



January – February 2025

Happy New Year!

President Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

The beginning of a new year is always an exciting time of planning events and anticipating activities. The Old Cemeteries Society is looking forward to a year with lots on the go. As always, we'll have our weekly tour program every Sunday at 2 pm, starting on February 16 with a new tour from John Adams. And once again, we will be organizing several cleaning bees in Ross Bay Cemetery during the summer.



We will also be undertaking fundraising for a major restoration project. In the last issue of *Stone Cuttings*, I introduced the story of Edna Farnsworth; she had an intriguing story with a sad end and has a unique marker in need of work. We'll be sending out a special request for contributions to this project.

Besides in-cemetery work, we'll be carrying on with outreach activities at various heritage-related events around town. Please check [our Facebook page](#) for ongoing notices of our own activities and those of other heritage and history organizations. (And check out our first Facebook Reel, at left, featuring great photos from 2024.)

Of course, all our activities depend on the participation of volunteers. Whether it's selling tickets at tours, leading a tour, scrubbing at a cleaning bee, patrolling at Halloween or doing any of the many other tasks an organization like ours needs doing, we're grateful for the dedication of our volunteers.

Just one more note: it's membership renewal time. We depend on our memberships to help keep us going. Please visit the [membership page on our website](#).

I'm looking forward to seeing many of you in the coming year.

Ghost Tour and Halloween Patrols

Diana Pedersen



The annual OCS Ghost Tour on October 27 was another success despite less-than-ideal weather. Light showers began half an hour into the tour, causing some people to take refuge under trees, but the heavy rain held off until the end. This squelched an attempt to sell copies of our publications at a display table as people were leaving the cemetery, but everything else went according to plan. The arrivals were greeted by four efficient ticket-sellers—**Gudrun Leys**, **Amber Woods**, **Shirley Waldon**, and **Diana Croteau**. Shirley did the final tally: 11 members and 194 non-members purchased tickets for a total of 205 attendees and \$992 from ticket sales.

The attendees were sorted into nine groups of 20-25 and led off to their starting places on the circuit created by tour coordinator **John Adams**. The storytellers were **Glenn Perlstrom** (Helmcken House ghosts); **Tom Pound** (Lady Douglas's watch); **Kate Humble** (David Fee's ghost); **John Adams** (Isabella Ross's ghost); **Brynne Croy** (Barkerville Death's Head); **Asher Bessant** (Bastion Square hangings); **Jason Stevens** (Point Ellice Bridge disaster); **Fiona McVeigh** (Yow Gum and Chan); and **Emily Butler** (Robert Service at the Bard and Banker).

The valiant **Ken Sudhues** stood alone in the centre of the circuit with an air horn, timer, and earplugs, sounding the pre-arranged signals to keep the groups at each stop for five minutes before moving promptly to the next story. **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** and **Larissa Ciupka** served as spotters, helping to keep things moving with military precision. The tour started just after 2 pm and ended on time, sixty-five minutes later; it was pouring rain but everyone was smiling.



Moments from the Ghost Tour (before the rain)

Photos by Diana Pedersen



Friday night, it was raining heavily and the volunteers met only four people. The sodden patrols returning to the warmth of the office reported that the cemetery was completely dead; the second shift went home early.

All the visitors were courteous when OCS volunteers explained their mission to protect the cemetery. Everyone professed ignorance of a City by-law prohibiting night-time visits. The visitors had failed to notice several inconspicuous signs at the corners of the cemetery, mounted well above eye level on very tall metal posts; there are no such signs at the Memorial Gate. The **Ross Bay Cemetery Bylaw** (Part 7—General Regulations) prohibits entering or remaining in the cemetery between one hour after sunset and one hour before sunrise. It also prohibits removing or damaging any structure in the cemetery, causing a nuisance, or behaving “in an indiscreet or unseemly manner.” Curious OCS members can study the 25-page Bylaw No. 10-046 [here](#).

