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# “Classbook Sense”: Genre and Girls’ School Yearbooks in the Early-Twentieth- Century American High School

Amy J. Lueck

*What is remembered dies,/What is written lives,/Therefore I write to be remembered.*

—Ruth Douglass Campbell, in the class book of Kate Bodine Stone (1913)

*What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have.*

—Carolyn R. Miller, “Genre as Social Action” (165)

In the spring of 1908, the students of Louisville Girls High School (LGHS) in Louisville, Kentucky, inaugurated their first school annual, a special edition of the school’s quarterly literary journal dedicated to the senior class. The object of this volume, as delineated in the preface, was “to collect into a narrow compass, and to arrange in a form convenient for reference, and consultation, a choice selection of the remarkable utterances, and pictured thoughts of the great among all classes, but chiefly of the great Seniors among the class of nineteen hundred and eight” (LGHS, *Record 2*). That is, a primary purpose of this annual was to compose a shared repository of memories for reference, particularly in the face of an implicitly wide range of student experiences.

But the preservation of these memories was not solely or even primarily for the benefit of the seniors themselves, but instead directed at “the Freshman particularly,” to whom “it is of special value, as furnishing the means of storing the youthful mind with a fund of high and ennobling thoughts” (LGHS, *Record 2*).

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In other words, the school annual was to play an explicit role in shaping the students' experiences and culture, not merely to reflect and record that culture. This aim is underscored in the featured editorial of that inaugural issue in which the outgoing editors, in typically cheeky but no less earnest fashion, deny aspirations toward "superior intellect" and instead articulate their goal as "the establishment among ourselves of a feeling of fellowship and of loyalty and love for the school as it represents to us, in some degree, a thing higher and nobler than merely a sort of prison school-room during five hours of every day" (LGHS, *Record* 18). In other words, through this special issue of their literary magazine, students used their compositions to foster a sense of community and shared experience for themselves as students of Louisville Girls High School.

Composing a unified representation of their high school experience in this way may have been particularly important to students at this time, as high school enrollments were expanding exponentially in Louisville and across the United States, rapidly transforming the face of the American high school.<sup>1</sup> Louisville Girls High School, the first public high school for white girls in that city, was no exception. This school, initially called Female High School and opened along with Male High School in 1856, had an academic focus and rigorous curriculum modeled on the English curricula of colleges and prestigious high schools nationally. It remained the only public high school for white girls in the city throughout the nineteenth century, though commercial, business, and normal (teacher training) programs were also offered as alternative courses of study. In the twentieth century, branch high schools were opened for students in the eastern and western parts of the city, which provided the first two years of high school study, though the central campus remained the only one that offered the higher branches.

The school's enrollments had risen steadily since its establishment in 1856, growing from a few dozen to an average of 300 to 400 students by the turn of the century (Louisville School Board). By 1910, enrollments had swelled to 607 at LGHS, but by June 1911 these numbers would more than double when female students from LGHS, the two branch high schools for young women, and the co-educational commercial department were consolidated together into one Girls High School, swelling enrollments to a whopping 1,528 students (Board of Education). Though almost immediately overcrowded in their shared facility, the girls would remain in one high school until the establishment of two new high schools for girls in the 1920s, followed eventually by coeducation in 1950, at which time Louisville Girls High School merged with the all-boys duPont Manual Training High School and was renamed duPont Manual High School (still in operation today).

In addition to responding to these demographic changes, students producing their school’s first annuals might also have been experiencing the “memory crisis” described by Liz Rohan, as turn-of-the-century Americans came to doubt their powers of memory and increasingly seek material devices to supplement their own flawed remembrances (370). Undoubtedly, they were also influenced by the changes in print technology that made the production of such publications accessible to such would-be publishers as high school students. But if advances in printing technologies made the production of these texts affordable, enrollments made them necessary, as students sought to understand, construct, and memorialize the experience of the American high school in a time of transformation.

School literary annuals participated in this work, alongside and in conversation with other memory texts, particularly the newly popularized school memory books in which students collected signatures, photos, and artifacts from their school days. Across these texts, students developed what one student called a “classbook sense,” suggesting an emerging genre awareness of texts dedicated to memorializing high school. This *classbook sense* transcended and ultimately merged the work of school annuals and school memory books and the two textual traditions they represent—that of the literary journal, with its cultural and aesthetic goals, and that of the scrapbook, with its personal and social memory functions. The resulting *yearbook* that emerged became a means of group, rather than individual, identity formation (see Figure 1).

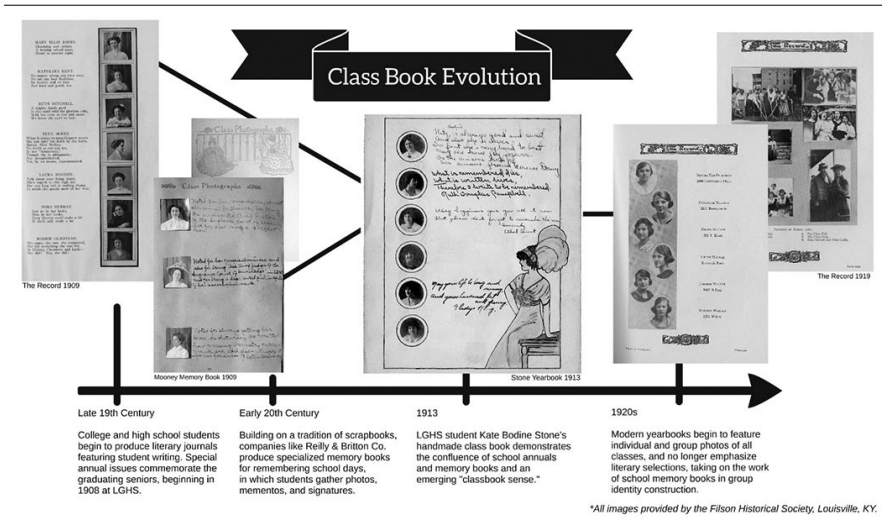


Figure 1. Class book evolution timeline

Drawing on a small collection of these school memory books and annuals from Louisville as a case study, I demonstrate how the compositional practices students engaged across these memory texts eventually constructed the modern school yearbook as a meaningful form and practice and how that practice in turn shaped the experiences and identities of high school girls as a group. In particular, I analyze a set of seven manufactured school memory books from LGHS students between 1909 and 1920, the LGHS school annuals for most academic years (and many half-years) from 1908 onward, and a handful of other scrapbooks and photo albums from LGHS students.<sup>2</sup> I argue that it is through these interleaving genres (which can be variously collected under the heading of “class books”) that these students composed a collective vision of the high school experience, and a common grammar for communicating and shaping that experience through what became modern yearbooks.

