Guide to the Laura Gordon papers, [ca. 1856-1882]

Collection number: BANC MSS 80/108 c

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Collection Summary
Collection Title: Laura Gordon papers,
Date (inclusive): [ca. 1852-1882]
Collection Number: BANC MSS 80/108 c
Creator: Gordon, Laura de Force, 1838-1907
Extent: Number of containers: 2 boxes
Repository: The Bancroft Library
   Berkeley, California 94720-6000

Physical Location: For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Library's online catalog.

Abstract: Correspondence relating to her career as newspaper woman and lawyer in California and to her work on behalf of woman suffrage movement at the state and national levels; clippings; ephemeral material re politics and the suffrage movement; miscellaneous papers.

Languages Represented: English

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Biography
Laura de Force Gordon—journalist, lawyer and suffragette—was born in Erie County, Pennsylvania on August 17, 1838. In 1862 she married Dr. Charles H. Gordon of Scotland, followed him to New Orleans where he was stationed during the Civil War, and subsequently traveled with him to Nevada in 1867 and to Lodi, California in 1870.

Prior to her marriage Mrs. Gordon had lectured on spiritualism on the east coast, and continued her lectures when she moved west. An early advocate of women's rights, she was instrumental in founding the California Woman Suffrage Society in 1870, serving as its president in 1877 and from 1884 to 1894. She also lectured widely in California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington Territory on behalf of the movement. In 1871, nominated for state senator in San Joaquin County by the Independent Party, she received some two hundred votes.

Her journalistic career appeared to have begun in 1873, when she wrote a column for the Stockton Narrow Gauge, a semi-weekly. Later that year she edited and published the Stockton Weekly Leader, which became a daily in 1874, and which she sold in 1875. Moving to Oakland, she edited the Oakland Daily Democrat until 1876, and in her editorial capacity championed women's rights and the Democratic party. In 1877 she played an important role in lobbying for the passage of a landmark bill, first drafted by Clara Shortridge Foltz, permitting women to practice law in California. The two women collaborated again in successfully appealing to the California Supreme Court a case against the Hastings College of Law which denied them official admission. The case made legal history, and the two women were admitted to the California Bar in December 1879. Mrs. Gordon maintained a law office first in San Francisco, and later moved to Stockton.

An eloquent speaker, she vigorously campaigned in the California mining country on behalf of the Democratic Party in 1888 and 1890, and in Nebraska and Utah in 1892. Always an ardent feminist, Mrs. Gordon twice served as delegate, to the National Woman Suffrage Association, and with Susan B. Anthony appealed at the Liberal Republican Convention in 1872 for adoption of a suffrage plank. She retired to manage her farm near Lodi in 1901, and died there at the age of sixty-eight, on April 5, 1907.

Scope and Content

The papers, purchased from Louis Stein in March 1980, include letters written by Mrs. Gordon, relating to her careers in journalism and law, and her work on behalf of woman suffrage and the Democratic party; letters written to her, many of them documenting the history of woman suffrage at state and national levels, and also reflecting her activities as a newspaper woman and attorney; a few accounts; personalia; ephemeral materials relating to politics and the suffrage movement; and clippings relating to Mrs. Gordon and other suffragists.

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Box 1
Letters written by Mrs. Gordon, 1870-1882, to friends and family, describing her journalistic and legal work and her activities on behalf of woman suffrage. (21 letters in one folder).

Boxes 1-2
Letters written to her. Arranged alphabetically by author, and chronologically thereunder. A partial list of correspondents follows the Key. Most of the letters relate to the woman suffrage movement, especially in California, but also at the national level. Some reflect Mrs. Gordon's legal activities, and her earlier newspaper work. Letters from her husband contain information concerning the Civil War and his life and medical practice in Mokelumne.

Box 1
A - Q

Box 2
R - Z

Box 2
Unlisted letters, A-Z
Unidentified letters
Miscellaneous accounts, 1876-1880
Calling and business cards
Invitations and memberships
Ephemeral materials relating to politics and suffrage
Clippings re Mrs. Gordon and the suffrage movement

Allen, Ira
Letter, Dec. 27, 1869, re arrangements for a woman suffrage meeting in Watsonville.

Ames, Fanny (Baker), 1840-1930 (Mrs. Charles Gordon Ames)
Letter, Feb. 2, 1870

Anthony, Susan Brownell, 1820-1906
7 letters, 1869-1877

Avery, Alida C
2 letters, 1877, re woman suffrage in Colorado.

