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# Discovering and Recovering the Nineteenth-Century Journals of Martha E. McMillan in an American Women Writer's Course: A Collaborative Digital Recovery Project

Michelle M. Wood

*Cedarville University*, woodm@cedarville.edu

Lynn A. Brock

*Cedarville University*, brockl@cedarville.edu

Gregory A. Martin

*Cedarville University*, marting@cedarville.edu

Adam John Wagner

*Cedarville University*, adamjwagner@cedarville.edu

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Discovering and Recovering the Nineteenth-Century Journals of Martha E. McMillan in an American Women Writer's Course: A Collaborative Digital Recovery Project

Michelle Gaffner Wood, Lynn A. Brock, Gregory A. Martin, Adam J. Wagner

**ABSTRACT:** The following essay tells a story about an undergraduate American Women Writer's course, the University archives, a nineteenth-century journal, and a Digital Recovery project. The essay explains that the story of undergraduates and their work to discover and to recover a primary text within the context of a single course could not have happened without collaboration. Because our story is a story of collaboration, I cannot tell it alone. I am Michelle Wood, an Associate Professor of English who teaches American Literature. During spring semester 2015, I collaborated with Lynn Brock, the Dean of Library Sciences, to create an archival recovery project for a course entitled American Women Writers. Together we will tell our story.

**Michelle Gaffner Wood**

When I began planning an American Women Writers course for undergraduate English majors at Cedarville University, a four-year undergraduate institution located in a small Ohio town, I wanted my students to achieve two learning outcomes. First, I wanted my students to read and become familiar with American women writers' texts that had been marginalized and excluded from traditional, masculinist renderings of the American literary "canon."<sup>1</sup> In order to accomplish this learning outcome, I asked my students to read texts that scholars had "recovered" and reprinted a few decades before our class took place. The students read Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, and Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy*. The second learning outcome I wanted my students to achieve was not only to become aware of the recovery work that had produced the texts that they purchased without a second thought at the bookstore but also to become involved in the scholarly process of discovering, recovering, and publishing an overlooked or ignored text for a contemporary audience. In short, I wanted my students to experience the process and politics of recovery—the gains and losses—most clearly demonstrated by my university bookstore's inability to acquire a class set of Alice Cary's *Clovernook Series and Other*

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<sup>1</sup> For discussions about how nineteenth-century women's writing has been excluded from traditional narratives about the American literary canon, see Baym, Tompkins, Warren, and Fetterley's "Not in the Least American: Nineteenth-Century Literary Regionalism."

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*Stories*, edited by Judith Fetterley and reprinted in the American Women Writer's Series in 1987 but already out of print by 2015.

The students' difficulty in acquiring the Cary sketches was a real-life example in the politics of recovery and the need for positive scholarly attention once works have been recovered lest they slip back into oblivion.<sup>2</sup> In this course, I wanted to collaborate with my students in the process of discovering a text, making a defense for it, and figuring out how we might lay a scholarly foundation that might keep a text alive for a contemporary audience to appreciate.

At the same time that I had planned those two learning outcomes for my students to achieve in the course, I myself was learning two important lessons. First, I was learning that collaborating with specialists outside the English department could enhance students' learning experiences in an American Literature course. Second, I was discovering for the first time the valuable texts that the university maintained in its archives. Knowing my interests in nineteenth-century American texts written by women, a senior colleague pointed me in the direction of the university archives and the Dean of Library Sciences, Lynn Brock.<sup>3</sup> When Dean Brock led me on a tour through the archives, I was amazed to discover many texts that might be of interest to a literary scholar who is interested in recovering women's lives, women's texts, and women's voices.

One of the texts Brock introduced to me was the journal of local Cedarville woman Martha E. Murdoch McMillan. She had written a journal—over ten-thousand pages' worth—began the day she was married in 1867 and maintained until just a few days prior to her death in 1913. Brock had begun scholarly work on the journal, but as we discussed this fascinating text of life-writing, we understood how daunting the task of preserving, re-discovering, recovering, and publishing this relevant text was for one person alone. Brock had transcribed the notes that Martha's grandson Rankin MacMillan had attached with paper clips at the front of each journal.<sup>4</sup> These notes include dates that Mr. MacMillan thinks important to future readers of the diaries. Brock had also transcribed the journal entries that

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion about how scholars might keep recovered texts from slipping back into oblivion, see Fetterley's "Commentary: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and the Politics of Recovery."

<sup>3</sup> My thanks to Dr. Barbara Loach, Senior Professor of Spanish, for introducing me to the McMillan Journals.

<sup>4</sup> In the introduction to Rankin MacMillan's notes, Lenora MacMillan explains "the prefix Mc in McMillan was used before 1900 but after that the form MacMillan was legally used by many of the family, recognizing their Scottish heritage." We retain the spelling of McMillan with the Mc prefix in this essay to represent how Martha McMillan spells her name.

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Mr. MacMillan mentioned in his notes. Brock's transcriptions, his presentation at the local library about Martha McMillan and the Cedarville, Ohio, she knew, as well as the collection the MacMillan family had given to the university provided a solid foundation on which to begin recovering the texts of the journals, but at this point, no one at the university had actually read the journals themselves.

