

Findings of the Penn Slavery Project, Semester Two

Introduction

As conversations around slavery and its connections to colonial institutions – specifically to colonial Universities – expands around the country, the Penn Slavery Project is seeking to bring the University of Pennsylvania into this conversation. Penn is uniquely placed among colonial colleges, as it is one of the oldest and is located in the city that is commonly hailed as the birthplace of American abolition.

One of the most important questions that must be considered when addressing an institution's connection to slavery is that of complicity. From our perspective as researchers, Penn's complicity does not necessarily mean the University actively and persistently owned enslaved people, but rather it speaks to the ways that Penn, as a colonial University, was both reliant on and contributed to America's status of a slave society. It's dangerous to put too much emphasis on the definition of complicity or to challenge what constitutes direct involvement in slavery and the slave trade, as it can shift the focus away from the facts of Penn's connection to the institution of slavery, instead getting trapped in comparing Penn to other schools. When we only acknowledge Penn's ties to slavery in the context of them being "not as egregious as other schools", we do a disservice to the memory of those who suffered under the systems of oppression that were perpetuated by Penn's active involvement in the maintenance of chattel slavery.

In order to handle our findings in a moral way, it is important to first evaluate what we uncover in terms of Penn's connection to slavery independent of other schools so as not to minimize the significance of our findings.

Part I: Last Semester's Findings

Last semester, our focus was primarily on the early trustees of the University and their connection to slavery and the slave trade. We began by looking at biographies of the trustees on the University Archives website. We looked for those who were merchants or involved in medicine or trade, as they were most likely to have explicit connections to slavery, whether it is through their direct ownership of enslaved people or by simply trading goods produced by enslaved populations. We moved forward by examining the tax records of the trustees who we had identified.

We discovered what we came to refer to as stories of contradiction. In the 18th century, the University had a total of 126 trustees. Of them, we chose to examine more closely 28, and of that number, we found certain proof that 20 of them owned enslaved people at one point in their life. It is important to clarify that what this ownership looked like was different depending on the trustee. Some, like Benjamin Chew, owned many slaves – at least 52 in 1747.¹ Others, like Joseph Reed, owned one enslaved person and played a role in abolitionist work. Joseph Reed, when he served as Governor of Pennsylvania, wrote the preamble to the Gradual Abolition Act of Pennsylvania.²

These are just two examples of many complex stories of the early trustees of the University, and, more importantly, of the enslaved people they owned. These men, some of the most powerful and prominent in Pennsylvania, gained this power and wealth through their

¹ Nancy E. Richards, "The City Home of Benjamin Chew, Sr., and his Family A Case Study of the Textures of Life," Cliveden of the National Trust, Inc., 1996, <http://www.cliveden.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Benjamin-Chew-townhouse.pdf>.

² Ancestry Library. "Joseph Reed 1774 tax records from Philadelphia County, in Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768-1801." Accessed October 26, 2017. <http://bit.ly/2keq4Zh>; *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed*, ed. Charles R. Hildeburn, (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1847), 176.

involvement with the slave trade and their exploitation of enslaved labor, either directly through ownership of enslaved people or more indirectly through trade with slave-produced goods. Despite the fact that many of the trustees were involved in abolitionism, these men and their stories are linked inextricably both to slavery and to the early management of the University.

Part II: Questions of this Semester

Coming into this semester, it was important to us as a group that we expand our focus outside the lives of the white men who were the trustees of the University. We hoped to look more into the lives of those people who these men enslaved, something that we have found to be very difficult, but have continued attempting.

We identified a few main paths that we wanted to trace moving forward this semester. First was the building of the physical University. We knew that many of the buildings in the area where the original campus existed were built using enslaved labor or at least with bricks that were produced using enslaved hands. We hoped to examine documents that describe the creation of these buildings and the people who were contracted to do the labor for it to trace the connections to slavery. We also felt very confident that we would find connections between the medical school and slavery, particularly in the south. Based on information we learned first semester and context provided to us by Mark Lloyd, the University Archivist, we knew that the medical school that would eventually become a part of the University had many connections to the south of the country. The medical school was the first one in the American colonies, founded in 1765. Even when other medical schools emerged, the one at Penn was the most prestigious and geographically the one located farthest to the south. For these reasons, many wealthy slaveholding families sent their children to Philadelphia where they would study at Penn's medical school and then return to the south with the knowledge they gained here. This meant that there were doctors being trained at Penn's medical school who were able to pay for their schooling because of their wealth, gained through slavery. They would return to their plantations, to slave trading ports, to governmental positions where they would defend slavery,

examine enslaved bodies to assign value to them. Finally, we hoped to examine the legacy of slavery on campus today. Where can we see remnants of enslaved labor on our current campus? Where are there tributes to those who benefitted from, advocated for, or fought against slavery at Penn today?

