

Royal BC Museum and Archives
in partnership with
The Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley
Report of a Community Consultation for The Punjabi Legacy Initiative
Hosted by The Reach Gallery Museum
Abbotsford, BC, June 27, 2016

This was one of eight community consultations held throughout the province by the [Royal BC Museum and Archives](#) in partnership with the [Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies](#) (CICS) at the University of the Fraser Valley and the [Punjabi Intercultural History Advisory Committee](#). Consultations sought input from the Punjabi community, a pioneer group that has had a significant impact on the province's cultural, economic and social history.

The consultations were coordinated by the two partnering institutions and the local hosts, with guidance and support from the BC Punjabi Intercultural History Advisory Committee, and many committee facilitators and note-takers.

Each group was asked the same three questions, as the first step in creating a provincial Punjabi legacy project that preserves and shares community history.

On June 27, 2016, [The Reach Gallery Museum](#) hosted a BC Punjabi Legacy Project consultation in Abbotsford, in the Fraser Valley, where the Punjabi-Canadian communities have long settled. The following is a summary of discussions:

1 – What significant stories/events best convey Punjabi legacy in BC?

- Forum participants identified the following significant moments and movements in South Asian history that influenced migration:
 - anti-colonial resistance via the Ghadar movement in 1913,
 - the Komagata Maru incident in 1914,
 - the contribution of Punjabis to the war efforts in WWI and WWII,
 - regaining the right to vote in BC in 1947,
 - the ramifications of India's Partition in 1947 and
 - Operation Bluestar and the anti-Sikh pogroms of India in 1984.
- Participants highlighted places from which many of the Punjabi migrants came, including high-volume villages such as Dhudike in the Moga district, from which large numbers of migrants settled, mainly in the Fraser Valley.
- Migration patterns from 1902 to the present feature bulges in the early 1900s and 1970s, as well as from settlement by Punjabi migrants who moved to Canada from other parts of the world, including Africa, Malaysia, Singapore and Kenya. Some participants pointed to the communities to which some of the largest Punjabi populations first migrated, e.g., Prince

George in the 1970s, whose stories may now be forgotten.

- Participants also discussed the importance of community stories unique to the Abbotsford area, such as their grandparents' experiences in the Valley.

2 – What artifacts/information are important to preserve for today and for future generations?

- Post-migration discussions focused on sites of Punjabi migrant gatherings and community building, like the gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) and its associated langar (communal kitchen offering free meals daily). This spirit of generosity is central to the Punjabi ethos. Many participants identified gurdwaras as centres of culture and history.
- Significant sites of early Punjabi settlement were urban centres that offered work, e.g., Fort St. James, Fort St. John, McKenzie, Prince George, Quesnel, Houston, Terrace, Prince Rupert, William Lake, Kelowna, Kamloops, Oliver, Golden, Kitimat and Vernon.
- Sites of present-day Punjabi migrant concentrations are between 4th Avenue and Main Street to Scott Road, and around 84th Avenue and 128th Street in Surrey.
- Families discussed artifacts in their possession, such as family letters, images, cooking utensils and suitcases/trunks.

3 – How might we create a legacy project to make Punjabi history in BC available to all British Columbians?

- Many advocated the need to inform teachers, and to work with the local schools to include Punjabi history in the curriculum.
- Participants recommended school trips to the Sikh heritage gurdwara.
- Others proposed outputs including documentaries, books, virtual museums, archives and artifacts. Digitization was recognized as being crucial to this effort.