

JUNCTION EXPRESS

The Official Newsletter of the Roseville Historical Society

WRAPPING UP 2024

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The Carnegie Museum Christmas Tree

It has been another wonderful year for the Carnegie Museum and the Roseville Historical Society! Thank you to all of our members, donors, history enthusiasts and our entire community for the continued support. We truly could not do it without you! We hope you have a beautiful holiday season, a very happy New Year, and will join us at the Carnegie Museum for some new exhibits, events, and programs in 2025!

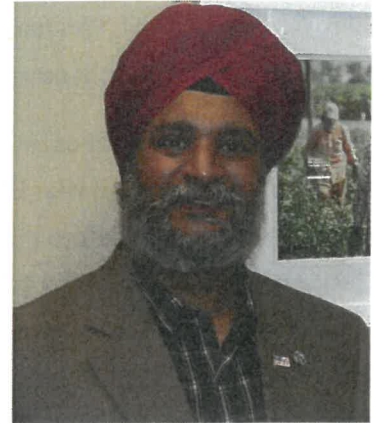


SIKH FIRSTS IN PLACER COUNTY

By *Kulvinder Singh, Esq., Roseville, CA*
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Placer County residents who are reading this article may think Sikhs, a community with origins in the Indian subcontinent, are new to northern California. No, that is not the case, they were here a long time ago. They farmed in the fertile lands here northeast of Sacramento over a hundred years ago.

In the early 1900s, Sikhs living in Sacramento, Stockton, Berkeley, Yuba City, Los Angeles and Imperial Valley were agitated with the British and wanted them to leave India. Sikhs in America had a political party, a newspaper and a voice in a free country to speak about the British injustices in Punjab. The Punjab was a kingdom until 1839 when the Maharajah died and within 10 years was annexed by the British in 1849. The British found Sikh men useful in their outposts around the world, Sikh soldiers passed through the West Coast of North America as early as the 1890s. Some Sikhs came to Placer County at that time and saw the fields and agricultural potential of the Central Valley and dreamed of farming here as they did in Punjab. Sikhs were able to find work on the railroad which cut northeast through Placer County on its way to Utah. Some worked as laborers on the Panama Canal in the early 1900s and others found ways to farm as tenants in Placer County and Sacramento until the laws prohibited them from leasing farmland anymore. There was a gradual tightening of immigration laws, a national policy, which started with Chinese exclusion laws then miscegenation laws and finally land leasing rules.



Kulvinder Singh, Esq.

1910 - 1920

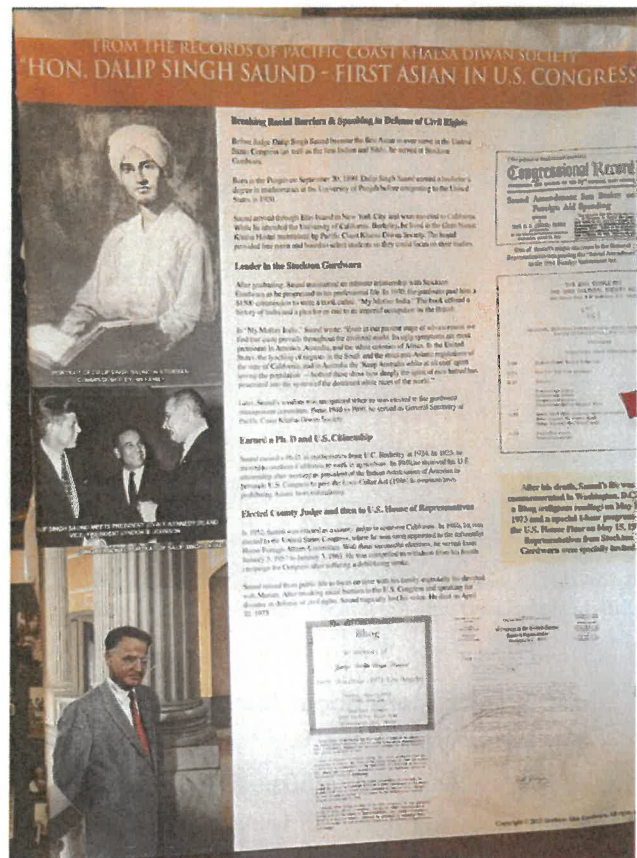
Sikh Farmers settle in California



When and where they gathered, Sikhs talked about how to get the British out of India and be free again. The Ghadar Party, which means mutiny in Urdu, was started in Astoria Oregon where Sikhs had found work at the mills in the 1910s and then became a larger and more active community group in Berkeley, Stockton and Sacramento by 1913. It resulted in these advocates being wanted by