Part III: Findings of this Semester

Many of the questions that we asked we were able to begin finding answers to in our research this semester. We uncovered information regarding George Whitefield's ties to the University. Whitefield is often considered the founder of Methodism, and for many years he was known to condemn the horrors of slavery. Later in his life, though, he moved to Georgia. While there, he purchased a plantation in South Carolina as a means of maintaining financial income for an orphanage he had established in Georgia. When he realized how profitable slavery was, he began campaigning for its reestablishment in Georgia, where it previously had been abolished. Partially as a result of his efforts, the colony legalized slavery once more.³ In the Quadrangle, the main freshman dorm on Penn's current campus, there is a statue of George Whitefield, under which is an inscription that reads "The University of Pennsylvania held its first sessions in a building erected for his congregations and was aided by his collections, guided by his counsel and inspired by his life." There is a lot of conversation across the country today regarding the legacies of racism as embodied in statues, and it is clear that the University has its own questions regarding this matter that we need to consider.

Another significant finding was related to a man named Ebenezer Kinnersley. Kinnersley was a professor of English and Oratory at the University, and he partnered with Benjamin Franklin in his research on electricity. He was named a faculty master of the school's first dormitory. On January 29th, 1757, there is a note in one of the Trustees' Day Books which notes their payment to Kinnersley for the use of his slave's labor. By their own description, the

³ Joel McDurmon, "Slavery at Bethesda: Et Tu, Whitefield?" The American Vision, February 13, 2018.

payment is for “his negroes Services at the Academy in Ringing the Bell making Fires”.⁴ This is one of the most direct connections to slavery that we have come across in our research.

My portion of the research this semester focused on findings from the trustee’s minute books. In the period before the revolution, what was then still the Academy was struggling financially. The trustees decided that steps needed to be taken to ensure its continued existence. During the meeting of the trustees on October 22nd, 1771, the trustees came to the decision to send a fundraising trip to South Carolina. “The Members are unanimously of Opinion, that Dr. Smith be desired to take a Journey to the Southern Colonies as far as South Carolina, to solicit contributions for the use of the College.” The Dr. Smith in reference is that Robert Smith, the first provost of the University, who owned two enslaved people during his time at the University. We believe that these enslaved people likely lived on campus with him. In December of 1771, Provost Smith left for South Carolina to raise funds for the school.

While he was in South Carolina, Provost Smith solicited donations from 98 people for varying amounts, totaling £7,195 in South Carolina dollars, which equated to £1,027 sterling. The Trustees minutes list the name of every donor next to the dollar amount of their donation. The list comprises many names of people who were in the South Carolina elite. That is to say, it is for all intents and purposes a list of many of the wealthiest slaveholding individuals and families in Charleston at the time.⁵ In order to better understand who exactly was making these donations, I will highlight just a few of the individuals and describe their connections to slavery.

⁴ Henry Hill, *Day Book Belonging to the Trustees of the Academy of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1779, 39.

⁵ William Coleman, *Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania Minute Books*, Volume 2, 1749-1768 (College, Academy and Charitable School). Vol. 1. Philadelphia 1749-1768, 48-49.

The Honorable Henry Middleton Esq., was an incredibly prominent politician in South Carolina. He was a member of the continental congress before the colonies declared independence. The Middleton family was one of the largest slaveholding families in the South Carolina colony. In fact, at the time of his death in 1784, Henry Middleton is recorded to have owned 199 enslaved persons on his family's plantation.⁶ During the 1771 fundraising trip, Henry Middleton made a donation of £350 in South Carolina currency, or £50 sterling. Miles Brewton was another prominent South Carolinian who donated during the fundraising trip. He was the colony's largest slave trader in 1771, and was one of the wealthiest men in the province. He profited hugely from his involvement in the slave trade. He made a donation of £175 in South Carolina currency, £25 sterling.⁷

The single largest donor on the South Carolina trip was a man named Gabriel Manigault. Manigault was a merchant and banker, and was reputed to be the single wealthiest man in South Carolina, and perhaps the entirety of British North America in 1770, one year before the fundraising trip. There exists some documentation that suggests he was morally opposed to slavery. That being said, though, he was in fact a slave trader. He is documented as having traded slaves eleven separate times, three of which are large enough that they were likely entire ships of enslaved Africans; somewhere between 40 and 50 enslaved people in each boat. At the time of his death, he owned 300 enslaved persons on his estate. An inventory of his estate itemized the many enslaved persons in his possession, listing their names and monetary

⁶ Walter B. Edgar and N. Louise Baily eds., *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Volume II, The Commons House of Assembly, 1692-1775*, (University of South Carolina Press: Columbia, South Carolina), 458-460.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-97.

values.⁸ Manigault donated £700 in South Carolinian currency, equaling £100 sterling. His son, Peter Manigault, donated an additional £147 SC currency, £21 sterling.

