

Audio Clip 1

Dispossession..... Rationalizing the Indefensible

In the spring of 1942, Japanese Canadians living in Chemainus left with assurance that their property and possessions would be safeguarded by the government.

It was the law....

Officials understood their task to be the preservation of property. And any decision must benefit its owners.

In less than a year all this had been turned upside down.

The law was changed and the forced sale of Japanese Canadian property became the clear policy of the Custodian of Enemy Property....

Why?

The explanations are varied...

none are defensible....

none were designed to consider the interest of Japanese Canadians...

The Custodian of Enemy Property was simply unprepared for the complexity of the task of managing all the properties in its possession. It soon became evident that it was easier to sell the property than manage them properly. This became especially clear as theft and vandalism became common.

In Chemainus, the property and possessions of Japanese Canadians were administered by one part-time volunteer and one provincial police officer, who also had other duties...

How long would the war go on?

It was unclear when Japanese Canadians would be able to return to their homes. Until then, the responsibility for security, and proper

care and maintenance remained with the Custodian. The sale of all property would end the uncertainty and eliminate these future costs...

The full costs of internment had not been thought through. The policy of forced sale was therefore promoted to reduce the expense of supporting the camps.

In short, Japanese Canadians were required to pay for their own internment through the forced sale of their property and possessions...

As early as the fall of 1942 the federal government was concerned about how to reabsorb the surge of returning veterans into the economy at war's end.

One solution advanced was to acquire Japanese Canadian farms and to sell them to returning vets under the Veterans Land Act.

Three rural properties in Chemainus were acquired for this purpose...

Some Japanese Canadian properties were in desirable commercial locations and municipal and business interests lobbied to free-up such properties for civic and private advantage....

And most alarming of all, dispossession was a politically driven means of discouraging the return of Japanese Canadians to the West Coast; there would be nothing to come back to..

Alderman George Buscombe of Vancouver stated this position clearly in September 1942...

"We want all of their property sold We don't want the Japanese to return here after the war."