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JAPANESE.

NOTES & MEMORIES OF THE COMING OF THE JAPANESE TO THE
SLOCAN LAKE COUNTRY 1942. THEIR RECEPTION BY THE INHABITANTS;
THEIR REACTIONS, ETC.

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New Denver
March 28th 44

Notes and memories of the coming of the Japanese to the Slocan Lake
Country 1942 Their reception by the inhabitants; their reactions etc.

In the summer of 1942 it was apparent that feeling against The Japanese who were living in the coastal sections of B.C. was growing very strong and that both The Dominion and Provincial Governments would have to take some really drastic action to relieve the public nervousness. There has been strong anti Asiatic feeling for very many years all up and down the Western Coast of this continent; manifested in most unjust laws and often in acts of violence and in the segregation of the Asiatic populations in fairly distinct quarters in our cities. Also on one historic occasion, the forcible prevention of a shipload of Hindoos from landing at Vancouver.

All Asiatics had been included in this strong prejudice which resulted from the fear of cheap labour. The White workingman felt that these experts in the art of frugal living, would be used to undermine his standards. The small business man also became aware of "the Yellow Peril" as all sorts of small shops and trades were opened with Asiatic ownership. When The Japanese attacked their gigantic neighbour, public opinion swung stringly against them and The Chinese by their heroic resistance came into public favour, whilst all the fury was directed against The Japanese. Pearl Harbour set all these smouldering passions ablaze and The Japanese with their fishing boats were certainly in a position to do very great harm. Public opinion had much more ground than usual to support it. The danger seemed very great and very, very near, to those who were living at *The Coast*. *If was* ~~The~~ ~~was~~ ~~decided~~ to move all The Japanese to some places in The Interior where they could be watched and guarded. (We must remember that there was the danger of mob violence at The Coast against isolated Japanese) there were cases already, where Japs were attacked and their assailants had strong public support.)

A commission was sent out by The Dominion Government to spy out the land and decide upon the best places to move the 23000 Japanese too. The Japanese must not be moved to any place within easy reach of any vital industry or public utility; where they might sabotage machinery, railroad bridges, or water mains. Old buildings if in decent repair would be a very great help, for lumber was extremely scarce. Deserted mining towns evidently were the most hopeful solution and The Slocan District had the most to offer. It was on a branch railroad. Some of its towns had a number of empty buildings in fair condition and provided with water and electric light, telephone connections etc. Also, most important, extensive forests quite handy.

The Commissioners came with very considerable powers. They wisely consulted the local authorities and leading citizens, but they let it be known that they had to act promptly and that no private interest could prevail against their decisions, though there could be appeals to the courts against their ~~decisions~~ rulings.

We at New Denver were astonished to hear that they had decided to place a large number of Japanese in Sandon. Sandon lies in a deep gorge and the possibility of gardening there is very small; however there were a number of good buildings in fair repair and the need for haste was great. Then Kaslo was selected. It also had many empty buildings, with a good deal of fine land around it and a grand situation by The Kootenay Lake.

Amongst The New Denverites there was considerable difference of opinion and much hot discussion; but even those who felt disposed to oppose their coming into the town on personal grounds, began to see that the poor Japs had to go somewhere, and that they had better surrender their own prejudices and make a virtue of necessity. So The City fathers and The Board of Trade, signified their willingness to receive these unfortunate outcasts. Dr. Francis should be given credit for bringing about this state of public opinion; He was appointed Medical officer to The Commission with The Japanese doctors under him. He had very big plans for building a great sanitarium at New Denver. This building was to be used for a convalescent home and hospital for The Japanese who are suffering from T.B. and after The Japanese left for wounded soldiers.

Silverton refused to admit The Japanese. The big concentrator of the Mammoth Mine is right in town and the management were afraid of sabotage. Slocan City agreed to admit them and they were allowed down The Slocan Valley as far as Appledale. It was decided that no Japanese were to be allowed to use boats on The Slocan Lake, or to fish in the lake or creek. This seems a very harsh and unnecessary provision and one that in the interests of both The Japanese and The Whites should be abolished and The Japs should be encouraged to fish, under proper supervision, especially for the coarse fish which are a great nuisance.

