AN EXAMINATION OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN POST-MORTEM PHOTOGRAPHY

A Thesis

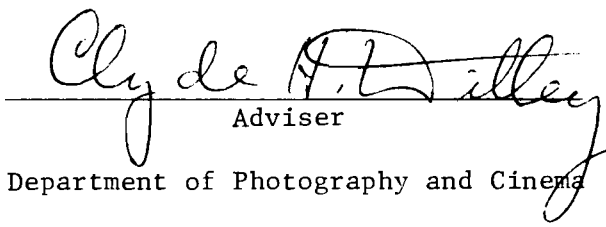
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Arts

by

Kent Norman Bowser, B.A., B.S.

The Ohio State University
1983

Approved by



Adviser

Department of Photography and Cinema

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Walter Johnson, Curator of Photography at The Ohio State University for his generosity in allowing me access to his personal collection of post-mortems and for the numerous discussions we had. I would like to acknowledge the extensive aid of my advisor Professor Clyde Dilley in the completion of this work. His many valuable suggestions as well as those of the other members of my committee, Professor Barbara Groseclose and Professor Jonathan Green, have been incorporated in this work, and I am very grateful for all their efforts. Of the other individuals who also aided me in the course of this study, I especially want to acknowledge the access given me by Professor Charles Swedlund at Southern Illinois University to his collection of nineteenth-century post-mortem photographs.

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INTRODUCTION

Post-mortem photography, the practice of making photographs of deceased individuals, was a common phenomenon in nineteenth-century America. Although many examples of these post-mortem photographs still survive, the practice is little acknowledged beyond the fact that it existed; accordingly, there has been very little research done on this body of photographs. These powerful images, macabre perhaps to present-day sensibility, have not been analyzed to any extent by sociologists and are usually mentioned only briefly by historians of photography.

Philippe Ariès' The Hour of Our Death, a recent comprehensive study of death in the Western world since medieval times, exemplifies the neglect accorded post-mortems as a source of primary material.[1] Ariès uses many sources —— literary, liturgical, testamentary, epigraphic and iconographic —— to describe practices and changes in attitudes towards death. Nowhere, however, does he acknowledge the existence, let alone the value of the post-mortem photograph for this study. Perhaps he was unaware of these images, but they reveal attitudes towards death, dating from the beginning of photography in 1839 to the present. Ariès is typical of those writing about death who either are unaware of this photographic phenomenon or choose to ignore it; however these visual documents constitute

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[1] Philippe Ariès, The Hour of Our Death, trans. Helen Weaver, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981). The footnotes in this volume give a good listing of sources on the study of death.

primary evidence which documents nineteenth-century society's changing attitudes towards death.

While historians of photography at least acknowledge the existence of the post-mortem photographic tradition, their treatment of the practice is nearly always cursory. Such brief treatments not only shortchange a very rich tradition, but also have led to some inaccuracies and oversimplifications in regard to the post-mortem practice. Robert Taft's Photography and the American Scene, one of the first histories of photography to mention post-mortem photographs, devoted barely a paragraph to photography of the dead.[2] Taft stated that the death photographs were, "too gruesome to contemplate with pleasure. Fortunately the practice disappeared with the aging of the art."[3] Obviously, these images were not treated in any thorough fashion because they offended the sensibilities of the writers. Even the most recent (1982) edition of Beaumont Newhall's The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present contains only two sentences on post-mortem photography.[4] Floyd and Marion Rinhart, authorities on the early history of photography, have written the most extensive accounts to appear on post-mortem photography, but they have confined their research to the daguerrian

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[2]Robert Taft, Photography and the American Scene (New York: MacMillan Company, 1938, reprinted, New York: Dover Publications, 1964).

[3]Ibid., p. 196.

[4]Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present, 5th ed. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), p. 32.

era.[5] They contend that the custom of memorial photography fell into disuse sometime between 1855 and 1860,[6] a fact that is contradicted by a large number of extant post-mortem images that were made after this time. Thus, while the Rinharts directed attention to the practice, they have created an oversimplified view which does not do justice to the importance of post-mortem photography.

My interest was first sparked in 1973 by contact with the Walter Johnson Collection of post-mortem photographs. Mr. Johnson, curator of photography at The Ohio State University in Columbus, has been collecting photographs concerned with death for over a decade and is still actively adding to his personal collection, which now contains approximately eight hundred works. His original intention was to collect only nineteenth-century images, but eventually his interest expanded to works of this century as well. After first seeing Mr. Johnson's collection, I read Michael Lesy's Wisconsin Death Trip, which contains photographs and bits of information from newspapers of nineteenth-century Wisconsin. The selection of photographs contained several post-mortems and explained their occurrence and significance in terms of the survivor's guilt and public ritual.[7] In attempting to understand this phenomenon further, I began to

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[5]Among their writings on daguerrian post-mortems are: "Rediscovery: An American Way of Death," Art in America, no. 5 (1967), pp. 78-81 and The American Daguerreotype (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1981), pp. 298-304.

[6]Ibid. "Rediscovery: An American Way of Death," Art in America, no. 5 (1967), p. 81.

[7]Michael Lesy, Wisconsin Death Trip (New York: Random House, 1973).

think seriously about death imagery.[8] My focus eventually changed from an emphasis on individual images to an interest in how the tradition evolved from a sub-genre of portraiture to a documentation of funeral ceremonies and customs. This study is based primarily on the Johnson Collection, which represents the range of post-mortem photography made in America during the nineteenth century.

Access to extant post-mortem photographs is difficult in photographic archives such as at the International Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House or the Library of Congress because there is no heading which distinguishes the post-mortem material from other photographs.[9] This material is usually found in any sizable collection of photographs from the nineteenth century, but direct access is possible only in the two sizable collections of the post-mortem photographs known to the author: beside the Johnson Collection, Prof. Charles Swedlund's collection in Carbondale, Illinois, is the other large group of post-mortem photographs. The Swedlund Collection confirms that the Johnson Collection is representative of the types of post-mortem photographs made throughout the nineteenth century in America. Grant Rohmer, curator of conservation at the International Museum of Photography, also considers the Johnson Collection representative of the post-mortem tradition,

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[8] Kent Bowser, "Some Aspects of Nineteenth Century American Post-Mortem Photography," The New Daguerrian Journal, no. 4 (1974), pp. 4-8.

[9] I interviewed Paul Vanderbilt from the Wisconsin State Historical Archives about access to the post-mortem photographs in this large collection and was informed that the post-mortems were not indexed. Consequently, one would have to go through the Archives in their entirety to find the post-mortem photographs.

as well as being the most comprehensive collection thus far assembled.

The Johnson Collection is not yet catalogued and the images are rarely identified or dated. The process by which they were made is the best indicator of approximate date, while other methods, such as dress styles, can also be useful for dating the works. Numerous photographic processes developed in the nineteenth century passed in and out of popularity, and thus use, as progressively cheaper and easier methods were invented. The increasing sensitivity of the photographic materials and commercial preparation of plates, papers and commercial photofinishing meant that as the century progressed it became easier to make a photograph. The support materials that the light-sensitive emulsions of the photographic processes rested on became less costly, making the finished photographs cheaper. Although expensive, because they required silver-plated copper sheets for support, daguerreotypes[10] were popular from 1839 until the Civil War. Ambrotypes,[11] using glass for supporting the emulsion, were

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[10]The daguerreotype was prepared by sensitizing a silver plate with iodine and exposing it in the camera; then in the dark it was developed soon after exposure with mercury fumes and fixed subsequently with a solution of sodium thiosulfate. After these steps were completed in the dark, the daguerreotype was rinsed, toned, dried and then sealed in a hinged case. For a good discussion of the daguerreotype process see: Beaumont Newhall, The Daguerreotype in America, 3rd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1976), pp. 121-29.

[11]The ambrotype process used sensitized silver salts in collodion on glass plates which were exposed in a camera, developed, fixed and washed. The resulting negative was then backed by a dark surface such as black paper, velvet or dark red glass to produce a positive image. For a more complete description of the process see: Thomas Febdvebel, The Ambrotype Old and New (Rochester, N.Y.: Rochester Institute of Technology, 1980), pp. 9-24.

popular from 1854 until about 1866; tintypes,[12] which were popular from 1856 until 1865, used sheets of iron as emulsion supports. Later, popular processes used paper as the support: cabinet cards were made from 1866 until about 1910, and paper prints[13] were popular from the 1870s onward. The Johnson Collection contains many examples of these different processes, and thus it represents the full development of the post-mortem tradition through various photographic processes used in the nineteenth century.

This study is divided into sections which deal separately with post-mortem images produced by different processes. This approach facilitates a determination of the various treatments which distinguished each process in the depiction of death. This approach also makes apparent the changes that occurred in post-mortem imagery, and the treatment of that imagery throughout the century. This study includes an examination of factors affecting attitudes towards death and death rituals which help explain the changes that occurred in post-mortem photography.

This examination will reveal that post-mortem photography was viable until the end of the nineteenth century and actually continued

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[12] Another variation of the collodion process was the tintype. Tintype images utilized a sheet of iron for the image support, instead of glass as in the ambrotype. Otherwise the process is basically the same one used in making the ambrotype.

[13] Paper prints were first made on albumen paper made from egg whites. The light-sensitive silver salts were suspended in the albumen on a paper base. The paper after being exposed to light in conjunction with a negative was developed, fixed, washed and dried. A later method (1879) of suspending the silver salts used a gelatin emulsion with the paper base. This is the process used to the present.

into the twentieth century. Careful analysis of this imagery reveals how it relates to other photographic traditions of the nineteenth century and, more important, how it differs. Also, this examination reveals a distinct evolution in the imagery which can be useful for discerning changes in the attitudes towards death in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, this study reveals how the photographic tradition is part of a larger visual tradition of death imagery in the nineteenth century; it also reveals attributes unique to the photographic post-mortem image.

