

FRAMING GRIEF: FUNERAL FLOWER FRAMES IN AMERICA, 1860-1920

by

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Framing Grief: Funeral Flower Frames in America, 1860-1920

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at George Mason University in partnership with the Smithsonian Associates

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who sat with me in the darkness and encouraged me in the light; and to my father, without whom this would never have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING GRIEF: FUNERAL FLOWER FRAMES IN AMERICA, 1860-1920

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The multitude of flowers frames used in American mourning culture of the nineteenth century up to World War I have left behind a vivid, visual history of the changing perceptions about death. This thesis will explore how funeral flower frames reveal an emotional and cultural shift from fears of hellfire and damnation, to a concept of restful sleep for the redeemed soul and hope of being reunited in a better place. The use of flowers at funerals evolved from a way to mask the physical and sensory ugliness of death to messages of religious and sentimental beauty, to individualized and symbolic representations of the deceased, and finally to conventional tokens for the funeral director to use decoratively. This thesis will explore the relationship between the presence of wire flower frames at funerals and the changing perceptions of death throughout the nineteenth century and up to World War I.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*'Beauteous flowers, why do ye spread
Upon the monuments of the dead? – Cowley.'*
*And we may answer, that we place them there as emblems of the frailty of human existence, and of the
evanescent nature of its brightest enjoyments; they also serve to remind us of that better land, whither we
hope the souls of the departed are gone.¹*

— Henry Gardiner Adams, *The Language and Poetry of Flowers*, 1864

In the second half of the nineteenth century and leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, death was celebrated with great pomp and circumstance, and in the celebration of death, flowers led the way. Funerals typically required home decoration, as well as many floral tributes and arrangements. Flowers were used in all stages and variations of the funeral process, from the wake to the ceremony, in the procession, and at the grave. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century in America, funeral flower tributes were an essential form of condolence, and etiquette manuals prescribed there being sent in time for a funeral. The presence of flowers became so integral to the American funeral practices, that even as other mortuary modes became outdated, flower use remained stable.

Many kinds of designs were appropriate for funerals in the nineteenth century. Wreaths, set pieces in symbolic shapes, baskets, sprays, vases, potted palms and other green or blooming plants, as well as flowers placed loosely in a box were sent to the

¹ H.G. Adams, *The Language and Poetry of Flowers*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 141.

house of mourning as a tribute to the deceased. Though our practices originated abroad, American funeral flowers, like other aspects of their funeral and mourning practices, were more elaborate and flamboyant than their forbearers. Florist's catalogues from British and French companies showed large set piece designs in symbolic forms, but the favored design in these countries was the simple wreath.

Set pieces or set designs were among the most popular funeral designs in America in the second half of the nineteenth century. Symbolic shapes that expressed an overall theme for an occasion in flowers were very fashionable. Many designs were made to depict the profession, associations, or hobbies of the individual. These formalized and standardized designs were also ordered for special celebrations and weddings (fig. 1). The term set piece was usually applied to designs in a wide variety of forms, which are often symbolic in character. The designs for set pieces were characterized by the florist as emblems. The florist, William Cleaver Harry, explained in *The Manual of Floral Design* in 1919, "A floral emblem is a copy in flowers, of some other emblem or of something emblematic. It may be taken from a lodge button, or it may be an original design depicting a symbol, scene or historical event."² In a general sense, all set piece designs were emblems and were often referred to as such, however in the florist trade, they made a distinction between symbolic shapes – e.g. crosses, horseshoes, hearts, crowns – and "emblems proper" – the insignia and designs of organizations and associations. Typical of the Victorian style, these designs were elaborate and massive.

² William Cleaver Harry, *The Manual of Floral Designing*, (New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919), 30.

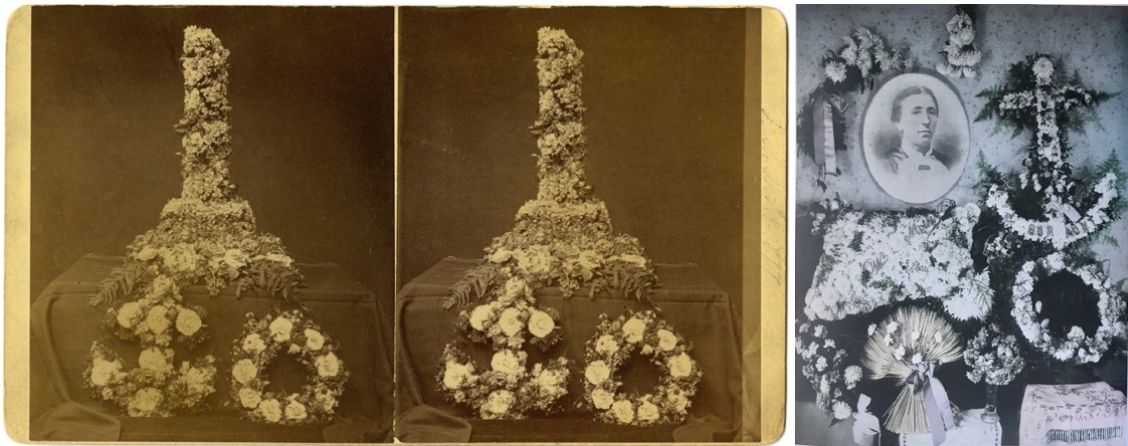


Figure 1. *left.* “Funerary Floral Arrangements: Broken column, anchor, and wreath,” c. 1880-1910, Stereograph, 3.5 x 7 inches. Accession # OFEO-SG-AAG20130429006, Archives of American Gardens Stereograph Collection, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right.* “Postcard showing funeral tributes displayed with a portrait of the deceased.” c. 1890. From *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 177.

Set pieces were usually made up on wire frames in the desired shape, which acted as a foundation for the floral arrangement (fig. 2).³ Early set piece foundations were made of willow, straw or slats of wood and consisted mainly of crosses and wreaths.

Commercially produced, heavy-gaged wire frame designs became available between 1860-1864. Peter Henderson, America’s best authority on floriculture in the nineteenth century, in his revolutionary book, *Practical Floriculture*, originally published in 1868 and republished several times with the most up to date information, with information for the florist about the designs on frames, stated, “Wire frames have entirely superseded the old methods of winding flowers to sticks and wires.... The frame gives the florist at once the desired form, and makes it easy for any person of taste to arrange flowers in the shape

³ See Appendix A for a list of commercially produced wire frame designs.

of an anchor, star, etc., etc.”⁴ Wire frames were made in both straight or curved outlines and either as a box (three-dimensional frame) or flat frame. Most designs came in several sizes. The standard forms in wire works catalogues ranged in size from 10 to 60 inches, some large enough to make life-sized reproductions.

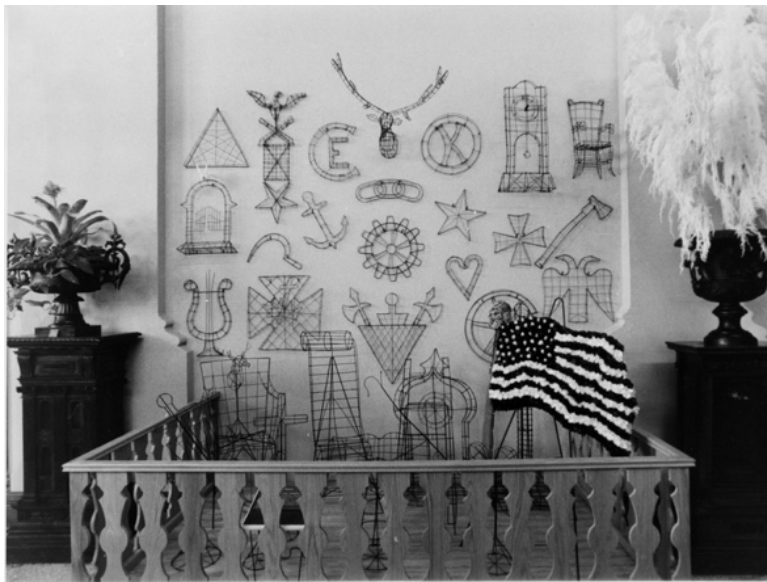


Figure 2. “Floral Frames.” c. 1980, photographic print, 8x10 inches. Accession # OFEO-SG-AAG20130424004. Archives of American Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

In the nineteenth century, flower frames were created to symbolize religions, nationalities, occupations, activities, and organizations. While flower frame designs were highly symbolic in their shapes, the flowers used and the color choices also held significance for nineteenth-century Americans. Part of the appeal of designs on wire frames was their adaptability to the age, gender, and interests of the deceased person. One

⁴ Peter Henderson, *Practical Floriculture; a Guide to the Successful Cultivation of Florists' Plants, for the Amateur and Professional Florist*, (New York: Orange Judd Company, 1892), 235.

could adjust the message intended by a floral tribute through color or flower choice. Florists were instructed to keep the purpose and the person in mind when designing tributes. Etiquette manuals, florist guides, and floral dictionaries dictated which of the various shapes, colors, and varieties were appropriate for funeral arrangements. Not only were designs suited to the person receiving the flowers or the deceased, designs were suited to the changing attitudes toward death in the nineteenth century.

Certain attributes were considered more appropriate than others for individuals because of their age or gender. The floral authority, Ella Grant Campbell turned these adaptations into a kind of formula for the florist to apply to the deceased or recipient of the flowers. In *Floral Designs: Series I* from 1888, she grouped aspects of color, proportion, and selection of flowers and foliage by the following categories: Infants; Young Persons; Prime of Life, Men; Prime of Life, Ladies; and Aged People. With flowers for infants, she noted “Simplicity must be the key-note-everything sweet and lovely, but nothing gaudy...Use fine, fragile blossoms, not large—an absence of large flowers should distinguish this class of work.”⁵ For the aged, “These must be less pronounced, and be of dignified effect. Over-done work for aged people is as bad as it is for children.”⁶ However in general, “Aged persons’ funeral flowers were dramatic in

⁵ J. Horace McFarland, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I - Including – Mrs. Ella Grant Campbell Practical Hints on Floral Work.* (Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888), 132.

⁶ McFarland, *Floral Designs*, 137.

comparison to all other groups.”⁷ This system was adhered to throughout the United State. Similar advice is found in many articles and floriculture publications.

The set piece was constructed by attaching flowers to a wire frame in the shape desired that had been stuffed with sphagnum moss (fig. 3). Florists used dampened sphagnum moss to supply moisture and thereby promote longevity of floral displays. Arrangements on wire frames often required hundreds of blossoms for a single design, and allowed the florist to dispose of large quantities of the flowers that had to be stocked at all times. Flowers were placed head-to-head in order to form a smooth, even surface. In funeral flower work before the 1880s, designs were created exclusively from white flowers, however by the end of the century, flowers in other colors were added to the arrangements. Popular choices for flower frame designs included calla lilies, Easter lilies, lily-of-the-valley, orchids, asters, lilies, gladioli, dahlias, feverfew, achillea, gypsophila, stevia, stocks, rose, carnation, and chrysanthemums. Florists would also make up arrangements and set pieces from ornamental grasses and dried flowers known as *immortelles* or “everlastings.” Foliage was also an important feature of Victorian flower arrangements, including designs on wire frames. In the second half of the nineteenth century, foliage was also used by itself on set pieces, in arrangements, or potted. Ribbons as well as inscriptions were popular features of floral designs on wire frames. These might include the name or a pet name for the deceased, the relation with the deceased, or simple mourning slogans.⁸

⁷ James Michael DelPrince, “Floral Designs of the Victorian Era”, (PhD diss., Mississippi State, 1996), 166.

⁸ For a comprehensive list of inscriptions see Appendix D.



Figure 3. "Pillow design shows sections at different stages of completion." 1930. From *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists' Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 181.

Funeral flower arrangements on wire frames could be displayed in a variety of ways (fig. 4).⁹ Flat designs were intended to be placed on the casket or the floor. They could also be leaned against the wall or under the casket's carriage. Designs could also be hung on a hook on the wall or inside the lid of the casket. Two-dimensional set pieces were also mounted on easels. Standing designs were mounted on a wire base that was broad enough to keep the design from tipping over. Some designs on wire frames were even meant to be hung from the ceiling.

⁹ Regional and religious considerations might influence the use and placement of flower arrangements in, on, or around the casket.



Figure 4. Redbook Florist Services Educational Advisory Committee. "Illustration of Traditional Display of Sympathy Offerings." *Selling and Designing Sympathy Flowers*. Paragould, AK: Redbook Florist Services, 1992.

Unlike today's floral designs in plain, radially-balanced, geometric forms, sympathy floral offerings from the late-nineteenth century were comparatively melodramatic. They offered direct, instead of implied, messages of sympathy and consolation through symbolic designs.¹⁰ Both man-made and celestial subject matters were popular for flower frame shapes to express the themes of faith, hope, reunions, loss, and the end of life. The iconography was often significant to death and mourning or honored the life of the deceased person through symbols of their professional or leisure pursuits. A partial list of the kinds of flower frame motifs which appeared in American funerals in the latter-half of the nineteenth century would include the following: mortality symbols, monograms, symbols of religion, organizational emblems, neoclassical designs, imitations of everyday objects and tools, architectural forms, and decorative shapes.

¹⁰ DelPrince, "Floral Designs of the Victorian Era," 149.

According to the nineteenth-century serial *Vick's Flower and Vegetable Garden*, “three of the most common designs, wreath, crown and cross; next to these, the anchor is most frequently used.”¹¹

Symbolism for flower frames was pulled from many sources and was easily recognized and understood. Mourning art and paraphernalia flourished in first half of nineteenth century following the barrage of memorial works created for the death of George Washington in 1799. These works inspired and set precedence for the designs for flower frames. Paintings, prints, embroidery, and jewelry were popular media for these memorials, and it was acceptable to wear mourning colors and accessories and to decorate the home with mourning objects long after a family death. Artists and craftsmen frequently used the images and codes from the repertoire of symbols used by their predecessors. They drew inspiration from ancient funerary customs and traditional Christian symbols associated with death. The art historian, Anita Schorsch, explains in *Mourning Becomes America* that, “design motifs are to the mourning picture what metaphors are to the poem. They are symbols of thought, motifs so ancient in origin and so pervasively a part of the mainstream of thought that they were immediately recognizable and understandable to a people conversant with the classics and with the Bible.”¹² Americans were biblically literate in the nineteenth century, and the majority followed mainline Protestantism. This made the Christian-inspired symbols of mourning readily recognizable to the public. Even those who did not adhere to those values,

¹¹ *Vick's Flower and Vegetable Garden*. (Rochester, NY: James Vick, 18--?), 32.

¹² Anita Schorsch, *Mourning Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation*, (Clinton, NJ: The Main Street Press, 1976), Section I.

recognized the symbols and their meaning. They were encountered daily. Even children were exposed to this symbolism in their samplers, and printed in their Bible, fables, and primer books.

Artistic decorations echoed the social currents, both secular and religious. Changes in mourning symbolism spread across media both in and outside the home. Designs once meant for the graveyard became popular subject matter for memorials within the home. Fine artists, jewelers, and craftsmen all borrowed and contributed motifs and symbolism. Fashions in floral forms followed changes in attitudes toward death in the nineteenth century. Symbols were developed and gained or lost popularity based on the directions of American perceptions about death and dying, which were influenced by the events of the century and the religious and philosophical interpretations.

When interpreting symbols, anthropologists have shown that conclusions are largely dependent on the cultural context in which they are used. By relying on extraneous information and contemporary artifacts, one may be able to illuminate the meaning behind a given symbol. The intention of the creator or the person it was created for is important to consider in order to understand whether a design is symbolic or decorative. Gravestone interpreter, James Hija compiled a series of warnings from other scholars that must be taken in account. He warns, "Stuart Piggott has informed

archeologists that mortuary artifacts are ‘the product of complex mental situations and emotional states now irrecoverable.’”¹³

The seemingly decorative is not always as it appears; often times designs held a deeper meaning than that which meets the eye. The power of a symbol exists only in its ability to be recognized. However, when we encounter the symbolism employed in funeral flower frames today, their meaning can be confused. Some are easy to interpret, yet some have many meanings with layers of interpretation. The simpler the symbol, the more open it is to conveying different meanings; and with more meanings, it becomes more complex. Being open to different explanations does not invalidate its symbolism, but one must be wary of this when interpreting a symbol used in a funeral tribute.¹⁴

Whether a floral arrangement was attached to a deeper meaning or merely ornamental was dependent on how the mourners read them. This is true of their shape, as well as the colors and varieties of flowers used in the design. A white rosebud may have been chosen because it was considered beautiful, because of its meaning of youth, because that was what the florist had in stock that day, or because the florist needed a flower of just that shape and size to fill the arrangement, or a combination of any of those reasons. In the same way, the shape of a flower frame design may have been chosen with unknown motivations.

¹³ James Hijiya, “American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death: A Brief History,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 127, No. 5, (October 14, 1983), 340.

¹⁴ David V. Barrett, *A Brief History of Secret Societies*, (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2007), 154.

The interpretation of a particular symbol is further challenged by its ability to change over time. Furthermore, in some instances a symbol may have an entirely different meaning between one culture and another.¹⁵ For instance, the swastika can be seen as the sacred symbol of the spiritual principals of Native Americans, Jainism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, or the emblem of the Nazis. Similarly, a crown may be seen in a religious context or a political one. Symbols can also become diluted over time. The skull and cross bones, once a symbol of death, today is applied to everything from home goods to children's sneakers, and in such cases, carries no meaning whatsoever; or may be laden with Catholic, especially Mexican, Day of the Dead jubilation. William Barret notes in the 1868 *Flowers and Festivals*, "There are many symbolical forms, whose outlines suggested much pious meaning to our unlearned ancestors, of which we, their posterity, have nearly lost sight."¹⁶ Dilution, changes in meaning, and even the choice of a certain symbol in preference to another have the ability to reveal the underlying beliefs and tendencies of the culture in which they are used, when investigated in relation to other areas of change resulting from events, philosophical, scientific, religious, and social currents.

Funeral flower tributes are ephemeral and thus they have escaped notice of scholars until now, but they are important to look back at for what they can tell us about attitudes toward death as memorialization. The creation and use of flower frames provides a window to the ideas, values, attitudes, and beliefs related to death in the

¹⁵ Douglas Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2004), 9.

¹⁶ William Alexander Barret, *Flowers and Festivals, or, Directions for the floral decoration of churches*, (London: Rivingtons, 1868), 26.

nineteenth century. These objects and their symbols were influenced by human needs and values and created within established cultural structures. They developed their functional, aesthetic and symbolic properties according to the cultural needs and value systems of Americans in the nineteenth century. The use of symbols is one way these objects were adapted to suit the needs and beliefs of their time, and by them we can trace the changes that occurred. By understanding the symbolic meaning of shapes, flowers, and colors, we are able to better interpret the messages intended by these flower frames, as well as track the changes in attitudes toward death. Etiquette guides, mourners manuals, consolatory works of fiction and poetry, and tastemaker publications uncover the array of social pressures and other persuasive forces that guided the choices about funerary paraphernalia and indeed the choice of symbolism ordered from the florist. They uncover that the symbolic shapes were not a random reaction or individual impulse; on the contrary, these floral tributes were meaningful and expressive of the attitudes by which Americans confronted death.¹⁷ Changes in the content and emergent symbolism of the funeral and its paraphernalia indicates a dynamic interaction with other changing socioeconomic, philosophical, and religious factors in America in the nineteenth century.

Variations from within the American death culture emanated from geographic, religious, ethnic, and socioeconomic factors. America, even in the nineteenth century, was vast and socially complex. As a “melting-pot” it has always been made up of a number of different cultures which deviated from one another to such an extent that etiquette guides provided warnings such as seen in Julia Bradley’s 1889 *Modern Manners*

¹⁷ Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2nd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 24.

and Social Forms, “In America the ideas of propriety vary somewhat in different parts of the union, New England requiring less outward display than some other sections.”¹⁸ The religious traditions of those in mourning dictated the treatment of the body, the types of ceremonies performed, the burial, and the commemorations of the deceased. Differences in mourning and funeral customs were also present in Italian, Polish and Greek cultural groups, which did not assimilate as fully to American practices. Those of the Catholic, Jewish, and other minority faiths also followed different practices than the Protestant mainstream funeral rituals. Similarly, the changes in attitudes toward death and developments of the funeral and mourning rituals applied to the majority of America in the nineteenth century, however, cultural and regional differences slowed the chronology in which these changes occurred. While variations in the attitudes and customs surrounding death and mourning on the mainstream American mode are important, it is the purpose of this work to explain the principal themes seen in attitudes toward death and how they were expressed through funeral flower designs.

The American view of death evolved since the time Europeans first arrived on the continent. From the 1600s to the dawn of the nineteenth century, death rituals remained relatively steady. However, conceptions of death and mourning culture changed sharply between 1800 and 1920. While death did not change in the nineteenth century, American attitudes toward it did: from fear, to calm acceptance, to denial and avoidance. A close examination of flower frames and their symbolism reveals and reinforces our understanding of our ancestor’s view of death. The multitude of flowers frames used in

¹⁸ Julia M. Bradley, *Modern Manners and Social Forms*, (Chicago: James B. Smiley, 1889), 137.

American mourning culture of the nineteenth century up to World War I have left behind a vivid, visual history of the changing perceptions about death. This thesis will explore how funeral flower frames reveal an emotional and cultural shift from fears of hellfire and damnation, to a concept of restful sleep for the redeemed soul and hope of being reunited with loved ones in a better place through victory over death, finally shifting to avoidance of any reminders of mortality. The use of flowers at funerals evolved from a way to mask the physical and sensory ugliness of death to messages of religious and sentimental beauty, to individualized and symbolic representations of the deceased, and finally to conventional tokens for the funeral director to use decoratively. This thesis will explore the relationship between the presence of wire flower frames at funerals and the changing perceptions of death throughout the nineteenth century and up to World War I.

CHAPTER TWO: THE FOUNDATIONS FOR ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH

*When we are sad, to sadness we apply
Each plant, and flower, and leaf, that meets the eye.*¹⁹

— Anon.

In America, the use of funeral flowers did not take hold until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Prior to the Civil War elaborate floral arrangements were seldom used; occasionally, perhaps a modest vase of flowers might be placed next to the deceased. Flowers at the time of a death were used less for decorative or commemorative purposes, but rather to help combat the odors of decay. Aromatic herbs and strongly scented flowers such as stocks, carnations, violets, tuberoses, jasmines, and lilies were effective at masking the odors of bodily decomposition and the antiseptic smell of embalming fluid in the home. Later in the nineteenth century, with new technologies in embalming, the use of funeral flowers became more symbolic than useful. With the exception of carrying a sprig of rosemary and some isolated regional or ancient traditions, the proliferation of funeral flowers began to aggregate with the growth of retail floriculture in America after the Civil War.

After the 1860s, death provided one of the main reasons for floral display, both fresh and dried, in America from the middle of the nineteenth century to this day.

¹⁹ H.G. Adams, *Flowers; Their Moral, Language, and Poetry*, (London: H.G. Clarke, and Co., 1845), 14.

Funeral flower tributes then rose to great popularity in a short time of about fifteen years and came to be a vital component to the funeral ceremony. The linking of flowers with funerals, especially the elaborate designs on wire frames proliferated in part because of the high mortality rates of the nineteenth century. Death was constantly intruding in the lives of nineteenth-century Americans, and as a result, it was highly visible and widely remarked on. The multiplication of local newspapers carried long obituaries and accounts of even relatively modest funerals. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, written descriptions of the flower frames as well hand drawn or photographic prints were often included, especially in the case of prominent members of the community. This further contributed to the skyrocketing popularity of funeral flowers and the proliferation of designs and symbols created for the funeral.

