

# **George Byron Gordon Personal Papers**

1166

**Finding aid prepared by Emily Romanello.**

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University of Pennsylvania, Penn Museum Archives

July 30, 2015

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	University of Pennsylvania: Penn Museum Archives
<b>Title</b>	George Byron Gordon Personal Papers
<b>Call number</b>	1166
<b>Date</b>	1907-1927
<b>Extent</b>	0.5 linear feet
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>George Byron Gordon (1870-1927) served on the staff of the University of Pennsylvania Museum from 1903 to 1927, first as a curator, and later as director. Under his leadership, three wings were added to the Museum, and the collections were expanded extensively, most notably the Chinese Collection. Gordon also led two expeditions for the Museum to Alaska and initiated the regular offering of anthropology courses at the University of Pennsylvania. The George Byron Gordon Papers Collection consists of 12 folders in one archival box, consisting of correspondence, certificates, and personal materials.</p>

**Cite as:**

[Item name]. Box [Box number]. George Byron Gordon Personal Papers. Penn Museum Archives.  
Accessed [Date accessed].

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## Biography/History

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George Byron Gordon (1870-1927) was born on August 4 in New Perth, Prince Edward Island, Canada to James and Jane MacLaren Gordon. He studied at the University of South Carolina for one year (1888) and later attended Harvard University, where he earned his Ph.D. in 1894. In 1892, he was assistant to John G. Owens on the Harvard excavations at Copán, Honduras. After the death of Owens in 1893, Gordon took over the leadership of the expedition for the next six seasons, until 1900.

In 1903 Gordon joined the staff of the University of Pennsylvania Museum as Assistant Curator of the Section of General Ethnology. Since the position of curator of the section was honorary (held by William Henry Furness III), Gordon carried out most of the tasks of the department. He was made Curator of the Section in 1905.

In 1905 and 1907, Gordon led two expeditions for the Museum to Alaska. On both trips he traveled with his brother, MacLaren Gordon. The results of these expeditions were published in *In the Alaskan Wilderness* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1917).

Gordon was the first to establish regular courses in Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1886 and 1887 Daniel G. Brinton had offered selected courses in the field, and the Department of Anthropology was not officially established until 1913 by Frank G. Speck, but Gordon offered courses, both graduate and undergraduate, every semester from 1907 to 1915.

In 1910, the management of the University of Pennsylvania Museum having outstripped the capacities of a volunteer Board of Managers, George Byron Gordon was appointed Director of the institution. With the help of Charles Custis Harrison (Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, 1894-1911; Vice-President of the Museum, 1911-1916; and President, 1917-1929) and Eckley B. Coxe, Jr. (President of the Museum's Board of Managers, 1910-1916), Gordon oversaw the largest period of growth in the history of the Museum. Three wings were added to the original 1899 museum building: the Harrison Rotunda (1915), the Coxe Egyptian Wing (1926), and the Administrative Wing (1929). The collections saw a multifold increase, as well as the Museum's involvement in the field. Some of the major expeditions carried out under Gordon's directorship include Memphis (Mit-rahineh) and Thebes (Dra Abu el-Naga) in Egypt, Ur in modern Iraq, Beth Shean in modern Israel, and the Amazon Expedition. He also established *The Museum Journal*, the institution's magazine and the forerunner of today's *Expedition* magazine.

Gordon had a very keen collector's eye. When purchasing collections he always chose the best specimens and drove a hard bargain with antiquities dealers, who, however, respected his connoisseurship and sought him out when they had a rare piece to sell. He became an expert of great breadth in archaeology, history, and art. Although he was trained in Central America, he undertook ethnography in Alaska, wrote about the history of London (*Rambles in Old London*; Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1924), and made perhaps his most lasting reputation putting together the Museum's Chinese collections, which rank among the best in the world.

In 1926 the University of Pennsylvania conferred upon Gordon the honorary degree of Doctor of Science. In January 1927, Gordon slipped and fell down the stairs after dinner at the Racquet Club of Philadelphia. He never regained consciousness, and died six hours later. He was buried in the cemetery at St. David's Episcopal Church, Wayne, PA, in the Harrison family plot. Gordon was unmarried and had no children. At the time of his death he was survived by two brothers, James Kelso Gordon of British Columbia and Charles Gordon of Australia (his brother MacLaren was killed in France during World War I); and three sisters, Margaret Gordon and Ada Gordon of Portland, Oregon, and Harriet L. Smith of British Columbia. Gordon had been a member of the American Philosophical Society, the Franklin Inn Club, the Lenape Club, the Rittenhouse Club, the Explorer's Club of New York, the American Anthropological Association, the American Ethnological Society, the Authors Club of London, and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

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## Scope and Contents

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The George Byron Gordon Papers Collection was donated in 2015 by Dana Strome, his great-grandniece. The records arrived in a damaged three-ring binder, which was discarded. The collection spans the years 1907 to 1927 and consists of correspondence, certificates, and personal materials.

