

# “ENEMY ALIENS” AND “CONCHIES”:

## *Perceptions of the “Un-British” in the Fraser Valley, 1939–45*

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WHEN FIGHTING broke out in September 1939, Euro-Canadian residents of Abbotsford and Chilliwack, rural communities in British Columbia’s eastern Fraser Valley, marched off to war: some literally, most figuratively. These Abbotsfordians and Chilliwackers engaged in the war effort across a broad spectrum of activities in pursuit of victory: they enlisted, participated in voluntary causes, gave money, and generally accepted sacrifices demanded of them in the form of heightened taxation, rationing, and pressure to maximize production. In a sense then, much of their war experience fit the contours of Canada’s “good war,” the popular memory of the war with which most Canadians are passingly familiar. Jeffrey Keshen, in *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, lays bare that, while this “‘good war’ comforts, it also clouds ... In many ways the popular memory has sanitized and simplified a ‘complex and problematic’ event, whose legacies for Canada were not just profound, but also contradictory.”<sup>1</sup> Much of the complexity and contradiction, however, only becomes visible when we dial in to the local level, what Robert Rutherford terms “hometown horizons,” within which Canadians actually experienced the distant phenomenon of world war.<sup>2</sup> The war that Abbotsford and Chilliwack residents lived was shared with families and neighbours, and consumed and filtered through the lens of their local media, the *Chilliwack Progress* and *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News* (referred to hereafter as the *Progress* and the *News*, respectively). Keshen acknowledges that telling the story from a national level “will leave some exceptions and nuances unexamined. No doubt, studies homing

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada’s Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada’s Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

in on West Toronto, say, or Chicoutimi, Medicine Hat, or Pugwash, would produce slightly different accounts, and in time those local tales must be told and a new synthesis may well emerge.”<sup>3</sup> The dialogic relationship between national and local is essential and healthy, but we argue that these “local tales” are more important to our understanding of the home front than mere microcosms that might tweak the national narrative. Rather, these more intimate histories *were* the national experience replicated, with local variations, in countless communities across the country. When this local experience is viewed through the news stories, editorials, and letters to the editor in their weekly newspapers, it becomes clear that the global total war was not the only, or even the most important, conflict that residents of Chilliwack and Abbotsford experienced between 1939 and 1945.

Just weeks after Canada’s declaration of war, the *Progress* argued that, while there may be the rare “enemy of the country” living in their midst, “it would be quite Un-British to seriously question the loyalty of all who have come to this country from foreign parts to make their home.”<sup>4</sup> Despite these calming and rational words, Chilliwackers and Abbotsfordians would engage in an intense struggle through the war years defending and defining the boundaries of identity, belonging, and citizenship, and the grounds upon which residents qualified as good citizens and acceptable members of their communities. Deborah Cowen argues that “National identity became salient through mass war when national risk sharing became a necessity. Thus, one particularly powerful legacy of war is that people become *a people*.”<sup>5</sup> In the Fraser Valley, complex and varying racial and ethnic tensions challenged such ethnic community bonding. The *News* admitted: “It is impossible to speak for either all the Anglo-Saxons of the area or all the foreign-born people who are our problems. Neither group is unanimous.”<sup>6</sup> The particular geographic location, demographic makeup, and largely agrarian way of life of Abbotsford and Chilliwack influenced these debates in distinct and surprising ways. The fiercest attacks targeted Mennonite conscientious objectors and residents of Japanese ancestry, both of whom, despite falling under completely different legal frameworks, were forced to live with the consequences of being “Un-British” in the wartime Fraser Valley.

<sup>3</sup> Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers*, 9. The slightly dismissive tone is indicative of academic historians’ often tepid appreciation for local history.

<sup>4</sup> “A Timely Declaration,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 27 September 1939, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Deborah Cowen, *Military Workfare: The Soldier and Social Citizenship in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 13.

<sup>6</sup> “Proof of the Pudding,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 22 December 1943, 2.

The local experience revealed not only an intensification of boundaries of belonging based on Whiteness and Britishness but also less rigidity and greater permeability than the historiography would suggest. Also significant, in the face of scholarship suggesting that civic national identity did not supplant ethnic identity in Anglo-Canadian settler society until the 1960s, the most visceral criticisms were aimed at Mennonite settlers whose conscientious objection to military service clashed with the civic duties of democratic citizenship – specifically the responsibility to defend society.<sup>7</sup> This was amplified by the Mennonites' economic success and local perceptions that they were not only profiting from the war but also buying up all the available lands and thereby threatening the economic future of those serving in the military – the true Canadians. Ultimately, the Second World War occupied a lot of space in the pages of the *News* and the *Progress* between 1939 and 1945, but what provoked the most emotionally charged reporting was the more tangible local war over belonging and farmland in these agricultural communities.

Much like today, during the Second World War the Fraser Valley was a thriving and largely agricultural region. In the late nineteenth century, primarily British settlers began occupying the territories of the Stó:lō Coast Salish people, who were rapidly surrounded and supplanted by a fast-growing settler population.<sup>8</sup> In the two decades leading up to the Second World War, the population of Chilliwack and Abbotsford doubled, reaching 11,462 and 8,636, respectively, by 1941.<sup>9</sup> Most of the populace was directly employed in agrarian pursuits, or in supporting businesses, though forestry was also a significant local industry.<sup>10</sup> Helping drive the growth were the 13,355 hectares of fertile farmlands on the Sumas Prairie, between Chilliwack and Abbotsford, opened up to

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<sup>7</sup> José E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Thor Carlson, Albert Jules McHalsie, and Stó:Lō Heritage Trust, eds., *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001); and Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *You Are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Population statistics from Eighth Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. II, 53, accessed from University of Toronto Library Map and Data Library site: <https://mdl.library.utoronto.ca/collections/numeric-data/census-canada/1941>, 3 March 2021. Chilliwack's figure is a combination of the District of Chilliwack and the Municipality of Chilliwack. The Abbotsford number is a rough approximation derived from combining the populations for Abbotsford, Matsqui, and Sumas, three communities subsequently merged to form the present city of Abbotsford.

