



A Meeting of Many – The Joan Gillis Fonds at the University of British Columbia and Collaborative Programming in 2022

CEAL Annual Meeting - Committee on Japanese Materials Session

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March 16, 2023





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Photo credit: UBC Library Communication & Marketing

UBC Asian Library is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people



The Joan Gillis Fonds at the University of British Columbia

Title: Joan Gillis fonds

Reference code:
RBSC-ARC-1786

Date: 1941 - 1988

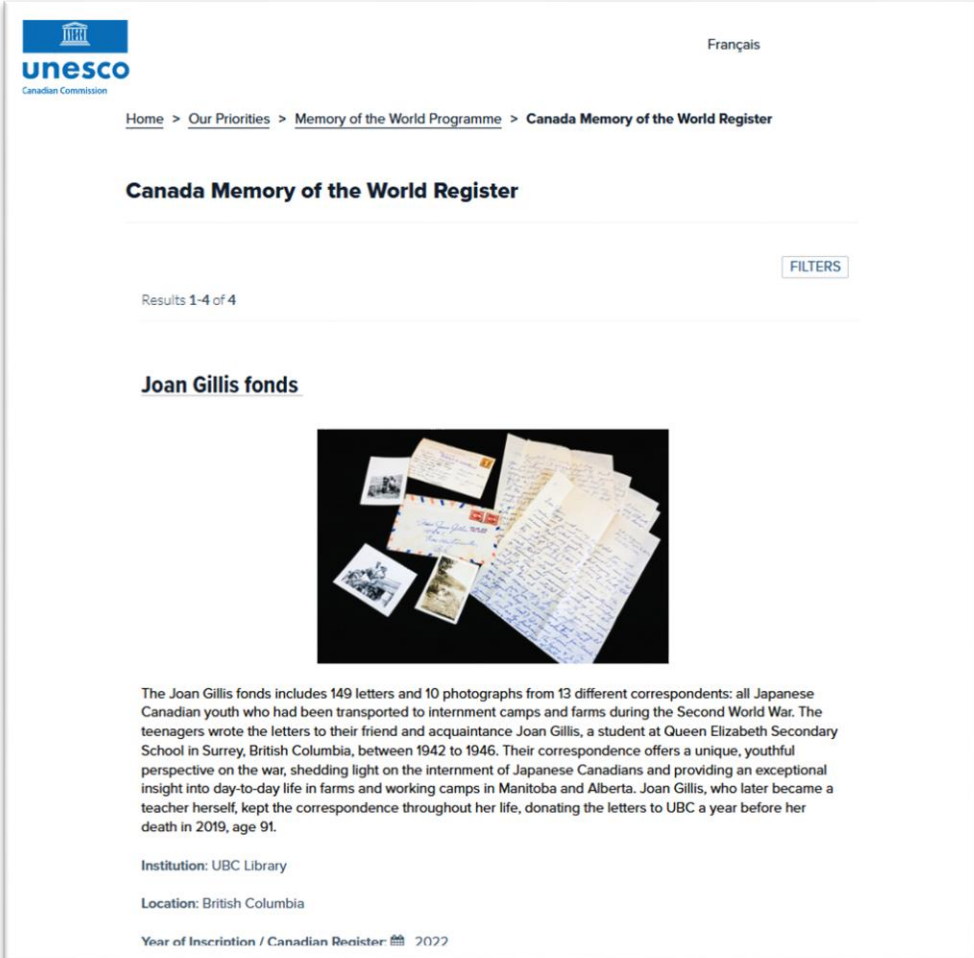
Contains 149 letters and
10 small b/w photographs

Link to the finding aid:
<https://rbscarchives.library.ubc.ca/joan-gillis-fonds>



Agenda

1. Present the Joan Gillis Fonds to the Asian Studies and Japanese Studies Community
2. Discuss the collaborative programming efforts carried out with partners from within the Library, the University, and the Japanese Canadian community



The screenshot shows the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme website. At the top left is the UNESCO logo with 'unesco' and 'Canadian Commission' below it. At the top right is the word 'Français'. Below the logo is a navigation path: 'Home > Our Priorities > Memory of the World Programme > Canada Memory of the World Register'. The main heading is 'Canada Memory of the World Register'. Below this is a search bar with a 'FILTERS' button on the right. Under the search bar, it says 'Results 1-4 of 4'. The entry for 'Joan Gillis fonds' is displayed. It features a photograph of several handwritten letters and small photographs. Below the image is a paragraph of text: 'The Joan Gillis fonds includes 149 letters and 10 photographs from 13 different correspondents: all Japanese Canadian youth who had been transported to internment camps and farms during the Second World War. The teenagers wrote the letters to their friend and acquaintance Joan Gillis, a student at Queen Elizabeth Secondary School in Surrey, British Columbia, between 1942 to 1946. Their correspondence offers a unique, youthful perspective on the war, shedding light on the internment of Japanese Canadians and providing an exceptional insight into day-to-day life in farms and working camps in Manitoba and Alberta. Joan Gillis, who later became a teacher herself, kept the correspondence throughout her life, donating the letters to UBC a year before her death in 2019, age 91.' Below the text are the fields 'Institution: UBC Library' and 'Location: British Columbia'. At the bottom, it says 'Year of Inscription / Canadian Register: 2022'.

