

May – June 2026

## A Farewell and a Flag

On Sunday morning, April 19, sixty-six people and two dogs assembled at Ross Bay Cemetery for the interment of Michael Halleran’s ashes in the plot that he purchased many years ago (M75 W2); one of the dogs was Michael’s sixteen-year-old rescue dachshund, Myer. Michael was a founding member and longtime Board member of the Old Cemeteries Society. The attendees included many past and present OCS Board members and volunteers, as well as members of the Hallmark Heritage Society and the Victoria Historical Society. On April 16, the *Times Colonist* published a [front-page tribute to Michael](#) for his “rediscovery” of the Vancouver Island flag. The gathering at RBC was arranged and led by former OCS President Gerry Buydens; founding member John Adams summarized Michael’s remarkable life and career.



Remembering Michael at Ross Bay Cemetery

Photos by Diana Pedersen

## Parks & Recreation Tree Tour at Ross Bay Cemetery



*Appreciating the trees at Ross Bay Cemetery*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

On Wednesday, April 15, twenty-five people attended a free Tree Tour at Ross Bay Cemetery—an annual offering by City Parks & Recreation. The tour guide was **Sean Smith**, one of the City’s eight arborists who manage Victoria trees on city streets and in public parks. The tour began by the public washrooms on Memorial Crescent and crossed the cemetery to end at our arborist’s favourite tree—the massive copper beech in Section B near Fairfield Road (lower left). We learned about tree varieties and strategies to protect the trees from pests and lawnmowers. Highlights included the fantastical moss-covered bigleaf maple in Section H near the Memorial Gate (upper right). The OCS was unofficially represented by volunteers **Gregory Ciupka** and **Diana Pedersen**, who pointed out a resident barred owl, explained the place of trees in the historical cemetery landscape, and promoted the OCS Sunday tour program.

## A Windstorm and Its Aftermath at RBC

Diana Pedersen

On Sunday, March 15, those of us attending Mike Woodcock’s tour on Early Surveyors of Vancouver Island were heading south, towards the water, through Ross Bay Cemetery’s Section B. In the lower section, just above Dallas Road, we encountered a dramatic sight. An enormous branch had been ripped from a mature tree, landing in an area where there were graves and possibly monuments. We immediately speculated that this destruction was likely the consequence of a windstorm that had hit the whole South Island the previous Wednesday night, with winds in Victoria gusting at over 100 km/h.



*Downed tree limbs in Section B on March 15*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

A large area had been sectioned off by Parks workers, with their yellow tape advising “Caution Do Not Enter.” As we approached, it was evident that the tangled mess actually consisted of two huge limbs—a branch from a mature Austrian Pine had taken down another large branch from a nearby Silver Maple. Fortunately, this part of the cemetery has many patches of bare grass and few standing monuments. Only the smaller branch tips appeared to have fallen across any graves with markers; they narrowly missed a nearby group of monuments with tiered bases topped by crosses. Assessing the damage to graves and markers would have to wait until Parks workers cleared the debris, made a safety assessment, and removed their yellow tape.

The whole clean-up operation took three weeks—there must have been many calls on City arborists and chainsaw-wielding Parks workers following the March 11 storm. By March 20, the

yellow tape was gone and most of the debris had been cleared, with some large pieces of sawn limbs awaiting removal and a carpet of twigs, pine needles, and cones still covering the ground. By March 25, all the debris was gone but the yellow tape was back. No doubt after an assessment by City arborists, workers were pruning the maple and taking down the pine—challenging operations that required a crane. By April 5, City workers had finished their cleanup and only an orange delineator post remained to mark the stump of the vanished pine tree. (Use this helpful resource to locate and identify the [Trees of Ross Bay Cemetery](#).)



March 25, three views; lower right, April 12, after repairs. Photos by Diana Pedersen and Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

