

JUST MARRIED.

ABNER M. EYDE
AND
BERTHA E. KAUTZ.

The Undertaker says while he would gladly render his services if needed at any other time, he prefers to be let alone on this particular trip.

Who could censure him for it!
His "Chums" surely would not.

BRAND NEW BRIDE & GROOM

They are on this train. They will receive your congratulations, see that they get them.

You will recognize the Undertaker by his very sedate appearance, the bride will be very modest, please do not embarrass them.

Handbill printed and distributed by Dad's chums (after following the wedding buggy with a brass band) on the train for their wedding trip to Steelton.

Early Lancaster County

Funeral Customs

by Miriam Eyde Bixler

In 1683 William Penn reported on Indians in Pennsylvania, "If they die they bury them with their apparel [*sic*] be they man or woman and the nearest of kin fling something precious with them as a token of their love. Their mourning is blacking of their faces which they continue for a year. They are choice of the graves of their dead. Lest they should be by time fall to common use they pick off the grass that grows upon them and heap up the fallen earth with great care and exactness."¹

North Museum displays many valued treasures discovered in the seventeenth century graves of the Susquehannock Indians at Washington Boro. Pipes, the last tribal art, were found in graves of men, women and children. There were also funeral pots containing such food as blueberries. Long guns were bent to fit the graves which were made about the size of a bathtub. The body was flexed to fit, knees towards chest and head turned towards the east.²

It was an early custom to place the family graveyard of the pioneers in the woods or in the roughest and stoniest part of the homeplace.³ Lancaster County's first cemetery was that land near Paradise given by Mary Feree around 1710 to the settlement for burial.⁴

The Ellis R. Bachman Funeral Home of Strasburg was established eight generations ago when in 1715 the first John Bachman made coffins as well as furniture and houses.⁵

In 1738 the first death occurred among the single Brethren at the Ephrata Cloister. A bell was rung. Then the pealing was succeeded by tolling a certain number of times for Brother Martin (Bremmer) the Community tailor who made the monastic habits. Brother Martin's cabin window was opened "as soon as the breath left the body so that the soul could take its flight heavenward unhindered" and on the night of the funeral "as the body was being carried out of the Berghouse, a bucket of water was poured upon the door-sill and swept outward." The door was closed quickly, "to

prevent the return of the spirit of the departed." Clay or red earth was used to mark three crosses on the door jamb. Burial with mystic ritual took place at midnight by torchlight.⁶

When Conrad Beissel, founder of the Community, died July 6, 1768 the Sisters "informed the hives of bees so they wouldn't swarm. Every house turned over on shelf barrel, keg or crock of wine, vinegar, pickles, sauer kraut and preserved fruit to prevent them from spoiling."⁷

One hundred wounded Revolutionary War soldiers died at the hospital established at the Cloister during the war. The first were buried with honors of war, the funeral sermon preached by one of their own but the many deaths put a stop to the ceremony.⁸

The Lititz graveyard was consecrated in 1758 at the first death in that community, three year old John Baumgartner. It was designed to separate males from females and married men opposite married women. There was a space for singles and little boys and girls under twelve. Graves were made with moulds in just two sizes and were oblong and flat. Tombstones were laid flat and mountain pink was encouraged to grow around them.⁹

Three days elapsed until burial. The body was never brought into the church but put in a stone building behind it for better preservation and in case of contagion.¹⁰ Three types of hymns were sung at the funeral chosen whether the deceased was male or female, married or not, old or young. Death was announced with horns instead of tolling bells and a band led the funeral procession to the cemetery.

The funeral pall, as reported in 1844, was white instead of black and embroidered "Jesus my Redeemer liveth" in blue silk.¹¹

A quote on pioneer life in Warwick Township informs, "Funerals were attended on foot, horseback and in the old Conestoga wagon." Some mourners seated themselves around the coffin in the wagon. Others walked to the grave where a circle was formed around the coffin and wine and cake were served if not done before at the house.¹²

It was not until 1798 that illegitimate children were allowed to be buried in the cemetery of the First Reformed Church in Lancaster. Even then the bell could not be tolled and the pastor was not allowed to attend the funeral or perform any religious services.¹³

That same year Joshua Brown, a Quaker from Little Britain Township, died. His sons carried him out of his house in a plain coffin and tied it with a rope to a four-wheeled arrangement with a wide board. The undertaker rode ahead on horseback to Penn Hill meeting house with the mourners following on horseback, on foot and in wagons. There was a short pause at the grave and then the casket was lowered. There was no feasting. All was quiet and solemn.¹⁴

References to pre-twentieth century Amish funeral customs are scarce. Today's Amish cling to the old, country ways. Death notices are made by personal visits by close neighbors. Six-sided wooden coffins and simple funeral wagons are still in use. This sort of casket was commonly used by all people before 1900.

