

TO: MAYOR & EACH  
COUNCILLOR  
FROM: CITY CLERK'S OFFICE

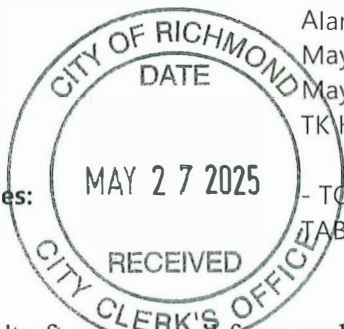
Schedule 1 to the Minutes of the  
Parks, Recreation & Cultural  
Services Committee meeting of  
Richmond City Council held on  
Tuesday, May 27, 2025.

ON TABLE ITEM

Date: May 27, 2025  
Meeting: PRCS  
Item: 1

From: Alan Sakai <asakai123@icloud.com>  
Sent: May 25, 2025 9:15 PM  
To: Mayor and Councillors  
Subject: TK Homma Commemorative Plaque Installation

Categories: - TO: MAYOR & EACH COUNCILLOR / FROM: CITY CLERK'S OFFICE, - DISTRIBUTED ON  
TABLE



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**City of Richmond Security Warning:** This email was sent from an external source outside the City. Please do not click or open attachments unless you recognize the source of this email and the content is safe..

May 24, 2025

Dear Mayor and Council,

*I strongly support the placement of the plaque commemorating Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma's Legal Case at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building (JFBSB).*

- Placing the plaque at the JFBS building will serve as an educational resource to cultivate greater visibility and raise public awareness and understanding of the early Japanese settlers in a public space in the heart of historic Steveston.*
- The current renewal landscape plan outside the JFBS building could incorporate the plaque, this is in progress by the City of Richmond's Culture team.*
- The plaque promotes and preserves an aspect of Japanese Canadian history, heritage and contribution that can be shared with a broad audience.*
- The plaque's location would be across the street where people can conveniently view the Nikkei Stories short video, Tomekichi Homma, Man of the Times on their cellphones. Information about Tomey would be centralized for those who are interested in learning more about his life.*
- Tomey Homma was instrumental in fundraising and arranging support for the building of the Japanese Benevolent Fishman's Society Building in Steveston and was the President of this society for many years. The connection to the JBS could be easily seen and enhance the story of the JBFSB and its work during a difficult era.*

*The plaque recognizes the historic contribution to the hard-fought, long-awaited struggle for fundamental rights of citizenship. This placement is central to the story of Tomey Homma, and the Japanese Community that he fought for.*

*As this commemoration belongs to all citizens it should not be encumbered by placement in a location whereby access could be restricted by competing agendas more than in a public space. An example of this would be a school where access would require special dispensation during school hours or on certain dates due to the school calendar.*

Alan Sakai,  
Director Steveston Judo Club,  
Director Steveston Community Society,  
Chair of the Japanese Canadian Heritage Committee of the Steveston Community Society,  
Chair Steveston Martial Arts Centre

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MAY 27 2025 PA

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**Steveston Community Society**  
*Serving the Community of Steveston Since 1946*

**ON TABLE ITEM**

Date: May 27, 2025  
Meeting: PROF  
Item: 1

May 26, 2025

Dear Mayor and Council:

**TO: MAYOR & EACH  
COUNCILLOR  
FROM: CITY CLERK'S OFFICE**

**Re: TK Homma Commemorative Plaque Installation**

The Steveston Community Society supports the placement of the plaque commemorating Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma's Legal Case at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building (JFBSB).

As this commemoration belongs to all citizens, it should not be encumbered by placement in a location whereby access could be restricted by competing agendas. An example of this would be a school where access would require special dispensation during school hours or on certain dates due to the school calendar.

By placing the plaque at the JFSB building, this will serve as an education resource to cultivate greater visibility and raise public awareness and understanding of the early Japanese settlers in a public space in the heart of historic Steveston.

The current renewal landscape plan outside the JFBS building that is in progress by the City of Richmond's Culture team, could incorporate the plaque that promotes and preserves an aspect of Japanese Canadian history, heritage and contribution that can be shared with a broad audience.

The plaque's location would also be across the street where people can conveniently view the Nikkei Stories short video, Tomekichi Homma, Man of the Times on their cellphones. Information about Tomey would be centralized for those who are interested in learning more about his life.

Tomey Homma was instrumental in fundraising and arranging support for the building of the Japanese Benevolent Fishman's Society Building in Steveston and was the President of this society for many years. The connection to the JBS could be easily seen and enhance the story of the JFBSB and its work during a difficult era.

The plaque recognizes the historic contribution to the hard-fought, long-awaited struggle for fundamental rights of citizenship. This placement is central to the story of Tomey Homma, and the Japanese Community that he fought for and is best placed at the JFBSB.

Yours truly,

Alan Clark  
President, Steveston Community Society



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**Parks  
Canada**

**Parcs  
Canada**



**To:** Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Services Committee

**Date:** May 14, 2025

**From:** Meghan Kate Humble – National Historic Sites Superintendent – Coastal BC Field Unit  
Pierce Smith – Curator – Coastal BC Field Unit  
Kelvin Higo – Chairman of the Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre Advisory Committee  
Linda Barnes – President Steveston Historical Society  
Tenney Homma – Proponent

**Re:** **Approval to Install the National Historic Event Designation *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma***

**Seeking Recommendation:**

For approval to install, in partnership with the City of Richmond, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) National Historic Event Designation *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma* in the front garden of the Japanese Benevolent Fishermen's Society Building (see Attachment 1).

**Background**

This year marks the 125th anniversary of the landmark court case *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma*. In 1900, Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma sought to secure the right to vote for Japanese Canadians. It was during a hostile, anti-Asian period in British Columbia when the White Majority and provincial politicians placed restrictions and legislation that affected the social, economic and occupational lives of Japanese immigrants. Homma believed being able to vote gave Japanese Canadians political voice to change racist laws and barriers.

This case was successful in the County Court of Vancouver and the Supreme Court of BC but was ultimately struck down by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in 1903 (the highest court of appeal at the time) in London, England. Almost fifty years later in 1949 and four years after Tomekichi's death, Japanese Canadians were granted their voting franchise. However, it wasn't until 1960 that equal voting rights were granted to all Canadians; further to this, specific Canada-wide voting rights were not solidified for Japanese Canadians until 1982 in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

**Location**

In 2017 a plaque commemorating *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma* was unveiled at the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre as a National Historic Event. The Peter A. Allard Law Building at UBC was the original recommended location for the plaque installation. However, in consultation with the Musqueam Nation, UBC asked that an alternative location be chosen.

