

RESEARCH NOTE

The Politics of Public History in the Fraser Valley, the Tretheweys of Abbotsford, and Legacies of White Supremacy

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I WAS AN ACTIVE BOARD MEMBER of the Heritage Abbotsford Society (HAS) in recent years. Known as the Matsqui, Sumas, Abbotsford Museum Society until 2017, HAS is a not-for-profit organization that currently receives considerable community funding to maintain the Trethewey House Heritage Site.¹ I began this work in 2018 as part of my community service commitments as a faculty member in the Department of History at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV). I wanted to encourage connections with local public history and heritage organizations and practitioners to foster opportunities and practicums for students interested in applied historical studies. I also sat for one year as the co-chair of the UFV Race and Anti-Racism Network and collaborated with faculty and community members who were (and are) directly affected by lived experiences with white supremacy and racism. This broad service involvement helped give perspective to wider community activities and assertions about systemic racism in Canada.²

Based on these service experiences, this research note shows how such activities brought me into engagement with an important local public history matter that has yet to be resolved – namely, the contentious name of the Trethewey Heritage Site. Why is it contentious? Because the name of the site connects to an under-acknowledged local historical case of white supremacist political formation, to be outlined below.

* The author would like to acknowledge and thank some of the people in and around Abbotsford, BC he consulted about this research note at various stages of its development, notably Robin Anderson and Harrison Mooney, UFV's Scholarly Sharing Initiative, as well as participants from the "Abbotsford, the KKK and Undoing White-Washed Histories" panel at the 2021 BC Studies conference (hosted by UFV's History Department).

¹ "About Us/Heritage Abbotsford Society," <https://www.tretheweyhouse.ca/about-us/>.

² For more on the University of the Fraser Valley Race and Anti-Racism Network, see <https://www.ufv.ca/antiracism/>.

Engagement in such critical reflection could also potentially help local publics better grapple with how to better achieve and honour efforts towards Truth and Reconciliation in an age of renewed anti-racism and social justice through clearer understandings of more inclusive local pasts. As scholars Patricia Landolt and Paloma Villegas note, most suburban spaces across Canada (like Scarborough, Ontario) do not house the number of colonial statues and monuments of monarchical, imperial, and settler-nationalist figureheads that are found in urban metropolises. Unfortunately, however, many suburban spaces still have what they call a “monumentalism” that reifies the founding stories of prominent white-settler families in streets, institutions, and public spaces, and, by extension, elides Indigenous and non-white settler pasts in these places.³

Such suburban “monumentalism” is certainly on display in Abbotsford, BC, and a program for change could proceed from renaming locally prominent “pioneer” sites like the Trethewey House – in connection with both physical and programmatic shifts to site maintenance and visitor experiences. These changes could still preserve the valuable architectural heritage of a settlement house but in a way that enables greater public access to more nuanced portraits of founding notables who continue to stand as unblemished namesakes in local regions.⁴ In the spirit of these movements and critical appraisals of public history-related “monumentalism,” it is hoped, then, that this research note offers other settler-scholars engaged in service and community activism a blueprint for helping to uncover local matters of similar concern in other towns and areas.

Beyond these past service roles, I taught and still primarily teach American history and have devoted my decidedly academic career to, in part, studying racial formations and racism in the United States – notably

³ Patricia Landolt and Paloma Villegas, “Suburban Monumentalism: How Do We Change Indigenous-Settler Relations When There Are No Statues to Destroy?”, *Conversation*, 18 July 2021, <https://theconversation.com/suburban-monumentalism-how-do-we-change-indigenous-settler-relations-when-there-are-no-statues-to-destroy-163203>.

