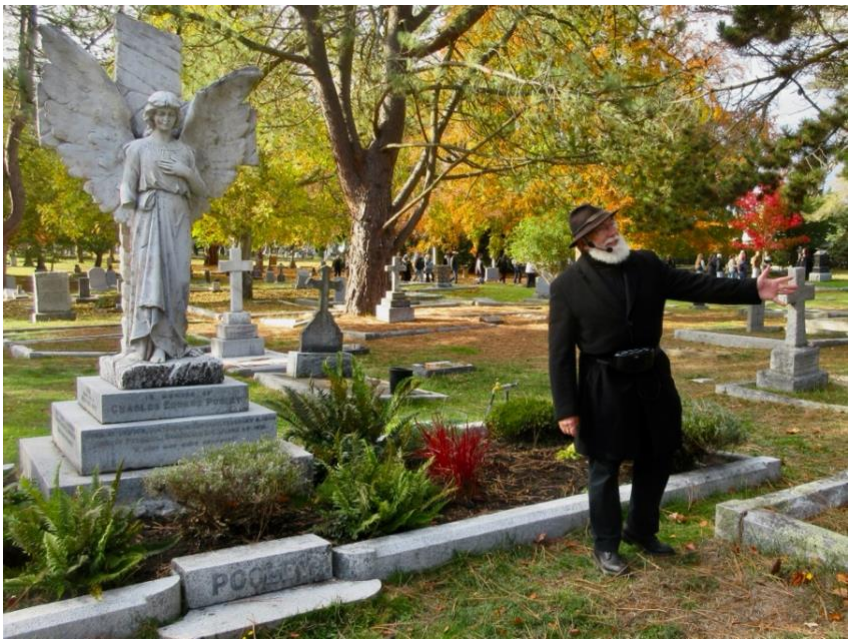
STONE CUTTINGS
Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria Newsletter

November – December 2026

Ghost Tour and Halloween Patrols

This year, the Old Cemeteries Society's annual Ghost Tour at Ross Bay Cemetery was held on a mostly sunny October 25, which came as a huge relief after a gloomy forecast and overnight rain; no one wanted a repeat of last year's drenching. After an unusually long warm stretch in October, there were piles of dried leaves everywhere but many trees were still clad in red and gold; the cemetery was at its most beautiful.



John Adams, our masterful Ghost Tour coordinator (at left, observed by the Pooley Angel), chose a different route this year, starting at the Memorial Gate and looping through the eastern section of the cemetery. The turnout was helped by an announcement on CBC's *North by Northwest*. Our Treasurer, **Gudrun Leys**, was in charge of an efficient team of ticket sellers—this year including **Seth Ainsley**, **Diana Croteau**, **Nancy Jimenez**, **Dorothy McMicking**, **Grace Walker**, and **Amber Woods**—who greeted the parties of arrivals (some costumed for the occasion) and handed out stickers with aplomb; they collected bags of cash ($1,231) and handled e-transfers ($90) for total receipts of $1,321. Their efficiency mattered, given the tendency of our tour attendees to arrive en masse starting at about 1:45 pm. On this special occasion, possibly because of parking challenges, late

arrivals continued until almost 2:15 pm. Gudrun reported a total attendance of about 270 people—a significant improvement over last year's sodden event!

Next, the attendees were marshalled into nine groups by **John Adams**, **Chris Adams**, and **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**. There were nine stops on the tour with a storyteller who remained in place at each grave as the groups rotated through the stops. Delivering a timed and polished presentation nine times in rapid succession is no mean feat!

