



A young Japanese girl enjoys the tranquility of the Nitobe Gardens at the University of British Columbia. Dr. Inazo Nitobe, a member of the Japanese House of Peers and Undersecretary General of the League of Nations, died suddenly in Victoria on his way to a peace conference in 1933. A small garden was built in honour of his peace efforts, but it was vandalized during WW II. The consulate and UBC decided to revamp the garden. It was designed by Kanosuke Mori and dedicated in 1960.

## Nihonmachi (Powell Street)

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VANCOUVER'S NIHONMACHI, the Japanese name for the Powell Street area, began in the 1890s with commerce around one of the largest employers of Japanese, the Hastings Sawmill located at the foot of Dunlevy Street. As the Japanese contractors began to supply labour for the mills and the building of the railroad as early as 1886, they set up offices on Powell Street. In order to serve the needs of the labourers who were living in boarding houses close to the mill, Nihonmachi hotels, food suppliers, baths, barber shops, restaurants, churches, clothing stores, banks and all things Japanese began to pop up along Powell, Alexander, Hastings and Cordova Streets. The Canadian Pacific Railway's Empress Fleet was among the first to

bring Japanese immigrants across the Pacific to Vancouver, peaking in 1907 with some 8,000 Japanese immigrants coming to these shores. A total of 11,000 Asian immigrants came that year, causing a great deal of anxiety within the Caucasian community, resulting in an anti-Asian riot in 1907 that left many stores along Powell Street and in Chinatown damaged. The September 1907 riot led to the restriction of male immigrants to 400 per year, with no restrictions on women and families joining their husbands, and so the "picture bride era" began, and a resultant baby boom of the Nisei or second generation.

The Issei or first generation pioneers worked mainly in the forestry, fishing, farming and canning industries throughout the province. But the two most concentrated communities were Nihonmachi and Steveston. Nihonmachi was known as "Poweru Gai" or Powell Street by the Japanese community. By 1921 there were 578 stores, organizations, businesses, churches, in the area. The frontier buildings predated Japanese immigration and were built for and by the earliest residents of Vancouver—city officials, business elite and labourers. Many of the buildings were boarding houses. As the wealthy elite moved to more prestigious neighbourhoods, the Japanese began to buy up the crude shiplap buildings. They added store fronts, living quarters for the family, and often ran a boarding house in the back. By 1940 the thriving community was considered to be the centre of the Japanese community. Some of those buildings still exist today.

William Lyon Mackenzie King, high-ranking federal civil servant and from 1909 Minister of Labour, visited Vancouver shortly after the Asian riots of 1907. He had led a Royal Commission report on Oriental immigration in 1902 and acquired a Ph.D. from Harvard University for his dissertation based on the study of Oriental immigration to Canada.

In 1942, when the Japanese Imperial Army's aggression in China and Southeast Asia contributed to fear that

This war memorial, located in Stanley Park, was dedicated on 2 April 1920 to honour the Japanese Canadians who fought in the First World War. Ironically, after the war was over, some of these war heroes were treated as enemy aliens, their land was taken away, and they were sent to camps or to Japan. One veteran, Zennosuke Inouye, after writing 80 letters, successfully had his land returned to him in 1949. A smaller plaque, attached later, honours those Japanese Canadians who died in the Second World War and the Korean War.





Hiroshima Kenjin kai (gentlemen of the Hiroshima Prefectural Association) pose along Powell Street just east of Gore Avenue before going on a picnic, 1919. On the corner is Taishodo Store, the first two-storey business built by a Japanese Canadian selling gifts and patent medicine. The building on the right shows the considerable architectural modification that had already taken place. The two-storey, shiplap-clad, hipped-roof house has a structure added at the back, a square false front and new storefront.

大正八年六月一日  
不=回積急急協外 恒有以在 支氣 運 勤 守

PHOTO BY  
SHOKICHI AKATSUKA



Ochigo san (Buddhist formal dress for celebrations) in front of Yoshino's restaurant at the 300 block Alexander Street, 1916. Japanese Canadian communities all over BC participated in local parades such as this Dominion Day parade in Vancouver, often entering floats. Front row from right: Miss Kumano, Tatsuke (Kato) Masuda, fifth over: Shizuko (Sato) Fune.