⁴ Heritage sites elsewhere in the largely uncaded province of British Columbia, such as Point Ellice House, directed by Kelly Black in Victoria, are beginning to grapple more with these questions of reframing pioneer settler stories to account for racist erasures by presenting more complex portraits of the Trutch and O'Reilly families. See Nicole Crescenzi, “Point Ellice House Exhibit Offers New Lens into Colonial History,” *Victoria News*, 20 July 2019, <https://www.vicnews.com/home/point-ellice-house-exhibit-offers-new-lens-into-colonial-history/>. Another good local example would be efforts in New Westminster museums to showcase the histories of local historically racialized communities. See Christopher Cheung, “Museums Are Full of History Holes: How to Fill Them,” *Tyee*, 29 August 2022, <https://thetyee.ca/Analysis/2022/08/29/Museums-Full-History-Holes/>.

the struggles of Black Americans to overcome and challenge that nation's sordid history of racial exclusions through the long civil rights movements of the twentieth century. Given this background, and as someone who grew up a white Anglo-settler from this part of the world, I am always open to learning about alternative and counter-hegemonic pasts in any context as well as from those with lived experiences with racism.⁵

Over the course of the summer of 2020 and in the wake of the protests over George Floyd's police murder, I learned, from an article published by staff at HAS, "History of Racism in Abbotsford," that Abbotsford had had a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) chapter. This article outlines a series of local examples of racism in the Fraser Valley from the mid- to late nineteenth century but highlights a historic news clipping from the *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News* that shows that a Trethewey family member, who managed the family's mill in the 1920s, was one of the local notables to support the establishment of Abbotsford's first KKK chapter. So, a member of the family whose name is on the city's Mill Lake heritage site, helped start the KKK in Abbotsford. After learning of this history, I tried to use my role as a board member to push HAS to speak for the histories of *all* citizens of Abbotsford (which it purports to do), and not just the Anglo-European "pioneers" whom the organization has traditionally represented (especially when it was the MSA Museum Society) – a legacy that has surely whitewashed and omitted this important footnote to local history. I strongly advocated that the society work more equitably to collaborate and partner with local institutions that have long been doing the work of addressing the problems of white-Anglo colonial-settler pasts centred in local heritage contexts – such as the Gur Sikh Temple and Sikh Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, the Nikkei National Museum and Cultural Centre in Burnaby, and the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre in Chilliwack, as well as local groups like Black Connections in Abbotsford, which have organized cultural events at the Reach Museum and Gallery.⁶ I joined some fellow board members and all staff at the society to advocate for more diverse and inclusive board membership and programming that would more adequately represent the city's multicultural communities and interests.

⁵ Robert Jago, "Renaming Places: How Canada Is Reexamining the Map," *Canadian Geographic*, 22 July 2021, <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/renaming-places-how-canada-reexamining-map>.

⁶ "The Reach Celebrates Black History Month and Beyond," The Reach Museum and Gallery, <https://www.thereach.ca/the-reach-celebrates-black-history-all-month-and-beyond/>.

Most recently, I was fortunate to be part of a community consultation over Zoom with City of Abbotsford Park staff, wherein I noted that the heritage site at Mill Lake Park should be renamed – preferably in consultation with the local Matsqui First Nation. The recommendation seemed very well received by city staff on hand as well as by the other local citizens who joined the consultation, notably Aaron Levy, president of the Abbotsford Arts Council, a group that occupies the building right next to the Trethewey House on the east side of Mill Lake.⁷ No one at the meeting raised any objections to my intervention in this matter and it seemed to be a point well taken by the roughly dozen or so people in attendance online.

As noted above, revelations about the local KKK appeared in a modest online article posted by HAS. Written by its staff, HAS's online blog post, entitled, "History of Racism in Abbotsford," also briefly reviews histories of white racism and white Protestant settler colonialism in the Pacific Northwest. It gives particular attention to what occurred in the Fraser Valley, including the infamous racially motivated lynching of Stó:lō teenager Louis Sam in 1884, which involved the complicity of local and US authorities; the virulent anti-Asian racism that culminated in the infamous Vancouver race riot of 1907; and, notably, an item in the 3 December 1925 edition of the *Abbotsford Sumas and Matsqui News*. This item reports that US organizers of the KKK "held a meeting recruiting Abbotsford members for a local branch at 10\$ a piece." Membership was open "to those who were white, male, able bodied, of 'sound mind,' over eighteen years of age, Protestant, born in Canada, the British Empire, the United States, or Northern European countries in order to "maintain forever White Supremacy" and who upheld the "privileges, traditions, and ideals of a pure Britishism." Most interestingly, it notes how several "notable" residents signed up.⁸

In September 2020, the HAS article was updated to indicate some important connections regarding who, exactly, these "notable" residents were. They were from one of the more prolific British Anglo-settler

⁷ "Stakeholder Workshop Notes," prepared by IBI Group, 10 August 2021 (in author's possession).

