

Memento Mori

Memento Mori...

...'remember death'. These two simple words, and (in Latin) the title of this newsletter, succinctly capture the essence of the cemetery - a place to remember those who have died.

As this is the first edition of the newsletter for Vancouver's Mountain View Cemetery, it is appropriate that I introduce myself and give an idea of what to expect in this and future editions.

I am a recent migrant to Vancouver having spent most of my life in Regina and Saskatoon. It was in Saskatoon that my passion for cemeteries was first revealed to me. In 1996 I was asked to take over the management responsibility for their municipal cemetery. I knew nothing of cemetery operation but was intrigued by the idea and eager to learn. Very early in my experience it became clear to me that this was going to be more than just a job or stepping stone to another career.

In 2002, I was chosen by the City of Vancouver to manage the current operations and to lead the revitalization of Mountain View Cemetery. Armed with 6 years of experience from a similar sized municipal cemetery, a strong desire to relocate to British Columbia, and a drive to find the next big challenge, I welcomed the opportunity.

With the Master Plan as the guide, work has begun on the implementation of many of the ideas and concepts for re-opening, redeveloping and revitalizing this important civic space. That's where this newsletter fits in...

The purpose of this newsletter is to be one way for the cemetery to communicate and connect with the variety of people who are interested in our past, present and future. Friends and relatives of those we have buried, people in the neighbourhood, and those who are waiting for new space to become available represent only some of those people. Genealogists, artists, funeral directors, fellow cemeterians and others all have an interest in what has happened and what will happen to this often overlooked or forgotten civic space. In fact, it is more than a just civic space, for the friends and family of those buried here live across the globe.

In this edition we introduce a few of those interested people who have agreed to contribute content to this and future issues. They will tell the stories of some of the almost 150,000 people whose mortal remains lie within our cemetery. We will also provide information on current and future projects, improvements and events that are happening in the cemetery. Throw in a couple other related snippets and we think we will be able to create an interesting read for a wide audience.

I hope you enjoy this first issue!

Glen Hodges

Manager, Mountain View Cemetery

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Head Stones Restored

As part of Mountain View Cemetery's revitalization, the revised Cemetery Rules allow existing monuments, which had been set flush to meet the requirements of regulations passed in 1964 to enable easier mowing of the grass, to be re-erected by the family.

One of the first to be re-erected is for the Leck Family. Set flush in the 1960's and badly discoloured, the family arranged for a local monument company to clean the monument and engrave the family name "LECK" on the top of the monument.

Although not required for re-erecting monuments, the family wished to have a new granite foundation installed. Cemetery staff removed the marker and base free of charge and installed the new granite foundation. •



The Leck Family monument before and after

Commonwealth War Graves Commission Renovation Project Underway

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission in conjunction with Veterans Affairs Canada, Last Post Fund, and the City of Vancouver's Mountain View Cemetery, is managing a five-year project to upgrade the 384 graves within this block (Jones 45). Among these graves are 215 war dead.

The project will result in most of the monuments being replaced. They will be installed in new continuous-beam foundations and embellished with floral borders. This site contains one of the largest groups of Commonwealth war dead in North America. This will be the

most comprehensive site-renovation conducted by the Commission on the continent to date.

The Commission was established by Royal Charter in 1917. Its duties are to mark and maintain the graves of the members of the forces of the Commonwealth who died in the two world wars, to build and maintain memorials to the dead whose graves are unknown, and to keep records and registers. It operates in 23,000 cemeteries in 150 countries. •



Jones Section before (top)
Finished, with geraniums (bottom)

A Special Event at the Cemetery



Amanda Neil

“To honour and protect in death seems but a small return to those who have protected their country in life.”

A special ceremony to unveil a new marker and name-plate on a commemorative monument for an unmarked veteran took place at Mountain View Cemetery on Saturday, March 11, 2006

The \$335 needed for the marker was raised by 12-year-old Amanda Neil from Ladner. Amanda was inspired to raise the funds following an event last summer where 13 new monuments commemorating 939 unmarked veteran graves were dedicated in Mountain View Cemetery.