To make this argument, I first introduce the initially diverse texts through which LGHS students memorialized their school days, which included early school literary annuals and memory books as well as scrapbooks and photo albums. I then trace the emergence of a *classbook sense* across student compilations and inscriptions in annuals and memory books, which resulted in the development of the modern yearbook as a text and practice at this site. I close by tracing the key developments of the yearbooks as a national trend in the twentieth-century United States.

Though I focus on materials from LGHS, archival holdings from across the country suggest that the developments I describe are applicable to many other US schools, as concentrations of both the particular form of school memory books examined here as well as annuals and yearbooks are extant from the first three decades of the twentieth century. Though school memory books have continued to be composed by students even up to recent years, their popularity drops steeply once the modern yearbook is established nationally by the 1930s; their concentration during this early period indicates the particular significance of these compositional practices to students at this time.

Of course, these genre categories overlap significantly. Each of these genres (memory books, annuals, and yearbooks) is a prime example of what Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray call “boundary-blurring items” in the archives, which are those that do not fit easily in the categories of diary, scrapbook, commonplace book, and so forth. Ellen Gruber Garvey (*Writing* 15) further points to the “flexible” nature even of categories like *scrapbooks*, which overlap significantly with albums, portfolios, commonplace books, as well as with the later forms like autograph albums or friendship albums. The term *yearbook* is similarly unstable, indicating a range of practices and overlapping with terms like *annual* and *final*.

While these texts are difficult to categorize reliably, my argument here supports Zboray and Zboray’s claim that “the very moment these documents shift form or genre is often ripe with significance, for it offers a glimpse into the structural relationship between writing as a practice and lived experience” (103). That is, the shifting form of school memory books and annuals in the first two decades of the twentieth century points to the significant memory and identity work these students were engaging through their composing practices, which were increasingly group-oriented as “teenage girls” became an identity group of their own (Schrum).

Though they haven’t been well defined as a genre of their own, the various class books these students composed already appear frequently in histories of writing. Scholars examining scrapbooks have particularly noted the phenomenon of school memory books and have included them in analyses of scrapbooking in the United States. Jessica Helfand’s *Scrapbooks: An American History* includes several copies of the popular *The Girl Graduate* and other school memory books in its analysis (along with other similar texts for soldiers, new brides, and other audiences). In “Telling Particular Stories,” Susan Tucker analyzes a copy of *The Girl Graduate* completed by a young African American woman in the 1920s, exploring the complicated identity work negotiated by that student in relation to the white faces and culture depicted and assumed by the book itself. While Helfand and Tucker each identify these volumes as scrapbooks, their work begins to blur the boundaries of “scrapbooks” to include what Garvey identifies as a trend of producing memory (or memorabilia) books around certain identities, including students as well as young married women, mothers, soldiers, and theater fans (*Writing* 16). While scrapbooks are what Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farrell call a “genre of self” (2), these school memory books, as Garvey argues, do “express individuality” but also more specifically “mark entry into group identities and experiences” and “show people expressing their identities” as students (*Writing* 16). Other research that connects the identity work of scrapbooks to that of Facebook (Good; Vescio) or to twenty-first-century yearbooks as a genre (Caudill) further suggests the ways scrapbooks have undergirded the textual practices by which students came to negotiate group identity and memory.

In addition to scrapbooks and memory books, scholars have drawn frequently on student magazines, journals, and yearbooks in their historical research. Kelly Schrum’s “‘That Cosmopolitan Feeling’: Teenage Girls and Literacy, 1920–1970,” discusses the significance of these student publications as well as mass-market teen magazines for strengthening the “emerging group identity” of teenage girls and playing “an active role in the development of teenage girls’ culture and literacy” (104). Moving beyond their personal and social significance to their pedagogical traces, Kelly Ritter’s discussion of school annuals in *To*

*Know Her Own History* further demonstrates the significance of these texts in complicating our histories of composition instruction, as such extracurricular writing often evidences different compositional and instructional values than other institutional artifacts might (77).

These texts are particularly valuable to documenting the lives of students and schools that left little else in the way of a textual record. Hence, it seems to be no mistake that a majority of the contributions to Lori Ostergaard and Henrietta Rix Wood's recent collection on high schools and normal schools cite school yearbooks and magazines as part of their historical record. Work on high school memory books and yearbooks is particularly valuable to the work of feminist historiographers dedicated to exploring the compositional practices of women, as women remained underrepresented in colleges until 1978 but were a majority of high school graduates from at least the 1870s (Davies 57). Thus, Jane Greer's edited volume *Girls and Literacy in America* includes excerpts from student newspapers and literary annuals as well as student inscriptions and class histories from yearbooks among its primary documents, which Greer notes "create a permanent record of their collective experiences and . . . celebrate their common bonds" (231, 241).

The findings of the present study encourage researchers to continue to recognize the valuable historical record represented by school yearbooks and other student writing, but also to attend to Zboray and Zboray's call to "heed not only what [students] have written but also to the myriad, often hybrid, and ever fascinating forms through which they chose to express themselves" (116). That is, it is not only through what they say, but also through the genres students modify and create to do so, that students articulate identities and make meaning of their schooled experiences.

#### UNRULY MEMORIES: EARLY COMMEMORATIVE BOOKS

The existence of yearbooks in Louisville as "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations"—Carolyn Miller's oft-cited definition of a genre (159)—is as much marked by its early absence as by its later presence. While yearbooks are said to have existed in some nineteenth-century high schools and colleges,<sup>3</sup> the primary documents from Louisville suggest that the genre was not recognized there (in a modern sense of the term) until the second decade of the twentieth century. Instead of modern yearbooks, the compositional practices and texts associated with memorializing and shaping the high school experience took other forms, which were generally more eccentric and self-sponsored.

The earliest books commemorating LGHS in the collections I examined were two 1876 photo albums, each of which recorded only photographs of class-

mates without signatures or identifying information (e.g., Brinley; McKnight). While one of these photo albums was organized with separate headings for faculty and student photographs, they did not otherwise feature the elaborated categories and textual commentary characteristic of later class books.

