

Facing the “King of Terrors”

death and society in
an american community, 1750–1990

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Meeting the “King of Terrors”

The death of Joseph Ebinger is easy to overlook. Aged three when he died on August 19, 1902, Joseph was one of 4,368 people whose deaths were recorded in the Schenectady city death register between 1902 and 1907.¹ Since over one-third of the deaths were to children his age or younger, Joseph’s was not especially remarkable. Yet, even when one is examining the register to determine overall patterns of death in Schenectady, the fact that Joseph died in the New York Central Railroad Station attracts attention. What were the circumstances that led to this child dying in so unlikely a place? Were his parents immigrants on the way west when their child sickened, who got off in Schenectady seeking medical aid that was too late? What happened to them after he died? And what arrangements did they make for his burial? Submerged in the thousands of other deaths in the register, Joseph’s was, nonetheless, a deeply personal tragedy for his parents.

We are, in fact, able to learn a little more about Joseph. The death register records that he had “just come over” from Germany, and that he died of “cholera infantum,” that is, of diarrhea. His father, also Joseph, was German, and his mother, Abel, was Hungarian. Joseph Heatly, the city coroner, attended the death, after which the child was buried in St. John’s Cemetery. A brief newspaper account on the following day informed the city that Joseph and his mother had just arrived from Europe to join Mr. Ebinger, who had been working in Schenectady for several years. Joseph, Sr., had traveled to New York to greet his family, whom he had not seen for over two years. At Hudson, on the way to his new home, the child had taken sick, worsened at Albany, and died in his father’s arms on the way to Schenectady. The paper reported that “The father was prostrated by grief.”² In spite of this inauspicious family reunion, the Ebingers remained in the city.

What are we to make of this story? On the one hand, Joseph’s death, of a cause common for children at that time, is recorded in a register one purpose of which was to provide information about collective patterns of death that might be used to improve health and longevity. Thus, Joseph’s death reminds us that death is a universal human condition, and that our individual experiences are embedded in basic aspects of biology and culture. On the other hand, we are struck by the tragedy that afflicted the elder Ebingers, whose joy at reunion was so quickly followed by

grief over the loss of a child. However much death is a part of the human condition, it is also highly personal for both the dying and the immediate survivors. No doubt the Ebingers called upon their religious training to get them through their son's interment at St. John's, but what was their reaction in the weeks, months, and even years after? This we do not know. We can surmise that few others in Schenectady gave Joseph's death much thought.

This book is intended to answer these and other questions regarding how a community has lived with death from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Death is certainly the most universal, and perhaps most terrifying, of all human experiences. At its core biological, death is always experienced through cultural mediators that explain the origins, meaning, and proper responses to mortality. Nonetheless, anyone who undertakes even the most cursory cross-cultural comparison of death customs quickly learns that specific behaviors and attitudes surrounding death vary greatly from one society to another, and within cultures over sufficiently long periods.³ Although scholars have produced significant work on a variety of subjects dealing with death in America, their work has generally focused on a single topic for the United States as a whole, or some part thereof.⁴ In most instances, however, little in any one study relates to what is in the others; and that is a serious omission.

By restricting our focus to a single community – in this instance, Schenectady, New York, between the late seventeenth century and the present – it is possible to explore the connections among various aspects of death and dying. Here we can examine, among other topics, what people died from, where they were buried, what they placed over their graves, how the community responded to epidemics, what was involved in funerals and other rituals of death, who took care of the last rites, and how individuals responded to their own impending deaths or to the death of a loved one. Of special interest are the ways these various aspects of death related to each other, and how changes in one area were accompanied by new patterns in others, an integration of material impossible on the national or regional level, but which can be accomplished within the confines of a single town.

Before examining attitudes and practices regarding death in Schenectady, it is useful to consider what other scholars have said about attitudes toward death in Western culture over the last several centuries. Several scholars have had significant influence on the shape of this study, and they deserve extended comment. Disagreements with and modifications to the work of my predecessors will be presented in the concluding chapter.