This year's presenters were a mix of experienced OCS tour guides and veterans of John's downtown walking tours: **Dakota Farenholtz** (the ghost ship *Valencia* at the memorial to George Jesse, who was lost in the shipwreck); **Kate Humble** (*Empress of Ireland* ghost stories at the grave of Dr. Grant, ship's surgeon); **John Adams** (Brother XII's black magic curse, told at the grave of the Pooley family); **Brynne Croy** (the ghost of Lizzie McGrath at the Empress Hotel); **Morag Wehrle** (St. Ann's Academy hauntings, told at the Sisters of St. Ann plot); **Rachel Perkins** (descendant of Isabella Ross, with stories of her ghostly ancestor at Ross Bay); **Chris Adams** (James Hawthornthwaite's encounter with the ghost of an axe murderer); **Jason Stevens** (William Porritt's haunted book, at Porritt's grave); **Emily Butler** (the Victoria Golf Club ghost, at the Pemberton family plot).

In the centre of the tour loop, equipped with stopwatch and airhorn, were our current and past Presidents, **Ken Sudhues** and **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, who timed the five-minute presentations and monitored the flow of traffic. With all nine groups in place, the airhorn sounded at 2:10 pm, started and ended each presentation, and concluded the tour with five blasts at 3:15 pm—a credit to the planning and efficiency of all our volunteers.

Towards the end of the tour, dark clouds were massing on the horizon and a strong wind came up suddenly as we were leaving. No matter! The 2026 Ghost Tour was a great success!



This year's ticket sellers, top left; spooky storytellers, top right; our timekeepers, bottom left; tourgoers enjoying a ghostly tale, bottom centre; and an enthusiastic party of arrivals, bottom right. Photos by Diana Pedersen.

OCS patrol coordinator, Gudrun Leys, reported a safe and uneventful Halloween at RBC, thanks to twenty-one volunteers who turned out for two two-hour shifts on Friday night, October 30, and another thirty-two volunteers on Saturday, October 31. Once again, we were able to use the caretakers' hut as a warm base. This year brought milder temperatures and no rain, inspiring many people to take an after-dark Halloween stroll in the cemetery. This included a delegation from Victoria's annual Mushroom Show, on a field trip to investigate fungi growing at RBC—they use infrared light! Not everyone was happy to hear about the City by-law prohibiting public access after dark, but there were no unpleasant incidents. One couple was taking pictures of possible sites for celebrating their marriage in costume the following day! Many thanks to Gudrun and all our volunteers who showed up to keep Ross Bay Cemetery safe.

TalkDeath's Halloween Cemetery Scavenger Hunt

Diana Pedersen





After more than three decades of Ghost Tours at Ross Bay Cemetery, OCS members know that the annual October surge of public interest in the spooky, the supernatural, and the dead can help lure the living to a local cemetery—a prospect that might seem daunting, depressing, or just too "creepy" at any other time of year. Not every community has a large, committed, and knowledgeable pool of volunteers to organize an ambitious event like our annual Ghost Tour—but recently a social-media-based alternative has emerged.

On October 24, the CBC's Margaret Gallagher interviewed Vancouver death educator Christa Ovenell on *North by Northwest.* Ovenell reflected on the therapeutic and educational benefits of cemeteries in our contemporary "death-phobic" culture. She also promoted an upcoming free, fun, and family-friendly event inviting the general public to explore a cemetery—the older the better. Vancouver's Mountain View Cemetery was one of eleven American and six Canadian cemeteries sponsoring TalkDeath's annual Halloween Cemetery Scavenger Hunt.

The Hamilton-based founders of TalkDeath, whose aim is to bridge the gap between death professionals and the public by making the subject of death less scary, held their first cemetery scavenger hunt during the Covid lockdown. They were inspired by Mexico's Day of the Dead, and their modern adaptation of the scavenger hunt has proven remarkably appealing. At the appointed time, TalkDeath posts clues online, and participants gathered in cemeteries compete to find examples. Proof of success involves taking a selfie and posting it on Facebook or Instagram. People who aren't interested in competing can take the clues and explore a local cemetery at their leisure, learning some local history in the process. TalkDeath provides guidelines for appropriate behaviour (but it's OK to have fun!) and emphasizes respect at all times for monuments, burials in progress, and cemetery rules about public access and similar matters.