<sup>10</sup> Both industries figure prominently in the anecdotal histories of the small villages that made up Chilliwack. See Ron Denman, ed., *The Chilliwack Story* (Chilliwack: Chilliwack Museum and Archives, 2007).

settlement by the draining of Sumas Lake during the mid-1920s.<sup>11</sup> So, too, did enhanced transportation connections, particularly the BC Electric Railway line connecting Chilliwack and Abbotsford to the western Fraser Valley and Vancouver after 1910, which provided huge markets for even perishable crops and dairy. The profitability, composition, and productivity of agricultural operations in Abbotsford and Chilliwack dramatically transformed in the shift from Depression to wartime conditions.<sup>12</sup>

The first Japanese farm settlements appeared in the Fraser Valley in 1904 and “progressed slowly and quietly,” expanding in numbers and extent through the 1920s while raising little opposition, in part because Japanese farmers brought into productivity marginal lands undesired by other settlers.<sup>13</sup> Most Japanese farmers could gain access to and afford only small plots of under eight hectares, which encouraged a focus on berry crops, which would produce a high yield per hectare with minimal capital requirements. By the 1930s, Japanese farmers produced 85 percent of the Fraser Valley’s berry crop. Most of the Japanese farm families settled north of the Fraser River in Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, and Mission. South of the Fraser, a relatively small number of families established farms as far east as Abbotsford and Chilliwack, perhaps fifty scattered families in the former and just a handful in the latter.<sup>14</sup>

The first Mennonites arrived in Chilliwack and Abbotsford in 1928, most of them having fled persecution in the Soviet Union, but their numbers grew much more quickly than did those of the Japanese. Predominantly rural and agrarian, Mennonites accounted for more than one third of the 320,000 German-speaking residents in Canada in

<sup>11</sup> See Chad Reimer, *Before We Lost the Lake: A Natural and Human History of Sumas Valley* (Halfmoon Bay: Caitlin Press, 2018); and Laura Cameron, *Openings to a Lake: Historical Approaches to Sumas Lake* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> T.D. Regher, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939–1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 112; Tara North, “Harvesting Victory: Abbotsford Agriculture in WWII,” *Fraser Valley History Project*, <http://app.ufv.ca/fvhistory/studentsites/wwII/agriculturewwII/index.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Anne Doré, “Transnational Communities: Japanese Canadians of the Fraser Valley, 1904–1942,” *BC Studies* 134 (Summer 2002): 43–44.

<sup>14</sup> The estimates of family numbers are derived from the small number of informal *Nokai* developed in parts of modern-day Abbotsford. *Nokai* were nominally agricultural societies but were actually much more than this as they had complex social and economic functions in Japanese settler communities. Mission, Pitt Meadows, and Surrey each had at least one *Nokai*, while Maple Ridge had four. However, in Abbotsford there were only three small and informal *Nokai* in Mount Lehman, Clayburn, and Coghlan, each “of no more than twenty families” (Doré, “Transnational Communities,” 49). The Chilliwack number is inferred from an article about two families representing “half of the Japanese people resident” in the area, too few for a *Nokai*. See “Local Japanese Pledge Their Support,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 10 December 1941, 1.

1941, and of the 5,119 Mennonites living in British Columbia at the time, most dwelt in farming settlements in the Fraser Valley.<sup>15</sup> These recent immigrants sought productive land for agricultural purposes during the interwar years, despite the fact that the Depression hit the farming sector hard. When the war broke out in 1939, most Mennonites "were eking out a living on small, mixed farms that produced the food that they needed and small quantities of berries, vegetables, and dairy and poultry products for sale on local markets."<sup>16</sup>

Local newspapers are integral sources for historians' understanding of community life: they capture and preserve the devotion, struggles, ideals, problems, and sacrifices of the members of its respective communities. The editor of the *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News* wrote in 1941: "Few people, as they read their weekly newspapers realize that they are reading perhaps the only contemporary history of their community it is possible to read."<sup>17</sup> Journalists saw themselves as chronicling the story of their community for future generations, self-consciously attempting to write in a way that would be understood "twenty-five or fifty years" later.<sup>18</sup> Community weekly newspapers also differentiated themselves from those published in larger, urban settings:

The weeklies are closer to their field and to the life of the people than any metropolitan newspaper can hope to be. Their writers know personally many of those about whom they write. They have their fingers upon the community pulse. They are in touch with the thoughts and manner of life of the men and women of the constituency to a degree which in a larger constituency is not possible.<sup>19</sup>

Although local newspaper staff clearly believed that their columns best reflected the thoughts and opinions of the community as a whole, these weeklies also ran the risk of becoming a soapbox for their owners or editors. Far from being objective reflections of a community, weeklies were sometimes under the management of one man for "as long as most people [could] remember," with the potential to take on the individual's personality and views.<sup>20</sup> These newspapers were often remarkably different in tone, especially in their depictions of certain social groups. Editorials in the *Chilliwack Progress*, for example, tended to be less

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<sup>15</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Regehr, 109.

<sup>17</sup> "The Press and Local History," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 23 July 1941, 2.

<sup>18</sup> "The Press and Local History."

<sup>19</sup> "The Canadian Weeklies," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 8 July 1939, 3.

<sup>20</sup> "The Canadian Weeklies."

frequently overtly racist in nature than did those in the *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, which reflected the latter's influential editor, Lang Sands.

Weekly newspapers in the Fraser Valley also served as a catalyst through which communities voiced their worries, anger, triumphs, and shortcomings: they shed light on the issues that were dominating the thoughts of the citizenry. Letters to the editor and quotations in local news stories often revealed anxieties and resentments aimed at individuals or groups that authors perceived to be a threat to the social, economic, or political good of the community. These local newspapers' blunt constructions (or fabrications) of the "enemy" or "enemy alien" demonstrate the profound influence of the local experience on perceptions of "others." According to Rutherford, "essentialized stereotypes of both 'the enemy' and 'the enemy alien' served to heighten fears and hatreds of the 'other side' and to strengthen the resolve for a final victory over forces often unseen directly, often imagined."<sup>21</sup> Such editorial discussions of cultural and racialized others and enemy aliens often became heated. But because their audience was the Anglo-Canadian majority, the weeklies reflected the thoughts and opinions of that majority, leaving Un-British groups as easy targets for criticism.

It was not only enemy and enemy alien Un-British groups in British Columbia that found themselves caught up in this way. South Asian, Chinese, First Nations, and Mennonites all faced elevated scrutiny as Canadian society rallied around the flag under tense wartime conditions. Particularly during the dark days of the war between the spring of 1940 and mid-1942, when Allied fortunes reached their nadir, the Anglo-Canadian mainstream re-evaluated the diverse components of a multicultural society to determine who was with them and who was against them.<sup>22</sup> This battle over boundaries of belonging in the Fraser Valley had profoundly different results for different groups. Those who found themselves on the inside of the line, within the "we," witnessed a reduction of overt prejudice and enhanced inclusion in a wartime spirit of solidarity.<sup>23</sup> Both South Asians and Chinese residents experienced this to varying degrees on the home front, though both faced

<sup>21</sup> Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 119.