Photo credits: Above, Ross Bay Cemetery's Pooley Angel, Halloween 2024, photo by Rowan Walker Fustukian; below, sign facing Fairfield Road, photo by Diana Pedersen.

The spooky season at Ross Bay Cemetery continued on Thursday, October 31, and Friday, November 1, when groups of volunteers, enlisted by OCS President **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, patrolled the cemetery in two shifts each night—8 to 10 pm and 10 pm to midnight. This OCS tradition was initiated in the 1980s to protect the cemetery from seasonally inspired vandalism. We had permission from City Parks to use the caretakers' heated office. **John Azar** held the fort, debriefed the patrols, and supervised refreshments.

The volunteers, with flashlights and reflective vests, set off into the night in small groups. Their assignment was to seek out unauthorized persons in the cemetery, identify themselves as friendly volunteers from the OCS, and politely point the intruders to the nearest exit. The early shift on Thursday encountered an astonishing 100 people who had decided to spend their Halloween evening exploring the cemetery; only six turned up during the second shift. On



Around Town

In 2024, [Craigdarroch Castle](#) discovered something long familiar to the OCS—the fundraising potential in the seasonal public appetite for the spooky as the days grow shorter. A successful new after-hours tour, **Curiosities of Craigdarroch**, was offered in October and November. This tour highlighted the Victorian fascination with death, mourning, spiritualism, and ghosts; it included [some Dunsmuir stories](#) that have been told on OCS tours at Ross Bay Cemetery. If you missed the Curiosities tour or can't manage the imposing central staircase, Victoria's castle has attracted the attention of travel vloggers. Check out [Craigdarroch Castle](#) (8:18) from Take Time to Travel and [Haunted Victoria: Ghosts of Craigdarroch Castle](#) (6:33) from Exit Thru the Giftshop.



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[Mountain View Cemetery](#) (106 acres) has been owned and operated by the City of Vancouver since 1886—it's also Vancouver's only cemetery, containing the remains of more than 150,000 people. There is no more room for casket burials; earlier this year, the City announced [plans to build above-ground columbariums](#), creating 6,000 new spaces for cremated remains as part of a master plan to recoup maintenance costs. In November, the City [announced a six-percent fee increase](#), effective January 1, 2025, to cover rising costs for staff, ocean freight, and granite. Also in November came the sad news that after twenty years, the founders and organizers of [All Souls at Mountain View Cemetery](#)—the annual artist-led, non-denominational community event to honour the dead—are bowing out. [The cemetery will be reviewing its support and the future of the event is uncertain.](#)

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On October 1, the temporary exhibit space in Fan Tan Alley, opened in 2021, [became a permanent museum](#) and has been re-named the [Victoria Chinatown Museum](#). The Victoria Chinatown Museum Society, whose Board of Directors includes OCS Past President **John Adams**, has taken over from the Chinese Canadian Museum Society, based in Vancouver. This change will shift the museum's emphasis to the history of the Chinese people who came to Canada through Victoria—a story told by John Adams in [Chinese Victoria: A Long and Difficult Journey](#) (2023).



An Excursion to Ross Bay Cemetery

Heidi Pringle

Editor's Note: Adapted with permission from an article that appeared in the December issue of *Happenings*, the newsletter of the Gallery Associates—the fundraising volunteers of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

October 30, 2024. 10:30 am. It was a wet, windy, dark, and chilly fall day—the day before All Hallows' Eve, perfect for a presentation on the art and lives of nine Victorian women artists buried in the sacred grounds of Ross Bay Cemetery on Fairfield Road. These were women who lived in a time when death could come at any moment. A time of spiritualism and superstition.

Twenty-five intrepid souls from the [Gallery Associates](#), wrapped in jackets, hats, gloves, and, I hear, even wearing long johns, descended upon Ross Bay Cemetery to hear **Larissa Ciupka** talk about the lives of some of the women artists buried throughout the cemetery grounds. This was an impressive performance of art, history, and gossip, presented within the context of the challenges for women in those times.

