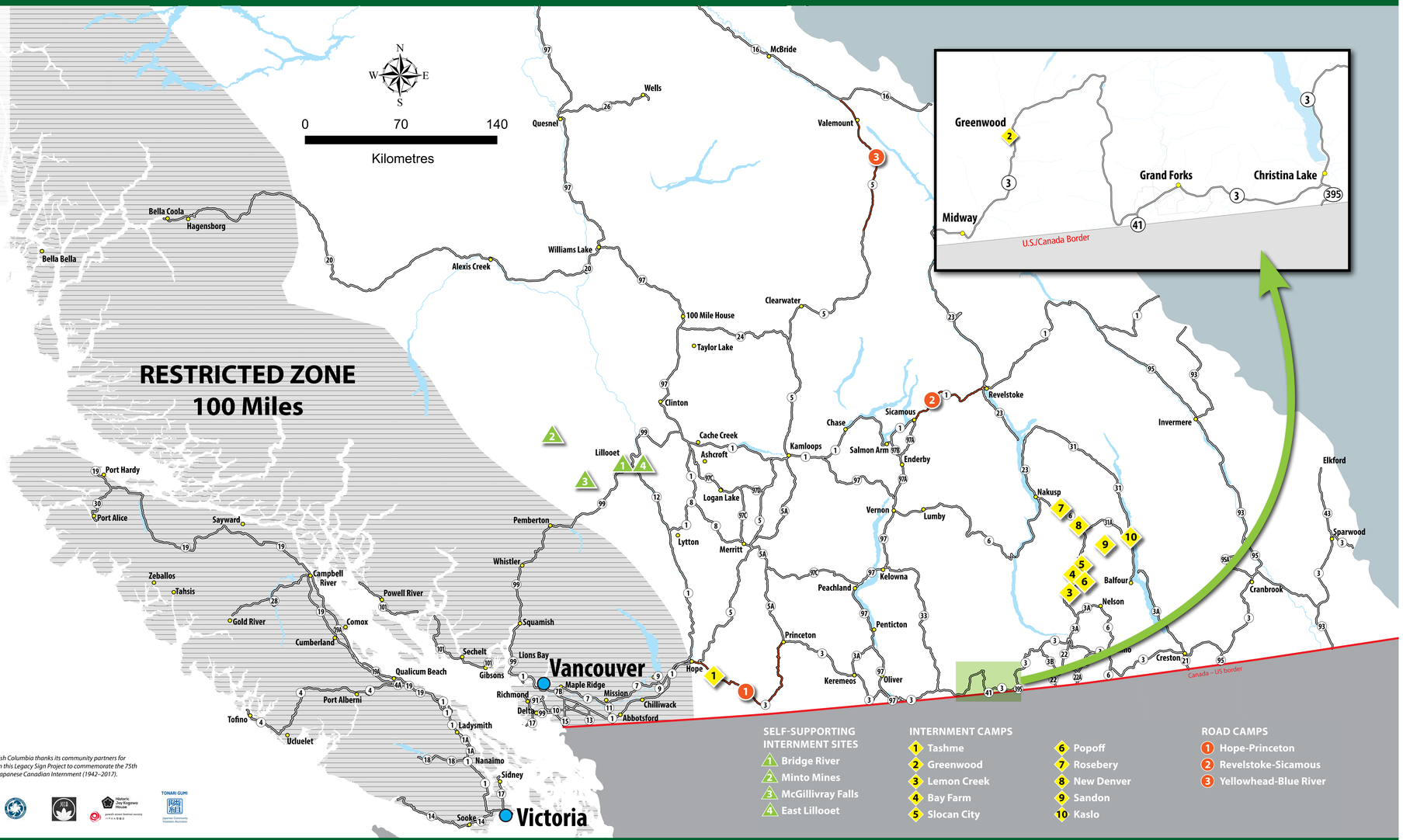
Some groups who wished to remain together as families were forced to work in the sugar beet fields of Southern Alberta and Manitoba. Some families who had financial means were approved for relocation to self-supporting camps in the Lillooet area. However, the largest proportion of the group, about 14,000 people, were interned in isolated and declining former mining towns and hastily created camps in the West Kootenay and Boundary regions of the province. As the Internment camps were made ready, Japanese Canadians were moved to these camps through the summer and fall of 1942. Ten internment camps and four official self-supporting sites were established for Japanese Canadians who were who were forcibly uprooted, dispossessed and incarcerated during the Second World War.

After the War – Ongoing Exclusion and Displacement

When the war ended in 1945, the B.C. slogan at the time was 'Go East or Go Home', and still willing to cooperate, Japanese Canadians took up the offer of a free ticket to other provinces and cities that would accept Japanese Canadians. Influenced by racist sentiment in BC, the powers of the War Measures Act were ex-tended under the National Transitional Emergency Powers Act until 1949. In 1946, about 4,000 Japanese Canadians were sent to Japan, but over half were Canadian citizens or born in Canada. This was unconstitutional and a violation of civil liberties and human rights. In contrast in the USA, although incarcerated, Japanese Americans returned to their own land once the war was over and their internment was paid for by the US Government.

In 1947, mainly as a result of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations, the Canadian Government rescinded the deportation order. In the same year, the Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect, allowing all Canadians to become for the first time, citizens of Canada, no longer British subjects. Finally, after seven years of internment, in 1949, Japanese Canadians were granted the right to vote, live wherever they wanted, and were free to come and go as they wished. Some returned to the coast, many to fishing in Steveston.

In the decades following the war, the former community of Japanese Canadians in British Columbia, once numbering over 22,000, was spread across Canada and as far away as Japan. Rebuilding a sense of trust and acceptance took years, but by 1977, the Centennial anniversary of Japanese immigration to Canada, there was a renaissance of Japanese culture and ethnic pride taking place across the country. The effects of this renewed sense of community strongly influenced the 1988 redress and formal apology by the federal government for all wrongs committed against Japanese Canadians during World War II.



BRITISH COLUMBIA
Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

The Province of British Columbia thanks its community partners for working together on this Legacy Sign Project to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Japanese Canadian Internment (1942–2017).

THE JAPANESE HALL
Nikkei national museum & cultural centre
SUNSHINE VALLEY TASHME MUSEUM
BC Shin Buddhist Temples
Historic Joy Kogawa House
TONARI GUMI
Japanese Community Volunteers Association