

Attachment 1

March 1, 2021 Report to Council

“Naming of City Asset in Commemoration of the Komagata Maru”

# ***REPORT***

## ***OFFICE OF THE CAO***

***To:*** Mayor Côté and Members of Council      ***Date:*** March 1, 2021  
***From:*** Lisa Spitale,  
Chief Administrative Officer      ***Doc #:*** 1777234

***Subject:*** Naming of City Asset in Commemoration of the Komagata Maru

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### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

THAT Council direct staff to proceed with naming the QtoQ Ferry docks in Queensborough and Downtown in commemoration of the Komagata Maru.

THAT Council direct staff to include interpretive signage to tell the story of the Komagata Maru and include recognition for members of the community found to have participated in supporting passengers of the ship.

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### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a recommendation to name the QtoQ Ferry docks in Queensborough and Downtown in commemoration of the Komagata Maru. This report also provides Council with contextual information surrounding City connections to this history and recommends that interpretation of the Komagata Maru history accompany the naming of these civic assets.

### **BACKGROUND**

On October 28, 2019 Mr. Raj Singh Toor – spokesperson for the Descendants of the Komagata Maru Society – attended Council and requested the City consider naming a street, park, or other City asset after the Komagata Maru. In response Council directed City staff to do a report on the connection of New Westminster and the Komagata Maru incident. In particular, the report should provide documentation of the support the New Westminster South Asian community offered to the passengers of the Komagata Maru.

## DISCUSSION

### Komagata Maru History

In 2012 Simon Fraser University Library launched a website and digital archive called Komagata Maru – Continuing the Journey. This site was developed to shed light on the Komagata Maru Incident and its significance to Canadian history. The website states the following about the Incident:

More than just an isolated "incident", 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".

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.<sup>1</sup>

### Research Outcomes

In order to identify City connections to the Komagata Maru Incident, Museums and Heritage Services staff undertook research into Council minutes, newspapers, municipal property assessment rolls and archival documents held by the Simon Fraser University Library.

Staff research has identified direct political connections to the Komagata Maru Incident. On June 22, 1914 City Council passed the following motion:

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<sup>1</sup> "The Incident." <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/incident>. Accessed 23 February 2021.

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. <sup>2</sup>

In response to the above motion, Council received the following correspondence from W.D. Scott, Federal Superintendent of Immigration:

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.<sup>3</sup>

Further to the above, the mayor presided over a community meeting assembled to organize against South Asian and Asian immigration. A majority of City Council attended this meeting which resulted in the following resolution to be cast by the gathering:

That this mass meeting here assembled do most heartily endorse the action of the immigration officials in preventing the landing of the Hindus from the Komagata Maru, and call on the Federal authorities at Ottawa to invoke the full power of the present statutes and, if necessary, enact new laws, to effectively deal with the total exclusion of Asiatics from this country.<sup>4</sup>

Further details of this meeting can be found in Attachment 1 to this report.

Research has not uncovered conclusive evidence of direct support offered by New Westminster's South Asian community to the passengers of the Komagata Maru. However New Westminster was home to one of three prominent BC South Asian communities at the time; the others were Abbotsford and Vancouver. For this reason, it is likely that members of this community were supportive of passengers on board the vessel. Furthermore, research within municipal assessment roles from 1913 and 1916 has identified one individual – Met Singh – who may have been a member of the Komagata Maru Shore Committee. The Shore Committee was a group of BC residents that organized to support Komagata Maru passengers through fundraising efforts, legal services and the provision of food and water.

Met Singh owned two properties along Ewen Avenue across the street from today's Sukh Sagar Park. His name is similar to that of Mitt Singh Pandori who was a member of the Shore Committee and secretary of the Vancouver Khalsa Diwan Society. SFU Library Archival records indicate that Mitt Singh worked at lumber mills in both Vancouver and

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<sup>2</sup> "Minutes of Council." Vol. 8, April 28, 1913 – September 21, 2014, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> "Will Discuss Hindu Problem At Mass Meeting on Sunday." British Columbian, June 27, 1914, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> "Asiatics Get No Supporters." British Columbian, June 30, 1914, pp.1 & 4

New Westminster. It is feasible he and Met Singh are the same individual and there are different variants to the spelling of his name. Research into this connection is ongoing.