Flower frame designs were further aligned with the American deathways due to the mass casualties of the Civil War. In total at least 620,000 soldiers were killed in addition to the unknown number of civilians who lost their lives. This massive toll created widespread mourning, need for consolation, and inevitably caused the proliferation of funeral flowers. Because the war had resulted in so many funerals, by 1868 sending funeral flower tributes was an established and widespread practice in the United States. The popularity of funeral flowers, especially the vast set pieces was cemented in the consciousness of Americans with the deaths of notable, national figures in the last half of the nineteenth century. Beginning with the funeral cortege of President Lincoln in 1865, which was highly publicized and was notable for the large number of

funeral flower tributes sent to honor him including a plethora of wire frames in symbolic forms (fig. 5).

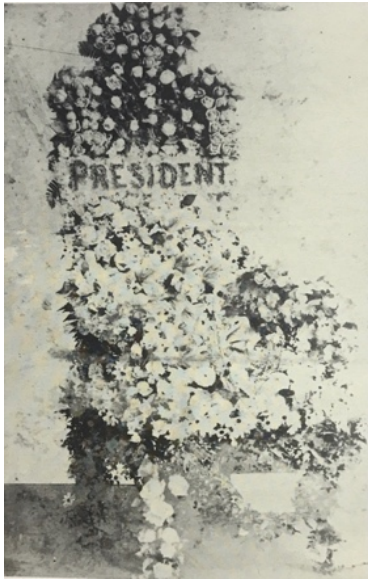


Figure 5. “Empty Chair” tribute for Abraham Lincoln.” 1865. In *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 25.

Further outpourings of national sympathy and floral tributes followed the assassination of President Garfield in 1881, as did the burials of such luminaries as General Grant, Robert E. Lee, George Peabody, and Henry Ward Beecher (fig. 6). Newspapers and magazines were filled with detailed descriptions of the spectacular floral outlay on display at these funerals raising, the respectability and fashionableness of flower tributes with each occasion. The funerary scenes of America’s great men left their mark on American mourning culture and created an American practice of elaborate floral display at funerals in the home, at church, and on the graves.



Figure 6. *left*. “The Interior of President Ulysses S. Grant’s Tomb.” 1885, Riverside Park, NY. Collection of The New-York Historical Society. From *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 25. *right*. “Scene in the Interior of the Chapel of Washington-Lee College—Ladies Decorating the Casket of General Robert E. Lee with Immortelles. – From a sketch by our Special Artist.” Lexington, VA. *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, November 5, 1870. From the collection of Stewart Morris, Sr. From Michael P. D’Amato, ed. *Horse-Drawn Funeral Carriages: 19th Century Funerals*. Bird-In-Hand, PA: Carriage Museum of America, 2004: 353.

Funeral designs, especially those on wire frames rose to such popularity that funeral tributes were purchased by all social classes and were gaged by the budget available. Flowers were sent by the deceased’s family, friends, neighbor, foreman, union, some of his co-workers, as well as church members and any associations or clubs to which the person belonged. With nearly everyone, from family members to mere acquaintances sending floral tributes a single funeral might be deluged with floral tributes. Those of special prominence in the community were bombarded with hundreds of designs sent on the occasion of their death. Examples of this can be seen at the 1901 funeral of a Chicago store manager and those at the tomb of J.F. Ober in figure 7.



Figure 7. *left.* “Funeral designs from the service of a Chicago department store manager include a 4-foot loving cup of solid white roses for \$50, and a 7-foot broken column of roses and violets for \$55.” 1901, Chicago, Illinois. In *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 182. *right.* “Floral Designs from a Pittsburg Funeral.” 1909. In *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 178.

In the nineteenth century death was a common topic even in polite conversation, furthermore, mourning was a common part of everyday life. Everyone from children to adults were effected by death and involved in mourning. No one was spared. For much of the nineteenth century, death was almost a shared experience. Survivors turned to family, friends, and the church in the face of loss, which expanded the avenues where consolation and solace were found. Oftentimes the inscription on a design gave a clue as to its sender. Familial or work relationships were often seen on floral designs in memorial photographs. One such example appears in a postmortem portrait of an adolescent girl in *Sleeping Beauty II* (fig. 8). In the image, a dove is seen holding a small banner which reads “PLAYMATES”. The author, Stanley Burns tells us, “Children were very aware of

death and participated in funerals at all ages.” This included sending flowers to the deceased.²⁰



Figure 8. “Teenager in a Jewel Box Casket in Parlor.” c. 1895, silver print, 5 x 7 inches.” Collection of Stanley Burns, New York. From Stanley B. Burns, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography, American and European Traditions*. New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002: plate 87.

There was no denying the reality that death could come at any time in the nineteenth century. Death was a frequent visitor and struck with cruel force. Unlike today, death was not silently suffered; instead the death of a loved one was openly and often conspicuously mourned. One method for dealing with grief over a death channeled these emotions toward increasingly ostentatious funerary and mourning rituals, which

²⁰ Stanley B. Burns, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography, American and European Traditions*, (New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002), caption 87.

included the abundance of flowers at funerals. The presence of death was recognized by a network of signs which included the door badge and draping the home where death had occurred: the shades or curtains of this room were typically drawn, and the walls, furniture, and mirrors were covered with black crepe and the clocks were stopped. Ostentatious mourning practices further contributed to the evidence of threatening loss. Furthermore, it was a continual reminder of the prospect of one's own death, adding insult to injury by compounding fear on grief.

The popular mind was saturated with death in America in the nineteenth century. There was a forced intimacy with death, because of high mortality rates that kept mourning rituals and paraphernalia at the forefront of daily life. In the in the personal writings of many Americans, the references to death and one's inability to prevent such a loss were ubiquitous. Sermons, diaries, novels, and Civil War accounts express the physical pain of death and how sorrowful people felt when they lost someone. The preoccupation with death lent to the proliferation of motifs that were reminders of the tenuous nature of life. Death's presence was further amplified as it became a pervasive theme in art, literature, and discourses, causing it to overtake the collective imagination of Americans through an economy of symbols that were both insidious and redemptive.

While most items that figured in Victorian funerary rites signify permanence, flowers, reinforced the brevity of life rather than contradicting it. Dating back to antiquity, the flower has stood as a reminder that both life and beauty are fleeting. The life cycle of the flower mirrors that of man: flowers are planted, sprout, bloom, go to seed, wither, and die; humans are born, grow up, marry, have children, mature to old age,

and eventually die. Allusions to the similarity between the frailty of life, its passing beauty, and inevitable end abound in the arts and written word. Man's frailty and the fading flower have been associated since ancient times. It was alluded to in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Job 14 laments "He [man] comes forth like a flower and fades away."²¹ It has ever since been used as a religious tool. In a funeral sermon by the Rev. James Hughes, the flower is used in this manner, when he states, "The word of God has made everything around us vocal with instruction...The flower of the field is oft the subject of beautiful and affecting allusion in the word of God, as well an example of God's care, as also a type of frail and perishable humanity."²²

Reminders of the frailty of man permeated visual culture, and also found its way into symbolism of funeral flower frames. The foundations for attitudes toward death in the nineteenth century were embedded in the American people's historical and religious backgrounds. James Farrell's pivotal work on American death culture, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, explained, "when Victorian Americans considered the question of death, they drew upon answers that successive generations of Englishmen and Americans had supplied. As exemplars of the Reformed Tradition, new England Puritans formulated the most refined and influential early interpretation of death in America."²³ By 1630, the Americans Puritans had established death rituals that would set the course for next 250 years in America. Their harsh symbols developed from the fear of

²¹ Job 14: 2, KJV.

²² Rev. James Hughes, "The Faded Flower," in *Memorial Tributes. A Compend of Funeral Addresses, An Aid for Pastors, A Book of Comfort for the Bereaved*, edited by Joseph Sanderson, (New York: E.B. Treat, 1889), 102.

²³ James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 16.

death and dying in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The Puritans, as well as other sects within the Reformed Protestant tradition, inspired a language of mortuary symbolism, some of which, despite the proliferation of a new iconography of death, held on in popular culture. This persistence in the nineteenth century was in part due to traditionalism, but it was also symptomatic of the high visibility of death and lingering beliefs of early religious doctrines. Literature, sermons, funerals, and art of the nineteenth century reflect this, and set the tone for a class of symbols used in funeral flower frames.

Protestant doctrines were handed down from the Reformation, and interpretations of the afterlife within this Reformed Tradition included a balance of punishment and perfection. Early perceptions about death in the nineteenth century originated in the Puritanical teachings of eternal damnation, death was depicted as the “King of Terrors.” It was viewed as a punishment for one’s sins, and despite the faithful living a good life, in all likelihood, it would lead to eternal separation from loved ones and the torments of hell. Between 1760-1800, beginning with the series of religious Awakenings in America and the impact on thinking from the Age of Enlightenment, the persuasive tools of torment and separation from loved ones in hell as punishment for sin began to lose some of its force. This would continue throughout the nineteenth century with greater efficacy.

The trepidation in the face of death was in no way eradicated in the nineteenth century. Despite the Protestant clergy’s new tactics, the prospect of judgement and hell still loomed in the eyes of many Americans. Sympathy and religion caused death to unite individuals and removed some of the fear, but as religion used death as charge for moral

fortitude the fear was also reinforced.²⁴ Issues of life and death were approached with religious perspective stemming from evangelicalism after the decline of Puritanism. But the Puritan foundation caused most Americans to maintain that death was painful, and suffering was God's reminder to live morally and to remind of mortality.²⁵ These spiritual anxieties were driven to dread due to the high mortality rates and the lack of adequate medical care. Americans were largely fearful of death and dying, because family members died in the home. Victims of illness or injury often died slowly, in agony, and were then given only a slim prospect of redemption in the afterlife. Literature, sermons, funerals, and art of the nineteenth century reflect this, and set the tone for a class of symbols used in funeral flower frames.

Mortuary symbolism that resulted from the Reformed tradition can be classified as mortality symbols. Through their physical, formal, material, and functional characteristics, these objects "embody the ideas of ephemerality, transience, and perishability, but also the concepts of eternal sleep, darkness, and time."²⁶ These symbols of mortality were collectively referred to as *Memento Mori* (Remember you will die). Many of these symbols that were translated to flower frames were directly inherited from the Puritan forbearers, from which many of the American funerary and mourning traditions and rituals developed. Beginning in the mid 1830s and 1840s, macabre motifs

²⁴ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, 63.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁶ Enrico De Pascale, *Death and Resurrection in Art*, (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007), 110.

made a resurgence.²⁷ Iconic shapes such as the *Stopped Clock*, sickle, broken wreath, sheaf, scales, and hourglass were handed down from Puritan times through funeral paraphernalia, mourning art and in print.

The clock was an important death symbol in America in the nineteenth century. The *Stopped Clock* flower frame is based on the ritual of stopping the clocks when draping the home (fig. 9). Clocks have a long history of being associated with death. A symbol of the fleeting nature of life and time running out, the clock has a history dating back to the seventeenth-century *vanitas* paintings. Instead of a direct, explicit reference to death, such as the skull or skeleton, the clock was used to evoke the mortal condition of man and “the passage of time, which consumes all earthly things.”²⁸ The significance of the time on the clock in artistic representations as well as on the flower frame was that it showed the time of death. In these floral designs, a white face indicated that the time of death was before noon, and a purple face meant it had occurred after noon. The *Stopped Clock* flower frame was most suitable for men in the prime life.

²⁷ Anita Schorsh, *Mourning Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation*, (Clinton, NJ: The Main Street Press, 1976), forward.

²⁸ Pascale, *Death and Resurrection in Art*, 110.



Figure 9. *left*. “Floral Frame: Standing Clock of Time,” c.1860-1960, 29 x 5 in. Accession # OH.1980.35.032, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection. Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. A.T. De La Mare. “Floral Clock.” *Floral Designs de Luxe*. New York: The Florists’ Exchange, 1913: No. 165.

Like the *Stopped Clock*, the sickle was also a mortality symbol. It was an attribute to both Death and Time. This connection came from the European tradition and carried over to the New World. Death and Time, known to destroy all things, used the sickle as one of the “weapons of death.” This symbol, like death, brought all things down to the same level. It could be seen as an instrument of punishment, choosing its victims, or as a blind instrument, striking indiscriminately.²⁹ The sickle shaped flower frame was a popular funeral tribute; however, it was not appropriate for everyone (fig. 10). *Floral Designs*, written in 1888, instructs, “A sickle should only be used for old persons, as it

²⁹ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, Translated by John Buchanan-Brown, (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 836.

emblemizes old age.”³⁰ This design was an inexpensive option for the funeral because it did not require many flowers to achieve the shape. A few sprigs of wheat were often included, to make the design appear as if they had just been cut by the blade.

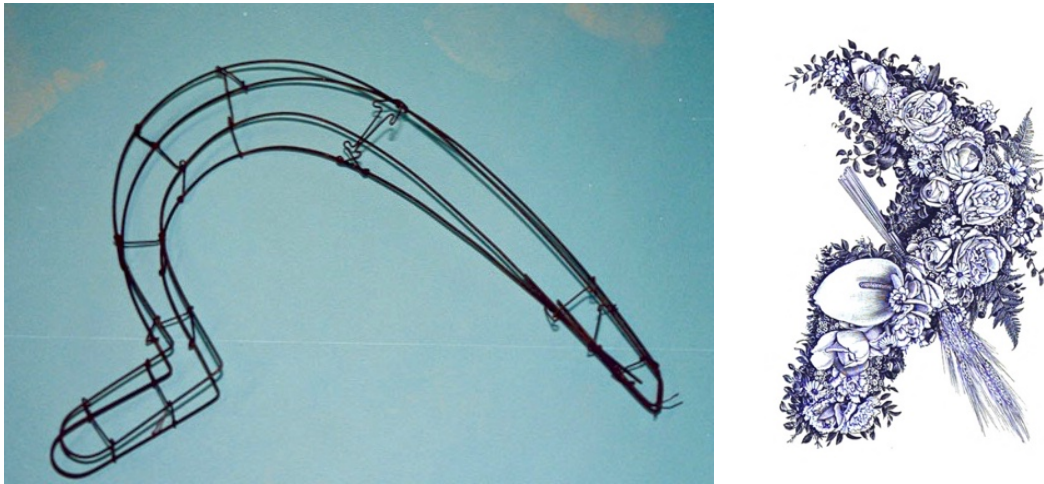


Figure 10. *left*. “Floral Frame: Sickle.” c. 1879-1962. Accession # 1979.011.064, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. A. Blanc. “No. 10. Flat Sickle.” c. 1888. Engraving. In McFarland, J. Horace, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I*. Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888: 27.

The concept of the harvest saw the sickle flower frame frequently combined with a sheaf of wheat (fig. 11). The sheaf was made of the stabilized, dried grasses known as “everlastings,” many of which were imported from Italy. Signifying both death and the harvest-cycle, the sickle and sheaf implied self-renewal. Though cutting the stalk meant certain death, spreading the seeds from the ear guaranteed new life, making this design symbolic of death and the hope of rebirth in heaven. Wheat was a token of resurrection

³⁰ J. Horace McFarland, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I - Including – Mrs. Ella Grant Campbell Practical Hints on Floral Work*. (Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888), 138.

since ancient times. The sheaf of wheat also implied a rich harvest and plenty. It was also symbolic of a long and fruitful life, hence the saying “ripe old age.” This design was also only suitable for the elderly because they had opportunity to create a life well-lived. Whereas for those who had died in youth, such a symbol only implied what the deceased had been denied. The harvest was a popular theme for funeral sermons, and the “Harvest Hymn” was frequently sung at the funeral services for the elderly.

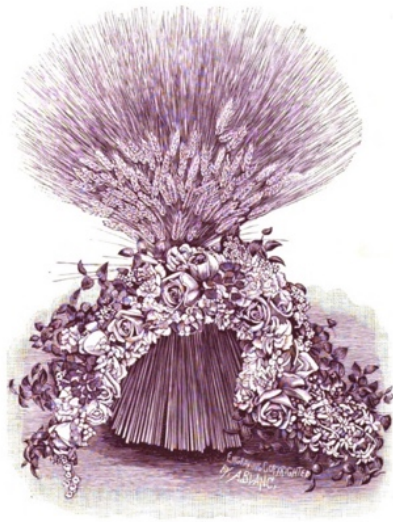


Figure 11. A. Blanc. “No. 9. Sickle and Sheaf.” c. 1888. Engraving. From J. Horace McFarland, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I.* Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888: 25.

Throughout the nineteenth century, these symbols were employed in both the fine and decorative arts, as well as memorial and mortuary works. When emblems such as the scales, hourglass, sickle, and broken wreath appeared in funeral flower frames, they were familiar because they were widespread. The rise of secularism and evangelicalism in the

early nineteenth century was accompanied by design shifts in funeral behavior and paraphernalia. Attitudes toward death softened over the course of the nineteenth century and after 1840, the harsh mortality symbolism inspired by fear gave way to a gentler form of mourning imagery. Even as attitudes toward death changed, some designs such as the sickle remained popular options for funeral tributes because they were traditional, while others such as the scales or hourglass frames were virtually abandoned.

The softening of symbols was prompted in part by the changing spiritual landscape. New and traditionally Christian themes and symbolism of mourning can be seen as indicative of the evangelical vision in the nineteenth century and its changing attitudes toward death. In the nineteenth century, the evangelical movement took hold in America. In transforming the staunch Calvinist cosmology and traditions, Evangelicals added elements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Concepts of preparation for death and the idea of death as a spur to encourage repentance were the foundation for evangelical interpretations of death, and the concept of “a delicate balance of fear and hope” was the ideology championed by the clergy. The evangelical movement had a profound impact on attitudes toward death and its rituals in the nineteenth century as well as the symbolism used in connection to them. The second quarter of the nineteenth century was a fundamental turning point from the early Christian fears of hell, fire, and brimstone both in the religious and metaphysical attitudes toward death as well as in the symbolism used to depict it. Between 1825-1850, the evangelism of fear with its severe, punishing rhetoric, which placed an emphasis on human depravity and impending judgement, was supplanted with a sentimentalized religious interpretation of death that

revived and inspired softer pious symbolism. In this more optimistic climate, mortality symbols gave way to symbols of faith and hope.

It is hard to think of a symbol more closely associated with Christianity than the cross. As the Christian symbol of Jesus's crucifixion, it implied grace and life everlasting through His death for man's sins and the resurrection. Dating back to early Christianity, it was often used as a standard and became the chief emblem of the faith. The cross flower frame was the most widespread Christian symbol used in the nineteenth century for funeral, religious events, and holidays, and continues to be used today (fig. 12). It could be combined with other funeral frames and objects, and came in a variety of shapes and sizes. For the funeral, the cross was suitable for all ages and genders depending on the color and flowers used. Inscriptions for the cross design were meant to both proclaim the faith of the deceased and provide comfort for the bereaved. They included "We Look Beyond the Cross," "No Cross, No Crown," and "Simply to Thy Cross I Cling." These phrases were reminders to have faith, hope, and to trust in the Lord. They evoked the comfort of popular hymns which seemed to speak straight from the heart.



Figure 12. *left*. “Floral Frame: Cross on Stand.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # OH.1980.37.006, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. Max Schling, “Cross of Shasta Daisies and Red Roses.” *Art in Floral Arrangements*. Harrisburg, PA: Horace McFarland Co., c.1919: plate 30.

The encouragement of Christian hope of salvation for themselves and their loved ones made the anchor one of the most popular flower frame designs for Protestant funerals in America in the nineteenth century (fig. 13). The anchor was one of the earliest Christian symbols, and it was a favorite emblem in the catacombs for the tombs of saints. This connection was made in the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”³¹ The anchor was the seaman’s last resort in the storm, and all his hopes for deliverance from the rough seas were placed in it. In this same way, hope was the Christian’s support through the trials and tribulations of life, such as the loss of a loved one. Early Christian Fathers spoke of this, stating: “As an anchor thrown into the sand will preserve the ship in safety, so Hope,

³¹ Hebrews 6:19, KJV.

even amidst tribulation, remains firm, and can sustain the soul.”³² It was a consoling symbol because it reminded the bereaved that their hope could be placed in the prospect of salvation, which meant that they would be reunited with their dead loved ones in heaven. The anchor was also an attribute of the allegory of Hope. She was one of the most popular allegories in both the home and the cemetery. The characteristics of the anchor as a solid, heavy object whose weight held the ship secure made it symbolic of steadfastness and strength of character. Its ability to hold fast amid the pressures of whatever currents, also implied tranquility and faithfulness in the deceased. Because of its consoling ability it was appropriate to send to the funeral of men or women of any age.

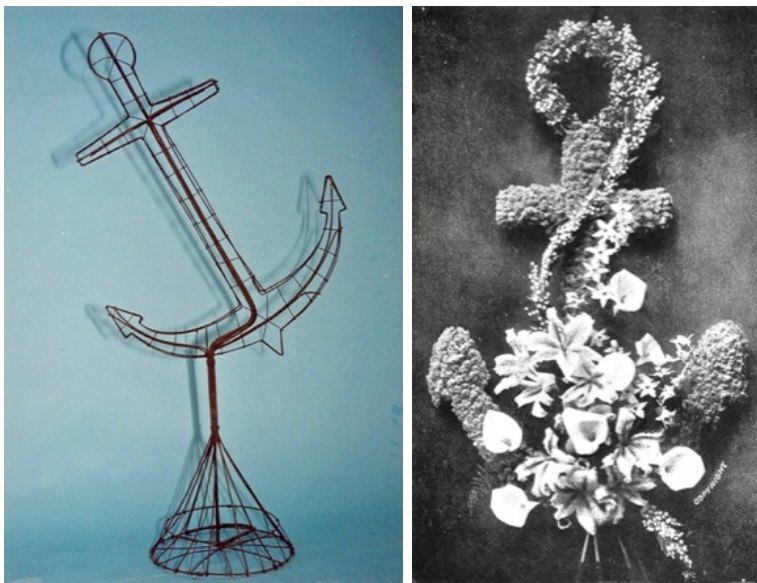


Figure 13. left. “Floral Frame: Anchor Standing,” c. 1879-1962. Accession # 1979.11.49, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. **right.** Felton and Sons, The Royal Flower Shops. “Anchor of Grey Lichen and Choice Flowers.” *Memorial Designs*. London: Felton and Sons, florists, c. 1910: 15.

³² Mrs. Henry Jenner, *Christian Symbolism*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1910), 157-158.

A book in mourning symbolism represented a scholar, the Bible, or the Book of Life. The Bible was a popular adaptation for funeral flower frames (fig. 14). As the Word of God, it told the Christian story and held the path to salvation. It was seen as a holy object that was symbolic of divine truth and knowledge. Furthermore, the Bible was an emblem of Christianity. Bibles were meant to call attention to religion and be a testament to the beliefs of the deceased. The book ranged in sizes and might be open or closed. It often included a ribbon as a book marker with a favorite verse on it. The Bible was sometimes combined with other floral frames, such as the wreath or cross, to enhance its symbolic potential. It was a suitable design for any age individual of the Christian faith, both male and female. A late nineteenth-century florist's manual instructs, "The Bible is supposed to be open at the record of deaths; the name and age are placed on left page, and small lettering must be used."³³ Inscriptions meant for the Bible design included "He Chasteneth us," "Let not your heart be troubled," "Christ Is My Hope," "I go to prepare a place for you," and "The Lord's Will Be Done."

³³ McFarland, *Floral Designs*, 135.

