

September – October 2025

## Vandalism Update

Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

In mid-June, Ross Bay Cemetery suffered its worst vandalism in years. The City of Victoria workers who maintain the cemetery identified twelve damaged markers. These were concentrated in the newer Catholic section (Block U), on the east side of the cemetery, and in the old Catholic section (Block C), in the south-central part of the cemetery. Most of the damaged markers had stone crosses, and some were damaged beyond repair. Among those affected were two of the few original crosses remaining in the section containing the graves of the Sisters of St. Ann. Our project manager **Wilf Bruch**, with the help of **Gregory Ciupka**, has been able to repair all those that could be put back together. Please visit the [Projects and Updates](#) page on our website to see a step-by-step record of repairing one of the markers, along with other photos of the repair effort. Thanks to everyone who helped with identifying and restoring the markers.



*Gregory and Wilf repairing the vandalized Maria Condon monument*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*



## Ross Bay Villa Annual Garden Party



The Old Cemeteries Society is privileged to rent office space (formerly a child's bedroom) in the [Ross Bay Villa Historic House Museum](#), conveniently located across the street from Ross Bay Cemetery. Every summer, Ross Bay Villa is decked out in its finest bunting for its annual garden party, held when the flowerbeds are at their best—especially the spectacular old-fashioned hollyhocks. The public is invited to enjoy music on the lawn, tea, ice cream and cake, and house tours led by costumed volunteers. This year's event on Sunday afternoon, July 13, was attended by several hundred people. As usual, both the [Hallmark Heritage Society](#) and the OCS set up information tables; ours was located beside a large cage of dark [Brahma chickens](#)—a heritage breed owned by the Roscoe family in the 1870s. The OCS table was staffed by longtime volunteer **Linda Richards**, with some assistance from Board members **Ken Sudhues** and **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**. Linda was kept busy fielding visitors' questions about the OCS tour program, Emily Carr's grave, and the recent spate of vandalism at Ross Bay Cemetery.



Yvonne, Linda, and Ken at the OCS table



Photos by Diana Pedersen



## Old Cemeteries Society Garden Party



*OCS members relax on the grounds of Ross Bay Villa*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

This year's annual OCS garden party for members and friends was held at Ross Bay Villa on Sunday, July 20, following the tour. Conditions on the lawn were perfect, offering shelter from the cool breeze that was blowing in the cemetery. Forty people attended, including some longtime members and volunteers who can no longer participate in the tours. The attendees enjoyed the refreshments ordered from Thrifty's: platters of devilled eggs, cheese and crackers, fruit, sandwiches, bars and cookies, and tea and coffee. The arrangements were handled by OCS Board member **Gudrun Leys**, with assistance from our summer contractor **Quinn MacTavish**, and from volunteers **Carol Christensen**, **Clarence Christensen**, **Tom Esakin**, **Ken Sudhues**, and **Grace Walker**. OCS President **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** thanked everyone and gave a brief report about the recent vandalism. The book raffle raised \$94 and we received \$160 in donations.

