The Medical School of Pennsylvania graduates and their impact on the medical field and American society, (1768 -1774)

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Introduction

As late as 2016, the University of Pennsylvania claimed that they had "no direct university involvement with slavery or the slave trade."[1] However, this was soon found to be false by Penn and Slavery Project researchers. The project found that not only did the university benefit from the institution of slavery in many different ways, but also had an enslaved man named Caesar working on Penn's campus during the 1760s.[2] This paper contributes to the Penn and Slavery Project by following the careers of those who graduated from the medical school graduates between 1768 and 1774 to assess their impact on the field of medicine and American society more broadly.

One of the first professors at the medical school was Dr. William Shippen Jr. To quote the Perelman School of Medicine's own description, he "delivered the first medical lectures at the College, establishing the roots of the institution that has profoundly shaped American medicine ever since."[3] The medical school acknowledges the impact Dr. Shippen, and by extension, the school had on the American medicine. Even before he was appointed a professor at the university, Dr. Shippen had started a course on anatomy in 1762.[4] He was appointed

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[1] Shella Simmons, "UPenn claims no traces of slavery in its DNA," *The Philadelphia Tribune,* September 9, 2016, https://www.phillytrib.com/commentary/upenn-claims-no-traces-of-slavery-in-its-dna-hmm/article_0d8072c4-96ff-5617-82d0-f00b0ab4c910.html.

[2] "Caesar's Bell," *Penn and Slavery project,* accessed November 30, 2022, http://pennandslaveryproject.org/exhibits/show/slaveownership/enslavedpeople/caesarsbell.

[3] "The William Shippen, Jr. Professorship of Obstetrics and Gynecology." *Perelman School of Medicine*, University of Pennsylvania, www.med.upenn.edu/endowedprofessorships/the-william-shippen,-jr.-professorship-of-obstetrics-and-gynecology.html. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

[4] Joseph Carson, *A History of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania, From Its Foundation In 1765: With Sketches of the Lives of Deceased Professors* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blakiston, 1869),40.

professor of anatomy at the College of Philadelphia on September 17th, 1765, a position he held until his death in 1808.[5] Even though Joseph Carson describes Dr. Shippen as "graceful, his manner polished, his conversation various", he was surrounded by controversy throughout his life.[6] He was accused of body snatching and had to defend himself in 1762 and in 1770. In 1765, his class was disrupted by a sailor's mob, when the sailors tried to retrieve the stolen corpse.[7] In 1780, he was court martialed, where he was accused of rarely being in his office, incompetence, and negligence.[8] This paper attempts to assess Shippen's impact by examining what his students did after their graduation.

Methodology

The first step of the research process was to learn more about the topic. As an international student, racial slavery was topic that I only learned about superficially through my AP history class. This meant that it was difficult for me to fully understand the emotion and the personal tragedies of the history that I was investigating. It is difficult to understand the suffering of people if it is boiled down to simple numbers and dates memorized for a test. The two texts that were key to supplementing my understanding were *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology* by Deidre Cooper Owens and *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* by Daina

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[5] Joseph Carson, 56.

[6] Joseph Carson, 105.

[7] Daina Berry, 183.

[8] Whitfield Bell, "The Court Martial of Dr. William Shippen, Jr., 1780," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 19, no. 3 (1964): 218–38, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24621429, 218.

Ramey Berry. These two books provided me with detailed accounts of what the lives of the enslaved population were like during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One striking point in both readings was the fact that white people didn't treat slaves as people. Every stage of their lives had a price on it, even post-mortem.[9] Whether it was at the slave market being sold, or being forced into medical experimentation by the doctors, the books vividly depicted how the enslaved population was treated as objects and could be commodified. This cruelty did not end with the death of an enslaved individual. Their body parts would be sold as souvenirs or for medical dissection.[10] Even the development of gynecological surgical skills which saved the lives of enslaved women were seen as a skill that could increase their owners' wealth.[11] Such commodification of human bodies sharpened my focus on how the medical field benefited from the bodies of enslaved people and what role the institution of slavery played in the development of American medicine.

After deciding on this topic, I had to decide whether I should focus on trying to bring out the hidden stories of those who suffered during this period, or on the individuals who perpetuated and participated in the institution of slavery. The final decision came from listening to Natasha A. Kelly's documentary *Rassismus. Kolonialismus. Heute – wie der Kolonialismus den Rassismus bis heute prägt.* The documentary argues that the discussion of colonial history and slavery should eventually move away from focusing on the perpetrators, since that erases the

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[9] Daina Berry, *The Price for their pound of flesh: the value of the enslaved from womb to grave in the building of a nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 7.