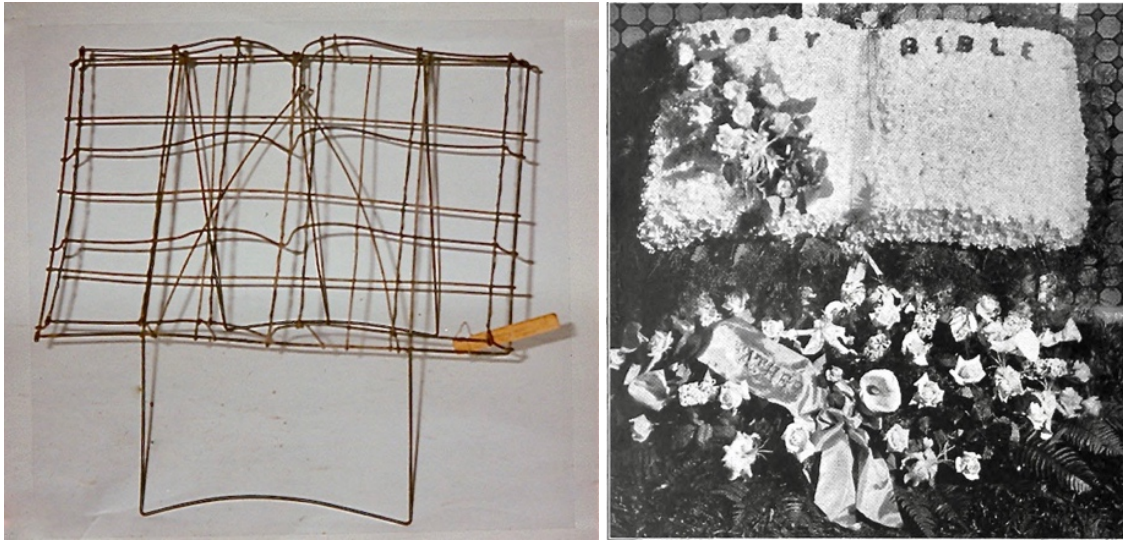


Figure 14. *left.* “Floral Frame: Open Book on Folding Stand.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # OH.1980.35.030, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right.* “Open Bible for Minister’s Funeral.” *Album of Designs: Funeral flowers*. Florists' Publishing Company. Chicago: Florists' Publishing Company, 194-: 76.

A different theme for the book flower frame was the Book of Life. In the Christian tradition, the Book of Life was a ledger of the deeds of the righteous and thereby contained the names of those who would be granted entrance to Kingdom of Heaven. According to Revelations 20:15, “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” This flower frame was a favorite device for chronicling the name of a deceased Christian. In addition to the name, a suitable inscription for the Book of Life could be “Finis.” When portrayed with an open book, the design was appropriate for the funeral of any Christian. However, when closed, this design represented a completed life, and was, therefore, more suited to the elderly.

As has been stated, in the nineteenth century the foundations for attitudes toward death, as well as mortuary symbolism, were imbued with the American people’s religious backgrounds. Indeed the whole of American society up to the nineteenth century was

built on a foundation of Christian principals. The religious beliefs held by Victorians guided the themes of floral designs at funerals.³⁴ Domestic piety encouraged the expression of religious sentiments in nineteenth century memorial designs. The waves of religious enthusiasm were seen in the choices of designs for the funeral. Iconography was chosen to convey the religious qualities and interest of the deceased. Bibles, Crosses, Anchors and many other religious designs were used to highlight the beliefs of those for whom the Christian faith was a central tenant.

³⁴ James Michael DelPrince, "Floral Designs of the Victorian Era," (PhD diss., Mississippi State, 1996), title page.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SECULARIZATION OF DEATH

*Bring flowers, pale flowers, o'er the bier to shed
A crown for the brow of the early dead!
For this through its leaves hath the white rose burst,
For this in the woods was the violet nursed.
Though they smile in vain for what once was ours,
They are love's last gift—bring ye flowers, pale flowers!*³⁵

— Felicia Dorothea Hemans, “Bring Flowers,” 1824

The nineteenth century was characterized by the changes in the structure of social and religious life. New religious and philosophical ideas spread rapidly. Past Puritan ideas about death developed in two directions at the same time: Romanticism and Evangelicalism. James Farrell explains in *Inventing The American Way Of Death*, “Death is so closely linked with life that changes in the American way of life inevitably affect our way of death. Between 1830 and 1920 urbanization, industrialization, and professionalization joined changes in transportation, science, medical practice, religion, philosophy, psychology, aesthetics and domestic life to modify American beliefs and behavior concerning death.”³⁶ Each of these currents had an impact on the use of flower frames and their design. The first changes in attitudes toward death is the result of

³⁵ Felicia Dorothea Hemans, “Bring Flowers,” in “Flowers and Music at Funerals,” By Mary F. Davis, *Banner of Light*, (August 21, 1869), 4.

³⁶ James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 213.

philosophical events occurring around 1830, which continually appeared and influenced attitudes throughout century.

The Romantic movement in America had a profound and lasting impact on attitudes toward death and mourning. Romantics shifted perceptions from a vengeful God, and created relationships between man, God, and Nature. They created two interpretations of death: one which celebrated death as the ultimate correspondence between man, God, nature, and the Universe, as man at last became totally united with Mother Nature; the other beheld death with a sense of wonder as a source of the sublime, which elevated human emotions to their peak sensitivity. The horrors of death and the grave incensed fear and were employed as a “horrible means” to invoke the sublime.³⁷ Romantics admitted the inevitability of individual death, while celebrating the immortality of life. Romanticism accompanied a rise of secularism, which affected burial practices and its symbolism. Romanticism brought changes that shaped flower frames and the rituals which called for them. These changes brought about increasingly secular, emotional, and mannered death rites.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, further challenges to the traditional, religious belief system occurred, and as a result, secularism and agnosticism were on the rise. For many, science, medicine, and new philosophies about the life of the spirit broke down the exclusively Christian interpretations of the relationship between man and his mortality.³⁸ Until the age of scientific progress, man had accepted the idea of the soul and

³⁷ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, 33-34.

³⁸ Cynthia, Mills, *Beyond Grief: Sculpture and Wonder in the Gilded Age Cemetery*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2014), 49.

continued existence after death. The scientific discoveries and theories such as evolution caused society to become increasingly secular-minded. In 1859 Charles Darwin published his *Origin of the Species*, which challenged God's role in creation as well as death. The theory of evolution was a shock to many Americans because its religious implications challenged the biblical account of creation. Furthermore, this meant that man was no longer created in the image of God, instead he was just another animal. Evolution and other scientific discoveries caused challenges to the traditional vision of immortality, destiny, and human significance. By 1870, the progression of the natural sciences caused many to lose religious certitude, and Americans began to have wavering hope in their future state after death. With growing religious doubts people clung to the dead at first, but doubts led to the alienation from death that occurred in the twentieth century.³⁹ This is not to say that the whole of American society felt this way. For many Americans, issues of life and death were approached with religious perspective stemming from Evangelicalism. They believed, or wanted to believe, God's hand was on death, and it not just a natural scientific occurrence.

The symbols which had long been used to make sense of human mortality drew on deeply rooted sensibilities in the Christian mainstream interpretation. As viable explanations from outside the realm of theology began to take hold in the nineteenth century, the punishing symbols and interpretations were supplanted. Mortality symbols were challenged, downplayed, or modified. A constellation of new symbolism was drawn from outside religion, as part of the avoidance of specifically Christian iconography. This

³⁹ Charles O. Jackson, ed., *Passing: The Vision of Death in America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 62.

led to a proliferation of secular symbolism suited to death and dying pulled from classical art and architecture and reshaped by the Romantic spirit. Universal and non-religious symbols became more desirable; these included: urns, stars, setting suns, vases, arches, harps, lyres, and hearts.

Inspiration for secular symbolism came from ancient funerary customs and a fascination with exoticism and eclecticism. Motifs included concepts from mythology and ancient artistic design, which were adapted to create an iconography for secular purposes. The Romantic and sentimental aspects of neoclassicism were enthusiastically embraced in memorial symbolism. Their symbolism was enhanced by their classicizing roots, with Egyptian and even Gothic influences, which suggested the perpetuity of civilizations and the permanence of memory after life had been snuffed out.⁴⁰ Urns, lyres, garlands, obelisks, columns, and other previously “pagan” emblems were employed in preference to religious symbols.

The urn was an extremely popular neoclassical emblem in the nineteenth century symbolizing mourning, fate, and death (fig. 15). The urn characterized a major style of gravestone carving, and appeared in other memorial works including prints, painting, and decorative arts beginning in America in 1770. The urn suggested the spirit of the deceased, inspired by ancient customs of housing the vital organs and ashes in urns placed in the tomb, symbolic of a bed for the spirit. As cremation was seldom practiced in nineteenth century America, the symbol of the urn was chosen more for its classical associations than its actual use. Urns were used more as decorative devices. However,

⁴⁰ Mills, *Beyond Grief: Sculpture and Wonder in the Gilded Age Cemetery*, 61-62.

because of its connotations, this floral design was often used in cases when the body could not be present. The drape over many urns could be seen as a symbol of the veil between the heavens and the earth or merely as a “reverential accessory.”⁴¹

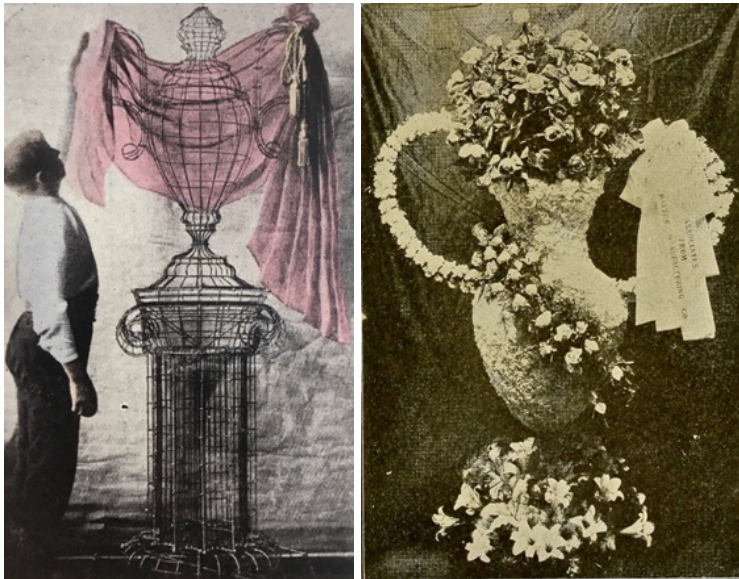


Figure 15. *left.* Reed & Keller. “Grecian urn on an ionic pedestal and fabric drape of wire net.” 1904. From *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 313. *right.* “A Floral Urn” William Cleaver Harry. *The Manual of Floral Designing*. New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919: 43.

The lyre was another popular neoclassical funeral flower tributes (fig. 16). It could be free standing, hung, or placed on a pillow or within a wreath or crescent. The lyre was appropriate for both men and women, the young and the old. The strings could be made from a variety of materials including flowers, wire, and fabric strips such as chenille. The Greek lyre was a symbol of music in classical times and one of Apollo’s

⁴¹ Douglas Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2004), 137-138.

attributes. Representing harmony between heaven and earth, the lyre was a symbol, as well as an instrument, of both peace and musical talent.

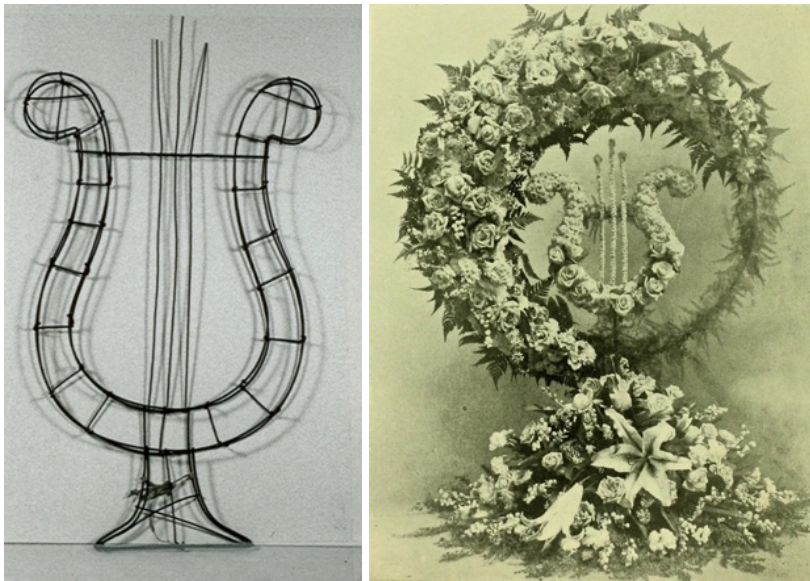


Figure 16. *left.* “Floral Frame: Lyre, Flat.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # 1980.37.004, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right.* Daniel B. Long. “Elaborate Crescent on stand encircling Lyre.” *Designs and Arrangements in Flowers*. Buffalo, NY: D.B. Long, c. 1901.

The heart was a common universal option for the funeral and came in a variety of styles and sizes (fig. 17). The heart was popular at many occasions such as weddings, anniversaries, and for Valentine’s Day. It could be an open design or filled in with flowers. Hearts were meant for placement on an easel, a stand, or as a casket cover. Hearts are symbolic of the deepest heartfelt emotions of love, joy, sorrow, and courage. In modern times, the heart has more to do with romantic love than anything else, but dating back to the Middle Ages, the heart was a popular symbol of mourning. In mourning iconography, the heart was symbolic of the love of Christ, true love, and bliss.

As a symbol, it was in opposition to the mortality emblems and imagery of death.⁴² The basic heart design could also be modified to suggest a broken heart with a zigzag or crack dividing it in two. It could also be changed into a bleeding heart with cascading red roses from a point in the center. Both of these designs represented intense loss and sorrow over the death of a loved one.



Figure 17. *left.* “Illustration of Standing Heart Floral Frame.” In William Cleaver Harry. *The Manual of Floral Designing*. New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919: 11. *Center.* Max Schling. “Open Heart Made of Mixed Flowers” *Art in Floral Arrangements*. Harrisburg, PA: Horace McFarland Co., c.1919: plate 34. *right.* Redbook Florist Services Educational Advisory Committee. “Illustration of Heart Set Piece – Broken Heart.” *Selling and Designing Sympathy Flowers*. Paragould, AK: Redbook Florist Services, 1992: 12.

Throughout the nineteenth century, numerous descriptions of the afterlife were offered and alternative images, symbols, and implications developed. The Romantic attempt to make death less ominous led the scientific naturalists to try to teach people not

⁴² Allen I. Ludwig, *Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and its Symbols, 1650-1815*, 3rd ed., (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 160.

to fear natural death. Death was a natural occurrence an essential part of nature. Furthermore, they encouraged that it was not painful or frightful to die.⁴³ One method of removing man's fear was to redefine death as a natural component of life and to emphasize the ease of dying. The discovery and widespread application of anesthesia in the 1840s created a dramatic turning point in attitudes toward death. With anesthesia, the dying no longer had to endure pain. Doctors were now able to eliminate it. Junius Henri Browne, writing in "the Dread of Death," in 1888, declared that, "Physical dissolution was long regarded as intensely painful, and by-gone literature is full of such phrases as 'the last struggle' and the 'final agony,' which are now entirely without significance... The act of dying, it is now ascertained, is absolutely free from suffering, is really unconscious; insensibility always preceding it."⁴⁴ Anesthesia provided a manifestation of the concepts of death and sleep, and this came to be employed as a powerful tool to console mourners and ease the fears of death and dying. As a result, many Americans came to look at death nonchalantly, as if birth was waking up in the morning, and death was falling asleep at night. Sleep was comforting and comprehensible because sleep was a something done in life. This made death and burial seem more natural, in that the grave was merely one's sleeping chamber.⁴⁵ By the 1870s, death was widely associated with sleep, and this was seen in the presentation of the dead body as well as in the funeral setting and paraphernalia.

⁴³ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, 25.

⁴⁴ Junius Henri Browne, "The Dread Of Death" *Forum* 6 (Oct 1888), 212-13 quoted in *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, by James J. Farrell, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 73.

⁴⁵ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, 58.

Death as sleep was not a new concept, however it was now more widely acceptable. Throughout the history of Western culture this association has been made. Homer and Virgil both made references to death as sleep, and we also see references in the Bible. Though this was a significant change in visions of death, the rhetoric of life as a pilgrimage and death as respite continued. Death was escape from the world's sadness. In this nineteenth century construction, rather than implying a continuity of life, the image being conjured suggested the discontinuity of life and its struggles through a peaceful death. The association with death and sleep was an enduring and popular metaphor, as it helped to deal with the thought of dying as well as making the loss of a loved one gentler. Portraying death as sleep was an ambiguous image, but it fit with attitudes that saw an improbability in immortality. However, Victorian Christians also interpreted death as a last sleep, peaceful for the redeemed soul. In mourning symbolism, symbols of rest and peace became popular and consoling universal options. Floral frames were made in shapes such as the pillow, the crescent and star, a banner with the word "Rest," or floral frame lettering to spell out "At Rest."

In flower frames, the idea of death as sleep was expressed most frequently through the popular pillow frame design (fig. 18). The pillow was symbolic of comfort, peace, and rest. Because of its domestic connotations, it was also indicative of family and home. The most frequently used size was 16 x 24 inches. While the form of the pillow was simple, florists could use considerable variation in making it up.⁴⁶ The pillow was considered appropriate for all ages and genders. *The Manual of Floral Designing* written

⁴⁶ Gertrude White, "Floral Decoration." (Thesis, Massachusetts Agricultural College, 1915), 40.

in 1919 tells us, “The pillow perhaps, one of the earliest designs used. As an emblem, belongs to the home and nearly always ordered by the immediate family, consequently there are more pillows made than all other designs put together, excepting wreaths.”⁴⁷ Unlike most floral frame designs, the pillow had a proper placement in the funeral setting. *Vick’s Flower and Vegetable Garden* advised: “A pillow cannot, with propriety, be placed anywhere but at the head of the casket.”⁴⁸



Figure 18. *left*. “Wire Frame, Pillow on Folding Stand.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # 61B [WF], Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. Daniel B. Long. “No. 193. Large Lettered Pillow.” *Designs and Arrangements in Flowers*. Buffalo, NY: D.B. Long, c. 1901.

Inscriptions were frequently applied to the pillow design, and for that reason the pillow was frequently chosen for that purpose. “Rest” or “At Rest” were the two most frequently chosen inscriptions for the pillow. Other lettering suggestions included the name of the deceased, or script to indicate the relation of the sender to the deceased such

⁴⁷ William Cleaver Harry, *The Manual of Floral Designing*, (New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919), 14.

⁴⁸ *Vick’s Flower and Vegetable Garden*. Rochester, NY: James Vick, 18--?, 19.

as “Father,” “Mother,” “Son,” “Daughter,” “Sister,” “Brother,” “Aunt,” “Uncle,” or “Baby.” One of the most popular inscriptions for the pillow among Christians was “Asleep in Jesus.” It was considered especially sentimental on the frames made for the funerals of young children. In a funeral sermon, Theodore Cuyler tells the mourner of the succor received from this expression. In it he states, “No three words are inscribed on more tombs or on more Hearts than these, ‘Asleep in Jesus.’”⁴⁹

Large letter flower frames were made to spell out messages such as “Victory” and “At Rest” (fig. 19). This design was meant to soften the blow of separation with its reference to sleep. It appealed to both the secular and religious, and was appropriate for all ages.



Figure 19. “Floral Frame: AT REST.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # OH.1980.36.002, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

⁴⁹ Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D., “Asleep In Jesus”, in *Memorial Tributes. A Compend of Funeral Addresses, An Aid for Pastors, A Book of Comfort for the Bereaved*, edited by Joseph Sanderson, (New York: E.B. Treat, 1889), 294.

The proliferation of non-explicitly Christian symbols in mourning iconography has been observed by historians as implicit of the rising tide of secularism in America in the nineteenth century. In “The Religious Symbolism of Laurel Hill Cemetery,” however, Colleen McDannell explains, “In the rush to define the cemetery as a secularized space free from Protestant denominational control, historians neglect to take into account the fundamentally religious outlook of middle-class Americans during the nineteenth century.”⁵⁰ In the evangelical era, the majority of Americans interpreted death in theological and Biblical terms. The innate religious stance of the nineteenth-century, American middle class was still apparent through the continued use of traditional religious themes. Religious symbolism and reassuring inscriptions about the afterlife were, in actuality, standard elements in articles of mourning throughout the nineteenth century. Furthermore, many of the secular symbols that were created could still be given religious meanings such as the pillow or heart. They were universal in their appeal.

Secularization was indeed a strong force in the nineteenth century, but evangelicalism was simultaneously gaining ground with many Americans. These distinctly different forces were working in opposition to one another, yet they managed to coexist. Evidence of this is found in the variety of symbols and interpretations in mourning iconography resulting from an increasingly variegated population with different attitudes toward death and the afterlife. At the same time secularized symbols spread, conventional Christian emblems continued to be used and many gained in popularity.

⁵⁰ Colleen McDannell, “The Religious Symbolism of Laurel Hill Cemetery”, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 111, No. 3 (1987), 278.

Furthermore, many of the symbols created to meet the needs of secularism maintained or could be given some spiritual meaning such as the heart, star, lyre, and pillow, among others. While they were not a total rejection of Christian iconography, many of those symbols with religious connotations became diluted over time. As a result, funeral floral arrangements began to lose some of their symbolic potency. Bertram Puckle tells us of this need for secular symbols in mourning art. In *Funeral Customs*, he reveals:

In its present form the mourning card is a modest affair, printed in black and silver, and exhibiting all that elementary lack of taste which is so marked a feature of everything connected with our funeral customs. It contains, as a rule, in addition to the name and age of the deceased, some symbol of the Christian faith, sufficiently obscured by a wreath of lilies or ivy in order to render it acceptable to all shades of religious opinion. A verse selected from some popular hymn expressing a pious aspiration, preferably in relation to 'sleep,' is added, but avoiding, of course, all the pitfalls, either definite or dogmatic.⁵¹

Some shapes became so generic, that one might see a pillow or cushion flower frames at the baptism of a new baby and a virtually identical one at the funeral of an elderly man the next day. A harp form could celebrate the graduation of a musical young lady or the "choir of angels" in heaven at a funeral. A wreath was not limited to domestic Christmas decoration, but was generally used to celebrate an academic or sport triumph and especially a funeral without regard to age, gender or status of the deceased. Bells were used at weddings, holidays, and funerals. Anchors, not only represented a maritime connection but were a popular symbol of hope and even of a long and stable marriage.

The Romantic influence on attitudes toward death was seen in the proliferation of non-Christian symbolism for mourning, as well as attempts to make death less

⁵¹ Bertram S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs*, (Los Angeles: The Library of Alexandria, 1926), 198.

frightening by reinterpreting death as the last sleep. These efforts were further encouraged by another expression of Romanticism in the nineteenth century, sentimentalism. Sentimentalism encouraged interpersonal relationships and the expression of emotions engendered by death. This impacted all aspects of mourning, including the proliferation of funeral flowers as well as their symbolism.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SENTIMENTAL DEATH

*Yes, flowers, have their language. Theirs is an oratory, that speaks in perfumed silence, and there is tenderness, and passion, and even the lightheartedness of mirth, in the variegated beauty of their vocabulary... no spoken word can approach to the delicacy of sentiment to be inferred from a flower seasonably offered; that the softest impressions may be thus conveyed without offence, and even profound grief alleviated, at a moment when the most tuneful voice would grate harshly on the ear, and when the stricken soul can be soothed only by unbroken silence.*⁵²

— Louise Cortambert, *The Language of Flowers*, 1839

In America, beginning in 1800, death was transformed from a traditionally brief, personal, private drama of the everyday life cycle into a prolonged, ceremonial, public ritual. While death did not change in the nineteenth century, the American attitudes toward it and American actions in the face of it were radically altered as a sentimentalized attitude toward death began to take hold. In addition to its philosophical influences on man's understanding of death, Romanticism also affected the emotions engendered by death. Romanticism recast individuals as important enough to be mourned and encouraged individual memory. This created a Romantic revolution in feeling in the nineteenth century that created ties between individuals, the destruction of which was considered intolerable and inconceivable. In the early nineteenth century, sentimentalism emerged as a way to cultivate feelings and structure bereavement, which was an aspect of the American Romantic movement. While Romanticism called for the raging emotions of

⁵² Louise Cortambert and Frederic Shoberl, *The Language of Flowers: with illustrative poetry; to which is now added, the calendar of flowers*, (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839), 5-6.

the sublime, Americans, possessing this heightened awareness of the emotions engendered by death, sought a way to channel their intense feelings into social order. Romanticism often became sentimentalism, and consequentially, sentimentality reigned throughout Victorian America. Sentimentalism encouraged familial bonds and bonds of friendship. Creating and maintaining these relationships created affections that made the separation of death more painful, even unbearable. Many assume the Victorians had a morbid obsession with death. While the nineteenth century attitudes and rituals surrounding death and mourning are excessive by modern standards, they gave people of the time the personal and social mechanisms to deal with grief and loss.

