The Ron Bick Lee collection was donated by the Lee family in Vancouver, British Columbia to the University of British Columbia Library in 2010. Ron Bick Lee was a Chinese Canadian pioneer who moved to Canada from China in 1910 and spent most of his life in Vancouver. He was well known as a successful businessman and a dedicated community leader. As a recent library school graduate, I was privileged to have the opportunity of working on this important collection as an archivist since July 2011 to October 2011.

The collection material spans from 1914 to 1994, almost a century long, and it mainly contains Ron Bick Lee’s personal correspondence, certificates presented to him for his community and political involvement, and business documents related to his Foo Hung and Granville Greenhouses business. His correspondence with his families, friends and business partners in China, Hong Kong and North America depicts his vast network across the Pacific Ocean.

Working with the collection was a valuable and enjoyable learning process. The physical processing stage was my first thorough encounter of the collection. By rearranging the collection material, I was able to conceptualize the types of the material. In writing the finding aid document, I studied the collection in order to gain a good understanding of the scope and content of the material. The collection material has portrayed the immigration experience of Chinese Canadian in general and Ron Bick Lee’s personal experience as a businessman, a community leader and a family member of his immediate and extended families.

As a young archivist whose own life experience has little overlap with Mr. Bick Lee’s, I had challenges of grasping the background of some of his documents, understanding part of his handwriting, and making connections among people in his vast network. However, these challenges motivated me to research more details in and outside the collection for a better understanding of Ron Bick Lee himself as the creator of the collection and the historical and cultural setting he has lived in.

Throughout the arrangement and the description stages of the collection, I felt as if I were getting to know Mr. Bick Lee as a person, his meticulous work habits, intellectual curiosity and generous personality. This was probably the most interesting and rewarding part of my experience with the collection.

This overseas Chinese rare collection is a very valuable source to explore the Chinese Canadian history in the 20th century. Ron Bick Lee’s remarkable story depicted in the collection gives us a vivid image of a Chinese Canadian pioneer in British Columbia, particularly in Vancouver.

Research methodology such as unstructured observation in the scope of qualitative research was employed during the research.