



Abbotsford Sikh Temple

33089 South Fraser Way, Abbotsford, British Columbia, V2S, Canada

Formally Recognized: 2005/07/25

Other Name(s)

Abbotsford Sikh Temple
Abbotsford Gurdwara

Links and documents

[MSA Museum Society](#)

Construction Date(s)

1910/01/01 to 1912/01/01

Listed on the Canadian Register: 2006/09/01

Statement of Significance

Description of Historic Place

The Abbotsford Sikh Temple is a one and one-half storey, wood-frame vernacular structure set on a full raised basement, with a false front parapet, an upper balcony running along three of the facades, and a prominent poured concrete stairway leading to the main central entrance on the upper level. It is located on a prominent knoll on South Fraser Way in the centre of Abbotsford, between the early settlements of Clearbrook and

downtown Abbotsford. The Sikh Temple has been designated as a National Historic Site, including the original Temple building with its additions, the present 'Nishan Sahib' (flag pole) and the bases of earlier flag poles, including the remnants of the base of the original 'Nishan Sahib'.

Heritage Value

The Abbotsford Sikh Temple ('Gurdwara') is a valuable symbol of the early roots of the Sikh community and the larger Indo-Canadian community in this region of Canada. The builders of this temple were part of the initial wave of immigration from India, before a restrictive immigration policy was implemented, making further immigration virtually impossible for the next fifty years. The Sikh population was centred in Vancouver, the Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island, and consisted mainly of male sojourners, whose families remained in India. Locally, most of the Sikhs worked for the Abbotsford Lumber Company, once B.C.'s third largest forestry employer. The use of local materials to construct the Temple was significant, representing the Sikh connection to the lumber industry and to the Abbotsford Lumber Company, which donated the lumber for the temple, demonstrating the mutual interdependence of large, isolated industrial plants and their local workforce.

The Abbotsford Sikh Temple is the only Gurdwara from the pioneer phase of Sikh immigration to Canada that has survived, and is the oldest surviving Sikh Temple in North America. Construction started on the Temple in 1910 and was completed by 1912. Built of wood-frame construction, the false front parapet, simple rectangular floor plan and front gabled roof are typical of vernacular commercial buildings of the period. This was a pragmatic adaptation of Sikh traditions using a common frontier style, which expressed the men's limited financial resources and their desire to integrate with the community. The building is typical of early purpose-built Canadian Sikh temples, containing all the elements of a traditional Gurdwara, including the prayer hall on the upper level and a communal kitchen and dining area at ground level. The utilitarian interior, with tongue-and-groove wooden walls and regular fenestration, became common features of early Canadian temples. The location at the crest of a hill on busy South Fraser Way contributes to the Sikh Temple's landmark status.

The Temple was the centre of Abbotsford's Sikh community, serving both religious and social needs and acting as the reception centre for new immigrants. It was enlarged to the rear in 1932 to extend the prayer hall and a second addition was built in the late 1960s, changes which reflect the growth of the Sikh community, particularly once wives and children were allowed to immigrate. A new, much larger Temple was constructed across the road in 1983, but the original Temple was retained as a symbol of the struggles and achievements of the Sikh pioneers.

Source: City of Abbotsford

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Sikh Temple include its:

- original location on a prominent knoll on South Fraser Way
- institutional, vernacular form, scale and massing as expressed by its one and one-half-storey height, full raised basement, simple rectangular floor plan, and informal additions to the rear
- exterior architectural details such as its: false front parapet; front gable roof with generous porch roof, supported by steel posts; wraparound upper verandah running along three sides; a prominent central, poured concrete stairway leading to the main entrance on the upper level; five separate staircases to access the upper level
- wood-frame construction, with horizontal wooden drop siding, and door and window mouldings of

dimensional lumber

- masonry elements such as board-formed concrete foundations and brick chimneys
- exterior details of the two rear additions, the first with a dropped roofline and the second with a slightly sloped roof
- regular fenestration, with double-hung 1-over-1 wooden-sash windows
- spatial configuration of the interior, such as the main central entrance opening directly into the upper-storey prayer hall, with a community kitchen and dining hall on the lower level
- interior details in the prayer hall including: narrow tongue-and-groove wooden panelling; picture rails; raised floor; wooden arches and ornate canopy defining the altar; and early pendant light fixture
- the present 'Nishan Sahib' (flag pole) and the bases of earlier flag poles, including the remnants of the base of the original 'Nishan Sahib'.

Recognition

Jurisdiction

British Columbia

Recognition Authority

Local Governments (BC)

Recognition Statute

Local Government Act, s.954

Recognition Type

Community Heritage Register

Recognition Date

2005/07/25

Historical Information

Significant Date(s)

n/a

Theme - Category and Type

Building Social and Community Life

Religious Institutions

Peopling the Land

Migration and Immigration

Function - Category and Type

Current

Historic

Religion, Ritual and Funeral

Religious Facility or Place of Worship

Architect / Designer

n/a

Builder

n/a

Additional Information

Location of Supporting Documentation

City of Abbotsford

Cross-Reference to Collection

Fed/Prov/Terr Identifier

DgRn-32

Status

Published

Related Places



Abbotsford Sikh Temple National Historic Site of Canada

Abbotsford Sikh Temple National Historic Site of Canada is located on a one-acre property at the crest of a hill in the centre of Abbotsford, in the Lower Fraser Valley of British...