### Analysis

It is evident that City actions of the time were supportive of discriminatory, racist and exclusionary laws that ultimately brought about the plight of the passengers of the Komagata Maru. This conclusion is supported by correspondence sent to the City from Superintendent Scott stating that New Westminster's sentiment was similar to that of other jurisdictions; bolstering federal confidence in the severe enforcement of its laws.

For well over 100 years the South Asian community has been a socially supportive and active part of New Westminster's community. Council actions of the day would have made these residents and ratepayers feel unwelcome and unsafe in their homes. These actions are not consistent with current Council values and strategic priorities around Reconciliation, Inclusion and Engagement. Specifically:

- to create a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting community that promotes a deep understanding and respect for all cultures; and,
- to 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 of that community today. It would also be appropriate for the City to name an asset in an area of the City that has not predominantly been home to South Asian residents; sharing this story equally across the community and fostering respect and understanding for their histories. These actions would demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity and an interest in working towards reconciling past discriminatory and racist actions the City has taken against the South Asian community.

Staff recommends that Council consider naming The QtoQ Ferry docks in Queensborough and along the Esplanade in commemoration of the Komagata Maru Incident. These areas are symbolic of the Incident; representing access to the land that was denied to the passengers of the Komagata Maru. Neither of the above locations are currently named by the City and they lend themselves to an interconnection of this narrative across City neighbourhoods.

### Consultation

The above recommendations were brought to the City's Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Realm Advisory Committee for endorsement. The following motion was passed by The Committee:

MOVED and SECONDED

THAT the Facilities, Infrastructure and Public Realm Task Force recommend that Council support naming the dock and/or walkway at Port Royal in memory of the Komagata Maru;

THAT Council consider locations on the mainland of the City as well; and,

THAT Council also consider recognizing local members who may have participated in supporting passengers of the Komagata Maru.

CARRIED.

All members of the Committee present voted in favour of the motion.

Staff have also consulted with leadership of the Sukh Sagar Gurdwara in Queensborough to determine if there would be support for the naming of these City assets. The Gurdwara is supportive of this naming and has offered to help the City in moving this initiative forward.

### **INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON**

Both the Manager of Horticulture Services and Parks and Open Space Planning and the Manager of Transportation have been consulted in developing this report.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The resources for the naming and supplemental interpretive signage can be found within the current approved City Interpretive Signage capital program.

### **OPTIONS**

The following options are presented for Council's consideration:

That Council:

1. direct staff to proceed with naming the QtoQ Ferry docks in Queensborough and Downtown in commemoration of the Komagata Maru;

2. direct staff to include interpretive signage to tell the story of the Komagata Maru and include recognition for members of the community found to have participated in supporting passengers of the ship;
3. Provides staff with alternative direction.

*Staff recommends Options 1&2.*

Report Author,

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Rob McCullough  
Manager, Museums and Cultural  
Services

Approved for Presentation to Council

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Lisa Spitale  
Chief Administrative Officer

*Attachment # 1*  
British Columbian Newspaper Reports on  
Public Meetings Regarding  
Komagata Maru



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# PUBLIC MEETING

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## CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER.

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At the request of a number of the ratepayers, I hereby call a Public Meeting in St. Patrick's Hall, on Monday, the 29th inst., at 8 p.m., to consider the exclusion of the Hindus now on board the ship "Komagata Maru" at Vancouver.

A. W. GRAY,  
Mayor.

Mayor's Office, June 26, 1914.

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# Will Discuss Hindu Problem at Mass Meeting on Monday

**Mayor Gray Issues the Call—  
Deputy Minister Reiterates  
Assurance that Immigration  
Regulations Will Be En-  
forced.**

Mayor Gray has been assured by the government at Ottawa that every effort will be made to enforce all existing immigration regulations to keep out the Hindus now on shipboard in Vancouver harbor. A telegram to this effect was received this morning from Deputy Minister W. D. Scott, as follows:

"Representations of the City of New Westminster in common with similar representations from other quarters regarding the exclusion of the passengers on the Komogata Maru have received the careful attention of the government, which will make every effort to see that all existing immigration regulations are strictly enforced."