⁸ "History of Racism in Abbotsford," Heritage Abbotsford Society, September 2020, <https://heritageabbotsford.ca/history-of-racism-in-abbotsford/>. For more on the lynching of Louis Sam, see Keith Thor Carlson, "The Lynching of Louis Sam," *BC Studies* 109 (Spring 1996): 63–79. For an excellent recent overview of the history of racism in British Columbia, see Nicholas XEMFOLTW Claxton, Denise Fong, Fran Morrison, Christine O'Bonsawin, Maryka Omatsu, John Price, and Sharanjit Kaur Sandhra, *Challenging Racist 'British Columbia': 150 Years and Counting*, an open source publication of the University of Victoria research project Asian Canadians on Vancouver Island: Race, Indigeneity, and the Trans-pacific, and Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (BC Office), 2021, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/challengingracistbc>.

families of the town – whose family name is still recorded in the names of local streets and buildings. “S.O. Trethewey” was the first “notable” to sign up with the local chapter (or Klavern) of the KKK in Abbotsford. The meeting took place at the regional Orange Hall – a site of Protestant cultural organization whose history would likely further unpack histories of whiteness and white supremacy in the region given the prevalent anti-Catholicism of such formations across Canada – a tendency that was shared with organizations like the KKK during this period as well.⁹

Local histories of the Fraser Valley romanticize the Tretheweys and their role in the founding of Abbotsford and other Fraser Valley communities such as Maple Ridge. Originally from Cornwall, England, the family managed local forestry and mining industries and established homesteads in the Fraser Valley in the early decades of the twentieth century as “rugged pioneer” settlers and seemed to be notable wherever they went. The highly hagiographic *Go Ahead or Go Home: The Trethewey Story* (1994) features a foreword by journalist Paul St. Pierre, who wrote:

Five generations of Tretheweys in BC and they appear to have involved themselves in everything except the arts, politics, and protest parades. Nobody is good at everything. The Tretheweys seem to have been invariably attracted to the primary production industries, ranching, farming, logging, and finally, the industry which attracts dreamers and incorrigible optimists, mining.¹⁰

Daphne Sleigh, author of *Go Ahead or Go Home*, describes Samuel Trethewey as a “likable maverick” and larger-than-life bon vivant.¹¹ But

⁹ “History of Racism in Abbotsford.” Other nativist organizations implicated in histories of white supremacy in this region were the Native Sons of British Columbia as well as the Protestant Orange Order, most well known in the modern era for its role in the sectarian conflicts of Ireland. For more on the Orange Order in Canada, see Michael Wilcox, “Orange Order in Canada,” *Canadian Encyclopedia*, 30 November 2016, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/orange-order>; Forrest D. Pass, “The Wondrous Story and Traditions of the Country”: The Native Sons of British Columbia and the Role of Myth in the Formation of an Urban Middle Class,” *BC Studies* 151 (Autumn 2006): 3–38. For an excellent study of the ways the second KKK re-emerged in the early twentieth century to encompass not only anti-Black and anti-Asian racism but also anti-Catholic xenophobia across North America, see Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Norton, 2017). For a recent study of the KKK in Canada in relation to other Anglo-Protestant nationalist organizations and formations, see also Allan Bartley, *The Ku Klux Klan in Canada: A Century of Promoting Racism and Hate in the Peaceable Kingdom* (Toronto: Lorimer, 2020).

¹⁰ There are many biographies and hagiographies published through local presses about the Trethewey family. See, for example, Daphne Sleigh, *Go Ahead or Go Home: The Trethewey Story* (Abbotsford, BC: Vicarro Publishing, 1994); Julia K. Rohan, *Pioneers in Petticoats: The Trethewey Women 1800 to 1900* (Abbotsford, BC: Heritage Abbotsford Society, 2019).

