

Plucked from their homes....

...under guard of Acton man

# B.C.'s Japanese Canadians herded out to ghost towns

**G**arry Ockenden was a witness. He saw thousands of families herded by trainloads to prison camps, thrown off their land, denied freedom of religion, speech, assembly...not accused of a crime or given the right to be tried by a court of law.

He saw it all. But Garry Ockenden was not in Nazi Germany. And these prisoners were not sent to Soviet gulags. What Garry Ockenden witnessed took place in British Columbia and the prisoners were Japanese-Canadians in 1942.

Garry Ockenden had never seen a Japanese person until he joined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in January 1942.

Within a year, the 18 year-old was seeing hundreds of Japanese daily, transporting them into the British Columbia interior.

"At that time, the process had started, to bring them out of the coastal area, inland," Mr. Ockenden, now a white-haired Acton resident said. "That was what I ended up doing while I was there."

"There" was Vancouver, British Columbia, the first place Mr. Ockenden was sent to by the RCMP after he finished five months of training in Regina, Saskatchewan.

It was Garry's second trip since he'd left the Lloydminster, Saskatchewan prairie farm on which he'd been raised. The first had been to Regina, to join the RCMP.

He'd joined the colorful force in hopes of being sent overseas. Garry wanted to see the world.

However, he didn't get beyond Canada's borders, spending instead, much of his time in the western provinces during the war years.

It was 1942, and Canada had declared war on Japan following the December, 1941, Japanese attack of the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbour in the Hawaiian Islands.

There were about 23,000 Japanese people living in Canada, most of them in Vancouver and area, and some in the Fraser and Okanagan Valleys of British Columbia.

With the declaration of war, things began to change for the Japanese living in Canada, although many of them were "Nisei" or second generation Japanese who considered themselves Canadians.

## Schools closed, cars, cameras and boats were confiscated.

The government closed Japanese language schools, stopped the publication of Japanese newspapers and confiscated cars, radios, cameras and boats from the Japanese living in Canada.

The Canadian government was afraid Japanese-Canadians would cause trouble and help the enemy Japanese army. Therefore, in March 1942, the coastal British Columbia Japanese were moved to Vancouver's Hastings Park, in the exhibition grounds.

They weren't allowed to leave the park and their letters were censored to make sure they weren't helping the enemy.

Then, the government announced the Japanese Canadians were to be moved from the coast, starting with just the menfolk.

When the trainloads of Japanese were being transported into the British Columbia interior in 1942, Garry Ockenden was there.

In his official RCMP uniform, he was making sure the train rides went smoothly and the Japanese didn't offer any resistance.

"We just never had any trouble," Mr. Ockenden remembered of his many trips to camps at Hope, Nelson, Sandon, Revelstoke and Kaslo, British Columbia. "We never lost any on our train trips, to my knowledge."

By himself, the 18 year-old would supervise three carloads of people, about 150 to 200 people in total. If there were more train cars of Japanese-Canadians, another RCMP officer would make the trip with Garry.

Hope was one of the closest camps to Vancouver. Previously a beef cattle farm, the owner had turned his land over to the British Columbia Security Commission. The Commission was responsible for the evacuation and settlement in the B.C. interior of these Japanese-Canadians.

"Sandon was a great trip," Mr. Ockenden recalled. "We had to go to Nelson by train, then by barge up to Kaslo, a former mining town, then by train to Sandon."

Sandon was also a mining town, in Kootenay Valley, with maybe 50 residents, he said. An old hotel was the main building of the town. It was about 700 miles from Vancouver.

"There was beautiful country in that area," Mr. Ockenden said. "In wintertime I guess it was pretty bleak. Those towns were more or less ghost towns in those days."

In most cases the Japanese arrived in towns that looked like those of the old west, with their high roofed stores and fronts.

Although just the men were put on the first trains out, the government changed its mind and moved families as groups in subsequent evacuations.

By September 1942, 21,439 Japanese had been evacuated to the B.C. interior. Over half of them were sent to places like Sandon and nearby New Denver on the shores of Slokan Lake. Some were sent to sugar beet farms in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. About 700 were in detention camps.

At the camps, the Japanese slept in bunk beds and did their own cooking and cleaning.

"They did the best they could with what they had," Mr. Ockenden said. "I guess it wasn't like home. Space was fairly small."

Most of the Japanese had committed no crimes and were Canadian citizens. After moving them into the interior of British Columbia, the government began in January 1943 selling off the impounded goods of the evacuated families. Fishing boats, 1,200 of them, were sold, along with land, homes, furniture and other valuables the Japanese Canadians had left behind, although at the time of evacuation they were told their property would be kept in "protective custody" till their return.

