

Immigration Branch

MRJR/EC.

Department of the Interior

Canada

File No. 2129

Vancouver, B. C., January 3rd 1914

Ottawa File No. 536999

W. D. Scott, Esq.,
Superintendent of Immigration,
OTTAWA, ONT.



Sir:-

Referring to your favor of the 17th instant, asking me to visit Victoria and submit a report in connection with the escape a short time ago of the four Hindus detained at that port for medical reasons, together with some 35 others.

In accordance with your wishes I visited Victoria on the 30th ultimo, and herewith beg to submit my report:

On separately interviewing the different members of the staff, including the janitor, I elicited the following information:

Dr. Milne states every precaution had been taken in escorting the 39 Hindus to the Court House on the day of the trial, - viz. November 26th. The men were taken in a street car accompanied by 6 policemen, 4 immigration officers and 2 mounted men, and were placed in a special room, the guard being maintained. They returned from Court at 5 o'clock, reaching the detention building at 5:30, the escape occurring at about 6:30 the same evening.

The decision of the Court had been favourable in the case of 35. Three special officers had been engaged as guards during the period that the 39 were in detention, Mr. W. F. Ahern being the day guard, going off duty at 7 p.m.

Dr. Milne does not state that the janitor was responsible in any way for the escape of the 4 Hindus, although he most emphatically states that a change should be made and a new janitor appointed, giving various reasons - the principal one being a direct violation of your instructions of March 3rd 1910, viz: that McCahill and wife were to reside in building, but no family; and

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further in defiance of your letter of September 22nd 1910, Ottawa File No. 334403 (2). The son, a man of over 21, still remains in the building, eating and sleeping there.

Wm. Francis Ahern, Special Officer: Stated that he had been engaged shortly after the arrival of the Hindus on the 17th of October. His hours of duty were from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. On the night in question, November 26th, he was on duty. The four men were in their room, which opened on to a balcony used for exercise, and where one of the toilets was situated. Afraid that the rats in the basement would have access to a sack of flour used for the Hindus' food, he hurried downstairs in order to carry same up.

(Special Officer Hendricks, who was engaged as Chinese guard was on the same floor, but had nothing to do with guarding the Hindus.)

Ahern went down to the basement, picked up the sack of flour, and carried same upstairs and immediately on entering the room he found the Hindus had gone. He investigated and found the whole of the wire work at one side of the balcony broken down. He immediately rushed down and told Hendricks, who got on a wheel, and scoured the grounds around the building, and also hailed Inspector Roff who had just left, and phoned Dr. Milne, but no trace could be found of the men who had apparently gone through the hole in the wire netting, using the trellis work as a ladder to reach the grounds, and over the fence in the far corner, using the same means as the Hindu who had got away three or four days before.

Ahern claims that he made every search possible for the men - in fact has been searching ever since, - but without success. He definitely states that the hole through which the first man escaped, had not been repaired; that the matter was still under discussion.

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In any case he stated the 39 could have escaped through the weakness of the wire, but after one had got away his fellowcountrymen themselves watched each other to see that no further attempt was made, as they announced that if they could not lawfully through the Courts remain in the country they were quite prepared to go back, but would not lower their dignity by attempting to run away.

Ahern further stated that he saw Janitor McCahill, by signs, showing the second lot of Hindus in detention, how the first man had got away, and further saw him show some of the 39 how they might escape through a window - not barred - into the surgery, room No. 22, and through another window-not barred - into the corridor, into the grounds and away.

Inspector Roff states as follows: After the dismissal of the 35 by the Court (one of whom had previously escaped) the whole detachment came back to the detention building; the 34 were duly released but the remaining 4 for medical treatment were left in the same room upstairs. He went to supper about 6:15, leaving guards Ahern and Webb, to take the 4 men upstairs, and had only got a block away from the building when he heard someone calling him. He came back immediately and found the four Hindus had escaped.

He saw an automobile a short distance from the building, dash off at a 25-mile clip, and is of the opinion that friendly Hindus were waiting and the escape was pre-arranged.

Mr. Roff looked carefully over the wire work and found it was torn away from the side leaving ample room for a man to pass through even when upright. He further states that one man had escaped through a hole in the wire netting on Saturday, the 22nd of November, and that repairs had been made to the hole, and feels fairly confident that same had been repaired by the night of the 26th.

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Special Officer Hendricks. (who acts as special Chinese guard for the C.P. Ry. Co., and Messrs R. P. Rithet & Co.) states:

He was on duty the night of November 26th, as Chinese guard at about 6 o'clock. He could assume no responsibility for the escape of the Hindus, but was aware that one had gone through a hole in the wire work on the Saturday night previous, and further knew that the Hindus were angry at this man's escape, and watched each other to see no others took advantage of any defect in the wire netting. He refused to deny or confirm the statement with reference to the janitor.