¹¹ Sleigh, *Go Ahead or Go Home*, 124.

local biographers and hagiographers seem to have side-stepped deeper considerations of potential white supremacist political commitments and persuasions in their protagonists. “S.O.” was Samuel Trethewey, who managed the Abbotsford Lumber Company at Mill Lake, a major founding settler-industry that was owned by his brother J.O. Trethewey. Moreover, little is recalled in the city park today (in terms of memorials) of the arduous work the mill’s racialized labour force, which was of Japanese, Punjabi Sikh, Chinese, and various European origins.¹² Sleigh records that, as well as managing the mill, Sam was a “leader” of community life, president of a baseball club, and director of the local branch of the BC Automobile Association. He and his wife hosted “strawberry socials and other polite” events in the social life of Abbotsford.¹³ One could rightly ask what exactly were these “polite events” in the “social life” of Abbotsford? What was the full scope of the “arts, politics, and protest parades,” noted by St. Pierre in his foreword to *Go Ahead or Go Home*, of which the Tretheweys were allegedly not a part?

In 2019, HAS published *Pioneers in Petticoats* to highlight the relatively unheralded role of women in the family and community. The book is surely a useful source on the experiences of local women from the Trethewey family, but it does not treat the extent of the family’s political affairs – notably the ones highlighted in this research note. Elizabeth Trethewey is profiled in the volume and it describes her husband, Sam Trethewey, as a similarly energetic individual who was a “community leader,” but this merely echoes Sleigh’s earlier work, which mentions how he and his wife engaged in “polite events.”¹⁴ While perhaps offering a valuable insight into under-appreciated local women’s voices, such biographies do little to complicate the family’s historic legacy through the figure of Sam, and they omit any sordid or unseemly political aspects of the family’s affairs, such as Sam’s complicity in the establishment of a KKK chapter in Abbotsford during the 1920s. It behooves future historians to further unpack critical histories of such local white Anglo-settler families to balance out public understandings of regional pasts in public memory.

I am not the only public historian to remark on these local pasts in public-facing ways.

¹² A very good local study of this working-class community may be found in Michaela Sapielak, “Milling About: Cross-Cultural Relationships at the Abbotsford Lumber Company,” UFV History 440 Project, Spring 2020, <https://millingabout.opened.ca/> (accessed July 26, 2021).

¹³ Sleigh, *Go Ahead or Go Home*, 130.

¹⁴ Rohan, *Pioneers in Petticoats*, 82; Sleigh, 130.

HAS was also involved in a local news podcast, entitled “Hushed History of Racism,” broadcast by local CIVL Radio (101.7 FM). The podcast, conducted by freelance journalist Aly Laube, also recalls how *Pioneers in Petticoats* was first envisioned.¹⁵ According to the local executive director of HAS, Christina Reid, the book was designed to include more women in local exhibitions and research. However, when Reid and other staff were researching this project, some local “people” involved in its publication asked for factual but unflattering details to be kept off the record.¹⁶ Such gatekeeping perhaps helps to explain why many complex instances of local racism remain untold. The HAS board and (especially) its predecessor were particularly vulnerable to such pressure depending, as they did and do, on funding from the local government and private donors.¹⁷ As HAS’s executive director indicated in a message to board members in the summer of 2020 in light of an outdated article (now removed) on the history of Abbotsford linked from the city’s website: “relatively small details that should be easy to fix ... are incredibly convoluted, and we just have not had the political clout, nor the time, to go toe to toe with the organizations preventing us from moving on.”¹⁸ In my view, this was/is a form of gatekeeping directed by the society’s funding sources – a dynamic that remains largely publicly unacknowledged.

This reality appears to be changing in recent times due to the efforts of society employees and some engaged community members. As of this writing, staff members at HAS have been hard at work over the last couple years producing engaging, accessible, and inclusive local histories showcased through various internet and social media platforms. These include the notable “Stories to Spaces” program, as well Aboriginal Arts and Culture Day, which, among many things, has highlighted Indigenous place and land-use practices in the area around Mill Lake. HAS has also published material on under-appreciated histories of local Buddhist and Japanese communities, the history of Pride, and an interview with the founders of the local *Punjabi Patrika* newspaper. They also recently installed an exhibit entitled “The River People and

¹⁵ Aly Laube, “Abbotsford’s Hushed History of Racism: Introducing the Tretheweys,” Abbotsford, CIVL Radio, 21 April 2021, <https://canada-info.ca/en/abbotsfords-history-of-hushed-racism-introducing-the-tretheweys/>.

¹⁶ Laube, “Abbotsford’s Hushed History of Racism.”

¹⁷ Mainly when it was the MSA Museum Society.