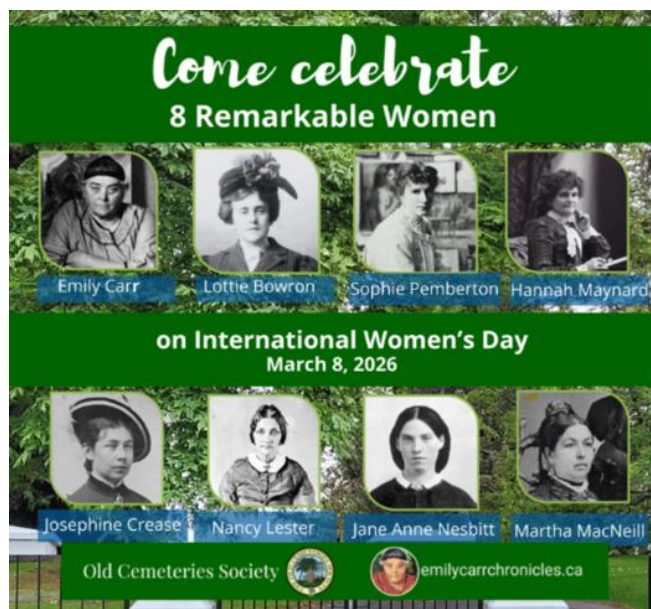
Fortunately, our Project Manager **Wilf Bruch** had returned from wintering in Arizona, just in time to assess the situation. Remarkably, only the Barry family grave sustained any damage. Its well-preserved covering of ceramic tiles was miraculously unscathed. The marker for Captain John Joseph Barry (d. 1914) and his wife Elizabeth Barry (d. 1915) was also unharmed; it is missing a cross, probably from some long-ago act of vandalism. The marker for their six-year-old nephew, John Edward McQuillan (d. 1906) was shifted off its axis; its small marble obelisk was knocked off its base and slightly chipped. On April 6, Wilf and OCS volunteer **Gregory Ciupka** reoriented and rebalanced the McQuillan marker, replaced its obelisk, and fixed it all in place with epoxy. Wilf recalls that this monument has been vandalized and repaired at least three times since the 1980s; he says that it really ought to be taken apart and rebuilt with professional tools. The long seafaring career of Captain John Barry, on both coasts, will be recounted on September 6 at our Labour Day weekend tour, **Salty Tales: Victoria's Maritime Heritage**.

## International Women's Day Special Event

Diana Pedersen

This year, International Women's Day—which is always observed on March 8—fell on a Sunday, occasioning a special celebration at Ross Bay Cemetery. In a very well-attended first-time collaboration between the Old Cemeteries Society and [Emily Carr Chronicles](#), the graves of eight remarkable BC women were visited in a guided walk through the cemetery, led by **Marilyn Jones** and **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**. We were fortunate to have a spectacularly sunny day, with daffodils blooming on many graves, the resident deer quietly observing, and a lot of noisy crow activity overhead. The strong and chilly wind blowing off the water did not prevent a record turnout. For this special event, the ninety-minute tour was offered twice. Sixty-five people attended the 10 am tour and an astonishing 137 people arrived for the 2 pm tour.

The OCS and Emily Carr Chronicles shared the responsibility and costs of promoting this special event; we received a helpful mention on CBC Radio's *North by Northwest*. The usual OCS admission charges applied and the proceeds were also shared. The large number of tour-goers required some extra volunteer assistance. Thanks to **Gudrun Leys**, **Ava Pettman**, **Liz Taylor**, and **Paul Taylor** for selling tickets. Thanks to **Dakota Farenholtz** and **Ava Pettman** for providing assistance to the two tour leaders. And thanks to **Thrifty's** for donating a bouquet of roses in aid of the celebration; the individual blooms were placed on the graves by **Jacquie Pearce**.



Marilyn and the morning tour group at Hannah Maynard's grave

Photo by Diana Pedersen

Along the designated route, planned by Yvonne, Marilyn presented at the graves of Emily Carr, Hannah Maynard, Sophie Pemberton, and Josephine Crease; Yvonne presented at the graves of Nancy Lester, Jane Anne Nesbitt, Lottie Bowron, and Martha MacNeill. This interesting selection of women from varied backgrounds provided insights into many aspects of local history and women's experiences. The attendees also learned that Ross Bay Cemetery was segregated not by race but by religion; Black and Indigenous women were buried alongside their White co-religionists. This question is often raised by first-time visitors to the cemetery.



*The afternoon tour group at Emily Carr's grave*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

This International Women's Day Special Event succeeded in drawing many people who had never previously visited RBC or attended an OCS tour, but its success brought some problems. We learned that our dependable VoiceBuddy personal voice amplifiers are not powerful enough for a group of over 100 people; the strong wind was an aggravating factor, sometimes interfering with the microphones or carrying the sound in only one direction. In the large afternoon group, some at the back could not see the grave or the presenter; many could hear the commentary only with difficulty, causing a few people to leave early in frustration. The size of the group also affects the pacing of the tour—a very large group moves more slowly from grave to grave, which can force presenters to cut content or run overtime. Predicting turnout is not easy but, for future special events, we will be sure to have a back-up plan to allow for the creation of smaller groups.