Last Cleaning Bee of the Summer

Thirteen volunteers, mostly veteran cleaners, came to Ross Bay Cemetery on a pleasantly warm Saturday morning, September 12, for the last OCS cleaning bee of the year. We continued working in Section M, adjacent to the caretakers' shed and just south of the sections that were cleaned on August 8. These graves face a major north-south walkway through the cemetery, taken by people who use the entrance opposite Ross Bay Villa.

Thanks to the OCS volunteers who cleaned close to fifty graves, passersby will notice the many large flat concrete surfaces now free of mossy growth thanks to energetic scraping, raking, sweeping, and hosing. Most importantly, the family names on the curbing of many graves were revealed for the first time in years. Our coordinator, **Tom Esakin**, trundled many wheelbarrow loads of dried mossy growth off to the debris pile. As always, there was a variety of tasks to choose from, and some diligent volunteers (with patience and strong backs) opted for chopsticks, attacking the inscriptions on some lichen-covered flat markers, one letter at a time.



Moss-covered grave surfaces, before (top right) and after (bottom right) *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

A Recent Restoration Project at RBC

In addition to the Old Cemeteries Society cleaning bees, in which volunteers with willing hands can participate three or four times during the spring to fall months, a small number of volunteers undertake more ambitious cleaning and restoration projects on a year-round basis. For decades, our Project Manager **Wilf Bruch** has supervised these undertakings and passed on his knowledge and experience to those who would like to learn. These projects provide opportunities for acquiring new skills or putting to use skills that you may already have, working in a small

group or spending time alone in the cemetery, and enjoying the satisfaction of helping to protect our heritage cemeteries. Sometimes minor repairs are needed as a response to vandalism, falling tree branches, or weathering and gravity. (Tree removal and heavy lifting are handled by City Parks workers.) Special attention may be given to individual graves or monuments at the request of distant relatives or OCS tour leaders who are planning to feature a particular grave in an upcoming tour. If you think you might like to assist with these projects and learn about the proper care of heritage graves and monuments, please contact the OCS office.

OCS volunteer **Gregory Ciupka** describes one such project undertaken this summer:

> This was an extremely difficult repair to the Stromgren grave at T44 W44. In cleaning the top surface, we found that many of the tiles were loose. Keeping track of them and trying not to lose any was a challenge. As you can probably imagine, you can't go down to the local tile store and buy replacements. Out of the approximately 8000 tiles, there were lots missing! After searching all over Victoria, we found a 2″ x 2″ tile in both black and white that closely matched the old tile in colour and thickness. We were lucky! Now to the cutting … Each of the 2″ x 2″ tiles was cut on a wet tile saw and produced four ¾″ x ¾″ replacement tiles. I think we cut about 200. After setting the new and loose tiles in place, the whole top was cleaned and polished with an electric sander with scrubbing pads. Indeed, a challenging but satisfying project!



Before and after removing moss and dirt, replacing damaged tiles, and more cleaning. Photos by Gregory Ciupka

The Stromgren grave is now ready to star in a future OCS Sunday tour featuring some of the restoration projects undertaken by our volunteers. But who is buried in this grave? What stories might be told about their lives? What might we learn from them about the history of our city?

T44 W44, in the new Anglican section of the cemetery that opened in 1907, is the grave of Capt. Carl Gustaf Stromgren (ca. 1855-1912) and his wife Hulda Ottilia (Clarens) Stromgren (ca. 1858-1945); they emigrated to Victoria from Sweden in 1890. Stromgren, a Master Mariner when he died, had been a seafarer since boyhood and was engaged in Victoria's sealing industry in the 1890s. He then moved into the local freighting business as part-owner and master of the steamer *Oscar*. He captained the small passenger and freight steamer *Tasmanian* on its new run between Victoria and Sooke, and then its more commodious replacement, the *Sechelt*. By great good fortune, he surrendered command of the *Sechelt* only days before it went down with all hands near Race Rocks on March 24, 1911. Sadly, Capt. Stromgren died the following year from a stroke at the age of only fifty-seven. Until shortly before his death, he was ferrying coal miners to and from Protection Island at Nanaimo. His wife outlived him by thirty-three years.

