

Province of B.C.: Its Climate and Resources; with information for emigrants, 1883

These panels honour Japanese Canadians who helped build communities in the Southern Gulf Islands. Their stories of perseverance—amid anti-Asian discrimination, loss of property, and forced removal—and their struggle for justice reveal the unequal foundations on which this country was built.

By the late 1800s, island life revolved around small farming, logging and fishing, and a growing need for labour. Relationships and marriages between settler men and Indigenous women helped connect communities and share resources, while exclusive colonial policies continued to shape land ownership and power.

Early Settlement and the Japanese

A black and white portrait of a man with a full, dark beard and mustache. He is wearing a dark flat cap and a dark, high-collared jacket or coat. The background is a mottled, light-colored studio backdrop. The photograph is mounted on a white card.

Harry Bullock arrived in 1892 from England and became a major landowner, relying on Japanese workers as his primary field hands. J.H. Monk and Alex McLennan also employed Japanese as well as Chinese and White labour to clear and develop their farmland.



Japanese workers pose on the front porch of Bullock's house.

Kinzo Uyehara was one of these bosses. Although few records document the work and contributions of these labour contractors, the census record and quotation below help illustrate Uyehara's role in island life. His son, Sadao, and daughter, Haru, were the first Japanese Canadian babies recorded on Salt Spring Island, born in 1893 and 1898, respectively.

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF CENSUS, 1900

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SCHEDULE I. POPULATION.

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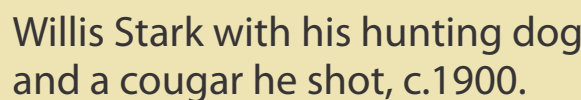
1906 Salish Chiefs begin their journey to petition King Edward VII on the loss of their lands and rights. Photo: City of Vancouver Archives, P41.1



They didn't ask us if they could start dealing with land, with pre-emption or fee simple title. That was a mistake. And just because time has passed doesn't mean it's not a mistake. It's still a mistake until they deal with it. J. SINTEN John Elliott, Knowledge Keeper WSÁNEC Nation

The ground where you are standing was once part of the 200 acres George Richardson claimed in 1859. He came north with other Black settlers from California, invited by Governor James Douglas—himself of mixed race—who offered British protection and equal rights. While some were former slaves or children of slaves, all were free U.S. citizens seeking safety, land, and relief from discriminatory laws. The diverse group of merchants, miners, farmers, and educators settled in the island's north end and Ganges areas, clearing land and building roads still in use.

A Whims family gathering, c.1912.



Maria Mahoi, daughter of William Mahoya, a Native Hawaiian employed by the Hudson's Bay Company and his Indigenous wife, was born in 1855. After the death of William Haumea, Maria inherited his Russell Island property.



A Kanaka wedding at St. Paul's Catholic Church in Fulford, c.1900.

Native Hawaiians, often referred to as Kanakas, were among the earliest non-Indigenous settlers in the Gulf Islands. Some arrived as early as the 1850s after working in whaling and the fur trade for the Hudson's Bay Company. By the 1870s a small but distinct Hawaiian community had formed at the southern end of Salt Spring Island. Children attended the Beaver Point and Isabella Point schools, often travelling by canoe or rowboat.

The lives of single migrant workers, far from home and often labouring in dangerous conditions, were not easy. Records show that several Japanese labourers died in accidents in those early years. In this photo, friends gather at the funeral of one such worker in May, 1902.



Omata (or Omadan) lived and worked at Ruckle Farm. He came to Canada in 1907 at age 20 and may have returned to Japan to marry before bringing his wife back.



Our Japanese friend, Mr. Kinzo, is busy these days converting our Douglas firs into props for Mexican mines, and piles for wharves and bridges in China. There will be a succession of ships coming in to load, and quite a large number of hands, both white men and Japs are at work in the camp.

Kinzo Uyehara is listed with a note in this 1901 Census:
All these Japanese are out cutting mining props but go fishing in the salmon season. Kinzo is the head boss.