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### **March – April 2018**

#### **Annual General Meeting**

Gerry Buydens

The Annual General Meeting of the Old Cemeteries Society of Victoria was held on Wednesday, February 28, 2018 at Old Craigflower School. There were 30 people in attendance. The meeting was chaired by Gerry Buydens, President of OCS.

The treasurer's report was presented by Gudrun Leys. Gerry Buydens summarized the highlights from the president's report & the committee reports. He thanked the executive for their support and also thanked the many volunteers. OCS has a high number of volunteers. The Executive for 2018 will be Gerry Buydens - President; Wilf Bruch – Past President; Vice President – vacant; Gudrun Leys - Treasurer; Michael Halleran - Secretary; and Members at large are: Bente Svendsen, Drew Waveryn, Linda Richards, Pat Lydon and Steve Thomson

The business portion of the meeting ended at 8:30 pm. There was a refreshment break and then the group was treated to a presentation by Drew Waveryn on his trip to Europe and his attendance at VIMY100.

A copy of the Treasurer's Report and all other Committee Reports are available upon request from the office. Sunday Tour Brochures have been delivered to the various public libraries and the local archives. They are also available at the Sunday tours or from the office.

#### **A Tombstone Tourist in Iceland**

Linda Coates (nee Brandson)

My grandfather, Einar Brandson, born 1861, emigrated from Iceland to North Dakota in 1886 and moved to Victoria the following year. He worked as a caretaker at Ross Bay Cemetery for many years and is buried in plot M35E01. His older brother, Einar Brandsson, remained on the family farm in south Iceland. Note that both brothers shared the same name except for the second "s" in their surname. On coming to Canada many Icelanders dropped the second "s". In

Iceland at that time it was not unusual for two living children to have the same first name, in which case they were identified as "eldri" or "yngri". Both Einar Brandsons died in 1933.



Einar Brandson in Ross Bay Cemetery in the 1920's. Einar's two sons, my father, Brandur, and my uncle James (Gudmundur) worked with him for a time. Note that there are few mature trees- the trees we enjoy today were planted later.



Unfortunately I do not know any living relatives in Iceland, but on a recent visit there I found the country churchyard where several of my ancestors are interred. It was great to discover my 'roots'! Here is the headstone of my grand-uncle Einar and his wife. Note that the year of death is shown as 1934, not 1933.



I learned that every farmer in Iceland has a unique 'brand' or symbol which he cuts into the ear of every sheep or lamb belonging to his farm. There is a national compendium of all sheep farmers and the marks attributed to them. Every farmer /area has a record so that if any animal goes astray it is easy to determine which farm the animal belongs to. Some farmers' tombstones bore the shape of the "brand" for their sheep.

We received a follow-up lesson on the unique markings Icelandic farmers use to identify their sheep. We noticed carved tree stumps along the roadway as we approached the old manor home/cultural centre “Skridouklauster” of an Icelandic writer Gunnar Gunnarsson. We inquired about the significance of the stumps and were told that the carvings were indeed in the shape of a sheep’s ear and portrayed the farm’s brand. It was interesting to later find gravestones with these special markings, and to have the story reconfirmed.



The Westman Islands lie about 150 km southeast of Reykjavik, Iceland. All of the islands have evolved from underwater eruptions. The islands are edged by steep sea cliffs, home to millions of puffins and other sea bird colonies. Heimaey is the largest of these islands, and the only one inhabited. Eldfell, a massive volcanic cone, once thought to be extinct, dominates the harbour. Vestmannaeyjar is the main town.

In January, 1973, with no prior warning, Eldfell erupted in the middle of the night. Fire sirens alerted the villagers, who left everything behind and evacuated by way of fishing boats. It was fortunate that a storm the previous day caused many fishing boats to be anchored in the harbour. An almost total evacuation of the town was possible, with little or no loss of life.

As many as four hundred buildings and homes were engulfed with lava; the lava flow threatened to close off the harbour. Seawater was pumped on the lava to slow its course. As much as 200 tons of ash and volcanic material rained down upon the little town. Most homes and services were completely destroyed. Eventually some people returned to the island and rebuilt homes. It now has a thriving fishing industry and is a popular tourist and hiking destination.

Of special interest is the cemetery in Vestmannaeyjar. After the eruption it lay up to 6 feet deep in volcanic ash. Much of the clean-up and restoration was done in the late 1970s without the use of heavy equipment. Excavations revealed a perfect time capsule of the life at the time. A team of mostly volunteers used shovels and buckets to dig out the area carefully so as not to destroy the headstones. The ash was then loaded into trucks for disposal. Some relics are now incorporated into a museum which has been called “Little Pompeii”.



1128



1134



1133



1113



1130



1023

Photos:

- # 1128) shows the arch entrance of the cemetery as it is today.
- # 1134 is an image of the cemetery and the arch the night of the eruption.
- # 1133 is an image showing the arch entrance and the level of ash.
- # 1113 lava destroyed house
- # 1130 is the cemetery in its current state.
- # 1023 town rebuilt, lava in foreground; volcanic "Eldfell" in the background

### Water Cremations....

....are not cremations in the normal sense, but a technique whereby human tissues are liquified in an alkaline solution heated to 152° C in a pressurized tank. The liquid is poured down the drain and the bones are ground to powder and given to the family in an urn. Water cremations are claimed to be the most environmentally method of dealing with the body after death.

Water cremation is now available in Canada and in several American states. In Britain the technique has been resisted so far by government and by a broad section of the public. For many, the thought of Granny being flushed down the loo is just too much!

### Membership Dues for 2018:

We would like to express our appreciation to the members who have submitted their membership dues for 2018 and we encourage those who have not yet done so to please submit your dues as soon as possible. Membership cards are no longer automatically mailed to you, but will be provided to members who request them.

### Tombstone Oddities

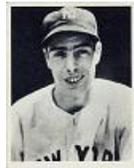


In Holland in 1888 a Protestant colonel and a Catholic noblewoman caused a scandal by marrying. Knowing they would not be allowed to be buried together, they arranged for plots in adjacent Protestant and Catholic cemeteries and rest clasping hands in stone over the dividing wall.

### Last Words

Joe DiMaggio

1914-1999



“I’ll finally get to see Marilyn.”