Yes, the day was wet, with wind warnings, and the noise of sirens and garbage trucks filled Fairfield Road. But Larissa rose to the challenge, clinging tightly to her paper notes, as the wind threatened to whip them away. Her voice rose to counter the bangs and clangs and gusts of wind clamouring for attention.

The tour began with a short but interesting talk by **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, current President of the Old Cemeteries Society. She spoke of the history of the Ross Bay Cemetery, from its first burial in 1872 until the present day. Did you know that the cemetery occupies 27.5 acres? Or that before 1911 bodies were at risk of being washed out to sea during storms? Or that the first trees weren't planted until the 1930s?

The artists discussed included photography innovator Hannah Maynard, Sophie Pemberton (memorialized on the family monument as S.T. Deane-Drummond), miniaturist and advertising firm co-owner Mary Bampfylde Daniell (represented by the grave of her 21-year-old son who died by drowning), Maude Lettice (represented by the grave of her parents), Louise Loveland, Gwladys Woodward, Sarah Lindley Crease (later Lady Crease), Emily Woods (Emily Carr's first art teacher), and, of course, Emily Carr, whose grave is Ross Bay Cemetery's most visited.



Left to right: OCS President Yvonne Van Ruskenveld, Gallery Associate Marianne Bianco, and tour leader Larissa Ciupka at the Pemberton family plot in Ross Bay Cemetery. Photo by Marilyn Denton.

Ross Bay Cemetery Then and Now

Diana Pedersen

Recently, while I was browsing the online images held by the [City of Victoria Archives](#), I noticed an undated photograph of the “Evans family at grave in Ross Bay Cemetery.” My grandmother’s maiden name was Evans and I wondered if this family might have been Welsh. I wondered about this funeral and the unusually large mound of floral tributes. Who were the grieving family members in the photograph and who had died? I recognized two Ross Bay landmarks—the Mackenzie Mausoleum and the Bossi Angel—and I wondered how the grave and the cemetery might appear from the same vantage point today. As so often happens with cemetery research, one thing led to another and a remarkable story emerged.

This large family plot (H88/89/90 E24) in the Presbyterian section of the cemetery was purchased by prominent municipal contractor, Hugh Macdonald, who arrived in Victoria from Nova Scotia with his wife, Rusha, in 1879. Seven of their eight adult children are buried with them in this grave. In 1898, forty-five-year-old Rusha was the first family member to be interred in the Macdonald plot; she was the “Mother” memorialized in red granite.



In 1908, Hugh and Rusha’s sixth child, Annie, married Arthur Wellesley Evans, whose Welsh parents had emigrated to California, where he was born, and then settled in Duncan, where he grew up; the groom was employed as a nurse at the Royal Jubilee Hospital. Arthur and Annie had three children in Victoria: Albie, b. 1908; Lorna, b. 1909; and Muriel, b. 1910. By 1914, the Evans family was living in North Vancouver, where Arthur was employed by a doctor in private practice.



On Saturday evening, November 11, 1916, thirty-one-year-old Mrs. Annie Evans and her seven-year-old daughter Lorna Rusha Evans were drowned in the North Arm of the Fraser River in [one of Vancouver’s worst transit accidents](#). The driver of a jitney car carrying eleven passengers across the Fraser Street Bridge failed to respond in time to the

Photo credits: Above, Image M07910 courtesy of City of Victoria Archives, photographer unknown; below, attendees gather for the annual OCS Christmas tour at RBC, December 8, 2024, photo by Diana Pedersen.

light indicating that the swing bridge was in the open position. The speeding car crashed through a flimsy gate, skidding into eighteen feet of water. Nine people died; six-year-old Muriel Evans was one of the three who were rescued. Hugh Macdonald rushed to Vancouver to escort the bodies of his daughter and granddaughter back to Victoria for burial in the family plot at Ross Bay Cemetery. A large double funeral was held on November 16 from the Macdonald home on Pandora Avenue; the newspaper reported that the two caskets were covered with a mass of flowers. Annie and Lorna Evans were buried beside the family matriarch, Rusha Macdonald.

