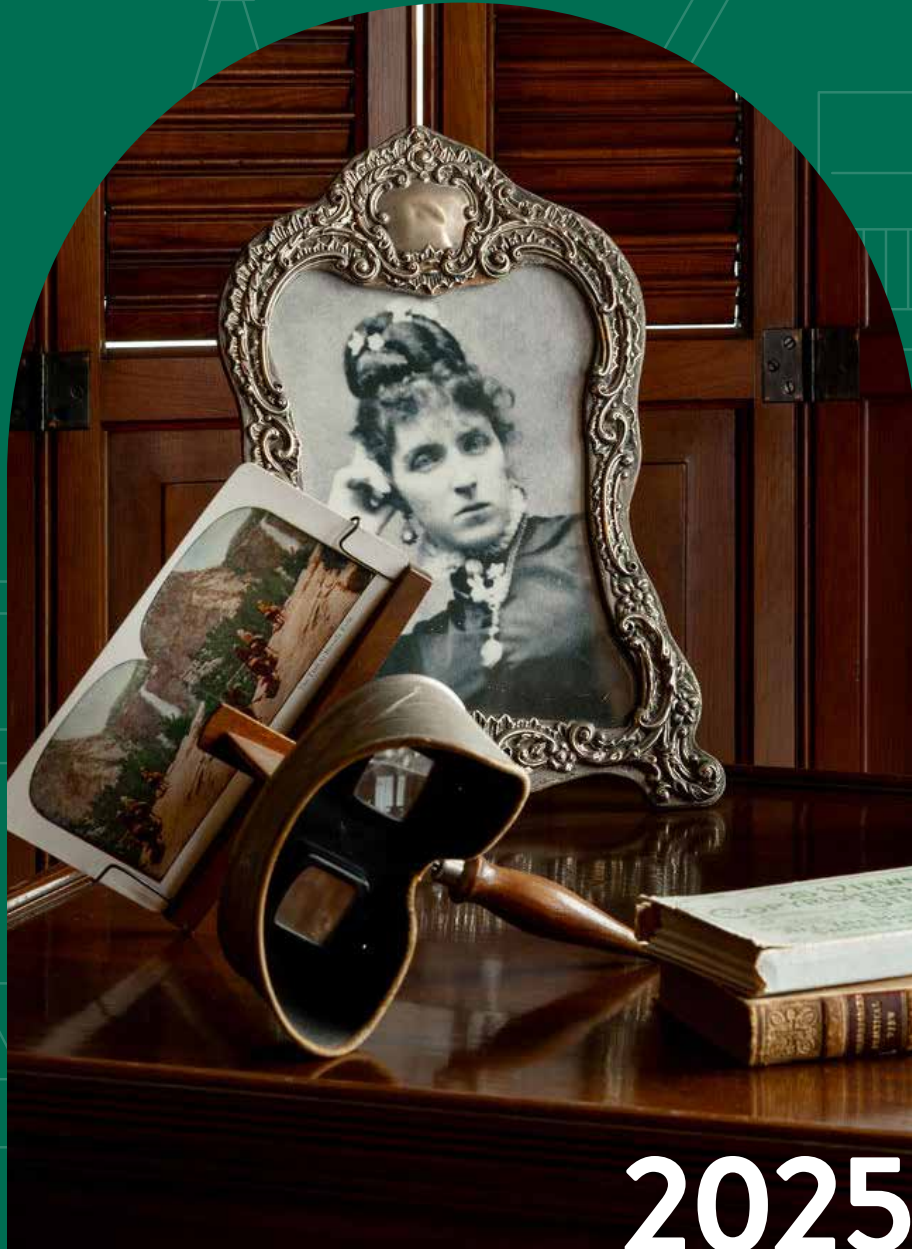




**CRAIGDARROCH CASTLE®**

CANADA'S CASTLE



**2025**

# Annual Report



# Mission

To preserve Craigdarroch Castle and bring its history to life.

# Vision

Craigdarroch Castle is Canada's leading house museum, recognized internationally for excellence in conservation, education and visitor experience and is an integral part of Victoria's past present and future.



