

ROSS BAY CEMETERY

An enchanting enclave of history and natural beauty in a spectacular seaside setting – only minutes from Downtown

Background: Ross Bay Cemetery was Victoria's community cemetery after 1872 and was divided into sections for Christian denominations, First Nations and Chinese, the 'potters' field' (where the poor are buried) and general use. Victoria once had a large Black population and many are buried throughout Ross Bay Cemetery according to their religious affiliation. There are some prominent parts of Victoria's historical population you will not find here. The Jewish community established its own cemetery in 1859 (now BC's oldest operating cemetery) on Fernwood at Cedar Hill Road. Chinese Buddhists used Ross Bay Cemetery only from 1873 to 1903, then purchased their own site, now the Chinese Cemetery at Harling Point. Sikhs began arriving in Victoria in the late 1800s, but they cremate their dead and scatter the ashes over water.

Organized Cemetery Tours: The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria offers an extensive tour program every Sunday afternoon at 2 p.m. from mid-February to mid-December. No reservations are needed for these scheduled tours. Most of our tours are at Victoria's historic Ross Bay Cemetery, but we do sometimes visit other heritage cemeteries or sites. Make sure to check our website for topics and locations. For current information about the week's tours, visit our website at www.oldcem.bc.ca

Locating a Grave: If you are looking for a specific grave at Ross Bay Cemetery and don't know where it is, you may be able to find the plot number by checking the City of Victoria Archives website at <https://www.victoria.ca/city-government/archives/whats-archives/burial-death-marriage-indexes>, or you call them at 250-361-0375 (weekdays) or email them at archives@victoria.ca. Or call the Parks Department at 250-361-0600 (weekdays) or The Old Cemeteries Society at 250-598-8870 and leave a message. At least one day's notice is preferred. If you already know the plot number, cemetery staff or our hosts can show you the location. People looking for specific graves are always advised to call ahead to ensure that staff or a host can help you.

Who Looks After the Cemetery: Ross Bay Cemetery is owned, maintained and managed by the City of Victoria. City staff mows the lawns and keeps the 27.5 acres of the cemetery in good condition.

The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria: The Old Cemeteries Society is a registered non-profit, charitable society that can receive donations and issue receipts for income tax. Our goals are to encourage the research, preservation and appreciation of Victoria's 20 heritage cemeteries. Our members are involved in many volunteer activities, mainly at Ross Bay Cemetery. Cataloguing, cleaning and restoring monuments, computerizing burial records, conducting historical research and giving tours are our main activities. We give dozens of tours to schools each year and encourage young and old alike to respect the cemeteries in our community.

Share Your Information: If you have information about or photographs of people buried at Ross Bay Cemetery or other Victoria cemeteries, please let us know. The Old Cemeteries Society maintains an active list of descendants of families buried at Ross Bay Cemetery and is always looking for new information for our tours. The Victoria City Archives is the best repository for historical information about Ross Bay families.

Become a Member: The Old Cemeteries Society welcomes new members. Membership information is available every Sunday on our weekly tours or by visiting our website, calling us at 250-598-8870, or emailing us at oldcemvictoria@gmail.com.

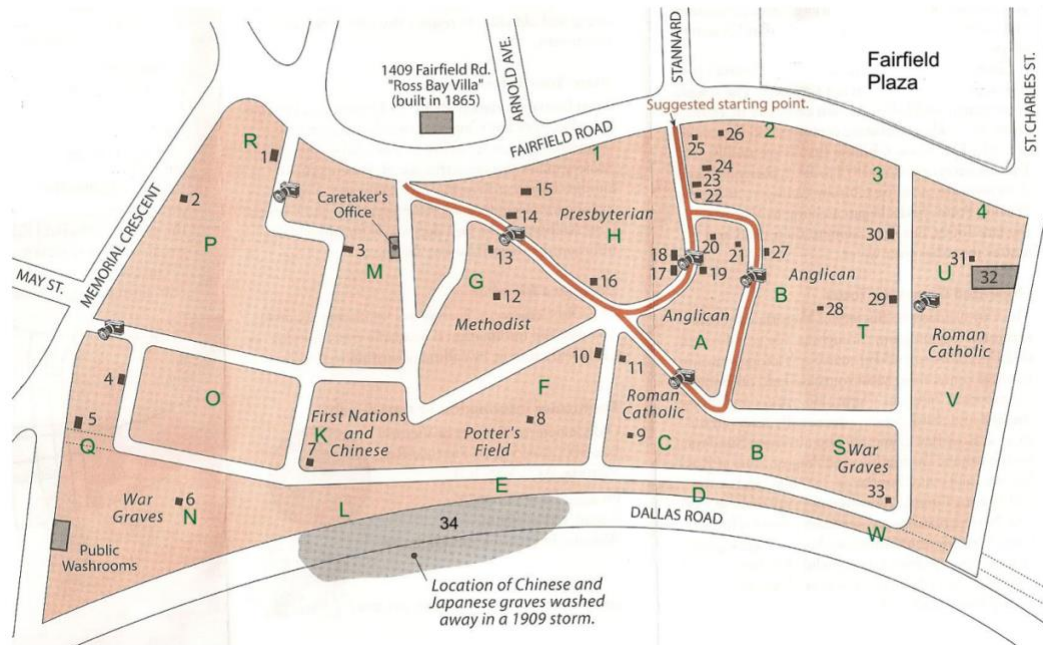
For Further Information or Tour Details

Visit our website at www.oldcem.bc.ca; email us at oldcemvictoria@gmail.com; call us at 250-598-8870; or write to us at The Old Cemeteries Society, Box 50004, #15-1594 Fairfield Rd., Victoria BC V8S 1G1

