

# Victorian Hair Necklace

## ORIGINS

*Date:* 1800s

*Place:* North Eastern United States  
Or England

*Materials:* Human Hair, Metal closures and jumprings (presumed Brass or tin)



Caption

*Donated*

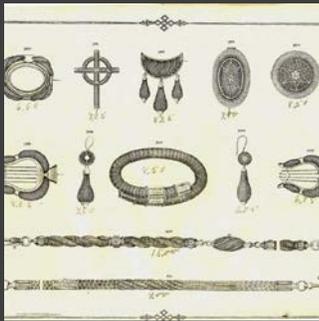
*By:* Unknown

## DESCRIPTION

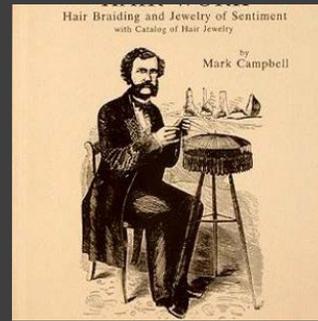
The necklace comes to 17 centimeters in length, 14.5 in diameter, and consists of about forty 'beads', six of which make up the cross that hangs down. The cross itself is 5 centimeters long and 2.5 centimeters in width. Each 'bead' is made out of woven human hair that is kept together by a wax material, the 'beads' are 2 centimeters in width. The cross is held on by metal findings that are connect the cross to the rest of the necklace, at the ends of the cross and the top of the necklace. The beads are mostly intact, except the two that are at the top of the necklace, near the clasps. These beads appear to be moth eaten or just damage from not being preserved correctly.



Closeup of Cross.



From "The Art of Hairwork" By Mark Campbell. 1875



Mark Campbell, Author of "The Art of Hairwork". 1875

## CULTURE

**Description:** This Cross Necklace made of only human hair, wax and metal finishing ends comes to us from the Victorian era, which is between the 1850's and 1900's. According to the British Library, the Victorian Era was one riddled with diseases such as smallpox, syphilis, measles, mumps, and many more. The era was given its iconic name after Queen Victoria of Britain, who would began to accessorize with jewelry made from her late husband's hair. Becky Little of National Geographic describes Queen Victoria as, "the monarch of mourning, a celebrity who influenced how grieving women dressed and behaved in Europe and the United States. But for many people in Victorian times, the amount of hair involved in remembering loved ones went far beyond a little lock in a necklace."

In a time plagued by a large amount of diseases, where men would often only live to the young age of 45, death was an everyday part of life. Being such, in both British and American context, mourning and death were more accepted in everyday life. By wearing the hair of a loved one, an individual could feel a sense of closure that it seemed illness would not allow. Hair decays much slower than flesh, and if taken care of will not deteriorate much at all, so it was part of a person, a loved one, that the surviving family of wife/husband could keep to bring light to the reality of death.

The extreme interest in the macabre mourning ended with the First World War, as death was less associated with a spirituality and related instead to medicine. Bodies were no longer thought of as the carriers for the soul to the extent that Victorians had praised, and instead seen as physical objects of science and to be dealt with by medical practitioners.



*Caption:* Here, we see the full Hair Necklace owned by the Cazenovia Public Library.

### Use within Culture:

The use of human hair for jewelry stems from a trend of wanting a keepsake from loved ones who have died. The use of photography was expensive for the everyday person, so keeping something like a lock of hair was a way to keep that person close to you. Making jewelry out of human hair was a way to allow closure to the surviving party. In a time where death was common and expected, it allowed for a sense of finality with their loved ones and let them actually "hold on" to them. Soon after it picked up in popularity, and with the publishing of books such as the self-instruction guide "The Art of Hair Work" by Mark Campbell in 1875, it adapted as a trend rather than necessarily as a mourning tool. Now, individuals could make jewelry for themselves, and beyond that, the trend could spread to the lower class who might not necessarily be able to afford the precious keepsakes to make themselves.

### Report written

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