Over the last two years Parks Canada staff have been working with Tenney Homma, Grace Eiko Thomson (original proponent), and the City of Richmond Cultural Heritage staff, to find a suitable location in Richmond/Steveston for this designation. We have identified a site for installation outside the Japanese Benevolent Fishermen's Society Building (JBFS) in Steveston. This plaque placement requires a minor alteration to the exterior grounds outside the historic building. The changes to the landscape will be planned and designed collaboratively with the City of Richmond staff.

The plaque and stand as well as their maintenance are paid for and installed by Parks Canada. The proposal is to install it in front of the right side of the JFBS Building and can be completed in accordance with any requirements from the City of Richmond. The installation can be done by city staff or Parks Canada can pay for a contractor to do the work.

### **Community and Proponent Support**

As an arrival in the early 1880's to this country, Tomey Homma was one of the first Japanese immigrants to settle in Steveston. He worked in the salmon fishery and helped organize Japanese Canadian fishers to demand fair prices and equal treatment from the canners. Homma was instrumental in the founding of Gyosha Dantai (Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society). In 1897, he was voted by his peers to be the society's first president. Homma made an enduring mark on the JFBS as it became an important institution in the Japanese Canadian community. He was instrumental in the creation of a community hospital, open to all, as one of its first activities. Later, he endorsed the construction of a school for Japanese Canadian children. Homma's community spirit shaped the development of the early Japanese Canadian community.

The JFBS Building is deeply rooted in the history of Japanese Canadian contributions to the Steveston community. This is where Homma undoubtedly spent time working on behalf of his fellow immigrants which continued even after he moved to Vancouver. This historic building stands as a fitting place to honor one of the most pivotal legal battles for civil rights in Canadian history in which the JFBS members supported and raised funds to help pay for Homma's legal costs.

There are additional reasons to install this designation at this site. It would create an added physical enhancement and attract interest to this heritage corner as seen in Attachment 2. The JFBS Building is currently located behind the Steveston Museum and across the street from the Nikkei Stories video about Tomekichi Homma titled *A Man of the Times*. Information about Homma will be centralized making it convenient for the public to learn about his life and achievements. The location of the proposed plaque site on Moncton Street is in the heart of Steveston; it will be in a high traffic area and readily visible for maximum viewing.

In terms of plaque location, two other sites were also considered. The Tomekichi Homma Elementary School has no direct connection to Tomekichi Homma's life, though it is named after him. Putting the plaque there would be redundant and would not have the same traffic of heritage-interested visitors. Similarly, the Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre does not have the same tangible connection with Homma's life and accomplishments in this community. However, the JFBS Building was the centre of his greatest activity and provides a material, tangible connection between the fabric of the structure that was touched by his hands and the enduring legacy of his advocacy.

There is significant endorsement from local organizations, residents, and members of the broader Japanese Canadian community for the plaque to be placed at this location, as evidenced by the attendance here today and the letters of support provided.

Respectfully,

Meghan Kate Humble  
[Meghankate.Humble@pc.gc.ca](mailto:Meghankate.Humble@pc.gc.ca)  
250-661-3781  
National Historic Sites Superintendent

Pierce Smith  
[Pierce.Smith@pc.gc.ca](mailto:Pierce.Smith@pc.gc.ca)  
236-335-4090  
Curator

Att. 1: Google Map image of the location of the Japanese Benevolent Fishermen's Society Building, photographs of the outside of the Japanese Benevolent Fishermen's Society Building from City Staff.  
Att. 2: Support Letters from various community members and organizations.  
Att. 3: Backgrounder about Tomey Homma.  
Att. 4: Image of the plaque artwork and plaque text.

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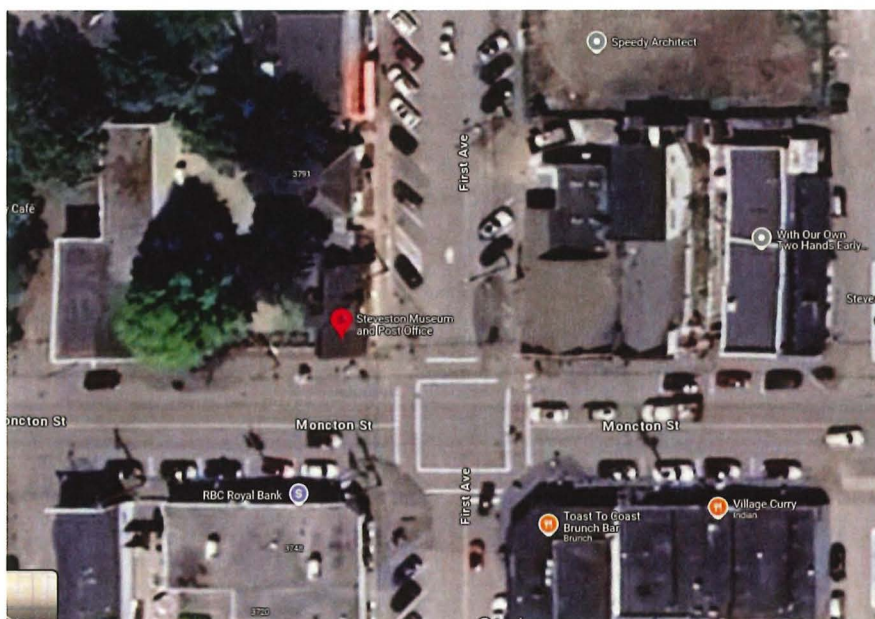
Parks  
Canada

Parcs  
Canada



**Att. 1 - Google Map image of the location of the Japanese Benevolent Fishermen's Society Building, photographs of the outside of the Japanese Benevolent Fishermen's Society Building.**

Originally this building was located between the Japanese Canadian Language School and the hospital: two important JFBS projects which Tomey Homma endorsed, fundraised for, and helped build.