[10] Daina Berry, 101.

[11] Deirdre Owens, *Medical Bondage: Race, Gender, and the Origins of American Gynecology,* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 39.

agency of the people who suffered.[12] This discussion was taking place in the context of what Germany could be doing to advance their work on coming to terms with the atrocities of the Second World War, and how they can be the first country in Europe to take a meaningful first step in dealing with their colonial past. However, I believe that such discussion can only take place when the society in question reaches a certain willingness to process the past. In the present moment, the US has not achieved this willingness. In her book, Susan Neiman quite bluntly states that "America never did the hard work to face its past that Germany has done."[13] We still see in our society denial about what happened in the past, and we have yet to fully uncover everything there is to know. Thus, I chose to focus on the people who benefitted from the institution of slavery rather than those who suffered under it in the hopes of bringing to light who did what to perpetuate it.

In both of the aforementioned books, I noticed Philadelphia was mentioned multiple times as a place where corpses were liberally supplied.[14] Since the University of Pennsylvania holds the title of being the first medical school in the United States, Berry saw the connection between the two, and I wanted to investigate further. This led me to one of the founders of the medical school, Dr. William Shippen Jr., who was engulfed in controversy over the methods he used to acquire cadavers for his anatomy classes.[15] Based on this, I started to look in detail at the

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[12] "Rassismus.Kolonialismus.Heute - Wie Der Kolonialismus Den Rassismus Bis Heute Prägt | Wissenszeit," *YouTube*, 15 Oct. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=04si4P4cTlA. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

[13] Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: race and the memory of evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), 357.

[14] Daina Berry, 162.

[15] Daina Berry, 158.

network that Dr. Shippen used to acquire the bodies used in his anatomical lectures and whose bodies they were. I soon realized that his name was mentioned in conjunction with many of his students. I decided to focus on how Dr. Shippen's reliance upon graverobbing for teaching dissection and anatomy might have been were reproduced by his students.

With help from Mr. Jim Duffin and Mr. John Pollack from the University Archives and the Kislak center respectively, I was able to look through the university's holdings of the contents of Dr. Shippen's student's class notes. I soon realized that there were only a few notes by his students and miscellaneous manuscripts. At this point, I realized that what the university had archived would not contain a clear record of wrongdoing. I also came to the conclusion that even those who did partake in acts of graverobbing would have left little record of it officially, seeing as how it was a behavior that was not accepted by society even at the time. Thus, I ruled out trying to directly link Dr. Shippen with his students' graverobbing.

This made me shift my research to an investigation of his students' careers. I started this by looking at three primary sources in order to create a comprehensive list of graduates. Those three sources were *Catalogue of the trustees, officers and graduates of the Departments of Arts and Science and of the honorary graduates of the University of Pennsylvania 1749-1880* by the Society of the Alumni, *Biographical catalogue of the matriculates of the college, together with lists of the members of the college faculty and the trustees, officers and recipients of honorary degrees 1749-1893* by the Society of the Alumni, and *General alumni catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania, 1922* by W.J. Maxwell. I compared the list I compiled with *History of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania* by Joseph Carson. I came up with a list of 28 graduate students who received a Bachelor of Medicine or Bachelor of Physic from 1768 to 1774.

Note on Institutional Name Changes

The University of Pennsylvania went through many iterations before assuming its current form. Officially, Penn places the date of its founding to 1740. The first iteration of the school was a charity school that was also a church. This was later changed into the Academy and Charitable School in the Province of Pennsylvania by Benjamin Franklin in 1751. The college followed soon after in 1755, led by Provost William Smith.[16] The medical school came a decade later in 1765. As the medical school had its own faculty separate from the college, Penn claims to have been the first university in North America.[17] Officially, Penn used the word "university" in 1779 when the new charter granted by the new state government replaced the old charter and the school became the University of the State of Pennsylvania. The name that we are familiar with was only used after its privatization in 1791.[18] I decided to focus my research on medical graduates from the years 1768 to 1774 as this included the first graduates of the medical school and ended before there was a big shift in curriculum at the college. The exact nature of the medical school is difficult to determine. Even though it was part of the College of Philadelphia in its inception, earlier records of trustees do not include the board of trustees or the professors of the medical school in their

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[16] Mary D. McConaghy, Michael Siberman, and Irina Kalashnikova, "Penn in the 18th Century", Penn Libraries, https://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century/.

