

MOURNING

The Victorian Celebration of Death

AFTER

Oshawa Community Museum

May 18 - November 27

1450 Simcoe St. South (Lakeview Park) Oshawa

EXHIBIT FUNDERS & PARTNERS



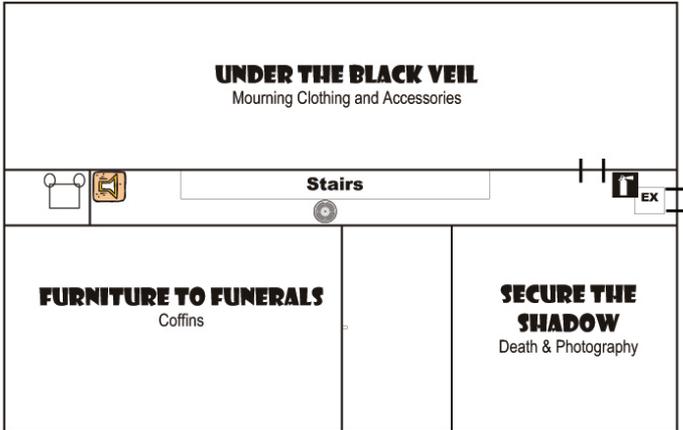
Cover photo: Farewell Cemetery, 2009
Photo Courtesy: *Melissa Cole*

*Short and sudden was the call
of one so dearly loved by all;
the blow was great, the shock severe
we little thought his death so near;
and only those who loved can tell
the pain at not saying a last farewell;
Mother.*

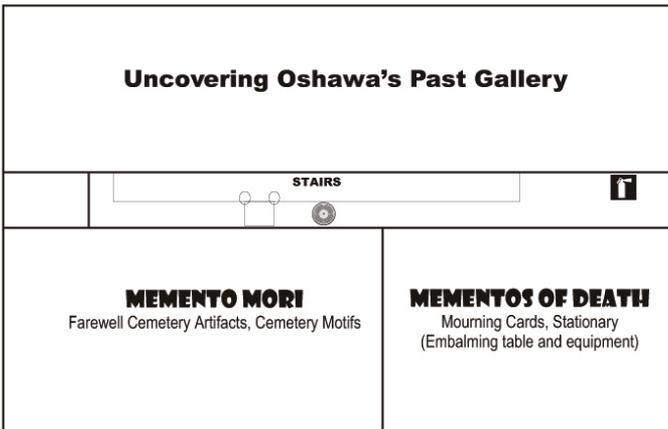
Epitaph from Sidney T. Northcott's headstone,
located in the Port Oshawa Pioneer Cemetery

~ Floor Plan ~

Robinson House First Floor



Robinson House Second Floor



CURATOR'S REMARKS

by *Melissa Cole*, Curator

Mourning customs and rituals of the 19th century were clearly defined and adhered to, as much as finances and circumstances allowed, but in today's society of medical advances and wonder drugs, it is perhaps difficult to understand the need for such practices. In order to understand them we must delve into the conditions of the 19th century including disease, lack of sterile practices, diets that lacked essential vitamins and nutrients, and medical treatments which made death more prevalent than the 21st century.

Death was so prevalent that mourning customs and rituals were refined from several centuries of superstitions and beliefs as a way of showing proper respect for the deceased. These customs called for changes in clothing and in one's way of life. Mourning rituals in Canada were directly related to those in England and Europe. Magazines of the day such as the *Ladies Home Journal* and *Godey's* often carried advice on customs of mourning pertaining to both clothing and acceptable behaviour during the mourning period.

Mourning After: The Victorian Celebration of Death explores 19th century death and funeral customs by drawing on museum and private collections, mourning dress, death and memorial photography, tombstone motifs, hair jewellery and other mementos of the funeral ceremony.

Be sure to mark your calendars for two special events that will be featured in September. Henry House will be draped in mourning starting September 20. On September 26, Proof will be joining us for a live ghost hunt. Get your tickets early for this event to avoid disappointment. Details are on page 15.

~ Hair Work ~

Hairwork jewellery grew out of a desire to keep a part of the loved one close to the wearer. "Godey's Lady's Book", from December 1850 introduced the craft to women which soon became a popular pasttime. In the exhibition an example is provided of the style of table that was used for creating hair jewellery. This is a reproduction, the actual table would be approximately 33 inches in height.