The correspondence is organized alphabetically by last name of the sender and mostly includes letters of thanks for receiving copies of his books, some from famous figures, including Winston Churchill and Rudyard Kipling. Also included are letters regarding his family clan and an order for the Gordon tartan, as well as notes of miscellaneous content. The correspondence spans from 1907 to 1924.

The certificates acknowledge Gordon's election as Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1909 and 1911.

The personal materials consist of news clippings, materials related to his genealogy, and family photographs. The news clippings are divided between pieces regarding either his professional work or the Gordon clan and articles and obituaries regarding his death. The genealogy materials consist of three hand-drawn family trees. The family photographs include a portrait of Harriet Gordon Smith (1864-1952).

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## **Administrative Information**

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## **Related Materials**

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### **Related Archival Materials note**

George B. Gordon Director's Office Records

George B. Gordon General Ethnology Section Records

George Byron Gordon Central American Expedition Records

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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**CORPORATE NAME(S)**

- MacDougall & Co. Ltd..

## FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence

## PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Baden, A.L.
- Ballam
- Beaux, Cecilia
- Biddle
- Bidelle
- Bilfor
- Breton
- Buckingham Palace
- Carlisle, Rhoda
- Carter, E. Bonham
- Cawthra, A. Maude
- Churchill, Winston, 1871-1947
- Clarkson Clothier, 1846-1917
- Edy, Warren S.
- Fisher, H.A.L.
- Foster, C.C.
- Gordon, G. B. (George Byron), 1870-1927
- Gordon, John Campbell
- Hall, Howard
- Harrison, Charles C.
- Henderson, H.G.
- Hoxe
- Hunter, Anne G.
- Kenyon
- Kipling, Rudyard, 1865-1936
- Long, Walter, 1879-1952
- McKenze
- Michaelis
- Mitchell, Weir, 1829-1914
- Morgan
- Mormon
- Murray, Mary
- Peabody, Marian, 1875-1974
- Roosevelt, Theodore, 1858-1919
- Shipley
- Smith, Clara
- Tyler, Charles A.

- Vaux, C. Bowyer

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## Bibliography

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- The University Museum: An Appeal (Philadelphia: [The University Museum], 1917)
- Caverns of Copán, Honduras: Report on Explorations by the Museum, 1896-97. *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*; v. 1, no. 5 (Cambridge: The Museum, 1898)
- Emblems of Empire. (1920)
- Examples of Maya Pottery in the Museum and Other Collections. Edited by G. B. Gordon. (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1925-1943). 3 portfolios of plates.
- The Hieroglyphic Stairway: Ruins of Copán: Report on Explorations by the Museum. *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*; v. 1, no. 6 (Cambridge: The Museum, 1902)
- In the Alaskan Wilderness (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Company, 1917)
- Prehistoric Ruins of Copán, Honduras: A Preliminary Report of the Explorations by the Museum, 1891-1895. *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*; v. 1, no. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Museum, 1896)
- Rambles in Old London (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1924)
- Researches in the Uloa Valley, Honduras: Report on Explorations by the Museum, 1896-97. *Memoirs of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology*; v. 1, no. 4 (Cambridge: The Museum, 1898)
- The Serpent Motive in the Ancient Art of Central America and Mexico ([Philadelphia], 1905)

## Collection Inventory

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### CORRESPONDENCE.

#### **B.**

Baden, A.L., 1920.

Ballam, 1918.

Beaux, Cecilia.

Biddle, 1923.

Bidelle.

Bilfor, 1920.

Breton, 1908-1919.

Buckingham Palace, 1920.

Bullock, Jim, 1911-1924.

#### **C-G.**

Carlisle, Rhoda, 1923.

Carter, E. Bonham, 1923.

Cawthra, A. Maude.



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[Churchill, Winston], 1920.

Edy, Warren S., 1916.

Fisher, H.A.L., 1920.

Foster, C.C., 1920.

[Gordon, John Campbell], Aberdeen and Temair, 1920.

## **H-L.**

Hall, Howard, 1920.

Harrison, Charles C., 1924.

Henderson, H.G., 1920.

Hoxe.

Hunter, Anne G., 1923-1924.

Kenyon, 1922.

Kipling, Rudyard, 1920.

[Long, Walter], 1920.

## **M.**

Macdougall & Co. Ltd., 1919.

McKenze, 1923.

Mormon.

Michaelis, 1912.

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Mitchell, Weir, 1908.

Morgan, 1918.

Murray, Mary, 1921.

**P-V.**

Peabody, Marian, 1907.

Roosevelt, Theodore, 1918.

Shipley, 1920.

Smith, Clara, 1920.

Tyler, Charles A., 1923.

Vaux, C. Bowyer, 1916.

**Illegible.**

unknown, 1921.

unknown, 1923.

unknown, 1920.

unknown, 1923.

unknown, 1925.

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**CERTIFICATES, 1909-1911.**

American Association for the Advancement of Science.

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**PERSONAL.**

News Clippings.

News Clippings [obituaries].

Genealogy.

Family Photographs.