

Penn and Slavery Project

Research Report

Spring 2020

Conor Muller
University of Pennsylvania
cbmuller@sas.upenn.edu
May 2020

Introduction: College finances in the late eighteenth century

While neither the University of Pennsylvania nor its pre-1791 predecessor the College of Philadelphia were themselves enslavers, their finances have been shown by the Penn and Slavery Project to be both inextricable from the proceeds of slavery and reflexive of the connection between enslavement and wealth in colonial and early national society.

In the University's early years its finances were much less robust than they are now. The trustees secured funding from donors, including and especially Pennsylvania's governor Thomas Penn, and rented out property in addition to income from student tuition.¹ In the 1760s and 1770s the trustees became increasingly keen to track down additional sources of revenue. The salaries of faculty and the construction and improvement of buildings placed severe burdens on the College's reserves of funds as it had to meet the double cost of meeting the College's existing obligations (especially staff salaries and building repairs) and of expansion through additional hiring and construction. The first campus around Fourth and Arch Streets was expanded from the 1750s and following the opening of Nassau Hall at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), the trustees understood that a dormitory was needed to accommodate students in Philadelphia, so one was constructed between 1759 and 1765.²

¹ Incoming payments for rented property can be found throughout the College's early financial records. For an example of an incoming rental payment (for Perkassie Manor), see the 1749-1779 Day Book, May 18, 1768, UPA 3, Archives General Collection of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1820, 87, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

² The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania, "The Early Years: The Charity School, Academy and College of Philadelphia," 1972, University of Pennsylvania Archives, <https://archives.upenn.edu/digitized-resources/docs-pubs/early-years-1972#container>.

There is no definitive evidence that enslaved people were involved in the construction of these new buildings.³ They would, however, be involved in paying for them, as to meet these increasing costs the trustees turned to another source of funds: donations, or subscriptions. From 1762, the College engaged in a series of fundraising drives. The first of these was to Britain, of which Pennsylvania was still one of thirteen North American colonies. Provost William Smith, himself known to enslave one person, departed for Britain in 1762 and returned in 1764.⁴ Then, in 1771, Smith departed on another fundraising trip, this time to the slave colony of South Carolina. The following year, professor of medicine John Morgan set off for Jamaica, another British slave colony, raising roughly four times the amount raised in South Carolina.⁵ The Penn and Slavery Project research has uncovered donations from enslavers and proponents of enslavement in records from all three fundraising trips.⁶

It is true that donations from enslavers provided a reasonably reliable revenue stream for other colleges too, not just Penn. In his book *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, Craig Steven Wilder outlines how they exploited connections and sent administrators and faculty to secure capital from enslavers. To give just two examples of many, the prominent North Carolina politician and serial enslaver Benjamin Smith donated 20,000 acres to the nascent University of North Carolina and the merchant Philip Livingston donated the money to have a Yale professorship named after him.⁷

³ Clay Scott Grabaud, "Documenting the University of Pennsylvania's Connection to Slavery," 2018, University of Pennsylvania Archives, https://archives.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CSGraubard_Documenting-the-University-of-Pennsylvanias-Connection-to-Slavery.pdf.

⁴ VanJessica Gladney, "Penn Trustees in the 18th Century," Penn and Slavery Project, 2018, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByhKPgmFDS9WSzh0S0E4dzVWcDdvRUppWmZjcWROSVdMN3hZ/view>.

⁵ Caitlin Doolittle student report, Penn and Slavery Project, Spring 2018.

⁶ For a summary, see <http://pennandslaveryproject.org/exhibits/show/finances>.

⁷ Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 100; Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy*, 77.

The College of Philadelphia was therefore no exception to the trend of early American universities partially funding their growth through funds solicited from anyone willing to donate, and as enslavers often had the financial resources to spare, they appear disproportionately as donors. The Penn and Slavery Project's research has highlighted how capital raised from the kidnapping, forced transportation and labor of enslaved people flowed from South Carolina, Jamaica and indeed Britain itself into the holdings of the College of Philadelphia. By sending Smith and Morgan to such places and through their solicitation of funds from enslavers, the College's trustees, often enslavers themselves, were actively and knowingly seeking out wealth extracted through enslavement and the exchange of enslaved human 'commodities'.