Detention Centre in Vancouver, B.C., circa 1942

[Image omitted]

“Where Japs Must Move Out”
(newspaper article)

The Vancouver Daily Province, Feb.
3, 1942. Retrieved from
<https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/february-3-1942-page-1-22/docview/2368911283/se-2>

[Image omitted]

Japanese children being escorted
across Pender Street by a Vancouver
police officer, 1942 (photograph)

Cited in Legislative Assembly of
British Columbia. “[1939 to 1945 -
World War II and the Japanese
Internment.](#)”



Building K, Men's Dormitory - (Formerly Forum); Hastings Park, Vancouver, BC, circa 1942. Nikkei National Museum. 1994.69.3.18. https://nikkeimuseum.org/www/item_detail.php?art_id=A2221

Differences between the U.S. and Canada

United States	Canada
Family kept together in camps	Family separated; men forced to do road work and other physical labour
Allowed to serve in armed forces	Not allowed to serve in Canadian Forces 1942 - Jan. 1945
Allowed return to West Coast in the immediate aftermath of WWII	Not allowed to return to West Coast until after April 1, 1949. Canadian Gov't tried to "repatriate" 4,000 Japanese Canadians to Japan though many had never lived in Japan before.





Nikkei National Museum. 1996.178.1.33.a-b.
https://nikkeimuseum.org/www/item_detail.php?art_id=A3453

“Repatriation” to Japan, Slocan, B.C. circa 1946



Nikkei National Museum. 1996.178.1.32.a-b. https://nikkeimuseum.org/www/item_detail.php?art_id=A3458

Afterlife of the forced dispersal and dispossessions

[The] lingering effects of wartime injustice – its afterlife – tended to defy expression for a very long time.... The burden of history rests heavily both on Nikkei North Americans who endured wartime incarceration and on their families.

Karen Inouye, *The Long Afterlife of Nikkei Wartime Incarceration*, 2016



Niwatsukino family working on farm in Turin, Alberta, 1942. UBC Library
<https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0049061>



The Joan Gillis Fonds at the University of British Columbia

September 24, 1943

Dearest Joan,

Just a sheet with few lines to say "hello" and "how are you?" It's been quite a long time since I've heard from you last, and I hope you are all well as we are also. I imagine you're going to school every day and enjoying your everyday life. That's swell! Life is very dull out here... no school, no play.

Think of us in the field pulling and topping beets while you are doing your geometry, social studies, etc., will you, Joan? And I'll think of you having a wonderful time while I work.

— Sumi Mototsune, Raymond, Alberta



February 1943 Sumi Mototsune (right) and her sisters, Alberta. RBSC-ARC-1786-PH-01. UBC Library



The Joan Gillis Fonds at the University of British Columbia

September 19, 1945

I, like hundreds of other Canadian born boys, am officially a citizen of Canada for which I was willing to serve as she wanted me to. I have done nothing bad, yet I am treated as I am.

I am hoping that some day, justice and true democracy will come to me.

— Yoshio Nakamura, Magrath, Alberta

Yoshio Nakamura drinking water summer 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-PH-08. UBC Library





JAPAN
SURRENDERS



University of British Columbia Library. Rare Books and Special Collections.
Japanese Canadian Research Collection. JPCP-11-009

Japanese Canadians arriving at or departing from Slocan City

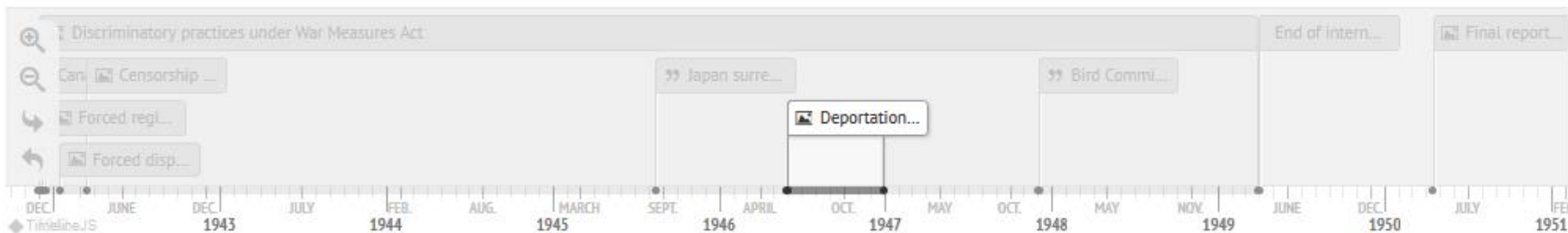
MAY 31, 1946 – 1947

DEPORTATION AND EXILE OF JAPANESE CANADIANS

Thousands of Japanese Canadians are deported to Japan after being forced to choose between signing "repatriation" forms or relocating to Eastern provinces where neither homes nor jobs have been secured.



