

Meanley, Cordie Diaries

Cordie Meanley Diaries

1862-1871



WILLIAM
& MARY

CHARTERED 1693

Title Statement

Meanley, Cordie DiariesGuide to the Cordie Meanley Diaries MS 00139

Publication Statement

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Notes

Finding aid description enhanced by Robert Browne in July 2019.

Profile Description

Creation: This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on 2025-09-10 07:02:37 -0400.

Language Usage: Description is written in: English, Latin script.

Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

MS 00139

Unit ID

/repositories/2/resources/7738

Unit Date

1862-1871

Language

English

Creator

Meanley Banks, Cordie

Extent

0.25 Linear Feet

Extent

One book approximately 6 3/8" X 7 5/8" (16.5 cm X 19.5 cm) in size and the other about 8" X 10" (20.5 cm X 25.5 cm) in size.

Repository

Special Collections Research Center

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

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Processing Information

Enhanced description by Robert Browne in July 2019.

Preferred Citation:

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Biographical / Historical

According to her marker at Williamsburg's Cedar Grove Cemetery, Cordie Meanley was born in 1836 and died in 1912. She was the wife of James A. Banks, whom she married in 1877. At the time she started Book 1, she was 26 years old, single, and living at "Marl Hill," a place in New Kent County on Virginia's Peninsula. Marl Hill is about 25 miles east of Richmond. She also lived in Richmond during the war years, apparently working as a clerk in one of the government offices.

Content Description

Cordelia (Cordie) Meanley's diary consists of two bound books. The smaller one consists of 184 pages, covering the period from August 1862 to November 1863 (Book 1). The larger one has about 220 pages, running from November 1863 to November 1871 (Book 2).

In both books, there are some gaps between dates, despite Cordie Meanley's declared intent on the first page "to keep a diary of my life." Some pages reflect subsequent revisions or deletions.

Generally, her diary (written in a neat, legible hand, but with different inks) reflects the concerns of a young, single woman of the South living in a time of war and its aftermath. She often begins her diary entry with a comment about "the weather," but then moves to that day's particular concern(s): a pleasant visit with family or friends; an inability to see family or friends (or even to get news of them); the day's good war news or bad war news (including the deaths of persons she knew); and - for a mid-19th century, single woman - matters of the heart.

As the war continues, her diary increasingly reflects the changing nature of warfare and the suffering experienced in her part of Virginia. She mourns the death of men like Stonewall Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart.

She struggles continually with the call of her Christian faith ("to love one another") and her antipathy of Yankee soldiers.

Keywords

Richmond (Va.)--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives

American Civil War, 1861-1865

Women--Diaries

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives

Description of Subordinate Components

Diary

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/268197

Unit Date 1862 August 2-1863 November 19

Mixed materials 1 (Box)

Container 1 (Folder)

Language English

Scope and Contents

The first diary, with numbered pages, covers the period from August 1, 1862 to November 19, 1863, when the Army of Northern Virginia, under Robert E. Lee, achieved some of its most notable victories. She began it just after the Army of the Potomac, under George B. McClellan, had been withdrawn from the Peninsula. She reflects on Confederate victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, and notes there had been a battle at Gettysburg, "but no official report, only Yankee news." She writes glowingly of Stonewall Jackson, and laments his death just after Chancellorsville (creating a black border around her entry). In this first part of her diary, she affirms her faith in the Confederacy's military leaders.

Starting with a November 14, 1863 entry, the second book in her diary covers the period when Ulysses S. Grant had taken command of all Union armies, and launched the Overland Campaign (May and June 1864). She notes the fighting that took place (known now as The Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse) and comments about the forces eventually opposing each near Petersburg. She mourns, as she did for Jackson, the death of J.E.B. Stuart (again creating a black border around her entry). She mentions, in a March 1865 entry, during the Confederacy's last days, the "negro volunteers" who were being proposed to fill Confederate ranks.

