

University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections

Finding Aid - Joan Gillis fonds (RBSC-ARC-1786)

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Joan Gillis fonds

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Summary information

Repository:	University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections
Title:	Joan Gillis fonds
Reference code:	RBSC-ARC-1786
Date:	1941 - 1988 (date of creation)
Physical description:	Extent: 24 cm of textual records. 10 photographs : b&w
Dates of creation, revision and deletion:	The fonds was arranged, processed, and described by Claire Williams in May of 2018.
Note [sourcesDescription]:	Information derived from the following sources: -Records within the fonds. -"Letters from exiled teens rare peek into B.C.'s past" article by John Mackie in the Vancouver Sun, April 16 2018 -Biography written by Steve Turnbull in April 2018 -Joan Parolin (nee Gillis) Interview. August 8 1990. Surrey Museum and Archives. Surrey museum and archives transcript: http://surrey.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/DESCRIPTION/WEB_DETAIL_M2A//SISN 4784?sessionsearch -The Sunday Leader "Letters from Afar" March 2nd, 2008 "Correspondence from interned Japanese-Canadian students shows ethnicity was of little importance for teens torn apart during wartime" by Steve Turnbull, "We Lost Our Friends" by Sheila Reynolds -Japanese Canadian History Site: https://japanesecanadianhistory.net/historical-overview/secondary-timeline/
Note [generalNote]:	See Roy Miki fonds, File 28-1 for a letter from Joan Gillis to Roy Miki in regards to her collection of letters.

Administrative history / Biographical sketch

Note

Joan Parolin (née Gillis) was born Winnifred Joan Gillis on January 16th, 1928. She was born in Sproat Lake, near Port Alberni, on Vancouver Island where she spent the first ten years of her life, with her mother Margaret Forster, her father William Gillis, her younger sister Donalda Gillis, and her uncle Jim

Gillis. Here her father and Uncle worked as contract loggers, until her Uncle was killed in a logging accident in the summer of 1937. Following this, her family moved to a one-acre property and house on Scott Hill in Surrey. This home was roughly a mile from the Patullo Bridge in an agricultural area, then known as South Westminster. The family kept chickens, and a cherry orchard, and the father sold eggs at work, while the children sold cherries at a roadside stand during the summer. At the age of 10, Joan began attending South Westminster Elementary school on 104th avenue. Here she met her friend Sumi Mototsune whose father owned a small boat-building yard on the Fraser River, near the Patullo Bridge. She attended South Westminster Elementary until Grade 7 and then Sir Richard McBride School in New Westminster. She began Grade 7 on September 3rd 1939; the same day that Britain and France declared war on Germany.

At this time, the Queen Elizabeth Secondary School was being constructed, and from September to November Gillis and her classmates attended Newton Elementary School until the building was complete. Beginning in November of 1940 Gillis attended Queen Elizabeth (Q.E.) Secondary School on King George Highway, now King George Boulevard in Surrey. Gillis became involved in the school newspaper, 'The Q.E. Vue' and met several students from higher grades working on it, including Setsuko Fujii, Yoshi Okamura, and Yosh Nakamura.

In the wake of World War II and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Gillis watched as her friends of Japanese Canadian descent were ordered, along with their families, to be interned away from the 'security zone' of within a 100 mile radius of the coastline.

Gillis and many of her classmates felt that this was unjust, and in 1942 she began regular correspondence with several of her Japanese Canadian friends and acquaintances. On V.E. day in May of 1945 Gillis celebrated with many of her female friends by wearing slacks to school; an offense for which they were suspended for the day.

Gillis continued at Queen Elizabeth until her graduation in June of 1945. The previous autumn her parents had a third child, Kenny Gillis, born in November of 1944.

Due to the lack of teachers following the war, the province waived the requirement for students to complete Senior Matriculation (Grade 13), and so Gillis went straight to the Provincial Normal School to train to become a teacher. This school was located at the Northwest corner of 12th avenue and Cambie Street in Vancouver, and she commuted there from her home in Surrey from September 1945 to June 1946.

Upon graduation she applied to teach in several school districts and was accepted by 3, including the Vancouver School District. She refused to work at Vancouver School District because they paid female teachers less than male, and instead accepted a position teaching Grade 2 in Parksville on Vancouver Island. Aged 18, Gillis taught here for one year, and then moved to the Maple Ridge District where she taught from 1947 to 1955. From 1950 to 1951 Gillis took a year off from teaching to obtain her Bachelor of Arts from University of British Columbia, which was required for her to teach high school. She also attended U.B.C. later in her career, completing a Masters of Education.

From 1955 to 1959 Gillis taught in Hope School District. Here she met her husband Joe Parolin, who had signed up for a French class Gillis was teaching. Gillis and Parolin married in 1963 and had two children, Peter, born in 1967, and Margaret, born in 1968. Gillis had moved to Surrey School District in 1959 and she taught there until her retirement in December 1984.

Gillis passed on March 10, 2019.