Picture 1 – Google Image of Installation Street



Picture 2 – Japanese Fishmen's Benevolent Society Building in Steveston





Picture 3 – Japanese Fishmen's Benevolent Society Building Front Garden



Picture 4 – Japanese Fishmen's Benevolent Society Building Front Garden

11005 Swan Crescent  
Surrey, B.C. V3R 5B7

May 13, 2025

Parks, Recreation, and Culture Commission  
City of Richmond  
Richmond City Hall  
6911 No. 3 Road  
Richmond, B.C. V6Y 2C1

Dear Parks, Recreation, and Culture Commission:

RE: Support for Installation of Homma Plaque outside of the Japanese Benevolent Fisherman's Society Building (JBFSB) in Steveston

I am writing in support for the installation of the Cunningham V. Tomey Homma plaque (Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and Parks Canada) outside of the Japanese Benevolent Fisherman's Society Building (JBFSB) in Steveston.

Tomey (Tomekichi) Homma fought for the voting rights of Japanese Canadians. This is significant if it was his only achievement, but he also did important work much earlier for the Steveston community.

Tomey Homma and other Issei (first generation Japanese Canadian) founded the first Japanese Canadian fishermen's association, Gyosha Dantai, in Steveston in 1887. In 1899, the association was registered as the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Association. Homma served as the first president and chair from 1887 to 1899. The association negotiated labour disputes, established the first hospital in the area which was open to all, the first form of public health care, and the first Japanese language school in Canada.

I also have a personal connection to Steveston. I am a descendant of Japanese Canadian fishers on my father's side. My Oikawa family came to Canada at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and settled on Oikawa Island. After 1942, the Oikawa name was removed and Don Island is the name currently on the charts. Former City of Richmond Councillor Harold Steves brought this history to the attention of the mayor and council.



Twenty years ago in 2005, the City of Richmond recognized the historical name, Oikawa Island. I also have a connection through my uncle Buck (Tatsuro) Suzuki who was a leader in the Japanese Canadian community in Steveston and fought to have the Japanese Canadian fishers included in the fishers' union. He also took on the challenge of protecting fish habitat at a time when most did not understand the dangers of polluting our water.

I serve on the board of the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC) as past president, and am currently working on projects in Surrey and Vancouver evolving from my work with the NAJC to set in motion legacy initiatives to honour our Japanese Canadian ancestors.

Tomekichi Homma's story is important to the Japanese Canadian community and all Canadians.

I urge you to support the installation of the plaque outside of the Japanese Benevolent Fisherman's Society Building in Steveston where Tomekichi Homma did so much good work.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "L. Oikawa".

Lorene Oikawa

*Arthur K Miki, CM, OM  
910-1395 Grant Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB R3M 1Z*

May 12, 2025

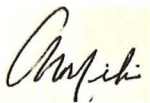
**Letter of Submission for Richmond City Council**

**Re:** Site Placement of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Plaque  
Commemorating Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma's Legal Case at the Japanese Fishermen's  
Benevolent Society Building

As the former president of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, I am very much aware of the contribution that Mr. Tomekichi Homma made in seeking justice for Japanese Canadians who were deprived of their right to vote. I had read during the redress campaign about his long struggle through different levels of courts only to be denied the right to vote by the Privy Council in England. As far as I recall, he is truly the first Canadian human rights advocate in Canada. His challenge, despite the hostile racist environment he faced, required courage and perseverance that needs be recognized as a reminder of such past injustices.

In 2017, I attended the unveiling of the plaque in Vancouver with Grace Eiko Thomson at the Nikkei Centre and was surprised to hear the original placement was rejected. Tomekichi Homma has played an important role in the history of the Japanese in Canada and his efforts and commitment to achieve equality is something that we are proud of. I urge the Richmond City Council to give the recognition Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma deserves as proposed in the placement of Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Plaque at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building. Thanks very much for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Art Miki', is written over a small yellow rectangular background.

Art Miki

President of National Association of Japanese Canadians 1984-92



**GEOFF MEGGS**

819 Sawcut, Vancouver, BC

May 1, 2025

Councillor Chak Au, Chair,  
Park, Recreation and Cultural Services Committee,  
City of Richmond,  
6911 No. 3 Road,  
Richmond, V6Y 2C1

Dear Councillor Au,

I am writing to express my strong support for the placement of the plaque honouring pioneer Japanese Canadian resident Tomeikichi Homma outside the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society building in Steveston.

Homma was a remarkable individual whose community spirit shaped Steveston in many ways. As an early arrival to this country, he found work in the salmon fishery and helped organize Japanese Canadian fishermen to demand fair prices and equal treatment from the canners. This organization, the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society, quickly became one of the most important institutions in the JC community. As founding president, Homma made an enduring mark on the JFBS and drove forward the creation of a community hospital, open to all, as one of its first activities.

Homma believed that discriminatory voting laws that restricted Japanese participation in the democratic life of the province, as well as limited Japanese participation in many occupations, were an unacceptable barrier to full citizenship. In 1900, he resigned from the JFBS to challenge these laws and sought to register to vote in the federal election that year. His test case succeeded at the county and BC Supreme Court levels, only to be overturned by the Privy Council in London. This case, however, is considered the beginning of the battle to extend the vote to all Canadians without discrimination. No doubt Homma planned his case with his friends in the JFBS, probably in this building.

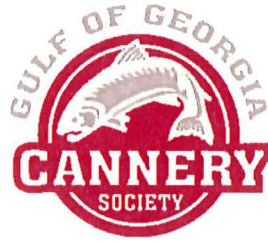
As someone who has done extensive research on Homma's life and work, I can think of no better way to honour this eminent citizen of your community.

Sincerely,



Geoff Meggs

cc: Todd Gross, director



May 9, 2025

Hello,

The Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society has a long-standing relationship with Steveston's Japanese Canadian community. Our exhibits, programs and events at the Gulf of Georgia National Historic site include stories of Japanese Canadian cannery workers and families. We were very pleased to hear of the proposed installation of a Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Plaque commemorating Tomekichi Homma's legal case.

The late Grace Eiko Thomson nominated Tomekichi Homma for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) designation. The extended Homma family and our organization support the plaque that commemorates the landmark legal case Cunningham v. Tomey Homma be placed by the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society (JFBS) building on Moncton St. in Richmond.

Examples:

- Placing the plaque at the JFBS building will serve as an educational resource to cultivate greater visibility and raise public awareness and understanding of the early Japanese settlers in a public space in the heart of historic Steveston.
- The plaque promotes and preserves an aspect of Japanese Canadian history, heritage and contribution that can be shared with a broad audience.
- As with other historic sites in Steveston, we collaborate to engage all visitors to Steveston. The placement of this at the JFBS building will not only enhance our visitors' experience but also strengthen connections within our community.

