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New photo exhibition reveals life in Cumberland before WWII

In 1942, more than 20,000 Japanese Canadians living on the west coast were rounded up by a racist and xenophobic government and interned in British Columbia's interior. Their exile dismantled the infrastructure and influence brought by decades of Japanese immigration.

A new exhibition of photographs, in partnership with the Cumberland Museum and Archives, explores the prewar lives of those living in the central Vancouver Island community and opens June 17 at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (AGGV). Curated by the AGGV's Manager, Collections and Exhibits, Stephen Topfer, it's called *Mirror with Memory* (for what else is a camera using silvered glass plate negatives?).

The featured images were created by the photographers of the Japanese Canadian photo studio founded by Senjiro Hayasi; it operated for 30 years in Cumberland, from 1912 to 1942. Using both candid shots and studio portraiture, more than two dozen prints and additional projected images depict daily life in Cumberland: working conditions in the mines, community events, funerals, ball games, parades, friendships and family portraits. The photographs are augmented with material from the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre to show how crucial the photo studio's role was in documenting Cumberland's moments in time.

"These photographs, while documenting real people and events, have powerful lives of their own and offer tantalising evidence that may challenge our expectations about life on the island and the impact and role of the photographic image," said Topfer.

In April 1942, the 585 Japanese Canadians remaining in the Cumberland area had their homes and businesses seized and they were permanently removed from their community. The studio's last work was to photograph the residents' for required government-issued registration cards.

Mirror with Memory opens with a free Public House from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on June 17 and runs to September 4 at the AGGV.

For more information visit aggv.ca

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