“Amanda’s initiative and determination in response to the commemoration of the unmarked veterans is fantastic. It is inspiring that a 12-year-old would make this kind of effort to commemorate a stranger. The cemetery is very grateful,” said Glen Hodges, Manager of Mountain View Cemetery.

Amanda raised the money by collecting bottles in her neighbourhood and through donations from relatives. •

Feature Story: Meeting George Frost

If you view the world with a squint in your eye, you’ll miss the beauty of light

There are strange things seen on the midnight green,
Where the dead lie dark and deep.
The graveyard trails hold secret tales,
That win never leave this keep.
But one black night when the wind blew right,
My path by Fate was crossed
For I heard his moans, and it chilled my bones,
The night I met George Frost.

(With apologies to Robert Service.)

George Frost is dead; to begin with. His story written, and the pages closed, he was laid to rest on a cold wet winter’s day way back in 1953. Now, half a century later, only a moss-muted, dark grey headstone remains to punctuate his life - a life worthy of a book.

But life, it seems, is stranger than fiction. And apropos of that, I’m here to testify that old George Frost - dead though he remains - is certainly not gone; for he took my hand, and with a gesture grand, he said ‘Hullo’, one night not long ago...

It was a late fall evening, the proverbial ‘dark and stormy night’; and as the wind and rain lashed down from a darkening sky, I found myself duty bound to a chore. I had promised an elderly friend that I would walk his dog; so there was nothing for it but to suit up and go.

I found Henry in bed; cozied up to the Globe and Mail. His infirmity may have limited his physical activity, but his mind retained the prowess of an athlete; case in point, as I arrived he was busily multitasking the TV, radio and a crossword puzzle all at once. Lesser mortals, like me, would be challenged by a single stimulus; but he could juggle them all without dropping a thing. He amazed me. (He came by his genetic talents honestly; for his lesser talented brother was the renowned lawyer Harry Rankin.)

As I leashed up his dog to head out in the rain Henry promised me a warm cup of something nourishing when I returned. He always delivered on a promise; and as I stepped out into the chill night wind, I did so with the pleasant expectation of a wee surprise awaiting me at the rag-end of the walk. (Little did I know what.)

But walk time is dog time; you are tethered to an ancient obligation of patience in this symbiosis with ‘man’s best friend’. And where they lead; you follow. So when Chinook began pulling for the darkness beyond the street lamp’s reach, I gave him lead to follow his nose wherever it might take us; and off I went, doubtfully but dutifully, into the inky black cemetery.

Soon we came to a halt. Chinook, snuffling underfoot, became entranced with something invisible; while I, waiting by in the dark, merely became wetter in the pelting rain. In my boredom I looked down to find the shadowy shape of a recumbent headstone at my feet.

Feeling a twinge of embarrassment, as if I’d bumped someone inadvertently, I stepped back off the marker and squinted down at the occupant’s name; it was the least I could do, by way of an apology, to read his name and acknowledge to read his name and acknowledge his presence. So, leaning forward and squinting in the half-light, I found the following:

George Frost, 10th Batt. CEF, Feb. 26, 1953

Now, for some people, this information might’ve sputtered and died, like a candle snuffed out in the wind; and George Frost would’ve slipped away into the empty nothingness of a rainy black night. But for me, as one who harbours an interest in history, it triggered a flickering moment of wonder.

I knew, for example, that the “CEF” indicated he had joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force and had served in World War One. And as he’d belonged to the Calgary “10th Battalion”, that meant he’d gone overseas early in 1914 with the First Division. This little fact proved a significant insight, because it meant that he’d survived a lion’s share of carnage in four years of war - not to mention the 1918 Influenza outbreak - and lived to tell about it. How did he manage all that, only to end up lying here in this rain-wet grass, forgotten? But before I could think anything more, the dog suddenly tugged on the leash; and away we went, stumbling through the wind whipped rainy night... goodbye George Frost. (Or so I thought.)

