

Materials on Korean Studies

Mary and Clarence Greathouse Papers
(1803-1905)
at the University of Kentucky
(Lexington, Kentucky)

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Introduction

The “Mary and Clarence Greathouse Papers” deposited at the University of Kentucky Special Collections in Lexington, Kentucky comprise 2.12 cubic feet (six boxes) of documents bequeathed to the university by Mary Elizabeth Hancock Greathouse. Mary Elizabeth Greathouse was the mother of Clarence R. Greathouse, who had a varied career as lawyer, newspaper manager, entrepreneur, political lobbyist, and ultimately advisor to King Gojong (after 1898, Emperor) from 1891 until his death in Seoul in 1899. These papers comprise miscellaneous documents belonging to mother and son through their shared sojourns in Japan and Korea, to include personal correspondence, photographs, newspaper clippings, and the diaries of Mary Elizabeth Greathouse covering the years 1888-1905. Though the overall volume of the collection may be relatively small, its contents have very rarely been mentioned, much less consulted, in studies of the place and period and contain many items of interest to the history of Korea in the late Joseon and early Daehan Empire period.

As is widely known, Clarence R. Greathouse, as Vice-President of the Home Office and legal advisor to King Gojong, was given a key responsibility in the investigation into the 1895 murder of Queen Min. There are several items in the manuscript collection related to his role in this affair. Also of great interest are the diaries of Mary Elizabeth Greathouse, which cover nearly every day of the decade she spent in Japan and Korea and thus can offer important insights into daily life in Seoul, the expatriate community, and contemporary politics, among other subjects. This paper will briefly introduce this collection, first by offering a short biography of Clarence R. Greathouse and his career, before proceeding to provide a general description of the collection’s scope and contents and further information on its consultation.

Clarence R. Greathouse (September 17, 1846-October 21, 1899)¹

The biography of Clarence R. Greathouse has never been written but there are sufficient primary and secondary sources to set forth a fairly detailed outline of his life.² He was descended from German immigrants (Greathouse being an Anglicization of the original German “Groethausen”) who arrived in America in the early eighteenth century. Clarence’s family tree sits squarely in the forest of American history. He was the grandson of a Major Isaac Greathouse, who served in the American Revolutionary War, and through his father a cousin of Ridgely Greathouse, who also saw military service, though for him it was in the ranks of the Confederacy during the American Civil War (and after the conflict serving briefly as US Consul at Geneva) (*The Evening Bulletin*, June 30, 1902, 3; July 7, 1902, 2). Clarence R. Greathouse was also the nephew of Thomas P. Porter, who served as the acting lieutenant governor of Kentucky during the Civil War. Clarence was born in 1846 to Dr. Ridgely Greathouse (1804-1852) and Mary Elizabeth Greathouse (née Hancock, 1818-1906) on a farm near Versailles in Woodford County, Kentucky, just west of the city of Lexington.

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1. There has been some confusion regarding the middle name of Clarence Greathouse. Most secondary sources simply omit his middle name or provide only an initial. *Appleton’s Cyclopædia of American Biography* has “Ridgeby.” The finding aid for the manuscript collection being treated here renders it “Ridgeley.” Still other sources, such as newspaper accounts from Kentucky—which one might assume to be accurate considering it was his home state—have “Ridgely,” which also happens to be the given name of his nephew. The most reliable source would seem to be Greathouse’s epitaph, namely as his mother would have overseen arrangements for his funeral and burial. His tombstone, in the Yanghwajin Memorial Cemetery in Seoul, has yet another rendering in “Ridgley.” This latter spelling was also the first name of Clarence R. Greathouse’s father, lending this spelling yet more authority. Chris Bailey, who in his laborious genealogical work on the related Stull family, posits that his middle name was indeed Ridgley (see Bailey 2000, 395n2). But to avoid potentially perpetuating an inaccuracy, henceforth this essay will only initialize his middle name. There is still further confusion on the year of his birth, with various sources citing 1843, 1845, and 1846. Again, considering his own mother would have overseen preparations for his burial, the date on his tombstone is the one used here.
 2. The following biographical sketch of Clarence Greathouse takes as its primary sources *Dictionary American Biography* (1943), Chris Bailey’s *The Stulls of “Millsborough”: A Genealogical History of John Stull “The Miller,” Pioneer of Western Maryland* (2000), and obituary notices appearing in the *New York Times* (November 17, 1899) and *Boston Globe* (May 12, 1895), with other sources also cited. Though every effort has been made to maintain accuracy insofar as the facts of Greathouse’s life, the author must acknowledge the possibility that some errors of fact have managed to slip in, and for any such errors takes full responsibility in advance.

