

## BLACK PETER

Parents in Victoria used to scare their kids into good behavior by saying that Black Peter would get them if they didn't mind their manners.

In the mid-1800s, when cholera, yellow fever, and sick immigrants rolled into Victoria in waves, the city called upon Black Peter to bury the dead. For two dollars and fifty cents and a quart of good whisky, Black Peter would haul a body to Memorial Square and bury it, usually tied into the sheet or blanket in which the person died. Never mind that the blankets soon rotted, and, since the graves were shallow with several corpses in each, it wasn't long before feet, hands, and noses protruded from the loose dirt and attracted great packs of wolves into town.

The time came when the city council found itself in a budgetary bind, and the task of informing Black Peter that his services would no longer be required fell to an alderman known as "Eleven Fingers" Rogers. (He didn't really have eleven fingers; he just had two thumbs on one hand.) They say Black Peter didn't take kindly to the news. He leaned a corpse against the front door of Rogers's store, and when the alderman came down to open up the next morning, it fell in upon him.

Rogers immediately hunted up Black Peter and told him to get back to work; the city would find a way to pay him.

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Wolff, Henry, Jr. "Black Peter Was in Charge of Burying the Dead," *The Victoria Advocate*, September 10, 1998, p. 4A.

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