



# Coquitlam

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## Fraser Mills Logbook Illuminates South Asian Millworkers

Occasionally, at the City of Coquitlam Archives, we get to collaborate with Archives with different mandates than our own. These are welcome opportunities to see how other archives, situated in different environments, operate. This web exhibit will discuss a recent collaboration with The South Asian Canadian Digital Archive (SACDA).

One of the problems we face as municipal archivists is that there is often a lack of diversity within the collections. Groups that have been marginalized in society, including women, people of colour, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQ2S+ community, are not represented in archival records. Archivists are seeking to fill these gaps and give voice to communities who had been silenced.

With this in mind, the City of Coquitlam Archives recently completed a records processing project that related to the Corporation of Fraser Mills. We targeted this backlog because we knew Fraser Mills had a diverse workforce, which would be reflected in the records. The Corporation's records (around 3 meters of textual records) had been in storage since it re-amalgamated with the District of Coquitlam in 1971.



Unprocessed Fraser Mill records

In the summer of 2022, Archives staff processed the Fraser Mills records and we discovered the forgotten names of residents from the Japanese-Canadian, Chinese-Canadian and South Asian-Canadian communities. That project was a success as we were able to highlight some of the diverse communities that called Fraser Mills home. See our web exhibit - [The Corporation of the District of Fraser Mills fonds](#) - for some of our discoveries.





Processed Fraser Mill records

The project sparked community interest in Fraser Mills and we noticed an uptick in research requests regarding the area. In the summer of 2023, staff from the South Asian Canadian Digital Archive expressed interest in a Fraser Mills accident logbook. In particular, they were interested in the names of the mill workers who were possibly South Asian.

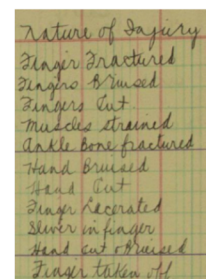
The logbook (1909–1955) is in excellent condition. Like many logbooks from this era, it was made with corduroy and a marbled green inlay, making it ornate in appearance. This belies its somewhat grizzly nature, as it was used to inventory the names of workers who had suffered accidents while employed at Fraser Mills. The accidents varied in severity: from bruised legs, cuts, fractures, sprains, finger loss, burns and, in one tragic instance, death.



Cover of log book



Inside cover of log book



Nature of injury

The South Asian Canadian Digital Archives collects, digitizes, digitally preserves, and makes accessible materials with significant ties to the South Asian diaspora across Canada. The South Asian Canadian Digital Archive is an initiative of the South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley. The South Asian Canadian Digital Archive partners with memory institutions, individuals, families and organizations to digitize, describe and provide online public access to heritage materials created by, or relevant to, the South Asian–Canadian diaspora. Its mandate allows the aggregation digital archival material from different repositories such as the City of Coquitlam Archives.

We invited South Asian Canadian Digital Archives staff to come and review the logbook at the City Archives. After studying it, they confirmed that many of the workers listed were of South Asian origin, primarily Punjabi/Sikh, and this would make it an excellent candidate for digitization.

Archives' staff then reviewed the logbook and determined that only one early section of the logbook from 1912 to 1923 could be digitized due to privacy legislation. Because this section was over 100 years old, it was acceptable to digitize and make available for public access. The remainder of the ledger ran to 1955 and could not be digitized, as it contained highly sensitive information regarding Workers' Compensation Board claims and had not met the 100 years threshold. South Asian Canadian Digital Staff digitized the 1912–1923 section and, in doing so, revealed the names of dozens of, until now, unknown, South Asian mill workers.



South Asian Digital Archive Logo



South Asian Studies Institute logo

### List of South Asian workers listed in Accident Logbook by year

- 1909/10 – Ganda Singh, Ala Singh, Hardial Singh, and Kala Singh
- 1911 – Jagat Singh, Attar Singh, and Kishan Singh
- 1912 – Narian Singh
- 1913 – Giva Singh
- 1914 – Indor Singh, Mitt Singh, Labh Singh, Dalin Singh, Bakhtawa Singh, Kahn Singh, Omr Singh, and Bishan

