

Haverford College Library
Special Collections

Finding Aid for the JULIA WILBUR PAPERS,
1843-1908

Collection No. 1158

4 document boxes (2 linear feet)

Gift of Douglas Steere in 1980, 1989 and 1990

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INFORMATION FOR USERS

RESTRICTIONS: No restrictions.

For Erika Baron's Haverford College senior thesis on Julia Wilbur, "Bridging Separate Spheres: the Life of Julia Wilbur," a psychobiography written in May 1989, see Haverford College archives finding aid.

ABSTRACT

Civil War era diaries of Julia Wilbur, a teacher and Contraband relief worker.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Julia Wilbur (1815-1895) was born near Rochester, NY. The family was of middle-class Quaker background. Mary L. Van Buskirk is probably Wilbur's sister. Unmarried, Wilbur taught school in the Rochester public school system. Her diaries indicate an interest in political and social issues, but no one single event brought her to involvement in the abolitionist movement, though she mentions hearing Frederick Douglass speak for the first time in July 1845. She met Harriet Jacobs, a slave who had escaped to the north, in a reading room run by the Rochester Ladies' Anti Slavery Society. Thirteen years later, they would become close friends working together to assist the freed slaves in Alexandria, Virginia.

At the age of 43, Julia Wilbur gave up teaching to care for her niece, Freda, until Freda's father took her to live with him. After a two-year bout with depression, Wilbur relocated to Alexandria, Virginia to assist freed slaves. Here, she distributed food, clothing and supplies to the Contrabands, organized schools, set up orphanages and solicited financial support. After this work was completed, she moved to Washington, D.C. and worked for women's suffrage.

The diaries "have rare and detailed information about Washington's elite black community and about former slaves. They include marvelous detail about life in a city rocked by the political and social upheavals of the war, about nascent racial segregation and about the nature of friendships among black and white women ... and extraordinary resource for historians of women, African Americans, Washington and the second half of the 19th century."

(Information from Baron, Erika Lea, "Bridging Separate Spheres: The Life of Julia Wilbur". Haverford College senior thesis, 1989 and Kate Masur, researcher (LC & Northwestern U),

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

The collection consists primarily of the diaries (or journals) of Julia Wilbur, 1844-1895. However, there are also diaries of Mary L. Van Buskirk, two photographs of Wilbur and a few other miscellaneous items.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

Box 1: Julia Wilbur's Diaries

- Julia Wilbur's bound, annual diaries: 1856-1857; 1860-1879.
- Julia Wilbur's journal briefs: 1844-62.
 - Summarizing events.
- Camp Meeting hymn with note from Julia Wilbur that this was sung at a Millerite Camp Meeting in 1843.
- Albumen photo of Julia Wilbur, ca. 1865; tintype of Wilbur, ca. 1860s.

Box 2: Julia Wilbur's Diaries

- Julia Wilbur's bound, annual diaries: 1880-1890s.
 - ❖ Notes: These diaries that were all part of the 1980 gift were microfilmed, except for the 1887 diary that was received in 1989. The diaries are all in a format of one page per day, except for 1880, which is in two volumes

and often has several pages per day. Journal briefs are Wilbur's summaries of her diaries.

Box 3: Julia Wilbur's Diaries

- Julia Wilbur's diaries: May 1, 1844-January 8, 1865.

Box 4: Julia Wilbur's Diaries

- Julia Wilbur's diaries: January 9, 1865-May 30, 1873; January 1, 1895-April 5, 1895.
- Mary L. Van Buskirk's diaries: 1906-1908 (not complete) and Visit to Washington, 1881.
 - ❖ Notes: This second set of Julia Wilbur's diaries is unbound, but some are sewn together. While the information recorded is similar to the first set, it is not identical. This set does include the years 1858 and 1859 that are missing from the first set.