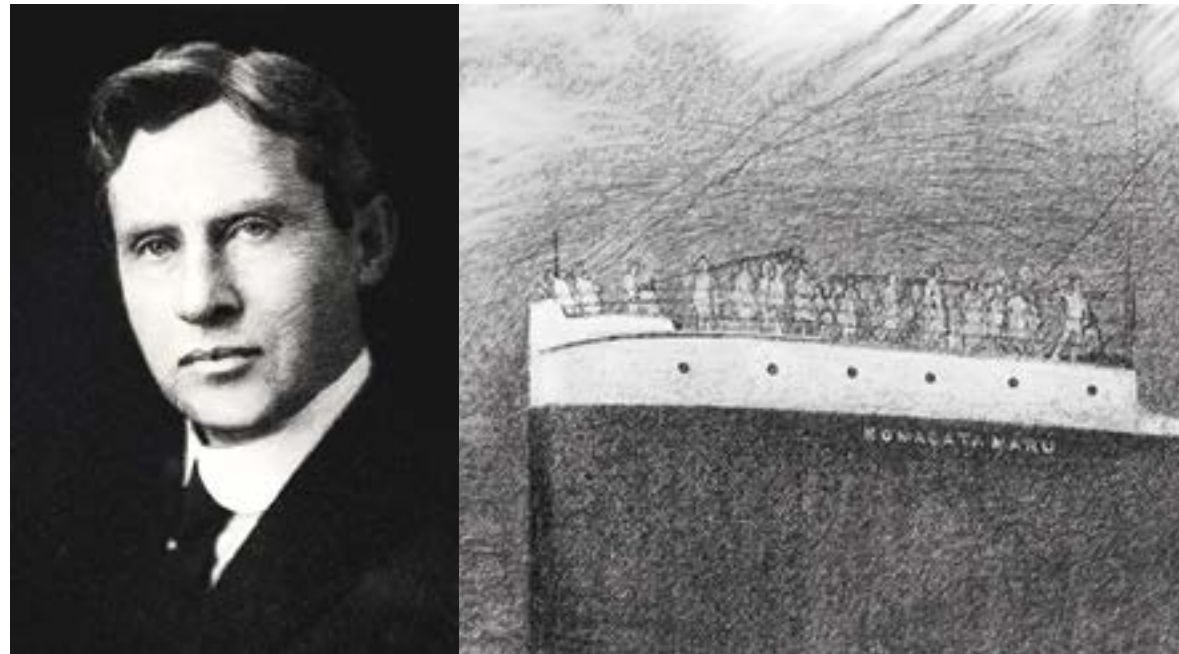


A man who did not accept the values of his time

Remembering Edward Bird



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Based on Interview with his grandson Richard Bird, Q.C.

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My first recollections of my grandfather Joseph Edward Bird would be in the early thirties. I used to go over there on my tricycle. Grandmother made delicious cakes for me.



When he and my grandmother were living in Kitsilano right opposite the park, one day a 'Hindu' truck drove up with a load of wood and dumped it in the lane behind my grandparents' place and then instead of coming over and presenting a bill or seeking payment or whatever, the driver just went away. I asked my grandmother Caroline, 'what's going on here?' She said that the 'Hindus', as they were called in Vancouver then, were grateful to grandfather for acting as their lawyer in a matter and of course I learned later that it was the Komagata Maru case. The passengers would have had a hard time finding a lawyer but my grandfather stood by them as his clients as history records. In 1914 racial discrimination was rampant in Vancouver.

I used to go out with my grandfather on rent days. I can remember my grandmother shouting from the door "Ed, collect the rent and don't promise to make repairs." I gathered from that that he had come home empty handed and promised to make repairs. He provided for his old age by investing in rental properties. Grandfather was always bright and cheerful.



I asked my father about it and his explanation was that Edward kept coming home with briefcases bulging with documents, spread-out the contents on the dining room table and worked until the wee hours of the morning and not paying enough attention to my grandmother.



