

Studies in Documents

The Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property: An Overview of the Office and its Records, 1920-1952

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This study examines the now obscure Canadian government agency known as the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property, which was established to administer claims and reparations arising from the First World War. The article concentrates on the administrative evolution of the office from its beginnings in 1920 through its expansion during the Second World War and on the nature of records created by the office (which are now in Record Group (RG) 117, Records of the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property, in the custody of the Federal Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada). Attached to the Secretary of State's department for many years, the custodian's employees worked in relative anonymity. The office was seldom even mentioned in the secretary's annual report. Annual reports are often extremely useful in tracing the development of a government body, but the custodian's office, unlike larger and more stable government departments, never published them. Hence, the sources for the study of the office are almost exclusively in RG 117.

The outbreak of World War I brought to a halt normal commercial relations with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In fact the Trading with the Enemy Acts of 1914 and 1915 forbade payment of money to persons or organizations residing in enemy countries and appointed a custodian for England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland "for the purpose of receiving, holding, preserving, and dealing with such property as may be paid to or vested in him in pursuance of this Act."¹ Although these were British statutes, the Canadian government confirmed the British government's actions through the War Measures Act of 1914 and an order-in-council.² Canadian firms which imported German goods could not make payments to German companies after August 1914. German citizens and corporations which had invested money in Canadian businesses could not receive the dividends they would normally be entitled to. The same stipulations applied to those residing in Austria-Hungary. Whenever doubts as to the meaning of these statutes

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1 *Statutes of Canada*, 15 Geo. V, 1914, c. 12; 5-6 Geo. V, 1915, c. 79.

2 PC 2724, 30 October 1914 cited in Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Records of the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property, RG 117, vol. 36, file 483A, McPherson Report, May 1938.

arose, business and law firms sought clarification from the Secretary of State.³ Correspondence from Colonial Secretary Bonar Law to the Governor General also provided further interpretations of British policy.⁴ In Britain, enemy firms were either liquidated by the custodian or the enemy interest sold to British subjects with the proceeds of the sale being received by the custodian.⁵

In 1916 the Canadian government passed the Consolidated Orders Respecting Trading with the Enemy which further delineated the regulations applicable in Canada. Any business deemed "enemy" could have its affairs wound up or liquidated by the Secretary of State. The Minister of Finance and Receiver General became the custodian who was empowered "to receive, hold, preserve and deal with such property as may be paid to or vested in him."⁶ Payments on dividends owing to enemies were made to the custodian through the banks designated by him. The courts were empowered to vest enemy property in the custodian. Moreover the custodian was to keep a record of "(a) debts ... due to persons resident or being within Canada, from persons residing or being in enemy countries; (b) other property in enemy countries (including securities) belonging to persons residing or being in Canada."⁷ The Minister of Finance and the Secretary of State shared responsibilities for administering the Consolidated Orders from 1916 to 1919. The finance minister as custodian received the payments while the Secretary of State investigated enemy trading and enemy property. As the war drew to a close the Canadian government felt that the divided administration of the orders had hindered production of a "statement of enemy indebtedness to and claims against Canadians" which the British Enemy Debts Committee had asked for. The government wished to know what arrangements should be introduced for the "liquidation of the commercial, banking and other financial transactions between Canadian and enemy persons" as well as the necessary steps to investigate "claims owing by alien enemies to Canadians and of alien enemy claims against Canadians."⁸

As a result of the Canadian Enemy Debts Committee's recommendations and the Treaties of Peace Act, 1919, the Canadian government approved The Treaty of Peace (Germany) Order in 1920 which established the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property or a Clearing House, as it was originally named, under the authority of the Secretary of State as the sole custodian. In addition, the order detailed obligations for debts; property rights and interests; contracts; and industrial property under Articles 296, 297, and 298 of the Treaty of Versailles.⁹ Creditors in Canada had six months to notify the office of their claim if they had not already done so. Every debtor had three months to pay the custodian the amount owing plus interest. The Canadian office had to notify the German Clearing Office of all enemy debts through the Central Clearing Office in London, a British government department established to administer payments of debts and claims to Germany and Austria-Hungary on behalf of Britain and her dominions. Moreover "all property, rights and interests in Canada belonging on the tenth day of

3 PAC, Records of the Secretary of State, RG 6, H3, vol. 793, file 2165B, information from the U.K., n.d.

4 RG 6, H3, vol. 791, file 2165, pt. 2, Correspondence, 1914-15; vol. 792, file 2165, pt. 4, Correspondence, Nov.-Dec. 1914; and vol. 792, file 2165, pt. 5, Correspondence, 1914.