the British for treason, and would face punishment should they ever return to India. For these reasons, many Sikhs who were able to successfully find work and make a living in California could not return, they were people without a way back home and chose to become Americans. However, America did not want Sikhs and others who were considered 'orientals' to become citizens, or to bring their families or wives here. Laws did not change until the 1940s to allow Asian immigrants to gain US citizenship and bring their families and relations.

Sikhs in Placer County include Dalip Singh Saund and just before his time were farmers with names we don't know except for Dhana Singh Poonian who arrived to work in Loomis in the late 1900s. Dalip Singh Saund was the Congressman from India, he was elected to represent Riverside and Imperial County in the US House of Representatives in 1956. When he first arrived in America on September 27, 1920 by ship from Punjab, he was 20 years old. He learned that Berkeley had a Sikh community boarding house and a university where he could study agricultural food preservation. He was a polymath. Literally. He graduated from college in Punjab with a math major and decided to change majors at UC Berkeley to get a Masters in Mathematics by 1922 and his PhD in 1924. There was no tuition for graduate studies; however, he needed money to support himself and found work in the fruit ranches of Placer County - King Road in Loomis, PFE Road in Sacramento. There are records of many Sikhs finding agricultural farm labor work



Dalip Singh Saund

here as early as 1902. Dalip Singh Saund graduated and could not find work in his professional career and moved down to Imperial Valley where there were lettuce, alfalfa and other farms and ranches that were owned by Sikhs. Down in the border region, Mexicans and Punjabis had found ways to own land despite the California and federal laws that barred them from doing so. Maybe it was that they were all brown people who liked tortillas and beans and didn't speak much English and worked on farms. As a result, Sikhs and Mexicans married. Several families became successful and their next generation, sometimes called 'Mexican Hindoos' by their own people, eventually settled in central and northern California.

Dalip Singh Saund had to settle for work as a foreman for many years in the southern border area of California. He had a PhD and had to return to the farm work of his people because there was no other employment available due to his race and national origin. He saw and suffered the Great Depression, married and raised a family, and got involved in local politics. Democrats were the group in power. In 1946, he became a US citizen. He ran for a position as Justice Court judge in 1953 which at that time was not a job that required a law degree. He was not a lawyer, he was a mathematician and a brilliant man who loved to read, so he read law books and probably could have passed the bar exam. At that

early stage, California's legal community was made up of people who 'read the law' in a law office and then would take and pass the bar exam and then go into practice. I think he did that. His family could not confirm. Once he was a judge, was known as Judge Saund by the communities around Westmoreland and Imperial Valley and ran for Congress when there was an open seat. He was elected



Dalip Singh Saund with President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson.

in 1956 and served 3 terms until his health failed and he returned to California in 1963. There are photos of him with President Kennedy and Vice President Johnson and he is celebrated as the First Asian to serve in the US Congress. He was also first a farm worker, working in the fields of Placer County. Recall, he came as a 20 year old and worked those first 3 to 4 years in the summers in the fields while attending Berkeley.

There is much more about first Sikhs and Sikh firsts in Placer County, including the first Sikh divorce, the first criminal case, the first Sikh family to farm in Loomis and then Roseville and to buy a house and live in Roseville in the 1950s. Sikh firsts include the first Sikh millionaire from Placer County and benefactors of the first Sikh temple in the area built in Yuba City in the early 1970s. More firsts by Sikhs include those Sikhs who currently serve in commissions, on boards and likely in the near future as elected officials. There have been Sikh candidates for offices including city council and public boards since 2000. The future is bright.

*More about Roseville's Sikh heritage in upcoming newsletters. Thank you to Kulvinder Singh for this incredible article and providing the Roseville Historical Society and Carnegie Museum with long overdue history about our community's history of Sikh culture. -RHS



Raj Kor holding 3 month old Dalip.