Death Artifacts and Rituals
as a Reflection of
the American Family since 1850

Thursday, December 10, 1992

Honor's Thesis
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INTRODUCTION

Death is an important element in a people's culture. How a group deals with death, how they dispose of the body, who disposes of it, and what connection if any remains between the dead and the living, all give us vital clues to our history and our way of life. Just as any ancient archaeological find tells us about our distant ancestors, death rituals and artifacts reflect our past generations and even our own lives.

Cemeteries and gravemarkers are excellent artifacts for interpretation of the past. Glenn Vernon writes in the Sociology of Death, "The grave, with its markings, is a place where the living can symbolically maintain and express their intimate relations with the dead." Establishing and maintaining monumental symbols of the dead help keep the beliefs about the dead alive. And in return, keep their culture alive (231-232).

Cemeteries are the meeting ground where life and death converge and reflect each other. And what better realm of our lifestyle does the cemetery mirror than the family? Where our ancestor's family plots outlined in stone in small, community graveyards tell of a strong, community based, family-oriented society, today our death culture tells us something else. It is characterized by large, privately-owned market-driven, grid-patterned cemeteries. They are filled with lone or coupled stones or high-rise mausoleums, and we place our children in separate and distinct areas. These modern cemeteries reflect a culture with parallel characteristics of a capitalistic, individual world where the family is to some lonely children only something the media and politicians argue about.
An evolution is clear in our cemeteries and our families. Yet this project looks not only at the tangible death artifacts but also at death rituals like embalming and funerals. I justify expanding the scope of the study by the fact that gravemarkers, as any artifact taken out of its social context, presents us with ambiguous meanings. With this in mind, I decided to look at other death rituals as well. Funerals, mourning customs and embalming offer us a more complete look at our culture when coupled with cemeteries and their gravemarkers.

As much is to be learned from looking at such a wide range of death, I chose to focus on those aspects which reflect best the changes of the American family over the last 150 years. To keep the project focused I narrowed the research down to mainstream Middle-America. Though status and ethnic differences, for example, are reflected well in death artifacts and rituals, they are largely ignored in this study and replaced with those that permeate the middle-class, Middle-American WASP culture. This project takes American death culture and relates it to our families' life culture since around 1850.

When working with gravestones, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of stones from all time periods are characterized by simply dates and names. So often the unusual stones are singled out for interpretation when, in actuality, they are the exception rather than the rule. But this does not void their importance. Often the unusual and eccentric give us a more obvious and straightforward look at what is happening around them. Nonetheless, the plain stones are many, and they too occur with variations and trends. These are not excluded from this project and in some parts dominate the study.

The first section of the project is completed largely through written accounts. The last sections combine written accounts with my own research of nearby cemeteries and a personal interview with a
professional in the monument field. Pictures accompany the text to give a fuller understanding of the visual aspect of death rituals and artifacts. The first section is lacking in quantity of photographs due to the deterioration of many stones of the period, as most are unreadable or do not photograph well.
LIFE AND DEATH IN 19TH CENTURY AMERICA

To set the stage for a look at American death artifacts and how they represent the American family, a look at death and its meaning in the 1800's is in order. The demography of death in the mid-1800's took the shape of a world where it was not unusual for families to lose seven or eight family members or neighbors in one year, many of these children. Only 23 per cent of females born in 1850 lived through the cycle of marrying, having children, and seeing the youngest child leave the home as compared to 57 per cent of women born in 1920. These women died often between the ages of 25 and 55 due to complications during childbirth. In 1853 in New York City 49 per cent of all deaths were children under the age of five. In fact, a male born in Massachusetts in 1850 had only a 33 per cent chance of living to the age of 20; 80 per cent of males born that year never made it to the age of 5 (Green 172).

This was a time of the rise of scientific medicine, germ theories and the sanitation movement which gave hope to ending old age. Death began to be governed by scientific naturalism which viewed death as a natural phenomenon. It was a force governed by nature rather than an act of an angry God (Farrell 44).

The 1870's saw a distinct vision of heaven emerge where previously heaven was reserved for the saintly. Popular, nonevangelical ministers like William Ellery Channing, Andrew Peabody, and Austin Phelps described heaven as a reunion of family members where homes are restored and nurseries exist to care for the children that come alone. Previously heaven was a sacred counterpart to American society, more an "ethereal dominion" (Green 167). Towards the middle part of the century, heaven began to look like the perfect suburban home instead. As an
example, *Godey's Lady's Book*, a popular women's journal, in 1870 contained 71 poems, 40 percent of which were about death. Death was no longer a feared phenomenon that was tended to by the clergy. But more importantly, death was now portrayed as life's great event: death was "a liberator from earthly troubles and the passage to the realm of reunited families and powerful 'heavenly homemakers'" (178).