General concepts from the work of Robert J. Lifton provide the basis of much of what follows. Central to Lifton's argument is a threefold division regarding the psychological experiences surrounding death.⁵ He begins with the obvious point that death is universal, and that all cultures share a need to explain death and to dispose of bodies. Based on psychoanalytic principles that humans commonly deny their own personal mortality, Lifton considers "the central quest of human history [to be] the struggle for believable symbolizations of meaning and continuity,"

which enable members of a society to confront their own deaths.⁶ He identifies five modes of symbolizing immortality, and hence of achieving some acceptance of death. They are: (1) the biological, which refers to an identification with family and kin, and especially children; (2) the theological, which may emphasize the immortal soul or belonging to a chosen people; (3) the creative, by which we live on in our acts of creation, including, for Lifton, acts of scientific or technological invention; (4) the natural, which refers to an identification with nature and natural processes; and (5) the transcendent, by which we achieve a sense of attachment to the wider world through ecstatic experience, which may also include a perception of the cessation of time, and hence of death.

Although societies frequently achieve stable and effective modes of symbolizing immortality, material and psychic conditions change, sometimes rapidly and catastrophically, with the result that the old symbols become fragmented, ineffective, and even burdensome. Lifton believes that the twentieth century is a time of symbolic collapse, resulting in heightened anxiety about death and a search for new solutions. With science and rationalism having undercut older theological symbols and beliefs, without offering completely satisfactory replacements, the profoundly unsettling effects of World War II, the Nazi extermination camps, and atomic weapons left Americans and others with no effective means of confronting their mortality.⁷ Lifton argues that "there is good reason to believe that the American suppression of death imagery in young adulthood is uniquely intense and constitutes a cultural suppression of life's possibilities."⁸

It is not necessary to endorse Lifton's psychoanalytic perspective or decide the merits of his conclusions about contemporary America, to accept the importance of his observations that universal concerns about death, its meaning, and its management are mediated through cultural patterns that are susceptible to change. In addition, Lifton has demonstrated that within a culture, individual biography affects how that culture's death symbols and rituals will manifest themselves.⁹ In studying Schenectady, we will examine both the cultural patterns of death as they have changed over time, and the ways in which those patterns have been affected by personal circumstances.

Other scholars agree with Lifton's negative assessment regarding Americans' attitudes toward death in the twentieth century, while providing historical perspectives about the nature and timing of the change. Perhaps the best known is Geoffrey Gorer's observation in 1955 that death had replaced sex as an unmentionable topic in Great Britain and the United States by the middle of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, death was commonplace and even romanticized, while mention of sex was considered pornographic. Gorer argues that by the middle of the twentieth century, Britons and Americans were able to discuss sex more freely than before, but death, a topic so alarming as to produce denial, could no longer be mentioned in polite company.¹⁰ According to Gorer, these new attitudes have emerged because of a loss of faith in an afterlife and the medicalization of death, which has rendered it more invisible and less natural. In short, death has become a topic we cannot talk about, though we may muse about it in private.

Philippe Ariès provides the most sweeping historical examination of Western attitudes toward death.¹¹ According to Ariès, Western attitudes toward death divide into four periods, the last three overlapping American history. He argues that for a thousand years before the twelfth century "tamed death" was the prevailing attitude, as death was simple and familiar, a part of the human condition. Ceremonies were traditional, death was public, in the sense that a person died surrounded by family and friends, and often the dying would announce the imminence of their own death, being well attuned to their own bodies.¹² About the twelfth century, emphasis shifted to "one's own death," as death acquired a more dramatic and personal meaning. For centuries, the common belief had been that death meant a long "sleep," follow at the end of time by the resurrection and last judgment.¹³ Now Christians came to expect judgment to occur at the moment of death, with a focus not only on the record of how a person had lived, but on the way he or she died. The hour of one's death became a test so essential that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries authors began to offer advice on the art of dying (*artes moriendi*). The dying person became the central actor in the drama of death, while tombs and inscriptions personalized death and memory.

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, a change occurred, and a new aspect of death came to be considered important. This change did not emerge in Schenectady, and possibly in the rest of America, until the start of the nineteenth century, but eventually happened there as well. This new pattern, called by Ariès "thy death," produced a dramatic exaltation in the deaths of others, especially family members. Death became romanticized; emotional outburst became acceptable and expected. Although the dying maintained the initiative in directing the final act, bystanders became more central to ritual enactments, and perhaps more important, were expected to mourn expressively long after the funeral. A cult of cemeteries developed, with elaborate monuments to confer a lasting memory and attract visitors who would receive a moral lesson.