[17] McConaghy, Mary, et al. "Penn in the 18th Century: Medical School." University Archives and Records Center, archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century/medical-school/. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

[18] Mary D. McConaghy, "Penn in the 18th century."

records.[19] This paper will refer to the medical department of the University of Pennsylvania as the medical school.

Research findings

My research focused on the graduates from the first year that the medical school conferred degrees in 1768 to the beginning of the revolutionary war in 1774. I have limited the scope of my research to the beginning of the revolutionary war to account for the fact that not only did the medical school not produce any graduate students from the year 1775 to 1779, but the College of Philadelphia was also seized by the state of Pennsylvania in 1779, which led to sweeping changes in the board of trustees and curriculum. This time frame gave me a total of 28 graduates from the medical school. Of these 28, ten graduated in 1768, eight in 1769, one in 1770, six in 1771, 1 in 1773, and one in 1774. This number of graduates I found is equal to the tally published in the nineteenth century sources describing the medical school.[20] I tried to answer four questions about these graduates. First, were they politically active? Second, what was their connection to Penn? Third, did they have an impact on the medical field? and lastly, were any of them enslavers? The number of students who graduated should not be viewed as a comprehensive list of those who attended the lectures at the medical school at the time. Many more people attended lectures than actually graduated, and fewer still came back for a medical doctorate.[21]

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[19] *Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers and Graduates of the Departments of Arts and Science and of the Honorary Graduates of the University of Pennsylvania, 1749-1880* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Society, 1880), xi.

[20] *Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania.* [Philadelphia]: [publisher not identified], 1844, 9.

[21] *Medical Department, 10.*

One reason for this might be the cost of attending the courses. Carson, the author of *A History of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania,* breaks down the cost to graduate from the medical school. First, a student must pay a sum of twenty shillings to have his name added to the list of names at the College. This was matriculation money. Second, the students had to pay more than one guinea to each professor. Third, if the student wished to use the library, he needed to pay 1 dollar to gain access. Lastly, a lecture ticket was not to exceed six pistoles.[22] If the student was to be considered for a degree in medicine, he had to attend at least one course in Anatomy, Materia Medica, Chemistry, the Theory and Practice of Physic, and one course of Clynical Lectures.[23] With the conversion rate not stable at this point, it is difficult to determine exactly how much each of these currencies are in today's standards. However, we can estimate their worth based on the "Notes for the Report on the Value of Gold and Silver" by Thomas Jefferson. In 1776, one Guinea, depending on whether it was from England or France, was between 1 pound 14 shillings and 1 pound 13 shillings 6 pence. A Spanish pistoles was 1 pound 7 shillings. A Spanish dollar was 7 shillings 6 pence.[24] This meant that at the bare minimum, a student had to pay the university a total of 20 pounds to graduate with a bachelor's degree. 20 pounds in Philadelphia was equivalent to 12 pounds 7 shillings in Britain.[25] This

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[22] Joseph Carson, 66.

[23] Joseph Carson, 60.

[24] Thomas Jefferson, "Notes for the Report on the value of Gold and Silver Coins, [2 September 1776]," *National Historical Publications and Records Commission,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-01-02-0214.

[25] John J. McCusker, *How Much Is That In Real Money?: A Historical Commodity Price Index for Use As a Deflator of Money Values In the Economy of the United States* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2001), 70.

amounted to 125 days' wage for a skilled tradesman in the 1770s.[26] This meant that many who attended individual lectures did not get a degree. This also meant that those who graduated from the College were from wealthy families. This is confirmed when we look at the families of the graduates.

In 1768, there were ten graduates. They are, in alphabetical order, David Cowell, David Jackson, Humphrey Fullerton, James Tilton, John Archer, John Lawrence, Jonathan Elmer, Jonathan Potts, Nicholas Way, and Samuel Duffield. These graduates were the first students to receive a Bachelor of Medicine in North America. Information about these individuals was not difficult to find. Apart from Humphrey Fullerton and John Lawrence, every one of these graduates was worthy of note in his own time.

