

Archive Package: 1885–1922 (Head Tax)

Quote Sheet: 1885–1922

Fred Soon

Born in Canton, China, in 1908.

Immigrated to Vancouver with uncle and cousins in 1921.

“ When we landed in Vancouver, we were put in the Immigration Building—you might call it like a jailhouse—and we were there for three weeks. My father had to go through a lot of red tape and that was done with paying a head tax of \$500 and then I was able to stay in Canada. In the Immigration Building, we each had a bed. No furniture, naturally, not even a night table. There were probably a dozen people in a big open room. No privacy, everything was public, you couldn't even write a letter. Those are the days we don't like to remember. The past is the past and I don't really want to dwell on it.

Harry Con

Born in Vancouver in 1922.

“ In the early days, people were sent back to China to be buried and the reason why is because they felt this was not their country. They worked hard, and their family could not come here, so when they died, they wanted their bones sent back where their family was. The white people said that the Chinese are hardcore people and they will not integrate, and even their bones they want to send back home. Actually, it was a condition that was forced onto us... If the government in those days had had the same idea as today, probably the Chinese people would have contributed more to this country. In my father's days, if he didn't have to send me home, if he didn't have to send money home, all the money would have been invested here.

“...we landed down at the foot of Burrard Street, that old immigration building. They called that the “pig house” because all Chinese people who returned back to Canada in the old days had to stay there for weeks, they had to go through the investigation. One of my relatives from the east, when he first came to Canada, he had to stay in there for over a week. You know, it’s just like a jail. And then wait for his father to come down and pay \$500 head tax, and then he was free to go. In the old days, they all discriminated, and that’s the law, so what can you do? I think the conditions at that building were as decent as they could be, I mean, not as bad as probably some of the places they lived here. Today we think of it as bad, but in those days, in the 1930s, 1920s, the living conditions were not that advanced, you know. But there they had a room, they had a bed to stay—that’s not so bad. And they had three meals provided by the government.

Excerpts from:

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