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# Report from the President

**DEAR FRIENDS OF CRAIGDARROCH CASTLE,**

**AS ONE INTERESTING YEAR IN THE LIFE OF CRAIGDARROCH CASTLE DRAWS TO A CLOSE AND ANOTHER ONE COMMENCES, I'M PLEASED AND PROUD TO LET YOU KNOW THAT WE'RE DOING ALL RIGHT.**

**MORE THAN ALL RIGHT.**

We've been buffeted by forces beyond our borders and many things beyond our control but thanks to thoughtful, innovative staff The Castle has reinforced the positives while at the same time we pivoted, recalibrated and found and defined new possibilities thanks to talent within. These new ideas make us less dependent on old business assumptions and offers a new income stream. The Castle has found new inroads to some new destinations that makes us less dependent on tourism and more open to the unique opportunities offered by history, heritage, and education.

We enjoyed another great Christmas season and, this year, we had two sold-out Paper Street Theatre productions. We published a beautiful, illustrated book by Jim Wolf, *Craigdarroch Reconstructed*, that put the spotlight on the Castle's architecture and the stories it tells. New artifacts (such as additional women's dresses from the early Dunsmuir days) are on display. Additional wayfinding from "Garry the Mouse" is available for both children and adults. Under development for 2026 are three new tours, one focused on the revelations of the Craigdarroch

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collection's artifacts (led by Curator Jenny Seeman) and two others (one focused on Rockland neighbourhood's Garden Walls, the other on stone buildings in Victoria's inner harbour), led by the Castle's Building Conservation and Facilities Manager Shawn Thibault. The Castle's offerings keep getting better and better!

I want to thank the board for their care and attention to Castle matters; being a member of this board has been one of the best things I have experienced. I'm finishing up my second term as president and while I will remain available to the Castle for any counsel desired, I will be joining Kelly Somogyi and Angelica Pass in bidding adieu. I thank them for all the interest and expertise they have brought to the board.

I also want to thank John Hughes and Castle staff, as well as members and volunteers. Just as we can look back to the 19th century and the start of the Castle's rich and varied story, we can also look forward to its continuation, as new ways are found to share the Castle's different tales with more people.

Being President of the Craigdarroch board of directors has been one of the great honours of my life. I can't adequately express my gratitude beyond: Thank you.

**Moira Dann**

PRESIDENT



# Report from the Executive Director

AS I PRESENT MY REPORT AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SOCIETY IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE ANOTHER YEAR HAS PASSED. FIRST AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, I WANT TO RECOGNIZE THE HARD WORK AND SUPPORT FROM THE INCREDIBLE STAFF TEAM AT CRAIGDARROCH CASTLE. FOLLOWING ARE MY HIGHLIGHTS OF 2025 AT THE CASTLE.

With respect to visitor numbers, 2025 was much the same as 2024, though we did notice a shift in country of origin. Visitors from across Canada increased throughout the year, not just in our shoulder seasons. The international market also increased though we're still missing many of our visitors from the Asia Pacific market. The American market softened a bit during the summer but seemed to be as expected during the fall and into December. I expect we'll see a similar visitor mix this year and, with luck, the newly approved return of the Chinese group tour market will deliver more visitors to Victoria and the Castle.

Reflecting on the Castle's summer activity, we transitioned into high season with expectations of strong visitor numbers for June, July and August. BC Ferries and BC Destination Management Organizations were also predicting a robust summer. Given the current global economic challenges and increased cost of goods and services we did fairly well. As with the early part of the year, visitor activity remained somewhat unpredictable so days we expected to be busy weren't and other days were unexpectedly so. June was disappointingly soft, then July exceeded 2024 visitor and revenue numbers by a small amount. August numbers started off even with last year and ended with a similar level of visitors. We continue to research new ways to engage with our audience and encourage people to visit.

For the second year, our *Curiosities of Craigdarroch, After Hours Tour*, ran throughout October and November and was consistently sold out. Tour goers experienced a hauntingly authentic glimpse into the lives of the Dunsmuir Family and the world they inhabited during the macabre Victorian era.

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The Paper Street Theatre Co. returned twice, in March and again in November, for sold-out runs of *Murders on Paper Street: An Improvised Mystery in a Real Life Castle*. Inspired by one of the best selling authors of all time, Agatha Christie, this fully improvised mystery had visitors on the edge of their seats until the final whodunit reveal.