The Security Commission was naturally in the utmost hurry to get the Japanese moved out of Vancouver, where conditions were very bad, and up to their new homes. It was a gigantic task; from what we were able to see, they accomplished it with great credit and humanity to The Japanese.

I believe that about 40 carpenters (Japanese under White foremen) were sent into Sandon and Kaslo. There were many empty houses in both these towns and therefore there was less preparation required to make them ready. Very soon some Japanese began to arrive and take up residence. It was arranged to send the R.C.s mostly to Grand Forks. The Anglicans to Slocan, The Buddhists mostly to Sandon, The United Church to New Denver. These plans were only partly fulfilled.

Very soon other carpenters arrived at Slocan, closely followed by Residents; almost too closely, for there was terrible overcrowding for a time. There was no sudden influx of Japanese at New Denver, such as took place at Kaslo. One or two Japs were observed first as they passed between Slocan City and Sandon. Then one or two came down for treatment at The Slocan Community Hospital, New Denver, and we began to grow accustomed to seeing an occasional Japanese. Doctor Francis hired an old fisherman to work in his large garden, we all admired his industry and the fine care that he took of the garden etc. He was an Anglican.

It was not until September that The Commission were able to start building in New Denver in earnest. Japanese nurses were now put on at The Hospital and they made a most excellent impression with the patients, and all with whom they have come in contact. I think that the nurses have done very much to heal both the sore bodies and the sore and bitter feelings between The Whites and The Japanese, none could help liking them. The Security Commission had taken The Bank of Montreal Building for their main office in these parts. The Bank reserved a small part of the office for its very reduced service. (two days a week) After a time the commission added on a building for extra office room.

We had a very good skating rink at New Denver. It had an iron roof and was in good condition. The Commission rented this and large numbers of Japanese lived in it at first. The Commission also divided off part for a carpenter shop and installed up to date carpentry machinery. The framing work for the new houses was done here and soon the neat little Japanese houses began to go up as if by magic. They were very simple huts, all the same breadth, but some had two, some three rooms for the larger families. Overcrowding was never quite so bad up here as at Slocan City but it was bad enough. The lumber used was absolutely green, right from the trees to the mill and right from the mills to the buildings. Mostly hemlock shiplap, for the siding and fairly good flooring. Felt roofing. Directly the Japs moved in and fires were lit, the lumber started to shrink and sweat, making the walls very wet and draughty. Conditions were awful for a time, in spite of the efforts of The Japs to stop the chinks, as there was so little material to be got. These conditions were no ones fault, as nothing better was available. To make things worse dry wood was very scarce. The winter was the hardest that we have ever experienced in The Slocan. We felt that our new neighbours deserved great credit for the plucky and cheerful way in which they met their hardships.

The fire wood situation was very bad but might have been very much worse. A forest fire had swept through the valley around Summit Lake, destroying very much fine timber, about ten years previously. This dead timber was still lying about or standing. The fir and hemlock was rotten but the cedar and ~~hemlock~~ were still sound, and dry. Numbers of Japanese were set to work to get out this timber and this saved the day. An enormous lot of timber was taken out and hauled by truck, even as far as Sandon, from near Summit Lake. Other gangs of Japs were also sent into the forests and they recovered much fallen cedar and this incidentally helped clear up the forest. In 43 very large logging operations were started in the heavy green timber just above the end of Slocan Lake. The most up to date methods were employed and a tremendous lot of firewood was shipped to Vancouver by rail and the inferior wood sent to the Japanese camps around here by truck. A small ~~logging camp~~ saw mill at Roseberry was also run to use up the best logs. Most of the enormous trees taken out had been left far too long and were rotten and hollow, so that the proportion fit for lumber was very small.

Boatbuilding as a possible industry for the Japanese was suggested. There were many skillful boat builders amongst them. I think that difficulties of transportation prevented this from being carried out.

The Japanese have been allowed to move about freely within certain defined limits. Police guards were placed at the North and the South ends of the district and a notice was posted on the road between New Denver and Silverton, warning The Japanese that they must not enter Silverton. This notice has been ignored of late and a good many Japanese walk into Silverton to sample the goods and prices at the stores there. It should be noted that the Silverton Miners Union who were organising sports for the First of July

wrote to The Security Commission for leave for two Japanese base-ball teams to play a match on the Silverton grounds. The Security Commission gave consent however so much bitterness developed amidst the people of Silverton on the question, that it was thought best to abandon the idea

Amongst The Japanese are a number of first class base ball players. Men who have been in the big teams at The Coast. There are no teams of White players left here, who could compete with them. They have a small League amongst themselves and tremendously keen competition. Old players say that they play the best base ball ever seen in these parts. Of course they have plenty of time and opportunity for practise. Their hours of work are short and they are taken to and from work in trucks; they have few distractions and they are very keen sportsmen and set out to enjoy their games to the limit making all sorts of fun "kidding each other" They take defeat very good naturedly and there is little disputing the umpire.

Of course they are splendid swimmers and they have had glorious times in our lovely lake. It is a great sight to see them bathing, a happy light-hearted crowd. They certainly appreciate the magnificent scenery of this country and the climate, even if it has played them some dirty tricks. Many have said that they would like to settle down here, if only there was some decent work to be done. The government policy seems to be to scatter them as much as possible, throughout Eastern Canada, and a number have gone East already. Some opposition to them is arising in The East just at present and very few are going there ~~at present~~. It would be good for them to be more scattered, both for their own sakes and for that of all Canada, but for my part I should be very sorry indeed to see them all leave this part of the country. May we long continue to live together as neighbours and friends, helping each other as God gives us opportunity and the good sense to take advantage of each others skills and experience.

A Japanese lady, Miss Suzuki has opened a dressmaking establishment in New Denver and she employs about girls. This little plant has been running successfully (apparently) for several months. This is the first industry to be established by The Japanese, may many others follow her excellent lead. Some very clever wood carving has also been done at Kaslo, where they specialise in making children's toys. Some people are looking for suitable clays for pottery. Catching out the coarse fish from all these inland lakes and rivers and converting the fish into food for human beings, poultry, minks, foxes, etc. and the refuse into the much needed manure for our extensive light bench lands, seems to me the most sensible and appropriate opening for these wonderful fishermen and fish consumers. It will be a great reproach to ourselves if we fail to turn these very gifted and energetic people into very important ingredients of our future Canada.

Rumours of pilfering from shops and other crimes have been circulated from time to time. The police have given them a most excellent record. I have had very good opportunity to judge their conduct as they live and work all around me. I have found them remarkably honest and the children have a wonderful respect for other peoples property. The Japanese women are extremely good mothers, and their children very well behaved both in play and in school. The men can turn very sulky and are real artists in wasting time if they get in an ugly mood. They were looking for trouble and making lots of it for the Commission and others. They wasted lots of gasoline and were very careless of the fine trucks and equipment. Treat them fairly and respect them and they respond most readily is the general verdict around here. Let us give them a fair chance.

The teachers of the High Schools report. The church building of The United Church New Denver has been used constantly (overcrowded usually) by the scholars. Remarkably little damage has been done. They use The church organ and the typewriters and the library books freely after school, whilst under no supervision; No damage has resulted.

Miss Lediard has already sent in a report of the teaching and High School work. I can bear witness to the splendid work done by all the teachers and to the very great assistance that they have been to The White congregation. They have also contrived, with willing Japanese help, to considerably improve the building. Next year they anticipate that the number of Japanese scholars will increase from fifty to seventy. We hope to get the use of another building to accommodate this number.

J. C. Harris