

May Burton's Autograph Book

By Barbara Glakas

Long before there were school yearbooks there were autograph books. These small booklets of blank pages were exchanged amongst friends and classmates, where they would write personal messages, drawings or small pieces of verse. Autograph books remained popular through the 19th century, until they were replaced by yearbooks.

Found in the Herndon Depot Museum was an autograph book that dates to the late 1800s. The book has a teal-colored hard cover. The front cover says "Album" and is decorated with debossed depictions of birds and flowers. The beige colored pages, now faded with time, have red color around its outer edges, intentionally colored by a printer as a decorative touch.

All the autograph entries were written to a young lady named May. When the book is opened, the first page says: "Anna May Burton, With sincere good wishes from Amy M. McGlean. Christmas, 1886." It appears this book may have been a Christmas gift to Anna from Amy.

It appears the identity of the owner of the autograph book may be Anna May [nee Burton] Groh who was born in 1875 and went by her middle name, May. Most of the people who signed her autograph book and who identified themselves as May's classmates were born between 1874 and 1876. It is also known that these children attended The Herndon School that used to be located on Center Street. (The former school building is still located on Center Street and has been renovated into a single-family home). In 1887, The Herndon School was the only school in town for white students and it provided instruction for all grades, primary through high school.

Most of the students signed this book in either December of 1886 or January of 1887, with a couple of miscellaneous entries made as late as 1890. Was it possible that May passed her new autograph book around to her friends during the holidays? Or did her school term end that winter? We may never know. But, interestingly, in a group photo of The Herndon School dated circa 1887, May can be seen along with many of her classmates.

The signatures in May's autograph book represent a who's who of early Herndon residents. Many of the students were children of northern families who transplanted to the Herndon area after the Civil War and helped settle the town.

Several boys who signed the book simply wrote "To May, Yours Truly" and signed their names. They include George Barrows, Howard Wiley, Willie Blanchard and Granville Garrett.

William "Willie" Blanchard was the son of Howard and Susan Blanchard, who lived on Monroe Street. Howard Blanchard was the Town of Herndon's first Town Clerk in 1879. Granville Garrett was the son of Enos and Louisa Garrett. They had a home on Elden Street at the intersection of Center Street. Enos was a Civil War veteran who later served as Herndon's Postmaster, Town Sergeant and Mayor.

There were a couple of adults who signed the book as well. They wrote:

- “Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Aunt Mary B., Herndon, Dec. 31, 1886.”
- “Miss May – The True, the Beautiful and the Good should be woven in the character of every human being. E.E. Kidwell. Jan. 11, 1887.”

Edgar E. Kidwell was a teacher at The Herndon School.

Most of the entries in May’s autograph book were from her classmates and friends. Listed here are some of the entries, many written in very poetic form:

- “Dear May, When you are old and cannot see, put on your specs and think of me. I am your schoolmate. Lillian Bowers. Jan. 20, 1887.”
- “To May, When we are old we smile & say we had no care in childhood’s day, but we will be wrong, we’ll not be true, I have this much care, I care for you. Your schoolmate, Jennie Crouse, Herndon Va, Jan. 20. 1887.”
- “To May, When the golden sun is setting. When from care your mind is free. When of loved ones you are thinking, will you sometimes think of me. Fred M. Crouse. Jan. 20th, 1887.”
- “Dear May, Guard well thy thoughts for they are heard in heaven. Ever your true friend, Mary E. Buell.”
- “Herndon Va. To May, As the ripples follow, The waves to the sea, So may God’s blessing, Follow thee. Your friend, Ida Ball. May 2, 1890.”
- “Remember me when far away, And only half awake. Remember me on your wedding day, And sent me a slice of cake. Your Friend, Willie A. Ball. May 2nd 1890.”
- “Remember me is all I ask. And if remembrance prove a task, Forget me. Is the wish of your friend, Eddie Ball. May 2nd 1890.”
- “Dear May, I thought, I thought, I thought in vain, I thought I would write my name again. Nevada Orrison. Herndon Va, Jan. 20th 1887.”
- “Herndon Va., Dear May, When rocks and hills divide us. And you no more I’ll see. Will you remember Isabella. Who went to school with thee. Your friend, Isabella Oliver. Jan. 13, 1887.”
- “To May, Friendship is a priceless jewel. It cannot be bought or sold. It is found among the humble, and it’s worth cannot be told. Alice Ernest. April 6th, 1887. Herndon Va.”

