



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

**BRIAN SMALLSHAW**

BA (University of Regina, 1986)

**“The Dispossession of Japanese Canadian Land on Saltspring Island”**

Department of History

Wednesday, April 26<sup>th</sup>

2:00 P.M.

Clearihue Building

Room C214

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. John Price, Department of History, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. John Lutz, Department of History, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Donald Galloway, Faculty of Law, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Aaron Devor, Department of Sociology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## **Abstract**

During World War Two, 77 Japanese Canadians were uprooted from Saltspring Island, and eleven properties were taken from them and later liquidated. The largest belonged to Torazo Iwasaki, and was purchased by the agent for the Custodian of Enemy Property, Gavin Mouat. In contradiction to the widely held view that Japanese Canadians were stoic and accepting of the injustice they faced, a number of Japanese Canadian Saltspringers fiercely resisted what was being done to them. The Iwasaki family launched a court case against the government in 1967 that went all the way to the Supreme Court, and in the face of continued racism the Murakami family returned to Saltspring to rebuild their lives. This thesis investigates the position of the Japanese Canadians in the settler society on Saltspring and how racisms were manifested within it, the government's decision to liquidate Japanese Canadian properties, and the resistance and resilience of some of the island's Japanese Canadians. Racist politicians, including the MLA representing the island, were calling for the removal of Japanese Canadians from the west coast. They led the drive to ethnically cleanse British Columbia, but their success depended on the cooperation and acquiescence of many others. This microhistory explains how this process took place on Saltspring Island, while examining the larger story of the decision to liquidate. Though the Orders in Council authorizing the dispossession of property were enacted under the War Measures Act, this thesis challenges the legality of the government's actions. Seventy-five years after the uprooting, a frank acknowledgment of past injustices will be necessary for the full reconciliation of Japanese Canadian survivors and the Saltspring community.