

Wellesley woman figured it out

Strange tale of a tombstone cryptogram

By Mary Schuessler
district correspondent

WELLESLEY — One of the most puzzling tombstones in Canadian history stands in Rushes Cemetery located several miles north of this village.

The major portion of the stone consists of a solid block of 225 random letters and numbers. Besides this mysterious cryptogram on the four-inch marble slab, a few intelligible inscriptions do occur. At the top of the stone stands the family name of "Bean" with "Henrietta" and "Susanna" written below it. A hand with three fingers bending down toward the palm and the index finger pointing skyward announce the words, "Gone Home". Along the bottom of the tombstone a final sentence declares: "Reader! Meet us in heaven."

For almost 70 years this block of mindless letters stood unyielding. It made absolutely no sense to anyone

who saw the stone in the cemetery built on a rise of land east of the road between the village and Crosshill. But Florence "Flossie" Dewar, who lived 60 years in this village, finally broke the code and unlocked the tombstone's silence in 1936.

Since last July, Mrs. Dewar and her husband, Anderson, have taken up residence at Nithview in New Hamburg. The alert and active 92-year-old woman still keeps among her mementos the large piece of cardboard penciled off in a grid with each letter of the cryptogram written into a square. Below each letter, she's recorded in green ink a number, all 225 of them. These numbers reveal the progression of the coded message as it twists its way throughout the block.

"If you start from the top with the seventh letter from the left and go down seven squares, you begin with the letter 'I,'" she points out. "The letters go counterclockwise in a zigzag."

Only the first circle of

words follow in a straight line as it spells out "In memoriam". The next wider circle follows a zigzag course, but reverts to a straight line pattern on its third round. But the remainder of the cryptogram follows to the end in a series of zigs and zags.

The deciphered message reads:

"In memoriam Henrietta 1st wife of S Bean MD who died 27th Sep 1865 aged 23 years 2 months & 17 days and 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."

Mrs. Dewar recalls that in her early years in Wellesley, few people ever talked much about the stone or paid any attention to it. She'd moved into the village with her family from Ellice Township when she was nine years old. She remembers hearing her parents and grandparents, who attended an Evangelical church in Gadshill, speak of this doctor who had also become an Evangelical, or German Methodist, minister



Florence Dewar with the piece of cardboard she made up to solve the Bean cryptogram. Photo by Mary Schuessler

as well.

Mrs. Dewar admits that sheer curiosity drove her to seek out the key to the Bean tombstone that probably goes back to 1867. "I must

