1. Project Summary

The Georgia Open History Library: From Colony to Statehood (GOHL) digitized and made openly available nearly 50 previously out-of-print single-authored scholarly titles and two multivolume series originally published by the University of Georgia Press. Selected by a statewide advisory board and involving 8 statewide partners, the digital GOHL titles have garnered more than 25,000 users since the online publication launched with accompanying interactive exhibit in September 2021.

2. Project Origins and Goals

In anticipation of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States in 2026, we proposed a project that would anticipate a significant anniversary of Georgia’s journey from colony to statehood—an occasion that guarantees a measure of popular interest in the form of symposia, press coverage, public programming, and classroom exercises. The project also presented an opportunity for early Americanists, who often toil in relative obscurity, to find larger, more public audiences for their work and to connect these primary documents to the citizens of the thirteenth colony. The GOHL open digital editions of out of print UGA Press titles focused on Georgia’s relationship with other groups, colonies, countries, and the new Union. The title selection included studies of Adams and Jefferson; the American Revolution in Georgia; the Creek Nation; the papers of Revolutionary War General Lachlan McIntosh and the colony’s visionary founder James Edward Oglethorpe; and records of the German-speaking Protestant Salzburger settlement.

The majority of the GOHL volumes are primary sources, documents, and records that have been the wellspring for most of the research on this period in Georgia history since their original publication. The value of the GOHL was increased significantly not only by the open digital format but also by the commissioning of new forewords written by a diverse group of contemporary historians, which added critical historiographic context. As such, we succeeded in our goal of creating an open digital collection that constitutes the most fulsome portrait of early Georgia and its inhabitants—European, Indigenous, and diasporic African—available from primary sources.

3. Project Activities, Team, and Participants

When we became aware of the Humanities Open Book funding opportunity, the Press convened an internal group to review our backlist for potential groupings of out of print titles that would fit an appropriate theme. We immediately realized that we had a significant cluster of OP titles that would work with the upcoming US@250 anniversary of the founding. We immediately knew that any such project on early Georgia should involve statewide partners. In this regard, we were
lucky in that Georgia has a robust and active network of nonprofit humanities and historical organizations. We were able to get immediate commitments from the following partners who joined us at an in-person meeting in 2019 to select the UGA Press backlist titles for the GOHL: UGA’s Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library; the Digital Library of Georgia; the UGA Willson Center for Arts and Humanities; Georgia Humanities; the New Georgia Encyclopedia; Georgia Historical Society; and the Atlanta History Center. This advisory board also assessed the scholarly significance of each work and suggested experts in the field to write new forewords for each of the books, as well as advised on statewide programming ideas.

Our original work plan kicked off in May 2019 and was designed to conclude the project in April 2022. However, in March 2020 the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and all its related uncertainties complicated everything, requiring us to request a one-year extension of the grant period and revise our timeline. The challenges caused by the pandemic included delays from scholars who’d agreed to write forewords, internal staff illness, turnover, and vacancies that slowed our internal workflow, an institutional budget cut and recession that affected our operations, and difficulty booking institutional host sites for the traveling exhibit owing to closures.

We had to adjust the time allowed for the copy editing, typesetting, digitization, and conversion, in part owing to the pandemic-related delayed submission of the final batch of new forewords but also owing to the Press’s need to bring all typesetting for its publications in-house for FY21 as a means of budget savings made imperative by recession-driven budget uncertainty.

These delays and adjustment required us to change the publication date of the GOHL from March 30, 2021, to October 15, 2021. In retrospect, a March publication date was unrealistic even without the added complications of the pandemic. Moving the pub date to October gave us time to carefully and thoroughly complete the production and digitization process, as well as announce the GOHL series in our Fall 2021 seasonal catalog. This change actually made much more sense for the successful launch of the project. Our new plan, as follows, was approved in December 2020:

**May 2019- January 2021**
Content Phase: select titles, secure permissions, commission new forewords, transmit in batches to Production over three publication seasons

**April 2020 – May 2021**
Production Phase: digitization of OP titles; copy editing, design, and layout of new material; new covers designed; file prep by external vendor

**June 2021-October 2021**
Metadata and File Distribution Phase: creation of MARC records and metadata; dissemination of files to various vendors and platforms

**November 2021-April 2023**
Marketing and Promotion Phase: project/exhibit launch with keynote speaker; statewide institutional exhibits; academic conference displays; publicity and advertising
The pandemic altered our public engagement plans, but thanks to burgeoning virtual options, we were able to creatively respond to the new challenges. Designed by the staff at the UGA Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, an exhibit based on the Georgia Open History Library opened in September 2021, running through December 2021. The exhibit included 4 tabletop displays of select primary documents now digitized in the project, 2 iPads for accessing the digital GOHL ebooks, and overview text about the importance of the project.