THE ERA OF CASED PHOTOGRAPHS

The tradition of post-mortem photography began soon after the introduction of photography to America during the era of cased images. The very existence of a post-mortem tradition in early photographic practice is indicative of why authors who write on the history of death, like Ariès, conclude that nineteenth-century Americans were preoccupied with death.[14] The cased post-mortem photograph's emphasis on a portrait treatment of the deceased can be linked to the romanticization and preoccupation with death which existed in the early nineteenth century in America. An examination of the differences between contemporary children who are taught essentially little about death, except not to think about it, and nineteenth-century children, who were confronted with death often in fact[15] and in children's literature, reveals how great this preoccupation with death was in the nineteenth century.[16] David E. Stannard, a sociologist states that children in the nineteenth century were taught that "death was a glorious removal to a better world, a reunion with departed and soon-to-be-departed loved ones."[17]

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[14] Ariès, pp. 446-47.

[15] Death was proportionately more common then because of unhygienic living conditions, including improper sewage disposal; many diseases —— such as cholera, diptheria, measles, small pox and typhoid —— were fatal.

[16] David E. Stannard, The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 188.

[17] Ibid., pp. 188-89.

Even schoolbook reading exercises frequently contained verses that glorified death, thus making it palatable. An example of this is an excerpt from a poem entitled "What is Death?":

> How beautiful will brother be
> When God shall give him wings,
> Above this dying world to flee,
> And live with heavenly things.[18]

Against this backdrop of sentimentality and romanticism about death, photography, with the capability of providing lasting, multiple images of loved ones, arrived. Prior to photography's invention only the wealthy could afford posthumous portrait paintings; the post-mortem daguerreotype must have proved a welcome arrival to those who could not afford a painting. The tradition of posthumous painting is not yet completely understood, but such works were not uncommon, especially in the early part of the nineteenth century.[19] These paintings, often life-sized, usually depicted children or young adults, shown as if they were still alive. Their dead state was usually alluded to only by disguised symbols. Thus this posthumous portrait tradition and the newly emerging practice of portrait photography must have served as direct models for the post-mortem photographic tradition, a treatment which nicely coalesced with the early nineteenth-century romantic view of death.

Portrait painting was not the only visual tradition linked with

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[18] Ibid., p. 175. This is from McGuffey's Fourth Eclectic Reader.

[19] For an examination of posthumous mourning portraiture see: Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray-Armstrong, eds., A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America (Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), pp. 70-89.

death in early nineteenth-century America as the visual tradition of death imagery was quite varied. This nineteenth-century visual tradition resulted from society's preoccupation with death; the extensive range and variety of this imagery reflects the depth and duration of the nineteenth-century's focus on death. Preoccupation with death also manifested itself with the rise of organized cemeteries; the development of bodies of literature, such as consolation literature and the elegy; and the emergence of funeral and mourning etiquette as complex and important ritual.

The visual tradition which parallels this preoccupation with death seems to have begun in the late eighteenth century with memorial embroideries.[20] These embroideries consist of stitched words that commemorate the life of the deceased. The first few decades of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of the painted and embroidered mourning picture on silk, usually depicting the churchyard or family plot and mourners.[21] These were popular until the 1830s when printed memorials began to appear.[22] These printed memorials, usually lithographs, were similar to the embroidered or painted memorials because they also depicted graveyard scenes with mourners. Blank spaces were provided to be filled in by the mourner with data about the deceased. Most of these date from the 1830s and 1840s, but some

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[20] Ibid., p. 67

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

were produced later in the century.[23]

The posthumous mourning portraits, paintings of the deceased portrayed as though they were alive, were popular between 1830 and 1860, although the tradition continued throughout the rest of the century.[24] Thus, photographic images of the dead were easily accepted and perhaps even eagerly sought as familiarity with imagery of the dead was part of this period's sensibility.

DAGUERREOTYPES

The age of photography came to America when daguerreotypes were first produced here in 1839, a process which dominated the first twenty years of American photography. By 1840 portraiture became quite feasible for the daguerrian photographer as chemical and optical improvements reduced exposure times to a few seconds or less.[25] Most daguerreotypes were portraits, and by the mid-1840s many commercial portrait daguerreotype studios existed and were commercially successful.[26] Contributing to the early commercial success of photography, especially that of portrait photography,

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 85.

[25] Newhall, p. 32.

[26] For a good discussion and description of portrait studios see: Helmut Gernsheim and Alison Gernsheim, The History of Photography from the Camera Obscura to the Modern Era (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1969).

were the growth of the middle class, the general rise in the standard of living and the diffusion of families to more geographically distant areas.

The greater mobility of American society throughout the nineteenth century spurred the desire for portrait photographs. Ariès notes that the westward migration of the American population during this period required new methods of long-distance communication.[27] While Ariès points out the shift from oral to written communication which resulted from these movements, the mobility of people could also help to explain the desire for photographic records of the family. The cased photographs were smaller than most portrait paintings and could be easily sent through the mail or carried by moving populations. The fact that a majority of the early post-mortem images are of children and babies may indicate that the distance between families, which may have prevented some relatives from ever seeing children before they died, spurred the desire to have a record made for their relatives.

The post-mortem photograph, a sub-genre of portraiture, developed at this time. To some degree it paralleled the success of the daguerreotype photograph and was likewise dependent upon the abilities and services of a professional photographer because the daguerreotype process is a fairly complex one, necessitating great care in order to obtain good results. Each daguerreotype is unique: there is no negative to make multiple prints. The complex process

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[27] Ariès, p. 447.

also demanded competent technique to estimate the long exposures necessary to make the image. Due to the technical difficulties and the cost of the materials, daguerreotypes were expensive, and post-mortem daguerreotypes could cost more than ten times the amount for a regular daguerreotype because of greater adversities encumbering post-mortem work.[28] That photographers could obtain such sums is an indication of the value of post-mortem photographs to the survivors.

The professional daguerrian photographer's equipment was usually set up in a studio designed so that a great deal of light could illuminate the subject because the response of the light-sensitive material was slow. Therefore skylights or banks of artificial lights were needed. When the professional photographer went into homes in order to make post-mortem images, he had to take his camera, tripod and processing equipment with him. Because of the difficulties in working under unfamiliar conditions, especially the uncertainties of illumination and the trouble of transporting the equipment, the daguerreotype photographer was able to charge large prices for post-mortem images.[29] Another cost factor the daguerreotypist considered in his fee was the fact that he had to work when summoned at short notice, leaving his studio and any other work with which he may have been engaged. Although the working conditions were difficult, many

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[28]The general cost of a daguerreotype was from one to five dollars for an average size (sixth-plate) image at the time. Floyd Rinhart and Marion Rinhart, "Rediscovery: An American Way of Death," Art in America, no. 5 (1967), p. 80.

[29]Ibid. According to the Rinharts the average cost of a post-mortem daguerreotype was $75.00, a considerable sum for the time.

extant post-mortem daguerreotypes were well-handled technically.

Perhaps the most striking quality about many of the daguerreotype portraits, whether of the living or of the dead, is the intensity of the images. This intensity was in part produced by the strong sense of realism achieved with the process; the daguerreotype was able to record in a very exact fashion all visual elements and details. Further underscoring this effect is the fact that the daguerreotype received a rather private viewing. The polished mirror surface of the image presented reflections, and, depending upon the angle of viewing, both a negative and positive image. The small size of the daguerreotype and the fact that it was encased also contributed to the sense of intimacy. The most common size was the one-sixth plate, only 2 3/4" x 3 1/4".[30] These factors necessitated that the daguerreotype be held at close range for viewing.

These factors made the viewer's role an active rather than a passive one, as one had to open the case and, to effectively see the image, hold the daguerreotype closely. Through this activity a direct and intimate connection was made between viewer and image, creating an especially poignant experience when the daguerreotype was a post-mortem image. Such intimacy in presentation of the image continued as long as small photographs were presented in cases.

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[30] Plate Sizes:

Whole Plate	6 1/2" x 8 1/2"
Half Plate	4 1/4" x 5 1/2"
Quarter Plate	3 1/4" x 4 1/4"
Sixth Plate	2 3/4" x 3 1/4"
Ninth Plate	2" x 2 1/2"
Sixteenth Plate	1 3/8" x 1 5/8"

Most daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes are sixth plates.

The treatment of the post-mortem image by the daguerrian photographer shares some characteristics with daguerrian portraits of live subjects, yet at the same time there are also differences. Figure 1 is an example of a typical daguerreotype portrait made around 1850. Both photographer and subject are anonymous. Characteristic of the daguerrian portrait of the living, the subject is obviously dressed for the occasion, and the solid composition results from the central placement of the figure in the composition, and the frontal vantage point of the camera. The emphasis is on the subject as the frontal, formal treatment severs the subject from the relatively bland background. This treatment resulted in works that were not overly dramatic in their compositions or use of space. The smiling expression and gentle manner of the subject in this work are the only elements that make this work unusual as a daguerreotype portrait, since most are sober, austere renderings of people due to the long exposures required by the daguerreotype process.

The usual treatment for the post-mortem daguerreotype, on the other hand, was the placement of the figure so that it resembled a sleeping pose, linking death with sleep in order to make it more palatable. Hence, figures often would be placed in beds with pillows and comforters which enhanced the sense of rest or sleep. Figures 2, 3 and 4 are all examples of this treatment and typify post-mortem daguerreotypes made regardless of the deceased's age. These images exist eerily between this world and another. While the deceased are shown as if they are merely resting or sleeping, some hold flowers in their hands, clearly not a natural activity of the sleeping.

Interestingly, sleeping portraits of the living were also made by daguerrian photographers. Small children had their portraits taken when they were asleep in order to minimize motion.

Port-mortems are distinguished from live portraits by their formal air of presentation, and attributes such as flowers placed in the hands of the deceased. Black mats were sometimes placed around post-mortem images. Although these images of sleep are rare, they do establish another link between the treatment of living and dead subjects by the daguerrian photographer: death was portrayed as a permanent, but peacefully deep, sleep as can be seen by its similar visual effect and iconographic meaning in the photographs of live and dead subjects.

Paralleling the development of the post-mortem photograph was the tradition of the posthumous mourning portrait which further underscores the portrait aspect of the post-mortem photograph. Both the painting and photographic treatments of the dead produced portraits, but the painting tradition seemed to favor full-length, life-sized canvases while the photographs were limited by the medium and were generally only 2 3/4" x 3 1/4". The other major difference between painting and photography was that painting presented the deceased subject as being alive in a natural environment whereas photography could not fabricate this fiction: it could only present the deceased subject as being dead. Often, though, photographs presented the dead in a sleeping pose, a gentle portrayal of death which softened or masked its impact. Crosses or bouquets painted into the hands of the deceased on photographs indicated death also.

