

#1

Chinese at work on the C.P.R. in mountains

Photograph of Chinese railway workers taken in 1884 by photographer Ernest Brown in the mountains of B.C.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Chinese Canadian life on the railway



Library and Archives Canada, C-006686B, Boorne & May, 1884. <http://data2.archives.ca/ap/c/c006686.jpg>

#2

Housing built for Chinese labourers working on the C.P.R.

Photograph taken in 1883 shows housing built for Chinese Workers by the Canadian Pacific Railway in Fraser-Cheam, B.C. mountains of B.C.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Chinese Canadian life on the railway



Image I-30869, Accession Number: 198401-006, 1883, courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

#3

Chinese workers' camp on the C.P.R.

Photograph taken in 1886 of a C.P.R. Chinese workers' camp in Kamloops, B.C.

**PRIMARY
SOURCE**
Chinese Canadian life
on the railway



Edouard Deville, Library and Archives Canada, C-021990, 1886.

#4

Newspaper account of Chinese deaths

Excerpt from an 1883 newspaper article that discusses the lack of medical care for Chinese workers on the C.P.R.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Yale Sentinel

1883

Here in British Columbia along the line of the railway, the Chinese workmen are fast disappearing under the ground. No Medical attention is furnished nor apparently much interest felt for these poor creatures. We understand that Mr. Onderdonk declines interfering, while the Lee Chuck Co. (labour contractors), that brought the Chinamen from their native land, refused, through their agent Lee Soon, who is running the Chinese gang at Emory, to become responsible for doctors and medicine.

Yale Sentinel (1883), quoted in Berton, Pierre. The Last Spike. Toronto: Anchor Canada, 1971.



#5

Chinese men gambling under a makeshift awning

Photograph taken in 1886 showing a group of Chinese men gambling under cover of a tent near Kamloops, B.C.



Image B-09758, Accession Number: 193501-001, 1886, courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

**PRIMARY
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Chinese Canadian life
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#6

The Chinese experience in BC: Transcript of original

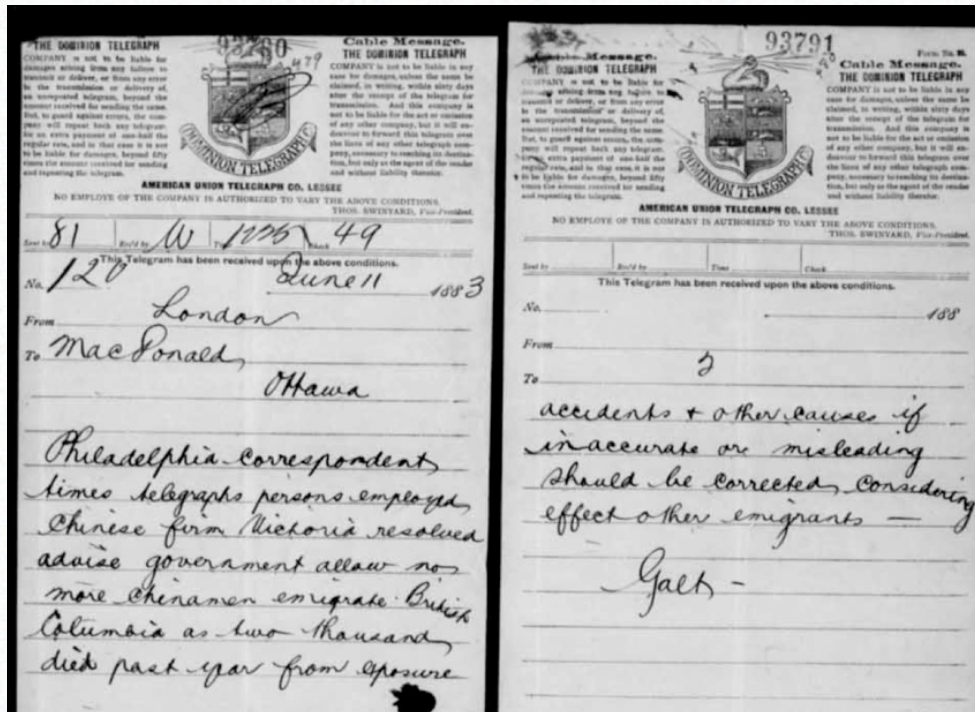
Excerpt from a telegram sent from former government minister and Canadian high commissioner to London, Alexander Tilloch Galt to John A. Macdonald from London in 1883.