Henry Ward Beecher cannot go unmentioned. An influential clergyman in the 1800's, Beecher rejected the existence of hell and was the first to advocate celebrating death. "Death is only God's call, 'Come home,'" he said (172). He advocated death as a natural progression, the "porthole to immortality." Beecher wanted bright colors, flowers and happiness to dominate the American funeral. But his influence was only partial. In the late 1800's, bright flowers became a norm for funerals, yet tradition reigned as Americans could not bring themselves to celebrate the loss of their loved ones. Black as a symbol of sorrow remained the norm for funeral attire, and grieving persisted (Farrell 90).

Mourning was discouraged by Beecher as were other traditionally sorrowful funeral procedures. But Beecher never convinced Americans to give up these traditions. Mourning rules set grieving families apart from society and linked family members together. Giving up this tradition would no longer exempt them from the social rules of Victorian America as mourning had. Yet mourning in the 1870's and later was left up to the women and children. Men were to carry on after a death as they would any other day.

Why the change? Death was seen as a religious encounter, and in Victorian American, religion was a female duty. In the 18th century, men and women participated equally in religion, but by the mid 1800's the majority of active church members were female (Green 173). Victorian women were the moral fabric of America. Increasingly, men were working
in the cities which was seen as a necessary, yet evil, part of American life. It was the female's job to bring the spiritual life into the home and to protect her family from the evils that the men had clinging to them like dust from the streets.

Playing an even larger part than indicated in studies of the Victorian lifestyle are the effects of economics on mourning customs. The Victorian age was a time of rapid change. More men were working in the marketplace than ever before. Grieving practices would keep a man away from the office or the factory longer than could be afforded in this market-driven society. The women, whose primary concern was the home, could still care for the children and the home while following tradition. It seems American mourning customs were a product of not only changing of moral roles within the household, but also the changing economy of America.

Early 1800 funerals were a community affair, as everyone had a role to play. Neighbors laid out the body, and the carpenter or cabinetmaker made the coffin. The clergyman said the prayers over the body, local men dug the grave and lowered the body, and friends and relatives brought food for the family (Vernon 245). In short, people were their own undertakers. As more settlers arrived with the expansion of the country, more specialization occurred, but no one specialized solely in death. It wasn't until the last quarter of the century that death became a profession. In W. Lloyd Warner's study of Vermillion County, Pennsylvania, 1869 was the first year that a person advertised locally as an undertaker, and by 1905 all funeral directors in the area considered death their specialty (199).

What this change reflects is a change in the Victorian lifestyle. Previously, all family advice came from within the family or from the clergy. In the Victorian age, though privacy was highly valued, society permeated the family through books, magazines, and advice books (Aries,
Science had gripped America with sanitation concerns and germ theories. As a result, Americans began to look towards the "professionals" for guidance. In a world of entrepreneurship, the cabinet makers and the undertakers grasped hold of an untouched realm of death, and the American people welcomed it.

Increased mobility and urbanization were characteristics of the Victorian age. As portions of families moved to find new land or jobs, they were left without the strong family ties that colonial Americans had. The rise of the funeral industry allowed people with little or no relatives to be buried with similar dignity that others received. Funeral directors also took over the arrangements of transporting the bodies of deceased family members who died far from home.

New laws and restrictions set by the government and health industry made transporting bodies across state lines a bureaucratic affair. The new funeral director with his expanding duties was able to bear this burden. This brings up the issue of embalming. Due to the Civil War many families lost loved ones on the battlefield. This was viewed as a heroic and worthy death. To bury a relative without reflecting such dignity was unjust. Embalming developed in the 1870's as a way to send bodies home to their families. It conveniently kept the bodies in a preserved state to be viewed without the disgust of seeing a loved one in a state of decay.

By 1890, embalming was used for virtually everyone (Farrell 159). Beecher's influence shines through here. As death and its effects were understandably unpleasant to see, viewing death as a reason for celebration was difficult to comprehend. Traditionally, family members dressed the body and prepared it for viewing in their own home. Once embalming and the use of funeral directors became the norm, the grotesque aspects of death were easier to separate from family life. When a family member died and the funeral director was summoned, the
deceased was transported to the funeral parlor. The next time the body was viewed by the family, it often looked as good or better than before he or she died. The sleeplike appearance created by embalming hid the sunken cheeks and yellow skin of the decaying body.

Embalming reflects well the Victorian attitude towards appearance. Cosmetic use in both life and death increased concurrently, and fashion began to replace custom during this period (Aries, "Family" 18). No longer was what was right more important than how it seemed to the outside world. For example, children became showpieces for their families, and church attendance increased without any indication of increased faith (Blake 632).

At the gravesite, 19th century America saw distinct shifts in burial patterns. Beginning with the cemetery as a distinct entity, the 1800's saw three types of burial grounds. The graveyard or churchyard was the traditional place of burial in Colonial America. These were small burial grounds where congregations, families or communities buried their own and where the graves were cared for by the deceased's family and friends. Around 1830, the rural cemetery developed and remained the prevalent and desirable place to be buried until the beginning of the next century. The lawn or park cemetery then evolved and remained popular a relatively short while, until about the 1920's (Farrell 99-100).