Back at the house, I was towelling down the dog when Henry called me over; he had something for me. He hands me his Legion Magazine

(himself a W.W.II vet.) saying: “Here, you’ll like this story; it’s about a First War guy.” Briefly scanning the magazine, politely but absently, I was just about to set it aside ‘for later’ when I was abruptly shocked into mouth-gaping silence. For there, staring back at me from the inanimate page was the name: George Frost. The very name I’d just encountered, only moments earlier, out there in the inky dark cemetery! How weird, I thought, as a tingling sensation crept over my skin, migrating up the arms to cross my shoulders. With the hair at the back of my neck on end, and my interest peaked by this spooky bit of chance, I now read on in rapt attention; only to discover something more bizarre...

For this was not your average, run-of-the-mill, coincidence; nor merely that crazy kind of fluke when you see the same name appear in two places at once. No, this was something stranger still; a story worthy of Ripley’s Believe It Or Not. Against all mathematical probability, (you skeptics beware!) this was, in point of fact, the same man! Strange, but true; for it seems that the occupant of the grave I’d just stumbled over was, in freakish fact, the very person being featured in this magazine I now held in my hands!! Whoa. Now that’s weird

I stood in jaw-dropped, tongue-numbing, awe, as I read the passage confirming that this magazine George Frost was, indeed, the same George Frost who is buried “in the Field of Honour, [in] Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver”. I felt dumb struck, as if I’d had the wind walloped out of me. A thunderbolt, out of nowhere, couldn’t have seared my senses more completely. What, in dizzy wonder, were the chances of such an odd coincidence?

The magazine article, apparently, was a book review; the grandchildren of this George Frost had seen fit to cobble together his fragmentary writings in order to tell the story of his amazing life. And from the magazine’s brief synopsis I learned that he’d been caught in the vortex of some turbulent historical events; landing, like a cat, always on his feet, and ready to keep pace with whatever adventure chanced across his path.

For instance, he was orphaned and sent to sea in the hard days of sail, where he rose from cabin boy to master mariner. He then began a military career and served in several international conflicts around the world. He was in Cuba, under Teddy Roosevelt in the Spanish-American war; was wounded in the South African Boer War; sailed in the navy again to participate in the Russo-Japanese war; and eventually emigrated to Canada where he homesteaded. But when Britain and Germany went to war in 1914, he enlisted with the CEF and went overseas to France where, at Ypres in 1915, he survived the first poison gas attack. It was then that he was captured and his warring days ended as a ‘guest of the Kaiser’. Owing to his advanced age, however, he was lucky enough to be repatriated; and he eventually settled in Vancouver, having ‘done his bit’, and then some. Now he lies in an unassuming plot, in the shadow of a hedge, forgotten; but for Fate.

Ah yes, Fate; which in this case seemed more like a mercurial alignment of wildly disparate entities --everything from a dog’s nose, through an idle moment of boredom, to an old man’s memory - all of which were conspiring together (like three witches over a cauldron) to create this bizarre bit of synchronicity. And I, being caught in the middle of it, felt like I’d just witnessed a freak accident; as if I’d seen two threads, swirling round in a tornado, come hurtling together only to meet - end to end - at the very same instant, in the eye of a needle. Go figure. What are the chances?

In the great, diffuse radiating web of all things, how do such things occur? How could these two unrelated events become fused in a singular moment of time? Consider this: of all the graves I might’ve stepped on that night, (one in several thousand) and of all the other nights Henry might’ve handed me that magazine, (in the year and a half I knew him) how is it that these two separate entities should cross the space/time barrier and collide, head on, in one spectacular instant? To reiterate: what are the chances?

I don’t know. Let those mathematicians among us work out the statistical im-probability of it; all I can do is scratch my head in wonder at its sensational strangeness. (Perhaps there’s more than meets the eye, and the rest of our squinty senses, in the reach beyond our technologies?) But

if there's a moral to be gleaned here, what I can say is this; the truth will out. For a good story has legs; it gets up and goes, with a life of its own. And in this situation, happily, at least one "secret tale", from the graveyard trail, has escaped into the light of day. Like a cat let out of the bag, the spirit of old George Frost has chanced his lot to us; make of it what you will. For myself, I take it as an inspiriting inoculation against complacency; and an abject lesson in staying open to the wide realm of mystery all around us. The enveloping world, that cocoons our mortal consciousness, is storied with wizardry; and squint though you may, Harry Potter himself would concur.

