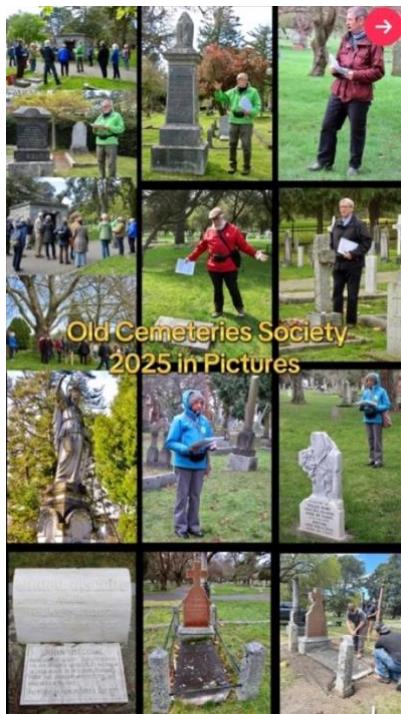


January – February 2026

Quite a Year!

Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

Early in 2025, we began a major fundraising effort to restore the unique and impressive [Edna Farnsworth grave](#). Thanks to your generosity the [restoration work was completed](#) earlier than expected. Later in the year, we installed two new wooden markers on the [Sydna Francis and Eliza Lyall graves](#). A huge thanks to Wilf Bruch for making those markers.



One restoration project we had not planned on was repairing markers vandalized in a widespread [event in June](#). Thanks to Wilf Bruch and Gregory Ciupka for their work in [re-erecting and restoring](#) broken stone markers.

In April, the OCS sponsored a new event at [William Head Cemetery: Ching Ming](#). OCS member Mary Lindsay organized a moving ceremony for the members of the Chinese Labour Corps who died there during World War I. The ceremony will be held again this year in May.

Two new projects in the office are helping us improve access to the information in our files. Quinn MacTavish, our summer contractor, has been working on our archives, while Dakota Farenholtz, a student at the University of Victoria, has begun the huge project of digitizing the files of recorded information on all (or almost all) the graves in Ross Bay Cemetery. Both those projects will continue into the new year.

Throughout the year, our volunteers came through with three cleaning bees, a full tour program, six newsletters, displays at events hosted by other organizations, and Halloween patrols, all of which we look forward to continuing this year.

I want to express my personal thanks to our Board members for their work in supporting the OCS. I am stepping down as president but will continue to be active as past president and tour coordinator (with John Adams). I know it will be another good year for the OCS.

Ghost Tour and Halloween Patrols

Diana Pedersen

The 2025 Old Cemeteries Society Ghost Tour at Ross Bay Cemetery, held on October 26, was surely one of the wettest on record. The forecast was for rain, but as OCS volunteers began arriving just after 1 pm, the overcast sky seemed bright, the temperature was mild, and there was no wind. We were feeling optimistic—but it didn't last. By 1:40, just as large numbers of tour goers were arriving, the heavy rain began in earnest. Doubtless, some people chose to stay home, but Treasurer **Gudrun Leys** reports 175 attendees and \$785.75 in ticket sales. These figures are slightly below the previous year's, but they attest to the popularity of our annual Ghost Tour and the determination of the hardy Victorians who came prepared with umbrellas and rain jackets.

Tour co-ordinator **John**

Adams planned a new route for this year's event, so the starting point was at the entrance by the caretakers' shed, across the street from Ross Bay Villa. Gudrun and helpers **Diana Croteau** and **Shirley Waldon** efficiently greeted the arrivals and sold tickets—in the pouring rain. Their plans to offer new memberships at an end-of-year discount rate and sell some of our publications had to be abandoned. Tour-goers bought their tickets and quickly took shelter under the nearest tree. Marshalling them into groups of about fifteen and leading each group to its starting point on the circuit of ten graves—a task undertaken by John and his grandson, **Oak Adams**—proved challenging; heavy rainfall makes a surprising amount of noise.