The 1909 handmade commencement book of LGHS student Minnie Sauer, though carefully indexed, also lacks the format of later books; it is recognizable instead as a scrapbook in that it is indexed and organized rather idiosyncratically, based on the existence of individual documents needful of recording and does not feature the standard section headings and themes that would emerge in the following years. At the same time, though, the impulse to categorize and order materials in this scrapbook via an index may indicate a trend toward organizing and making such memories and documents searchable, which was manifested in the production of the school’s first annual the year before and the coming popularity of mass-market school memory books.

Though clearly a precursor to the school’s yearbook, the first LGHS school annual was little more than a special issue of the school’s quarterly literary journal, *The Record*, dedicated to commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the school’s first graduating class and featuring special content and photographs dedicated to that class and the senior class of 1908. Like other issues of the literary journal, which LGHS students had produced since 1896, this first annual issue features student-authored essays, stories, poems, and humorous sketches, which were supplemented by photos and compositions dedicated to the 1858 and 1908 graduating classes, giving the volume an historical or retrospective bent. But, while many of the literary selections were composed by members of the senior class, they are not otherwise remarkable among school literary magazine productions, being only infrequently dedicated to the topic of graduation or school. Even the photos of the members of the senior class demonstrate a disorderliness, being unalphabetized and attended by poetic inscriptions that incorporate the names of students with quirky irregularity, sometimes omitting the student’s first name. In other words, this first annual was no yearbook.

By its second year, 1909, the annual had begun to transform, featuring alphabetized senior photos, group photos of other classes, and special compositions commemorating students, teachers, and the school, expanding the interest of the volume to encompass a larger sense of school identity that transcended both the scope of a typical literary magazine and the immediate exigence of graduation (see Figure 1). In these and later developments, the annual responded both to the culture of annuals that emerged at surrounding high schools (which students witnessed through “exchanges” with other magazines) and to other textual forms, such as mass-market school memory books, which contributed to the definition and organization of the high school experience.



*Exchanges*—or the practice of sending and receiving print material between and among various publishers—were a significant force in the development of annuals and yearbooks, serving as a means of circulating texts and genres between and among institutions. As Garvey notes in relation to newspapers, exchanges had much in common with scrapbooking in that they “endorsed an ideal of reuse and recirculation” and comprised “circuits of connection and diffusion” (“Scissoring” 212). Through such exchanges, students gleaned content as well as forms and patterns of production for their school magazines and annuals, connecting their own composing practices to those of students from schools and colleges across the country.

In 1908 and 1909, LGHS exchanged issues with *The Crimson* from the local boys high schools and dozens of other high schools and colleges from around the country, including *The Iris* (Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA), *The Maryland Collegian* (Maryland College for Young Ladies, Lutherville, MD), *The Spectator* (Johnstown High School, Johnstown, PA), *Whims* (Seattle High School, Seattle, WA), *The Cadet Adjutant* (Kentucky Military Institute, Lyndon, KY), and *The Tennessee College Magazine* (Tennessee College for Women in Murfreesboro, TN). By 1915, *The Record* mentions having received fifty to sixty exchange papers a month, pointing out also that “the Record has gone to points as far distant as the ones from which our exchanges have come” (LGHS 61). Students at LGHS carefully read and critiqued the magazines they received on exchange and included an entire page or two-page spread for discussing them in most early issues. Of course, their own magazine was read and critiqued in turn, and the students printed some of the glowing reviews received from papers such as the *Spectator* of Louisville Male High School, the *Mortonian* of Lexington, Kentucky, and the *Mirror* of Washington, DC, in their 1915 annual issue.

Perhaps the most insightful review included in that issue was from the *Red and Black* of Salt Lake City, Utah, which wrote: “You must have splendid literary talent in your school, judging from the amount and kind of material in your last issue (October). Your idea, concerning the exchange department, of telling the interesting things which other schools are doing is a worthy and novel one” (LGHS, *Record* 61). This comment drives home the idea that the school annual was still considered primarily as a special issue of the literary magazine, even as it began to transform. It also suggests that LGHS students were at the forefront of changes to this form, developing unique features for their annual that, perhaps significantly, required a keen eye for noticing and sharing the “interesting things” other schools were doing, which might well have included new, nationally-circulating ideas about the emerging tradition of school annuals and yearbooks.

In addition to the examples and inspiration gleaned from these exchanges, students also shaped the experiences of school yearbook making through the textual practices of school memory books. The manufactured school memory books of the early twentieth century, published most notably by Reilly & Britton Co. (later Reilly & Lee) beginning around 1906, were mostly blank, containing only the outlines of a book—like a template—in the form of “ornamental headings of appropriate title and design” and a basic paratextual apparatus including a decorative title page and table of contents (“Literary News and Criticism”). The contents of each page were to be provided by the student user, who would use the section headings to guide her compilation of photos, clippings, commentary, and signatures, or “those things and records dear to the memory of her school days’ close” (“New Books Received”; see Figure 1). As previously mentioned, this form of guided scrapbook was not only produced for students, but also for new brides and mothers, recipe collectors, soldiers, and a range of other specialized audiences. The most popular of these texts for students was *The Girl Graduate: Her Own Book*, which was reportedly “the biggest seller” among graduation books, featured in bookstore advertisements from Bismarck, North Dakota, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Bennington, Vermont (The Little Book Shop; Strong’s Book Store; Evans’s). According to the *Cumulative Book Index*, this particular title was published from 1906 to 1917 and had gone through fourteen editions by 1912 (cited in Tucker 221). Other titles from Reilly & Britton included *School-Girl Days* and *School-Fellow Days*, each of which appear less frequently but still reliably across national archives and collections and among online vendors.

The earliest LGHS student whose school memory book is preserved in these collections is Laura Jean Mooney, who completed her copy of *The Girl Graduate* in 1909—the same year that Minnie Sauer created her own homemade scrapbook, mentioned previously. Though several girls in later years completed these books, Mooney’s text is distinct from the other school memory books in this collection, and these differences suggest that, though she had access to the orderly ways of making meaning of the high school experience prescribed by these texts, she had less familiarity with the textual norms that would emerge through their actual use. For example, rather than leaving each student to sign by her photo (as all later books would do), Mooney echoed the format of the LGHS school annual (for which she had written content) by filling the Class Photographs section with photographs arrayed linearly down the left side of the page and accompanied by her own pithy descriptions of the pictured students, typically characterizing what each student was “noted for” (see Figure 1). Her classmates, then, signed their names instead in the Class Autographs section (and elsewhere throughout the book), and they did so in multimodal, unscripted, and

informal ways, often accompanied by photographs and drawings, and most often without the “Dear Laura” greeting that would become standard in later versions.