Another Season of Weekday Group Tours at RBC



On a warm and sunny Wednesday afternoon, September 9, a group of seven residents of the Cridge Village Seniors' Centre arrived with their activity coordinator for a tour of Ross Bay Cemetery (left, at the grave of Sir James and Lady Douglas). Mini-buses bringing weekday tour groups can enter at the caretakers' shed and drop their passengers just inside the Memorial Gate. Tours for seniors' groups—in this case a general tour on BC history from Yvonne Van Ruskenveld—last about an hour and stay mainly on the paved walkways. For this group, a visit to the grave of Bishop Edward Cridge and Mary Cridge was a special highlight.

This year three seniors' groups requested tours, preferring some combination of the history of Ross Bay Cemetery, BC history with an emphasis on the gold rushes, and favourite stories from our Gossip in the Graveyard tours. Four private adult groups also requested general tours.

In 2026, the Old Cemeteries Society provided eleven school group tours of Ross Bay Cemetery. These are devoted to BC history with an emphasis on famous names that students might recognize from their history classes. One school tour was given by **John Adams**, and all the rest were handled by **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** and **John Azar**.

More volunteers are needed to expand the weekday tour program for school groups, seniors' groups, and other private adult groups that might request a general interest tour. If you are available and might be interested in participating next year, please contact the OCS office.

Art Canada Institute Tributes to Three RBC Artists



If you have never visited the website of the Art Canada Institute (ACI)—"your definitive online source for Canadian art"—check it out on one of the dreary grey afternoons that will soon be upon us. One of the ACI's most recent online publications is a lavishly illustrated book-length study of Victoria's extraordinary experimental photographer, Hannah Maynard, who is finally achieving national recognition as an artist. This work joins previously published tributes to painters Sophie Pemberton and Emily Carr, both also buried at Ross Bay Cemetery. These studies are rich in context about the history of early Victoria. Hard copies of these beautifully produced books can be purchased, but the content of the downloadable pdfs is identical—and free! Resource guides are provided for teachers of Grades 8-12.

An Afternoon of Reflection at the Jewish Cemetery

Amber Woods

On Sunday afternoon, September 6, at the Jewish Cemetery of Victoria, Rabbi Eli Herb led three services of reflection: a dedication for the new names carved into the Zachor Wall, an unveiling of the "Monument for the 36," and Kever Avot. All three services tied into the holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Known as the High Holidays, they call upon observers to contemplate the past year, make amends if required and safe to do so, and set goals for the upcoming year. It is a time to remember our personal and community ancestors.

"Zachor" is a Hebrew word meaning "remember." The rock retaining wall inside the Jewish Cemetery is called the Zachor Wall; since its creation in 2016, it has become a part of the spiritual and historical infrastructure of the cemetery. Five years ago, it was designated as a site where the names of people who are not buried in the Jewish Cemetery can be carved. On September 6, Rabbi Eli opened the ceremonies in front of the Zachor Wall with a song; more than fifty people were in attendance. The thirteen new people whose names were recently added to the wall were remembered by a friend or family member.



The Zachor Wall *Photo by Amber Woods*



The unveiling *Photo by Penny Tennenhouse*

The next ceremony was the unveiling of the monument for the thirty-six who are known to be buried in the cemetery, but whose plot location is unknown. The creation of this memorial was part of a larger project identifying and marking the plots that were overlooked as burial records were copied and recopied over the 166 years since the cemetery was founded.

Dan McLeod from the Greater Victoria Savings Credit Union Legacy Fund (GVSCU), which funded a portion of the project, spoke about how well the objectives of both the GVSCU and Congregation Emanu-El are aligned. Dan Barer of the Cemetery Committee summarized the project; he was then joined by Cemetery Committee member Amber Woods to unveil the monument. The prayer of mourning was then recited for the thirty-six people. With the new monument, these people now have a more permanent record of their burial, and the historical record is more accurate.

