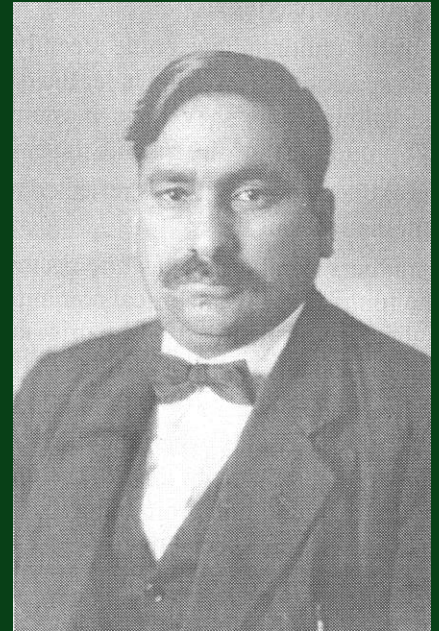


## PALDI VILLAGE ON VANCOUVER ISLAND

In 1906, an enterprising young man named Mayo Singh relocated to Canada from his native village of Paldi in the Punjab region of India. Joining relatives in Abbotsford, B.C., Mayo began work as a lumber stacker, and eventually was able to pool resources with family members to lease and purchase sawmills in Chilliwack and New Westminster.

By 1916, Mayo had established himself as an independent businessman. His adventurous spirit led him to Vancouver Island in 1917, where he bought a defunct mill owned by the Island Lumber Company, renaming it Mayo Lumber Company. He steadily transformed the abandoned site surrounding the mill into a vibrant multicultural community. This was especially unusual during a period in Canadian history that was rife with racial tension and discrimination. Originally called Mayo, the community would later be renamed Paldi village after Mayo's hometown in India.



Mayo Singh



Mayo Lumber Company in Paldi Village, BC

Some of the first inhabitants of Paldi were Japanese-Canadian labourers who had worked with Singh in Chilliwack. As the community expanded, so too did its ethnic diversity. Men, women and children of Indian, Chinese, Japanese and European descent all worked and lived together peacefully. In many ways, Paldi resembled any other small Western Canadian mill town of the day, but its multicultural composition made it quite distinctive. A Sikh temple and a Japanese temple stood in the village center. Paldi's schools housed children of all races, and Indian and Japanese children took after-school language programs at their respective temples.



Paldi Village in the 1920s





First public school built in Paldi, 1921

During a trip to India in 1927, Mayo married Sardani Bisham Kaur and returned to Canada with her. The couple had three children, and the Mayo family built a large, luxurious family home in Paldi. The Mayo home was a favourite spot for many of the community's children. Mayo was the first person in town to own a television, and on weekends neighborhood children would assemble in his living room to watch programs.



Mrs. and Mr. Mayo, late 1920s



Mrs. Mayo with 3 Mayo children, 1930s



Mayo with mill workers outside family home



The Mayo lumber mill temporarily shut down from 1931-1933 at the height of the Great Depression. Despite this, its population continued to grow and diversify. By 1937, 150 single men and 100 families lived in Paldi.



Paldi school children of varied ethnic backgrounds, 1941

In 1945, the mill was closed again due to World War II, and never re-opened. Tragically, during this period, Paldi also lost its Japanese inhabitants, as Canadians of Japanese descent were forced out of their homes and sent to internment camps. Mayo Singh died in 1955 and the village continued until around 1965. Today, Paldi is an historic site, and all that remains of the once bustling town center is an old water tower and the Sikh temple.

Mayo Singh was remembered as a successful businessman who established two other lumber mills on Vancouver Island in addition to the one in Paldi, but he was also known for his generosity. Mayo made many large donations to schools and hospitals in the Cowichan Valley of Vancouver Island. At a time when jobs for immigrants were hard-to-come by, he hired workers across all racial backgrounds and acquired a reputation for giving a job to almost anyone who requested one.

The story of Paldi village and its pioneering Indian founder remains an important but little-known part of Canadian history. In 1997, Mayo Singh's daughter-in-law Joan Mayo wrote a book entitled *Paldi Remembered*, which pays tribute to this once-thriving multicultural mill town.

