

# Would You Write in My Friendship Album?

By Inga Milbauer

The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century “Moss Rose” album from the collection of the Boylston Historical Society and Museum contains personal messages, poems and drawings from the sister and several friends of the original owner, Laura Ann Barnes. She was the daughter of Millen Barnes (October 7, 1809 -July 26, 1892) from Marlborough, Massachusetts and Eliza Keep McNeil Barnes (July 27, 1811 -November 29, 1892) from Westmoreland, Cheshire County, New Hampshire.<sup>1</sup>

Laura was born on April 20, 1835 in Marlborough, Massachusetts and moved with her family to Boylston by June 1837.<sup>2</sup> According to the United States Federal Census for Boylston, Massachusetts in 1850, Laura had four younger sisters: Ellen Maria, Harriet, Eliza Jane and Sarah A. who was then just one year old.<sup>3</sup> It would be the eldest, Ellen Maria who would write in Laura’s album.

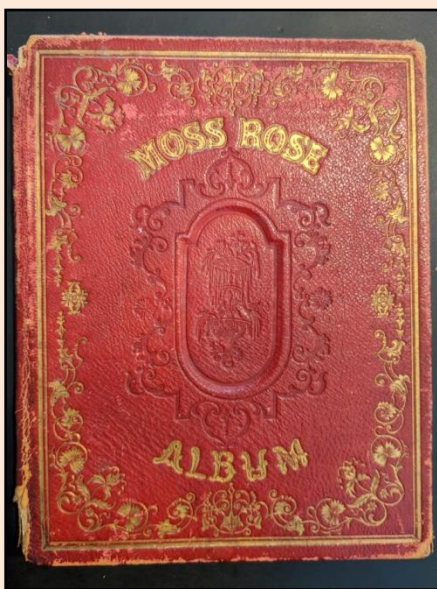


Tintype photograph of Laura Barnes  
BHSM Collection

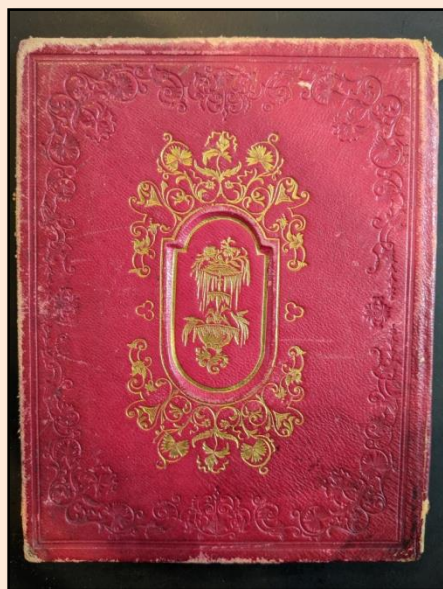
It became especially popular in the 1820s to have an album in which friends would write personal messages and poems. Such albums are often referred to as friendship or memory albums. Originally a tradition of German university students in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, German immigrants brought the custom to the United States in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These albums became a favorite form of recording memories of friendships. Laura Barnes seems to have used this “Moss Ross” album for this purpose.

The Moss Rose album gets its name from the Moss rose (*Rosa x centifolia*), a favorite type of rose during the Victorian era. It is named for the moss-like beards that form around the rose petals, flower stalks and sometimes their leaf stalks and stems.<sup>4</sup> The colors of Moss roses vary from white (rare) to various shades of pink and red to deep purple.

The Barnes’ Moss Rose album measures approximately 6½” by 8”, and is about ½” thick. It is leather bound, impressed with gilded decorations. It contains eight solid-colored pages (blue, green or faded purple) and five pages with beautiful floral lithographs. The notebook was donated to the museum in 2013 by Ms. Lee Holly Havens.



