

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 Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum
Prince George, BC, June 28, 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 28, 2016, the [Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum](#) hosted a BC Punjabi Legacy Project consultation in Prince George, in the middle of the Northern region, where the Punjabi-Canadian communities have a long history in industries such as logging. The following is a summary of discussions:

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

- Punjabi migration patterns: many participants agree that some of the largest migrations to Prince George were in 1970–75.
- Pioneering stories shared between generations cover topics such as families. There were five well known in Prince George in 1970–75, including the Sandhu and Sahota families.
- 100 years of Punjabi settlement in the surrounding area at sites including Fort St. James, Fort St. John, McKenzie, Prince George, Quesnel, Houston, Terrace, Prince Rupert, Williams Lake, Kelowna, Kamloops, Oliver, Golden, Kitimat and Vernon.
- Work in the sawmill and lumber industries during the mid-twentieth century. (See a video project on 100 Years in Prince George.)
- Racism that was prevalent in northern BC had the effect of silencing people's identities. Examples include systematized anglicizing and/or changing of Punjabi names, and ignorance of how to pronounce or spell them, and the deeper meaning that is lost when the name is misspelled or spoken incorrectly.
- Different groups negotiating for space in Northern BC, resulting in conflict or competition with

other ethnic and indigenous groups.

- Punjabi participation in political life, e.g., Councillor Moe Takhar.
- Establishment of the first gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) in Prince George in 1979.
- Emergence of the Nagar Kirtan traditional parade in May 1999.
- Incorporation of the Prince George gurdwara in historical records (local, national and international).
- Large chain grocery stores introducing fruits and foods more relatable to the Punjabi experience, e.g., mangoes. This saved hours of travel for community members; previously they would go, often in groups, to get culturally specific food items from larger cities.

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

- Artifacts related to sports and leisure, as Punjabi men enjoyed playing their favorite games. This held special significance against the backdrop of intense racism, discrimination and separation from families. Artifacts include trophies awarded in sports competitions like cricket, kabaddi, grass hockey, or playing cards (informal tournaments).
- The longest beam joints in BC, with their connection to the Sandhu Mill at Williams Lake.

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

- Historical discourse is needed to help build bridges and bring communities together. A recurring theme was artifacts and sharing stories through leisure and sports.