Late in the nineteenth century, Ariès sees a "fault line" develop, dividing America and England from continental Europe. In the former, the emphasis was on simplicity of monuments and a more personal and private mourning, the result partly of Protestant and Catholic differences, and partly of the industrial revolution. Regardless of the cause, he describes a "brutal revolution in traditional ideas and feelings," leading to the state of "forbidden death."¹⁴ Similar to Gorer, Ariès points to the increasing medicalization of death, making the end of life unnatural rather than something to be accepted. To die in a hospital is to die surrounded by strangers, subject to their desires and efforts, and often connected more to machines than to one's loved ones. The dying were not to be told of their condition, and if they suspected the worst, they were not to disturb society's pursuit of happiness. Funeral rites, modified to show less emotion and material display, were turned over to businessmen, many of whom sought to reduce the presence of death at funerals to a minimum. Grief became an illness to be cured rather than a legitimate response to a significant loss.

Of historians who discuss general patterns of death in America, David Stannard

deserves first mention. Although his work on *The Puritan Way of Death* concentrates on the period before 1800, he also outlines what he thinks has happened since. Stannard begins his study with an overview of "death in the Western tradition," rooting the Christian notion of judgement of the soul at death in ancient Egyptian culture. As basic to Christian practice, he lists: the belief in a resurrection; a linking of sin, death, and punishment; and a contempt for this world in comparison to the next. Puritan belief in predestination gave a particular slant to the attitudes of those early Americans toward death. Their beliefs in the reality of evil in this world and the basic depravity of mankind, in the predetermination of salvation or damnation by God's grace rather than by human action, and in the inscrutability of God left many Puritans facing death with fear and anxiety. Although many considered death a welcome release from the troubles of this world, they also believed that most were condemned to hell, and that any sense of assurance of salvation was probably evidence of the opposite. Thus, seventeenth-century Puritans received remarkably little comfort from their faith when confronting the awesome uncertainties of death.

Stannard argues that by the middle of the eighteenth century the rigors and terrors of Puritan faith were diminishing. The Great Awakening of the 1740s offered more promise regarding the attainment of heaven, a more cheerful outlook reflected by the transition on grave markers from skulls to faces, from corruption to salvation. Funeral rituals became more elaborate, primarily to recognize the passing of pillars of the community; but the change also reduced psychic stress on individuals. By the nineteenth century, death became sentimental and private, and much less threatening. Children, the objects of much concern under Puritan sway, no longer had to think of death as a possible permanent separation from their families, but could welcome release from this world in expectation of a family reunion in the next. Death was beautiful, and cemeteries were the homes of the revered remains of loved ones.

The twentieth century, according to Stannard, has been a time of denial about death. Children are no longer even taught that they or their families will die. Death in hospitals, locations "sterile and nonsocial," is organized to "have as little impact on the staff as possible," and so, for the dying, "has become a process marked by loneliness, irrelevance, and an absence of awareness."¹⁵ Most alarming of all, and in agreement with Lifton, Stannard believes that "it is not really that we have subdued or even cheapened death, but rather that we no longer possess the conceptual resources for giving believable or acceptable meaning to it."¹⁶ He concludes that, unlike modern Americans, the Puritans understood "that death cannot be abstracted from life and still retain its meaning."¹⁷

In a study of changing styles in gravestones, James Hijiya suggests how those objects reflected more general attitudes about death.¹⁸ The most important transition occurred about 1800. Prior to that time, grave markers were *prospective*, as their messages in icon and word stressed the afterlife and the need to prepare for death. After 1800, they became *retrospective*, looking back on the life just ended with sorrow, defiance, or denial. Within this broader change, Hijiya identifies six