- “Good ink, Good pen, Poor writer, Amen. Your friend, Frank Lacy. Jan. 20th, 1887.”
- Dear May, When this you see, remember me, and think of all the good times we had. Maud Yount. Herndon Va, Jan. 20, 1887.”
- “Dear May, Don’t forget the fun we had sliding down the hill at school. Your friend, H. Grace Stephenson. Herndon Va, Jan. 13, 1887.”
- “To May, On the mossy bank of friendship, save a seat for me. Your schoolmate. Edith Dyer. January 12, 1887.”
- Dear May, Oh think of me May, Oh think of me ever, Oh think of the good times, We have had together. Your true friend, May Simonds. Remember May 1st, 1890.
- “Dear May, Love many, Priest few, And if you can, Paddle your own canoe. Your friend, Katie Groh, Herndon Va, Dec. 5th, 1888.”

Looking at some of these children’s families ... Lillian Bowers was the daughter Luther and Alice Bowers, who once owned a large swath of land, including the Eldenwood Fruit Farm, now in the surrounding vicinity of Herndon Middle School. Jennie and Fred Crouse lived on Madison Street and were the children of Amos and Isabella Crouse. Amos was a Civil War veteran who later worked for the U.S. Treasury Department and also served on the Herndon Town Council from 1880 through 1883.

Mary Buell was the daughter of Perez Barham Buell, who operated Herndon’s first real estate agency, once located on Lynn Street. Ida, Eddie and Willie Ball were children of Samuel and Alberta Ball. Samuel was the pastor at Herndon’s first church, the Northern Methodists Episcopal Church located at Elden and Center Streets.

Nevada Orrison was the daughter of John and Virginia Orrison. John was a farmer and large land owner in downtown Herndon, whose land stretched from the current town golf course to the Kingston Chase neighborhood. Some of his land was taken when the railroad was built through town in the 1850s. Isabella Oliver was the daughter of Theodore and Mary Oliver. Theodore was the town’s shoemaker. Maud Yount was the daughter of Ephraim and Laura Yount. Ephraim was a farmer and government clerk. They lived in an old 1850s home that is now commonly known as the Monroe Hill house.

Edith Dyer was the daughter of Elisha and Mildred Dyer. The family lived on Monroe Street. A lifelong Fairfax County resident, Elisha was a Civil War veteran, who interestingly fought on both sides. He served off and on as Herndon’s town sergeant and as mayor in the 1880s. He was elected mayor again in 1907.

May Simonds was the daughter of Edwin and Marion Simonds. Edwin Simonds was a farmer and government clerk. Katie Groh was the daughter of Levi and Anna Groh who were dairy farmers. Katie's older brother, Jacob, would later marry May Burton.

May Burton was the oldest daughter of Charles M. and Anna D. Burton who were born in 1850 and 1853 respectively. May had five younger brothers and a sister. The Burtons came to Herndon from Vermont. Charles was not only a farmer and carpenter, but he also served as the Town of Herndon's first Town Sergeant in 1879. The Burtons were members of Herndon's Congregational Church, which used to be located on Pine Street.

Katherine "Kitty" Kitchen Hanna, who was born in 1830 and lived in Herndon all of her adult life, remembers the Burtons and some of the other early comers. When being interviewed by Virginia Castleman in 1906 and 1907, Kitty said,

"An' along from New England come a lot o' settlers, bein' mostly to north and east side, an' buildin' houses out'n the Government what became to the Republicans after Surrender. They had monop'ly of Post Offices an' such, an' they was mighty busy an' industrious, bein' temperance folks, an' Congregational. Every year at Thanksgivin' time, there'd be a big to-do 'mongst them, havin' family reunion – Blanchards an' Burtons an' Sweetzers and others. As your Ma said, they was thrifty an' in Government favor, so's they prospered an' waxed fat, so to speak, from the start."

May married Jacob Groh in 1904. He was eight years her senior. In the 1910 census Jacob and May were found living in the Mount Vernon District of Fairfax County. Jacob was a general farmer. The census indicated that May had one child but none were living. Unfortunately, May herself did not live very long. She died in 1913 at the age of 38 and was brought back to Herndon to be buried in Herndon's Chestnut Grove Cemetery.

Despite the loss of Anna May Burton Groh, the Burton family continued to deepen their roots in the town of Herndon for many generations.

About this column: "Remembering Herndon's History" is a regular Herndon Patch feature offering stories and anecdotes about Herndon's past. The articles are written by members of the Herndon Historical Society. Barbara Glakas is a member. A complete list of "Remembering Herndon's History" columns is available on the Historical Society website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org.

The Herndon Historical Society operates a small museum that focuses on local history. It is housed in the Herndon Depot in downtown Herndon on Lynn Street and is open every Sunday from noon until 3:00. Visit the Society's website at www.herndonhistoricalsociety.org, and the Historical Society's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/HerndonHistory> for more information.

Note: The Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help keep the museum open each Sunday. If you have an interest in local history and would like to help, contact HerndonHistoricalSociety@gmail.com.