

It is difficult to particularize and give any church pride of place, but Holy Cross at Skookumchuck is truly outstanding. It illustrates in a splendid manner the best of the work of the early craftsman in both symbolism and design. St. Andrew's at Lake Bennett is a mute witness of the gold rush. Except for their wooden construction, St. Peter's Quami-chan or St. Mary the Virgin at Metchosin might be part of English rural life today. Clearly history is not the documentary evidence alone, but artifacts as well. The origins of western Canada and its historic roots can be seen in these varied buildings.

The author has selected his illustrations with care from a variety of sources. Some are extremely artistic, others more mundane, but all serve to add to the value of the text. Mr. Downs has produced a pleasant addition to the increasing literature on British Columbia. The aims of the author are modest, and his text is readable and informative, with nicely selected quotations from historical sources. *Sacred Places* is not the last word on the subject of historic churches in the province, and other more professional work will ultimately appear, but for the moment Mr. Downs' book is a useful and popular introduction to this facet of history in art.

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*The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*, by Hugh Johnston. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979. Pp. 162, *illus.*

A whole book about an unfortunate incident that took place back in 1914? Some might think that we know enough about this skeleton in the closet of British Columbia's past. The luckless attempt by enterprising Sikhs to get around Canada's racist immigration laws through the charter of a Glasgow-built Japanese ship has been frequently discussed in print, then and since. Peter Ward's *White Canada Forever* (Montreal, 1978) devotes a whole chapter to "The Komagata Maru Incident" in the broader perspective of the efforts once made to exclude all non-white immigrants from our shores. But in the light of recent headlines such as: "Racism: B.C.'s Latest Victims are the East Indians" (front page, *Vancouver Sun*, 12 March 1981), it is good to have this thorough and objective account of the origins of a problem that is still — alas! — too much with us.

Professor Hugh Johnston of Simon Fraser University has done a beautiful job, piecing together materials from Canadian, British and Indian archives and from personal interviews, and organizing them into a lucid, very readable account of this shameful event in our past. The problem of racism arose not just because British Columbians (white ones, that is) *were* racist in the early years of this century, but because they were themselves divided in crucial ways over whether or not, and in what capacity, to make use of Indian labour, and because they — and Canada — were still “British” enough to feel obliged to disguise their racial hostility to certain fellow British subjects. The result was a confused situation and inconsistent policies, which made possible the opportunity taken by Gurdit Singh and his companions in chartering the *Komagata Maru*. Nearly all of these men, although born in the Punjab region of India and Sikhs by religion, were already working in various bits of the British Empire outside India — and had experienced inequality in opportunity and treatment that belied imperial propaganda and theory.

The opportunity that beckoned these men to Canada was the usual one of employment — primarily in sawmills, but also on Okanagan farms and on railway contracts, mostly for the bottom unskilled wages rates going, \$1.50 to \$2.00 per day. Their situation was very analogous to the “guest workers” in Germany and Sweden today — employers wanted their labour but society in general did not care for their presence. Most of them wanted only to pursue the normal Punjabi peasant family-centred economic strategy, as described so clearly in studies like Tom Kessinger’s *Vilyatpur* (Berkeley, 1974): when a family was lucky enough to have more male workers than could be employed locally, younger and often unmarried men travelled in search of work elsewhere, or joined the British Indian army. They worked hard, lived frugally, and contributed their savings to the family finances; most would also intend to return to their ancestral village some day, although not all did. Such motivation was not always understood by white Canadians with their more individualistic values.

Gurdit Singh and his shipmates saw a loophole in the formal requirements of Canadian immigration law, so cleverly shaped by Laurier’s government to keep the likes of them out without appearing to discriminate on racial grounds. But Vancouver and British Columbia insisted that their government rigidly enforce the informal requirement — that immigrants be white. It is instructive for us now to be reminded how widespread this unworthy conviction was. Both the *Sun* and the *Province*, of course, led the way. But they reflected the wide opposition to Indian

immigration: from the politicians, the Trades and Labour Council, the Ministerial Association, the Women's National Council.

One of Hugh Johnston's most original contributions is to tell us what happened after the *Komagata Maru* left here. The treatment given to the Punjabis by their "own" government, the British Rāj in India, is even sadder than their reception in Canada. Treated as if they were dangerous criminals, fired on by panicky police officers when they disembarked, some were killed and others imprisoned. The lesson which many of the voyagers had already discussed, that "good" government is no substitute for self-government, was driven home. Gurdit Singh himself, then 56 years old, abandoned his life as a businessman to throw himself into nationalist politics. He became a minor celebrity, met Mahatma Gandhi, and lived to see India become independent. The incident that changed his life was soon swallowed up by greater crimes and became, in India as in Canada, only a footnote to the history of our times. For the British, surely the chief sinners in this squalid little tale, it is not even that. Such an attitude helps explain why Britain today makes such heavy weather of its coloured immigrant workforce from the Commonwealth countries, although surely she is more honest than her continental neighbours who deny their desperately needed "guest worker" labour force the rights of immigrants.

Johnston does not present us with any conclusion, and perhaps we do not need one. His well-told story speaks for itself. And the problem is not concluded, but still unfolds in the everyday contacts between Indians and other Canadians in our communities, workplaces, schools, shops, and playing-fields. We can try to write our own conclusions in the attitudes we bring to such contacts.

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*In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.*, ed. by Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess. Victoria: Camosun College, 1980.

This fine book about early British Columbia women is part of an interesting tradition. None of the seventeen contributors to *In Her Own Right* were engaged in paid work as historians at the time that their book was published. They are exploring their own past and writing their own histories as students, as political activists, or, in one case, as an oil company executive. They have published their own book through the