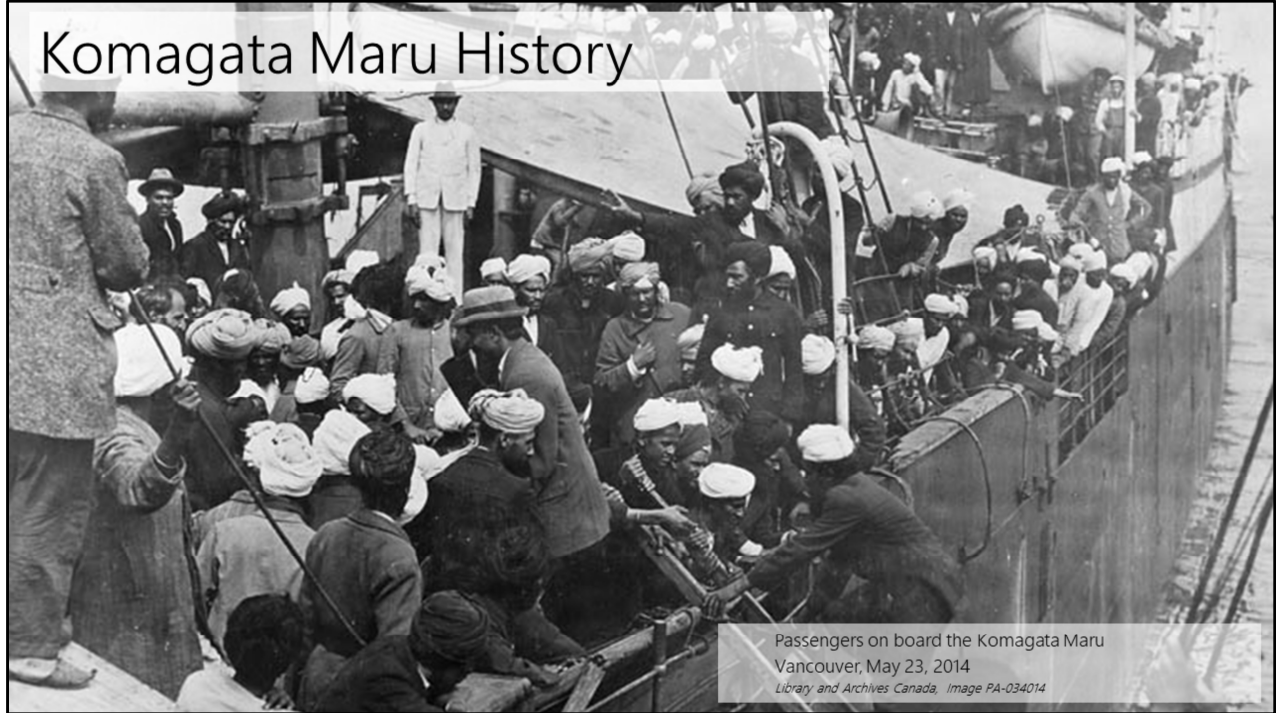


Komagata Maru Interpretive Panel

- On October 28, 2019 the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society requested the city consider naming a street, park, or other city asset after the Komagata Maru. Their spokesperson was Mr. Raj Singh Toor.
- In response Council directed staff to undertake research into City connections to this incident

Komagata Maru History



Passengers on board the Komagata Maru
Vancouver, May 23, 1914
Library and Archives Canada, Image PA-034014

Direct Quote from Komagata Maru – Continuing the Journey – A website developed by the Simon Fraser University Library to shed light on the Komagata Maru incident and its significance to Canadian history

“On May 23, 1914, a crowded ship from Hong Kong carrying 376 passengers, most being immigrants from Punjab, British India, arrived in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet. The passengers, all British subjects, were challenging the Continuous Passage regulation, which stated that immigrants must "come from the country of their birth, or citizenship, by a continuous journey and on through tickets purchased before leaving the country of their birth, or citizenship." The regulation had been brought into force in 1908 in an effort to curb Indian immigration to Canada. As a result, the Komagata Maru was denied docking by the authorities and only twenty returning residents, and the ship's doctor and his family were eventually granted admission to Canada. Following a two month stalemate, the ship was escorted out of the harbour by the Canadian military on July 23, 1914 and forced to sail back to Budge-Budge, India where nineteen of the passengers were killed by gunfire upon disembarking and many others imprisoned.