### Conclusion

This year marks a significant milestone, the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tomekichi's prominent law case to secure the right to vote. It is a fitting tribute for the plaque to be permanently placed at the historic site in Steveston.

We strongly recommend Council members support the placement of the HSMBC plaque by the JFBS building. The plaque recognizes the historic contribution to the hard-fought, long-awaited struggle for fundamental rights of citizenship. This placement is central to the story of Tomey Homma, and the Japanese Community in Richmond that he fought for.

Perry Mazzone  
Chair, Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society



April 25, 2025

Jeff Chiba Stearns

8534 Timber Court, Burnaby, BC, V5A 4B6

Author: Tomey: The Unyielding Spirit of Tomekichi Homma

To Whom It May Concern,

As the author of the forthcoming graphic novel *Tomey: The Unyielding Spirit of Tomekichi Homma*, to be published by the National Coalition Against Anti-Asian Racism (NCAAR) in May 2025, I am writing to express my full support for the installation of the 2017 Cunningham v. Tomey Homma commemorative plaque in Steveston, Richmond.

I first became aware of Tomekichi Homma in 2023 when I visited Tomekichi Homma Elementary in Steveston where I spent three days delivering author talks to the students. I did not have any prior knowledge of Tomekichi Homma before visiting the school. While at the school I read about his remarkable life from a plaque on the library wall. I was amazed that as a prominent member of the Japanese Canadian community, I had never heard of the incredible impact Tomekichi Homma had on our building and shaping community not just in Steveston but nationally.

Now having spent the last two years meticulously researching Tomekichi Homma's life for my graphic novel, I have come to respect him as one of Canada's first and greatest social justice champions and civil rights activists.

Tomekichi Homma's story is often overlooked in Canadian history but prominent members of our Japanese Canadian community such as Art Miki, President of the National Association of Japanese Canadians, 1984-1992 have been quoted in our book as saying, "Let us celebrate the courage and perseverance of the first Japanese Canadian human rights activist, Tomekichi homma!" While Maryka Omatsu, Canada's first female Judge of Asian heritage, has been quoted as saying, "Tomekichi Homma is a Japanese Canadian hero. His life was a struggle against racism for equality for all Asians."

We are recommending that this plaque be installed outside the Japanese Benevolent Fisherman's Society Building (JBFSB)—a location that holds particular relevance, as Tomekichi Homma was instrumental in its establishment and the founding of Gyosha Dantai (Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society). In 1897, he was voted by his peers to be the society's first president.

The Japanese Benevolent Fisherman's Society Building is deeply rooted in the history of Japanese Canadian contributions to the Steveston community, and stands as a fitting place to honour one of the most pivotal legal battles for civil rights in Canadian history.

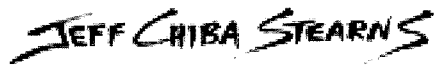
This installation will require an application for a permanent alteration within a designated Heritage Area, including modifications to the landscape outside the JBFSB. These thoughtful and respectful changes are crucial to ensuring that this nationally recognized historic event is commemorated in a meaningful and contextually appropriate setting.

In 2017, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recognized Cunningham v. Tomey Homma as a national historic event. The Government of Canada has acknowledged that "Tomekichi Homma's legal battle is known as one of the most significant acts of resistance to repression in the history of human rights in Canada." His unwavering demand for equitable treatment laid the groundwork for future movements and legal milestones, including the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960 and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982.

It is essential that we preserve and share stories like Homma's to help future generations understand the struggle behind the rights and freedoms we enjoy today. The right to vote—once denied to so many—is now a constitutionally protected right, thanks in part to trailblazers like Homma. The proposed plaque is more than a marker; it is a call to remember, reflect, and continue striving for justice, freedom, and equality.

I respectfully urge the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Commission with the City of Richmond to approve the proposed location and installation of this plaque. There is no other location more fitting to honour a man who gave so much to building Steveston. This will be a powerful and permanent tribute to a man whose legacy continues to inspire future generations of activists and leaders.

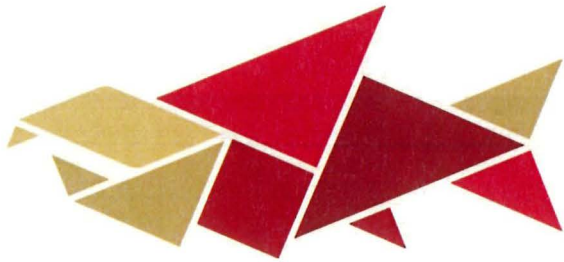
Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JEFF CHIBA STEARNS". The letters are bold and slightly slanted, with some ink bleed-through visible.

Jeff Chiba Stearns

Author, Tomey: The Unyielding Spirit of Tomekichi Homma





# **STEVESTON**

## **JAPANESE CANADIAN**

## **CULTURAL CENTRE**

May 1, 2025

To: Parks, Recreation, Cultural Services Committee

My name is Kelvin Higo and I am the chairman of the Steveston Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre Advisory Committee. This ad hoc advisory committee was established over 10 years ago to promote and protect the culture, history and traditions of our Japanese Canadian community.

We have been recently advised that Parks Canada, City staff and members of our Nikkei community have been working to install a plaque commemorating the 1900 Cunningham v. Tomey Homma landmark legal battle. This nomination was made to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada by the late Grace Eiko Thomson, a highly respected member of our Nikkei community.

My committee wishes to advise City Council of our support for the installation of the commemorative plaque acknowledging this historical event related to our Nikkei community and agree with its proposed location at the Fishermen's Benevolent Society building.

Locating this commemorative plaque at this location provides context with the adjacent building as well as recognizing the struggles of the Japanese immigrants to become Canadian citizens.

This year is the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic legal case that sought the franchise for our Nikkei community and we feel it is fitting to install this commemorative plaque immediately so that this project is not delayed any longer.

Sincerely,

Kelvin Higo

Chairman - SJCCC Advisory Committee

1903-2055 Pendrell Street

Vancouver, BC V6G 1T9

May 1, 2025

TO: Richmond City Council

**RE: Placement of Tomey Homma's Plaque at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building**

Dear Council Members,

I am Canada's first female judge of Asian descent, now retired and a long-time activist for human rights. I am writing to support the Japanese Canadian community's proposal for the placement of Tomey Homma's plaque at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society's building on Moncton Street in Richmond, BC.