The Philadelphia collections, 1772

People enslaved on plantations or imprisoned on ships sailing from Africa to the New World were not the only enslaved people involved in the College's fundraising drives. In 1772, while Dr. Morgan was raising funds for the College in Jamaica, Provost Smith was once more seeking further donations. This time, they were to come not from planters or Britain and its slave traders, but from residents of the city of Philadelphia. The minutes of a meeting of the Board of Trustees on May 19, 1772 tell us that "Dr Smith reported that tho' upwards of £1200 were subscrib'd in Town for the College, yet there were still a great many well-disposed Persons to be called upon who would contribute, if he could find Time to wait upon them. He is therefore desired . . . to prosecute the Collection."⁸ Indeed, it should be noted that the efforts that followed this represented an

⁸ *Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania Minute Books*, vol. 2, 1768-1779, 1789-1791, 47, University of Pennsylvania Archives. The £1200 figure refers to the local Pennsylvania pound which was not equal in value to the British pound sterling.

intensification of existing local fundraising efforts by reaching out to both existing donors, like the Governor of Pennsylvania Thomas Penn, and new ones too.

It is clear that, just as was the case with the College's fundraising missions to Britain, South Carolina and Jamaica, Smith's Philadelphia collections were prompted by the precarity of the College's finances in the 1770s. Smith recorded the donations in a book, noting the value and origin of each donation. The list begins with a statement outlining the purpose of the collections and seeking agreement to donate:

“the Trustees . . . have set forth the necessity of making such addition to their Funds, as may enable them to compleat the necessary Repairs and additions to their Buildings, and to pay the Salaries of the Professors and Masters for the future, without Breaking in upon their Capital Stock, and have for that Purpose obtained very liberal Benefaction from generous Persons as well in the mother Country as some of the neighbouring Colonies, we the subscribers . . . do severally promise to pay . . . the sum which we have hereunder respectively subscribed.”⁹

In short, donors were told that the College was unable to meet its most basic financial obligations and that it would decline or disappear without the financial support it was hoping to receive from Britain, the colonies and from Philadelphia itself. The trustees' efforts to intensify the College's local fundraising efforts were therefore part of a wider attempt to raise money through

⁹ William Smith, *The Collection Books of Provost Smith* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 3.

subscriptions from the colonial population. Naturally, these private donors tended to be wealthier than usual, and wealthier people were more likely to be enslavers.

Research aims and questions

Previous Penn and Slavery Project research has found that fundraising efforts contributed significantly towards the College's wealth – the combined proceeds of the missions to South Carolina and Jamaica alone came to 14% of its total capital.¹⁰ The College also had a history of seeking out money obtained from the labor of enslaved people through targeting South Carolina, Jamaica and British port cities like Liverpool and Bristol for fundraising drives. The trustees had even explicitly instructed Dr. John Morgan to target enslavers during his time in Jamaica.¹¹ The College therefore owed a great deal of its early capital to enslavement, and collecting donations from enslavers was one important way in which it obtained its wealth. The Philadelphia collections of 1772 are the last of the fundraising drives launched by the trustees in the 1760s and 1770s not yet investigated by the Penn and Slavery Project.

The obvious questions that must be answered by an investigation of local donations to the College is simply how much was raised and how much of this amount came from donors who were also enslavers. An immediate answer to part of this question can be found in the introductory pamphlet, edited by Jasper Yeates Brinton and Neda M. Westlake, to the 1964 facsimile reproduction of The Collection Books of Provost Smith. The authors find that £1,839 had been collected or promised by the end of year, but it seems from the collection books that this figure counts duplicate entries

¹⁰ Based on an estimate of the College's total wealth of £14,000 in Alexis Broderick Neumann, "Summary of Research Progress," Penn and Slavery Project, Fall 2018, 5-6.

¹¹ *Minute Books*, vol. 2, 44.

twice.¹² The introduction is very favorable in tone toward Provost Smith (Yeates Brinton is one of Smith's descendants), fails to address slavery at all, does not include citations to back up its statements and in any cases focuses on Smith's time in Britain much more than it does on the Philadelphia collections.¹³ Yeates Brinton and Westlake are, however, correct to note that precise figures are difficult to ascertain as the funds seem to have been disbursed without formal acknowledgement in the financial records in many cases, but indicative numbers are certainly possible.¹⁴

Deeper research into the Philadelphia collections present the opportunity to produce more definitive figures. The city was not a planter society like South Carolina or Jamaica, nor was it an imperial metropole like Britain. It was a colonial city with a strong antislavery movement where the first legislation to ban slavery was less than a decade away. Indeed, the co-author of Pennsylvania's 1780 Gradual Emancipation Act (and future College trustee) is named among the donors in Smith's collection book.¹⁵ Despite this, as Gary Nash shows in *Forging Freedom*, professed Quaker abolitionists stubbornly held on to their enslaved people, and although urban slavery in the North was milder than its Southern variant, violence remained the key to depriving black Philadelphians of their freedom.¹⁶ The city was a diverse mixture of prominent white families, poor white laborers, indentured white servants and free and unfree black people. Provost Smith's collections can tell us how the College related to the city; how the donors as a cross-

¹² Jasper Yeates Brinton and Neda M. Westlake, *The Collection Books of Provost Smith* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 22.

