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Dr. William Shippen Jr.: Medicine and Grave-Robbing in 18th Century Philadelphia

Abstract

This research paper investigates William Shippen Jr.'s contribution to the College of Philadelphia's medical school during the eighteenth century and the accusations of "grave-robbing" made against him by Philadelphia's marginalized community members. The plundering of graves in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became a central issue in North American cities with the emergence of dissection as the main method for teaching anatomy. The unmarked and unprotected graves of Black and other marginalized peoples fell victim to the demands of the doctors at the medical school, in particular, William Shippen Jr., who was accused of graverobbing at various times throughout his career. These communities found mechanisms to fight back and protect the graves of their loved ones, which led to nearly two decades of high tension and "grave-robbing wars" between the Black community of Philadelphia and William Shippen Jr.

Research Process

When I began my research, I was interested in learning about William Shippen Jr.'s teachings, especially his lectures on midwifery and how he addressed race in his classes. Previous Penn and Slavery Project students had written about obstetrics and gynecological studies and their relation to enslaved women, and I was curious to find out if Shippen provided instruction on the subject and the type of language he used to do so. I began by looking at the lecture notes from some of Shippen's students from the late 18th century, and despite discovering a handful of information on midwifery, none of the sources provided much insight into Shippen's approach to race and obstetrics.

At the same time, I went through old clippings of *Pennsylvania Gazette* and *Pennsylvania Journal* to learn more about the anatomical lectures Shippen began in 1762. While the initial newspaper files only displayed advertisements and information on the lectures, later issues contained Shippen's declarations to the public responding to complaints and protests about his grave-robbing and dissections. The various apologies to the public suggest that this was an ongoing issue for Shippen, while the University Archives biographical file locate the tensions as arising mainly with the Black community of Philadelphia. Clippings from the early twentieth century continued to voice suspicion regarding Shippen's work and the sources of the cadavers he procured for his anatomical lectures. He was later described in the early 20th century as "predatory" by local newspapers and instructed his own students on "body-snatching." This inspired me to once again read through the lectures notes of his pupils to see if there was any instruction about how to obtain cadavers for anatomical studies. I went to the American Philosophical Society in hopes of finding more evidence on his procuring-instructions, but was only able to find letters between Shippen and his family members that did not discuss his medical work.

My research plan shifted when I read through Whitefield J. Bell's "Patriot-Improvers Biographical Sketches of Members of the American Philosophical Society." There, I came across letters from Shippen to his son from 1786 and 1788 that steered my research in a new direction. The content of the letters showed that even after Shippen was accused of grave-robbing and subject to protests from the 1760s and 1770s, he continued to procure bodies from the burial grounds of Black Philadelphians throughout the 1780s. Even more so, the letters conveyed the tensions and social conflict that had emerged over grave-robbing, and how the Black community had begun to fight back. Black residents attempted to protect the cadavers of their loved ones by physically guarding the graveyards and pillaging the homes of doctors who had stolen the bodies. This transcript that I stumbled on also added new details to Shippen's attitude toward race, as he called the Black Philadelphians who mobbed his home "devils" and revealed frustration as a result of his struggle to obtain cadavers for his dissections.

I began thinking about shifting my research towards attempting to contextualize and characterize the social conflict and tensions that existed in Philadelphia following the opening of Shippen's anatomical lectures. Not only did the dissections themselves offend the local people, but the graveyards of the marginalized folk of Philadelphia were preyed upon by the medical professionals and were treated as "fair game." Perhaps what resonated with me the most across Shippen's various newspaper confessions and letters was his sense of arrogance and entitlement to the graves of Philadelphians. The accusations that supposedly began in 1765 did not stop him from procuring bodies for the next twenty years, which made me question who was in office at the time in Philadelphia and if there was any legal action taken to prevent the grave-robbing. These findings inspired me to focus my research on the social dynamics in Philadelphia at the end of the 18th century, specifically the conflict between the grave-robbers and the victims. At this point in my research, the potter's field in Philadelphia had become a recurring subject, and so I learned

about its location, relation to the almshouse, and its significance to Philadelphia society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries using an archaeological study done by Douglas B. Mooney and Kimberly A. Morrell. I had read bits of Gary Nash's *Forging Freedom* at the beginning of the semester, and remembered how it contextualized Philadelphia society in the eighteenth century.