At any event, that is the true story of my strange meeting with George Frost. My impetus for sharing this tale 'from the beyond' was not merely to provide readers with an entertaining idyll in *The Twilight Zone*, but rather, to incite others to share their own experiences of the Mountain View Cemetery. For I look upon this place as a veritable library of untold stories; a mutual heritage that remains, sadly, largely overlooked and ignored. But there's an incredible wealth of local history contained therein and some fascinating lives worth discovering, free for the walking. And as the spirit of George Frost exhorts, there may even be magic lurking underfoot; amazing stories worth discovering, if we'd only take the time to stop, listen, and share.

So turn off the TV, shut down that computer, open the door and step out into your neighbourhood (dog optional). And if Fate should steer your feet, off the straight and narrow and into the sleepy green regions of the cemetery, be aware; for there's another world waiting to be discovered, a world of magic and mystery, and all for the sharing.

There are strange things learned, where
the grass is turned,
And the dead lay dark and deep.
The graveyard trails hold some
awesome tales;
That we must share, to keep.
So one fine night, if the wind blows right,
And your path by Fate is crossed;
Just say 'Hullo' to the one below,
In the spirit of old George Frost.

Cheers.
Yours, J.S. MacEachern

Olaf Elmer Berge

By John Atkin

One of the interesting aspects of Mountain View Cemetery is how connected it is to significant events in our history. Recently, while researching a small item unconnected to Mountain View, I stumbled across a reference to Olaf Elmer Berge on the internet site for the BC Geographical Names Office:

"Named to remember Royal Canadian Navy Stoker 1st class Olaf Elmer Berge, V73882, from Vancouver. Serving aboard HMCS Esquimalt when he was killed in action 16 April 1945, age 20; buried at Mountainview [sic] Cemetery, Vancouver, grave 3- 18- 14.

Source: BC Place name cards, or correspondence to/from BC's Chief Geographer or BC Geographical Names Office"

Intrigued, further research showed that Olaf was the son of Egil George and Ida Helena Berge of Vancouver. The *HMCS Esquimalt* was a diesel-powered Bangor-class minesweeper operating primarily as an anti-submarine escort. She was torpedoed in the approaches to Halifax, five miles off Chebucto Head, in the morning of 16 April 1945 by German U-boat U-190, just three weeks before the end of the war. It turns out *HMCS Esquimalt* was the last Canadian warship lost to enemy action in the war. Of her seventy-two member crew, only twenty-seven survived.

U-190 was on her last patrol to North America under the command of Werner Hirschmann and surrendered to the Canadian Navy in 1945. He spent time as a prisoner of war in Canada and Britain before being returned to Germany. Hirschmann emigrated to Canada in 1950. He is a member of the Royal Canadian Military Institute and Naval Officers' Association of Canada, and an honorary member of the veterans' association of *HMCS Esquimalt*.

In 1989 the *HMCS Esquimalt* Memorial Association erected a cairn on the front lawn of the Esquimalt Municipal Hall to remember the crew members lost. •

The First Burial in Mountain View Cemetery?

By Lorraine Irving

It is very hard for me to choose just one story about Mountain View Cemetery. However, as this is the first issue of the newsletter, I thought that I would start with the first burial that should have taken place on January 29, 1887.

Simon Hirshburg arrived in Port Moody with his wife, Elmira, on the first intercontinental train in July, 1886. He built the Leland Hotel at the intersection of Hastings Street and Granville Street. On January 28, 1887, he took an overdose of opium. The paper reported that he had been acting strangely of late and had repeatedly threatened to end his existence. When the doctors arrived, he recovered consciousness briefly and said in German, "I told them so."