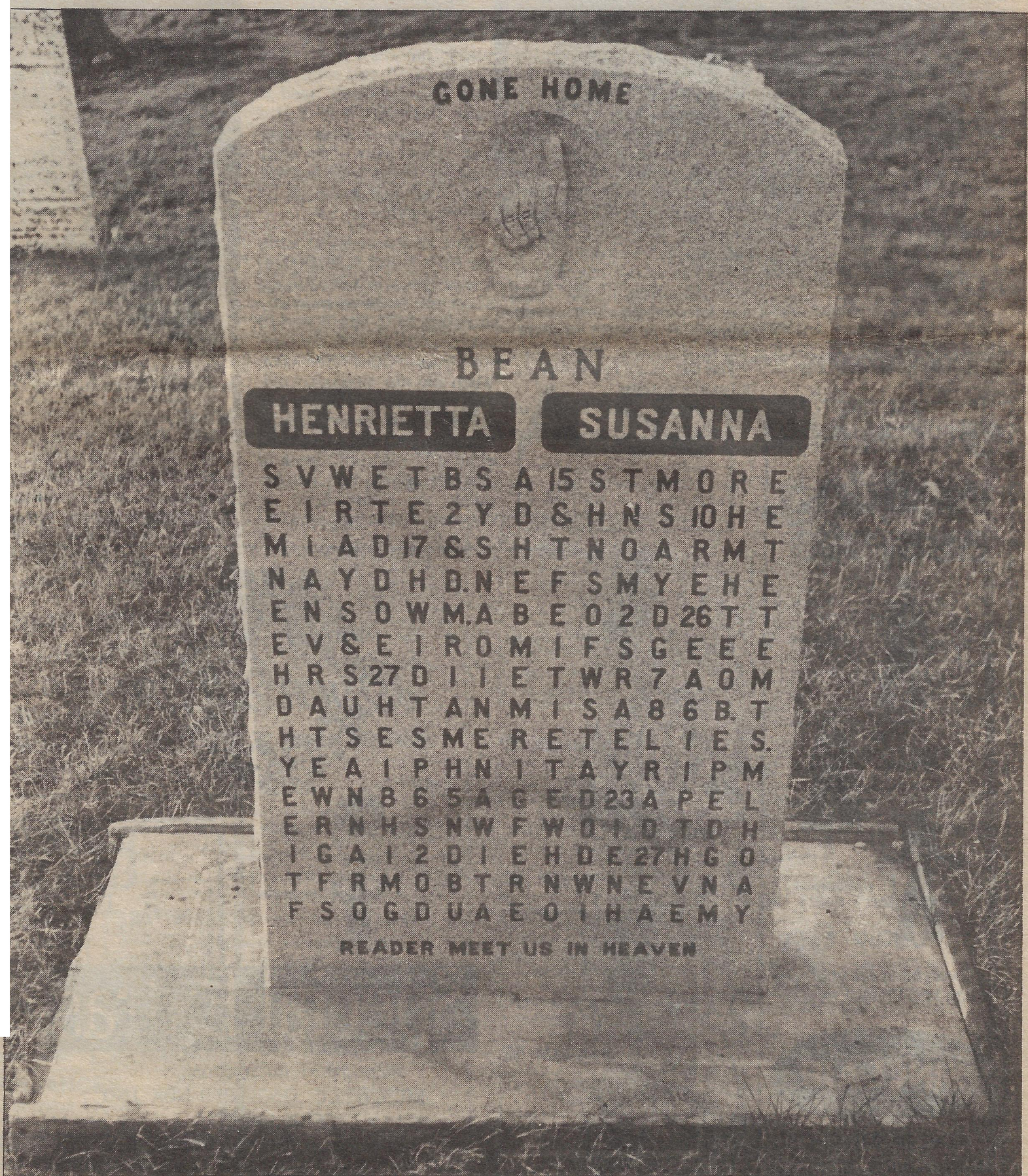
have been sick in the head," laughs Mrs. Dewar, a bookkeeper and accountant before her marriage. "I always liked to work with figures. Let's say arithmetic was my best subject in school."

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At right is a strange tombstone in a cemetery near Wellesley. For a story about the stone and the woman who eventually decoded its message, see pages 2 and 3.



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After going to the cemetery and copying down all the letters and numbers on the stone, she took the cryptogram back home. "And then I started to work at it for a little amusement," she recalls. She estimates she spent several weeks on the puzzle, but once she discovered the message began in the middle of the block and worked in a counterclockwise direction, she'd learned the most important and vital key. "But I sure didn't do it in one night," she says.

Once Mrs. Dewar broke that code in 1936, her work with the stone didn't end. For the discovery evoked even more questions about the doctor and his two young wives.

Research revealed the man was born in Wilmot Township in 1842. Before becoming a doctor, he'd served for three years as the first school teacher at S.S. No. 8 in Hay Township near Zurich, Ont. He then went on to study medicine in Philadelphia where he met and married his first wife, Henrietta Furry.

When his bride of only seven months died in 1865 in Linwood, the doctor resorted to a cryptogram on the black bordered funeral card that announced her death. The message, once again starting in the centre and moving counterclockwise, revealed that Henrietta had left all of her friends behind in Pennsylvania and had come to Linwood, Ont. where her

husband had set up his first practice. The doctor praised her as "a model wife, 1 of 1000" and wrote her death was "much regretted by her sorrowing husband and all who knew her."

