

## ARCHIVIST'S CORNER

# FRIENDSHIPS and AUTOGRAPH BOOKS

By Mike Kostek, Archivist, EPS Archives & Museum

*"We ought to smile  
And we ought to laugh  
But in this book  
We autograph"*

So stated the witty instruction in an old autograph book acquired at a vintage book sale.

Another entry scribbled on the inside cover of the memory book read:

*"To keep my friends is my delight  
So in this book I pray you'll write"*

Autograph books were ubiquitous in the 1930s and '40s and one's status as a popular student was sometimes measured by the number of autographed ditties and witty statements scribbled in the multi-coloured pages of his autograph book.

Some of the written messages were simple greetings or humorous observations. Other messages conveyed deeper thought in such statements as:

*"Do kindness well so angels will the story tell"*

Clever short messages such as:

*"In your little house of memories, please consider me a brick."*

often appeared in an old friend's message. So did witty statements such as:

*"May your slide down the banister of life be free of splinters."*

There were nonsense rhymes as well:

*"A collie dog a melon saw and thinking 'Oh how jolly'  
The collie ate the melon and was filled with melancholy."*

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Verses proffering romance or marriage often appeared in these memory books. One read:

*“Here’s something to think about.  
I heard it at a ball.  
It’s better to be kissed and caught  
Than never kissed at all.”*

Humorous words of caution regarding marriage often appeared in the vintage books as well:

*“When you get married and have twins  
Don’t come to my place for safety pins”*

Another clever observation warned:

*“Many a ship is lost at sea for loss of mast and rudder and  
many a lass has lost her lad for flirting with another”*

One’s autograph book became very special if it included a teacher’s entry. Highly prized were such profound messages as:

*“Good, better, best  
Never let it rest  
Till your good is better  
And your better is best”*

Other serious messages often expressed good wishes –

*“I wish you health  
I wish you wealth  
I wish you gold in store  
I wish you Heaven after Earth  
What could I wish you more”*

And of course the class wit always wrote:

*“Blessed is he who sits on a tack for he shall surely rise.”*

Autograph books marked an age when writing letters, telegraphing greetings and conveying messages of good will were expectations among friends. The advent of radio, television and computers brought an end to the autograph greetings much to the disappointment of those now approaching four score and ten years. But many social niceties and practices often re-appear. Hopefully, the practice of autographed greetings will be one of them.