I went back to the book after my visit to the APS, and discovered another piece of evidence for the grave-robbing conflict: attempted legal action taken by the Black community in 1782 to protect their graves at the local potter's field. This showed that not only was the community taking steps to protest the grave-robbing, such as the raid on Shippen's home and walking the burial grounds at night, but also seeking legal assistance from the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council in 1782. This added another layer to the story of this conflict and showed how marginalized communities sought out various means of protecting their loved ones. In the end, however, violence and protesting seemed to be the only mechanism that sparked change. Shippen's letter from 1788 to his son describes his negotiation with the Black community for the exchange of a body. This occurred after a mob of sailors and black Philadelphians stormed Shippen's home to retrieve a stolen cadaver.

While my sources initially characterized the protests of the sailors and Black community members as separate events, Shippen's letter from 1786 suggests that the populations came together in their struggle against the illicit procurement of the bodies of their loved ones. This finding supports the existing accounts by Nash and other research regarding the precarious nature of life for free Black people in Philadelphia. While the population was technically "free" under the laws of the state of Pennsylvania, their political, social, and economic rights were limited, their complaints were frequently left ignored, and they were treated as second-class citizens. The findings of my research demonstrate how they were often forced to take matters into their own hands as a result of not receiving legal assistance with the goal of preserving their humanity. The

combination of newspaper findings, Shippen's letters, and information from the Archives created a foundation of core research to help me characterize and contextualize Philadelphia society and the consequences of the anatomical lectures that began in 1762.

Research Analysis

The eighteenth century witnessed a global boom of progress in medical knowledge. Providing answers to questions in the form of physical evidence, human anatomical dissection became the gold standard for medical training at the time and an essential way for teaching anatomy. Anatomical dissection taught students that the truth about the body resided inside and needed to be exposed to view. Medical students received training in Europe and traveled overseas to begin working and spreading their knowledge in American institutions. Dr. John Morgan and Dr. William Shippen Jr. were both educated at the University of Edinburgh and founded the first medical school in British North America in Philadelphia in 1765, which would later become the Perelman School of Medicine. Modeled after European-style anatomical instruction, lectures began in the winter of 1762 and took place at the Surgeon's Hall on 5th Street in Center City. Penn's medical school aspired to the standard of Atlantic medical training yet struggled with a shortage of bodies at times. William Shippen Jr. became one of the most recognized anatomical instructors at the College of Philadelphia, and thus the focus of accusations of grave-robbing and depredations against the marginalized peoples of Philadelphia.

Shippen's anatomical lectures were advertised in local newspapers during the winter of 1762 as courses for the "Advantage of the young gentlemen" from the neighboring areas that consisted of 60 lectures.¹ "All of the parts of the Human Body" were to be demonstrated in surgical operations and that in addition to the operations and surgeries, "an explanation of some of the

¹*Pennsylvania Journal, or, Weekly Advertiser* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), no. 1833, November 4, 1762: [6].
Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

curious women that arise from an examination of the uterus and a few plain and general directions in the practice of midwifery”.² Shippen is perhaps best recognized for his advancements and studies conducted in the field of midwifery, however his lectures were met with suspicion by locals who opposed human dissection. Each person that desired to attend the sixty lectures had to pay “six pistoles” and “those who intend also to learn the arts of injecting and dissecting, to pay ten pistoles.”³ A pistole in the mid-18th century was worth almost a pound (.83), or about 18s shillings, thus students were paying from 4.98 to 8.3 pounds per semester, which correlates to approximately \$500-800 in modern day per lecture series. By 1800, the hypothetical wage rate in Philadelphia was “7s”, shillings a day for skilled laborers, which converts to about \$30 in modern day.⁴ Thus, those who could afford to attend the lectures came from the elite class; by the nineteenth century, the majority would come from wealthy plantation-owning families in the South. While the anatomical lectures proved quickly to be popular and drew young students in the area, suspicions that Shippen had been procuring bodies from the local potter’s field began to grow.

