

## Finding Aid to the Death and Dying Historical Photograph Collection

**Olin, Ronald, collector**

Death and Dying Historical Photograph Collection, 1860s-1920s

156 photographic prints

Collection number: Photo 2060

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### OVERVIEW

**Links to other Ronald Olin Collections:**

Finding aid to the [Fargo, N.D. Postcard Collection](#)

Finding aid to the [Scandinavian Royalty Images Collection](#)

Finding aid to the [Cartes de Visite Photograph Collection](#)

Finding aid to the [North Dakota Cities and Towns Postcard Collection](#)

**Links:** View images on [Digital Horizons](#)

**Access:** The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

**Provenance:** Deposited by Dr. Ronald Olin, 2006 (Acc. 2773).

**Property rights:** The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

**Copyrights:** Copyrights to this collection remain with the creator or are in the public domain.

**Citation:** Institute for Regional Studies, NDSU, Fargo (item number)

### HISTORY

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century death often struck people down in their prime, and often unexpectedly. At a time when not everyone had access to a camera, young children and even some adults died prior to having their picture taken. As a result it was a common practice to have a photograph of the deceased taken as a keepsake. For the more well-to-do families, a professional photographer would be called in to arrange the scene, getting the proper lighting and

setting the correct ambiance to give the deceased individual the most dignified final photograph possible.

Another reason for the practice of postmortem photography was the fact that it was not easy for a person to travel long distances to see their loved ones prior to death, to attend a funeral, or visit the gravesite. So it was important to document the occasion for those who could not be there. By today's standards these images may appear morbid and in some cultures taboo, but they reflect an aspect of a time when people were more in-touch with their own mortality.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection of images was assembled by Dr. Ronald Olin of Fargo, N.D. from a variety of sources. The images in this collection delve into a number of aspects dealing with death, and are not just postmortem images of individuals. Although the images have no geographic limitations, the majority of the items are likely from, or related to the Upper Midwest due to the residence of the collector. The collection is divided into four series; Postmortem Photographs, Funerals, Burial and War.

The [Postmortem Photographs Series](#) contains images that actually show the remains of deceased individuals. For the most part the remains appear in caskets, but in a few cases they are laid out on tables and on one case in a deathbed. For the most part the individuals are unidentified, but three images of deceased children are identified as George Clare Cowgill, d. 1912; Mable Malinda Fortmann, d. 1910; and Durward Potter, d. 1913. One particularly poignant photograph from Kongsvinger, Norway shows two parents standing over the remains of their deceased child. Another image shows a woman on her deathbed. The image was sent in the mail from Dent, Minnesota to a Mrs. Sadie Langley, of Caroline, Alberta, Canada. An image of a child (2060.3.12) was framed in a gold frame. The photograph was removed from the frame for preservation purposes. The frame is kept in a separate box for storage.

The [Funerals Series](#) deals with images related to the rites and traditions of dealing with death. The Rites and Ceremonies file contain images that show funerals as they are taking place, or caskets in the front of churches during or prior to a service. The Caskets file contains images of closed caskets, many taken in homes, funeral parlors or outdoors. The Floral Tributes file contains images of different flower arrangements in different scenarios, such as items left on graves, and photographs of the deceased individual embedded with the arrangements. One image shows the floral tributes left at the grave of Gov. Winfield Scott Hammond of Minnesota. Other images show tributes to Albert H. Troska, "Grandma" Allemang, T.J. Howland, Mrs. L. Kylo, Oscar Swenson, and V.G. Versland. The Funeral Cards file contains six cards for Andrew Indegaarden, died Aug. 16, 1893; A.J. Bohlen, died March 24, 1909; Kari H. Ulsaker, died Feb. 2, 1916; Edward G. Schumacher, died Feb. 19, 1917; Kenneth Stevens, died Oct. 23, 1917; and Arne C. Kliffgard, died March 27, 1925. The card for Arne Kliffgard also has a portrait of him mounted on the card. The President McKinley Funeral file contains nine stereograph images from that event.

The [Burial Series](#) contains images dealing with graves, tombstones and cemeteries. The names on some of the stones can be identified as Erdmann, Jessie Agnes Tennis Astle, Anne Halvorson, Alexander and Margret Campbell, Tobias and Katharina Erion, and Anders E. Odegaard. There are several postcards depicting the National Cemetery in Andersonville, Georgia, G. Grants grave, Longwy-Bas Cemetery in Lorrain France, and the graves of Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane in Deadwood, South Dakota.

The [War Series](#) contains images related to war deaths from the Civil War, Spanish American War, and World War I. They are all stereograph images.

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3	Postmortem Children - Unidentified (21 items)
4	Postmortem Adults (15 items)
	<b>Funeral Series</b>
5	Rites and ceremonies (7 items)
6	Caskets (21 items)
7	Floral tributes (41 items)
8	Funeral cards (13 items)
9	President McKinley funeral (10 items)
	<b>Burial Series</b>
10	Cemeteries, graves, tombstones (20 items)
	<b>War Series</b>
11	War deaths (5 items)