

ABBOTSFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD BUGEL®

bugel (byoogl), n., v., 1. a micro-tab newspaper serving a neighbourhood.
2. an instrument to sound the alarm or trumpet the truth.

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Photo exhibition focuses on immigrant history

BY WENDY SIMPSON

When life stories are lost, family histories fall by the wayside and pieces of the past can never be recovered. That's why Abbotsford's Indo-Canadian community asked the University of the Fraser Valley to record the local history of Indian pioneers.

The long-term goal is to produce an academic study of the first century of Indo-Canadian presence in B.C., and release a history book to coincide with the upcoming centennial of the old Sikh temple on South Fraser Way. Now a national historical site in Abbotsford, it was the first Sikh Gurdwara built in the province.

While the project's completion date is set for 2011, UFV is presenting a photo exhibit as part of the BC 150 celebrations, to whet the public's appetite and encourage more Indo-Canadian families to share their stories.

"We really want the community to embrace this project and contribute to it, so we thought we'd share what we have so far by presenting a photo exhibit, along with stories narrating those photos," says Satwinder Bains, the director of the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies.

As head of the project, Satwinder is inviting the general public to attend, and would like more members of Indo-Canadian pioneer families get in touch with her.

"Indo-Canadian history is an integral part of the 150 year history of BC, and this exhibit brings the pioneers' stories to the forefront and gives them their rightful place," she says.

Those profiled in the Udaari exhibit will include the Darham Singh Gill family of Abbotsford and Mission. With their historic ties to the village of Dhudike in the Punjab, their story includes a long estrangement from family members that is typical of the immigrant experience. Being the

family elder, Darham Singh Gill had to leave his family in India, and by the time he met up again with his son the boy was 26 years old.

In the exhibit, there will also be panels of the heritage temple on display, as well as photos from several local pioneer families and individuals that include the Banga family.

Nand Singh Banga was born in India in 1906, the same year his father Takhur Singh came to Canada. He arrived 14 years later with two of his uncles and married Dhan Kaur five years after that. During the following 10 years they had four children.

A photo of the couple with their first child shows how they adapted to the western climate and style of dress. And, according to the researcher's notes, Dhan kept her modesty by covering her hair.

Another picture of their two sons, Bimbh and Ajit, with their cousin, Malkiet, shows the three children wearing the turban style that copied the Rajasthan Maharaja design that was very much in vogue in India at that time.

The boys' father, Nand Sing Banga, was a long-time volunteer at the Sikh Gurdwara in Abbotsford, and research notes state that he would often get up at 3 a.m. to cook all the food for events held there. In 1977 he was honored for his contribution to the now historic temple.

The Udaari Pioneer photography exhibit kicks off with a special opening ceremony at 3 p.m. today (Friday) at the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies on the UFV Abbotsford campus. For those who can't make it on the opening day, the exhibit will remain open until the end of October from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies, in Building F, is located off the McKenzie Road entrance. The Udaari exhibit is free.



Two of Nand Singh Banga's sons, Bimbh and Ajit, with their cousin Malkiet.



Nand Singh Banga and Dhan Kaur Banga, with their first child Bhagwan.

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