

968

Balmoral

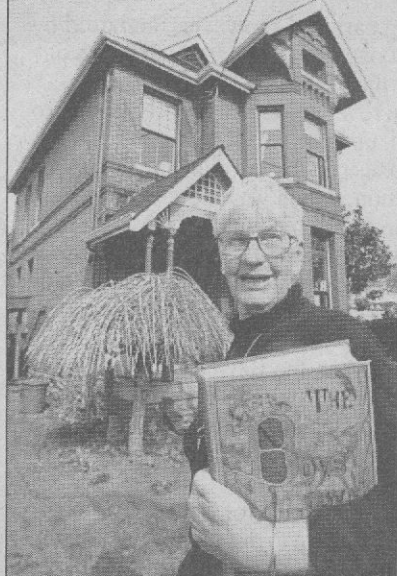
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**Joanna Hagar:**  
Neighbourhood heart

## Farewell to good books, a grand home and great lady

BY DARRON KLOSTER

*Times Colonist business editor*

Joanna Hagar will close turn the page on Poor Richard's Books Saturday, ending a 22-year saga of selling literary treasures out of a building she saved from the wrecking ball.

"I've always said you have to leave a party when it's fun," said Hagar, who will turn 70 next month. "This is a great business. I loved it every day I did it, but I'm walking away. It's just time."

Haggard and her husband, Barney, who died in July 2000, bought the three-story Baker-brick, granite-trimmed house at 968 Balmoral Rd. in the North Park neighbourhood in 1982. They lovingly rebuilt the 1890 home into a business, cramming its ground-floor rooms and halls with 30,000 used books, and remaking the second floor and attic into their home. Their efforts earned heritage status from the city.

The restoration ignited other projects in North Park, and the renewal of the neighbourhood continues today. "It still has its problems," the out-spoken and gregarious Hagar said between puffs of her cigarette. "But it's a heck of a lot better than it used to be. This whole place used to be boarded up. Nobody wanted to come here. Now you look around and you see the character homes coming back. You see people of every kind making their homes here. It's a neighbourhood in the real sense."

Hagar, a founding member of the North Park Neighbourhood Association, says she has sold the building — perched on the front of a 120-foot lot with a hidden, tranquil garden — to a Victoria doctor and businessman who will rent the property out as retail and residential.

Her doors will close for the last time Saturday afternoon at around 5. All week, Hagar has been selling her inventory — mostly history, non-fiction and early children's books — for the last several days at 60 per cent off. Other books dealers have come to pick things over, make offers on the custom and antique shelving and pass along their well wishes. Other classic pieces such as an early century stock-trading table and glass cases were given away to some long-time customers.

After Saturday, she's letting the Greater Victoria Public Library take all the stock that's left to use in its upcoming spring sale. "I like the library ... they taught me the Internet," Hagar laughs.

Hagar isn't moving far. She's found a small, comfortable duplex over on Fifth Street, where she'll take a few of her favourite books and two stray cats, Kiki La Douce and Finfar Magnificat.

The former registered nurse helped her husband open their first Poor Richard's store on Fort Street in the space now occupied by the Blue Fox Cafe in 1977. Barney, a Second World War veteran who fought at Normandy, had a soft spot for military history and the collection grew from there. He contracted tuberculosis during the war and suffered from its effects for years, eventually succumbing to complications from a stroke. They were married 38 years and had one son, Kaare.