In November, we hosted a launch event for Jim Wolf's new book, *Reconstructing Craigdarroch, the Story of the Castle's Design and Construction*, which is available in the Gift Shop.

Christmas is always a special time at the Castle and the 2025 holiday season was no exception, with the Castle interior decorated for the holidays from December 3 through January 7, 2026.

This year, a new guided *Holiday Tour of Craigdarroch Castle* was offered on selected dates through December. Guests wandered through the Castle, viewing period-style decorations while their guides shared stories and information on the traditions of the 19th century.

In July, as he celebrated his 50th anniversary at Craigdarroch Castle, curator Bruce Davies retired. I am so very grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from him.

He is a thoughtful and patient man who has helped a great many people develop their interest and expertise in Craigdarroch Castle, be they authors, researchers, or staff. In August, following his retirement, the Board named Bruce Davies Craigdarroch Castle Curator Emeritus.

I want to thank the Board of the Society for their on-going support to the entire staff team at the Castle, their financial oversight and their dedication to their work on our behalf. In particular, I want to thank Moira Dann, our Board Chair, as she completes her term on the Board. Moira is a true champion of Craigdarroch, and while she will no longer be on the Board, I know that she will continue her commitment to telling our stories.

Finally, my thanks to all of our members, volunteers, donors and the community who have supported and encouraged us.

**John Hughes**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



# Report from the Treasurer

**IN 2025 REDUCED VISITATION WAS OFFSET BY HIGHER ADMISSION PRICES, WHILE INVESTMENTS IN STAFFING AND CURATORIAL ACTIVITIES RESULTED IN HIGHER EXPENSES COMPARED TO 2024.**

While both admissions and museum store revenues were higher in 2025 compared to the prior year, investment income and program revenue were significantly lower. Donation revenues remained consistent year over year. Consequently, revenues declined by 2 percent compared to 2024.

Meanwhile, expenses increased by 3% in 2025 with rises in salaries and curatorial initiatives leading the way.

For the 2025 financial year, the Society realized a cash surplus, maintaining a strong financial position that allowed it to carry out essential preservation work while continuing to expand the historical experiences offered to visitors of this historic site.

Despite ongoing uncertainties within the global tourism sector, the Castle's proactive leadership in diversifying revenue streams is highly encouraging, signaling a strong forward momentum.

Our thanks go to the Society's membership for your steadfast support. It will be our pleasure to welcome you back to the Castle in the near future.

**Julie Murtha**

TREASURER



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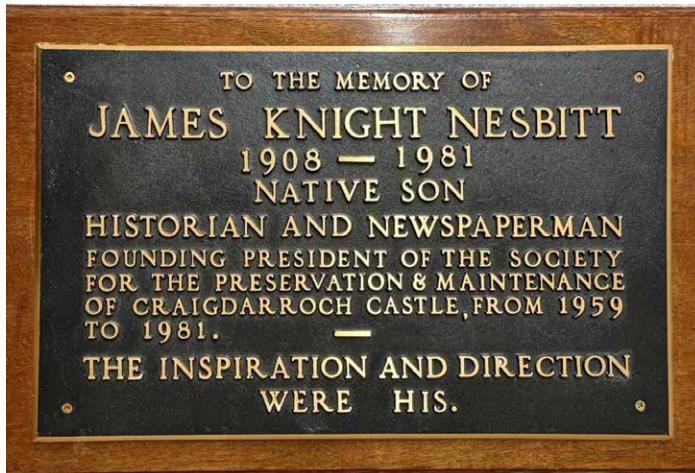
Full 2025 financial statements are available at:  
[thecastle.ca/pages/become-a-member](https://thecastle.ca/pages/become-a-member)

# Acquisitions

**THE SOCIETY'S MUSEUM COLLECTION IS USED TO PRESENT STORIES OF THE DUNSMUIR FAMILY AND THE INSTITUTIONS THAT HAVE OCCUPIED CRAIGDARROCH.**

Work continues to enhance the descriptions in our publicly available collections database [collection.thecastle.ca](https://collection.thecastle.ca), including adding photograph records to items that were only briefly described.