Clarence Greathouse received his early education at Bethany College in Wheeling, Virginia (later West Virginia). His early studies were interrupted by the outbreak of the American Civil War, forcing him for a time back to his mother's farm in Kentucky. After the war he went on to obtain a law degree from the University of Virginia. He then began the practice of law back home in Kentucky under the tutelage of his uncle Thomas P. Porter. In 1868, aged only twenty-three, Greathouse was elected prosecuting attorney of his native Woodford County, Kentucky. He also helped establish, in partnership with a Captain Henry McLeod, a newspaper there known as *The Woodford Weekly Sun*, thus beginning his foray into journalism (the paper continues to publish to this very day, currently as the *Woodford Sun*). Greathouse moved to California around 1870. In doing so he was following in the footsteps of his physician father, who had moved to California alone a generation earlier—ostensibly to bring his family out once he was settled—but had died there administering to the victims of cholera when Clarence was only a small child. Once established in California, Clarence Greathouse resumed the practice of law, ultimately forming a practice with his cousin-in-law Gordon Blanding. The practice was later joined by Senator William Morris Stewart (1827-1909) of Nevada to become Stewart, Greathouse & Blanding. Stewart, Greathouse & Blanding developed into one of the leading corporate law firms of the thriving young city. Among their clients were the Wells-Fargo Express Company, headed at that time by Lloyd Tevis, Mr. Greathouse's first cousin, and George Hearst (father of William Randolph), who had a number of mining interests in the region.

Despite his hectic work schedule as a partner in a prospering legal firm, Greathouse's interest in journalism had not left him. In 1883 he became the general manager of the *San Francisco Examiner*. Though the finding aid to the Greathouse manuscript collection claims he purchased "a controlling interest" in the paper, this is not confirmed.³ What is known is that Greathouse had developed through his law firm a close friendship with George Hearst, the paper's owner since 1880, and so this reentry into the world of journalism was no doubt facilitated in some form or fashion by Greathouse's association with him. In his two-year run as managing editor of the *Examiner* Greathouse

3. "Mary and Clarence Greathouse papers, 1803-1905" October 13, 2011. Finding aid at the University of Kentucky Special Collections, Lexington, Kentucky.

oversaw that publication's transition to a morning paper. In this role, Greathouse also no doubt had encounters with the American writers Ambrose Bierce and Jack London, both of whom were publishing in the paper during this period. During his time with the *Examiner* Greathouse came under fire for his political lobbying and using the major daily as a mouthpiece of the Democratic Party and a weapon for attacks on political rivals. The picture that emerges of Greathouse at this time is of a man in his prime, of frenetic energy and far-seeing ambition but who was versed in and relished the game of politics. Senator William M. Stewart, who knew Greathouse during this period, described him as "a young man of attainments and brilliant intellect" (Stewart and Brown 1908, 265).

As noted, in California Greathouse also became legal advisor to George Hearst, with whom he shared an interest in mining ventures (Hearst built the family fortune in mining to be inherited by his son William Randolph), and in 1883 Greathouse had been brought on as editor and general manager of Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*. In 1886, the Democrat George Hearst was named the United States senator from California to fill the seat vacated by the death of the incumbent John F. Miller. The following year George Hearst handed over control of the *Examiner* to his son, William Randolph Hearst.

With the election of the Democrat Grover Cleveland as President of the United States in 1884, came the usual flood of political appointments—the so-called "spoils system." Among these politically appointed positions, some of the most coveted were the federal postmaster offices. Clarence Greathouse at this point apparently had ambitions to be named Postmaster of San Francisco, and to further his cause, his friend and colleague and now United States Senator George Hearst introduced him to President Grover Cleveland in April 1886 (*Oakland Tribune*, April 17, 1886, 2). Greathouse clearly had some influence and pull in the Democratic Party, for he was one of only a handful of Californians to receive important posts.⁴ Though Greathouse was never named to head the San Francisco Post Office, what is certain is that not long after his spring 1886 visit to the White House, newly elected President

4. By some accounts, Greathouse even developed a very personal relationship with Grover Cleveland, who it is said twice offered Greathouse a position as associate justice of the United States Supreme Court, which he declined. See *Louisville Courier-Journal*, November 19, 1950; quoted in Jack Murray Greathouse, 1954. This is also mentioned on Greathouse's tombstone in Seoul's Yanghwajin Cemetery.