The information in the years following was more difficult to obtain. In 1769, there were eight graduates. They were Alexander Skinner, James Armstrong, John Hodge, John Houston, John Winder, Josias Carvil, Myndert Veeder, and Thomas Pratt. I was not able to find any information on Hodge, Houston, Veeder, and Skinner. It is strange to see such an abundance of information on the graduates just a year before, and a complete lack of information for the graduates the following year. The only one I could find credible information on was James Armstrong, who later became a Dickinson college trustee and eventually a Cumberland Country court judge.[27]

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[26] "Currency converter: 1270-2017," *The National Archives*, accessed December 6, 2022, https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency-converter/#currency-result.
[27] Dickinson College Archives. "James Armstrong (1748-1828) | Dickinson College." Archives.dickinson.edu, 2005, archives.dickinson.edu/people/james-armstrong-1748-1828. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

This was followed by only one graduate, Thomas Parke, in 1770, and then seven graduates in 1771. The seven are Benjamin Alison, Jonathan Easton, Frederick Kuhn, John Kuhn, Bodo Otto, Robert Pottinger, and William Smith. Four graduates of the class of 1768 returned to earn their doctorate in 1771. These four include Jonathan Potts, James Tilton, Nicholas Way, and Jonathan Elmer.[28] The last two graduates were Thomas Biddle and James Hutchinson. Thomas Biddle graduated in 1773. Initially, I believed that he was a member of the old Philadelphian Biddle family. However, there was no Thomas Biddle in the family history that matches with this graduation date. All individuals named Thomas Biddle were born after this graduation date.[29] The last graduate before the American revolution was James Hutchinson. Hutchinson later became the professor of materia medica and chemistry at Penn's medical school.[30] From these 28 graduates, we can see certain patterns emerging.

Graduates fell into four broad categories. The first category is for those who, after the revolutionary war, became in the political scene of the newly established United States of America. These people include congressmen, senators, and judges. 10 graduates fit into this category. The second category is those who founded their own medical societies. Some stayed in Philadelphia, while others moved to different states. There were 5 who were the founding members of new medical societies. More became trustees and professors of Penn and other

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[28] "A History of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania.djvu/71 - Wikisource, the Free Online Library." En.wikisource.org, en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:A_History_of_the_Medical_Department_of_the_University_of_Pennsylvania.djvu/71. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

[29] Jordan, John W. *Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania: Genealogical and Personal Memoirs.* New York: The Lewis Pub. Co., 1911, 179.

[30] "James Hutchinson." *University Archives and Records Center,* accessed December 1, 2022, archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/james-hutchinson/.

institutions. Thirdly, there were those who didn't accomplish anything of note, but attended the school as their family was part of the faculty at the College or the Academy of Philadelphia in one form or another. There were 7 graduates who fit into this description. Lastly, there was one enslaver. Even though I have divided the graduates into these categories for the purposes of analysis, many of the graduates fit into more than one category.

Political Influence

John Archer, Jonathan Elmer, and Jonathan Potts all played a role in the new government of the United States of America. The best example of this is Jonathan Elmer, who served the country as the member of the Continental Congress from 1777 to 1788, the United States Senator of New Jersey from 1789 to 1791, then as a judge from 1802 to 1804. This was on the back of his time in the military during the revolutionary war, during which he served as the captain of a light infantry company.[31] John Archer had a similar life trajectory. Archer practiced law in Harford, Maryland rather than medicine. During the revolutionary war, he also served in the army as a captain and was promoted to major. He was elected as a Republican Representative from Maryland to the Seventh, Eight, and Ninth Congresses.[32] His son and grandson continued the tradition as representative of Maryland, being elected for 4 terms each.[33] Jonathan Potts was stationed as the director of the hospital at Fort George and Director of the General Hospital for

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[31] "ELMER, Jonathan," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/E000155.

[32] "ARCHER, John," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/A000272.

[33] "ARCHER, Stevenson," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/A000273.

the Northern Department during the revolutionary war. He then worked under his former professor, Dr. Shippen, who had become the Director General of United States Hospitals. His sister, Rebecca Potts, married Samuel Duffield.[34] From these examples, we can see that not every graduate pursued a career in medicine. Some such as John Archer and Jonathan Elmer pursued political careers. This, however, does not mean that they abandoned the field of medicine. For example, John Archer submitted his observations drawn from his work treating enslaved women to the Medical Repository of Original Essays and Intelligence, Relative to Physic, Surgery, and Natural History after his term as a representative in the house of delegates.[35]

Continued Penn Connections

The best example of the Penn medical community's insular and self-perpetuating nature is David Jackson, the first graduate of the medical school. David Jackson was the brother of Paul Jackson, the professor and clerk of the trustees of the Academy and College of Philadelphia. After the revolutionary war, he served as a trustee of the University of Pennsylvania in 1789 until 1791. One of his sons, also named David Jackson, married the daughter of another trustee,

[34] Edward neill, 6.