PRIMARY SOURCE
Chinese Canadian life
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American Union Telegraph
No 120
June 11, 1883

...(A)dvise government allow no more Chinamen emigrate (to) British Columbia as two thousand died (this) past year from exposure(,) accidents(,) and other causes. (I)f (this is) inaccurate or misleading (it) should be corrected, considering (the) effect (on) other emigrants.



(Signed)
Galt

Library and Archives Canada, MG26-A, Volume 220,
Page 93790, From London to Sir John A. Macdonald,
"Correspondence, June 11, 1883."

#7

Chinese workers on the C.P.R.

Photograph taken in 1883 of Chinese workers on the C.P.R.



**PRIMARY
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on the railway

Image D-07548, Catalogue Number HP072553, Accession Number 193501-001, 1883, courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

#8

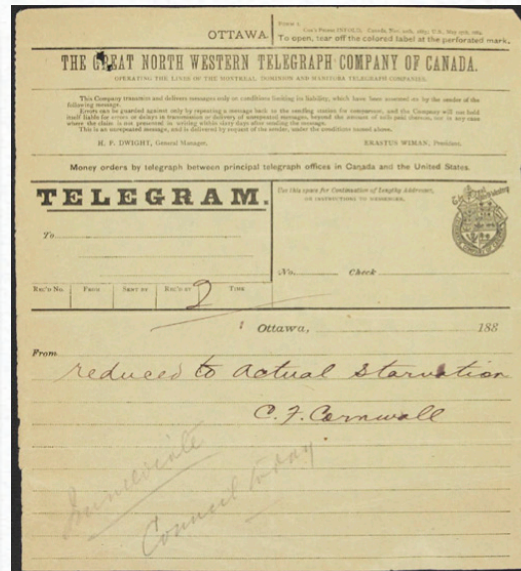
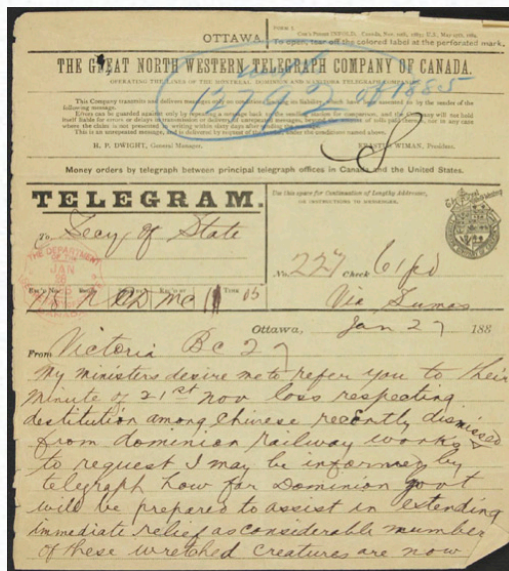
Telegram from Lieutenant-Governor to Secretary of State

PRIMARY SOURCE
Chinese Canadian life on the railway

Excerpt from a telegram sent January 27, 1885 from C.F. Cornwall, Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia, to the Secretary of State in Ottawa inquiring into the amount of help the Dominion government is willing to provide for Chinese workers laid off following completion of the C.P.R.

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The Great North Western Telegraph Co.
Secretary of State in Ottawa
January 27, 1885



"My ministers desire me to refer you to their Minute of 21st Nov (a letter or dispatch sent November 21st) ... respecting destitution (poverty) among Chinese recently dismissed (laid off) from Dominion railway works (the C.P.R.), to request (that) I may be informed by telegraph how far (the) Dominion govt (government) will be prepared to assist in extending immediate relief (financial help) as considerable numbers of these wretched (miserable) creatures are now reduced to actual starvation."

(Signed)
C.F. Cornwall

Library and Archives Canada, RG6-A-1,
Volume 60, File 2235, Items 10-11

#9

Chinese work gang

Photograph taken in 1889 of a Chinese work gang working on the C.P.R. near Summit B.C. between Glacier House and the Loop, just west of Rogers Pass.



Glenbow Archives NA-3740-29, Chinese work gang, Canadian Pacific Railway tracks near Summit, British Columbia, William Notman and Son, Montreal , Quebec, 1889.