5 *Ibid.*, vol. 795, file 2165G, Trading with the Enemy — Information from the U.K., n.d.

6 PAC, Records of the Privy Council Office, RG 2, PC 1023, 2 May 1916.

7 *Ibid.*

8 RG 2, PC 2785, 11 November 1918.

9 RG 2, PC 755, 14 April 1920.

January 1920 to enemies, or theretofore belonging to enemies and in the possession or control of the Custodian at the date of this Order shall belong to Canada and are hereby vested in the Custodian."¹⁰

The custodian's office opened on 1 April 1920. Correspondence and documents previously held by the Department of Finance were transferred to the new office.¹¹ Later the custodian opened a branch of the clearing office in London, England in order to liaise with the Central Clearing House and to examine the securities relating to Canada held by the British Public Trustee. The clearing office in London dealt with claims for debts owed by German nationals to Canadians and German claims for debts owed by Canadians. The custodian's office was responsible for claims against Germany including the sequestered property of Canadians in that country; proceeds stemming from the liquidation of German and other property in Canada; real property in Canada; securities under the control of the custodian, the English Public Trustee, or the American Alien Property Custodian; release of property vested in the custodian; and German property reported to the custodian between 1916 and 1919 plus property "of very great value" vested in the custodian by the provincial courts.¹²

When the custodian's office opened, the staff consisted of seven individuals. By the end of 1920, it had increased to sixteen; by 1921, twenty-four.¹³ While the Secretary of State was the custodian, the Under-Secretary of State, Thomas Mulvey, shouldered most of the responsibility as deputy custodian. He, in turn, was assisted by Major H. Spencer Ralph; A.H. Mathieu acted as the accountant. The London office employed Miss L. Secchi (as she is always referred to), a stenographer who had worked for the Canadian Armed Forces during 1916-20. Her exact title is unclear, but from the nature of her correspondence she acted in an administrative capacity; by 1931, she was the sole representative of the custodian in England.¹⁴ The custodian also utilized the services of several individuals who worked in the Public Trustee's Office on behalf of Canada.¹⁵

The work carried out by the custodian's staff was both financial and clerical in nature, as reflected in the administrative division of the office. The Claims Section, the Accounts Section as well as the Property, Rights and Interests Section formed its components. Three filing systems were implemented: one was for the operations of the Clearing House; the second concerned reparations; and the third contained files dealing with property, rights, and interests. In addition, registers, account books, and ledgers were kept.¹⁶ Staff registered and carefully checked all Canadian claims before sending them to the German Clearing Office via London. Sometimes the claims were sent back to the applicant because of insufficient information. When claims from German nationals began to arrive at the custodian's office, it was soon apparent that many Canadian debtors had never reported their indebtedness to the custodian in accordance with the Consolidated Orders of 1916. The volume of work to investigate and settle these debts was considerable.

10 *Ibid.*

11 RG 117, vol. 17, file 175, Alien Property Custodian, United States — Correspondence, Lists and Legal Documents, 1921-50 and vol. 40, file 525, Staff List, 1915-21.

12 *Ibid.*, vol. 18, file 175.

13 *Ibid.*, vol. 40, file 525.

14 *Ibid.*, vol. 10, file 125, Office of the Custodian and the Clearing Office, London, England — Correspondence of Miss L. Secchi, Canadian Representative, 1930-39.

15 *Ibid.*, vol. 7, file 55B, Canadian Clearing Office (London, England) — Correspondence with the Custodian, 1926-31.

16 *Ibid.*, vol. 17, file 175.

