

A Guide to the Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Papers

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Papers 1799-1989

1799-1989



A Collection in the Special Collections The University of Virginia Library 12792

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1997

History

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Title Statement

A Guide to the Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Papers

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Descriptive Summary

Collection Number

12792

Language

English

Provenance

Estate of Katharine Lane Weems

Extent

ca. 860 items

Repository

University of Virginia. Library. Special Collections Dept.

Alderman Library

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Virginia 22903

USA

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open to research.

Use Restrictions

See the [University of Virginia Library's use policy](#).

Acquisition Information

The collection is a bequest from the Estate of Katharine Lane Weems through Mrs. George Freeman.

Funding Note

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Preferred Citation

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Biographical Sketch

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve(1831-1924), who was probably America's greatest classical scholar, was born in Charleston, South Carolina on October 23, 1831. He was the second of seven children of Benjamin Gildersleeve (1791-1875), a prominent Presbyterian minister, and Emma Louisa Lanneau (1805-59). His early education was provided by his father and was steeped in the study of Latin, Greek, and the classics. He began his formal schooling at the College of Charleston and later enrolled at Princeton from where, in 1849 at age 17, he graduated fourth in a class of seventy-nine.

In 1850, Gildersleeve traveled to Germany to pursue more intensive classical studies in Berlin, Bonn, and at Gottingen University from which he received a Ph.D. (1853). Returning home to Richmond, he engaged in several literary and journalistic activities until his election in 1856 to a professorship at the University of Virginia where he would spend the next twenty years teaching Greek and Latin. During this period, while convalescing from a Civil War battle wound, he met and later married Elizabeth Fisher Colston (1846-1930); they raised two children, Raleigh Colston (1869-1944) and Emma Louise (1872-1954).

In 1875, Gildersleeve left pastoral Charlottesville for Baltimore to serve as the first faculty appointment and Greek chair at the newly established Johns Hopkins University. During a 40 year tenure at Hopkins, he achieved worldwide academic distinction as a classical scholar, renown as a master of Greek syntax, and recognition as a major contributor to the "university" system in American education. He founded the American Journal of Philology in 1880 and raised it to international influence by the force of his written contributions and editorship; he was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters and later to the American Academy of Arts and Letters; he served twice as president of the American Philological Association; and, in 1905, was the first American to receive a doctorate of letters from both Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

Gildersleeve continued in academic work until his retirement in 1915 at age 83. He died on January 9, 1924 and is buried in University Cemetery in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Scope and Content

The collection contains ca. 860 items (2.5 shelf feet) and consists primarily of a variety of keepsakes and

memorabilia that reflect on the life and work of Gildersleeve and that appear to have been personally gathered and saved by him and by Elizabethand, in later years, by his daughter, Emma(Mrs. Gardiner M. Lane) and his granddaughter, Katharine Lane Weems. The scattered assortment of letters, notes, diaries, books, reprints, newsclips, published articles, obituaries, photographs, diplomas, mementoes, and other memorabilia that make up the collection have been arranged in four groupings:

Correspondence--A large portion of the correspondence consists of personal letters and poetic notes that Gildersleeve wrote to his wife over the span of their married life. The remaining correspondence includes a handful of letters to him from friends and colleagues and a miscellaneous group of letters that are addressed to other family members. Noteworthy are: an 1866 Robert E. Leeautographed letter inviting Gildersleeve and Elizabeth to be his house guests at Lexington, Virginia(see: Correspondent Letters--to Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve); a letter written in cuneiform script by JHU Professor Paul Haupthoning Gildersleeve on his 70th birthday (see: Correspondent Letters--to Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve); several colleague letters that are affixed, together with some of his published articles, in an annotated album that Gildersleeve has entitled "Sargasso--On Weeds from the Atlantic" (see: Diaries/Notebooks-- Basil Lanneau Gildersleeveannotated album); and two groups of acknowledgement letters (26 items and 67 items respectively) from recipients of the publication: Selections from the Brief Mention of Basil Lanneau Gildersleevewhich was distributed originally in the 1930s by Gildersleeve's daughter to some of his former colleagues, friends, and pupils (see: Correspondent Letters --to other family members) and then again in the 1960s by his granddaughter to university and college libraries throughout the world (see: Correspondent Letters --Katharine L. Weems).