Looking first at the names Americans gave their final resting place, we can see some important changes. The terms graveyard and churchyard are quite graphic. The former leaves no question in one's mind what fills its borders, and the latter alludes to the importance of religion in early 1800 American death. The use of cemetery instead of graveyard softens the association with death, as the etymology of cemetery is that of a dormitory or a place of sleep. No where (except in modern usage) does the word cemetery suggest a burial ground. This softening shows the desire of
mid-1800 Americans to make death less a thing of dread and more a natural phenomenon much like sleep (Farrell 111). The lawn or park cemetery used later in the century shows even a further separation from death and a closer association with a place that is for visiting, playing, and picnicking.

The rise of the rural cemetery is attributed to several factors. One was the concern of large numbers of bodies buried near cities posing sanitation risks. Another was the fall of the churchyard through the separation of religious congregations as the country expanded and urbanization increased (Farrell 197). Lastly, towns began to see rural cemeteries as a reflection of a town's prominence, even if a large cemetery was unnecessary because of a moderate population (193).

Rural cemeteries became a status symbol of sorts. They became a final resting place far from the evils of city life, much like the suburb was simultaneously becoming a haven away from the city. The cemetery and the suburb are characterized by winding roads and natural scenery [fig. 6] in opposition to the grid-patterned city streets and square architecture (110). Straight lines in the city streets and architecture are a product of man, while curves symbolize nature's products. The desire to keep the city separate from the home is seen in taking the burial grounds away from the city -- away from man's influences (107).

Inside the rural cemetery was a desire to offer consolation through the aesthetics of the landscapes. The cemetery owners hoped to offer a return to the past against the materialism, self-centered activism and idolism of trends that were occurring in Victorian America (108). Outside the cemetery was a mirrored image. The ideal home was viewed as a "perfect retreat" from the evils of the greedy, immoral, and opportunistic city. The perfect home was in the suburb where trees still flourished and the birds could still be heard. In fact, in the 1800's three themes
flourished in American writings on the family: retreat, conscious design, and perfectionism (Aries 8). These three themes are clearly represented in the rural cemetery. The new cemeteries were far from the downtown marketplace, they were consciously planned to produce a desired effect, and they had to be perfect.

In Victorian America a gap was developing between the home and the workplace. The workplace and those associated with it (mostly men) were viewed as threats to the peace and unity of the family (Aries 14). It was the woman's duty to ensure that her home was perfect and that it served as an adequate haven from the outside world (16). On her laid a great responsibility to nurture her child and civilize her husband. In her hands laid America's historical and spiritual destiny.

The perfection of womanhood... is the wife and mother, the center of the family, the magnet that draws man to the domestic altar that makes him a civilized being, a social Christian. The wife is truly the light of the home. [From Godey's Lady's Book 1860 (Green180)].

Entering deeper into the cemetery we find an even more personal look at American families. Though it was more common for the wealthy, even the middle class desired to be buried at least close to their loved ones if not on the same plot. Middle class nuclear families were commonly buried together in the rural cemetery (Warner 288) The family plot was sometimes outlined by a stone border [fig. 7] emphasizing the unity and the importance of the elementary family (Vernon 232). Perhaps it served as a mark of territory, since owning land had become a primary goal for 19th century Americans. The rural cemetery allowed families to reunite in death as the family was the central unit of civil society. The grave was depicted as a home with boundaries where deceased family and friends could rest -- it was "a haven in a heartless world" (Farrell 106-7).
Within the family plot, the mother and father almost always occupy the central position, with the patriarch normally being the central figure for distinction (example Jane Doe, wife of John Doe; or Jack Johnson, son of John Johnson) [fig. 8a]. Variations from this are few. The size of the stones reflect the status within the family. Often the patriarch's stone is the most dominate with his wife's second in size. This is expected. Yet almost as often the wife and the husband's stones are equal in size [fig. 8b]. This seemingly contradictory fact makes perfect sense when noting the importance of the wife in the Victorian home. Her power was in the home and his outside the home, yet they were equal in Victorian ideals. Even though her job (to save her family from moral decay) seems eternally more vital than his (to save his family from economic decay), the wife's stone was never larger. This reflects the equal yet unequal status of the wife in the American household.

The inscriptions on the Victorian patriarchs' stones reflected notions of status and wealth. The symbols of the battlefield, and workplace are reserved solely for males while females' inscriptions offer much deeper sentiment and speak more of love and affection than material accomplishments [fig. 8c]. This trend comes as no surprise, since nurturing, religious conviction and humanities were the woman's world.

One particular style of stone that is found almost exclusively in the Midwest is the tree stump marker [fig. 8d]. It offers an interesting look at American life. Bronner believes these markers reflect the mark made in civilization and in nature, as these stones were made from stone but imitated nature (109). They reflect the duality that was experienced as Americans moved westward and tamed the wilderness. It was man against the environment and the artificial against the natural (112). These log stones reflected the difficulty experienced with the rapid change that was occurring outside the gates of the cemetery (111).
when childhood was short and filled with rules and punishment, children's stones were merely small replicas of adult stone's (25).