The photograph at Ross Bay Cemetery must have been taken after the burial of Annie and Lorna, on November 16, 1916, probably for the benefit of distant relatives who were unable to



Vancouver, Daily Province, November 13, 1916, p. 11.

attend the funeral. Standing beside the new grave are Arthur Wellesley Evans and his two remaining children, Arthur Elbert "Albie" and Muriel. Annie's name is inscribed on one side of the red granite monument, along with six of her siblings. In recent years, a small plaque has been attached to the curbing to memorialize "Lorna Evans 1909-1916."

Hugh Macdonald and Arthur Wellesley Evans both remarried. The stories of Rusha Macdonald and Annie Evans will be told at a new OCS tour, **The First Wives Club**, on June 15, 2025.

News from St. Luke's Cemetery

The [historic cemetery of St. Luke Cedar Hill Anglican Church](#), sometimes the site of OCS Sunday tours, is maintained by active volunteers who reported a busy fall season in 2024. Twelve volunteers turned out for a [cemetery cleanup](#) on Saturday, October 26, in preparation for Remembrance Day and Veterans' Week. On Thursday, November 7, students from Cedar Hill Middle School attended a [No Stone Left Alone ceremony](#) in the cemetery, leaving poppy rocks on the graves of veterans. On [Fantastic Friday](#), November 8, church volunteers prepared decorations for the church interior and cemetery. On Sunday, November 10, St. Luke's held its annual [Service of Remembrance](#), paying tribute to the veterans buried in the cemetery and placing [remembrance pots](#) with rosemary, a poppy cross, and a Canadian flag on their graves.

The Cemetery Committee maintains a [list of 183 veterans](#) buried at St. Luke's; it includes twenty-two more First World War veterans recently identified by a volunteer who was cleaning markers. Between 2018 and 2021, St. Luke's Cemetery had [four Last Post Fund markers](#) installed on the unmarked graves of veterans; two more applications have been submitted.

On May 4, 2025, when the camas and other spring flowers will be blooming, the OCS will offer a tour of St. Luke's Cemetery led by Barb Prescott and a team of volunteers.

Tour Notes

On October 20, thirty people dressed in rain gear attended **John Adams'** popular seasonal tour, **Spiritualism in Victoria**; the initial heavy showers stopped by the end of the tour. Interest in communication with the dead through mediums and séances spread widely in the aftermath of the American Civil War. Victoria spiritualists formed a close-knit community and, as John noted, were involved in one another's funerals. Photographer Hannah Maynard's deep interest in spiritualism was reflected in some of her experimental photomontages. Anita Bossi's grave was restored by the Old Cemeteries Society in 2021; she [donated the family Ouija board to Craigdarroch Castle](#) where it is now a treasured object.



John at the restored grave of Anita Bossi (right)

Photos by Diana Pedersen



On November 3, twenty-seven people turned back their clocks and assembled on an overcast and damp afternoon at RBC. The OCS and the [Victoria Historical Society](#) collaborated on a new tour—**Dictionary of Canadian Biography (DCB)**; the storytellers were **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld, John Adams, Jack Bryden, and Diana Pedersen**. Scholarly biographical essays on more than seventy “nationally significant” individuals buried at RBC have been published in this essential and [freely available online resource](#). The sampling of graves we visited included those of Jack Bryden's ancestors—[John Bryden](#), [Robert Dunsmuir](#), and [James Dunsmuir](#).