<sup>22</sup> R. Scott Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 83.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, the Canadian government "decided to wipe the slate clean" for more than two hundred illegal immigrants from the Indian subcontinent in 1939, in the interests of wartime Commonwealth unity. See Hugh Johnston, *The East Indians in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984), 10. Norman Buchignani and Doreen M. Indra with Ram Srivastava, in *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* (Toronto: Ministry

nearly impenetrable barriers to service in Canada's military, a hugely important symbol of belonging and civic nationalism.<sup>24</sup> The fact that both originated from Allied countries and were shrinking and largely bachelor populations, and thus a receding economic threat, was key in South Asian and Chinese residents' wartime conditional acceptance. First Nations likewise found themselves in a relatively more inclusive place during the war, both domestically and in the military services, which proved a powerfully egalitarian experience.<sup>25</sup> Those groups that fell inside the line of the "we" were in essence upgraded from Un-British to honorary British for the war years.

Obviously, in a wartime context, populations from enemy countries, especially enemy aliens of Japanese, German, and Italian ancestry, fell on the wrong side of that line. Being defined as Un-British in wartime provoked heightened hostility and more overt prejudice from Canadians and varying regulatory restrictions from the Canadian state.<sup>26</sup> As becomes clear, however, the relative level of hostility in Abbotsford and Chilliwack varied widely across these groups. More surprisingly, Mennonites, who were neither enemy aliens nor a direct physical threat

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of Supply and Services, 1985), 96–97, 99, suggest that South Asians found greater inclusivity in wartime. *Johnston, East Indians in Canada*, II, situates the shift in attitudes after 1945.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Roy, in "The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens," *Canadian Historical Review* 59, no. 3 (1978): 342, notes that Chinese and (initially) Japanese BC residents who were keen to enlist were denied because officials understood that military service would make it "impossible to resist the argument that they are entitled to the franchise." Late in the war, several hundred Chinese Canadians were enlisted. As Roy suggests: "The decision to treat Chinese like other Canadian soldiers suggests exigencies of war can help reduce racial sensitivities" ("Soldiers Canada Didn't Want," 177). In fact, more served with British intelligence behind enemy lines in Southeast Asia against the Japanese rather than in the Canadian forces. See Marjorie Wong, *The Dragon and the Maple Leaf: Chinese Canadians in World War II* (London, ON: Pirie Publishing, 1994). Scott Thompson discusses the ban on South Asian, Chinese, and Japanese military service and the state rationale against such service. See Scott Thomas, "Real Canadians: Exclusion, Participation, Belonging, and Male Military Mobilization in Wartime Canada, 1939–45," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 50, no. 3 (2016): 709. Buchignani, Indra, and Srivastava reveal the extensive activism of the Indo-Canadian community during the war to translate wartime conditions, access to military service, and resistance to conscription without the franchise into citizenship rights (*Continuous Journey*, 94–97).

<sup>25</sup> R. Scott Sheffield, "Fighting a White Man's War? First Nations Participation in the Canadian War Effort, 1939–1945," in *Canada and the Second World War*, ed. Geoffrey Hays, Michael Bechthold, and Matt Symes (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 67–91; R. Scott Sheffield, "Exploring the Meaning of Indigenous Military Service during the Second World War in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2018): 63–79.

<sup>26</sup> Cowen notes that nationalist and familial narratives in wartime "have resulted in highly racialized forms of ethno-nationalism and national policy that are organized around notions of the 'purity' of the people" (*Military Workfare*, 13).



to the country, found themselves the most targeted Un-British population in the wartime Fraser Valley.

At the outbreak of the war, Germans, Japanese, and Mennonites in British Columbia were quick to express their loyalty to Canada and pledged to support their country in various ways. As these groups were aware of their marginal social standing, such public pledges were intended to ward off public criticism or government restrictions. Germans in British Columbia stated that they were “whole-heartedly behind the stand taken by the British and Canadian governments in calling a halt to the continued aggressiveness of the Hitler regime.”<sup>27</sup> Even before Canada went to war with Japan, the Japanese Canadian community pledged its support, stating: “In this hour of national need the Japanese Canadian Citizens’ League unites with our fellow citizens in pledging our deepest loyalty and devotion to our country and the British Empire. We are fully prepared to act in the preservation of our Canadian democratic ideals.”<sup>28</sup> Three weeks later, Mennonite organizations added their own public statements of support.<sup>29</sup> However, as Reina Neufeldt argues, “while members of minority groups may desire membership in an ethnic or civic national majority, and may affirm their allegiance publicly, entrance is often difficult.”<sup>30</sup>

The difficulty lay in having the claims of devotion and belonging weighed against preconceived understandings among the Anglo-Canadian majority in the Fraser Valley. Many Abbotsfordians and Chilliwackers already viewed these groups of “others” as real or potential threats to the economic, political, social, and moral cohesion of their community. Nonetheless, community responses were often dictated and shaped by the ebbs and flows of a distant war. Initially, the focus was primarily on German-born men of military age, followed quickly by the addition of Italians once that country joined the war in the spring of 1940. There was a pervasive fear that enemy aliens were secret saboteurs who threatened true “British” British Columbians directly. The *Chilliwack Progress* noted that other countries had been “over-run by Axis gangsters” and feared that this would occur in British Columbia.<sup>31</sup> Although residents of Japanese ancestry were seen as a greater threat after December 1941, initially the obvious fear was of German and then Italian espionage or

<sup>27</sup> “Canadian Germans and Japanese Pledge Loyalty to Adoptive Land,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 6 September 1939, 6.

<sup>28</sup> “Canadian Germans and Japanese Pledge Loyalty to Adoptive Land,” 6.

<sup>29</sup> “Fraser Valley Mennonites Pledge Loyalty to Empire,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 27 September 1939, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Reina Neufeldt, “Tolerant Exclusion: Expanding Constricted Narratives of Wartime Ethnic and Civic Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 2 (2009): 207.

<sup>31</sup> “This Week,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 24 December 1941, 4.



sabotage in the Fraser Valley.<sup>32</sup> Such fear was endemic across the country, and state authorities responded by establishing a system of registration of enemy aliens and interning those deemed a danger.<sup>33</sup> On the whole, state enforcement was surprisingly measured, with official numbers recording 847 internees of German nationality and 632 of Italian nationality, much lower numbers than were interned during the Great War.<sup>34</sup> Those of German and Italian "racial origin" were required to register with the RCMP, even those who had been naturalized for ten years or, in the case of Italians, after 1922.<sup>35</sup> What is striking in the Fraser Valley, however, is that once state security measures were in place, evidence or reports of escalated fear of European enemy aliens virtually disappeared. A *News* editorial mentioned the low figures interned in October 1939 as being

only 145 ... from the area between Winnipeg and the Coast ... The number ... is not large. It is in fact small enough to show that with few exceptions western Canadians have conducted themselves properly and that nothing in the nature of a "purge" can be charged against the authorities. May good sense prevail, and the number never have to be increased.<sup>36</sup>

Such measured attitudes towards ethnic Germans and Italians seem to have prevailed for the duration of the war in the Fraser Valley.<sup>37</sup> Howard Palmer's examination of nativism in Alberta finds similar patterns, and he concludes that, compared with the Great War, "the anti-German sentiment of 1939–1940 seems relatively benign."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> "Internment of All Enemy Aliens Requested by City; Home Guard Plan Approved," *Chilliwack Progress*, 22 May 1940, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Angelo Principe, "A Tangled Knot: Prelude to 10 June 1940," in *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad*, ed., Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Keyserlink, "Breaking the Nazi Plot: Canadian Government Attitudes towards German Canadians, 1939–1945," in *On Guard for Thee: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939–1945*, ed. Norman Hilmer, Bohdan Kordan, and Lubomyr Luciuk (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1988), 63–64. The information about registration was published in "Aliens Registering with the RCMP," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 18 October 1939, 1.