## Meet Quinn, Our Summer Contractor

Yvonne Van Ruskenveld



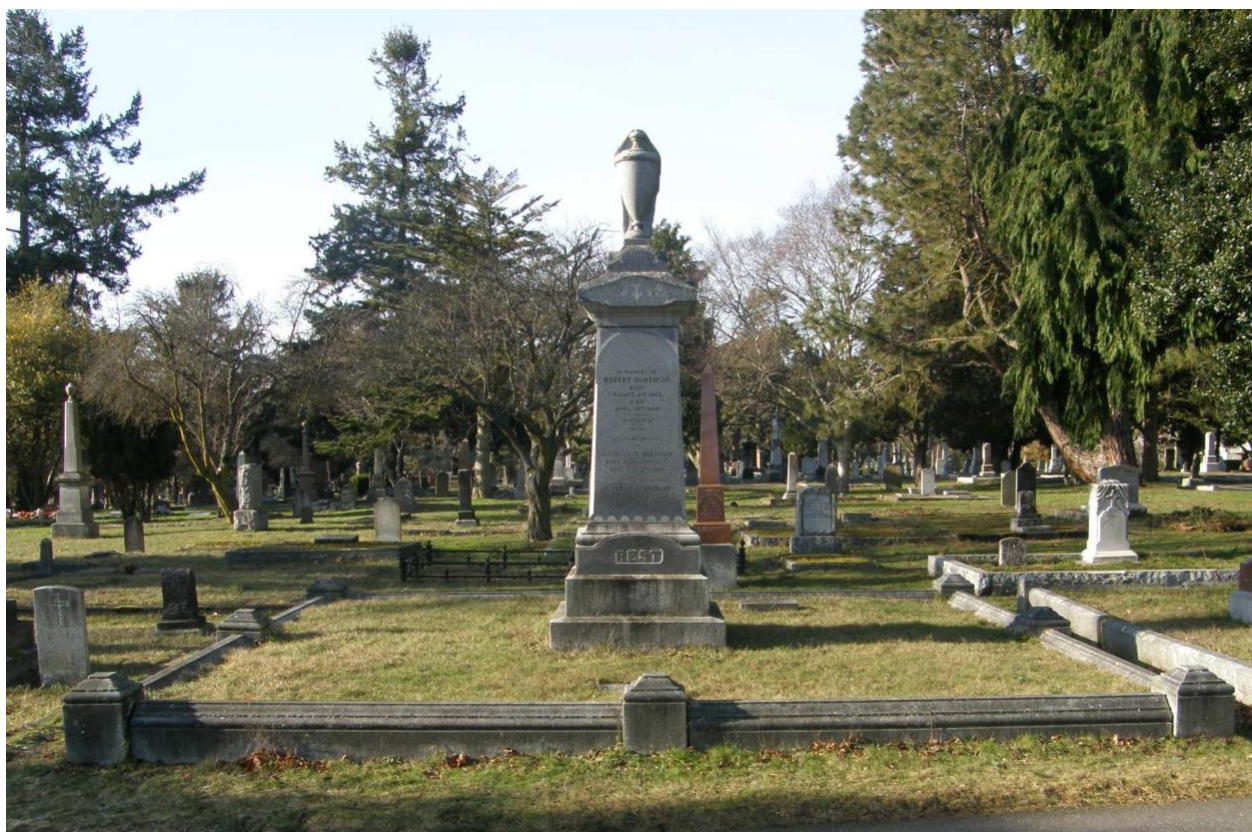
*Quinn MacTavish in costume*

Earlier this year, we looked around the office and realized we needed help. We had a large amount of material waiting to be incorporated into our extensive archives of people buried in Greater Victoria. In a job-sharing arrangement with Ross Bay Villa, we advertised for the position of archives clerk and office assistant and received 160 applications! **Quinn MacTavish** was the successful candidate. Quinn is a graduate of Victoria High School and the University of Victoria (history major). After working with the BC government, he recently completed a Bachelor of Education from Queen's University. Quinn has been an active volunteer in a range of organizations, including the Quadra Village Community Centre and the James Bay Community Project. He also served on the City of Victoria Heritage Advisory Panel. Over the summer, Quinn has made excellent progress. His extensive knowledge of Victoria and BC history has come in handy in sorting out our files and identifying cross-references. Thank you to Quinn for his work.

## A New Look for the Dunsmuir Monument

Diana Pedersen

The large and prominent Dunsmuir family grave—eight plots located on prime real estate near Ross Bay Cemetery’s new Memorial Gate—is a familiar stop on Old Cemeteries Society tours. The Dunsmuir fortune derived from coal and railways; the family was once the wealthiest in the province. Both the founder of the dynasty, [Robert Dunsmuir](#) (1825-1889), and his son, [James Dunsmuir](#) (1851-1920), have qualified for entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. The Hon. James Dunsmuir served as Premier of British Columbia (1900-02) and then as Lieutenant-Governor (1906-09). Two former Dunsmuir family residences—[Craigdarroch Castle](#) and [Hatley Castle](#)—are now National Historic Sites and major Victoria tourist attractions.



The Dunsmuir grave photographed in January 2017

Courtesy of “Betty and Dan,” [findagrave.com](#)

Early this spring, OCS members noticed that cleaning and restoration work were taking place at the Dunsmuir monument, prompting much curiosity about what was happening and who was responsible. In recent decades, the gravesite has been maintained by City Parks workers who keep the grass mowed and patrol the cemetery for debris and hazards. Otherwise, the Dunsmuir monument received no special attention and, despite the evident quality of its construction, it was showing its age. Over the years, the fine granite had darkened, with some patches of staining. The inscriptions had become difficult to read, except in the right light, because most of the original black paint had flaked off, leaving the incised lettering bare. As the ground slowly settled, the curbing tilted outward, leaving gaps between the curbing and the corner posts.