Writings--Included in this group are several of Gildersleeve's published articles contained in periodicals that were very likely part of his private collection and that bear his autograph and marginalia. The unpublished papers, together with the diaries and notebooks that make up the balance of this group, are an accumulation of bits and pieces of written material, most of which appear to be in Gildersleeve's hand. Those that are not, along with some typewritten drafts, are of unknown authorship. Although not voluminous, the items in this group represent a vivid sampling of Gildersleeve's writing style over a period of some 75 years. Included are poems he wrote in 1848 as a 16 year old student, travel notes he made during his first and only trip to Greece in 1896, and poetry he composed for his wife in 1923, shortly before his death.

Commentary--The collection of newspaper and published articles gives an indication of the esteem in which Gildersleeve was held by scholars and commentators from around the world.

Miscellaneous--Most of the material in this group consists of keepsake items and mementoes that may have held special meaning for Gildersleeve as well as for his wife, daughter and granddaughter. Of special note among Gildersleeve's personal keepsakes are ancient Greek coins from the period ca. 400-336 B.C. and his grandfather Finch's Continental Army Commission that bears a John Jay autograph. Also included in this group are a collection of family photographs and some miscellaneous genealogical material relating to the Gildersleeve and Colston family lineage. Oversized material (30 items) consisting of several large photographic prints, diplomas, academic certificates, and a blueprint drawing have been relocated to an oversized storage box.

Container List

Correspondence

Family Letters and Notes--Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve to wife, Elizabeth

Unit Date 1865-1923

Container Box 1

Family Letters and Notes--Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve to other family members

Unit Date 1897-1921

Container Box 1

Family Letters and Notes--exchanged between other family members

Unit Date ca. 1880-1924

Container Box 1

Correspondent Letters--to Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1865-1923

Container Box 1

Correspondent Letters--to other family members

Unit Date 1869, 1924-1931

Container Box 1

Correspondent Letters--to Katharine Lane Weems

Unit Date 1944-1985

Container Box 1

Writings

Published Works--articles written by Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1891-1916

Container Box 2

Extent (2 folders)

Published Works--books written by Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1899, 1907

Container Box 2

Published Works--reprints of Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve's "Brief Mention"

Unit Date 1917-[1920]

Container Box 2

Unpublished Papers--drafts written by Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1848-1923

Container Box 2

Unpublished Papers--unsigned drafts, (some may be Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve's)

Unit Date n.d.

Container Box 2

Unpublished Papers--unsigned drafts, (authorship unknown)

Unit Date n.d.

Container Box 2

Diaries/Notebooks--Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve annotations

Unit Date 1896-1920

Container Box 3

Extent (2 folders)

Diaries/Notebooks--Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve annotated album

Unit Date 1892-1923

Container Box 3

Diaries/Notebooks--Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve (and some unidentified) annotations

Unit Date n.d.

Container Box 3

Commentary

Newsclippings--about Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1856-1979, n.d.

Container Box 3

Extent (2 folders)

Newsclippings--about Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve's death

Unit Date 1924

Container Box 3

Articles--about Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1903-1980

Container Box 3

Articles--memorial tributes to Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1924-1926

Container Box 3

Miscellany

Photographs--Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve portraits

Unit Date 1863-ca. 1906

Container Box 4

Photographs--family members, friends and locations

Unit Date ca. 1868-1984

Container Box 4

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Keepsakes--ancient Greek coins

Unit Date ca. 400-336 B.C.

Container Box 4

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Keepsakes--Continental Army Commission, Finch Gildersleeve

Unit Date 1779

Container Box 4

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Keepsakes--insignia and photos (Am. Acad. of Arts and Letters)

Unit Date ca. 1923

Container Box 4

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Keepsakes--sketched miniature (Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve as Gottingen student)

Unit Date 1851

Container Box 4

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Keepsakes--University of Virginia commemorative coins

Unit Date 1912, 1921

Container Box 4

Basil Lanneau Gildersleeve Keepsakes--Johns Hopkins University emblematic seal

Unit Date n.d.

Container Box 4

Family Keepsakes--Gildersleeve family

Unit Date ca. 1865-1950s

Container Box 5

Extent (2 folders)

Family Keepsakes--Katharine L. Weems

Unit Date 1926-1989, n.d.

Container Box 5

Family Keepsakes--eyeglasses (ownership unknown)

Unit Date n.d.

Container Box 5

Genealogy--miscellaneous material (Gildersleeve/Colston families)

Unit Date 1881-1989

Container Box 6

Genealogy--Edward Colston and the Colston School

Unit Date 1906-1979

Container Box 6

Genealogy--biography--Edward Colston

Unit Date 1852-1971

Container Box 6

Extent (2 folders)

Diplomas, academic certificates, photographs, blueprint

Unit Date 1849-1922, n.d.

Container Oversize Box (Box)