Mooney’s choice to echo the design of her school’s annual points to an emerging pattern of intertextual influences between the annuals and memory books, which texts were both part of the same cultural and material moment and shaped one another in both symbolic and material ways. In this way, the marking of what students and teachers were “noted for” in Mooney’s book reflects the humorous tables published in both the 1908 and 1909 annual issues of *The Record*, which characterized select students based on what each was “noted for” as well as her size, sayings, hobby, “what she thinks about,” and “what others think about her.” In addition to following such formal cues from the annual, Mooney also made these intertextual interactions material when she cut pages from her annual (such as interior and exterior photos of the school and group photos of the class officers), pasting them into her own memory book.

Just as school annuals shaped students’ engagement with memory books, these memory books also reciprocally shaped the production of the annual. The class prophecy is an example. Mooney’s memory book invited her to compose a class prophecy, and she produced a lengthy example in the pages of that book, which she also shared on Class Day, as recounted in the annual of that year. Though Mooney’s prophecy was not published in the annual, such prophecies would become a regular feature by at least 1913, and it is possible that the production of a class prophecy was suggested to the LGHS students by the memory books that dedicated space to them.

Because such content was not yet standardized, Mooney and her peers completing memory books or compiling school annuals engaged the expectations dynamically and often consciously. In this way, Mooney’s entry in the Jokes and Frolics section takes up the invitation to include playful anecdotes therein, while overtly acknowledging that she is following the stated expectation of the category heading and the way it proposes to frame her experience: “A joke? far from it! A frolic? well, hardly! Virgil was never considered very frolicsome, I don’t believe. Still, we did have a real good time getting Latin” (141). But her awareness of these categories did not entail slavish adherence to them; instead, Mooney changed several page titles to suit her own needs, including dedicating one whole page to her friend Clara Belle Thompson and creating a page heading for “The Senior Teachers: What I Think of Them” (which is sadly left blank).

Of course, as much as they may be read as a response to a lack of recognized genre constraints, Mooney’s copious, creative commentary and particular design choices could also very well be unique to her—a result of her identity as a poet and contributor to *The Record*. After all, her reputation for skillful language use was memorialized in her senior annual, which said of her: “Talk about your be-

ing smart, / She’s superb in this high art. / Her one long suit is making rhyme, / In which she spends most all her time” (LGHS *Record*; 16). As such, Mooney might have had a particular investment in providing her own unique content in her memory book. And, of course, as a 1906 review of *The Girl Graduate* pointed out, a school memory book is always a “volume the interest and literary excellence of which will vary with each purchaser” (“Literary News and Criticism”).

Nonetheless, Mooney’s textual practices participated in the construction and circulation of the genre of the yearbook, the characteristics of which would become increasingly stable in this local context. Genre theorist Amy Devitt provides a lens through which to understand this stabilization in form; she writes, “If genre is based on recurrence at all, it must be a recurrence perceived by the individuals who use genres . . . Paradoxically, then, people recognize recurring situations because they know genres, yet genres exist only because people have acted as though situations have recurred” (21). That is, Mooney and the peers who signed her book are constructing the genre of the yearbook by acting as though it already exists.

#### KATE BODINE STONE’S CLASS BOOK

Though early memory books and annuals were unruly in their organization and style, the handmade book of Kate Bodine Stone in 1913 evidences the increasing stability of and widespread engagement with these textual practices at LGHS (see Figure 1). Her text is worth discussing at some length because it most clearly straddles the genres and traditions of memory books and school annuals, anticipating more modern yearbooks in its combination of more traditional alphabetic writing as well as elements of design and collecting in its collaborative and multimodal composition.

From its section headings to its art-nouveau illustrations, Stone’s book suggests an intimate familiarity with both the mass-market school memory books and school annuals as forms. Indeed, the high-quality illustrations and text design make Stone’s book almost indistinguishable from popular school memory books of the time on first glance, though it is also adapted to include common contents from the annual in its pages as well. Stone labels her book a Class Book, demonstrating a genre awareness that her schoolmate would later call “classbook sense” (Partridge 30). Perhaps significantly, this book is characterized as a “yearbook” by archivists at the Filson Historical Society where it is held, distinguishing it from the more traditional scrapbook that Stone also composed, as well as from the other memory books in the collection (like Mooney’s), which are catalogued as scrapbooks. I refer to it here as a class book because that is

how Stone labels it and because it usefully straddles the terms *memory book* and *yearbook*, as the text itself does.

Stone begins her book with a page to record the school colors, class colors, class flower, class yell, and class song, which were categories usually included at the opening of mass-market memory books. Interestingly, though, although Stone presumably produced the book and determined its features, she did not herself fill in all sections of this page, omitting the class colors and flower from her record. The fact that she herself did not find each of these sections significant enough to complete suggests the force of genre expectations by this time: the attempt to create a class book recognizable as such dictated that she include categories in which she herself may not have had interest.

Drawing on the features of both memory books and annuals, this class book is particularly illustrative of the development of these textual forms—it is evidence of the merging of memory books and annuals that makes it difficult, if not impossible, to determine Stone’s influences precisely. For example, her choice to array photos along the margin of each page had been established as a regular feature of both memory books and the school annual. Similarly, the class prophecy is once again instructive, being anticipated in the design of the text with the illustration of a fortune-teller and completed with a clipping from *The Record*, where prophecies had become a regular feature.

Other sections derive more clearly from the tradition of literary annuals, such as the section dedicated to photos of the school, for which photos are clipped from *The Record* itself. The school annual had been regularly produced by students for five years by this time and had become an important part of students’ end-of-year rituals. Students at LGHS regularly used the school annuals not only as models but also as a source of content for their school memory books, clipping photos and text from *The Record* to include in their own books, as Mooney did as early as 1909. It was common to cut and paste pages and even whole sections from *The Record*. Though this cutting and pasting entailed destruction of the annual, it also suggests, as Garvey argues in relation to scrapbooks, that students valued the annual enough to preserve elements of it in their own books (“Scissorsing” 217). As *Exchanges* editor, Stone might have had a particularly strong connection to and familiarity with both *The Record* and other annuals circulating at peer institutions, as evidenced in her text.