BIRD COMMISSION
INQUIRY BEGINS



I Know We'll Meet Again

Correspondence and the forced dispersal of Japanese Canadians

[Home](#) [Browse Letters](#) [Explore Themes](#) [About the Exhibit](#)



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- [By Time](#)

apart, I know we'll meet again - and I hope it'll be soon. I'll always remember you
matter when & where. I'm just itching for the time to come, when we're all together
and happy once more.

— Sumi Mototsune in *Letter to Joan Gillis, July 31, 1942*

Introduction

Between December 1941 and March 1942, the Canadian Federal Government passed numerous Orders in Council that reduced the freedom of Japanese Canadians to live on the Pacific coast. These included orders that required

Description

This digital exhibition on Japanese Canadian forced dispersal and internment features materials from the Joan Gillis

I Know We'll Meet Again

Correspondence and the forced dispersal of Japanese Canadians

Home Browse Letters Explore Themes About the Exhibit

Search



Explore transcripts: View About the Transcript Tool

Education

Homelife

Labour

Communications

Even though we're far apart, we'll meet again – and I hope it'll be soon. I'll always remember you and think of you, no matter when & where. I'm just itching for the time to come, when we're all together and happy once more.

— Sumi Mototsune in *Letter to Joan Gillis, July 31, 1942*

Introduction

Between December 1941 and March 1942, the Canadian Federal Government passed numerous Orders in Council that reduced the freedom of Japanese

Description

This digital exhibition on Japanese Canadian forced

Colour-coded Subject Visualization

Click on a color below to toggle visualization to show just that color. Hover over section to see text, and click to go to that portion of the interview.

- Belonging
- Recreation
- Homesicknes:
- Labour-condi
- Photographs
- Joan
- Communicati
- Education
- WWII
- Living-condit
- Gender-dynar
- Optimism
- Forced-disper

Reset

Ikeda  Click to filter




Ikeda19430214  Click to filter



Ikeda19430510  Click to filter



Mototsune  Click to filter



Panel from the Japanese Canadian Community

Laura Ishiguro
Associate Professor
History, UBC



Angela May
Artist
PhD Student
McMaster University



Carolyn Nakagawa
Poet, Playwright
Education Program
Developer
Nikkei National
Museum & Cultural
Centre



Lisa Uyeda
Archivist
Collections Manager
Nikkei National
Museum & Cultural
Centre



Nicole Yakashiro
PhD Student
History, UBC



Public Panel Event

I Know We'll Meet Again: Correspondence and the Forced Dispersal of Japanese Canadians

MARCH 1 | 1:00 - 2:30 p.m.

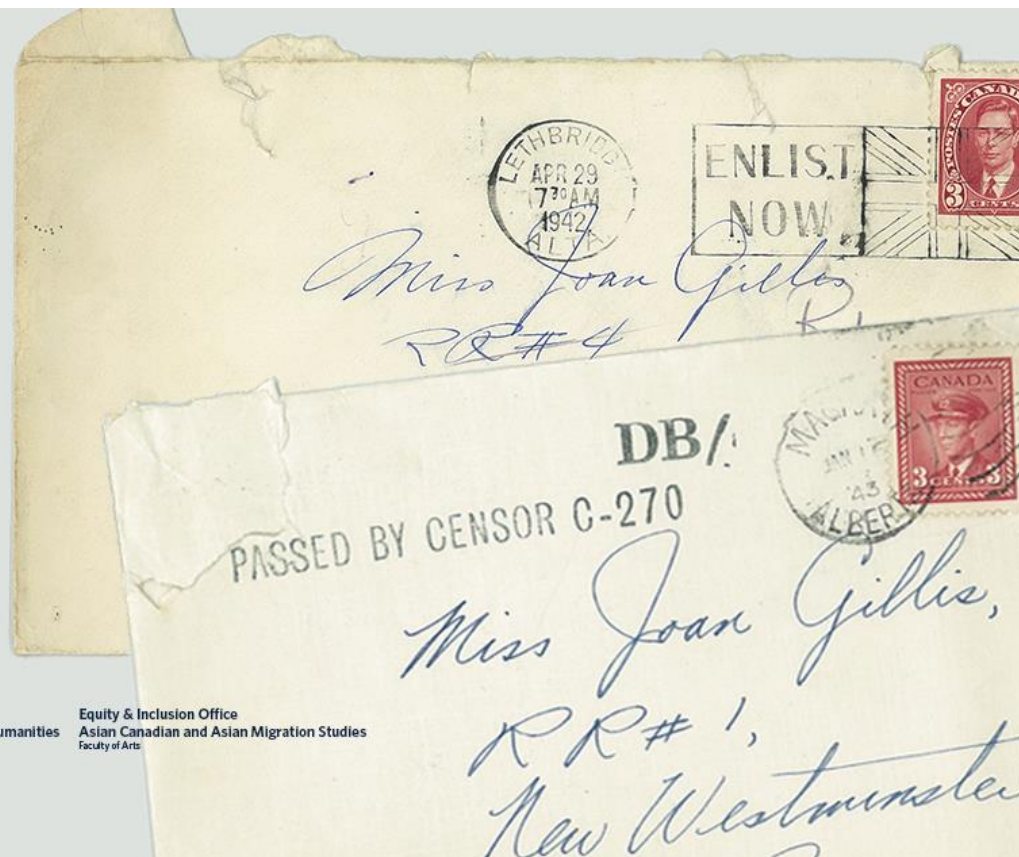
Join us as a panel of artists, scholars,
and archivists share responses to a
remarkable collection of letters by
young Japanese Canadians.



