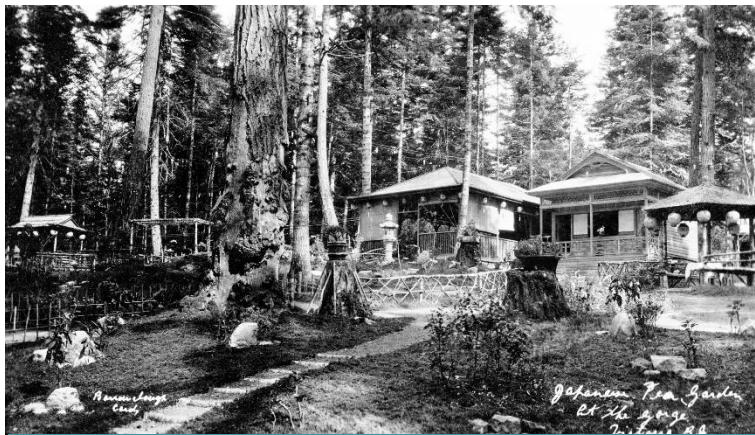


Righting a Historical Wrong

The Esquimalt Japanese Tea Garden

Educator Tomo Nishizawa

Imagine a railroad running through Esquimalt Gorge Park. When the Tramway Gorge Park opened in 1905, there were picnic tables, walking trails and concession stands that lined the beautiful Gorge



The Japanese Tea Garden at the Gorge The Japanese Tea Garden was a successful business for 35 years until the Takata family was forced to abandon it in 1942. Credit: BCA E-01902

waterway. Over the years, an outdoor movie theatre was added, as well as a merry-go-round, rollercoaster and waterslides. It was a local hub that attracted many families to spend their weekends on the Gorge.

At the height of the growing park, Japanese Canadian businessmen Yoshitaro Kishida and Hayato Takata (later joined by his brother, Kensuke Takata) built the Japanese Tea Garden in 1907. The one-acre garden featured Japanese bonsai trees, stone lanterns and bridges amidst plants native to the Gorge. The teahouse itself was also

designed to blend Japanese and Canadian cultures. It was decorated with paper screens and lanterns, but served English-style meals such as poached eggs with toast.

This was a time when anti-Asian racism was prevalent in the Pacific coast. While Japanese Canadians lived and worked all over Vancouver Island as fishermen, loggers and seal hunters, they did not have voting rights and often experienced racial segregation. They were excluded from practicing certain professions and did not have access to public areas like the Crystal Garden swimming pool in Victoria. In such a time, the success of the teahouse signified how Japanese Canadians could, in fact, integrate and contribute positively to the society.

In 1942, life changed for the Takata family when they were forced to leave their home and live at an internment camp in Sandon, BC. Shortly after the uprooting, local Esquimalt residents vandalized and looted items found at the [abandoned teahouse](#). They broke windows, stole plants and sold personal belongings at public auctions. The foundation that the Takatas had worked to build for 35 years was destroyed and forgotten in a few weeks.

With no home or business to return to, the Takatas moved to Ontario after the war. The Esquimalt Gorge Park today features a Japanese garden and a pavilion under construction that will, in part, commemorate the Japanese Canadian history of the park. Nearly seven decades after the internment, [Dillon Takata](#), great grandson of Kensuke Takata, recently returned to live in Victoria. When the pavilion opens, the residents of Esquimalt and Victoria will be invited to remember the Japanese Tea Garden once again.