

LIBRARY TREASURES: OLD AUTOGRAPH BOOKS and OLD VALENTINES

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Items to be treasured come to CCHGS from many sources. Recently the Bloomsburg Public Library closed out its Local History room and donated much of its contents “upstairs.” The Society Library Committee has been delighted to find many intriguing items in the collection. Among them:

- a Persian watercolor, perhaps 17th century
- Japanese ivory statuette of a goddess
- Latin parchment manuscript scrap from the late Middle Ages, found in a 1630 book
- very rare history of the American Revolution printed in 1805
- a dozen large books with beautiful engraved illustrations, notably many by famed French artist Gustave Doré (1832-1883).

There were also many items of notable local interest, including family Bibles with vital records. For this article, though, we’ll focus first on a pair of small autograph books of a Bloomsburg mother and daughter. The mother was born Cora Lavinia Eshelman at Carlisle, PA on 11 April 1847. Her *Album of Remembrance* contains scores of signatures of fellow students at the State Normal School at Millersville, dated 1860 to 1865. The inscribers usually include their hometowns, and these range all across Pennsylvania. Among the briefer inscriptions was “Yours Truly / C. W. Miller / Bloomsburg / Columbia Co / Pa.”

This colorless entry turned out to be the most important one in the book, for on 11 October 1866 at Port Carbon, PA, Cora Eshelman married Charles Willett Miller. Though he trained as a teacher, Charles was a budding attorney who was admitted to the Columbia County bar the following year. The couple raised four children at 417 Center Street in a turreted house which still stands.

As was customary in the Nineteenth century, many of the inscribers of Cora’s pages included poems or other messages above their signatures. For example, this quatrain entered by Laura C. Brown of Green Castle, PA:

The flowers that bloom the brightest
Are oft the first to fade
The forms that move the lightest
In earth are soonest laid.

It isn’t clear whether these sour lines are original or were copied from a printed source. Somewhat more upbeat are these lines inscribed by “W.L.B. Port Carbon, May 20, 1862”:

I saw the morning's golden beam,
Lie bright upon a passing stream;
I saw at eve 'twas sparkling yet,
And pure as when at first they met;
And thus, the Joys that gaily now
Give beauty to thy snowy brow,
Still may they, on thy life tide shine,
And gild thy spirit's last decline.

(This poem was drawn, without attribution, from the *Ladies' Keepsake and Home Library*, vol. III [1854].)

The other album, titled *Autographs*, is from the next generation. Among Cora's children was Bloomsburg schoolgirl Vida Alice Miller. Vida was sixteen years of age when she dated her new blank book at "Bloomsburgh September 1886."



Vida is at center, from a Pursel group photo
(CCHGS 30-0008)

As with her mother's album, many of the entries in Vida's book are simply signatures, or with a brief inscription, but one entry, from "Old Maid," is much more interesting. It is a four-stanza original poem about a maiden and her wished-for lover, decorated with tiny two-inch sketches of the two imagined persons:

(To Vida) Why Don't He Come?

*“Why don’t he come? He promised
me
He surely would be here,
And pa and ma are out to tea—
For once the coast is clear.*



*I wonder what he wants to say!
When last his leave he took
He asked me twice at home to
stay—
I wonder how I look?*

*Oh why! I’m almost out of breath!
Suppose he asks? – what then?
I’ll certainly be scared to death
I’m so afraid of men!*



*I think I’ll have him though, at last
But first I’ll answer ‘No’—
For many a girl by hurrying fast
Just loses her tardy beau.”*

April 27, 1889 (Old Maid)

We don’t know who among Vida’s friends imagined her anxious pining and composed this poem and drew the evocative little pictures. What we do know is that Vida waited eleven years before she successfully nabbed a beau. In February 1900, at the age of 29, Vida married Bloomsburg merchant Frank Patterson Pursel, who developed the Pursel department store at Market Square in Bloomsburg.

