This stop is one of our object highlights!

This small book is called an album. It has a beautiful but worn red leather cover embossed with gold leaves and scrolls in the center. In the early 1800s, people used albums like yearbooks or scrapbooks to collect inscriptions, drawings, and poems from friends. They were especially popular among young people who could afford to attend schools and secure a literary education. Mary Virginia Wood, a young woman of African descent, asked her friends to sign this one in 1834. Wood and her sister Annie were newcomers to Philadelphia, where they had moved from North Carolina.

The Forten family welcomed Mary and Annie into their social circles, and this album includes messages from three of James Forten’s children, who were all around Mary’s age. Two years later, in 1836, Mary Wood married one of them, Robert Bridges Forten. Their family preserved this memento of Mary’s friendships and education. Today, the album is on loan from Howard University, a historically Black university in Washington, DC.