¹³ Samuel Orloff student report, Penn and Slavery Project, Spring 2019.

¹⁴ Yeates Brinton and Westlake, *Collection Books*, 22.

¹⁵ This is Edward Biddle. See Craig W. Horle, Joseph S. Foster, Laurie M. Wolfe, *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 3, 1757-1775 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 340.

¹⁶ Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 12; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 32.

section of the College's social circles were different from the city's population as a whole. In sum, closer examination of the collections highlights the specific social strata in which the early College operated and how slavery was enmeshed in the economy and social structure of the theoretically freer North. THIS IS LOVELY==A GREAT WAY TO FRAME YOUR RESEARCH

Sources and findings: the city, its enslavers and the College of Philadelphia

In researching the Philadelphia collections, I have drawn upon several different sources to cross-reference the names of each of Smith's donors with records of ownership of enslaved people in Philadelphia and beyond. The collection books from both Philadelphia and Smith's mission to Britain have been reproduced as facsimiles. (The original is at the Kislak Center at the University of Pennsylvania's Van Pelt Library.)¹⁷ As part of this research, I transcribed the details of the name of each donor and how much they gave to the College onto a spreadsheet. The second important source is the dataset produced by Gary Nash and Billy Smith which matches Philadelphia's 1772 tax list with the 1775 constable's return.¹⁸ This includes the number of enslaved people and indentured servants recorded in tax documents around the time of Smith's collections. However, since it cannot be assumed from this data that any individual donor was not an enslaver, it is useful to use wills and tax records from other periods and places. I conducted further research using Ancestry.org and FamilySearch.org, on the top ten largest donors not listed as enslavers in Nash and Smith's dataset to locate additional enslavers among the donors. Finally, past Penn and Slavery Project research has produced a list of eighteenth-century College trustees and data about whether

¹⁷ "Original subscription list to the College, Academy &c., 1772," Ms. Coll. 599, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania. This is the original version of the book reproduced as a facsimile with Yeates Brinton and Westlake, *Collection Books*.

¹⁸ Gary B. Nash and Billy G. Smith, "Philadelphia 1772 Tax List (Complete) Matched with 1775 Constable's Returns," McNeil Center for Early American Studies, <https://repository.upenn.edu/mead/35/>.

or not each was an enslaver, and this was helpful in investigating the trustees who donated.¹⁹ All of these sources were combined to produce an estimate of the proportion of donors who were enslavers.

Compiling the data produces some surprising results. It is essential to note that all of the figures below are conservative – both ownership of enslaved people among donors and the proportion of the amount donated to the College coming from enslavers are almost certain to be higher as it is highly likely that many donors owned slaves outside of Philadelphia or who were not included in the city's records.²⁰ In total, Provost Smith recorded 172 donors in his collection book. Of these, slightly less than half (83) have been shown to have been enslavers. Between them they enslaved at least 165 people, or an average of about two each, and had in their service at least 46 indentured servants altogether. The amount raised in total came to £1433 in the local Pennsylvania currency. Of this, £940 18s., or 65.7%, came from donors who have been shown to be enslavers despite them making up a minority of individual donors. The disproportionate contribution of enslavers is further illustrated by their average donations. The mean amount donated by known enslavers was £11 6s., whereas for donors who are not known to have been enslavers the mean was only £4 16s. Enslavers therefore donated almost two and a half times more on average than non-enslavers.

These sums are not insignificant sums of money. To illustrate these figures in more meaningful inflation-adjusted 2019 dollars, nearly \$125,000 was raised in total, over \$82,000 of this from enslavers, producing an average enslaver's donation of \$985 in contrast to a mean of \$418 among

¹⁹ Gladney, "Penn Trustees in the 18th Century."

²⁰ The data includes only the known enslaved people included in official records, and even then donors are only taken to be enslavers when it is very likely that the name recorded in the collection books relates to the same person as the official record showing that the donor was an enslaver.

donors who are not known to have been enslavers.²¹ It is true that less was raised in Philadelphia than in other colonies. The College raised a total of \$143,000 from its fundraising in South Carolina and a staggering \$593,000 from Jamaican donors in 2019 US dollars.²² But the Philadelphia collections do illustrate several characteristics of late-colonial slavery and a further way in which the University drew its wealth from enslavers and indirectly from the transportation and labor of enslaved people.