After numerous conversations, it seemed to us that the best process by which we might be able to make any scholarly strides to recover the McMillan diaries and publish them for the public would be to begin a collaborative process in which the Dean and I would introduce the journals to students in the American Woman Writers course and facilitate together not only transcription of the journals but also critical analysis of their significance for contemporary readers at our local university, the Cedarville community, and beyond. We planned for Dean Brock to help students organize and display their transcriptions and analyses at the end of the semester in a public display case at the library. I was excited about the project because as far as I could tell from cursory research into life-writing, the McMillan journals seemed to be one of the more robust examples of nineteenth-century mid-western women's life writing, and I thought that collaborating with Dean Brock on reading, transcribing, and analyzing the journals would not only introduce the students in the course to a marginalized text and author but also allow them to participate in the discovery, recovery, and publication of that text for contemporary readers.

Before Dean Brock and I mapped a plan to integrate archival recovery work into the course, I spent two afternoons a week reading the 1867 journal, taking notes, transcribing, and as a result, hearing Martha's voice. At the same time I was wondering if my sophisticated English majors might revolt at the thought that they would be required to read, transcribe, and analyze a nineteenth-century "farm journal." In spite of that nagging thought, I saw how McMillan's journals invited discovery and recovery. Intrigued by her words on the inside cover of 1867—"Thoughts vanish but writing is eternal. M.E.M."—I knew Martha McMillan did not think her writing in vain ("The McMillan Journal Collection"). These words suggested to me that she wanted her voice to be heard; that in fact, she was writing for an audience beyond herself. I also knew that the over ten-thousand pages of the years' journals defied the twenty words M.A. Broadstone ascribes to Martha's entire life in the 1918 *History of Greene County, Ohio: Its People, Industries, and Institutions*: "Martha, now deceased, who was the wife of James McMillan, a farmer living two or three miles east of

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Cedarville" (894). In short, despite my misgivings about students' perceptions, I thought that this text might allow students to experience the processes of recovery—discovering for the first time, transcribing, and publishing, as well as the politics of recovery—considering, defining, historicizing, evaluating, and defending the value of the text, the writer, her voice, and her life.

In order for my students to experience the work of literary scholars, I had six goals for incorporating this local text into the course. I wanted students to

**Goal 1:** Discover life-writing and this particular, local example.

**Goal 2:** Evaluate their own processes of recovering and interpreting in weekly "Recovery Reports."

**Goal 3:** Participate in recovery work both in transcribing and analyzing the journal.

**Goal 4:** Articulate a thematic, literary, or critical significance of the four months they chose to read and transcribe in a Critical Introduction Essay that would introduce the section of the journal they read and their analysis of it to contemporary readers.

**Goal 5:** Publish their transcriptions and their scholarly introductions in a display case in the library. Finally,

**Goal 6:** I wanted the undergraduate English majors to have a comprehensive undergraduate English experience in which they not only consumed texts others had recovered and defended but also produced and defended texts of contemporary significance.

Together, Dean Brock and I developed a plan to meet these goals so that students could experience literary recovery at the same time that they introduced this truly remarkable woman and the text she produced to the public.

**Goal 1: Discover: Martha McMillan and Life-Writing**

Before my students could be involved in "recovering" Martha's journals, they had to "discover" Martha and the journals she wrote first. In response to a question posed to various scholars as part of a roundtable discussion about whether or not the recovery of nineteenth-century writers is complete, Joyce Warren distinguishes "recovery" from "discovery" and suggests that "recovered" works "[were] known prior to [their] being lost and

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then recovered" (232). In our case, few people beyond Martha McMillan's family members and a small number of faculty knew Martha McMillan's journals existed. On the day we had scheduled for the students to discover the journals, our class met in a classroom located in the library and situated near the archives. Dean Brock created a display of the journals in the center of the room. Before he welcomed students to examine the texts, their bindings, and the fading cursive, Brock introduced the students to the writer Martha McMillan.

**Lynn A. Brock**

Martha Elizabeth Murdock, born January 26, 1844 in Clinton County, Ohio, was married to James McMillan on January 15, 1867. They lived in the McMillan homestead near Cedarville, Ohio, where James was a farmer well-known for the raising of sheep, hogs, and high-bred trotting horses as well as the usual field crops. A graduate of a female seminary in Xenia, Ohio, Martha McMillan was well-read and active in her community. She attended the Presbyterian church and sent her children to school in this community. From the day of her marriage until about a week before her death, Martha kept a journal of the daily events in the home and on the farm, as well as community activities. Her eloquence, insights, and faith are clearly evident in her recollections. Martha kept the daily journal for more than 46 years. The journals comprise approximately 10,000 handwritten pages, back to back with no margins. Early in the first journal, the year of her marriage 1867, Martha McMillan says, "Tonight James and I stand upon the threshold of a new existence in which the future, like a great unfathomed ocean, is spread out before us. O! May we glide along its bosom in peace and love until, at last, we reach its sunset shores . . . ." ("The McMillan Journal Collection," January 15, 1867). With these words, written on her wedding day, Martha Murdock McMillan began a handwritten journal of her life — her family, her faith, and her farm. James and Martha had 10 children, seven raised to adulthood, an eighth died at 19, a ninth child died in infancy, and a tenth died shortly after her birth. Martha writes about these challenging losses, the ups and downs of farm life, work, death, education, Sabbath schools, and politics all in the context of faith that looked beyond herself for strength to respond to earthly trials and to inform a significant, full life. For example, Martha wrote in her first year of marriage, "Some days I can't help feeling that housekeeping is going to be more real than I ever dreamed" ("The McMillan Journal Collection," October 8, 1867). She continues, "For this life I can't help sighing" ("The McMillan Journal Collection,"

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October 8, 1867). Yet she concludes, revealing a glimpse of steadfast character that will see her through so much joy and heartache in years to come: "I must try and banish such feelings forever from my heart and look for the bright side" ("The McMillan Journal Collection," October 8, 1867).