The Amish have never used door crepes, flowers, blankets. There are no handles on the plain, walnut stained (unvarnished) coffins lined simply in white which display the deceased by opened, upper half-lids. Wooden "rough-boxes," no vaults, are used. Sometimes a community burying ground is donated by one of the congregation and cared for by the members but they also bury in convenient graveyards.¹⁵

Mourners wear black. The deceased is dressed in white for "they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy." Like other folks the Amish no longer use shrouds. A woman is sometimes buried in the white dress she made for her wedding which was unused again until now.

Funeral services are held at the house. Later at the grave there are spoken hymns and silent prayer followed by a benediction by the officiating minister. The funeral feast is still offered to all those attending. At one time there was an objection to embalming; "tampering with the person" for preservation could postpone the return of man to his original element as set forth "for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." A non-Amish funeral director is now hired for embalming and little else. Alfred R. Furman of Leola is Lancaster County's "Amish undertaker." He stores a very old, big, plain, wooden hearse just for the sect's use.

About 1807 the beginning village of Marietta had its first death, that of a twelve-year old boy named Walton. The ceremony was performed in the parent's front yard. Afterwards as the bearers stood near the bier two persons, each with a large "waiter" covered with white linen moved among the people. One offered cheese and sweet cake in slices and the other wine and "Jamacian spirits." Then the coffin was put in a wagon and the crowd dispersed as the body was taken for burial somewhere unknown to the chronicler.

In a short time the infant Longdorf died in Marietta and was interred in a newly-fenced off portion of land which later was the graveyard of Zion Church built in 1816. Residents in the houses between the burying ground and the Susquehanna river called an angry protest meeting. They felt that the burial would defile the water in their wells and cause disease and death. The baby's grave had to be guarded for several nights but then ashes were "strewed" over it so its disturbance could be detected and the vigil ended.¹⁶

In olden times pictures were fashioned to honor the deceased. One stitched in 1811 by student Mary Seeger hangs at Linden Hall, Lititz, Pa.¹⁷ A fractur in memory of Sister Zenobia of the Ephrata Cloister has been found in the kammer once occupied by her. It is

framed in imitation of a tablet and honors her as being beautiful, lovely and devout.¹⁸

In 1823 the Consistory of the First Reformed Church of Lancaster resolved that "persons who live in open lusts and die without repentance" shall have no tolling bells, no minister and be buried in an obscure place in the back part of the graveyard.¹⁹

Lancaster's first Mayor, John Passmore, died in 1827 at fifty-five years, weighing 408½ pounds. There wasn't a "catafalque" large and strong enough to carry him. His coffin had to be especially made and instead of a hearse an open wagon was used. It is said that this was one case in which the graveyard sexton did not have to monitor a newly-made grave to prevent it from being robbed by the town's medical students in search of experimental corpses.²⁰

The Rev. John Henry Hoffmeier, Pastor of the First Reformed Church, Lancaster, who died in 1838 was shown "respect and veneration" by the Consistory who attended his funeral in a body and passed a resolution to wear the usual badges of mourning for thirty days. For many years black crepe sleeve bands were worn by mourning males. Then for a time only pall bearers used them.²¹

Mrs. Anne Royal, pioneer woman journalist, visited Lancaster in 1828. She reported, "Funeral in Lancaster. Cold and rainy. The hearse was proceeded by the Mayor and two aldermen abreast on foot. Citizens followed with umbrellas, church bells tolling all the while." One hundred were in the procession. The **Lancaster Journal** of Friday, November 7, 1828 reported, "Died on Thursday evening, Philip Menneskep, Esq., one of the aldermen of this city and formerly Register of Wills for the County in [*sic*] the sixty-eighth year of his pilgrimage. By his death his family have lost an honest man."²²

