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May 1, 2017

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Naper Settlement explores death, mourning and cemetery art in new program

Naperville, IL — By the mid-19th century, there was a significant shift in the way Americans handled death. From a gloomy, puritanical outlook to a romanticized view, the traditions surrounding death took on a new meaning when Victorian society began to dictate the appropriate mourning behaviors, clothing and accessories for honoring the deceased. Naper Settlement is excited to present, *Victorian Memory and Mourning*, plus *Cemetery Symbols*, a program and guided walking tour of the Naperville Cemetery on May 13 from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. This program will explore how Americans have traditionally handled death and will be led by folklorist and Naper Settlement's Director of Learning Experiences, Sheila Riley. Admission is \$15 per person and \$13 for Settlement-6 members and above. Registration is required. To register, call 630.420.6010.

“When we know how people coped with tragedy in the past we can add those strategies to our own set of coping mechanisms,” said Riley. “Memorialization has been around for thousands of years as a tool for remembering and honoring our deceased loved ones. Today we see it in graffiti wall memorials in cities and in roadside crosses along the highways.”

During the Victorian period, people were heavily influenced by three major events: the frequency of death from common illnesses, embalming of deceased soldiers for shipping back home during the Civil War, and England's Queen Victoria's obsessive mourning for her husband Prince Albert who died in 1861. Queen Victoria remained in mourning until her death in 1901, setting an example for many women around the world.

Visitors will get an in-depth look at the clothing and jewelry that were the most recognized symbols of mourning, and other examples that include lithographs and handmade memorials showing your mourning status, mourning tea sets for visiting with those paying their respects, and post-mortem photographs. The demand for mourning items among middle and upper class Victorians created a strong "mourning goods" market, and commercial suppliers sold necessary goods through department stores and mail-order catalogs like Montgomery Ward.

During the guided cemetery walk, Riley will explain gravestone art and symbols, and the history behind more unusual markers.

“In the Naperville Cemetery, participants will see grave markers that reflect what was stylistically popular at different times in history, including traditional symbols reflecting religious and secular meanings, like the anchor being a Christian symbol for ‘hope’ and ivy meaning immortality,” said Riley.

About Naper Settlement

Naper Settlement is a nationally accredited, award-winning outdoor museum set on 12 magnificent acres in the heart of Naperville, where history comes to play and community comes to connect. For more information, visit www.napersettlement.org or call (630) 420-6010.

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