During these war years, the Japanese-Canadians lost the right to enjoy private property, to be tried in a court of law if accused of a crime, to freedom of religion, to freedom of speech, and freedom of assembly and association.

The 1927 War Measures Act was swept into force, giving the cabinet huge powers, and making it legal for the newly-formed British Columbia Security Commission to move the Japanese.

Spending the war years doing factory, farm, road, or domestic work, the evacuees barely survived on the pittance they were able to earn, and had to accept relief, which in 1944-45 cost the BC government nearly \$2 million.

In May 1945 Germany surrendered and slowly the government regulations on how the Japanese-Canadians must live became more relaxed. In August 1945, the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. Sept. 2, Japan signed unconditional surrender terms.

"Now you think about what happened...when I was young, I was doing my job. When you get older, your thoughts change and you think of what different procedure could have been used," Mr. Ockenden said. "I can't come up with an answer, because I don't think there is any different procedure that could have been followed.

ed. If you're going to protect your country, you have to do these things. We needed protection of the coast."

Today, Garry Ockenden works in Malton at the Norenda division of Hawker Siddeley Canada Ltd. He looks after payroll. He quit the RCMP many,

many years ago, "because the wages weren't too hot and I wanted a change."

Working with him is a Japanese man. Ten years ago they got talking, and discovered they'd taken the same train out to camp Revelstoke. Today they are good friends.



A lad of 18 back in 1942, Garry Ockenden of Acton guarded the movement of Japanese-Canadians from the coast to British Columbia's interior. An RCMP officer he made sure train rides went smoothly, with no trouble on board.



This picture was taken of a scene in Building E of a Security Commission Clearing Station, Hastings Park, Vancouver, B.C. taken in 1942. Japanese-Canadians were told when they were evacuated that their property would be kept until after the war. It was later sold off. (Courtesy of the Public Archives of Canada)

**ORDERS FROM THE B.C. SECURITY COMMISSION**  
 Notice to Vancouver Japanese Persons of Japanese origin residing in Vancouver should terminate, not later than the 30th April, 1942, all leases or rental arrangements they may be working under. They must also be prepared to move either to Hastings Park or to work camps or to places under the Interior Housing Scheme at twenty-four hours notice. No deferments whatsoever on business grounds may be made to the above orders.

STORIES BY ANI PEDERIAN

## A concentration camp the fate of Sumi's brother

Sumi Ibuki remembers going to the train station after the Second World War to bid her friends goodbye. Her friends were going back to Japan.

Mrs. Ibuki was almost going to leave Canada herself, then.

"My father wanted us to go back to Japan, but none of us children had ever been to Japan and we didn't want to go," the Georgetown woman said.

About one month after the war, Mrs. Ibuki's father died, and rather than move to Japan, the family decided to join Mrs. Ibuki's older brother and sister in Hamilton.

"We had to come out here and start from scratch, with just the shirts on our backs," Mrs. Ibuki remembered. Four days were spent on the cheapest train to Toronto.

"We couldn't lay down or anything. I'll never forget that," she said. Since then she tries to avoid train trips, Mrs. Ibuki laughed.

Born in 1934, one of eight children, Mrs. Ibuki was a young girl when the Canadian government started transporting the coastal Japanese into the

British Columbia interior. "Those were painful years," she recalled.

She and her brothers and sisters were Canadian-born. Her father had been living in Canada since the turn of the century, returning to Japan only to find himself a bride. Mrs. Ibuki's mother was 17 when she came to Vancouver, and 18 years younger than her new husband.

Because Mrs. Ibuki's father was in his late fifties, he was allowed to stay with his family when they were moved to Kaslo, B.C.

An older brother and sister had already gone out east, so the family consisted of six children when settled into a building that housed a former barber shop. Mrs. Ibuki's oldest brother had been sent to a concentration camp because he was 18 and her eldest sister spent the war years sewing parachutes for the Canadian war effort.

"We were given one room to sleep in and a communal kitchen we shared with two other families," Mrs. Ibuki said, referring to Kaslo.

"You know, when I was at high school in Hamilton, I felt so proud to be a Canadian...then I went to the library

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## War compensation 'Canadian problem'

Feelings are mixed among Japanese-Canadians when it comes to compensation for the losses they suffered during the war years.

This month, The National Association of Japanese-Canadians held a national conference and made plans to rally more public support for its cause.

The Association isn't satisfied by the federal government's offer of a formal apology for the evacuation and internment of Japanese-Canadians during World War Two. Nor is it satisfied with the government offer of \$4 million to \$10 million for a foundation to promote human rights and better race relations.

