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George W. Gordon papers finding aid

Title: George W. Gordon papers
Collection No: MSS.0117
Extent: 0.5 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1863-1911 and undated

Abstract: The George W. Gordon papers includes a handwritten account of the Battle of Chickamauga, a handwritten speech, photographs, documents, a bound memorial address on his life and character, a watercolor painting; and a scrapbook of clippings, correspondence, and news releases concerning Gordon's activities in the United Confederate Veterans, an American Civil War veterans' organization.

Processed by: Robert D. Bohanan, 1978; Grace Neeley, 2023.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: George W. Gordon papers, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis

Publication date: 2023 April

Biographical Information

George Washington Gordon (October 5, 1836-August 9, 1911) was a soldier, lawyer, politician, and the son of Andrew and Eliza K. Gordon; born in Pulaski, Tennessee. Gordon grew up partly in Texas and Mississippi, and then completed his education at the Western Military Institute of Nashville in 1859 and took up the work of surveying. He also worked on the Nashville & Northwestern Railway.

At the start of the Civil War, Gordon enlisted in the military service of the Confederacy and became drillmaster of the 11th Regiment, Tennessee Infantry, which saw action defending the Cumberland Gap during the winter and spring months of 1862. Gordon became regimental commander when James E. Rains assumed command of Carter L. Stevenson's brigade and fought at the Battle of Tazewell on August 6, 1862. In November 1862 he became the regiment's colonel. Gordon was promoted to brigadier general in August 1864, and was one of the youngest Confederate generals. Gordon led Vaughn's Brigade, in Major General John C. Brown's division, at the Battle of Franklin (November 30, 1864), where he was wounded and captured. Many of the men he led are buried at McGavock Confederate Cemetery in Franklin, Tennessee. Gordon was sent to the prisoner-of-war camp at Fort Warren until he was paroled in the summer of 1865.

After the war, Gordon studied law at Cumberland University, was admitted to the bar, and practiced in Pulaski, Tennessee, where the Ku Klux Klan was formed. He became one of the Klan's first members. In 1867, Gordon became the Klan's first Grand Dragon for the Realm of Tennessee, and wrote its "Precept," a book describing its organization, purpose, and principles. Gordon's first wife, Ora S. Paine, whom he married on September 5, 1876, died in New York on their wedding journey. In 1883, he became a state railway commissioner, and two years later was appointed to a post in the Department of the Interior, serving for four years as Indian agent in Arizona and Nevada until 1889.

He returned to Memphis and was made superintendent of the city schools between 1889 and 1907. In 1907, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives, the last Confederate brigadier to sit in Congress. He was twice re-elected and during his three terms, he served on the committee on military affairs. In 1910 and again in 1911 he was elected commander-in-chief of the United Confederate Veterans. He was survived by his second wife, Mary Harbor Hannah Gordon, to whom he was married in 1899. George W. Gordon died in Memphis, Tennessee, on August 9, 1911, at the age of 74. Mary H. Gordon died in Memphis, Tennessee, on November 30, 1928, at the age of 66. Both are buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Memphis, Tennessee.

Scope and contents

This collection gives a sampling of George W. Gordon's life and presents items of individual interest documenting events including his handwritten account of the Battle of Chickamauga, a handwritten speech by Gordon, and the statue and commission documents appointing Gordon Commissioner for Missouri. An important item in the collection is Gordon's scrapbook from

circa 1904-1905. It contains clippings, correspondence, news releases, etcetera, concerning Gordon's activities in the United Confederate Veterans. The collection also includes photographs of Gordon, his parents, Jefferson Davis, and others; and a watercolor painting of Confederacy flags.

Subject terms

Confederate States of America. Army. Tennessee Infantry Regiment, 11th
Gordon, George W.
Indian agents.
Ku-Klux-Klan
United Confederate Veterans
United States. House of Representatives

Processing information

These papers were acquired by the West Tennessee Historical Society which received a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for processing.

Inventory

Box 1

Folder

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 1 | Document: G. W. Gordon's report on the Battle of Chickamauga near Chattanooga, Tennessee, 1 handwritten page, 1863 September 10. |
| 2 | Documents: General Statutes of Missouri of 1865, Title 8, Chapter 22, and commission instructions for G. W. Gordon as commissioner for Missouri, signed and sealed by Eugene F. Weigel, Secretary of State of Missouri, 1873. |
| OS1 | Official certificate: commission appointing Gordon commissioner for Missouri, signed and sealed by Eugene F. Weigel, Missouri Secretary of State, 1873 September 10. |
| 3 | Receipt: by direction of General Sherman, Headquarters Army of the United States, from O. M. Poe, Bvt. Brig. Gen. to Gen. G. W. Gordon, Memphis, Tennessee, 1882 October 24. |
| 4 | Speech: given by G. W. Gordon, Nashville, Tennessee, 10 handwritten pages on Life Association of America paper, circa 187(?), November 12. |
| 5 | Daguerreotype: parents of G. W. Gordon, undated. |
| 6 | Photograph: collodion printing-out paper, Jefferson Davis, photographed by J. H. Moyston, 338 Main St., Memphis, Tennessee, circa 1885-1889. |
| 7 | Photograph: albumen print, G. W. Gordon, Brigadier General C. S. A., photographed by Gray, Memphis, Tennessee, 1864. |
| 8 | Photograph: albumen print, Corporal Wilder, the federal soldier who captured G. W. Gordon near Foxwell, Tennessee, in 1862, photographed by J. D. Wolbach, Wadsworth, Ohio, 1862(?). |

- 9** Photograph: Mary (Mamie) H. Gordon, circa 1900. Photographer: Bingham, Memphis. Also, small scrap of paper describing Mamie H. Gordon's fellow piano students, undated.
- 10** Bound book: "Memorial Addresses on the Life and Character of George Washington Gordon", delivered in The House of Representatives and The Senate of The United States; prepared under the direction of The Joint Committee on Printing, 97 printed pages, 1911 August 10 and 1912 May 12.
- Box 2** 1) Watercolor painting: "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi, In God We Trust", "C.S.A. Confederate States of America", with three flags, the flag on the left was first adopted by the Confederacy, the flag on the right represents the succeeded states, the flag in the middle was the naval flag until Battle at Vicksburg when it was adopted and later used as the official Confederate flag. The artist is unknown, it was framed in Memphis, Tennessee, undated.
- 2) Photographs: on the front is an unknown woman wearing a white dress with lace and ruffles, sitting in a chair, circa 1870s. On the back is clipped image of Bishop Thomas Gailor, third bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee, early 20th century.
- 3) Scrapbook: clippings, correspondence, news releases concerning Gordon's activities in the United Confederate Veterans, 1904-1905.

Addition, 2017

Box 1

- 11** "The White Man's Civilization" by Mary Hannah Gordon, undated. Copy of manuscript by General George W. Gordon's second wife claiming he was the first Grand Wizard of the Invisible Empire. Original in Memphis Pink Palace Museum.