In response to requests from several civic bodies, Mayor Gray has called a mass meeting of citizens in St. Patrick's Hall, Monday evening, to consider the Hindu immigration problem, and to give expression to the views of New Westminster people on the subject. There will be several speakers to take part in the discussion, including Mayor Gray and several of the aldermen. Mr. J. D. Taylor, M.P., has been invited to attend the meeting and to address the citizens on the subject.

## DEATH CLAIMS THREE IN AIR ACCIDENT

BERLIN, June 27.—Two aviators and one passenger were killed in aeroplane accidents in Germany today. At Bitsch while flying near the earth, a military aeroplane driven by Major Buechner, carrying one passenger, turned turtle and fell. Both were killed. At Metz, Aviator Grunow lost control of his machine, which fell fifty feet and he was killed.

## PROGRESSIVES STICK TO NAME

**Association Believes Original Title  
Expresses Wide Scope of Aims—  
Officers Elected.**

At the adjourned annual meeting of the Progressive Association held in the Board of Trade Rooms last night, Mr. W. T. Reid, who has zeal-



# MEMBER STANDS FOR EXCLUSION

No "Partial" Policy in Asiatic  
Problem Will Satisfy  
Col. Taylor

## GOVERNMENT IS FIRM

Despite Imperial Complications,  
Every Energy Will Be Directed  
Towards Keeping Them Out.

"I have no sympathy with any 'partial' policy. It is incumbent upon us to say: 'We do not want these Orientals at all,' and let us get rid of them directly and by the shortest route possible," declared Col. J. D. Taylor, M.P., last night, in addressing a large assemblage of citizens in St. Patrick's hall, who had come at the invitation of Mayor A. W. Gray to discuss the Asiatic immigration problem from all its angles.

In his opening remarks, the Federal member reminded his hearers that although conditions with regard to the immigration laws might be considerably bettered, they must remember that the laws had been considerably worse. There was a time, not so very long ago, when the immigration officials could not have held up this shipload of Hindus now lying in Vancouver harbor. He recalled the time when the Asiatics had been pouring into the province at the rate of four and five thousand per month and the immigration officials had not been allowed to stop them. These laws had been brought down prior to the last Dominion elections and had but recently been checked by an order-in-council which excluded any and all immigrants of the artisan or laboring classes, skilled or unskilled, and no one was now allowed to enter unless he had been in the country before and had so established residence. Legislation of that sort, he declared, showed that the Federal authorities were alive to the defects in the immigration laws and there was no reason why this order-in-council should not be renewed indefinitely until further legislation effectively dealing with the situation could be brought down.

Right of Appeal.

down.

### Right of Appeal.

It would be a hard thing to tell the Hindus that they could not appeal to the courts, as they were now doing. The possibility of their appeal being successful was a very remote one, he said, with at least three good grounds for exclusion; they must have at least \$200; they must have come direct from India, and as he had previously pointed out the order-in-council was still in effect prohibiting any artisan or laborer. He had every confidence in the courts of British Columbia and felt assured that, if the case was a good one, the Hindus now on the Komagata Maru would be returned whence they came.

Although he was well aware that any legislation bearing on the total exclusion of Asiatics would be offensive to the people whom it concerned, he asserted with emphasis that all the ingenuity and courage of the Government would be exercised to keep out Orientals. He must remind his hearers that to do so would increase the responsibility of the Mother Country while lessening her power to perform all obligations to Canada. It would mean Canadians doing more for themselves and he had no doubt they would be prepared and ready.