Firstly, it is clear that slavery was alien to neither the College nor the city of Philadelphia. Even if, as Gary Nash has suggested, the institution was ‘dying’ in Philadelphia during the years before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, slavery cannot be externalized to Southern and Caribbean colonies.²³ There were plenty of people still enslaved in Philadelphia, plenty of people keeping them in chains and plenty of wealth still being expropriated from their labor, even if this was on a much smaller scale than on plantations. 469 (10.5%) of the 4485 people listed on Philadelphia’s 1772 tax list are listed as enslaving at least one person, a small proportion compared to planter societies, but it is still significant.²⁴ Furthermore, as the College’s fundraising in the city shows, enslavers continued to comprise in disproportionate numbers the social and financial elite. In addition to donating a majority of the proceeds of the College’s fundraising mission in

²¹ All figures are produced by using John J. McCusker’s tables to convert 1772 Pennsylvania pounds into 1991 US dollars and then inflation-adjusting to 2019 US dollars using the website MeasuringWealth.com. See table A-3 of John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1992), 333; MeasuringWealth.com, “How Much Is a Dollar from the past Worth Today?,” <https://www.measuringworth.com/dollarvaluetoday/>.

²² Caitlin Doolittle student report, Penn and Slavery Project, Spring 2018; converted into Pennsylvania currency using John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 186; inflation adjusted using McCusker, *How Much Is That In Real Money?*, 333; and MeasuringWealth.com, “How Much.”

²³ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 10.

²⁴ Nash and Smith, “Philadelphia 1772 Tax List.”

Philadelphia, enslavers were over four times as prevalent among the donors as they were among the city's population at large.²⁵

It is fair to argue that the 1772 Philadelphia collections constitute further evidence of the College's complicity in enslavement. While the trustees did not specifically instruct Smith to focus his fundraising efforts on Philadelphia's enslavers, this is more reflexive of the nature of enslavement in the city and in the Northeast than it is of any meaningful abolitionism on the part of the College. The lower but still disproportionate number of enslavers who donated highlights the intimacy of the College with enslavers both financially and through the city's elite social circles. This is made even clearer through the composition of the Board of Trustees. 60% of eighteenth-century trustees are known to have been enslavers.²⁶ Among the past, current and future trustees who donated to the Philadelphia collections in 1772, this figure was even higher at 80%.²⁷ Wealth and proximity to institutions of elite society like the College therefore correlate with enslavement. It may not have produced the wealth that flowed into the College's funds in quite the same way as it had for donations solicited on South Carolinian and Jamaican plantations, but as late as 1772 slavery was still an integral part of the elite Northeastern colonial society and social circles in which the College and University operated.

²⁵ Based on enslavers making up 48% of donors in Smith's collection book in comparison to 10.5% of those listed in the city's tax list in Nash and Smith, "Philadelphia 1772 Tax List."

²⁶ Gladney, "Penn Trustees in the 18th Century."

²⁷ Smith, *Collection Books*, cross-referenced with Gladney, "Penn Trustees in the 18th Century."

Conclusions

Unlike South Carolina and Jamaica, Philadelphia (and wider Pennsylvania) was not known for having an economy dependent on the labor of enslaved people. Provost Smith had, of course, visited Britain between 1762 and 1764, but he had spent a great deal of his time in cities intimately connected to slavery and the transportation of enslaved people like Liverpool and Bristol. The College's fundraising activities in Philadelphia are therefore a unique opportunity to assess the attitudes of its senior leaders toward enslavement in a city with an economy well along in its transition to wage labor. Although enslavement was still a central feature of social and economic life in late-colonial Philadelphia, it was not dominant in the way it was in the other places where trustees searched for donations. It might be expected that there would be many financial opportunities for the College to exploit that were not directly connected to enslavement. After all, this was the "Quaker city" where the first legislation against slavery in the Thirteen Colonies was only eight years away.²⁸

There are two reasons why this was not the course pursued by the trustees. Firstly, the leaders of the College were themselves hardly committed abolitionists, even if some of them may have been theoretically antislavery. Even Benjamin Franklin was still an enslaver in 1772 (although he was developing an opposition to slavery), and fellow trustee Benjamin Chew was hardly an outlier in enslaving fifty people on just one of his many plantations.²⁹ The College was not philosophically opposed to slavery at all. Secondly, the disproportionate presence and contribution of enslavers in and to the Philadelphia fundraising efforts highlights the degree to which enslavement continued

²⁸ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 11.

