

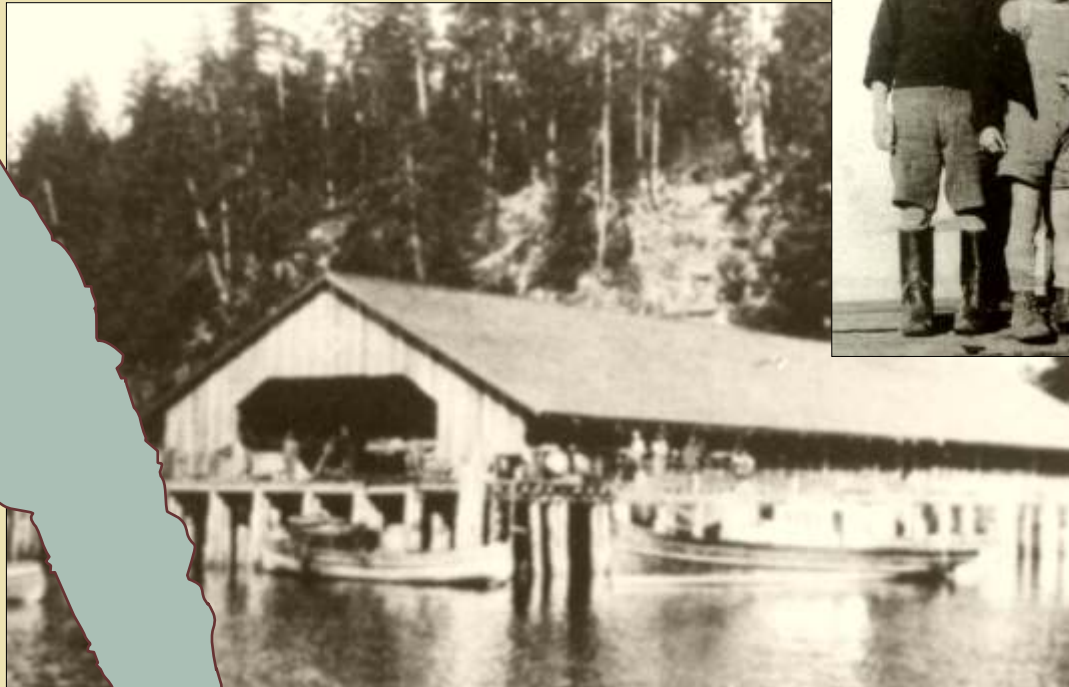
Work and Island Communities

From the early 1900s onward, Japanese immigrants in British Columbia built their lives amid increasing race-based government restrictions. Strict limits were placed on the number of Asian immigrants allowed into Canada, fishing licences were reduced, and employers who hired Asian workers faced penalties. Japanese Canadians were also denied the vote, limiting their participation in political decision-making. These measures shaped where they could work, how they could earn a living, and how securely they could settle.



Japanese Canadian fishing boats docked at Miners Bay, Mayne Island. Crafted by skilled Japanese boat builders, these vessels were known for their quality and were highly sought after on the coast. Photo: Mayne Island Museum 2020.05.001.30

Below: Tabata Saltery, Saltery Bay, Galiano. Photo: Galiano Museum



Above: Gumboot kids of North Galiano, c.1936. Four are from the Ohara family, who later moved to Salt Spring Island. Photo: Galiano Museum

Galiano Island

The salted herring fishery, developed by Japanese immigrants, expanded along the coast in the early 1900s. After fires destroyed salteries near Nanaimo and Newcastle Island, operators relocated south. By the 1920s, six salteries operated on Galiano, exporting herring and roe to Japan, Hong Kong, and China. At Saltery Bay, shoreline complexes included piers, processing sheds, bunkhouses, mess halls, and workshops, employing Japanese, Chinese, Indigenous, and White workers. Charcoal kilns were also built on the island by those from Wakayama Prefecture.

In those days, too much discrimination, all over. In everything: hiring practices, name calling, work, pay.

Ei Kadonaga, born 1908 on Mayne Island. Japanese Canadian Oral History Collection 94174.025, Nikkei National Museum

Within these limitations, many followed a seasonal rhythm. They fished for salmon or worked in canneries along the Fraser River, moving to the Gulf Islands in the off-season to cut cordwood, make charcoal, or labour in logging camps and salteries. As restrictions tightened in the 1920s and 1930s, families sought greater stability and safer communities. Some gradually shifted away from full-time fishing, purchasing or leasing land for farming, poultry raising, and greenhouse production. Others continued seasonal work. Across the Southern Gulf Islands, temporary labour settlements slowly evolved into rooted communities.

Mayne Island

Japanese labourers arrived in the 1890s to cut cordwood and make charcoal during the winter months. Many early settlers came from Agarimichi village in Tottori Prefecture. A saltery at Dinner Bay provided employment for many locals and Japanese migrant workers. As fishing became more restricted, families turned increasingly to farming and poultry operations. Greenhouse tomato production expanded, and produce was marketed under the 'Island Brand' name. By 1941, people of Japanese ancestry made up roughly one-third of Mayne's population.



Mayne Island-born Masao Adachi, left, with a group of friends, c.1930s. Photo: Irene Hawes, Nikkei National Museum



In the face of their impending removal, Japanese Canadian tomato growers still planted their seedlings as usual. Kumazo Nagata, secretary of the Active Pass Growers Association, requested that non-Japanese workers be allowed to tend the greenhouses so the crop—and the workers' income—would not be lost.

Photo: Greenhouses near Miner's Bay BC Archives D-97434

APGA packing label, courtesy Mayne Island Museum 2013.2.257



British Columbia Fish Salteries, Ltd. built by the Matsuyama Company. Photo: Pender Island Museum

Pender Island

At Hayashi Cove in Otter Bay, Japanese loggers cut cordwood for mainland canneries as early as the 1890s. In 1929, a large herring saltery was built there. Japanese carpenters constructed docks and buildings, including an 800-foot dock supported by 400 pilings. Fishermen used tow boats and scout boats to locate herring.

Japanese and White fishermen worked together but lived in separate quarters. The saltery changed hands following the uprooting of Japanese Canadians in 1942.



Tumbo and Saturna Islands

On Tumbo Island, a small coal prospecting venture in the early 1900s employed about ten Japanese labourers before flooding forced abandonment. On Saturna Island, charcoal kilns remain as evidence of small-scale industrial activity.



Above: Masuo Mikado and workmates falling timber in Paldi, near Duncan on Vancouver Island. Photo: Mikado Family Collection



Right: Loading herring into the pen at Otter Bay. Photo: Pender Island Museum



White British Columbia

Anti-Japanese rhetoric was widespread in B.C. politics from the early 1900s onward. Macgregor Macintosh, MLA for The Islands (1931-33, 1937-41), campaigned for the removal of all Japanese Canadians from the coast, calling them a threat to White men's jobs. Speaking at a 1938 meeting in Ganges, MacIntosh drew upon racist tropes, claiming Japanese homes were dirty. Dr. Raymond Rush challenged him, inviting him to visit the Okano home, but MacIntosh refused.

Above: Liberal Party advertisement in The Vancouver Sunday Sun, Dec. 4, 1921.

What is the Remedy?

Each Liberal Candidate has pledged himself to White British Columbia. Sitting on the Government Bench, the Liberal Candidate has pledged himself to White British Columbia.