<sup>35</sup> "All Italians and Germans in Canada Must Register Now," *Chilliwack Progress*, 26 June 1940, 8.

<sup>36</sup> "Not Many Exceptions," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 18 October 1939, 3.

<sup>37</sup> There is only one mention of Italian Canadians in the *Chilliwack Progress* and the *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News* from 1939 to 1946, which highlights which Italians need to register with the government. See also *Chilliwack Progress*, 26 June 1944, 8. German Canadians are mentioned a handful of times, only once regarding any "threat" or "disloyalty" on the part of this group.

<sup>38</sup> Howard Palmer, "Ethnic Relations in Wartime: Nationalism and European Minorities in Alberta during the Second World War," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 14, no. 3 (1982): 8.

The Japanese and Mennonite immigrant populations, in striking contrast, would remain at the forefront of conversations throughout much of the Second World War. Although Japan did not enter the war until late 1941, the negative coverage of Japanese nationals and Japanese Canadians in the Fraser Valley continued to reflect the long-standing racialization and prejudice practised in British Columbia in the early twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> Once Japan entered the war, this already racialized environment provided fertile soil for the germination of elevated anti-Japanese rhetoric. In an article regarding the “Jap farmer” in the Fraser Valley, the *Chilliwack Progress* stated: “The Jap is already looking down his nose at his ‘White trash’ neighbour.”<sup>40</sup> Japanese Canadians were said to be “evil,” “treacherous,” and “objectionable competitors,” and this “enemy race” should be first removed from British Columbia and then, after the war, sent back “home” to Japan.<sup>41</sup> Editorials promoted these alleged, innate differences between the “races,” which perpetuated fear and anger towards Japanese Canadians. Contamination via miscegenation was dreaded and feared, one editor arguing: “We want a class of settlers whose offspring will not shame the present residents when the question of intermarriage crops up.”<sup>42</sup> Social Darwinism, still pervasive common-sense knowledge for British Columbians, put the Asian population near the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Fundamentally, those of Japanese ancestry were others because they visibly fell outside ethnic notions of community identity. Protestations of loyalty counted for relatively little to most Abbotsfordians and Chilliwackers because, ultimately, these individuals were not British, and their perceived inability to assimilate meant they could not transcend racial boundaries.

Mennonites quickly garnered anxious attention in the Valley as well, with their use of an enemy language proving particularly provocative. At the outbreak of the war, separate German-language schools were banned, but German-language newspapers and church services remained

<sup>39</sup> This has been extensively covered in the literature, notably in Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978); Patricia Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbian Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858–1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man’s Province, 1914–1941* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> “A Peril in Our Midst,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 18 February 1942, 2.

<sup>41</sup> “Propose Ban on Land Sales to Japanese,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 7 January 1942, 8; “Says Japanese ‘Squeezing Our People from the Valley,’” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 3 June 1942, 1; “Japs Not the Ones to Be Considered,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 9 June 1943, 2.

<sup>42</sup> “Tom Robertson Heads Associated Boards,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 1 April 1942, 3.

open.<sup>43</sup> Some institutions, like St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Chilliwack, bowed to public pressure and discontinued the use of German in its services.<sup>44</sup> The "language problem" of the Mennonites in the Fraser Valley, however, remained a lightning rod for years. In a letter to the editor of the *Chilliwack Progress*, W.A. Baird argued: "A great many people would like to know, if the Mennonites are such loyal citizens as they pretend to be, why they use their Bible school in Yarrow to teach the Hitler language to their children."<sup>45</sup> But it was not simply that Mennonites spoke German that bothered local residents. One concerned citizen, Harry Day, wrote a letter to the editor of the *News*, stating: "As far as the language is concerned, it wouldn't matter a particle if they spoke Chinese. But it would demonstrate just as clearly as speaking the German language does, how little they really think of their adopted country."<sup>46</sup> Press coverage reveals that the anxieties and frustrations with Mennonites centred on their real and perceived resistance to assimilating into Anglo-Canadian ethnic and cultural norms. By late 1941 and 1942, the pressures were building on both Mennonites and Japanese Canadians in the Valley.

Patricia Roy notes few in British Columbia urged restraint against Japanese residents. Stephanie Bangarth notes how opposition to the "incarceration and expatriation" of the Japanese was relatively "muted in Canada," and this was certainly the case in the Fraser Valley papers.<sup>47</sup> With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor at the close of 1941, any public restraint towards the residents of Japanese heredity evaporated as British Columbians vented their anger and fears. The rising tide built on long-standing racial discourse surrounding the Japanese community's supposed unassimilability, high birth rates, illegal immigration, economic success, and unfair labour competition.<sup>48</sup> Politicians, organizations, and citizens alike argued that it was necessary to remove all Japanese from the threatened coastal area, regardless of citizenship or declarations of loyalty.<sup>49</sup> Land and businesses owned by Japanese Canadians were confiscated by the government and eventually sold at auctions, though

<sup>43</sup> "'We Only Want to Make Homes,' They Say," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 15 December 1943, 1, 6.

<sup>44</sup> "Lutherans to Discontinue Use of the German Language," *Chilliwack Progress*, 13 September 1939, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to the editor from W.A. Baird, *Chilliwack Progress*, 19 April 1943, 2.

<sup>46</sup> Letter to the editor from Harry Day, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 7 July 1943, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Patricia Roy, *The Triumph of Citizenship: The Japanese and Chinese in Canada, 1941-1967* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 24; Stephanie Bangarth, *Voices Raised in Protest: Defending North America Citizens of Japanese Ancestry, 1942-49* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 6.

<sup>48</sup> Ward, *White Man's Province*, 107.