Cleveland appointed Greathouse the American Consul-General at Yokohama, Japan, a rather significant diplomatic posting.⁵ One account of Greathouse's appointment to Japan goes thus:

He [Greathouse] was a great student and developed into a very great lawyer....He was both eloquent and graceful, a man who would attract attention anywhere and in any company. He visited President Cleveland in Washington City soon after the advent of that administration [1885] and that great student of human nature and judge of real men was so impressed with his personality that he tendered him the Consulship of Japan. It was accepted and his services were so eminently satisfactory to both countries that the administration under President Harrison retained him.... (qtd. in Bailey 2000. 375-76)

This is surely a bit of homespun boasting that sweeps the politics under the rug. What is more likely is that the in no way insignificant diplomatic appointment was given as consolation for the post office position that did not materialize, in recognition of Greathouse's battles for the Democratic Party in California, and likely in no small part to Greathouse's association with the Hearst name.

Clarence, who never married, took his widowed mother with him when he left for Japan in the summer of 1886. As the American Consul in Yokohama, Greathouse was a laudable success, again evidence of his personal and political acumen and affability. But in 1890, Greathouse suddenly resigned his official diplomatic position—and United States government service—to take on new responsibilities in Korea. At his farewell dinner before leaving Japan for Korea, Greathouse was toasted as, “the soundest and also the best American consul that had ever been in Yokohama” in the previous thirty years (*North China Herald*, January 2, 1891).

Official Korean records indicate that on November 23, 1890, Greathouse was named Vice-President of the Korean Home Office 內務府協辦 (Naemubu hyeoppa).⁶ How precisely Greathouse came to be recruited and

5. It was from his posting as consul-general that Greathouse earned the title of “general” that would sometimes be applied to him.

6. *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Gojong 27/11/23). Young Ick Lew suggests Greathouse was invited as a substitute for Owen Nickerson Denny following the promotion of Charles W. Legendre to the top post in the Customs (Lew 1976, 75).

selected as an advisor to the Korean court—and perhaps as importantly, why he felt compelled to accept such an appointment—is unclear. One who purported to know Greathouse well speculated that his former interest in mining concessions—a legacy of his relationship with the Hearsts—coupled with stories of vast gold wealth in Korea had convinced him to make the move, but this is pure conjecture (*Boston Sunday Globe*, May 12, 1895, 35). In his transition to Korea, Greathouse was again accompanied by his indefatigable mother (now 72) as well as by a friend and personal secretary who he had taken on in Japan, a Goanese named H. A. Dos Remedios, of whom it was said he came to occupy the position of “son as well as secretary” to Greathouse, “although he was never officially adopted.”⁷ Remedios appears prominently in the diaries of Mary Elizabeth Greathouse, who was very fond of him. Greathouse, who never received his appointment to head the San Francisco post office, must have felt a certain satisfaction in being appointed in 1893 as Assistant Director of the Korean Telegraph and Postal Service 會辦外遞郵信事務 (Hoepan oeche usinsamu).⁸

In terms of Greathouse’s time in Korea, one must be wary, to say the least, of the accounts of period newspapers, which had few qualms about publishing rumors, half-truths, or even tall tales as long as they sold copy. Colorful period accounts paint Greathouse as a latter day Count of Monte Cristo who had risen to fabulous wealth and power or as a sort of American maharaja in the East. As one account put it, “The metamorphosis of the young sailor, Edmond Dantes, into the fabulously rich count of Monte Cristo, was not more startling, and scarcely more improbable than the evolution of a Kentucky boy into prime minister, and almost king, of far-off Corea; wrapped in oriental luxury and jealously guarded from harm by barbaric monarch, whose devotion to him was as strong as if Greathouse had come of a long line of Corean ancestry” (*The Republican-News*, December 12, 1899, 5). Even Oscar Shuck’s more sober, *History of the Bench and Bar of California* (1901) called Greathouse “practically prime minister for many years of the kingdom of Corea” (Shuck 1901, 553). In truth, as with many foreign advisors during this period—Denny, Legendre, Dye, Nienstead—Greathouse found himself in waters already too agitated to be much effective in controlling the ship of state. But

7. “Clarence Ridgeby [sic] Greathouse,” *Dictionary of American Biography*, 526.