¹⁸ Letter to HAS Board Members, August 20, 2021 (in the author’s possession)



Figure 1. The Trethewey House Heritage Site, pictured from Ware Street in Abbotsford, BC, September 2022. Photo by the author.

the Land: Living within S'ólh Téméxw" that involved collaborations with local scholars, storytellers, and Elders.¹⁹

These programming changes are not immediately visible to visitors, however, because the physical site remains unchanged. (See photo in Figure 1 taken September 2022.) It would help to see these program changes reflected in a revised site design that included prominent murals, plaques, or dioramas erected outside the heritage homes to better present local multi-ethnic stories and histories. It is my view that the City of Abbotsford needs to be further pressured to permit broader histories, like the activities of the mills' largely racialized labour force, to be visible at the Trethewey House Heritage Site or around Mill Lake, given its strategic location in the city's premier park space. It is time for more open conversations to happen, consistently and transparently, especially

¹⁹ "The Abbotsford Heritage Stories Project Press Release," Heritage Abbotsford, <https://heritageabbotsford.ca/category/stories-to-spaces/>; Heritage Abbotsford Society Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/TretheweyHeritageSite> (accessed September 25, 2022).

since HAS has had increased funding from the City of Abbotsford for its programs and operations in recent years.

Moreover, effective anti-racist histories must do more than add racialized voices to existing narratives: the histories of white settlers themselves must be re-evaluated.²⁰ Such histories have begun to be explained nearby and locally. Vancouver's 1920s KKK story has been more openly told in public and popular history channels connected to white supremacist histories of the Pacific Northwest. For example, it has been reviewed in mainstream news outlets like the *Vancouver Sun* and in the context of wider histories of the region.²¹ To my knowledge, the *Abbotsford News* has yet to cover this story in depth, and it certainly could have done so by now. An image of KKK leaders outside the mansion that is now Canucks Place Hospice in Vancouver's posh Shaughnessy neighbourhood is regularly used by those of us who teach the Canadian history survey. Local histories of the KKK in Vancouver reference activities through the late 1970s and early 1980s, when US KKK leader David Duke came to town. A recent publication, *Union Zindabad!*, on South Asian Canadian labour history, notes how British Columbia had an active chapter of the KKK that left "burning crosses" on lawns and attacked South Asian homes and temples.²² This was around the time that the Trethewey family donated its pioneer home on Ware Street to the City of Abbotsford for its use as a local heritage site. Were the family's connections to these local pasts discussed in the 1980s, when important decisions were being made about how city pasts would be portrayed?

²⁰ This idea draws on the notion of provincializing European history in North America/Turtle Island to better indicate the ways in which white-settler histories are often incomplete because they are frequently uncritically centred in national and local pasts. This is to suggest that such settler histories are rarely universal or fully representative of local histories in colonial contexts and that the latter deserve greater attention to their nuances and complexity – especially when they are presented to popular audiences and through public history knowledge, whether in school curricula or through public heritage sites. See Paige Raibmon, "Provincializing Europe in Canadian History; Or, How to Talk about Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Europeans," *Active History*, 24 October 2018, <http://activehistory.ca/2018/10/provincializing-europe/>.

²¹ Matt Robinson, "Abbotsford's Trethewey Heritage Site Grappling with Namesake's Racist, KKK Past," *Vancouver Sun*, 25 September 2020, <https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/abbotsfords-trethewey-heritage-site-grappling-with-namesakes-racist-kkk-past/>; Lani Russwurm, "The History of the KKK in Vancouver," <https://forbiddenvancouver.ca/blog/kkk-history-vancouver/>; Trevor Griffey, *The Ku Klux Klan in Washington State* (Seattle: Civil Rights and Labor History Consortium, University of Washington, 2004–20), https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk_intro.htm, which includes an important entry on the KKK in Vancouver, "Non-Citizen Klan: Royal Riders of the Red Robe," https://depts.washington.edu/civilr/kkk_rrrr.htm.

²² Russwurm, "The History of the KKK in Vancouver"; Donna Sacuta, Bailey Garden, and Anushay Malik, *Union Zindabad! South Asian Canadian Labour History in British Columbia* (Abbotsford, BC: University of the Fraser Valley, 2022), 96–97.