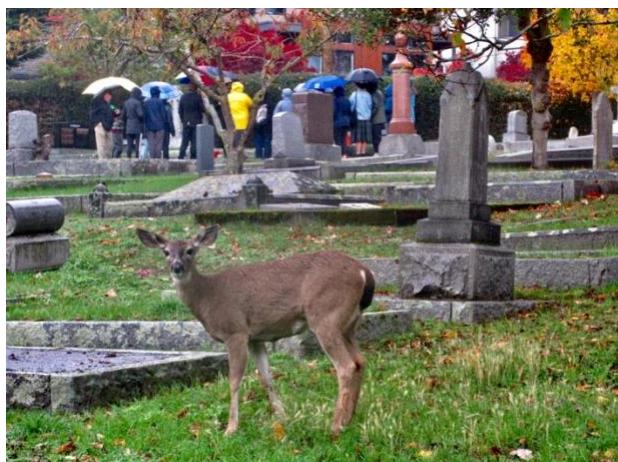
With the sounding of the air horn, the tour got underway at 2:10 pm. John had recruited the storytellers, dressed in spooky black, most of whom had experience with his [Discover the Past Walking Tours](#).

They performed like troopers, each telling a carefully prepared and timed story ten times in rapid succession, in the pouring rain. A few were lucky enough to be stationed under a sheltering tree; most were not. The storytellers were **Kate Humble** (Hatley Castle ghosts); **Jason Stevens** (Point Ellice Bridge disaster); **Emily Butler** (Belle Adams and Charlie Kincaid); **Glenn Perlstrom Jr.** (Hilda Harris' ghost); **Fiona McVeigh** (Michael Williams' ghost); **Brynette Croy** (Pendray family ghosts); **John Adams** (Isabella



Ross and other RBC ghosts); **Jakob Svorkdal** (Parrot House ghosts); **Sheldon Parathundiyil** (Chinese ghosts); and **Asher Bessant** (Taketomo Koreyada's ghost).

At the centre of the circuit, exposed to the drenching rain, timer **Ken Sudhues** sounded the air horn to begin and end the five-minute presentations and signal each group to move to the next stop on the circuit. He was joined by volunteer **Quinn MacTavish** and OCS President **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, who kept watch to ensure that traffic flowed smoothly. The rain continued for the duration, although it did lessen in the last half hour. At 3:20 pm, the air horn sounded for the last time, and groups of bedraggled people headed home, thinking about dry clothes and hot drinks. By 4:00 pm, the rain had stopped, the sky was clearing, and the sun was shining.



Moments from the Ghost Tour

Photos by Diana Pedersen

Halloween patrols at Ross Bay Cemetery have been an OCS tradition since the 1980s. Twenty-three OCS volunteers turned out for the two shifts on Friday night, October 31, and another sixteen took over on Saturday, November 1. Once again, we had permission from City Parks to use the caretakers' shed as a base; **John Azar** held the fort and supervised refreshments. Despite a forecast for heavy rain and wind, both evenings were mild and calm. Our volunteers patrolled the cemetery in pairs or small groups, advising unauthorized visitors that, according to a City by-law, the park is closed after dark. They encountered about sixty people on Friday and forty on Saturday, including a group of cyclists who came to celebrate a birthday in the cemetery. No one had nefarious intentions and, with minimal grumbling, everyone left. Thanks to all the volunteers who showed up to keep the cemetery safe through another spooky season.

Remembrance Day at Ross Bay Cemetery

On the morning of November 11, hundreds of people gathered in the southeast corner of Ross Bay Cemetery for a Remembrance Day ceremony. This annual event is not as well publicized as the ceremonies held at the various municipal cenotaphs in the Greater Victoria region. It is located at the Cross of Sacrifice, adjacent to the Naval Memorial and the neat rows of Commonwealth War Graves. It attracts many families; the cemetery's park-like setting provides lots of room for people to spread out and for children to explore. The 2025 event was held on a mild, sunny, and windless fall day, with the water providing a sparkling backdrop.



Commonwealth war graves, below left; Cross of Sacrifice, right

Photos by Diana Pedersen

The short service at Ross Bay Cemetery was conducted by Naval Warfare Officers from HMCS *Venture*, the Naval Officer Training Centre in Esquimalt. Afterward, service members and the public left their poppies at the Cross of Sacrifice before departing. As people milled about before and after the ceremony, many were evidently seeing the cemetery for the first time, reading the war grave markers with interest and appreciating the spectacular setting.

Earlier this year, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) ceased providing funding to the City for the landscaping of war graves. City Parks is continuing to landscape the narrower strip between the rows of markers. The CWGC will still maintain the grave markers.

Who Made the Dunsmuir Monument?