**Bruce Davies** and **Jenny Seeman** from Craigdarroch Castle graciously agreed to meet with me on July 31 at the Dunsmuir monument to discuss its recently completed “make-over.” After



fifty years at Craigdarroch, [Bruce has just retired](#) from his position as Curator. The torch has now passed to Assistant Curator Jenny, who was formerly the Archivist at Royal Roads University, where she was deeply immersed in the history of Hatley Park. These two public historians share a prodigious knowledge of Dunsmuir family history, sites, documentation, and artifacts. They also maintain ongoing contacts with many of the far-flung surviving Dunsmuir descendants. Both appear in a 2016 documentary on the Dunsmuir family saga—*Whatever the Cost: Hatley Park and the Dunsmuir*s—that can be [downloaded from Royal Roads University](#) (185.41 MB).

Bruce and Jenny explained that the recent cleaning and restoration were undertaken as a tribute to a Dunsmuir descendant, [Meredith Jorgensen](#), who died last December. She was the



granddaughter of **Robert William “Robin” Dunsmuir**, eldest son of James Dunsmuir. Jenny noted that Meredith was proud of her connection to the Dunsmuir family and took an active interest in the family history, always attending special events at Hatley and Craigdarroch. After her death, her son contacted Craigdarroch about his plans to fund the cleaning and restoration of the Dunsmuir grave in memory of his mother.

It was agreed, Bruce explained, that the work should wait until the spring and better weather. Then the painstaking repainting of the inscriptions could immediately follow the cleaning of the monument. There would be no interlude to allow the accumulation of new dirt or grit in the lettering. Anticipating his retirement, Bruce wanted to undertake this task himself. Restoring the inscriptions to their original clarity, he said, was something he had wanted to do for fifty years.

First, the entire monument was thoroughly cleaned by [Ravenstone Masonry & Conservation, Inc.](#),

using the gentle technique of steam-cleaning. Next, the eight curb posts were removed, the curbing was straightened, and the posts were put back in place. Any remaining gaps between curbing and posts were sealed with fresh mortar. The iconic Dunsmuir granite column with its elegantly draped urn had remained absolutely level. Ravenstone reported that the base had been placed on such a well-constructed foundation that no straightening was required.

After the steam cleaning, [Stewart Monumental Works Ltd.](#) added two new inscriptions to the monument, commemorating Meredith and her grandfather: **“In Memory of Meredith Dola**

**Jorgensen 1960-2024” and “Robert William Dunsmuir/Born August 21<sup>st</sup> 1877/Died January 26<sup>th</sup> 1929.”** Robin Dunsmuir was originally buried in Singapore in a beautiful cemetery that closed in 1972. Two decades ago, the land was expropriated and all unclaimed human remains were disinterred and cremated. In 2008, Robin’s ashes narrowly missed being scattered at sea. His granddaughter played a part in their rescue and return to Victoria—a remarkable story that will be told in a future issue of *Stone Cuttings*. Meredith would no doubt be pleased to see that an inscription for Robin Dunsmuir has now been added to the family monument.

The final step was the painting of all the inscriptions, which Bruce was able to begin after carefully removing any remaining flecks of paint from the incised lettering. He wore a loupe and



applied two coats of durable black mineral paint, ideal for highlighting engraved lettering on grave markers. In May, many OCS members reported sightings of Bruce at work in the cemetery. He said he appreciated this unique opportunity to experience Ross Bay Cemetery and spend quiet time with the Dunsmuir family.

Coincidentally, this spring saw two small flat markers added to the north side of the Dunsmuir grave by descendants from another branch of the family. These were not part of the restoration project undertaken in memory of Meredith Jorgensen, but they commemorated two women who were known to her. **Laura Mitchell** was Meredith’s aunt (and a daughter of Robin Dunsmuir), and **Dola Boas**, Laura’s daughter, was Meredith’s cousin and, in childhood, her guardian.



Photos by Diana Pedersen: previous page, Bruce Davies, Jenny Seeman, and the two new inscriptions, July 31; top, Bruce painting inscriptions on the freshly cleaned monument, May 23; bottom, two newly installed flat markers.