[35] John Archer, "FACTS Illustrating a DISEASE Peculiar to the Female Children of Negro Slaves: And OBSERVATIONS, Showing that a White Woman by Intercourse with a White Man and a Negro, may Conceive Twins, One of which Shall be White, and the Other a Mulatto; and that, Vice Versa, a Black Woman by Intercourse with a Negro and a White Man, may Conceive Twins, One of which Shall be a Negro and the Other a Mulatto," *The Medical Repository of Original Essays and Intelligence, Relative to Physic, Surgery, Chemistry, and Natural History (1800-1824)* 1, (Feb, 1810): 319, https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/facts-illustrating-disease-peculiar-female/docview/89476743/se-2, 1.

Dr. Gerardus Clarkson, while his other son, Samuel Jackson, earned a medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania and eventually became a professor at Penn's medical school.[36]

Other members also embodied the medical school's insularity. Most of the information I found about the 1771 graduates came not from articles or archived material, but from prominent members of their family who held key positions at the University of Pennsylvania. I was able to find that all but two members of the pool of 28 graduates already had existing connections to Penn before they entered medical school. Jonathan Easton was a member of the faculty at the Academy, teaching English from 1768 to 1770.[37] Benjamin Alison was the son of Francis Alison, who was the rector of the academy of Philadelphia before becoming the vice provost in 1755.[38] Even though the University Archives states that Benjamin Alison received an M.D. in 1771, the actual graduate listings show him as receiving a Bachelor of Physic in 1771.[39] John and Frederick Kuhn were the brothers of Adam Kuhn, the third person elected to be a professor at the medical school. In the biography of the Kuhn family, the author notes that "Dr. Adam Simon Kuhn was a delegate to the Provincial Council in January 1775, and had six sons in the Revolution, including John Frederick and Adam who were also doctors."[40] Lastly, William

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[36] "David Jackson 1747-1801," *University Archives and Records Center,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/david-jackson/.

[37] McConaghy, Mary, et al. "Penn in the 18th Century: Academy Faculty." University Archives and Records Center, 2004, archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-history/18th-century/academy/faculty/. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

[38] "Francis Alison." University Archives and Records Center, archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/penn-people/biography/francis-alison/. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022.

[39] "A History of the Medical department"

[40] Black, Helen Kuhn Jackson, and Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center. The Kuhn (Coon) Family of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania; with Reprint of History & Genealogy of the

Smith was the son of the first provost of Penn, William Smith. Even though the University archives list the younger Smith as graduating in 1775 with a Bachelor of Medicine, there were no records of any graduates in 1775, and the only mention of William Smith is in 1771. From this data, we can see that only 3 years after the medical school produced its first graduates, it had become a very insular network that perpetuated the legacy of doctors within families of already established members of the field of medicine and with connections to Penn.

New Medical Societies

A visible measure of the impact the graduates had on the medical field is the establishment of new medical societies. The College of Physicians of Philadelphia is a great example of this. Out of the twelve senior members that founded the College, three of them were graduates of the medical school, and three of them were Dr. Shippen, Dr. Rush, and Dr. Morgan, the professors at the medical school. The three graduates were Thomas Parke, Samuel Duffield, and James Hutchinson. James Hutchinson was the first secretary of the newly founded College, while Dr. Shippen, Dr. Rush and Dr. Morgan played the role of censors.[41] This was followed by Samuel Duffield becoming the treasurer and Thomas Parke the fourth president.[42] The entrance fee to the College was 3 pounds, and an annual contribution of fifteen shillings was necessary.[43] The fact that economic status rather than the medical knowledge was the basis for membership

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Kuhn Family. Internet Archive, 1956, archive.org/details/kuhncoonfamilyof00blac/page/n169/mode/2up. Accessed 1 Dec. 2022. 77.

[41] *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. Centennial Volume* (Philadelphia: Printed for the College, 1887), 20.

[42] *Transactions,* 42*,* 132.

[43] *Transactions*, 23.

allows us to see the elite nature of the College of Physicians. This is supported by the College's close affiliation with the authorities. It is stated that the College "took an active part in dealing with the broad question concerning "the regulation of the practice of Physic within the State"" at the behest of the Governor, the Legislature of the State, and by the local Board of Health.[44] Even though they were not officially elected to office, they played a key role in establishing the rules and regulations regarding medicine in the entire state.

