



NEWS RELEASE

Commemorative Komagata Maru Way highlights Abbotsford's humanitarian connection to the historical tragedy

ABBOTSFORD – July 11, 2023 – The City of Abbotsford, in collaboration with the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society, Khalsa Diwan Society and the South Asian Studies Institute, is memorializing and honouring the tragic Komagata Maru incident of 1914, by commemoratively renaming a section of South Fraser Way to Komagata Maru Way. Three new interpretive panels will also be unveiled outside at the National Historic Site Gur Sikh Temple, highlighting the humanitarian efforts of Abbotsford's Sikh community who provided for passengers left stranded aboard the Komagata Maru steamship while it sat in the Burrard Inlet from May to July 1914.

The commemorative street renaming, between Fairlane Street to Ware Street, serves to honour 352 passengers of the Komagata Maru who were denied entry into Canada due to the government's application of racist and exclusionary immigration laws and essentially kept as ship-bound prisoners for two full months before being sent back to India. During that time, members of Abbotsford's Sikh community provided and organized delivery of food, water and other provisions for the stranded passengers, who were mostly from the Punjab Province of India, and raised funds for legal aid to challenge the government's refusal to allow them to disembark the ship. The installation of the new interpretive panels, which were designed by the South Asian Studies Institute with support from the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society, aims to honour the important role the Abbotsford Sikh community played during the ordeal.

"The commemorative renaming of part of such a prominent street in Abbotsford to Komagata Maru Way acknowledges the tragic event of the Komagata Maru and highlights the incredible humanitarian response of Abbotsford's Sikh community who rallied together to help those left stranded," said Abbotsford Mayor Ross Siemens. "As the cultural and economic Hub of the Fraser Valley, we strive to embrace all the unique cultures, backgrounds and groups that make up our city, and that includes recognizing the historical discrimination and injustice some members of our community experienced. It also reminds us of the important role we all play in fostering a more inclusive and connected city, where everyone is welcome."

"The commemorative renaming of South Fraser Way, between Fairlane Street and Ware Street, to Komagata Maru Way and the Komagata Maru plaque will help inform the community and remind us of how unique Canada's and Abbotsford's diverse makeup is," said Raj Singh Toor, Vice President of Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society. "We are all richer when we remember how special it is to have so many different ethnic communities living together. I hope that it will help to connect Canadians, British Columbians and Abbotsford residents with their past to build a more peaceful and tolerant tomorrow."

The commemorative street renaming and unveiling of the panels takes place on Saturday, July 22 at the Gur Sikh Temple in the City's centre and residents are welcome to join at 1:00 p.m. A new exhibition showcasing the transnational story of BC and the contributions of the Sikh community in the early 1900s is also opening on July 22, at the Sikh Heritage Museum.

"This exhibit is a fitting tribute to the early Sikh immigrants living in Abbotsford as we honour and record their struggles and their triumphs in equal measure," said Dr. Satwinder Bains of South Asian Studies Institute.

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“Their steadfast commitment to social justice against such great odds is to be commended. Today, we are the beneficiaries of their long-sighted vision to help make Canada a better place for all of us. We hope whoever interacts with the exhibit will pause and reflect on the critically important role of local citizens over a hundred years ago, and work to prevent unjust laws and discrimination to find a place in our society.”

Residents wanting to learn more about the commemorative street renaming, as well as Abbotsford’s connection to the Komagata Maru event can email culture@abbotsford.ca.

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