

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

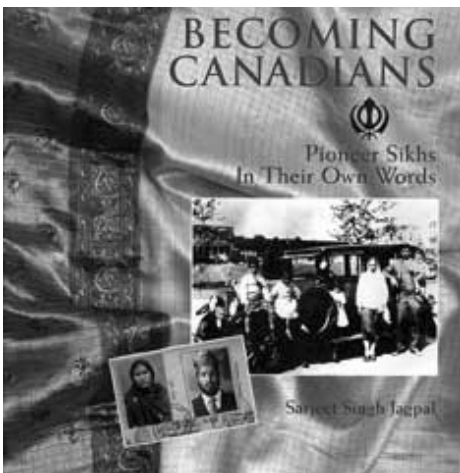
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Canadians of Indian Heritage Their History in Vancouver: Speaker Sarjeet Singh Jagpal

Indians from various parts of the subcontinent first came to the Pacific Northwest coast as crewmen on British ships with the Maritime fur trade in the late 1780s and early 1790s. One hundred years later, Indians, mainly Punjabi Sikhs, began to move out from the relatively small Punjab region as British subjects having already spread their wings under the British Empire. In 1897 Sikh soldiers of this unique and fiercely independent minority religious-political-social group returning to India from having

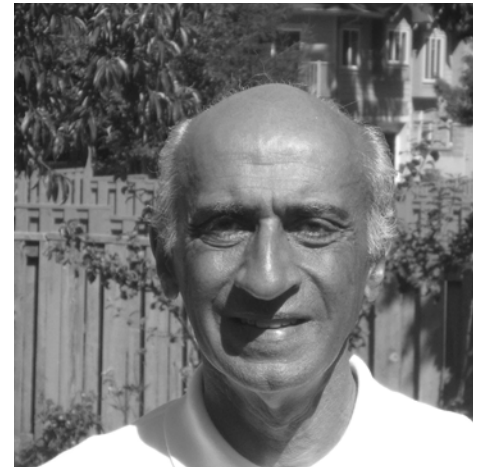


taken part in Queen Victoria's jubilee, passed through Vancouver. As British subjects within the British Empire, they liked what they saw and were determined to return as immigrants. Considered a threatening block of votes and as low-paying threats to European-held jobs, Indians faced active discrimination from the start.

The 1907 Chinatown riots were, paradoxically, the outcome of a northward movement of the Asiatic Exclusion League originally railing against the Indian presence from San Francisco, north. In 1914, in an effort to circumvent impossible rules which required Indians to sail non-stop from India, 376 Sikhs, Moslems and Hindus arrived on the *Komogata Maru*; only 22 previously resident Canadian Indians were allowed to disembark, the rest returned to India. Nasty recriminations both in India and Canada were felt for years. Still, with the knowledge that they would have to accept disenfranchisement upon arrival, 118 arrived between 1908 and 1920 but all knew that their interests would be looked after by their gurdwara (place of worship). As well, carefully kept temple records are now some of the only surviving record of those who arrived. Like the gurdwara, its communal kitchen was also a place of comfort for both Hindus and Moslems.

Still, there were great human stories of journeys over to Canada. Equally important is the story of how the mainly Punjabis moved into sawmills and agriculture to work, assumed ownership of small businesses and sawmills and participated in the broader community.

Family stories reveal how they came to terms with the Canadian society and environment.



Sarjeet Singh Jagpal

However, with post WWII enfranchisement and full citizenship, many Indians began arriving from all over the sub-continent. Now a significant presence in Canada, Canadians of Indian heritage have become vibrant contributors and very successful in all walks of the nation's life.

Former school principal, Sarjeet Singh Jagpal, is familiar with the Indian journey in Canada. He is the author of *Becoming Canadians: Pioneer Sikhs in their own words*, Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1994.

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 pm, Thursday, Sept. 22, 2011 at Museum of Vancouver

Preznotes

The Society enjoyed many different activities over the summer months, as is reported elsewhere in this edition of the newsletter. Our autumn program is shaping up to be as busy and exciting, with a variety of speaker topics and activities planned. As we look toward the next few months, I'll take this opportunity to address some practical issues, to get the ball rolling.

First, I've been asked to remind everyone about the parking situation at the Museum of Vancouver parking lot. The cost is \$5 after 6:00pm, so if you intend to drive and park please be sure to bring adequate change, and to arrive early enough not to feel rushed in making the meeting on time.

On a related note, I am asking for one member who regularly attends monthly meetings to volunteer for assisting our fellow members in working the parking lot machines, as they can be confusing and poorly lit. A flashlight, umbrella, and training will be provided, as well as a reserved seat at the meeting. All we ask is that you arrive at the monthly meeting before 7:00pm (the meeting starts at 7:30pm), "hang out" at the machine in the west end of the parking lot to assist members if they are having difficulty, and leave the machine a minute or two after 7:30pm to come in to the meeting.

I am also asking for one member who can volunteer about four to five hours a month, mostly in one block of time, to mail out the newsletter at the beginning of each month. The task basically involves picking up a box of newsletters (about the size of a box of envelopes) from a downtown location, stuffing them into envelopes that have been labeled and stamped, and delivering them to a Canada Post mailbox. Training will be provided, and you will be reimbursed for the cost of envelopes and stamps.

Scott Anderson, President
sanderson@vancouver-historical-society.ca

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VHS Summer Activities

The Society was active through the summer months with three field trips and participation in a neighbourhood car-free fair.

On Saturday June 11, 2011, two days before the 125th anniversary of the Great Fire, the Society joined VHS member



John Atkin (in straw hat) leads walking tour explaining the events and personal stories of the Great Fire of June 13, 1886.

