

The Social Aspect of Mourning: Covers and Collateral Material

Although mourning covers predated Queen Victoria, it was during her reign (1837-1901) that the custom flourished. Queen Victoria's complete devastation on her husband Prince Albert's death began a whole new approach to mourning. In this exhibit the emphasis is on mourning covers as a social custom and cover usage within postal systems. Mourning covers are identified primarily by black borders of varying widths, designs and embellishments. Some covers can be bordered by grey and purple. There is no hard and fast rule as to the width of that border, some students believe the wider the border the more recent the death, the closer relationship to the deceased or even the time elapsed since a death but there does not seem to be an ultimate determination. During Victorian times people were generally better off financially and were able to not only write caring bereavement letters on special stationery but they could also afford to send these letters in the mail, although in some early instances they were not prepaid. Mourning covers continued to be seen into the twentieth century with less and less frequency.

The exhibit shows basic stationery cover designs, followed by examples of obverse flap embellishments, florals, monograms and crests. A variety of border designs were dictated by the whims of printers and stationers. Usage shows an emphasis on British Victorian era covers and examples of international mourning cover design. Enclosures were an important part of the social aspect of mourning covers. WWI added censorship to the mix. Other aspects include 'ironic' postal markings. The exhibit ends with collateral material items.

Exhibit Plan

Title Page

1. Basic Mourning Stationery
2. Usages
3. Border Varieties
4. George V
5. International
6. Covers & Enclosures
7. Censored
8. Inflation, mourning stamp
9. Ironic cancels, collateral

2mm black border
obverse:

wax seal "Elizabeth Ann"



LONDON 'OLD CAVENDISH STREET' to Montreal Lower Canada

oval L 18 AU 43 – Liverpool transit mark

manuscript rate 1 shilling and 2 pence

overstruck in Quebec, boxed 1 shilling 4 pence currency

b/s double frame red maltese cross O.C.S. 17 AU 17 1843

*This cover is pictured on page 485 of Boggs' **The Postage Stamps and Postal History of Canada** (1945) as an example of a short paid ocean mail letter. Mrs. Pelton would have paid the currency rate to receive her mourning letter.*