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**remembering working
people: plaques around
the province project**

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**BC LABOUR
HERITAGE**
2017 CENTRE

Union Made

Project Background

In 2010, the BC Labour Heritage Centre partnered with the Vancouver Convention Centre on the installation of a series of educational panels along the interior and exterior of the new Convention Centre.

Building on this success, the Labour Heritage Centre launched the **Remembering Working People: Plaques Around the Province Project** in 2016.



A series of plaques documenting events and people in British Columbia's labour history are on display at the Vancouver Convention Centre.

Our aim was to extend the Convention Centre program to areas outside of Vancouver. Over 20 new plaques have been installed.

Nomination Criteria

We are seeking nominations of events, groups, individuals and places throughout the province that demonstrate the contributions of working people to the history of British Columbia.

Our criteria includes, but is not strictly limited to:

- defining **events, actions, episodes, movements, or experiences** that played a significant role in the history of the labour movement and working people in British Columbia
- **groups and individuals** that made a lasting contribution to

labour and working history

- **places** that hold a direct association with a significant aspect of BC or Canadian labour history

When proposing a suitable event and location for a plaque, nominators will be asked to consider locations where they will be accessible to the public and contribute to an understanding of the foundations laid by working people in the province's history.

Plaque Style

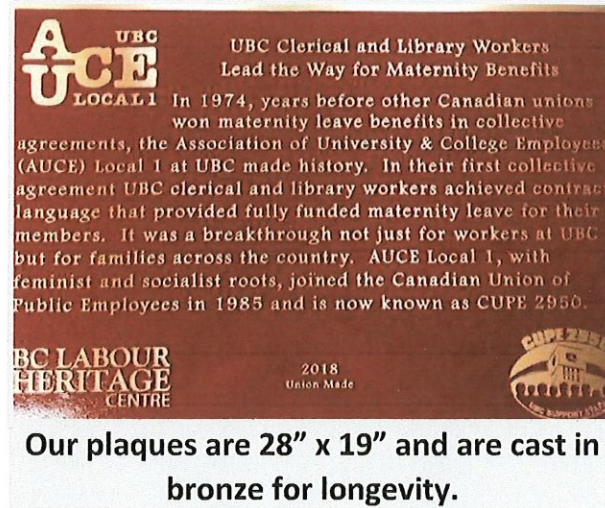
Ornamental Bronze, a unionized facility located in Richmond, produces our plaques.



Highly-skilled members of Ironworkers Local 712 work on our plaques.

Costs

Each cast bronze plaque is individually crafted and costs approximately \$5,000 depending on its size and complexity. Nominators must contribute at least one-third of the cost of



each plaque. The Labour Heritage Centre covers the cost of research and promotion of each plaque, including links to background materials on our website. Nominators and sponsors will receive recognition through our website and promotional materials.

How to Submit a Nomination

This is an ongoing project; there is no deadline for submitting a nomination.

Download a copy of our Nomination Form:

<http://www.labourheritagecentre.ca/projects/plaques-around-the-province/>



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www.labourheritagecentre.ca

Plaques Around The Province Nomination Backgrounder

Darshan Singh Sangha – 1940s IWA Organizer

Darshan Singh Sangha is being nominated for his organizing work in the South Asian community in and around the Cowichan Valley. Labour's long hostility towards Asian workers was slowly beginning to change in the 1930s, but South Asian workers in the forest industry needed convincing that joining the union was in their interests.

At the time IWA leadership hired three organizers from visible minorities to break down the barriers of race and unite workers in the forest industry's workforce. Darshan Singh Sangha all played a key role during the union's intense organizing drives of the 1940s.

The son of a poor Punjabi farmer, Darshan Singh Sangha arrived in BC as an 18-year-old in 1937. He joined the Communist Party in 1938 and was introduced to the leadership of the IWA by local Lake Cowichan man named Nigel Morgan.

Darshan Singh Sangha entered the industry and found generally that most of the White workers were being paid 40 cents an hour while the East Indian and Chinese workers got much less for the same work. He also found that East Indians were the first to be fired and last to be hired. In addition to that, he observed that some of the East Indian employers would offer him soft jobs with good earnings if he would give up his union work.

But Darshan Singh Sangha persevered as an organizer because he recognized the need for overall unity and supported the union with enlisting these other ethnic groups. The union took a consistent stand on racism feeling that equality should be extended to all and that racial discrimination was anti-working class.

The East Indian community got equal rights legally in 1946 and from then on, the right of vote and the right to citizenship was extended to them. It was also the year the entire industry went on strike for about forty days for some very basic demands.

After a few years of hesitancy to join the IWA, East Indian workers were convinced that the organization was there to protect them and it was strong enough so they joined up in masses.

Swayed by Darshan's Punjabi union pamphlets and fiery rhetoric, South Asian sawmill workers who had previously shied away from White-run unions began flocking to the IWA. When the Youbou Mill manager tried to evict Darshan Singh Sangha for talking to the workforce, 90 South Asian employees gathered outside in the rain and told the boss that if he was thrown out, then they would leave too. Sangha was allowed to stay.

Darshan Singh Sangha's commitment to organize the masses was palpable and in some predominantly South Asian mills the vote to join the IWA was almost unanimous. Thanks to Darshan Singh Sangha the rank of the IWA swelled and the union prospered.

Despite being an organizer for only a short time (1940-1948), Sangha left his mark on the IWA. Not only was he a successful grassroots organizer, but he was also elected as the union's District Trustee and both attended and spoke at IWA Conventions, Sangha served on the powerful Convention Resolutions Committee and became a strong voice for minorities within the union structure.

In 1948, Sangha returned to India. In his resignation letter to the IWA, he reminded union members: "One of the greatest achievements of the IWA was the uniting of all woodworkers—White, Indian, Chinese, Japanese—irrespective of race and color."

Framework of this text is based on excerpts from the South Asian Canadian Legacy Project book, Union Zindabad – South Asian Canadian Labour History in British Columbia by Donna Sacuta, Bailey Garden, and Dr. Anushay Malik.