Scope and content

The fonds consists of the incoming correspondence to Joan Gillis from a group of young Japanese Canadians she met while attending Queen Elizabeth Secondary School in Surrey. The fonds includes 149 letters and 10 small photographs, referred to colloquially as 'snaps' in the letters, sent from a total of 13 different correspondents. The majority of the correspondence took place during 1942 to 1946, with different friends writing from farms and work camps in Northern British Columbia, Manitoba, and Alberta. The letters provide insight into the Japanese Canadian internment, which occurred against the backdrop of a larger cultural context. Since the early 1900s Japanese immigrants and persons of Japanese descent living in Canada were subject to racially targeted legislation, including limits on immigration, limits on fishing licenses, and being denied the right to vote based on racial status.

In the spring of 1941 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) fingerprinted and registered all Japanese Canadians over the age 16, who were required to carry identification cards until 1949. Following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941, Canada declared war on Japan. The Royal Canadian Navy impounded the fishing boats of the Japanese Canadian fishing community, and within two months 1,200 Japanese Canadian owned boats were sold. On February 24th 1942 the federal government authorized the removal of all persons of Japanese origin, and gave the RCMP the power to search without warrant, to impose a dawn to dusk curfew, and to confiscate all cars, radios, firearms, and cameras. Mass forced dispersal and dispossession ensued, with all Japanese Canadians being sent to internment camps, to work on farms, and perform other forms of hard labor, living in very poor conditions through the much colder winters of Canada's interior.

The letter-writers discuss their day-to-day life at the camps, living and working conditions, their new schools and teachers, and ask after Gillis' life in Surrey and the on-goings at Queen Elizabeth (Q.E.) secondary school.

Gillis kept the correspondence bound in twine or ribbon, which is also included in the fonds. A government censor opened and read many, if not all of the letters, and many of the envelopes bear a sticker or stamp marking this. Many of the letters are hand-written, some are typed, and some are written on postcards. Listed at the file level is the full name of each correspondent and his or her specific geographical location.

Notes

Title notes

Physical condition

Materials are generally in excellent condition.

Immediate source of acquisition

All materials acquired from donor.

Arrangement

The creator kept the materials arranged by correspondent. The order in which they were arranged has been preserved by the archivist, and is reflected in the above description.

Finding aids

A finding aid for the fonds complete to the item level is available in this database.

Related material

Joan Parolin (née Gillis) interview available at Surrey Archives: http://surrey.minisisinc.com/scripts/mwimain.dll/144/DESCRIPTION/WEB_DETAIL_M2A//SISN%204784?sessionsearch

Accruals

No further accruals are expected.

Other notes

- **Publication status:** published

Access points

- Multiple media (documentary form)
- Children and youth (subject)
- Cultural groups (subject)
- Cultural groups--Japanese (subject)
- Education (subject)
- Japanese Canadian history (subject)
- Japanese Canadians--Evacuation and relocation--1942-1945 (subject)
- Land, settlement and immigration (subject)
- Women (subject)
- Surrey (B.C.) (place)

Series descriptions

Ref code	Title	Dates	Access status	Container
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-01 (1 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	May 14 1942		
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-02 (2 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	May 19 1942		

RBSC-ARC-1786-01-03 (3 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	May 25th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-04 (4 of 22)	File - Akira Fujii	June 5th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-05 (5 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	June 8th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-06 (6 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	July 16th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-07 (7 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	August 9th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-08 (8 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	September 15th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-09 (9 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	October 23rd 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-10 (10 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	December 11th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-11 (11 of 22)	File - Akira Fujii	December 12th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-12 (12 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	May 3rd 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-13 (13 of 22)	File - Setsuko and Akira Fujii	April 3rd 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-14 (14 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	August 14th 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-15 (15 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	January 7th 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-16 (16 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	May 14th 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-17 (17 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	December 12th 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-18 (18 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	February 28th 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-19 (19 of 22)	File - Akira Fujii	April 2nd 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-20 (20 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	April 15th 1945

RBSC-ARC-1786-01-21 (21 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	August 13th 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-22 (22 of 22)	File - Setsuko Fujii	January 27th 1946
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-23 (1 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	April 25th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-24 (2 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	May 10th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-25 (3 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	June 10th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-26 (4 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	July 24th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-27 (5 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	September 15th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-28 (6 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	November 17 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-29 (7 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	October 28th 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-30 (8 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	June 22nd 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-31 (9 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	February 16th 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-32 (10 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	May 8th 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-33 (11 of 11)	File - Jackie Takahashi	February 24 1947
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-34 (1 of 11)	File - Albert Ohama	April 27th [1942?]
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-35 (2 of 11)	File - Albert Ohama	July 4 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-36 (3 of 11)	File - Albert Ohama	August 12 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-37 (4 of 11)	File - Albert Ohama	November 14 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-38 (5 of 11)	File - Albert Ohama	January 28 1943

