

# Commemorating the Komagata Maru Incident

Secondary Naming of a Street, May 30<sup>th</sup> 2023



# Acknowledgements

We recognize we are gathered on the unceded homelands of the x̣ẉṃə̣θ̣ḳẉə̣ỵə̣m (Musqueam), Ṣḳẉx̣ẉụ́7̣mesh (Squamish), and ṣəḷiḷẉə̣ṭə̣ł̣ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

We are sharing the information in this report as a record of the impacts of the Komagata Maru (Guru Nanak Jahaaz) incident in Vancouver. The report shares research, archives and voices of South Asian community members with the assistance of City staff.

# Background & Context

In response to community advocacy and leadership, the City formally apologized for historical discrimination toward passengers of the Komagata Maru in May 2021.

In July 2022, after staff presented the interim report on *Historical Discrimination against People of South Asian Descent in Vancouver*, Council directed staff to prepare for a secondary naming of a street after the Komagata Maru incident.

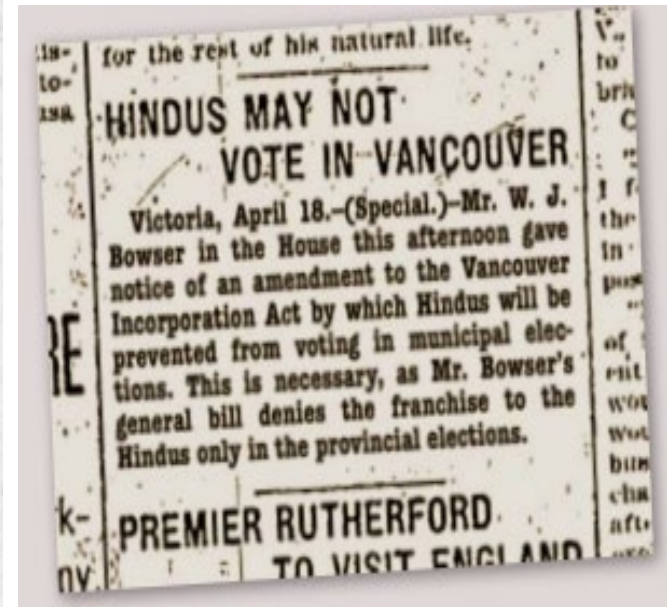
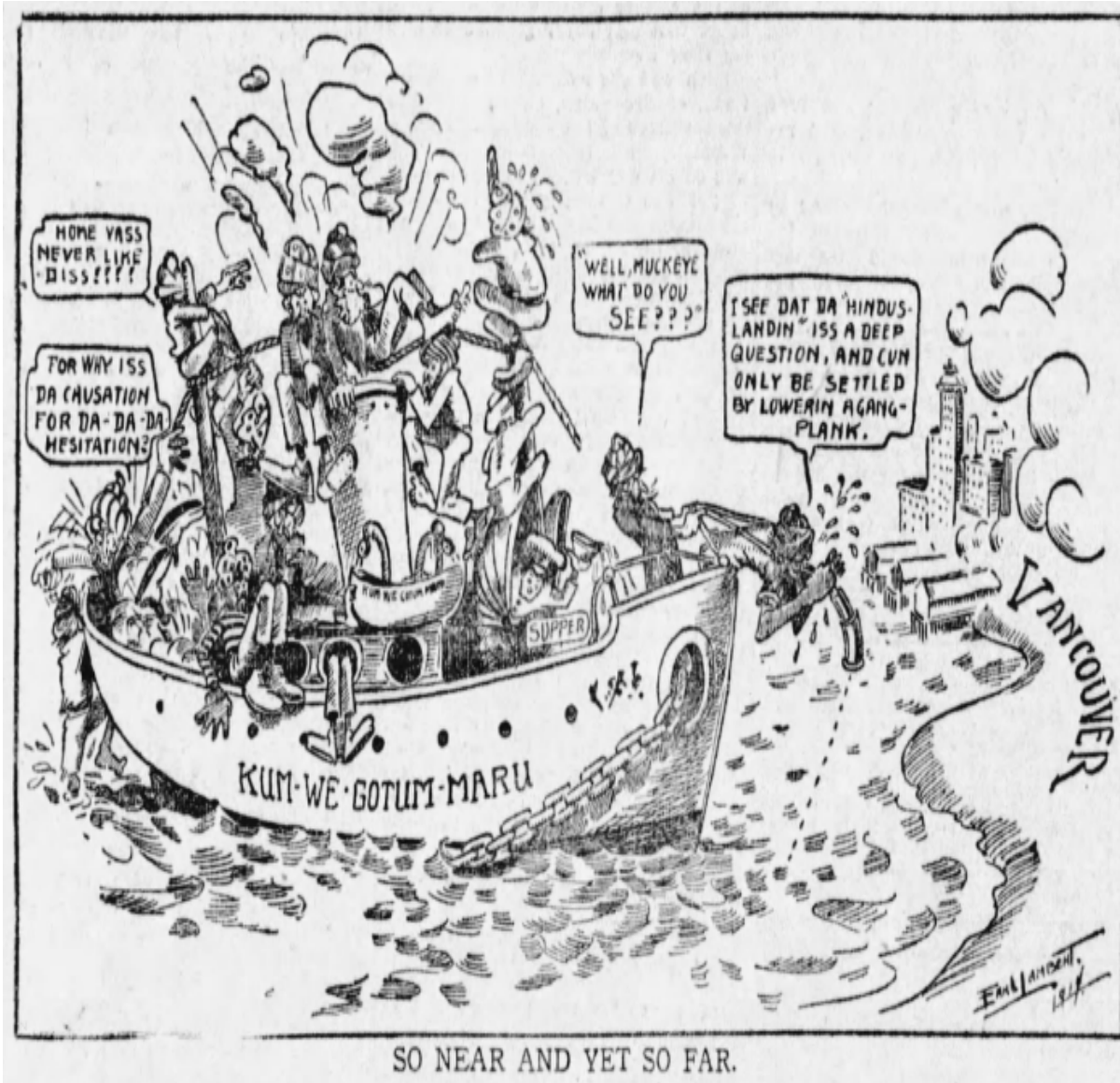