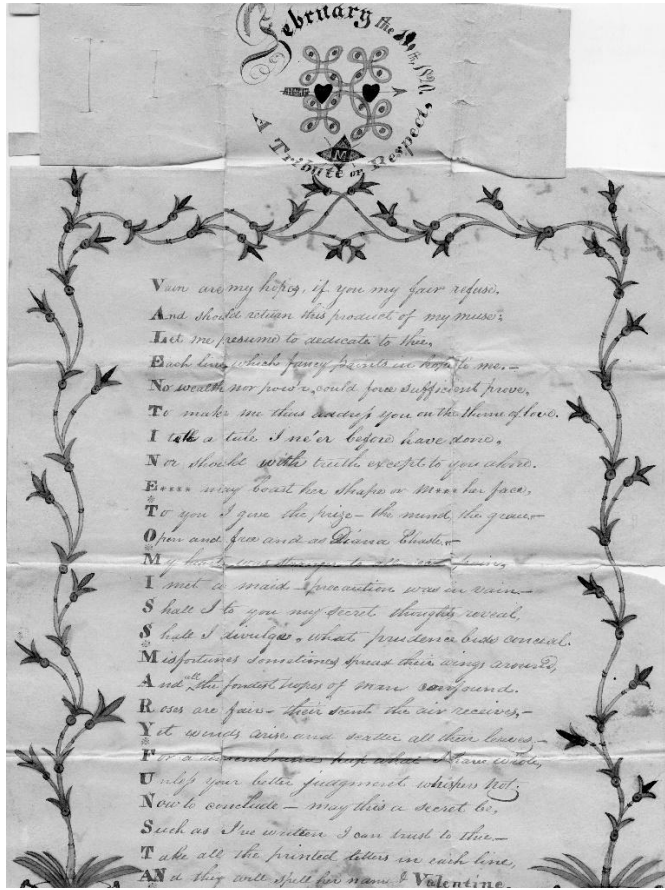
Perhaps Frank was the beau featured in the poem and kept Vida waiting all that time. In any case, the couple settled a block away from Vida’s mother Cora at 20 East Fifth Street, where they raised four children. Vida died at age 97 in April, 1968; perhaps she still remembered her anxious wait for her “tardy beau” some eighty years earlier.

(Note: Vida’s grandson, Frank “Pat” Pursel III, died recently at the age of 93 at the family’s orchard farm near Buckhorn.)

A TWO-CENTURIES-OLD VALENTINE

What could be more romantic than a handmade valentine, one featuring original poetry and artwork? What if it has the added charm of having been written over two centuries ago? In 1820 a young man in Derry (now Madison) township was in love with a neighboring young woman, Mary Elizabeth Funston, daughter of Jerseytown physician Dr. John Funston (1799-1868). The hopeful wooer was Peter F. Moody, age twenty. For Valentine’s Day in 1820 he composed an

acrostic poem for a valentine addressed to Miss Funston. He wrote it out carefully within a design of entwined ivy drawn in green and brown inks. At the top he lettered a circle of date and title enclosing an arrow piercing two hearts. The first letters of the poem's lines spell out "Valentine to Miss Mary Funstan."



Moody's Valentine, 1820
(about 1/2 size)

Following is a transcription of the valentine:

February 14th 1820
A Tribute of Respect.

*Vain are my hopes, if you my fair refuse,
And should return this product of my muse;
Each line which fancy paints in hope to me—
No wealth nor pow'r, could force sufficient prove,
To make me thus address you on the theme of love.
I tell a tale I ne'er before have done,
Nor should with truth except to you alone.
E . . . may boast her shape or M . . . her face,
To you I give the prize - the mind, the*

grace-...

**Open and free and as Diana Chaste.-
My heart was stranger to all secret pain,
I met a maid —precaution was in vain.—
Shall I to you my secret thoughts reveal,
Shall I divulge, what prudence bids conceal.
Misfortunes sometimes spread their wings around,
And all the fondest hopes of man confound.
Roses are fair—their scents the air receives, —
Yet winds arise and scatter all their leaves—
For a remembrance keep what I have wrote,
Unless your better judgment whispers not.
Now to conclude—may this a secret be
Such as I've written I can trust to thee. —
Take the printed letters in each line,
AND they will spell her name & **Valentine.****

On the back of the sheet is a notation in another hand: “Written by Peter Moody.” The creases show that the page was folded into a tiny packet just 2¼” x 2¾” so as to slip easily into a pocket or purse and remain “a secret.” The poetry shows, perhaps, only a little talent, though the sentiments may be real enough. However, the poem doesn’t seem to have won over the recipient.

