

The Rebecca Gratz Digital Collection Transcription Protocols & Editorial Methodology

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Why transcribe?

Transcription increases the accessibility of handwritten material. While transcription cannot capture every aspect of a letter, it can make much of the material accessible to more people.

Guiding Principles for Editing and Transcribing:

The editing and transcribing approaches in this project are guided by the desire to make this material useful to a wide range of readers, including scholars, family historians, family members, genealogists, students, and interested community members.

The editors of The Rebecca Gratz Digital Collection have adopted a semi-diplomatic approach to transcribing. In this, the aim is to represent the letters in a way that balances the decisions of the authors while making them accessible to modern-day readers. These transcriptions suggest the original formatting but do not attempt to reproduce all spacing and formatting precisely. For those interested in material textual analysis, please consult the digital images. For a detailed description of our transcription protocol, please see below. This semi-diplomatic approach preserves the original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Additionally, key information such as author, recipient, and date, appear in a standardized format above the transcription. If the date was not supplied by the writer, every effort is made to include a best approximation which appears in brackets. The address, if known, is listed at the end of the transcription. If a second author contributes to the letter, that author and the recipient will appear in a standardized form above the transcription of that additional text.

Markings and notes on the letter, not produced by the author, including postage marks, recipient docketing, and archival and editorial notations, are not included. Please consult the images if interested in this material.

The editors employ brackets for a wide range of interventions, by either the editors or the author, rather than attempting to create an exhaustive list of categories. This alerts the reader to an intervention without overly interfering with the letter's readability.

Transcription Protocols

Author's Notations

Notations made by the author, including insertions, deletions, and emphasis, are represented as follows.

- **Insertions** are silently lowered into the text.

- **Superscriptions** are also silently lowered and followed by a period. Such as M^s becomes Mrs. and 8th appears as 8th.
- **Abbreviations** that use superscriptions are also silently lowered and followed by a period (example: Phil^a appears as Phila.)
- **Deletions** appear in brackets. If the letters are legible, those letters are struck through. If not, that material is represented by [...].
- **Underlining** by the author is represented in the transcript by also underlining the word.
- **Overwriting**, whether to correct spelling or to use a different word, is marked by brackets: the final, intended word appears in the brackets. If the reader is interested in deciphering the earlier attempt, they should consult the digital image.

Spelling, Capitalization, and Punctuation

- **Punctuation** was not yet standardized in the early 19th century. There is an ample use of dashes of varying lengths, where current conventions would require periods, and periods where current use demands commas. The editors have attempted to capture the punctuation of the original as closely as possible.
- **Capitalization and Spelling** does not follow modern standards. Rather, the transcriptions reflect the author's own style, conventions, and capabilities.
- **The Long “s,”** as a special letter, was still in use in the nineteenth century and appears in almost all the letters. This “s” is rendered as a standardized “s” in the transcriptions.

Illegible, Unclear, or Missing Text

- When a spelling, capitalization, or punctuation is unclear, the editors err on the side of employing modern conventions to improve readability.
- If anything renders the text illegible or missing, either generated by the author or due to physical damage to the page (such as ink smudges, torn or missing paper, etc.), regardless of the number of letters, words, or lines that are missing, the missing or illegible text is represented with three periods enclosed by brackets, such as [...].
- When the editors are not completely sure about a word, those words are included in brackets with a question mark. For example, “She employed a [thorough?] examination.”
- When editors are sure about a word or phrase due to context, but elements of that word do not in a technical sense appear, the word is put in brackets with no question mark. For example, “I send my [earnest] affection to you.”

The Review Process

Each letter receives a first initial transcription by one of the two editors, followed by a second read through by that same editor. The third pass employs an oral double proofing process with both editors.

For a helpful (and comedic) overview of the process, see the *The Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi's* blog post on double proofing (<https://civilwargovernors.org/2854-2/>)

Editorial work that informs this methodology includes:

The Adams Papers Editorial Project

The Jane Addams Papers Project

The Civil War & Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi

The Julian Bond Papers Project