

Can you crack the code on this Crosshill headstone?

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Sat., May 28, 2016

Update Article was updated Apr. 11, 2020

When I heard the welcome news that Bill Tutte, our local connection to the fascinating Bletchley Park story of the Second World War, had been inducted into the Waterloo Region Hall of Fame, I immediately thought of John Hammond. The two never met and probably never heard of one another. One was a brilliant University of Waterloo scientist and mathematician from England; the other was a Wellesley Township farmer and cemetery caretaker. It is the latter we'll talk about today.

The most celebrated code in Waterloo Region history is not buried in computer software. It is chiseled into marble at a small rural graveyard just south of Crosshill but its roots are in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

In 1800, John and Barbara Biehn joined the first Mennonite exodus to the future Waterloo County. They were among the earliest settlers here and son Abraham, born near Doon in 1804, was one of the first locally born white children. Abraham and his second wife, Susannah Graybill, in turn produced 10 children, including Samuel G. Bean (1842-1904). In Abraham's generation the surname had been Anglicized.

As a young teacher, Samuel moved to Pennsylvania but returned to Waterloo County in the mid-1860s with two things — an American wife named Henrietta Furry Bean and a medical certificate from "Eclectic College of Pennsylvania." The latter was a diploma mill; for \$75 he had purchased his "diploma." Samuel set up his shingle in Linwood, Wellesley Township, as the village's first "doctor" and advertised "Physic Surgery and Midwifery."

Henrietta, 23, died September 27, 1865. Samuel took a local woman, Susanna Clegg, as wife two but after 10 months she died, age 26, on April 27, 1867, a week after birthing a daughter.

During his five years in Linwood, Samuel not only lost two wives but abandoned medicine in favour of preaching. Around 1870 he moved permanently to the United States, married Anna Wankmiller and they had three children. Samuel spent the final 30 years of his life evangelizing and raising fruit in Florida. Of the three wives, Anna was luckiest! She survived until 1904, dying six months after Samuel had drowned on a trip to Cuba.

Back to the Linwood years, 1865 to 1869. When Henrietta died, Samuel's clever mind created a funeral card featuring a 19-letter-square cryptic coded message which puzzled most recipients. When solved, it expressed Samuel's love for Henrietta and included a brief biography. He buried her in Rush's (or Rush or Rushes) Cemetery, south of Crosshill. Susanna's death 20 months later also spurred Samuel's linguistic creativity, this time in more permanent form. Laying Susanna beside Henrietta, he composed a smaller 15-by-15-letter puzzle and had it engraved onto a marble double grave marker.

Eighty years later, cemetery caretaker John L. Hammond became the first recorded code-cracker. Now is your chance to compare wits with the Rush's Cemetery caretaker. Without cheating — there are numerous solutions on the web — see what you can do using this photograph of the 1982 replica grave marker.

Some hints? The first words are "In memoriam Henrietta" and the opening "I" appears seven-rows-down, seven-columns-in from left. Letters jump around vertically, horizontally, diagonally and zigzag. The final words are " ... to meet them there" and are easily spotted at top of the two right-hand columns. Years are in four separate numerals but days and ages are shown as double numbers, so look for the appropriate dates in my earlier text. By the way, there are spelling mistakes in the engraved code! Good luck! On June 11 there will be further details on the puzzle's history and solution.

Perhaps someone will assist you May 31 when Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society presents "Finding Your Roots in Wellesley Township" at 7:30 p.m. at the community centre, 1000 Maple Leaf St. in Wellesley village. Information at www.wellesleyhistory.org.