

the Evolution of  
*Scrapbooking*

by Maureen Taylor



Tucked away in historical societies, archives and family attics are the forerunners of today's scrapbooks. More than just a bundle of scraps and paste, these predecessors of the modern-day scrapbook served as a means of personal expression, offering a window into an ancestor's everyday life, personality and interests. The centuries-old tradition of preserving keepsakes and mementos has never gone out of style, and that emphasis on family history continues to inspire the current billion-dollar scrapbook industry.

BEGINNING IN THE 16TH CENTURY, EDUCATED men and a few women kept albums of quotes, poems and sayings they found memorable. These commonplace books began as a way for an individual to record important items of interest, but pages soon included household memos, recipes and jokes contributed by the whole family. Many families followed the instructions for indexing their newspaper and other clippings in philosopher John Locke's *New Method of Making Commonplace Books*, published in 1706.

These commonplace books appealed to all types of people—even presidents. While in office from 1801 to 1809, Thomas Jefferson filled his books—originally attributed to his granddaughters—with clippings of poems and news of his presidency gleaned from newspapers. In 2002 Jonathan Gross, a professor at DePaul University, went to Monticello to work on a book about Jefferson's interest in Romantic poetry and ended up editing *Thomas Jefferson's Scrapbooks: Poems of Nation, Family & Romantic Love* (Steerforth Press, 2006). In an article on George Mason University's History News Network, Gross admits that he "could not picture the author of the Declaration of Independence with scissors and paste, gluing poems about owls and parrots on the back of his own correspondence." But cut and paste, he apparently did; Jefferson's scrapbooks are filled with hundreds of his favorite poems, many illuminating the president's vision of the new nation and its leadership, as well as his views on family and romantic love.

WHETHER THE COMPILER PURCHASED A BOUND book or made one using fabric, cardboard or wallpaper, commonplace books continued to evolve in the 19th century, sometimes taking the form of illustrated journals or memory books. Some individuals reused published books, pasting clippings right onto the printed page. Hattie Harlow, a late 19th-century Boston seamstress, used her handmade volumes to catalog her knitting stitches and paste her swatches.

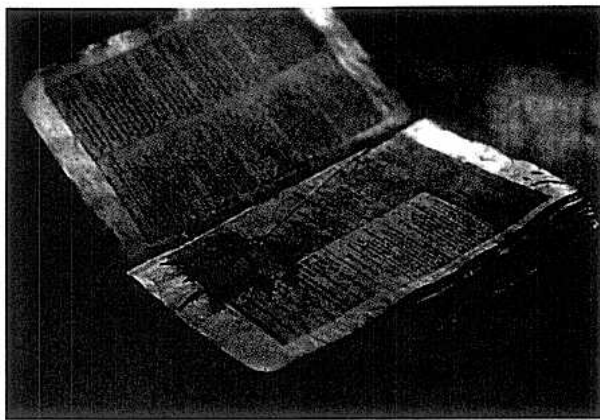
In 1769, English publisher William Granger printed a history of England, first with illustrations in the appendix and later with clean pages for readers to personalize their copies with letters or drawings. His name became synonymous with the production of "extra-illustrated" volumes. A Grangerized book refers to one with pictures and mementos either added to the blank pages within a volume or to sheets inserted later during rebinding.

Around the turn of the 19th century, brightly colored die-cut paper images known as scraps became available in Germany. The scraps, or ephemera, appeared on package decorations and greeting cards and were meant to be disposable, not collectible. But when children across Europe and in the United States began collecting them, publishers capitalized on the craze by offering sheets of pictures suitable for cutting and pasting. By 1800, publisher Rudolph Ackerman offered new items weekly. Women and children used the scraps not only to fill albums, but also to decorate household items.