Mike McCahill, Janitor: States that apparently on the return from the Court, the 54 who had been released were very anxious to assist him in rolling up the blankets and putting the place into ship shape order before they left, and in the face of what transpired, the janitor now sees this was only part of the scheme to get rid of him, as no doubt they had made up their minds at that time to assist the four to get away.

McCahill is a man of 63 years of age. He has been in British Columbia since 1875. Prior to accepting the position as janitor in the detention building, he was for some two years at William's Head Quarantine Station. Owing to some differences with the late Dr. Watt, he either resigned or was requested to do so. He claims he has too much work to do to properly guard anyone. He describes himself as janitor, scavenger and caretaker, and amongst other duties he has to keep up the heating for the building, the heating plant for water for baths and the electric plant as well, claiming that he works from 5:30 to 8 o'clock at night. He states he could give much better satisfaction if he had an assistant there,- a man to clean the office windows etc. He was quite willing to do

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the furnace work and dirty work himself.

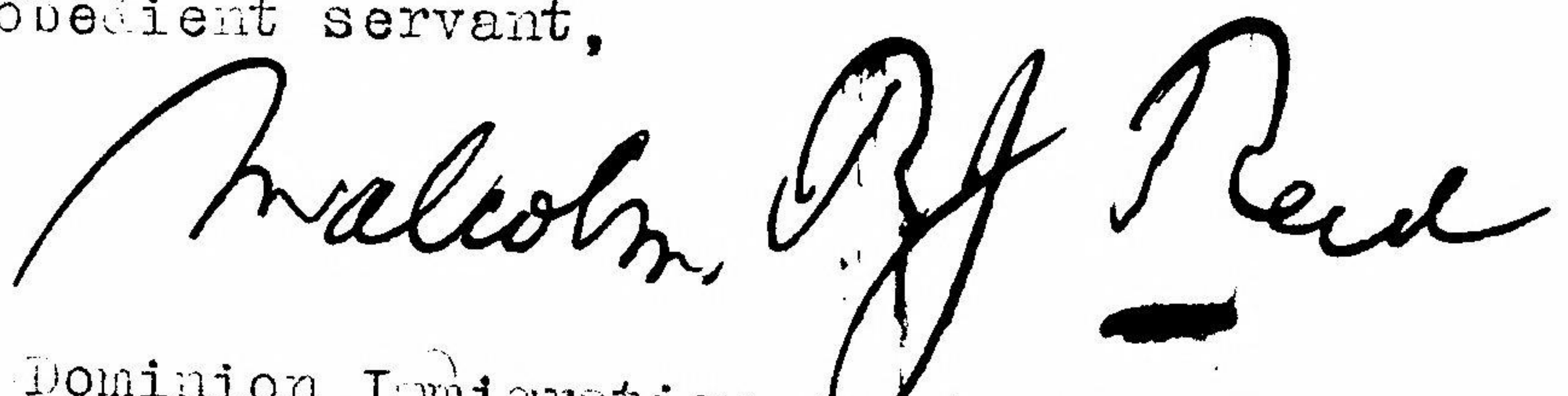
The Hindus were detained from the 17th of October until the 26th of November, and McCahill is of the opinion that they could have all escaped at any time should they have so desired, owing to the weakness of the protecting wire fencing. He also further states that with only two men on guard sitting in the room, had they so wished they could easily have over-powered these men and made off.

SUMMARY:

Dr. Milne apparently exercised every precaution in conducting the men from the building, and cannot be held responsible for the detail work of guarding the men whilst there. I carefully went over the building with Dr. Milne and examined the alleged wire screen work, which is fastened on the outside of the exercise balconies. In my opinion this should be immediately torn down as it is in bad shape, and should be replaced with bars. This would only be necessary on the outside, as it is impossible to escape from the inner courtyards. The netting seems to be to be a poor subterfuge for holding prisoners. Should a hole be made, the remainder of the netting could be used as a ladder, and further from the outside, anyone wishing to help inmates, could easily climb the netting and with a small screw driver passed in, it would be very easy in fifteen minutes to take out enough screws to take the wire netting in one section completely out.

My attention was also called to a door opening into the basement where the wood and coal are stored. This door should also be studded, as should anyone secure an axe, it would only be a matter of a few minutes to smash same in.

Your obedient servant,



Dominion Immigration Agent & Inspector.