Kever Avot concluded the afternoon of reflection; it is a tradition to visit the graves of ancestors as part of the preparation for the High Holidays. The practice is an opportunity to acknowledge the lives of those who have gone before us, and to learn from their experiences. Appreciating and remembering the past can help us understand what has contributed to our current circumstances and guide us as we set our own priorities for the future.

Tour Notes

August 30 was an overcast and rather chilly day, but forty-five people—almost half first-timers—attended **Emily Carr, Part 2**; this was the second of our two annual tours about Ross Bay Cemetery's most famous resident. It was led by our team of **Kate Fisher**, **Ann-Lee Switzer**, and **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, who provided historical context at the graves of people who knew Emily, and **Molly Raher Newman** whose dramatic readings from Emily's writings are always the highlight of the tour. This was an unusually enthusiastic audience and, by a happy coincidence, we stopped for a story at the grave of Emily's guardian, James Hill Lawson; five of his great-grandchildren were in attendance, some visiting the city especially for this occasion.






Emily's stories by Molly, Yvonne, Ann-Lee, and Kate *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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On September 6, we had a warm and sunny Sunday for a busy Labour Day weekend. To coincide with the annual Classic Boat Festival, we offered a new tour, **Salty Tales: Victoria's Maritime Heritage**, attended by thirty-four people, almost half first-timers. The tour was led by our team of storytellers—**Diana Pedersen**, **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, **Morag Wehrle**, and **John Azar**; two repair projects were also explained by OCS volunteer **Gregory Ciupka**. Tour highlights included the graves of Major W.H. Langley and Commander George R. MacFarlane, both stories having special connections to the Maritime Museum of BC. We also visited the graves of James Dunsmuir, Capt. John Swanson, Capt. John Barry, John S.H. (Sam) Matson, and Capt. J.W. Troup, ending with the Naval Memorial to the sinking of HMCS *Galiano* in 1918.






Salty tales told by Diana, Yvonne, Morag, and John *Photos by Larissa Ciupka*

September 13 was a pleasantly warm late-summer day at Ross Bay Cemetery; fourteen people attended **Kit Pearson**'s tour based on her book for young people, ***A Day of Signs and Wonders***. The author, who has now been leading OCS tours for twenty years, explained how she came to imagine a fictional encounter between Kathleen O'Reilly, age thirteen, and Emily Carr, age nine. **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** provided historical context at the graves of people mentioned in the story, followed by Kit's dramatic readings. A great-grandson of "Mrs. Crane"—actually Mrs. Joanna Tyrwhitt-Drake, who figures in the writings of Emily Carr—was one of the attendees.





Kit and Yvonne, left; at the O'Reilly and Fell graves, centre and right *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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On a warm September 20, **Tim Fitzthum**'s well-researched new tour, **Splish Splash, They Were Taking a Bath**, drew forty-two people to RBC to learn about early bathing facilities in Victoria—a necessity when few residences had bathtubs or running water. We heard first about the early barbershops that catered to the personal hygiene needs of a mostly male population. Next Tim explained the variety and popularity of medicinal baths, including some that were likely harmful or even fatal. Finally, we learned about the growing interest in seawater bathing facilities for health and recreation, culminating in the opening of the Crystal Garden in 1925.





Tim explains hygiene challenges in early Victoria, left *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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On September 27, fifty people agreed that hearing tales of **Murder Most Foul** was an excellent way to spend a beautiful autumn Sunday afternoon at Ross Bay Cemetery. This version of one of the longest-running OCS tours was presented by **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, **Dakota Farenholtz**, **Kate Fisher**, and **Greg Scott**. The tour began with Victoria's most famous unsolved murder—

the gruesome killing of Agnes Bings in 1899 that led to rumours of Jack the Ripper's possible relocation to this city. There were also new stories gleaned from local newspapers, whose extensive sensational coverage of violent crimes remains a veritable goldmine for researchers. Based on this evidence, several presenters offered their own speculations about "who done it."