Drawing on both the material resources and genre characteristics of memory books and annuals, then, Stone created a class book that is remarkable in its fidelity to a genre that was only just emerging, being shaped by texts such as her own. Her design choices are in marked distinction to the handmade memory book of classmate Minnie Sauer of four years previous, which lacked the standard

categories and organization that Stone replicated so well. While the available model for Sauer was a scrapbook, the generic landscape was different for Stone. The fact that a student could produce an artifact that so closely echoed the features of these emerging class books—and be recognized generically by her peers as well, as suggested by their inscriptions—demonstrates the recognition and relevance of the genre by that time, shaping the very context of school attendance and graduation in the process. By identifying yearbooks as a genre and developing their own attendant "classbook sense," users constructed the situation of high school as a shared experience with particular features worth remembering, reinforcing their own images as high school students and graduates in the process. In what follows, I will further explore the actions and interactions of students in the pages of these books, examining their significance as recurrent social actions in the construction of high school identity and experience.

#### "CLASSBOOK SENSE": STUDENTS COMPOSING A GENRE

Stone's class book is suggestive of a genre awareness that was spreading across the various memory texts of LGHS students. As a genre, these books begin to engage group identity work that shapes the American high school by encouraging students to notice, remember, and therefore experience certain aspects of high school over others. In this way, the function of class books transcended recording and instead also entailed a construction of school memory and experience itself. As suggested in the preface to LGHS's first annual cited at the opening of this essay, students quite consciously took on this work, seeking to build a sense of community and affirm their social bonds through these texts.

But if class books were one form by which collective identity was reproduced and regulated, they were also a site to assert some level of agency, originality, and even resistance. In this section, I examine the ways students interacted with mass-market memory books to uncover the ways they actively revised these books in their own image, composing their own genre of class book that would shape their development of a school yearbook. As Susan Tucker observes, such overt revisions "immediately tell us to look beyond the surface of creation and consider questions about rejecting one image in favor of another" (220). In other words, modifications to these books by both compilers and signatories point to an active construction of experience, community, and self on behalf of the students. Though no signatures are preserved in copies of the school annuals in Louisville's collections, the hundreds of signatures collected in these memory books reveal these texts as important precursors to the practices attendant to the modern yearbook and its social and personal meaning for students.<sup>4</sup> These signatures, along with the revision and compilation practices of students who

owned the books, reveal students as actively negotiating values and conventions posed by both the books themselves and the practice of composing and exchanging them in the extracurricular interstices of the school day. Through this compilation, composition, and circulation, students were creating the genre of the yearbook in their own image.

Of course, the mass-market school memory books had suggested their own patterns of engagement through their subject headings, which proposed categories of attention and memory for students. The categories featured in *The Girl Graduate*, for instance, included the expected sections for class photographs and autographs, as well as sections for “Her Invitations,” “Her Gown,” “The Presents,” and the baccalaureate sermon, each with their own ideological and gendered valences. A later edition titled *The Girl Graduate’s Memory Book* added an almost dizzying number of categories for gendered social engagements and other extracurricular interests that underscored the strong interest in socialization in the years leading up to the war, including Luncheons and Dinners, Concerts and Musicales [sic], Theatre Parties, Chafing Dish Suppers, Dancing Parties, Card Parties, Week End Parties, Receptions, Holidays, and My Sorority. With such parameters in place, memory books enabled certain literate practices and constrained others—that is, they participated in the work of all genres but made that work explicit through these designations.

As owners of these books, students resisted the normative image of their experience presented by publishers by changing subject headings, leaving sections blank, or simply ignoring the subject headings in favor of collecting documents and inscriptions that reflected their own interests. On average, the students whose mass-market school memory books are included in this collection left 38 pages blank, and repurposed 19 pages per book (in books ranging from 150 to 190 pages). The ways they repurposed the sections were often exciting and inventive from the perspective of modern writing scholars and feminist historians. For example, Ruth Douglass Campbell (1913) crossed out the word “class” in the section of Class Autographs to be inclusive of signatures beyond her own cohort (33). In a similar move, Bertha Van Overbeke (1919) changed the category of My Sorority to My Sororities, resisting a single and unified identity and allegiance. While she tends to hold to the categories at the beginning of her book quite staidly, with blank pages left where necessary, Van Overbeke covers or changes several headings as the text goes on, amending them to include items other than assigned categories—especially more info on the YWCA, in which she was very active. Many categories (such as Chafing Dish Suppers and Dancing Parties) are pasted over with section titles from *The Record*, followed by clippings therefrom, and later blank pages are used to record information about her first office job.

Margaret Colson Nash (1916) created her own categories by changing Baccalaureate Sermon to My Presents, while Edith K. Partridge (1919) made room for additional signatures and her great number of theater programs by covering the section headings for Societies and Clubs and using those pages as a free-form scrapbook. The strategy of Margaret Gans Lochner (1917) seems to have been to mobilize a loose interpretation of the categories, putting her class songs under the Glee Club section, theater notices and advertisements under Dramatic Club, and an account of her class walk in a local nature reserve under Sports & Athletics, for example. She used the remainder of each of these sections for at least twenty pages of additional signatures. Lochner comments on her own negotiation of these categories, writing in the Class Officers section: “This section of my classbook seems to have been set aside for our most honored class-mates. They are the girls of the ’17 class who have held offices. The officers during my Junior year were: . . .” (Lochner 33). Her commentary reveals the (sometimes) conscious engagements with textual expectations in these students’ constructions of experience, memory, and self through their compilations.

Like the owners of these school memory books, classmates who signed these books similarly recognized the constraints of the categories as a guide for action. Commenting on the categories suggests awareness of their constraints and a conscious negotiation of them, even when writing outside of their official bounds:

Favorite studies is an appropriate page for my name to appear. I think Margaret made me a favorite study rather than her Latin lesson—Nevertheless I bear her no ill will. On the contrary, here is much love from Elizabeth McConathy (Nash 43)<sup>5</sup>

Dear Laura: Since you have put me under this heading [Her gowns] what can I write. Remember me always. Loads and loads of love, Emma Lee Kreiver (Mooney 132)

These comments acknowledge but ultimately dismiss the expectations posed by the texts themselves, demonstrating their vulnerability to actual student values and interests as students shaped the yearbook genre.

