

Synopsis

Mourning: Covers, Usage and Collateral Material

Purpose: This three frame display class exhibit is intended to give an overview of mourning covers that passed through postal systems. Mourning letters and cards were a noteworthy part of mail in the Victorian era. The exhibit's emphasis is on the Victorian era (1837-1901) but usage of mourning stationery continued into the twentieth century, not only in Europe but also in the Americas.

Background: Mourning stationery originated before the fabrication of the 'envelope'. Originally there was a self-folded sheet of paper with a black line perimeter, often sealed by a black wax seal. With the introduction of the 'envelope' stationers and printers created more elaborate designs, from black perimeter width and design, stamp frames, to embellishments on the obverse side of the cover - crests, monograms, floral motifs, wax seals. Enclosures in the envelopes might be handwritten letters of condolence, calling cards, printed funeral notices, prayer cards.

Plan: As shown..

Exhibit Plan

Title Page

Sect. 1: Basic Design
Embellishments

Sect. 2: Covers
Usage

Sect. 3: Notices
Enclosures

Sect.4: Collateral

Treatment: The exhibit traces mourning stationery from its most basic designs, comparing border widths and varieties and drawing attention to flap embellishments. Postal rates are noted. Stampless covers are succeeded by penny postage, unpaid and paid covers. Cancels of interest are a maltese cross and a Charing Cross 2 penny paid. "Court" corner stationery, although British in origin, was more often used in Canada and during the small Queen era. Included are collar designs, 'international' usages, consular mail, censored covers, business covers, German inflation cover and a mourning stamp on a mourning cover. The exhibit ends with collateral material including an 1803 invitation to join in a funeral procession, an 1832 account of funeral expenses, a Halifax printer's promotional material, oversized notices for church or town bulletin boards, a piece of Victorian mourning hair jewelry.

As an aside: **Difficulty of acquisition:** Basic mourning covers are not unusual, and therefore not difficult to find in the usual dealers' stock, **but**, mourning items are very popular amongst "Goths", and as one dealer told me, "Goths would die for this!", referring to an item that seemed to be overpriced. One never knows wherein one's competition lies.

References:

The History of the Postmarks of the British Isles 1840-1876, John G. Hendy
Collect British Postmarks, Dr. J. T. Whitney (1983)
British Postmarks R.C. Alcock and F.C. Holland (1960)
Stamps of North America. Fred Jarrett 1929
The Nova Scotia Post, J.J. MacDonald 1985
'Court' Mourning, *Mourning Notes* Vol. 1, No. 4, Oct. Dec. 2007, Elmer Cleary