Before and after Emancipation slaves from the nearby forges and mansions were buried or buried themselves in the "mountain" (Welsh Mt.) cemetery. It is related that one of the last burials in an old Negro cemetery was that of "Little Round Top" who had lived with a white woman and so was mistrusted. After the funeral Dr. Minn of Morgantown hired "Little Johnny Proudfoot," who did odd jobs, to help him carry a side of leather to his workshop in his garret. When Johnny saw Round Top's feet hanging from the bottom of the bundle he ran off.²³

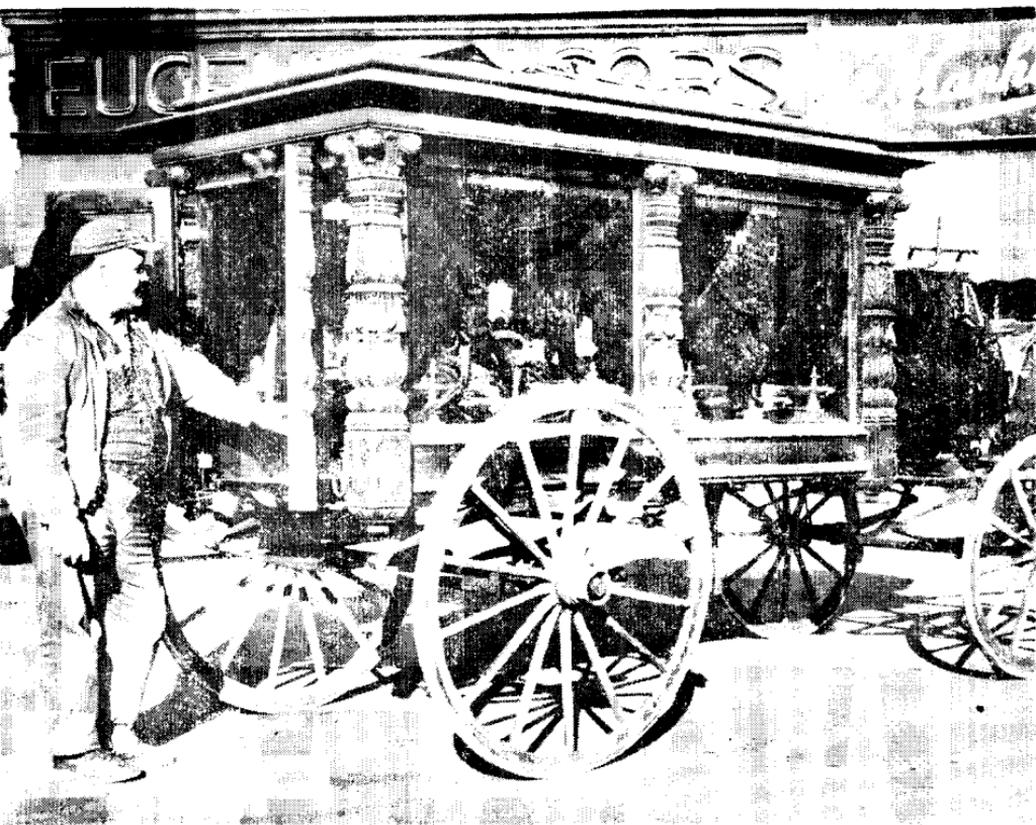
In 1861 a newspaper advertisement stated that Hager and Bros. had in stock "mourning dress goods—bombazines, alpacas, crepes, delaines, merinoes and chintzes."²⁴

Phoebe Gibbons wrote in the 1870's about the funerals of her country neighbors near Intercourse. Friends would "red up" the house of mourning and go into the kitchen to bake bread, rusks and pies. Two young men and two young women sat up to watch all night in a room adjoining that containing the corpse.

If necessary, tables for the funeral feast were set up in the barn or large wagonhouse. Cold meat, bread and butter, pickles and apple butter were served. Sometimes there were stewed chicken, mashed potatoes, cheese and coffee. Old men and women sat at "first table" with the mourning family.²⁵

Charles Thon, Justice of the Peace of Lancaster Township, notes themes of funeral sermons in his diary. He states that the Rev. Christian S. Herr was buried from the Old Mennonite Church east of Millersville. Twenty ministers and fourteen to fifteen hundred people were in attendance and all were invited back to the house to eat. Five hundred accepted the invitation to the "big dinner."