Between 1830 and 1870, the formal characteristics of sentimentality and mourning took shape as Americans sought solutions to the sorrow and loss resulting from death, which relentlessly intruded in daily life. According to Harold Schechter, “Death became an occasion for sentimental excess.”⁵³ In the sentimental mode, one way of compensating for this loss was through the cultivation of memory in word, physical forms, and deeds. This developed into what has been called the “cult of mourning” and was one of the most significant expressions of sentimental culture in America. Mourning was energetically cultivated, creating a system that directed the sentimental survivor to transform their private grief into public mourning. By the 1880s, a rigorous system of rules governed mourning. Upper- and middle-class mourning observed many social regulations which governed dress, conduct, and expressions of condolence. Mourning was almost exhibitionistic, fashioned into a system of formal rituals and dominated the

⁵³ Harold Schechter, *The Whole Death Catalog: A Lively Guide to the Bitter End*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 13.

literature and art of the period. Some of these elements of sentimentality had occurred earlier, but they were encouraged in the nineteenth century to a greater extent than in the previous centuries.⁵⁴

Part of the popularity of flowers was driven by their ability to express the sentimental feeling of the era. While most people appreciate flowers for their colors, textures, forms, and fragrance, in the nineteenth century they were perceived differently. Flowers were seen as advocates of morality and sentiment made visible. As Nicolette Scourse tells us in *The Victorians and their Flowers*, flowers were subjects for “eulogies on filial duty, chastity and the mother image” and “worthy advocates of morality and religion.”⁵⁵ Flowers were also suited to the Romantic interest in natural beauty and natural theology because the Romantics believed every flower held a lesson. Under these conditions the love of the flowers increased, and the sentiments behind flowers became more meaningful. Not only did they symbolize immortality through their life and death cycle, they held individual meanings which developed into an unspoken Language of Flowers.

With the beginning of the nineteenth century, middle classes on both sides of the Atlantic became obsessed with the notion that flowers could convey a secret meaning and the analysis of a posy could unlock a complicated code. The images and ideals conjured by flowers were everyday parts of the nineteenth century world of flowers. Traditional

⁵⁴ Lawrence Taylor, “Symbolic Death: An Anthropological View of Mourning Ritual in the 19th Century,” in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, edited by Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, (New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 40.

⁵⁵ Nicolette Scourse, *The Victorians and their Flowers*, (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 1.

flower symbolism, as well as nineteenth century interpretations, were organized and elaborated in a set of formalized lists in the cultural phenomenon known as the Language of Flowers. The Victorians went to great lengths to give flowers special attributes, combining Christian symbolism, ancient myths, folklore, and sentimental poetry based on the flower's color, size, shape, habit of growth, lifespan – which were thought to be indications of their character – and name.⁵⁶ The floral message idea became a highly-developed code and many dictionaries of flowers and their meanings were created. Individual biases and interests of the writer came into play and alterations from the original sentiments appeared. Despite modifications, some meanings were generic; for example, the red rose is a universal symbol of love and laurel represents victory.⁵⁷

As it says in *Flowers and Their Teachings*, from 1874, “Some plants and flowers have ever been considered more appropriate than others for the purpose of decking the resting-place of the departed.”⁵⁸ While some funeral flowers, were useful for their names, others because of their mournful color and habit of growth were deemed funeral varieties. Other flowers were also chosen because of their name. The forget-me-not, for this reason, was a useful funeral variety. This sentimental flower was named for the German melancholy legend which surrounds it, in which a young knight sacrifices his life to retrieve these flowers for his love. According to the folktale, with his dying breath he

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Haig, *The Floral Symbolism of the Great Masters*, (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1913), 25-26 and 32.

⁵⁷ The meanings attributed to a particular flower became so diverse that flower dictionaries cannot be relied on today to interpret a Victorian use, be it a flower frame, a quilt, or a hand-painted plate, however it should be recognized as factor in their choice of flower for the funeral tributes.

⁵⁸ By the author of “Sunshine and Shadows in Kattern’s Life”, *Flowers and their Teachings*, (London, Religious Tract Society, c.1874), 154.

proclaimed “Forget me not!” and so it was named ever since. Flowers that symbolized the nature of one’s relationship to the deceased were a popular sentiment to express in floral tributes. Moss might be shown on the base of an arrangement to signify maternal love; syringa (lilac) expressed fraternal love; and the cinquefoil meant the deceased was a beloved daughter. Ivy was a favorite in funeral designs. The significance of ivy for constancy and friendship made it suitable to practically anyone sending a flower frame to the funeral, but because of its dark color it was generally only used for adults and the elderly.

Knowledge of sentimental varieties might influence the customer when choosing which in-season flowers to be sent to a house of mourning. It also aided the florist looking to make a sale. Flowers that held ambiguous meanings of love such as the rose, myrtle, heliotrope, pink, dahlia, mignonette, and hyacinth were popular funeral varieties whose meanings carried an appropriate message for many mourners. The “devoted attachment” of the heliotrope, the “constancy” of the hyacinth, the “pure love” of the pink, and the dahlia that was “forever thine,” could also be sold under the premises of courting. Florists often hyped up these sentiments to sell whatever they had in stock as it suited their purpose. Some varieties were used despite their meanings. Achillea, notwithstanding its meaning of “war,” was a popular funeral variety; as was tuberose, which was symbolic of “dangerous pleasures.” Aster was symbolic of an “after-thought,” which is certainly not the sentiment one would wish to express to the bereaved, but it appeared in many funeral designs.

Some of the most popular designs in funeral flowers in the late nineteenth century were those that appealed to the sentimentality of the period. By the mid-nineteenth century symbolism was much softer and more sentimental. This was because of changes in the vision of death, and it was also a reflection of the social structure. The symbols used were consistent with the “pleasures of melancholy,” which was sophisticated and highly fashionable at the height of sentimentalism.⁵⁹ These flower frame designs were both more decorative and more personal in their references. Shapes that alluded to lives cut short and the loss of cherished relationships were among the most frequently ordered.⁶⁰ Symbolism that emphasized the loss of loved one and the wreck left behind them were seen in a variety of broken objects. These frame shapes stressed the severed relationship and were poetic statements on lives cut short, such as the *Broken Wheel*, the *Broken Column*, and the *Harp with Broken Strings*, as well the empty furniture designs expressed the heartache over separation from ones loved ones. These sentimental symbols also met the need for secular symbolism but carried a deeper message. These designs favored emotion rather than reason by symbolically re-representing their loss and gave tangible proof to their struggles with the reality of death. Through sentimental symbols and sentimental flower varieties Americans in the second half of the nineteenth century were able to express their feelings of loss and love through the tributes they sent to the funeral.

⁵⁹ Anita Schorsh, *Mourning Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation*, (Clinton, NJ: The Main Street Press, 1976), section 1.

⁶⁰ Cynthia, Mills, *Beyond Grief: Sculpture and Wonder in the Gilded Age Cemetery*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2014), 61-62.

The *Broken Wheel* or wheel with a missing spoke design was symbolic of broken family or community ties (fig. 20). The missing spoke on the wheel signified the missing member or family or organization. The wheel on its own was a symbol of eternity, progress, and continuation, but as the broken wheel can no longer turn, this design stated their journey was over. This mourning iconography was also seen in mourning art and in the cemetery. It was also suited to professionals in the railroad and transportation industry.

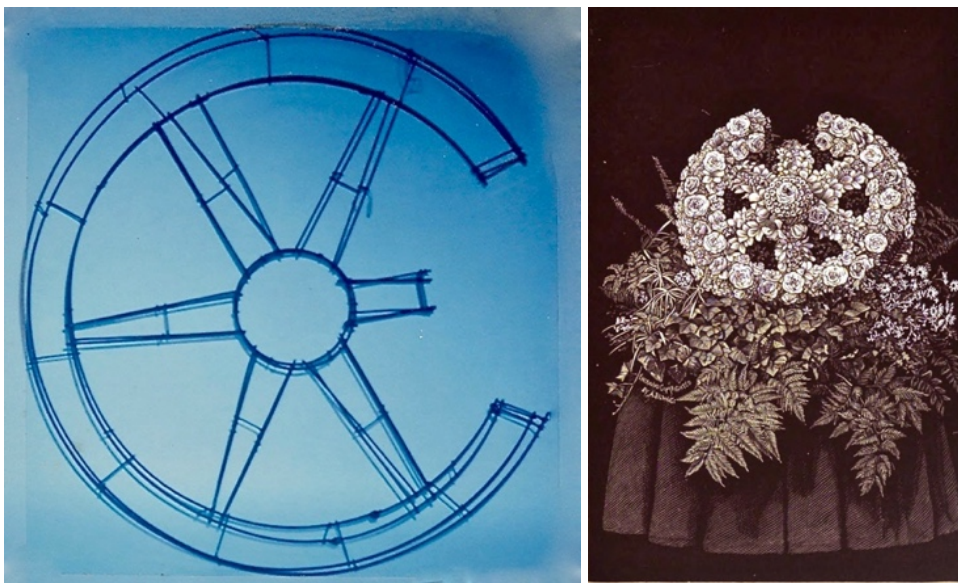


Figure 20. *left.* “Floral Frame: Broken Wheel.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # 1980.35.021, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *Right.* A. Blanc. “No. 19. Broken Wheel on Ivy Base.” C. 1888. Engraving. In McFarland, J. Horace, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I.* Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888: 45.

The *Broken Column* was one of the most popular symbols in floral designs and mourning iconography in the nineteenth century (fig. 21). The visual impact of this

design contributed to its popularity. It usually ranged in height from two to six feet. A broken column was a symbol of the end of life, and more specifically the unfinished work and frustrated hopes brought by a life cut short. This design was often given to parents who had lost a child either in youth or to the family of men in the prime of life. The theme of dashed expectations was essential to the theme of the *Broken Column* and life cut off. A common inscription for this design, as well as the broken wheel, is “Broken Hopes.” *Floral Designs*, written in 1888, explains symbolism of this inscription on the *Broken Column* tribute: “Broken Hopes represent the feelings of the bereaved parents whose only son had through an accident been burned to death.”⁶¹ The symbol of a broken column had past associations that many felt were not appropriate for Christian burial, and it was considered a “revised Pagan style.”⁶² Despite this, the *Broken Column* reigned supreme in floristry and mourning iconography. The *Broken Column* was also seen in the cemetery, in mourning art, and in sentimental literature.

⁶¹ J. Horace McFarland, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I - Including – Mrs. Ella Grant Campbell Practical Hints on Floral Work.* (Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888), 95.

⁶² Neil Harris, “The Cemetery Beautiful”, in *Passing: The Vision of Death in America*, edited by Charles O. Jackson, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 108.

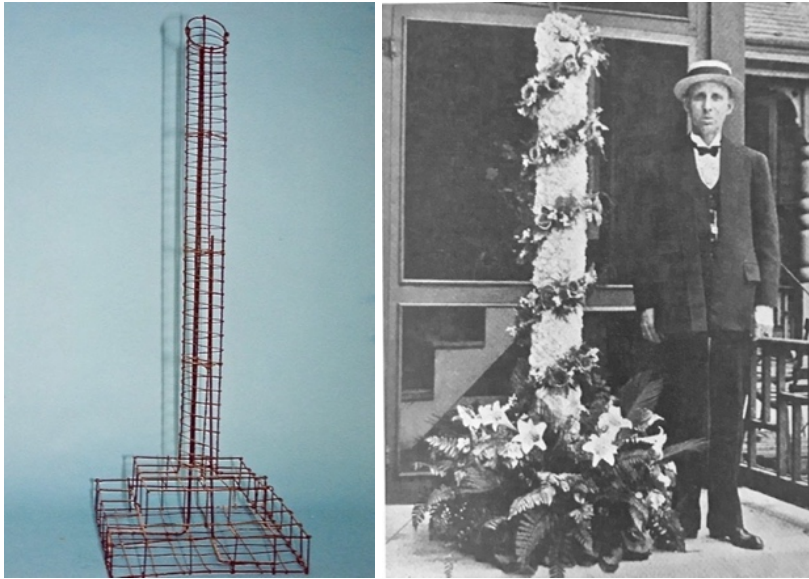


Figure 21. *left*. “Floral Frame: Broken Column with Base.” c. 1879-1962. Accession # 1979.011.12, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. “A 6-foot column design for the funeral of a glass manufacturer, William Elliot Smith of the Illinois Glass Co.” 1909. From *A Centennial History of the American Florist*. Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 182.

Another class of sentimental symbols popular in the nineteenth century was empty furniture. These designs were in the form of objects that the deceased had interacted with. Mary Louise Kete explains in *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* that these designs were “imbued with what was seen as the essence of personhood—the affections—of those who have touched them.”⁶³ The furniture the deceased loved one had used, therefore, became a personification of the individual who had been lost. These symbols exuded the power of

⁶³ Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 105.

sentimentality to evoked strong emotions when one considered these objects, which once filled, now stood empty.⁶⁴

The *Vacant Chair* or *Empty Chair* was an elaborate and massive floral design (fig. 22). It was usually life-sized. Depending on the ambitiousness of the design and the quality of flowers, these arrangements were some of the most expensive flower frame tributes. The chair, in itself was a symbol of authority. Dating back to ancient times up through the seventeenth century, only the highest-ranking individuals would have a chair to sit on. Therefore, to remain seated while those around stand was to demonstrate authority, and to offer someone a chair was recognition of their superiority or prestige. The chair being empty implied the absence or loss of an authoritative figure. This made the *Empty Chair* particularly suited to men, especially those in positions of authority; however, any father, as head of the household, was worthy of such a tribute in the nineteenth century. The *Empty Chair* design did not have to indicate authority. As a visual genre, unfilled furniture came to represent a deceased loved one.⁶⁵ Therefore, the *Vacant Chair* design could be more general in its connotations indicating any missing member of the family or community. The empty chairs appeared in a variety of mediums. The chair was often depicted in the cemetery, usually with a pair of small shoes on or beside it, to indicate the loss of a child. Memorial photographs also used this mourning iconography, often picturing the chair in which the loved one used to sit with other props to indicate death. “The Vacant Chair” by Henry S Washburn and George F. Root was a

⁶⁴ Ellen Marie Snyder, “Innocents In A Worldly World: Victorian Children’s Gravemarkers” in *Cemeteries And Gravemarkers: Voices Of American Culture*, by Richard E. Meyer, (Boulder, CO: Utah State University Press, 1992), 23.

⁶⁵ Snyder, “Innocents In A Worldly World”, 20.

Civil War ballad inspired by a family's despair at Thanksgiving over the chair left unfilled by a young soldier, John William "Willie" Grout, who was killed at Balls Bluff, Virginia, in October 1861.⁶⁶



Figure 22. *left*. "Floral Frame: Chair, Small." c. 1879-1962. Accession # OH.1979.12, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. A.T. De La Mare. "Vacant Chair." *Floral Designs de Luxe*. New York: The Florists' Exchange, 1913: No. 147.

The *Empty Crib* flower frame was designed for the funeral of infants, although this same design was frequently employed at births and christenings (fig. 23). *Floral Designs* in 1888 described one such funeral design for an infant, "was a cradle of blossoms with the little one laid in it, with a cover-lid of white cashmere covered with Roman hyacinths, the corner turned back and faced with marguerites; an exquisite fringe

⁶⁶ H.S. Washburn, "The Vacant Chair," Music by George F. Root, 1861.

of lily of the valley finished this beautiful receptacle for the baby's last sleep."⁶⁷ The symbol of an empty cradle recreated the lost child's connection with their former life and environment. These designs were highly sentimental, and had the ability to evoke emotional reactions in the viewer. The empty crib was also a popular mourning symbol for the cemetery, in memorial art works, and in songs and literature.

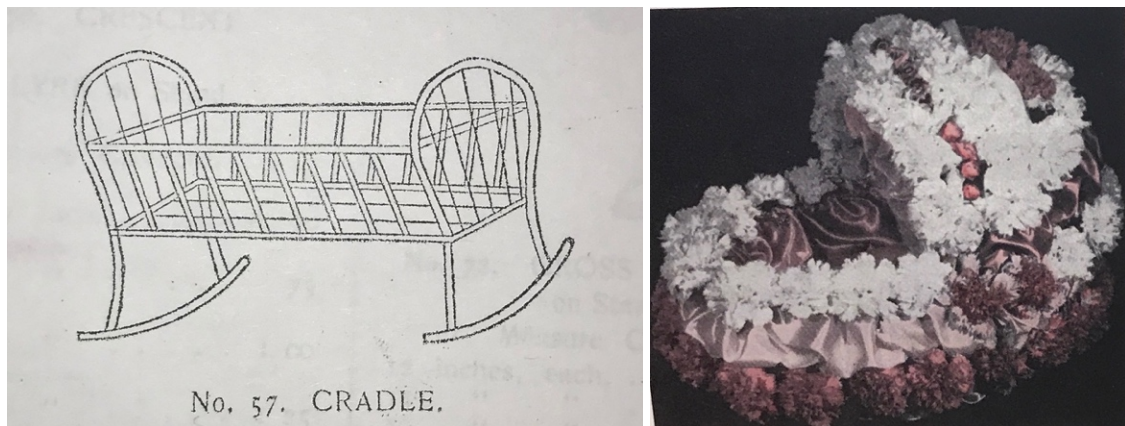


Figure 23. *left.* Henry Rajsik. “No. 57. Cradle.” *For the Trade. Wholesale and Net Cash Price List of Wire Floral Designs... Manufactured by Henry Rajsik.* Philadelphia, PA: Lilienfeld Brothers, c. 1883: 19. *right.* “Bassinet, covered with carnations.” 1945. From *A Centennial History of the American Florist.* Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997: 128.

An important reason for the proliferation of flowers, especially symbolic arrangements on wire frames was the “beautification of death” phenomenon. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, changes were made to funerals in order to make them as painless as possible. Victorians wanted to reduce the harsh reality of death, to mute it, and they wanted it beautified. They believed beauty had the power to transform grimness of death into sweet grace, to make death less of a tragedy. By mid-century, with

⁶⁷ McFarland, *Floral Designs*, 132.

elaborate funeral paraphernalia and multitudes of flowers, the Victorians celebrated and aestheticized death and mourning. This process was known as the “beautification of death,” and led to a new ideology and material culture in relation to death and mourning in America in the nineteenth century, which peaked in the late 1860s and 1870s. The beautification of death was characterized by ritualized behavior and material objects that idealized death, heaven, and the deceased person. This cultural trend, in which all aspects of death were aestheticized including the dead body, the mourners, and the funeral rituals, occurred on both sides of the Atlantic and across socioeconomic lines.

The beautification of death was a manifestation of Romanticism and sentimentalism. The visual display and elaborate rituals of death and mourning mirrored the emotional intensity of these movements. Romanticism, which stressed strong emotions, was no less affected by the emotional response to the aesthetic experience. The funeral under these sensibilities should be something expressive and beautiful in order to achieve the desired effect. All aspects of mortuary activity were directed toward beauty and sublimity concomitant with a growing concern for aesthetic luxury. Furthermore, the sentimental response to loving the dead made the living want to surround the deceased in beauty in order to hide the realities of death and loss and to deny their insecurities about the afterlife.⁶⁸

The beautification of death transformed the American way of death. Socially, it was expressed in the practice of high mourning among the Victorians, which became increasingly formalized, ostentatious, and expensive, thus distancing the bereaved from

⁶⁸ Harris, “The Cemetery Beautiful,” 107.

the source of their distress. Materially, the beautification of death was manifest in the elaborate displays, which used both mass-produced and handmade decorative funerary paraphernalia, such as hearses, coffin hardware, and flower frames. Beautification also included a large number of invited guests, a long line of carriages in the procession, the prevalence of black crepe, as well as appropriate black dress and other fashion markers for the mourners and pall bearers, and the participation of the most famous members of the clergy in the pronouncements over the dead. Sidney George Fisher, a writer and diarist who attended a number of funerals named these rituals and activities “the pageantry of woe.”⁶⁹

In addition to the ritual aspects of death and mourning, the aesthetics of the service became increasingly important. The pattern of mortuary behavior developing over the nineteenth century was driven by the popular desire to provide a setting, beautiful to both see and feel, for death and dying. From the middle of the century on, emphasis was placed on color, beauty, and aesthetic appeal by placing the deceased in an ornate casket and surrounding it with the natural beauty of flowers. Beautification efforts encouraged adornment of the home with funeral crepe and, increasingly after mid-century, flowers at the time of death. A large and diverse quantity of objects was created to beautify death and mourning including extravagant mourning clothes, decorative mortuary art, ornamental memorial statuary, and the profusion of funeral flower arrangements. It also led to families commissioning or creating decorative arts commemorating the death. The cheerful luxury of the funeral setting paralleled the changing styles in funeral

⁶⁹ Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 43.

paraphernalia, cemeteries, and flower frames, all of which directed the bereaved's attention away from their grief and toward the increasingly elaborate and costly trappings of death.

Funeral directors together with the florist sought to reduce grief by creating a beautiful death scene for the bereaved's last moments with the departed, with decorative and sentimental trappings.⁷⁰ These were assimilated into the traditional death practices in America throughout the course of the nineteenth century. Joseph N. Greene, in *The Funeral: Its Conduct and Proprieties* from 1905, describes the affective display, "Often the position of the casket in the room, gracefully canopied by an attractive curtain, and banked against flowers artistically arranged, forms a picture so beautiful as to relieve the scene of death of some of its awfulness. It were well that this picture form the last memory which the bereaved have of the departed in the home."⁷¹ This idea of the picturesque last memory of the deceased was of such importance, that in his mourning manual, Greene also instructs, "to have the funeral goers leave the home before the casket is removed from this scene, as moving the casket will disarrange the flowers and create a disordered room, and the "last beautiful picture in the mind will be destroyed and confused."⁷²

It was very common to take a photograph of the deceased surrounded by their floral tributes. Photography gave us a vivid visual record of these changes occurring as

⁷⁰ Jay Ruby, *Secure the Shadow: Death Photography in America*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 15.

⁷¹ Joseph N. Greene, *The Funeral: Its Conduct and Proprieties*, (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1905), 33.

⁷² Greene, *The Funeral: Its Conduct and Proprieties*, 34.

part of the beautification of death (fig. 24). Early postmortem photographs, between 1840 and 1860, showed few beautification concerns; death was not disguised as a last sleep and no flowers or other props were present. As the beautification of death developed, flower arrangements were introduced to the scene, eventually becoming “full floral extravaganzas” by the 1870s.⁷³



Figure 24. *left*. “Mary Myrtie (Carver) Berry posed beside the coffin of her twenty-two-year old brother, Clarence L. Carver.” Photograph in possession of R. Terry Houchen of Glasgow. From Sue Lynn Stone. “‘Blessed Are They That Mourn’: Expressions of Grief in South Central Kentucky, 1870-1910.” *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (Summer 1987): 224. *right*. “James Thomas Moss at the Casket of His Wife, Lasha Etta Moss, Carterville, Massachusetts, Silver Gelatin Print 8 by 10 inches, May 1916” Burns, Stanley B. *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement and the Family in Memorial Photography, American and European Traditions*. New York: Burns Archive Press, 2002. Fig. 100.