In the 1880's, Tomey Homma was one of the first Japanese to settle in Canada. He was a community leader, fisherman, newspaper publisher and advocate for social justice for Japanese (Chinese and First Nations) Canadians.

Homma is most remembered for the landmark decision of the UK Privy Council, in Cunningham v. Tomey Homma. The Privy Council overturned the decision of the BC courts and upheld the denial of the franchise and citizenship rights to naturalized and Canadian born citizens of Asian heritage.

Today, the Homma decision is studied as a racist legal decision in a dark period of British Columbia's history. A ceremony, mounting the plaque will acknowledge how far we have progressed from those days and would celebrate the life of a man who played a role in advancing rights for a more just Canada.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Maryka Omatsu



April 30, 2025

ATTN: Parks, Recreation, and Culture Commission, City of Richmond  
RE: Support for the installation of the Historic Sites  
Cunningham V. Tomey Homma plaque

I am writing on behalf of the Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre (NNMCC) to wholeheartedly support the recommendation to install this designation at the Japanese Benevolent Fisherman's Society Building in Steveston which remarkably, Tomekichi Homma helped build.

We have been eagerly awaiting proper installation ever since unveiling the plaque at the NNMCC in 2017. We applaud the efforts of Pierce Smith and Kate Humble of Historic Sites for continuing to work with our community elder Grace Eiko Thomson and Homma descendant Tenney Homma to find a suitable permanent location when the original location intended to be at the Law Building at UBC fell through. It is sad that Grace, who passed away last year, will be unable to see the final installation but I am confident her spirit is in full support of the plaque's placement in a suitable space with significant public access.

We strongly encourage you to approve this proposal and would be delighted to see this happen this year, which would be the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of Homma's important court case.

Sincerely,



Sherri Kajiwara, Director | Curator  
Nikkei National Museum & Cultural Centre





Steveston Historical Society  
3811 Moncton Street  
Richmond, B.C. V7E 3A7  
[www.historicsteveston.ca](http://www.historicsteveston.ca)

May 7, 2025

**Attention: Mayor Brodie and Council**

**Re:** Site Placement of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Plaque  
Commemorating Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma's Legal Case at the Japanese Fishermen's  
Benevolent Society Building

On behalf of the Steveston Historical Society, we have been collaborating with Tenney Homma, the late Grace Eiko Thomson, and Rebecca Clarke from the City of Richmond to support the installation of a plaque commemorating Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma's significant legal case. Grace Eiko Thomson nominated Homma for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) designation, and both the extended Homma family and our Society endorse placing this plaque by the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society (JFBS) building on Moncton Street in Steveston/Richmond.

We are honored to be considered as the site for this plaque, which the City of Richmond's Culture team plans to incorporate into the renewal landscape outside the JFBS building. This plaque will celebrate the history, heritage, and contributions of Japanese Canadians, enabling a broad audience to engage with this rich legacy. Located strategically across the street, it will also allow visitors to view the Nikkei Stories short video, "Tomekichi Homma, Man of the Times," on their cellphones, providing centralized insights into Homma's life. Homma was instrumental in fundraising and supporting the construction of the JFBS building, serving as its President for many years.

This year marks the 125th anniversary of Tomekichi Homma's landmark legal battle for voting rights, making it a fitting time for this tribute. We strongly recommend that Council members support the placement of the HSMBC plaque by the JFBS building, as it honors the historic struggle for fundamental citizenship rights and highlights the pivotal role of Tomey Homma and the Japanese community in Richmond.

Thank you,

Linda Barnes and Joanne Teraguchi  
Co-Chairs  
Steveston Historical Society

## **2025 Letter of Submission for Richmond City Council**

**Date:** April 2025

**From:** Keiko Tenney-Sean Homma

3590 Benvoulin Road

Kelowna B.C. V1W 4M6

604.986.2459

**Re:** Site Placement of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Plaque

Commemorating Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma's Legal Case at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building

We respectfully acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territories of Indigenous peoples who are the traditional keepers of the lands and waters.

**In 2017, a Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada plaque commemorating Tomekichi Homma and his court case, *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma* was officially designated as a National Historic Event.**

**The Canadian Government determined,**

**"Tomekichi Homma's legal battle is known as one of the most significant acts of resistance to repression in the history of human rights in Canada. Homma's demand for equitable treatment influenced others to fight for equal rights, and, in retrospect, the court case has become crucial to our understanding of the context and events that led to the enactment of the *Canadian Bill of Rights* in 1960 and the entrenchment of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* into the *Constitution Act* of 1982..."**

**(Backgrounder *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma*, Government of Canada Commemorates *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma* as a National Historic Event, Parks Canada Agency, News Release, Burnaby, BC, December 10, 2017)**

My name is Keiko Tenney-Sean Homma, and I am the granddaughter of Tomekichi Homma.

The late Grace Eiko Thomson nominated my grandfather for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) plaque. The extended Homma family and I favourably support the plaque that commemorates my grandfather's landmark legal case *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma* be placed by the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society (JFBS) building on Moncton St. in Richmond.

### **Background Information**

Tomekichi (Tomey) Homma was one of the first Japanese to settle in Steveston in the early 1880's. The son of a prestigious samurai family, he was brought up to follow the samurai code of conduct, to loyally serve one's family and community. Tomey was well educated; he spoke, read, and wrote Japanese, Chinese and English. His upbringing shaped him into becoming a committed community leader who advocated for the rights of his fellow immigrants and



championed the emergence of the early Japanese Canadian (JC) communities in Steveston and later, the Powell Street neighbourhood in Vancouver.

During this time in British Columbia, racial prejudice and discrimination were common, and the presence of a hostile anti-Asian climate was dominant. Japanese immigrants encountered harsh political, economic, and occupational hardships and inequalities which affected and restricted aspects of their lives. Tomekichi believed this environment was inequitable and unjust, so he worked to change the widespread racial prejudice and restrictions of the time.