Diana Pedersen

Author's Note: With thanks to Bruce Davies and Jenny Seeman. The recent cleaning and restoration of the Dunsmuir monument was described in [Stone Cuttings, Sept.-Oct. 2025, pp. 4-6.](#)



The superbly crafted column at the Dunsmuir family grave (H65-68 E27/W28), made from the finest grey granite and topped by an elegantly draped and polished urn, is one of Ross Bay Cemetery's most iconic monuments. It was erected following the death in April 1889 of [Robert Dunsmuir](#)—coal baron, builder of the E&N Railway, and British Columbia's wealthiest industrialist. Robert's wife, Joan, arranged for his lavish funeral and burial services. The records of undertaker Charles Hayward indicate that in June 1889 she paid \$100 for a block of eight burial plots and \$83.50 for construction of a temporary vault with a heavy flagstone cover at the new Dunsmuir grave.

But who was responsible for the magnificent granite column and curbing installed later, after the grave had settled? Some of Ross Bay Cemetery's other large monuments bear the conspicuous “signatures” of skilled local monument makers, but this was not the case with the Dunsmuir column. Over the decades, the identity of its maker was forgotten, only to be fortuitously rediscovered during the monument's recent restoration.

Last spring, [Ravenstone Masonry & Conservation Inc.](#) undertook the cleaning of the granite column and the cleaning and straightening of the surrounding curbing. In May, Bruce Davies, then Curator of [Craigdarroch Castle](#), devoted several weeks to repainting all the inscriptions with black mineral paint as his personal pre-retirement project and tribute to the Dunsmuir family.

One day, as Bruce tells the story, he was redoing the lettering on the flat plaque directly in front of the Dunsmuir column; it identifies the Hon. [James Dunsmuir](#) as the former Premier and Lieutenant Governor of the province. This was a painstaking and awkward task, and Bruce decided to rest his back by lying on the grass. He turned his head toward the monument. At that moment, the front face of the column was bathed in sunshine, and clearly visible on the lowest tier of the base was an inscription he had never noticed before. The etching was so shallow that

it almost disappeared into the rougher texture of the granite base—unless observed at close quarters and with the light striking at exactly the right angle. Very likely, the decades of accumulated grime, now removed, had also caused generations of historians and visitors to overlook what had to be the mark of the Dunsmuir monument’s maker: “R. Reid/Montreal.”

Why would Joan Dunsmuir have ordered the monument to her husband, and to the future generations of her family, from Montreal? In the absence of direct evidence, some speculation is permissible. In keeping with her “spare no expense” approach to her husband’s funeral, Joan likely saw the family monument as another opportunity for the ostentatious display of Dunsmuir wealth—but it would have to wait. With Craigdarroch still under construction, Joan and her three unmarried daughters left for England shortly after her husband’s funeral. Exactly a year later,

Victoria’s *Daily Colonist* reported that they were in Montreal, on their way home from Europe. We can assume, says Castle Curator Jenny Seeman, that they were visiting another Dunsmuir daughter, Marion, and her husband, militia officer [Charles Frederick Houghton](#), who was then stationed in Montreal.

In 1890, Robert Reid (1843-1919) was the successful proprietor of the Montreal Sculpture and Granite Works on Saint Catherine Street. He was born and educated in Scotland, emigrating to Montreal in early life to learn the monument trade from his uncle, James Mavor, who founded the business. The Reid family was well established in Montreal’s close-knit Scottish community but, unlike the Dunsmuirs, they were Liberal and Unitarian. Robert Reid’s wife, [Eliza Anne \(McIntosh\) Reid](#), and his daughter, [Helen Richmond Young Reid](#), both became prominent social reformers and campaigners for women’s rights. Robert Reid won international acclaim as a sculptor and as “one of the best-known men in the marble and granite trade in Canada.”