In 2025, we received some excellent donations. Highlights include:



## 2025.1 | James Nesbitt Plaque

This bronze plaque was commissioned by The Castle Society's Board of Directors on December 13, 1981 to honour the memory of the late James K. Nesbitt, the founding President of The Society for The Preservation and Maintenance of Craigdarroch Castle. It has now formally been added to the Castle Society collection.

## 2025.2.1 | Lady's Dresser Set

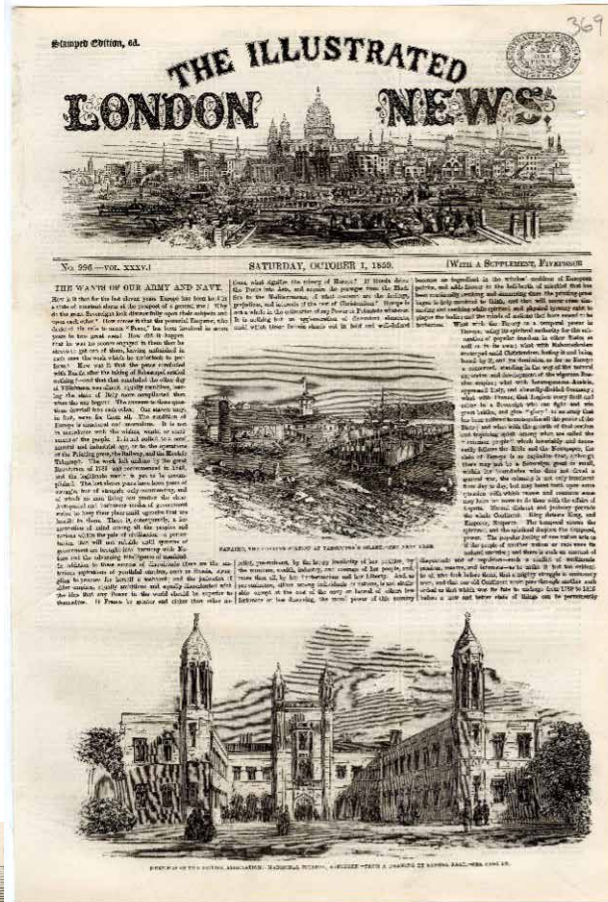
The brushes, shooehorn, glove stretcher, and jar make up a 5-piece hand-carved ivory lady's dresser set. Chinese decorative arts and furniture was desirable to late 19th Century Victoria residents. This exotic, beautiful, and well-made dresser set is a fine example of Chinese craftsmanship.





### 2025.2.2 | Service Bell

This call bell was commissioned by Reginald Spencer Chaplin and given by him to his sister-in-law, Mary Jean Dunsmuir (aka Mrs. Henry Croft). Mr. Chaplin was married to Mary's sister, Henrietta Maud Dunsmuir. Mr. Chaplin provided the silversmith with a handwritten message to Mary which the silversmith then engraved onto the bell.



### 2025.3 | Magazine Clipping

This clipping is the first two pages of the twenty-four-page October 1, 1859 edition of The Illustrated London News. The roof of the first Nanaimo cottage occupied by Robert and Joan Olive Dunsmuir and their family is depicted in the illustration. It is the second cottage in the far distance to the left of the Hudson's Bay Company Bastion. The illustration was produced from a sketch by Royal Navy Lieutenant Panter-Downes of H.M.S. Tribune, which is also depicted in the image.



**2025.4 | Book**

This book, written by Castle Society founder James K. Nesbitt, recounts the stories of old Victoria homes and families. Many of the stories included were previously published by Nesbitt in the Victoria Colonist's Sunday magazine section. It is of importance to the Castle Society collection because it provides evidence of James K. Nesbitt's deep knowledge and interest in preserving the stories of old Victoria. While its publication date of 1956 predates the founding of the Castle Society by three years, it nevertheless includes an in-depth account of the Dunsmuir family and their dominance in Victoria's society life from the 1880's through to the 1930's when Laura Dunsmuir died at Hatley Park.



**2025.5 | Brunton Compass and Barometer**

This leather case containing a Brunton compass and an aneroid barometer was owned and used by John William Bryden and dates from around 1912.

A Brunton compass is used in the calculation of the 'strike' and 'dip' of geological features (faults, contacts, foliation, sedimentary strata, etc.). The aneroid barometer is a barometric altimeter which indicates altitude by measuring atmospheric pressure.