- A. THAT Council acknowledges the discriminatory decisions made by the City of Vancouver when responding to the arrival of the Komagata Maru and its passengers in 1914.
  
- B. THAT Council approve the recommendation that the primary street Canada Place be provided a secondary honorary name “Komagata Maru Place” as an act of cultural redress for the City’s role in the Komagata Maru incident.
  
- C. THAT Council recognize the importance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave Gurdwara (1866 West 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue) to the South Asian community and direct staff to explore options for how to recognize the specific role it played during the Komagata Maru incident and its larger historical and cultural significance

# The Komagata Maru Incident

- The 1914 Komagata Maru incident represents a significant moment in Canadian and Vancouver history in which the City as local government made deliberately discriminatory decisions founded on racist beliefs that prohibited the landing of South Asian immigrants in Vancouver.
- The Komagata Maru passengers were Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus from Punjab, yet the historical significance of this incident contributed to decades of racism against South Asian Canadian communities in Vancouver broadly.
- South Asian Canadians represent diverse geographies, languages, dialects, religions, race, gender, caste, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, ability, and several different countries of origin that include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

# The Komagata Maru Incident



KOMAGATA'S MEN HAVE  
NO CHANCE TO ENTER



## 7-8 EDWARD VII.

### CHAP. 33.

#### An Act to amend the Immigration Act.

[Assented to 10th April, 1908.]

HIS Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:—

1. Subsection 1 of section 30 of *The Immigration Act*, chapter 93 of the Revised Statutes, 1906, is hereby repealed and the following is substituted therefor:—

R.S., c. 93.  
s. 30  
amended.

“30. The Governor in Council may, by proclamation or order, whenever he considers it necessary or expedient, prohibit the landing in Canada of any specified class of immigrants or of any immigrants who have come to Canada otherwise than by continuous journey from the country of which they are natives or citizens and upon through tickets purchased in that country.”

