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This Weekend

Friday

25°



Saturday

21°



Sunday

20°



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Crosshill tombstone was a real puzzler for decades

Mysterious cryptogram was designed in 1867 by bereaved husband Dr. Samuel Bean to honour two former wives

Julian Gavaghan
Observer Staff

NEAR THE DAPPLED SHADE OF mature trees in the corner of Rushes Cemetery, a short drive south of Crosshill, there is a grave that stands out more than any other.

In fact, the Bean tombstone puzzle, erected above the bodies of two young brides lying side by side, has been baffling the people of Wellesley Township and beyond for almost 160 years.

Above the inscription “Reader meet us in heaven,” there are 225 assorted letters and numbers engraved on the marble marker that form a coded secret message.

The cryptogram, designed in 1867 by bereaved husband Dr. Samuel Bean, whose wives Henrietta and Susanna died just 20 months apart, remained a mystery even decades after the Linwood physician went to his own watery grave after perishing at sea in 1904.

The unusual epitaph, which also includes the inscription “gone home” alongside an engraved hand pointing upwards, holds a particular interest for Andrew Jacobson,

the chair of Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society (WTHHS).

“It’s a great part of the history of Wellesley Township. It’s enigmatic, it’s really fascinating and brings people to look at it all the time,” he said of the little Methodist cemetery’s old curiosity stop.

While the message in the cryptogram was eventually solved (read on and you’ll find out how), the reason it was left there in the first place remains a mystery, said Jacobson.

Dr. Bean, born in Wilmot Township in 1842, was a descendant of German-speaking Swiss Mennonites who came to Pennsylvania in 1745 and later changed their last name from Biehn to an Anglicized version.

The medic, who converted to Methodism, later married Henrietta Furry and then Susanna Clegg, making Beans of them too, if only for a sadly short while.

They each died from probable sicknesses aged 23 and 26 respectively, with Susanna most tragically passing away only a week after the birth of a daughter by the same name, according to accounts.

→ TOMBSTONE 5



Andrew Jacobson, chair of the Wellesley Township Heritage and Historical Society, with the replica Bean tombstone erected in 1982 that allows visitors to continue to read the cryptic message. [Julian Gavaghan](#)

Province expands program for free menstrual products in schools

Andrea Eymann
Observer Staff

THE PROVINCE’S EXPANSION OF FREE menstrual products in schools is welcome news for the local public school board.

The government last week announced a new agreement with Shoppers Drug Mart to expand the Menstrual Equity Initiative, which will provide more than 23 million period products over the three years. A contribution that amounts to \$8 million will take the program beyond the initial three million products made available initially.

“We know that when students can’t access or afford menstrual products, it often results in them missing school, work or other activities - but we’re changing that,” said Todd Smith, the Ontario minister of education.

“Access to products through Ontario’s Menstrual Equity Initiative is just one more way we are removing barriers for women and girls so they can reach their full potential and realize their dreams.”

The menstrual products will be available across all Ontario schools.

→ MENSTRUATION 7

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The original tombstone (left) at Rushes Cemetery, under which Dr. Samuel Bean's two young brides, Henrietta and Susanna, were buried after short marriages. Right, a replica of the Bean tombstone puzzle with a message that says: "Reader meet us in Heaven." [Julian Gavaghan](#)

TOMBSTONE: History isn't quite sure who first cracked the code, but the puzzle has been preserved for others to try

→ FROM 1

"We know he was a very religious man and he was clearly greatly affected by the deaths of his first two wives," said Jacobson.

"But why he chose to memorialize them with a puzzle is one of those things that people have all different opinions about. But it remains a mystery."

Dr. Bean didn't stay in Wellesley Township long enough after he erected the tombstone riddle to explain either his motive or the message.

A year after the death of his second wife, he became a licensed preacher for the Evangel- ical Church and in 1870 married again, this time to Annie Wankmiller.

Wryly noting "third time's a charm," Jacobson said it was Dr. Bean's final wedding.

The couple soon moved to Niagara Falls, New York, and later spent time in Iowa before settling in Florida, where they raised fruit and three of their own children.

Anna, the luckiest of the three wives, ended up outliving her husband by six months after he was lost overboard from a boat heading to Cuba.

Back in Crosshill, Wellesley village and other

surrounding settlements, the mystery of the tombstone in Rushes Cemetery lived on, however.

Many tried to solve the riddle, but it would take at least three more decades before anyone came close.

Some reports say the puzzle was first decoded by Wellesley villager Florence Dewar in 1934 or 1936, while other newspaper articles claim the Methodist cemetery's caretaker John Hammond first cracked it in 1947.

"I must have been sick in the head," Dewar, a former bookkeeper and accountant, told The Stratford Beacon Herald

in 1989 at the age of 92 as she explained why she was so determined to unlock the cryptogram's secret message.

If you don't want to know how she did it, and want to crack the code by yourself, look away now.

Using an etching of the puzzle, she recorded a number below each letter that tracks the progress of the message as it snakes its way through the grid.

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

explained.

Reading in a spiral fashion, the inscription reads: "In memoriam Henrietta, 1st wife of S. Bean, M.D. who died 27th Sep. 1865, aged 23 years, 2 months and 17 days and Susanna his 2nd wife who died 27th April, 1867, aged 26 years, 10 months and 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."

Dewar's involvement did not stop there. Together with the Wellesley historical society, she was instrumental in obtaining and erecting a replica tombstone at the site in 1982.

The original marble one, which remains at the site today, had by its 12th decade been rubbed and weathered so much that it had become very difficult to read.

So a more durable granite marker was added alongside the old one so that people could continue to have a go at figuring out the epic head-scratcher.

"It has preserved the puzzle for posterity," said Jacobson, who noted he had never seen any grave like the one for Dr. Bean's brides.

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80

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