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Library
Public Humanities

Equity & Inclusion Office
Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies
Faculty of Arts



Public Panel Event

UBC Library

I Know We'll Meet Again:

Correspondence and the Forced
Dispersal of Japanese Canadians

PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

JOAN GILLIS FONDS

ASIAN LIBRARY | ASIAN.LIBRARY.UBC.CA



Link to Event Recording:

https://learning.video.ubc.ca/media/%22I+Know+We%E2%80%99ll+Meet+Again%22+Online+Panel+Event+Presentations+%26+Discussion/0_ne3i86zp

Oral History Project at UBC School of Information

LIBR 588 - Theory and Practice of Oral History with Professor Hannah Turner of the School of Information

- The history, theory, and practical implementation of oral history projects in memory institutions
- 5 student project groups interviewed families in the spring of 2022



UBC Library DIY Media Lab. Photo credit: UBC Library Communications & Marketing



June 8, 1942

Dearest Joan,

Thanks a million for your letter. I received it on Saturday. Gee, I was disappointed when you said that the Blues won, but oh well, a person can't do anything now I suppose but to laugh it by.

Did the Q.E. school put out a paper or an annual of some sort? If they have, if you happen to have a extra copy, I wonder if you could send me one.

What's on the Hit Parade this week? I guess I wouldn't know the song, but anyway, I like to know.

— Setsuko Fujii, Kaslo, B.C.

Setsuko Fujii early spring 1942 at Q.E.
RBSC-ARC-1786-PH-06. UBC Library



Public Event Organizing Team

Library

- Allan Cho, Community Engagement Librarian
- Phoebe Chow, Asian Library Program Assistant
- Bianca Chui, Asian Library Graduate Academic Assistant
- Tomoko Kitayama Yen, Japanese Studies Librarian
- Krisztina Laszlo, Rare Books & Special Collections Archivist
- Chelsea Shriver, Rare Books & Special Collections Librarian

History

- Professor Laura Ishiguro

Asian Canadian & Asian Migration Program

- Professor JP Catungal, Interim Head
- Szu Shen, Program Manager



Resources Relating to the Joan Gillis Fonds

- Joan Gillis fonds finding aid: <https://rbscarchives.library.ubc.ca/joan-gillis-fonds>
- Online exhibit (select letters): <https://ubc-library-rbrc.github.io/gillis-2021/>
- Panel event recording:
https://learning.video.ubc.ca/media/%22I+Know+We%E2%80%99ll+Meet+Again%22+Online+Panel+Event+Presentations+%26+Discussion/0_ne3i86zp
- Angela May's video art featured at the event: https://youtu.be/kH_5mqo4dBw
- Meuse, Matt. "What's on the Hit Parade?' Rare letters show Japanese-Canadian internment through teens' eyes." *CBC Radio*. June 11, 2018. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/docproject/dearest-joan-1.4678413/what-s-on-the-hit-parade-rare-letters-show-japanese-canadian-internment-through-teens-eyes-1.4678439>.
- "UBC Library's Joan Gillis Fonds is added to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO's Canada Memory of the World Register." July 26, 2022. <https://about.library.ubc.ca/2022/07/26/ubc-librarys-joan-gillis-fonds-is-added-to-the-canadian-commission-for-unescos-canada-memory-of-the-world-register/>.



For more resources, please see [A Selected Bibliography on the History and Legacy of Japanese Canadian Internment, UBC Day of Learning – October 10, 2017](#)



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