Prohibition  
of certain  
immigrants.

# The Komagata Maru Incident

**COUNCIL ASKS FOR  
EXCLUSION OF  
HINDUS**

**CITIZENS WILL VOICE  
THEIR DETERMINATION  
TO SEND HINDUS AWAY**

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 711

**HINDU INVADERS NOW  
IN THE CITY HARBOR  
ON KOMAGATA MARU**

vessel Arrived Here This Morning Before Daybreak — Ex-  
cited Crowd of Hindus Assembled on Waterfront — Sev-  
erely Scam. Assured of Being Admitted — (Cont.)





# Role of the City

Passengers and their representatives wrote letters to the Mayor of Vancouver requesting food, water and medical aid but were ignored.

Mayor Baxter Opposed to City  
Assuming Portion of  
the Cost.



*“One day a child... named Fouja Singh... fainted due to thirst. His mother began to weep. It was a heart-rending scene; I hastened to the cabin of the captain...and brought a bottle of beer. As soon as a few spoons of it were put into his mouth, the child began to regain his senses.”*

-An account by Gurdit Singh  
(Charterer of the Guru Nanak  
Jahaz)

# Role of the City

Vancouver Mayor Baxter organized and led a public rally with over 2000+ people to send the “undesirables” back to India

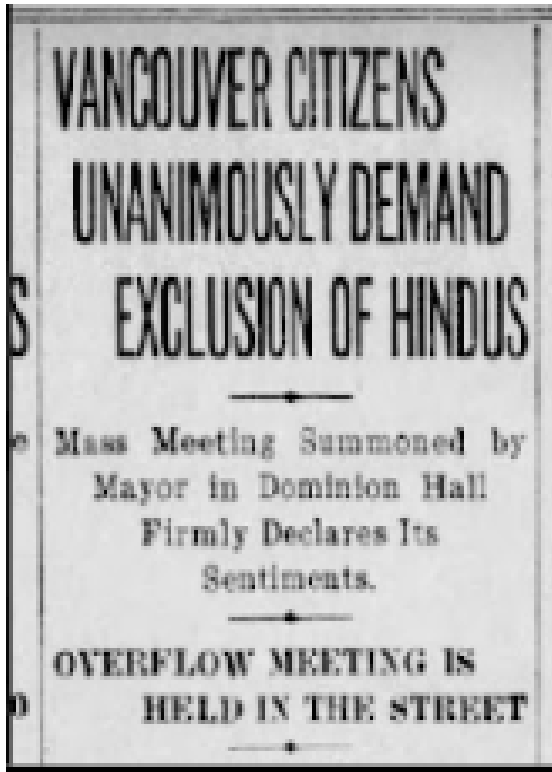


Image: Onlookers would gather daily to get a view of the ship on the Vancouver Wharf, July 1914. Source: City of Vancouver Archives

# Role of the City

The City of Vancouver unanimously passed a resolution advocating for the exclusion of “Hindus and other Asiatics”.

13

RE IMMIGRATION OF HINDUS & OTHER ORIENTALS.

14

Moved by Ald. Hamilton,

15

Seconded by Ald. McBeath,

16

Whereas the Japanese Steamship Komagata Maru has been lying in Vancouver Harbour, for over a month with several hundred Hindus on Board who are attempting to gain admission into Canada in deliberate contravention of the Dominion Immigration regulations;

17

AND WHEREAS it is known that if these Hindus succeed in landing it <sup>is</sup> the plan of the promoters of the scheme to bring thousands of their compatriots into this Country:

19

AND WHEREAS the presence of these people would prove a serious menace to our civilization both economically and socially besides intensifying the present unsatisfactory labour conditions;

21

This Council therefore desires to place itself on record as unalterably opposed to the admission of Hindus and other Asiatic Races into this Country, and that His Worship the Mayor be authorized to send a telegram to the Premier Sir Robert Borden conveying this expression of the Council. CARRIED.

23

24

The Council then adjourned.