Hairwork jewellery was not used exclusively for mourning, it was a natural way to remember a deceased loved one.

The exhibit features various forms of hairwork, including two examples of hair wreaths, located in the Henry House parlour and dining room. Other examples of hair work include necklaces, brooches, bracelets & lockets. **These examples can be seen in the *Under the Black Veil* section of the exhibit where the mourning fashions and accessories are located.**



Hair Jewellery 971.4.14, 971.4.8
From the collection of the Oshawa Community Museum



Detail of Hair Wreath 970.49.5
From the collection of the Oshawa Community Museum

~ Furniture to Funerals ~

During the late 1800s there was a rising concern for improved health conditions and sanitation; many undertakers began offering to embalm the deceased. Embalming could be done either at the deceased's home or at the undertaker's establishment. Gary Laderman, in his book, *Rest in Peace*, includes a description of an at-home embalming. This reminiscence is written by a third-generation funeral director remembering how his father would work:

The body was embalmed on the bed Just to make things more effective the embalmer would sometimes bring his own folding board. The embalmer had to work very, very neatly embalming in somebody's bedroom..... You had to be a neat worker like a surgeon. They didn't work with a surgical gown. My father embalmed generally in his high button shirt and tie as a gentleman and not as some type of worker.... He'd put a wide rubber sheet under the body and over the wooden board he brought along, and embalmed the body ... You could lay the body out in the best room they had which was generally the front room.

Since the days of ancient Egypt, if not before, embalming has been a part of the funeral process. The Egyptians embalmed for religious reasons, believing it was necessary for entrance into the afterlife, because once in the afterlife the decedent would need a body. In North America the practice of embalming occurred during the American Civil War. Embalming was done to preserve the bodies of troops so that they could be shipped back to their families for burial. Today we embalm our dead for preservation and restoration to a more pleasing appearance.



Detail of Folding Embalming Table , late 19th Century 010.11.5
From the collection of the Oshawa Community Museum

~ *Secure the Shadow* ~

Post-mortem photography refers to photographs taken of people after their death. While this practice may continue quietly today, with the photographs taken by members of the family and kept in private, it was an important part of business for photography studios during the Victorian era.

It is not uncommon to find photographs of parents posed with their deceased children held in their arms or sitting on their laps. Most often the child's eyes would be closed, a clear indicator that it is a post-mortem photograph. Occasionally the photographer would attempt to pose the photograph in such a manner as to express the sorrow the parents were feeling. However, even when the photograph was shot simply, with only the parents sitting holding the child they lost, their pain can be clearly seen through the lack of emotion.

Then there are the photographs that you look at and wonder, what appears to be off about that person, and those photographs may in fact be post-mortem. It was popular to pose the person in such a manner that they appeared to be alive. The deceased would be posed sitting in a chair, or at times, even standing upright. Occasionally the eyes of the deceased would be left open or the photograph would be doctored to make the eyes appear open. These are the most difficult style of photograph to determine if they are in fact post-mortem.



Post-mortem photograph, File 1371
From the collection of the Oshawa Community Museum

~ Farewell Cemetery ~

The Farewell Cemetery is located on the southeast corner of Harmony Road and King Street in Oshawa. The property on which the cemetery is located is a few hundred feet south of King Street. Mr. Moody Farewell donated the land to be used as a private burial ground for the Farewell family and their relatives. The Brown and Hinton families were also granted permission to bury relatives in the cemetery. Mr. Farewell divided the property to ensure each of his sons received a portion. The Farewell Cemetery had been in use from approximately 1827 until 1937.

The Farewell Cemetery was professionally excavated by Archaeological Services Inc. of Toronto. Several bodies had been buried on a section of the property that had at the time of interment been deemed as a road allowance. Archaeological Services Inc. was employed to excavate the bodies and rebury them on available space within the cemetery boundaries. The human remains and associated artifacts recorded during the investigation supplied valuable biomedical and archaeological information about this period.