The McMillan Journals were donated to the Cedarville University Centennial Library in 1987 by descendants of Martha McMillan, living both in Cedarville, Ohio, and elsewhere around the country. James MacMillan explains in his donor letter why the family chose to house the journals at Cedarville University:

...these diaries of Martha Elizabeth Murdock MacMillan are unique in that they give a daily detailed account of the MacMillan life on an Ohio farm near Cedarville from 1867 to 1913....and will be invaluable to scholars researching that era and locale in the future. The MacMillan and Murdock families played prominent roles in [the] early life of Greene County, Ohio and in the founding and development of Cedarville College and it is appropriate that the college should have custody of these valuable volumes. (MacMillan, James, Letter to Lynn Brock)

The family wanted others to have access to the journals and not leave them packed away in a family member's house, so they were looking for a place where Martha's journals could live on in a secure and accessible environment. There was obviously a connection to the Village of Cedarville and to Cedarville University (College at that time) and we were willing to invest some money in preserving, protecting, and making the journals available. They have lived on in a number of programs, presentations, and academic projects over the years.

The Martha McMillan journals came to the Library accompanied by note cards, summarizing the content of each of the journals, prepared by Rankin MacMillan. His note cards provide the "indexes" to the Journals, and the mention of significant events led us to explore the journals with a desire to read what Martha actually said. Thus, the development of selected transcriptions began, resulting in subsequent attempts to frame a portrait of Martha McMillan. We were beginning to get to know Martha.

Those early contacts with Martha's writing focused on her contact with Cedarville College since her son Homer was in the first class enrolled at Cedarville in the Fall of 1894

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and one of 5 student in the first graduating class in 1897. After attending that first commencement and experiencing the graduation of one of her sons, Martha observes in her entry for that day, June 10, 1897:

This was a grand gathering in the Opera House today. If the graduating class can never forget this day I feel sure that some of the rest of us will always remember it. It will always stand out above and over days bright and beautiful....May the remembrance of ...this day help and strengthen us through the years. Commencement Day' not finished but beginning! May all that is good and best and highest and grandest and noblest and holiest in life crown my boys is the prayer of this Mother ("The McMillan Journal Collection").

Martha's eloquence drove us deeper into wanting to learn more about her. What was Martha like as a farmer's wife, as a mother, as a woman of faith, and as a woman in her world? And what was that world like in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in rural America?

**Michelle Gaffner Wood**

After Dean Brock's presentation on the second day of class, the students were anxious to meet Martha themselves and to answer the questions Brock had posed. At this point in the course, I introduced the semester-long Recovery Project. First, students would read four months from a journal they selected and then transcribe the four months so that future readers could have access to a word-processed version of the document. Second, students submitted "Recovery Reports" in which they could respond to the journals and jot down any "significant threads" they were discovering that might inform their critical analyses of the journals. Third, I asked students to research one "significant thread" they discovered in the journal and write a Historical Analysis Essay that would serve to introduce the section of the journal they had read, transcribed, and analyzed to a contemporary reader. Last, with Dean Brock's help and guidance, students were to create a display for the university library that would represent Martha McMillan, her text, and their work on those texts to the public.

After hearing Brock's introduction and examining the actual journals, students were excited to discover more about McMillan and these journals. During the discovery phase,



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students read Rankin MacMillan's notes that Brock had transcribed, and based on what most interested them from Rankin's notes, they chose the year they wanted to focus on for the semester. They also read my transcriptions from 1867 in order to "meet" Martha for the first time. Students selected the years 1868, 1874, 1888, 1894, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1904, and 1913. One student chose to read McMillan's travel diary that McMillan had sewn into the back of 1899. McMillan had been invited to Indiana that year to give a speech at a regional meeting of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Another student chose the 1904 California travel diary. Both had interest respectively in those diaries because they lived in those states when they were not at school. Beyond affinity to the states McMillan visited, neither I nor the students were quite sure what they would discover once they began to read the texts. In order to facilitate their reading of the journals, Dean Brock packaged each journal and made it available at the circulation desk for students to read the journals in the library.