An early example of posthumous mourning portraiture (Figure 5) is Ralph E.W. Earle's painting, Sarah Louise Spense, c. 1833, in the collection of Craig and Tarlton, Inc., Raleigh, North Carolina. A letter attached to the back of the painting indicates that the subject was deceased when the work was painted.[31] Earle took measurements from the corpse, worked with a lock of Sarah Louise Spense's hair, used an earlier portrait of the child and had her half-sister pose because of the half-sister's similar eyes in order to achieve an exact likeness which would be almost life-size when finished.[32] As Phoebe Lloyd, in writing on posthumous mourning portraiture points out, the subject of the painting addresses the viewer's space by her gaze and the possibility of her stepping into the viewer's space, enhanced by the aspect of being life-size, while only the knowledge of the symbol of a downturned rose alerts the viewer to the true state of the painting's subject.[33] It is this symbol, the downward held or drooping rose, which is the only identifiable symbol of death in this early example of posthumous mourning portraiture.

A later example showing the continuation of the posthumous mourning portrait (Figure 6) is Suzanne Walter's Memorial to Nicholas Catlin, 1852, in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. This image differs from Earle's in that the viewer does not need to read just a disguised symbol of a downturned flower

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[31] Pike and Armstrong, p. 87.

[32] Ibid., p. 73.

[33] Ibid.

in order to know that Nicholas is dead. This fact is inscribed on the memorial to the right of the boy. Lloyd lists other symbols in the painting which indicate the boy's death: Nicholas pulling a rose off a plant to indicate that he is being cut off from the family's growth; a boat sailing on the horizon symbolizing, as in Thomas Cole's The Voyage of Life, the passage from life to death, the weeping willow, a symbol of death found on tombstones of the period; all in addition to the obvious symbol, the tombstone memorial.[34] Lloyd labels Walters as a folk artist, and the stiff, awkward style of the painting is similar in treatment to early mourning pictures. Interestingly, the recurring use of the rose as a symbol and the boat sailing on the horizon underscore the written evidence found on the tomb. While Walters' use of symbolism is not inventive in combining the disguised with the obvious, it demonstrates a continued tradition of the use of specific symbols indicating death. Lloyd is the only scholar who has written at length on posthumous mourning portraiture and few examples of the painting tradition have been identified so it is difficult to make any sweeping conclusions.

The obvious symbols found in post-mortem photographs bear some resemblance to the disguised symbols in posthumous mourning portrait paintings, but the symbolism in post-mortem photographs was never developed to any extent or used often because the deceased subject was recognizably dead. In the less realistic medium of painting such symbols served a similar function in identifying the subject as

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[34]Ibid., p. 75.

dead. While the symbols in painting were crucial, they were usually disguised as hidden clues to the true state of a subject in a post-humous mourning portrait. Thus in photographs we are alerted to the condition of the subject by the unnatural presence of the symbol, but in paintings we are alerted to the condition of the subject by the hidden meaning of the symbol whose presence in a portrait may not be unusual.

The intent of the post-mortem daguerreotype seems most commonly to be a subtle depiction of death which is achieved largely through a portrait-like approach, but this is not the only treatment found in daguerreotypes. While the viewpoint of the camera usually approximates a natural vantage point for viewing the subject, the camerawork and the immobile nature of the subject sometimes created much more dramatic compositions than were usually realized in portraits of live subjects, or, at the very least, convey a slightly greater sense of dynamism and compositional cohesiveness. Though it seems odd to think about images of the dead as being more dynamic presentations than images of the living, this clearly appears to be the case for a number of these post-mortems. A good example of this is Figure 7, which is a post-mortem image of a small child. This image was made with the camera tilted, presenting the figure of the child on a slanted ground. The graphic lines of the crib rungs emphasize a sense of containment of the figure and at the same time help to flatten the space. The dramatic tilt of the figure created by the camera's viewpoint causes a bold and startling effect as the figure seems to float on a compressed ground. This effect contrasts sharply

with that found in the standard daguerreotype portrait with its frontal, solid —— even stolid —— presentation of the subject.

More subtle but still somewhat dramatic is the depiction found of the deceased as resting: they are covered with blankets or quilts and are often shot at oblique angles, making them a more dynamic element of the composition than is usually true for daguerreotypes of live subjects. Figures 2 and 4 are good examples of this subtle dynamism which is often present in the reposing treatment of the post-mortem daguerreotype. While each is certainly a gentle, portrait-like treatment of the deceased subject, the coverlets and the high angle of the camera tend to abstract the bodies and merge them into the surrounding space of each work.

Another significant aspect found in post-mortem daguerreotypes is the depiction of mourners. As part of his services, the daguerrian photographer would photograph the mourners as well as the deceased. In addition to being photographed as a group sometimes the mourners were portrayed with the deceased. Most often these are parents photographed with their deceased children; Figures 8 and 9 are two examples of this mode. Again, like the sleeping or resting treatments of deceased subjects, these combined "mourners and deceased" images relate to treatments used for live subjects which depict parents with children.

Figure 8, a portrait of a mother and child, is a good example of the treatment found in live group portraits of the family. The child and mother, typically placed in the center, make the composition a solid, stable one. Figure 9 exemplifies a "mourners and deceased"

portrait which is quite similar in treatment to that found for live subjects. The parents are placed in the center of the frame, sitting rigidly and facing forward. While the woman holds the dead child as one would naturally hold a live baby, it is too stiff to be alive —— the only unsettling element in this otherwise calm presentation. The lack of emotion in the parents underlies the very formality of the work and its somber note. The daguerreotype process, due to the length of exposures required, usually resulted in expressionless portraits. Exposures could run over ten seconds, depending on the light, which necessitated poses that could be held for appreciable lengths of time; accordingly most daguerreotype subjects do not show emotion.

In contrast to the treatment in Figure 9 is that found in Figure 8, a rare "mourners and deceased" image that captures a good deal of parental emotion. Here the figures are not placed in a formal pose, staring straight into the camera; rather, they form a triangular composition with the dead child placed before them. Their heads are tilted towards the child. Even more unusual than this less formal pose is the evident sense of mourning and grief communicated by these bowed heads and the woman's gesture in holding a handkerchief to her face. Curiously, such direct expressions of grief are often lacking in these images of mourners combined with the deceased, although the period itself was a notably sentimental one.[35] Probably

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[35] See: Ann Douglas, "Heaven Our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880," Death in America, David E. Stannard, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 1975), pp. 49-68.

this lack of emotion was due to the length of posing time necessary for an adequate exposure. Obviously, this makes the woman's gesture in Figure 8 a conscious and poignant choice on her part. (Having your portrait taken was a very formal occasion; this was before candid portraits were possible.)

The lack of information about the various daguerrian photographers and the paucity of dated images make it difficult to trace the stylistic evolution of daguerrian portraiture of both live and deceased subjects. While we often have the names of different photographers, relatively few images can be attributed to specific individuals.[36] This is indeed unfortunate because it would be interesting to compare an individual photographer's treatment of live subjects with his post-mortem work. The present anonymity of authorship of most post-mortems also prevents a complete understanding of the exact procedures involved in the sessions when the post-mortems were made. Certainly photographers had several procedures for how many and what kind of post-mortem images they would make, depending upon cost factors and the desires of their clients. Since most collected post-mortems have been found as unique images of individuals, little evidence remains to indicate how many views may have been made of the same subject. The author has seen only two examples of differing views of the same deceased person. Taking more than one view of the body was probably not

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[36] For a list of known American daguerreotypists see: Floyd Rinhart and Marion Rinhart, The American Daguerreotype (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1981), pp. 380-417.

rare, although few multiple images exist as the different views were probably dispersed. Yet, certainly, a greater knowledge of such matters would help define the range of variations that occurred in post-mortem daguerreotypes.

Lacking specific dates and authorship of specific works, some scholars have looked elsewhere for evidence useful for dating daguerreotype images. Some have attempted to date the daguerreotype case and to use this as a tool for determining the dates of the images themselves.[37] While initially this seems a fine idea, the dating of the cases also presents difficulties. The only dates that can be concretely fixed are the production dates for the cases and the mattings, not the dates when they were actually used to encase a daguerreotype. Mattings sometimes do not correspond in date with the cases with which they are now found, indicating that, logically, photographers continued to use what they had on hand until stocks ran out. Thus, without specific knowledge about the photographer's dates of activity for the production of his images, the case dates may offer only approximate dating of the images. Another variable affecting the certainty of the use of case dating is the fact that the images can be removed from their cases, and, while this was probably not a common practice, it could falsify the dating of a daguerreotype.

Even though it seems somewhat vague, the best procedure at the present in organizing the post-mortem daguerreotypes is to analyze

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[37] Floyd Rinhart and Marion Rinhart, The American Daguerreotype, pp. 305-47.

the variations that occur in the treatment of the deceased subject. Such an approach could, with further specific information about the photographer's work or specific dates, be useful for defining a more exact chronological evolution in the treatment of post-mortem daguerreotypes. For the moment, these post-mortems can be dated only to the era when the daguerrian process was popular, 1839 to about 1860. The connections between the post-mortem image and live portraiture indicates that the post-mortems of the daguerrian process are viewed most properly as first, a sub-genre of portraiture, and secondly, as images of death. Further, the variations on the standard treatment of post-mortem imagery resulted in works of unusual distinction in terms of formal considerations and emotive power.

AMBROTYPES

During the period when the daguerreotype was popular (1839-1860), other photographic processes were invented and achieved popularity. The ambrotype process, patented in the United States in 1854 by James Cutting, used glass as the support for its photographic image. The process was cheaper than the daguerreotype process because the materials were less expensive and the technique was simpler. Both processes produced similar products in that each yielded cased images, and the plates were available in the same sizes. Thus, the personal nature involved in the act of viewing the image was true for the ambrotype, just as it was for the daguerreotype image. The ambrotype, like the daguerreotype, was used primarily for

portraiture of both live and dead people. Unlike the reflective, mirror-like surface that is characteristic of the daguerreotype, the ambrotype is distinguished by the lack of reflection in the highlight areas, making it easier to view. But the ambrotype does not have the crisp contrast of a daguerreotype; instead, the tones seem muddier in comparison.