When Joan Dunsmuir arrived in Montreal in 1890, Reid’s reputation was at its zenith, having been secured in the 1870s by several important commissions for memorial sculptures. He produced Toronto’s first piece of public art, the [Canadian Volunteer Monument](#) or Lime Ridge



Monument, erected in 1870 and still standing at Queen’s Park. In the mid-1870s, he designed two monuments to Montreal firemen who had died in the line of duty—one placed at [Mount Royal Cemetery](#) and the other at [Notre-Dame-des-Neiges Cemetery](#). In 1873, he was commissioned by the Ladies Memorial Association of Savannah, Georgia, to create a monument to the Confederate war dead, made entirely from Canadian materials and not designed or constructed by their former enemies; this monument has since been [moved and altered](#). Reid also sculpted the rifleman (nine feet tall and weighing 3,000 pounds) standing atop Winnipeg’s [Volunteer Monument](#), designed by architect Samuel Hooper and unveiled in 1886. Although the style of ornamental and allegorical sculpture favoured by Robert Reid eventually fell out of fashion, these commissions established his reputation and brought in orders for grave markers from far and wide, especially from wealthy families like the Dunsmuirs, who wanted the very best.

Tour Notes

November 2 was a mild and slightly overcast fall day. Twenty-eight people attended **John Adams'** new tour, **The Church Schism**—the first of two OCS tours commemorating the 150th anniversary of the founding of Church of Our Lord in 1875. With his usual clarity, John explained the dispute between Victoria's high Anglicans and low Anglicans that led to the exit of The Very Reverend Edward Cridge from Christ Church Cathedral; he became Bishop of the new Reformed Episcopal Church. His supporters included Sir James Douglas, as well as some of the city's Black pioneers who were welcomed to Cridge's church and are buried near his grave. Another tour highlight was the unmarked grave of organ-builder William Seeley.



John at the Cridge grave, left



Photos by Diana Pedersen

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Historic chapel; John and Yvonne at the Cross of Sacrifice, right



Photos by Diana Pedersen



For our annual Remembrance Day tour of the [Veterans' Cemetery](#) in Esquimalt on November 9, we had a beautiful mild fall day; the golfers were out in force on the classic course of the [Gorge Vale Golf Club](#) that surrounds the cemetery. Forty-four people attended—the largest turnout since **John Azar** began offering this tour twenty-five years ago; about a third were first-timers. Groundskeeper **Dean Savich**, who spoke briefly, opened the historic naval chapel for attendees to explore. Starting and ending the tour at the Cross of Sacrifice, John read war poetry, outlined

the history of the cemetery, and clarified the distinction between veterans and the war dead. **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** described the service of Canada's nursing sisters during the First World War and the establishment of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service and the Canadian Women's Army Corps during the Second World War. As a member of the [Royal United Services Institute of Vancouver Island](#), John had invited others to participate in the tour: **Clive Caton**, **Paul Seguna**, **Laurence Johnson**, and **David Giacomelli** all attended and told moving stories of relatives or friends who served, most of them buried elsewhere.



Veterans' Cemetery tour with golf course backdrop

Photo by Diana Pedersen

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OCS members visit Church of Our Lord



Photos by Diana Pedersen

This year's annual OCS indoor tour was held on a dreary November 16 at the beautifully restored [Church of Our Lord](#), celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2025. The event, attended by forty-five people, was hosted by **David Vuckson**, church historian and organist. We sat in the original pews, fashioned from single boards, to enjoy an interesting talk before we were let loose to examine the rich architectural details for ourselves. First, we learned about the founding of the church, following the exodus of The Very Reverend Edward Cridge and his supporters from Christ Church Cathedral. The building, with its extraordinary vaulted wooden ceiling, is an outstanding example of the Carpenter Gothic style; Emily Carr described its interior in *The Book of Small*. We learned about the history of the windows and recent efforts to protect them from vandalism. The central stained-glass window, showing Jesus the Good Shepherd, is dedicated to

Sir James Douglas, the church's most important early benefactor. Finally, we heard the story of the organ, purchased in San Francisco and, ultimately, towed safely into Victoria harbour in a ship that had been completely disabled in a storm. The organ, now a heritage treasure in its own right, is still almost entirely mechanical and requires humouring with careful attention to temperature and humidity. We were treated to a splendid rendition of the hymn, "Lancashire."