As they were reading the journals for the first time, I introduced the students to the genre of life-writing. We discussed how a daily journal is different from works such as *A New Home, Who'll Follow, The Clovernook Sketches, or Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* that represent a reflection on a person's life. In the article "Reading and Interpreting Unpublished Diaries by Nineteenth-Century Women," Suzanne Bunkers explains the contrast between memoir/autobiographical fiction and nineteenth-century diaries. She writes that nineteenth-century diaries "are not a retrospective examination and interpretation of a life already lived; they are a commentary on a life as it was lived, on life as process, not product" (15). Bunker also contends that a nineteenth-century diary is different from twentieth-century notions of the private diary. In the essay "Diaries: Public *and* Private Records of Women's Lives," she argues that nineteenth-century journals were not private documents and that many diarists intended others to read the texts they wrote (17). In fact, Margo Culley identifies women's nineteenth-century journals as "semi-public documents" (4). Our class discovered that McMillan's journal was indeed a "semi-public document" in entries such as December 27, 1898, when Martha adds to the current entry, "Under Christmas Day I intended to note the Christmas present rec'd" ("The McMillan Journal Collection"). This particular entry seems to indicate the writer's awareness of readers other than herself. Later on August 1, 1902, McMillan addresses her readers when she directs them to the travel journal that she attaches to the back of the current year's journal:

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It has been seven weeks and one day since I layed [sic] down the pen and left it with Paul. On last night Mr. Mc and I returned home from our ever to remembered and delightful trip. It is like beginning life in the new to take up the duties here. When we left we never expected to be away longer than three weeks. It is certainly true that it is the unexpected that happens. I think I am completely cured of making plans or seeking my own [illegible, one word] but learn to take life as it is unfolded moment by moment. I kept a journal while we were away which you can find in the back of this journal. ("The McMillan Journal Collection")

At the same time that McMillan might have intended that the "you" to whom she refers to be the future McMillan generations and possibly the wider audience that her family intended when they gave the journals to the Cedarville University archives, Bunkers also emphasizes that even though many journal writers wrote for an audience, the private act of writing also empowered the individual writer. Bunkers argues that the journal "represented more than a tiny book [or a collection of year-long journals in Martha's case] where a writer could record daily events; it also provided her with a safe place where she could generate a sense of self, share thoughts and feelings, contemplate her relationships with others, and comment on institutions and events" ("Reading and Interpreting," 15). As my students read and discovered life-writing for the first time, they began to ask their own questions. They built on Dean Brock's question about who might Martha have been and asked why this writer, her thoughts and feelings, her relationships, or her comments on institutions or events would be relevant to them. Why discover and recover the life and writing of an unknown, local woman? How could a mid-western woman's journal be as important to English majors as *Walden* is? Why would this journal be relevant for contemporary readers?

**Goal 2: Evaluate Individual Processes of Recovering and Interpreting:  
Recovery Reports**

At the beginning of each class session, students shared informal observations about what they were discovering in the journals or about how their reading of Martha's life was informing their reading of the other texts about nineteenth-century women's lives that we were discussing throughout the semester. A provocative discussion in and of itself about how life-writing and semi-autobiographical reflective texts might pair, my students realized

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that Martha's life-writing was dismantling some of the preconceptions they had about nineteenth-century women, which they suggested made them better readers of the other texts assigned for the course. Although that particular potentially valuable discussion is not the focus of this essay, the connections the students made between the life-writing and the recovered, published texts facilitated our semester-long reflexive conversation about how we engage with life-writing as literary critics and why the recovery of a local text such as Martha's might be as important to contemporary readers interested in women's lives and voices as Kirkland's, Cary's, and Jacobs's recovered texts are. Our class found itself agreeing with Sharon M. Harris and her admonition to recovery scholars published in the journal *Legacy's* Roundtable discussions entitled "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Two *Legacy* Roundtable Discussions" that "[s]o much archival work remains to be accomplished on writers we are only beginning to recognize as important to cultural movements, to local communities, and to ideas that shaped women's lives and international agendas" (214). And we also discovered Harris's comment that archival work takes us out of the "realm" not only about writers and texts we privilege but also "equally so" outside "our own critical processes" to be equally true (214). In the effort to become more reflexive about our efforts not only to read but also to theorize this text for future readers, I asked my students to read "Reading and Interpreting Unpublished Diaries by Nineteenth-Century Women." In this essay, Bunkers conveys not only the importance of nineteenth-century journals to contemporary readers but also she reminds those readers of their ethical responsibilities in interpreting the text for future readers. She explains in her own processes of reading and recovery, that she "must be constantly aware that I approach each text from a point of view that is not value-free and that I must take responsibility for my interpretation of the text, just as any reader must do" (16).

During the first eight weeks of the semester, students read their selected journals and submitted 200-word Recovery Reports each Friday in which they articulated how they were becoming aware of their responsibilities as readers of this text. In the first reports students contemplated their responsibilities to a text to which they could not relate or that they considered unimportant. The reports helped students to be reflexive about their "own critical processes" for analyzing an example of life-writing and how they might apply their understanding of literary analysis to interpret the public and private realities Martha inscribed in the journals for contemporary readers.

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I encouraged the students to discuss in their weekly Recovery Reports whatever interested them as they were reading the journals and at the same time to be aware of their own biases in reading and interpreting. In the syllabus, I prompted them with topics they might consider, such as, thoughts about recovery, content, concerns, misgivings, historical references of note, topics of note, or "value" for a modern reader. I also asked them to consider why it might be significant for literary folk to analyze the record of daily, mundane events. Further, they could address how Martha constructed community, how Martha constructed her own subjectivity as a person or as a writer, or how Martha constructed herself as community member. In the syllabus, I also suggested that they might consider the relevance of the text for Cedarville—the community and the university.

The Recovery Reports were helpful in allowing students to express personal responses to the journals at the same time that students could evaluate how they might apply critical analysis to a text that recorded the daily weather report, the work the hired help performed, or the number of sheep sheered in one day.