John William Bryden was a professional mining engineer, having been sent to study at the Freiburg University of Mineral Technology with his cousin, Robin Dunsmuir in 1897. John William prospected for various precious metals and minerals around BC, such as mineral claims in Port Essington in Skeena river country in the 1900s and later, holding interests in Vancouver Island Gold Mines Ltd (near Port Alberni) into the 1930s. The Brunton compass and barometric altimeter were used by him throughout his career.





**2025.6 | Bell**

Bells such as these are sometimes known as school bells or nautical bells and are used in these contexts because of the loud sound they can produce. This bell produces a very loud clear ring and would be ideal in a setting such as Craigdarroch's kitchen. If a cook, housekeeper, or butler were managing a catered event on the south lawn or at the castle's summer house, a bell like this would be the perfect thing to alert or summon a staff member on the grounds.



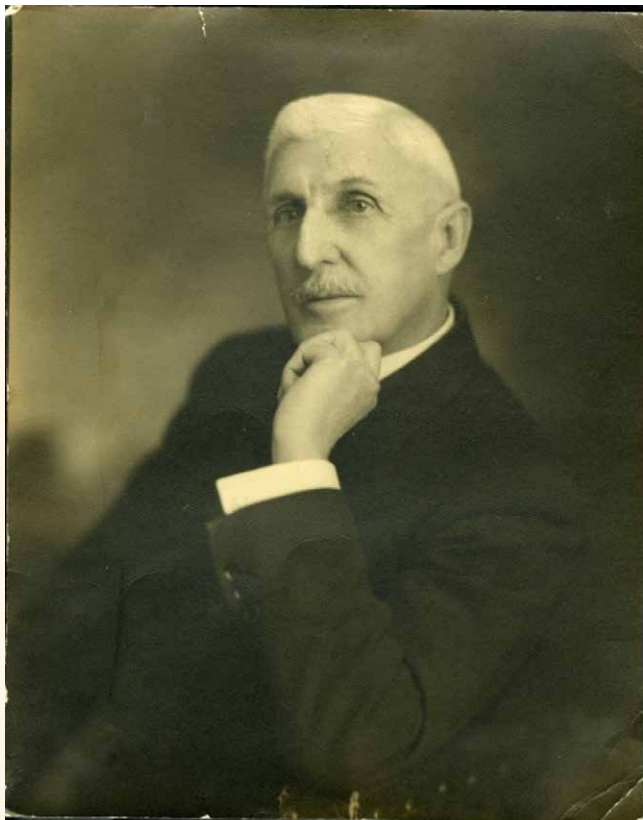
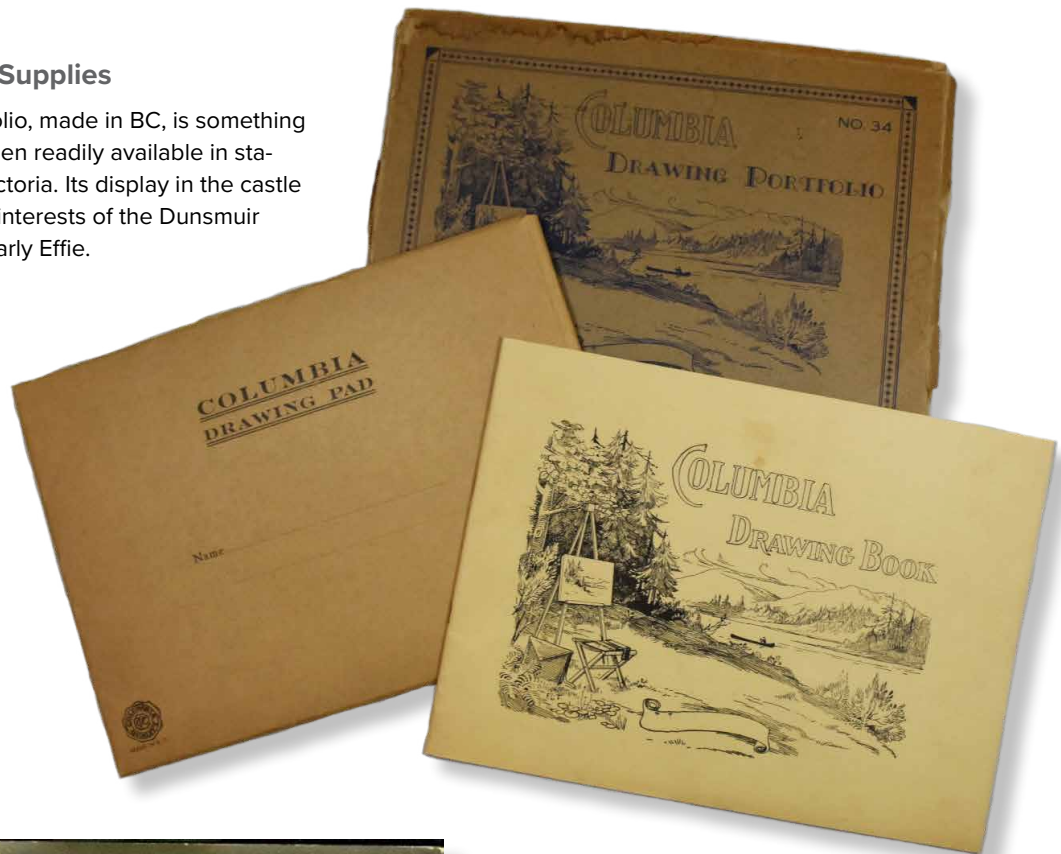
**2025.7 | Silverware**