The mourning customs and beautified paraphernalia of death created during this time reveal emerging social behaviors constructed to cope with the loss of an individual.

⁷³ Stanley Burns, *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America*, (Altadena, CA: Twelvetreets Press, 1990), Identification by era, 1870s.

The rituals and aesthetic quality of death ceremonies were cultivated to create beauty and thereby comfort, effectively creating a setting that would condition the moods of the bereaved by supplying therapy for grief and loss. As Cynthia Mills explains in *Beyond Grief: Sculpture and Wonder in the Gilded Age Cemetery*:

Beauty could serve a palliative function, perhaps easing pain, but it could also be equated to something that was good and true, with a moral life and outlook. It could cloak or assist in denying ugly truths. Ideally, it could be a means to transform, or mask the unspeakable, the trauma subject beyond the scope of normal language. The goal was to turn a tragedy into poetry, to counterbalance the horrific and convert a sense of grief to one of awe or wonder, something positive that awaited in a realm beyond grief.⁷⁴

Moreover, the living created an atmosphere that had the power to temporarily manipulate or displace emotions they did not want to face, such as despair, anger, relief, guilt, and even grief itself.⁷⁵

Flower frames created a visual display that mirrored the emotional intensity generated by the loss of loved one. However, as James Farrell explains in *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, “Sometimes the flowers served as ‘emblems of our own great resurrection, emblems of the bright and better land,’ but often they appeared as much for visual effect as for symbolic significance.”⁷⁶ Many of the secular flower frames were generic symbols which were more decorative than meaningful such as heart, urn, crescent wreath, “In Memoriam” pedestals, and vases. Often these frame designs were less about symbolism, than achieving the beautification of death. These symbols are

⁷⁴ Mills, *Beyond Grief: Sculpture and Wonder in the Gilded Age Cemetery*, 79.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 80.

⁷⁶ James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 177.

important not because of their meaning but because their very existence shows the importance of the beautification of death in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE AFTERLIFE REIMAGINED

*The powerful love of association, of...using flowers at funerals, seems to us to prescribe it. Its object is not to 'associate flowers with corruption,' but to associate death with tranquility, and hope, and even rejoicing, to remind the survivors that death is not simply corruption, but change; not night only, but morning.*⁷⁷

— Editor, “Flowers At Funerals,” *Nation*, 1866

Throughout the nineteenth century Americans continued to seek consolation due to the high mortality rates and growing doubt over the fate of man after death. Comfort about the future state of one’s soul and that of their loved ones, as well as the feelings of loss also came from consolation literature. This genre of literature, written between 1830-1880, was centered on the culture of death in the nineteenth century. It amplified the significance of dying and the dead through mourner’s manuals, religious tracts, hymns, poetry, biography, and fiction. Consolation literature posited hopeful, literal-minded assurance and was characterized as being self-indulgent, domestic, and feminine in flavor. These works encouraged the elaborate funerary practices, conspicuous mourning rituals, and the proliferation of monuments and memorials of the deceased. Their popularity in the nineteenth century reveals the cultural shift toward sentimental and evangelical forms of mourning. This literature, as well as in church services, advised Americans to resign themselves to God’s will in the face of mourning. At the same time, they tried to convince the mourner that death had not really taken their loved ones

⁷⁷ “Flowers at Funerals,” *Nation*, (New York: NY, July 12, 1866), 36-37.

because they would be reunited in the heavenly realm. The concept of reunion became increasingly important. These works were intensely saccharine, and volumes of poetry and prose gave death a cloying gloss of sentimentality.

With confidently detailed passages about celestial life, consolation literature contributed to the complex debates over the nature of the afterlife ongoing in American and European thought. Such writers imagined heaven as home where motherhood, domestic bliss, and the afterlife were entwined. Heaven was reimagined over time from a paradise of lush forests, soothing waters, unfading flowers; to a celestial realm inhabited by harp-playing angels, where days were spent singing praises to the Lord; to the nineteenth century construction of an individual's personal idea of bliss, much like daily life, yet without pain and suffering. Americans domesticated death in order to quell their fears on the subject using tools from sentimentalism and Romantic expressionism. Instead of traditional imagery, heaven was re-envisioned as similar, though better than everyday life of middle-class Americans: they created a Utopian vision of the life they already knew.⁷⁸ Heaven was described in the 1860s as a place much like home, the "home beyond the skies." Hymns such as "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling" promoted the idea of the weary soul going home, and that Jesus wants us to come to heaven and be at peace. With this new conception of heaven, immortality no longer was a completion followed by stasis. Instead, man remained on his path, continuing in everlasting progress of what he had achieved on earth. However, more aggressive forms of striving would cease, and the gentler leisure pursuits of the busy American family

⁷⁸ Charles O. Jackson, ed., *Passing: The Vision of Death in America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 62.

would continue.⁷⁹ This new concept of the afterlife maintained the individuality of the deceased person, which appealed to Romantic individualism and the sentimental cult of memory. The Kingdom of Heaven as a theory, a metaphor, or a reality, gave hope to the nineteenth-century American.⁸⁰

Within this new vision of death, reunion with loved ones was championed as one of its principal attributes. Death meant finally entering the “realm where parting is no more.” The Christian was assured that one of the chief joys in heaven would be that their friendships and familial bonds would resume.⁸¹ This helped individuals accept the termination of relationships on earth. It also transformed death further into a time of joy and hope, rather than gloom and despair. The end of life continued to be seen as a relief from the sorrows of this world, but now it also offered the opportunity to be reunited with loved ones who had gone before.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps took the new conceptions of heaven as a perfected extension of life on earth by religious leaders like her father, Austin Phelps, to the extreme in works of consolation literature for the thousands who had lost sons and husbands in the Civil War. Her best-selling novels, *The Gates Ajar*, *Beyond the Gates*, and *Between the Gates*, dramatized and accelerated widespread acceptance of this ideal.

⁷⁹ Lawrence Taylor, “Symbolic Death: An Anthropological View Of Mourning Ritual In The 19th Century”, in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, edited by, Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, (New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 460.

⁸⁰ Paul Carter, “If A Man Die, Shall He Live Again?”, in *Passing: The Vision of Death in America*, edited by Charles O. Jackson, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 114.

⁸¹ James Moorhead, ““As Though Nothing at all had Happened’: Death and Afterlife in Protestant Thought, 1840-1925.” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (Winter 1984), 469.

These works gave detailed descriptions, which included every minute detail of heaven, including food, courtship, lifestyles, occupations, and the nature of child care. This sentimental interpretation of life after death was an inspiration for a new array of mourning symbols. Flower arrangements such as the large letters spelling out “Welcome Home,” furniture, musical instruments, pillows, and objects from daily life referenced the domesticity of heaven in addition to their other symbolic meanings.

The *Gates Ajar* floral frame designs were also popularized by Phelps’ novel and became a popular symbol in nineteenth-century mourning culture (fig. 25). The assurance of salvation and awaiting heavenly reunions meant that this was not painful imagery for the bereaved, but a reminder that the deceased were in a better place. In mourning iconography, the moment of transition from this world to the next was symbolized by gates, at the threshold of which the two worlds collided. One reason for their popularity was that gates, unlike doors, were porous in nature, which provides a view into the world beyond and an opening through which to forge a connection with those who have passed. This open gateway to the beyond appeased the sentimental desire to maintain the bonds with the deceased. Furthermore, the *Gate Ajar* designs were appealing for the message they implied. The gates, because they were open, meant that mourners had only to pass through when their time came. Nothing stood in their way of eternity in heaven and reunion with all those they had loved and lost.

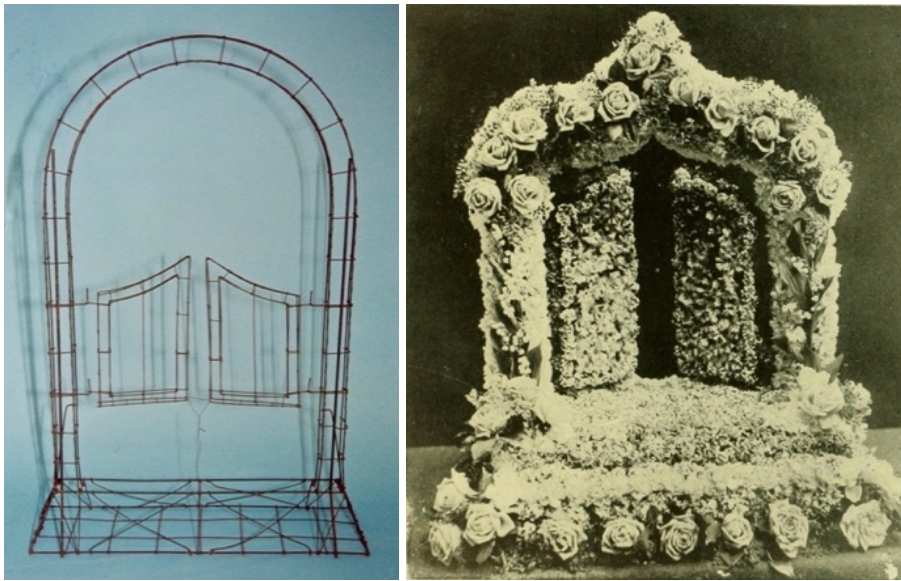


Figure 25. *left*. “Floral Frame: Gates Ajar.” c. 1860-1960. 25 x 42 in. Accession # OH.1980.36.001, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. Daniel B. Long. “No. 307. Large Gates Ajar, Standard Style.” *Designs and Arrangements in Flowers*. Buffalo, NY: D.B. Long, c. 1901.

The *Gates Ajar* or *Gates of Heaven* set piece was an especially elaborate design. It generally ranged from two to four feet high. The gates were usually left open to indicate the recent departure of the spirit into heaven. A taxidermied dove, or less commonly a star, was often placed surmounting the arch. A variation of this design incorporated a pathway in the foreground at the base of the design and was entitled the *Golden Way*. Inscriptions were frequently included on the platform base. “Gone Home” was specifically suited to this design. This design was appropriate for the funerals of both men and women. Ella Grant Campbell tells us in the 1888 florist’s manual, *Floral Designs*, of a design for a lady in the prime of life: “The most beautiful Gates Ajar I ever saw was entirely of white, with garlands of white roses around the posts. A white dove was so placed as to appear in the darkened room to be taking his flight to heaven with a

soul in his charge. This can be gotten up in a magnificent manner, but is easily spoiled in the hands of a poor workman.”⁸² This was one of the most popular set piece designs of the nineteenth century.

While religious and secular ideas about death meshed in some areas, in other areas religious attitudes took ideas about the acceptability of death a step further, transforming it into something hopeful, desirable, and even a victory through liberal Christian theology. Religious liberalism developed in America principally between 1850-1930 and spanned almost all Protestant denominations. The liberal Christian movement combined elements of Romanticism and scientific naturalism into a religious philosophy, the central tenant of which was the immanence of God in both nature and human nature.⁸³ It attempted to mediate between the Romantic, scientific, and traditional Calvinist orthodoxy, and set the course for Christian thought. In the process of creating a liberal Christian theology, new ideas about death, heaven, eternity, and eternal life emerged. Emphasis was placed on aspects of religion that would soothe anxiety and fear of death in an attempt to make immortality understandable to American evolutionists. They proposed “a loving God immanent in a benevolent evolutionary process.”⁸⁴ As a result of religious liberalism, many found hope in spite of science and the challenges it made against religion.

⁸² J. Horace McFarland, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I - Including – Mrs. Ella Grant Campbell Practical Hints on Floral Work.* (Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888), 134.

⁸³ James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 74.

⁸⁴ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death*, 93.

Leading up to the twentieth century, popular theology stopped stressing death, judgment, and hell as the secularization of churches occurred. This theology went further to assure a victory over death by softening the evangelical emphasis on judgment and removed the horrors of hell looming before man. Victory over death was rooted in the tenants of the Christian faith; however, in the mid-nineteenth century this concept was magnified. Faith for the Evangelicals and liberal Christians extended beyond just assurance of salvation; Christian death was elevated to a triumph of faith, which spoke to the power of the gospel in the Christian's life. Liberal Protestant theologians reminded the Christian that whatever pain and suffering that may occur at the time of death, they would come out on the other side of it into glory and heaven.

Faith gave a victory over death, and allowed a triumphal entrance into heaven. Death was not despair, it was a triumph and the achievement of eternal life. As the faculty of the Episcopal Theological Seminary, observed in 1925, 'When we recite the words, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body; we do not affirm that the flesh we commit to the grave will ever see the light of day again.' Instead believers assert 'the survival after death of all that is essential to human personality'; they proclaim the total 'victory of life over death.'"⁸⁵

Many proclaimed their Christian belief in everlasting life through images which represented victory, the Kingdom of Heaven, and eventual reunions with the departed in mourning paraphernalia and floral frames. Because of changing attitudes toward death in Christian theology, symbols of victory were popular options for funerals in the nineteenth

⁸⁵ "The Resurrection and Modern Thought", *Homiletic Review*, 89, (April 1925), 318-320.

century. Flower frame designs such as the crown, the wreath, and the letter V were emblems of victory. Through the Language of Flowers references to victory were also made by using palm, laurel, or nasturtium on other symbolic designs.

The most widespread and enduring funeral flower arrangement, the wreath, was often used to celebrate the victory over death (fig. 26). The classic wreath form, which has no end and no beginning, symbolized eternal life and love everlasting. The florist, William Harry wrote in *The Manual of Floral Designing* from 1919, “The most useful floral design is the wreath. As an emblem it is universal. The word wreath means garland. In ancient Rome and Greece, it was a symbol of victory, a proclamation of triumph, a crown for the hero. In its present-day use, as a funeral token, it still holds the same significance in the conquering of the ‘last enemy,’ but not exactly in the same sense.”⁸⁶ The wreath has a longstanding tradition of being used at funerals. It was the earliest form of arranged flowers to be used in the funeral in the West.

⁸⁶ William Cleaver Harry, *The Manual of Floral Designing*, (New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919), 22.



Figure 26. *left.* Felton and Sons, The Royal Flower Shops. “Wreath.” *Memorial Designs*. London: Felton and Sons, florists, c. 1910: 3. *right.* A.T. De La Mare. “Wreath Made of Kalmia, Asters and Cycas.” *Floral Designs de Luxe*. New York: The Florists' Exchange, 1913: No. 36.

The wreath was appropriate for all genders and ages, and was the most frequently ordered sympathy design leading up to the twentieth century. They came in a variety of styles including broken wreaths, crescent wreaths, and “father and mother wreaths.”

These forms could have solid, decorated, or shower placement of the flowers and foliage which was a long tapered cascade of blossoms, greenery, and/or ribbons from the central form. The wreath could be made in an endless array of styles and combinations. This allowed the florist to create designs that were either very formal or artistic. The wreath was the most profitable set design for the florist and depending on the size and materials, it ranged in price from \$2 to \$200.⁸⁷

The significance of the crown as an attribute of rank, kingship, and sovereignty was not usually a factor in American mourning iconography. Instead of the earthly crown

⁸⁷ Harry, *The Manual of Floral Designing*, 22, 28.

of royalty, this symbol referred to the heavenly crown, which represented the attainment of celestial honors. The early church took the theme of the crown, from the garland of laurel awarded to the victorious in antiquity and transposed it from secular life into a religious and spiritual symbol. Implicit in the Christian vision, the individual's sustained effort and continuous striving to live up to the message of the Gospel would be rewarded in heaven. The prize at the end of a faithful life would be glory, victory over death, immortality, and the Crown of Righteousness. In "The Dying Christian," published in a consolation manual in 1889, the Reverend R. Gibson England describes the moment the goal was attained, "a crown purchased by a righteous Redeemer given freely. The course was finished, the battle was fought, the victory was won and now the wreath, the laurel, and the green palm of glory is his."⁸⁸

As the reward at life's end, the crown symbol was especially suited to funerals (fig. 27). Floral arrangements came in variety of crown shapes and were made on flat or "in the round" frames. It was often combined with other floral frame designs, such as the book or the cross. It was an appropriate emblem for both men and women. Critiques of funeral flowers often referred to as one of the more garish frame designs.

⁸⁸ Rev. R. Gibson England "The Dying Christian. On the Death of Mr. J.C.H., aged 32", in *Memorial Tributes. A Compend of Funeral Addresses, An Aid for Pastors, A Book of Comfort for the Bereaved*, edited by Joseph Sanderson, (New York: E.B. Treat, 1889), 150-151.

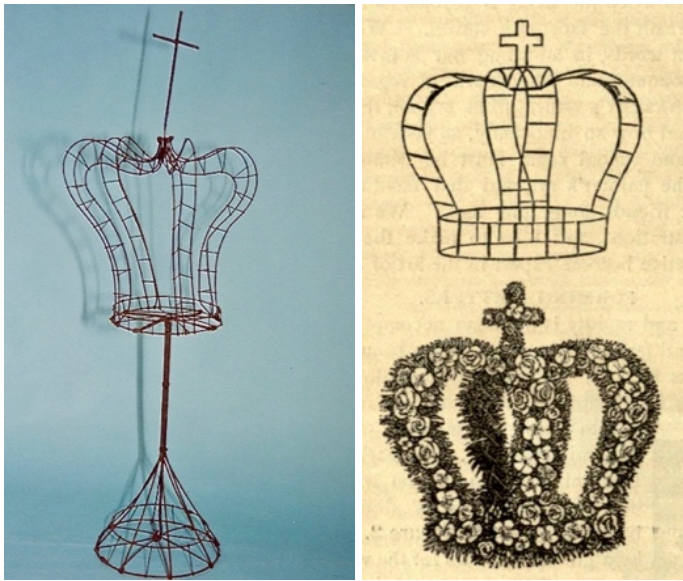


Figure 27. *left*. “Floral Frame: Crown Standing.” c. 1879-1962. Accession # 1979.11.51, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. “The outline engravings show the forms made of wire, and the lower engravings the designs finished.” In *Vick’s Flower and Vegetable Garden*. Rochester, NY: James Vick, 18--: 32.

The cross and crown was a popular combination for flower frames (fig. 28). This mourning iconography was meant to remind the survivors that after the trials and tribulation of life (the cross), the Christian dead would be rewarded in heaven (the crown). Reverend John H. Macdonna in 1889 tells the mourners in “The Unavoidable Journey,” “When the journey is over, Jesus will welcome and embrace us and the cross will be exchanged for the crown.”⁸⁹ When combined with the cross, the crown also implied the sovereignty of the Lord and His power and authority.

⁸⁹ Rev. John H. Macdonna “The unavoidable Journey,” in *Memorial Tributes. A Compend of Funeral Addresses, An Aid for Pastors, A Book of Comfort for the Bereaved*, edited by Joseph Sanderson, (New York: E.B. Treat, 1889), 275.

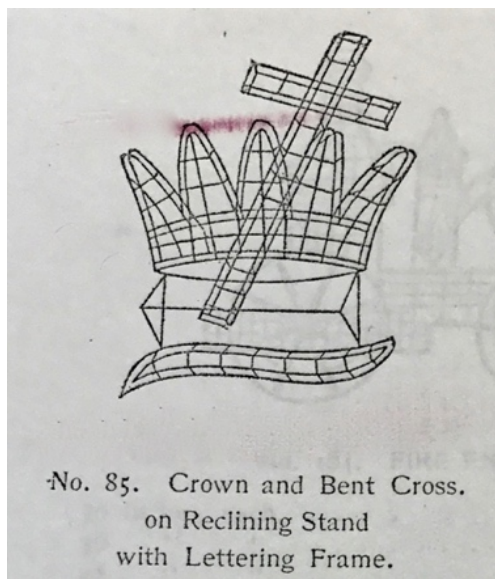


Figure 28. *left.* Henry Rajsik. “No. 85. Crown and Bent Cross. on Reclining Stand with Lettering Frame.” *For the Trade. Wholesale and Net Cash Price List of Wire Floral Designs...Manufactured by Henry Rajsik.* Philadelphia, PA: Lilienfeld Brothers, c 1883: 27. *right.* A. Blanc. “No. 14. Floral Scroll. With Cross and Crown.” c. 1888. Engraving. In McFarland, J. Horace, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I.* Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888: 35.

Because death was championed as a victory, many liberal Protestants were opposed to lugubrious mourning customs. They encouraged people to look at death with optimism and celebrate funerals, for Christians had assurance in immortality. Some believed that somber trappings of the funeral had contributed to the fear of death.⁹⁰ For example, the home was draped at the time of death until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Customs varied by region and decade, but it generally included drawing the blinds or closing the shutters, and clothing the windows in black crepe; mirrors were also covered with black material or turned toward the wall; if there was a portrait of the deceased, it would also be dressed with black; and many people stopped all the clocks in the home at time of death, to be restarted after the burial. The room where the dead lay,

⁹⁰ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, 182.

and often the whole downstairs of the house, was also swathed in black and shades of grey, with deeply-colored veils hung in the doorways. A sense of the mood created by the swathes of black during the solitary mourning period is felt from the instructions of M.L. Rayne, in *Gems of Deportment and Hints of Etiquette* written in 1881:

The dignity of death is unalterable, and careful deference should be paid to the rules which govern the conduct of individuals at such a time. The house should be darkened and hushed; a subdued air should prevail throughout; no one should laugh or sing or play on the piano, or do any of the things practicable at other times; the bell should be muffled, and crape hung from its handle on the outside of the door. There may be no deep grief to demand this; but the mere presence of the great potentate, Death, is sufficient to inspire a feeling of thoughtfulness and retrospect.⁹¹

As early as the 1850s, the beautification of death began to alter this ritual, adding more color and paraphernalia to relieve the scene in favor of those traditional “props” of the funeral. Funeral design that elicited misery and fear was now seen as anachronistic in light of the progress of science and religion. The “stiff formality overlaid with heavy gloom” was now inappropriate. Henry Ward Beecher wrote in 1859, “Draw not over yourselves the black tokens of pollution. Do not blaspheme by naming that despair which is triumph and eternal life.”⁹² By the 1880s, new decorations and ornamentation littered the funeral scene, which “brightened the shadow of death and lightened the dark associations of the parlor.”⁹³ As funeral flowers became increasingly popular after the Civil War, they began to appear amidst the lachrymose sea of crepe. The Victorians

⁹¹ M.L. Rayne, *Gems of Deportment and Hints of Etiquette: The Ceremonials of Good Society, including Valuable Moral, Mental, and Physical Knowledge, Original and Compiles from the Best Authorities, with Suggestions on all Matters Pertaining to the Social Code*. (Chicago: Tyler & Co., 1881), 406-405.

⁹² Henry Ward Beecher in *Notes From Plymouth Pulpit: A Collection of the Memorable Passages from the Discourses of Henry Ward Beecher*, Edited by Augusta Moore, ed. (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859), 47.

⁹³ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death*, 176-177.

attempted to beautify death through colors, ornaments, and fragrance, which were meant to create a sense of comfort, quiet, and loveliness. Rose E. Cleveland makes this point in 1888 in *The Social Mirror*:

It is an encouraging sign of progress in the thought of people, when their burial customs begin to lose much of the somber and superstitious, and to take on more of the cheerful and philosophic. Such seems to be the nature of the innovations that are now going on, from day to day. As long as human love is stronger than human wisdom, death will always be terrible, inscrutable and solemn, and there is surely little need to add to its terrors by gloomy pall and winding sheet, and all the other sombre accessories of the past.⁹⁴

The symbolism and visual effect of flowers appealed to the Protestant ideology that sought to banish mourning. According to Ernest Geldart's 1899 *A Manual Of Church Decoration And Symbolism*, "FLOWERS show generally some vision of the joys of Paradise."⁹⁵ In the late 1880s in the parlor, where the viewing and the funeral were usually held, flowers gradually replaced the sober, black, crepe drapery. In 1888, the IFDA (International Funeral Directors' Association) encouraged its members to use flowers instead of crepe. What resulted has been referred to as the "battle of flowers versus crepe."⁹⁶ Both liberal Christians and the funeral directors sought to remove emblems of sadness and replace them with those that inspired joy. Vibrant floral arrangements were used to deemphasize the corpse and feelings of loss and replace them

⁹⁴ Rose Elizabeth Cleveland, *The Social Mirror: A Complete Treatise on the Laws, Rules, and Usages that Govern our Most Refined Homes and Social Circles*, (St. Louis, MO: L.W. Dickerson, 1888), 280.