Historian Catherine Kerrison, who wrote the new foreword to the GOHL edition of *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf*, gave a virtual public lecture on October 12 via Zoom, with no tour or reception as originally planned. Kerrison’s talk is available for viewing on YouTube, as is the Hargrett GOHL digital exhibition.

4. Project Outcomes

The result of the grant is an open digital library of 46 primary documents, scholarly editions, and scholarly studies updated with new forewords, freely and accessibly available across multiple digital platforms, as well as in saleable print editions

Our target audience was students, teachers, scholars, librarians, and citizens throughout the state and beyond who might use the GOHL as an important resource for understanding the founding of the state and the nation.

We reached these audiences through the following public engagement and promotional strategies:

GOHL Exhibit Schedule

- Opening at Hargrett Library, UGA, Fall 2021
- Albany State University, April - May 2022
- Columbus State University, April 2022
- Emory University, March - April 2022
- Georgia Highlands College, March 2022
- Georgia Institute of Technology, April 2022
- Georgia Archives, July-August 2022
- Atlanta History Center, August 2022
- Georgia Southern University Lane Library (Savannah), September 2022
- Georgia Southern University Henderson Library (Statesboro), September 2022
- Georgia State University (Atlanta), November 2022
- Georgia State University (Clarkson), November - December 2022
- Mercer University, March 2022
- Savannah State University, October 2022

Academic Conferences (promoted at UGA Press book exhibit)
- Southern Association of Women Historians, June 2022
- Society for the History of the Early American Republic (SHEAR), July 2022
- Southern Historical Association, October 2022
- Organization of American Historians, April 2022
- Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, October 2022
- Georgia Historical Association, February 2023

Additional promotion:

In a presentation with the **Georgia Genealogical Society (GGS)** in April 2023 the exhibit was presented and a link to the virtual exhibit was shared for use on their website. The focus of this presentation was the 15 volumes of the *Detailed Reports on the Salzburger Emigrants Who Settled America* and the single volume *Salzburgers and Their Descendants*. We advertised in and completed a print interview in the statewide GGS newsletter promoting the Georgia Open History Library and offered links to the GOHL titles hosted on the UGA Press Manifold site. We also sent the GOHL exhibit to the Alabama Genealogical Society for their annual meeting in 2022.

We worked with the **Georgia Historical Association** to advertise the GOHL program including the virtual exhibit and the open access titles hosted on the UGA Press Manifold site.

Lisa Bayer (UGA Press) and Katherine Stein (Hargrett Library) presented on the GOHL at the 2021 Georgia Library Conference. Their presentation covered the range of the collection; online access points; uses for students, teachers, scholars, and citizens; and connections to primary documents housed at UGA’s Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Former Metadata and Digital Publishing Coordinator Lana Brand, Editor Nate Holly (both UGA Press), and Katherine Stein presented on the GOHL at the June 2022 GALILEO (Georgia Library Learning Online) virtual conference. The presentation, entitled “Georgia Open History Library: An Innovative Use of Primary Resources,” is available on YouTube.

Lisa Bayer presented on the panel “Why Should We Care About Bibliodiversity in Academic Book Publishing? The Implications of Regional Identity for American University Presses” at the Charleston Conference, November 1-4, 2022, and the annual meeting of the Association of University Presses, June 2023. She used the GOHL project as an example of open access collaborative bibliodiversity with the UGA Libraries and other statewide partners and extensive public programming throughout Georgia.