8. *Joseon wangjo sillok* (Gojong 30/8/17).

he was perhaps more qualified than most. Yun Chiho, who rarely met a man up to his standards, though he had admittedly mixed opinions of Greathouse, still deigned to describe him as a man of high intelligence and culture, and one who always knew “who is up and who is down in the scale of influence in the government” (Yun 1975, 4:67). As noted earlier, a history of Greathouse’s native Woodford County, though admittedly not the most impartial source, records that Greathouse was “both eloquent and graceful, a man who would attract attention anywhere and in any company” (qtd. in Bailey 2000, 375-76). A more grounded estimation comes from one who purported to know Greathouse very well, a journalist named Frank Carpenter, who described him as a “shrewd, far-seeing man” and a “frank, open westerner [i.e., from the western United States]” (*Boston Sunday Globe*, May 12, 1895, 35). A photo of Greathouse at his ease on the patio of his Japanese home would seem to suggest this. The artist and keen observer of human nature Henry Savage Landor wrote that Greathouse was an outgoing and garrulous man with “a gift for telling humorous stories, of which he had an unlimited supply” (Landor 1895, 4).

Greathouse’s drinking tendencies are also fairly well documented. Yun Chiho noted his predilection for *makkoli* (a taste duly noted in the mother as well). Franklin Sands also remarked on this aspect of Greathouse, adding, however, that though rarely sober, Greathouse was a first-rate lawyer and a remarkable man. Indeed, the “drunker he got the more lucid he became” (Sands 1975, 49). Less generously, Harrington (1966, 298) termed him “... an alcoholic Russophile employed by Chosen as a legal expert.” Perhaps the most balanced assessment came from French Minister Collin de Plancy. Himself a long-time resident of the Korean capital, in official correspondence relating Greathouse’s death in Seoul, Collin de Plancy noted that one could not say that Greathouse’s time in Korean employ “was of any great use to the peninsula. It is not that his advice was not sound, at least in those few lucid moments that the immoderate use of alcohol left him, but that his advice was no more followed than that of other foreigners in Korean service.”⁹ But there was one thing on which all who knew Greathouse agreed, and that was his pronounced legal ability.

9. Collin de Plancy to French Minister of Foreign Affairs (23 October 1899), Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe (ed.), *Peurangseu oemubu munseo* (*Documents of the French Foreign Ministry*). Vol. 9 (2002).

With the upheavals surrounding the Sino-Japanese War and the Gabo Reforms in late summer 1894, all foreigners found themselves—at least temporarily—excluded from government service in Korea. It seems the Japanese felt they could control both Greathouse and his compatriot and colleague in the Home Office, General Charles W. Legendre. In any case, the pair was almost no sooner on the outs than back in again. This period saw the climax of Greathouse's time in Korea, which came in the tumultuous days of the Sino-Japanese War, the Gabo Reform period, and the assassination of Queen Min in October 1895, a series of events that would reshuffle the geopolitical chess pieces and lead ultimately to Korea's checkmate. Greathouse was appointed by King Gojong to oversee the trials of the accused conspirators in the assassination of Queen Min in 1895. As the *Korea Repository* reported, at the request of King Gojong, Greathouse "...attended the sessions of the Court, examined the witnesses and supervised the proceedings." That same issue goes on to quote Greathouse's own assessment of the trials, that they had been "fairly and carefully conducted" and that no torture was used in the gathering of evidence (*Korea Repository* 1896, 118-19).