Japan would plan an attack on BC's shores, it was Prime Minister Mackenzie King who declared war on Japan. In an already anti-Asian climate, Japanese Canadians in British Columbia found themselves at the mercy of a long history of racism, fear, and political decisions that violated human rights. Anxious to prove loyalty to Canada, many Nisei offered to sign up to fight for their country. They were refused.

Using the powers given to the Cabinet under provisions of the War Measures Act (1914), King removed 22,000

Japanese Canadians from the 100-mile coastal security zone, in his words "for their own safety." The BC Security Commission under Chairman Austin C. Taylor, a business leader, was to oversee the removal of the Japanese from the coast, relocate them in camps, and act as the authoritative body to enforce the numerous Orders-in-Council. One of the camps, Tashme, was named after Taylor, Shiras and Mead, taking the first two letters of their last names. John Shirras was the Assistant Commissioner of the BC Police, and F. J. Mead was the Assistant Commissioner of the RCMP.

As the evacuees were allowed to take only few possessions with them, their homes were turned over to the Custodian of Enemy Property and later sold, as legislated by Order-in-Council. Nihonmachi and the vibrant community of Japanese disappeared in the space of months. Many of the already aged buildings in Nihonmachi fell into disrepair and were sold for less than fair market value, while the Japanese Canadians were in the camps.

The Japanese Canadians were not allowed back to the coast during the war years, and due to a new act in 1946, entitled "National Emergency Transitional Powers Act," they were kept away from the coast until 1949. This

act was a way to disperse the Japanese community and coerce some 4,000 to go to Japan (50% of those had never been to Japan and were born in Canada). Half of the remaining 17,000 were dispersed across the provinces of Canada, and the rest slowly moved to communities in BC, but very few returned to the Powell Street area. In the 1950s a few Japanese stores sprung up, some restaurants, and a gambling club at the Lion Hotel on Powell Street. In 1953 half of the former Japanese language school and hall was returned to its owners, the only example of a confiscated property returned in Nihonmachi. During the war, the Canadian Army had used half the building for administration

POWELL STREET UNITED CHURCH KINDERGARTEN GRADUATION, 29 JANUARY 1932. Many Japanese immigrants attended the Methodist Church, which amalgamated with the Presbyterians to become the United Church in 1925. The early Methodist ministry helped the residents of Powell Street learn English and assimilate into Canadian society, set up a Kindergarten in 1901, and organize a free medical clinic in 1925. The ministry also assisted in the Japanese in the camps throughout the internment period.



and sold the other half for expenses. A year later the Buddhist church bought the United Church building on the corner of Jackson Avenue and Powell Street; both organizations exist today as stalwarts of Japanese culture. Tonari Gumi, a volunteer organization that in the early days provided assistance for seniors and new immigrants, was established in the 1970s. Eventually the volunteers set up Sakura So, a seniors' residence on Powell Street. The group supported a long-term-care facility nearby with culture and lunch programs that served as a drop-in centre for those in need.

Nineteen seventy-seven was a big revival year for the area: youthful activists masterminded a centennial celebration that acknowledged the immigrant experience

and the history of Nihonmachi with a book and touring exhibition entitled "A Dream of Riches." Currently the exhibition and Nihonmachi history are housed in the Japanese Canadian National Museum in Burnaby. The annual Powell Street festival is held at Oppenheimer Park each August. This popular event presents Japanese cultural events, food, arts and crafts, a sumo tournament, Powell Street walking tours, and other displays from supporting organizations. In honour of the legendary Hall of Famers, the Asahi baseball team plays a memorial game at Oppenheimer Park each year.

HASTINGS PARK CLEARING STATION 1942. Building K, formerly the Forum, was turned into the Japanese men's dormitory. The Park was taken over by the BC Security Commission to temporarily house and disperse the Japanese Canadians in the early months of 1942. This photo was taken by Leonard Frank, a well-known Vancouver commercial photographer who was hired by the BC Security Commission to document the clearing station and the camps.





# Japantown

- 1 Ballantyne Pier
- 2 Japanese Language School
- 3 Maikawa Department Store
- 4 Uchida Building
- 5 Fuji Chop Suey
- 6 St. James Anglican Church
- 7 Tamura's New World Hotel
- 8 Sisters of Attonement Mission
- 9 Oppenheimer Park
- 10 Buddhist Church
- 10 Vancouver Police Department