

## Using Friendship Books For Genealogical Research

by Jean Nudd, Archivist



I know I usually write about federal records but while I was doing some filing of my personal genealogy papers last fall, I found two copies of friendship books that my cousin gave me. One is the friendship book that belonged to my grandmother, Florence Hill Nudd's, mother, Louise Jones Hill, and dated from the early 1890s. The other belonged to Mary Hammond Howard Hill, my grandmother Florence's great-grandmother, and dated from the 1830s.

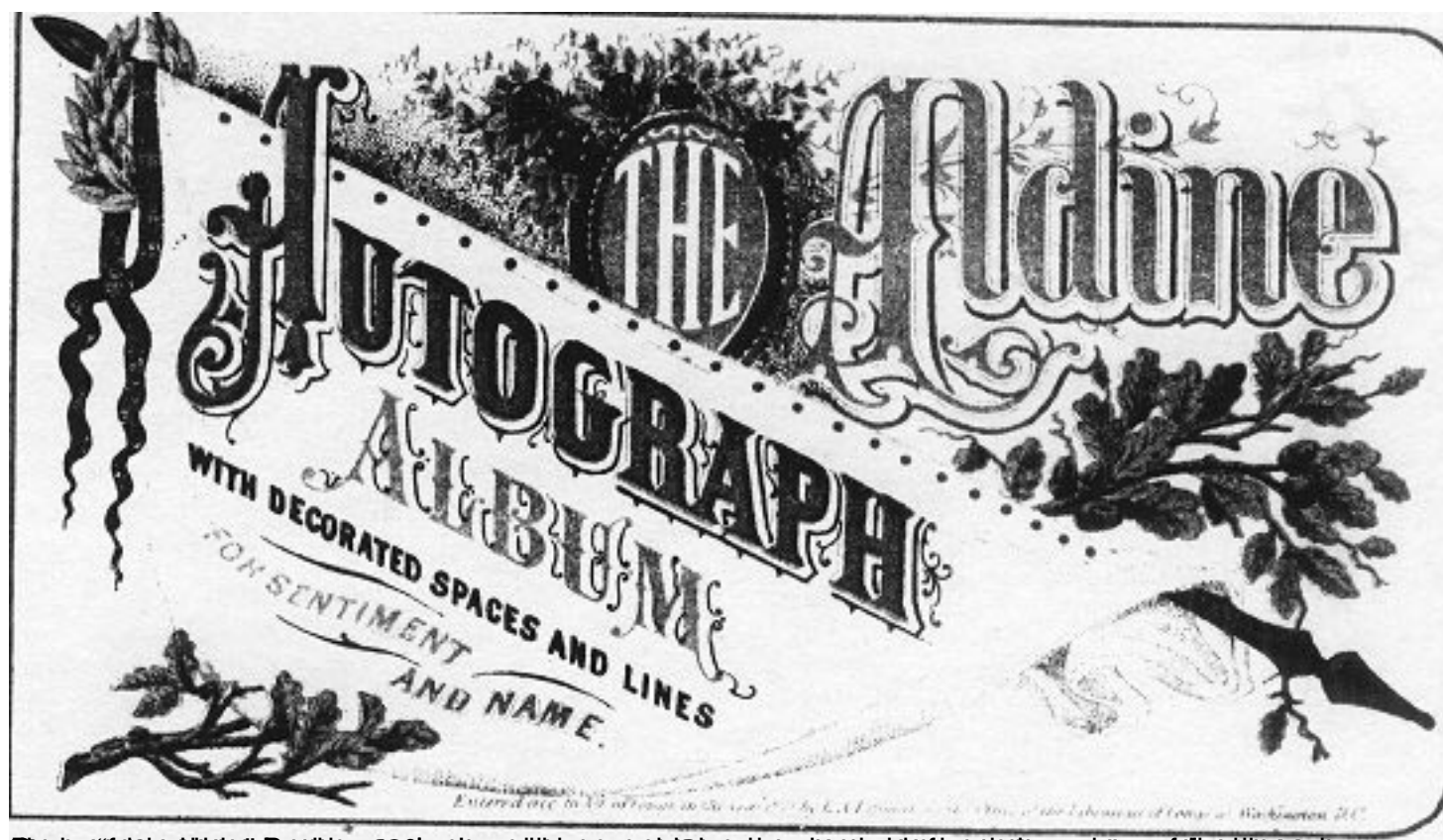
Now, I know most people aren't familiar with friendship books – I've heard them also called memory books or autograph books. Some historical digging led me to an interesting book, *In the New England Fashion; Reshaping Women's Lives in the Nineteenth Century*, by Catherine E. Kelly. She discusses these books in her chapter on women's friendships to examine the inner workings of those relationships. She describes them as,

Friendship books, which contained girls' tributes to their dearest friends as well as meditations on friendship itself . . . [a] common part of both male and female student culture in antebellum New England, were regularly circulated among close friends for an inscription and signature. In script that ranged from the plain to baroque, girls carefully transcribed epigrams, poems, and extracts from improving essays, each chosen to describe and celebrate the virtues of the album's owner: piety, sincerity, loyalty, innocence, and beauty were especially prized. Writers sought to capture not only the essence of their friends but something of their friendships as well. Girls understood that the collected inscriptions simultaneously fixed and preserved precious connections.<sup>1</sup>

An interesting element of the beginnings of friendship books occurred because of the growth of educational opportunities for middle-class girls in the 1800s. Both Kelly and Nancy Cott discuss how these educational opportunities were tied to their religious beliefs and often focused on strengthening those ideals and encouraging their wider development among these teenaged females. In her book, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, Cott discusses how ". . . the clergymen urged women into Christian benevolence. In fact, a unified set of assumptions about women's qualities of "heart" structured all their exhortations regarding women's religious duties."

<sup>2</sup>

The opportunity to travel to a regional school gave these girls the chance to form friendships with girls who would usually have been out of their "neighborhood" of friends and exchange ideas. The religious structure of the early 1800s focused these ideas around piety and devotion.





Mary,

We look forward to happiness and anticipate that at some future period we shall be happy. But the subliminary nature of all things here below teach us far otherwise for how frequently has experience shown us that where roses were supposed to bloom nothing but briars and thorns grew - In all our pleasures and with all that splendid and shining in this world it is decreed that there should mingle many shadow of woe - Let us, then, cherish that feast of great price which, when our forms shall moulder and decay, will ensure us a blest and happy above which lies beyond the confines of the grave.

J. Hammond Jr

May Angels guard you with peculiar care  
And every blessing fall to your share.

Your Brother

December 10<sup>th</sup> 1835.

To Mary Hammond

There My Child, I would on thy young mind impress  
O'er rule the onward path of life to bless -  
Never be thy soft and sweet affections given  
To him who scoffs at pity and heaven.  
But when they are bestowed on any friend  
Let them always be constant and true  
That your pathway may be peace to the end  
And your joys in heaven always be new

Joseph Hammond

2. - 26. - 1892.

"No 221"

"Love no man even a brother whose hair  
is one color, and mustache another."

"Your sister"

"Lizzie W. Jones."

2. - 27 - 1892.

3. - 11 - 1892.

"Bellows Falls, Vt."