⁹⁵ Ernest Geldart, *A Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism*, (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1899), 79.

⁹⁶ Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamars, *The History of American Funeral Directing*. 4th ed. (Milwaukee: National Funeral Directors Association of the United States, Inc., 1996), 263.

with vitality and communion. The multitude of blossoms brightened the room instead of darkening it, which created a more cheerful environment for the funeral process.

In the 1880s, color was also added to the formerly white flower arrangements to make them a more cheerful component of the beautification of death. In 1899, William Scott, a florist, wrote of abandoning the tradition of white flowers: “Funeral designs are now made with great taste. Fine flowers are used and color is not forbidden. No longer do we see the solemn whiteness in bunches or designs, or any arrangements. Why should we? I think the fashion of white flowers is as absurd as the deep mourning assumed by many.”⁹⁷ The color applied to funeral flower designs was predicated on the accepted colors for mourning dress and other funeral paraphernalia in the nineteenth century. As funeral rituals and decorations were governed by the faith of the deceased, florists were encouraged to study color symbolism because it was important to understand the significance colors like, red, white, and purple held in Christian ideology. Ernest Geldart’s *Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism* in 1899 revealed, “Whether we are concerned with the flowers, the decorations, the vestments, or ornaments of the Church, the colours employed have without doubt *some* significance.”⁹⁸

White was an appropriate first choice for flower tributes used in the funeral ceremony, as it had long been associated with Christian funerals. The use of white symbolized the belief that death was the joyful release of the temporary pilgrimage on earth and the beginning of eternal life in heaven. However, some felt white was

⁹⁷ William Scott, *The Florists’ Manual; A Reference Book for Commercial Florists*, (Chicago: Florists’ Publishing Co., 1899), 99-100.

⁹⁸ Geldart, *A Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism*, 40.

inappropriate for everyone. Bertram Puckle's *Funeral Customs* explained the opposition, "The fact that white flowers are almost exclusively used for the purpose reminds us that they are a special token of purity... From what we have seen of the matter, it would seem that the funeral wreath of white flowers signifies virginal purity, and if this is so, we must admit that it is singularly out of place for general distribution."⁹⁹

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, flowers in shades of purple and lavender began to be incorporated in the traditional, "frosty white funeral arrangements."¹⁰⁰ The symbolism of purple was an important factor in the acceptance of color in floral funeral tributes. Geldart's *A Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism* explains, "Purple, which is a sort of mean between red and black, denotes penitence, fasting, and the like, by which through the Blood of Christ, we escape the death of sin and hell."¹⁰¹ Purple was used to designate mourning for many Christian groups, as well as for royalty. For the remainder of the century up to the 1920s, the majority of funeral flowers were sent in white, lavenders, and purple. Not only did this allow the florist more artistry in design, but it eased problems of shortages of white flowers.

To create a cohesive setting, florists tried to match the flowers to other articles in the funeral display. By the beginning of twentieth century, all colors for flowers, as well as ribbons came to be acceptable for the funeral, but florists were encouraged to stick to subdued colors. Most important was that the color reflected the gravity of the event

⁹⁹ Bertram S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs*. (Los Angeles: The Library of Alexandria, 1926), 120-122.

¹⁰⁰ Robert L. Treadway, "Origins," in *A Centennial History of the American Florist*, (Topeka, KS: Florists' Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997), 25.

¹⁰¹ Geldart, *A Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism*, 40.

through a shared language which represented respect for the deceased. A floral designer by the name of Ivera wrote in “Funeral Flowers” in 1900, “The death chamber is no place for a riot of colors... When we see bunches of American Beauty roses tied with purple, pink or green ribbon, and sent as a token of respect to the dead, we look upon it as an insult to art, and those responsible ignorant.”¹⁰²

The concepts of the Romantic beautification of death were mirrored in liberal Protestant beliefs by the addition of flowers and color to the funeral setting. These movements worked together to shape ritualized behavior and material objects that idealized death, heaven, and the deceased person. They aimed to achieve a funeral setting which would be evocative of aesthetically pleasant feelings or imagery in order to reduce the sting of death. Liberal Christian minister, Lymon Abbot, in his optimistically titled, “There Are No Dead” writes in 1913:

We have done much to Christianize our farewells to those who have gone before us into the next stages of life. We no longer darken the rooms that now more than ever need light and warmth of the sun; we no longer close the windows as if to shutout Nature...we no longer shroud the house in black, we make it sweet with flowers; for the hymns of grief we are fast substituting the hymns of victory; for words charged with a sense of loss we listen to words that hold wide the door of hope and faith.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ivera, “Funeral Flowers,” *The Weekly Florists’ Review*, Vol.5, No. 114 (February 1, 1900), 243.

¹⁰³ Lymon Abbot, “There Are No Dead”, *Outlook*, 104 (Aug.30 1913), 979.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CELEBRATION OF LIFE

*The mother's despair was a moment beguiled
With the lilies she strewed o'er her fair sinless child;
And the bright fadeless hue of the olive's dark leaf
Brought e'en to the widow a pause in her grief;
And the laurels, when strewn on the patriot's tomb,
Staunch'd the tears of a nation when mourning his doom.*¹⁰⁴

— Eliza Rennie, “Stanzas,” 1828

Personal individuality and the growing preoccupation with the individuality of others had a profound impact on the developing funerary and mourning practices in America in the nineteenth century. For some Americans, the effects of Romanticism, sentimentality, Evangelicalism, and liberal Christianity worked together to create a sense of ease about death by the 1870s that had not been felt before.¹⁰⁵ Death was now portrayed as restful, beautiful, a time of reunion, and able to be triumphed over. Furthermore, leading up to the twentieth century, popular theology stopped stressing death, judgment, and hell as the secularization of churches progressed. For many Americans, with heavenly reunions on the horizon, pain elided, and the fear over the possibility of eternal separation from loved ones eradicated, celebrating the memory of

¹⁰⁴ Eliza Rennie, “Stanzas” quoted in *The Language and Poetry of Flowers*, by H.G. Adams, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 219-220.

¹⁰⁵ James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 64.

the deceased became a more comforting solution to grief.¹⁰⁶ This was encouraged by the Romantic and sentimental focus on individualism and interpersonal relationships, which had caused the pursuits of man to be celebrated. This occurred in an era in which complex theological and erudite explanations of human mortality had less and less relevancy for some Americans in the nineteenth century, thus heightening the desire for alternate forms of immortality for both the deceased and the survivor who could not bear such a loss.

Throughout the century, the affections between individuals, which were nurtured and glorified in the sentimental mode, created a need to further compensate for one's loss through the cultivation of memory of the deceased. For the survivor, maintaining some form of the emotional, personal attachments to the dead expanded the desires for memorial objects that would provide some kind of connection with them. This excited what has been coined the "cult of memory," which inspired new expressions of grief and bereavement, such as cults of the dead, mourning pictures, prolonged seclusion and mourning rituals, the rural cemetery movement, and the romantic rhetorical treatments given to death and dying in sermons, literature, and contemporary writing. Through acts and objects a kind of immortality was achieved on the part of the deceased. For as long as one's memory was kept alive, one was not wholly dead. This created a social immortality that began to replace the emphasis on spiritual immortality.

This was not the type of eternal life that depended on God or heaven, and as such it appealed to the rising current of secularism in the nineteenth century. Man's concern

¹⁰⁶ Daniel E. Sutherland, *The Expansion of Everyday Life: 1860-1876*, (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 129.

with death and personal immortality was redirected over the course of the nineteenth century toward the cultivation of social forms of immortality and posterity. Man's memory, rather than the grace of God was the ultimate means to eternal life.¹⁰⁷ Both the dying and bereaved were consoled with the knowledge that good men would live on in the memory of successive generations. One would live on through their children and the mark they left on the world through their life's work. In fact, some believed that the only worthy immortality was in the survival of remembrance.

The various beliefs in future life or its alternative, life in the memory, are examples of secularization occurring in America. As society was moving from religion to secularism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century funerals and their paraphernalia were transformed into statements of individuality of the dead. From the nineteenth century to the present, funeral activities have been largely directed toward the personhood of the deceased. Rather than a reminder to live a virtuous life and prepare to meet one's maker, funerals became "celebrations of life."¹⁰⁸ Both secular and religious funerals focused less upon God and the afterlife, and more upon the person and the life lived. Americans were both strongly ritualistic and individualistic, and both were intertwined in the culture of consumerism fostered in the nineteenth century. As the undertaker assumed control of the planning of funeral and the preparations of the body in the late-nineteenth century, the family and friends were left with more time and energy to

¹⁰⁷ James Hijiya, "American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death: A Brief History," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 127, No. 5, (October 14, 1983), 356.

¹⁰⁸ Marion Peck, "Remembering Death," in *Beyond the Dark Veil: Post-mortem & Mourning Photography from the Thanatos Archives*, (Fullerton, CA: California State University, 2015), 6.

dedicate to memory of the deceased, culminating in an unprecedented level of celebration, memorialization, and commemoration that expanded over the course of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹

The desire to remember, as well as to be remembered in an individualized way, a way that expressed one's own character and biography, caused commemorative symbols of the deceased individual's pursuits and interests to emerge from the anonymous symbols of mortality, peace, rest, and mourning. By 1876, this trend was widespread and was evident in obituaries, mourning art, and the stone monuments over the grave. The eclectic assortment of symbols created were meant to remind the viewer of the individual qualities, interests, achievements, and pursuits of the deceased. Following the sentimental mode and the cult of memory, shapes for funeral tributes were created in "remembrance of accomplishment which keeps the 'spirit alive.'"¹¹⁰ These motifs invited particular responses from the viewer in order to elicit feelings such as curiosity, pity, admiration, or respect. In flower tributes, the harshness of the traditional mortality symbols, such as the sickle and the *Stopped Clock*, were now accompanied, or almost totally replaced by a plethora of mourning iconography with imagery that was both positive and personal. In a 1913 article titled "There Are No Dead," Lyman Abbott stated, "on the memorials which we place where they lie who have vanished from our sight we no longer carve the skull

¹⁰⁹ Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 175.

¹¹⁰ Hijiya, "American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death," 356.

and crossbones, the hourglass and the scythe—we recall some trait or quality of achievement that survives the body and commemorates the spirit.”¹¹¹

Flowers that suggested the characteristics of the deceased, either personal or physical, from the Language of Flowers were also used in funeral designs. According to some flower lore, primrose was symbolic of childhood and early grief, making this flower especially suited to use at funerals for infants, children, and young, unmarried adults.¹¹² Similarly, according to Catherine Waterman’s *Flora’s Lexicon*, a floral dictionary written in 1855, “the rose bud, from its grace, and gradually maturing beauty, has not been inappropriately made emblematical of a young girl.”¹¹³ Other flowers suited to the funerals of those who died in their youth were flowers signifying purity and modesty such as the lily, mignonette, and violets. On the other hand, oak leaves, suggestive of strength because of the oak tree’s stability and firmness, were especially suited to the funerals of men.

The monuments and tributes created in honor of the deceased were a prominent area in which the celebration of the individual created new modes of mortuary display. As the gravestone scholar, James Hijiya, explained, “Monuments used a variety and immensity to commemorate more forcefully the special qualities of the dead.”¹¹⁴ This was true of monuments of stone, as well as those of flowers sent by associates, friends,

¹¹¹ Lymon Abbot, “There Are No Dead”, *Outlook*, 104, (Aug.30 1913), 979.

¹¹² Henrietta Dumont, *The Floral Offering: Token of Affection and Esteem; comprising the Language and Poetry of Flowers*, (Philadelphia: H.C. Peck & Theo. Bliss, 1853), 20.

¹¹³ Catherine H. Waterman, *Flora’s Lexicon: An Interpretation of the Language and Sentiment of Flowers: with an Outline of Botany, and a Poetical Introduction*, (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1855), 174.

¹¹⁴ Hijiya, “American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death,” 355.

and family members. Though the florists regularly spoke out against them, requests were often made for unusual set pieces to represent the person's occupation or hobbies. These whimsical designs were time consuming and difficult to arrange. If for whatever reason a funeral was delayed custom shapes could be ordered from the wireworks that produced these frames; otherwise the florist had to combine several frames and other material to create these designs. In the 1919, *The Manual of Floral Designing*, William Harry remarked on this practice:

In taking orders for this kind of work, every florist has had some amusing experiences. I know one thing and that is this: The florist business should never be taken too seriously... Some years ago a prominent butcher in our town passed away. His sons, who were his associates in business, decided to get something appropriate in a floral emblem, so they ordered a cleaver and knife designed in red Carnations, on a solid panel of white Carnations. Nothing was left to the imagination but the blood, and that was mercifully omitted.¹¹⁵

Floral frames came in an endless array of designs to celebrate one's interests. Musical talent was often celebrated in funeral designs (fig. 29). Flower frames were created to resemble a bar of music, complete with floral notes. Musicians also frequently received tributes in the forms of their chosen instrument such as a banjo, guitar, or violin. The popular mourning symbols of the harp and lyre designs were also suited to this purpose.

¹¹⁵ William Cleaver Harry, *The Manual of Floral Designing*, (New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919), 35.

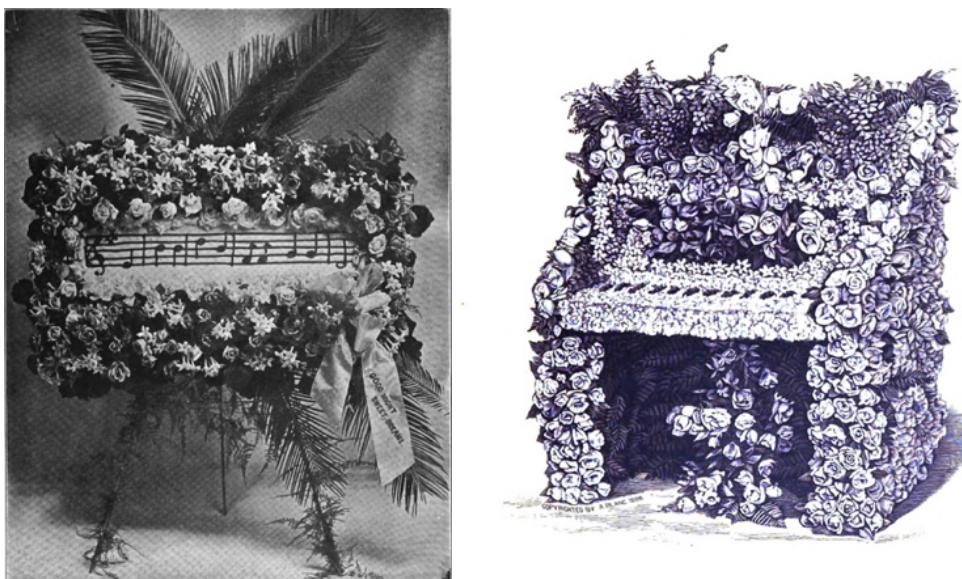


Figure 29. *left.* A.T. De La Mare. “Panel Design for an Organist or Conductor.” *Floral Designs de Luxe*. New York: The Florists' Exchange, 1913: No. 299. *right.* A. Blanc. “No. 36. Floral Piano.” c. 1888. Engraving. In McFarland, J. Horace, ed. *Floral Designs: A Hand-book for Cut Flower Workers and Florists. Series I*. Harrisburg, PA: A. Blanc and J. Horace McFarland, 1888: 79.

Frame designs which honored the professional life of the deceased were a popular Victorian fashion. Vehicles, tools, and products were recreated in flowers to celebrate a loved one's life's work. These designs were some of the largest and most innovative designs made in flower frames. The professionals of the railroad had some of the most interesting designs for their occupation (fig. 30). As mentioned, a broken wheel might be used to signal this profession. The locomotive and tender was an impressive design sent to employees, ranging from engineers to the president of the railway. These designs were generally several feet long, and were often displayed with a track and even a tunnel made of flowers.



Figure 30. *left*. “Floral Frame: Locomotive and Tinder,” c. 1860-1960. length 48 in., accession # 30C, a & b, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection. Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. U.S. View Company. “Photograph of B&O funeral wreath.” Richfield, PA, c. 1890-1900s, albumen print on cardboard mount, 8x10 inches. Center for Visual Communication, Mifflintown, PA. From Jay Ruby. *Secure the Shadow: Death Photography in America*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995: Fig. 94, pp. 139.

Civil servants and government officials often received floral tributes on behalf of their city at their funerals. Floral replicas of badges, city and state seals, and items or tools specific to their work were popular subjects for designs. Firemen often received tributes from their fellow fireman as well as a thankful city. A fireman’s hat, ladder, fire engine, axe, or trumpet were all created for their funerals (fig. 31). Some of the impressive designs for the funeral of a chief of a fire brigade were described in *The History of American Funeral Directing*: “the principal floral offering at the funeral of a fire chief was a large floral fire engine, nine feet high and six feet long, patterned after the old Red Rover #3, and covered with smilax, carnations and roses. Lettered in violets on the boiler were the words, ‘Our Chief.’ Another floral piece was fashioned after a fire

alarm box. It bore the number '4,' in memory of the last fire to which the Chief had responded.”¹¹⁶

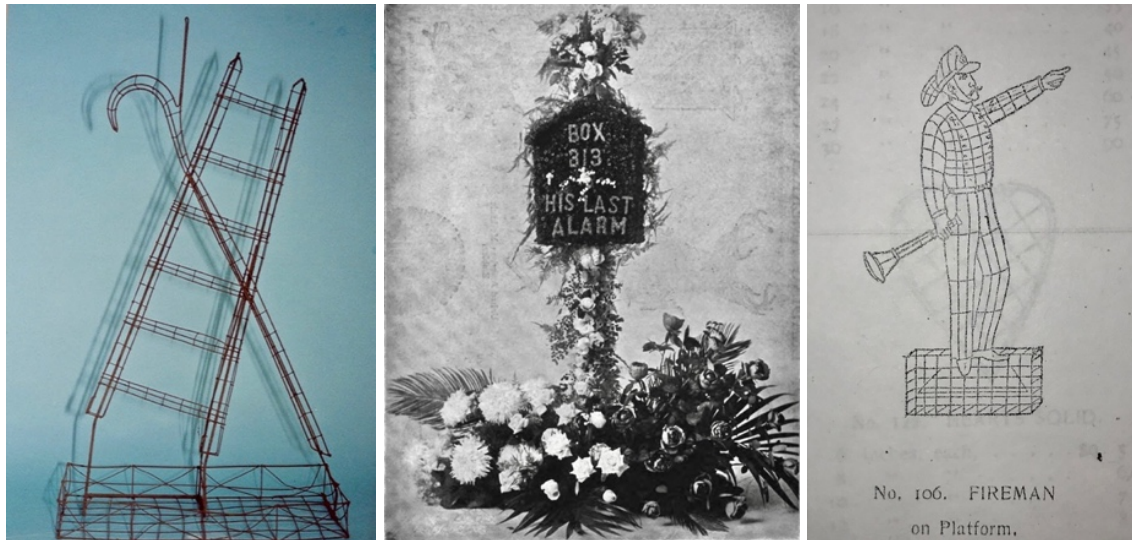


Figure 31. *left*. “Floral Frame: Fire Hook and Ladder.” c. 1879-1962. Accession # 1979.011.47, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *center*. A.T. De La Mare. “His Last Alarm’ – Fireman’s Tribute.” *Floral Designs de Luxe*. New York: The Florists' Exchange, 1913: No. 338. *right*. Henry Rajsik. “No. 106. Fireman on Platform.” *For the Trade. Wholesale and Net Cash Price List of Wire Floral Designs... Manufactured by Henry Rajsik*. Philadelphia, PA: Lilienfeld Brothers, c 1883: 31.

When a military figure died, especially a war hero, the pageantry of the funeral exceeded the standard Victorian levels of ostentation. Since the American flag draped the coffin, a custom which dates back to the Napoleonic Wars (1796-1815), no flowers were placed on the casket. The flower arrangements would be placed at the head of the casket on an easel. Patriotism and solidarity were celebrated through national symbols and emblems of the military branch of the fallen in the flower frames. The Spanish American

¹¹⁶ Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamars, *The History of American Funeral Directing*. 4th ed. (Milwaukee: National Funeral Directors Association of the United States, Inc., 1996), 275.

War, though it only lasted for three months in 1898, popularized patriotic tributes. Flags were among the most popular designs sent to funerals of active military and veterans as they represented patriotism and the deceased's devotion to their country (fig. 32). Roses, carnations, and cornflowers were used to create that patriotic red, white, and blue color scheme. These designs remained popular into the twentieth century.



Figure 32. *left*. “The American Flag. A floral design much in demand: extremely effective when well done.” William Cleaver Harry. *The Manual of Floral Designing*. New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919: 32. *right*. “Floral Frame: American Flag with dried flowers on Easel.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # OH.1980.37.001, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

It was very common for social or business organizations to which the deceased belonged to send flowers to the funeral. In addition to fraternal societies, these groups included temperance leagues, social clubs, veteran's organization, and worker's unions, among others. The floral tributes were often set pieces patterned after their emblem,

which were an assemblage of symbolic shapes and colors that were meaningful to the organization or club. Depending on the size of the floral recreation, elements of the design might be added or subtracted while maintaining an accurate impression of the emblem. In addition to the fraternal emblems recreated in flower frame designs, many of their symbols, or assemblages of multiple symbols recreated out of wire frames were also used for these floral arrangements. These were usually made with flowers and ribbons in the emblematic colors of the organization.

Freemason emblems were the most frequently ordered from the florist.

Freemasonry is the oldest and most influential fraternal society in the United States. Also known as the Masons, this society came to the United States in 1720, and many of America's founding fathers were brothers in this fraternity. Every subsequent American secret society is said to be Masonic: either a direct descendant of it, or designed from the Masonic foundation. The mid-nineteenth-century Mason could also belong to many different auxiliary organizations such as the Knights Templars, the Shriners, and the Order of the Eastern Star each of which had flower frames representing their insignia. The primary emblem of the Masons was the square and compass, said to be symbolic of the interaction between mind and matter, inside of which is the letter G, symbolic of either God or geometry (fig. 33). The Maltese Cross, often with a cross and crown in the center was another popular Masonic flower frame design. The cross was usually made of red geraniums, carnations, or roses (fig. 34). Additional designs for the Masonic funeral included a Masonic Bible, banner, and scroll of honor.