²⁹ Gary B. Nash, "Franklin and Slavery," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 150, no. 4 (2006), 631; Dillon Kersh student report, Penn and Slavery Project, Fall 2017.

to penetrate colonial society, even in Northeastern cities where it was in decline like Philadelphia. Enslavers made up a small minority of the population at large, but made up a much larger proportion, sometimes even a majority, of the wealthy and those in influential administrative and financial positions at institutions like the College of Philadelphia. In other words, where there was wealth and power, there was likely to be enslavement. In the absence of a conscious decision to reject enslavement on its part, the College was bound to become a beneficiary of both enslavers and the institution of slavery, such was its penetration into the tiers of society from which the College drew so much of its wealth and personnel.

Further research

Now that the Penn and Slavery Project research has investigated the College of Philadelphia's fundraising in Britain, South Carolina, Jamaica and Philadelphia, it would be useful to bring this work together. I have touched briefly on a quantitative comparison between these missions by comparing the overall figures of how much was raised. A qualitative analysis of the differences between the forms of enslavement from which the College appropriated its funds would complete this. (This was originally within the scope of this research, but the restriction of time and of primary material to digitized resources only by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic have made this impossible.) Equally, subscriptions were only one source of income. Research should continue to investigate student recruitment, as the importance of tuition receipts effectively means that student recruitment was a form of revenue-raising, especially if the choice of South Carolina and Jamaica as fundraising destinations turns out to indicate that connections to slave economies go deeper than just finance.

Conor, you have produced an excellent and tightly written research report based on really fine research. In non COVID conditions, this would have received at least an A; in light of the

circumstances and your persistence, despite an eviction from your dorm, the university, and the country, I am assigning an A+ for the report and for the semester.

Please make the small changes indicated here and send it back to VanJessica Gladney, who I will copy on this email. When you send it back to her, please also send her a picture and a short bio so she can include you on the website. If you want to send a self-video presentation (2-3 minutes?) you should feel free to do so.

Well done! Thank you for being such an engaged presence in the class, both in its live format and virtually.

Bibliography

- Doolittle, Caitlin. 2018. "Spring 2018 Research Report." Penn and Slavery Project, University of Pennsylvania.
- "Finances." n.d. Penn and Slavery Project. Accessed April 27, 2020.
<http://pennandslaveryproject.org/exhibits/show/finances>.
- Gladney, VanJessica. 2018. "Penn Trustees in the 18th Century." Penn and Slavery Project.
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByhKPgmFDS9WSzh0S0E4dzVWcDdvRUppWmZjcWROSVdMN3hZ/view>.
- Grabaud, Clay Scott. 2018. "Documenting the University of Pennsylvania's Connection to Slavery." University of Pennsylvania. https://archives.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CSGrabaud_Documenting-the-University-of-Pennsylvanias-Connection-to-Slavery.pdf.
- Horle, Craig W., Joseph S. Foster, and Laurie M. Wolfe. 2005. *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania: A Biographical Dictionary*. Vol. 3, 1757–75. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Kersh, Dillon. 2017. "Fall 2017 Research Report." Penn and Slavery Project, University of Pennsylvania.
- McCusker, John J. 1978. *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- . 1992. *How Much Is That in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States*. Worcester: American Antiquarian Society.
- Nash, Gary B. 1988. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- . 2006. "Franklin and Slavery." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 150 (4): 618–35.
- Nash, Gary B., and Billy G. Smith. 2018. "Philadelphia 1772 Tax List (Complete) Matched with 1775 Constable's Returns." <https://repository.upenn.edu/mead/35/>.
- Neumann, Alexis Broderick. 2017. "Summary of Research Progress." Penn and Slavery Project, University of Pennsylvania.
- Orloff, Samuel. 2019. "Spring 2019 Research Report." Penn and Slavery Project, University of Pennsylvania.

The Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania. 1768. “1749-1779 Day Book.” Archives General Collection of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1820. UPA 3. University of Pennsylvania Archives. Philadelphia.

———. 1772. “Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania Minute Books.” Digitized Resources. University of Pennsylvania Archives. Philadelphia.
<http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/codex/public/PageLevel/index.cfm?WorkID=820&Page=53>.

———. 1972. “The Early Years: The Charity School, Academy and College of Philadelphia.” Digitized Resources. University of Pennsylvania Archives. Philadelphia.
<https://archives.upenn.edu/digitized-resources/docs-pubs/early-years-1972#container>.

Wilder, Craig Stephen. 2013. *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Yeates Brinton, Jasper, and Neda M. Westlake. 1964. *Introduction to The Collection Books of Provost Smith*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.