<sup>49</sup> "Says Japanese 'Squeezing Our People from the Valley,'" *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 3 June 1942, 1.

the previous owners rarely saw much of the money from the sale.<sup>50</sup> Beginning late in February 1942, all people of Japanese descent living in the restricted coast region were required to move to Interior work camps or farther east, with often deplorable conditions and much hardship.<sup>51</sup>

Press coverage made clear to Japanese Canadians that, in the Fraser Valley, their citizenship faced constant public scrutiny.<sup>52</sup> As one man pointed out, “a Japanese cannot hide his nationality like a German or Italian can”; Japanese Canadians wore their “differences” and, as members of the “enemy race,” they were identifiable targets.<sup>53</sup> When using the term “Japanese,” the members of the Matsqui Municipal Council boldly stated that they “disregard legal technicalities ... because no amount of naturalizing [would] ever make a Japanese anything but a Japanese.”<sup>54</sup> This group of locally elected political representatives, along with many others in the Fraser Valley, did not differentiate Canadian citizens from Japanese immigrants. Press portrayals regularly painted people of Japanese ancestry as “bound to their homeland by blood sureties,” implying that, because of this, “none [could] become a true citizen of Canada.”<sup>55</sup> While some acknowledged that Japanese Canadians had been “decent, orderly people,” even “peaceful and law-abiding,” the broad consensus saw no value in their oath to Canada.<sup>56</sup>

In February 1942, an editorial in the *Progress* worried that the Japanese “peril in their midst” would turn on them, revealed that residents in the Fraser Valley shared broader provincial fears well chronicled by scholars.<sup>57</sup> The same editorial confidently declared that there was substantial evidence that “these citizens of an enemy nation were prepared

<sup>50</sup> Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship*, chap. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Peter Ward provides a narrative overview of the internment in “British Columbia and the Japanese Evacuation,” *Canadian Historical Review* 57, no. 3 (1976): 289–308; Pamela Sugiman, in “‘Life Is Sweet’: Vulnerability and Composure in Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 186–218, offers a gendered examination of the enduring legacy that these experiences left in the memory of Nissei who experienced the war trauma.

<sup>52</sup> “Boys Overseas Confident That Folks at Home Will Not Let Japanese Return to BC Areas,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 18 October 1944, 7.

<sup>53</sup> “J.B. Shimek Makes Reply to Rev. G.L. Collins re Japanese,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 25 February 1942, 8.

<sup>54</sup> “Proposed Ban on Land Sales to Japanese,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 7 January 1942, 8.

<sup>55</sup> “Japs Valueless as Citizens, Says Alex Paton, MLA,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 October 1944, 3.

<sup>56</sup> “The Japanese Question,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 23 August 1939, 3; “Proposed Ban on Land Sales to Japanese,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 7 January 1942, 8; “Gathering of 800 Hears Japanese Problem Speakers,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 11 October 1944, 1; “Third Japanese Panel Looms in Haney District,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 25 October 1944, 1.

<sup>57</sup> “A Peril in Our Midst,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 18 February 1942, 2.

to carry out fifth column activities" in British Columbia.<sup>58</sup> Patricia Roy shows that such fears fostered broad support in the Fraser Valley for the removal of Japanese residents from the region.<sup>59</sup> Even after their removal from the coastal region, fear of subversive activity lingered.<sup>60</sup> The *Chilliwack Progress* argued that internment camps east of Hope had "an insufficient number of [guards] to prevent Japanese from staging a mass drive down the valley, destroy[ing] vital railway and road bridges en route."<sup>61</sup> Editorials also expressed "resentment over the privileges given to the Japs and the pussyfoot manner in which they were treated" in these camps.<sup>62</sup> Some voices critiqued such "wild rumours and baseless reports" regarding the supposedly seditious activity of enemy aliens, stating that accepting these rumours as facts would "do our cause no good."<sup>63</sup> On the whole, though, these voices of moderation were relatively few and were drowned out by speculative reporting on the perceived menace of enemy aliens, regardless of the lack of evidence.

In contrast to the generalized criticism of Japanese aliens and Japanese Canadian citizens, stories of two Japanese families in Chilliwack hint at the possibility of transcending racial categories. The *Chilliwack Progress* interviewed the two families, or "half of the Japanese people resident" in the Chilliwack area, on Monday, 8 December 1941.<sup>64</sup> The Adachis and the Kojimas were long-time, successfully integrated residents of the Rosedale area, where they were prominent members of a local church. Without enough Japanese Canadians this far east in the Valley to form a *Nokai*, an agricultural and benevolent organization formed by Japanese Canadian communities as a cultural bulwark against prejudice and assimilative pressures, the Adachis and Kojimas appear to have been more amenable to assimilating than was common farther west in the Fraser Valley.<sup>65</sup> These families were shocked by Pearl Harbor and were eager to assert their allegiance to Canada so as to reassure their neighbours.

<sup>58</sup> "A Peril in Our Midst," 2. Ken Adachi first noted how widespread was the speculation about fifth columnists stated as fact in the wake of Pearl Harbor in the United States as well as in British Columbia. See Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was: A History of Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 204–7.

<sup>59</sup> Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship*, 26.

<sup>60</sup> Suspicion continued even though intelligence and security services found little evidence of sympathy or collusion: "British Columbia was no haven for 'Fifth Columnists' formed from the ranks of disgruntled enemy aliens." See Timothy Wilford, "The Enemy Within and the Pacific Threat: Canadian Security Intelligence in British Columbia, 1942–45," *Intelligence and National Security* 27, no. 4 (2012): 558.

<sup>61</sup> "Board of Trade Protests Lack of Guard for Japs," *Chilliwack Progress*, 2 September 1942, 3.

<sup>62</sup> "Board of Trade Protests."

<sup>63</sup> "Idle Rumors and Imaginative Reporting," *Chilliwack Progress*, 13 September 1939, 4.

<sup>64</sup> "Local Japanese Pledge Their Support," *Chilliwack Progress*, 10 December 1941, 1.

<sup>65</sup> Doré, "Transnational Communities," 48–51.

According to the *Progress*, “The mother of one family broke into tears as she explained the difficult position into which naturalized Japanese had been put.”<sup>66</sup> Mrs. Kojima, who had lived in Canada for twenty-eight years, stated that she was “very sorry, very sorry indeed” about the attack. The Adachis declared: “[Canada is our] country now and we will help in every way to defend it. Japan is sure to be defeated.”<sup>67</sup> Having provided these families a voice, an opportunity offered to few other Japanese Canadians, the *Chilliwack Progress* concluded that Chilliwackers had little to fear from these Japanese families in their town.<sup>68</sup> The authorities finally incarcerated the Kojimas in the internment camp at Tashme, in the BC interior, in October 1942. In November, the members of the popular Adachi family were forcibly relocated to Ontario, but not before more than one hundred Rosedale residents honoured and celebrated them at a number of parties and church functions.<sup>69</sup> These families’ adherence to the values, and participation in the institutions, of the surrounding settler community transformed them into neighbours and rendered permeable the usually rigid boundaries of race. It is telling, however, that the *Chilliwack Progress* lauded the qualities and character of these families while simultaneously lacing its pages with vitriolic coverage of the perceived Japanese threat.