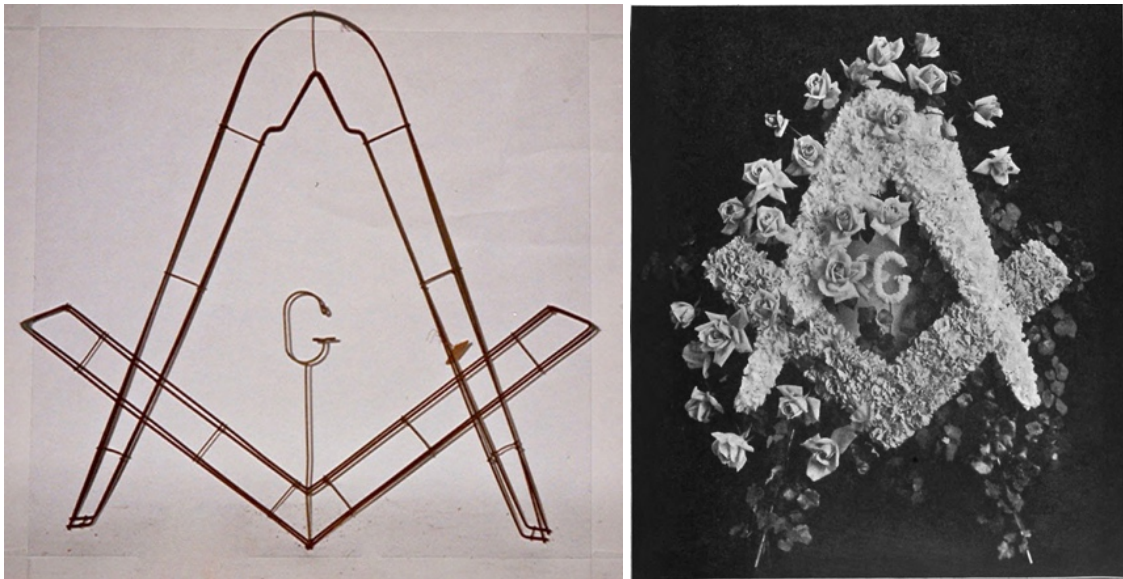


Figure 33. *left*. “Floral Frame: Masons’ Compass.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # 1980.035.031, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. “Masonic Emblem of Carnations, Roses and Ivy” From William Cleaver Harry. *The Manual of Floral Designing*. New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919: 47.

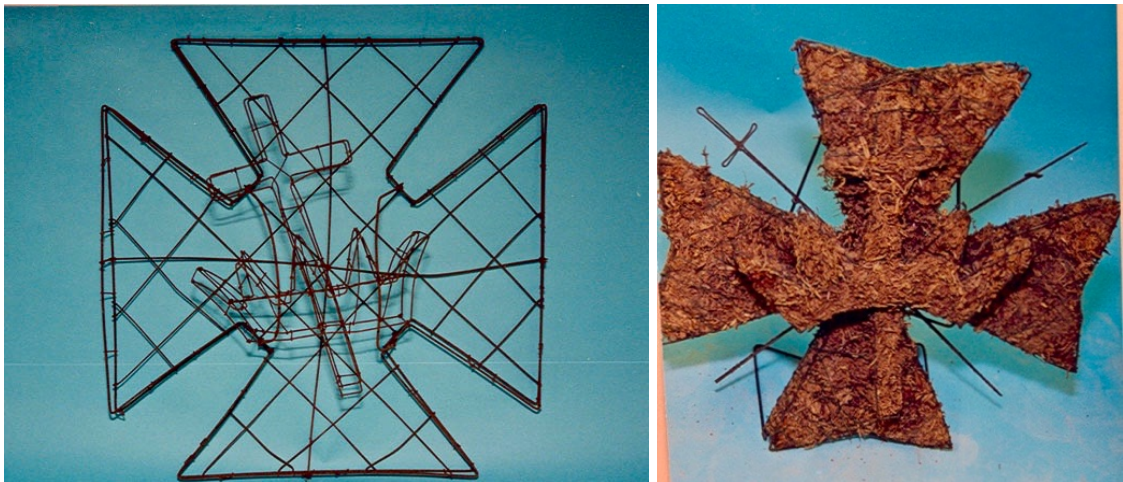


Figure 34. *left*. “Floral Frame: Maltese Cross.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # OH.1980.37.014, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. “Floral Frame: Maltese Cross, Filled with Moss.” c. 1860-1960. Accession # UA.24, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

After the Civil War, soldiers from both the Confederate and Union armies established veteran’s organizations, with similar services and activities as those of

fraternal and benevolent societies. The largest and most important of these groups was The Grand Army of the Republic, or GAR, established in 1866.¹¹⁷ Their ceremonies, rituals, and symbolism was based on the Masonic model. The Grand Army of the Republic was so popular that floral frame manufacturers usually included the GAR insignia in their catalogues and design albums (fig. 35).

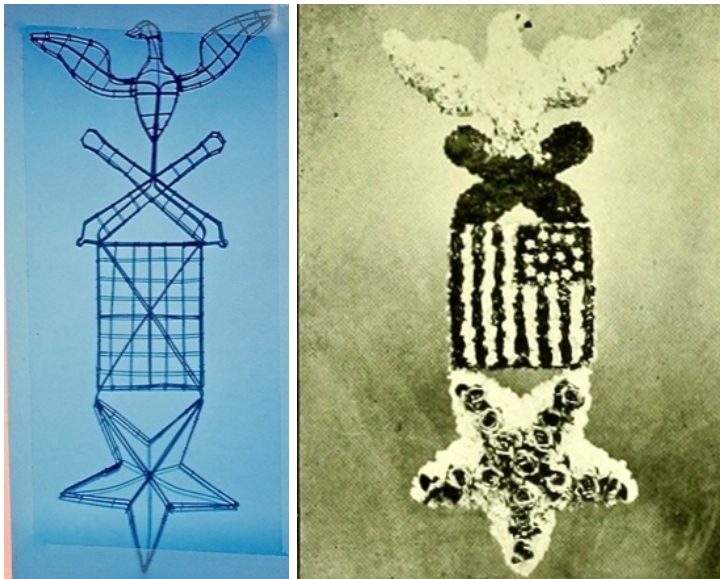


Figure 35. *left*. “Floral Frame: GAR Emblem.” c. 1879-1962. Accession # 1979.011.035, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection, Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right*. Daniel B. Long. “No. 329. G. A. R. Badge Design.” *Designs and Arrangements in Flowers*. Buffalo, NY: D.B. Long, c. 1901.

In the decades after the Civil War, female participation in fraternal and friendly societies increased. Groups included temperance unions, suffrage organizations, female auxiliaries of male fraternities, women’s clubs, and other reform and charitable-based

¹¹⁷ Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 8.

foundations. Many of these groups sent floral tributes to the funerals of their members under the same premise as fraternal organizations. Some organizations, such as the Eastern Star even offered funeral arrangements, bereavement assistance, and a cemetery plot with grave marker. Figure 36 shows the funeral tributes and mourning regalia which might have appeared for the death of a member.



Figure 36. “Our Darling Laura” Chicago, Illinois. Gelatin silver print (9.5” x 7.5”). “On the back is written: ‘Laura May Kirbill, died April 19,1898, aged 18 years, 10 months and 26 days’. The Thanatos Archive: Early Post Mortem & Memorial Photography, Duvall, WA. Thanatos.net.

The Order of the Eastern Star (OES) was created in 1855, as the women’s auxiliary of the Freemasons, however it was not officially recognized as an affiliated body by the grand lodges until 1869. Membership was restricted to the wives and

daughters of the male members who had achieved the Master Mason degree. The symbol of the Eastern star was a five-pointed star which referred to five biblical heroines – Adah, Ruth, Esther, Martha, and Electra – who achieved virtue in the five roles of a woman’s life – daughter, sister, wife, mother, and widow. Each point also symbolized the central tenets of the organization: fidelity, constancy, loyalty, faith, and love. Eastern Star Organization flower frames were in the shape of the star in which one point faces downward in white then green, red, blue, and yellow points arranged clockwise (fig. 37). The letters FATAL were sometimes applied to the points which stood for “Fairest Among Ten-thousand Altogether Lovely” as well as implying that to betray the secrets of the Eastern Star would be fatal.¹¹⁸

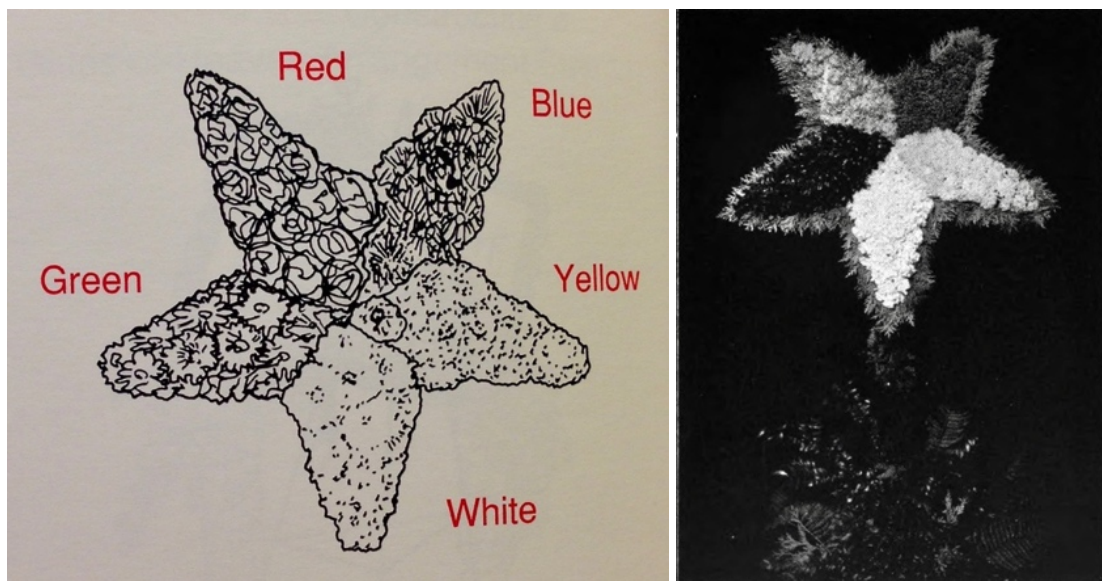


Figure 37. *left*. “Floral Replica of Order of Eastern Star.” *Album of Designs: Funeral flowers*. Florists' Publishing Company. Chicago: Florists' Publishing Company, 194-: 66. *right*. Redbook Florist Services

¹¹⁸ Douglas Keister, *Stories in Stone: A Field Guide to Cemetery Symbolism and Iconography*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2004), 194.

Educational Advisory Committee. "Diagram: Order of the Eastern Star Emblem." *Selling and Designing Sympathy Flowers*. Paragould, AK: Redbook Florist Services, 1992: 12.

Outside of the standard designs on wire frames, large floral tributes in outlandish shapes with gaudy colors were sometimes sent to funerals, such as a tooth for a dentist, a meat cleaver for a butcher, and a beer stein for a brewer. Critiques of these novel designs were numerous. Many florists felt these designs were below them, viewing them as "unartistic monstrosities." Both social commentators and florist authorities took to the pen to declaim these garish designs, which ultimately lead to their disappearance in the twentieth century. Gertrude White's 1915 analysis of the florist industry critiques, "Probably the most atrocious and inappropriate things ever perpetrated in the name(s) of floral decoration have been done for funeral purposes.... Happily we are getting away from that sort of thing though we still have them with us, and only a few years ago a floral aeroplane was made for the funeral of Mr. Wilbur Wright."¹¹⁹ (fig. 38)

¹¹⁹ Gertrude White, "Floral Decoration." (Thesis, Massachusetts Agricultural College, 1915), 36-37.

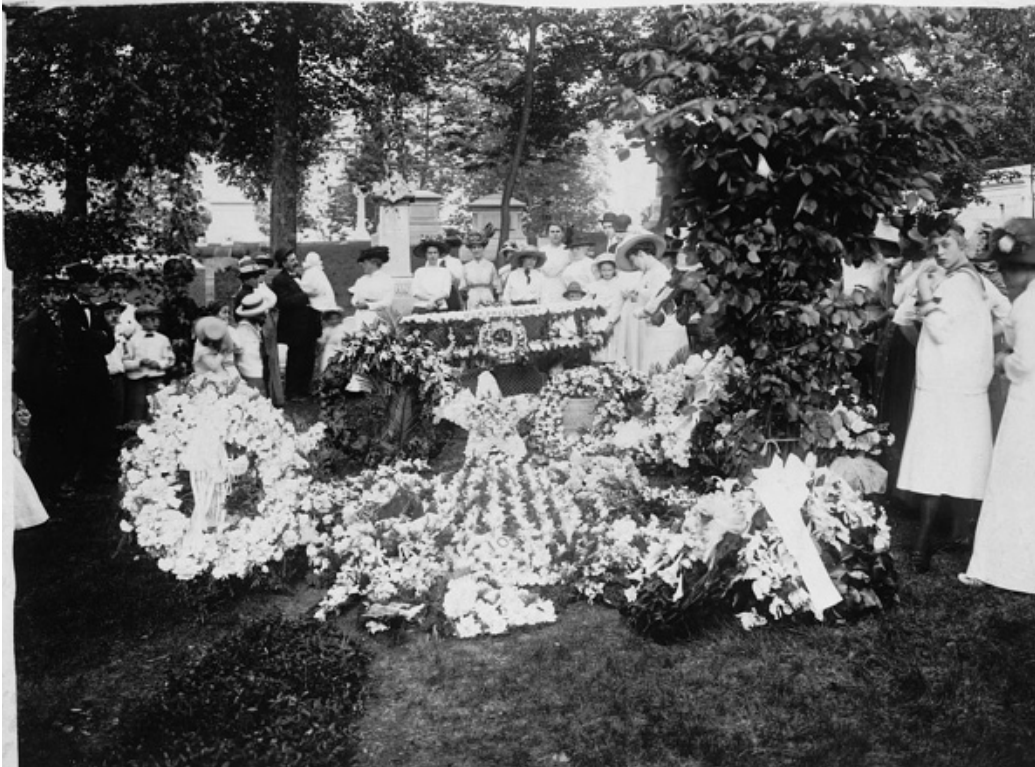


Figure 38. "Wilbur Wright Funeral." Woodland Cemetery, Dayton, Ohio, 1912. Library of Congress, Washington, DC. [loc.gov](https://www.loc.gov).

However, not all florists were so determined in their opposition to these flower frames. Many took them on begrudgingly because of the lucrative opportunity they provided. In spite of the excessive statements against them, these unusual set pieces signifying the interests, occupations, and organizational connections of the deceased remained popular into the twentieth century. Organizational emblem designs remained popular long after other flower frame shapes had passed out of fashion because their significance could not be conveyed with a standard tribute such as a basket or spray.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DEATH

Without sentiment human nature would become cold, and the world not worth living in. It is bad enough as things stand to-day; we must repress our emotions, harden our hearts, and steel ourselves against any outward manifestation of man's most noble attribute, at least so says fashion, but that jade must not step on this, our inner breastworks, the privilege of laying over a departed friend, in sympathy and love, all the flowers we can afford to bestow, God's most lovely creations, and our last sad tribute.¹²⁰

— “To Do Away with Floral Tributes at Funerals,” *The Florists' Exchange*, 1894

Soon after the use of large floral set pieces in symbolic shapes reached its pinnacle, changing attitudes toward death and dying, shifts in upper-class fashions, and calls for funeral reforms brought dramatic changes to the American funeral, including the use of funeral flowers. By the beginning of the twentieth century, changes in funeral and mourning styles suggested that the “beautification of death” had drawn to a close. Privacy and simplicity supplanted the social presentation associated with elaboration, and the rituals of mourning and its accoutrements were abandoned. Funeral and mourning paraphernalia such as heavy black crepe, black bordered stationary, and memorial art and artifacts were left behind along with large flower arrangements in symbolic shapes.

These changes, occurring in the beginning of the twentieth century, were evidence of the shift in attitudes towards death. The American way of death was the result of complex cultural change. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a completely

¹²⁰ “To Do Away with Floral Tributes at Funerals,” *The Florists' Exchange*, Vol. 6, No. 37 (August 11, 1894), 700.

transformed relationship with death emerged and set the course for the remainder of the century. After a period of heavy Romantic, sentimental, and Evangelical involvement, the Victorian way of death was coming to a close. Secularization, urbanization, professionalization, and the progress of medicine came together to remove death from view. As a result, sentimental mourning was replaced by what scholars have referred to as the “Denial of Death,” the “Invisible Death,” and the “Death of Death.”¹²¹ By 1900 death was becoming a topic to be avoided at all costs. Denial was practiced by the opening of the twentieth century and increased with each decade.

Leading up to the twentieth century and throughout its early decades, Romanticism was replaced by practicality and commercialism. Medical progress changed views of death, as life expectancy increased, diseases were eradicated, vaccinations were developed, infectious diseases could be treated, and physical suffering was reduced. The hospital became the socially acceptable place to die, instead of the home. This removed death further and further from sight. During the nineteenth century, the funeral director emerged to provide the services needed in the funeral process. Many of these duties had been carried out by friends and family of the deceased. The undertaker’s assumption of these death duties was one of the significant forces in the alienation that occurred between people and death and dying. Another major shift occurred due to decline in traditional faith and growing secular outlook. The questions science raised about evolution, liberal Christianity, as well as the increasing curiosity about non-Christian faiths such as Buddhism or Hinduism, contributed to greater diversity and openness by

¹²¹ Andrea Fontana and Jennifer Reid Keene, *Death and Dying in America*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity Press, 2009), 72.

the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead of emphasizing the depravity of man or the presence of evil and danger in the world, personal morality became the compass of living. Man was more interested in the search for pleasure in the present. In an article entitled the “Dying of Death” written in 1899, the author states,

Death is regarded no longer as a king of terror, but rather as a kindly nurse who puts us to bed when our day’s work is done. The fear of death is being replaced by the joy of life. The flames of hell are sinking low, and even heaven has but poor attraction for the modern man. Full life here and now is the demand; what may come hereafter is left to take care of itself.¹²²

The movement away from ostentatious funerals was also inspired in part by the upper class’ inclination for simplicity that occurred in the decade before the twentieth century. A florist manual states in 1899:

Our best people (by that I don't mean necessarily the most virtuous, but the people of wealth and refinement and the taste and education which wealth affords) have almost entirely set their faces against the elaborate designs that were used by all classes twenty years ago. Gates ajar and broken columns and scrolls, and even crosses and anchors are never seen or ordered by that class who lead in fashion, and depend upon it the other strata of society will copy and emulate the well-to-do as they do in every particular where their means can possibly reach.¹²³

In the nineteenth century, displays of wealth and social dominance came in the form of lavishness and ostentation. Funeral goods and floral arrangements became increasingly elaborate and ornamental. Industrial and commercial developments made the goods, once only available to the wealthy, available to the growing middle class who imitated elite funerals. By the second half of the nineteenth century, mass-production and mass-marketing led to mass consumption of funeral paraphernalia, including floral

¹²² James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 5.

¹²³ William Scott, *The Florists’ Manual; A Reference Book for Commercial Florists*, (Chicago: Florists’ Publishing Co., 1899), 99.

displays. As part of an elite strategy to maintain their social status, in the late-nineteenth century, the old guard redirected their mourning toward simplicity and privacy in order to demonstrate their superiority.¹²⁴ Elegance and luxury, that had once been expressed through the lugubrious and highly ornamented was now indicated by more reserved funeral styles. One of the most significant examples of this was in the use and display of funeral flowers. Peter Henderson related the following addendum in the 1892 edition of his *Practical Floriculture*, which was originally published in 1868:

Funeral flowers are less used now than when this was written, owing probably to the fact that some dozen years ago it was carried to such an excess as to be a heavy tax on the poorer friends of the family in affliction. But the turning point in the tide of fashion was when one of New York's biggest millionaires was dying, he requested that no flowers should deck his bier. Then the toadies to wealth—the flunkies of fashion—took the cue, and there was for years a standing protest against funeral flowers from the fashionable world. But the fiat was not sufficient to stop all use of flowers to deck the dead, for the 'common people' revolted. The hearts of the sympathizing friends could find no better way to express their feelings of veneration than by sending to those they have loved and respected a few flowers as a last tribute of remembrance.¹²⁵

The middle class was less apt to relinquish elaborate funeral practices because they believed they were doing the right thing by the deceased person by holding extravagant funerals. More display was equal to more respect. Often in spite of the critiques and instructions of certain etiquette guides, floral tributes poured in on the occasion of the funeral. At the obsequies of some public official or high-ranking member of society the overabundance of floral tributes often filled the house and overflowed onto

¹²⁴ Barbara Dodd Hillerman, "Chrysalis of Gloom: Nineteenth Century American Mourning Costume", in *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America*, edited by Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, (New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 105.

¹²⁵ Peter Henderson, *Practical Floriculture; a Guide to the Successful Cultivation of Florists' Plants, for the Amateur and Professional Florist*, (New York: Orange Judd Company, 1892), 227-229.

the sidewalks. Display, transportation, and disposal of such enormous quantities of arrangements began to be seen as a burden, rather than a source of consolation.

Soon efforts were made to suppress the number of flowers sent to the funeral. Beginning in the 1880s, critics of floral tributes began requesting that no flowers be sent to their funerals. The movement toward economy and simplicity inspired the expression “Please omit flowers,” which appeared with increasing frequency in newspaper obituaries. In 1895, *Modern Cemetery* printed, “One of the surest indications that, as a people, we are tearing away from barbaric customs...is found in the changes which, slowly but surely, have come over our mourning customs and funeral emblems. The time is not so far back when the announcement in a funeral notice that ‘friends will please omit flowers’ was an unheard of thing. When this first appeared people wondered at it.”¹²⁶ Soon this was subjoined to the desire that donations be made to a charity in the name of the deceased. Many etiquette guides celebrated these changes.

The florist fought back against “please omit flowers” from the beginning and florists continued to speaking out into the twentieth century. Max Schling wrote in his 1919 catalog *Art In Floral Arrangements*, “The request, ‘Please do not send flowers,’ is unfair to the living and to the dead—to the living in that they are prevented from expressing their sympathy in the most beautiful way, and to the dead in that their loved ones are denied the solace of earth's most lovely gift to man.”¹²⁷ The “please omit flowers,” also known as the P.O., trend reoccurred throughout twentieth century, always

¹²⁶ Park And Cemetery, “Changing Our Mourning Customs,” *Modern Cemetery*, Vol 5-6 (Chicago 1895-1897), 280-281.

¹²⁷ Max Schling, *Art in Floral Arrangements*, (Harrisburg, PA: Horace McFarland Co., c.1919).

causing controversy with the florist, the funeral director, the church, and the public. Despite the funeral and flower industries best efforts to combat the problem of “please omit flowers,” the florist still saw a decline in sympathy sales. The cycle of upper-class innovation and middle- and lower-class emulation brought display for its own sake at the funeral to a low point in the early decades of the twentieth century.¹²⁸ Regardless of the decline, the desire to stop floral tributes was never able to gain unanimous consent, and no better way of expressing sympathy was every found than the floral tribute.

In addition to the smaller number of floral tributes used in the funeral ceremony in the early twentieth century, there was also a change in their design. By the twentieth century, the varying attitudes toward death combined with changing fashions inspired by the whims of the upper class towards a more refined taste, and with the encouragement of the florist, designs for floral tributes on wire frames were made much less frequently. “American Floral Art in the Past 10 Years” was written by a florist on the change in taste occurring as early as 1898:

[T]here has been some wonderful improvements in the past few years...Of course, there are not near so many flowers used now as were formerly, but you will agree with me that there is a great deal more art displayed in the funeral designs of to-day than when heavenly gates, arm chairs, fire ladders, clocks, ships and trolley cars; in fact, any old thing was good enough to copy and place upon the grave of the dead... The simple cluster bunch and the ever-beautiful wreath are the most popular designs to-day.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Barbara J. Little, Kim M. Lanphear, and Douglas W. Owsley. “Mortuary Display and Status in a Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Cemetery in Manassas, Virginia.” *American Antiquity*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (July 1992), 415.

¹²⁹ James Ivkra Donlan, “American Floral Art in the Past 10 Years.” *The Florists’ Exchange*, Vol. 10, No. 50 (Dec. 10, 1898), 1170.