The mid-1800's brought the separation of the city and the home as well as the separation of the cemetery from the urban areas. Rural cemeteries became the suburbs of the dead and even looked like the suburbs of the cities with made-to-order, natural surroundings and winding roads. To Victorian America, the city was corrupt, and the home and the family were America's salvation. The tall stones in the cemetery reflect an age of prominence with the family serving as the base. There is a definite family structure in the rural cemetery as family members are buried together, their status reflected in their positions in the family plot. Men were the providers, and women were the moral guidance with the children relishing an innocent and separate world.

Yet the marketplace was flourishing with specialization, and concerns of sanitation brought in a new professional. The funeral director took over when mobility took a person away from his roots. He was able to make death more appealing and profited from Henry Ward Beecher's preaching of death as a place of rest rather than judgement. No more must death be grotesque or feared; now heaven seemed an inhabitable place where most anyone can enter in. Even the dead seemed less dead. They seemed sleep-like, content, almost alive. Never would death be the same.
LIFE AND DEATH IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The early 1900's brought longer lives -- old age became something nearly everyone could expect to encounter. Deaths due to childbirth decreased continually as the century wore on, and childhood diseases were curbed by new vaccines and medical technology. Church membership was up, but the majority of members were women. Henry Ward Beecher's influence was still strong as heaven was preached about heavily, and hell was a place for only the truly evil.

Talk of the "youth revolt" was common beginning in the 1920's, and the generation gap would widen as each decade passed. Work outside the home became more accessible for women, and tolerance of divorce increased. Expectations of romantic bliss grew as the media portrayed the ideal, and society became more complex with each war and new technology. This combination helped produce an increase in divorce and untraditional family structures outside the cemetery (Blake 632-3).

The cemetery of the early 1900's had a new form. The lawn cemetery (originating in the Eastern United States around 1855 but not reaching the Midwest in heavy influence until around the turn of the century) is characterized by a hidden purpose. It was assumed in the beginning of the 20th century among cemetery professionals that the most beautiful of cemeteries resembled parks (Farrell 116-7). Their purpose of disposing of the dead became secondary -- something that should never be obvious [fig. 11].

Lawn cemetery managers wanted to enliven burial grounds, to emphasize life rather than death. There were no more willows (a traditional symbol of weeping), vertical monuments, or iron fences. Instead there were trees and benches meant to exhibit joy and gladness.
If the superintendents couldn't have useful or natural monuments (such as trees with a small plaque or a bench with a family name), then the low lying simple plaques were certainly preferred over the columns and obelisks from the previous era [fig. 12a, b]. In fact, a name and two dates were encouraged by the cemetery officials if they couldn't convince a family that only the family name was needed. The cemetery officials said that a strong character and accomplishments would serve as a sufficient monument to an individual (126-7).

Besides the change in monument designs, the lawn cemetery, or park cemetery as some called it, was characterized by a predetermined plan that meant "educated taste" should dictate the general plan rather than individual preference. A speaker at the 1894 convention of cemetery managers summed it up well:

The great object of modern cemetery planting is ... that the beautiful picture presented by a skilled display of trees, shrubs, and flowers should rob death of the many terrors (with) which the ignorance and superstition of older times surrounded it... It should be the aim to make pleasurable the visits of the living, by making beautiful the resting places of the dead, leading the mind from gloomy thoughts such as ancient cemeteries fostered. (131-2).

Artificial flowers and landscaping were encouraged as long as they looked natural. Nature in the new cemeteries was considered a "wayward child." A cemetery superintendent described nature as something which when left alone would be:

... barefooted and dirty, clothes torn and hair uncombed, and anything but ornamental. But take her as you find her, give her a Turkish bath, brush out her tangled locks and give her clean and whole clothing, and she will turn out a confessed beauty, and one you will have no cause to be ashamed of (128).

The lawn cemetery ensured that art predominated over nature. A speaker at a 1919 American Association of Cemetery Superintendents
convention noticed that "the value of the artistic as a psychological asset is becoming a real factor in commercial life. Home life, town and city life, as well as business life demand this as a positive essential to the progress of civilization" (131).

Outside the cemetery was a new notion of acceptance of the city. Though the old fears of corruption from the city and the marketplace had not disappeared altogether, the populations were beginning to accept the good that the city had to offer, and even farmers were forced to accept the marketplace. Art, efficiency, and organization came from the cities and extended into American death culture. Landscaping, grid-locked patterns of monuments, and cemetery associations became the norm in 20th century cemeteries [fig. 13].

What is important to remember is that death had become a strong industry by this time. There were professionals involved now. Like the doctor and lawyer, the funeral director and monument maker were not only providing a useful service, but now they were profiting. The concerns of making death more pleasurable and hidden by removing the stone or iron fences around family plots, for example, also happened to reduce the cost of upkeep of the plots substantially. Of course, ask a cemetery manager about this change and the concern of fences "breaking up a unified landscape and showing a selfish possessive individualism" fills the conversation (120).

