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## Flash From the Past: Headstone puzzle was finally decoded in 1947

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*The living come with grassy tread / To read the gravestones on the hill; / The graveyard draws the living still, / But never anymore the dead.*

Only Robert Frost's first three lines are true at Rushes Cemetery in Wellesley Township. Two weeks ago, Flash from the Past left you with a puzzle and I suspect many readers are still puzzled.

The most famous grave marker in Waterloo Region is certainly no easily-unravell'd spiral of letters. Dr. Samuel Bean created an infuriating code and engraved it on a tombstone honouring his first two wives. Even with Bean's text at hand, the pathway through the letters and numerals can be maddening. Before offering the text, here is a bit more history about the site of this almost 150-year-old head-scratcher.



Rushes Cemetery in Wellesley Township. On the left, the 1982 replica grave marker donated by Superior Memorials. To the right is Samuel Bean's cleverly coded original 1867 expression of love for his first two wives.

Land for a graveyard near Crosshill was provided by Elisha Rush in 1851.

Soon, the farmer/carpenter was overseeing the erection of a small Wesleyan Methodist Church beside the burial ground but the congregation lasted only until 1889. However, unlike Frost's graveyard, Rushes Cemetery is still in use

today at 1915 Hutchison Road, one kilometre south of Streicher Line between Crosshill and Wellesley. The sign calls it Rushes Cemetery but other documentation refers to Rush's or Rush. Why the plural caught on instead of the possessive is perplexing.

In spring 1867, Dr. Samuel Bean was a bereaved husband (two wives dead within 20 months), a single father (daughter Susanna surviving her same-name mother's death) and an Evangelical preacher so we should understand his puzzle's emotions in that context.

Whether anyone ever solved the code in the late 19th or early 20th centuries — or if Samuel ever revealed the secret — is unknown. The man generally credited as the first (in 1947) to decipher the puzzle is cemetery caretaker John L. Hammond, whose own grave is nearby.

In the May 21, 1955 Kitchener-Waterloo Record, John Schmidt wrote that Hammond "had copied the inscription, took it home and over the course of several months figured it out." A 1992 Record article by John Roe tells of another late 1940s decoder, Florence Dewar of Wellesley village. A decade earlier, Dewar had been instrumental in restoring the original grave marker and involving township mayor, Albert Erb. Superior Memorials of Kitchener created and donated a replica stone which was unveiled at an impressive ceremony on October 17, 1982. It is Superior's granite stone pictured in the May 28 Flash from the Past.

There is a single letter-discrepancy between the two stones. In line 7, column 8, the original's "D" became an "E" on the replica — as it should be. However, there remains one seeming error: in line 8, column 14, each stone shows "B" but this has no place in the puzzle. If made an "O" it completes the word "SO" in the puzzle's final phrase. I like to think that Samuel had these false letters engraved into the original marble to have the last laugh on his township neighbours.

On the replica stone, 10 of Samuel's periods and a comma (after "GOD") were inexplicably omitted from their preceding letter or numeral. They are shown below in my corrected 1867 text. It is all in Samuel's upper case and retains his original punctuation and contractions.

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 SO TO MEET THEM THERE

Now try matching this text to the May 28 Flash from the Past photo which appears if you search: "Crack the code Crosshill." As you grumble to yourself over the solution, keep in mind that Hammond and Dewar only had the tombstone code, not the text. Good luck! If you do get stuck, email me and I will send my explanation diagram.

At some point, a display stand was installed at Rushes Cemetery containing John Roe's 1992 article. The stand and article have deteriorated badly but I am happy to report that Nancy Maitland and the Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society are investigating a replacement. For more information on the project, contact [info@wellesleyhistory.org](mailto:info@wellesleyhistory.org).

In addition to the two articles in The Record noted above, Waterloo Historical Society issue 70 from 1982 has an article by

Flash From the Past: Headstone puzzle was finally decoded in 1947 <http://www.therecord.com/living-story/6710756-flash-from-the-past...>

Kathryn Hansuld Lamb detailing that year's ceremony at Rushes Cemetery. Several area weekly newspapers have also featured the story over the decades. Alas, all these sources I have employed contain defects in their published solutions.

On May 21, Flash from the Past focused on the Granite Club in Kitchener. As it turns out, my note that paintball was one of the current sports at the site was old news. Both Mike Mixer and Dan Pronovost quickly updated me. Paintball has moved on and the K-W Badminton Club has since purchased the entire building. After major renovations, the Granite now hosts pickleball, Tri-City Roller Derby action and BATL, the axe-throwing league.

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