The technical decisions for the project were made in close consultation with the UGA library faculty on our steering committee, including Digital Library of Georgia Director Sheila McAlister and Head of Cataloging Kelly Holt, as well as the Press’s Digital Publishing and Metadata coordinators. We could not have completed this project without their expertise and understanding of the digital information ecosystem and standards. We also benefited from our institutional relationship with the University System of Georgia (USG).
The GOHL ebooks are hosted by the USG’s Open Educational Resource (OER) repository, Affordable Learning Georgia. Additionally, the Press partnered with the Digital Public Library of America’s (DPLA) ebook initiative to make the titles available via the DPLA Exchange and Open Bookshelf projects. Titles were cataloged and records made available through WorldCat. The Digital Library of Georgia ingested metadata records and full-text into its Georgia portal and posted links to the open titles on its K-12 Educator resource site. As a service hub, the DLG funnels its metadata to the DPLA’s main portal, where the books were made discoverable. Titles are available and discoverable as open digital editions across a broad range of aggregators and sites, including the UGA Press Manifold platform; EBSCO ebooks Open Access Monograph Collection; Project MUSE; Books at JSTOR; and HathiTrust.

Additionally, we asked CodeMantra, our file prep vendor, to follow Universal Design for Learning principles in ensuring that the ebooks, including images, are accessible for all learners. We assigned a CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0 for all books. The license allows users to share the material widely for non-commercial purposes and compels those who transform the material to distribute their work under the same license terms.

5. Project Evaluation and Impact: usage metrics

Open access library aggregators have a far and wide reach. Since the ingestion and distribution of GOHL titles in September 2021, over 25,000 users have accessed the materials. JSTOR and Project Muse had high visitor counts as access to these platforms is often available to researchers via their institutions’ libraries and research centers. JSTOR, most noticeably, received 11,074 visits from 125 countries from September 2021 to August 2023. At Project Muse, 6,083 people visited GOHL titles from 69 countries.

On a more local—but not insignificant—scale, the Digital Library of Georgia (DLG)-hosted GOHL titles have received over 3,000 interactive visits to the collection since 2021. The metadata from the DLG feeds out to the Digital Public Library of America, which increases visibility of the collection by circulating metadata and catalog records of GOHL. The Press also leveraged its Manifold app, where additional open access titles published by the Press can be found, to host GOHL titles. The collection had an impressive 7,576 unique visits, with every title accessed at least once. Visits to the Manifold app and the DLG are not restricted to library users and can be found via text searches in popular internet search engines, meaning that anyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status or access to library materials, can access GOHL titles.

**JSTOR**

11,074 visitors accessed the collection from these countries:

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Moldova
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Morocco
Myanmar (Burma)
Nepal
Netherlands
New Zealand
Nigeria
Norway
Pakistan
Palestinian Territories
Panama
Papua New Guinea
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Puerto Rico
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Serbia
Seychelles
Singapore
Slovakia
Slovenia
South Africa
South Korea
Spain
Sri Lanka
St. Lucia
Sweden
Switzerland
Taiwan
Tanzania
Thailand
Trinidad & Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
U.S. Virgin Islands
Uganda
Ukraine
United Arab Emirates
United Kingdom
United States
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Vatican City
Vietnam
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Project Muse

6,083 visitors accessed the collection from these countries:

Albania
Belarus
Belgium
Bulgaria
Cambodia
Canada
China
Costa Rica
Czech Republic
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
6. Project Continuation and Long-Term Impact

We consider the GOHL project to have been extremely successful and to have accomplished the goals we set out in our initial summary of the project:

“When shared broadly in a permanent, accessible, discoverable format via multiple online platforms, the [GOHL] collection will be an invaluable resource to both general readers and scholars. A key component of our promotional strategy is public-facing programming with a diverse group of statewide organizations, colleges, universities, historical societies, academic organizations, and public and research libraries.”

The diversity of statewide partners, enthusiastic response from the scholarly community, attendance at public events, interest in hosting the collection throughout the state at a wide variety of institutions and organizations, and, most important, robust global usage metrics across platforms and hosting sites prove, to our mind, that opening scholarship in this way both serves the public good and is of interest to a broad range of audiences.

This project also allowed for a deeper introduction to Open Access publishing for the UGA Press staff, as well as for the authors commissioned to contribute new forewords for the individual titles in the collection. Historians are reputed to be most resistant to OA scholarship, so perhaps by involving historians and other humanities scholars in this project, we helped to expand their understanding of the benefits of OA.

As a result of the success of GOHL, the UGA Press is working with GALILEO/the University System of Georgia on a new funded Open Access pilot involving our new and
backlist titles, while at the same time we expand our participation in other funded Open Access initiatives including Path to Open and Knowledge Unlatched. Our long-term goal is to continue to add OA titles to the GOHL collection building on and learning from the initial experience with the funded project.

We are grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities Humanities Open Book program for providing funding for this project, which is now a critical resource for learning about early America.