Funeral flower tributes gradually broke away from the designs on wire frames, which were faulted for looking “stiff” and “artificial.”¹³⁰ Earlier flower fashions in the nineteenth century were tightly wound bundles of flowers, but by the beginning of the twentieth century, floral fashions had decidedly shifted. Light, loose, graceful clusters of roses, lilies, violets, orchids, carnations, and chrysanthemums were now preferred. An 1899 florist manual stated, “Floral arrangements for the more refined are almost entirely now limited to loose arrangements... The crowding of flowers in a design is no longer permissible. Every flower should if possible show its individuality.”¹³¹ From the early twentieth century, cut-flower work sought to mimic how plants appeared as they were growing and in radial patterned arrangements rather than solid bunches. This style of flower arrangement was inspired by the Art Nouveau movement, which cast aside Victorian overabundance in favor of lighter, more simplified arrangements with sinuous lines in an open, free-form composition. In favor of mechanical or formal designs, the loose and airy flat sprays and basket arrangements replaced the flower frame designs as the most popular sympathy tributes. While the florist was still called upon to make sympathy designs in symbolic shapes on wire frames well into the twentieth century, demand was largely and increasingly for more natural and organic forms of arrangements. This shift is apparent from the comparison of the floral fashions from 1889 and c. 1910 seen in figure 39.

¹³⁰ Norah T. Hunter, “Funerals,” in *A Centennial History of the American Florist*, (Topeka, KS: Florists’ Review Enterprises, Inc., 1997), 186.

¹³¹ Scott, *The Florists’ Manual*, 99-100.



Figure 39. *left*. “13-year-old N.W. Thompson in Casket with Flower Wreaths, Barrows, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, Cabinet Card, 1889” in Burns, Stanley, M.D. *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America*. Altadena, CA: Twelvetimes Press, 1990. plate 64*right*. “Willie and Her Baby.” c. 1910, Decatur, Illinois. The Thanatos Archive: Early Post Mortem & Memorial Photography, Duvall, WA. Thanatos.net.

The floral spray became the most popular sympathy tribute from the early twentieth century on. These hand-tied bunches of flowers were generally made with a dozen of the same type of flower and finished with a bow (fig. 40). The florist preferred floral sprays to wire frame designs because they could be made quickly, saving time and labor, which resulted in greater profit. The spray could be sent to the homes of the bereaved or the funeral home. A florist manual in 1919 surmised:

Funeral sprays came into favor several years ago for two reasons. The first was that so many designs were sent at a funeral that the result was an offense to good taste. For instance, two ‘gates ajar’ were sent by rival breweries and a great standing lyre (the emblem of music), to the funeral of a man who couldn’t even whistle a tune. Even the florist himself admitted that the emblems were a little far-fetched. Secondly, with the advent of an abundance of long-stem flowers, which were coming into favor, we find the florist giving assent to the spray as the universal token. By doing so, he made the notice: ‘Please omit flowers’ to read: ‘Just send a nice spray’ and instead of curtailing his funeral business, he has tripled it.¹³²

¹³² William Cleaver Harry, *The Manual of Floral Designing*, (New York: A.T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1919), 46.



Figure 40. *left.* Felton and Sons, The Royal Flower Shops. “Memorial Bunch.” *Memorial Designs*. London: Felton and Sons, florists, c. 1910: 16. *right.* Max Schling. “Spray of Asters and Palm Leaves” *Art in Floral Arrangements*. Harrisburg, PA: Horace McFarland Co., c.1919: plate 38.

Another popular option in the early twentieth century was to send a basket of flowers as sympathy tribute. Baskets came in all shapes and sizes and could be filled with one type or a combination of flowers (fig. 41). Because the basket design contained water in its base, flowers stayed fresh longer. The variety and longevity of these arrangements made them highly-favored by the customers. Basket designs also suited the desire for loose graceful arrangements. Like the floral spray, these designs could be constructed quite quickly by the florist, creating greater profits. Furthermore, large baskets stood out prominently in the funeral display giving the sender more recognition for a tribute of equal value to more laborious designs. However, some florists and customers were opposed to the basket arrangement for funerals because of their earlier associations with more celebratory occasions. In a *Florists' Review* article from 1916 the author stated, “Some of the best florists of the country are today using baskets for funeral offerings,

made in such a manner that the only thing that distinguishes them from use for some festive occasion is the surroundings and the word ‘Sympathy’ instead of ‘Congratulations’ on the card.”¹³³ Despite objections, the basket maintained its vogue in early twentieth-century funeral tributes along with the floral spray.



Figure 41. *left.* Roswell Floral Co. “Funeral Basket Wicker.” c.1860-1960, Accession # OH.1980.035.006, Horticultural Artifacts and Garden Furnishings Collection. Smithsonian Gardens, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. *right.* “Basket of Yellow Chrysanthemums, Bronze Pompoms and Huckleberry.” *Album of Designs: Funeral flowers.* Florists' Publishing Company. Chicago: Florists' Publishing Company, 194-: 25.

Notwithstanding the sharp decline in the use of floral frames, the flamboyant and sentimental designs on wire frames continued to appear, though with less frequency, until the 1940s in America. The wreath was the primary surviving set piece design on a wire frame from the nineteenth century, and it was seen at funerals, special occasions, and holidays. A 1913 etiquette manual stated: “The favorite “set piece” to-day is a wreath,

¹³³ Hunter, “Funerals,” 189.

while bouquets or loose flowers are even more popular. Heavily scented tuberose and artificially colored immortelles are not now considered the proper choice for funeral flowers; nor is it requisite to send white or purple blossoms only.”¹³⁴ Other designs continued as well, such as the pillow and heart, but they were rarely used.

In funeral flower arrangements, simplicity became more highly regarded than symbolism. This reflected the American aesthetic for more simplified and naturalistic design of the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau movements, which were in rebellion to the overelaborate Victorian fashions. It is also evidence of the aversion to reminders of dying and death.¹³⁵ As death became taboo, symbolic shapes, whether negative or positive, became unappealing because they were reminders of or they acknowledged death. The symbols that had survived were watered down to the point that many of them were unrecognizable by modern eyes. Bertram Puckle, writing in the 1920s on funeral customs, made an observation of the lack of potency of the old symbols: “That the ultimate state was one of happiness, seems to have been generally taken for granted. Can we say that the symbols used by a past generation as expressions of a state of bliss--such as crowns, harps, streets paved with gold and gates of pearl--have not often enough been accepted literally.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, in times past, presentations of flowers in bouquets, garlands, chaplets, and set-pieces conveyed lasting and significant meanings through the color and variety of the blossoms, but by the end of the nineteenth century the language

¹³⁴ Helen Lefferts Roberts, *The Cyclopaedia of Social Usage: Manners and Customs of the Twentieth Century*, (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1913), 501.

¹³⁵ Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, 171.

¹³⁶ Bertram S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs*. (Los Angeles: The Library of Alexandria, 1926), 6.

of flowers was dying out. As Nicolette Scourse tells us in *The Victorians and their Flowers*, “the appeal of flowers is not timeless” and “each is a mirror of its time.”¹³⁷ The “beguiling old-world flower with its sentiment, morality, snobbery and controversy disappeared with the Victorian attitudes and preoccupations which created it.”¹³⁸ In the twentieth century, the language of flowers was considered a charming idea but largely defunct.

The move away from the sentimental and symbolic was also seen in the cemetery. The prevalent trend was for horizontal tablets, rather than conspicuous statements of status and individuality for posterity; just as the spray replaced designs on wire frames. Grave markers were characterized by the absence of ornament and minimal information in the inscription, often only the name of the deceased and the dates of their lifespan. As all aspects of death, dying, and funeralization were becoming depersonalized, so too were the florals tributes and grave markers.¹³⁹ On the machine-made slabs, as well as flower frame designs, inscriptions followed this trend toward depersonalization. Terms of endearment such as “our darling” were replaced with more generic options such as mother, sister, daughter, or father, and increasingly they too were left behind. This allowed individuals to distance themselves from grief and feelings of loss, that could not be achieved in the face of sentimental shapes and inscriptions.

¹³⁷ Nicolette Scourse, *The Victorians and their Flowers*, (London: Croom Helm, 1983), preface.

¹³⁸ Scourse, *The Victorians and their Flowers*, 1.

¹³⁹ Stanley Burns, *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America*, (Altadena, CA: Twelvvetrees Press, 1990), Chronology, 1920.

In the same way, flower designs for the funeral in the twentieth century were characterized by a distinct lack of symbolism. With denial and avoidance came a loss of symbolic shapes in floral designs because those shapes reminded people of death, what death had taken from them, and what their loved ones might or might not be experiencing. Floral arrangements were no longer in the form of meaningful shapes, and additional symbolism from the language of flowers and symbolism of color had also disappeared by the early twentieth century. There was nowhere to look for a deeper meaning. The designs of death, once memento mori's proclaiming "remember you will die" now served to silence this message and cover up mortality.

The general trend toward decline in the use of funeral flowers and the growing preference for non-symbolic shapes was brought to a head in both Europe and America in the World War I era. Americans had already begun pulling back from the focus on death and its material reminders, as well as transforming the act of mourning. In a climate that was already privatizing grief and bereavement, the Great War brought the Victorian death culture to a close. One of the major reasons for this was the social changes brought on by the Great War. Needs on the front and at home, caused gender roles to be redefined. Women in the work force began to break down conventions of mourning because extended periods of seclusion and sumptuous mourning clothing were no longer practical. In the social upheavals of the World War I era, the hallmarks of Victorian society were no longer applicable to daily life. Furthermore, a new message was championed in the face of such tragedy that sought to amplify moral through patriotism. "Bucking up" for the sake of the country made heroism and self-restraint the morals of the day in England

and the United States. Lengthy and unrestrained mourning disgraced the fallen men who had died for a noble cause. The rituals of mourning were constrained in both its outward display and duration. The formal, publicly sanctioned act of mourning was transformed into something one “got over” quickly and quietly. Strength of character became an attribute of those who put on a brave face in spite of grief. The notion that one should not grieve “too much” set the tone for funerals and funeral flowers for the remainder of the century. Challenges due to practicality and patriotism, as well as social changes brought about by the war and the continued distancing from death transformed American desires and expectations in funerals and mourning rituals.

The decline in sympathy flowers that occurred in the early twentieth century never recovered. The elaborate use of flowers came to be considered unnecessary as simpler funeral customs supplanted older Protestant traditions. Following World War I and continuing up to today, funeral work has continued to be about one-third to one-half of the florist business, but fewer people today send flowers to the funeral than they did in the nineteenth century. However, flowers at the time of death remain a vital part of the funeral ritual. Though styles and trends may have changed, from the extravagance of the Victorian Era to the simplicity of today’s arrangements, their role in the grieving process remains the same. Flowers give form to heart-felt expressions of condolence. They honor the deceased, comfort the living, and add beauty to the otherwise painful surroundings.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

*Flowers will never be banished entirely from the funeral, as they help so much to soften the somber gloom, and to lend a sentiment of poetry and religious feeling to the sad ceremony.*¹⁴⁰

— Rose E. Cleveland, *Our Society*, 1888

In the still relatively new academic field of decorative arts and their history, the stress has tended to be on the finest and most fashionable silver, porcelains, glass, furniture, and textiles of each period. This focus has been largely influenced by what has been preserved because of its beauty, market value, and careful craftsmanship. The even newer study of material culture has found its themes in the usefulness of objects from underwear to can openers, but material culture has often foundered because so few objects of daily life have survived. Such things as kitchen tools and everyday clothing have often been of little or no monetary value, sometimes poorly designed or made, and are usually used until they fall apart or the uses they were intended for have disappeared. Flower frames do not fit neatly into either category. Made to be part of very transitory luxury objects for almost momentary purposes, few if any long-term alternative uses ever developed for flower frames. Although made of durable iron wire they had negligible value and have either been allowed to rust to powder or have been bundled up with the other scrap iron to vanish into a melting pot. If an object does not survive in sufficient

¹⁴⁰ Rose E. Cleveland, *Our Society: A Complete Treatise of the Usage That Govern the Most Refined Homes, and Social Circles*, (St. Louis, MO: L.W. Dickerson, 1888), 292-293.

numbers to be recognized as culturally significant the stories such an object can tell are also lost. While very few nineteenth-century flower frames may be found today, the study and categorizing of them are surprisingly revealing of our ancestors' changing views of life, and, especially, death.

In America in the nineteenth century, floral tributes for a funeral acted as the tangible representation of the grief suffered by those left behind and validated their feelings of loss. Furthermore, sending flowers was a recognized way for friends, family, and loved ones both near and far to honor the deceased. They were a way to express meaning without words and to act as a silent eulogy. In these aspects, flower frames were as much for the living as for the dead. The beauty and symbolism of flowers were employed to give comfort and soften the harsh pain of loss felt by those left behind, a practice known as the "beautification of death." Using etiquette books, obituaries, magazines and periodicals, funeral manuals, religious tracts, transcripts from sermons, and contemporary and consolation literature, along with surviving wire frames, manufacturers' trade catalogues, albums of design, florist manuals, as well as stereographs, photographs and postmortem photography, evolving notions about death are shown to be linked in funeral flowers and their development after the Civil War and leading to World War I. Attitudes toward death were shaped by the Reformed Protestant tradition, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, the Evangelical Era, liberal Christianity, as well as scientific discovery, and the rise of secularism.

Despite attitude and mortuary changes, many symbolic shapes continued to be used because they had become part of the cannon of funeral symbols. They were

traditional and therefore comfortable. Ernest Geldart, when defining the different types of symbols in his 1899 *A Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism*, wrote that, “A last division may, perchance, be called TRADITIONAL, in its modern and false sense, i.e., something carried on from—nowhere! It would seem that there is neither rhyme nor reason for a large number of such emblems, save the individual fancy of some unknown artist, whom others followed blindly.”¹⁴¹ Early designs for flower frames continued to be used in funerals because they had become established as traditional symbols of mourning. However, as the perceptions of death changed, new designs were created, and the popularity of established designs mirrored new sentiments. The use of flowers in funerals went from necessity to obscure the effects of death, to meaningful tributes and then to create elaborate displays for the “beautification of death” during the nineteenth century. However, after World War I, death became something of a taboo subject, largely because it was no longer such a presence in the home. Collectively, funeral flower frames speak not so much of chronological changes in thinking, but as patterns from the variations of acceptance and denial of death, which the American psyche faced. Consequently, this is not a history of American funeral flowers, but a catalog of iconography that uses objects, images, literary references, important historical events, doctrines, and the frequency of the appearance of these symbols to explain their meaning in relation to the philosophical and devotional currents of death and dying.

The early perceptions about death in America in the nineteenth century originated in the teachings of eternal damnation from the Protestant Reformed traditions, as well as

¹⁴¹ Ernest Geldart, *A Manual of Church Decoration and Symbolism*, (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co., 1899), 76.

the lack of adequate medical understanding. Americans were largely fearful of death and dying, because victims of illness or injury often died slowly, in agony, with only a slim prospect of redemption in the afterlife. This inspired flower frames made in shapes such as the sickle and the *Stopped Clock*. As secularization of American culture took root, non-religious and universal symbols gained in popularity. This was encouraged by medical progress and scientific discovery, which created new contexts for death without the fear of excruciating pain in this world or the next. Romantic sentimentalization led to closer family ties which made losing a loved one all the more painful. Designs such as the *Empty Chair*, the *Broken Column* and the *Silent Harp* expressed the sense of a life cut short and an absence lamented. Furthermore, through religious revivals and consolation literature of the nineteenth century, death became seen as more hopeful. Heaven was painted as a beautiful, restful place where loved ones would be waiting. Death became a welcoming place of peace that was portrayed in funerals through symbols like the *Gates Ajar*, the anchor, the harp, the lyre, crosses, and pillows. From this, death was further translated into the final triumph of the soul. Words like ‘victory’ spelled out on flower frames and crown designs expressed these new beliefs. Increased interest in the individual and memorialization led to funeral flower frames directed toward celebrating the life of the deceased, and this was encouraged as the sense of loss was replaced by the idea of reunion in heaven. Almost whimsical designs for frames such as trains, pianos, and baseball bats signified the interests or occupation of the deceased. Societies, organizations, and unions also began to send flower frames of their emblems to the families of their former members, and veterans were honored with badges, military stars,

or the American flag. By the beginning of the twentieth century, a major shift in designs was taking place, and symbolic designs were replaced by floral sprays and baskets. There was a distinct lack of symbolism in funeral flower design that mirrored the avoidance of death that eventually would cause death to become a taboo.

Flowers have long been an important element at funerals and in the mourning process. They are an instinctive choice to serve as tokens of grief and respect because of their language of emotion and euphemism, as well as the beauty they exude. During the time of mourning, flowers beautify the somber scene, lighten the aching heart, and speak messages of love and sympathy which no words can express. In the 1891 etiquette manual, *Polite Society at Home and Abroad*, the author expressed the value these funeral tributes had in the late nineteenth century and carry with them today:

How tenderly these emblems of purity and beauty speak to the mourning heart. They are the tokens of sympathy sent by friends to comfort the lonely ones. Their fragrance mingles with the memory of the dear one who has gone. How fitting that their exquisite beauty and perfume should mingle with the last sad rites and consolation be found by silently breathing the heart's emotions in their blossoms, for 'They are love's last gifts; bring flowers, pale flowers.'¹⁴²

With life, comes death, thus the need for sympathy flowers will always exist. Flowers are a form of communication that transcends the heart and expresses man's respect, love, and caring for the living and the dead.

¹⁴² Annie R. White, *Polite Society at Home and Abroad: A Complete Compendium of Information upon all Topic Classified under the Head of Etiquette*, (Chicago: Monarch Book Company, 1891), 306-307.

APPENDIX A

List of Designs

Agnus Dei	Anchor
Anchor with Chain	Anvil
Arch	Arch and Bible
Ball	Balloon
Banjo	Banners
Battle Ship [<i>sic</i>]	Bell, Double
Bell, Single	Bible or Book, Closed
Bible or Book, Open	Bible under Arch
Bicycle	Bleeding Heart
Bow and Arrow	Bow and Arrow with Heart
Bow and Arrow with Heart and Bell	Bowling Alley with Pins and Balls
Brick Layer	Broken Circle
Broken Column	Broken Crescent Wreath and Sickle
Broken Heart	Broken Ladder
Broken Link	Broken Wheel
Butterfly	Calvary
Canopy	Casket Cover
Chair	Chair with Arms
Chariot	Clock
Clover	Cock
Coronet, Cross, and Globe	Cradle
Crescent	Crescent and Crown with Star
Crescent and Harp	Crescent and Lyre
Crescent and Star	Crescent and Star with Heart
Crescent Wreath	Cross
Cross and Crown	Cross, Blocked
Cross, Casket	Cross, Slanting
Cross, Slanting, and Crown	Crown
Crown and Bent Cross	Dove
Faith, Hope, and Charity	Fan and Easel
Fire Engine	Fireman Standing on Platform
Fireman's Hat	Fireman's Trumpet
Flag	Font
Frame	Frame with Easel and Sickle

Gates Ajar, Double Arch
Globe
Gondola
Harp
Heart, Open
Heavenly Road
Hook and Eye
Horn of Plenty
Horseshoe with Arrow and Heart
Hourglass
I.H.S. Monogram
Knapsack
Lamb
Letters
Locomotive and Tender
Lover's Cup
Lyre
Mandolin
Omnibus
Pall
Parasol
Pillow with Anchor and Star
Pillow with Harp
Pilot Wheel
Policeman's Badge
Policeman's Belt and Club
Printer's Stick
Scales
Setting Sun
Shield
Square
Stack of Arms and Canteen
Star, six-pointed
Street Car
Swords
Traveling Bag
Trumpet
Vase, Roman
Well and Bucket
Wreath
Wreath with Anchor
Yoke

Gates Ajar, Single Arch
Golden Way
Guitar
Heart and Cross
Heart, Solid
Honor Roll
Hook and Ladder
Horseshoe
Horseshoe with Horn of Plenty
Hourglass and Scythe
Keystone
Ladder
Lantern
Locomotive
Love Knot
Lyra
Maltese Cross
Monument
Painters Palate
Panel
Pillow
Pillow with Gates Ajar
Pillow with Lyre
Plough
Policeman's Belt
Post, Lamp and Letter Box
Rock of Ages
Scroll
Shamrock
Sickle
Square and Compass
Star, five-pointed
Steamship
Swan
Tomahawk
Triangle
Urn
Violin
Wishbone
Wreath with "Rest" in center
Yacht

Organizational Emblems

Algonquin Club	American Mechanics
American Protective Agency	Ancient Order of United Workman
Christian Endeavor	Confederate Badge
Daughters of the American Revolution	Elk's Head
Freemasons	Good Templars
Grand Army of the Republic (GAR)	Kiwanis
Knights and Ladies of Honor	Knights Empvorth, League Emblem
Knights of America	Knights of Columbus
Knights of Honor	Knights of Pythias
Knights of Templars	Knights Templars
Legion of Honor	Maccabees
Mystic Shrine	Odd Fellow's Links
Order of the Eastern Star	Order of the Red Men
Railroad Societies	Royal Arcanum
Sons of the American Revolution	Sons of Veterans
Women of Woodcraft	Woodsmen of the World

APPENDIX B

List of Common Inscriptions for Floral Designs on Wire Frames

- | | |
|--|--|
| "A Tribute of Friendship." | "All is Well." (Pillow.) |
| "Asleep in Jesus." (Young children.) | "Asleep in the Lord." |
| "Asleep." | "At Rest." |
| "At Peace." | "Awake into Life Eternal." |
| "Baby." | "Beyond the River." (Pillow) |
| "Broken Hopes." (Column.) | "Brother." |
| "Christ Is My Hope." (Bible.) | "Faith." |
| "Farewell." | "Father." |
| "Finis." (Book of Life.) | "Friend." |
| "From Friends." | "Gone Home." (Gates Ajar or Pillow.) |
| "He Chasteneth us." (Bible.) | "He Giveth His Beloved Sleep." |
| "He Giveth the Victory." | "He Knoweth Best." |
| "Her children rise up and call her blessed." | "Here I lay my burden down." |
| "I am the resurrection and the life." | "I go to prepare a place for you." (Bible.) |
| "I know that my Redeemer liveth." | "In Memoriam." |
| "In Memory of -----." | "In War Victorious; In Peace Supreme." |
| "Let not your heart be troubled." (Bible.) | "Mother." |
| "No Cross, No Crown." (Cross.) | "Not Dead, But Gone Before." |
| "O death! Where is thy sting? O grave!
Where is thy victory?" | "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Child) |
| "Our Comrade." | "Our Friend." |
| "Peace." | "Playmates." |
| "R.I.P." | "Rest in Peace." |
| "Rest." | "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me." |
| "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." | "She Sleepeth." |
| "The Morning Cometh." (Panel.) | "Simply to Thy Cross I Cling." (Cross on
Rock.) |
| "The Link Broken Here Will be Joined
Again in Heaven." | "Shop Mate." |
| "Sister." | "Suffer little children to come unto me." |
| "The Angels Called Her." | "The Lord's Will Be Done." (Bible/Pillow.) |
| "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away." | "Thy will be done." |
| Any proper names may also be used | "We Look Beyond the Cross." (Cross.) |
| | "Vacant." (Chair.) |

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BIOGRAPHY

Janie Rawles Askew was born in Dallas, Texas but spent the majority of her life in Colorado on a horse ranch. After earning an undergraduate degree in Art History from the University of Denver, she moved to Washington, DC to attend The Smithsonian Associates/George Mason University master's program in the History of Decorative Arts. She was assigned to the Smithsonian Gardens for a research assistantship, which began her three-year relationship with the Gardens and their collections. Her work primarily involved researching and writing blogs about objects from the Garden Furnishings and Horticultural Artifacts collection. Through her research for the Gardens, she became acquainted with the collection wire flower frames, and her master's thesis topic unfolded. As the Enid A. Haupt Research Fellow, she worked on her thesis, *Framing Grief: Funeral Flower Frames in America, 1860-1920*.