Some may claim that Samuel Trethewey was a “wayward” son who left Abbotsford a few years after the KKK chapter was first established in 1925 and died a few years later. However, Samuel’s son, Howard, continued his father’s legacy of supporting the local KKK and participated in an infamous well-attended parade down Essendene Avenue in 1928 before the organization largely disappeared locally during the 1930s. Despite the efforts of local students, due to a lack of source materials, the history of this organization is difficult to trace through the mid- to late twentieth century. But this does not mean that it is not worth continuing to try to uncover it, as I hope future students of local history will do.²³

To me, the legacy of the Tretheweys’ historic connections to the KKK in the 1920s is more than just the activity of its wayward sons. It is a clear sign that close members of a powerful local family were implicated in the forces of reaction and racism that mark much of Abbotsford and British Columbia’s history through to the present. Aspects of local Sikh histories are instructive here because of that still under-recognized community’s centrality to many of the founding industries of the town (notably forestry and farming) and to the town’s history more generally. Of particular note are the connections between Mill Lake and the founding of North America’s oldest still-standing Gurdwara, which is just a kilometre up the road on South Fraser Way. In 1911, some of the earliest Sikh workers at the mill asked the owners for lumber that they literally carried on their backs to build what is now a vital Canadian National Heritage Site and a place of tremendous spiritual and cultural significance to surrounding communities. One recent CBC News article by journalist Kiran Singh, which touches on the KKK connections of the Tretheweys in the 1920s, notes how the mill’s East and South Asian labour force often worked twelve-hour days but were summarily dismissed at the outset of the Great Depression in the early 1930s after several generations of employment by the Abbotsford Lumber Company. This mill’s operators did this in order to make way for white locals (some of whom were members of the local Native Sons Association Sumas Prairie Assemblies) who wanted these resource industry jobs exclusively for themselves. They had been pressuring the company since at least 1927 to accede to their demands. These owners made significant profits on the backs of a largely racialized workforce who they were more than willing to dismiss when hit by economic hard times. Given these harsh eventualities, the

²³ Michaela Sapielak, “Cross-Cultural Relationships at the Abbotsford Lumber Company,” <https://millingabout.opened.ca/life-at-home/>; Olivia Daniel, “Underneath a Hood or Covered in Soot” (unpublished essay, Department of History, University of the Fraser Valley, 2021).

donation of wood in 1911 for the Gurdwara seems, in hindsight, like a convenient cover for a longer history of racialized labour exploitation at this consistently non-unionized mill site, which stopped operations for a time in the early 1930s. The founding of the Gurdwara was, first and foremost, a sign of the dignified formation of a community in the context of an often violent era of unregulated colonial resource extraction and xenophobia on the part of white Anglo-settler communities who (nearly uniformly) controlled early industries. As local public historian and professor Sharanjit Sandhra indicates: “when these Sikh men built this Gurdwara [they were] also fighting the systems of racism.”²⁴

To be clear, present descendants of the local Trethewey family are not being implicated and singled out here as personally or directly responsible for what their forebears carried out. They are not responsible for the KKK's presence in Abbotsford or for the actions of their mill-owning ancestors. But this does not mean that we should ignore such local pasts and the complexities of family histories that are associated with them. We ignore discussing these local connections to virulent xenophobia and white supremacy at the expense of more thorough and truthful accounts of how local histories have been represented and how local public consciousness about the past has changed and (arguably) could continue to change. I would wager that most residents of Abbotsford, if asked, would be unhappy to learn that one of their town's central heritage sites is associated with the establishment of a KKK chapter in the 1920s – indeed, the HAS article published on their website speaks to these broader concerns. Disturbingly, the KKK has in fact re-emerged locally in recent years, an event that produced considerable protests in 2017 when hate propaganda was openly distributed in the community. In the summer of 2020, in response to the police murder of George Floyd and other Black Americans in the United States, Abbotsford had what was likely its largest anti-racist protest ever, but with due attention to the need for racial justice in Canada given the ongoing instances of similar issues in this country.²⁵ Not dealing openly and honestly with such

²⁴ Sharanjit K. Sandhra quoted in Kiran Singh, “North America's Oldest Gurdwara Offers a Peek into the Complex History of BC's First Sikh Settlers,” CBC News, 27 May 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/history-fraser-valley-sikh-settlers-tour-1.6468402>; Mikaela Sapielak, “The Mill Reacts,” in *Milling About: Cross-Cultural Relationships at the Abbotsford Lumber Company*, <https://millingabout.opened.ca/>.

