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KHALSA DIWAN SOCIETY



SIKH TEMPLE

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OLD SIKH TEMPLE -1866 W. 2nd AVE., VANCOUVER



NEW SIKH TEMPLE - 8000 ROSS ST., VANCOUVER

KHALSA DIWAN SOCIETY

The first society of the Sikhs in Canada was formed in 1907. This was Khalsa Diwan Society (K.D.S.). In the first half of 1908 the society erected its first Gurudwara (Sikh Temple) in British Columbia at 1866 West 2nd Avenue, Vancouver. Bhai Balwant Singh served as the first Granthi (priest) of this temple. Soon, Vancouver, became the headquarter of the society, and in due course branches and temples were established throughout British Columbia in: Abbotsford, Fraser Mills, New Westminster, Paldi, Victoria and Port Alberni. The society was officially incorporated under the B.C. Societies Act on 23rd February, 1915. Today Khalsa Diwan Society has only one branch and this is K.D.S. Port Alberni. All other temples and branches are now autonomous.

Khalsa Diwan Society, Vancouver also served as a branch for the Gadhar Party Movement. Many K.D.S. members migrated back to India and gave up their lives for the freedom of India.

In the sixties a need for larger worship place was felt, in order to accommodate its members. On 1st April, 1966 the Society purchased a 2.75 acre lot on the corner block of S. E. Marine Drive and Ross Street in Vancouver. Consequently the foundation was laid on 30th March, 1969 and on 15th April, 1969 the construction contract for the temple was signed with H. Haebler Co. Ltd. for \$393,200.

Unfortunately for the Sikhs and the society at large, because of political reasons, the old temple located on W. 2nd Avenue, was sold by the executive for \$100,000 and thus a historical monument of Vancouver was lost.

The construction of the Sikh temple, 8000 Ross Street, was officially completed in

1970 as a \$433,000 project by the Haebler Construction Co. Ltd. The opening ceremony was held on 23rd November, 1969 prior to completion, to celebrate the quincentenary birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji (the founder of Sikh Faith).

The temple and the Society's offices were officially moved from 1866 W. 2nd Avenue to 8000 Ross Street on 25th April, 1970.

This temple was designed and built by the world renowned architects M/S Erickson and Massey. Out of the total land area of 2.75 acres 10,000 sq. ft. is covered and the rest is made into a parking area for 100 cars. Located on the ground floor is the main service hall. This area can accommodate 2000 members. All the lighting is through plastic skydomes which gives a daylight effect. The red coloured carpet adds to the richness of the interior. The stair-stepping of the high ceiling allows for better acoustics in the hall. The altar and the Guru Granth Sahibji (sacred scriptures) are located at the south end of the temple hall. It is customary for both Sikhs and non-Sikhs to remove their shoes and cover their heads before entering the temple, so that highest respect, purity and sanctity is shown to the scriptures. The code of No Smoking and alcohol in the temple premises is strictly enforced.

On special occasions, when the main hall is filled, the gallery is opened, which can accommodate more than 300 persons. The Akhand Path ceremony (continuous reading of the scriptures in 48 hours with each person reading for 2 hours) takes place in the south gallery. This ceremony is started at 9:00 a.m. every Friday and its completion proceeds the special function on Sunday at 9:00 a.m. There is free dining for everyone throughout the Akhand Path ceremony.

Every morning the Scriptures are brought down in the main hall for reading and guidance and are returned to the sound proof glass room, located in the north gallery, every evening.

The executive offices, a library (which has over 1000 books in Punjabi and English) living quarters, two modern kitchens, a big dining hall and washrooms are located in the basement. Shoes may be worn here.

The Langar hall (dining hall) can feed 400 people in one sitting. All food is voluntarily cooked by members of the society. Only vegetarian food is prepared. This hall is named Mewa Singh Hall after the first Sikh martyr of Canada. Mewa Singh shot inspector Hopkinson dead while he was in the Vancouver court on 21st October, 1914, because Mewa Singh believed that the Anglo-Indian official, Hopkinson, to be unscrupulous and corrupt, and used informers to spy on Indian immigrants. For this Mewa Singh was hung to death on 11th of January 1915.

On 2nd October 1979, marking the quincentenary birthday of Guru Amar Das Ji (the third Sikh Guru), the society purchased another 2.78 acre lot adjacent to the present Sikh temple at 8085 Ross Street, Vancouver. This property with its two beautiful buildings and a 100 car parking lot was purchased for \$520,000. The society now runs a school here, and classes are held regularly in the Punjabi language, teaching Music, Punjabi script and Sikh history. Approximately 200 students attend the school.

There are two Sikh Ministers employed by the Society. They conduct all services and take a greater part in the weddings, Akhand Path and death ceremonies.

The temple is open daily from dawn to dusk. There is a short service held every morning and evening. Special functions are held on Sundays between 9:00 a. m. and

12:00 noon. There is always free dining following this service.

Presently the society has a mailing list of over 2,000 and has a membership of over 5,500. There are twelve voluntary executive positions, and elections are held annually by way of secret ballot on the first weekend in December.

Both the average income and expense of K.D.S. is approximately \$300,000 per annum. As of December 1979 the temple and the lot was assessed at \$1,183,300 by the assessment Authority of B. C.

The society encourages its young members to participate in various sports activities. Every year, on Victoria Day weekend in May, a sports day is sponsored by K.D.S. This event draws a crowd of over 15,000.

Also a special parade is held annually on Baisakhi day (birthday of the Khalsa - Pure) in April. Floats are beautifully decorated, and various Sikh Societies of Canada participate in the celebrations. Over 20,000 Sikhs take part on this auspicious occasion.

The society also sponsors a religious radio program every Sunday morning. The goal of this program is to spread the message of God and to encourage the Sikh youth and adults to fight for righteousness.

In summary the goal of the Khalsa Diwan Society is to foster the spirit of fellowship amongst the followers of Sikh Faith and to create a spirit of goodwill with fellow Canadians regardless of race, creed, colour or religion.

SARBJIT SINGH NEEL
DECEMBER, 1980



BHAI MEWA SINGH
THE FIRST MARTYR
OF
CANADA



BHAI MEWA SINGH



BHAI BALWANT SINGH

BHAI BALWANT SINGH
FIRST PRIEST
OF
KHALSA DIWAN SOCIETY
VANCOUVER