David Vuckson at the organ, left



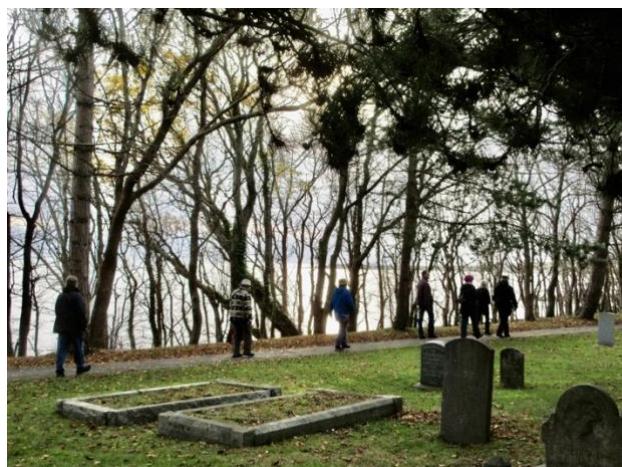
Photos by Gregory Ciupka and Larissa Ciupka

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November 23 was a cold and damp day at Ross Bay Cemetery, despite brief episodes of sunshine. Fourteen people attended a new tour by **John Adams**, created in honour of the **UN International Day for Tolerance** (November 16)—an occasion for promoting tolerance, understanding, and respect for diversity among cultures and people, and also for raising awareness of intolerance. John began by confessing that he didn't find anyone at RBC who fully embodied the UN ideals and he had to settle for "glimmers of tolerance." Judges occasionally appealed to fairness in cases involving overt racial discrimination. Some of Victoria's fraternal orders tried to be inclusive by welcoming Catholics and Jews to their membership, but non-whites were still excluded. We learned about some Victoria institutions that strove to educate or feed and house poor and marginalized people. One highlight was the grave of pioneer John Dean, who commissioned his monument seven years before his death. In 1921, he donated some of his property, resulting in the founding of John Dean Provincial Park in Central Saanich.



The John Dean monument



Photos by Diana Pedersen

For **John Adams'** annual OCS **Christmas Tour at the Old Burying Ground** on December 7, we finally had a sunny afternoon. Despite a chilly wind, forty people attended. This small city park, adjacent to Christ Church Cathedral and commonly known as Pioneer Square, was Victoria's main burial ground from 1855 to 1873. A tour of this cemetery tends to feature stories from Fort Victoria and the Colony of British Columbia—from the 1840s to the 1860s. John has collected many stories of early Christmas celebrations in Victoria and Yale, and even aboard ship while en route to Victoria; these generally took the form of dinners and dances. We learned about the cemetery's history and transformation into a park in 1908, and we visited graves of some members of Victoria's founding families—Ross, Cridge, Helmcken, and others.



Old Burying Ground Christmas tour



Photos by Diana Pedersen

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On an overcast but mild December 14, thirty people attended our final tour of 2025—**John Adams'** annual **Christmas Tour at Ross Bay Cemetery**. Highlights included more stories of shipboard Christmases and dinners at Fort Victoria (grouse and venison, no turkey); Robert Burnaby arrived at Christmas, 1858, and was forced to spend Christmas Eve stuck on a ship in Ross Bay. We heard the familiar story of David Fee's assassination on Christmas Eve, 1890, and a novel account of the Christmas vision of St. Clare of Assisi, who is now the patron saint of television and computer screens! At our final stop, we continued the tradition of laying a wreath at Emily Carr's grave. John also placed some Christmas boughs at the new grave marker for his friend Bonita Jackson, who made his Inverness cape—all handsewn from Melton cloth.



Ross Bay Cemetery Christmas tour



Photos by Diana Pedersen

Tour Schedule for January–February 2026

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. 15. RBC. Ross Bay Cemetery Top 10. Whether it's your first visit or you've been many times before, you will enjoy this tour with **John Adams** to the top ten attractions at BC's most famous Victorian-era cemetery. As we begin our 2026 tour season, we'll visit RBC's most iconic graves, hear about its most famous people, explore its unique landscape features, and learn about its interesting history. New stories and old favourites will be included. This accessible tour will stay on the paved pathways and focus on the original section of the cemetery to minimize walking distance.

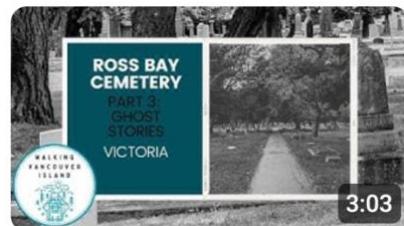
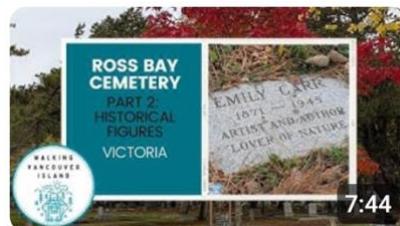
Feb. 22. RBC. A Celebration of Black History in Victoria. February is Black History Month in Canada, and the OCS partners with the **BC Black History Awareness Society** (BCBHAS) to present stories about many of the Black pioneers buried at RBC. Some were famous in their day and played leading roles in Victoria; others were not so well known but were an integral part of the city's life in the 1800s.