When the two-year old daughter of ex-sheriff Jacob F. Frey died in 1873 the funeral attendance was the largest ever known in the



In 1961 this 50-year old glass paneled horse-drawn hearse was purchased by Roy F. Steffy, Lititz R3, antique collector, from the Herr Funeral Parlor, Marietta. The ornate vehicle had solid rubber tires and an open drivers seat in front of the enclosure. (Sunday News Photo)

neighborhood. The Rev. Amos Herr moralized in his sermon giving no words of comfort.

Ann H. Moore's funeral was held in the schoolhouse in Lancaster Township. In 1881 a Methodist minister as well as a Mennonite minister preached at the funeral of seven-month-old Elwood Flinn Hess. There was a "magnificent coffin," decorated with beautiful flowers. Landis Valley Mennonite Church was the scene of the funeral of Elizabeth K. Hostetter, wife of Rev. Charles Hostetter. Three ministers sermonized in German.

A funeral held in a twenty-by-thirty foot Mennonite meeting-house was packed with mourners leaving very little space around the wooden stove in the middle of the room which was fired at "fever heat" to compete with the zero weather outside. Three bishops preached. Two held forth in German for two hours each and the third longer in broken English. The burial took place nearby and there was great weeping for the ninety-year-old departed. The "spread" at the house afterwards included pies, custards, fasnachts, doughnuts and gingerbread as well as "more substantial." "Leicht boi," funeral or raisin pie, was a favorite dessert.²⁶

High top beaver hats were worn by the affluent male mourners. In the 1890's Dr. Benjamin Bausman editorialized in the Reformed Church periodical, the **Guardian**, that the custom of men on the mourners' benches wearing hats during the service should be discontinued. He also disapproved of remaining seated during funeral prayers.

Mantelpieces in city homes were often "littered" with photographs of dead relatives and black memorial cards with gilt lettering. Tall glass cases containing memorial waxed or dried flowers stood on parlor tables. Wax lilies were popular as were immortelles or everlastings for the latter adapted well to drying when saved from the grave.²⁷

An 1890 issue of the magazine, **Christian Culture**, published an article remonstrating about the vulgar flower displays at funerals and ventured that the custom was only an ignorant source of cheap popularity and play for attention which was "dying out." It did not, however, wish to decry modest flower memorials. Another item quotes local undertakers as saying there was a decline in the highly objectionable Sunday funerals but still there was scarcely a Sunday without one.²⁸

Many undertakers are listed in the newspaper advertisements and city directories of the late 1800's. The 1859-1860 Lancaster City Directory lists three women: Anne Conrad, Jr. of German and Duke Sts.; Mary Hoffman, Middle and S. Queen St.; and Mary Miller, W. King and Mulberry Sts.

Some well-known County families of undertakers before the turn of the century, in addition to the Bachmans of Strasburg, were

the Becks of Lititz, the Libharts of Marietta and the S. L. Frey firm of Marietta, Columbia and eventually Lancaster.

In 1884 the Lancaster Crematorium and Funeral Reform Society was organized by Dr. M. L. David and George K. Reed of Lancaster and W. B. Middleton of Philadelphia. W. U. Hensel and Dr. Davis were editors of the magazine, the first publication of its kind, **Modern Crematist**. A crematorium, claimed to be the first in the country, was built in that year in Cedar Lawn Cemetery between Woodward Hill and Greenwood Cemeteries. The furnaces were built by the local Davis Garbage and Cremation Furnaces—Sanitary Supply Co.

Cost of cremation was twenty-five dollars for two hundred pounds of steamboat coke and attendant, ten dollars for the undertaker who provided a cheap wooden casket, five dollars for the hearse and three dollars for each coach.

Around the turn of the century when the crematorium and grounds were taken over by Greenwood Cemetery, vandals made it necessary to bury any remains stored there in a common grave and the building became a tool shed.²⁹

Funeral customs and the dead have always been the butt of jokesmiths. An 1890 local magazine printed the following:

From the Grave

First corpse: "Well, my friend, how do you like things down there?"

Second corpse: "I'm not kicking."³⁰

NOTES

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An advertisement c. 1875, of a Marietta
furniture dealer with a side line of under-
taking as a specialty.