The Komagata Maru story reflects a deliberate, exclusionary policy of the Canadian government to keep out ethnicities with whom it deemed unfit to enter. These justifications were couched in racist and ethnocentric views of "progress", "civilization", and "suitability" which all buttressed the view that Canada should remain a "White Man's Country".

<http://komagatamarujourney.ca/incident>

Research Outcomes

- Staff found political connections to the Komagata Maru incident. City Council of the time passed the following motion on June 22, 1914:

THAT this Council go on record as being opposed to this immigration, and that the Clerk be instructed to urge upon the Premier and the Minister of the Interior at Ottawa to use every effort to prevent admission of these people into the Country.

- A majority of council also presided over community meetings assembled to organize against Asian immigration at the time.
- During the research phase no definite community connections were not found but New Westminster was home to one of three of British Columbia's South Asian communities; for this reason community engaged research continued to verify if connections existed.

- Researched Council minutes, newspapers, City property assessment rolls and Komagata Maru archival documents on SFU Library's webpage
- A reply to Council from the Superintendent of Immigration W.D. Scott stated that:
"Representations of the City of New Westminster in common with similar representation from other quarters regarding the exclusion of the passengers on the Komagata Maru have received the careful attention of the govern, which will make every effort to see that all existing immigration regulations are strictly enforced.
- A notice was further issued from the Mayor's Office calling a "Public Meeting to consider the exclusion of the "Hindus" now onboard the ship Komagata Maru at Vancouver"
- There are a few research leads that staff are chasing. The names of some Shore Committee members are similar to those of property owners in the City. The Shore Committee was a group of BC residents that organized to support Komagata Maru passengers. One name is of particular interest and being researched more deeply by staff – Met Singh. He owned a property along Ewen Avenue across from where Sukh Sagar park sits today.

Analysis

- City actions of the time contributed to an atmosphere of support for discriminatory and exclusionary laws that ultimately brought about the plight of the passengers of the Komagata Maru.
- These actions would have caused New Westminster's South Asian residents to feel unwelcome in their home.
- For well over 100 years New Westminster has been home to a strong South Asian community. A community that is involved in city life and socially supportive of the city.

Analysis

- The actions of City Council in 1914 were not consistent with current council strategic priorities of Reconciliation, Inclusion and Engagement. Specifically to:
 - Create a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting community that promotes a deep understanding and respect for all cultures.
 - Apply a social equity lens throughout this organization to ensure that all residents can access, participate in, and benefit from City facilities, infrastructure, programs, and services.

Recommendation

- It would be appropriate to name a city asset in a neighbourhood that has historically been the home of many residents of South Asian descent and continues to be a social hub for that community today.
- This action would demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and an interest in working towards reconciling past discriminatory actions of the city against the South Asian community.
- Staff recommended that a location in Queensborough be considered for this action. Two locations were identified:
 - The Q-Q docks at both Port Royal and Quayside
 - The trail running the circumference of Port Royal; commonly known as the River Walk.

Staff have consulted with the Sukh Sagar Gurdwara and they are supportive of this naming.

Outcomes

- On March 1, 2021, City Council passed a motion THAT:
 - Staff proceed with naming the QtoQ Ferry docks in Queensborough and Downtown in commemoration of the Komagata Maru
 - Staff include interpretive signage to tell the story of the Komagata Maru and include recognition for member of the community found to have participated in supporting passengers of the ship.
- Council further passed a motion THAT:
 - staff draft a formal apology to the community, families and descendants of those who were impacted negatively by the actions and words of the Council of New Westminster during the Komagata Maru incident
- An apology was offered to this community in Punjabi, Hindi and English on September 27, 2021

Interpretive Panel

- Staff continued research into South Asian community connections during the time of the Komagata Maru incident.
- One community member – Met Singh – held a name similar to Mitt Singh Pandori who was a member of the Shore Committee. He was also secretary of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society at the time.
- Descendants of Met Singh were located and they verified that he lived in New Westminster during the time of the incident. This information was confirmed in January 2022.
- Met Singh owned two properties along Ewen Avenue across the street from today's Sukh Sagar Park