Before Conservation, Name Plate 994.28.32x
From the Farewell Cemetery Collection, Oshawa Community Museum



After Conservation, Name Plate 994.28.32x
From the Farewell Cemetery Collection, Oshawa Community Museum

~ Under the Black Veil ~

Clothing was an important way Victorians manifested their grief; in fact the rules of mourning were strictest in matters of fashion. Deep mourning demanded that women adopt a wardrobe made entirely of black crepe, a dull fabric without any sheen to reflect light or a heavy wool serge. Even parasols and handkerchiefs were trimmed in black. Men wore plain black suits with black arm bands.

If a gentleman was to marry a widow he would wear the black arm band during the ceremony to show his respect for the new bride's grief. Children under 12 wore white trimmed with black ribbon. Children over the age of 12 would wear black.

The dresses on display date from 1860 - 1930. You will notice a crepe armband has been placed on the men's black jacket. There are three dresses on display that would have been worn during deep mourning since they have very little decoration. The dress featured with the family would have been worn during middle mourning since this dress features a white collar and cuff and lots of lace throughout the gown. The grey shot silk dress would have been worn in the last stage of mourning. One must remember that the rules of etiquette may not have always been followed. If a woman could not afford to have a gown made, she would make use of what she already had.

Quite often these black gowns would be worn over and over again, as a widow came to the end of the deep mourning stage, another family member may pass and she begins the ritual of mourning again. This may explain why many of these black gowns in museum collections may appear to be 'worn' or 'tired' in comparison to other clothing.

*This section of the exhibit is presented in partnership with Patty Davis of **The Costume People.***



Brooch 970-L-138
From the collection of Oshawa Community Museum



Mourning Pins 980.7.1
From the collection of the Oshawa Community Museum



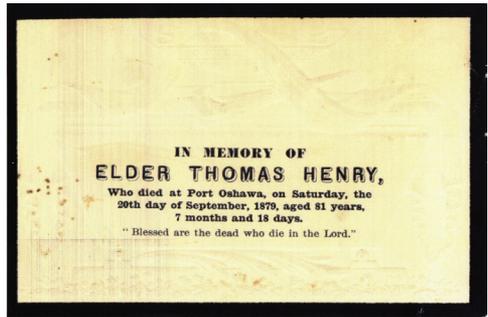
Shawl belonged to Lurenda Henry, circa 1870 970-L-137
From the collection of the Oshawa Community Museum

~ Henry House in Mourning ~

“Ring the bell softly, there’s crepe on the door”

Take a step back in time to September 20, 1879 and enter the home of the Henry Family, where a death has recently occurred. The family is bound by the rules of etiquette that dictate what they must do next.

Lurenda Henry calls upon the her daughter-in-law, Polly Ann, to assist with preparing the home for mourning. Polly Ann performs her duties.....she stops all the clocks in the home to the time of death, and gets out the black crepe that was saved from a previous funeral in the home. Polly Ann drapes the mirrors and pictures throughout the home. The drapes are pulled in the parlour to darken the room. Polly Ann reminds others that it is more respectful that everyone in the home keeps their voices down and walks softly. Crepe is placed on the door knob of the front door, signalling to the neighbours that a death has occurred. The family prepares for the funeral of Rev. Thomas Henry.



**Henry House will be draped in mourning :
September 20 - November 1, 2015**

AN EVENING WITH PROOF{f}

{f}ear is the only variable

**SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER 26th**

OSHAWA COMMUNITY MUSEUM
START TIMES: 8:00 / 8:30 / 9:00
TICKETS: \$20

Join the paranormal research team PROOF(f) as they host an interactive presentation about ghosts, hauntings and all things paranormal. Hear about their experiences researching paranormal phenomena. Learn how to ghost hunt and use the tools of the trade. Review audio, video and photographic evidence with the team. Share your stories. Followed by a public ghost with the PROOF(f) team.

Three locations! Three different start times!
Get your tickets early as spots are limited and will sell out quickly!

Learn the history of the buildings as well as the stories of the spirits that reside there.

Tickets available at The Oshawa Community Museum.



GHOST HUNT with PROOF{f}

Join PROOF(f) and be part of the search for ghosts at the Oshawa Community Museum. Spots are limited and will sell out quickly!

proofcanada.com

~ Superstitions ~

There are many rituals associated with Victorian mourning that have disappeared but many survive today, in an altered form. Victorians had an obsession with death, in part, due to the short life span of individuals during the 19th century.

