



Name

Abbotsford Sikh Temple----It is also referred to as a Gurdwara, the Punjabi word for temple but the word temple is considered to be recognizable to most Canadians.

Location

33089 South Fraser Way, Abbotsford, British Columbia. V2s 2A9. Just across is the new Sikh Temple at 33094, South Fraser Way.

Brief History

It was built in 1911 by determined Sikh pioneers who came from Punjab, India and worked in the nearby sawmill owned by the Trethewey family. The owners donated lumber for the construction of the temple, setting an enviable example of accommodation and humanism. The project was spearheaded by Sunder Singh Thandi, who worked for the Abbotsford Lumber Company and was one of the leaders of the Sikh community. With Arjan Singh he purchased the present one-acre property, located on a prominent hilltop outside the Abbotsford village and close to the mill, for \$3,000. They donated the land to the Khalsa Diwan Society and raised some funds from the community. It is the only temple from the

pioneer phase of Sikh settlement in Canada that has survived intact. It has been designated a National Historic Site, not only because of its being the oldest surviving Sikh temple but also for its role in the early period of Sikh settlement; for embodying the fundamental beliefs of the Sikhs and their experience in Canada and for its architectural adaptation of Sikh tradition to the Canadian context. At this early stage in their immigration history, the Sikhs preferred to blend into the host society rather than to emphasize their differences.

Some 5000 Sikhs came to Canada from Punjab, India starting from the last decade of the 19th century to the first decade of the twentieth century. Most of them were young who found work in the lumber and agricultural industries in the Fraser Valley, Vancouver, and Vancouver Island. The Khalsa Diwan Society, the central institution of the Sikhs built a temple in Vancouver in 1908 (no longer extant), the first in Canada.

The first Sikhs arrived in Abbotsford in 1905. Within a few years the community numbered about fifty people, many of them were employed at the Trethewey family's Abbotsford Lumber Company on Mill Lake. The Lumber Company provided separate accommodation for its Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Caucasian workers.

The Abbotsford Temple adapted the Sikh religious traditions to Western Canadian vernacular building. The wood-frame gable-roofed building with a false front facing the street follows a popular building form. This common type has been adapted to

accommodate the various ritual requirements of the 'gurdwara': a prayer hall (located on the upper floor), a community kitchen (on the ground floor), and doors on all four elevations. A staircase on the south (entrance) façade leads to the prayer hall and to upper-floor balconies along the east and west sides. The other important feature of the site is the Nishan Sahib, a tall, distinctive flag-pole which indicates the presence of a Sikh Temple, as well as, the base of the original Nishan Sahib, which was trimmed out of a 70 feet high tree.

The temple was enlarged at the rear in 1932 to extend the prayer hall, and a second addition was built in the late 1960's. Though a number of other minor changes have been made inside and outside, yet overall the building retains much of its original appearance. Although the historic temple is no longer used for regular worship, it remains an important community resource. Senior members of the Sikh community get together there during the day. Some of them read the holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib. They also discuss their religious and social affairs and pass their time properly.