As their comments suggest, these students understood what was expected of them when they signed such class books, and what was most often expected was something “original.” While many students signed their names with simple and familiar pleasantries so valued in earlier commonplace book traditions, many others acknowledged the expectation for originality and the challenge of producing an original composition in this emerging genre. They responded to this challenge in various ways, often by framing commonplace verses with their own remarks, pairing a more traditional inscription with critical commentary or selecting a self-aware commonplace critical of the expectation of originality. For example, one student expressed anxiety about her composition, but recognized



the importance of writing in class books to affirm social and interpersonal connections. She paired a common verse used from annuals and autograph albums with her own commentary to help her express her sentiments:

Dearest Edith:—  
 I vowed I'd write beings it's you. How can I tell you how I love and and [sic]  
 adore your wonderful, wonderful hair.  
 As long as the sea is salty  
 As long as the skies are blue  
 As long as I have a memory  
 That's how long I'll remember you.  
 Oodles of love n' everything  
 From Grace Caster  
 who adores you '19 ½ (Partridge 31; see Figure 2)

Indeed, some of the most popular verses to repeat in these texts were those that acknowledged the difficulty of original composition, the following two of which varied slightly in each iteration, but were so common overall as to be used more than once in the very same volume, in the first case:

I think, I think, I think in vain, At last I think I will write my name. Your true friend, Lola Marie Rethwisch (Mooney 43)

I thought, I thought I thought in vain,/At last I thought I would write my name. Mary Ida Zook (Mooney 128)

You ask me for something original / I'd write if I could with a wim/But there's nothing original in me/Except original sin. Dorothy Hedden 1916 (Nash 21)

You ask me for something original, / But where shall I begin./For there [sic] nothing original about me/ Except original sin. Gladys King (Campbell 19)<sup>6</sup>

While these verses may be technically “unoriginal,” Susan Miller points out in *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing* that “When commonplaces are treated as manifestations of theory . . . they become decidedly uncommon self-constructions and political actions” (21). That is, these students and others who draw on common phrases are actively positioning themselves in relation to a tradition, not merely copying. Further, as Lisa Reid Ricker argues, the variations inherent in the reinscription of such verses reminds us that “writing can never reenact the exact circumstances in which it was originally composed” (251).

Whether intentionally inventive or not, iterations of commonplace verse and sentiment construct identity and discourse and demonstrate agency. As Min Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner argue in “Translingual Literacy, Language Difference, and Matters of Agency,” “[A]gency is manifested not only in those acts of writing that we are disposed to recognize as different from a norm, but

also in those acts of writing that are ordinarily recognized as producing simply 'more of the same': conventional, unoriginal, ordinary, conformist" (584–85). These iterations represent a "contribution to sedimentation," and, hence, to genre (589). In this way, the work of compiling a memory book along the categories provided or responding in suit would have been effortful, creative, and purposeful, contributing to the power and perpetuation of those categories and ways of knowing.

Nonetheless, a more traditional sense of originality seems to have been an aspiration for many students writing in these texts, even as local cultures and individual preferences played a role as well. For instance, a student in Ruth Campbell's book redefined the meaning of "original compositions" when she wrote:

(Something Original)???  
 Best wishes for a happy future  
 (Campbell 25)

In their attempts to write something original, many express resistance to the task, and the expression of difficulty also merges with one of tedium as class books became more popular, leading students to complain that their originality had "run dry" as they sought new ways to express similar sentiments across multiple books:

How-de-do. (I'm tired of saying dear) child I wish you all the best things in life—and I hope you will remember the old girl that would have her "say"—whither or no  
 Sincerely yours  
 Beatrice McIntyre '17 (Lochner 111)

I've written in so many books  
 My brain is all a mess,  
 And what I've written in your book  
 I really cannot guess.  
 Doras Douglass Ray (Lochner 169)

To Ruth Campbell from one who ought to have something to circulate, but who has run dry, therefore I simply sign my name  
 Elizabeth Goodwyn (Campbell 36)

Students struggled under various other contextual difficulties as well, such as trying to write "standing in a terrible position" (Partridge 28), or in the oppressive heat of oncoming summer ("Oh-h-h-, it is too hot to write anything but I'll try" [Van Overbeke 35]); or contesting that "after this strenuous game of volley-ball down in gym, how can I write poetic words to one so sweet & charming as you" (Van Overbeke 18). They also complained that when others are "making such a dreadful noise, I can't think of a thing to say, dearie, save the same, old thing"

(Lochner 36) or simply protested, “Why didn’t you ask me to write on a day when my brain was more *fertile*?” (Lochner 101).

Each of these inscriptions evidences anxiety about composing for what was recognized as an important social record reflective of both personal talent or character and group identity construction. But anxiety or difficulty in the face of this writing task also does more than respond to the expectations of this particular rhetorical situation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, students also express generalized anxiety about the very act of writing, tied as it is to many students’ identities and sense of worth.

Dear Margaret:

I always could talk a lot but when it comes to writing I meet a stop. But this I’ll say—I’ll never forget you and I hope that you will never forget, Natalie Delray ’16 (Nash 27)

Not being a poet it is hard to have poetic thoughts—but I wish for you all the joy and happiness your heart desires. Sincerely Corinne Smith 13 ½ (Stone 22)

This sense of inadequacy as writers or poets is likely tied to students’ experiences with schooled literacies and may have been particularly pronounced in this context of writing in what Lucille Schultz, drawing on the work of Anne Ruggles Gere, calls “the edges of school” rather than in a fully extracurricular space (108). Schultz notes that it is in these peripheral spaces that students “went beyond textbook directives: they assumed the persona of a writer and wrote with attendant authority about their own experience of writing” (108–9). These documents support Schultz’s claim but also complicate it by evidencing the ways the specter of the schoolroom appears in many of the signatures. Though these texts were extracurricular, students clearly filtered the ideas about writing and self they represented here through the values and experiences of the school.

Indeed, the schoolroom is a common topic itself, as it was quite common for students to recall class lessons, special rooms, or spaces within the school, teachers, and subjects. In addition, the scene of writing seems often to have been on school grounds, adding another layer of influence and interaction between these extracurricular compositions and school spaces:

As the bell is going to ring and we will have to make a mad dash to get something to eat in the lunch room I can not say all I have in my heart but will just end with lots of love.

