

"Reader Meet Us In Heaven"

History lovers save tombstone mystery

County



Phyllis Kitchen, of Wellesley, deciphers a 115-year-old puzzle

By John Roe
district editor

WELLESLEY — A 115-year-old puzzle was given a new lease on life near here yesterday by lovers of history and an almost unsolvable mystery.

As about 50 people gathered on the hillside of Rushes Cemetery six kilometres north of town, a replica of a famous tombstone with a coded epitaph was unveiled.

Since 1867 the white marble stone with the mysterious inscription commemorating the two wives of Dr. Samuel Bean has puzzled historians across Canada.

In the past few years, moss has covered many of the letters while rain and snow have worn others away, making the tombstone almost impossible to read.

But Flossie Dewar, of Wellesley, who first decoded the cryptic message in 1934, was convinced something should be done to save the stone and enlisted the aid of Wellesley mayor Albert Erb.

After squeaking to the mayor, experts from Superior Memorials of Kitchener inspected the stone. They realized the stone was too fragile to be re-engraved. But they were so impressed by the marker that they offered to donate a replica fashioned in grey granite — an almost invulnerable substance.

"In human terms, it is here for virtually all times now," said Superior spokesman Alex Whorwood yesterday.

About 100 man hours went into making the replica, hours Mrs. Dewar thinks were well-spent. The cryptic message measuring 15 letters across by 15 letters down first captivated her nearly 50 years ago.

The epitaph Dr. Bean wrote for his wives seemed indecipherable but Mrs. Dewar persevered and cracked the code. The key, she says, is to start seven letters from the top and seven from the left-hand side. Begin reading counter-clockwise and then in a zig-zag fashion.

Decoded, the Puzzle reads: "In Memoriam. Henrietta, 1st wife of S. Bean, M.D., who died 27th Sep. 1865, aged 23 years, 2 months & 17 days & Susanna, his 2nd wife, who died 27th April 1867, aged 26 years 10 months & 15 days. 2 better wives 1 man never had. They were gifts from God but are now in Heaven. May God help me, S.B., to meet them there."

The puzzle's creator was a native of Wilmot Township and a medical doctor who practised in Linwood.

When his first wife died after only a few years of marriage, he had funeral cards printed in a code.

After his second wife died, he erected the puzzle tombstone over their graves.

Bean married a third time in 1870 and in later life became an evangelical minister who read the Bible 65 times. He died in 1904 at the age of 61 when a ship in which he was a passenger capsized off the

Florida coast. The body was never returned to Canada.

The man is as much a mystery as the stone.

For years people have wondered why the doctor created such a monument. Why did he write such an important message in such a difficult code?

"We thought for years he was a quack, but after you decode it, it's interesting and you realize how important the message is," explained Edgar Hammonds, of Milverton. Mr. Hammonds has known what the code says since his father John deciphered the stone in the early twenties.

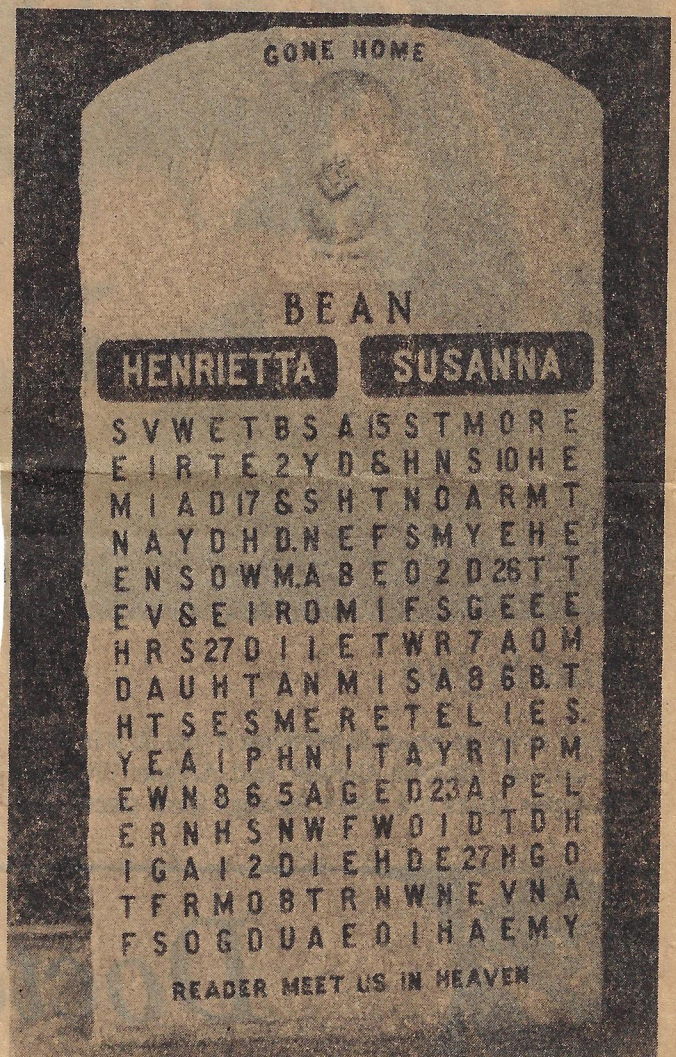
Nobody knows exactly when the puzzle was first unscrambled or who did it.

"Codes could have been a craze with him," speculated Mrs. Dewar. "Or maybe he was trying to set a puzzle for future generations."

All those who have solved the riddle believe the doctor was a deeply religious man. Perhaps the puzzle was his way of expressing the enigma of life that can only be understood after death.

The final line on the stone, written in plain English, hints that those who can't solve the puzzle now, can find the answer in the future.

"Reader," it says hopefully, "meet us in heaven."



Dr. Bean's mysterious message

Photos by John Roe