styles of grave markers which he links to particular attitudes toward death. Grave markers from 1640 to 1710 were plain, if they existed at all, reflecting resignation and humility. The soul, not the body, of the deceased deserved contemplation. Hijjiya admits that the plain style may also have reflected limited financial and artisanal abilities. Beginning about 1670 and extending to 1770, the death's head emerged as the next dominant style. The use of the skull, Hijjiya believes, was a reminder that death was to be feared and viewed with awe, an attitude that was the product of the conflicting emotions of terror and hope as death approached. The skull symbolized death and corruption, not the spirit. The third major style identified by Hijjiya is the angel expressing confidence. He prefers the term "angel" to "cherub" or "soul effigy," which other scholars have used, because he believes the fundamental symbolism is of "the spirit of a mortal who has joined the heavenly host," which he takes to be a loose definition of angel.¹⁹ However much an angel may have symbolized optimism, it still reminded observers of the afterlife.

The transition that occurred around 1800 in grave markers is, in Hijjiya's scheme, part of the more general change in Western culture, defined by the decline of Christianity and a rising emphasis on this world and human accomplishments. The first retrospective style, from 1780 to 1850, was characterized by the willow and/or urn, with a principal attitude of mourning. This particular emotion was the logical outcome of a transition in which "death had ceased to be a transcendental phenomenon and had become a social one: the most important relationships had become horizontal (between dead people and living ones) rather than vertical (between man and God)."²⁰ Along with mourning, a second, less obvious attitude was present – defiance of mortality. For those who were no longer sure that heaven even existed, immortality could be achieved by appropriate monuments and funeral sermons in the form of memorial biographies. Defiance joined with an emphasis on individualism between 1840 and 1920 to produce an eclectic style of grave markers, best categorized as monumentalism. Variety called attention to the self; massive size offered testimony to personal importance and a certain defiant attitude toward the humbling event of death and corruption. Not surprisingly, granite markers, the most durable of all, became popular at this time.

The final stage identified by Hijjiya is the modern plain style, beginning in 1900 and not yet completed. Markers of this type are plain, inconspicuous, and similar. Several reasons are offered for this striking change from the age of monumentalism. The first is a lingering sense of the medieval indifference to death, a sense that earthly things should not be valued too highly. Moreover, grief, and the need for its demonstration through elaborate grave markers, may have been lessened with reduction in the proportion of deaths of young people. It is not as tragic for the old to die; the sense of loss is not as great, as death is expected; hence the need to mark the loss is reduced. The final reason for the plain style is familiar, namely, the desire to ignore death as much as possible. When a graveyard superintendent could observe as early as 1910 that "all things that suggest death, sorrow, or pain are being eliminated" in modern cemeteries, grave markers that announced the fact that someone had died and was in fact missed were no longer appropriate.²¹

Although not as influential in shaping the broad contours of this study, the work of three other historians points to themes we will encounter in Schenectady. James Ferrell has located the invention of an American way of death in the period between 1830 and 1920, which reflected many of the contemporary changes in American society.²² This, according to Ferrell, involved American participation in what one English author called in 1899 "the dying of death," referring to "the practical disappearance of the thought of death as an influence bearing upon practical life; . . . [and] the cultural circumvention of dread of death."²³ Northern and middle-class in its origins, the new American way of death gradually spread to the South and to immigrants. Three fundamental cultural patterns were central to its shaping. Advocates of scientific naturalism sought to reduce the terrors of death by describing it as a natural process unconnected with divine judgement. In so doing, they also suggested that some control over death was also possible. But by eliminating the divine, they also reduced any sense of significance in death via the possibility of immortality. Professionalism was the second trend that produced the new way of death, especially as funeral directors and cemetery superintendents claimed expert knowledge in the handling of death. Not only did they provide services in preparing the body for burial, but they also secured "the ritual of the funeral in a web of social conventions," as defined and prescribed by themselves, often for the purpose of reducing the emotional trauma of death.²⁴ Finally, religious liberals, linking new findings of science with their desire to reduce the anxieties associated with dying, described immortality as the final step of the life cycle. With salvation assured, death lost its terrors, and its importance.