Jack Bryden at the grave of his great-grandparents

Photos by Diana Pedersen

On November 10, thirty-five people attended the annual OCS **Remembrance Day Tour** at the [Veterans Cemetery \(God's Acre\)](#) in Esquimalt. The afternoon was overcast but mild; the tour was accompanied by the crack of golf clubs and a chorus of tree frogs. **John Azar** led the tour, with stories also contributed by **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** and **Catherine Lang**, author of [Embedded](#), who read from her book about her niece who was killed in Afghanistan. Cemetery groundskeeper, **Dean Savich**, told us about [Princess Anne's visit](#) earlier in the year. The historic wooden chapel, a [Recognized Federal Heritage Building](#), has been closed pending the installation of a wheelchair ramp; we were able to go inside for the first time in several years.



Historic chapel with new ramp; Catherine and John (right)

Photos by Diana Pedersen



Every November, the OCS offers an indoor tour as an alternative to the damp and chill of Ross Bay Cemetery. This year, thirty-three people enjoyed a tour of the **Royal Oak Mausoleum**, led by **Lorraine Fracy**, Manager of Client Services at [Royal Oak Burial Park](#). Since its opening in 1996, this beautiful building has been the only community mausoleum on Vancouver Island. Its granite and marble galleries are lined with marble-fronted crypts for coffins and glass-fronted columbariums for cremation niche interment. Both options can be decorated with photographs and other personal tributes and memorabilia according to the tastes of families of many nationalities, making fascinating viewing for visitors. We learned about some local individuals who are “tucked in” at the Mausoleum, and also about the history of crypts and mausoleums, current interment options and prices, and the future of green burials and the funeral industry.



Lorraine fields questions in the Mausoleum (left); decorated crypt (right)

Photos by Diana Pedersen

On December 8, a rare sunny and mild Sunday afternoon brought fifty people to the cemetery for the final tour of the year, the **Ross Bay Christmas Tour**. **John Adams** continued the OCS tradition of a seasonal tour ending with the placement of a wreath at Emily Carr's grave (December 13 being her birthday). As usual, John offered lively stories interwoven with early Victoria history and the history of Ross Bay Cemetery, especially its organization into sections by religion. We heard about some early Christmas celebrations at Fort Victoria, the shooting of David Fee on Christmas Eve, one of the first turkey dinners in Victoria, a Christmas editorial message from Amor de Cosmos—editor of the *British Colonist*, and Emily Carr's recollection of seasonally decorated animal carcasses hanging at Goodacre's Butcher when she was a child. The tour was filmed by **Paul McLellan** (Rogers TV) and **Paul Taylor** (OCS) for Rogers TV, and it aired many times over the holidays. You can find it on the [OCS YouTube Channel](#) (63 min).



Christmas tour with John Adams being filmed for Rogers TV

Photos by Diana Pedersen

Tour Schedule for Jan.–Feb. 2025

There will be no tours in January. Tours are every Sunday at 2:00 PM. Charge: \$5 for non-members; \$2 for members. Cash or e-transfer only. No reservations needed. Rain or shine. Tours at Ross Bay Cemetery (RBC) start at the Memorial Gate on Fairfield Road, opposite the south end of Stannard Avenue. Other tours start where noted.

Feb. 16. RBC. Pastimes in Past Times. Our first tour of the 2025 season coincides with the start of **Heritage Week** in Canada. Heritage BC has chosen “Pastimes in Past Times” as this year’s theme, so the OCS is joining with hundreds of other heritage groups in promoting this intriguing topic. RBC offers many graves linked to people with a wide variety of hobbies and leisure pursuits: music, theatricals, oratory, sailing, fishing, spiritualism, taxidermy, philately, and raising exotic orchids, birds and monkeys. On this new tour, **John Adams** will reveal some of the quirky and mundane pastimes enjoyed by Victorians of a century or more ago.

Feb. 23. RBC. Black History. February is Black History Month in Canada, and every year at this time the OCS partners with the **BC Black History Awareness Society** (BCBHAS) to present stories about many of the Black pioneers buried at Ross Bay Cemetery. Some were famous in their day and played leading roles in Victoria; others were not so well known but were an integral part of the city’s life in the 1800s.

