

Louisa Parker (1812–1885), friendship and family memento with woven hair, Calais, Vt., 1849. Layered cut paper, thread, woven human hair, ink and watercolor on paper. 11¼ x 12½ inches.

Hair played a special part in the culture of sentimentality in the nineteenth century. Because it does not disintegrate, it was an everlasting reminder of a loved one. In 1849, following the popular fashion of the day for women of all ages, Louisa (née Ainsworth) Parker collected locks of hair from friends and family, braided them, sewed them onto cut paper hearts, and mounted them in this framed display. Unlike conventional friendship albums, in which mementoes are scattered across several pages, here the heart shaped tokens are all displayed at once, in a pattern that is reminiscent of patchwork quilts, another popular form of friendship memento. Louisa married Erastus Parker sometime around 1848. This memento may have been one way that Louisa commemorated friends and family from whom she may have been separated by married life. In an era before photography, such albums served as repositories for memories, and were accordingly treated as precious family treasures.



Made for Love

Selections from the Jane Katcher Collection of Americana by Erin E. Eisenbarth

The bonds of love and friendship infuse a diverse array of American folk objects, revealing the material ways Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries expressed emotion. Portraits large and small depict loving family groups; children's furniture and toys reflect their parents' aspirations as they prepared their offspring for the hazards of the adult world; while exquisitely decorated albums reveal intense bonds of friendship, particularly among women and young girls at school. Some objects were commissioned from professional artists and craftsmen; others, like exquisite paper love tokens, were lovingly handcrafted.

An exhibition, *Made for Love: Selections from the Jane Katcher Collection of Americana*, on view at Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, through August 26, 2007, offers an opportunity to explore ties of friendship and family through inscriptions and visual cues. Among the featured works are those by known artists, such as John Brewster, Sheldon Peck, Mrs. Moses B. Russell, and Robert Crossman, along with a number of talented, anonymous others. The objects in the exhibition are among those included in *Expressions of Innocence and Eloquence: Selections from the Jane Katcher Collection of Americana* (Marquand Books in conjunction

with Yale University Press, 2006).

The exhibition is supported by an endowment made possible by a challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and by the Friends of American Arts at Yale Exhibition and Publication Fund. "Heart and Hand: Collecting, Curating, and Creating American Folk Art," a symposium celebrating the exhibition, will be held on March 30–31, 2007 and is supported by the Oswaldo Rodriguez Roque Memorial Lectureship Fund and the Friends of American Arts at Yale. For more information about the exhibit, symposium, and related programming visit www.artgallery.yale.edu or call 203.432.0611.

John Brewster Jr. (1766–1854), *Comfort Starr Mygatt and Lucy Mygatt*, Danbury, Ct., 1799. Oil on canvas. 54 x 39½ inches.

Deaf artist John Brewster produced haunting and insightful portraits of New England's merchant class. In 1799 he painted a series of portraits to settle part of his debt at Comfort Starr Mygatt's store. Here he posed merchant, silversmith, and watchmaker Comfort Starr Mygatt with his five-year-old daughter, Lucy. He also painted portraits of Mygatt's wife and son, and father and stepmother. In this unusual grouping of a father and daughter, one of the greatest expressions of Brewster's mature style, the background trappings and room settings common to portraits of this era have been largely stripped away. This absence is a feature of many of Brewster's works; perhaps reflecting the isolation the artist felt in a hearing world. But though Mygatt and his daughter stand alone in a spare and stark space, the pair's gently touching hands link them physically and emotionally, and draw the viewer's eyes from one face to the other.



Doll's quilt for Alma D. Crane, Somerville or Cambridge, Ma., 1853. Cotton and printed cotton fabrics. 21½ x 23½ inches.

Alma Crane would have been about five or six when she received this doll's quilt from her as-yet-unidentified aunt. Handwritten poems inscribed amid the quilt's brightly patterned cotton squares reflect the hope that Alma and her dolls would be safe and protected. The two upper quadrants of the quilt feature the famous children's poem, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep," while the lower quadrants contain a presentation inscription and a second, perhaps original, poem that reads, "Baby Baby / Lay your head / On a brown pretty / little bed / All the clothes are tucked in tight / Little baby / good night." Like most girls' playthings of this era, this quilt encouraged behaviors crucial to females in adult life. Perhaps young Alma recited the poems on the quilt to her dolls in imitation of the fond goodnight wishes she herself heard from her parents and would recite to her own children one day.



Puzzle purse with love token, American, circa 1830.
Watercolor on paper inside a woven silk ribbon purse. 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

Nineteenth-century Americans expressed their feelings for loved ones through the exchange of elaborate handmade tokens. This small "puzzle purse" opens to reveal a delicate watercolor of a basket of flowers facing a foldout love token decorated with flowers. The innermost layer of the token features a watercolor of a rose, an ancient symbol of true love. It might have been exchanged at Christmas, New Year's, or Valentine's Day; holidays associated, then as now, with love and friendship. Instead of presenting the recipient with an actual rose, its creator offered a watercolor rendition that would never die.

