

# A Guide to the Lura Royall and Vladimir Sournin Correspondence, 1904-1925

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1904-1925

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## History

**Processed by:** Dale Dulaney

## Title Statement

A Guide to the Lura Royall and Vladimir Sournin Correspondence, 1904-1925

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## Profile Description

**Creation:** Machine-readable finding aid derived from being created directly into EAD, created by Bari Helms, 8 February 2013

**Language Usage:** Description is in English

## Revision Description

**2013-11-21** Converted to schema conforming EAD by dtd2schema.vh.xsl.

## Descriptive Summary

### Barcode number

1199407

### Language

English

### Collector

Lunenburg County (Va.) Circuit Court

### Physical Characteristics

.45 cu. ft. (1 box)

### Location

Library of Virginia

## Repository

The Library of Virginia

# Administrative Information

## Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

## Acquisition Information

These items came to the Library of Virginia in transfers of court papers from Lunenburg County.

## Preferred Citation

Lura Royall and Vladimir Sournin Correspondence, Lunenburg County (Va.) Clerk's Records, 1904-1925. Local government records collection, Lunenburg County Court Records. The Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia 23219.

# Biographical Information

Vladimir Sournin was born in 1875 into a military family in Mstislavl, Russia. In St. Petersburg, Russia, he became an expert chess player, sharpening his game under a world champion. While continuing his education in Paris, he became enamored of the American cause during the Spanish-American War and volunteered for the U.S. Army infantry. Afterwards he stayed in Washington, D.C., and began a career with the U.S. Geological Survey as a cartographer, eventually being recognized as one of the country's best draftsmen. He completed a well regarded survey of the Panama Canal Zone, then under construction, and was awarded a presidential medal for his work there.

After World War I, Sournin collaborated with General John J. "Black Jack" Pershing, leader of the American Expeditionary Force in The Great War, to create a map identifying Native Americans' contributions to the war effort. Famed American Indian photographer Joseph K. Dixon personally supervised the map project and department store magnate Rodman Wannamaker funded the effort.

Sournin made his mark in the American chess community. Considered to be a near-master player, he defeated a reigning world champion in 1908 and was a five-time Washington, D. C., Capital City Chess Club champion in the 1920s and 1930s.

Sournin also began a singing career in the 1920s as "Vladimir Sournin, The Russian Baritone." He died in 1942 in Baltimore and is buried in Baltimore National Cemetery. He is still known in chess circles for his skills, and his matches are still studied.

Born in Lunenburg County, Virginia, in 1879, Lura Royall had a 21-year teaching career in Lunenburg County until she was forced to retire in 1924 after contracting tuberculosis. Royall died in 1980 at the age of 101 and is buried in the Tussekiah Baptist Church Cemetery in Lunenburg County.

The relationship between Lura Royall and Vladimir Sournin began in 1889 when he was in his early twenties and she was 19. The two carried on correspondence until 1925. Neither ever married.

# Scope and Content

The Lura Royall and Vladimir Sournin Correspondence, 1904-1925, consist of 97 letters and postcards that were part of several cubic feet of papers left in the old Lunenburg courthouse by former Lunenburg County Clerk John L. Yates. The majority of the letters were written by Vladimir Sournin and document his relationship with Lura Royall and allude to their possible marriage. Sournin's letters document his chess career, his work with the United States Geological Survey as a cartographer, and his singing career. Sournin also discusses conducting a survey in the Panama Canal Zone and his subsequent lectures about the canal in the U.S. and Europe. One letter, dated March 1915, briefly mentions World War I. Information about Lura Royall's family and social life in Lunenburg County and Washington, D.C., can also be uncovered in the correspondence. Also included in the correspondence are copies of letters sent to Vladimir Sournin from photographer Joseph K. Dixon.

# Index Terms

## Persons:

Royall, Lura (1879-1980).  
Sournin, Vladimir (1875-1942).

## **Subjects:**

Canals--Panama.  
Cartography.  
Chess.  
Love-letters.  
Panama Canal (Panama).

## **Geographical Names:**

Lunenburg County (Va.)--History.

## **Genre and Form Terms:**

Correspondence.  
Photographs.  
Postcards.

## **Added Entry - Corporate Name:**

Lunenburg County (Va.) Circuit Court.

## **Arrangement**

Arranged chronologically.