## Tour Notes

March 1, St. David's Day, was a mild and sunny spring afternoon, perfect for visiting the cemetery to honour the patron saint of Wales and some of the Welsh emigrants who are buried at RBC. Thirty-eight people attended **John Adams'** tour on **Welsh Victoria**. We were fortunate to see daffodils, a Welsh national symbol, growing on many graves (one of the few flowers that are ignored by the deer). Tour highlights included the graves of Albert Toller Goward, Victoria manager for the BC Electric Company; Israel Wood Powell, physician and government official; and Margaret Jenkins, school trustee and social reformer.



Margaret Jenkins grave, left and centre; daffodils at RBC, right

Photos by Diana Pedersen

\*

Our March 15 tour was a relatively intimate gathering of a dozen people—no doubt a function of the dismal weather forecast. The day was overcast and very damp, and a cold rain began halfway through the tour. Undaunted, **Mike Woodcock** led an interesting new tour, **Measure, Map, and Mark: Early Surveyors of Vancouver Island**, which he developed for International Surveyors' Day (March 21). The names of these nineteenth-century "Renaissance men," some familiar and some not, have been attached to many BC places and geographical features; in recent years, particularly in the case of the controversial Joseph Trutch, some of them have been removed.



Mike at the Pemberton and Trutch-O'Reilly graves

Photos by Diana Pedersen

On March 22, a brisk spring day with a mix of sun and cloud, forty-two people—more than a third of them first-timers—attended a tour on **Peninsula Settlers and History**. The Saanich Peninsula has several small church cemeteries, but many of the earliest settlers are buried at Ross Bay Cemetery. This engaging tour was researched and led by **Charlotte Clar** from the [Sidney Museum and Archives](#). Tour highlights included J.D. Pemberton, who surveyed the Peninsula, and the founders of the Brackman-Ker Milling Company. Surprises included some Welsh emigrants, the John and Michell families, who established Glamorgan Farm and Michell’s Farm.



*Charlotte at the Brackman-Ker and John family graves*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

✱

On a cold March 29, twenty stalwart tour-goers arrived in the pouring rain for this year’s **Emily Carr Tour—Part 1**, presented by **Kate Fisher, Ann-Lee Switzer, and Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, with **Molly Raher Newman** as “Emily” reading from her own writings. Some of the stories came from *The Book of Small* and some came from *This and That*, Ann-Lee’s edited collection of Emily’s stories. All the presenters needed assistants holding umbrellas until the rain stopped at 2:30. On this tour we heard Emily’s descriptions of Bishop Cridge’s sermons, choosing the Carr family plot at RBC, her father’s attacks of gout, shops on Government Street, and nearly missing her address to the Canadian Club because her monkey, Woo, was sick.



*A very wet Emily Carr tour; “Emily” in her raincoat, left*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

Easter Sunday, April 5, was the warmest day of the year so far. Forty people opted to spend it at Ross Bay Cemetery, attending a tour on a very appropriate topic, **Sugar and Spice**, led by **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld, Kate Fisher, John Azar, and Dakota Farenholtz**. The tour began and ended with the graves of two giants of Canadian chocolate making—Charles Rogers and Richard Purdy. We visited the graves of other merchants who made and sold sweet treats and imported spices like cinnamon and nutmeg. An explosion in candymaking, with new inventions like marshmallows and fudge, was related to the increased global production and refining of sugar. We concluded with the introduction of the iconic Purdys chocolate bunny.



*Expounding on Victoria's sweet history*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

✱

On April 12, an overcast and mild afternoon, a special tour commemorating **Vic High's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** was led by **John Adams**, assisted by four other presenters—**Chris Adams, Denis Johnston, Alexis Tate, and Lissa Zala**; all of them graduated from Vic High between 1967 and 1997. Thirty-two people attended, with more than half identifying themselves as former Vic High students. Several presenters dramatized the reminiscences of well-known figures including Emily Carr, Agnes Deans Cameron, and Edgar Fawcett. Student John Cowper Newbury was the first BC winner of the Governor General's Medal. We heard moving tributes to Joyce Clearihue and the Clearihue family, Dr. Victoria Chung, Yohio "Yon" Shimizu, and Brian G. Whitmore.