This phenomenon in itself, reflects the outside world more than any of the other changes in the lawn cemetery. America was becoming a country more influenced by markets than theology, more by the media than by tradition. There was little mention of hell in the church, and death had become a time of rest from work rather than a time to face judgement. It's no surprise to learn that the cemetery industry's plans to remove death and its symbols from the cemetery came with little protest from
his services as his office became larger with the increase in services (209-211).

As funeral directors took over, the family became less involved. They became members to be consoled and cared for instead of active participants in the preparation for the ritual. Hospitals also contributed to the growth of the funeral home. Seldom were people dying at home anymore. Instead they were dying in the hospital and were sent directly to the funeral home to be prepared for viewing. As a result, death became far removed from the general population's frame of reference. Death became something that other people took care of -- coroners, doctors, and funeral directors, not husbands, mothers or cousins.

Embalming is an interesting aspect of the funeral directors work. Embalming, as mentioned before, was quite useful for preserving bodies for travel and had an image of cleanliness accompanying the mobility and the sanitation movement occurring in America. Interestingly, there is not one state even today that requires embalming by law, unless the body is to be shipped by common carrier. There is no medical evidence supporting the theories that embalming is a public health benefit. Yet embalming took root in the early 1900's and remains grounded solidly in our death culture (Vernon 249).

Embalming makes death less frightening and painful. Viewing an embalmed body at funerals is not repugnant or shameful as the subject being viewed is not completely dead in the viewer's mind. People are viewing something still present, maybe only sleeping (Aries, Western 101-2). Funeral directors discovered that death had become an industry for profit and realized the difficulties in selling something that was horrible or painful. Thus, funeral directors tried to blur life and death by using a convenient and efficient method. Some even advertised using
embalming as their main service. A Boston undertaker advertised around 1920:

For composing features -- $1
For giving the features a look of quiet resignation -- $2
For giving the features the appearance of Christian hope and contentment -- $5 (Green 82)

What all this tells us about the family, is centered around the shift of the importance of the family and the community. When funerals were arranged by the family and friends, America was a conglomeration of communities -- extended families who helped raise the children and plow the fields, friends who helped each other during crises. As people moved to the city, the community broke down, and families became smaller. Families became nuclear and were dependent on the advice and service provided by professionals. Neighbors were people of very different backgrounds -- different political faith, religion, heritage. The place in which they lived became their only common tie (Mead 30-1). The funeral director became America's extended family and took death away from our immediate perception. Simultaneously, he provided himself with a stable and profitable profession.

Looking back at the cemetery we see more symbols of the changing American family. The lawn cemetery moved closer to the city than its rural counterpart; it even took a name that suggests a park or a backyard. It was shaped by what the professionals thought was best for the industry and the people, not what tradition dictated. As the century wore on, other aspects came into play. The Depression and the World Wars took precedence in American lives. The cemetery reflects the troubled times through their small and handmade stones that appeared during the 1930's. America's obsession with material status is clear here as families often
Most children survived to grow up and marry, since childhood deaths had dramatically decreased since the late 1800's. Thus, they chose to be buried with their new family as their devotion shifted. Mobility kept extended family plots something for the rich, ethnic, or traditional (i.e. farmers). Infants and young children were buried in the modern cemetery in a new, separate burial area often labeled "Baby Land" [fig. 18]. This separate area unfortunately developed once again in response to the market (Dearborn). A small casket in a full size plot would be terribly inefficient from a market point of view (as cemeteries were always preplanned). Instead they developed areas that would normally not have been used because of space restrictions to bury the small caskets with small stones and left the full-size plots for full-size people with full-size prices.

At first glance, it is easy to concede that modern cemeteries were strictly businesses with no cultural implications as they once held. But important things were happening in American families that are reflected in the the separation of parents and children and the standardization and depersonalization of gravestones.

The fourtles and the fifties was a time of plentiful and well-paid jobs. Before, the family had been the burden bearer for other American institutions. Now we had social security, life insurance and public schools that allowed the family to shift their concerns to things such as human relations and nutrition (Mead 269-271). A new, young couple was now without their elders to guide them. Instead they had movies and magazines in which to compare themselves. A wife dared not ask another how her marriage compared to the other, lest hers seemed inadequate. There was no yardstick of tradition within her home, no voice from another generation, to tell her if her expectations were unreasonable (84).
It was a changing world. Scientists and experts took over. A parent's own childhood and experiences were not allowed to enter in, for there were no measles vaccinations or no vitamins for expectant mothers. Things were different. Comparisons were only valid when made between contemporaries (102).

Before it was a parent's goal to maintain a comfortable status throughout their child's youth and to provide an inheritance or a bit of ground to start the child off. During the fourties, a parent felt insufficient if they chose such a goal. Instead they were expected to make their children strong and well-prepared to prospect for themselves in this new world. They must do better. They expected their children to leave them physically, occupationally, and socially. They were always hoping to buy a nicer house, car or radio. Even during the Depression, their orientation was based on their lack of things -- their failures (39-40).

