

## Archive Package: School Segregation

### Story Sheet: Victoria School Segregation

#### Story Introduction

Jon Joe was a primary student during the period when Victoria schools were segregated. He recalls attending the segregated school on Kings Road for Grades 1 and 2. In Grade 3, he was sent to the Railway School. Once in Grade 5, he attended the integrated North Ward School.

#### Story of Segregation and Protest

In September, 1922, Chinese students enrolled in the Victoria School District were segregated. Principals of two schools called the Chinese students out of their classes and marched them over to the schools that were set aside for Chinese-only students. But three organizations, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), Chinese Canadian Club (Tongyuan Association), and Chinese Commerce Association, organized a student strike against the public school system of Victoria. When students reached the segregated school, instead of entering the building, they went home.

This protest was the culmination of years of efforts to stop movements towards segregation. In 1907, Victoria School Board chairman George Jay expressed interest in segregating the Chinese students, based on his belief that older Chinese students were attending the public schools to get a refund of their \$500 head tax. If they attended school for a year they could start work and receive a refund. He later passed a regulation stating that Chinese children could not attend public school until they had passed an English exam. Other non-English speakers were not included in this exclusion.

The Victoria and Vancouver Chinese communities had already set up fundraising committees named “Against the Discrimination of the Board of School Trustees” in order to counteract racist policy, and had raised over seven thousand dollars for their cause. The CCBA hired lawyer Fred Peters to file a suit against the superintendent

and the School Board, stating that the policy was illegal, because BC School Law said all parents must send their children to school. They used the remaining funds to expand their school to accommodate the children who could no longer attend public school because of the English exam clause.

The three organizations that planned the protest formed an Anti-Segregation Association to challenge the new policy. They appealed to the Chinese Consulate in Ottawa, and three years later the Board reconsidered and influenced the government to change the law. During that time, new immigration law meant Chinese immigration had stopped. The Chinese community and the Victoria School Board attempted various resolutions over the course of the school year, but did not come to an agreement until the following school year.

In 1922–23, fewer than six Chinese students attended public schools in Victoria, compared to 216 the previous year. Children did not return to their former schools until the fall of 1923. Complete integration at all levels from primary to high school did not occur until after the Second World War.