



Canadian Holy War: A Story of Clans, Tongs, Murder, and Bigotry

Ian MacDonald, Betty O'Keefe

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Scottish nursemaid Janet Smith was the victim of a 1924 tragedy that ignited racial tension in a very young Vancouver. At the core of the issue were the mysterious circumstances surrounding Smith's death, particularly the fact that the only other adult in the house at the time was the Chinese houseboy. When Smith's death was followed by the assassination of Davie Lew, a well-known Chinese man, it only strengthened the European view that Vancouver's Asian community was a hotbed of violence and corruption.

Newspaper editors and most of Vancouver's white community raised an outcry, charging the police with incompetence and demanding arrests, while Presbyterian indignation called for law and order as well as an end to Chinese immigration. Before the summer was over, the tongs of Chinatown and the clans of Canada's West Coast were set to defend their own, and one Scottish minister went so far as to declare it a time of "holy war."

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