In addition, the American child heard that he did not measure up to other children ("he doesn't eat like they say he should," for example). His whole place in the world depended on his parents and on the size of their house, their car, the toys they bought him. His acceptance by his parents was conditional upon his achievements in relation to others and their idea of others (90).

Parents and children were in different, uncomparable worlds. The things children learned in school were often about things their parents knew little. A parent couldn't teach their child their trade when it was expected that a child do something else, something better. Where, in the Victorian era, a gulf, which had since lessened, developed between the city and the suburb, the 1940's and 50's saw the gulf between parents and their children grow larger (96-98).

The media and the marketplace became America's extended family. Everything came from this perspective. The American mother had, by
society's insistence, become a master of versatility. Her husband was out in the marketplace learning to specialize and to become a well-oiled part of the organized production and consumption machine. She was cooking, cleaning and sewing. She became a nutrition specialist, economist, psychologist, transportation manager, and a beauty queen. At the same time, the child was learning that if his family were to become different than the ideal -- say, if his parents divorced or passed on -- he would become handicapped and different than everyone else. This was the very thing he had been conditioned to avoid (91).

The modern cemetery with its standardized gravestones and physical separation of parents and children was conditioned for normalcy. Death in the 1900's became a market that, like American life, was influenced by our new extended families. The market, science, and even government guided us in ways that only our families had done before. We even developed insurance to ensure our proper burial in the event that we chose to remain alone. We became a market oriented society in life and in death. Morrel Heald sums this time period up well:

Mass production and the mass market are said to have created a mass taste. Wherever we turn, we are assured that individuality and creative endeavor are being stifled by standardization, commercialism, and apathy. If we are to believe those who fear the encroachments of an impersonal technology, our scientific and technical virtuosity have produced a society in which art is alienated, the individual diminished, intellect trivialized and distracted. No small indictment indeed! (Hague 110)
Time brings change, and modern American death rituals and artifacts are no exception. Not only do we have an extension of the mid-20th century's obsession with homogeneity and capitalism, but also we see a shift towards individuality and uniqueness. The duality of death rituals in recent years are paralleled in American life. A large portion of the population is made up of untraditional families either through birth or through choice, while another portion is clinging to traditions and advocating the return to "Leave it to Beaver" family values.

In America today, divorce is common, remarriage is expected, and untraditional family structures are no rarity. More dads are "moms" in the traditional sense of the word than ever before, while grandparents have often become the people that send checks for Christmas from Arizona or the people we must visit in the old people's home on holidays. These are great generalizations, granted. Yet, the family structure has changed and acceptance to variants are growing. We need only look at the fall television line-up from an October in the 1950's to an October in the 1990's to see the changes. Where "Father Knows Best" (which typifies the traditional nuclear family) was the norm in the former, "Murphy Brown" (typifying the most untraditional family) and similar role models dominate our primetime today.

The 1990's, in particular, have seen a resurgence of traditional family values (at least in principle). The media and politicians (the two groups that perhaps spend the most resources trying to influence the American public) have taken sides on the issues of proper nurturing and role playing.
Whatever the side or reason, both groups have brought the issue of families and their roles to the headlines.

As in life, death has its trends. Recent years have seen shorter and smaller funerals as people pull the shades further over their eyes to hide death (Vernon 261). As the funeral director adapts, he/she has made up for the financial losses of smaller funerals by adding amenities such as smoking lounges and family rooms along with other gimmicks to justify their prices (Time 68). Today they are scientists, public relation specialists, legal consultants, and psychological counselors (Vernon 251). What began in the 19th century as a specialized role has now become an all encompassing profession.

The clergy take a secondary role even more so today than ever before. For example, most clergy (of all faiths) prefer closed casket services, yet in 1963 90% of U.S. funerals were conducted with open caskets. Funeral directors defend the practice as "grief therapy" for the survivors. Those left behind are left with a pleasant memory of the deceased in their minds, they say. (Interestingly, a look at other countries where embalming is rare shows no difference in the recovery of those left behind.) (Time 68)

Moreover, Americans don't seem to mind the lack of religious involvement or the dominance of the funeral director. Fancy caskets and the high cost of funerals have not brought on a revolution (although in the early 1960's several books were written to expose the industry) or even a great movement towards alternatives like cremation (a remarkably cheaper alternative)4. Some believe we prefer it this way. In a September 20, 1963 *Time* article on the changing funeral industry, it was written: "Fortified with the deceased's insurance money and sadly out of touch with spiritual traditions of the past, many Americans search for comfort in the face of death by conspiring with the technicians and gimmick merchants to pretend it hasn't really happened" (71).
As most people are shielded from death through hospitals, nursing homes, and mortuaries, it is no wonder Americans depend so heavily on the industry to guide them. Guilt, unfortunately, is a feeling that accompanies grief when family members are left alone or with strangers to die, and the industry professionals know this. Displaying a person as a status symbol through fancy caskets and expensive headstones seems to lessen grief, or so funeral directors encourage (Vernon 238).

