

## Ogle County Historical Society

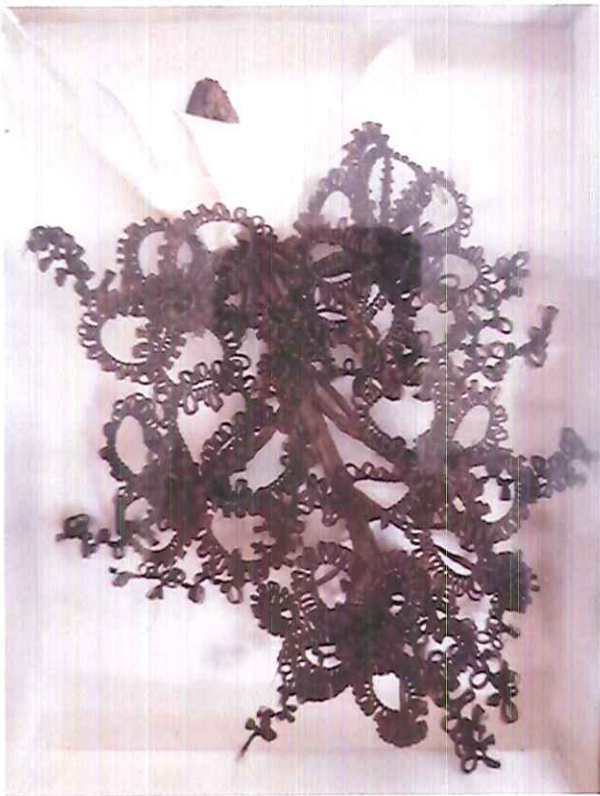
### The Art of Hair

Preserving human hair has been practiced for centuries. Early on as religious relics of saints and notable people, then later common in the 17th and 18th centuries due to high infant mortality.

Our American history of "mourning hair art" comes mainly from Queen Victoria. She formally mourned her husband Albert for 40 years until her death in 1901. People on this side of the Atlantic copied her somber black mode of dress and behavioral customs that became rigidly fixed. This became part of the American "Victorian Era" that scripted people's lives. For women over here, Godey's Lady's Book sold kits of tools and materials for hair work.

Sentimentality was a hallmark of all Victorians. According to one editor, "Hair is at once the most delicate and last of our materials and survives us like love. It is so light, so gentle, so escaping from the idea of death, that, with a lock of hair belonging to a child or friend we may almost look up to heaven and compare notes with angelic nature, may almost say, I have a piece of thee here, not unworthy of thy being now."

Hair art was not always gruesome and designed of the deceased person's hair. For middle class women (who had time), it became one of their art forms. They created meticulous designs of beauty often combined with flowers and other bits of ephemera. Some creations were wearable art such as rings, brooches, earrings, and men wore watch fobs of their loved one's hair. Sometimes family ge-



*This piece is approximately 6" tall and is wound around a small branch and decorated with a white ribbon.*

nealogies of hair were designed of the living and also those who had died. Together they became the elaborate window box framed wall hangings or also mounted inside a glass dome.

Preserving hair of the dead reached a pinnacle during the Civil War when thousands of young soldiers died, many without a photo image of themselves. Photography was in its infancy, expensive for most families and only the lucky ones might have that one solitary view of their son in uniform before off to battle. It is probable that many mothers kept a lock of their son's hair safely tucked away before saying goodbye for the last time. It may have been the only tangible remembrance because thousands were buried in mass graves at the battlefield where they died.

When embalming of bodies became a practice during the Civil War, still, far fewer families were able to afford the body transportation back home. Many Civil War tombstones here in Ogle County record where the soldiers died and

mark his death, but there was no body to bury. After the war, photography became more available and affordable. Images were taken, then incorporated into the hair designs and framed for family parlors.

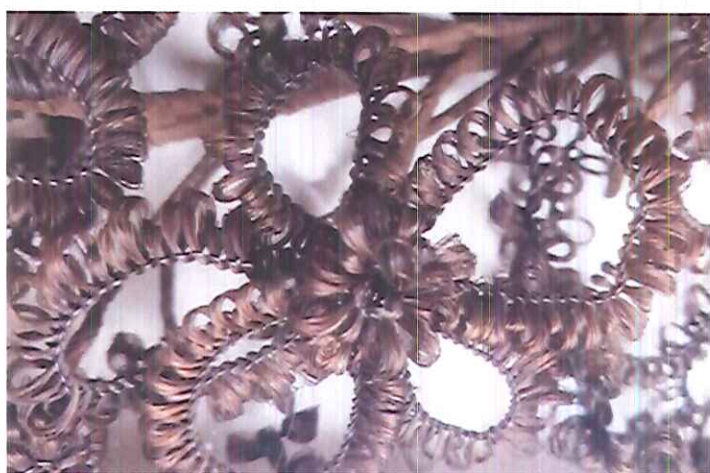
Even into the early 20th century, women collected their own hair from the traditional nightly brushing, then placing it in a special, often decorative container on their bedroom vanity. This might later be used for creating enhanced hair designs for themselves, pin cushions and many other uses.