**Goal 3: Participate: Reading for a Thread, Reporting, and Transcribing**

At the beginning of the semester, the students began to read the four month segments they had selected. In the years that the University had maintained the journals, no other students had ever handled or read the journals, so the students enrolled in this course were the pioneers in discovering the text itself. After they read Rankin MacMillan's notes, I asked students to look for "significant threads" or themes that they might see emerging in the journals. As students read, they also transcribed passages that represented the narrative "threads" they were discovering.

The students' initial Recovery Reports document how they first had to learn to read nineteenth-century cursive before they could begin to notice what I was calling "significant threads." In those early reports, students emphasized how difficult the text was to read. Courtney comments that she "read for over an hour" and only made it through "a few more weeks."<sup>5</sup> Tabitha wonders why the journal she is reading doesn't seem to follow any punctuation rules. She notes how the erratic punctuation will make the journals "tricky to transcribe." Of course, one obvious pitfall that the students discovered was that when a

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<sup>5</sup> Students from the American Women Writers 2015 course have given me permission to use their names and to quote from their work. The quotations are from the students' Recovery Reports.

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reader jumps into the middle of a journal or the middle of life, the reader is not sure who the people are whom the writer mentions. Michael points out that he doesn't know who "Homer" is. Homer is one of Martha McMillan's sons. Beyond the difficulties of the text itself and its context, Austin, one of the English majors taking the class, writes that another barrier he faced in reading and transcribing the journal was that he "originally assumed that Martha would be a pretty boring figure."

Yet during the third week of Recovery Reports and after students had become acclimated to the text and Martha's writing style, students began to record observations that surprised them, and, even better, they began to ask their own questions. At this point, I began to publish the Recovery Reports to the entire class so that not only could we help each other answer questions, such as, "Who is Homer?" but also we could collaborate to ask and answer questions about Martha, her world, her ideas, and about reading and recovery itself. Courtney shares with her classmates in a later Recovery Report that she is beginning to understand the complexity of Martha's personality and her life. She explains how the journal helps her to read beyond her own 2015 stereotypes of the nineteenth-century and people who lived in small towns. She transcribes an entry in her Recovery Report in which Martha writes, "A peddler from Arabia here this morning. He has only been twenty days in this country. Just to make a good start for him for the day I made a little purchase from him" ("The McMillan Journal Collection," January 31, 1900). Courtney reports, "to be honest, when I began reading that sentence, I half-expected her to say something snarky about him, or turn him away. . . . But I was wrong, and I'm glad—Martha is caring and compassionate, and this shows in her treatment of the peddler from Arabia."

By the final required entry, Austin, who had originally assumed that Martha would be boring, began asking his own scholarly questions about his own work with life-writing and with this journal in particular. He asks, "What defines life-writing?" and "What defines Martha?" Because I had given these pioneering students few criteria to guide their discovery, transcription, and analysis, Austin devised his own criteria for transcription. He suggests that his transcription work will be guided by the following criteria: (1) "Statements by Martha that reveal her character, attitude, likes, and dislikes"; (2) "Poetry, and other creative or meaningful statements. By meaningful, I assume it speaks to something universal, is unique, and helps us understand something differently"; (3) "Major events"; and (4) "The 'thread.'" As the evolution of recovery reports suggests, students became not only

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invested personally in the journals they were reading but they were becoming scholarly collaborators in the truest sense of that phrase when they began asking their own questions and drawing their own conclusions about what might be significant about Martha and her writing.

As the students continued to read, they did indeed begin to discover "threads" that guided their transcription work that they would later publish in the public display at the library. Courtney began to focus her work on identifying and analyzing McMillan's subjectivity. In her fourth Recovery Response, Courtney writes, "I'd like to focus on passages where Martha says something personal, and how she says it, and why I think it is important for us. She rarely writes down her feelings, so when she does, it matters, and I want to affirm that by making it important to me."

In his third response, Adam identifies a significant thread in which he characterizes Martha as a "literary woman" who is writing within the context of now-forgotten nineteenth-century literary women when he discovers how Martha copies other writers' poetry into her journal but then changes the endings to add her own creative revisions. This discovery led Adam to research the poems and their writers that Martha was quoting, and in one of his Recovery Reports, he introduced the class to Elizabeth Akers Allen and her poem "Little Feet"; Fanny R. and her poem "Home"; and Susan Archer Weiss and a poem attributed to her titled "Between Two Years."

Austin, too, along with the rest of us discovered a "thread" that might be the most significant thread for people collaborating in the discovery and the recovery of a nineteenth-century journal to identify and to share with the contemporary readers for whom they are transcribing the text. That is, Austin, articulated for all of us that what we were discovering in this extraordinary text was the significance of the ordinary person and the ordinary life. Austin writes:

I gave more thought to the 'daily and mundane' today. We often characterize history by big events. Despite the economic crises and wars and turmoil we record, people still filled their lives with daily activities. One day, people will look back at the period between 2007 and the early 2010s and characterize it by the economic recession. But the recession doesn't accurately describe my personal life. I laughed and cried, wrote and read, moved and stayed, learned and forgot. We're people. Life is not just

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recession or a war or an event worthy of recording. Life is the daily. Life is waking up in the morning, working and studying in the afternoon, having friends over for dinner, and going to sleep at night. . . . I think it should become common practice to read the daily journals of other humans. I think we learn about others; we learn about ourselves; and we learn about the meaning of life and community. Martha McMillan in 1894 is of a different gender, income, era, denomination, and way of life. Yet reading her life causes me to realize that she and I are exactly the same. We're human.

