



## Hair and Gone

By Karen Livsey and the Fenton History Center Staff

Hair has long been a keepsake by which a loved one or a friend is remembered. Even a favored pet such as a dog, cat or horse can be remembered by a lock of hair or something made from the hair. Locketts held not only a photograph or a small painting of a loved one but often contained a lock of their hair.

Hair wreaths, hair pictures and hair jewelry were widely seen during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Instead of a painting or photograph of the family, a hair wreath could be made using hair from various family members. This gave the assorted colors seen in a hair wreath. Wreaths were constructed using crocheting or tatting techniques around wire. They were also braided or woven around tubes or knitting needles. The tubes would then be boiled and dried. The needle or tube would then be removed and the molded hair could be fashioned into jewelry or used in a hair wreath. The hair around the wire could be bent to make intricate flowers and leaves. Wreaths were often constructed in a horseshoe shape leaving the top open-maybe to keep the family's good luck-or if a memorial wreath, to give the impression of ascending heavenward. If it was a memorial wreath, the hair of the

deceased was added to the center and would be moved to the side when the next person passed away.

Not all hair wreaths were memorials. Some were keepsakes of family members who may have moved away or a wreath could be made for a family member who was moving away. They could also be made of hair from members of a church, a school or a similar group.

A less elaborate hair keepsake was a woman's bracelet, brooch, and earrings. The hair was made into the form of a flower or a lock of hair was intricately braided and could then be encased in the brooch. Men could have vest chains made with fine ribbon and braided hair. An example of a braided watch fob and a delicate hair brooch are shown.

Some soldiers during the Civil War had watch fobs made from their wife's hair.

Mourning rings which were given to family members and close friends after a funeral often contained hair of the deceased. Hair wreaths and some jewelry could be made at home or the hair could be sent to a professional hair weaver to construct the wreath or jewelry. *Peterson's Magazine* and *Godey's Lady's Book*, two of the popular magazines of the mid-1800s, included instructions for making flowers and other items from hair.

Throughout 1861 *Godey's* illustrated the types of hair work available by mail-order.

Prices for earrings varied from \$4.50 to \$10 - very expensive for the time. Hair jewelry was the most popular item ordered in 1859.

A large hair wreath hangs in the family parlor at the Fenton History Center. It is not from the Fenton family but is a beautiful example of this art form from the mid-1800s. A second smaller wreath is included in the Victorian mourning exhibit along with a few pieces of mourning jewelry. The collections also hold a number of brooches, hair ornaments and pins.

