

Won Alexander Cumyow

An inventory of his fonds

in

Rare Books and Special Collections,
The Library of the University of British Columbia

Prepared by:

Melanie Hardbatt
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Fonds description	2
Series/sub-series descriptions	
Biographical information.....	3
Correspondence.....	3
Journals.....	3
Documents.....	3
Scrapbooks.....	3
Photographs.....	4
Printed material.....	4
File list	5

FONDS DESCRIPTION

Cumyow, Won Alexander, 1861-1955

Won Alexander Cumyow fonds. – [1885-199-?].

14 cm of textual records.

74 photographs.

Biographical sketch

Won Cumyow, the first Chinese-Canadian born in Canada, was born on or about March 21st 1861 in Port Douglas, B.C., located at the north end of Harrison Lake. Cumyow's parents had immigrated there from Canton and his father operated a business outfitting miners on their way to the Cariboo. In addition to Chinese and English, Cumyow also learned to speak Chinook, which would prove useful in his future career. The family later moved to New Westminster, where Cumyow was educated in law and appointed court interpreter in 1888. He eventually gained prominence as a merchant, community leader, and official Court Interpreter for the Vancouver City Police (1904-1936), and was involved with several groups, including the Chinese Empire Reform Association. He married in 1889 and had ten children, including four sons and six daughters. His son Gordon succeeded him as Court Interpreter.

Scope and content

The fonds consists of material relating to Cumyow's activities and interests among Vancouver's Chinese-Canadian community, his activities as a court interpreter, and the activities of his family. Includes correspondence, journals, scrapbooks, photographs, documents and printed materials.

Source of supplied title: Title based on contents of fonds.

Language note: Some material in Chinese.

Immediate source of acquisition: The majority of material in this fonds was donated to the University of British Columbia by Mrs. Hilda Cumyow, daughter-in-law of Won Alexander Cumyow, in 1975 and 1980, with some additional material donated by Aileen Cumyow in 1990.

Arrangement: The arrangement of the fonds generally follows the arrangement according to material type established by George Brandak in 1975.

Restrictions: No restrictions on access.

Finding aids: File list is available.

Accruals: No further accruals are expected.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Biographical information. – [1985-199-?]. – 0.5 cm textual records.

Series consists of photocopies of various newspaper clippings, book excerpts and documents, and an invitation relating to the activities of Cumyow and his family.

Title based on contents of series.

Correspondence. – 1900-1902, 1952-1954. – 2 cm textual records.

Series consists of correspondence of Cumyow, including petitions and related correspondence sent on behalf of the Chinese Empire Reform Association of Vancouver to the British and United States governments concerning a political crisis in China, 1900 to 1902. Series also includes Cumyow's correspondence with Vancouver City Archivist J.S. Matthews, 1952 to 1954, relating to the history of Chinese-Canadians in Vancouver, and the history of Vancouver in general.

Title based on contents of series.

Journals. – 1888-1992. – 5 cm textual material.

Series consists of a letterbook pertaining to Cumyow's various activities, including activities of a business, personal and civic nature, 1888 to 1904, and a notebook listing persons arrested by the Vancouver City Police and the offences committed, 1906 to 1925. Series also includes transcriptions of English letters and transcriptions and translations of Chinese letters in the letterbook.

Title based on contents of series.

The Cumyow letterbook journal is in very fragile condition. Letters have been transcribed and translated if necessary, but faded ink has made a complete transcription impossible.

Documents. – 1918, 1924. – 1 diploma. – 1 card.

Series consists of a 1918 educational diploma for Harry Won Cumyow, and Won Alexander Cumyow's 1924 registration card with the Department of Immigration and Colonization.

Title based on contents of series.

Scrapbooks. – 1885-1961. – 2 scrapbooks.

Series consists of two scrapbooks, 1885 to 1939 and 1904 to 1961, containing documents, clippings, and photographs relating to the activities of Won Alexander Cumyow and his family. Includes informal photographs of the Cumyow family, newspaper articles documenting Cumyow's career as an official court interpreter, his family life (weddings and funerals) and his activities concerning the Chinese Empire Reform Association, as well as passport certificates pertaining to Cumyow's entry into the United States.

Title based on contents of series.

Includes 44 photographs.