MAYOR.

# Role of the City

## COMPLIMENTS FOR VANCOUVER POLICE

Montreal Newspaper Says Disaster Was Averted Only by Coolness of Police.

## BLOODSHED ON KOMAGATA MARU

Large Force of Armed Police and Special Immigration Men Are Beaten Off Hindu Vessel by Maddened Passengers.

**MANY MEN ARE BADLY INJURED IN THE AFFRAY**



“This half brick was thrown off the Komogata Maru by Hindoos on the ‘Komogata Maru’ on morning of Sunday, (1:30 a.m.) 19<sup>th</sup> July 1914” reads the metal plaque on the century-old brick in the Museum of Vancouver’s collection.

## FORCE WILL BE USED IF NECESSARY ON HINDU BUCCANEERS

Pirates of Komagata Will Be Subdued by Boarding Party if They Do Not Surrender This Afternoon.

## HINDUS LOSE APPEAL MUST NOW RETURN ON KOMAGATA MARU

Court Decides that Dominion Government Has Absolute Authority in Matters Relating to Immigration.

**BRITISH SUBJECTS  
CAN BE EXPELLED**

# The Komagata Maru Incident



Image: The Komagata Maru Memorial in Kolkata, India at the port of Budge Budge <sup>13</sup>



Image: Children in front of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Gurdwara in Kitsilano, Vancouver.

Source: Charan Gill Family fonds. South Asian Canadian Digital Archive, University of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, Canada

The City recognize that this commemorative act does not end the redress required for the historic discrimination and its impacts on the communities' development here in Vancouver.