At one time it was believed the doctor's first two wives were sisters, but Mrs. Dewar discounts the theory. Samuel Bean, whose name was originally spelled Biehn or Biehan, came from German-speaking people of Swiss origins. The family first arrived in Pennsylvania in 1745 and later made their way into Waterloo and Oxford counties in Ontario.

A year after the death of his second wife in 1867, Dr. Bean became a licenced preacher for the Evangelical Church. He was ordained as an itinerant elder five years later. By that time he'd married his third wife, Annie Wankmiller from Strasburg in Waterloo County. The couple, who had five children, moved to Niagara Falls, New York shortly after their marriage in 1870. They took up residence as well in Iowa and Florida. One old Iowa settler recalls that if the doctor felt his medicine wouldn't cure the patient, he'd kneel down by the bed-

side and pray.

After a visit to Cuba in January, 1904, Dr. Bean was lost at sea when the boat capsized on the return voyage. His body was never found. His wife Annie, who died later that same year, is believed to have been buried in the Strasburg cemetery.

Florence Dewar's interest in the Bean monument continued into the 1980s. Over the years she'd watched the gradual deterioration of the soft and sugary Bean stone.

"I'd been after different ones to do something about the stone," she says. "I had pushed and pushed, but nothing came of it." She feared the decaying stone, losing its surface to harsh east winds and encrusted green moss, would be lost to future generations. Finally, the year 1982 with its 150th Wellesley Township anniversary celebrations provided.

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Henrietta Bean Susanna

S	W	E	T	B	S	A	15	S	T	M	O	R	E	
147	145	143	141	139	137	135	133	131	129	127	124	125	224	225
E	R	T	E	2	Y	D	8	H	N	S	10	H	E	
146	144	142	140	138	136	134	132	130	128	126	122	123	222	223
N	I	A	D	17	8	S	H	T	N	O	A	R	M	T
149	148	73	72	71	70	69	68	67	66	65	120	121	220	221
N	A	Y	D	H	D	N	E	F	S	M	Y	E	H	E
151	150	74	39	37	35	33	31	28	29	64	118	119	218	219
E	N	S	O	W	M	A	B	E	O	2	D	26	T	T
153	152	75	38	36	34	32	30	26	27	63	116	117	216	217
E	V	8	E	I	R	O	M	I	F	S	9	E	E	E
155	154	76	41	40	7	6	5	24	25	12	114	115	214	215
H	R	S	27	D	1	1	E	T	W	R	7	A	O	M
157	156	77	43	42	8	7	4	22	23	61	112	113	212	213
D	A	U	H	T	A	N	M	1	S	A	8	6	B	T
159	158	78	45	44	9	2	3	20	21	60	110	111	210	211
4	T	S	E	S	M	E	R	E	T	E	L	1	E	S
161	160	79	47	46	10	12	14	16	18	59	108	109	208	209
Y	E	A	1	P	H	N	1	T	A	Y	R	1	P	M
163	162	80	49	48	11	13	15	17	19	58	106	107	206	207
E	W	N	8	6	5	A	9	E	D	23	A	P	E	L
165	164	81	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	104	105	204	205
E	R	N	H	S	N	W	F	W	O	1	D	T	D	H
167	166	82	84	86	88	90	92	94	96	98	100	102	202	203
1	G	A	1	2	D	1	E	H	D	E	27	H	S	O
169	168	83	85	87	89	91	93	95	97	99	101	103	200	201
T	F	R	M	O	B	T	R	N	W	N	E	V	N	A
171	170	174	176	178	180	182	184	186	188	190	192	194	196	198
E	S	O	G	D	U	A	E	O	I	H	A	E	M	Y
173	172	175	177	179	181	183	185	187	189	191	193	195	197	199

The scaled-down version of the piece of cardboard that contains all the letters and numbers of the Bean cryptogram. Underneath each square, Florence Dewar wrote in a number — a total of 225 — to show the sequence progression of the words.