Photographs have been left in their original state, with acid-free paper interleaved between scrapbook pages for preservation purposes.

Photographs. – 1878-1949. – 30 photographs.

Series consists of portrait and casual photographs of Cumyow and his family, as well as some photographs of the Chinese Empire Reform Association.

Title based on contents of series.

Printed material. – 1953-1955. – 4 pamphlets.

Series consists of a few Vancouver City Archives pamphlets concerning dinners held for Vancouver pioneers, 1953 to 1955.

Title based on contents of series.

FILE LIST

BOX/FILE		DATE(S)
<u>Biographical information</u>		
1-10	Information about W.A. Cumyow and family	[1985-199-?]
<u>Correspondence</u>		
1-1	Chinese Empire Reform Association, Vancouver	1900-1902
1-2	Matthews, J.S.	1952-1954
<u>Journals</u>		
1-3	Letterbook, December 18, 1888 to 1904	1888-1904
1-4	Transcription of English material in letterbook	1992
1-5	Transcription of Chinese material in letterbook	1992
1-6	Photocopy of Chinese material in letterbook	1992
1-7	Police court notebook	1906-1925
<u>Documents</u>		
1-9	Registration card under Chinese Immigration Act	1924
oversize	Diploma – Harry Won Cumyow	1918
<u>Scrapbooks*</u>		
*scrapbooks are located in the <i>oversize</i> box		
<i>Album- "Photographs"</i>		
<i>Page 1</i>		
BC1848/23a-b	Two photographs of W.A. Cumyow, aged 60 to 70 sp And general information regarding his life.	[192—193-]
<i>Page 17</i>		
	Two articles regarding W.A. Cumyow's funeral, October 6, 1955.	1955
<i>Page 22 (from left to right, starting at the top of two rows)</i>		
BC1848/24	W.A. Cumyow's ninetieth birthday, with his sons. sp	1951

- BC1848/25 Harry Cumyow with motorcycle. sp [ca. 1920?]
- BC1848/26 Mr. Cumyow and friend or brother in house. sp [1945-1955]
- BC1848/27 W.A. Cumyow standing in front of illegible sign and building. sp [193-]

Page 23 (from left to right)

- BC1848/28a-b Two informal portraits of W.A. Cumyow [possibly in the latter years of his life]. p [1949-1955]

Page 24 (from left to right, starting at the top)

- BC1848/29 W.A. Cumyow's daughters and sons standing in front of a giant cedar in Stanley Park, Vancouver sp 1918
- BC1848/29neg W.A. Cumyow's daughters and sons standing in front of a giant cedar in Stanley Park, Vancouver n 1918
- BC1848/30 New Westminster, car going over bridge [with Cumyow family, July 1914]. sp 1914
sn
- BC1848/31 Third Beach; Stanley Park, [Cumyow family having picnic] sp n.d.
- BC1848/32 Harry Cumyow on motorcycle. sp [ca. 1920?]
sn

Page 25

- BC1848/33 W.A. Cumyow, Eva Cumyow and Harry Cumyow standing in front of car. Bridge in background. p [193-]
- BC1848/34 [Eva Cumyow] in garden. sp 1915
sn
- BC1848/35 [Cumyow's] house in New Westminster. Family standing in front of home. (postcard) [190-]
- BC1848/36 W.A. Cumyow standing by shed [at boatyard?]. sp [193-]

Page 26 (from left to right)

- BC1848/37a Portrait of Mrs. Chang, Mrs. Chow (sisters of W.A. Cumyow) and Won Cumyow in home. p 1951
- BC1848/37b Portrait of W.A. Cumyow in home in formal dress. (Likely in his eighties.) p 1951