There is a significant gap in her diary, being the days after March 26, 1865 and before May 9, 1865. This is the period that spans the evacuation and fall of Richmond, Lincoln's visit to Richmond, Lee's surrender at Appomattox and Lincoln's assassination. Later, after resuming her diary, she comments upon two Proclamations that President Johnson issued as Lincoln's successor, one calling for a "Day of Fasting, Humiliation, and Mourning for the Death of President Lincoln" and the other for "Thanksgiving Day, 1865."

The second diary notes the cost of items, states her intention to keep an account "of every cent" she spent, and begins (apparently, on the back pages of the book) to keep such an account. She also, more and more, looks back on the deaths of many of her friends and acquaintances, and writes often of her loneliness. In many places, despite the painful loss of a world she knew, she declares her faith in an all-knowing Providence, and warns herself - as the Bible does - against "murmuring."

Her last entry is November 5, 1871, which ends a nearly two year gap in her diary.

Note: In its original form, the second diary was intended as an "Index Rerum," an alphabetized manual for the preservation of "anything of interest." Its pages were blank, but a person could note down a subject or an idea, and its source. There are no sequentially numbered pages, only pages marked in the corners with the letters of the alphabet (in capitals) and, in page centers, with the first five vowels. Each letter has ten pages. Most of the pages are still held in place by the binding, but there are some loose pages. This fourth edition (1839) was authored by the Rev. John Todd, pastor of the Edwards Church, Northampton [Massachusetts].

Keywords

Southern States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865

Diary

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/375931

Unit Date 1863 November 14-1871 November 5

Mixed materials 1 (Box)

Container 2 (Folder)

Language English

Scope and Contents

The first diary, with numbered pages, covers the period from August 1, 1862 to November 19, 1863, when the Army of Northern Virginia, under Robert E. Lee, achieved some of its most notable victories. She began it just after the Army of the Potomac, under George B. McClellan, had been withdrawn from the Peninsula. She reflects on Confederate victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville, and notes there had been a battle at Gettysburg, "but no official report, only Yankee news." She writes glowingly of Stonewall Jackson, and laments his death just after Chancellorsville (creating a black border around her entry). In this first part of her diary, she affirms her faith in the Confederacy's military leaders.

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Additional Items

Unit ID /repositories/2/archival_objects/375932

Mixed materials 1 (Box)

Container 3 (Folder)

Language English

Scope and Contents

Additional items in the collection:

1. Three images in a white sleeve: one photo, marked "1544 Mrs. Cordie Banks"; one plate, bearing the images of a woman (not identified); one photo, marked "Cordie Banks at Raleigh Hotel Williamsburg, Virginia"
2. One handwritten poem
3. On Confederate States of America bond, dated February 17, 1864, promising the payment of \$500 (two years after ratification of a treaty of peace between the Confederate States and the United States)
4. One U.S. House of Representatives pass, dated February 16, 1864
5. One scrap of a note dated July 7, 1864
6. One Colonial Williamsburg letter, dated December 10, 1864, and addressed to Miss Lucille Saunders, with a want ad stapled at its bottom for a "bookkeeper"
7. One letter addressed to Mr. Banks, dated December 21, 1876
8. One scrap of paper, bearing a sketch of two birds over a scroll
9. One scrap of paper, showing the name Francis A. Sturtevant and his military unit, "Co. B 8th Geo Regt Anderson's Brigade"
10. One scrap of paper, bearing two sketches "Anticipation" and "Reality"
11. One calling card for Miss M. A. V. Heath
12. One scrap of an envelope, postmarked June 9, 1893, containing some pressed leaves and a calling card for "Charles E Smith Alabama"
13. One invitation for Mr. C. Filbates

and Family to the wedding of Mollie Butler to S. F. Collier, on September 12, 1894 14. One post card, addressed to Mrs. Cordie Banks, Williamsburg, Va, showing images of "Oldest House and Washington's Headquarters, Richmond" and "Washington Monument, Capitol Grounds, Richmond."