It is ironic in hindsight that the legal proceedings over the murder of the queen, and which came so close to Korea's collapse, were lauded by many for their impartiality and integrity. Again, the *Korean Repository*, which published a translated version of the final report of the proceedings, opined in an unsigned editorial (though likely from the hand of one of the editors Henry Appenzeller or George Heber Jones) that for their "purity and honesty of procedure, for patient and thorough-going investigation, and for general approximation of Western notions of justice and integrity" they were "in every way remarkable" (*Korea Repository* 1896, 119). The French representative in Korea at the time concurred, largely crediting Greathouse for the inquest's impartiality and accuracy, features "generally not found in Korean judicial proceedings."¹⁰

Homer Hulbert thought the trials, and Greathouse's role in them,

10. The original text is as follows: "L'enquête semble ainsi avoir été conduite avec un degré d'impartialité que on ne trouve généralement pas dans la procédure des cours de justice coréennes. On peut, je pense, considérer comme l'expression de la vérité l'exposé des faits tels qu'ils sont racontés dans ce rapport." M. Lefèvre to Foreign Minister (5 April 1896), Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe (ed.), *Peurangseu oemubu munseo (Documents of the French Foreign Ministry)*. Vol. 7 (1895-1896).

heralded “a new and enlightened era in Korean political history” (Hulbert 1906, 149). But such an optimism and such an era—if there was one—was short-lived. Even Greathouse seemed to recognize that Korea’s fortunes as an independent nation were on the wane. By 1897, he gave it two years at most before “the whole concern will be busted up” (Yun 1975, 5:22). But it was Greathouse who collapsed first.

Mary Greathouse’s diaries relate a constant struggle with health, both for herself and her son, throughout their sojourn in Korea, certainly nothing unique to the Greathouses’ experience. Life in Korea was fraught with perils to one’s health. Cholera made a regular appearance and the dusty and dirty streets of Seoul were never described as salubrious. But in the summer of 1899 Greathouse began to suffer from bouts of stomach pain, which a regiment of milk did little to alleviate. He suffered two fainting spells during his final audience with now Emperor Gojong.¹¹ By September he was bed-ridden. Well-wishers stopped by the Greathouse residence, or in the case of Emperor Gojong, sent along their wishes for a swift recovery. But this was not to be. Despite the dedicated care of his mother and several physicians, and his transfer to the Baldwin Dispensary near Seoul East Gate from September 13, Clarence Greathouse’s condition steadily deteriorated and he passed away on the afternoon of October 21. Greathouse’s funeral ceremony was conducted at his Seoul home two days later, with the capital’s foreign colony well represented, even including the Catholic Bishop Mutel and Father Poisnel, who remained outside the home during the memorial. A funeral oration was given by Henry Appenzeller, who took as inspiration for his sermon the twelfth book of John, which Appenzeller said he had read to the pain-ridden Greathouse in his final hours and which had gone far in relieving his physical and mental torments.¹² A motley funeral procession of rickshaws, carriages, pedestrians, bicyclists, and not least several hundred Korean soldiers, then accompanied the casket on its way to the city’s Yanghwajin foreigners’ cemetery (Mutel 1993, 2:407).

One period paper intoned that Greathouse’s epitaph might well read “one of the most pregnant verses in the modern epic of the Far East.” (*The Japan Weekly Mail*, October 28, 1899, 439). In reality it read more prosaically,

11. Mary Elizabeth Greathouse diary, 23 October 1899.

12. “Funeral Address, Gen. C.R. Greathouse, Seoul, October 23, 1899.” H. G. Appenzeller Papers. Accessed via microfilm at the Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, Gwacheon, Korea.

providing the dates and places of his birth and death and a short biography of his notable accomplishments, from his election as Woodford County Attorney at a tender age, to his near-nomination to be a justice of the United States Supreme Court.

Upon Clarence Greathouse's death his mother Mary was named sole legatee. Yun Chiho (1975, 5:234) lamented of her, "She is all alone! More to be pitied than the dead." It was reported that the Emperor Gojong granted Mary Greathouse "3000 yen" to pay for her voyage home to Kentucky (*The Evening Bulletin*, December 4, 1899, 1). This included a personal envoy—a man named Chang whom the elderly Greathouse considered as a son—who accompanied the bereaved mother as far as San Francisco. Mrs. Greathouse eventually resettled in her native Versailles, Kentucky and survived her son by seven years, dying in October 1906 after injuries suffered during a fall (*The Citizen*, October 4, 1906, 7). She was eighty-seven.

Items of Special Note

The Mary and Clarence Greathouse Papers have much to attract the interest of researchers. Perhaps primary among these are the expansive journals of Mary Elizabeth Greathouse, who recorded her impressions and experiences almost daily for the decade the Greathouses resided in Seoul as well as for their years in Yokohama. These journals may offer valuable insights into the expat community in Seoul, impressions of individuals, and the routines of daily life in the Korean capital in the tumultuous decade of the 1890s.