While residing in Steveston, Tomey became a naturalized Canadian citizen; a status he believed should democratically embrace citizens regardless of ethnicity, cultural traditions, and religion. However, under the racist provincial law of his day, an amendment to the *Provincial Elections Act* that disqualified Japanese Canadians from the vote; Tomekichi was denied the rights of full Canadian citizenship. During his time in Steveston, Tomey decided to wait until he could one day challenge this unjust law and fight for the voting franchise. In 1900, that day arrived. Tomekichi brought his case before the County and B.C. Supreme Courts, both of which ruled in his favour; however, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London England overturned these decisions. This judgement meant the B.C. government could grant or withhold voting rights based on race from both naturalized immigrant citizens and Canadian-born citizens. This legal ruling was the pivotal moment when racism, already written into legislation in Canada, was validated by the courts. Tomekichi realised that the inability to vote meant the Japanese would continue to face racial discrimination and restrictive laws and thus, remain second class citizens in Canada.

- The Canadian Human Rights Commission recognizes *Cunningham v. Tomey Homma* as a key legal case that has significantly shaped human rights in Canada since 1900. It marked the beginning of the protracted struggle for civil and equal rights. (Oct. 2008)
- Andrea Geiger, historian, lawyer and professor emerita at Simon Fraser University researched and examined Grandfather's court case. She argued that the British Columbia courts correctly applied the existing law when they upheld grandfather's challenge to the Provincial Voters Act and that the Privy Council's decision was ill founded in its reliance on a phrase extracted from an 1863 American legal treatise that had, by definition, no bearing in Canada. (Tomekichi Homma *The Story of a Canadian*, 2008)
- As described by Geoff Meggs, an acclaimed journalist and retired politician who was Chief of Staff for former Premier John Horgan, "In the absence of those rights, Homma's community remained forever vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, a reality underlined by the forcible dislocation and deportation of Japanese Canadians from the BC coast in the Second World War." (Jan. 2024)

### **Placement of the Plaque**

- The Steveston Museum has exhibits about the Japanese community. The presence of the plaque by the JFBS building would be a welcome addition as Tomekichi was a prominent Japanese Canadian civil rights pioneer.
- This historic building is where Tomekichi worked and attended meetings and functions. In 1887, he helped organize the Japanese Canadian fishermen and cannery workers to

protect their economic rights by establishing the Japanese Canadian Fishermen's Association, serving as its chair until 1899 and provided social services for their emerging community with a hospital and school. His work helped shape Steveston's history and maritime culture.

- Steveston is where Tomey began his life-long fight for human rights and advocacy for social, economic and occupational equality. This is where he determined with the support of the fishing community that the fight for the voting franchise was crucial if the Japanese Canadians sought to achieve full citizenship as Canadians.
  - It was proposed to place the plaque by the Tomekichi Homma Elementary School however, as Geoff Meggs explains, "The association (JFBS) building was a place Tomekichi Homma undoubtedly visited many times. He helped organise the association and spearheaded fundraising both for the association and the hospital, which was nearby. This was also the centre of events during the salmon strikes of 1900 and 1901. Although Tomekichi Homma was then living in Vancouver, the association quickly turned its attention to his bid to win the vote as soon as the 1900 dispute was settled. It was here they raised funds to support the court challenge.  
By contrast, the school is a welcome acknowledgement of Homma's career and importance in the community, but its location has no significance in his story. A plaque there would really be redundant, simply repeating what the school's name has already accomplished.  
I strongly agree that the commemorative plaque to Tomekichi Homma should be at the JFBS Building rather than the school." (Geoff Meggs 2024)
  - The late Mr. Rintaro Hayashi, a revered Japanese Canadian community leader in Steveston, highly respected and honored the work of my grandfather. He nominated the school in Steveston to be named Tomekichi Homma. I know Mr. Hayashi would unequivocally approve and endorse the plaque placement at the JFBS building and view it as a significantly suited location.
- Placing the plaque at the JFBS building will serve as an educational resource to cultivate greater visibility and raise public awareness and understanding of the early Japanese settlers.
- The current renewal landscape plan outside the JFBS building could incorporate the plaque. The plaque would then be one of the first impressions of the Steveston Museum and an item of interest that visitors come upon. It could encourage the public to enter and explore the museum.
- The plaque promotes and preserves an aspect of Japanese Canadian history, heritage and contribution that can be shared with a broad audience.
- The plaque's location would be across the street where people can conveniently view the Nikkei Stories short video, Tomekichi Homma, Man of the Times on their cellphones. Information about Tomey would be centralised for those who are interested in learning more about his life.
- The location of the proposed plaque site on Moncton Street is in the heart of Steveston; it will be in a high traffic area and readily visible and accessible.

## **Conclusion**

This year marks a significant milestone...the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Grandfather Tomekichi's prominent law case to secure the right to vote. What a fitting tribute for the plaque to be permanently placed at the historic site in Steveston.

The extended Homma Family, and I are strongly recommending City Council members to vote in favour of placing the HSMBC plaque by the JFBS building. The plaque recognizes the historic contribution to the hard-fought, long-awaited struggle for fundamental rights of citizenship. My grandfather believed the voting franchise was not a privilege but a fundamental, constitutional right. He understood that the ability to vote provided a powerful political voice to change discriminatory legislation and was a means to attain and protect justice, freedom, and equality in our democratic nation.

## **Cunningham V. Tomey Homma Plaque Inscription**

Prominent Japanese Canadian Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma fought a landmark legal battle in 1900-1903 against a provision of the British Columbia *Provincial Elections Act*, which barred Asian Canadians and first Nations from voting. While he won in the lower and superior courts, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England, then Canada's highest court of appeal, upheld the Act, affirming the power of the provinces to disqualify voters on the basis of "race." The injustice of this legal precedent inspired generations of activists who fought to secure equal voting rights for all Canadians, which was achieved only in 1960.

## **Addendum**

My mother's parents, Grandfather and Grandmother Yodogawa lived in Steveston before and after the war. Their seven children were born at the Japanese Fishermen's Hospital that Grandfather Tomekichi Homma helped establish. Other Yodogawa and Homma family relatives were born and/or received medical attention at this facility.

Growing up, I considered Steveston as my second home. I have fond childhood memories of spending time there. I remember hanging onto fishing nets hung high over wooden beams in the net house. My uncles and other fishermen pushed me, so I soared beyond the open exterior doors. Summers were spent in Steveston. I picked berries with cousins, played "jump the ditch" tag with them and walked to Moncton Street to purchase penny candy. I have relatives on my mother's side still residing in Steveston.