With middle-class concerns to achieve order and control in both psychic and social life providing a unifying impulse, an ethic and etiquette of self-control for the purpose of enhancing life spread to the fight against the fear of death. Institutional arrangements reflected these goals. Cemeteries of the period and the modernized funeral services which took shape from 1850 to 1920 offered efficient services with minimal emotional cost. Ferrell believes that in spite of the assurance Victorians had of their ability to control all things, including death, they succeeded only in creating "unspeakable anxiety about fear and death that persists to the present day."²⁵ The urge to deny death may have manifested itself in the effort to control it, but in the end "it is a curious kind of control which avoids confrontation with death."²⁶ Echoing Lifton's belief that we have lost the symbols useful in confronting death, Ferrell argues that the American way of death has cut people off from a sense of their own humanity, while professionalized rituals designed to allow Americans to "grieve or mourn . . . [only] in the culturally prescribed 'way,' offer only "dead social convention designed to constrain and contain their grief."²⁷ He concludes that we have inherited a way of death which has "transformed an important rite of personal passage into an impersonal rite of impassivity."²⁸

Both Ann Douglas and Mary Ryan emphasize that women played an important part in redefining the meaning of death in the nineteenth century, and in determining who was in control of the process.²⁹ Douglas sees the development of new attitudes toward death, especially via consolation literature, as the result of a power

struggle between a masculine, industrial, competitive world, and a preindustrial, domestic, and largely feminine world. Hostility toward the world of business, both implicit and explicit, manifested itself in several ways. Consolation literature, ranging from the verse of Lydia Sigourney, the novels of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and a myriad of hymns, glorified the meek and humble, as well as those who conveyed the message of Christ. The new rural cemeteries offered retreats from the rough-and-tumble world of business, their values of quiet and contemplation becoming the antithesis of the masculine world, remarkably like a middle-class home. Heaven, described in hymns, novels, and in the contacts made by spiritualists, emerged as a domestic paradise, where death had simply transferred members to a new and better home over a period of years. Conspicuously absent was "the chaos of productivity," though the "pleasures of consumption" were not diminished.³⁰ After death the separate spheres of men and women became the world of women exclusively.

Ryan's discussion of Utica, New York, elaborates on the role women played in the redefinition of death and dying. Although Ryan's work is primarily about the changes wrought on families by the new urban, industrial, secular, and private order, she comments, albeit briefly, on the influence women held over attitudes toward death. Early in the nineteenth century, magazines began to publish sentimental stories describing how young women organized their last moments, often using them to promote the salvation of family and friends. Ryan argues that "these deathbed scenes were . . . hyperbolic symbols of a new species of women's influence, the right to hold forth on religious subjects from a position of apparent weakness and to wield the emotional persuasiveness that accompanied these pathetic scenes."³¹ Ryan notes also the flood of verse, professional and amateur, regarding the loss of a child. This "literary staple of the middle-class women . . . expressed and indulged genuine grief at the loss, or anticipated loss, of a beloved child." At the same time, "the more urban, secular, and privatized culture . . . gave free expression to the emotions associated with the death of intimate family members."³² With lives circumscribed to their homes, middle-class women found themselves devoting more of their time and energy to their children. Thus, the death of a child came to symbolize the inevitable loss mothers experienced, often from an actual death, but more commonly through the natural process of growing up and leaving home. At the same time, increasing privacy left women to bear the burdens of their real or anticipated sorrow alone, especially if their husbands were enmeshed in the world of business. The frequent appearance of poems on the loss of children in newspapers, one of the most worldly of media, was a means of linking the separate spheres, and of reminding men of their domestic ties.

Scholarship on the history of attitudes toward death, and my own reading of the sources for Schenectady, suggest several important themes. To begin, we must understand how people faced the King of Terrors on three different levels. First, death is obviously a universal phenomenon that all cultures must recognize, from the most basic needs such as disposing of bodies before they decay to the psychic problems of explaining why we die and what happens after we are dead. However com-

mon these concerns may be, their solutions are manifested in particular cultures that are subject to change. Individuals who died in Schenectady had their deaths defined by enduring Western attitudes. At the same time, it is evident that the period we will cover here was one of dramatic changes in the patterns of death. There is no evidence that Schenectadians were unusual in their attitudes and practices regarding death, though they may have preferred some choices over others, and changes may have occurred more or less rapidly than elsewhere. Thus, a major concern here will be to pay special attention to how and when cultural patterns changed in this particular community. Since culture only guides the actions of individuals, it is essential to attend to the ways in which unique men and women confronted their own mortality and that of family and friends. Of the factors shaping personal responses to death, social status based on gender, race, and class; the quirks of individual personality; and the historical accidents of each life course all deserve attention. Surviving evidence has, however, a powerful limiting effect on how far these topics can be pursued.