The hobby of preserving illustrations, clippings and memorabilia in a book gained a name in 1820 in a magazine called *The Scrapbook*. By the mid-19th century, middle-class families spent leisure time placing "scrap" items in blank paper books now known as scrapbooks. Encouraged by articles in women's magazines, mothers used alphabets of scrap as

teaching tools. Illustrations were sold in sets, and children collected pictures and pasted favorite series in their books. Like scrapbooks, visitor or friendship books also gained popularity during the Victorian period. Young women collected hair weavings, autographs and tokens to add to their volumes whenever friends and relatives came to visit.

President Rutherford B. Hayes and Mark Twain were other famous practitioners of the hobby. Twain dedicated Sundays to his scrapbooks, and in 1872 he patented a self-pasting model, eliminating the need for paste. By 1901, at least 57 different types of scrapbooks bore Twain's name. Ready-made scrapbooks could be purchased from local booksellers or ordered from the Montgomery Ward catalog.



Above: Thomas Jefferson collected newspaper clippings as well as musings on life, love and philosophy in his scrapbooks.  
Below: Scrapbook aficionado Mark Twain patented a self-pasting model.



TOP IMAGE © STEPHANIE GROSS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA. BOTTOM IMAGE COURTESY OF THE MARK TWAIN HOUSE.

Photographs soon joined newsprint and colored scrap in decorating the pages of scrapbooks. Alongside cards advertising soap powder or pictures of African animals, scrapbook compilers would add photos of great-grandma and grandpa at the beach, accompanied by a handwritten note or caption. By the time E.W. Gurley published *Scrap-books and How to Make Them* in 1880, scrapbooking was a favorite American pastime. The popularity of George Eastman's Kodak camera in the 1880s only increased the number of photos found in scrapbooks—and from that point on, the personal camera blurred the boundaries between photo albums and scrapbooks. Members of fraternal societies, schools, clubs and churches collected photographs and newspaper clippings to create bound volumes of the history of their groups.

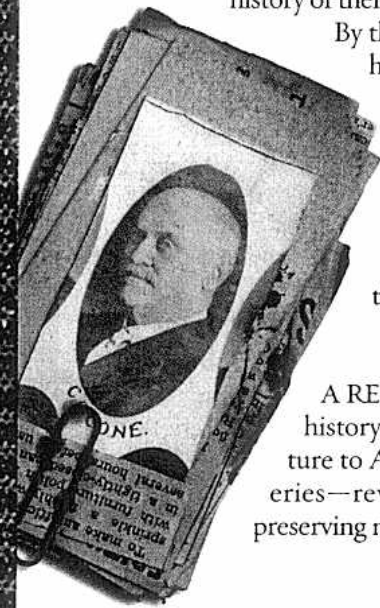
By the mid-20th century, scrapbooking had declined in popularity. During WWII, "Books Across the Seas," a book exchange program, briefly revived the hobby. The trade started when a shortage of books led organizers to sponsor a scrapbook exchange between students in the United States and England.

A RESURGENCE OF interest in family history in the 1970s—tied in popular culture to Alex Haley's *Roots* book and miniseries—revived the public's enthusiasm for preserving memorabilia. Instead of self-pasting

pages, this new generation used magnetic photo albums with self-adhesive pages. At an international genealogy conference in Salt Lake City in 1980, several individuals exhibited their scrapbooks of family history information and material, sparking a new demand for scrapbook-related products.