This quaint, vibrant village remains close to my heart and that of my grandfather's. I know Grandfather Tomekichi would be pleased that the Japanese Canadian community in Steveston has more than endured; it is thriving, keeping the sense of community alive and prosperous.

Keiko Tenney-Sean Homma

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7 May 2025

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To Whom it May Concern:

**Re: Commemoration of Tomekichi Homma**

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I am honoured to write this letter supporting the placement of a plaque commemorating the life and accomplishments of Tomekichi Homma at the Japanese Fisherman's Benevolent Society in Steveston, British Columbia.

Simply put, Tomekichi Homma is a hero of Canadian history. It took remarkable vision, courage, tenacity, and open-heartedness to lead the legal campaign to recognize the rights of Japanese Canadians to vote in the early twentieth century. In doing so, Tomekichi Homma had to confront the entrenched racism of a legal system that denied the equal worth of every individual, and the discrimination of a political culture that vilified Japanese Canadians as unworthy members of the community.

Tomekichi Homma rejected Canada's legacies of racism in favour of a vision of Canadian rights, shared civic responsibilities, and diverse communities of mutual respect and flourishing. In 1903, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, then Canada's highest court, disagreed. It is a tragedy that Tomekichi's vision of Canada and the rights of its citizens was not fully accepted in his lifetime. His inspiring fight for change, however, would endure as a model, especially within the Japanese Canadian community.

The national plaque honouring Tomekichi's memory and legacy would be well placed at the Japanese Fisherman's Benevolent Society in Steveston – the site of significant moments of organization among the Japanese Canadian community in their fight for recognition of their status as citizens, including the right to vote.

As a legal historian and constitutional scholar, I applaud every effort to ensure that Tomekichi's story remains alive and visible for future generations. We need to remember our champions of the past, especially in the places where their voices mattered most.

Best,

Eric M. Adams

Professor of Law



## Department of History

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12 May 2025

City of Richmond  
6911 No. 3 Road  
Richmond, BC V6Y 2C1

Attn: Richmond City Council

Re: Site Placement of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Plaque  
Commemorating Tomekichi Homma's Legal Challenge to the Provincial Voters  
Act at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building in Steveston, BC

Dear Councilors:

As a historian and longtime student of Japanese Canadian history who regularly taught a seminar on Nikkei history in North America, I am particularly pleased to have this opportunity to write in support of the proposed placement of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada Plaque commemorating Tomekichi Homma's early 20<sup>th</sup> century legal challenge to British Columbia's Provincial Voters Act at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building in Steveston, BC.

I first encountered Homma's case in 1996 when I visited what was then the Japanese Canadian National Museum (now the Nikkei National Museum) and recognized – at a time when there was as yet little information available about the substance of the case – that a profound injustice was done when the British Privy Council upheld the discriminatory provisions of the Provincial Voters Act after hearing argument in the case in 1902. The article I wrote after researching the case in depth, "Writing Racial Barriers into Law: Upholding B.C.'s Denial of the Vote to its Japanese Canadian Citizens, Homma versus Cunningham, 1902," was published in a volume of essays edited by Gail Nomura and Louis Fiset titled *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century* by the University of Washington Press in 2005.

Born into a samurai family in Chiba, Japan, in 1865, Tomekichi Homma immigrated to Canada in 1883 at the age of 18. During his first years in Canada, Homma worked as a fisherman out of Steveston, B.C., where he helped to found the *Gyōsha Dantai* (Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society) in 1887, serving as its chairman through 1899. He joined with other community leaders in establishing a hospital for Japanese Canadian fishermen in Steveston and a Japanese language school in Richmond, B.C. Homma became a naturalized British subject in April 1893. Although he would expand his activities to include Vancouver in 1897, Homma maintained his close ties to Japanese Canadian community in Steveston whose members would be among his staunchest

Richmond City Council  
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Page 2

supporters when he filed his test case challenging the racially discriminatory provisions of the Provincial Voters Act in October 1900.

Homma's effort to overturn the racially discriminatory provisions of the Provincial Voters Act failed only because the British Privy Council, then the final arbiter of cases arising in Canada, was willing to adopt an approach that was both legally and logically unsound in ways no one could have anticipated. While Homma had prevailed in B.C.'s lower courts, the Privy Council overturned their decisions, handing down a vague and poorly reasoned decision of its own that relied in significant part on a clause in an outdated U.S. legal treatise interpreting an article of the U.S. Constitution which, of course, has – by definition – no bearing in Canada.

Although Homma did not prevail, his courage in challenging an unjust law inspired generations of activists to continue the fight to secure equal rights for all Canadians.

Locating the plaque at the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society Building in Steveston, BC, recognizes Tomekichi Homma's courage in challenging the racially discriminatory provisions of the Provincial Voters Act at a time when anti-Asian prejudice was rampant in BC; it also situates Steveston and its Japanese Canadian fishers at the heart of one of the most important early efforts to ensure that Canadians of all backgrounds would not be barred from voting on grounds of race but would have equal access to the franchise as they do today.

Very truly yours,

Andrea Geiger, J.D., Ph.D.  
Professor Emerita, History



# Tomekichi “Tomey” Homma

# Canada’s first

# human rights activist

by GEOFF MEGGS

**I**F ANY ONE PERSON could claim to be Canada’s first civil rights activist, surely that person would be Tomekichi “Tomey” Homma, who in 1900 challenged racist provincial voting laws at a time when anti-Asiatic prejudice was at full and violent strength.



Homma twice won the right to register to vote in lower courts only to be defeated by a verdict of the highest court in the British Empire. In its decision, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) overturned its own precedent only two years earlier that denied the Province of BC the right to bar Chinese workers from employment in BC’s coal mines. It was a reversal that would deny the franchise to Japanese, Chinese and Asian Canadians for nearly 50 years, a verdict that had repercussions across the empire from South Africa to India and Australia.

As the Government of Canada acknowledged in 2017, in marking Homma’s challenge, “the JCPC’s decision had a lasting impact on Canadian federalism because it legally defined the vote as a privilege that a province could grant or withhold on the basis of race, from immigrant citizens or Canadian-born alike. It also validated in law a long tradition of racial, ethnic,

class, and gender exclusions in Canada's voting history. Moreover, it served as precedent in future legal challenges against anti-Asian legislation.”

