

Victoria Nikkei Cultural Society



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c/o 1200 Tolmie Avenue
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Mayor Lisa Helps
City of Victoria
1 Centennial Square
Victoria, BC
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Dear Mayor Helps,

RE: Letter of Support

The Victoria Nikkei Cultural Society is seeking the support of the City of Victoria to have certain land marks and sites in Victoria given recognition for their historic value to the BC Japanese community. This is in response to the BC Government project to recognize sites in BC that are significant or important to the history and development of the Japanese community in BC. (Link to Press Release <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2016FLNR0146-001234>)

Victoria had one of the earliest Japanese immigrant communities in Canada because Victoria was the port of entry for Asian immigrants. The Victoria Nikkei Cultural Society will be nominating 4 sites in the greater Victoria area this historic recognition - Takata Teahouse and Garden in Esquimalt Gorge Park, Japanese Bazaar, a store on Government Street which is still standing (now a Gelato shop), the Japanese Christian Church located in downtown Victoria and Ross Bay Cemetery. These 4 sites were chosen because they represent many important aspects of the early Japanese immigrant community in Victoria.

- **Takata Teahouse and Garden** was a recreational and social centre for not only the Nikkei community but also the greater community.
- **The Japanese Bazaar** owned by Charles Gabriel was the first place where Japanese landed immigrants were offered full time and part time jobs to allow the new immigrants to earn a living and become residents of Victoria. It was a training ground for many new Japanese immigrants to acquire the skills and knowledge to become their own entrepreneurs in their new adopted home.



- **The Japanese Christian Church**, a Methodist church, was the first church set up for Japanese in Canada. It became not only the spiritual hub for the Japanese immigrant community but it also housed the the Japanese Language School, and was used to hold a variety of social events such as celebrating the Emperor's birthday, Japanese New Year, Easter celebration and Christmas celebration. Regular movie night were also held at the church.
- **The Ross Bay Cemetery** is the burial place of 152 early Japanese immigrants that resided in Victoria. This is significant because these are some of the first Japanese immigrants to Canada. These graves fell into neglect after the internment of Japanese and Japanese Canadians in 1942. Wooden markers were lost and some gravestones were vandalized. In the 1980's the Victoria Japanese community undertook a project, called the Kakehashi project, to identify all of the Japanese graves and to install grave stones for those that did not have a marker. Every year in August the Victoria Japanese community clean the graves and hold a ceremony, called Obon ceremony, to honour these early Japanese immigrant pioneers.

In our submission to the BC Government we would like to have a Letter of Support from the City of Victoria for the 3 Victoria based sites. Since the submission deadline is September 9, 2016, your early attention to this request would be greatly appreciated.

If you require more information feel free to contact me at tsugkurushima@gmail.com or 250-384-2654

Yours truly,

Tsugio Kurushima
President, Victoria Nikkei Cultural Society