When the debts were verified, the Central Clearing House in London was notified and in turn Germany received credit for that amount. At the end of each month, the British office compiled the *Monthly Account* which showed the amount of debts owed by German nationals to Britain and her dominions as well as amounts owed by them to German nationals. If the balance favoured the British Clearing Office, Germany was required to pay that sum in cash. If the balance favoured Germany, then Germany received no cash payment, but a credit on the next month's account.¹⁷

Under article 297 of the Treaty of Versailles (1919) Canada was entitled to keep and liquidate any German property in Canada. The German government was supposed to compensate its citizens for any such loss of property. Germans also had to surrender their securities, certificates, and shares to the custodian in Canada.¹⁸ By 1924 the custodian held over \$490,000 worth of enemy property in Canada and \$7.3 million in enemy-owned securities. Moreover, the Public Trustee in England held \$5.5 million and the Alien Property Custodian in the United States held \$1.4 million in enemy-owned Canadian securities. Once the certificates were received, they were sold by the custodian to Canadian interests.¹⁹ The majority of the securities handled by the custodian were those issued by the Canadian Pacific Railway.²⁰ If the enemy property in Canada was also partly owned by allied or neutral interests, the owners claimed and received compensation according to the amount owed.²¹ The proceeds of the sold shares were earmarked for reparations by which compensation for losses was later paid to Canadians. By 1930 Canada and Germany reached an agreement in which Canada agreed to return all unliquidated property to Germany. All unsold bonds, debentures, shares, and other securities owned by Germans but now under the control of the custodian were given back to the Foreign Office of the German Reich.²² Once that was accomplished, the custodian's work on claims decreased and became preoccupied with reparations.

According to the Treaty of Versailles, Germany owed the Allied Nations the astronomical sum of 132 billion gold marks in reparations. Subsequently a conference between representatives of the British Treasury and the Dominions fixed Canada's share of reparations at \$300 million. Because of Germany's inability to pay all the reparations, the British Reparations Committee produced the Dawes Report in 1925 which did not fix amounts payable by Germany, but phased in yearly payments.²³ The Young Plan introduced further modifications to reparations owed by Germany in 1930.

In Canada, the government appointed a Royal Commission on Reparations headed by Errol McDougall to investigate and recommend on claims for reparations. He held hearings across Canada and in three American cities and reported twice in 1932. The claims originated from military personnel and civilians who had suffered losses during the First World War. Many of the cases came from Canadian prisoners-of-war who sustained injuries as a result of forced labour in salt and coal mines in Germany. Non-military cases

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, file 40, Memorandum prepared by Thomas Mulvey re: the Dawes Report on Reparations and How It relates to Canada and Canadian Interests, 1924.

19 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, file 30, Tenders, 1924-29.

20 *Ibid.*, vol. 17, file 182, Custodian — General Correspondence, 1921.

21 *Ibid.*, vol. 19, file 206, Memoranda re: Property Situated in Canada Incorporated under Laws of Allied or Neutral Country and Either Wholly or Partially Owned or Controlled by the Enemy, 1914-18, 1947.

22 *Ibid.*, vol. 10, file 125, Correspondence — Miss Secchi, 1930-39.

23 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, file 40.

dealt with losses of personal effects as well as some personal injuries.²⁴ Of the 1,277 cases heard, 660 claims were disallowed and 456 individuals were awarded over \$1.123 million in one-time payments. The custodian's office was responsible for paying and recording the amounts of the awards.

In 1932 another kind of award was also sanctioned by the Canadian government for which the custodian's office paid out the money. During 1920-21 a number of claims had been received from Armenians in Canada. Under the Treaty of Lausanne, 24 July 1923, the Paris Commission was established to assess claims from individuals who suffered losses during the war. The claims from Canadian Armenians were forwarded to the commission but some arrived too late for consideration while others received no compensation for loss of property; a few managed to receive a "solatium" for the loss of wives and children during the war. The McDougall Commission refused the claims because of the lack of proof and because they had already been dealt with by the Paris Commission. The claimants then appealed to the Governor General. As a result the Secretary of State recommended that a "moral" claim for compensation be decreed by Parliament. The Armenians who had filed claims received \$300,000 for loss of property in Armenia as well as for the loss of spouses and children.²⁵

Within the custodian's records are three files on the Armenian claims. Besides the correspondence, memoranda, and reports on how to deal with this question, there are the claims vouchers showing the name, the nature of the claim, and the amount of the award. The receipts, signed sometimes only by an "X," indicate the claimant received his cheque. The place of residence is also indicated on some vouchers. The supporting documentation for the claims is virtually non-existent. For Armenians seeking to document the 1915 massacre in Armenia these files only hint at the loss of lives. They do, however, give some idea of the numbers who immigrated to Canada after the war.

