L&A Treasures
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A vibrant Victorian celluloid photo album can be found in the Bigham family collection in the History Center’s Library & Archives. Inside the album are 62 well-preserved cabinet cards depicting the family, though many subjects are unidentified.

The original owner is not known; an inscription inside reads, “A token of regard and good wishes from your scholars January 2, 1890.” Possible provenance includes Reverend Thomas James Bigham (1875 – 1950); his wife, Ida; or his father, Joel L. Bigham, Esq. (1847 – 1892). The Reverend’s grandfather, Thomas James Bigham (1810 – 1884), was a lawyer, politician, and founder of Grace Episcopal Church. These three generations and probably several others resided in the Mount Washington neighborhood of Pittsburgh.

The album retains its rich and lively colors. A calm smoky brown accents the cattails. The greens are dark and energetic. A delicate hint of pink preludes those flowers that are not already in bloom, all among an undulating gray background. The setting is embossed atop and surrounded by dark royal blue velvet, which completes the quintessential pond motif and gives a three-dimensional effect. The ornate clasp is stamped, “patented June 6, 1882.”

The photographs within are almost all portraits. A notable exception is a picture of the home of Thomas James Bigham in Chatham Village; the house, which still stands, was said to have been a way station on the Underground Railroad.

The Library & Archives is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., or visit www.digital.library.pitt.edu/hswp to search the L&A catalog.

The top photo shows the home of Thomas James Bigham.

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