Fork, Southeastern Pa., 1809. Iron, brass.
H. 16 $\frac{3}{4}$, W. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 1 in.

Long-handled forks were essential kitchen tools in the era of open-hearth cooking. In Pennsylvania-German culture they were often given as wedding gifts along with ladles and other kitchen equipment. Though many forks were plain, those given as presents were often engraved. The brass inlay on this piece features swagged decoration along with the inscription, "Esteem the giver," the initials "J.L.," and a date of 1809. The piece shows little evidence of wear, indicating that it served mainly as a kitchen showpiece.





Artist unknown, *Mary Gay and Lucy Gay*, Suffield, Ct., circa 1780. Oil on canvas. 27½ x 44 inches.

Mary and Lucy Gay were the oldest and youngest children, respectively, and only daughters of Connecticut minister Ebenezer Gay and his second wife. Painted in two separate ovals on the same canvas, the two sisters are simultaneously separated and united. Depicted in what may be two separate rooms of their Suffield home, the sisters sport nearly identical hairstyles and dresses, as they look somberly, and perhaps cautiously, out of the corners of their eyes. Young Mary holds a book, a symbol of education. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the importance placed on training young girls who would raise the future citizens of the new nation, made this a popular symbol in portraits of young women. Lucy holds a bird, a popular pet of the era. It was believed that caring for birds taught moral responsibility; they were also popular symbols of the soul, a fitting emblem for a minister's daughter. The two African-American children in the background of Lucy's portrait may represent Sybil and Ti Gay, who were raised as members of the family by Ebenezer Gay and his first wife, Hannah.



Joseph H. Davis (active 1832-1837), *Martha Nelson Furber*, Farmington, N.H., 1835. Watercolor, ink, and graphite with gum Arabic on paper. 8¾ x 6½ inches.

This rare signed watercolor by itinerant artist Joseph Davis celebrates the importance of education in nineteenth century America. Three-year-old Martha Nelson Furber proudly presents a delicately rendered bouquet of flowers in this gift to her teacher, Miss Emily P. Parsons, who, the inscription notes, is "her favourite Instructress." The lace at Martha's collar and cuffs, her elaborate apron and reticule, and the beads around her neck suggest her family wealth, but the subject of the watercolor shows that the Furbers placed a premium on education. While children often received certificates and awards of merit for their scholarship, it is less common to see items that commemorate their teachers. This watercolor is a thank-you gift, given by young Martha's parents, who recognized the importance of teachers in their child's life.



Attributed to Robert Crossman (1709–1799), lift-top chest with drawer, Taunton, Ma., 1731. White pine, iron cotter-pin hinges, cast brass pulls and escutcheons with bright-cut engraving, original painted decoration. H. 32, W. 35½, D. 17¼ in.

One of a group of painted lift-top chests attributed to Taunton craftsman Robert Crossman, the date “1731” is prominently painted on the front, along with an elaborate design of birds, trees, vines and flowers that has been compared to the tree-of-life motifs found on Indian textiles. Crossman made a similar chest, also dated 1731 but featuring the initials “PC,” possibly for his sister Phoebe as a wedding gift. Chests were often given to young women as they left their parent’s house to set up a home of their own. The chests and the goods they held were generally considered to be the woman’s property, and in the event of her husband’s death were held separate from his estate. As a gift from brother to sister or father to daughter, these chests were both practical forms of storage and insurance against future hardship.



Attributed to Mrs. Moses B. Russell (1809–1854), Hiram Stinson, Aurelia Dinsmore Stinson, Ella Stinson, Adelaide Stinson, Boston, Ma., 1848. Watercolor on ivory in original gold-filled locket. D: 1½ in.



Mrs. Moses B. Russell (née Clarissa Peters) is recognized as one of the mid-nineteenth century’s great miniaturists. Married to Moses B. Russell, a Boston portrait miniaturist, the pair created successful careers for themselves even as the daguerreotype was replacing the art of portraiture. Here the Stinson family’s large, soulful eyes give them an endearing appearance, no doubt cherished by Hiram Stinson, a ship’s captain, who carried these miniatures of himself, his wife, and their children with him on his voyages. Ingeniously mounted in a watchcase, the miniatures symbolically kept the family together even when great distances separated them. In a further symbolic gesture, the gold case is engraved with a house, creating a dwelling where the family could always be together. In contrast to their parents’ somber appearance, the children’s portraits are vibrant and glowing, perhaps indicating their youthful promise.

Erin E. Eisenbarth is the Marcia Brady Tucker Assistant Curator in the Department of American Decorative Arts at the Yale University Art Gallery and the organizer of the exhibition.

All objects shown are from the Jane Katcher Collection. All images by Gavin Ashworth, courtesy of Jane Katcher.