The files regarding the McDougall Commission on Reparations are somewhat more enlightening in regard to the circumstances surrounding each claim. By providing some details on each case, whether it was allowed or disallowed, the claims provide the social historian with insights into the impact of war on the civilian population and provide an indication of deplorable conditions endured by Canadian prisoners-of-war in Germany. These records on compensation have a human aspect which renders them more interesting.

Most of the custodian's records in RG 117 reflect the financial nature of his work. Thirty-seven First World War ledgers record the unliquidated securities given back to Germany under the terms of the 1930 agreement, the CPR shares owned by German citizens, CPR applications for release, debts, claims, real estate, securities transfer, incoming and outgoing securities, securities held by Austrians, and doubtful shares or notes. The files of the custodian contain Vesting Orders, including lists of companies and amounts vested with the custodian; company files on various Canadian firms such as Bell Telephone and the Grand Trunk Railway; case files on individuals owning Canadian securities; ledger sheets showing the names of those holding securities, their address, the amount of the shares, and the balance payable to the custodian; numerous files concerning CPR securities owned by German and Austrian businesses or individuals, reparations, relations with the British and American custodians, and internal office procedure. While

24 *Ibid.*, vol. 13, file 139, Reparations Commission, Further Report, 1932.

25 *Ibid.*, vol. 20, file 229, Armenian Claims — Accounts, 1931-75.

the files indicate Canada's subordinate position in the British Empire, some correspondence illustrates Canada's quest for greater autonomy in handling her relations with other countries. By far most files deal with financial or business matters which an economist with an interest in historical events or a business historian might find useful for gauging the degree of foreign investments, particularly German and Austrian, in Canada.

Since the records for this period comprise only 13.2 metres, the completeness of the custodian's records is doubtful. While the surviving records give a good picture of the office's responsibilities and functions, it appears that some files were probably destroyed in the 1950s. On 30 January 1976 Comptroller E.R. Carr wrote to Senator Ray Perrault: "Files relating to German owned assets, other than those not delivered under the Agreement which were later transferred to the Department of Finance, were screened and destroyed pursuant to TB 463341 of March 5, 1954."²⁶ Obviously documents have been lost with no way of gauging whether they had any historical value. Such a loss could have been prevented had an approved records retention and disposal schedule existed.

As mentioned previously, the work of the custodian and the London office diminished after the agreement with Germany was signed in 1930. Miss Secchi became attached to the High Commissioner's office in 1931 where she continued to look after the custodian's work and to review old cases up to the Second World War. In 1931 she began to ship to Ottawa the Clearing Office records of closed enemy debt files. Throughout the 1930s, records of the Trust files including deliveries, applications for release of CPR shares, reports, files concerning Bulgaria, Hungary, the Alien Property Custodian, debit balances, and internal office files were shipped back to Canada.²⁷ By 1940 the Canadian High Commission handled the custodian's affairs in England with Hume Wrong acting as liaison officer with British authorities.²⁸

As a result of the outbreak of the Second World War, the custodian's work started anew. The authority for his work stemmed from the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1939 which was revised in 1943 and again in 1947.²⁹ The Trading with the Enemy Act not only included Germany and Italy as enemy countries, but expanded the prohibition on trade to include the German-occupied countries of Holland, Belgium, Denmark, and Norway. Records for this aspect of the custodian's work have yet to be transferred to the Public Archives. At present, the ledgers and account books are stored in the Ottawa Federal Records Centre where they are controlled by the Department of Supply and Services. Therefore the next part of this article will not deal with this aspect of the custodian's work, but it will focus on the activities of the Vancouver Office.

In 1941 a new dimension was added to the custodian's work as a result of Japan's entry into the war and the Mackenzie King government's policy towards Japanese Canadians. G.W. McPherson, who had worked for the custodian in the late 1930s, transferred from the British Government Office in New York to Vancouver where he began to organize the Enemy Property Section to handle Japanese, German, and Italian property. Since a

26 *Ibid.*, vol. 32, file 424, Property, Rights and Interest — Sundry Correspondence, July 1931-Feb. 1976.