Page 27

- BC1848/38 Mr. Won A. Cumyow reading newspaper on election day [June 1949]. (First day Asian-Canadians were allowed to vote for 51 years; Cumyow is age 88). p 1949
- Page 28*
- BC1848/39 Mr. W.A. Cumyow's ninetieth birthday. He is blowing out candles on his cake with his grandchildren. p 1951
- Page 29*
- Newspaper articles, April 23, 1936 and June 27, 1949. 1936, 1949
- BC1848/40 Copy of request for appointment to official court interpreter by W.A. Cumyow. 1904
- Page 32*
- BC1848/41 Certificate by the government of Canada to Chinese persons about to go to the U.S. Includes A photograph of W.A. Cumyow. sp 1904
- BC1848/42 Certificate: includes family photograph, Cumyow, daughter and son.
- Page 33*
- Newspaper articles entitled "50th Anniversary of early B.C. wedding" and "Mrs. W.A. Cumyow passes in hospital."
- Page 36*
- Newspaper articles regarding return of vote after fifty-one years to Asian Canadians; newspaper photographs of Alexander Cumyow; Mrs. Cumyow's funeral.
- Album- "Scrapbook"*
- Page 1 (from left to right)*
- BC1848/43 Vancouver, B.C., ceremonial archway with cedar Columns sp 1912
- BC1848/44 Chinatown, "Mandarin Inn" sp [ca. 1900?]
- BC1848/45 Vancouver Pageant, Parade sp 1914
- BC1848/46 Hastings Street, Vancouver, B.C. (postcard) [ca. 1900?]
- Page 2 (top to bottom)*

BC1848/47	Vancouver, [New Westminster]	sp	1913
BC1848/48	Vancouver, B.C. taken from Grandview	sp	1914
BC1848/49	Vancouver Pageant, parade and floats on street	sp	1914

Page 3

Application for Police Court Interpreter, W.A. Cumyow, and newspaper article, April 3, 1903 from *World* newspaper. Titled "Enjoyable was Banquet given by Chinese Reform Association."

Page 4

Articles from *Colonist*, *Times*, and *Standard* in 1885 regarding debate over Cumyow's appointment as interpreter.

Page 5

Articles from the *Colonist* and *Province* in 1885 and 1901 regarding Cumyow's appointments and yellow oaths.

Page 6

Articles about the Chinese Empire Reform Association, possibly Early 1900s.

Page 7

Articles about Chinese Empire Reform Association and events in Vancouver in which Cumyow is mentioned as a spokesperson for Chinese Canadians.

Page 8

Newspaper article entitled "Orientals Will Vote at Poll." [ca. 1900?]

Page 9

Newspaper articles entitled "Queerious Reform," "China Needs Papers," and "New Record Made by the Blue Funnel." Articles refer to the Chinese Empire Reform Association, Mr. Cumyow as spokesperson, and a record set by an ocean liner on the Pacific.

Page 10

Newspaper articles regarding Chinese banquets in the early 1900s.

Page 11

1904, 1903 newspaper articles regarding Chinese reform, Mr. Cumyow as spokesperson, and Mr. Cumyow's activities as interpreter.

Page 12

Newspaper articles regarding Chinese-Canadian right to vote, and a

funeral, 1902, of the brother-in-law of Cumyow.

Page 13

Articles, 1901, regarding Mr. Cumyow's idea to have a skating rink, and various business transactions as a lawyer.

Page 14 (top to bottom)

BC1848/50 Celebrating reign of Queen Victoria, Barkerville, B.C. (postcard) [18--]

BC1848/51 [Highschool building] p n.d.

Page 15 (top to bottom, left to right)

BC1848/52 Barkerville, B.C., before the fire (postcard) 1868

BC1848/53 Old church in Barkerville, B.C. Built 1869. (postcard) [ca. 1900?]

BC1848/54 New Westminster, white goose swimming in lake (postcard) 1916

Page 16 (top to bottom)

BC1848/55 Vancouver, B.C., ceremonial Chinese archway, by Hotel Balmoral, downtown sp 1919

BC1848/56 Lover's Walk, Queen's Park, New Westminster, B.C. (postcard) 1914

BC1848/57 New Westminster, B.C., lake and reflections. (postcard) 1916

Page 17 (top to bottom)

BC1848/58a-b Two unidentified docks/marinas. sp n.d.

BC1848/59 English Bay, women wheeling prams along Sidewalk, and view of the beach sp 1914

Page 19

BC1848/60 Granville St. Burrard Inlet, alias Gastown. (City of Vancouver Archives) p ca. 1884

Page 20

Four newspaper articles entitled "Vancouver of Twenty Years Ago," mentioning Mr. Cumyow's name and various activities. One newspaper article mentioning the burning of Fort Douglas.

Page 21

Newspaper article entitled "Vancouver's early life."