Walking Ross Bay Cemetery

Here's a mid-winter treat for Old Cemeteries Society members near and far who haven't been able to visit Ross Bay Cemetery recently. Or, if you are a volunteer or regular tour-goer, you can share these links to show others where you hang out with your friends, living and dead!

[Walking Vancouver Island](#) began as a pandemic project; its creators undertook to explore as many South Island parks as possible, producing short videos to share on social media and now on Rogers TV. They have visited more than two hundred parks. In November, they released three short videos of **Ross Bay Cemetery**: [Part 1, From Farmland to Final Rest](#); [Part 2, From Governors to Gold Miners](#); and [Part 3, Between History and Haunting: Ghost Stories from Ross Bay Cemetery](#). The videos are well researched, and they feature excellent recent footage of the cemetery. Included are views of the newly restored Dunsmuir grave, the re-landscaped Commonwealth War Graves, and some post-Remembrance Day footage at the Cross of Sacrifice. Ross Bay Cemetery's resident deer are given a starring role! Enjoy and share.



Volunteer Profile: Larissa Ciupka

Diana Pedersen

Since moving to Victoria only three years ago, Larissa Ciupka has become one of the Old Cemeteries Society's most active volunteers and an important addition to the Sunday tour program. She has contributed to our popular team tours—including Murder Most Foul, Skeletons from Victoria's Closets, The First Wives' Club, and especially the Emily Carr tours—as well as developing her own tours on Victoria's Grocery Wars and Notable Women Artists.



Larissa was born in Munich, Germany, and grew up in Toronto. She studied history and political science at the University of Toronto, Canadian history at the University of Waterloo, and Human Resources Management at Ryerson (now Toronto Metropolitan University). She and her husband, Gregory Ciupka (another OCS volunteer), then moved to Hamilton, where Larissa worked for twelve years at the [Art Gallery of Hamilton](#) as Director of Marketing and Communications. After retiring from the art gallery, she continued to volunteer as a docent—honing story-telling skills that now serve her well as an OCS tour leader.

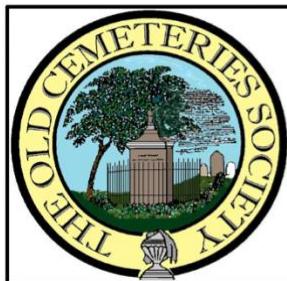
Larissa and Gregory began spending time in this city when their daughter attended the University of Victoria. On their first visit, they signed up for one of John Adams' downtown [Discover the Past Walking Tours](#). Larissa says that joining the OCS has been “a great way to learn about our new province and neighbourhood and meet wonderful people.” She also serves on the

Executive Committee of the [Associates of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria](#)—the Gallery’s fundraising volunteers. She enjoys travelling to visit both art galleries and cemeteries!

Larissa is a dependable hard worker at OCS cleaning bees. Just over a year ago she joined the Board, where she puts her creative marketing skills to good use in helping to raise the Society’s public profile; our active [Facebook page](#) now has over 2,000 followers! Larissa posts notices of upcoming tours, cleaning bees, and meetings. We all enjoy her appealing Facebook collages and reels that highlight the activities of our volunteers and showcase our heritage cemeteries.

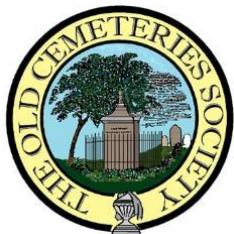
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Annual memberships in the Old Cemeteries Society run from January 1 to December 31. Individual \$30, Student \$20, Household \$45. Payments can be made by cheque or e-transfer. To join or renew, see the [Membership page](#) on the OCS website for more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



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It's Membership Renewal Time!

Since the mid-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.

Special Renewal Offer! Renew your membership by **January 31st** and we'll send you **two complimentary tour passes** so you can treat family or friends to an upcoming tour.

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. \$ _____