Natalia Shevin 3-minute presentation

This past February, our First Wave Feminisms class went to the archives to choose from 10 collections, which we wanted to spend half of a semester working on. When looking through Mary Church Terrell’s file, we found this business card of a forester in Washington DC, which read: “You can’t keep her out.” Now that I know the incredible things Terrell did including, but by no means limited to, confronting Secretary of War Taft in his office, challenging a former Oberlin College president about its dorm segregation in the early 1900s, and presenting to United Nations to reverse a scheduled lynching of a Black female sharecropper whoever Russell Thomas Edwards directed this statement towards surely knew what Mary Church Terrell was capable of. I wanted to put together the story of which Terrell was, using this business card as a reminder of her ability to affect change. Especially as a student of Oberlin College now, I’m dedicated to learning about one of the great movers and shakers of this college, during a time when the administration was growing more conservative in regards to race. Terrell wouldn’t let Oberlin forget its founding.

From this project I have been able to connect a network of histories all from this first point of discovery. Within a quotidian object that easily could have been discarded, Terrell became real for me. If I truly want to do justice to American history, keeping Terrell living through these objects and their documentation is absolutely necessary.
You can't keep her out.

RUSSELL THOMAS EDWARDS

AMERICAN TREE ASSOCIATION
AMERICAN NATURE ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON, D.C.
Becca Debus: 3-minute presentation

When we first started working on this archival research project in class this past spring, my group and I weren’t at all sure about the project we’d been assigned. It wasn’t our first choice. It wasn’t even our second choice. It was our last choice. We’d been hoping to study a dramatic civil war-era diary, and instead we found we’d been given a seemingly unremarkable file of letters from an Oberlin missionary in Jamaica to her brother.

Several months, and innumerable hours of research later, I am so glad to have been given this project. That Oberlin missionary, named Lucy Woodcock, became more and more interesting the more I researched her. She was daughter of farmers, and the only one of her many sisters to attend college; she threw herself into the work of the Jamaican mission with such fervor that even her stubborn male contemporaries, who were not at all pleased with the notion of young single women serving as missionaries, had to admit that she was integral to the success of their mission. Firmly committed to making the world a better place, she was a serious abolitionist, a compassionate missionary, and the kind of woman that I always hoped I would find among the pages of history book.

But this remarkable missionary isn’t the only reason I’ve been glad to work with this collection, because while I spent my time this spring diving into her life, my fellow group members decided to poke around in the rest of the collection her letters were filed in. In this collection, which contains all the papers of Lucy’s brother, and fellow Oberlin graduate, Henry Woodcock, my group members unearthed some rather remarkable things, specifically courtship letters between Henry Woodcock and his second wife, and, written many years later, letters from him to his two daughters. Between us, my group members and I were not only able to bring to light one remarkable woman, but to describe the relationships of an entire family. It was when we as a group began to examine the ways in which gender roles influenced the relationships within this family, that we were able to piece together a story that put all of our documents into a greater context. Through working with my groups members in the spring, and through the help
of my fellow research assistants this summer, the Woodcock Collection became a way to illustrate the changing landscape of gender roles in the nineteenth century, and to put those changes in context with other societal transformations. And yet, at the same time, the vitality of these wonderful primary sources prevented us from becoming too dry and abstract, but helped us firmly ground ourselves in the realities of life for nineteenth century women. And that has been a tremendous experience.