An ambrotype of a man in a coffin (Figure 11) reveals the continuation of the uncommon dynamic presentation found in some post-mortem daguerreotypes. This image was taken with the coffin resting upright against the wall and the coffin lid propped against the body, covering the figure from the chest down. This use of a frontal view and flat lighting is a standardized portrait treatment found in many daguerreotype portraits of both living and deceased subjects. The dramatic arrangement of the body in the coffin and utilization of space found in this work is atypical of post-mortem daguerreotypes and ambrotypes. The dynamic sense of space is caused by the interaction between the tilting axis of the coffin and the projecting lid in the foreground, which underscores the sense of containment present in this post-mortem. The attitude of rest and eternal sleep commonly found in post-mortem images is essentially absent here because the bold presentation of the coffin as a container reminds the viewer that this balding gentleman in a suit no longer resides in this world.

Figure 12 is another ambrotype which represents the usual treatment of the post-mortem for both daguerreotypes and ambrotypes. The image is of a deceased boy about ten years in age, who is laid upon

a leaf-patterned blanket or quilt and covered with a patterned robe. The treatment of the image is related to portraiture of live subjects in its central and solid pose; it is rather distinct from more sensational commemorations of the dead like that seen above in Figure 11. The boy's body is presented again, as were many of the images of post-mortem daguerreotypes, with an allusion to eternal rest or sleep portrayed by a natural, peaceful pose. The camera was at the same level as the boy's head and was focused only on the face, allowing the foreground to go out of focus; thus, the emphasis is on the portrait quality. The composition effectively knits the various parts of the picture together —— figure, bed, background —— and further emphasizes the boy's head by its central placement.

A third example of the ambrotype post-mortem is illustrated in Figure 13. As the preceding work emphasizes the portrait-like qualities of the image and the notion of peaceful sleep, this image shows the deceased child in her crib. But Figure 13 also relates to some of the qualities found in the more dramatic treatment of the ambrotype illustrated in Figure 11. This image of the dead child was taken with the camera at the level of the child's face, and the plane of focus falls just short of the face, thus emphasizing the bedding and its interaction with the crib. The tactile qualities of the cloth, the child's sleeping pose and the intimate viewpoint give this work a soothing quality, but the space created in the work with the oblique positioning of the side of the crib and the interplay between the crib and its bedding make the composition more dynamic than the spatial play usually found in ambrotype portraits of live

subjects. The composition emphasizes this subtle dynamism and, perhaps, serves as an allusion to the dramatic cause for the subject's condition. It also effectively distances viewers from the subject. Thus many of these ambrotypes, meant to convey a peaceful view of death with a very personal, portrait-like sensibility, result in images that are differentiated from portraits of live subjects in very understated but significant ways.

The post-mortem ambrotypes present a body of imagery that basically continues the tradition revealed in post-mortem daguerreotypes. In these cased images, the photographer's usual intention is to render death gently, a treatment apparently desired by his clientele. But, as seen with all three of the ambrotype post-mortem images illustrated here, there are distinct differences between both the tradition and effect found in portraits of the living and those of the dead. Further, while there is a standard treatment for both the daguerreotype and ambrotype post-mortem image, there is a good deal of variety that occurs within this tradition.

The popular period of the ambrotype lasted from 1854 to the Civil War; its popularity peaked betwen 1856 and 1857.[38] Invented during the latter part of the daguerreotype period and losing popularity about the same time as the daguerreotype did, the post-mortem ambrotype represents a further development of the tradition founded with the inception of post-mortem daguerreotype imagery.

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[38] Febdvebel, p. 5.

TINTYPES

Another adaptation of the collodion process was used to make the tintype. The inventor of the process, Hamilton L. Smith, an American, assigned his patent in 1856 to William Neff and his son Peter. The Neffs used the name melainotype, and the term ferrotype was also used by others; but tintype, although inaccurate, is the term which became popular a few years after its invention. Like the daguerreotype and ambrotype, each tintype was a unique image. Although usually cased, the iron backing of the tintype was much more durable (even though lighter) than the fragile glass support of the ambrotype or the delicate surface of the daguerreotype, so the tintype did not actually need the protection of the case. As a result, tintypes could be sent through the mail, carried in one's pocket or mounted onto paper pages.[39] Not only were these images more durable, they were also less expensive due to the cheaper materials employed, the use of multilens cameras which could produce several images on a single sheet of iron and easier processing.[40] Due to the fragility of glass and its sharp edges, working with the ambrotype was more difficult than working with the tintype. This may also have been a factor in the lower cost of the tintype image.

The image in a tintype is different in appearance from either the daguerreotype or the ambrotype, although it shares some

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[39] Newhall, The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present, p. 63.

[40] Taft, p. 163.

characteristics with these two processes. All are unique images, similar in size and usually encased. The tintype, however, does not have a reflective surface as does the daguerreotype; instead, a tintype has a dull surface with a limited tonal range which produces a muddy image. Daguerreotypes have more contrast and are sharper in appearance than tintypes, making the former more attractive. Ambrotypes have deeper blacks and a longer, more appealing tonal range than tintypes, and because they are on glass, ambrotypes possess a gloss that is not present in the dull-surfaced tintype. Because of these differences in appearance, the tintype is not as refined as the daguerreotype or ambrotype. Due to its lower cost the tintype was produced not only by competent professionals, but also by lesser-skilled individuals, who were often itinerant photographers making images that were more primitive technically and visually than the imagery produced in studios.

The tintype process remained popular well into the era of the paper print. In fact, although its popularity declined by the end of the 1870s, the tintype process survived through the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth century in America. As the tintype shares many physical properties in common with the daguerreotype and ambrotype images, likewise post-mortem subjects are treated similarly in these three processes. What is most interesting and important about post-mortem tintypes is that they reflect the earlier traditions established by the two preceding processes, and, at the same time, also exhibit new elements which were further developed in the imagery of the post-mortem paper print.

The new treatment that emerges in post-mortem tintypes reflects a more casual regard for the dead subject than seen before, and a tendency to move away from the tight, close-up portraits seen in post-mortem daguerreotypes and ambrotypes.

Figure 14 is an example of a post-mortem tintype which reflects the continuation of the well-established formula for the treatment of this subject matter already seen in daguerreotypes and ambrotypes. The child shown in this work is pictured with its head resting on a pillow and is covered by a blanket, suggesting that it is merely asleep. This tintype emphasizes the child's body as well as directing attention to its face. Two-thirds of the body fills the composition and is shown at an angle oblique to the camera, creating a composition that is more dynamic than usually found. The oblique angle of the body, and the fact that the child's face is in focus while the background is not, creates a sense of confusing space in this work; accordingly, the child is not fully anchored to the setting, producing an element of instability not found in contemporary portraiture of the living. Although the indistinct character of the background and the rather dramatic spatial play present in this work somewhat undermine the peaceful quality of the image, these elements do give the work an ephemeral, other-worldly quality particularly suited to the nature of its subject matter. The dynamics of space present in this work, also seen in some post-mortem daguerreotypes and ambrotypes, makes such works noteworthy beyond just the sensational nature of their subject matter. In other words, these works represent some of the most unusual and perhaps most advanced spatial

arrangements made in photography of the time, at least in photographs of humans. This is due to the fact that portrait photographers often centered their subjects in front of backdrops and required their subjects to remain motionless; the post-mortem image did not rely on repetitive formulas which tended to produce emotionless, flat images.

While many tintypes are similar to that seen in Figure 12, and are portrait-like, peaceful renditions of death, other post-mortem tintypes show a slightly different kind of treatment of the dead subject. Some of these no longer present close ties to the traditions of photographic treatment of live subjects, unlike most examples of daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and at least one-half of all tintypes. For example, the tintype in Figure 15 depicts the coffin of the deceased with the occupant balanced on a chair, a most unusual mode of presentation. The coffin lies parallel to the picture plane and is opened up to expose the child's face, establishing graphically the presence of the dead. This post-mortem functions less as a portrait, since the child's face is but a small part of the composition, but emphasizes, instead, the dramatic event of death and burial. This is rather remote from the gentle depictions of death seen previously as the most common treatment for post-mortem images. Even those pictures which contained some kind of spatial play of dynamism were not so abrupt in announcing the true nature of their subject. And the coffin present in the ambrotype of Figure 11 is not so overwhelming as in this tintype, for in the ambrotype the emphasis is still upon a close-up portrait rendering of the man. The window in the upper-left section of this tintype's composition

may function as a portal for the ascending spirit, a popular pictorial device in paintings and prints of the time. Thus its inclusion in this photograph would then serve to further underscore the dramatic emphasis on the event of death itself.

Another group of tintypes, represented by the image illustrated in Figure 16, sheds further light on the changes of post-mortem imagery occurring in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Such images show an encroaching crudeness which may signify more than just the declining prices for post-mortem photographs. The work in Figure 16 presents a deceased boy outdoors. Although this unusual setting is not emphasized, it is sufficiently apparent to create a very different ambiance for this work. No longer shown as peacefully asleep inside a room, as a memento of a child for the family, this treatment is no longer so thoroughly sentimental. The child is laid out matter-of-factly, perhaps while in transit to the burial site; he is rudely placed on some sort of covered incline. The crudeness and lack of subtlety in the presentation of the subject is matched by the offhanded manner in which the picture was composed. The choice of camera angle, the off-center placement of the figure and the lack of the alignment of the body to the picture edges tend to deny any portrait-like quality in this work. It seems to have been hastily done, characteristic of many low-cost operations.

Works like Figures 15 and 16 suggest that by the 1870s post-mortem images were no longer to be regarded as simply a sub-genre of portraiture: such works are no longer treated in that fashion. Perhaps some decline in the reverence for the photograph as an image

of the dead may be discerned in this shift, but changing attitudes towards death and funeral practices (as will be discussed later) affected the role and thus the results of post-mortem photography. While still grounded in a portrait tradition for the treatment of the dead subject, the tintype often conveyed less of a feeling of portraiture than was previously true; instead, it seemed to emphasize the ritual or the event of death more than the sense of the deceased as a unique individual. As the post-mortem photographic tradition evolved, the connections with other photographic and painting traditions became less pronounced.