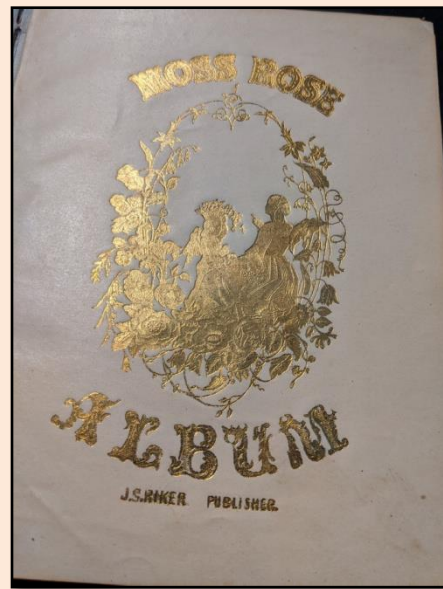
Victorian Friendship Album  
Front View  
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Victorian Friendship Album  
Back View  
BHSM Collection



Victorian Friendship Album  
Spine Detail  
BHSM Collection



Victorian Friendship Album  
Title Page  
BHSM Collection

The earliest message in this friendship album dates from April 1854, when Laura was nineteen years old. The last message was written in 1865. The friends and family members who wrote in the notebook lived in Boylston and the nearby surrounding towns of Northborough, Worcester, and Oakdale. Her future husband, Walter, wrote a poem in the notebook on October 29, 1854. They would marry two years later. Laura’s younger sister, Ellen Maria, at the age of fifteen, wrote in the album on February 4, 1855. Ellen had been born in Boylston on August 19, 1839. She married Benjamin F. Cook on October 31, 1862. She died on June 27, 1881, predeceasing her husband, who died on August 16, 1914. A cenotaph for them can be found at the Mount Vernon Cemetery in West Boylston, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> Laura’s friends George Colburn and H.A. Colburn of Boylston, inscribed messages which date back to May and June 1854 respectively.



Not everyone, of course, felt competent to write an original poem themselves, so often one would rewrite proverbs or well-known poems to convey a personal message. As her friend Joseph Allen from Northborough wrote on the first page of this album on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1854:

*“I cannot write poetry nor even make verses, but I will copy on the opposite page some lines, which I have just met with in a little hymn book, just published, which I think you will like.”*

The hymn he copied was by Jones Very from Salem, Massachusetts (August 28, 1813 – May 8, 1880).

*The bud will soon become a flower,  
The flower become a seed;  
Then seize O youth, the present hour, -  
Of that thou hast most need.*

*Do thy best always; - do it now; -  
For in the present time,  
As in the furrows of a plough,  
Fall seeds of good or crime.*

*The sun & rain will ripen fast  
Each seed that thou hast sown;  
And every act & word, at last,  
By its own fruit be known.*

*And soon the harvest of thy toil  
Rejoicing thou shalt reap;  
Or, o'er thy wild, neglected soil  
Go forth in shame to reap.*

The album is interwoven with several colored flower lithographs, see the photos below:



Laura Barnes went on to marry Walter H. Barnes on December 11, 1856 in Worcester, Worcester County, Massachusetts. Walter, the son of Baxter Barnes and Thankful Wheelock, was born in 1834 in Worcester, Massachusetts. Walter and Laura lived in Worcester after their marriage, where their son Charles H. was born on June 14, 1858. At that time, Walter was a “railroad ticket clerk”, in the 1865 United States Federal Census his profession is recorded as “railroad conductor”. The family later moved to Brookline, Norfolk County, Massachusetts. Walter died there on 14 November 1904; Laura died on June 20, 1920. They are both interred in Forest Hills Cemetery in Jamaica Plain, Suffolk County, Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup> Their son, Harry W. Barnes, and daughter, Grace S. Barnes, are interred there as well. Laura’s time in Boylston will always be remembered through the written memories and poems in her lovely friendship album.

#### Acknowledgements

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/144867365/millen-barnes>

<sup>2</sup> Vital Records of Northborough, page 148, records the birth of two siblings born in Boylston, Ellen Maria in 1837, who died on March 14, 1839, and a second Ellen Maria Barnes born in 1839

<sup>3</sup> United States Federal Census, Boylston, Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1850

<sup>4</sup> <https://oldroses.nl>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/124218718/ellen-maria-barnes>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/134049278/walter-henry-barnes>

<https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>

<https://a-z-animals.com/blog/types-of-old-roses/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autograph\\_book](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autograph_book)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jones\\_Very](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jones_Very)

[https://hymnary.org/text/the\\_bud\\_will\\_soon\\_become\\_a\\_flower#pagescans](https://hymnary.org/text/the_bud_will_soon_become_a_flower#pagescans)

<https://recollections.biz/blog/before-selfies-and-text-messages-were-friendship-books/>

Editor, Nancy A. Filgate, Director, Boylston Historical Society & Museum, Inc., Boylston, Massachusetts

Photography by Inga Milbauer