[Please forgive me for writing 500+ words.]

I think that all of us as a group of collaborators were excited to see a "thread" that we had all stumbled upon together. This particular thread was just one of the reasons why our work to recover a nineteenth-century journal was so important. The increasing length of the Recovery Reports reflected the students' excitement and their personal connections with the text. By reading and transcribing Martha's journal, we had discovered together, perhaps the most significant thread, the significance of the ordinary life.

**Goal 4: Articulate: The Historical Analysis Introductions**

The Recovery Reports and the transcriptions indicated that students had indeed participated in the discovery and recovery process of an unknown writer and text. The next part of the project allowed students to engage the politics of recovery. That is, they had to introduce Martha McMillan and her journal to contemporary readers at the same time they had to make a case McMillan and her journals were relevant to those readers. In short, the Historical Analysis Introduction papers analyzed one "significant thread" that readers had discovered and defended why the journals proved to be a valuable text for contemporary readers. All the essays placed Martha McMillan in a historical or literary context. Bethany emphasized the historical and Adam emphasized the literary. Bethany's introduction to 1898 entitled "Rewriting the Spanish-American War" argues how the McMillan journals might be relevant to contemporary readers because they revise historical narratives that ignore the individual's daily life.

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Adam introduces the 1868 journal with a paper entitled "Martha McMillan and Victorian Periodicals and Poetry." In his essay, he introduces Martha McMillan as a literary woman and defends her journals as a significant representation of the nineteenth-century literary conversation about home and domesticity. He answers both Dean Brock's question about who Martha is and speaks to the students' question about why she and the journal might be relevant for contemporary readers. All the essays spoke to the questions the students themselves posed as well. They defended Martha as an activist, a thinker, a writer, a teacher, a valuable community member, and each made a case for how McMillan's journals were relevant for contemporary readers.

**Goal 5: Publish: The Library Display and the Digital Commons**

In collaboration with Dean Brock, students selected portions of their historical analysis introductions and their transcriptions to represent in display cases in the University's library. During class time, the class met with Dean Brock at the library, and he taught students how to create a display. He supplied pictures, maps, mounting boards, and signage. Students worked together to organize and complete two display cases. When the displays were complete, the library hosted a reception for the campus community at which students could talk with guests to introduce the McMillan journals and to discuss their work. We invited Martha McMillan's relatives, community members, current students, and faculty. The display and the reception generated so much excitement that Dean Brock and I realized that the work on this text should not be limited to a display that students would put together only every other year. At this point, Dean Brock asked Gregory Martin, Associate Professor of Library Science and the Digital Commons Director, to consider publishing the work these pioneering students had begun in a digital form to which we could add in the future. Like many English professors, I have no training in digital platforms in an academy that is becoming much more interested in the Digital Humanities. In my situation, collaboration with the library helped to bridge the gap for me between classroom practice and digital publication. Gregory Martin created and maintains the *Martha McMillan Journal Collection* on Cedarville University's Digital Commons ([http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/mcmillan\\_journal\\_collection/](http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/mcmillan_journal_collection/)).



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**Gregory A. Martin**

The Centennial Library established Cedarville University's institutional repository in early 2012, using Berkeley Electronic Press's (bepress) Digital Commons platform. Although the primary focus of the repository is archiving and organizing the scholarly and creative output of the faculty, staff, and students of the university, we have endeavored to preserve the historical record of the university as well. Therefore, a number of projects have been undertaken in cooperation with University Archives and Special Collections, such as digitizing the university's yearbooks, academic catalogs, and annual reports, and creating video galleries for commencement, convocation, and other recurring events.

During their study of Martha McMillan's journals, Dr. Michelle Wood and the students of the American Women Writers course produced a body of material that was significant both in quantity and in content. The Dean of Library Services was interested in preserving this material and making it available not only to future students, but also to the general public. He therefore approached me about the possibility of using the repository to accomplish this purpose.

In addition to the recovery reports, transcriptions, and research reports produced by the students, there were additional items in the Martha McMillan Journal Collection that deserved to be preserved and made available as well. In addition to Rankin MacMillan's notes, we found a number of items within the pages of the journals, including such things as newspaper clippings, obituaries, family photographs, a lock of hair, railroad tickets, commencement invitations and programs, postcards, a wedding guest list, and a list of wedding presents. Most of the items shed important additional light not only on the events and people Martha discusses in the journals but also on her own life and times. Over the years, Dean Brock and others have made presentations to interested groups on Martha and the journals, and we wanted to preserve the papers and PowerPoint slides used in those presentations as well. Lastly, and most importantly, we wanted to digitize the journals themselves, for which purpose we purchased an Atiz BookDrive Mini. We used the images produced by the book scanner to compile a PDF version of each journal. There was no other platform available that offered the flexibility required for such a wide variety of materials nor the long-term preservation capabilities that the Digital Commons provides.

The first step in the process of creating a web presence for all this material was to determine which type of structure in the repository would best present each type of content.