*Vic High stories at the Newbury and Daniels-Whitmore family graves*

*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

On a warm and sunny April 19, the Old Cemeteries Society Sunday tour visited Pioneer Square. Forty people, almost half first-timers, came to hear **John Azar**'s recounting of **Tales from the Old Burying Ground**. This small public park is still a cemetery, with more than 1300 burials, although most of the monuments were removed in 1908. John explained how the Fraser River gold rush created the need for a new cemetery. Highlights included the naval corner and the empty corner that was once the site of Chinese burials. One of the first burials resulted from a duel that took place across the street on the now-vacated site of the YMCA-YWCA. Copies of the OCS publication *Tales from the Old Burying Ground* were available for sale.



*Telling tales at the Old Burying Ground*



*Photos by Diana Pedersen*

✱

April 26 was another warm and sunny spring day at Ross Bay Cemetery—perfect for a new tour by **Nancy Kostyrka**, entitled **Service, Compassion, and Courage—Nursing Pioneers of Victoria**. Fifty-five people attended, including a large contingent of Nancy's fellow volunteers from Government House. We learned about the challenges faced by some nursing pioneers in home nursing and midwifery, a smallpox hospital, and nursing education at St. Joseph's Hospital. The tour started with Evaline Pemberton, who became the first registered nurse in Canada. Also featured were the careers of several nursing sisters who served during the First World War, in the terrible conditions on the Western Front and at Gallipoli; one was Ethel Saunders, who was the great-aunt of our current President, Ken Sudhues.



*Nancy at the graves of the Sisters of St. Ann, who founded St. Joseph's Hospital, right* *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

## Tour Schedule for May—June 2026

*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 3. 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 have a new mix of mayors, following up from the popular tours of the last couple of years.

**May 10. RBC. Mum's the Word! A tour to celebrate Mother's Day.** Many families, large and small, thrived in early Victoria, despite the high rate of infant mortality. An OCS team will share fascinating stories of the varied trials, tribulations, and testimonials of mothers who lie in RBC. We'll visit some of the many tombstones that embody stories of mothers, grandmothers, and mothering. Some have moving epitaphs; some are simply inscribed "Mother." Join us for a spring ramble with a special focus on Victoria's family history.

**May 17. RBC. The Gorge of Summers Gone.** Back by popular demand, today's tour will be conducted by **Dennis Minaker**, author of the definitive history of the Gorge Waterway, *The Gorge of Summer's Gone*, originally published in 1998. Through countless interviews with people who lived or played along the Gorge, and from hours combing archival records and photographs, Dennis has built up a fascinating history of Victoria's inland waterway.

**May 24. Chinese Cemetery.** This unique tour takes place during Asian Heritage Month in Canada. For over 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 31. RBC. Deaths by Mistake.** Accidental deaths were a common feature of life in Victoria's past. Some resulted from chance or fate, but most involved human error or mistaken judgments. This OCS team tour will feature sometimes gruesome stories of accidental death that received extensive newspaper coverage. They offer an unusual window into the daily lives of Victorians and the hazards they encountered on land and sea, at home, on the street, and on the job. Some of these hazards seem familiar, and some we could never have imagined!

**June 7. Hatley Memorial Gardens.** Join us for a new tour of this 1932 lawn cemetery where many notable people are buried. Originally known as The Colwood Burial Park or The Colwood Cemetery, it is privately owned and operated by Arbor Memorial, a Canadian company. Enjoy the beautifully landscaped grounds, while hearing stories told by an OCS team. Meet inside the main entrance at 2050 Sooke Road in Colwood.

**June 14. Jewish Cemetery. Merchants for the Mines.** The allure of gold attracted adventurous young Jewish men to seek their fortune in B.C. Having honed their business expertise with gold rushes in California, they brought their expertise north and became a vital part of the frontier. **Amber Woods**, author of our popular *Guide to Victoria's Historic Jewish Cemetery*, will share their stories of success, failure and murder. Meet at the main gate, Fernwood Road at the corner of Cedar Hill Road. Men, please wear a hat.

