

Trading with the Enemy

We were informed that in the near future the chattels then on hand will be sold by public auction. This would appear to be desirable so as to relieve the custodian's office of the responsibility of maintaining safe custody of numerous articles of little value, many of which, it could be seen by inspection, would rapidly deteriorate and probably become worthless if kept for a protracted period of time.

The report of Mr. Mathieu, assistant deputy custodian has a section in it dealing with the custody of property of these persons of the Japanese race which was seized in British Columbia, and held there. At page 39 and following of the report I read these extracts:

It must be remembered that the custodian became responsible for the whole household economy of over 22,000 persons who were moved out of their homes from communities such as Powell street, known as "Little Tokyo" and fishing centres such as Steveston, 20 miles from Vancouver, from farming districts of more than 50 miles in extent in the Fraser valley and also segregated locations throughout the whole coastal and protected area of British Columbia.

It is also true that a certain type of citizen considered the abandoned homes of evacuees an opportunity to engage in theft and vandalism which were in evidence in many cases before our fieldmen or our agents had an opportunity of taking charge.

Even in the better class districts this was in evidence and perhaps an outstanding example may be given in connection with the property owned by the former Japanese consul in the Shaughnessy district of Vancouver. This house was under the control of the protective powers until the capitulation of Japan.

At the time the property was handed over to us in December, 1945, Mr. K. W. Wright, counsel to the custodian, and Mr. F. G. Shears, director of our Vancouver office, inspected these premises with Mr. Baeschlin, representing the Swiss government. Every piece of plumbing had been removed, light fixtures and switches had been disconnected and taken away and even leaded glass doors and windows had been taken from their frames and were missing. This had occurred in one of the best districts of Vancouver, and according to representatives of both the Spanish and Swiss authorities, the house had been broken into time after time even although it was boarded up after each depredation.

Our own experience in regard to buildings which had been used for storage was somewhat similar to that of the Japanese consuls house. Breakings-in were frequent, entrance being made in some cases by the use of fire escapes, through windows which were boarded up or covered with a grill or through basement doors.

It may be of interest to record that a building on East Hastings street, registered in the name of a Japanese association and which certain Japanese had filled with chattels, was left by them in the care of Messrs. Norris and MacLennan. Upon request for the shipment, through the security commission, of some of the contents of the building, we requested Mr. MacLennan to accompany one of our staff to the building for the purpose of selecting the goods required for shipment. Finding it impossible to open the front door, access was made through a rear entrance when it was discovered that thieves had entered by the front door and had then

[Mr. Fleming.]

barred it from the inside with planks. The place had been ransacked, lids of boxes torn off and the entire contents scattered over the floor. Both Mr. MacLennan and the representatives of the British Columbia security commission realized the futility of attempting to identify to whom the chattels belonged.

The assistant commissioner of police wrote to the Vancouver office on July 28, 1942, in regard to the Richmond district, stating that it was impossible for their police in that area to do more than keep as eye on Japanese property although he assured us that they would do their utmost to prevent breakings and enterings. He suggested that we might consider employing a watchman in that district. As a result, we asked the commissioner to recommend a suitable person . . .

It then goes on to state that a watchman was appointed after all this extensive damage had been done to the properties of these people. Regardless of whether these people were under suspicion because of their being persons of Japanese origin, I think it should have been expected that, in justice to them as individuals, steps would be taken to safeguard their property so that it would be kept in proper custody. That obviously was not done. After requesting the police for cooperation, the report continues:

The police, however, seemed powerless to deal with the situation and apart from property in which the custodian was interested, the public press at this time contained many reports of a general crime wave of breaking and entering and safe cracking. Frequent reports were made by us to the police and were acknowledged as receiving their attention.

Of the three classes of goods under administration, I think one extract concerning the property of illegal organizations is worth referring to. Again it is not a question of whether these people were guilty or innocent; it is a question of whether adequate steps were taken under the circumstances to safeguard their property. We are told in this report that steps were taken to obtain a proper valuation of property and to make sure that sales were made based upon those valuations. The extract which I intend now to read deals with a striking case. I wonder how many hon. members feel that they can justify the claim made by the government that proper valuations of such property were made at the time of seizure as well as at the time of disposal. I read from page 65 of this report the following extract which appears under the heading, "The Workers' and Farmers' Publishing Association Limited":

At the time this company was declared illegal, an inventory was prepared of all machinery and tools.

The valuers employed by the agents for the custodian appraised these at \$9,811. The equipment so valued was advertised for sale by tender, and sold, for \$9,696.46.