Volunteer Profile: Paul Taylor

Diana Pedersen

Longtime OCS volunteer Paul Taylor is one of those unusual creatures—a lifelong resident of Victoria. He and his wife, Liz Taylor, also an OCS volunteer, met in Grade One at Burnside School; they are usually seen together at OCS Sunday tours and cleaning bees. Paul was elected to the OCS Board as a Member-at-large in 2019 and is the only serving Board member to have professional experience in the funeral industry. A Chartered Professional Accountant (CPA), he spent twenty-five years with McCall Bros., Funeral Directors Ltd., as their Office Manager until he retired in 2012.

Paul combines his commitment to local history, professional interest in cemeteries, and business background in his activities for the OCS. He files the annual CRA return for charitable organizations and assists the Treasurer with the monthly financial reports. He also assisted with the fundraising campaign for the Memorial Gate, serves as co-administrator of [our Facebook page](#), and sometimes helps with ticket sales at the Sunday tours. He is often seen at the tours with his camera, and he filmed the Zoom tours offered by the OCS during the Covid shutdown. Most recently, he helped to film the Ross Bay Christmas Tour for Rogers TV. (Some Zoom tours and the Christmas Tour are still available on [our YouTube Channel](#).)



Paul, accompanied by Liz, recording the Christmas Tour at RBC. Photo by Diana Pedersen.

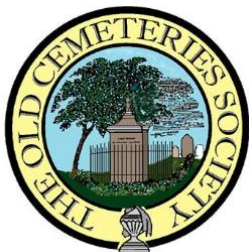
Paul's commitment to cemeteries is also expressed in his eleven years of service on the [Board of Cemetery Trustees of Greater Victoria](#), which operates [Royal Oak Burial Park](#) and [Shady Creek Cemetery](#). He is a volunteer with the [Royal Oak Historical Society](#), which has produced [Royal Oak School Yard](#)—recorded oral history interviews aired on Rogers Community TV. For more than thirty years, he has served on the Board of the [Vintage Car Club of Canada, Victoria Chapter](#). He has also held many volunteer positions supporting the sport of Ten Pin Bowling at all levels, locally and provincially.

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Annual memberships in the Old Cemeteries Society run from January 1 to December 31. Individual \$30, Student \$20, Household \$45. Payments can be made by cheque or e-transfer. To join or renew, see the following page of this newsletter or the [Membership page](#) on the OCS website for more information.

	<p>The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria P.O. Box 50004, RPO Fairfield Plaza Victoria, BC V8S 5L8 tel: 250-598-8870 email: oldcemvictoria@gmail.com website: http://www.oldcem.bc.ca Facebook: https://facebook.com/OldCemeteriesSociety</p>
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It's Membership Renewal Time!

Since the early 1980s, members of the Old Cemeteries Society have protected, preserved, and promoted Greater Victoria's more than twenty heritage cemeteries; most activities centre on Ross Bay Cemetery. Volunteers engage in historical research, lead Sunday walking history tours, conduct school tours, provide assistance to genealogists, catalogue and computerize burial records, combat vandalism, clean graves, and restore damaged monuments. Membership dues, tour admissions, and donations all support the ongoing work of the OCS.

Benefits of OCS membership include email notices of Sunday tours and other events; reduced admission to the Sunday tours; and our newsletter, *Stone Cuttings*, published online six times a year. **Annual memberships run from January 1 to December 31.**

Membership Application

To become a member or to renew your membership, choose one of two payment options. Fill out the form below and mail it with your cheque to the address provided at the top of the page OR send an electronic transfer, labelling it "Membership," to oldcemvictoria@gmail.com.

☐ New membership

☐ Renewal

☐ Individual \$30

☐ Student \$20

☐ Household \$45

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

email: _____ Tel: _____

Donations

The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria is a registered charitable organization and will issue tax receipts for donations over \$10. Any amount will be greatly appreciated.

☐ I would like to support the ongoing work of the OCS. Please specify amount. \$ _____