~

The Victorians feared being buried alive. The wake, which has turned into the the visitation today, sprang from this fear and a lack of medical knowledge. What can easily be diagnosed today with sophisticated methods remained a mystery to them during the 19th century. The wake was a 12 to 24 hour period when family and friends gathered. They would eat, drink, play music and make a lot of noise to see if the body may wake up. If the individual didn't awaken then the person would be considered dead. This was a practice that embalming would make unnecessary. Our modern day visitation tends to be on the quieter side. The eating and drinking usually takes place after the funeral service and burial has taken place.

~

Due to Victorian's fear of being buried alive, a string would be attached to the deceased person's finger which ran up through a pipe to a bell at the top. The theory is, if they awoke then they could ring the bell and summon help!

~

Victorians would stop all the clocks in the home at the exact time of death and leave them stopped until after the funeral had taken place. When the clocks were re-started, they would be set one to two minutes out so that the exact time of death would never occur again in the home.

~

Suicides - initially individuals were not buried in cemeteries, instead they were buried at a four corner intersection. People believed that the soul would be confused as to which road to take. Victorian's feared that suicides would return to haunt their living ancestors. Later suicides were buried on the outskirts of the cemetery properties.

~

Photographs of the deceased would be turned to face the walls or draped in black cloth.

Resources & Additional Reading

Archaeological Services Inc. Archaeological Mitigation of the Farewell Pioneer Cemetery. March 1994.

Bury, Shirley. Sentimental Jewellery. Her Majesty's Stationry Office: UK, 1985.

Curl, James. The Victorian Celebration of Death. Sutton Publishing, 2004.

Jackman, Mark I. In Repose: Victorian Funeral Customs & Practices. Kirby: Clarke Museum & Archives. 1992.

Jalland, Pat. Death in the Victorian Family, Oxford University Press, 2005.

Kerstens, Elizabeth Kelley. "Victorian Death Rituals" Ancestry Magazine Vol. 19 / No.5 September/October 1999.

Kerstens, Elizabeth Kelley. "Secure the Shadow . . . Ere the Substance Fades" Ancestry Magazine Vol. 23 / No. 5, September/October 2005.

Laderman, Gary. Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in 20th Century America. New York, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Ludwig, Allan. Graven Images: New England Stone Carving and its Symbols, 1650 -1815, University Press of New England, Hanover, N.H., 1966.

May, Trevor. The Victorian Undertaker. Shire Publication Ltd. UK, 2007.

Ruby, Jay. Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1995.

Saunders, Shelley and Ann Herring eds, Grave Reflections: Portraying the Past through Cemetery Studies, Canadian Scholar's Press, Toronto, 1995.

Smart, Susan. A Better Place: Death and Burial in Nineteenth-Century Ontario. Toronto, Dundurn Press, 2011.

Suchan, Laura. Memento Mori: Classifying Nineteenth Century Ontario Gravestones, An Oshawa Study, Oshawa Community Museum, 1999, updated 2009.

Trask, Deborah. Life how short, Eternity how long: Gravestone Carving and Carvers in Nova Scotia, The Nova Scotia Museum, Halifax 1978.

Websites:

Association of Gravestone Studies <http://www.gravestonestudies.org/>
Friends of Oak Grove Cemetery, Massachusetts <http://oakgrovecemetery.wordpress.com/the-music-of-mourning/>
Museum of Funeral Customs <http://www.funeralmuseum.org>
Morgan Funeral Home www.morganfuneral.com/our-heritage.html

MUSEUM ETIQUETTE & REMINDERS

- Oshawa Community Museum is a smoke-free building - smoking must be 9 metres away from the building.
- No food or drinks are allowed in the buildings. Bottled water with a lid is permitted.
- Oshawa Community Museum recycles its exhibition booklets - if you are not interested in keeping your booklet please pass it along to your Visitor Host, not on the floor or elsewhere in the museum.
- Please help us preserve our artifacts for future generations to enjoy by not touching any object, painting or artifact. Although if you see a little GREEN HAND that means you CAN touch that artifact!

Thank you for your co-operation!



1450 Simcoe Street South, Oshawa, ON Lakeview Park

PH: 905.436.7624

www.oshawamuseum.org | info@oshawamuseum.org

