



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

**A Finding Aid to the
Rebecca Gratz Correspondence
Manuscript Collection No. 143**



Collection Summary

Title	Rebecca Gratz Correspondence
Dates	1785-1845
Collection Number	MS-143
Repository	The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives
Creator	Gratz, Rebecca, 1781-1869 Etting, Reuben Gratz, Hyman, 1776-1857 Gratz, Joseph, 1785-1858 Gratz, Michael, 1740-1811 Lee, Eleanor Percy, 1820-1849 Levy, R. Ogden, Caroline
Extent	0.4 linear feet (1 Hollinger box)
Language of the Material	English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch

Rebecca Gratz (March 4, 1781 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania - August 27, 1869 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) was a preeminent Jewish American educator and philanthropist. Gratz was the seventh of twelve children born to Miriam Simon and Michael Gratz. Her mother was the daughter of Joseph Simon (1712-1804), a preeminent Jewish merchant of Lancaster, while her father was descended from a long line of respected rabbis. Miriam and Michael were observant Jews and active members of Philadelphia's first synagogue, Mikveh Israel.

In 1801, at the age of 20, she helped establish the Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances, which helped women whose families were suffering after the Revolutionary War.[1] In 1815, after seeing the need for an institution for orphans in Philadelphia, she was among those instrumental in founding the Philadelphia Orphan Asylum. Four years later, she was elected secretary to its Board. She continued to hold this office for forty years. Under Gratz' auspices, a "Hebrew Sunday School" was started in 1838. Gratz became both its superintendent and president, and assisted in developing its curriculum,[1] resigning in 1864.

Gratz was also one of the founding members of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, around November 1819. In 1850, she advocated in *The Occident*, over the signature A Daughter of Israel, for the foundation of a Jewish foster home. Her advocacy was largely instrumental in the establishment of such a home in 1855.[1] Other organizations that came about due to her efforts were the Fuel Society and the Sewing Society.

Gratz is said to have been the model of Rebecca, the daughter of the Jewish merchant Isaac of York, who is the heroine in the novel *Ivanhoe* by Sir Walter Scott. Scott's attention had been drawn to Gratz's character by Washington Irving, who was a close friend of the Gratz family.[2][3] The claim has been disputed, but it has also been well sustained in an article entitled "The Original of Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*", which appeared in *The Century Magazine*, 1882, pp. 679–682.

Gratz never married. Among the marriage offers she received was one from a Gentile whom she loved, but ultimately chose not to marry, on the account of her faith. Her portrait was painted twice by the noted American artist Thomas Sully. One of those portraits, both owned by the Rosenbach Museum, is on display at the National Museum of American Jewish History.

Gratz is buried at Mikveh Israel Cemetery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

--Wikipedia contributors, "Rebecca Gratz," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Rebecca_Gratz&oldid=416424813 (accessed May 3, 2011).

Scope and Content

Correspondence with family members and friends. Baltimore, Maryland; New York, New York; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged in one (1) series: Series A. Correspondence. 1785-1851.

Terms of Access The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

Terms of Reproduction and Use This collection has been placed in the permanent care, custody, and control of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) by the donors of the collection. Questions concerning rights to use or publish materials from the collection should be addressed to the Executive Director of the AJA. For more information, see the American Jewish Archives copyright information webpage.

Preferred Citation Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Rebecca Gratz Correspondence and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-143. Rebecca Gratz Correspondence. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance Received from Nancy Erdrich, Westmount, Quebec, December 1981.

Index Terms

Subjects Gratz family / Jewish women / Jews -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia

Personal Names Gratz, Rebecca, 1781-1869

Media Rare Documents

Series A. Correspondence, 1785-1845

Box and Folder Listing

Box 1. Folder 1. General correspondence, undated

Box 1. Folder 2. Etting, Rueben and Fanny, 1785, 1797, 1800-1806, undated

Box 1. Folder 3. Family correspondence, 1807-1822, undated

Box 1. Folder 4. Gratz, Michael. Indenture certificate, 1787

Box 1. Folder 5. Lee, Eleanor Percy, 1845

Box 1. Folder 6. Levy, R., 1803-1804

Box 1. Folder 7. Levy, R., 1805-1806, 1818, 1821

Box 1. Folder 8. Ogden, Caroline, 1808-1809, undated

Box 1. Folder 9. Slough, E., 1803-1804