

Mayo Story Told by Paldi Granthi, Mohinder Singh

Mayo Singh Manhas was from the Village of Mahalpur, near the Punjab village of Paldi. Even his birth name was Mayan Singh, it became 'Mayo' over-time as his life unfolded in Canada. In 1906, he left his village to come to Canada via San Francisco. According to the current Granthi (priest) of the Historic Paldi Temple, Mohinder Singh Palsied, though Mayo Singh was uneducated in the traditional sense, he was known for his high street smarts and intelligence.

Upon his arrival to Canada, Mayo began working in local BC mills. Because all the Punjabi men were living as singles then and in bunkhouses, they would cook for themselves. Though he knew very little English to begin with, Mayo slowly learned it with the more interactions he had with people. For example, when he would fetch his morning milk from a local Caucasian farm woman, his colloquial English slowly improved. Mayo's journey into the mill industry began in WWI. During this time, many mills were shutting down as the Canadian Government was calling on young and middle aged men to fight in War for Canada. There was one mill in particular, the Mesachie mill, was at risk of being shut down. It was at this point that Mayo's entrepreneurial skills came to the fore as he gathered some twelve to fourteen men around him and suggested that they all pool their resources together in order to lease the mill from its Caucasian owner. Eventually, this particular mill became highly profitable, and with a part of this profits Mayo purchased around 1300 acres which became known as the community of Paldi on the Island. Next, Mayo found a partner in Kapoor Singh, who also happened to be from the village Kharodha which was the village next to Paldi back in Punjab. Since Kapoor was more traditionally educated and could read and write in English, he took on the tasks needing such skills, while Mayo took on the other parts. Eventually, both Mayo and Kapoor built houses in Paldi so that the colony could become populated. Eventually, it would be here as well that this Paldi gurdwara would be built.

Despite the immense profit that Mayo made in his mill business, he remained a highly generous person, having donated so much to the local hospital that to this day it holds a picture of Mayo in recognition of his contributions. Another anecdote highlights how Mayo's generosity continued even when he would make occasional trips back home to Punjab, India. For example, notes the Granthi, Mohinder Singh, one time, Mayo was visiting with some College Professors in Mahilpur, located in District Hoshiarpur, Punjab. The professors were aware of Mayo's generosity and expected him to make a donation immediately in front of them all. Much to their disappointment, Mayo left after some informal conversations. One man within this group, Bagham Singh, smiled confidently and said "be patient, this man [Mayo] isn't the type to make a big show of his donation just so he can be patted on the back, but for certain he will give something." Indeed, seven or eight days later, the College received a donation of one lakh rupees (approximately 10,000). If one were to equate the donation of one lakh rupees seventy years ago, to today, that would be a donation worth crores (100 hundred million).

Another story about Mayo's generosity discusses how, when in India, Mayo would literally have his pillows full of bills and money. If anyone came to him asking for money, or help, ie. if their daughter was getting married, etc. he would simply grab a fist full of these bills and just hand it to that person. Such was the reputation of Mayo Singh that it was really no surprise that when the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Jawarlal Nehru, came to British Columbia on an official trip, he dined with Mayo at his home. The Paldi gurdwara to this day displays very proudly a picture from this visit. The picture shows Mayo's young son at the time, Mike Sarowa, shaking hands with the Prime Minister.

Soon after Mayo passed away in 1955, his legacy and mill also collapsed despite attempts by his sons and son-in-laws to revive the business. The Mayo family continues to have deep connections with the community of Paldi, as Mayo's grandson is now the current president of the Paldi Historic Gurdwara. In addition Joan Mayo, daughter in law of Mayo Singh, holds an annual prayer at the Paldi gurdwara in memory of the passing of her husband Rajindi who died in 2008.