

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 Golden Museum & Archives  
Golden, BC, October 15, 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 October 15, 2016, the [Golden Museum & Archives](#) hosted a BC Punjabi Legacy Project consultation in Golden, where the Punjabi-Canadian communities have established vibrant intercultural lives. The following is a summary of discussions:

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

- Participants emphasized the early pioneers who settled and sought employment in Golden and the surrounding areas, including stories about:
  - the first Punjabis coming to the community, including stories of landing in Vancouver and moving directly to Golden,
  - the sense of connectedness, whether by marriage or lineage,
  - the first Sikh temple in Golden and other significant temple sites,
  - communities working together at the local gurdwara (Sikh place of worship), for instance, people of European descent and Punjabi communities volunteering in the 1980s to build the gurdwara, which was cited as debt-free,
  - land where one of the first temples was built, now being donated by the current owner to build a memorial site,
  - volunteering and donating in the gurdwara in the 1980s and
  - the gurdwara as a significant part of community building, then and now.

- Some stories were tied to specific times, such as:
  - population growth: in the late 1960s–70s there were 200 people from the Punjabi community in Golden, and by the 1980s there were 450,
  - in the 1970s Punjabi workers lived in early bunkhouses, and in 1974 the bunkhouses closed, so some moved to town,
  - in the 1970s there was a small handful of Punjabi students in the local high school and
  - the first death, in 1970, when a boy died in an accident and was taken to Vancouver.
- Cremations where they took place in Kamloops and Salmon Arm.
- Relying on specific stores for cultural foods (e.g., Barlow Store or Joe's), or having to get ingredients from Vancouver or Calgary.
- Workplaces/ industries where Punjabis found work included sawmills and the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was stationed by the local school board office. After American-owned laminated mills replaced many of the older mills, two of the older mills closed in 1995, and the populations slowly moved away. The Columbia River lumber mill was cited as having been established in 1893.

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

- Participants mentioned many items that they have in their homes: family photo albums, passports, social insurance cards from their parents, canvas bedding, quilts, bedding, darri, khesi, rajai, silk salu for men, shawls, phulkari for women, (embroidery). Others shared utensils, such as the *tawa* (frying pan) and rolling pins. Other spoke about items such as traditional farming with a horse-drawn plow, or old films and music.

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

- Showing artifacts via learning camps, workshops, classes, website for kids, etc.
- Booths at community centres and fairs to display images and share history.
- Working with local gurdwaras openly advocating a welcome to other communities.
- Punjabi music, bhangra and dance program videos were suggested as potential tools for learning Sikhism and the community history. Any outputs would need to have local community input in terms of messaging.
- Including Punjabi-Canadian narratives within the school curriculum, or using hands-on, practical activities such as outreach kits and technology to connect with younger generations.
- Participants wished that younger generations could understand the struggles they faced; for example, the simple-yet-powerful stories of not being able to play sports like soccer, and being told to not fight discrimination in these forms. They wished to see a sense of pride evoked in their children, as opposed to embarrassment.