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We chose to create a new "community" in the Digital Commons which serves as the collection's home page ([http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/mcmillan\\_journal\\_collection/](http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/mcmillan_journal_collection/)). Within this community, we created book galleries for the journals and for Rankin MacMillan's notes, image galleries for family photographs and the miscellaneous items found in the journals, and separate collections for the transcriptions, student research reports, and documents from presentations.

Once we established the structure, it was necessary to determine the metadata that we wished to capture for each type of material. For example, the metadata for the journals themselves includes title, author, document type, journal date, dimensions, number of written pages, digitization date and specifications, Archives cataloging information, comments, keywords, and academic disciplines. Supplemental content consisting of Rankin MacMillan's notes and transcriptions was added to each journal's metadata page. Finally, we created a "flipping book" for each journal using the FlippingBook software. Users may download the PDF of each journal or browse through the journal using the flipping book. All the content in the collection is housed at bepress with the exception of the flipping books, which reside on university servers.

In order to cross-reference as much material as possible and provide multiple access points, additional metadata fields were added to some of the collections. For example, the items found within the pages of the journals have been scanned and placed in an image gallery. A field was then added to each journal's metadata page through which we link to those images in the image gallery. That field is also added to an automatically generated cover page for the journal's PDF so that users who arrive at the PDF directly from a Google search will also have access to the supplemental material. Cross-links among the transcriptions, Rankin's notes, and the journals are also provided in each collection, giving users a more complete picture of the life and writings of Martha McMillan.

The journals, of course, are handwritten, and Martha McMillan's handwriting is not always easy to read. In order to make the content of the journals more searchable and accessible, it was important to include transcriptions of the journals in the collection. The students in the American Women Writers course were required to provide transcriptions of the journal portions they were studying, but the transcriptions were of unequal quality and varied in how they handled indecipherable words, misspellings, etc. Therefore, it was necessary to develop guidelines for future students to use that would standardize the

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transcriptions. I researched best practices for making transcriptions of handwritten works and developed guidelines that have already been used successfully by students and Dean Brock.<sup>6</sup>

Although Martha McMillan's journals naturally focus on the day-to-day life and work of her family, they also provide very important context for a better understanding of society and culture in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Now, this valuable resource, previously stored in a corner of a university archives and not easily accessible by the general public, is openly available to researchers around the world at any time.

**Goal 6: A Comprehensive Scholarly Experience: A Student's Response**

**Adam J. Wagner**

When Dr. Wood first informed me about literary recovery work, I developed a burgeoning interest to a new, experimental, and—for our private university—unexplored area of study. The life and writing of Martha McMillan has amplified my English major education by helping me hone my research and analysis skills at the same that I could contribute to an on-going project that is recovering the life and the writing of an (extra)ordinary nineteenth-century American woman.

Across the English discipline, scholars are redefining the American canon, a move that puts an undergraduate student like me in both a troubling and exciting position. Transcription work and life-writing recovery emerges in this environment of re-canonization and puts an undergraduate student like myself in the unique position to be an active part of literary recovery. When Dean Brock first introduced the journals of Martha McMillan to our class, I immediately questioned the value of recovering a nineteenth-century woman's diaries. Indeed, Dr. Wood anticipated my and others' initial concerns about the project and encouraged us to persevere in reading and transcribing the journals and the specific months that we had chosen to read, no matter how many times Martha references the weather or who is home for dinner.

It was actually Caroline Kirkland's comments in her essay "Literary Women," that helped give me new insights into why a journal such as Martha McMillan's might be important for me and for other readers. Caroline Kirkland asks her readers to consider the

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<sup>6</sup> For the transcription guidelines Gregory A. Martin developed to guide future transcription work, see Appendix 1.

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outrageous idea that those women who keep journals might actually be significant writers. She asks her readers to consider, what indeed, "entitles a woman to the appellation of literary":

Must she have written a book? [...] If not a book, will a poem be sufficient? Or an essay? Or a magazine article? [...] Or does writing letters make one literary? [...] How is it with keeping a journal? Does that come within the canon? Might it not be maliciously interpreted into writing a book in disguise? (Kirkland 196-197)

Kirkland's inquiries were a beneficial foundation for my emergence into recovery work. Popular conceptions and my high school English education have constructed an idea of what constitutes a valuable piece of literature—mainly, a popular novel, short story, or poem that transcends culture by its universal themes. Kirkland expanded my conceptions of what texts can be considered literary: essays, articles, letters, and even personal diaries or journals. As English scholars continue to redefine the canon of American literature, they are also redefining the definition of literary, thus exposing undergraduates to real-life journals like Martha McMillan's. In this sense, my part in recovery work was a defining test: can undergraduate students find literary value in a nineteenth-century woman's journal? If so, perhaps re-canonization of literature should continue. As an undergraduate English major, I found critical value in McMillan's journals through recovering, transcribing, and researching.

Transcription work and life-writing recovery initially improved my English major educational experience by amplifying the important skills of investigative research and textual analysis. When recovering an unread and undocumented text like Martha's journals, I confronted an uncharted academic frontier—there was no peer-reviewed, scholarly research to assist me in research and interpretation. Instead, I simply had Martha's journal and a computer. The Internet, with its seemingly infinite collections of records and documents, proved to be a helpful way to research vague references, local family names, unknown books or poems, and historical/political remarks located within Martha's journal. Instead of relying on cross-references and footnotes, I was the researcher making new connections between Martha's writing and her reality. Along with investigative research skills, recovery work has also strengthened my abilities to analyze a text—making intertextual connections between the days and years of Martha's life, finding themes and

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critical ideas that continue through her writing, and constructing interpretive theses to understand Martha's thoughts and meaning in her journals. Professors teach students these skills throughout their undergraduate education, but learning these skills with a text that no scholar has previously analyzed, that no other human has ever read, increases the creative and intellectual excitement of analysis and makes research more tangible and enjoyable.