27 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, file 39, Report and Correspondence between Thomas Mulvey and H. Spencer Ralph While the Latter was Visiting The Canadian Clearing Office in London, England, 1924 and vol. 10, file 125.

28 *Ibid.*, vol. 6, file 36, Office of the Custodian and the Clearing Office (London, England) — Correspondence with the Canadian representative, Miss L. Secchi, 1932-40.

29 *Statutes of Canada*, 11 Geo. VI, 1947, c. 24.

number of Japanese in Canada were not Canadian-born, their property was vested with the custodian.³⁰

The Mackenzie King government began to take steps that would forever change the lives of Japanese Canadians and greatly increase the scope of the custodian's responsibilities and work. The Royal Canadian Navy impounded all fishing vessels owned by Japanese Canadians and towed over one thousand to New Westminster and two hundred to Prince Rupert. A Committee on the Disposal of Japanese Fishing Vessels formed in January 1942 sold many vessels before turning over 238 to the custodian in August.³¹ On 24 February, an order-in-council authorized the removal of all Japanese Canadians, whether born in Japan or in Canada, from the coastal areas of British Columbia.³² The government planned to re-settle these people in camps in the interior of the province. Another order-in-council passed on 4 March established the British Columbia Security Commission to oversee the resettlement and provided for the vesting and control of all property in the protected area in the custodian.³³

The first step in the evacuation process was the registration of over 22,000 Japanese Canadians under the supervision of the B.C. Security Commission. With the assistance of the RCMP, all Japanese Canadians in the Vancouver area went to the force's headquarters on Heather Street. Later registration offices opened in Hastings Park, the exhibition grounds where most Japanese Canadians were housed, and in Fuji Chop Suey Restaurant, now under the custodian's control, on Powell Street. Centres were created in Victoria on Vancouver Island and in Steveston. Once registered for evacuation, the Japanese Canadians were directed to a representative of the custodian who sought from each individual over the age of fifteen a "voluntary" declaration of his financial status. "All essential facts desirable to be known for the purpose of administration" were recorded on a "JP" form, which was later amended to include a clause stating that the "declarant voluntarily turned over to the Custodian all his property as set out in the declaration except fishing vessels, deposits of money, bonds and other securities."³⁴ Those unable to declare their assets at that time later did so by mail or through the establishment of special facilities at such places as Hope, B.C.

The administration of the affairs of over 22,000 people was a tremendous task. The custodian's office first disposed of the remaining fishing boats, which had undergone considerable damage since the Navy had rounded them up. The vessels were sold without the original owners agreeing on the assessed value of their boats.³⁵ Next fishing nets and gear were sold.³⁶ Cars, trucks, cameras, radios, and firearms were also liquidated. During relocation, the Japanese Canadians took only personal belongings they could carry. Most Japanese Canadians could not afford shipping charges for their belongings.³⁷ That left houses with all household furnishings and farms with equipment under the "protection"

30 PAC, RG 117, reel C9473, Outline of Custodian Policy Covering Operation of the Vancouver Office and reel C9469, *Annual Report*, 1943.

31 PAC, RG 2, PC 288, 13 January 1942.

32 *Ibid.*, PC 1486, 24 February 1942.

33 *Ibid.*, PC 1665, 4 March 1942.

34 PAC, RG 117, reel C9469, *Annual Report*, 1944.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.*

37 Anne Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of the Japanese Canadians During the Second World War* (Toronto, 1981), p. 110.

of the custodian. Interior “chattels” were moved to central storage areas after the empty homes and farms experienced numerous attacks by vandals.³⁸ The custodian’s office viewed this situation as too costly for the government to bear. The cost of storage, fire insurance, damage caused by dampness, pests, and theft, coupled with the wartime shortage of all goods, made custodian officials view liquidation as the “only appropriate policy.” Proceeds from the sale of these goods could be credited to the Japanese Canadian owners but only after deducting administrative charges and any outstanding debts.³⁹