## Get Ready for the Spooky Season!



If you missed the brief Victoria run of the new documentary film, *Satan Wants You*, in 2023, do take advantage of this opportunity for [free streaming on Knowledge.ca](https://www.knowledge.ca), starting on August 26. The film examines the impact of the now-debunked international bestseller *Michelle Remembers*, published in 1980. Victoria played a starring role in the subsequent moral panic over ritual abuse. Diana Pedersen reviewed the film and its Victoria connections, including those of special interest to OCS members, in “**Ross Bay Cemetery and the Satanic Panic**,” *Stone Cuttings*, Nov.-Dec. 2023, pp. 6-8.



## Tour Notes

On June 29, we finally had a warm summer's day to welcome **Mayor Marianne Alto** to Ross Bay Cemetery at its best. Twenty-eight people attended her tour, **Meet the Mayor(s)! City Fathers Since 1862**. This was the Mayor's third appearance at RBC, and this time she was back with a new set of nine mayors. She thanked OCS President Yvonne Van Ruskenveld for her research on our deceased mayors but, as usual, Mayor Alto skillfully included her own entertaining insights into the workings of City Councils past and present. She congratulated the OCS for its efforts to improve our city. The tour also featured a visit to the grave of Edna Farnsworth where Yvonne presented the results of the OCS's latest restoration project.



*Mayor Alto introduces Mayor Robert Beaven, left*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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*Ken at the Saunders grave, left; Larissa at the Rithet Mausoleum, right*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

July 6 brought another warm summer afternoon for **Larissa Ciupka's** tour, **Grocery Wars II**—a sequel to her popular 2024 tour on grocers of early Victoria; thirty-two people attended. Starting from the Munsie grave near the Memorial Gate, we crossed the top of the cemetery,



ending at the Spencer obelisk, the tallest monument at RBC. We visited the grave of Henry Saunders, where his great-grandson, **Ken Sudhues**, shared research and family lore to tell the story of H. Saunders Grocery and Liquor Store. Larissa highlighted the spread of “groceries” in the inter-war decades, inspired by the success of “cafeterias.” These introduced Victorians to innovative packaging, customer self-service, and “cash and carry” shopping.



*Amber and Gary at the Dunsmuir and Barnard graves*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

On a warm and sunny July 13, we had an impressive turnout of fifty people for a novel musical tour, **Victoria’s History in Songs and Sea Shanties**, offered by world folk musician **Gary Cohen**, accompanied by his partner, **Amber Woods**. The songs addressed familiar themes such as the Fraser River gold rush, salmon canning, dredging the harbour, the Cariboo Road, and the scandalous marriage of the daughter of Sir James Douglas. Many of the attendees sang along with the help of sets of printed lyrics. We visited eight graves, where commentary linking the graves and the songs was provided by **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** and, at the Dunsmuir grave, by **Diana Pedersen**. This was a fully accessible tour that stayed on the paved walkways.



*Tim addressing a large group at the Clay family grave, left*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*



On a pleasant July 20, enthusiastic interest in a new tour, **Detecting Queer Lives**, was evident in the very substantial turnout of seventy people, including many first-timers. The tour was led by **Tim Fitzthum**, volunteer transcriber of the [Peter O'Reilly Diaries](#). He explained the challenges of researching homosexuality in the past, when it was illegal and not publicly discussed, and the types of records that prove most useful for historians (newspapers, court records, diaries). At some familiar family graves—Begbie, O'Reilly, Crease, Dunsmuir, Cameron—we learned how clues in the documents (for example, references to “confirmed bachelors” or “heinous crimes”) can invite a rethinking of the lives of some people associated with those graves.



*Larissa and Yvonne at the Crease and Vigelius graves*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

A beautiful July 27 brought thirty-five people to Ross Bay Cemetery for the OCS's popular long-running tour, **Skeletons from Victoria's Closets**. This year's eight lurid and sensational tales, drawn largely from newspaper accounts, were told by **Larissa Ciupka**, **Diana Pedersen**, **Glenn Perlstrom Jr.**, and **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**. We heard stories of thievery, embezzling, and fraud; failed attempts at faith healing; adultery and divorce; suicide; brothel-keeping; and political corruption. Larissa concluded the tour with her own take on the loss of the Rogers' Chocolates family fortune and a vigorous defense of Leah Rogers, widow of Charles Rogers.



