News - Digital Library of Georgia

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Two New 2017 Subgrant Collections Now Available: Henry L. Benning Civil War Materials and Juliette Gordon Low Correspondence, Series India Letters

The Digital Library of Georgia (DLG) is pleased to announce the availability of two new digital collections, the Henry L. Benning Civil War materials collection, and the Juliette Gordon Low Correspondence, Series India Letters collection, thanks in part to the DLG’s Competitive Digitization grant program, a funding opportunity intended to broaden DLG partner participation for statewide historic digitization projects.

The Henry L. Benning Civil War materials collection is now available at: http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/CollectionsA-Z/ghlb_search.html. The collection belongs to Columbus State University Archives.

Henry L. Benning was born in Columbia County, Georgia in 1814. After finishing first in his class at the University of Georgia in 1834, he moved to Columbus in 1835. There, he was admitted to the bar, married Mary Howard in 1839, and entered his father-in-law’s firm. In 1840, Benning lost a race for the General Assembly but was later elected to the state Supreme Court in 1853. After Lincoln’s election, Benning became one of Georgia’s most vocal supporters for secession. During the war, he served as Colonel of the 17th Georgia Infantry in 21 engagements including Antietam, Gettysburg, and Chickamauga. By the beginning of 1863, Benning rose to the rank of brigadier general.

His regiment was the first part of the Army of Northern Virginia under Robert E. Lee and later under Braxton Bragg in the Army of Tennessee. After the war, Benning returned to Columbus and resumed the practice of law, dying on his way to the court in 1875.

Benning’s war correspondence deals with his service throughout the war and includes orders sent to him and reports of engagements, both those sent to him and those he submitted to his superiors.

David Owings, head of Columbus State University Archives stated: “General Benning is certainly an important figure in Georgia’s history, who resonates nationally because of his role in the Civil War. This material will attract broad national interest from scholars as well as those with a casual interest in the Civil War. We are excited that the Digital Library of Georgia has helped us increase access to our collections by making General Benning’s involvement in this important period of our history available online.”

Juliette Gordon Low’s 1908 India travel correspondence is now available at: http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/CollectionsA-Z/jglowc_search.html. The collection, Juliette Gordon Low Correspondence, Series India Letters, belongs to Girl Scouts of the USA and is housed at the Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace.

Juliette Gordon Low, founder of Girl Scouts of the USA; her 18-year-old niece Elizabeth Parker; and another friend, Grace Carter, traveled throughout northern India and parts of what is now Pakistan in 1908. Low wrote letters to her family describing her experiences and
impressions and, using carbon paper, copied the pages into a journal. Her accounts document visits to Madurai, Madras, Calcutta, Benares, Lahore, Delhi, and Bombay. Low’s work is an excellent example of an early 20th century woman’s travel journal. Few American women journeyed to present-day Pakistan and India as the founder of the country’s largest girls’ leadership organization and her companions did, unaccompanied by men. Low recorded their progress as they traveled to sites that included the Golden Temple of Amritsar, the Shalimar Gardens, the Taj Mahal, Shah Jahan’s Red Fort, Humayun’s Tomb, the site of the 1857 Indian Rebellion, the Qutub Minar, and the Tughlaqabad Fort ruins. She described the difficulty of making travel arrangements and wrote detailed descriptions about food, culture, festivals, shopping, animals, and art. The women met with Princess Bamba Jindan Singh, the explorer Sir Francis Younghusband, and numerous British army officers.

Stacy A. Cordery, professor in the Department of History at Iowa State University, and biographer of Juliette Gordon Low stated: “Juliette Gordon Low’s India travel diary was essential to the writing of my biography of Low, and I thought at the time that it deserved publication on its own because of the breadth and importance of the topics covered. It would be a terrific boon to scholars and the interested public (including school children) should this diary be digitized and available. Among other things, it would help to bring more attention to one of Georgia’s most famous citizens.”

Until now, the letters have only been accessible to researchers able to travel to view them in person. Digitization will make the materials available to a wider audience, potentially including users such as students studying Low as part of their curriculum, graduate students, art historians, tourism professionals, Asian studies scholars, historians, history enthusiasts, and girls and women associated with Girl Scouting. Low’s significance to Georgia history is evidenced by her inclusion in the state’s second-grade curriculum. Low recognized the need to train girls to have courage, confidence, and character, and these letters demonstrate this. The letters also present her as a multi-dimensional woman with prejudices reflective of her era and upbringing. The collection of letters is an important initial collaboration between the Digital Library of Georgia and Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) as GSUSA seeks to make its cultural assets more widely available.