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## The Communities : WHERE THEY CAME FROM : India

Many of Canada's early immigrants from India came from the Punjab region and practiced the religion of Sikhism. Some of the first to come had heard of work available on the construction of the railroad across Canada. They travelled to British Columbia via Hong Kong with the intention of earning some money and returning to India.

These first adventurous Sikh men arrived in 1904 to discover that jobs were also available in logging. Mayo Singh, the founder of Paldi, began his career in the logging industry at a mill in Fernridge, outside Chilliwack, in British Columbia's Fraser Valley. In 1917, he moved to the Cowichan Valley, and many of the men who had worked for him came along.

It was sometimes difficult for non-whites seeking work, due to restrictive immigration policies and racism. During the incident of the ship Komagata Maru, Canadian Immigration forced 376 passengers (340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, 12 Hindus) who arrived in Vancouver on May 23, 1914 to wait on board ship and eventually return to Asia. Indo-Canadians were finally permitted to vote in Canadian elections in 1947. Local newspapers give a sense of the attitudes of the time, and the lack of knowledge about the new Indo-Canadian community. The term "Hindu" was used to refer to anyone of Indian descent, regardless of whether they were Sikh, Muslim or actually practicing Hindus. These frustrating circumstances were faced by the Sikhs living in the Cowichan Valley.

Mayo Siding was a major employer of Indian workers, and the word spread that jobs could be found with Mayo Singh. Hillcrest Lumber also hired Sikh workers and supported the men and their families in the construction of a temple.



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*Sikh celebration, at old Hillcrest*  
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Many logging memoirs mention that the different jobs of logging and mill businesses were taken on by different ethnic groups: Indo-Canadians, Sikhs in particular, were associated with the lumber mills and there are many photographs of mill sites around Cowichan Lake that highlight this occupation. Yet it would be a mistake to think that the Sikhs were not out there high-rigging and falling in the woods.

Karm Manak began working for Hillcrest in 1929. His father was a first-generation Canadian from India who was also working in the forest industry. Mr. Manak comments that "people from India fit right into the picture. The industry needed them and they needed the work. They were there to stay, and they were well regarded and well thought of."