Interestingly, Mennonites purchased large portions of the property that was taken away from interned Japanese Canadians in the Fraser Valley.<sup>70</sup> As conscientious objectors, one of the reasons Mennonites had come to Canada was that the federal government assured them that they would not be forced into military service. The Canadian Mennonite leadership’s adherence to the principle of refusing to bear arms in the military led many to serve in alternative service camps (where they built roads, planted trees, or fought forest fires) or as non-combatants in the military (such as stretcher-bearers and medical personnel).<sup>71</sup> And yet, many Mennonite men chose paths that were out of step with the church leadership. In fact, among the sixty-eight Yarrow Mennonites who served during the war, more chose combat roles (forty-six) than non-combat roles (twenty-two), though this was rarely publicly recognised.<sup>72</sup> Most

<sup>66</sup> “Local Japanese Pledge Their Support,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 10 December 1941, 1

<sup>67</sup> “Local Japanese Pledge Their Support,” 1.

<sup>68</sup> “Local Japanese Pledge Their Support,” 1.

<sup>69</sup> “Rosedale Japanese Family Honored,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 4 November 1942, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 113.

<sup>71</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 51.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Schmidt, “Split Loyalties: Fraser Valley Mennonite Service in the Second World War,” *Fraser Valley History Project*, <http://app.ufv.ca/fvhistory/studentsites/wwII/mennonitew-wwIIservice/index.html>.



Fraser Valley conscientious objectors farmed and therefore qualified for exemptions from military service as essential labourers.<sup>73</sup> Although some voices in the *News* and the *Progress* defended Mennonites as "thrifty, law-abiding, industrious, intensely religious, and good farmers," many more of the dominant British settler population criticized people whom they often derisively termed "conchies" – that is, conscientious objectors. Despite the numbers that served in the forces, many in Abbotsford and Chilliwack regarded Mennonites as disloyal and their citizenship as illegitimate. For the Anglo-Canadian majority in the region, Mennonites did not speak the right language, accepted lower standards of living, practised different business policies, produced too many children (and therefore did not pay their fair share in school taxes), and resisted assimilation. Such concerns segregated Mennonites, despite their European background, from ethnically defined notions of citizenship and belonging in an Anglo-Celtic cultural norm.

Mennonites' economic competitiveness also drew attention, painted as "a blight creeping insidiously over the countryside," threatening the economic well-being of true Canadian citizens.<sup>74</sup> According to Sarah Wilshire Smith, "These people are benefiting by the fact that practically all our boys are gone, and they are stepping into the jobs left by them, hence they are able to be sporting big cars, etc., and are now vigorously trying to get the monopoly of the poultry business."<sup>75</sup> As Abbotsford and Chilliwack were largely rural, agricultural communities, debates invariably focused on farmland in possession of "enemy aliens" or conscientious objectors and became personal. Lang Sands, the editor of the *News*, stated that the main contention against the Mennonites was that they were gradually acquiring land that "men now overseas would be farming if there were no war."<sup>76</sup> Farmers in the Fraser Valley felt powerless to prevent what many saw as the infiltration of Mennonites with questionable loyalties onto valuable agricultural land. One story claimed that wartime shortages of labour forced some "elderly and physically handicapped people ... and even healthy men" to sell their land because they could not work it successfully.<sup>77</sup> With others forced to sell out, conscientious objectors were able to purchase the land for a "reasonable price" and were thought to have enough labour because the

<sup>73</sup> Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Letter to the editor from Harry Day, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 7 July 1943, 2.

<sup>75</sup> Letter to the editor from Sarah Wilshire Smith, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 February 1942, 2.

<sup>76</sup> "Fraser Valley Disturbed by Mennonite Issue," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 15 December 1943, 1.

<sup>77</sup> "Conscientious Objectors and Farm Sales," *Chilliwack Progress*, 24 February 1943, 2.



Mennonite farmer “has himself and his sons – two, four, six of them.”<sup>78</sup> The dissonance of profiting from the war while refusing to participate directly provoked persistent anger.

What really made the “Mennonite problem” visceral was the thought of a soldier overseas returning home to find himself unable to acquire land and “surrounded by foreigners with whom he [could] never find common ground.”<sup>79</sup> For those with loved ones in uniform, Mennonites appeared to be destroying the very future of service personnel in the region’s agricultural heart. As a result, increasing voices recommended that fertile farmland be reserved for returning soldiers. In December 1943, Alan Morley, a writer for the *Vancouver-News Herald*, travelled to the Fraser Valley to investigate the “dangerous tension” growing between Anglo-Canadians and Mennonites. He concluded that residents in Abbotsford appeared “to be more than a little jealous of the Mennonites’ success as farmers.”<sup>80</sup> The increasing prosperity of Mennonites as a result of the wartime economy provoked resentment. Gordon Towers, the president of the Langley Board of Trade, stated, “If it took Pearl Harbor to get rid of the Japs, it is going to take some real work before we get rid of these Mennonites.”<sup>81</sup> Try as they may, Fraser Valley farmers’ demands for the banning of land sales to Mennonites went largely unanswered by provincial authorities. It proved impossible to build political momentum for a land ban that had little resonance in British Columbia outside the Fraser Valley, especially when combined with the lack of any security threat and the fact that Mennonites’ agricultural productivity contributed significantly to the war effort.<sup>82</sup>

The *News* and *Progress* published many articles, editorials, and letters to the editor railing about ethno-linguistic and economic issues, but the intolerance of Mennonites was rooted in their pacifism. Conscientious objector status so angered members of the Abbotsford and District Board of Trade that they bitterly declared that “between Japanese and Mennonite settlers, the Jap was the lesser evil in building up the community.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> “Conscientious Objectors and Farm Sales.”

<sup>79</sup> “Conscientious Objectors and Farm Sales.” Similar sentiments were published in an editorial reprinted from the *Langley Advance*: “A Threat to Our Homes,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 31 March 1943, 2.

<sup>80</sup> “Fraser Valley Disturbed by Mennonite Issue,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 15 December 1943, 1.

<sup>81</sup> “Influx of Mennonites Gives Alarm,” *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 24 March 1943, 1.

<sup>82</sup> In contrast, Alberta passed the *Land Sales Prohibition Act* in 1942, barring Hutterites and enemy aliens from purchasing land for the duration of the war, which suggests a wider consensus about agricultural land existed in that province than in British Columbia.