*Glenn, Yvonne, and Kate illuminate our street names*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*



Despite stiff competition from the Symphony Splash and the holiday weekend, thirty people came out on a hazy August 3 for a popular OCS team tour, **On the Streets Where We Live**. The storytellers were **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, **Glenn Perlstrom Jr.**, **Kate Fisher**, and **Diana Pedersen**. At eight stops, we learned about some of Victoria's early prominent residents who had streets named after themselves and their estates—Davie, Langley, Mackenzie, McNeill, Prior, Tatlow, Tolmie, and Work. This was one of our accessible tours so we remained on the paved walkways—but we had to watch out for bicycle tours passing through the cemetery!

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*Nancy at the Margaret Jenkins monument, left*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

On a warm and overcast August 17, twenty-seven people attended former teacher **Nancy Kostyrka**'s well-researched new tour, **A Lasting Legacy—Educators Who Made a Difference**. Nancy explained women's attraction to teaching in both public and private settings—an occupation considered suitably nurturing and “womanly.” We visited some notable graves, including those of Margaret Jenkins, school trustee; Selina Smith, music teacher; Lottie Bowron, rural teachers' welfare officer; and Sister Mary Osithe, art teacher. Nancy described the difficult conditions for teachers in different parts of the province. BC's large and inclusive education system of today, she argued, is built on the foundation laid by these pioneer educators.

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On August 24, Ross Bay Cemetery was a pleasant place to be, as Victoria coped with a late-summer heat wave. Thirty-five people found lots of shade and a fresh breeze off the water. **Emily Carr—Part 2** was the second of our two annual tours devoted to Emily Carr's Victoria and the people who inhabited her world. As usual, **Molly Rahe Newman** (Emily) read stories from Carr's writings in a manner that never fails to engage. The team of storytellers providing context and commentary consisted of (standing left to right) **Ann-Lee Switzer**, **Kate Fisher**, **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, and **Larissa Ciupka**. Highlights included the graves of two other Victoria artists who were Emily Carr's contemporaries—Emily Woods and Josephine Crease. We also visited the Ross family marker at the grave of Mary Lascelles, the Carr family's washerwoman who died of tuberculosis.



## Tour Schedule for September–October 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.*

**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 Road. 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 a fictitious meeting between Emily Carr and Kathleen O'Reilly on a beach one day in 1881, a day on 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 Spiritualism's 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.



## Volunteer Profile: Linda Richards

Diana Pedersen

Linda Richards is one of the Old Cemeteries Society's inspiring longtime volunteers whose face may not be familiar to our newer members. After serving on the Board for fifteen years, she stepped down in 2023 due to mobility issues that make it difficult for her to attend the Sunday tours. She continues to represent the OCS at special events and to respond to queries directed to the office by faraway descendants and genealogists.

Linda confesses to a keen interest in family history and learning about the details of other people's lives, perhaps a product of her own unusual background. Her parents married in Victoria just after the Second World War. When her father inherited a family property in England and discovered that money from the sale could not be taken out of the country, her parents moved to



the Bahamas, still British territory. Linda was born and spent her first five years in Nassau, before the family returned to Victoria and life on a hobby farm in Brentwood.

Linda discovered her interest in local history while volunteering at Craigdarroch Castle in the early 1980s. She learned about the OCS in 2000 and loved the tours so much that she soon became a member and active volunteer. She helped out with the OCS Halloween tours and Ghost Bus Tours, and began assisting Leona Taylor with research at the BC Archives. Now, of course, she can do newspaper, genealogical, and cemetery research on her home computer. She has handled enquiries from all over the world from people who are seeking graves or researching their ancestors at Ross Bay Cemetery. She created a Black Pioneer History Book for reference use in the OCS office.

Linda has also enjoyed attending history-related events at Ross Bay Villa and the Bay Street Armoury, and heritage celebrations such as Esquimalt Buccaneer Days, Saanich Pioneer Days, and BC Black History and Heritage Day. There she can be found at the OCS information table, usually surrounded by large placards that she has created herself. She believes that these question-and-answer encounters with members of the public can take the "scariness" out of Ross Bay Cemetery. They also provide an opportunity to promote OCS tours, school programs, publications, preservation efforts, and anti-vandalism initiatives.



**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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