### Repudiates Insinuations.

He warmly repudiated any ulterior motive on the part of ministers in office on this question. He felt hurt that such an insinuation should have been made. He answered an insinuation of Mr. L. B. Lusby, as to his absence from Ottawa at a time when the Vancouver member brought down legislation calculated to deal with the question, by pointing out that a member had many duties besides occupying a chair in the House of Commons. He thought the insinuation had been well answered by Mr. Lusby himself, who had declared that the proposed act could not possibly do any good when introduced at the closing days of the session, at which time he, Col. Taylor, ventured to say, the wisest bill ever brought down would stand no chance of passage. Good had been accomplished, however, in that something in concrete form had been laid before the house on which the members might ponder during the recess and a further bill brought in would stand a better chance of receiving full consideration. The problem was a grave one and presented enormous difficulties but he thought the best and only solution was that the Government enact and perfect their own statutes until the purpose of exclusion had been finally accomplished.

British Columbian June 30, 1914



# ASIATICS HAVE NO SUPPORTERS

No Dissident Voice Is Raised  
When Mass Meeting De-  
mands Exclusion

## ALL FACTIONS UNITED

Public Opinion Presents Solid Front  
Against Menace of Oriental  
Immigration.

No stronger demonstration of the feeling of the citizens of this city with regard to the vexed problem of Asiatic immigration could have been possible than that shown by the large gathering of ratepayers assembled in St. Patrick's Hall last night, who after listening to the heads of the various civic bodies expound their views, passed the following resolution amid enthusiastic cheers.

"That this mass meeting here assembled do most heartily endorse the action of the immigration officials in preventing the landing of the Hindus from the Komagata Maru, and call on the Federal authorities at Ottawa to invoke the full power of the present statutes and, if necessary, enact new laws, to effectively

(Continued on Fourth Page.)

## ASIATICS GET NO SUPPORTERS

(Continued from First Page.)

deal with the total exclusion of Asiatics from this country."

There was not a dissenting voice, and party and political prejudices were for the nonce buried, and all united to undertake what Alderman Dodd aptly termed a "herculean task," the total exclusion of all Asiatics.

### Representative Gathering.

Mayor Gray presided and on the platform were Col. J. D. Taylor, M. P., Ald. Annandale, president of the Conservative Association; Aldermen Dodd, Goulet and Bryson, D. S. Cameron, president of the Trades and Labor Council; Mr. L. B. Lusby, president of the Liberal Association. The big hall was well filled when the meeting was opened by Mayor Gray, who read copies of telegrams exchanged with the Minister of the Interior by the city council, in which the latter body advised that the exclusion of the Hindus now on the Komagata Maru was advisable and urging that all powers of the immigration statutes be brought to bear in aiding the Vancouver officials in keeping them out.

Hon. Dr. Roche replied that the matter was receiving the careful attention of the department and that all existing regulations would be strictly enforced.

The Mayor then read a copy of a letter signed "Westerner," in a London, England, paper in which the author laid the blame on the shoulders of the labor unions for creating an artificial wage condition and stupid restriction of immigration. The mayor denounced such sentiments and defended the standard wage of \$3 per day of eight hours. He thought a good way to stir the Eastern people to the need of Oriental restriction would be to send three or four carloads back there as an object lesson.

Not Political Issue. I

lesson.

### Not Political Issue. I

Alderman Annandale declared that it was utterly impossible for the whites and Asiatics to assimilate. This was not a political issue; it was one on which they all agreed and must pull together.

Mr. L. B. Lusby was afraid that the Dominion government was not fully alive to the acuteness of the situation. There seemed to be an unseen hand behind this immigration and it might be that some of the ministers at Ottawa knew of it.

Alderman Dodd placed the blame on the employers of labor. They were brought here as samples of bone and muscle, but he was glad to see that the merchants and business men were commencing to realize that the Asiatics had brains as well. It was a political question, he said, but not necessarily a party one. Let all pull together for total exclusion of all Asiatics.

"If we don't do something to stop this immigration the Asiatics will put us out of business, sure," was the way Alderman Bryson sized up the situation. He believed the many interests and combines which were evidently behind the movement should be brought to a realization of the gravity of the situation.

Ald. Goulet advocated a special session of the Federal Parliament for the purpose of drafting stringent restricting legislation.

Attachment # 2  
Proposed site locations for  
Komagata Maru Commemoration