Despite his ultimate defeat, Homma remains revered to this day in the Japanese Canadian community for his selfless sacrifice in their fight for fundamental rights and freedoms. As one community historian put it, he was “surely the foremost advocate and activist of Nikkei civil rights, and without peer.”

Homma valued the right to vote not just as a doorway to employment – many jobs required the incumbent to be on the voters list -- but for “its more cardinal substance, such as the right to elect and be elected to public office.”

For all these reasons, Homma warrants full acknowledgement in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. As a naturalized Canadian, he expected and

***The Privy Council “defined the vote as a privilege that a province could grant or withhold on the basis of race, from immigrant citizens or Canadian-born alike.”***

demanding the full rights of citizenship: the right to vote, seek office, serve on a jury. Under a provincial law of his day, he and his descendants would forever be denied those rights by reason of their Japanese ancestry.

In the absence of those rights, the Japanese Canadian community remained forever vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation, a reality underlined by the forcible dislocation and deportation of Japanese Canadians from the BC coast in the Second World War.

Homma’s story has new resonance today as hundreds of thousands of new Canadians, already admitted as permanent residents, wait years for full citizenship and the right to shape the future of the country they have chosen as their home. His struggle raises important questions about what it means to be a Canadian.

Homma first saw Canada from the deck of a steamship that diverted to Vancouver in 1883. He was headed to study at Oxford, but he decided to stay after seeing the tree-covered mountains around Burrard Inlet and new city lots being laid out in anticipation of the arrival of the railway. He became a salmon fisherman in the growing canning industry on the Fraser River.

The son of a samurai family, he was marked by great discipline, strength of character and commitment to community service. Within ten years of arriving in

BC, he was a respected leader of the growing Japanese community, a key figure in the emerging Japanese fishermen's association. Year after year, as Japanese, white and Indigenous fishers fought with the canners and each other for a living from the fishery, Homma was in the front lines, urging organization and solidarity among the Japanese and respectful relations with Indigenous and white fishers.

At the same time, Homma led a drive to build a hospital in Steveston, open to all, that would treat the many fishermen afflicted by diseases like typhoid and malnutrition. Fluent in Chinese and English, he provided translation and court interpretation for anyone who needed it. He founded an organization to fight for the rights of Japanese and launched a number of businesses in Vancouver's Chinatown, including a rooming house and a restaurant, to provide jobs to his compatriots.

Homma was outraged by changes to provincial law in 1895 that would deny Japanese the vote, even if naturalized and even if they were born in Canada. From the beginning, Homma saw the organization of the Japanese fishermen serving two goals: the protection of their economic rights and the expansion of their political rights through winning the vote.

On Oct. 19, 1900, just weeks after a lengthy and violent strike that ended in the deployment of armed militia to Steveston, Homma walked through the front door of the Vancouver Court House, stood before the elections officer and demanded to be registered to vote. As he expected, he was refused. He promptly demanded a judicial review, a court ruling on the validity of the elections officer's decision.

The judge who ruled in Homma's favour at his first court hearing warned that "the residence within the Province of large numbers of persons, British subjects in name but doomed to perpetual exclusion from any part in the passage of legislation affecting their property and civil rights, would surely not be to the advantage of Canada, and might even become a source of national danger." This prophetic warning went unheeded. Japanese Canadians faced constant reductions in their economic and political rights until they were finally forcibly taken from their homes, saw all their assets seized and were interned east of the Rockies. Homma himself died in internment in 1945.

Homma's fight for the franchise was taken up by others. Having defeated fascism, Canada had to acknowledge its own racist legal infrastructure. Homma's son Seiji was in the gallery at the Legislature in 1949 when BC finally granted Japanese Canadians the vote, four years after Tomekichi Homma's death in internment and half a century after he had taken up the battle for the vote.

Homma's challenge, issued at a time when racism in Canada was in full flood, reminds us that the right time to fight for the expansion of human rights, democracy and social justice is always now. Homma refused to wait and so must we. This uniquely admirable man showed the way.

## Why should we care about Tomekichi Homma?

- He demanded his full rights as a Canadian citizen – to vote, to serve on a jury, to run for office, to work in any field he chose – in the face of constant, sometimes violent racist opposition
- He was respected and admired in the wider community, organizing an association to press for full rights for Japanese Canadians while acting as an interpreter and translator for Japanese and Chinese immigrants to Canada
- He challenged BC's racist voting laws with a grassroots campaign that won twice in lower courts before going all the way to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, the highest court in the British Empire
- His story remains relevant today, 125 years after his historic court battle, as hundreds of thousands of newcomers to Canada wait years to achieve full citizenship, despite arriving as permanent residents, or remain without a path to citizenship through the Temporary Foreign Worker program.
- His story is a reminder that there is never a bad time to fight for human rights and social justice – the best time is always now

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#### Att. 4 – Cunningham v. Tomey Homma Plaque Artwork



##### *CUNNINGHAM V. TOMEY HOMMA*

Prominent Japanese Canadian Tomekichi "Tomey" Homma fought a landmark legal battle in 1900–1903 against a provision of the British Columbia *Provincial Elections Act*, which barred Asian Canadians and First Nations from voting. While he won in the lower and superior courts, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England, then Canada's highest court of appeal, upheld the Act, affirming the power of the provinces to disqualify voters on the basis of "race." The injustice of this legal precedent inspired generations of activists who fought to secure equal voting rights for all Canadians, which was achieved only in 1960.

##### *CUNNINGHAM V. TOMEY HOMMA*

Éminent Canadien japonais, Tomekichi « Tomey » Homma mène une lutte judiciaire marquante de 1900 à 1903 pour contester la loi électorale de la Colombie-Britannique privant les Canadiens asiatiques et les Premières Nations du droit de vote. Bien qu'il gagne devant des tribunaux inférieur et supérieur, le Comité judiciaire du Conseil privé d'Angleterre, alors la plus haute cour d'appel du Canada, confirme la loi, affirmant le pouvoir des provinces de disqualifier les électeurs selon leur « race ». L'injustice de ce précédent juridique inspire des générations d'activistes à exiger le droit de vote pour tous les Canadiens, qui n'est accordé qu'en 1960.



Historic Sites and  
Monuments Board of Canada  
and Parks Canada

Commission des lieux et  
monuments historiques du Canada  
et Parcs Canada

Canada