The potter’s field looks east toward Cedar (now South Street) and the Schuylkill River and is now called Washington Square. The potter’s field, also called the “Stranger’s Burying Ground” served as an unmarked communal burial ground of the Philadelphia almshouse which opened in 1732.⁵ The almshouse served as a “last resort for the city’s orphans, indigent, and people with both physical and mental illnesses” or those viewed as outsiders who lived on the margins of

² *Pennsylvania Journal*, 1762

³ "Advertisement." *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), September 27, 1764: 1. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁴ Perkins, Frances, and Isador Lubin. "Fraser | Discover Economic History | St. Louis Fed." United States Department of Labor. United States Government Printing Office, 1934. https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/files/docs/publications/bls/bls_0604_1934.pdf.

⁵ Mooney, Douglas B., and Kimberly A. Morrell. *Bethel Burying Ground Project*, <https://bethelburyinggroundproject.com/>.

Philadelphia society.⁶ The Almshouse was later known as the Philadelphia Hospital, and the only physical remnant today is a fence near the present-day Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Many of those interred in the grounds at the potter's field were buried anonymously and often left victim to grave-robbers, as the burial site had no formal protection. In contrast, religious burial grounds in the city were protected and funded by Church sponsors and thus white citizens of the middle and upper classes were able to safely bury their loved ones in those spaces. Only Black people who were lucky enough to become part of the city's white churches, Christ Church, for example, had the privilege of burying their loved ones in a protected space.

Public anxiety surrounding dissection and grave-robbing reached a peak in 1765, when an angry mob of sailors stormed Shippen's home, accusing him of preying on the graves of their loved ones. A newspaper report from 1900 wrote that "Shippen had been digging into the graves in the churchyards. It excited the special wrath of the sailors from the city, because they supposed that some of their dead comrades were in danger, and a mob was formed to deal with Shippen by sacking his house."⁷ Given the frequency of death at sea of unidentified sailors, it is likely that many sailors were interred in the potter's field if they had no local family or comrades to claim the body, thus sparking the 1765 protest. While the number of sailors in the "mob" is not specified, the physical and violent nature of the situation communicates the resentment of the sailor population towards Shippen and raises the question of how many sailors were victims of the grave-plundering and for how long this had been going on before a protest took place. Had the sailors voiced their complaints before and been ignored? This parallels the situation of the Black

⁶ Mitchell, Paul Wolff. "Black Philadelphians in the Samuel George Morton Cranial Collection." | Penn Program on Race, Science, & Society, February 15, 2021. <https://prss.sas.upenn.edu/penn-medicines-role/black-philadelphians-samuel-george-morton-cranial-collection>.

⁷ "In the Ghostly Old Times," 12 Oct. 1900. William Shippen, Jr., faculty, box 2463, Alumni Record Files, UPF 1.9AR, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

community as they too were forced to take the issue of grave-robbing into their own hands by uniting to combat the encroachment on the graves of their loved ones.

Shippen publicly responded to the local complaints in a newspaper declaration. On October 31, 1765, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* published a column that observed, "It has given Dr. Shippen much pain to hear, that notwithstanding all the caution and care he has taken, to preserve the utmost decency in opening and dissecting the dead bodies, which he has persevered, in chiefly from the Motive of being useful to mankind, some evil-minded persons, either wantonly or maliciously, have reported to his disadvantage, that he has taken up some persons who were buried in the church burying ground, which has distressed the minds of some of his worthy fellow citizens - the Doctor, with much pleasure, improves this opportunity to declare, the Report is absolutely false; and to assure them, that the Bodies he dissected, were either of Persons who had willfully murdered themselves, or were publicly executed, except now and then one from the Potter's Field, whose death was owing to some particular Disease; and that he never had one Body from the Church, or any other private Burial Place."⁸ Shippen's language appears fiery and frustrated, as he calls out those who have accused him of grave-robbing as "evil-minded persons" and "malicious." The public scandal of the Sailor's Mob and the need to address local tensions perhaps obstructed Shippen from procuring cadavers for his lectures. Shippen's statement reveals that he considered the potter's field a public and fair site to use for the acquisition of cadavers because it was not protected by a Church. He made a religious appeal to the public by claiming that only the cadavers of those who had sinned or committed crimes were being used in his lectures, yet he felt no need to justify this practice because the potter's field was not legally claimed or under the control of