Eva May Barnes ’17 (Lochner 170)

Dearest Edith:

Somehow I can’t write poetry in this room. Miss Chamberlins [sic] soaring accents disturb me so that I can’t concentrate. However it does not keep from wishing you the “bestest” future that life can give you, full of joy and happiness. With lots of love; Jessie Speed. Sec. 19 ½ (Partridge 19)

In this latter passage, Jessie Speed acknowledges the classroom as her context for writing, tacitly admitting to being off task during class, as her history professor’s “soaring accents” interfere with her efforts to write. Setting off her use of “bestest” in quotes, she also calls attention to the irony of her use of non-academic phrasing in the context of a semi-curricular site. In their playful use of colloquialisms and cheeky engagement with their schooled literacies, these passages play with the fact that the schoolroom and teachers will no longer determine what is correct in their writing. These books even provide a potentially rare opportunity to speak back to the teachers’ authority and correct *them*, as Mooney does when she alters her principal’s inscription in her book: in his recommendation that she “frequently upon Him who is the embodiment of all purity,” Mooney perceives that he intended to recommend that she “frequently *call* upon Him,” and she supplies the omitted word (in her own pen) to Principal Bartholomew’s inscription in her book (162). In a similar move, Edith Partridge chastises her instructor Lucy J. Higgins for writing in Photographs section of her book, which (though other students had signed there) was apparently the wrong section for a teacher to sign. In the left corner of the pictured memory book page in Figure 2 she writes,

Teachers may be brilliant but they have no “classbook sense[.]” Lucy wrote in the wrong place. (Partridge 30)

Through their engagement with class books, students like Partridge developed a genre knowledge—or “classbook sense”—to which their teachers do not have access, and she takes the opportunity here to celebrate her authority in this context, which subtly pushes against the previous authority of her teachers in her school experience. Again, her temporal position “on the edges of school” might have enabled her to make such a move, as the school began to loosen its grasp, and her class book provides a space in which to experiment with her emerging identity as not just a high school student, but also a high school *graduate*. In this same way, another student rejects the authority of school on her later life outright, affirming her social connections as the primary take-away from her experience of high school:

I know that all my books I’ll smash/But I’ll never forget you, Margaret Nash—  
Sincerely Margaret Kelly- ’16 (Nash 26)

In their negotiation of school authority and the approaching “real world” of later life, these texts provide students a space to work through their emotions and values together as a cohort. This textual work often has real power for students, affirming their group identity and friendships, even as it marks the partial severing of them, as Eva May Barnes so eloquently stated it:

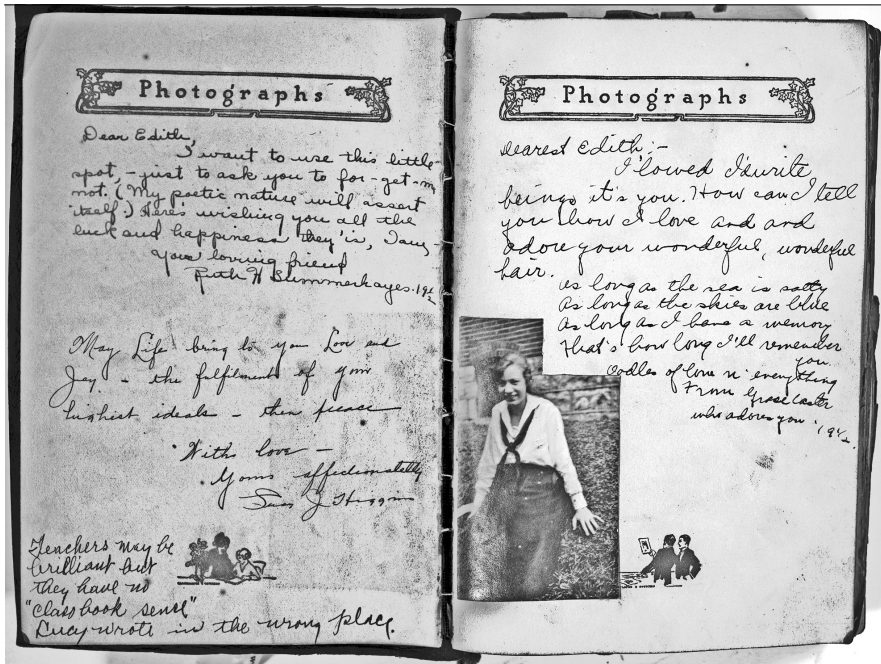


Figure 2: Edith K. Partridge memory book (1919). From the Louisville Girls High Alumnae Club Papers. University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections.

I know that our long friendship will not end when I write this but somehow it seems so much like departing when I write in some class-books  
Eva May Barnes '17 (Lochner 170)

In remembering their time together, students constructed a narrative of it that would have lasting effects both on their own recollections and on the experiences of classes to come, both reflecting and shaping school culture. As Devitt explains in *Writing Genres*, "The genres that develop from a group's interactions, then, reciprocally reinforce that group's identity and nature by operating collectively rather than individually. It is no logical leap to argue that genres, which reflect and construct recurring rhetorical situations, also reflect and construct a group of people" (36). In this way, members of a group—like these early twentieth-century graduates—are both *constructing* and *constructed* through their yearbooks.

## ESSE QUAM VIDERI

The genre of “yearbooks” can be traced across different kinds of texts (both memory books and annuals) and different textual practices (collecting, compiling, composing, circulating) because “yearbook” gestures to a specific exigence and set of actions as much as it denotes a specific textual object. But by the second decade of the century, the features of the modern school yearbook were at last being established and reflected in the productions of LGHS students. Informed by the practices and values associated with school memory books, the school’s yearbook ultimately grew out of transformations in the school literary annual, which became increasingly self-aware as a special commemorative volume discrete from the literary magazine and with its own set of regular features. By 1917, the annual began to feature a table of contents to organize these features, which typically included faculty and student photos, photos and accounts of school clubs, and a range of jokes and essays discussing the school and students, such as the class history, class prophecy, and “last will and testament” of the graduating class. The annual was actually semi-annual during this time, produced twice a year in relation to both the spring and winter graduations.