<sup>83</sup> “Abbotsford Sends Protest against Sending More Mennonites to District,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 29 April 1942, 3.

The *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News* affirmed that responsible citizenship should include a willingness to fight to protect freedom and democracy for their country.<sup>84</sup> Mennonites understood that other Abbotsford and Chilliwack settlers frequently viewed them as did W.W. Weeden, who declared in 1943: "these people are not desirable neighbors and will never be desirable citizens."<sup>85</sup> One letter to the editor of the *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News* proclaimed: "It is NOT because these people are of German origin that they are so disliked. It IS because of a religion which they use to obtain concessions which are denied to others."<sup>86</sup> In response to all of this criticism, Yarrow Mennonites defended their pacifist stance and their record of service and economic support of the war effort, expressed their desire to be considered Canadians, and condemned the public campaign that had painted them as "worse than the Japanese."<sup>87</sup>

Viewing both Japanese Canadians and Mennonites as physical, economic, and ethnic threats, regional dialogue gradually turned to a perceived political threat posed by each group. Given that the citizenship and loyalties of Japanese Canadians and conscientious objectors were in question, some Chilliwackers and Abbotsfordians seemed to believe that members of these groups should not be given any political power. On the issue of Japanese Canadians who had been disenfranchised since 1895, there was little said in the Fraser Valley newspapers until 1944. The issue resurfaced as part of a broader provincial and national debate over the postwar fate of Japanese nationals and Japanese Canadians in 1944. The increasingly popular CCF took up the cause of enfranchisement, though it was far from unanimous in this course.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, the *News* warned that people "should also watch closely any political party who would help to hasten the day by giving the Japanese a vote in the administration of affairs of this province."<sup>89</sup> Those who supported giving Japanese Canadians the right to vote were consistently criticized. A similar upswell of voices appeared earlier in the war, arguing that conscientious objectors should be disenfranchised. "If those fellows who call themselves Mennonites won't fight with us they shouldn't

<sup>84</sup> "Citizenship and Responsibility," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 18 March 1942, 2.

<sup>85</sup> "Back Move Barring 'Conchie' Land Sales," *Chilliwack Progress*, 10 March 1943, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Letter to the editor from Harry Day, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 7 July 1943, 2.

<sup>87</sup> "Mennonites Protest Criticism: Organize to Buy Loan Bonds," *Chilliwack Progress*, 5 December 1943, 1; "We Only Want to Make Homes' They Say," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 15 December 1943, 1; "Mennonite Leaders Deny 'Reprisal Threats,'" *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 22 December 1943, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Roy, *Triumph of Citizenship*, chap. 3.

<sup>89</sup> "Hard to Understand," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 7 June 1944, 2.

have the vote,” proclaimed Flight Lieutenant Leslie H. Eyers, MLA, in early 1942.<sup>90</sup> In October 1941, the Mennonite vote was “one of the hottest issues of the final phases of the [provincial] election campaign” in the Fraser Valley.<sup>91</sup> When local officials petitioned to Victoria on the Mennonite “vote” question, the *Chilliwack Progress* reported that “the right of approximately 800 Mennonites to go to the polls hangs in the balance.” Despite the uproar from the Fraser Valley, the deputy provincial secretary, Peter Walker, claimed that the government was “entirely of the opinion and belief that Mennonites may vote if they are registered,” and it did not restrict the Mennonite vote during the war, though it did so briefly in 1947–48.<sup>92</sup>

In Abbotsford and Chilliwack, letters to the editor of the newspapers often questioned the citizenship of “other” groups in the area. In 1942, the *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News* published a series of letters over the course of six weeks that strongly exemplifies the attitudes towards the Mennonites settled in the Fraser Valley. After a Mennonite choir sang at a Thanksgiving church service at an auditorium in Abbotsford, some of the congregation was either “burning with indignation” or “seething with resentment.”<sup>93</sup> Attendees were angry that

so many young men of military age [were] standing before men and women whose husbands, sons, brothers and loved ones are fighting and dying to preserve the liberty of this land of Canada, while they stand apparently oblivious of their obligation to defend the land which gives them these priceless gifts of freedom and security.<sup>94</sup>

Sara Wilshire Smith wrote to the editor: “I speak for hundreds of mothers who can no longer tolerate this state of affairs and will not rest till something is done about this. If these people want to be Canadian citizens then let them fight for their rights as such, shoulder to shoulder as Canadians with our boys.”<sup>95</sup> When Valley residents came face to face with the lingering presence of fit men of military age who were claiming the same rights of citizenship as their own men, who were

<sup>90</sup> “Introduces Mennonite Vote,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 21 January 1942, 6.

<sup>91</sup> “May Seek Permanent Solution to Question of Mennonite Vote,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 22 October 1941, 1.

<sup>92</sup> “May Seek Permanent Solution to Question of Mennonite Vote.”

<sup>93</sup> Letter to the editor from Ellen MacNeil, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 February 1942, 2; letter to the editor from Sarah Wilshire Smith, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 February 1942, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Letter to the editor from Ellen MacNeil, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 February 1942, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Letter to the editor from Sarah Wilshire Smith, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 February 1942, 2.

making sacrifices overseas, their response was visceral. The perception that Mennonites were profiting from their avoidance of military service only amplified their anger.

In response, George Funk, on behalf of the Fraser Valley Mennonites, stated that he believed that those letters "would not have been written had the above mentioned parties known who Mennonites are and what they stand for."<sup>96</sup> He explained the history of the Mennonites and argued that their interpretation of one of the Ten Commandments, "Thou Shalt not Kill," was the reason that Mennonites "should in no way be willing to shed [the] blood of any human being." Funk claimed that he was aware that the Mennonites had obligations towards Canada: "we are willing to sacrifice our life, as well [as] property." He argued, however, that they also have obligations to God and that it is their first duty to serve "Him." In response, Catherine E. Beetlestone wrote that "our *true* Canadians, thank God, are not willing to be murdered and submit to wholesale destruction of life and property ... even if it means the great sacrifice."<sup>97</sup> In these letters, citizenship, or at least good citizenship, was equated with making sacrifices for the country and Empire. In the following edition, the editors of the newspaper published an article entitled "Killing in Battle: Is it Murder?" They argued that, when soldiers kill, they are doing an awful but righteous service for God; that they are serving the interests of humanity and that, therefore, they should do so without guilt. At the end of the article, the editor stated: "While we are printing in this issue two more letters from readers on a subject related to the above question and which has been aired both ways by correspondents during the past several weeks, we do not think anything will be gained publishing further letters on the matter at this time."<sup>98</sup> In these letters, the Mennonites' pacifist stance was juxtaposed with the prospect of BC husbands and sons serving and sacrificing overseas, revealing the raw emotions that injected so much intensity into the perceptions of conscientious objectors.<sup>99</sup> Only one writer, Ellen Cowin, acknowledged that there were a few Mennonites, "thank goodness," fighting alongside other local boys "for our own beloved British Columbia."<sup>100</sup> For Anglo-Canadian residents in the Fraser Valley, the Mennonites who fought in the war were seen as worthy of their citizenship.