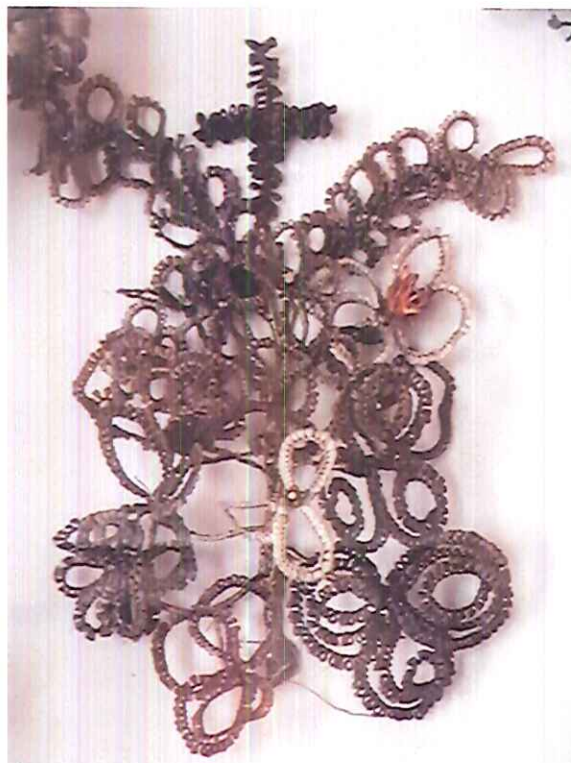
*This hair wreath is approximately 20" tall. It has decorative items woven into it.*

Here in Oregon at the Ruby Nash Museum, there are several framed pieces hair art. The largest framed hair remembrance is of multiple members of the Warner Families and another from the Beckman, Sauer Families. The hair retains its original color and there are blond, dark brunette and red hair clearly seen. They show incredibly intricate twisting, knotting, artistic designs and can be seen during open museum hours.

*Beth Simeone*



*Close-up of the intricate detail work.*



*Close-up of the center of the wreath.*

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Please don't forget our GoFundMe campaign. Find us on [gofundme.com](https://gofundme.com) and search for Ogle County Historical Society. Our campaign will come up as KrisGs campaign for Ogle County Historical Society. The picture on our page will be the Ruby Nash home as shown to the left. We are making progress. Thank you for your support!

## Skimmington ~ Charivari ~ Shivareed A Midwestern Wedding Custom



"Skimmington" was an early European folk ritual that found its way to the American Frontier. In the earliest form, it meant "a procession through a village, intended to bring ridicule on and make an example of a nagging wife or an unfaithful husband". Skimmington meant a "ride" practiced in various forms over many centuries and was to "make night hideous". In earlier centuries, the practices were wide ranging, often more violent and punishing.

This article will describe what became a more normalized, yet lively event among early pioneers of this Northern Illinois area. The term "charivari" became known and spelled as "shivaree" and yet they

both have been used interchangeably. Our variation lasted until after World War II when urbanization and the post war economy changed people's lives. But back then, in the late 18th, 19th century, "shivareed" consisted of surprising the newlyweds in the dark at their home, after they had gone to bed. A noisy party, mock serenading and required hospitality from the new bride and groom were all part of the raucous scene. Often it served as a purposeful interruption on the wedding night in rural areas and was accompanied by banging on pots and pans as noise makers after dark by friends, relatives and neighbors who would pound on the door.

If not on the wedding night, the shivaree was meant to catch the newlyweds off guard and on occasion the bride might be kidnapped, or the groom placed in a wheelbarrow and taken off somewhere. At its worst, when the crowd was crude or rough and "got out of hand" an opening salvo was a shotgun blast in the air, and upon gaining entry, might tear up the house, rearrange furniture, hide the couple's clothes as it was intended to surprise them in their nightclothes. Many couples kept clothes at the bedside anticipating the abrupt intrusion in the darkness.

In the best shivaree's, after moderate noise making to awaken the newlyweds, all were welcomed in, furniture was moved out to the yard for a dance and music began in the house. Some people played cards instead of dancing and the merrymaking might last until morning.

In all shivaree's, the newlyweds were obligated to provide food and drink to the revelers. In the best scenarios, the couple often prepared extra food and refreshments early in anticipation of the most certain nighttime antics. In some places there was an unwritten rule that you could only shivaree a couple if you were not invited to the wedding. 19th century pioneer and later pre-WWII weddings were often in homes with only immediate family and carried out in a frugal manner. There might be plenty of acquaintances who did not attend. On the other hand, if a couple was not shivareed in small villages and rural areas, they might feel

slighted as everyone knew each other in these isolated communities. These rituals resulted in a feeling of community and reassurance of one's valued place.

In Oregon there was a unique precursor to the charivari. It could be seen in the Owl's Club for single men and the Umzowee's Club for single women. Each group had intricate rituals that mocked their members who married during the year. Later in the century, newlyweds found tin cans tied to their car bumpers, signs saying, "Just Married" and most popular of all, limburger cheese put on the groom's car radiator in winter.