The Provincial Government had granted the city 20 acres for a cemetery on what was then North Arm Road. City employees had started to clear the



Mrs. Evans visited her son's grave in 1939. CVA Port N173.1

land near the current intersection of Fraser Street and 33rd Avenue. A grave was dug for Mr. Hirshburg but unfortunately when the funeral procession arrived, the pall bearers were unable to carry Mr. Hirshburg over the uneven ground to the grave and he was buried on the roadway. He was described as a big man.

On February 26, 1887, Caradoc Evans, a nine month old infant was buried in the cemetery. His father,

David Evans, did not want him buried in the roadway beside Mr. Hirshburg and carried his small coffin over the fallen trees to the top of a hill.

In 1939, Mrs. Evans returned to Vancouver and visited her son's grave. She was living with her daughter in Seattle at that time. During her visit she was interviewed and photographed by Major Matthews, Vancouver's first archivist. She did not recall hearing that Mr. Hirshburg had ever been moved into the cemetery.

To date, I haven't been able to locate Mr. Hirshburg's death certificate. I have tried various spellings of his name. In 1941, Mrs. Hirshburg, who had remarried and was now known as Mrs. Nordager, required proof of Simon's death to obtain a pension. Major Matthews wrote a letter to support her application. "However, I presume there are still living a dozen people who know the circumstances of his death; he committed suicide in the Leland Hotel, one of the swell hotels of that day." In 1887, deaths should have been registered in New Westminster and the death register may have been destroyed in the 1898 fire. However, I did find Caradoc's death which was registered in March, 1897.

On a couple of cemetery tours, people have asked if Mr. Hirschburg was Jewish. The newspaper reported that the Rev. H. Clinton officiated and read the beautiful burial service of the Church of England over the grave. •

Note: If you are ever near the intersection of 33rd Avenue and Fraser Street, look at the pedestrian light pole at the south west corner of the intersection. There you will find a small trophy plaque mounted in memorial to Simon Hirschburg.

A Night for All Souls

Acoustic music, candles, fire, flowers, food, and poetry were all part of a unique, contemplative, evening held on October 29, 2005.

A Night for All Souls at the Mountain View Cemetery is designed to provide opportunities for the public to commemorate their dead through a series of workshops, culminating in a family oriented community art event. For some people observing All Souls Day is a regular tradition, and for many this will be a new experience. The Night for All Souls at the Mountain View Cemetery is a non-denominational sacred event, and opportunity for people to share their own customs and experiences.

Created by Mountain View's artist in residence Paula Jardine, the evening was organized to revive the role of the urban cemetery in the life of an increasingly secular and multicultural community. "I think this will give people a little different slant on what a cemetery is or could be," says Mountain View manager Glen Hodges. "Art is a great way to open it up for others to look at it in a different way."

In many cultures around the world, the days at the end of October and beginning of November are considered an important time for honouring the dead in our lives, through ceremony and celebration, and the practical maintenance of the family gravesites. Customs include cleaning and decorating graves, feasts, flowers, lanterns, and candles. In our modern, urban, and relatively transient culture, traditional "village" customs have been left behind, though not the human impulses that led to these traditions. •

Many thoughtful comments have been received from those that attended the first All Souls event, we'd like to share some of them. For more, vancouver.ca/cemetery/allsouls

"As my friend and I walked around we felt very privileged to be a part of something so soul comforting. There were many special moments for many people who attended."

"The Morning After: I went out to the cemetery this morning... a family, a man with two young girls, was at the main shrine and they were curious about what had been going on. His little daughter was buried near by. He seemed happy to know that something [more] was being made of Halloween than the usual."

"It was a really beautiful evening. It was so nice to see the receptiveness of community to the creation of a new ritual. Especially a ritual around death. There is a responsive need for community to come together to share grief and loss and find paths to celebrating the richness of life anew. Thank you & thanks to Mountain View for a great beginning of a "marvellous thing". I hope it continues."

