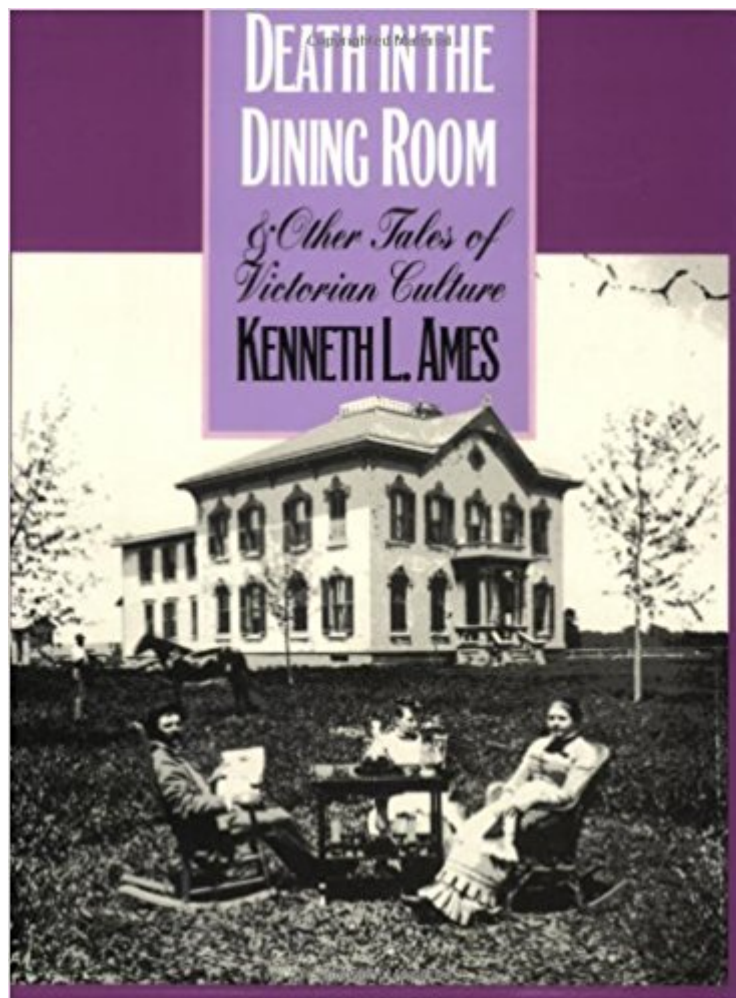




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# Death In The Dining Room And Other Tales Of Victorian Culture (American Civilization)



## Synopsis

Takes a look at Victorian America, and explores the minds of Victorians by examining some of their most distinctive and fascinating creations. The five essays in the book discuss specific pieces - hallstands, sideboards, embroidered mottoes, parlor organs, and seating furniture - within the context of broader cultural issues and concerns.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Ken Ames has always 'heard a different drummer.' *Death in the Diningroom* explores his unique ideas of how our home furnishings give visitors a message about our status and concerns. Why don't we own a hall tree? Why are dead birds carved on the sideboard? And why are some Victorian chairs so uncomfortable? These and other strange thoughts pop up as you read his latest, well-illustrated book." —Ralph and Terry Kovel, authors of *Kovels' Antiques and Collectables Price List* "[E]ffectively explores and articulates 'the varied tasks and roles' performed by ordinary goods in the everyday life of Victorian America, as well as the complex, contradicted elements of culture they often reveal." —*American Quarterly* "An eminently engaging and entertaining work by one of the pre-eminent interpreters of Victorian culture." —*Antique Review*

A richly illustrated and provocative discussion of Victorian culture through an exploration of common household goods Outstanding Academic Title, Choice Henry-Russell Hitchcock Award, Victorian

## Society of America

This is an interesting book and an indepth history of household furnishings and the reason they were important to folks at the turn of this century. Chapter One is "First Impressions" which deals at length with entry foyer furniture and how it was used. Hall racks, card stands and hall chairs are all discussed in this chapter. Chapter Two is "Death in the dining room" - which gets it's name from the slain game often depicted on victorian dining room furniture - such as side boards and buffets. Chapter Three is "Words to Live by" - Samplers, wall hangings and other embroidered or metal stamped messages. Chapter Four is "When the Music Stops" which covers the societal importance of pump organs and how music was very important to a Victorian woman. Chapter Five is "Posture and Power" - a chapter about living room (parlor) furniture. There are a zillion interesting little factoids about life at the turn of this century. And it does give you a good feel for etiquette and expectations and the rules back then. And it answered questions for me - like "Why was parlor furniture so uncomfortable and rigid?" Because Victorians placed great emphasis on the importance of self-control as an invaluable discipline. Comfortable furniture suggested mental laziness. (My paraphrase) So it does give some insights into why things were the way they were. Lots of history there. But when I picked it up, I thought it was a book on old houses, not old furniture. I thought the title was an allusion to the fact that 100 years ago, funerals were held in the dining room, which is the reason many old house dining rooms have an entry door - so the visitors could graciously and easily leave the house after the viewing. It is not that kind of book. But I still enjoyed reading it. It is a large book with one or more pictures of antique furnishings on every page. A good resource for someone who wants to recreate a historic interior. Rose Thornton author, *The Houses That Sears Built*

This book is not light reading as it tells you in more detail than most want to know the symbolic significance relative to cultural values of several standard pieces of Victorian furnishings. It was interesting but longer than it needed to be to get the information across in my opinion.

I bought this to use in developing a college course that I'll be teaching next fall. After reading through some of this book (I haven't finished it yet), I'm really, really impressed with the quality of detailed information and the reliability of the research that went into it. In fact, I'm so impressed that I decided to make it one of the required texts for my students. If you have an interest in American home life, history of interiors, Victorian history, or even social/cultural history, this is a great

resource. It has a large number of good-quality illustrations, which I appreciate, and the writing style manages to be both interesting and informative.

I LOVED this book. It works in some ways as a companion piece to "A Tasteful Interlude" which contains photographs of Victorian interiors. In fact they share some photos of the music/deportment teacher's parlor on the Idaho frontier. Ames exhibits some astonishing artifacts - sideboards, hall stands, parlor organs - and teases out some possible cultural implications from each. Why is hall furniture so uncomfortable? Is tilting your chair a power move? Why did the Victorians like representations of dead animals on their dining room furniture? These are some of the questions he tackles. Some things seem eerily familiar. Leaving visiting cards, but not visiting seemed a lot like modern "virtual" relationships carried on over the internet. He repeats a story about two ladies who had been leaving cards for one another for years, but did not recognize one another in a face to face meeting. He has a whole chapter on mottos: printed, embroidered, punched into cardboard and embellished. It reminded me of hanging posters in your house (or in your room if you were merely a teenager) during the '60's and '70's. The Victorians had "Fear God" and "Love One Another", we had "Love the One You're With" and "\_\_\_\_\_ Housework". (The more things change.....)

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