Despite the depressing trend of the market's influence on funerals, a contradiction is blossoming. A September 1992 obituary page in the Muncie Star contains an article about a "celebration" for a teen who died from injuries suffered in an automobile accident. A picture the boy had painted was displayed, and his favorite songs were sung. The teen's parents were adamant in distinguishing this service from a typical funeral (although a sermon was preached and the casket was open for viewing). This was a celebration of a short but well-lived life (Satterfield 6C). This "celebration" isn't so unusual anymore. Traces of individuality are beginning to permeate funerals everywhere. At my grandfather's funeral, for example, was read a poem he had written with applause from the congregation following. Strangely though, these changes towards lighter funerals do not affect the costs or services of the funeral director.

Where doubt of an afterlife is more frequent then spiritual assurance today, the need for a special remembrance in the memories of those left behind has become important. The personalized funeral may give us this. No longer is this ritual a medium for ensuring a proper passage of a soul into the afterlife. Now it is a medium to ensure the survivors have a proper picture of a friend or family member forever in their memory. Death has become a technical phenomenon rather than a spiritual one. We cannot even agree on when death occurs. We let professionals and politicians make the decisions on how we raise our children, when our
Inscriptions appropriate for use on a relative's memorial.

F-601  No man is indispensable but some are irreplaceable.
F-615  He lives with us in memory and will for evermore.
F-602  His friendship was an inspiration, his love a blessing.
F-616  To those who knew and loved him his memory will never grow old.
F-603  He was beloved in life.
F-617  He had a kindly word for each and died beloved by all.
F-604  He loved his fellowman.
F-618  My pal on earth, God's angel in heaven.
F-605  A loving father, tender and kind, what a beautiful memory you left behind.
F-619  Fond memories linger every day, remembrance keeps him near.
F-606  Resting with those he loved.
F-620  The world's loss was heaven's gain when God took you home.
F-607  His greatest joy was in making others happy.
F-621  A man greatly beloved.
F-608  His joy was in serving others.
F-622  To know him was to love him.
F-609  God took him home, it was his will, but in our hearts he liveth still.
F-623  We loved him a lot but God loved him more.
F-610  At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember him.
F-624  On him and on his high endeavor the light of praise shall shine forever.
F-611  O, Lord I put him in thy hands.
F-625  His life was gentle, and the elements so mix'd in him, that nature might stand up and say to all the world, "This was a man!"
F-612  His mission on earth fulfilled.
F-626  To live with him and sing in endless morn of light.
F-613  He loved people and laughter.
F-627  
F-614  His friends were his world.

WHEN ORDERING Words of Comfort, please order by number and also print the desired inscription clearly on the order form. The size of the letters used as Words of Comfort is determined by the available space and other inscription which is incorporated on the face of the memorial. If Words of Comfort other than those listed in this leaflet are desired, they should not exceed the length of those suggested here.
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☐ We prefer Mausoleum Information
☐ Yes, I am A Veteran

☐ Yes, I Already own at Elm Ridge and would like my file reviewed.

Name
Address
Phone (work)
Phone (home)

Expire Dec 31, 1992

Fig. 24a
years ago to 33% in recent years (1). Monument makers can honestly call their work an art again as demands from the public call for it. In fact, a Lawrenceburg, IN, monument shop calls itself a "Memorial Art Shop" that gives the allusion of a craft shop with its white picket fence surrounding the small white house.

The modern gravestones we find in our cemeteries today take on a new look. Hobbies and other interests are prevalent on these specialized stones [fig. 25a]. More important now is who you were in life, not who you were in relation to your relatives. Those stones that reflect still who their family members are have new distinguishing features. Men are distinguished now by who their wives are for the first time in cemetery history, and children sometimes have only their mother's name to follow. Maiden names have even began to appear where previously they were reserved for women whose birth name reflected a high social status [fig. 25b,c,d].

Men are remembered more affectionately than ever before. And the trend that began in the 1940's and 50's of placing marriage as a focal point has increased. Take the Robert's stone in figure 25e as an example. The stone takes the form of a heart (a relatively new symbol in monument art). On it we see common symbols of their faith. But the use of love as the dominant message symbolizes that their union is more important than everything else. In fact, it seems their earthly love even surpasses physical and spiritual death.

Perhaps this obsession with love and marriage is in part due to the increasing rarity of "until death do us part" unions. Those that do part only at death are proud and may want it to reflected in their monuments. Yet perhaps demographics play a role. Early in the century, women were quite likely to die young due to childbirth complications leaving the husbands to do the choosing of the monument. As females were thought to be nurturing
and romantic, it is no wonder males chose affectionate symbols to represent them. Today women are more likely to survive their husbands, thus they are often the designers of their husbands' gravestones. As women traditionally like the romantic aspects of life, they may more often choose romantic symbols for their husbands than if their husbands had selected their own.

This argument may not explain the trend fully. Not only do we see more affectionate remembrances of men on their gravestones today than ever before, but they are not always from their wives' or mothers' standpoint. We also see a greater emphasis on men's relationships with their children. As traditional roles have given way with more women entering the workforce, men are more often involved with the nurturing of their children today, and these changes are reflected on their gravestones [fig. 26a].