Yet perhaps the most value I have found as an undergraduate English major in transcription work and life-writing recovery is the honest human connection made from a text over 100 years old. I am a millennial college-aged male, a human who would normally have no connection with a nineteenth-century adult woman, yet I find that in reading Martha's journals, I have grown to care about a life vastly removed from mine. In an age consumed with technological innovation, media saturation, and the human disconnect from nature, Martha's journals remind me of the power of the individual's connection to the earth, the simple pleasures of daily life, and the importance of local, human communities. Additionally, as a religious college student, Martha's thoughts about God and living a spiritual life are just as relevant and encouraging in 2016 as they were to Martha in 1868. The power of holding an old journal, reading Martha's handwriting directly, and the process of recovery and discovery of a woman's writing, of a life lived and completed before mine even began, is a humbling and moving human experience. And in an age consumed and infatuated with fame and celebrities, with the pressure to rise above others and be known, recovery work of life-writing reminds a college student like me of the value of daily, ordinary life.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Michelle Gaffner Wood**

The students in the American Women Writers course achieved the two learning outcomes. They not only became familiar with marginalized texts but also they played an integral part in the pioneering of discovering and recovering local writer Martha McMillan and her nineteenth-century journal. The students discovered what Martha was like as an individual and as a community member. They also realized that Martha's Cedarville was her Walden—her inspiration, source of transcendent insight, and the place that made her whole. Like *Walden*, McMillan's journals reveal a larger literary and philosophical conversation in which McMillan's journals participate. Yet the students also understood that the journals added something new to the American literary conversation. Bethany points out

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that McMillan's journals make women's lives visible—not just her own but her neighbors' lives, too. Tori concludes that "Martha seems to value both the women that came before her and the women of future generations." Ultimately the class came to the conclusion that discovering, reading, and recovering Martha's journals makes women's lives visible—past, present, and future—and for that reason make them relevant for them and for contemporary readers. While the students achieved the learning outcomes for the class, their work far exceeded the six goals I had originally hoped the semester would accomplish and the Martha McMillan Journal Recovery Project went well beyond the original scope of the course. I attribute that to the power of collaboration.

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Appendix 1

Creating Transcriptions

Gregory A. Martin

Cedarville University

A transcription is an exact copy of an original document. The key word here is *exact*. Everything should be rendered exactly as found in the original source - spelling, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviations, and the arrangement of text. Expanding abbreviations, adding commas, etc., risks changing the meaning of the original.

**How to Handle Illegible Content**

Make a note in [square brackets] when ink blots, poor handwriting, and other flaws affect the legibility of the original document.

- If you aren't sure of a word or phrase, then flag it with a question mark in square brackets.
- If a word is too unclear to read, replace it with [illegible] in square brackets.
- If an entire phrase, sentence, or paragraph is unreadable, indicate the length of the passage [illegible, 3 words].
- If part of a word is unclear, then include [?] within the word to indicate the portion that is unclear.
- If you can read enough of a word to make a guess you can present a partially illegible word with the unclear portion followed by a question mark enclosed in square brackets such as cor[nfie?]ld.
- If part of a word is obscured or missing but you can use context to determine the word, just include the missing portion within square brackets, no question mark necessary.

**More Rules to Remember**

- A transcription typically encompasses the entire record, including margin notes, headings, and insertions.
- Names, dates, abbreviations, and punctuation should *always* be transcribed exactly as written in the original.
- Use the Latin word [*sic*], meaning "so written," sparingly and in its proper form (italicized and enclosed in square brackets), following the recommendation of the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Do **not** use [*sic*] to indicate every misspelled word. It is best used in cases where there is an actual error (not just a misspelling) in the original document.
- Reproduce superscripts as presented, otherwise you risk changing the meaning of the original document.
- Include crossed out text, insertions, underlined text, and other changes as they appear in the original document. If you cannot accurately represent changes in your word processor, then include a note of explanation within square brackets.
- Do not use a proportionally-spaced font, such as Times New Roman. Use a non-proportionally-spaced font, such as Courier, which makes it easier to see spacing problems in the transcriptions.



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Because our essay represents a collaborative Digital Humanities project, we wrote the essay collaboratively. **MICHELLE WOOD** is an Associate Professor of English at Cedarville University. She has presented at the Society for the Study of American Women Writers, CEA, CCCC, and NCTE. She is currently working on projects related to nineteenth-century women writers, lodging, liminality, and mobility. **LYNN BROCK** is the Dean of Library Services and the university's archivist at Cedarville University. He has served in that position for over forty years. He has served on Institutional Planning committees throughout his tenure. **GREGORY MARTIN** is an Associate Professor of Library Science and the Director of Cedarville University's Digital Commons. He is currently preserving images digitally of Martha McMillan's handwritten journals. **ADAM WAGNER** is a 2016 graduate of Cedarville University. He plans to apply to graduate programs in English.