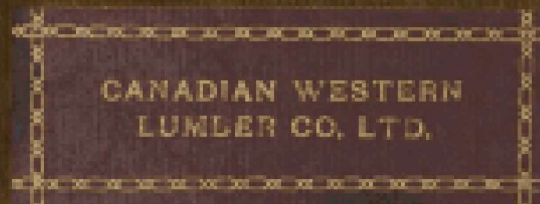


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October 15, 2024

## Unearthing forgotten histories: The hidden legacy of South Asian workers at Fraser Mills

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On the north side of the Fraser River, the master-planned community of Fraser Mills sits where a thriving lumber industry stood just 100 years ago.

The story of Fraser Mills is one of successful settlement, where pioneers created a bustling industrial hub. However, a closer look shows a crucial piece of the story is missing — one that's being properly written thanks to a partnership between the City of Coquitlam Archives and UFV's South Asian Studies Institute.

SASI's work with the [South Asian Canadian Digital Archive](#) led to a significant discovery: an accident logbook from Fraser Mills with a list of South Asian workers' names.

The logbook, made with corduroy and a marbled green inlay, contains a record of the names of workers who suffered accidents while employed at Fraser Mills.

The significance lies not just in the logbook itself, [but in the names it contains](#). Spanning from 1909 to 1955, the logbook lists several South-Asian workers, primarily Sikhs, who suffered accidents on the job. These entries, whether for minor cuts or serious fractures, offer a rare glimpse into the lives of workers who played an essential but largely unrecognized role in Coquitlam's industrial success.

The logbook serves as a tangible link to the lives of South-Asian workers whose contributions to Fraser Mills has been forgotten from official history. Each entry, whether detailing a minor cut or a serious fracture, shows how integral these workers were to Coquitlam's industrial success.

For Satwinder Bains, Director of SASI, the discovery is a welcome one.

"There are families still around where the Mills are still a topic of conversation," Satwinder explains.

"We know community members who worked there, but when the mill shut down, that part of history was buried," Satwinder says. "Every discovery like this one helps us piece together a more complete and honest history, ensuring that the real story of our past is told."

The partnership with the City of Coquitlam Archives led to not just these logbooks, but also hospital transfer papers of South Asians, Chinese, and Japanese workers. These records are further proof that Fraser Mills was built up by a workforce that spanned more than just of European heritage: people of colour were here working, building their own lives, and trying to establish their own roots.

"The past is not just about remembering what happened; it's about recognizing who made it happen and ensuring their contributions are not lost to history."

As new communities rise where Fraser Mills once stood, the rediscovery of these names ensures that the contributions of South-Asian workers — and all who helped build this place — will not be forgotten.



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