Bacon, George Andrew, 1847-1930
Letter, Aug. 16, 1865
Bancroft (A.L.) and Company, San Francisco
Letter, June 19, 1877, by Cosville Libby
Bierce, Ambrose, 1842-1914
Letter, Nov. 15, 1875
Blake, Lillie (Devereux), 1833-1913
Broughton, W. W.
Letter, Oct. 8, 1870, re woman suffrage in Santa Cruz.
Carr, Jeanne C. (Mrs. Ezra Slocum Carr)
2 letters, June 8, 1878 and n.d., re suffrage movement in California. Enclosure to
1878 letter: letter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Undated letter written on verso of
letter from Laura J. Watkins.
Chandler, Lucinda B.
Letter, July 22, 1871, re woman suffrage in Massachusetts.
Clapp, H. K.
Letter, Dec. 23, 1871, re floods in Carson City, and re activates of Susan B. Anthony.
Curtis, Celia
2 letters, 1869-1870, re woman suffrage in San Francisco.
Denio, Angie S.
Doten, Lizzie, 1829-
2 letters, 1861-1864
Eddy, Almira H.
2 letters, 1878-1881, re her role in the suffrage movement from 1869, and her later
views on the subject.
Foltz, Clara (Shortridge), 1849-1934 (Mrs. Jeremiah Richard Foltz)
4 letters, 1878 and n.y., re suffrage movement in California.
Fox, Dorus M.
2 letters, 1862, re civil war.
Freeman, Abraham Clark, 1843-1911
Letter, Dec. 16, 1871, re California law relative to separate property of married
women.
Gage, Matilda (Joslyn), 1826-1898
4 letters, 1874-1880, re work for woman suffrage.
Ginn, John I.
Letter, Sept. 15, n.y.
Goodrich, Sara Knox
5 letters, 1878-1881, re work for woman suffrage in California.
Gordon, Charles H, 1833-
32 letters, 1863-1868. Early letters re Civil War experiences at camps in Rhode
Island; later letters re life in Mokelumne, local politics, his own writing, comments on
his wife's work and on suffrage activity in California, and information on his medical
practice in Mokelumne.
Griffing, Emma, 1841-
Letter, Sept. 5, 1871, written on behalf of her mother, Josephine Sophia White
Griffing, re woman suffrage.
Griffing, Josephine Sophia (White), 1814-1872 (Mrs. Charles Stockman Spooner Griffing
Letter, Sept. 11, 1871, re woman suffrage. See also Griffing, Emma.
Griffith, John L.
Letter, Dec. 16, 1870, to Samuel J. Alden, on behalf of Mrs. Gordon, who wished to
speak in Georgetown on woman suffrage.
Hinton, Richard Josiah, 1830-1901
Letter, Mar. 5, 1877, re San Francisco Daily Evening Post.
Hutchinson, Abigail Jemima, 1829-1892
See Patton, Abby Hutchinson
Johnson, J. A.
Letter, May 22, 1875
Kirby, Georgiana Bruce
Letter, Dec. 31, n.y., re woman suffrage in California.
Leavitt, Mrs. C. C.
Letter, Jan. 3, 1870, re arrangements for Laura Gordon's lecture tour in the Nevada
City-Grass Valley area.
Link, H.
19 letters, 1860-1864, re spiritualism.
Maguire, James George, 1853-1920
Letter, Jan. 30, 1880, congratulating her on her admission to the Bar and on the
success of the mandamus case instituted by Clara Foltz and Laura Gordon. Also
comments on woman's rights in Washington Territory.
Mulford, Prentice, 1834-1891
Letter, Dec. 31, 1869, giving advice re woman suffrage.
Murphy, R W
Letter, June 11, 1878, re her acceptance as a delegate to a convention, and re his
interest in the suffrage movement.
Palmer, Cynthia M
4 letters, 1870-1871, re woman suffrage in Nevada City.
Patton, Abby (Hutchinson), 1829-1892 (Mrs. Ludlow Patton)
2 letters, 1880-1881. Letter from her husband, Ludlow Patton, also included.
Pratt, R H
Letter, Dec. 8, 1870, re the suffrage movement in Carlin, Nevada.
Ringgold, Charles S
2 letters, 1879, re the passage of a section of an act relating to woman suffrage in
California.
Safford, A. P. K., 1828-
Letter, May 1, 1877
Safford, Jenny L. T.
2 letters, 1870-1871. 1870 letter re suffrage movement in San Diego.
Sargent, Ellen Clark (Mrs. Aaron Augustus Sargent)
7 letters, 1871 and n.d., re woman suffrage. Some refer to writing the history of the
movement in California.
Savage, Myron H.
Letter, Mar. 15, 1882, requesting a statement on woman suffrage.
Schenck, Elizabeth T.
Letter, July 20, 1871, re suffrage.
Spencer, Sara Andrews
Postcard, July 12, 1880, re suffrage.
Sprague, Mrs. C. H.
Letter, Mar. 18, 1880, re woman suffrage in Woodland.
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, 1815-1902
See Carr, Jeanne C.
Steele, Rowena G
9 letters, 1880-1882. Letter, July 21, 1880, written on verso of letter by David Terry
to Mrs. Steele. Some re legal case Mrs. Gordon handled for Mrs. Steele.
Stevens, Emily Pitts
2 letters, 1871, written from the office of the San Francisco Pioneer, re woman
suffrage.
Stow, Mrs.
Letter, July 25, 1881, re woman suffrage in San Francisco.
Tallmadge, Frank W.
14 letters, 1856-1861
Terry, David Smith, 1823-1889
5 letters, 1877-1878. Some re woman suffrage. See also Steele, Rowena G.
Van Valkenburgh, Ellen R.
Walcott, Josephine
  4 letters, 1878-1879, re woman suffrage in California.
Wallis, Sarah (Mrs. Joseph S. Wallis)
  4 letters, 1871-1881, re woman suffrage in California.
Waterhouse, L. G.
  Letter, July 22, 1881, re woman suffrage in Pacific Grove.
Watkins, Laura J.
  See Carr, Jeanne C.