



Street Stories

Grewall Crescent

GPS: [49.1490851,-122.2922849](#)



Naranjan Singh Grewall, who deemed it a privilege to live and work in Mission, had a street named in his honour by the District of Mission in November of 1995.

Mission Community Archives Item No. 0025 198302-0073

“Lumberman Grewall Found Shot to Death,” cried the Province newspaper headline on July 12, 1957. It was a sad and premature end to one of Mission’s great citizens who was prominently known throughout BC as a lumberman, sportsman, philanthropist and political pioneer. He was 48 years old.

Born in East Punjab, Naranjan Singh Grewall moved to Canada in 1925, settling in Mission in 1941. A millwright and union official, Grewall came to own and operate six sawmill companies, becoming one of the most influential business leaders in the area.

With the extension of the franchise to East Indians in 1947, Grewall successfully ran for a seat in 1950 on the Corporation of the Village of Mission’s Board of Commissioners. He topped the polls, becoming the first East Indian ever elected to political office in British Columbia and it is believed Canada. Following his victory, he placed an advertisement in the local paper which in part read:

Thank you – Thank you All the Citizens of Mission City. Your support by electing me as your commissioner has encouraged me enormously. It is a credit to this community to elect the first Hindu to municipal office in the history of our great Dominion. It shows your broadmindedness, tolerance and consideration (FVR: 1950- 12-20:5).

He was re-elected in 1952 and chosen chairman by his fellow commissioners in 1954.

Passionately committed to helping others, Grewall once stated, “Democratic privileges also carry obligation and duties.”

Acting on these words, he served as a member or director of many organizations including: the hospital board- chairing a committee to build a larger hospital for Mission; the Parent Teachers Association and a campaign for senior citizens housing. He also sponsored a baseball team called the Mission Grewalls. In 1955, while visiting his native village of Jodhan in India, he financed the building of a school when he discovered they did not have one.

Grewall also held advanced views on forestry. Despite being a mill owner, he was strongly in favor of labor rights and responsible forest management. He deplored what he considered the destruction of B.C. forests through “cut out and get out” methods. He submitted a brief to the Royal Commission in Forestry in 1955 that called upon the provincial government to implement a more responsible approach to forest management based upon the principles of sustainability. He also played an instrumental role in securing a tree farm license for Mission (1958) – making it the first municipally owned tree farm in Canada.

Fueled by his humanitarian and pro- labour beliefs, he was nominated as candidate for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (later he NDP) in the 1956 provincial election, but failed to win the seat.

Upon his death a year later, an editorial in the *Fraser Valley Record* stated: “Mission has suffered no inconsiderable loss because Mr. Grewall was a zealous worker on behalf of this community.” (1957-07-17:2)

by David Buss and Val Billesberger