Even for children, changes have occurred. Not only have traditional gender roles been deemphasized as Tremel Hazzard's stone implicates [fig. 26b], but their monuments have gotten larger. As fatal childhood diseases are fewer today and families are smaller, the death of a child is increasingly tragic. John Dearborn of Wearly, unfortunately relates the size of the stone to the sense of grief the parents are stricken with. Parents who lose a young child today are often to purchasing a large stones out of grief with little or no means of paying for it. These are the greatest percentage of Wearly's debtors.

Another shift in the cemetery is the use of the mausoleum. Previously above-ground burial was reserved for the wealthy. Of late, anyone can delay their loved one's decay longer by purchasing a "room" in a "condominium of death." The growth of mausoleums is slow but seems to be steady as salespeople push this new resting place. As over-population concerns plague some who are skeptical about traditional burials,
mausoleums offer an alternative to cremation. Now we can be buried on top of strangers much like we live.

In summary, death rituals and artifacts reflect the duality in modern life. On one hand we are slaves to the market, and on the other, we are looking for ways to express our individuality. In the face of unpleasantness, many of us prefer having our choices laid out for us and having someone to execute our plans. Today death is something that occurs in institutions or on television; we let other people handle the dirty work. In life, it seems we also let others handle the things we would rather not handle or the things we aren't able to fit into our hectic lifestyles. We send our children to day-care to be nurtured, and we depend on the state to be sure our children are being taught the things they should. In death we trust that the professionals will ensure that our loved ones are given a dignified burial while we sit back and act as passive observers.

Yet, in a computerized and technical society, we are striving to become more than a number. As we often don't have the strong family ties to relate our existence to, we look for unique, personal characteristics to be remembered by. We have broken free of many ancient stereotypes of men as emotionless beings, and women as homebound. Families are smaller, and a loss of a young life is particularly hard to bear. Modern gravestones show these changes as technology has allowed for more detail and uniqueness. As we realize diversity is here to stay, the diversity will continue to shine through in our death rituals and artifacts.
CONCLUSION

The American family has been transformed through time into a small unit dependent on the expertise of professionals. The American family was once held together by a strong community that worked together in troubled times. But the family was affected by mobility and the expansion movement. Extended families were not mobile enough to suit the needs of a growing marketplace. What was left was a nuclear family who learned less from the experience of tradition and more from the advice they read about or saw on the television.

The death industry started out much like the family did. Death was a time for family and community members to pull together to ensure a righteous passage of the soul into the afterlife. Today skepticism is stronger than faith and the funeral reflects this. Where once the funeral was meant for the deceased now it is meant to console the survivors. Mourning customs are virtually extinct and lively, hopeful songs have replaced the unhappy hymns at funerals. Embalming made death bearable and gave rise to the new professional -- the funeral director.

The traditional family structure has changed and the cemetery reflects it well. Where once we had family burial plots surrounded by borders, now we have individual or double plots with children occupying plots far from their parents. In life, the family was once the center of society, but the generation gap grew wider leaving the gap between the city and the rural areas to fill in on its own. In short, the cemetery and death rituals have had distinct trends throughout the last 150 years. Their trends give us clues to the changing American family outside the cemetery gates.
ENDNOTES

1 A good example of ambiguity in gravemarkers was found in *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers*. A popular motif in early Americana monument art is a felled tree symbolizing death. Sometimes an arm extends from the clouds holding the axe that did the job. The image of God determining our fate is strong in this image. Yet, as the saying goes, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. On a stone in Hanover, MA., is an image of a felled tree lying beside a tree still standing. A face peers out from beneath the tree looking not particularly distressed. At first glance the traditional image is apparent. Yet through a lengthy epitaph, we find that the man was killed by the tree he was cutting when it fell on him. Without the epitaph (which are more uncommon that common) the meaning is distorted (Deetz xiii-xiv).

2 It is important to note that cemetery trends did not always follow the distinct time periods that researchers set up for them. In different parts of the country, trends reached their height at different times. Though the lawn cemetery is dated in Farrell's work as to have begun as early as 1855, in middle-America the lawn cemetery did not become significant until later in the century. It remained dominant through the first quarter of the 20th century, thus it is examined at depth in the next section.

3 It was also typical for families to move family members from one grave to another to reflect the social mobility of the group. After the influence of the lawn cemetery era plots were priced according to a combination of location and size rather than simply size as they were previously. Families who rose on the social ladder even moved deceased
family members to plots with nicer views (Farrell 123-4).

4 Cremation has been neglected in this study mostly because it never reached popularity in middle class America. It seems its advocates were mostly highly educated liberals. One reason it may have never caught on is its association with witches and criminals. Cremation seemed to be something for the evil (Farrell 111).

5 Caskets are styled for status and catalogs describe them as such. Take the “Monaco” description as an example: “... sea mist polish finish, interior richly lined in 600 Aqua Supreme Cheny velvet, magnificently quilted and shirred, with matching jumbo bolster and coverlet” (Vernon 250).
WORKS CITED