These items have a long history of use by descendants of Robert and Joan Olive Dunsmuir. The bonbon dish was made in 1902 by British silversmith, Joseph Gloster. The cigarette case, with initials "LB" most likely belonged to Lucy Lenore Bryden, a granddaughter of Elizabeth Hamilton Dunsmuir and was also made by Joseph Gloster Ltd. in 1927.



### 2025.8.1 | Art Supplies

This drawing portfolio, made in BC, is something that would have been readily available in stationary stores in Victoria. Its display in the castle evokes the artistic interests of the Dunsmuir daughters, particularly Effie.



### 2025.8.2 | Photograph

Francis Napier Denison's connection to Craigdarroch Castle is brief but fascinating. Between 1938 and 1940, after having been a meteorologist for the province of BC, and with the permission of Victoria College, Denison used a room in the castle basement to keep Meteorological and seismograph instruments. He recorded daily maximum and minimum temperatures for the City of Victoria in the College's name. He also repaired a Hydrograph donated by the fire department for the College and was conducting groundbreaking earthquake research onsite.

**2025.9 | Salt Dish**

This silver-plated item was part of a condiment set that supported dinner service on board the Dunsmuir family yacht, DOLAURA and was used by the James and Laura Dunsmuir family on board between 1908 and 1920. There are various pieces of Dolaura cutlery and tableware that have been donated to the Castle Society and most have the name Dolaura etched in a fancy script style. Only this piece and item 987.013.001 (cheese scoop) has the DOLAURA stamp in this plainer style. It is possible that they were for use in less formal settings, such as among the crew or in the kitchens, or they may have been part of a secondary set ordered at a different time to the fancier canteen.



**2025.10 | Beer Bottle**

This Carter Brothers beer bottle was once used by a worker involved in the construction of the Castle in about 1889. It was found in the 1980s in the bottom space between two of Craigdarroch’s sloping roof rafters. Carter Bros. operated their “Vancouver Brewery” at the corner of Herald and Government Streets in Victoria, BC when this bottle was filled.

# Our Team

2025 SAW LITTLE IMPROVEMENT OVER 2024 AS VISITOR NUMBERS WERE FLAT. HAVING SAID THAT, THE SPECIALTY TOURS, PRIVATE GUIDED TOURS AND THEATRE PROGRAMS HELPED KEEP REVENUES AT A DECENT LEVEL AND THE TEAM CONTINUED DEVELOPING NEW VISITOR EXPERIENCES THAT WILL LAUNCH IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 2026.

Another area that has grown over the year is our YouTube channel, which gets regular updates. The content is created, filmed and edited by staff who dedicate many hours to their scripts before filming begins. Their dedication to telling new stories is helping visitors understand the depth of information we have to share and I encourage you to follow the channel, share the content and let us know if there are topics you'd like us to address.