Penn graduates James Tilton and Nicholas Way went onto found their own medical society in Delaware. James Tilton became the president of the Medical Society of Delaware on May 12, 1789, by a unanimous vote. By 1822, this medical society was in charge of "granting licenses for the practice of medicine in the state upon the presentation of a diploma."[45] This meant that the graduates of the medical school at the College of Philadelphia were among those deciding who could and could not practice medicine in the state of Delaware. Belonging to a medical society also did not hurt a graduate's chances of political success. Nicholas Way was made Treasurer of the Mint of the United States by George Washington in 1794.[46] James Tilton served not only in the Continental Congress, but also in the State House of Representatives from 1783 to 1785, and as the Surgeon General in 1813.[47]

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[44] Henry, J. Norman. *The College of Physicians* (Philadelphia, Pa.: s.n., 1908), 5-6.

[45] "History of the Medical Society of Delaware," *Medical Society of Delaware,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://www.medicalsocietyofdelaware.org/DELAWARE/assets/files/POLICY%20STATEMENTS%20OF%20MSD%202014.pdf.

[46] "From George Washington to the United States Senate, 19 May 1794," *National Historical Publications and Records Commission,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-16-02-0078.

[47] "James Tilton," *AMEDD Center of History & Heritage,* accessed December 6, 2022, https://achh.army.mil/history/surgeongenerals-j-tilton.

Enslavers

One of the graduates in my pool had a direct link to the institution of slavery. David Cowell came from a family in Trenton. His father graduated from Harvard and was the first pastor of the Presbyterian church of Trenton, and later became a trustee of Princeton.[48] After graduation, the younger Cowell moved to back to Trenton where he practiced medicine until his death. In *Princetonians,* a book describing the lives of Princeton graduates, it is stated that "In 1780 Cowell found himself in a bitter public controversy involving his slave, Adam."[49] I was able to follow the public controversy in the pages of the New Jersey Gazette. It began with David Cowell taking out an ad space in the New Jersey Gazette. On January 12th 1780, he wrote under the "To be Sold" section, "To be sold or exchanged for a suitable Negro Boy of about 16 years of age, a sober, healthy, able-bodied Negro Man of about 32 years of age, who has had the small-pox, and understands all kinds of farming business, and the care and management of horses, equal to any in the country."[50] Adam responded on February 1st of 1780 to David Cowell, stating

"I have a solemn engagement for my freedom for the consideration therein mentioned, written and executed by his own hand, which he has often attempted, and still persists in

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[48] Alexander Leitch, *A Princeton Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), https://doi-org.proxy.library.upenn.edu/10.1515/9781400870011, 121.

[49] James McLachlan, *Princetonians, 1748-1768: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), https://doi-org.proxy.library.upenn.edu/10.1515/9781400870776, 424.

[50] David Cowell, "To be sold," New Jersey Gazette, January 12, 1780.

endeavouring to violate, although I have very sufficient proof that the said consideration is fully paid him: Therefore this is to caution and warn all persons from buying, exchanging, bargaining, or any way being concerned in an assignment for me, as I have fulfilled my part of the aforesaid agreement, and expect that freedom, justice, and protection which I am entitled to by the law of the stae, altho' I am a Negro."[51]

From this exchange, it seems that David Cowell promised Adam his freedom, yet not only did he not deliver on his promise but wished to sell or exchange him. This public dispute continued for several weeks. It was only concluded in 1783, when David Cowell once again took out an advertisement on the New Jersey Gazette stating "whereas negro Adam still continues to absent himself from the service of the subscriber, in such a manner as that the constables have not been able to take him, after being publickly declared to be the property of the subscriber by a solemn adjudication had on a writ of Habeas Corpus, before the Justices of the Supreme Court."[52]

Conclusion

Coming to terms with one's own past is a difficult process. We shouldn't be discouraged from trying to form a better understanding of this country's history just because we might be faced with an ugly truth. If Penn as an institution really wants to reckon with its past, it should put more effort into uncovering that past rather and making it accessible to us in the present. Further research based on this paper would include expanding the scope to include more of the graduate students from the medical school. With an expanded pool of medical students, we

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[51] Adam, "To be sold," *New Jersey Gazette*, February 2, 1780.

[52] David Cowell, "Trenton," *New Jersey Gazette*, June 25, 1783.

would be able to make more accurate statements about the tendencies of graduates of the medical school and their influence on Philadelphia, medical science, and the law. I hope that this paper can be a contribution to Penn's ongoing effort to reckon with its history as it charts its present.

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