Two other related themes should also be highlighted here. It is clear that, as elsewhere, death in Schenectady has become more professionalized and more privatized over the past two centuries. Professionals appeared not only in obvious places like medical practice, but also in funeral directing, supervising cemeteries, and in the collection of statistics on health and mortality. Privatization involved moving the rituals surrounding death away from public space and attention and into private, personal quarters. This was the product both of an increased emphasis on the individual and the home, and of the transformation of a small, homogeneous town into a large, diverse industrial city.

In the end, perhaps the most important goal of this book is to demonstrate the multitude of ways in which death is a part of life, as well as the web of connections that ties together the many manifestations of death in the culture. A funeral, for example, is a complex event. It is at once a private ceremony of remembrance and farewell, a social gathering of family and friends, a public statement about the deceased and the family, and, to the extent that the public participates, a reaffirmation of communal values. The rituals and symbols of funerals must serve to remind us of our own mortality, of the fact we are still alive and need to continue functioning with some vitality, and of our connections with the dead that help ensure both their immortality and, in time, our own. Funerals of public figures or ceremonies recognizing collective losses during war, epidemic, or other disaster are especially significant as reassertion of community. The funeral is, however, only a part, albeit an important one, of a much more complex set of rituals surrounding death. Even the grave marker, a small but often important part of the rituals of death, and apparently a simple artifact, must be understood in terms of its size and shape, its material, the words and icons inscribed on its surface, its place in the cemetery, and the cemetery in which it is placed.

A few remarks on the location and methods of this study are in order. Schenectady has three characteristics that make it an attractive community to study. First, the city was settled in 1661 and so has existed long enough for changes in attitudes to

become evident. Of Ariès's four periods, Schenectady misses only the time of "tamed death." All the changes observed by Stannard, Hijjiya, and Ferrell overlap with the history of this community. A second advantage is that while Schenectady was founded by the Dutch from Albany, it quickly became a multiethnic society of Dutch, English, Scots, Africans, and Indians.³³ By the start of the nineteenth century, New Englanders joined the mix, followed in the 1820s by Irish Catholics who labored on the Erie Canal. Jews, Catholics, and Methodists arrived from Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century, followed in the early years of the twentieth century by Italians, Poles, Russians, and Austro-Hungarians. Whenever possible, we will consider the effects of ethnicity on attitudes toward death. The geography of the city adds a third advantage. Schenectady is located about fifteen miles northwest of Albany on a bend in the Mohawk River. For about a mile east from the river, the city lies on relatively flat, and not always well-drained, land. As the town grew, health problems emerged regarding this part of town and the few small streams that meandered across the plain. By 1900, however, the burgeoning industrial city was moving up the hills to the east. As the city expanded, geography influenced both the location of cemeteries and the health of the town's inhabitants.

Even though Schenectady offers attractive social contexts within which to examine attitudes and practices regarding death, we need to consider, however briefly, whether it is a representative community. The answer is twofold. On the one hand, Schenectady often appears similar, though not always identical, to other communities. Developing styles and tastes in grave markers paralleled those elsewhere. Changes in life expectancy occurred at about the same time as in other communities, and on roughly the same scale. Rituals of death and mourning in the middle of the nineteenth century were solidly rooted in Christian traditions dating to the early Middle Ages. On the other hand, questions about typicality may be irrelevant. This case study sacrifices wide geographic range to examine topics in depth, and to explore the connections among various aspects of death. Moreover, it is the first to attempt such an integration. How representative this town is will be evident only when other similar studies have been completed. Nonetheless, work on a variety of topics allows some comments relating Schenectady to the wider world, and such will be provided when possible.