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<sup>96</sup> Letter to the editor from George Funk, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 11 March 1942, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Letter to the editor from George Funk.

<sup>98</sup> "The Duty to Protect," *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 March 1942, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Letter to the editor from A. Ellwood, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 March 1942, 2.

<sup>100</sup> Letter to the editor from Ellen Cowin, *Abbotsford, Sumas, and Matsqui News*, 25 March 1942, 2.

Abbotsford and Chilliwack residents participated in myriad ways in the Second World War, and this participation left a lasting legacy in the region. But they also waged a lengthy and complex battle to define citizenship within Canada and what it meant to belong in their own communities, and their tools and weapons were largely discursive. These skirmishes took the form of defining nationality and citizenship in terms that were both racialized and philosophical – and often interwoven with economic fear. Cowen suggests that war work and military service for the nation “became both an obligation of citizenship but also a means of categorizing, organizing, and othering citizens.”<sup>101</sup> For residents of the Fraser Valley, this process of categorizing and othering during the Second World War was carried out in the churches and in the real estate markets of their home communities. “Nationalism” and “citizenship” were terms mobilized and weaponized to create or enforce conformity and to attack certain expressions of diversity. In all this, people were motivated by complex factors that ranged from love of their sons and husbands overseas to resentment over the paying of school property taxes to educate “foreigners” who failed to behave in ways that reflected and reinforced the hierarchy and privileges of the Anglo-Canadian majority. Despite its distance from the theatres of combat, the region’s demographic composition, its agricultural foundation, and its geographic proximity to the threatened Pacific coast all crafted a unique home front. Given these factors, Italian Canadians were barely considered as a threat, minority communities’ economic competition invariably provoked debates over control of agricultural lands, and the relatively tiny population of long-standing Japanese residents in Chilliwack could be perceived as a much-loved part of the community and yet still be interned. The intensity of local influences on events makes clear that we cannot seek to understand communities at war only as microcosms of some common national experience; rather, the home front was an aggregation of thousands of distinct local experiences across the nation.

Those of German ancestry were initially a focal point of concern in the Fraser Valley, but this quickly subsided, as did any worries about Italian enemy aliens. In part this was due to the Great War experience with an “enemy” German population, which, despite heightened violence against ethnic Germans, had not produced any genuine physical threat to Canadian society.<sup>102</sup> In a sense, it gave Anglo-Canadian majorities

<sup>101</sup> Cowen, *Military Workfare*, 26.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Moogk, “Uncovering the Enemy Within: British Columbians and the German Menace,” *BC Studies* 182 (Summer 2014): 45–72.

a precedent for distinguishing between "good" and "bad" Germans. Thus, many Fraser Valley residents drew on this experience and quickly dismissed concern about the ethnic German and Italian populations. Surprisingly, the local responses to "Conchies" and "Japs" in the Second World War were far more strident, but this was partly because both were new phenomena. Japan had been a valued ally during the Great War and there was as yet no influx of pacifist Mennonites to unsettle Chilliwackers and Abbotsfordians. As a result, in the Fraser Valley the wartime responses to both groups were being invented without a clear precedent, and both groups became targets of overtly prejudiced assumptions and generalizations from the predominately Anglo-Canadian society. The notion that these Un-British groups were racial, physical, or economic threats was pervasive in the public debate, regardless of their declarations of loyalty and genuine contributions to the Canadian war effort.<sup>103</sup> The Second World War, in other words, was in many ways fought out in a theatre of collective identity formation through discussions of what it meant to be a citizen of a country that – outside of Quebec – still largely equated citizenship with Britishness or at least with the willingness of people of non-British descent to meet expectations of what it meant to be British.

How do we then interpret the reactions of Abbotsfordians and Chilliwackers to minority groups in terms of understandings of identity and belonging? José Igartua argues "that English-speaking Canada retained [a] British ethnic definition of itself until the 1960s, and then abruptly discarded it during that decade."<sup>104</sup> Certainly ethnic criteria formed the crux of the animus directed at those of Japanese ancestry, and eventually Fraser Valley debates centred on barring their citizenship rights and possibility of return. Fundamentally, Japanese residents could not circumvent the key ethnic criteria of "Whiteness" and were deemed beyond the pale of legitimate citizenship. In a similar vein, Neufeldt argues that "ethnic markers of belonging remained strong in Canada" and "that Mennonites were judged foremost by ethnic national criteria."<sup>105</sup> Mennonites were "White," but they were still attacked in the Fraser Valley for their resistance to assimilation and other ethnically defined criteria

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<sup>103</sup> This runs somewhat counter to Cowen's (*Military Workfare*, 53) argument that genuine citizenship was earned through war work. Certainly, Fraser Valley residents championed this ideal rhetorically; however, in practice, they often failed to acknowledge the actual war contributions that "Un-British" groups were making to the national cause.

<sup>104</sup> Igartua, *Other Quiet Revolution*, 5.

<sup>105</sup> Neufeldt, "Tolerant Exclusion," 217, 214.

While much of the evidence in this study supports the continuing emphasis on ethnic national identity in Anglo-Canada, we should be cautious about painting this picture with too categorical a brush. At least two key aspects of the experience in the Fraser Valley run counter to the broader narrative. First, the unusual levels of acceptance granted to the Adachi and Kojima families, developed over many years and through these families' determined efforts to adapt and to integrate, actually seemed to partially break down the usually potent ethnic barriers to inclusion. Certainly, this was partial at best as locals could celebrate these families and lament their internment while still cheering the more abstract notion of removing the entire Japanese and Japanese Canadian population from the coastal exclusion zone. Second, Mennonites' experiences of hostility in the Fraser Valley primarily targeted their unwillingness to serve in the military during wartime. Their pacifism and conscientious objector status undermined their ability to fulfill the powerful nexus of military service and citizenship in Western democracies. As Cowen argues, "war work operates as an important arbiter of entitlement for citizenship."<sup>106</sup> In the total war environment of the Fraser Valley, Mennonites' conscientious objection, and the economic opportunities this provided them, made them targets for exclusion more than their ethnic or linguistic "Germanness" ever did. Ultimately, to be "Un-British" in the Fraser Valley was to be defined outside the boundaries of "Canadian" during the Second World War.

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<sup>106</sup> Cowen, *Military Workfare*, 4.