Another less common and punishing charivari or shivaree, could occur if people disapproved of a particular marriage. The bridegroom might be dragged from his bed, if a widow remarried too soon or other actions were thought unacceptable, then they might be aggressively shivareed. These punishing behaviors were motivated at times by religious beliefs and self-righteous citizenry. Windows might be broken, other damages and general attempts at shaming the newlyweds.

Local records tell of one very public and deadly charivari in May, 1857 at Fountaindale, a large farm estate then located on today's Montague Road between Conger and Pecatonica Roads. It was owned by former Ohio Governor Wm Bebb who had left Whig politics in 1848 and moved his family to the "frontier" of Winnebago County.

It was here that a wedding celebration took place for his son, Michael Schuck

Bebb and his bride Kathleen Josephine Hancock of Massachusetts. (This younger Bebb earlier fell in love with the study of botany, attended Beloit College and devoted the rest of his life to experimenting and publishing his expert plant studies).

On this night after all family had retired, Governor Wm Bebb heard a loud commotion outside his home. The noise continued, including shouting, blaring horns, ringing bells, and discharging guns at the house (some stuffed with paper wads). Bebb later said he thought it was a "belling" party (another name for shivareed). He described taking up a double barrel shotgun, stepping outside and calling for them to leave the premises. But when the ruckus continued, he fired the gun in the air and all, but four young men left the scene. As those four rushed toward him, Wm Bebb fired again in the dark, hitting a young farm worker named Lemuel Clemens who died of the wound. It was reported that someone using Governor Bebb's wagon, took Clemens's body back to the Mortimer Brewster Farm in Ogle County. At some point, the former Governor, a lawyer himself, rode his horse to Rockford that night, told the sheriff what had happened and asked to be locked in the jail for his safety.

Whether Bebb was in jail is unclear, but reports leading up to this night imply an atmosphere of some resentment and hostility among neighbors about such a large land holding by an "Eastern" imposter. Before coming to Illinois, Bebb with his wife had founded the successful boarding school in his

home state of Ohio. Called Sycamore Grove School, he taught there and studied for the bar exam. He then practiced law from 1831 until his governorship from 1846-1849.

But in 1857, the unfortunate tragedy of events at Fountaindale led to an inquest. Then a jury found reason to charge Governor Bebb with manslaughter and a trial lasting several days was held in Rockford. After the jury trial, a verdict of not guilty was returned. The Rockford newspaper printed lengthy details and stated its approval of the verdict. Then it went on to editorialize:

"Charivaries in this neighborhood, and indeed in all others, are far worse than ordinary riots, because they are generally got up under the guise of friendship and are made an excuse for every description of lawlessness and outrage. Ours and the adjoining county have been the scene of too many of them, and we shall rejoice if the action of Governor Bebb has the effect of putting a stop to them."

For Governor Bebb and his family, life at Fountaindale was forever changed. With the onset of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln appointed Bebb examiner of pensions in the United States War Department and he moved to Washington, DC. Later he and his family moved to Rockford where he died on October 23, 1873, and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery. In time, the vast acreage of farmland was sold off in parcels to other farmers and Fountaindale became a name in Montague history.

*Beth Simeone*

## OGLE COUNTY OUTDOORS!!

Ogle County has a long history of hosting children in a variety of summer camp settings.

Some of the earliest campers were commonly referred to as the Fresh Air Kids. The Fresh Air Fund was founded in 1877 by the Rev. Willard Parsons, a minister from rural Pennsylvania. His goal was to save "little tenement prisoners" from the dirt and squalor and disease of New York's Lower East Side by sending them on two-week summer vacations to the countryside. Following Rev. Parson's example, the Chicago Bureau of Charities and the Chicago Daily News raised money to send disadvantaged children from Chicago to rural areas, including Ogle County.

In July of 1898 twenty-nine little girls, aged four to twelve, and one mother with two young sons arrived in Oregon by train. They were transported by wagon to the fairgrounds, where they were quickly examined for contagious diseases, and were then treated to a good dinner. The community offered provisions and clothing during the girls' stay, and each of these girls returned home with a new dress, sewn by local women.

As time went on, families were urged to open up their homes for the visits, so that the children could experience real country living. In 1904, however, it was decided that the children would again be housed at the fairgrounds, rather than splitting them up and sending them to individual homes.

Another type of camping experience was established in 1913 by Mrs. Florence Lowden, wife of Governor Frank Lowden. On ten acres just south of Daysville, she built two cottages and service buildings designed to house convalescent children, nurses, and support staff, naming the facility "Hill Top." According to the Ogle County Reporter, April 1, 1926, "'Hill Top' was built a number of years ago by Mrs. Lowden as a place for convalescent children and for a number of years quite a number of youngsters who needed fresh air and wholesome surroundings were kept there during the summer months." In actuality, boys stayed at Hill Top during the summer and girls during the winter. When staffing became difficult, Hill Top was closed in 1922, and the buildings burned to the ground in 1926.

Since that time, numerous camps for children have taken up residence in Ogle County. Some of these include the Stronghold Camp and Retreat Center, Mooseheart's Camp Ross, Camp Kupugani, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Camp Lowden Boy Scouts of America, Camp Medill McCormick for Girl

The Ogle County Historical Society  
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