



June 5, 2023

For Immediate Release

Contact: Lori Cohen
215-635-7300, x 182
lcohen@gratz.edu
www.gratz.edu

Gratz College Launches the Rebecca Gratz Digital Collection

Melrose Park, PA –

Gratz College announces the launch of the Rebecca Gratz Digital Collection, in memory of Prof. Dianne Ashton, who passed in 2022. The freely accessible Collection contains scans and searchable transcriptions of over 800 letters to and from Rebecca Gratz, the leading Jewish woman of nineteenth century American Judaism.

Rebecca Gratz’s letters are critical to meaningful understanding of Jewish womanhood, education, social welfare, as well as the Jewish experience during the Civil War – to list just a few areas. This searchable and centralized digital platform curates important historical artifacts – as well as the provenance and related metadata for each entry in the Digital Collection.

“This is one of the largest, most ambitious digital projects of any one figure in American Jewish life,” explained Gratz President Zev Eleff, an American Jewish historian. Together with our many partners, we have furnished the Rebecca Gratz Digital Collection for any student or scholar interested in women’s history, Victorian era philanthropy, Jewish education and welfare, lived religion, and so much more.”

Most of the letters were derived from physical collections at the American Jewish Historical Society, American Philosophical Society, The Rosenbach, and the University of North Carolina.

The digital project was conceived by Eleff and the late professor Dianne Ashton of Rowan University. Ashton was a leading American Jewish historian and Rebecca Gratz’s biographer. Before Emma Lazarus and Henrietta Szold, Gratz was, in Ashton’s words, the “foremost American Jewish woman of the nineteenth century.”

In 1838, Rebecca Gratz created the Hebrew Sunday School Society in Philadelphia, which became the launch pad for all Jewish congregational education in North America. She was also profoundly concerned with the social issues of her day. Gratz was instrumental in the creation of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, a Jewish foster home, the Fuel Society, the Sewing Society and more.



View the dynamic and growing digital collection [here](#).

To celebrate this landmark digital platform, Gratz College is hosting a Rebecca Gratz Tea Party on **June 13 at 2 pm ET**. Leaders in archival preservation, including the lead team at The Rosenbach, as well as in women's Jewish philanthropy, including the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society (founded by Rebecca Gratz herself), Women of Vision, Jewish Women's Philanthropy, and others will participate in this important program.

We have had a tremendous response and are excited to see that Rebecca Gratz's legacy of leadership, service, and philanthropy continues to inspire others. [Learn more and register for this exciting event.](#)

The Rebecca Gratz Digital Collection marks an exciting milestone for Gratz, as it continues to blaze a path forward as a field leader in digitization and online higher education.

Gratz Director of Libraries Donna Guerin explains, "The Rebecca Gratz Digital Collection is the first of many online collections created in collaboration with our institutional and philanthropic partners. Continuing with these joint ventures helps to bring more of the historical record to life, for this generation of students and scholars — and for the next."

###

About Gratz College

Gratz College, a private non-profit institution based in the Philadelphia area, is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Founded in 1895, Gratz College is the oldest independent college for Jewish studies in North America. Today, Gratz enrolls a diverse population of students from around the world with many programs that reflect its historic focus on Jewish studies and education. An early adopter of online education, Gratz offers blended and fully online degrees in a broad range of studies, including the world's only online Doctorate in Holocaust and Genocide Studies and a Doctorate in Education Leadership. Gratz also offers eight master's degree programs, including a Master's in Education and a Master's in Nonprofit Management; two undergraduate completion programs; various graduate and undergraduate certificates; a robust continuing education program; and Gratz Academy.