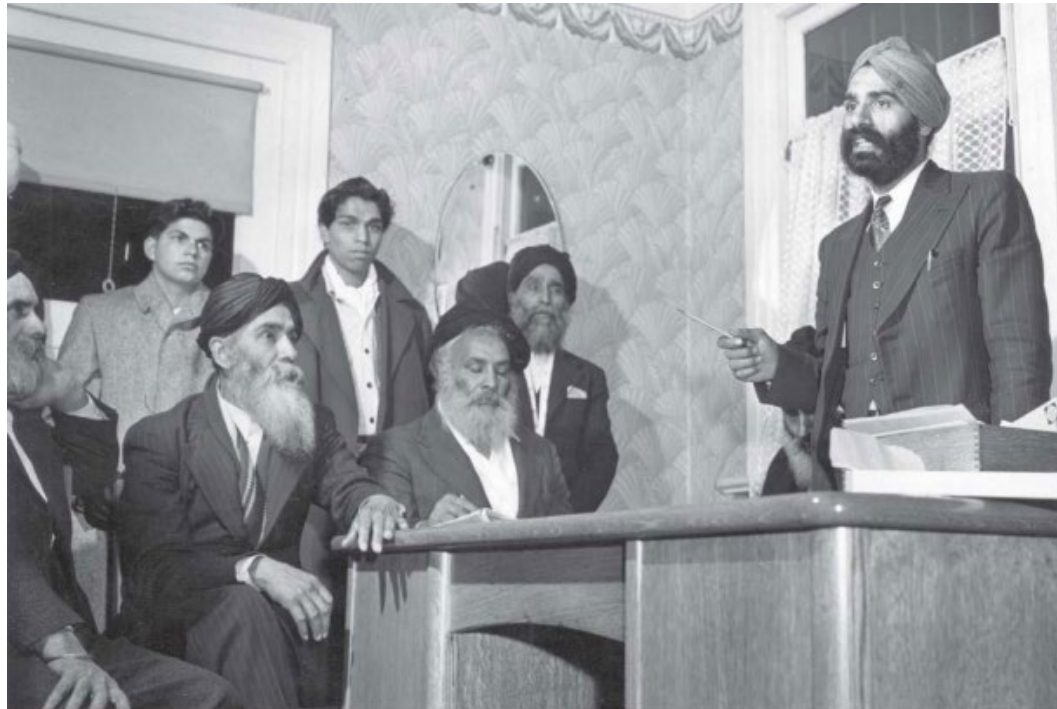
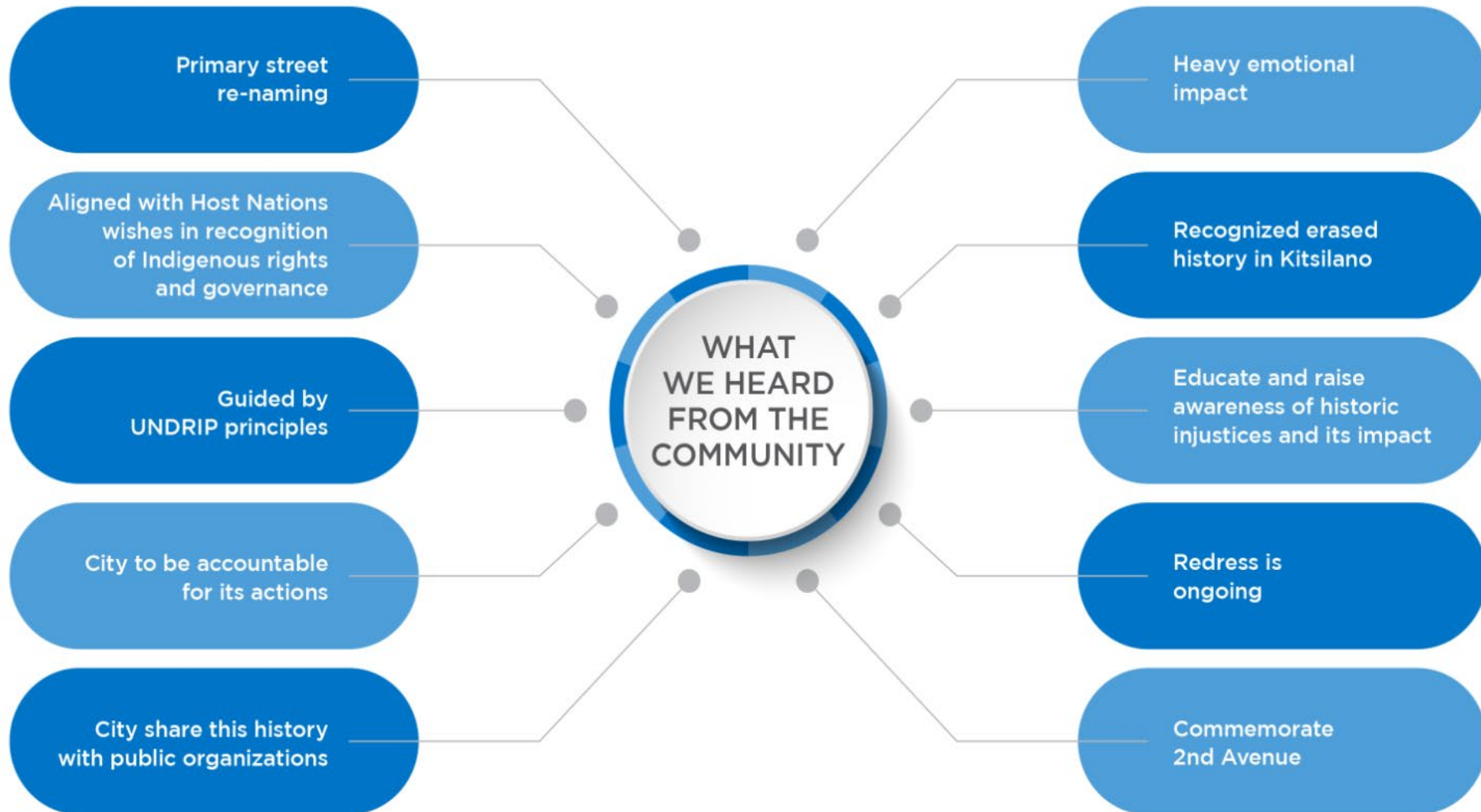


Image: Nagindar Singh Gill speaks at a meeting at the West 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Gurdwara in 1916.