Transformations toward a more modern yearbook continued over the decade. By February 1919, the staff of *The Record* is listed separately from that of the *Final* (the new name for the annual), suggesting both the significant amount of labor to produce these volumes and the increasing distinction between the mission and form of a literary journal and that of a yearbook. There are fewer literary selections, and those that are included are stories and jokes specifically depicting student life, particularly of the graduates (see Figure 1 for images from this yearbook). By 1923, the monthly literary magazine has been converted to a weekly newspaper, and the *Final* is now a stand-alone volume not associated with other student publications. By 1926, the *Final* takes on its own new identity as *The Echo*, which is the title it would retain through the remaining history of the school.

But as the volume came to follow the school’s own motto, *Esse Quam Videri*—to be, rather than just to seem, like a yearbook—it of course overlapped with previous textual practices and values. In particular, the 1927 issue of the yearbook, *The Echo*, suggests that memory books remained popular among students at this time, as the editors mention “We have purposely omitted programs, tags, etc., that we assume are already cherished possessions of every class book” (LGHS, *The Echo* 39). In time, though, the yearbook became increasingly central to the work of recording and perpetuating a shared school identity, functioning as the central space for recording school memories for many students. By 1929, four pages are marked off for autographs at the end of the volume, officially subjoin-

ing the work of autograph collecting to the school-produced volume, just as manufactured memory books were waning in popularity.

Of course, the yearbooks of other schools have their own local histories of textual interaction and production, some of which began much earlier and from different traditions, which may not have directly overlapped with memory books and student publications in the ways it did at LGHS. Nonetheless, the case of LGHS is broadly representative of a national trend to develop school annuals and yearbooks at high schools and colleges in the first decades of the twentieth century, many emerging from the school's literary magazine. LGHS students were stabilizing and standardizing the genre in their own local articulations, but this process of stabilization also tracks with the national trends of the yearbook genre as it was absorbed into the formal extracurriculum of schools. In fact, this very same period, from 1916 to 1930, is heralded as a "turning point" in the move toward standardization of school yearbooks, as national organizations emerged to oversee guidelines and rate student productions (Cutsinger et al. 16). Beginning in the mid-twenties, scholastic press associations and journalism organizations began to develop yearbook guides, score sheets, rules, and a rating system, building on the legacy of yearbooks as special issues of school magazines even as they became increasingly distinct as a genre of their own. Through this system of oversight, official versions of high school experience and memory were circulated in reliable forms across institutions. In this way, the stabilization of the yearbook genre not only paralleled but also informed the stabilization of the high school as it obtained a gendered coherence and meaning in the first decades of the twentieth century. The "American high school" and the "high school girl" in many ways came into being as ideas and types through the genres and texts that identified them—and through which they identified themselves.

Nonetheless, students continued to resist, remix, and reappropriate yearbook texts to suit their purposes. For example, copies of memory books and yearbooks in this collection have been modified to contain such diverse artifacts as marriage notices, records memorializing one woman's first office job, and documentation of fifty years of class reunions. A 1919 issue of *The Record* with obituaries attached to each photo even converts the yearbook into a living record of mortality. Overall, then, despite standardization, the genre of yearbooks continued to be both responsive to and productive of the American high school and high schooler, in both progressive and retrograde ways.

And the yearbook's significance as social action has not waned in subsequent years. Instead, in high schools across the country, students still produce and make meaning through their school yearbooks, drawing on an increasingly expansive array of modalities in the process. Because of their deeply embedded role in the experience and situation of high school graduation, yearbooks

represent a significant avenue for textual analysis and research into both the history of and the future for American high schools to which we, as scholars and teachers, should attend. Attention to documents associated with high schools is important to college teachers and researchers both because our own students so recently *were* high school students, experienced with particular genres and textual practices of their own in that context, and because—having been much more widely attended by a diversity of students than colleges—high schools can significantly broaden and enrich our historical archive of schooled literacies and genres. As mentioned above, women’s literate and schooled lives are not well-represented in the archives of college learning, to the extent that women themselves were not well-represented in such institutions; however, women have been a majority among high school graduates throughout most of the history of public high schools from their earliest years. And high schools continue to be a significant site of language learning and practice for a wider range of students than we are currently seeing in our college classrooms. As those students continue to organize, remember, and construct high school experience through such textual engagements as the yearbook, these genres also continue to change with emerging technologies and changing values and interests, leaving the American high school—and perhaps, subsequently, the American college classroom—itsself open to revision.

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#### NOTES

1. According to the US Department of Education, national high school enrollments rose from 298,000 students in 1890 to 2,414,000 by 1920 (Snyder 36).

2. My selection is based on availability of texts at the Filson Historical Society and University of Louisville archives. The years represented by memory books are the only years for which such texts were available in these archives. The provenance of the memory books is varied, some being included in the high school’s alumnae club records at U of L, others in the scrapbook collection of the Filson, and still others among collections of family papers. The popularity of these books locally reflects the national availability of these texts as well, which can be found in archives from as late as the 30s and 40s but very infrequently thereafter, likely due in large part to the popularity of school yearbooks on a national level by that time. I cut off my inquiry into yearbooks in the 1930s, when transformations to the form leveled off at LGHS. For comparison, I also reviewed yearbooks from surrounding high schools and purchased more than a dozen similar memory books from early-twentieth-century students across the country.

3. In *History Worth Repeating*, Cutsinger et al. identify the first high school yearbook as *The Evergreen* of Waterville Academy in Waterville, NY, published in 1845 (6). However, it wasn’t until



the 1880s that advances in printing technologies “signaled the beginning of a more economically feasible, mass-produced yearbook” that the authors identify as the “modern yearbook” (10). Specific locations and schools established annuals and yearbooks much later, dependent on both their familiarity with the genre and their access to funds to support the publication.

4. The lack of signatures in school annuals could be an accident of preservation or a pattern of textual engagement among the students. At a minimum, we know students made a regular practice of signing memory books and may have signed copies of the school annual as well. As evidenced in a copy sold on eBay (<https://goo.gl/mhcMnu>), students at LGHS signed their yearbooks alongside their photographs by at least 1938.

5. Throughout this article, I have attempted to preserve the format, punctuation, symbols, and specific language of student inscriptions; hence, the formatting across them is inconsistent.

6. This passage on original sin circulates frequently in autograph albums across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as cited in numerous primary and secondary sources. See, for example, Ricker, “(De)constructing the Praxis.” This inscription is even included among the collected works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, cited from an album inscription between 1824 and 1834 (Coleridge 1029). The previous passage on “thinking in vain” circulates as a model autograph album inscription as early as 1881 (“Prize Questions” 82).

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