

2025 Tour Schedule

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. This tour is wheelchair accessible.

Feb. 23. RBC. **A Celebration of Black History in Victoria.** February is Black History Month in Canada, and the OCS partners with the BC Black History Awareness Society (BCBHAS) to present stories about many of the Black pioneers buried at RBC. 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.

March 2. RBC. **A Mysterious Monument.** In a corner of the Methodist section of Ross Bay Cemetery, near the beautiful avenue of plane trees leading to Memorial Crescent, lies a unique monument. The large red granite stone is leaning now; the grave fence is in pieces; and the darkened surface of the marble slab obscures the beautiful image carved into it. It is the grave of a young woman with a fascinating story. Yvonne Van Ruskenveld will reveal the mystery surrounding this lavish monument and burial, and will share the OCS’s plans to restore this distinctive grave marker.

March 9. RBC. **Twisted History – Part 1.** Glenn Perlstrom Jr., excellent storyteller and one of the OCS's original tour leaders at RBC, is returning with another amazing tour compiled from his research files. Don't miss hearing Glenn's unique approach to history and his ability to find some of the more unusual, gruesome and downright bizarre tales from the past. Long-time OCS members still remember his classic tour entitled “Kaboom!” about people who met their end in explosions. This year’s tour will be equally memorable. Glenn will lead another, different Twisted History tour later in the year.

March 16. ON ZOOM. **A Tour of Small Cemeteries Tour (Without Leaving Home).** There are numerous cemeteries on the lower part of Vancouver Island that are not large enough to be part of the Old Cemeteries Society's weekly in-person tour program. Join John Azar on this Zoom tour to some of the small cemeteries that were important to the settler communities of the area. This tour will encourage participants to enjoy these sites on their own outings.

March 23. RBC. **Emily Carr Tour – Part 1.** Emily Carr’s grave is one of the most visited at RBC. Every year, a team of OCS guides visits the graves of many people Emily knew. Emily herself (a.k.a. Molly Raher Newman) will delight us with readings about these people from Emily’s prolific writings. A second, different Emily Carr tour is scheduled later this year.

March 30. RBC. **We Might Have Been the 51st State.** Recent talk about Canada becoming part of the USA is not new. In the late 1860s, there was a considerable movement in Victoria to have BC (or at least Vancouver Island) become part of our southern neighbour. John Adams will visit the graves of many influential people who pushed for annexation after the Civil War. Who were they? What was their motivation? Were they receiving any encouragement from US politicians? Obviously they did not succeed, but could it have happened?

April 6. RBC. **Norman Morison: Victoria's Mayflower.** The Hudson Bay Company-owned ship *Norman Morison* made three voyages (1850, 1851, 1853) from Great Britain to Victoria. The third voyage was the HBC's first attempt to introduce settlers. It included many families who entered five-year indentured commitments to the HBC in return for their own land. As these settlers became the early core of the Capital Region, the *Norman Morison* can be considered our *Mayflower*. Mike Woodcock will take us to the graves and highlight the stories of a number of these early passengers.

April 13. Royal Oak Burial Park. **Life on the Saanich Peninsula and in Sidney-by-the-Sea.** Many folks who have long standing-connections to Sidney are buried in Royal Oak Burial Park. For this week's tour, the OCS has partnered with the Sidney Museum and Archives to learn more about the history of Sidney, the Saanich Peninsula, and the residents who have lived there. Check back here for the meeting location, closer to the date.

April 20. RBC. **The Premiers of Ross Bay Cemetery.** Ross Bay Cemetery is the final resting place of twelve BC premiers. Some of their grave markers are grand and glorious; others are entirely unremarkable. Some premiers are well remembered; others are forgotten. How many Victorians could tell you a single fact about George Walkem or Andrew Elliot, or Robert Beaven? Among other stories, Alan McLeod will explain how it came to pass that a man born William Smith transformed himself into Amor de Cosmos. And why one of the province's greatest electoral victories was won by an unrepentant racist who promised to make BC a white man's province.

April 27. **Chinese Cemetery.** April is the month of Ching Ming, traditional Grave Sweeping Day. For two decades, former city councillor Charlayne Thornton-Joe has provided the fascinating history of this national historic site and recounted the lives of many who are buried here, including her own grandfather. Meet at the Chinese Cemetery, foot of Crescent Road, below King George Terrace.

May 4. **St. Luke's Cemetery.** The rich soil of the Shelbourne Valley enticed farmers, florists and gardeners to settle in the Cedar Hill and Gordon Head areas. St. Luke's picturesque churchyard is the final resting place for many of these pioneer families. Yvonne Van Ruskenveld, Barb Prescott and several descendants of St. Luke's families will join together for this tour. Springtime is the perfect setting for this tour, with the camas and other flowers in bloom. Meet in the parking lot off Cedar Hill Cross Rd. at the corner of Cedar Hill Rd.

May 11. Jewish Cemetery. **Jewish Mothers: No, That's Not a Joke.** In honour of Mother's Day, the focus of this year's tour of the Jewish Cemetery will be on some of the women who were

influencers in their day, and/or whose children made notable contributions in the world. The tour will be led by Amber Woods, author of *Guide to Victoria's Historic Jewish Cemetery*, now in its third printing.

May 18. RBC. **First, Do No Harm: Doctors of Early Victoria.** Pioneer doctor J.S. Helmcken is well known in BC history but many other doctors soon followed him to minister to Victoria's growing population in a slowly developing health care system. On this tour, Yvonne Van Ruskenveld will feature some of these doctors, many of whom, like Dr. Helmcken, went on to become influential members of Victoria and BC society, helping to shape our city and province.

May 25. RBC. **Victoria's Lusitania Riots.** On May 7, 1915, RMS *Lusitania* was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine off the coast of Ireland while sailing from New York to Liverpool. Seven Victoria residents were among the 1,197 people killed in this first-ever wartime attack on a great passenger liner. Victoria was the only North American city to experience anti-German riots in the aftermath. On this 110th anniversary of the events of May 1915, Diana Pedersen will lead this tour, considering their damaging legacy for Victoria and the city's established German community.

June 1. RBC. **Hidden Stories of Trees.** When it opened in 1873, RBC was Victoria's first formal public landscape. It combined features of a park and an arboretum, in keeping with Victorian cemetery ideals. On today's tour, John Adams will explore many varieties of trees. Included will be ones with powerful symbolism to ward off evil, discourage corpses from haunting the living and protect wandering spirits. Others, such as holly and hawthorn, have strong religious connotations. Learn the history of the rare Camperdown elm and why there are no weeping willows in the cemetery (except ones carved on the tombstones). Discover some of RBC's most fascinating features that often get overlooked.

June 8. RBC. **Murder Most Foul — Part 1.** We often look back at the past as a time free of crime, where everyone went about their days in safety. This rosy view will be clouded by today's tour. A team of storytellers will take us to graves of murderers and their victims and tell the grisly tales found in coroners' files, old newspapers and through interviews with family members. As the TV shows say, viewer discretion is advised.

June 15. RBC. **The First Wives Club.** In 1996, the American comedy film, *The First Wives Club*, became a cultural touchstone, confirming the modern stereotype of the first wife as the middle-aged divorcée, dumped by her husband for a younger woman. Divorce was rare in the nineteenth century, when first wives were more likely to be deceased than divorced. This new team tour will introduce some of the many first wives buried at RBC. We will consider their lives and their deaths, as well as arrangements for their final resting places.

June 23. RBC. **Métis Connections.** Métis are First Nations people who have had a European fur trader marry into their Indigenous family. They are one of the three recognized First Peoples in Canada. Today's tour will demystify confusion about the term and visit graves of many Métis buried at RBC and explain their historical importance to the city and the country.

June 29. RBC. **Meet the Mayor(s)! City Fathers Since 1862.** Many of Victoria's early mayors are buried in Ross Bay Cemetery. Mayor Marianne Alto will lead this tour to the graves of some of our earliest mayors, who helped to shape the city we live in today. Their stories reflect the very different times through which our city grew. Today's tour will introduce a new set of mayors, following up from the popular tour of the last couple of years.

July 6. RBC. **Grocery Wars II.** The saga of the shopkeepers continues! Join Larissa Ciupka as she tackles the tales of yet more grocers of early Victoria. Learn about the fascinating people who competed among themselves, married their children to each other, and built fabulous homes, all while keeping the families of this city fed. Special guest Ken Sudhues will spill the tea on the sometimes scandalous story of his great-grandfather, founder of the well-appointed H. Saunders Grocery and Liquor Store. Larissa's *Grocery Wars* tour in 2024 was one of the hits of the season. Don't miss this new exposé of Victoria's lively business scene.

July 13. RBC. **Victoria's History in Songs and Sea Shanties.** Victoria has a long maritime history, and sea shanties would have been part of the experiences of Victoria's sailors. World folk musician Gary Cohen will sing songs of the sea at the graves of some of the mariners. We'll also hear the stories of the fiasco associated with dredging the harbour, the scandal involving one of James and Amelia Douglas's daughters and other historical songs. This tour is wheelchair accessible.

July 20. RBC. **Detecting Queer Lives.** In 19th and early 20th century Victoria, few homosexual people were known, since most kept their sexual orientation hidden and outwardly conformed to societal norms. In trying to detect queer lives from that time, we have varying kinds and strengths of evidence of their existence. Some queer and possibly queer individuals are buried here, while others have connections to family members and associates who are. Tim Fitzthum, transcriber of Peter O'Reilly's diaries, will share this new perspective.

July 27. RBC. **Skeletons from Victoria's Closet.** True tales from a side of Victoria that may surprise you. An OCS team will reveal stories that may shock you with their revelations of the goings-on that expose a less-upright side of Victorian society. These lurid tales were brought to light in the sensational stories of Victoria's newspapers for all to see back in the day. Today, they tell us more about our ancestors' lives than we might have suspected.

Aug. 3. RBC. **On the Streets Where We Live.** On a stroll through Ross Bay Cemetery, you might notice graves with names you recognize from streets all over Greater Victoria. Who were these people and why did they deserve to have a street named after them? An OCS team will reveal the origins of the names of streets, roads and avenues you may know and have wondered about. This tour is wheelchair accessible.

Aug. 10. RBC. **Annual Obon Ceremony.** This is the Japanese Buddhist Day of the Dead when graves are cleaned, incense is lit and prayers are said. The ceremony will be at the Kakehashi

Monument in the southwest corner of RBC, near the corner of Memorial Cres. and Dallas Rd. The public are invited to the ceremony that takes the place of a tour today.

Aug. 17. RBC. **A Lasting Legacy— Educators Who Made a Difference.** Join us as retired teacher Nancy Kostyrka honours the lives and legacies of teachers who left a lasting impact on generations of students in Victoria and beyond. You will hear stories of pioneers who taught in one-room schoolhouses, teachers who bravely and creatively met the needs of students in a changing and growing society, visionaries who contributed to the development of Victoria's modern school system. This tour offers a blend of history, inspiration, and remembrance, perfect for history buffs, educators, and anyone curious about the lives behind the lessons.

Aug. 24. RBC. **Emily Carr Tour – Part 2.** This is the second of our tours about Emily Carr, whose grave is one of the most visited at RBC. Join our team of OCS guides and Emily herself (a.k.a. Molly Raher Newman) to visit the graves of many people Emily knew and wrote about in *The Book of Small* and her other writings. Today's tour is different from the one earlier this year.

Aug. 31. RBC. **Making Their Mark: Notable Women Artists.** Surrounded by breathtaking scenery, Victoria inspired many creatives, from big names like Emily Carr and Sophie Pemberton to lesser-known amateur painters. On this tour, Larissa Ciupka explores the lives, loves, laughs, and losses of several women artists active in watercolours, oils, photography, and other mediums. And speaking of mediums (see what we did there?!), we'll begin and end the tour with two artists who also dabbled in spiritualism.

Sept. 7. RBC. **Murder Most Foul – Part 2.** Back again by popular demand, an OCS team takes us to graves of murderers and their victims and tells the grisly tales we have found in coroners' files, old newspapers and through interviews with family members. This tour will include different stories from the tour earlier this year.

Sept. 14. RBC. **The YMCA and YWCA Come to Victoria.** For this year's 150th anniversary of the YMCA-YWCA of Vancouver Island, Diana Pedersen will lead this tour commemorating the arrival of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Victoria and their first fifty years of operations (1875-1925). We will visit the graves of founders and early supporters of these two separate organizations to learn about public appeals and building campaigns, and about programs and services for the young men and young women of the city in times of peace and war.

Sept. 21. St. Mary's Cemetery, Metchosin. **A Local's Guide to St. Mary's Pioneer Cemetery.** Ken Sudhues, raised in Metchosin, leads this tour in the beautiful and historic cemetery of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin. St. Mary's holds virtually all the pioneer settlers of the region and those that followed them to the place of stinking fish (the local Indigenous name). Some names we encounter will be familiar to anyone who visits local beaches. We'll also meet the world's first Boy Scout, a famous bounty hunter, a Boer War veteran, and servers of cream teas, all of whom Ken knew. The cemetery is quite small and flat, so those with mobility issues should be

able to navigate most of it well, though caution is always advised. Location: 4354 Metchosin Rd. Ample angle parking in front of the church.

Sept. 28. RBC. ***A Day of Signs and Wonders***. Today's tour title is the name of award-winning author Kit Pearson's novel about the fictitious meeting between Emily Carr and Kathleen O'Reilly on a beach one day in 1881, a day in which a comet appears. Kit is a frequent tour leader at RBC and is the author of many novels for young readers.

Oct. 5. RBC. **Twisted History — Part 2**. Earlier this year, Glenn Perlstrom Jr. regaled us with strange stories about some of Ross Bay Cemetery's long-time "residents." Today he has more tales that are head turning, and sometimes stomach churning – yet all true! There are lots of ways to learn history and the best way is telling it with stories that include the good, the bad, and the ugly. This tour will leave you with conversation pieces.

Oct. 12. RBC. **Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?** On this Thanksgiving weekend, Yvonne Van Ruskenveld has decided to celebrate Canada's Women's History Month with an imaginary dinner party. The invitees are a select group of women, buried in Ross Bay Cemetery, who can give us a window into the past, a view of what it was like to be a woman in early Victoria. They come from all of Victoria's social strata — from poor to rich. No necromancy is involved — just engaging stories from Victoria's past.

Oct. 19. RBC. **Spiritualism in Victoria**. From small beginnings in rural New York State in the 1840s, spiritualism went viral. By the 1860s, it was all the rage in Victoria and other places across the continent. Even Abraham Lincoln is said to have participated in seances at the White House. John Adams will talk about its main proponents here in Victoria, many of whom are buried at RBC, and what they experienced during their seances.

Oct. 26. RBC. **Annual Ghost Tour**. One of the OCS's most popular annual tours is based on ghost stories linked to people buried at RBC. On some of the graves, the occupants might even seem to come to life and tell their tales. Extra guides will be on hand for large numbers.

Nov. 2. RBC. **The Church Schism**. 150 years ago the Anglican church in Victoria experienced a major dispute over religious doctrine. It resulted in Edward Cridge, dean of Christ Church Cathedral, breaking away from the Anglicans and joining the Reformed Episcopal Church, based in the USA. He had the support of many prominent citizens in Victoria, including Sir James Douglas, who helped him found the Church of Our Lord in 1875. Today's tour will visit Cridge's grave and those of some of his followers (and a few of his opponents) to examine this amazing chapter in Victoria's history. Today's theme will continue on our Nov. 16 Sunday tour when we will visit the Church of Our Lord.

Nov. 9. Veterans' Cemetery. **Remembrance Day Tour**. At this annual tour at the Esquimalt Veterans' Cemetery (God's Acre), John Azar and guests will share stories of the contributions and sacrifices made by people in the service of our country. Lest we forget. Access off Colville Road near the Base Hospital. This tour is wheelchair accessible.

Nov. 16. **Church of Our Lord.** In 1875 Rev. Edward Cridge broke from the Anglican Church and started the Church of Our Lord, affiliated with the Reformed Episcopal Church. To mark the church's 150th anniversary, our tour today will be inside the church. David Vuckson, church organist and historian, will discuss the church's history, its stained glass windows and the amazing story of the organ. He will end the tour by demonstrating the rich sounds of the organ. Meet at the Church of Our Lord, 626 Blanshard St. at the corner of Humboldt. This tour is wheelchair accessible.

Nov. 23. RBC. **UN International Day for Tolerance.** In 1996 the UN created the International Day for Tolerance. Officially, it was last Sunday but it isn't too late to reflect on its important message. One of its key points is building societies founded on respect for human rights, where fear, distrust and marginalization are supplanted by pluralism, participation and respect for differences. RBC includes many people who did not embody these ideas, but on today's tour we will recognize people from many walks of life who did.

Nov. 30. ON ZOOM. **Vaccines, Vaccine Resistance and the Smallpox Epidemic of 1862.** University of Victoria history professor John Lutz will talk about new research on the smallpox epidemic of 1862, which reveals that, in Victoria, vaccinations were widely available to settlers and First Nations. Vaccination was an unusual procedure in the 1860s, only ever used to combat smallpox, and not universally embraced among the settler population. The practice went against traditional Indigenous beliefs so many First Nations rejected the idea. This presentation looks at vaccine acceptance and hesitancy among First Nations living in and visiting Victoria during the outbreak of 1862.

Dec. 7. **Old Burying Ground Christmas Tour.** John Adams will delight and amaze you with Christmas and holiday stories from Victoria of old. New Christmas tales and old favourites combine with the history of one of Victoria's oldest cemeteries, in use from 1855 to 1873. Meet at the corner of Quadra St. and Rockland Ave.

Dec. 14. RBC. **Ross Bay Christmas Tour.** On this in-person tour in the cemetery, John Adams continues the yuletide theme with more warm-hearted and humorous stories. Themes are different each year, but the final stop on the tour is always Emily Carr's family plot where a holly wreath will be placed, now an annual tradition of the OCS. (Emily's birthday is Dec. 13.)