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The Gilder Lehrman Collection

IDI began work in August 2013 on an extraordinary scanning project for publisher Adam Matthew at The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

The Gilder Lehrman Collection is considered one of the nation's great archives of American history and the Collection contains some of America's most important historical documents, such as one of the original twelve copies of the signed Declaration of Independence and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Publisher, Adam Matthew, awarded the digitization project to IDI in August this year. Adam Matthew (www.amdigital.co.uk) publishes unique primary source collections from archives around the world. Their award winning collections span the social sciences and humanities and cover a multitude of topics ranging from medieval manuscripts to 20th century popular culture.

The Gilder Lehrman Collection is a unique archive of primary sources in American history. It includes more than 60,000 letters, diaries, maps, pamphlets, books, photographs and ephemera that document the political, social and economic history of the United States.

Adam Matthew will publish the vast majority of the collection in two parts. Part 1, containing material from 1493-1859 will be released in late 2014.

The following are some of the documents that IDI is digitizing for the Adam Matthew project.

Columbus Reports On His First Voyage

Christopher Columbus' Letter to Ferdinand and Isabella 1493

Upon his return to Spain after discovering the American continent, Christopher Columbus wrote a long letter to King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella describing his momentous journey. Originally written in Spanish by Columbus, it was sent to Rome where it was translated into Latin. The Latin printing of this letter announced the existence of the American continent throughout Europe. In the letter Columbus describes the land and its natives and also declares that the land could easily be conquered by Spain.

The Doctrine of Discovery

Pope Alexander VI's Demarcation Bull, May 4, 1493

The Papal Bull "Inter Caetera," issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493, played a central role in the Spanish conquest of the New World. It supported Spain's strategy to ensure its exclusive right to the lands discovered by Columbus. All others were forbidden to approach the lands and it also declared that "the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread."

The Declaration of Independence 1776

During the spring of 1776, colonies and groups of ordinary Americans adopted resolutions endorsing independence. These resolutions encouraged the Continental Congress to appoint a five member committee to draft a formal Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson wrote the initial draft of this document. The most radical idea advanced by the American revolutionaries was the proposition set forth that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Paul Revere's Engraving of The Boston Massacre 1770

Produced just three weeks after The Boston Massacre, Paul Revere's historic engraving, "The Bloody Massacre in King Street," was probably the most effective piece of war propaganda in American history. Not an accurate depiction of the actual event, it shows an orderly line of British soldiers firing into an American crowd and includes a poem that Revere likely wrote. Revere based his engraving on that of artist Henry Pelham, who created the first illustration of the episode – and who was neither paid nor credited for his work.

Surrender of the British General Cornwallis to the Americans 1781

Three documents – a map, a manuscript, and a print – tell the story of the surrender of British commander Charles Cornwallis to American General George Washington. In October of 1781, the successful siege of Yorktown, Virginia by General Washington ended major fighting in the American Revolution. Cornwallis raised a flag of truce after having suffered the American attack. On the morning of October 19, Cornwallis signed two copies of the Articles of Surrender.

Two Versions of the Preamble to the Constitution 1787

On May 25, 1787, the fifty-five delegates to the Constitutional Convention began meeting in a small room in Philadelphia's State House. They barred the press and public, and took a vow not to reveal to anyone the words spoken there. The convention lasted four months. The preamble of the working draft and the final version differ significantly. In the early draft of the preamble, delegates described themselves as representatives of "the States of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island," etc. The final version began "We the People of the United States," showing that in the six weeks time the idea of a united nation had been born.

Sale of Slaves from Waverly & Meredith Plantations 1855

A Sale of Slaves publication that was posted in 1855. The headline read, 178 Sugar and Cotton Plantation Slaves, March 12-14 1855. Details such as the names and ages and family members of each slave are dutifully recorded and posted.

Draft of Lincoln's House Divided Speech Circa 1857

The Dred Scott decision in 1857 affirmed that no slave or descendant of a slave could ever be a U. S. citizen. It ignited jubilation in the South and fierce protests in the North. It strengthened the bonds among abolitionists, Republicans, and moderates in the North. These events moved Abraham Lincoln to take a public stand against slavery. In this handwritten speech fragment from 1857, Lincoln identifies slavery as a moral issue that threatened the existence of the United States. Invoking the famous biblical words, "A house divided against itself cannot stand," he declared, "I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall; but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.

The Surrender of Robert E. Lee 1865

In 1865 Lee wrote to Ulysses S. Grant and asked to meet to discuss surrender terms while troops were still fighting at Appomattox Court House. By the end of the day Lee had accepted Grant's terms. The next day Lee issued General Order No. 9, a farewell message to his troops, explaining why he surrendered. The war was over.

The Thirteenth Amendment 1865

An image of Abraham Lincoln's Thirteenth Amendment, February 1, 1865, containing the article, resolutions and names and signatures of all the Senate and House of Representatives who participated in its creation.

IDI is very gratified to play a key role in the ongoing digitization and preservation of our nation's most important historical documents for all of its citizens.