What's at the Cemetery: If you want to experience the charm of one of Victoria's most historic places and enjoy a quiet stroll along tree-lined avenues, don't miss Ross Bay Cemetery. It is like a visit to an outdoor sculpture garden, a walk in the park and a page from history rolled into one. Many famous Canadians and Americans are buried there, including Sir James Douglas (BC's first governor), Emily Carr (world-famous artist), Billy Barker (discoverer of gold at Barkerville) and Nellie Cashman (the 'Miners' Angel' who was featured on a US postage stamp). The unique fire hat marker, the tombstone with the poem written by a Black pioneer, the Japanese memorial and the Cross of Sacrifice are just a few of the other landmarks to see.

How to Get There: Ross Bay Cemetery is only a 10-minute drive from downtown Victoria or a pleasant 40-minute walk through quiet neighbourhoods or along the oceanfront pathway. The # 3 and # 7 busses stop on Douglas Street downtown and beside the cemetery along Fairfield Road. Vehicles can enter the cemetery only on weekdays, but parking is easily available on nearby streets or at the Fairfield Plaza (1516 Fairfield Road). Enter on foot through any one of several gates, but the Memorial Gate entrance opposite the corner of Fairfield Road and Stannard Avenue takes you to the oldest section. The cemetery is open to the public every day of the year during daylight hours.

MAP OF ROSS BAY CEMETERY (WITH SUGGESTED TOUR ROUTE AND SITES OF INTEREST)



Sites of Interest (see corresponding number on map). Letters/numbers in green denote Blocks (sections of cemetery)

1. Rithet family mausoleum – Owners of Hawaiian sugar plantations and Victoria's deep-sea docks.
2. Sir Richard McBride – BC Premier (1903-1915)
3. Grant family – Husband and wife seafarers who sailed around the world with their nine children.
4. Wilson family – Victoria Jane Wilson left her fortune to her parrot whose favourite drink was brandy.
5. Spencer family obelisk – Founders of Spencer's Department Stores (purchased by Eaton's in 1948)
6. Lorne Lewis – Pioneer Black policeman in 1858.
7. Kakehashi monument – Honours the 150 Japanese people buried in Ross Bay Cemetery (Kakehashi means bridge)
8. Billy Barker – He discovered gold at Barkerville in 1862 but died in poverty in 1894 in Victoria.
9. Isabella Ross – BC's first registered female landowner, once owned most of what is now Ross Bay Cemetery.
10. Carlo Bossi – Beautiful monument with carved marble portraits and flowers, designed by his wife.
11. Fee family obelisk – David Fee was assassinated by a Fenian gunman on Christmas Eve at St. Andrews Cathedral.
12. John Tod – Hudson's Bay Company chief trader was Victoria's first retiree.
13. Maria Grant bench – Women's suffragist and Women's Christian Temperance Union member.
14. Dr. Jim Helmcken – His boyhood home beside the Royal BC Museum is BC's oldest house.
15. Emily Carr – One of Canada's most famous artists and authors. Ross Bay's most visited grave.
16. Sir James and Lady Douglas – He was Vancouver Island's second governor (1851-1864) and BC's first (1858-1864)
17. Hon. John Robson – BC Premier (1889-1892)
18. Dunsmuir family – Coal barons, builders of Craigdarroch Castle.
19. Wood family statue – Fine marble carving of a girl by George Kirsop of Victoria.
20. Rebecca Gibbs – Black poet of Barkerville was born in Philadelphia.

21. Hon. Amor de Cosmos – Founder of Colonist newspaper in 1858. His name means ‘lover of the universe’
22. Mary Laetitia Pearse – First burial at Ross Bay Cemetery, December 1872.
23. Mackenzie family mausoleum – Founders of Craigflower Farm in 1853.
24. O’Reilly family – Peter O’Reilly was a judge and owner of Point Ellice House.
25. Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie – Chief Justice of BC (1858-1894). Was known as ‘the hanging judge’
26. Hon. John Hamilton Gray – Canada’s only Father of Confederation buried in Western Canada.
27. Pemberton family obelisk – Joseph Pemberton was colonial surveyor of Vancouver Island in 1851.
28. Fire helmet tombstone – Fireman Fred Medley was killed on duty in 1925.
29. Harry Helmcken mausoleum – Architecture of ancient Egypt inspired this granite building.
30. Pooley family angel – A full-sized angel with spreading wings is said to give comfort to the lovelorn. Two Pooley men were Attorneys General.
31. Nellie Cashman – Irish born Nellie became the ‘Miners’ Angel’ in frontier mining towns. She was featured on a US postage stamp.
32. Sisters of St. Ann – Pioneer teachers and nurses in BC and Alaska came from Quebec in 1858.
33. Cross of Sacrifice – World War I memorial designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, erected by the Imperial War Graves Commission.
34. Location of Chinese and Japanese graves washed away in a 1909 storm.