The Association is undertaking a \$30,000 study by the accounting firm of Price Waterhouse to tally the losses suffered by the more than 21,000 Japanese-Canadians who were evacuated in 1942.

The study is expected to be completed by March or April next year. A \$5,000 cheque was received last week from the City of Toronto to offset the cost of the study.

The Toronto chapter of the Japanese Canadian Citizens Association has taken a different stand on the issue. In fact, after the national conference, it dropped out of the National Association.

"There is a very strong philosophical difference in our position from the national position," Citizens Association spokesman George Imai told The Herald. "To put it bluntly, they're seeking vengeance. We're not."

A former president of the National Association, Mr. Imai said The Citizens Association was satisfied with a formal apology and \$5 million to \$10 million for a foundation.

"Of course, let us not forget the past, but we should plan for the future. This kind of injustice which was done to us should not be done to anyone else and we should strive for better race relations for all people," Mr. Imai said.

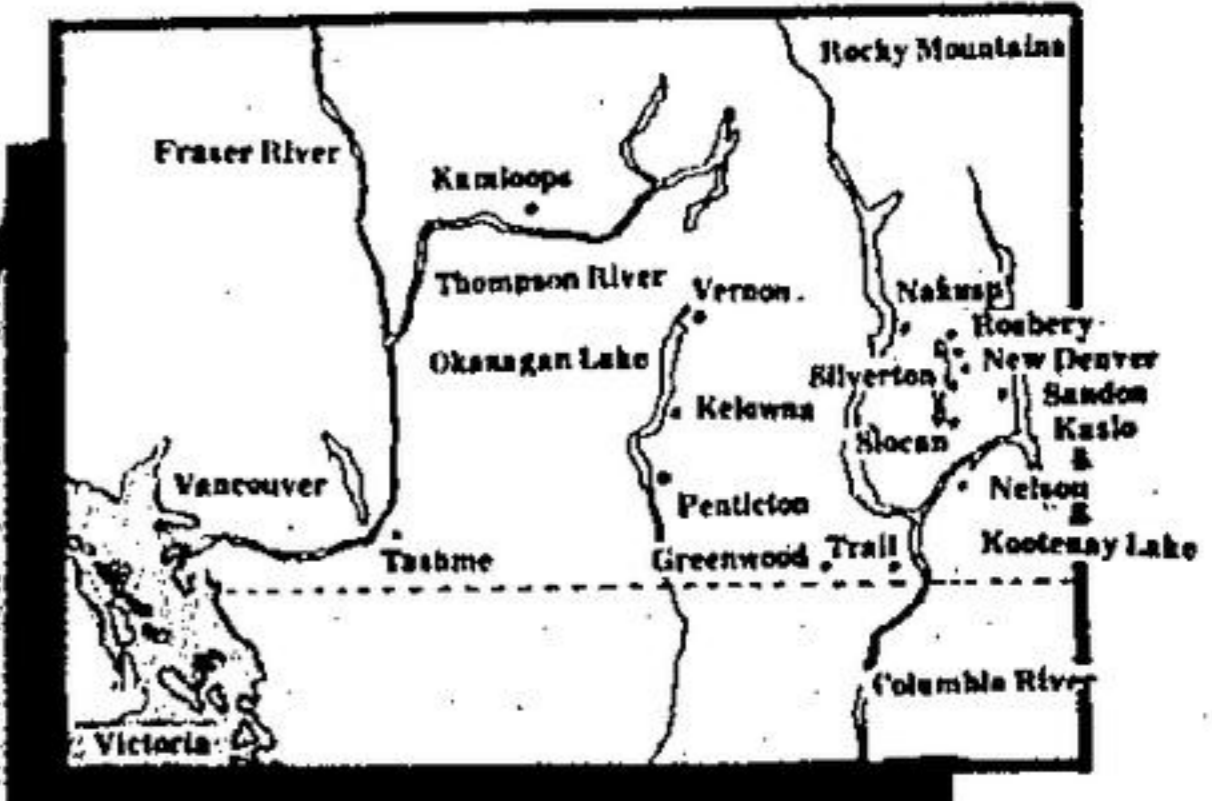
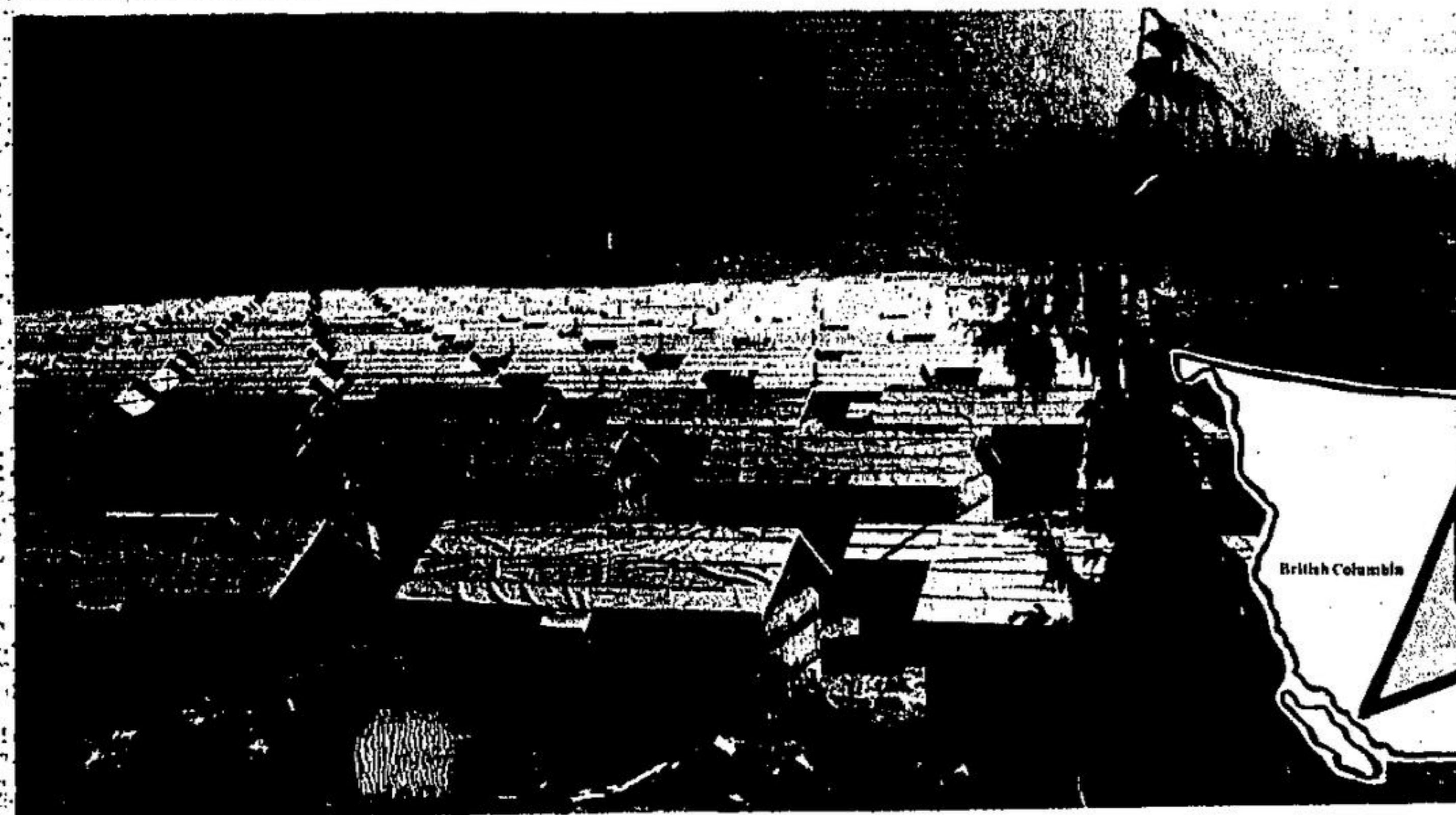
He said the Citizens Association had taken independent surveys, most notably in 1964, York University professor Dr. Wilson Head found, in a sampling of 700, that 72 per cent of Japanese-Canadians wanted group compensation rather than individual compensation.

Asked when compensation would be realized, Mr. Imai laughed and said he had no idea. "I think we're further from it now."

"I think this is a Canadian problem and not just Japanese-Canadian," Mr. Imai stressed. "We're part of this country, and what happened to a group of Canadians should never happen again."

He said his group is hoping to hold a national conference in Toronto before Christmas, with the agenda to have the Citizens Association position before the government again, as a reminder.

Attempts to get comments from Minister of State for Multiculturalism, Otto Jelinek, on this matter were unsuccessful as of press time.



This map above indicates where the internment camps were during the Second World War.

This camp for Japanese-Canadians was located near Hope, B.C., 100 miles from the coast. By September of 1942, 21,439 Japanese-Canadians had been evacuated to the B.C. interior. At the camps, they slept in bunk beds and did their own cooking and cleaning. Seen here are houses at the Tashme camp, B.C., taken in 1942. (Courtesy Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre)