

May – June 2025

## 2025 Annual General Meeting

Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

The Old Cemeteries Society's AGM took place on a mild spring evening, April 16, at the [Windsor Pavilion](#) in Windsor Park in Oak Bay. We had an excellent turnout of thirty-five attendees. The evening included both the business meeting and a talk by Ben Clinton-Baker, curator of the Wentworth Villa Architectural Heritage Museum.

As usual with AGMs, the main event was the election of officers. However, as main events go, it was straightforward since the nominations were not contested. The OCS Board for 2025 is: president, Yvonne Van Ruskenveld; vice president, Janet McMeekin; treasurer, Gudrun Leys; secretary, Michael Halleran; directors at large: Wilf Bruch, Larissa Ciupka, Diana Pedersen, Ken Sudhues, Paul Taylor, and Amber Woods. Gerry Buydens remains as past president.

Two items of "Other Business" proved to be the highlights of the evening. The first was a brief report about our current major project—the [restoration of the Edna Farnsworth grave](#) in Ross Bay Cemetery. We announced this project on a tour about past OCS projects last June. Wilf, our project manager, obtained an estimate of \$7,000 for the required work, and the OCS Board agreed to commit \$3,500. For the remaining amount, we are relying on fundraising. I was



*Wilf receives his award; Yvonne addresses the AGM*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

able to announce at the AGM that we had raised \$1,585 to date, and I was delighted to announce that an anonymous donor has stepped up and offered to match donations until we reach our goal. Thank you so much to that donor! I encouraged everyone to pick up a postcard of Edna's grave that provided information on the different

ways to donate.

One more item of "Other Business" came as a complete surprise to long-serving Board member, Wilf Bruch. Wilf has been on the Board and managing and doing cleaning and restoration projects, mainly in Ross Bay Cemetery, for over twenty-five years. He is responsible for the beautiful gate at RBC, and he also managed the development of the Ross Bay Cemetery records, leading to their addition to our website, with the help of Leah Freedman. In addition to cleaning and restoration and website enhancement, Wilf



sometimes gives tours and helps out with office tasks, such as replacing the printer. All in all, Wilf Bruch is an outstanding volunteer, so, to honour his many years of service, the OCS has established **The Wilf Bruch Outstanding Volunteer Award**, with Wilf as its first recipient. He is an inspiration! The award will be given annually.

Following that high point, the meeting adjourned for a break while the speaker set up. The break featured a delicious selection of home-baked cookies and squares provided by three Board members: Amber, Diana, and Larissa. Gudrun looked after the coffee and tea.

Ben Clinton-Baker gave a fascinating talk about the photographer Harry Upperton Knight, whose career in Victoria spanned decades from the 1920s through the 1960s. Ben captured the context and influences on Knight, while illustrating his talk with beautiful photos. Knight's work is currently featured at the [Wentworth Villa Architectural Heritage Museum](#) (see page 4). After his talk, Ben kindly stayed on to draw the tickets for the book raffle.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped to make this AGM so enjoyable.

## Around Town



This unmarked grave at Ross Bay Cemetery (H80 E19) is the focus of a special project of the [BC Black History Awareness Society](#), which is now seeking donations for a grave marker for [Sydna Edmonia Robella Francis](#)—"suffragist, abolitionist, devoted daughter, wife, mother, and property owner." Sydna Francis (née Dandridge) was born in Virginia in 1815. She also lived in Buffalo, NY, and Portland, OR, before moving to Vancouver Island in 1860; she died in 1889. Her mother and husband are buried at the Old Burying Ground. The family home, Dandridge House, still stands on Rudlin Street and received a [heritage designation](#) in 2003.





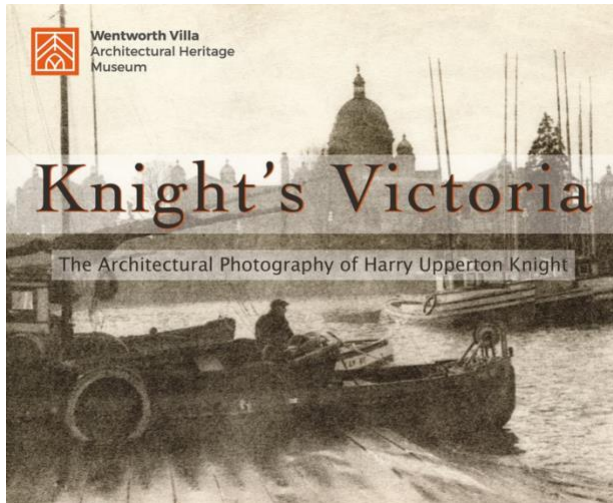
In 2026, the [BC Sports Hall of Fame](#) will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of its founding in Vancouver in 1966. Last year it created the designation of “**Sport Heritage Community**” to recognize BC municipalities “that have consistently put sport first from generation to generation.” The **City of Kamloops**, “Canada’s Tournament Capital,” was first to receive this designation. In March 2025, as reported by the [Greater Victoria Sports Hall of Fame](#) and the [Times Colonist](#), **Greater Victoria** was designated BC’s second “Sport Heritage Community”; this event coincided with the [100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration](#) of the Victoria Cougars’ Stanley Cup victory in 1925. Many people who participated in Greater Victoria’s rich sporting history are buried in our heritage cemeteries. Cemetery theme tours can promote and raise awareness of BC’s sport heritage and culture.



A short video interview on [Ross Bay Cemetery](#) (8:46) with OCS Founding President **John Adams** is a recent addition to the [British Columbia Review Interview Series](#)—an important series of short videos produced over the past year. In his segment, John discusses Ross Bay Cemetery, his books, and his walking tours. The series features the personal reflections of many familiar scholars, journalists, and authors who have contributed to BC public history—Barry Gough, Michael Layland, Wendy Wickwire, Richard Mackie, Kathryn Bridge, Daniel Marshall, Valerie Green, Ben Clinton-Baker, and others.



Since 2023, Victoria’s [Tam Kung Temple](#)—the oldest Chinese temple in Canada and a Chinatown landmark—has been raising funds to preserve and maintain its [deteriorating building](#). In March of this year came the [welcome news](#) that Parks Canada has [designated the temple as a national historic site](#); this recognition has already been granted to [Victoria’s Chinatown](#) (1995) and the [Chinese Cemetery at Harling Point](#) (1994). Parks Canada will provide a plaque for the building but no funding, so the community fundraising campaign will continue. Last year, [a short documentary film, \*Benevolence\*](#), was produced to explain the origins of the Hakka-Chinese people who built the temple and who have been its caretakers. The temple was an important religious centre and a vital community hub, serving as a post office and helping newcomers find homes and write letters. The current building was constructed in 1912 and the temple is on the fourth floor.



A new exhibit at the [Wentworth Villa Architectural Heritage Museum](#)—**Knight's Victoria: The Architectural Photography of Harry Upperton Knight**—will be running through the summer months. The English-born Knight (1873-1973) set up a Victoria studio in 1917 and became one of the city's most celebrated and prolific photographers during the interwar decades. This exhibit showcases his architectural photography. Thousands of Knight's images—capturing the businesses, residences, and portraits of prosperous Victorians, as well as street scenes—are [held at the City of Victoria Archives](#).



Donald Trump's first presidential campaign in 2015-16 sparked a flurry of journalistic interest in the "wild Canadian past of the Trump family" and the origins of the Trump fortune in the Klondike goldrush. (See reports from [CBC](#) and [Maclean's](#).) Grandfather Frederick Trump, a German immigrant, left Seattle for the Klondike in 1898, landing in Bennett, BC, near the Yukon boundary. He ran the successful Arctic Restaurant and Hotel, which served horse meat and offered "rooms for ladies." President Trump's recent interest in annexing Canada has [prompted the Canadian Press to revive the story](#). Did Frederick Trump cross paths with any of the Victorians in our heritage cemeteries who also sought their fortunes in the Klondike?



The second season of CBC's new web series, *Ghosting with Luke Hutchie and Matthew Finlan*, is [now streaming](#). In the first season of this "unscripted paranormal comedy," the two young actor hosts—veterans of horror films—and their celebrity guests visited eight purportedly haunted Ontario historic sites. Four episodes in the second season were filmed outside Ontario—including a [visit to "Canada's most haunted castle,"](#) Victoria's **Craigdarroch Castle**. There are some attractive shots of Victoria with an introduction to Robert and Joan Dunsmuir, and a maid who fell down the central staircase, as possible ghosts. What follows is a camp parody of paranormal investigation, mostly filmed in the dark with a lot of laughter, screaming, and innuendo. Will this series inspire a new generation to visit Canada's historic sites? Decide for yourself.



## Studying Archaeology at the Cemetery

Diana Pedersen

On Friday, February 28—the first warm and sunny day so far this year!—**Professor Erin McGuire** and eleven of her students from the University of Victoria gathered at Ross Bay Cemetery. This two-hour visit was part of the course work for **Anthropology 397: The Archaeology of Death**. To understand what the treatment of the dead can tell us about the living, the students study the funerary practices of different cultures and learn some of the techniques of mortuary archaeology. A heritage cemetery is an excellent place to start.

The visit began with an hour-long tour of the cemetery led by OCS President **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**. This tour included the history, design, and layout of the cemetery and emphasized the graves and monuments rather than the stories of individuals. Some familiar highlights included the Mackenzie Mausoleum; the graves of Mary Laetitia Pearce, Sir James Douglas, and Emily Carr; the Bossi Angel; and the Billy Barker monument. Yvonne explained many of the symbols on the monuments, pointed out some OCS restoration projects, and demonstrated the use of the flat location markers. Professor McGuire revealed how to find the name of the monument maker and discussed at length the various materials used for monument construction, as well as interesting features such as tiling and lead lettering.

After the tour, the students were given a form, adapted from the one used by the OCS to describe and document individual graves and monuments. Pairs of students were assigned a name and grave coordinates—their first task was to find that grave! Then they were to complete the form as well as they could by determining the size of the plot, estimating the number of burials, describing the grave and marker, transcribing any inscriptions, and identifying the types of materials used and their condition. The assignment also included mapping, at a later date, a small section of the cemetery in the immediate vicinity. No grave cleaning was to be undertaken—attending an OCS cleaning bee was recommended for learning proper techniques!



*Professor McGuire, above; Yvonne leads archaeology class tour at RBC*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

## Ching Ming at William Head Cemetery

Diana Pedersen

On Saturday April 5, a beautiful sunny afternoon for a drive, three dozen visitors, including half a dozen familiar faces from the Old Cemeteries Society, arrived at [William Head Institution](#) in Metchosin for a special ceremony at one of Greater Victoria's lesser-known heritage cemeteries. The [William Head Cemetery](#) is located on the grounds of a federal minimum-security correctional facility and so is rarely accessible to the public. The occasion was the first-ever [Ching Ming](#) event to be held at William Head. Also called Tomb-Sweeping Day, this traditional springtime Chinese celebration honouring the ancestors is explained every year by Charlayne Thornton-Joe at the annual OCS tour of the Chinese Cemetery at Harling Point (see page 12). It was a privilege to join others at William Head for this unique event.



Ching Ming at William Head was conceived and organized by Mary Lindsay, who handled the lengthy negotiations with the staff. [Mary's ongoing project](#) is the initiating of Ching Ming practices to honour the members of the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC) who died in Canada. Recruited to perform paid manual labour for the Allied Armies at the Western Front, 80,000 men from Northern China were secretly transported across Canada between 1917 and 1920, passing through William Head Station. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has identified [twenty-six graves of CLC workers](#) at William Head. Mary approached the Old Cemeteries Society when she needed a principal sponsor for her Ching Ming proposal, and the OCS Board readily agreed to assume this responsibility. Also providing support were the [Victoria Canada-China Friendship Association](#) and the [Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC](#). Several local businesses donated flowers, fruit, cake, and candy for the ceremonial offerings and gifts.

William Head approved a maximum of fifty visitors for the event. Attendees were required to pre-register for vetting and to leave all bags, electronics, and other personal possessions in the parking lot; lockers were provided if needed for wallets and car keys. We handed over our jackets to be passed through a scanner, and then we lined up for a brief introduction to a very efficient Labrador Retriever who specialized in detecting narcotics; none were found. Finally, we were shuttled in small groups to the cemetery, a short drive from the visitor parking area, past the attractive cottage-style residences and other buildings. Throughout this process the William Head staff were welcoming and helpful—not at all intimidating.

Before the ceremony, we had time to explore the small cemetery and take in its spectacular rural setting. William Head is a peninsula, surrounded on three sides by water, providing a



breathtaking view of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Mount Baker in the distance. The Institution was in the news last year when [its aging security towers were removed](#) and replaced by less obtrusive camera towers. The grounds, pathways, and cemetery are carefully tended by some of the residents, who also constructed the benches and picnic tables overlooking the water and planted the beds of daffodils in the cemetery. A platform and chairs were in place for the visitors and an orange decorated every Chinese grave. As we explored the site, about three dozen residents arrived and assembled along the fence behind the chairs; each of them had signed up to participate in the event. Resident Canada geese also observed and performed regular flypasts.

The William Head Cemetery dates to the site's late-nineteenth-century [origins as a quarantine station](#)—an isolated location where ships could be docked for medical inspections and the possible quarantining of passengers and crew. Many of the forty-nine graves, marked by simple stone crosses, belong to anonymous seamen. During the First World War commemorations a decade ago, the contributions of the Chinese Labour Corps received long overdue international attention, and the burial sites of CLC workers were identified and recognized as war graves. The CLC memorial at William Head was [unveiled in 2019](#).



The Ching Ming event began with words of welcome from the Warden of William Head Institution, followed by brief remarks from OCS President Yvonne Van Ruskenveld, expressing the society's support. Then came an informative talk from Kim Rempel, former staff librarian and now a volunteer at William Head, about the history of the quarantine station and the Chinese Labour Corps. Mary Lindsay spoke about her lived experience of Ching Ming, beginning with her reluctant participation as a child in an Ontario town with a small Chinese community. As she grew older, she became more interested in the tradition and how it could be maintained at the graves of people who had no living family members left to honour the ancestors. Could others assume that responsibility? After volunteering at the [Victoria Chinatown Museum](#), where she met Charlayne Thornton-Joe, she learned about the CLC graves at William Head. Ching Ming, it seemed, had never been celebrated at this isolated cemetery, and Mary began recruiting others to remedy this omission. As she explained, Ching Ming traditions vary from place to place; 105 years after the last CLC worker was buried at William Head, we would help create new ones.

Finally, Charlayne Thornton-Joe issued instructions, emphasizing the centrality of remembrance, reverence, and respect in the performance of Ching Ming rituals. The ceremony centred around the CLC memorial, where flowers had been placed and joss sticks were burning. Visitors were asked to form a line, pair up with one of the William Head residents, take a



donated pot of primulas, place it on one of the graves decorated with oranges, and bow three times in a show of respect. This interlude provided a brief opportunity for introductions and conversation between visitors and residents. Those who wished to participate were then given a piece of joss paper to be lit and tossed into the ceremonial incinerator, sending a prayer or good thoughts into the universe. The names of the CLC workers known to be buried at William Head were read aloud. In conclusion, everyone faced the memorial and bowed three times.

The departing visitors each received a fortune cookie and a gift bag containing a brochure about the event, an apple and an orange, a small Chinese cake, and several types of Chinese candy—all symbolically significant in the celebration of Ching Ming. Staff, residents, and visitors agreed that the day was a success and expressed hopes that it would be repeated—that this was indeed the beginning of a new tradition at William Head. Visitors left with an appreciation of this rare opportunity to visit a beautiful and tragic site whose history has local, national, and international importance. The OCS delegation was especially pleased to learn that this little-known heritage cemetery is being well maintained and enjoyed as a place for privacy and quiet contemplation by the staff and residents of William Head Institution.



*Clockwise from top left: Memorial to CLC workers, dedicated in 1919; Commonwealth War Graves Commission marker; Yvonne Van Ruskenveld addresses visitors and residents on behalf of the OCS; Mary Lindsay and Charlayne Thornton-Joe before the ceremony. Photos courtesy of William Head Institution.*



## Tour Notes

On an overcast March 2, thirty-five people attended **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**'s new tour on **A Mysterious Monument**—the unique grave of Edna Farnsworth. The OCS is now seeking donations for the restoration of this grave (G31 W8) as a [special project for 2025](#). Edna was a nineteen-year-old sex worker whose suicide in 1889 was covered extensively in Victoria and San Francisco newspapers. Drawing on the research of historians [Linda Eversole](#) and [Patrick Dunae](#), Yvonne set Edna's life and death in Victoria's history as a gold rush supply depot and "sexual emporium"; we visited graves of supporters and opponents of local prostitution. Yvonne explained the unique features of this monument and speculated about who had paid for it.



*Yvonne makes the case for Edna Farnsworth's grave*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*



Daylight savings began on a cold and wet March 9, but twenty-three hardy souls braved the weather for **Glenn Perlstrom**'s tour, **Twisted History, Part 1**—not for the faint of heart. Glenn has long had a fascination with morbid tales and unexpected deaths. He apologized for the gruesome details that were standard fare in nineteenth-century newspaper accounts. The varied causes of death included axe murder, runaway horse-drawn vehicles, smallpox, fishing with dynamite, and, of course, drowning—the leading cause of accidental death in the cemetery.



*Glenn recounts 1892 smallpox deaths, right*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*



On March 30, weak sunshine finally broke through for the forty people attending a timely tour by **John Adams**. **The Annexationists** was retitled **We Might Have Been the 51<sup>st</sup> State** in view of President Trump's recent public musings about annexing Canada. In the late 1860s, the future of the Colony of British Columbia was uncertain. Should it join the distant new Canadian Confederation or the United States? Two petitions supporting American annexation were circulated in Victoria and forwarded to President Ulysses S. Grant, who did not respond. Many of the signatories are buried at Ross Bay Cemetery, including a surprising number of the city's prominent German immigrants who had spent years living in the US before settling in Victoria.



*John explains annexationism in Victoria, right*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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Yet another tour began with heavy rain on April 6; it stopped halfway through. Twenty-five people attended **Mike Woodcock's** new tour, **Norman Morison: Victoria's Mayflower**, inspired by three voyages of this Hudson's Bay Company vessel in the early 1850s. Mike drew on extensive genealogical research and the diaries and memoirs of Scottish immigrants who arrived here as indentured labourers and founded some of Victoria's first settler families; several of their descendants attended the tour. Also mentioned was the grave (T40 W42) of Eliza Norman Morison Wishart (Anderson) Lyall (1852-1926), who was born at sea and named for the ship, the captain, and the captain's wife; Mike hopes that someday this grave will have a special marker.



*Russell family marker, moved from the Old Burying Ground, centre*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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On a sunny and mild April 13, thirty people arrived at [Royal Oak Burial Park](#) (ROBP) for a new tour led by **Charlotte Clar**, Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator at the [Sidney Museum and Archives](#). Many members of early settler families who were prominent in the history of the Saanich Peninsula, including some of the first Black families, are buried at ROBP. Charlotte shared her thorough research and many photographs; her tour referenced well-known features of life on the Saanich Peninsula, including the Saanich Fair, Holy Trinity Church, the Dominion Experimental Farm, Michell's Farm, and the Sandown Racetrack. The lush grass and sometimes steep hillsides at ROBP were covered with daisies. We hope for a follow-up Saanich Peninsula tour at Ross Bay Cemetery where members of the same settler families are also buried.



*Charlotte leads a hillside gathering at ROBP*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*



Easter Sunday, April 20, was a sunny and breezy spring day at Ross Bay Cemetery, where daisies and dandelions, daffodils and shooting stars were blooming in abundance. Twenty-three people attended **Alan McLeod's** new tour on **The Premiers of Ross Bay Cemetery**; RBC, he noted, has "more dead premiers than any other cemetery in BC." We visited twelve graves—a challenging route that took us all over the cemetery. Some of RBC's lesser-known premiers served only a few months; Sir Richard McBride was the second-longest-serving premier after W.A.C. Bennett. Alan offered his entertaining judgments about his subjects' political careers and about their grave markers, which ranged from modest flat stones to the Johnson mausoleum.



*Alan introduces RBC's premiers*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

On a sunny April 27, the early camas was blooming and the **Chinese Cemetery** provided a spectacular setting for **Charlayne Thornton-Joe's** annual tour, this year attended by forty-five people. Charlayne reflected on her long relationship with the OCS and with the cemetery, the latter beginning with visits to her grandfather's grave for Ching Ming when she was a child. She skillfully wove together Victoria history and the racism that led to the present location of the cemetery; elements of Chinese culture including feng shui ("wind-water") and Ching Ming; and a fascinating digression about confusion over Chinese names that causes ongoing difficulties for cemetery researchers. The [Chinese Cemetery](#) closed in 1950 and it is [now a national historic site](#).



*Charlayne explains feng shui, left, and Ching Ming, right*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

## Tour Schedule for May–June 2025

*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.*

**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, 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, including those with powerful symbolism to ward off evil, discourage corpses from haunting the living, and protect wandering spirits. Other trees, 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 those carved on the tombstones).

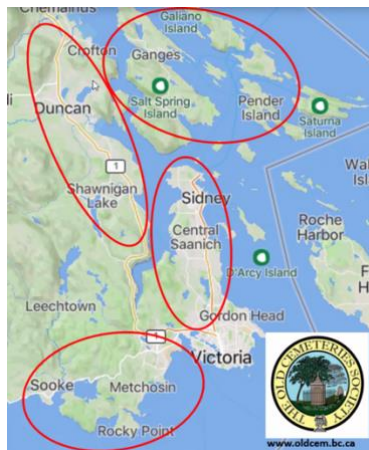
**June 8. RBC. Murder Most Foul—Part 1.** We often look back at the past as a time free of crime, where everyone went about their days in safety. This rosy view will be clouded by today's tour. A team of storytellers will take us to graves of murderers and their victims and tell the grisly tales found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

## OCS Small Cemeteries Zoom Tour

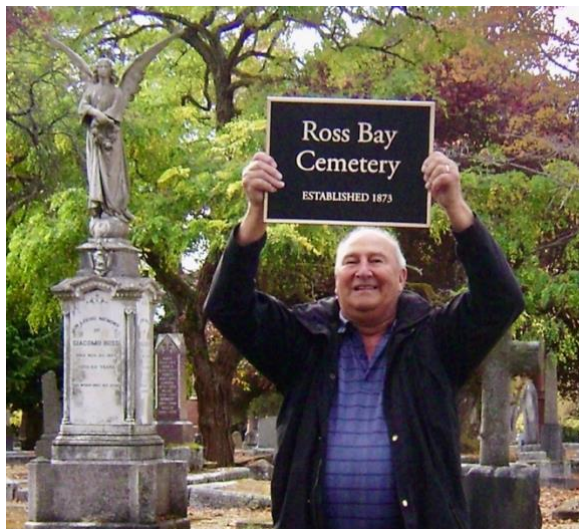


Several times a year, the Old Cemeteries Society offers a Zoom tour instead of an in-person tour at one of our heritage cemeteries. On March 16, thirty-three people met on Zoom to enjoy **John Azar's** PowerPoint presentation on the **Small Cemeteries** of southeastern Vancouver Island. Not included are cemeteries the OCS visits regularly or occasionally, very small family cemeteries, or First Nations cemeteries. The presentation is organized into four sections: **Western Communities, Saanich Peninsula, Gulf Islands, and North of the Malahat.** Enjoy visiting these cemeteries in your own home or plan your own road trips. If you missed it, the OCS Small Cemeteries Zoom tour is now [available on the OCS YouTube channel](#).

## Volunteer Profile: Wilf Bruch

Diana Pedersen

At this year's annual general meeting of the Old Cemeteries Society, Wilf Bruch became the first recipient of our new Outstanding Volunteer Award, named in his honour (see pages 1-2). Wilf has served on the OCS Board for twenty-five years, including two terms as president. He was the driving force behind the [Ross Bay Cemetery Memorial Gate Project](#), commemorating the cemetery's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023. Sunday, October 23, 2022, was a proud day for Wilf when he was able to announce that the sign for the new gate had arrived (see photo). Even the Bossi Angel looked on approvingly; one of Wilf's many repair projects was the reassembly and reattachment of [the angel's broken right wing](#), amputated by a falling tree in 2022. As OCS project manager, Wilf regularly patrols the cemetery looking for evidence of vandalism, broken or leaning monuments, collapsed graves and other hazards, and potential projects for OCS cleaning bees.



Wilf was born in Kelowna but moved to Victoria as a child in 1950; now he disappears from the city for half the year, staying in touch with the OCS by email. After his retirement in 2002, he and his wife embraced the "Snowbird Life"; they have a park model trailer and winter family in Surprise, Arizona. Wilf reflects, "I have done many things in my life ... worked in a plywood mill, restaurant, post office, on a farm for many years, worked for Sears for thirty years, but most of all, I renovated houses and managed properties. The renovations and maintenance of properties taught me the many skills that I use in the cemetery and in projects for the OCS."

Wilf has been deeply involved in [every major OCS restoration project](#) of the last twenty-five years; he believes that the [Row Marker Project](#) has had the greatest impact. He has worked tirelessly to maintain the OCS website and to create a [Ross Bay Cemetery Burial Records Database](#) that is now online—a boon to genealogists. Wilf has given presentations to historical societies and provided advice and assistance—about grave cleaning, maintenance, and special projects—to other heritage cemeteries. He continues to learn and is always willing to share his knowledge and skills with the public and other volunteers.

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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.

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