There’s no record of how Miss Funston (the usual spelling) responded to this love token, but we know that she didn’t marry Mr. Moody. Three years later, on 20 March 1823, she married well-to-do local farmer Jesse Barber. They had nine children before his death shortly before their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. The widow lived out her life on their farm near Jerseytown and died in 1868. Their children scattered across the country to Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Montana and California.



Mary Elizabeth (Funston) Barber in her later years, from a Funston family tree on Ancestry.

Peter Moody, the lovelorn poet, didn’t pine away for lack of Mary Elizabeth’s love. Two years after sending his valentine he married German immigrant Frances Seidel and in the 1830 census they were counted in Derry Township with two children under age five. They moved on to Banks (near Hazleton) and then to Pottsville, where they raised at least ten children. Peter died in 1873.

Sending a Valentine love-message was relatively new in 1820’s America, and Moody’s missive may have been among the very earliest valentines in Columbia County. Hand-written valentine greetings developed in England during the 18th century and printed cards began to be produced early in the 19th century. The tradition of expressing romantic love in connection with the church feast day of Saint Valentine goes back even further, to the 14th and 15th centuries in Europe. It isn’t clear why love-tokens became attached to that

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Prindle Station Bells

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Farm Bells.		School House or Factory Bells.	
Size	Price	Size	Price
12 in.	\$1.00	12 in.	\$1.00
14 in.	\$1.50	14 in.	\$1.50
16 in.	\$2.00	16 in.	\$2.00
18 in.	\$2.50	18 in.	\$2.50
20 in.	\$3.00	20 in.	\$3.00
22 in.	\$3.50	22 in.	\$3.50
24 in.	\$4.00	24 in.	\$4.00
26 in.	\$4.50	26 in.	\$4.50
28 in.	\$5.00	28 in.	\$5.00
30 in.	\$5.50	30 in.	\$5.50
32 in.	\$6.00	32 in.	\$6.00
34 in.	\$6.50	34 in.	\$6.50
36 in.	\$7.00	36 in.	\$7.00
38 in.	\$7.50	38 in.	\$7.50
40 in.	\$8.00	40 in.	\$8.00
42 in.	\$8.50	42 in.	\$8.50
44 in.	\$9.00	44 in.	\$9.00
46 in.	\$9.50	46 in.	\$9.50
48 in.	\$10.00	48 in.	\$10.00
50 in.	\$10.50	50 in.	\$10.50
52 in.	\$11.00	52 in.	\$11.00
54 in.	\$11.50	54 in.	\$11.50
56 in.	\$12.00	56 in.	\$12.00
58 in.	\$12.50	58 in.	\$12.50
60 in.	\$13.00	60 in.	\$13.00
62 in.	\$13.50	62 in.	\$13.50
64 in.	\$14.00	64 in.	\$14.00
66 in.	\$14.50	66 in.	\$14.50
68 in.	\$15.00	68 in.	\$15.00
70 in.	\$15.50	70 in.	\$15.50
72 in.	\$16.00	72 in.	\$16.00
74 in.	\$16.50	74 in.	\$16.50
76 in.	\$17.00	76 in.	\$17.00
78 in.	\$17.50	78 in.	\$17.50
80 in.	\$18.00	80 in.	\$18.00
82 in.	\$18.50	82 in.	\$18.50
84 in.	\$19.00	84 in.	\$19.00
86 in.	\$19.50	86 in.	\$19.50
88 in.	\$20.00	88 in.	\$20.00
90 in.	\$20.50	90 in.	\$20.50
92 in.	\$21.00	92 in.	\$21.00
94 in.	\$21.50	94 in.	\$21.50
96 in.	\$22.00	96 in.	\$22.00
98 in.	\$22.50	98 in.	\$22.50
100 in.	\$23.00	100 in.	\$23.00



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saint's day since the stories of his martyrdom in Roman times don't say anything about love for a maiden.

In any case, these verses, and those in Vida's autograph book, can tell us a lot about young love in the early days of Columbia County.