**PRIMARY
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Chinese Canadian life
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#1

The Chinese experience in BC: The railways

Excerpt about building the railway from the UBC library project website, “The Chinese Experience in British Columbia: 1850–1950.”



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Although Chinese played a key role in building the western stretch of the railway, they earned between \$1 and \$2.50 per day. Unlike their fellow white railroad workers, the Chinese had to pay for their own food, clothing, transportation to the job site, mail, and medical care, leaving barely enough money to send home. Chinese workers were delegated the most dangerous construction jobs, such as working with explosives. Not only did families of those killed workers not receive any compensation, they were not even notified of the deaths

The Chinese railway workers lived in poor conditions, often in camps, sleeping in tents or boxcars. Often doing their own cooking over open outdoor fires, these Chinese men primarily ate a diet of rice, dried salmon and tea. Because most could not afford fresh fruit and vegetables, many of the men suffered from scurvy, an agonizing disease caused by a diet lacking in vitamin C. Because there was no proper medical care, many Chinese workers depended on herbal cures to help them.

Due to these poor living conditions, many Chinese workers became ill. In the frosty winters of British Columbia, open fires were the only way of keeping warm. Whenever the workers put down more tracks, the camps had to be moved further down the line. When it was time to move camp, the Chinese workers would take down their tents, pack their belongings and move everything to the next camp, often hiking over 40 kilometres.”

“Work: Railways.” *The Chinese Experience in Canada: 1850 – 1950.*
The University of British Columbia, n.d., <http://www.library.ubc.ca/chineseinbc/railways.html>.

#2

The national dream

Excerpts from popular historian Pierre Berton's 1974 book, "The Great Railway," that describes the construction of Canada's transcontinental railway.



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Chinese coolies ... could be employed for one dollar a day. In addition, they did not require all the paraphernalia of a first-class camp. The coolie was prepared to move about in the wilderness, set up his own camp, and pack all his belongings, provisions, and camp equipment on his back. Michael Haney, who went to work for Onderdonk in 1883, discovered that it was possible to move two thousand Chinese at a distance of twenty-five miles and have them at work all within twenty-four hours

Many inflammatory incidents occurred because of accidents along this line, for which the Chinese blamed the white foremen. On one such occasion, about ten miles below Hope, a foreman named Miller failed to give his gang warning of a coming explosion; a piece of rock thrown up by the subsequent blast blew one coolie's head right off. His comrades took off after Miller, who plunged into the river to save himself Deaths appeared to happen oftener [sic] among the Chinese labourers than in the white group.

Berton, Pierre. The Great Railway. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1974, p. 296-298.

#3

From China to Canada

Excerpt from 1982 book edited by historian Edgar Wickberg entitled *From China to Canada: A history of the Chinese communities in Canada*.



Comments in brackets are not part of the original document. They have been added to assist the reader with difficult words.

Little is known about life in the railway camps to which the Chinese were sent because almost no Chinese records or diaries have been found that survive from that time. Perhaps the misery of their conditions precluded the workers from speaking much about them after they returned to China or settled elsewhere in Canada

Today the Chinese in Canada have a saying that a Chinese worker died for every foot of railroad through the canyons. While this is, of course, an exaggeration, Lee estimates that at least 600 Chinese died during railroad construction, more than 4 for every mile. This is probably a conservative estimate, since it is based on Onderdonk's testimony to the Royal Commission.

Wickberg, Edgar, et al. *From China to Canada: A history of the Chinese communities in Canada*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982, p. 22-23.

#4

The railway builders

Excerpt from B.C. social studies textbook entitled, “The Railway Builders” that describes Chinese workers on the railway.



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Part of the railway in British Columbia was built by an American named Andrew Onderdonk, who was under contract with the C.P.R. The line through the Fraser Canyon was incredibly difficult and expensive to build, and by 1881 Onderdonk was short of both money and workers. He solved his problems by hiring Chinese men at low wages. Between 1881 and 1885, more than 17,000 Chinese immigrants came to British Columbia to work on the railway. They were paid just a dollar a day, less than half the rate paid to European workers. They generally lived in separate camps and paid for food and lodging. Their work was dangerous and difficult; it is estimated that more than 600 workers lost their lives through accidents and illness. According to some sources, the number reached 1200.

Horizons: Canada's emerging identity (Second Edition). Michael Cranny, Graham Jarvis, Garvin Moles and Bruce Seney, eds. Don Mills: Pearson Education Canada, 2009, p. 235.