RBSC-ARC-1786-01-39 (6 of 11)	File - Albert Ohama	February 28th 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-40 (7 of 11)	File - Sonny and Albert Ohama	Dec. 30 1941
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-41 (8 of 11)	File - Sonny Ohama	April 27 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-42 (9 of 11)	File - Sonny Ohama	August 21 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-43 (10 of 11)	File - Sonny Ohama	[1942?]
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-44 (11 of 11)	File - Sonny Ohama	January 20 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-45 (1 of 5)	File - Emee Otsuki	May 22 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-46 (2 of 5)	File - Emee Otsuki	June 2 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-47 (3 of 5)	File - Emee Otsuki	June 30th 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-48 (4 of 5)	File - Emee Otsuki	January 26 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-49 (5 of 5)	File - Emee Otsuki	July 10 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-50 (1 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	August [1944?]
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-51 (2 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	July 13 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-52 (3 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	January 23 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-53 (4 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	July 7 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-54 (5 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	February 2 1946
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-55 (6 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	January 23 1949
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-56 (7 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	March 3 1949

RBSC-ARC-1786-01-57 (8 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	August 14 1949
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-58 (9 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	September 5 1951
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-59 (10 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	July 30 1952
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-60 (11 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	December 29 1986
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-61 (12 of 12)	File - Yoshuyuki Okamura	December 26 1988
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-62 (1 of 7)	File - Tad Nagamori	July 5 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-63 (2 of 7)	File - Tad Nagamori	August 3 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-64 (3 of 7)	File - Tad Nagamori	October 4 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-65 (4 of 7)	File - Tad Nagamori	January 9, 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-66 (5 of 7)	File - Tad Nagamori	February 14 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-67 (6 of 7)	File - Tad Nagamori	April 11 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-68 (7 of 7)	File - Tad Nagamori	January 16 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-01-69	File - Photographs	1942-1948
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-01 (1 of 6)	File - Leo Otsuki	March 2 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-02 (2 of 6)	File - Leo Otsuki	April 22 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-03 (3 of 6)	File - Leo Otsuki	July 18 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-04 (4 of 6)	File - Leo Otsuki	October 31 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-05 (5 of 6)	File - Leo Otsuki	December 2 1943

RBSC-ARC-1786-02-06 (6 of 6)	File - Leo Otsuki	February 7 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-07 (1 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	April 21 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-08 (2 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	April 25 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-09 (3 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	May 16 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-10 (4 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	May 30 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-11 (5 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	July 31 1942
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-12 (6 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	January 9 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-13 (7 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	January 31 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-14 (8 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	April 24 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-15 (9 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	July 18 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-16 (10 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	September 24 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-17 (11 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	December 28 1943
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-18 (12 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	April 7 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-19 (13 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	July 6 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-20 (14 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	August 16 1944
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-21 (15 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	June 4 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-22 (16 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	Nov. 4 1945
RBSC-ARC-1786-02-23 (17 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	Aug. 20 1945

RBSC- ARC-1786-02-24 (18 of 18)	File - Sumi Mototsune	January 21 1946
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-25 (1 of 2)	File - Teruko Ikeda	Feb. 17 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-26 (2 of 2)	File - Teruko Ikeda	May 10 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-27 (1 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	April 21 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-28 (2 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	April 28 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-29 (3 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	May 15 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-30 (4 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	May 30 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-31 (5 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	July 25 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-32 (6 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	August 26 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-33 (7 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	October 17 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-34 (8 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	January 1 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-35 (9 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	January 14 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-36 (10 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	January 29 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-37 (11 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	February 23 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-38 (12 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	June 3 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-39 (13 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	July 20 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-40 (14 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	January 8 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-41 (15 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	January 18 1944

RBSC- ARC-1786-02-42 (16 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	May 19 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-43 (17 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	June 26 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-44 (18 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	August 15 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-45 (19 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	November 15 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-46 (20 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	January 3 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-47 (21 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	February 28 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-48 (22 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	May 17 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-49 (23 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	May 22 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-50 (24 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	June 24 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-51 (25 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	Sept. 19 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-52 (26 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	Oct. 5 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-53 (27 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	July 27 1948
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-54 (28 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	October 10 1948
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-55 (29 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	February 25 1949
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-56 (30 of 30)	File - Yoshio Nakamura	March 27 1949
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-57 (1 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	July 24 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-58 (2 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	August 5 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-59 (3 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	August 17 1942

RBSC- ARC-1786-02-60 (4 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	September 18 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-61 (5 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	November 2 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-62 (6 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	December 28 1942
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-63 (7 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	January 13 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-64 (8 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	February 20 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-65 (9 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	April 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-66 (10 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	July 26 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-67 (11 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	October 9 1943
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-68 (12 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	January 31 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-69 (13 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	July 10 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-70 (14 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	November 14 1944
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-71 (15 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	January 3 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-72 (16 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	March 31 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-73 (17 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	September 22 1945
RBSC- ARC-1786-02-74 (18 of 18)	File - Masao Ujiije	February 7 1946