After the success of the South Carolina fundraising trip, the University decided to send a similar trip to the British West Indies, beginning in Jamaica in 1772. Because of a hurricane that had struck the islands that year, they ultimately decided only to fundraise in Jamaica, feeling it would be imprudent to ask for money while they were attempting to rebuild. For the fundraising trip, Dr. John Morgan was sent. Dr. Morgan was the founder of the medical school, and owned at least one enslaved person in 1769, four years before he went to Jamaica. While there, he solicited donations from 277 people, totaling roughly £6,100 in Jamaican currency. This amount equals £4,357 sterling, nearly quadruple the amount that was raised in South Carolina.⁹

While I have not yet been able to find information on most of the donors from Jamaica, based on the context and prominence of Jamaican slavery at the time it is safe to assume that many of the people whose names appear in the trustees' minutes were intimately connected to slavery or the slave trade. The instructions that the trustees gave to Dr. Morgan were explicit in how they wanted him to collect the donations. He was told to spend time in the city, and then to visit the estates and plantations of those he thought most likely to donate. In other words, Dr. Morgan was visiting the homes of wealthy Jamaican families, where sometimes hundreds or

⁸ Ibid., 428; Inventory of the estate of Gabriel Manigault, Charleston District, South Carolina, Inventory Book A (1783-1787), 434-437; digital images, [Fold3.com](https://fold3.com), accessed 20 April 2018; Inventory of the estate of Peter Manigault, South Carolina Inventories, Vol. 8 (1772-1776), 411; digital image, [Fold3.com](https://fold3.com), accessed 20 April 2018; Maurice A. Crouse, "Gabriel Manigault: Charleston Merchant, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Oct. 1967), 220-231.

⁹ Coleman, 73-79; John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America: 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

even thousands of people were enslaved. While he was there, he was probably served by enslaved people, and certainly witnessed the horrors of Jamaican slavery firsthand.¹⁰

¹⁰ Coleman, 54-56.

Part IV: Where to Go from Here

The most important next step in light of our findings this semester is that the research needs to continue, and should certainly be led by undergraduates as it has been thus far. Our group is agreed that as we continue to do more research, we find more lines of inquiry that we want to follow and that are necessary in order to fully understand even the general picture of the early University's ties to slavery and the slave trade. The continued support of the history department and the Provost's office's is instrumental in the continuation of this project in coming years. In its ideal form, the research project would be structured as an independent study as it has been that students can enroll in and which is overseen both by Professor Kathleen Brown and a PhD Candidate in the History Department who is well versed in this type of research work to support the students as they continue the work. Student researchers have to look more into the medical school, and continue to work at finding stories of those enslaved people whose lives were most directly impacted by trustees and attendees of the University, to continue the work researching who the donors were to the University as well as where exactly that money was going and what portion of the overall endowment at the time it made up.

It is also crucially important as more of this research comes to light, that the University begin to think about the next steps from the administration. In order to do this in the best way possible, administrators need to work with the populations and communities who have been most impacted by the reality of the University of Pennsylvania's connection to slavery. In other words, to form an appropriate response, administrators should work closely with both the African American community at Penn – students, staff, and faculty – and the surrounding

Philadelphia community whose lives continue to be affected every day by the decisions that the University makes.

Maintaining the academic integrity of the Penn Slavery Project is of the utmost importance. That being said, academia can often be remarkably exclusive and inaccessible. For this reason, the University should consider creating a website that is updated semi-annually with information about what the students are finding in a way that makes the information accessible to those who do not have the privilege of attending a top tier research institution like Penn. Transparency in our findings is the only way that we can be sure to maintain the morality of this project.

Similarly, the University should begin to reckon with the testaments to slavery that remain on our campus. Ten of the dorm buildings within the Quad are named after slave owners, in addition to many of our other academic buildings. We have statues across campus that honor people who owned enslaved people and benefitted from the violations of enslaved people. The answer is not always so simple as renaming these buildings or removing the statues – that would be the easy way out. Removing names and statues sometimes only erases the history as opposed to taking steps towards retribution. Truly reckoning with the implications of these buildings and statues would mean working closely with communities both on and off campus to address their needs as they see them.

Part V: Bibliography

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