At the same time the Soldier Settlement Board expressed a keen interest in acquiring the farms owned by Japanese Canadians in the Fraser Valley for future returned soldiers.⁴⁰ These circumstances predisposed custodian officials towards liquidation, which had been applied to “enemy” (German) property during the First World War. In fact, as far back as February 1942, the Vancouver office officials considered liquidation as a solution to administering the assets.⁴¹ However, the custodian’s powers extended only to administering and protecting the property of the Japanese Canadians. The King cabinet approved an order-in-council which extended the custodian’s power to dispose of all Japanese-Canadian property without the owner’s consent.⁴² This authority has subsequently proved to be the most controversial of the custodian’s powers. This was also recognized by custodian officials as protests against the sale of Japanese-Canadian property were directed to the office. In the 1944 annual report the director of the Vancouver office wrote that until the adoption of the liquidation policy the Japanese Canadians were “favourably disposed” towards the work of the custodian’s office, but now “the disposition of their real property removed to a considerable extent this feeling of confidence.”⁴³

Beginning in 1943 the Vancouver office proceeded to dispose of as much property as it could in “an orderly and unbiased manner.” Two committees, one to oversee properties in Vancouver and one to oversee rural properties, advised on the sales of land. The Soldier Settlement Board purchased 768 parcels of land for \$850,000.⁴⁴ Schools, churches, halls, and other property belonging to organizations were exempt from liquidation.⁴⁵ The first auction of goods and furnishings yielded \$34,759 in September 1943. The farm cooperatives in which Japanese Canadians owned shares were operated by a supervisor appointed by custodian’s office. On behalf of the custodian, P.S. Ross and Sons, an accounting firm, supervised, controlled, and liquidated many companies previously owned or controlled by individuals residing in Japanese-occupied territory.⁴⁶

After the war ended, the Vancouver office continued to operate, but its activities were gradually decreasing. Over three thousand people returned to Japan in 1946–47. Prior to their return they had to deliver any cash or securities to representatives of the custodian who arranged for the equivalent yen to be obtained by them in Japan. The business affairs of enemy companies continued to be wound up. As a result of the Bird Commission

38 *Ibid.*

39 PAC, RG 117, reel C9469, *Annual Report*, 1943.

40 Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism*, pp. 102-4.

41 PAC, RG 117, vol. 1, file 10, Vancouver Office — General Correspondence, Memoranda and Clippings, 1941-47.

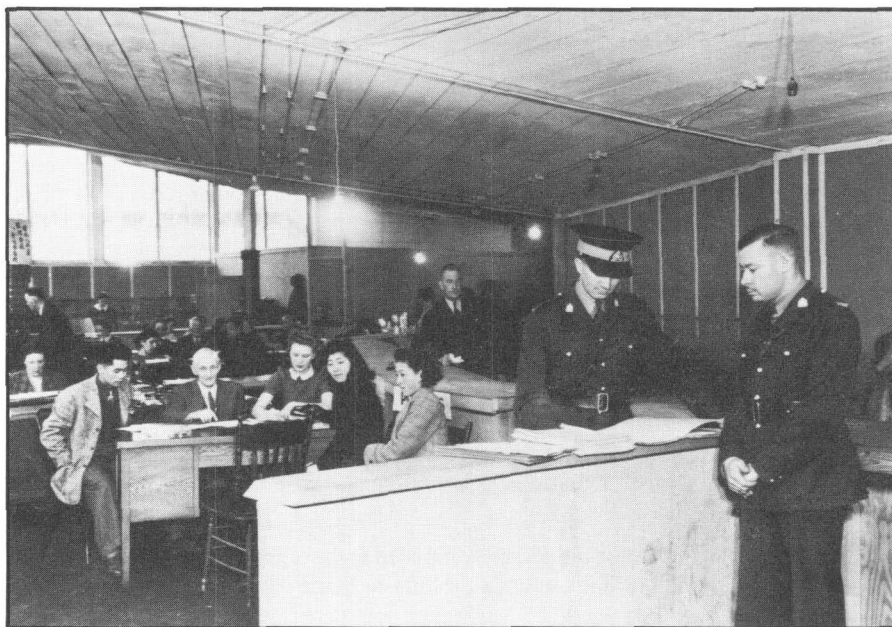
42 PAC, RG 2, PC 469, 19 January 1943.

43 PAC, RG 117, reel C9469, *Annual Report*, 1944.

44 *Ibid.*, *Annual Report*, 1945.

45 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, file 1, pt. 3, General Correspondence and Memoranda re: Staff, Vancouver Office, 1942-1946.

46 *Ibid.*, reel C9469, *Annual Report*, 1943.