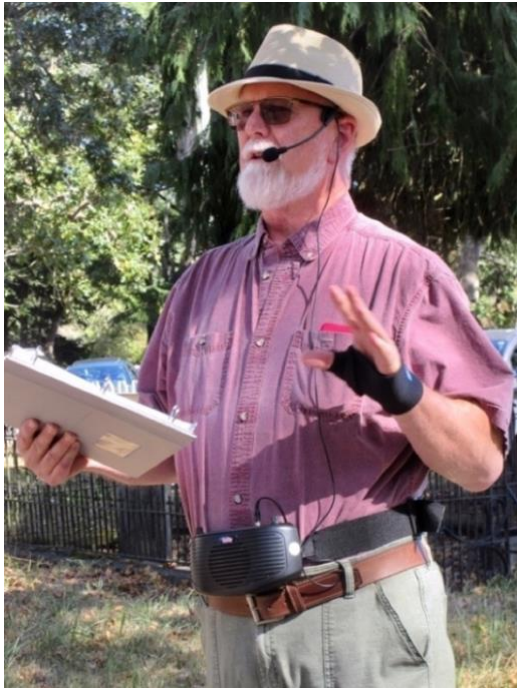
**June 21. RBC. National Indigenous Peoples Day.** Canada's National Indigenous Peoples' Day honours and celebrates First Nations, Inuit, and Métis pasts, presents, and futures. A team of OCS presenters will visit the graves of First Nations and Métis people, some who rest here on their traditional territories and others whose fur trade connections took them far from their traditional homes. Drawn from both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, these stories will celebrate the wide-ranging experiences of such individuals as Neshaki, a Nisga'a fur trader and Chief; Joseph McKay, Métis founder of Nanaimo; and Frank Calder, trailblazing BC politician and Nisga'a "Chief of Chiefs."

**June 28. RBC. More Queer Lives.** Continuing the investigation that led to the "Detecting Queer Lives" tour from 2025, OCS Board member **Tim Fitzthum** will present this new tour that uncovers stories of individuals who were queer or likely queer during a time when sexual orientation was hidden, and conforming to societal norms was expected. The tour will also touch on female and male impersonation—a popular form of entertainment on Victoria's vaudeville stages in the early twentieth century.

## Volunteer Profile: Ken Sudhues

Diana Pedersen

Our newly elected President, Ken Sudhues, has been actively involved with heritage building preservation since the mid-1980s. He has served on the Board of the [Hallmark Heritage Society](#) and on the Education Committee of the [Victoria Heritage Foundation](#). Since 2022, he has added researching historic cemeteries to his many volunteer pursuits, leading several Sunday tours for the Old Cemeteries Society and joining the Board as a member at large in 2024.



Ken was born in Victoria, where his mother's family has lived since 1864. His great-grandfather, [Henry Saunders](#), the founder of [H. Saunders Grocery and Liquor Store](#), is buried at Ross Bay Cemetery. Ken was raised in Metchosin, where he attended school. He had a long career as a public servant, working for the Ministries of Health for BC and Ontario. During a seven-year stint in Toronto, he led heritage walking tours based on lost streams and old rail lines, with some heritage buildings thrown in. He returned to Victoria in 2014.

As a boy, Ken was an altar server at [St. Mary's Anglican Church, Metchosin](#), and was fascinated by its heritage cemetery. Today he remembers many of the people who are now buried there. Last September, he researched and led an OCS Sunday tour, "A Local's Guide to St. Mary's Pioneer Cemetery" (see photo). Ken has also led tours at RBC on "Lieutenant Governors," "Residents of Rockland," and "Builders,

Books, and Believers"—on Hallmark Heritage winners of the past fifty years. He has sometimes been seen selling tickets at the Sunday tours, taking charge of the air horn at the annual Ghost Tour, and assisting with the OCS display table at Ross Bay Villa's annual garden party.

As an active member of the Victoria Heritage Foundation, Ken is also busy editing and revising two volumes of the much-loved series, *This Old House: Victoria's Heritage Neighbourhoods*. Earlier this year, all four volumes were made [available to download for free](#)—a wonderful gift to Victoria residents, heritage lovers, and local historians of all kinds.

✱

**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.

	<p><b>The Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria</b>  P.O. Box 50004, RPO Cook Street  Victoria, BC V8V 4Z8  tel: 250-598-8870  email: <a href="mailto:oldcemvictoria@gmail.com">oldcemvictoria@gmail.com</a>  website: <a href="http://www.oldcem.bc.ca">http://www.oldcem.bc.ca</a>  Facebook: <a href="https://facebook.com/OldCemeteriesSociety">https://facebook.com/OldCemeteriesSociety</a></p>
--	--