Photographs (from top to bottom):

BC1848/61	Barkerville/Lee Chong Co. Store of general merchant, Barkerville, B.C.	sp	n.d.
BC1848/62	Vancouver, Granville Street, [Orpheum].	sp	[192-]
BC1848/63	Barkerville, [Chinese] house boarded up.	sp	n.d.
BC1848/64	Brothers Joe and Frank in front of New Westminster, general store.	sp	[192-]

Page 23

Newspaper article entitled "Pioneer Chinese Couple Fete Golden Wedding Anniversary," November 30, 1939

Photographs

*n=negative, p=photograph/print, o/s=oversize, sn= small negative, sp=small print

**date of negatives and copy prints equals date of original photograph

from folder 1-12

BC1848/1	Won Alexander Cumyow with diploma	n*	[1911]**
BC1848/2	Won Alexander Cumyow with diploma	p	[1911]
BC1848/3	Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada. First executive officers. (Names listed on BC1848/13)	n	[ca.1900]
BC1848/4	Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada. First executive officers. (Photograph copy; names listed on BC1848/13)		[ca.1900]
BC1848/5	Portrait of W.A. Cumyow [taken at about 30 years of age)	p	[189-]
BC1848/6	Portrait of W.A. Cumyow [taken at about 30 years of age)	n	[189-]

BC1848/7	A Chinese "Yellow Oath" (non-photographic)		[ca. 1900?]
BC1848/12	W.A. Cumyow with family. Formal family portrait. (print torn in some areas)	p	1903
BC1848/12neg.	W.A. Cumyow with family. Formal family portrait.	n	1903
BC1848/13	The Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada. (Print of BC1848/3)	o/s	[ca. 1900]
BC1848/14	The Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada. (Photograph taken in same setting as BC1848/13, with a few different members present)	o/s sn	[ca. 1900]
BC1848/15	The Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada. (Photograph taken in same setting as BC1848/13 and /14, with a few different members present)	o/s sn	[ca. 1900]
BC1848/16	The Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada. Mr. Cumyow in group. (Photograph taken in same setting as BC1848/13, /14, and /15)	o/s sn	[ca. 1900]
BC1848/17	Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada. First executive officers. (Photograph copy; names listed on BC1848/13)		[ca.1900]
BC1848/18	Won Alexander Cumyow with diploma	o/s	[1911]
BC1848/19	Arts class, 1919, UBC. Harry Cumyow's photograph.	o/s	1919
BC1848/20	Fred Cumyow, present in group portrait.	o/s	[ca. 1920?]
BC1848/21	Crew of the Annie Fraser. Cumyee (coxswain), Brother of Cumyow in group. (City of Vancouver Archives copy)	p	1878
BC1848/22	Provincial Normal School, Vancouver, B.C. Harry Cumyow's photograph.	o/s	1917-1918
<i>folder unknown</i>			
BC1848/8	W.A. Cumyow and family standing in front of house.	p	[189-]
BC1848/8neg.	W.A. Cumyow and family standing in front of house.	n	[189-]

BC1848/9	Election day (federal). W.A. Cumyow, age 88, casts ballot in first federal election since Asian vote ban. Seen with deputy returning officer, Mrs. Mollie Dobell. (Vancouver Sun print).	p	1949
BC1848/9neg.	Election day (federal). W.A. Cumyow, age 88, casts ballot in first federal election since Asian vote ban. Seen with deputy returning officer, Mrs. Mollie Dobell. (Vancouver Sun print).	n	1949
BC1848/10	W.A. Cumyow's family. A portrait of first and second generations. [W.A. Cumyow is 62 years old].	o/s	1923
BC1848/10neg	W.A. Cumyow's family. A portrait of first and second generations. [W.A. Cumyow age 62].	n	1923
BC1848/11	Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada building. Officials standing on third floor balcony. (print faded)	p	[ca.1900]
BC1848/11neg	Chinese Empire Reform Association of Canada building. Officials standing on third floor balcony.	n	[ca.1900]

Printed material

1-8	Printed material	1953-1955
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Note: The Cumyow Journal, 1888-1905, box 1, folder 3A, is in very fragile condition. All the letters in English have been transcribed and are available in box 1, folder 3B. Faded ink in the letterpress copybook has made a complete transcription impossible.

The transcription and translation of the Chinese portion of the Journal is available in box 1, folder 3C.