After being removed from their homes in the coastal areas of British Columbia, many Japanese Canadians were housed on the exhibition grounds at Hastings Park in Vancouver. The Japanese Canadians in this photograph are shown registering with officials of the British Columbia Security Commission and declaring their real and personal property to representatives from the Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property. (15 July 1942). Courtesy: National Photography Collection, Public Archives of Canada, C 44958.

recommendations on Japanese property losses in 1947, the custodian's staff administered the awards established by the commission.⁴⁷ By 1951 the Vancouver office was phased out and the remaining records transferred to the custodian's office in Ottawa.

In the beginning, the staff in the Vancouver office was large in order to cope with the tremendous administrative burden of managing the property and effects of over 22,000 individuals. In November 1942 their numbers stood at 120, almost five times the staff of the custodian's office in the 1920s. By 1944 the numbers had shrunk to seventy and by 1950 only nine remained on staff.⁴⁸ Reduced staff reflected diminishing responsibilities as the custodian liquidated most of the Japanese Canadians' property.

The Vancouver office was organized into the Enemy Section and the Evacuation Section, both of which reported to the director who in turn reported to the deputy custodian in Ottawa. The custodian's responsibilities for managing properties necessitated an extensive records-keeping system and good accounting procedures. P.S. Ross and Sons examined the latter in September 1942 and made several recommendations. The firm

47 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, file 1, pt. 3; vol. 1, file 1, pt. 8, Correspondence and Memoranda of A.H. Mathieu re: Salaries and Compensation in the Vancouver Office; vol. 1, file 2, pt. 4, Memoranda Prepared by 1969 by the Assistant Deputy Custodian and Counsel Summarizing Government Actions re: Claims of Japanese Canadians, 1969.

48 *Ibid.*, reel C9469, *Annual Report*, 1944; vol. 1, file 3

suggested keeping two sets of books, one for “enemies” and one for “evacuees” and designing the accounting system as for a trust business in order “to give a complete record of the known and determined financial facts of any of the Japanese persons.”⁴⁹ These sets of books survive today in the form of twenty-six, bulky, heavy, blue and brown ledgers. The ledgers contain numbered entries for evacuees and “enemy repatriates and internees.” Entries record information on money held in trust and real estate. The real estate register (agricultural lands) shows various expenses paid by the custodian on behalf of the Japanese Canadians, property taxes with the lot number and address given, water bills, mortgages, liens on cars, life insurance, plumbing and house repairs, commissions for sale of property, etc. The evacuees ledgers record such information as name, registration and file numbers, expenses for repairs, taxes, valuation fee, commissions, liabilities, real estate operation disbursement, cash or income from bank accounts, cash, real estate, and miscellaneous assets and securities.⁵⁰ Most entries are amounts for real estate. Many are sparse, only a few have more detail, probably because most Japanese Canadians owned very little property beyond their home or securities except for savings bonds in small amounts. While these ledgers fulfilled the accounting firm’s recommendations for keeping essential accounting records, other records help complete the picture of Japanese-Canadian society in 1942.

The “JP” form which each individual completed at the time of registration formed the basis of an extensive case file system in the custodian’s office. Fifteen thousand, six hundred and ten files were opened, one for each Japanese Canadian who was uprooted with the exception of children under sixteen, while 1,525 files were opened for each individual designated enemy. The “JP” form recorded such information as name, address, age, marital status, occupation, employer, spouse’s name, children’s names, citizenship, information on bank accounts, property, insurance, and debts. Each case file also contained an “Information from the RCMP” form which recorded similar facts. Some case files contain correspondence with the custodian over the disposition of property, RCMP exhibit reports on such items as cars and radios, financial statements, affidavits on property, and the occasional personal memo on family members. Other case files only contain the two forms summarizing an individual’s life in three meagre pages.

Besides the ledgers and case files, the Vancouver office also kept numerous subject files. The minutes of the two advisory committees on the disposal of property, correspondence with the RCMP, custodian policy and reports from outside accounting firms and agents are among the files forming part of the custodian’s operational records which document the functions of the Vancouver office. Since an important aspect of the custodian’s activities was the control and subsequent liquidation of companies owned or controlled by the Japanese Canadians, the custodian required the essential business records of these companies. Thus RG 117 includes private records of about one hundred firms engaged in fishing, fish processing, lumbering, dry goods, printing, and food services. The inclusion of corporation minutes and bylaws, accounting ledgers indicating inventories, sales, wages, expenditures and disbursements, share certificate books, and even bank deposit slips, and the occasional income tax form makes RG 117 unique since most government records do not include private business records.

