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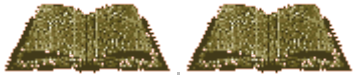



APPEALING

Cremation in America *by* Fred Rosen. Hard Cover, 6" x 9". Illustrations, Notes, Index. Prometheus Books, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197, USA. or . Publication Date 2004. 278 pages, ISBN 1-59102-136-7. Price $25.00

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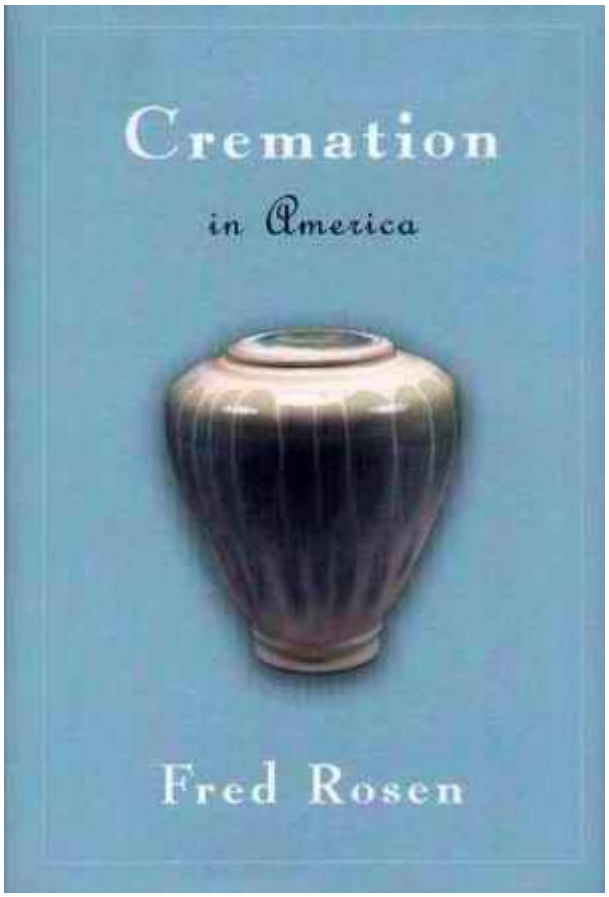

Fred Rosen



Fred Rosen (Woodstock, NY) is an award-winning former columnist for the New York Times and the author of thirteen books including Lobster Boy. He currently is an adjunct associate professor of communications at the New York Institute of Technology. Readers wishing to contact Fred may want to the linked page (mailto:frosen@hvc.rr.com?subject=Read about your book (Cremation in America) in Anil Aggrawal's Internet Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology&bcc=dr anil@hotmail.com).

"Cremation in America" is a slightly misleading title for this book as the author has to start of with a history of cremation because modern cremation practices emerged from Europe and not from America. The opening few chapters of this book are therefore on the history of cremation and notably the developments in Europe.

The author does go as far back as 3900 BCE and to the Native Americans of Manitoba. He then touches upon ancient Egyptians who of course never practised cremation.

Jesus Christ gets a passing mention when the author raises the somewhat blasphemous conjecture as to what would have happened if Jesus had been cremated!

Another Jesus Christ appears later in the book. This is of course the deceased son of an eccentric doctor William Price of Wales who attempted to cremate his dead son but was arrested and charged in 1883. He was subsequently found "Not guilty" and as such created legal history by legitimising cremation.

It is only at page 51 that the reader comes across a description of the first modern cremation in America, that of Baron De Palm.

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The Vatican, which had long objected to cremation, comes in for a bit of flak. In 1886 Pope Leo xiii banned cremation and it was only at the Second Vatican Council in 1963 that the ban was reversed by Pope John xxiii (and not Pope John Paul xxiii as Rosen mistakenly writes).

Incandescence of the cremated remains

Rosen mentions the incandescence of the cremated remains but fails to fully explain this phenomenon. When a body is cremated the protein matrix of the bone is completely consumed but the calcium remains in the form of calcium oxide or lime. A gas flame impinging on calcium oxide produces an incandescence similar to that produced by a "limelight".

-Gyan Fernando

There is also a good discussion of the Tri-State scandal where a crematorium in Noble Georgia stored rotting corpses in sheds.

One of the chapters, which should have been good reading, is unfortunately rather short. This is chapter11 entitled *The Dead Wives Club: How Murderers Use Cremation to Cover Up Their Crimes*.

...The book is rather fun and would appeal to those of us who have a macabre sense of humour!...

A rather curious and mildly amusing feature of this book is Appendix A entitled *Celebrities Whose Ashes Were Scattered on Land* and Appendix B *Celebrities Whose Ashes Were Scattered on Water*. We learn that these include Frederick Bulsara, better known as Freddie Mercury, who ended up on land as did Harpo Marx. Rock Hudson and William Holden ended up on water!

Other appendices deal with Forms Needed for Arranging a Cremation, Cremation Statistics and urn burial in Norfolk. End notes and an index completes the book, which carries a few monochrome illustrations.

Life Gems

Rosen describes how the carbon from your loved one's body can be made into a diamond. Interested readers may also want to look up http://www.lifegem.com/

-Gyan Fernando

The book is well presented in a hard cover complete with a dust jacket.

The author Fred Rosen is a former columnist of the New York Times. His interest in cremation apparently stems from the famous scene in the James Bond film "Diamonds are Forever" where Bond is nearly cremated alive (by Morton Slumber of Slumber Inc.!)

Unfortunately Fred Rosen can't seem to decide whether he's offering jazzed up history, casual gossip or serious journalism. The author uses good references and hard data but these are diluted by his frequent use of rhetoric. Whilst not a serious work on cremation the book is rather fun and would appeal to those of us who have a macabre sense of humour!



-Gyan Fernando
Dr Gyan C. A. Fernando is a Forensic Pathologist in the West Country of Britain. He has an ongoing interest in funeral practices from around the world.

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