Another item of note are the minutes Greathouse produced of the meeting between foreign diplomatic representatives and the President of the Korean Foreign Office Jo Byeongsik held at the Korean Foreign Office on July 16, 1894, in which was discussed, among other things, the legality of the presence of Japanese troops in Korea. The collection also contains items related to the frenetic diplomatic activities preceding the Gabo Reforms in 1894.

Also of interest is Greathouse's private letter book for the first few years (1891-1893) of his time in Korea. But of particular note will be Box 5, Folder 8, labeled "Notes Relating to the Legal Proceedings Resulting from the Queen's Assassination." Greathouse, in his capacity both as legal advisor and by special appointment, played a key role in the investigation and prosecution of those

implicated in the plot. These items include drafts of letters from Greathouse to the Korean Minister of Justice 法部 (Beoppu) detailing the handling of the investigation, testimonies of those questioned in the course of the investigation as well as what seem to be Greathouse's personal notes from his attendance at the trials of the conspirators that took place in the spring of 1896.

Organization of the Papers and Access

The “Mary and Clarence Greathouse Papers” comprise a total of 2.12 cubic feet of material. They are deposited in the University of Kentucky Special Collections in the Margaret I. King Building on the campus of the University of Kentucky at Lexington. They are arranged in six boxes, with a summary of their contents as follows:

Box 1 – Mixed materials from Yokohama and Seoul, Korea (1884-1891); Mary Elizabeth Greathouse (MEG) diaries from 1884-1891, covering her years in Yokohama, Japan and Seoul, Korea

Box 2 – MEG diaries, 1892-1896, covering the period in Seoul, Korea; photographs from Japan and Korea, mostly untitled

Box 3 – MEG diaries, 1897-1901, 1903, covering the period in Seoul, Korea and Versailles, Kentucky

Box 4 – MEG diaries, 1902, 1903-1904, 1905, covering the period in Versailles, Kentucky; private letter book of Clarence R. Greathouse (CRG) (1890-1891)

Box 5 – Private letter book of CRG (covering primarily the years 1891-1893); letters to MEG (covering the years 1870-1904) and to CRG (covering the years 1886-1898); notes relating to the investigation into the assassination of Queen Min; newspaper clippings

Box 6 – Mixed materials; family letters; newspaper clippings

Access to the collection is by appointment with the University of Kentucky

Special Collections.

Figures

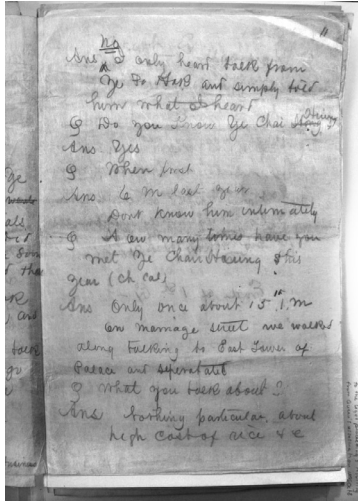


Figure 1 – Document from folder “Notes Relating to the Investigation of the Murder of Queen Min” (Box 5, Folder 8), Mary and Clarence Greathouse Papers.

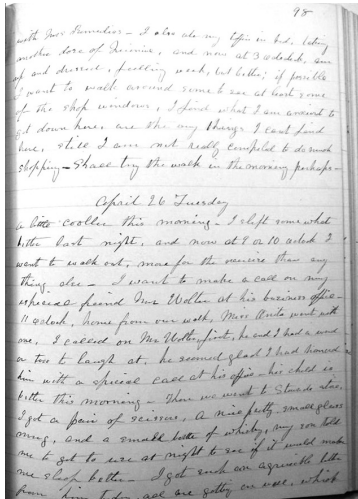


Figure 2 – Mary Elizabeth Greathouse diary (April 26, 1898) (Box 3, Folder 2), Mary and Clarence Greathouse Papers.



Figure 3 – Mary Elizabeth Greathouse and her Japanese maid (ca. 1888) (Box 2, Folder 6), Mary and Elizabeth Greathouse Papers.



Figure 4 – Clarence Greathouse (2nd from left) and Mary Elizabeth Greathouse (far right) at home in Japan (ca. 1888) (Box 2, Folder 6), Mary and Elizabeth Greathouse Papers.

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