Singh

- 1915 – Bhagwan Singh, Ojagar Singh, and Bishan Singh
- 1916 – Bugga Singh, Ram Singh, Dona Ram, Nahal Singh, Dohla Singh, and Eser Singh
- 1917 – Bhagwan Singh, Argin Singh, Najaram Singh, Rajah Singh, Bishan Singh, Dulcie Ram, and Moichi Baba, Jamel Singh and Santa Singh
- 1918 – Indar Singh, Jawala Singh, Sunda Singh, Jene Singh, and Nawab Khan. Bugga Singh, Bhagwan Singh, Indar Singh, and Tarka Singh
- 1919 – Rajah Singh, Esor Singh
- 1920 – Nand Singh, Bram Singh, Sher Khan, Dilip Singh, Partab Singh, Ram Singh.
- 1921 – Labh Singh, Chanda Singh, Tara Singh, Bhag Ram, Hamir Singh, Rud Singh, Harnam Singh.
- 1922 – Argent Singh, Gokel Singh, Narun Singh, and Laru Singh. Bugga Singh, Laru Singh, and Nand Singh.
- 1923 – Santa Singh, Eser Singh, M. Baba, Gokel Singh, Eser Singh

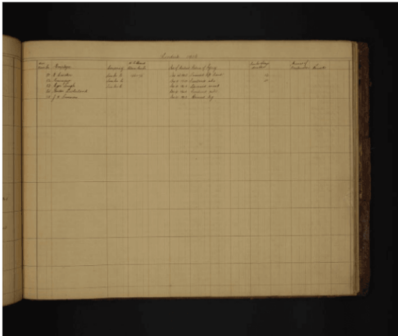
22	Bakhtawa Singh	.. 25, 14
23	Kahn Singh	Oct. 23/14
24	Amr Singh	" 24/14
25	Bishan Singh	Nov. 20, 14

### List of South Asian workers

The logbook provides evidence of a significant South Asian presence at Fraser Mills. This is important as the South Asian mill workers names are not captured elsewhere in the existing documentary record. Other archival records such as voters' lists do not include these workers as they were denied the right to vote at that time.

The first section of the logbook can be viewed at the [archives database Quest](#).

It can also be viewed at the [SACDA website](#).



Fraser Mills collection → Accidents 1923

ITEM

IDENTIFIER: 2023\_27\_01\_028

REPOSITORY: The City of Coquitlam Archives

REPOSITORY WEB SITE: <https://www.coquitlam.ca/683/City-Archives>

DATE: 1923, Date(s) of creation

EXTENT: 1 p. of textual records

FORMAT: textual record

DESCRIPTION: Page from the accident report book for the Canadian Western Lumber Company Ltd. Page includes name of worker injured, date of injury, and injury type. South Asian names included are: Eser Singh.

LOCATION: British Columbia, New Westminster Land District, Metro Vancouver Regional District, Coquitlam

LANGUAGE: English

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### SACDA website

This collaboration with South Asian Canadian Digital Archives ensures the logbook will now reach a wider audience and increase its accessibility enabling further research into the South Asian pioneers listed in the logbook, as well as linking the descriptions to other related materials across Canada.

This project demonstrates and reminds us of the unique nature of archival records—documents designed for one purpose end up being used for another. In this case, names were tallied in uniform fashion to record accidents. However, 100 years later, they open a new chapter of history by providing evidence of the diverse community that lived and worked in Fraser Mills.





Sikh millworker at Fraser Mills C4-S01-SS3-F01-MH.2011.3.21



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## Contact Us

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Map to City Hall

Hours: Mon to Fri, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

Reception: 604-927-3000

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We acknowledge with gratitude and respect that the name Coquitlam was derived from the  $h\acute{a}n\acute{q}am\acute{i}n\acute{a}m$  (HUN-kuh-MEE-num) word  $k\acute{w}ik\acute{w}\acute{a}\acute{l}am$  (kwee-KWET-lum) meaning "Red Fish Up the River". The City is honoured to be located on the  $k\acute{w}ik\acute{w}\acute{a}\acute{l}am$  traditional and ancestral lands, including those parts that were historically shared with the  $q\acute{i}c\acute{a}y$  (kat-zee), and other Coast Salish Peoples.

[coquitlam.ca/reconciliation](https://coquitlam.ca/reconciliation)