

## Komagata Maru Perimeter Trail and Dock

The S.S. Komagata Maru arrived in Burrard Inlet from Hong Kong on May 23, 1914. The ship was carrying 376 British Indian passengers who were challenging Canada's racist Continuous Journey regulation. This law only allowed legal entry to those migrants arriving directly from their country of origin. As there was no direct route from British India at that time, the law was a deliberate action by the government to deny entry into the Dominion of Canada – a subject nation of the British Commonwealth. For 62 days, Canadian officials held the passengers on board the ship and did not permit them ashore.

After 2 months of constant surveillance, legal challenges, physical struggles - and with the passengers running desperately short of food and water due to the government's inadequate provisions - a stalemate ended on July 23. The Canadian warship S.S. Rainbow escorted the Komagata Maru out of Canadian waters as the ship set off back to British India. There, British Indian forces greeted passengers with hostility and violence.

### Local Connections to the Komagata Maru

On December 28, 2019, representatives from the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society approached New Westminster requesting Council name a street, park, or other city asset after the ship. This request came through an understanding that residents of the City acted in support of British citizens held onboard the ship. The City undertook research into its connections to the incident and uncovered a troubling piece of our history.

Research revealed The City acted in support of Canada's racist policies, bolstering federal confidence in enforcing these unjust laws. On June 22 while the ship was moored in Burrard Inlet, New Westminster City Council passed a motion urging the Premier and the Minister of the Interior to "use every effort" in denying passengers the ability to land. A week later, Mayor A.W. Gray presided over a mass meeting at St. Patrick's Hall, endorsing a resolution supporting the actions of immigration officials and the "total exclusion of Asiatics from the country". A majority of City Council were also present at that meeting.

In contrast, research also revealed that New Westminster resident Mitt Singh Pindori, secretary of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society, was a member of the Komagata Maru Shore Committee. This Committee was organised by residents from across the Lower Mainland to support passengers' food, provision and legal challenges. Eventually, The Committee raised \$22,000 to take over the ship's charter and strengthen support for its passengers. Mr. Singh was a local lumber mill worker who lived on Ewen Avenue across from today's Sukh Sagar Park. At the time, this was an area of the City with a growing South Asian community.

### S.S. Komagata Maru Legacy

In 1914, the actions of New Westminster's City Council supported a national movement against South Asians. This directly contributed to the plight of the Komagata Maru passengers and an overall feeling of insecurity for South Asian residents of The City. Such actions do not align with the values of today's community, nor do they reflect Canadian values of equity and justice. For these reasons, on March 1, 2021, Council elected to name both the Ferry docks in Queensborough and Downtown in commemoration of the Komagata Maru. They also elected to rename Queensborough's River Walk

after the ship. Finally, on September 27, 2021, New Westminster City Council offered a formal apology to the community, families and descendants of those negatively impacted by the actions and words of the Council of New Westminster during the Komagata Maru incident. This apology was offered in Punjabi, Hindi and English.

The desire to come ashore was never possible for a majority of Komagata Maru passengers. The naming of this dock and the Queensborough River Walk represents a symbolic arrival of their presence through memory and stories. Our country has undoubtedly suffered because these passengers – and all migrants unjustly turned away from its borders – were never able to contribute to Canadian society.

The City of New Westminster thanks Rajwant Toor and Jaswinder Toor from the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society for drawing City Council's attention to this historical wrong.

#### Recommended Images:

1. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/397?display=full>
2. <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/node/15897>