Source: City of Vancouver Archives

# What We Heard





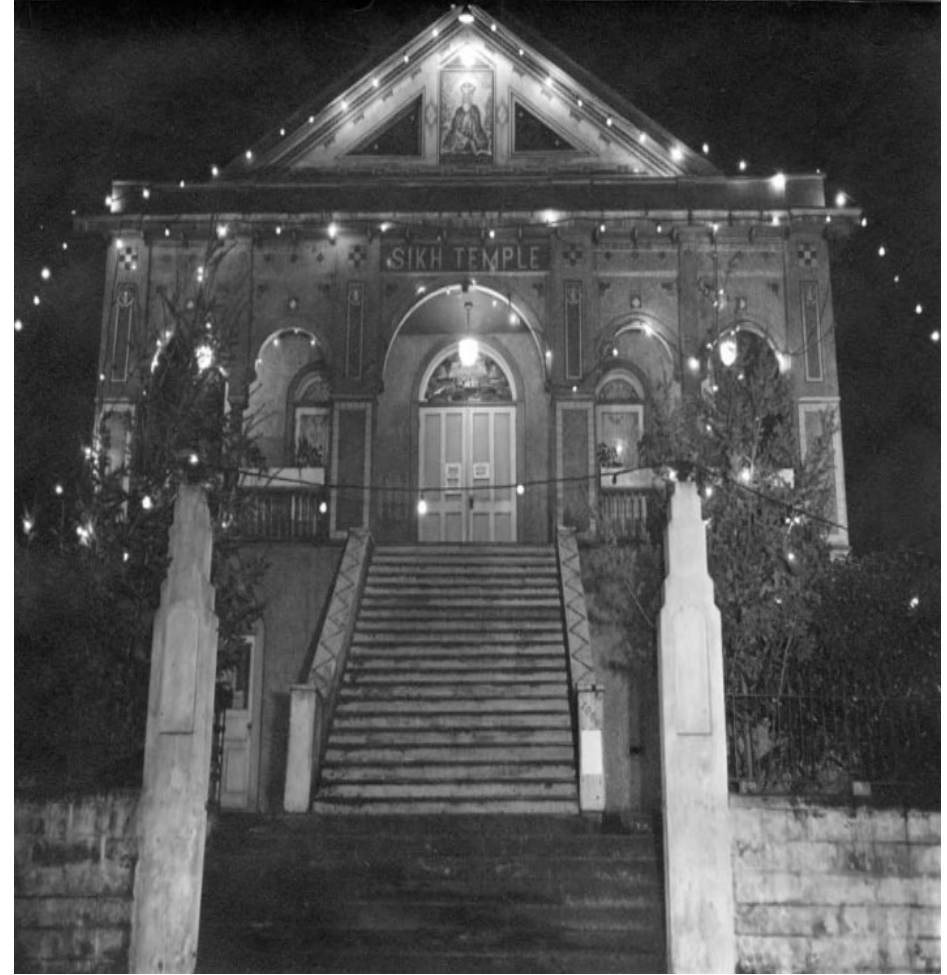
# Secondary Street Naming Recommendation

## Option A - Secondary Street Naming Location, Canada Place



# Secondary Street Naming Recommendation

## Option B - Secondary Street Naming Location, West 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave, Kitsilano



Images: 1866 West 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Kitsilano Gurdwara Source: <https://placethatmatter.ca>

- Staff will implement a community process to develop a culturally appropriate design for the sign; create public education materials, including for local residents; Staff anticipate the unveiling ceremony for the secondary name to take place in Q4 2023.
- Work with community to explore options for recognizing the cultural and historic significance of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave Gurdwara site and assist the Khalsa Diwan Society with identifying potential funding sources for the Komagata Maru Museum located at 8000 Ross Street.
- Staff will share this report and presentation with local South Asian organizations, the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy'əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations and public partner agencies.
- Staff anticipate a final report to Council with recommendations related to recognizing historical discrimination against people of South Asian descent in Q4 of 2024.