For More Information: Lea McLees, 404.727.0211, lmclees@emory.edu.

For Immediate Release

“CHINA ON MY MIND” EXHIBIT TRACES EMORY GRADUATE’S INFLUENCE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY CHINA

Selections from the archives of a Georgian who became one of the most influential foreigners in nineteenth century China will be displayed starting Oct. 12 in the Emory University Library’s Robert W. Woodruff Library.

The work of Emory College graduate Young John Allen (1836–1907), a missionary, journalist, translator, publisher and educator, is the subject of “China on My Mind: Young John Allen’s Journey from Emory to Shanghai.” The display of letters, journals, photographs, rare books, writings and artifacts celebrates Allen’s achievements as a mediator between East and West. It also recalls Emory’s long-standing ties to China, Japan and Korea, says Eric Reinders, associate professor of religion and one of the exhibition’s curators.

“The first international students at Emory, T. H. Yun from Korea and T. K. Tsong from China, arrived at Oxford in 1892 after studying with Allen at the Anglo-Chinese College in Shanghai,” said Reinders. “Currently, there is a lot of interest in this collection among Chinese scholars, which just goes to show that even today, Allen is the basis of internationalization at Emory.”

Little known in his native Georgia today, Allen graduated from Emory College in 1858 and married a fellow Georgian, Mary Houston, the following day. The next year the couple departed for missionary service in China, representing the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.
Shortly after the Allens arrived in Shanghai, the U.S. Civil War began. For the next five years the Methodist Church was unable to send any funds to its missionaries in China. As a result, Allen sought work in a variety of secular professions. Though he continued to preach, he gained his most lasting fame through other endeavors. Allen edited various newspapers, among them the *Wanguo gongbao (A Review of the Times)*, the single most influential news magazine in nineteenth-century China, said Joachim Kurtz, assistant professor of Chinese.

“Allen’s writings helped to inspire Chinese scholars and officials calling for social and political reforms,” Kurtz said. “He helped to communicate Western concepts of economics, international relations, natural science and gender equality to an increasingly receptive Chinese reading public.”

Allen also founded and supported educational institutions, such as the Anglo-Chinese College in Shanghai and Suzhou University. After 47 years in Shanghai, he died there 100 years ago, in 1907.

Allen’s personal papers, housed in Emory University’s Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library (MARBL), are one of the richest collections documenting the life and works of any individual China missionary held in the United States, according to Reinders. The 36-box assemblage includes diaries, letters, photographs, missionary lists, clippings and subject files, sermons, essays, printed works and personal possessions. The initial donation of 10 boxes was received before 1966, with major additions arriving in 1966 and 1994.

The exhibition was curated by Kurtz and Reinders in collaboration with Andrew P. Addington, Yen C. Chiu, and Phylicia S. Wu, and Naomi Nelson, assistant director of MARBL.

Exhibition sponsors include Emory University’s MARBL, East Asian Studies program, Scholarly Inquiry and Research at Emory program, the Department of Russian and East Asian Languages and Cultures, the Department of Religion, the Transforming Community Project and the Robert W. Woodruff Library.

The exhibition is free and open to the public between Oct. 12, 2007 and Jan. 15, 2008 on the second floor of the Robert W. Woodruff Library, 540 Asbury Circle, Atlanta, Ga. 30322. For more information, you may call 404.727.6887 or send e-mail to marbl@emory.edu.

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