²⁵ The KKK has re-emerged in Abbotsford in recent years, leading to public outcries and community protests. See Jesse Johnston, “Ku Klux Klan Pamphlets Distributed in East Abbotsford,” CBC News, 16 January 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/kkk-pamphlets-abbotsford-1.3937850>; Ashley Wadhvani, “Anti-Racism Protesters Gather in Communities across BC,” *Abbotsford News*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.abbynews.com/news/photos-anti-racism-protesters-gather-in-communities-across-b-c/>.

issues of public history, connected as they are to struggles for anti-racist reform, risks repeating the erasures of the past that have caused violence to marginalized communities.

Turning attention to the spaces and places in which I am fortunate to work and live – the lands of the Stó:lō peoples (Matsqui and Sumas Nations in particular) – it is high time to talk more openly and honestly about the white “pioneer” histories that have informed local history. In the United States, children of former Confederate Army generals are openly acknowledging their families’ complicity in maintaining histories of white supremacy and are helping to redress local representations of the past.²⁶ Why can similar forms of public accountability and truth-telling not take place more often in Canada than they have to date? This is not to suggest that such accountability has not taken place elsewhere in this country, surely it has, but that there is still lots of room for more. There is still plenty of history to be found and told in public-facing ways to enlighten local communities and bring healing to those who have been marginalized and discriminated against.

I propose that the Trethewey House Heritage Site in Abbotsford be renamed as part of these programs of public accountability. This could provide a model for civic leaders across the country who are in charge of similar heritage sites. Beyond the fact that the sign for the Trethewey House on Ware Street is in dire need of a facelift, Abbotsford’s population is set to more than double in the next five years, and its demographics are more multicultural than ever. These realities should be reflected in the broader public representations of the past that the city puts forward. Perhaps the site name change could align with a name the Matsqui First Nation deems appropriate for the lands Mill Lake occupies? Or perhaps, in lieu of an explicit name change, names for physical sites and spaces in and around the Mill Lake site currently operated by HAS could be more appropriately adapted to honour Indigenous heritage and land use? This would recognize the process of reconciliation in which the city is supposedly involved with local First Nations.²⁷ As noted above, there are signs HAS has been discussing reconciliation and is undertaking important program changes, such as the Stories to Spaces projects and

²⁶ Bryan Bender, Daniel Lippman, and Sarah Cammarata, “Why the Descendants of Confederate Generals Are Happy to See Their Names Go as the Senate Prepares to Debate Renaming Military Bases, We Called Living Family Members of the Generals. Here’s What They said,” *Politico*, 1 July 2020, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/07/01/renaming-confederate-generals-military-bases-341278>.

²⁷ Vikki Hopes, “Abbotsford Council Votes Down Motion Related to Truth and Reconciliation,” *Abbotsford News*, 13 July 2021, <https://www.abbynews.com/news/abbotsford-council-votes-down-motion-related-to-truth-and-reconciliation/>.

Aboriginal Arts and Culture Day, that move towards these ends. Certainly, preserve old buildings, but let us move away from the glorification of white pioneer settler families in these spaces and places, especially those who enriched themselves on exploited and racialized labour forces (even if their descendants later became benevolent philanthropists who helped fund local hospital wards and public institutions).²⁸

Students of history are increasingly interested in critically interrogating local pasts. This can be seen in the growing richness of projects completed each year at UFV through the South Asian Studies Institute, the Peace and Reconciliation Centre, and at the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre. Intricate histories of racism and white supremacy are likely to become a growing theme for the current generation of history students going through undergraduate and graduate programs not just at UFV but across Turtle Island. Certainly, there are many things for future scholars to explore in these subject areas, but one in particular might be to see if any other BC or Canadian towns and/or suburban areas have similarly celebrated founding “notables” in uncritical ways.

²⁸ Dustin Godfrey, “Abbotsford Philanthropist Donates \$1 Million for New CT Scanner,” *Abbotsford News*, 21 July 2018, <https://www.abbynews.com/community/abbotsford-philanthropist-donates-1-million-for-new-ct-scanner/>.