

Victorian Hair Craft and Mementos

Article to accompany artifact 2023.702.001 Victorian Hair Memento

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The name of the era came of course from Queen Victoria (1819-1901) who was the second longest ruling monarch in British history after Queen Elizabeth. Many of the art and design elements of this time are just as popular today. But other characteristics are not so desirable. The people of this time were generally thought of as prudish and rigidly separated by gender, class and race. Women were considered the weaker sex and completely dependent on men. The role for many was to bear children and keep a household running. An approved activity for women was “fancy work” or the creation of elaborate handmade crafted items which were both practical and decorative.

The Victorians were also extremely sentimental and family oriented. Many families were large and wanted special tokens of their loved ones. The use of hair was not considered odd or morbid as death was far more prominent then with mortality rates of infants and people felled by illnesses that had no cures yet. Funerals often were held in the home. Hair art and other “body” mementos like plaster casts of hands and death masks went well with the Victorian style of decorating. It was very busy in nature with fabric or flocked wall paper, heavy velvet drapery and all manner of items both hung up and arranged on tables and cabinets. Another quality of hair is its resilience. Hair has been found on centuries old Egyptian mummies that still retain its color and texture.

In this era most women had very long hair. Men as well had plentiful facial hair. During the almost seven decades of the era styles changed a bit but always a woman’s hair was considered one of her greatest assets. Elaborate hair dressing was done by maids for the upper classes but every woman had some experience with styling hair. A rite of passage into adulthood was wearing the hair up as immature children wore hair down and loose. There are photos of the era showing incredible hair lengths but these are “art photos” As a general method of protecting this asset hats, or some kind of hair covering was used over the up do. Later in the century the ideal was to have the width of the hair match the waist for a perfect silhouette. A lady’s dressing table contained a “hair receiver” - An elaborate box used for collecting hair from brushes and combs. Ends WERE trimmed as they tended to be dry.

Woven hair was made into accessories that were both sentimental and fashionable with the heyday in the 1860s during the Civil War. Magazines gave patterns to make various designs and a popular book published in 1867 was “[The Art of Hair Work](#)” by Mark Campbell a New York and Chicago wig maker and hair broker. There was a huge demand to assemble the many patterns he had collected over the years as well as the exact directions for different patterns in hair weaving. An actual table top loom and special chair gave best results.

Hair Ornaments As Family Remembrance

Hair was collected to be saved as either a family tree piece or would be used after the persons death in a “Memento Mori” Because of the high regard that hair was held in it was one of the most beloved memorials that could be created. This piece is quite special as we know the contributors of the many types of hair seen in it. That is often not the case.

We don't know exactly when the McClelland family started making these designs but it includes Dr Nicholas Miles McClelland, his wife Anna and their ten children. A close guess is 1855. It then was added to and passed on finally being completely assembled and framed around 1912.

The Patriarch Dr. Nicholas Miles McClelland was a surgeon, husband, father and active in local politics. In 1856 he sought to become warden of the Missouri state penitentiary. He received three letters of recommendation however he did not obtain the position. During the Civil War he was kidnapped by the Confederates and forced to operate on Southern soldiers as they did not have enough doctors. This family lived in Clay County Missouri. Most early settlers of the state travelled there up the Missouri and Mississippi rivers from the South and were sympathetic to the Confederate cause. Missouri was admitted to the Union in 1821 as a slavery state. In 1860 the Governor wanted Missouri to secede from the Union. By 1860 however Missouri had been supplemented with Irish German and like the McClelland's Scottish families who had no use for slavery. Missouri ended up being somewhat “Neutral”

After the war Dr McClelland became a leader of Clay County's Democratic Party representing Fishing River Township. Despite the fact that the Democrats of that time were sympathetic to the Confederacy's ideals he advocated for education for black families to lift them out of poverty and made it possible for local black men to vote for the first time. Later in 1882 he became Councilman of the third ward.

Timeline Of Hair Contained

Dr. Nicholas Miles McClellan 3/30/1814- 1/26/1883

Anna Elizabeth McCallum 3/20/1834-10/3/1914

Children: Margaret McClelland Luck Hershey 3/2/1855-

Her siblings

Roberta Ann McClelland 1858-1883

Sallie E McClelland 1858-1884

Cephas Hill McClelland 1859-1895

Louella B McClelland 1862-1930

Susanna McClelland 1864-1926

Arthur W McClelland 1866-1931

Robert Lee McClelland 1869-1947

Reese McClelland 1873-1944

Nannie McClelland Leopold 1876-

Oldest child Margaret's McClelland Luck's daughter

Lottie Luck McGregor 3/27/1880 – 11/24/1928

Her husband James Burns McGregor 1867-1931

Their daughter Margurite McGregor Hershey 1903-1987 Last person to contribute hair in 1913

Lottie and James had three other children:

Harry John McGregor 1903-1963

Luck Lee McGregor 1915-2004

Virginia Elizabeth McGregor Chaney 1911-

Her daughter is Jeannie Chaney George

a lifelong Cupertino Resident and the donor of the piece