

Designs for death

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It has been stated by more than one art historian that the Victorians were obsessed with death. I'm sure they were, because it was such a common occurrence. People just didn't live as long in the 19th century and there was an extremely high mortality rate for children. Elaborate funeral practices occurred so as to give the deceased person a proper send off.

I'm pleased to announce that I now have a slide lecture program relating to Victorian mourning and funeral practices. The premier showing of this will take place March 9 at the Maines Congregational Church. The Cobblestone Society will host a 3 p.m. dinner (reservations at 589-9013) followed by a 7 p.m. program (reservations not required but a small donation is suggested).

The program is based on an exhibit at the Cobblestone Museum entitled "Designs for death" which has been a popular display and very educational in nature.

Not only did Victorians create many homemade memorials but the commercial market provided death related remembrances in quantity. The piece shown with this article I found in a family album. It is entitled "Apotheosis of Washington & Lincoln" and dates to the 1860s following the assassination of Lincoln. We see in this allegorical image Washington welcoming Lincoln into Heaven with a kind of elevated status.

Pictures of this sort could be procured to fill the blank spots in the family album during the latter half of the 19th century.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Currier & Ives, the well known printers, published deathbed scenes of famous people that Victorians hung in their parlors.

Indeed, Victorians celebrated death and made reference to it in their daily lives. For example, the well-known children's bedtime prayer is truly a link of the after life.

"Now I lay me down to sleep I

pray the lord my soul to keep.

If I should die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take."

The slide program will not be a morbid lecture but rather a view into various aspects of how Victorians dealt with something rather grim by decorating it through pretty memorials and elaborate symbolism.