

Julia Wilbur papers, 1843-1908
MC.1158

Finding aid prepared by Emily Kingsley

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December 12, 2014

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections

December, 2014

370 Lancaster Ave

Haverford, PA, 19041

610-896-1161

hc-special@haverford.edu

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Summary Information

Repository	Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections
Creator	Wilbur, Julia , 1815-1895
Title	Julia Wilbur papers
Date [bulk]	Bulk, 1843-1895
Date [inclusive]	1843-1908
Extent	2.5 Linear feet (6 boxes)
Language	English

Preferred Citation

Julia Wilbur papers (MC #1158), Special Collections, Haverford College, Haverford, PA.

See Citation Guide for more detailed information on how to cite specific documents from the collection.

Biographical note

Although not as well known as many of her female contemporaries, Julia A. Wilbur was an active anti-slavery and women's rights proponent during the 19th century. The daughter of Mary Lapham and Stephen Wilbur, Julia was born into a Quaker family on August 8, 1815, near Rochester, New York. In 1844, Julia began teaching in the Rochester public school system. She notes several times in her journals her frustration at the wage gap between male and female teachers—an injustice that likely helped fuel her later engagement with women's rights efforts. One notable event in Julia's early life was her initial interaction with Harriet Jacobs in April of 1849. Jacobs, herself a freed slave, would eventually befriend Julia during their work with freed and escaped slaves in Alexandria, Virginia. It is also important to recognize Julia's early involvement with the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, for which she served as a correspondence secretary.

Julia's life changed markedly in April of 1858, when her sister, Sarah, died. As a result of this tragedy, Julia became the guardian of Freda, Sarah's daughter. Julia seems to have taken well to her new, motherly role. Yet, things took a turn for the worse in January of 1860, when Freda's father, who had recently remarried, decided to claim custody of Freda. Having her niece so abruptly pulled from her life was devastating for Julia; she was launched into a severe depression that continued for about two years. Fortunately, Julia's unhappiness did ultimately lift. This emotional shift was triggered in large part by her move to Alexandria, Virginia in October of 1862. Sent to Virginia by the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, Wilbur worked there alongside Harriet Jacobs providing supplies and education to freed slaves. This work was emotionally and physically taxing for Julia and exposed her to the sufferings of others in a very personal way.

In 1865, Julia made yet another shift by moving to Washington, DC. She became increasingly involved with the women's rights movement and also took a job working in the U.S. Patent Office. According to a letter written by Julia's great-niece, Julia was the first woman admitted to work in this office. Julia spent her last years living in Washington D.C. with her sister, Frances, until her death in 1895.

Resources Consulted:

Baron, Erika. "Bridging Separate Spheres: the Life of Julia Wilbur." Haverford College, 1989. Print. [Haverford College senior thesis] Cox, Rob. "Finding Aid for Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, 1851-1868." William L. Clements Library Manuscript Division Finding Aids. University of Michigan Digital Library, 1995. Roedner, Lauren. "First Step Toward Freedom: Women in Contraband Camps In and Around the District of Columbia During the Civil War." NCUR Proceedings 2012, printed online.

Scope and Content note

This collection is comprised primarily of Julia Wilbur's personal journals, which span from 1844 to 1895. It is important to note that Julia's journals vary in type. The first journal variety, which includes the years 1856-57 and 1860-95, are pocket-sized, individual books. The second journal style is larger in dimension than the first set. They are not bound books, but instead are individual pages that have been sewn together. These journals go from 1844 to 1873. There is some overlap in time among the different journal varieties, specifically for 1856-1857 and 1860-1873. Comparing corresponding entries reveals generally similar content, often with further elaboration in the entries of the second journal type due to the increase in writing space. Julia also wrote what she refers to as "journal briefs" for the years 1844 through 1862. These briefs offer summaries of her entries for those year and presumably represent what Julia saw as the most significant events that had occurred during those times. There are various other, miscellaneous items included in this collection as well. More specifically, there is a brief journal kept by Julia's sister, Mary L. Van Buskirk, during an 1881 trip to Washington D.C. There is also a compilation of loose journal pages that cover 1906 and 1907, as well as a bound journal written by Buskirk in 1908. There are two pictures of Julia in this collection in addition to a photocopy of an 1865 letter written by Julia to her sister, Mary, about the assassination of Lincoln. Finally, there is a letter written by the great niece of Julia Wilbur that summarizes many aspects of Julia's life.

Arrangement

Each set of diaries is organized chronologically.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Haverford College Quaker & Special Collections December, 2014

Use Restrictions

Standard Federal Copyright Laws Apply (U.S Title 17)

Acquisition

The Julia Wilbur papers were donated to Special Collections, Haverford College in 1980, 1989, and 1990, by Douglas Steere.

Processing Information

Processed by Emily Kingsley; completed December 2014

Controlled Access Headings

Subject(s)

- Women -- Suffrage -- United States
- Abolitionists -- United States -- 19th century
- Antislavery movements -- United States
- Women in education
- Women's rights -- United States

Pocket Diaries

Collection Inventory

Pocket Diaries		
	Box	Folder
1856-1857, 1860-1861	1	1
1862-1865	1	2
1866-1869	1	3
1870-73	1	4
1874-1877	1	5
1878-1880	1	6
1881-1884	2	1
1885-1887	2	2
1888-1890	2	3
1891-1894	2	4

Unbound Diaries

Unbound Diaries		
	Box	Folder
May 1, 1844- Nov. 21, 1847	2	5
Nov. 25, 1847- Jan. 10, 1854	3	1
Jan. 15, 1854- Jan. 14, 1856	3	2
Jan. 16, 1856- Sept. 4, 1857	3	3
Sept. 5, 1857- May 25, 1859	3	4
May 26, 1859- Oct. 3, 1860	4	1
Oct. 5, 1860- Oct. 5, 1861	4	2
Oct. 6, 1861- Aug. 28, 1862	4	3
Aug. 28, 1862- May 13, 1863	4	4
May 14, 1863- Feb. 14, 1864	4	5
Feb. 15, 1864- March 31, 1865	5	1
April 1, 1865- Oct. 23, 1865	5	2

Mary van Buskirk Diaries

Oct. 24, 1865- Aug. 14, 1866	5	3
Aug. 15, 1866- Oct. 1, 1867	5	4
Oct. 2, 1867- Sept. 5, 1868	5	5
Sept. 6, 1868- May 16, 1870	6	1
May 17, 1870- May 30, 1873	6	2
	Box	Folder
Journal Briefs; 1844-1862	6	3
Photographs; ca. 1860s	6	3
Miscellaneous Materials	6	5
Mary van Buskirk Diaries		
	Box	Folder
1881, 1906	6	7
1907-1908	6	7