"All Souls was wonderful and moving. I made a lantern for my friend who is dying

which was wrenching to place and see it in that context. I did one for my grandparents too and what was most interesting about that was, that although I see their wedding photo how many times a day, putting it on a lantern and placing it gave it some power. It did make me think about them differently, who they were and why they were so important to me. And it was really interesting to see other people, strangers, looking at them and commenting, wondering who they were and just getting it. It was very special. And very beautiful. I was glad that it was easy to step away from the light and the people into private space to cry."

"It was somber and low key and respectful. People were interested, hesitant, shy, pleased, relieved. We sat in the dark for a long time listening to the violinist playing Celtic music. I remarked to my partner that there's nothing quite like Celtic music for being jaunty yet mournful. Later, we couldn't get enough of the 3 women singing the gorgeous Ukrainian and Eastern European songs. I stood by one of the fire barrels, warming my back, listening. My hair and clothes were covered with ash from the fire

by the time I pulled myself away from those mesmerizing strong sad songs. So perfect for female voices. The falling ash seemed just right, too. Grief-rain, I thought."

"I lit candles at the family shrine for my Dad and my sister. I wrote a message on the board in memory of my sister, and realized it was the first time since her death that I had written her name. I stood transfixed, looking at it, remembering all the times I had written it in my life...on birthday cards and Christmas gift tags, and on letters when she lived overseas. There was a woman my age standing next to me, staring at the board, lost in her own thoughts. We glanced at each other briefly, and in our vulnerability we shared some sort of unspoken communion. When I left the shrine to wander with the crowds I had the sense that the whole event had been lovingly created as a place for people to gather to be vulnerable together and that everyone was respectful and appreciative of this offering. Thank you so much."

A Night for All Souls will again take place in October 2006, contact the cemetery for more information.

Our contributors:

Lorraine Irving

Lorraine has enjoyed exploring cemeteries since she was a young child when she would ride her bicycle to the cemetery on Mayne Island and record many of the interesting old inscriptions. As a long time member of the B.C. Genealogical Society, Lorraine helped record Mountain View cemetery in the 1980s as well as several other cemeteries in the Lower Mainland. In addition to her genealogical interest, she also has family members buried in the cemetery: her grandparents, Harry and Lillian Huggins, as well as a great aunt, Ivy Gladys Dickson. Her interest in Mountain View was evident in her participation on the Advisory Committee that worked on the Master Plan for the cemetery. She has a wealth of information on many people interred in Mountain View and enjoys guided tours and giving lectures. If you wish to arrange a tour for your group, you can contact her at loirv1824@aol.com

John Atkin

John Atkin is an author, historian and walking tour guide who organizes and conducts tours for groups and individuals. John has explored Vancouver like few others have and offers an interesting and offbeat insight to the city's architecture, history and neighbourhoods. He has created, and conducts, a number of unique and popular walking tours throughout the City of Vancouver. He is the author of five books, co-founder and past president of Heritage Vancouver, editor of *British Columbia History* for the BC Historical Federation. He is also the webmaster for the Mountain View Cemetery website.

J. S. (Joe) MacEachern

Just some 'Joe' who enjoys walks with the dog, prefers the changing light of a twilight sky over TV, would rather make his own music with friends than download i-tunes, and doesn't own shares in anything but enjoys sharing time with others—old or young, living or gone... Joe grew up in Vancouver, played sports, played in bands, played out the usual activities—various jobs, travelling, schooling—and is now a 'pall bearer', of sorts, in the dying industry that was once considered the crown of culture: the book trade. Every day he goes to work, though he's mining in the dusty rooms and forgotten shelves of a used book store, he takes pleasure in serving those special people who still require that age old—caveman ancient—need: to hear a 'good story', now and again. His association with Mountain View Cemetery began five years ago. Having befriended an elderly neighbour, Henry Rankin (and his dog Chinook), he became acquainted with the cemetery as a peaceful respite from the daily grind. Walks with Henry's dog introduced him to the significant wealth of local history contained within the cemetery's hedges. In time he became fascinated with the many stories, untold, that grace this place and mark the remains of lives once lived.

Contact Us...

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In Person:

8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Monday to Friday
(excluding holidays)



The Marantha Choir at A Night for All Souls