The scope of this study offers a singular challenge in terms of both sources and methods. A sample of the materials utilized here includes: fieldwork in local cemeteries, maps and aerial photographs, death registers, city directories, cemetery records, Common Council minutes and reports, deeds, wills, business records, newspapers, diaries, and letters. Analysis of these sources required techniques from the quantitative to the qualitative, from fieldwork to file work. Technical demographic construction of life tables to calculate life expectancy goes hand in hand with literary sources read carefully, with an eye for the forms, metaphors, and vocabulary of the discourse about death. In sum, I have used anything and everything I could find bearing on how the residents of Schenectady faced and responded to death. The results offer a degree of insight into attitudes and practices regarding

death I did not believe possible when I began the project. Expecting some hints about the topic, I have found the records to be full of the presence of death. And by relying on this one community I have been able to delineate some of the complex and interconnected facets of death as they existed in Schenectady. Death emerges not as a moment or state, but as a process which is given meaning, connection, and direction by the cultural beliefs of the time. From personal reactions and introspective meditations on seeing death firsthand, to broad social patterns perhaps not even evident to the participants, it is now time to see how Schenectadians faced the King of Terrors.

Notes

1. The death register is located in the Schenectady City History Center.
2. *Evening Star*, August 20, 1902, p. 5.
3. See, for example, Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual* (Cambridge University Press, 1979); John Bowker, *The Meanings of Death* (Cambridge University Press, 1991); and Hiroshi Obayashi, ed., *Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1992).
4. For some of the most interesting recent work, see James J. Ferrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830–1920* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980); Allan I. Ludwig, *Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and Its Symbols, 1650–1815* (Middletown, Ct., Wesleyan University Press, 1966); Richard E. Meyer, ed., *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture* (Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1989), and his edited volume, *Ethnicity and the American Cemetery* (Bowling Green, Popular Press, 1993); Samuel H. Preston and Michael R. Haines, *Fatal Years: Child Mortality in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991); David C. Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); and David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study of Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977).
5. The main outlines of the argument are in Robert J. Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1979). For a more brief outline see Robert J. Lifton and Eric Olson, *Living and Dying* (New York, Praeger, 1974).
6. Lifton, *Broken Connection*, 393.
7. Robert J. Lifton, *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (New York, Random House, 1967), and *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York, Basic Books, 1986).
8. Lifton, *Broken Connection*, 87.
9. Robert J. Lifton, Shuichi Kato, and Michael R. Reich, *Six Lives/Six Deaths: Portraits from Modern Japan* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979). For a different perspective on the interaction of culture and personal experience, see the special issue of *Ethos* on “Coping with Bereavement,” 23 (Dec., 1995), edited by Karen J. Brison and Stephen C. Leavitt.
10. Geoffrey Gorer, “The Pornography of Death,” *Encounter* (October, 1955), reprinted in his *Death, Grief, and Mourning* (Garden City, Doubleday, 1965), 192–99.

11. Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. Patricia Ranum (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974) is a short summary of his argument. For a longer version, see Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. by Helen Weaver (New York, Knopf, 1981). Much of his evidence comes from visual materials, which he has presented in *Images of Death and Man*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1985).
12. Fredrick S. Paxton argues in *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990) that Christian death ritual emerged about A.D. 900.
13. Caroline W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1995) suggests that ideas about death were not so stable and monolithic as Ariès describes, and that when resurrection occurred and what it entailed were subjects of considerable debate.
14. Ariès, *Western Attitudes*, 85.
15. Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, 191.
16. *Ibid.*, 193.
17. *Ibid.*, 196.
18. James A. Hijiya, “American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death: A Brief History,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 127 (1983), 339–63. Sloane, *Last Great Necessity*, 4–5, divides cemetery building into eight major styles, but offers no interpretation of the changes such as Hijiya’s.
19. *Ibid.*, 348.
20. *Ibid.*, 354.
21. *Ibid.*, 360.
22. Ferrell, *American Way of Death*.
23. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
24. *Ibid.*, 220–21.
25. *Ibid.*, 217.
26. *Ibid.*, 221.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, Knopf, 1977), Chapter 6, “The Domestication of Death”; Mary P. Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 87–88, 219–22.
30. Douglas, *Feminization*, 226.
31. Ryan, *Middle Class*, 88.
32. *Ibid.*, 219–20.
33. Thomas E. Burke, Jr., *Mohawk Frontier: The Dutch Community of Schenectady, New York, 1661–1710* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991).