A late example of posthumous mourning portraiture painting is Edwin Romanzo Elmer's Mourning Picture, 1889 (Figure 17), in the Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts. The information surrounding the circumstances under which the painting was made comes from an article written about Elmer by a relative.[41] The article relates how Elmer made a portrait of his daughter, Effie, after her sudden death, in order to commemorate the family's life together. Lloyd cites this work by Elmer and another posthumous mourning portrait painted in the late 1860s for the Bulkeley-Pomeroy families as late examples of the posthumous mourning portrait tradition.[42] They differ from the earlier pieces in that they are smaller and they portray the living and the dead together. Although such distinctions of the physical dimensions and whether

[41]Maud Valona Elmer, "Edwin Romanzo Elmer as I Knew Him," The Massachusetts Review VI (1964-65), pp. 131-43.

[42]Pike and Armstrong, p. 85.

the living living are combined with the dead are important, these two paintings do not provide enough material to draw definite conclusions about the later stages of posthumous mourning portrait painting.

Lloyd contends that the intermingling of the living and the dead marks the end of the tradition of posthumous mourning portraiture. At this point the posthumous painting tradition breaks with that of photography. From the beginning of the photographic tradition dealing with the dead, mourners were often photographed with the dead. Women dressed in black, mourning, often stared bleakly into the camera. Mothers would hold their dressed child; or, both parents, often in black mourning garb, would share the frame with the deceased child. These images presented grief more vividly than the posthumous mourning portrait paintings as grief is not typically displayed in an emotional sense by the mourners, but by the focus on the event and the obvious condition of the deceased in the photographs.

THE ERA OF PAPER PRINTS

CARTES-DE-VISITE AND CABINET CARDS

The era of cased photographic imagery ended with the decline in popularity of tintype images after the Civil War, when photographs on paper became popular. The first popular photographic images based on paper were the cartes-de-visite: the mounts were 2 1/2" x 4" with the image size being 2" x 3 1/2". This format originated in Europe in 1854, and spread to America by 1859, where it became popular the following year.[43] The negatives for cartes-de-visite were prepared by the collodion process and were then printed on albumen paper.[44] Albumen paper was used to some extent before the card format was introduced, but it did not find wide acceptance until cartes-de-visite made their appearance.[45]

These small paper prints became popular because of their price, which was much less than the price for a daguerreotype or ambrotype image, and the cartes-de-visite, like the tintypes, were easy to send

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[43] Taft, pp. 139-40.

[44] Albumen paper, invented in 1850 by Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard, used paper coated with egg white in which potassium bromide and acetic acid had been dissolved. When dry, this coated paper was sensitized with a solution of silver nitrate. The sensitized paper was then put into contact with negatives and exposed to sunlight, which developed the image; subsequently, the image was fixed, washed and dried. For a complete description of the process see: James M. Reilly, The Albumen and Salted Paper Book: The History and Practice of Photographic Printing, 1840-1895 (Rochester, N.Y.: Light Impressions Corp., 1980), pp. 27-46.

[45] Ibid., pp. 143-44.

through the mail.[46] Cartes-de-visite were less expensive because the image support was on paper rather than on metal or glass, and also because new camera designs allowed up to twelve images to be taken on a single plate (true for tintypes also), thus increasing the production of the photographer.[47] Another factor that popularized the carte-de-visite was the sale of images of famous persons, in addition to the normal photographic fare of families and friends.

As the public now had access to cheap and accurate representations of friends, family and celebrities, a problem arose with the small cartes-de-visite as they began to accumulate in the home. The necessity of storing the cartes-de-visite led to the creation of the family album. The family album, with recessed pockets to hold the cartes-de-visite and the uncased tintype images, appeared in 1860.[48] The introduction of the inexpensive card photograph effected the downfall of the daguerreotype and the ambrotype.[49] Gone too was that private viewing of a single image. The activity of opening the case and holding a unique image at close range was replaced by the viewing of an entire album, often by several people at a time. Looking at pages covered with a number of pictures became a popular social pastime conducted in the parlor of the home. Lost was the

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[46]Taft, pp. 140-41.

[47]Newhall, The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present, p. 64.

[48]William Welling, Collector's Guide to Nineteenth-Century Photographs (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1976), p. 93.

[49]Taft, p. 143.

one-to-one relationship a viewer had with cased imagery.

The carte-de-visite format gave way in popularity to a larger format, the cabinet card which was an image of 5 1/2" x 4" affixed to a 6 1/2" x 4 1/2" mount. The cartes-de-visite decreased in popularity after the appearance of the larger format cabinet card in 1866, but both forms of the card photograph were made throughout the rest of the nineteenth century.

In 1871 Dr. Richard Leach Maddox described an emulsion suspending silver salts in gelatin and by the end of the decade negatives were being commercially produced with a dry gelatin emulsion.[50] The era of the wet plate thus ended: no longer did the photographer have to sensitize the negatives before using them. Photographers could now buy presensitized film. With gelatin emulsions coated onto flexible film bases, roll film cameras became popular by the late 1880s. Not only did the gelatin emulsion revolutionize film development, it also had predictable photosensitivity and was more convenient to use as one did not have to develop the film immediately after exposure. The gelatin emulsion was used, furthermore, for suspending the silver salts on paper prints. Presensitized papers, commercially produced, became available in the 1880s, causing the albumen print to give way to the gelatin print, which is used to the present.

The albumen paper print was not only used for cartes-de-visite and cabinet cards, but also many large albumen prints were made from large negatives. Albumen prints were produced by a contact

[50]Newhall, The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present, pp. 123-24.

print process which yielded prints no larger than the negative. The new gelatin silver emulsions were more sensitive to light, which permitted the projection of small negatives onto large sheets of photosensitive paper, thus producing enlargements.

The faster speed of gelatin silver film emulsions resulted in making feasible the handheld camera, as exposure times were decreased to less than a tenth of a second. No longer was a tripod necessary. This, coupled with the ease of presensitized film, fostered amateur photography: with the introduction of George Eastman's Kodak camera in 1888, one only had to aim the device and release the shutter; processing could be done by technicians. Photography that did not demand the mixing of chemicals, using a tripod or carrying heavy, bulky equipment for development on the spot meant that photographs could now be made by anyone. From this time, photography was no longer restricted to professionals and dedicated amateurs, but was available to all.

The photographic album became the family album as we know it today, containing images of birthdays, weddings, parties, babies, vacations and many other events that could not be as easily photographed when a bulky camera, a tripod and elaborate procedures were required for making the photograph. The Kodak camera marked the real inception of popular, nontechnically oriented photography. The family album, the repository for the happy, joyous occasions in a family's life, became a vehicle for celebration. The professional photographer knew how his film and paper would react and had standard treatments for subjects that yielded predictable, formulaic results;

the amateur photographer, on the other hand, would treat subjects in unexpected ways, both technically and compositionally. The family album reflected this new, amateur vision with images shot from odd angles, with harsh or low lighting and events that were too trivial or slap-stick for the professional photographer's attention.

Made by professionals, the carte-de-visite portraits of subjects, both living and dead, were often full-length treatments. The small size of the images seems to suggest that the generally closer treatments or only partial views of the subjects, as was found frequently in daguerreotype and ambrotype portraits, would have been more appropriate for such small images. While there are some close-up portraits showing just the upper part of the body in carte-de-visite images, the common treatment indicates that the camera had begun to be placed further back from the subject. Figure 18 exemplifies this new treatment. This image continues the tradition of presenting the deceased child as if it were asleep, but the greater casualness in the presentation makes the sense of peaceful rest less apparent. The contortion of the child's face and the lack of a blanket or coverlet to suppress the obviously dead condition of the subject make this work more disturbing than was previously seen in comparable daguerreotype or ambrotype treatments. The strange feeling elicited by this presentation is further underscored by the contrast between the obviously dead body and the elegant design formed by the body and dress.

Another post-mortem carte-de-visite, Figure 19, shows some similarity to the previous image in terms of the camera distance;

accordingly, the child contained in the casket occupies less than half of the image space. The details of the face are hard to discern; it is as if the purpose of the image was not to record the identity of the child but, instead, to record the fact that the child was dead and about to be buried. This work also has some similarity in intent to that seen in the tintype of Figure 15. The title of Figure 19, handwritten on the photograph, "My Angel Baby," does denote a love for the child but it also certainly acknowledges the death of the child, a state that is intensified by the presence of the casket.

Both cartes-de-visite dispaly a physical distancing between the deceased and the camera which began to occur more regularly with the introduction of the paper print, although it can be found occasionally in post-mortem tintypes. This distancing paralleled the change in viewing from a rather private act associated with the era of cased imagery to the more public presentation of paper prints, whether they were shown individually or mounted into family albums. Both cartes-de-visite reveal the changes occurring from a portrait-like treatment of the post-mortem image to a more factual presentation of death. Such cartes-de-visite consistently show less concern with evincing peaceful, sleeping figures. This distancing and new factual treatment represent a changing attitude towards death.

The popularity of cartes-de-visite was usurped by the larger cabinet cards after the 1860s. These images, like the cartes-de-visite, were produced by professional photographers and were either mounted in albums or kept separately. The cabinet card continued the treatment found in the carte-de-visite post-mortem; it also

added new elements in the representation of the dead not seen in the earlier daguerreotypes and ambrotypes.

Figure 20 is an example of a cabinet card which retained some of the previous practices in depicting the deceased subject, yet the camera has moved back from the subject to produce a looser portrait treatment. Instead, it presents the figure within a surrounding environment. This continues the greater emphasis on the fact of death already seen in the cartes-de-visite, for this work does not attempt to mask death as sleep. The child's face is disturbing even though it takes up only a small area of the composition, and the flower arrangements surrounding the body clearly mark the scene as unusual. The body of the dead child is separated from the viewer by the flowers placed in front of its figure. While such separation was seen in daguerreotype and ambrotype treatments, it is more forceful in this cabinet card as the figure now participates in the scene as one element of a still-life arrangement. The placement of the body, its smaller size in the composition and the emphasis on textures present in this work all help to create the effect of a still life.