## STAFF

Barb Bergstrom / Bruce Davies / Naomi Duska / Beverly Fraser / Hope Grauer / Alysha Ewing  
André Garneau / John Hughes / Marissa Landoldt / Jasmine Li / Emily Kleamyck / Taya Magliocco  
Olivia Pereira / Jennifer Seeman / Echo Smith / Julia Theim / Shawn Thibault / Grace Weib  
Marina van Wittenberghe / Frank Tosczak / Catriona Wilson / Mohsen Zare

## BOARD MEMBERS

Karen Aitkin / Moira Dann / Amy Hinrich / Stephen Lyons / Julie Murtha / Angelica Pass  
Kelly Somogyi / Will Sorrell



# Premium Members

## **TOWER MEMBERS**

Barbara Armstrong / Michael Audain / Shelley Besteman / Randy Bonsen / Paula Carey  
Randy Eaton / Helen Edwards / Barry Gough / Adam Green / Kevan King

## **BULDER CIRCLE MEMBERS**

Charles Boas / Charles Christie / Katie Christie / Dave Cook / Rodney Fields / Sandra Hudson  
Britta Gundersen-Bryden / Larry Scott

## **FRIENDS OF THE CASTLE**

Joseph Anthony / Godfrey Archbold / Shannon Arnold / Paul Barasch / Susanne Barker  
Jennifer Barr / Nansi Blenkiron / Marilyn D.Brown / Joan Cousins / Peter & Beryl Cox / Jan Drent  
Carmen Dykes / Brenda Firestone / C.R. Gagnon / Nick Graham / Byron & Patricia Hill  
Amy Hinrichs / Colleen Hoggarth / Kate Humble / Mary Kennedy / Margaret Klatt / Barbara Leni  
Darlene Li / Miriam Nelson / Mark Pawluk / Patricia Pitts / Stephen Richardson  
Thomas K. & Laurie Robb / Dianne Roy / William Sorrell / Eleanor Voysey / Kaaren Wallis  
Hugh Wilzewski / Cidnee Wind

## **LIFE MEMBERSHIPS**

Alix P.B. Campbell / Bruce Davies / Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia  
Mayor City of Victoria

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Thanks to The City of Victoria for their permissive property tax exemption.

# Long-term Members

## **20+ YEARS**

Maureen Applewhaite / Godfrey Archbold / Michael Audain / Mauro Azzara  
Jennifer & Colin Barr / Randy & Katherine Bonsen / Marilyn Boyce / Barbara Bryan  
Alix P.B. Campbell / Charles Christie / Jeanne & Bernie Côté / Peter & Beryl Cox / Bruce Davies  
Jan Drent / F. Elizabeth Edmunds / Helen Edwards / Wenche Eilertsen / Peggy Foott  
Katherine Glew / Gwendoline Gold / Janette Hennigar / Valerie Holden / Andrew & Patricia Laks  
David & Robyn Larsen Sr. / Margie Mayfield / Beatrice Miller / Miriam Nelson / Mark Pawluk  
Patricia Pitts / Monica Reekie / Patrick Ringwood / Dianne & Leonard Roy / Irene Tosczak  
Ann Wright

## **15-19 YEARS**

Amy Hart / Mary Kennedy / Margaret Klatt / Jean Kucy / Jeff McIndoe / Keith Rodrigue  
Pauline Scherr / Jarrett Teague / Lyla Wilkins

## **10-14 YEARS**

Paula Carey / Kim & Dave Cook / John Cshany / Gail Dawson / Barry & Marilyn Gough  
Susan Gurney / Kathy Harris / Sandra Hudson / Beverley Kallstrom / Nancy Murray  
Heide Toner / Rosina Whittaker / Van Williams

## **5-9 YEARS**

Joseph Anthony / Barbara Armstrong / Donna Blyth / Valerie Couture / James & Carmen Dykes  
Willie F Grace / Sherry Hall / Kate Humble / Sylvia Jarvis / Ron Kerr / Kevan King / Verna Lang  
Elizabeth Liddell / Don & Charmaine Lovell / John & Crea Milroy / Rhiannon Murphy  
Sean Murray / Angel Star / James Tirrul-Jones



# CRAIGDARROCH CASTLE®

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