Photo: Kellan Higgins

and tour-guide extraordinaire John Atkin for a walking tour along the path of this major event in the city's history. Brush fires in freshly cut forest debris were fed by unanticipated high winds and quickly built into a wall of flame that roared through the newly-incorporated city of Vancouver consuming almost everything in its path. John described the conditions and landscape of the day, deftly evoking the course of events that unfolded and the myriad stories of the people involved.

On Sunday June 19, 2011, the Society participated in the Car-



Left to right: Kellan Higgins, Robert McDonald and VHS President Scott Anderson on Commercial Drive.

Photo: Amber Anderson

Free Day on Commercial Drive, where directors Kellan Higgins and Robert McDonald broadcast the *City Reflections* film and answered questions.

**VHS Summer Activities continues
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VHS Summer Activities Continued From Page 2

On July 23, 2011, the Society was guided by Ms. Joey Hartman of the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association in a walking tour of the labour history of Vancouver. The story of organizing Vancouver's working class within the context of an ever-evolving socio-economic order has always been with the end-goal of a fair return for, and improvement in, the lives of workers.

On August 20, 2011, the Society visited the Orpheum Theatre



Keyboard of theatre organ at the Orpheum Concert Hall. *Photo: Amber Anderson*



Architectural details of the area over the audience seating at the Orpheum Concert Hall. *Photo: Amber Anderson*

Scott Anderson and Bruce M. Watson

Welcome New & Returning Members

Alan & Florence Sung
Jacqueline Eden
Vicki Cuthbert
Adam Mitchell
Sheldon Goldfarb

S. Ingham & J. Hepburn
Ryan Schmidt
Chris Spencer
Chris Stocker

Upcoming Speakers & Events

The VHS invites everyone (including non-members) to attend our monthly talks. The talks are free and are held at the Museum of Vancouver, 1100 Chestnut Street (close to Vanier Park) at 7:30 pm on the fourth Thursday of every month except in June, July, August, December). Special events may be held at other times for which there may be a fee.

Thursday, October 27, 2011 - 7:30pm

Crime in Vancouver

Speaker: Kim Bolan

From 1865 when Tomkins Brew was given the job as Government Agent and Constable to maintain law and order in the Burrard Inlet area, Metro Vancouver has grown to include almost 2.5 million residents bringing with it unavoidable criminal activity. Veteran *Vancouver Sun* reporter, Kim Bolan who has reported in-depth on these activities, shares her extensive knowledge of crime in the Metro Vancouver area.

Thursday, November 24, 2011 - 7:30pm

Mildred Valley Thornton

Speaker: Sheryl Salloum

Learn more about internationally renowned artist Mildred Valley Thornton (1890-1967). The story of this distinctive artist is an important part of BC's history. Fiercely independent, adventurous and driven, Thornton was also a noted journalist, *Vancouver Sun* art critic (1944-1959), book reviewer, published poet, recipient of a Canadian Authors' Association Award for her book, *Indian Lives and Legends* (1966), and an advocate for social justice.

Thursday, January 26, 2012 - 7:30pm

The Drive: A Retail, Social and Political History of Commercial Drive

Speaker: Jak King

Learn more about the history of Commercial Drive, East Vancouver's fiercely independent, wildly entertaining, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-sexual district. Our speaker, Jak King, has devoted himself to the history of the area and has written a book on the subject. He has lived in the area for over 20 years.

Before & After

This year we celebrate the 125th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Vancouver. As part of this special year, we visit different locations in the city as they

looked years ago and how they look today. VHS Director Kellan Higgins visited the locations and took our present day photos.



Photo: Leonard Frank, Vancouver Public Library 4737



Photo: Kellan Higgins

Our two photos of the southwest corner of Robson and Thurlow are separated by 72 years. In the May 8, 1939 photo, you can still see residential buildings to which storefronts have been tacked on at the front. That had been slowly happening since the 1910s as Robson slowly became a commercial street due to the streetcar line built in 1899. The Busy Bee Grocery is on the corner and would be there for some time. There is a 1969 photo of the store in the archives although it probably lasted a few years after that. The first mention of the store is in the 1933 City Directory. “Free delivery” and the phone number “Seymour-74” are advertised on the store window. The delivery bicycle is leaning against the lamp post in front. Note the small Safeway store further down the block, the company having come to Canada in 1929. The Royal Visit

to Vancouver in late May of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth was the talk of the city at the time. All signs also seemed to point to another World War, which would start less than four months later. After the war, many immigrants opened small cafés and shops on Robson in such numbers that people often referred to the street as “Robsonstrasse.” Streetcar service ended in 1948 on this stretch of Robson to be replaced by trolleybuses. As the popularity of the street grew, increasing rents slowly started driving away the small retail shops to be replaced — especially during the 1990s — by high end global brand name stores. This corner is noted today for its two Starbucks coffee shops, one seen on the site of the old Busy Bee and the other in the Manhattan Apartments behind the photographer.

Jim McGraw

Vancouver Historical Society Leadership - 2011 - 2012 (Elected May 26, 2011)

EXECUTIVE

President	Scott Anderson
Vice President (Programs)	Bruce Watson
Treasurer	Kristen Wong
Recording Secretary	Jean Wilson
Director (Memberships)	Elizabeth Hawkins
Director	Kellan Higgins
Director	Jean Mann
Director	Robert McDonald
Director (Newsletter Editor)	Jim McGraw

APPOINTED POSITIONS

Webmaster	Quasar Data Management
Archivist	Elizabeth Hawkins
Info Line	Barbara Coles

CONTACT INFORMATION

Vancouver Historical Society Information Line: 604-878-9140
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3071 Vancouver, BC V6B 3X6
Website: www.vancouver-historical-society.ca
Newsletter Editor: jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca