

IMAGES OF INTERNMENT: PAINTINGS BY DR. HENRY SHIMIZU

February 19 – December 19, 2014



125th Anniversary
Consulate General of Japan
Vancouver

Visit our Event Listings:
www.vancouver.ca.emb-japan.go.jp

Series 1 - Exile from the West Coast

Series 2 - New Denver

Series 3 - New Experiences and Activities

Series 4 - Lifestyle in the Camp

Series 5 - Boys and Sports

Series 6 - Girls, and Farewell

February 19 - April 11

April 14 - May 30

June 2 - July 18

July 21 - September 5

September 8 - October 24

October 27 - December 19

“Images of Internment” are a series of oil paintings by Dr. Henry Shimizu, which recall the activities of and lifestyle of the internees in the New Denver Japanese Internment Camp, during World War II.

Dr. Shimizu is a Member of the Order of Canada, served as Chair of the Japanese Canadian Redress Foundation and was instrumental in creating the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre in New Denver. His family was removed from the B.C. Coast to the New Denver Japanese Internment Camp in 1942, when he was a 13-year old teenager.

Exile from the West Coast (Series 1)

1. Enemy Alien: Invoking the slogan of “National Security,” the Provincial Government of B.C. in collusion with the Federal Government of Canada, branded all Canadian Citizens with Japanese ancestry as “Enemy Aliens.” Under this designation, all persons of Japanese ancestry could be justifiably sent to internment camps legally and without recourse.

The intention was to eradicate the Japanese presence along the west coast of British Columbia. The War Measures Act and Orders in Council were the legalese used to justify the eradication and to implement the “ethnic cleansing.”

2. Exile: Leaving Prince Rupert: In February 1942, notices went up in public areas, as well as in newspapers, that people of Japanese ancestry would be prohibited from the West Coast of B.C. to 100 miles inland.

On March 23, 1942, after being uprooted and take to the station, a train with more than 600 people left Prince Rupert bound for Vancouver. Several of my Grade 7 classmates, as well as my teacher, came down to see us off. It was a sad time for many, since all of our homes and possession were left behind. We were housed in Hastings Park Exhibition ground (which was fenced), until we were moved to the interior of B.C. in September of that year.

3. New Denver: Just south of the village of New Denver, across a wooden bridge over Carpenter Creek, is an area of land jutting out from the lakeshore. The site of an old orchard, this protruding area was the site of the New Denver Internment Camp.

When my family arrived from the West Coast, in the fall of 1942, temporary “shiplap” houses were under construction. Eventually, over 200 such houses criss-crossed the “orchard.”

Over the next four years, a strong sense of community developed among the internees. Paradoxically, we became stronger Canadians, perhaps contrary to the wishes of the racist B.C. politicians who confiscated our property and dispossessed us of our citizenship.

4. Shiplap Houses: The skating rink doubled as a carpentry shop where the walls and joists of the many shiplap houses were pre-fabricated.

Three sizes of houses were built – small (16 x 16 ft.), large (16 x 24 ft.), and extra-large (16 x 28 ft.). I lived in an extra-large house which my family shared with the Nishikaze family for a total of 12 inhabitants.

5. Main Street – The “Orchard:” Main Street ran east and west. Other streets fanned north and south with still others running along the lakeshore. A T-bar with red fire buckets stood in front of every few houses; behind them stood an outhouse.

The buckets didn’t help much when flames devoured one of the houses. The fire was started by an explosion – apparently a distillery under the floor had exploded!

Additions for Opening Night:

6. “Mizu Kumi” (Carrying Water): Most of the shiplap houses in the internment camps were built and occupied by the end of 1942. After shelter and heat, the next priorities were water, toilets and garbage. These facilities were built on a communal basis as the houses were completed.

Once the houses were peopled, additions for bedrooms, storage, woodshed, outdoor laundry and clothes lines were attached. In-house water and electricity had to wait until the following year. Within two years, the shiplap houses became simple but comfortable homes.

7. French Cooking Lesson: The Nuns of the Order of Notre Dame des Anges came to New Denver and established a high school (1943) for the young Japanese-Canadians of the Internment Camp. In due time, they also began activities that would enhance the daily lives of the internees. Some of these undertakings, although laudable, were naïve and bizarre.

This painting shows the ladies of the Internment Camp, dressed in their finest clothes and furs, listening to a Nun discussing the art of cooking French desserts.

In reality, there was a shortage of required ingredients and desserts were not a big thing in our Japanese meals. Nevertheless, the nuns continually tried their best, in their extraordinary ways, to bring some sense of purpose in the lives of the Japanese-Canadian in the Internment Camps.

8. Hockey: Believe it or not, Saturday night during the winters in the 1940’s found us gathered around illegal radio listening to the raspy pitch of none other than Foster Hewitt! Fan support rallied around the Leafs, although Terry H. worshipped Les Canadiens (He even sported a Montreal jersey as he listened to the radio).

The pond on Harris Ranch was our hockey rink, the scene of many pick-up scrums and organized games. Amazing that humble beginnings such as these would enable Japanese Canadians to participate in Olympic Gold in both men’s (Paul Kariya) and women’s (Vicki Sunohara) hockey at Salt Lake City in 2002!

9. Kool Kats: Carpenter Creek ran between the “Orchard” and the Village of New Denver. A wooden bridge spanned the creek.

The “Kool” guys on the bridge sporting draped pants, gold chains and “pork pie” hats hoped their “Zoot Suiter” look impressed the girls. As teenagers, they were as Canadian as “real” Canadians.

10. Baseball: Playing “catch was a popular summer activity accompanied by listening to the World Series in the fall.

The arrival of a former semi-pro Asahi player from Powell Street helped us to organize baseball teams among high school students and young adults.

The Senior New Denver team played against teams from other camps. The level of play was more than entertaining. The New Denver senior team played the “famous” Trail Smoke Eaters and though they lost, they lost by only one run!

11. Bon Odori: The Bon Odori is a Buddhist commemoration of ancestors through the joy of dancing (“odori”). By 1943, internees adorned in colorful silk kimonos performed in the Orchard.

Eva, my younger sister, was an exceptional dancer. During the last year of internment, she danced at the Bon Odori held on the lawn of the “San” wearing a kimono my mother had carefully saved during the chaos of expulsion from Prince Rupert.

This last Bon Odori was a celebration and a farewell to an episode in our lives that will always live in our memory. The Orchard Internment Camp experience had been both bitter and beautiful.