Yvonne at the grave of Agnes Bings, left and centre *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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On a "late summer" October 4, forty-seven people attended the annual OCS Women's History Month tour, offered by **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** since 1992. For this year's topic of **Gold Rush Women**, Yvonne was assisted by **Dakota Farenholtz**, **Kate Fisher**, and **June Daniels**. Yvonne explained how gold rushes, beginning in 1858, shaped the history of this province; she ended the tour at the graves of the Sisters of St. Ann and "the Miner's Angel," Nellie Cashman. Along the way, we learned about women's vital contributions as business owners and hotel keepers, nurses, laundresses and cooks, wives, hurdy-gurdy girls, and sex workers. Women provided desperately lonely miners with opportunities for companionship and recreation (especially dancing!), as well as the comforts of "civilization" and reminders of domestic life.







June, Dakota, Kate, and Yvonne tell women's gold rush stories *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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On October 11, a warm sun was shining and the leaves were turning at Ross Bay Cemetery for this year's Thanksgiving Sunday theme tour, **Harvest Festival: Farmers of Early Victoria**, attended by thirty people; the tour was presented by the OCS team of **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld**, **Morag Wehrle**, **Kate Fisher**, **John Azar**, and **Greg Scott**. The crucial importance of agriculture in Victoria's early history is often overlooked. We learned about the earliest farms

established by the Hudson's Bay Company to feed Fort Victoria, and about some of the founding farm families who have left their names on Victoria streets and other local features: Mackenzie, Work, Rowland, Finnerty, Irvine, Deans, Macdonald, and McRae. The tour ended with the story of the Welsh family who established the six-generation Michell's Farm dynasty.






A spectacular Thanksgiving Sunday at Ross Bay Cemetery *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

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October 18 was another beautiful sunny Sunday, this time with a fall nip in the air. Fifty-eight people attended **John Adams**' annual tour on **Spiritualism in Victoria**. John explained the great popularity of Spiritualism in nineteenth-century Victoria, although it is often ignored by historians. We heard stories about fortune tellers, séances, automatic writing and painting, Ouija boards, and spirit photography. We also learned about the acceptance of ghosts and the spirit world in the local Chinese community. Some proponents of Spiritualist practices subjected them to rigorous tests in order to validate them and expose frauds. Highlights included the graves of Kathleen O'Reilly, Robert Dunsmuir, Mayor James Fell, Hannah Maynard, Bishop Cridge, Allen Francis, and Emily Carr. One advocate of Spiritualism, Benjamin Pitt Griffin, proprietor of the Boomerang Inn, now shares his grave with a large holly tree.




Ben Griffin grave, above; John at the Fell and Maynard graves, below *Photos by Diana Pedersen*

Tour Schedule for Nov.–Dec. 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.

Nov. 1. ON ZOOM. Echoes of Ancient Egypt in a Victorian Cemetery: Revealing Shared Symbols of Eternal Life. Ancient Egypt, exotic and mysterious, captures our imagination. Distant in time and place, its images, artifacts, and beliefs fired Western imaginations from the moment the temples and tombs were first discovered. Designers and builders of the Victorian period were inspired by ancient Egypt's unique representations of death and interpreted them in their own ways. One way was in cemeteries. In this illustrated talk, **Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** will reveal why and where we can find echoes of ancient Egypt's symbols in Victorian cemeteries—including an "Egyptian" temple in Ross Bay Cemetery.

Nov. 8. Veterans' Cemetery. Remembrance Day Tour. At this annual tour at the Esquimalt Veterans' Cemetery (God's Acre), **John Azar** and guests will share stories of the contributions and sacrifices made by people in the service of our country. Lest we forget. Access off Colville Road near the Base Hospital. This tour is wheelchair accessible.

Nov. 15. ON ZOOM. Unearthing the Past: A Guide to Victoria's Cemetery Records. Greater Victoria has over 20 cemeteries. Burial records exist for most of them but are not always easy to find or use. In this one-hour Zoom presentation, historian **John Adams** will cover the history of cemetery record keeping in the city and explain why some burial registers exist and others do not, and what information they contain. He will explain how volunteers from the OCS painstakingly created computerized databases for the Old Burying Ground (Pioneer Square) and Ross Bay Cemetery and how to access them. The talk will focus on using the records, but will also include lots of historical information about the cemeteries themselves.