My father said that his brother, who was in partnership with his father, was very concerned because grandfather Bird was losing his memory and he was failing to turn up on court days much to the annoyance of the bench.

He had a great influence on my life because both my mother and my father were very fond of Edward and I knew that Edward was a lawyer. So at a very early age, I was sitting on my grandmother's knee and she said to me "What you going to be when you grow up?" and I said "I will be a lawyer like my grandfather." she said very severely "Oh no! You are not!" I was very puzzled by that because I knew Edward Bird was highly respected.

Grandfather refused to quit and the two sons, Ted that is Edward junior and Harry, that is Harry Bird, my father, had to drag him, almost literally, drag him out of the office to retire because of the memory problem. At first we thought it was funny and then we came to realize that it was tragic. It was Dementia.

Grandfather was very kind to me in many ways and so was my grandmother. I have fond memories of them. My father told me about the Komagata Maru incident. He turned 14 on the 31st of July of 1914 while the incident was well developed. My father went aboard the Komagata Maru with his father..



My father also told me that the excesses of Lenin and Stalin rather turned Edward off, certainly his active participation as a proponent of socialism or Marxism but there is no suggestion that he changed his personal values which were, support of the rule of law, equality of the sexes and races before the law.

He demonstrated this equality by having a female law student article to him and racial equality by having a Chinese origin Canadian as an article student. He and this fellow, I think his name was Gordon Cumyow, knew that there would be difficulty in Cumyow being called to the bar because of racial prejudice. He was denied a call to the bar and he became a court interpreter instead.

Grandfather won a new trial for an aboriginal boy who was convicted of murdering a teacher. After the new trial the boy was acquitted. This was not a source of big money in terms of legal fees. He would take cases out of his convictions.



He didn't accept those values which were commonly held. Now his values of equality for men and women, equality of the races, and the rule of law are widely shared among Canadians. This would undoubtedly please him enormously. He stood up for what he thought was right and he was prepared to take criticism and death threats and so forth and he persevered.

Why I became a lawyer? Because through my parents I learned that Edward regarded the profession as a noble one which strived for justice and is essentially a benign influence on our society. Being a lawyer is often sneered at, but in past the liberties we enjoy flow from the strong legal profession that can often stand up for the weak and the disadvantaged to obtain justice.

Anne Murphy (Ph.D. Columbia) is Associate Professor in the Department of Asian Studies, Director of the Centre for India and South Asia Research, and Associate Dean for Strategic Initiatives in the Faculty of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies at the University of British Columbia. She teaches and conducts research on the vernacular literary and religious traditions of the Punjab region (India & Pakistan), with interests in the intersections between literary and material cultures, commemoration, and historiography. Current research concerns modern Punjabi cultural production in the Indian and Pakistani Punjabs and in the Diaspora, and the early modern history of Punjabi's emergence as a literary language. She has published one monograph, two edited volumes, and articles in *History and Theory*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *South Asian History and Culture*, the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and other journals. Her book-length translation of the short stories of Punjabi-language writer Zubair Ahmed, *Grieving for Pigeons: Twelve Stories of Lahore*, will be published from Athabasca University Press as an open access publication in early

Raghavendra Rao K.V. has built up a multidisciplinary art practice in Vancouver that integrates public art, multi-media work, painting and graphic design. A number of recent projects demonstrate the diversity of his work as an artist, curator, and project manager. As a co-founder and ongoing Artistic Director of the South Asian Canadian Histories Association, he has been involved in a number of public art and multi-disciplinary arts projects. He curated the exhibition that comprised the central piece of SACHA's Canada 150 project, "Trauma, Memory and the Story of Canada" in 2017. He has participated in many International Residency programs, giving him opportunities to understand different processes of making art, but also to create technically complex art. Most recently, he worked as the artistic director for an international project *Creative Interruptions' Punjab*, which for its India segment was led by Churnjeet Mahn (University of Strathclyde, Scotland) in partnership with Dr. Anne Murphy (UBC, Canada). A multi-arts Mela (Festival) was developed to exhibit work undertaken during artist residencies over October and November 2018.

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