Figure 21 shows another post-mortem cabinet card created and photographed in the photographer's studio (which can be determined by the background). This photograph depicts a floral display containing a photograph of a woman in the center of the composition. The central photograph of the woman pictures her when she was alive, but the memorial context surrounding the image makes this (Figure 21) a post-mortem. While it might seem inappropriate to call such works

post-mortems since they do not literally depict the individual after death, the intention of such works is the same as for earlier post-mortem images. Works such as this cabinet card show a further change from emphasizing portrait treatments of the deceased to commemorating the event of death.

The shift in treatment during this period of card photography reflects evolving attitudes towards death and how it was to be presented: it no longer seemed as appropriate to present death solely in terms of a dead figure. Yet the presence of the decedent's photograph, made while still alive, shows a continued interest in symbolizing death by an image of the deceased. This new reluctance to view directly an image of the dead body seems to parallel the growing specificity of the post-mortem image as a symbolic image of death, rather than a portrait of the dead. Often, as in Figure 21, the camera was positioned so that the photograph in the center of the cabinet card was the focal point of the composition, making a portrait placed in this context a death portrait; the whole work assumed the role of an actual photograph of the deceased. This approach in cabinet cards, coupled with the changes already noted in the cartes-de-visite, indicates a marked shift towards documenting the ceremony and memorials surrounding death rather than emphasizing a portrait treatment of the deceased. Perhaps the family album, and the expression of celebration of life contained therein, was an unsuitable place for portraits of dead subjects and stark, direct images of death.

The gelatin silver print became increasingly common during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Usually measuring 8" x 10"

or 5" x 7" (larger than the cabinet card), the paper print was made by photographers who could photograph in or out of their studios, wherever a photograph was needed. The paper print was usually mounted on a colored cardboard and sometimes put into albums.

Figure 22 depicts the deceased, an older woman, in her coffin. While the deceased assumes a central position in the composition, the actual area the body occupies is relatively small in this mounted paper print. Reduction of the figure's role in the composition has already been seen in earlier forms of paper prints which modified the portrait treatment typically found in daguerreotypes and ambrotypes. While the deceased is part of the work, she is only one element in a fairly complicated composition of a Victorian interior with its emphasis on cramped decoration filled with floral displays. This emphasis on texture and display has dwarfed the presentation of the body, making the work more a recording of the event per se than a post-mortem portrait of the woman.

Figure 23 represents one of the final phases in the evolution of the post-mortem image in the nineteenth century. In this 8" x 10" photograph, a professional photographer has recorded an arrangement of flowers in a room; these flowers are symbols of sentiment and commemoration of the deceased. The compositon is elegant, and the use of window light here further adds to the feeling of emptiness and a transitory state, while also conveying a sense of serenity. The image now is only symbolic of death with no direct or personal references to the deceased; in this regard, it is a rather unusual image, the more common treatment being represented by the previous

post-mortem of the woman in her coffin. This unusual image reveals how much the attitude has changed towards depicting death. This work is symbolic in a more obvious manner than usual; it is, in fact, a commemoration of the event of death rather than a portrait of the deceased in any sense.

Memorial floral arrangements along with pictures of the deceased made before their demise and compositions with the deceased in coffins continued to be made as post-mortem images through the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, the photographic post-mortem tradition had evolved from the portrait tradition of the daguerreotype to the documentation of the event and ceremony of death found in the paper prints. While the portrait tradition for treating post-mortem images did not end completely, it no longer existed as the dominant expression of post-mortem imagery. A good example of this shift in emphasis at the end of the nineteenth century is documented by two surviving pages (Figures 24 and 25) in a family album from the late nineteenth century which show funeral scenes and cemetery sites, but no close-up portraits of the dead.

In some ways the final state of the photographic post-mortem tradition resembles the earlier stages of posthumous mourning portrait painting, as many examples from the end of the photographic post-mortem tradition include photographs of the deceased taken while still alive. Such photographs, placed in floral arrangements which are subsequently photographed, are then changed into post-mortem images by symbolically referring to death. Showing the deceased

alive while alluding to his deceased state is much closer to the veiling of the death state in the earlier posthumous mourning portrait painting tradition.

The changes in the photographic treatment of the deceased made after the era of cased images reflect a complex series of transformations in American society which occurred after the 1860s. Though still apparently preoccupied with death, the Americans of the late nineteenth century began to deny rather than to embrace it.[51] David E. Stannard, a sociologist who studies the American nineteenth century, states that America's attitudes during this period changed to a point where avoidance became the practice of "a social compartmentalization so thorough that only the death of one's very closest loved ones touched one at all."[52] A number of factors contributed to this change, some of which are specifically identifiable, others more obscure, but the result is that the previous sentimentality toward death was replaced by a new, supposedly more realistic attitude.

The cemetery and the considerable changes it underwent in the nineteenth century is one of these identifiable factors in changing America's attitude toward death. Previously, burial at the beginning of the nineteenth century took place primarily on church grounds or in small civic graveyards. It was recognized that the family plot was an uncertain way of preserving the grave site in a

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[51] Pike and Armstrong, p. 40

[52] Stannard, p. 189.

period of westward expansion and population migration to urban centers, so private burial was largely abandoned by the end of the nineteenth century. Families moved more frequently and it became unusual for a family to own the same plot of land for more than a few generations. Once a family moved away from the land on which the family plot was situated, there was no guarantee that the grave sites would be kept clear or even intact. This is one reason why there was a decline in the late nineteenth century of establishing family plots.

Attitudes about burial began to change in the early part of the nineteenth century as graveyards were neglected and became overrun with weeds; indeed, bones were found more and more frequently on the surface of many graveyards in America. Because of the rapidly increasing population, the old graveyards became so crowded that they were, as Stannard writes, "frequently little more than stinking quagmires -- chronically offensive and occasionally serious public health hazards."[53] About these circumstances Ariès writes:

> The original reasons of decency and sanitation soon gave way to the grand design of transforming the abode of the dead into a cultural institution for the living, a place for people to come and meditate. It was then that the word cemetery[54] replaced churchyard and graveyard.

The newly established rural cemeteries, like Mt. Auburn which was founded near Boston in 1831, became a sort of cultural

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[53]David E. Stannard, ed., Death in America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 1975), p. 74.

[54]Ariès, p. 523. The Greek and Latin roots for cemetery means "a sleeping place."

institution in the minds of its founders. In these cemeteries the dead were buried and the graves were cared for. This respectful attention to the dead and their burial places parallels the personal nature of the cased post-mortem photograph, and, so, rural cemeteries were filled with personalized monuments of grandiose designs often inscribed with messages, like "Asleep in Jesus," which stressed the continued presence of the deceased. As the nineteenth century progressed this lavish taste for monuments was regarded as ostentatious, and the ubiquitous presence of grilles and railings around the plots was seen as disruptive. The use of such markers fell into disfavor, so that by the 1880s they were replaced by the preferred headstone which itself was eventually replaced by a more discreet stone slab or metal plate to mark the grave site.[55] The cemetery evolved towards nature and away from art as it looked less like a churchyard and more like a garden -- the lawn cemetery. As a garden with regenerative analogies, the cemetery became a place to commune with the dead in a more symbolic manner as well as to commune with the whole of nature while strolling through the parklike setting. This shift in the treatment of the dead in the rural cemetery is paralleled by the treatment of the dead in post-mortem photographs made after the era of cased images. In pictorial representations less attention was now paid to the deceased, as portrait treatments were replaced with more generally commemorative imagery.

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[55]Pike and Armstrong, p. 43.

The Civil War had produced changed attitudes towards death, perhaps more than is usually acknowledged. The American population experienced the death of over a million friends or relatives in a few short years. Almost every family had a member or close friend die. This helped give rise to a new abhorrence of death because no romantic view could assuage the horrors of a nation divided and turned upon itself. Alexander Gradner's Photographic Sketchbook of the Civil War (1865-66) was not a romantic view of the war: instead, it contained views of dead bodies, barren land and dull battlements. It never sold well, indicating America's feelings about viewing photographs of the war.

Another factor which affected the attitude towards death in the nineteenth century was the increasingly important role doctors and hospitals played in the event of death. This change began to occur during the Civil War.[56] The Civil War had also led to many new developments in medicine and medical practice. Hence, after the Civil War, doctors increasingly began to send their patients to hospitals, which were becoming more numerous. Due to the invention of anesthesia at this time, surviving an operation became more likely.

The place where a person died changed from the home to the hospital and the hospital became the place where death escaped the visibility it had received in the home.[57] No longer did the moment of death occur routinely at home so it became less common for

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[56]Ibid., p. 92.

[57]Ariès, pp. 532-33.

relatives and friends to see the person immediately after dying, the moment that the cased post-mortem had often documented and preserved for posterity. As the century ended, fewer people saw members of their family die at home, and so fewer post-mortem images of the deceased person were made.

Coupled with the advance of the hospital and its increasing role in the event of death, the funeral business also helped to remove death from the family's immediate experience. The personal way of dealing with death —— when the coffin had been made by the local carpenter, the body washed and laid out by family members and friends and the burial taken care of by friends or the church —— changed with the advent of the undertaker.[58] The undertaker's assumption of the family's duties in the caring of the deceased removed the body from contact with the family. Another instance of the war's influence on funerary practices and attitudes occurred as the undertaker's position became prominent during the Civil War when large numbers of dead had to be transported over great distances so that embalming for preservation became necessary. The practice and acceptance of embalming after the Civil War was the main reason for the undertaker's role achieving importance. After the Civil War, the status of the undertaker's position grew as his title changed to funeral director and a number of professional associations were created. The trappings and accessories of the funeral director's occupation also grew in complexity, as, for example,

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[58]Pike and Armstrong, pp. 49-50.

coffins became caskets, meaning jewel boxes, a word adopted consciously for its euphemistic meaning. The formalization of funeral customs and activities became codified into an etiquette at this time. America began to change from a series of communities to an integrated society in the late nineteenth century and, while formerly few institutional shields existed between the individual and the details of disease and dying, by the end of the nineteenth century numerous institutions were being erected to deal with these now seemingly unpleasant aspects of life.[59]

Early post-mortem photographs had denied death by romantically embracing and defining it as a peaceful, eternal repose of one's loved ones, a necessity when it was so intimately tied to the experience of the living. Later post-mortem photographs show the distancing of death as it was rendered remote, symbolic and impersonal as it was then defined by the society of the late nineteenth century. This shift in sensibility, apparent in the post-mortem photograph, cannot be explained solely in terms of changing photographic materials and equipment: more importantly it also was affected by the changes taking place in society itself.