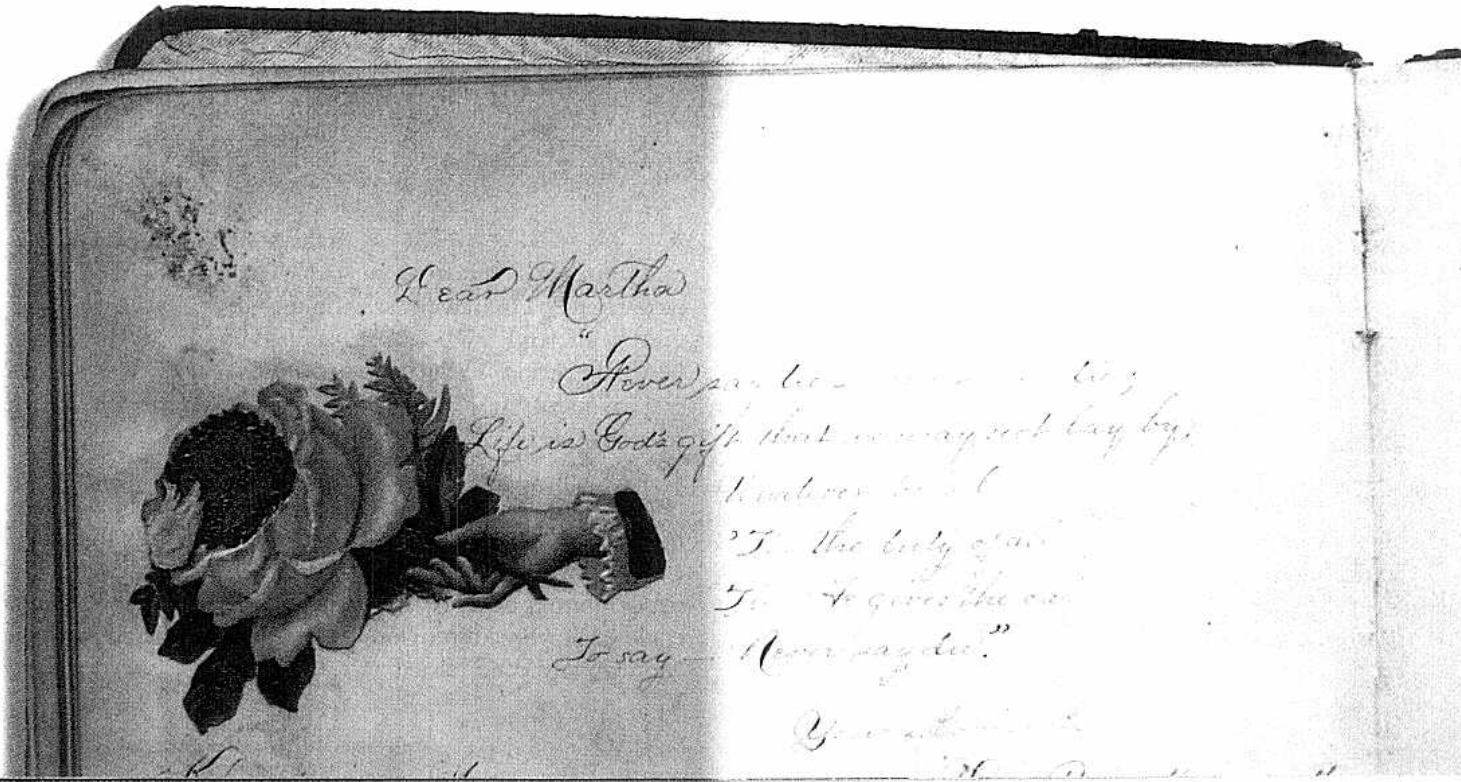
Today's scrapbooks are a long way from the simple books kept in the 18th century. Scrapbooks began as merely a way to retain quotes and poems, but they've become an international phenomena and a growing billion-dollar industry. Today's emphasis focuses on elaborate design and expression, not merely the collection of clips, poems or thoughts. Cut and paste is slowly giving way to click and paste as digital scrapbooking programs—with ready-made templates—become easier to use. Though the exquisitely designed 21st century scrapbook pages may differ in appearance from their 18th-century counterparts, the goal remains the same—saving a bit of the past for the future.

Maureen Taylor writes about family history and photography in her blog at [www.photodetective.com](http://www.photodetective.com). Her last article for *American Spirit* was "Colonial Rites of Passage" for the March-April 2006 issue.