Nov. 22. Royal Oak Crematorium Talk and Tour. Nestled in the rolling grounds of Royal Oak Burial Park (ROBP), the crematorium is the oldest on Vancouver Island. Inside the chapel, staff will explain its history and how the cremation process takes place. Then we will go behind the scenes into the working part of the building where the retorts and other equipment are located. We will have a chance to see the existing retorts and also the new ones that are replacing them. Meet at the crematorium. Drive through the ROBP gates at 4673 Falaise Road and follow the signs. Parking is available on the road near the crematorium.

Nov. 29. Helmcken House Tour. Construction of Helmcken House began in 1852 to provide a home for newlyweds Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken and Cecilia Douglas (daughter of Sir James and Lady Douglas). It remains on its original site and is the second-oldest house in BC. It was occupied by the Helmcken family until 1939 when it became a museum. **John Adams** will share the fascinating stories about how the house was built, and its evolution as a historic site. During December, the OCS's Christmas tours at the Old Burying Ground (Dec. 6) and Ross Bay Cemetery (Dec. 13) will include stories about Helmcken family graves. Meet at the front entrance to Helmcken House, located beside the Royal BC Museum, next to Thunderbird Park.

Dec. 6. Old Burying Ground Christmas Tour. **John Adams** will delight and amaze you with Christmas and holiday stories from Victoria of old. New Christmas tales and old favourites combine with the history of one of Victoria's oldest cemeteries, in use from 1855 to 1873. Meet at the corner of Quadra St. and Rockland Ave.

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

Volunteer Profile: Molly Raher Newman

Diana Pedersen

Emily Carr (1871-1945) is known internationally as one of Canada's great artists; hers is the most visited grave at Ross Bay Cemetery. Only at the end of the twentieth century did she achieve the recognition she deserved, and that process began in Victoria. In 1998, the Old Cemeteries Society introduced Emily Carr tours, but the real turning point came in 2001 with the Royal British Columbia Museum's definitive exhibition on Carr's life and work that caught the attention of the world. In Victoria, according to the reviewer for *The Wall Street Journal*, "just about every eccentric middle-aged woman in town is having a go at doing Emily Carr impersonations." Only one of them had enduring appeal; today, Canada's best Emily Carr re-enactor is the star of OCS tours devoted to the artist's life and writings.



Molly Raher Newman—artist, musician, actor—was born in Nebraska and raised in Madrid, Spain. A multi-instrumentalist, she has had a long career in the musical entertainment industry. She spent six years in Dawson City and, since 1984, has performed on Vancouver Island with bands spanning the musical genres of jazz, Celtic folk, bluegrass, medieval, and pop.

Inspired by re-enactments of the poet Robert Service at his cabin in Dawson City, Molly began playing Emily in 1999 at Victoria's Emily Carr House. Soon she was in front of the RBCM, promoting the Carr exhibit. "I painted tree-based landscapes and greeted people attending the exhibit, reading passages from her books. The live painting remained an important part of my performances." Over the years, Molly has appeared as Emily at art gallery openings, summer festivals, arts and crafts exhibits, conventions, and tourist association meetings. In 2017, after two years of fundraising, she commemorated Emily Carr's 1927 trip to the National Gallery in Ottawa by making her own railroad trip. Molly played Emily in six cities, attended ceremonies on Parliament Hill, and stayed at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection as artist-in-residence.

Today Molly devotes much of her time to teaching ukulele classes. Since 2015, she has enjoyed keeping Emily alive at OCS tours, occasionally with musical accompaniment. (Carr played guitar and mandolin.) "I do love bringing Emily's voice to life, and the unique format of presenters setting up the readings is truly a marvellous way to introduce others to Emily's words and thoughts."

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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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