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[59] Ariès, p. 530.

CONCLUSION

This study concerns the changing attitudes towards death in the nineteenth century and explains how post-mortem imagery evolved as the nineteenth century progressed. The early post-mortem portrait treatment of the dead reflected the early nineteenth-century romantic view of death in America. Indeed, the desire for such handling was fueled by this attitude and the prevailing social conditions. These portraits of the dead are often macabre to present-day sensibilities, which do not permit us to dwell at length on death. Photographs of dead people shock us today, but they were a normal part of a family's visual heritage through much of the nineteenth century. Pictorial treatments developed alongside the early portrait photography tradition for live subjects, a phenomenon which makes sense when one realizes that post-mortem work was a regular part of the early portrait photographer's business. The quality of these images became diverse with the introduction of photographic processes that were less demanding than the daguerreotype. This study shows that there were concomitant changes in the quality and type of imagery when the shift from cased images to paper prints occurred.

The range of treatment found in post-mortem photographs in nineteenth-century America shows a perceptible evolution reflecting the changing character of American society itself during this period. What at first were portraits of the dead, later became images which commemorated the event of death and the ornamentation surrounding it, meaning that the actual presence of the decedent was

avoided and replaced by some symbolic memorial of the deceased or remembrance of the occasion of his death. Such changes paralleled the changing attitudes towards death which became less romantic and sentimental toward the end of the nineteenth century. As post-mortem cased images, which were precious objects, gave way to the more public forms of the post-mortem paper print, the imagery became less private and more oriented towards commemorating the event of death. Underlying such changes in imagery was the physical removal of death from the home; thus the intimate experience of the event was mitigated for the survivors, creating emotional and physical distance. As death became more distant from everyday experience, a preference for more symbolic and less personal presentations of the deceased developed, presentations which confronted the fact of death less directly and thus had less shock value. The paper print imagery which depicted floral displays with photographs of the deceased before their death perhaps most clearly exemplifies this change in the evolution of post-mortem iconography in photography.

Photography's appearance in America in 1839 gave expression to an already existing need for post-mortem imagery. The evolution in the meaning of the photograph with its growing emphasis on a celebratory nature, in addition to changing social conditions in the nineteenth century, indicates the gradual decrease of direct, personal expressions of sentiment for the deceased as an individual. While the photographic portrait tradition for treating post-mortem images did not die out completely, it no longer existed as the dominant expression of post-mortem imagery by the end of the century.

In addition to illuminating social shifts in the nineteenth century, the tradition of post-mortem photography provides insight into the role of the photograph within society. These post-mortems also stand as important examples in the history of early portrait photography. In this light, the distinctive treatment of many formal elements seen in these post-mortem portrait photographs are important pieces of information for understanding the early manner of photographic expression, presenting, as they do, innovative or unusual approaches in regard to formal portrait concerns.

Organizing this examination of the post-mortem image on the basis of various photographic processes clarifies the fact that there were typical treatments for the post-mortem image. This method of organization also permits the changing nature of post-mortem imagery to be clearly discerned. Once ascertained, it becomes easier to see the importance of such changes as documenting the changing attitudes toward the photograph and the changing nature of photography in the nineteenth century. Once the nature of such changes, from portrait treatments to less personal treatments, is clear it is possible to see this as related to the changing attitudes towards death and the ritual of death in nineteenth-century America. Evolving attitudes concerning death become in turn more clearly understood with the visual evidence provided by determining the development of the post-mortem photographic tradition.

This study has given a broader context in which to view these post-mortem photographs by demonstrating the concern with death which existed in the early nineteenth century, and, further, by

establishing the existence of a well-developed pictorial tradition which dealt with death. This context gives a better understanding for these photographs which have been too often dismissed as aberrant, unimportant works. While the pre-existing, and predominantly sentimental, tradition of death imagery in the nineteenth century first gave form to early post-mortem photographic imagery, the nature of the photographic medium gave rise to new solutions, and its tradition eventually diverged from pictorial treatments found in other media.

These changes in the post-mortem tradition for death imagery were also influenced by the development of different photographic processes and, at the same time, by changing attitudes towards death. Thus, it clearly emerges that this facet of nineteenth-century photographic tradition cannot be isolated as a unique phenomenon of photography if it is to be understood. Neither, however, can it be simply lumped together with other pictorial media in a general analysis of death imagery. Photography is a unique medium which possesses distinct characteristics: while it joins forces with other artistic media in search of some common visual solutions, it always remains somewhat separate from them.

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Figure 1. Seated woman; daguerreotype. International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.
From Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography, rev. ed. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1964, p. 28.

Figure 2. Dead baby on a bed; sixth-plate daguerreotype. Walter Johnson Collection, Columbus, Ohio.

Figure 3. Dead child on a chair; sixth-plate daguerreotype. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 4. Dead woman in bed; sixth-plate daguerreotype. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 5. Sarah Louise Spense; painting. Craig and Tarlton, Inc., Raleigh, North Carolina.
From Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America, Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980, p. 70.

Figure 6. Memorial to Nicholas Catlin; painting. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. From Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America, Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980, p. 79.

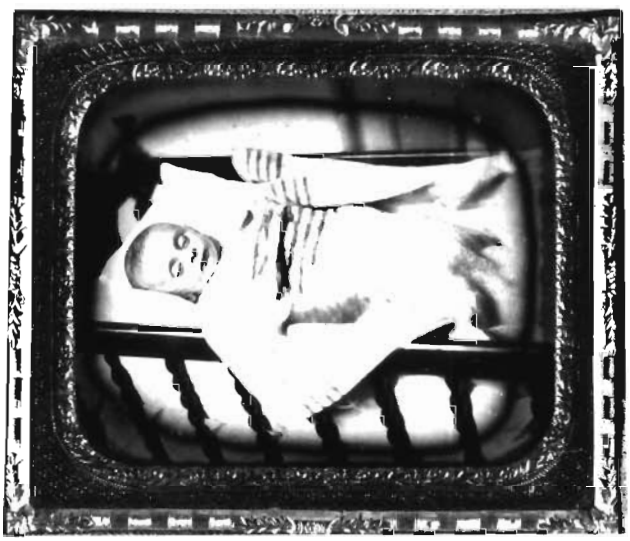

Figure 7. Dead baby in a crib; sixth-plate daguerreotype. Walter Johnson Collection

Figure 8. Man and woman with dead child; sixth-plate daguerreotype.
Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 9. Man and woman with dead child; quarter-plate daguerreotype.
Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 10. Mrs. Joseph Elisha Whitman Sr., and her Son Joseph Elisha Jr., born 1853; sixth-plate daguerreotype.
The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiques, Boston.
From Beaumont Newhall, The History of Photography, rev. ed. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982, p. 32.

Figure 11. Man in coffin; sixth-plate ambrotype. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 12. Dead child on bed; quarter-plate ambrotype. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 13. Dead girl in crib; sixth-plate ambrotype. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 14. Dead child on covers; sixth-plate ambrotype. Walter Johnson Collection.

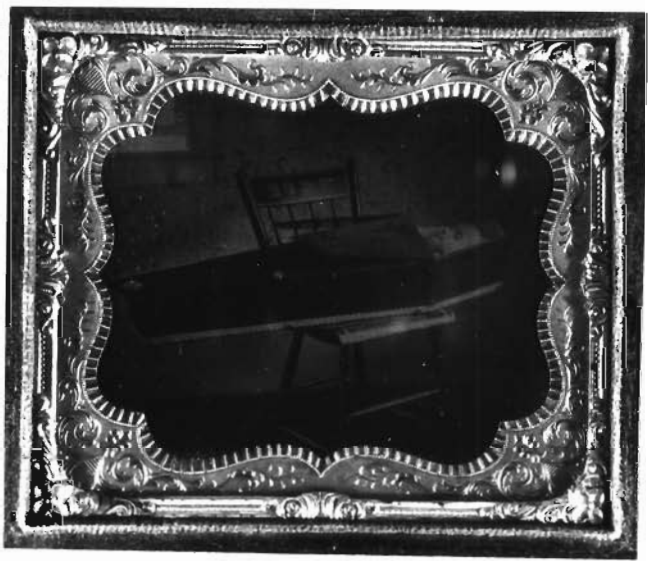

Figure 15. Dead child in coffin; sixth-plate tintype. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 16. Dead child out of doors; sixth-plate tintype. Walter Johnson Collection.

