

The Old Time Funerals As They were on the Hagey Homestead and Elsewhere

Excerpt from Some Local History of Franconia Township

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When a person had died, a few of the nearest neighbors went around the neighborhood, sometimes on foot and sometimes on horseback, to call all the neighbors for a distance of one mile to a meeting or "lummikunft" at the house of the dead usually a few hours after death. There was a foreman chosen and the meeting was called to order to form ways and means for holding a funeral and to choose men to do this and that. A list of the relatives was made beforehand on slips of paper, and one was given to each bearer of the death notice to invite the relatives near and far to the funeral. Some bearers usually had to go many miles by horse and wagon.

To dig the grave on the first nice day four men were chosen if the deceased was a married or an elderly person, or four boys were chosen if the deceased was a little child. The gravediggers were also the pallbearers.

Next chosen were four married women, four and sometimes five girls, four married men, and from ten to fifteen boys (if there were that many available to be hostlers). If boys weren't available, men were substituted.

The morning or noon before the funeral the girls and the men gathered at the place of the dead to prepare for the funeral the next day. They cleaned, set the tables in order, cooked prunes, raisins, and such things. On that day a large order from the store came containing such things as prunes, raisins, cheese, honey, and butter, but no meat was to be served. The baker usually came on the morning of the funeral and brought lots of bread, cakes and buns.

The four men had to make the barn ready for the horses. They had to take the wagons out of the barn and wagon houses and make stalls in there with fence rails. They put feeding boxes up for the horses and provided feed if there was not enough there.

The men then took a team and fetched benches at the schoolhouse and at the neighbors, who almost all had a bench standing on their porches and one in the dining room behind the table. The undertaker did not bring chairs along that time.

When the men and women had everything ready for the funeral, they went home. Early the next morning they gathered again at the house of the dead. Pretty soon the baker and the funeral director were on hand. And if it was winter, the hostlers sometimes had to take the horses and cows to neighboring farms to make room for visitor's horses.

Now everything was ready to attend to the relatives and friends of the dead, who commenced to arrive soon after eight o'clock. The funeral was usually at nine or nine-thirty or ten o'clock, according to how far they had to go to the place of burial. For those who came from far away, the hostlers had to unhitch their horses, mark the halter, the harness, and the wagon with a piece of chalk, put the horses in the prepared stalls, give them feed and water, and after awhile hitch them to the wagons again. Sometimes all the fences and places where a horse could be tied around the home were lined with teams. Often relatives living at a distance came with two-horse teams.

The relatives were all invited to a forenoon meal soon after arrival. The next meal was rather late in the afternoon.

After the funeral sermon was over, they left for the place of burial. When the funeral carriages had all left, about 10:30 o'clock or so, the women and the girls set the tables again. One man's duty was to slice the bread, another one had to cut the cheese and so on, and to see that everything was all right and to keep order.

Then the hostlers were called in, and everybody sat down at the tables-hostlers, men, and women-and ate their forenoon meal. When that was over the women cleaned the dishes and reset the tables again.

One of the men handed a box of cigars around, and from then on there was some talk and fun-in the winter in a warm room and in the summer out in the shade-until around two o'clock. Then the relatives came back from the meetinghouse.

Now every horse-and there were sometimes from 15 to 25 horses- were unhitched. Halters, harness, and wagons were marked, as described before, to distinguish which belonged together.

In the house all were called again to partake of that which was set before them. Afterwards they chatted with each other-friends and relatives- some of whom never met except at funerals. Towards evening one after another left for home.

After the relatives had eaten and the hostlers had taken care of the horses, about one half of the hostlers were called in to eat while the others attended to the teams. When the first bunch came out, the others went in.

There was usually some food left over, which the family could not use immediately, so the helpers very often took some along home. The helpers had also brought along some of their dishes, too, for it took quite a lot.

The cows and horses had to be brought home again. The loaned benches had to be returned.

This help was all given without remuneration whatsoever, as a neighborly act to get help back again in time of need.

The reader can get an idea of the cost of a funeral in earlier days, one hundred years ago, from a bill in the possession of Henry H. Halteman on the old Hackman homestead.

Franconia June 10th 1831

Henry Hackman bought of Jacob S. Harley

1 hundred of flour	\$3.25
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8 lbs of coffee	\$1.20
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12lbs sugar	\$1.20
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4 yds muslin	\$6.37
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Other expenses:

July 6th 1831, rec'd of Henry Hackman \$7.50 for a coffin for his father John Hockman, signed Joseph Dehaven. This funeral cost \$13.87.

One hundred years later on July 1932 the funeral for Mrs. Mary M. Kratz, an afternoon funeral, cost \$90.00 for coffin; \$15.00 for overcase; \$25.00 for labor; \$10.00 for use of hearse; \$7.50 for dress; \$7.20 for funeral letters; \$12.00 for digging grave. The total cost for the funeral was \$166.70. More stylish coffins now cost several hundred dollars.

This old style of conducting funerals made quite a lot of work and trouble, and as old things must give way to new ones, so it happened with this mode of conducting funerals.

On February 16th 1918 there was the first funeral held in the afternoon at the Franconia Mennonite meetinghouse, that of a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Henry H. Halteman. Only the near relatives and neighbors met at the house of mourning for a short sermon at one o'clock. About 1:30 o'clock the doors were locked, and everybody left for the meetinghouse. And from that time until now every funeral in this part of the country except two was conducted in this way, as far as the writer could investigate.

Watch Meetings

Many years ago they used to watch over the dead at night from the time of death until the funeral to make sure that the mice did not molest the dead body and such things. Of course, there was a tallow candle burning in the death room. That time the dead were not laid out as they are now and embalmed. They were simply laid on a board. Sometimes the corpse could be held only a short time.

The last watch that was held this way on the Hagey Homestead was for Johannes Hagey, the author's Great Grandfather, in 1859.

The watchers would pass their time during the long nights in another room, but they had to look in on the dead now and then. Abraham Delp of Elroy and now deceased told the author that he was one of the watchers that time. He was 18 years old and was a servant of the Hackman's where Levi M. Hackman now

lives. There were two and as high as five watchers, men and women. I have heard people say that sometimes the watchers had quite a lot of fun while on watch duty.

We all arrive here on this burdensome terrestrial planet without our consent, as pilgrims. We lodge here for a little while and proceed with our migration. How long we abide here and where we go, as well as the aim and purpose of our being here, are enigmas we cannot penetrate. We can't surmise either the origin or the conclusion of our journey. We are strangers here and everything is strange to us.

The human machine, strange creature, is not able to understand himself, much less the world around him. He comes into being not knowing why nor whence, gasping for breath, struggling to live. And again, disgusted with what he finds, he struggles as desperately to escape from life.

It is hard to understand why human beings should hasten on through the dark door, knowing well enough that Death is always walking toward them and will not fail to get them.

The Clock of Life is wound but once,
And no man has the power
To tell just when, the hands will stop
At late or early hour.