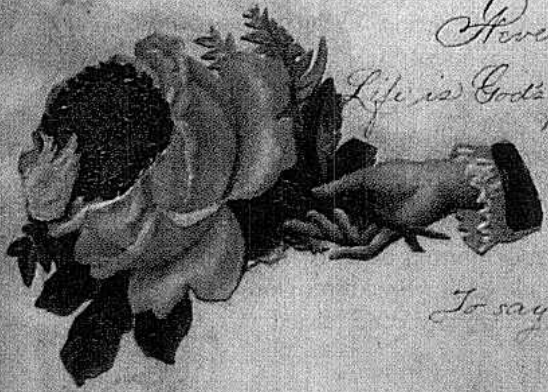


My sister is now the image with.  
By which my heart is broken  
Had another thought of love and then  
The weaver by the wheel

Live  
August 20, 1866  
O. J. H.  
34 1/2 - 18 1/2



Dear Martha



"Never say die - life is God's gift that we may not lay by."

To the lady of the house  
To give the word  
To say - "Never say die."

Your affectionate  
Maureen Taylor

# PROTECTING YOUR SCRAPBOOKS

Whether your ancestors created an attic full of scrapbooks like the Scrapbook King, Theodore Ashmead Langstroth II, whose 120 volumes reside at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County; or produced only a single volume, their books are likely in poor condition. "Scrapbooks from the late 19th-century face preservation issues depending on how the books were put together, the type of glue used and the paper quality of the pages," says Archivist Timothy Salls at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston.

Wood pulp-based papers that first appeared around 1865 have become brittle due to the acid content of the paper. The papers also yellow because of the natural substance of lignin found in wood pulp. Adhesives used to paste items on the page can deteriorate, causing pieces to fall out or edges to break off. Considering all of the time spent compiling an album, why not take time to ensure that it lasts for multiple generations? By following several simple steps when storing and creating albums, you can slow the rate of decay.

## SALVAGING OLD ALBUMS

- Start by placing your scrapbook in an acid- and lignin-free box wrapped in acid- and lignin-free tissue paper to prevent loose pieces from getting lost. You can also place sheets of acid- and lignin-free paper between the pages, though this can sometimes break the binding of the book.
- If there are newspaper clippings in your scrapbook, you should consider photocopying the article onto quality office paper (acid-free, lignin-free, and not recycled) using pigment toner and storing that one in your scrapbook.
- To protect your scrapbooks from damage, store them in a windowless closet in special containers away from water pipes and direct heat. Try to limit the fluctuation of temperature and humidity to extend the life of the albums.
- If your album is seriously damaged, you might want to call a conservator, though such a service is likely to be expensive. Visit the Web site of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (<http://aic.stanford.edu>) for a free referral service for professionals in your area.

## CRAFTING LASTING ALBUMS

The Scrapbook Preservation Society ([www.scrapbookpreservationsociety.com](http://www.scrapbookpreservationsociety.com)) has a wealth of information on appropriate archival materials to use when creating scrapbooks, some of which include:

- *Papers:* lignin-free, neutral sized, buffered, passes the Photographic Activity Test (PAT), which can predict harmful chemical reactions between scrapbook products and photographs.
- *Plastics:* PVC free, non-cellulose (acetate or nitrate), preferably polypropylene, polyester or polyethylene, passes PAT
- *Adhesives:* passes PAT, no latex/rubber
- *Inks:* pigment, fade-proof, waterproof, bleed-proof, lightfast, passes PAT

## FINDING PROPER MATERIALS

The following museum suppliers are good places to start for archivally sound materials:

- Light Impressions in LaBrea, Calif.  
[www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com); (800) 828-6216
- Hollinger Corporation in Fredericksburg, Va.  
[www.hollingercorp.com](http://www.hollingercorp.com); (800) 634-0491
- University Products in Holyoke, Mass.  
[www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com); (800) 628-1912