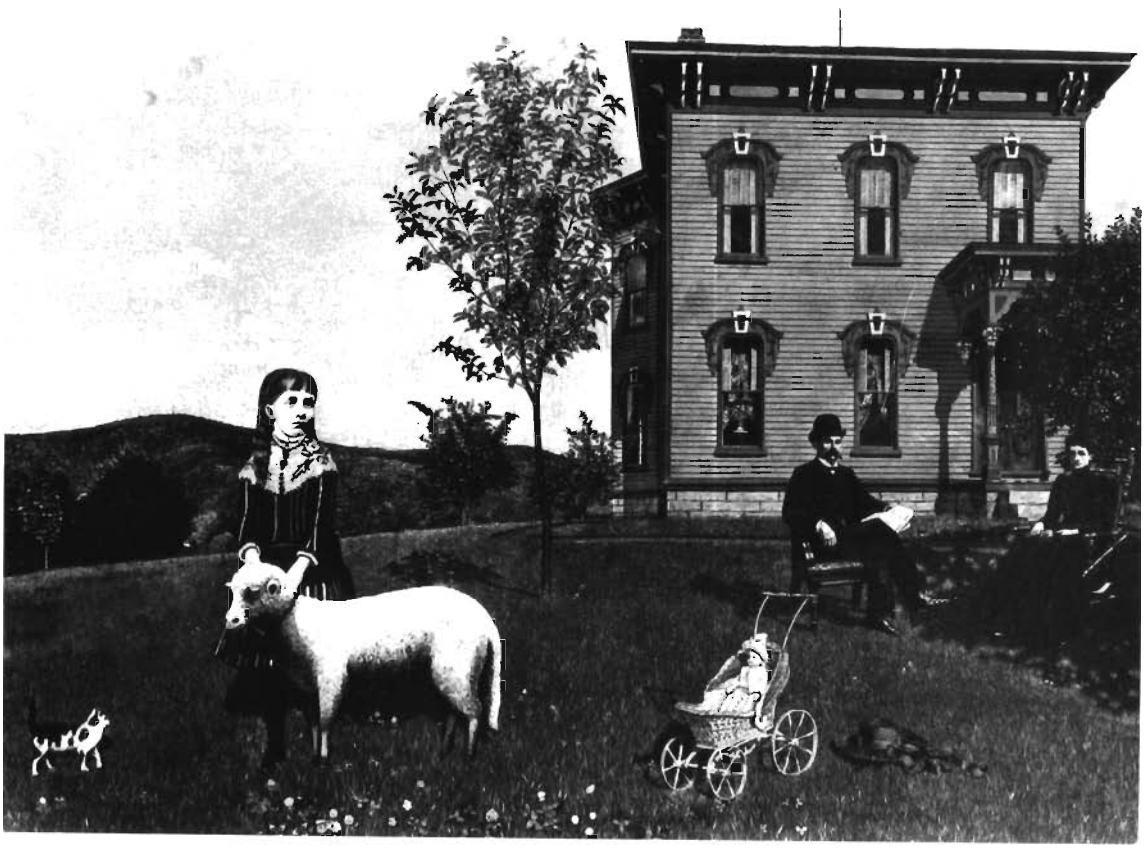

Figure 17. Mourning Picture; painting by Edwin Romanzo Elmer.
Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Mass.
From Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America, Stony Brook, N.Y.: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980, p. 88.

Figure 18. Dead child on couch; carte-de-visite. Walter Johnson Collection.

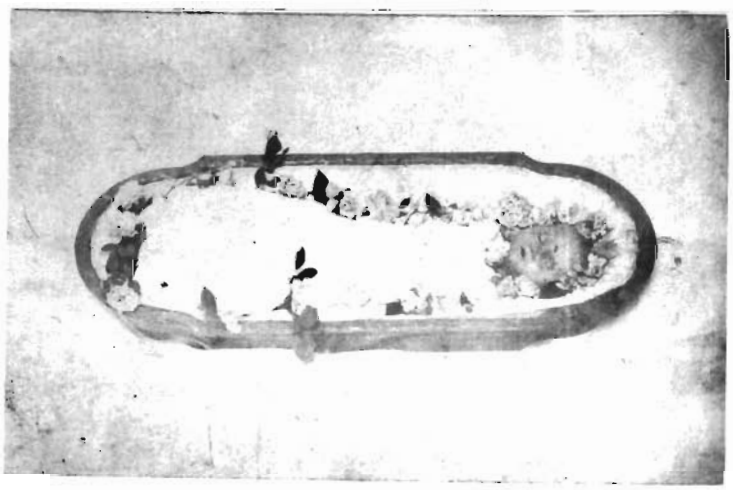

Figure 19. Dead child in casket; carte-de-visite. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 20. Dead child surrounded by flowers; cabinet card.
Walter Johnson Collection.

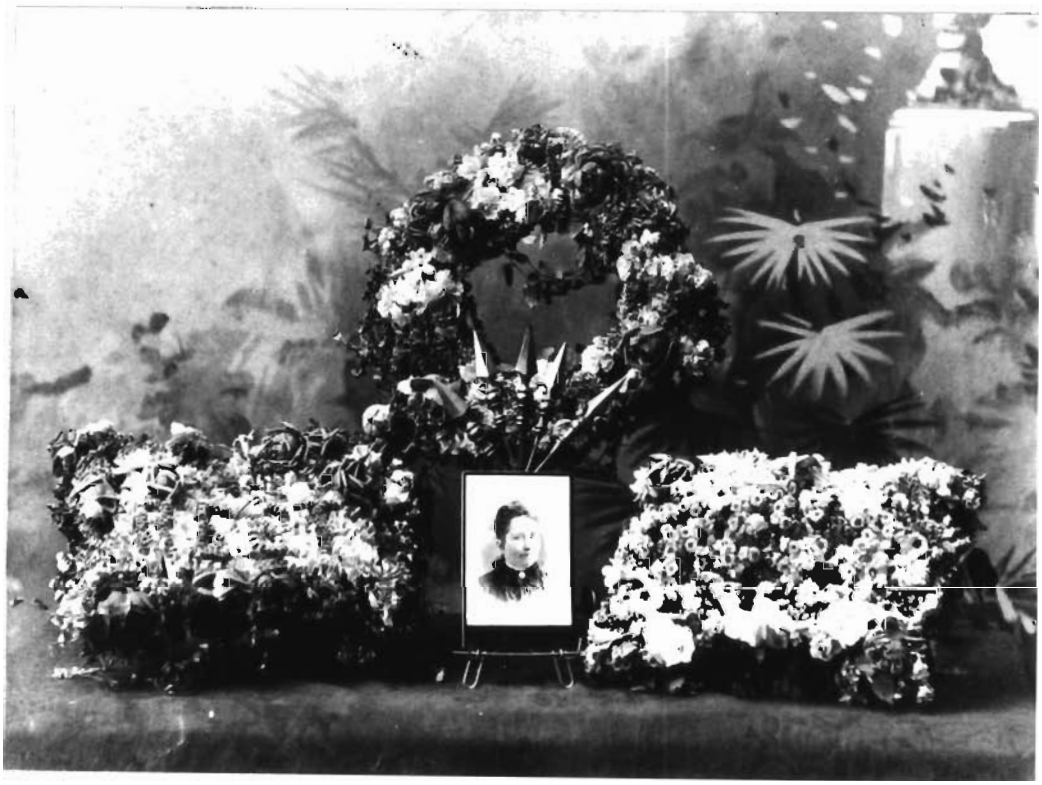

Figure 21. Memorial arrangements surrounding a cabinet card; cabinet card.
Walter Johnson Collection.

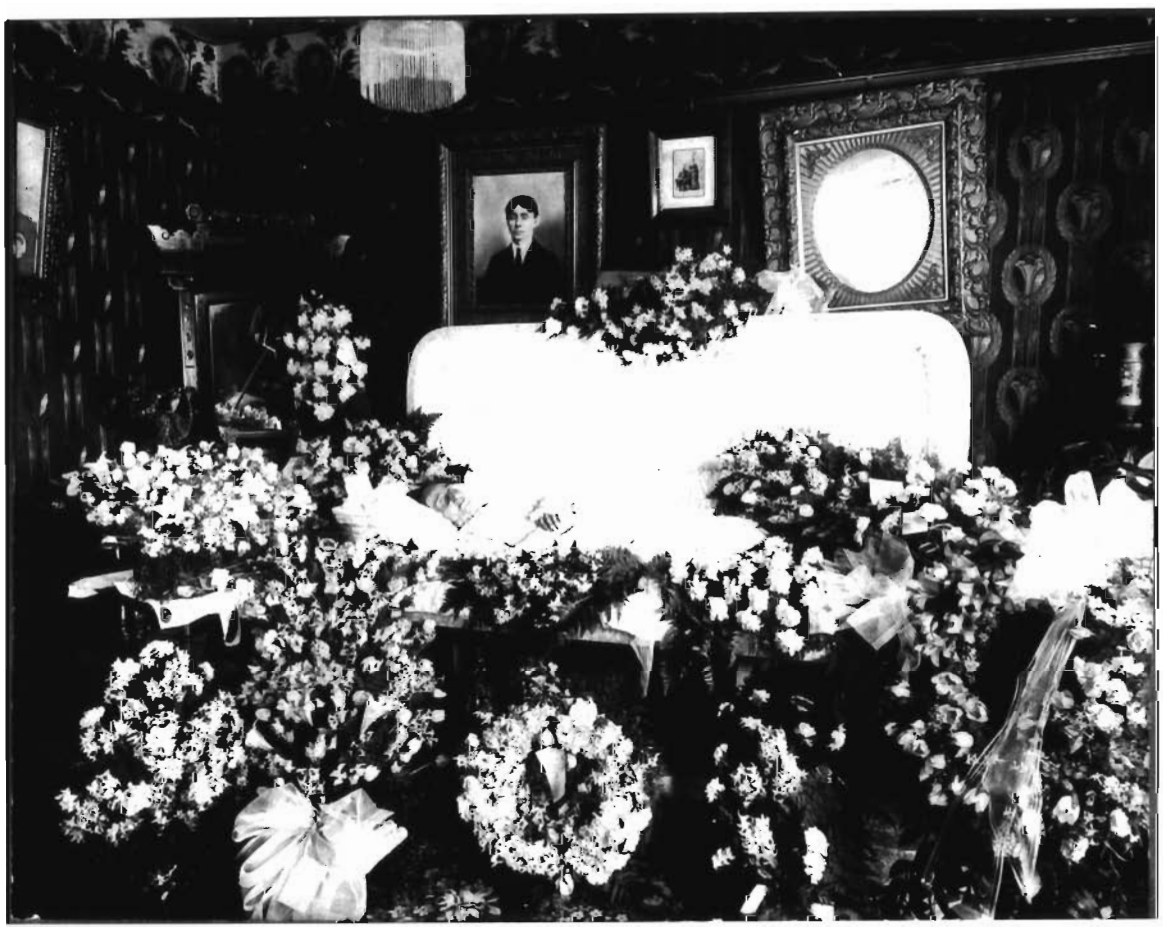

Figure 22. Coffin surrounded by memorial arrangements; mounted paper print. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 23. Memorial arrangements; mounted paper print. Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 24. Album pages; mounted paper prints.
Walter Johnson Collection.

Figure 25. Album pages; mounted paper prints. Walter Johnson Collection.