49 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, file 6, Correspondence of K.W. Wright, Chief Counsel to the Custodian re: Staff Matters in the Vancouver Office, 1946-52.

50 *Ibid.*, vol. 84, Vancouver Real Estate Register — Agricultural Lands, 1942-44 and vol. 70, Ledger — Japanese (Evacuees) 12901-16000.

These plus the Vancouver office ledgers and several subject files exist in hard copy. The case files, index cards, and the operational files exist only on microfilm. In 1949 K.W. Wright, a lawyer in the custodian's office expressed to the deputy custodian in Ottawa concern at the amount of storage space occupied by all the records.⁵¹ During 1950 Ottawa instructed the branch office to microfilm the records. Preparations began that year for filming in 1951 of the case files, real estate summaries and appraisals, auction statements, liability summaries, personal property summaries, files relating to the Bird Commission, and "all documents and correspondence which may have value for reference purposes."⁵² Routine correspondence and documents which existed elsewhere — such as municipal tax and land title records — were hauled to the city incinerator. Six tons of "routine" records were destroyed by 1952.⁵³ That same year the microfilm reels plus the office ledgers and business records were shipped to the Ottawa headquarters of the custodian where they remained until their transfer to the Public Archives in 1977.

Of all the custodian's records in RG 117, the records relating to the treatment accorded Japanese Canadians during the Second World War have the most potential for research. Although the custodian's office focused on the administrative and financial aspect of the treatment of these people, a human dimension can be found in this information. The case files in particular may prove to be a rich source for researchers. As Joy Parr discussed in her 1977 article in *Archivaria* 4, case files may shed light on some aspect of social history because the nature of the recorded information lends itself to quantitative techniques. The social historian could employ the case records on the Japanese Canadians to obtain a portrait of an ethnic group at a pivotal point in its history. For the demographer, these documents may offer insights into those who lived in particular communities prior to their uprooting. The private company records should appeal to the business historian or economist with an interest in small business. Since many of the ledgers predate the First World War, an accurate analysis of the business should be possible. These records require the researcher to be versed in financial matters; a knowledge of the Japanese language would be helpful. One thing may hinder full utilization of these records in the near future. Most of the World War II records are exempt under the *Privacy Act* because of the personal information contained in the files. The records must be reviewed by the Access Section of the Federal Archives Division before researchers can consult them.

The foregoing uses of the records are primarily directed toward the academic or scholarly researcher. The genealogist would find the case records invaluable for family history. An important use of these records lies in the area of legal or claims research. Ethical questions about the justice of Canada's wartime internment policy, especially the uprooting of a whole community, as well as the issue of compensation have surfaced over the last few years. The National Association of Japanese Canadians is pursuing claims for losses incurred as a result of the evacuation and resettlement policies of the King government. Since the custodian's office handled the property in question, the principal source for validating claims is RG 117.

This article has stressed the usefulness of the records of the Vancouver office from 1942 to 1952 because of their extensive nature and their apparent completeness. Records from

51 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, file 7, Correspondence of A.H. Mathieu, Assistant Deputy Custodian re: Staff Matters in the Vancouver Office, 1946-48.

52 *Ibid.*, reel C9469, *Annual Report*, 1950.

53 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, file 7.

the First World War are of lesser importance partly because they concentrate on technical, financial matters and partly because there is reason to suspect that some records are missing. Archivists sometimes dismiss accounting records as of less importance to researchers. With some imagination and a background in the financial matters, a researcher might find these records useful for the study of Canadian business development.

After World War II the operations of the custodian's office decreased in scope. During the 1960s, the office passed from under the authority of the Secretary of State to the Registrar General and then to Consumer and Corporate Affairs before finding a home within the Department of Supply and Services in 1972. The custodian today is the Minister of Supply and Services, but the actual work is carried out by one person who is basically an accountant. The records in RG 117, together with the dormant Second World War records in the Ottawa Federal Records Centre, await the imaginative researcher.