⁸ "Advertisement." *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), October 31, 1765: 4. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

any authority at the time. While sailors who initiated the protest were presumably mainly white men, many of the bodies buried in the potter's field were from the Black community, which at the time, did not have the financial resources or formal power to protect the burial sites of loved ones, thus leaving them vulnerable to the demands of the local doctors.

Students' notes taken at Shippen's lectures reveal the racial disparities in the victims and spectators of dissections. The first subject of Shippen's lecture was the "cadaver of a negro suicide given to him by the court."⁹ Given that only white men could afford the lectures, none of the subjects used in Shippen's dissections came from the community of these upper-class students. Perhaps Shippen relied on this distance between the elite and the marginalized communities to get away with using the cadavers of local peoples, as none of his pupils would have any reason to be offended or affected by the subjects he had procured. The Sailor's Mob proved to be just the tip of the iceberg of the accusations against Shippen, as he was the target of grave-robbing allegations for the next two decades.

In January of 1770, the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* published another confession by Shippen. The doctor claimed to be surprised to hear "the wicked and malicious reports of my taking up bodies from the several burying grounds in this place; notwithstanding these fears are groundless, the reports false, and seem either made and propagated by weak, prejudiced persons, or intended to injure my character, yet humanity obliges me to suppress all feelings of resentment and contempt, and do all in my power to remove these... declaring in the most solemn manner, that I never have had, and that I never will have, directly or indirectly, one subject from the burial ground belonging to any denomination of Christians whatsoever... it was generally believed I had taken up a young lady from Christ Church burying ground, whose grave has been opened within these

⁹ "Dr. William Shippen, Jr. Anatomist-Obstetrician- Teacher," 1940, William Shippen, Jr., faculty, box 2463, Alumni Record Files, UPF 1.9AR, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

few days, and her body found in its sacred repository undisturbed.”¹⁰ Shippen used the same language to express frustration as in his previous statement and repeatedly confirmed that he had never removed a body from a church burial ground, yet made no mention of the potter’s field in this statement. While he repeatedly affirmed that he had not transgressed against sacred church burial grounds, the slight alterations in his statements and his mention, or silence around, the potter’s field raises questions. Shippen chose to appeal to a religious audience, perhaps those of the elite white people, to assure them that he had never harmed the graves of their deceased family members. However, this statement completely ignores the marginalized classes of Philadelphia, reaffirming his sense of entitlement to raid the unprotected graves in the city.

To further defend himself, Shippen added an affidavit from one of his pupils, Joseph Harrison, who lived with him. Throughout his career, Shippen became an object of prejudice and it was “believed that he especially instructed his students in ways and means of body-snatching, that his rooms were filled with cadavers and that no grave was safe against his predatory plans.”¹¹ A newspaper clipping from 1906 writes that it was suspected that he kept vats of disposed bones and bodily fragments and people struggled to believe his assurances that the corpses were of suicides and animals. Harrison claimed in his affidavit that he knew where each body was obtained because he had lived in Shippen’s house since the lectures began. Another article from January 11, 1770, in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* stated that Shippen “has good reason to believe no such thing could have been done by any of the students of anatomy, without his knowledge, since Dr. Shippen

¹⁰*Pennsylvania Chronicle (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)* III, no. 50, January 8, 1770: 410. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

¹¹ “In the Ghostly Old Times,” 1900.

began his lectures.”¹² This statement neither confirms nor denies the grave-robbing of Shippen’s pupils, yet seeks to uphold Shippen’s innocence.

Black people in the city remained suspicious that anatomy professors were predatory. At night they would quickly walk out of their way to avoid the potter’s field out of fear that the medical professors were actively plotting their deaths to use their bodies for future use. This same sense of fear gripped the marginalized citizens of Philadelphia who did not have loved ones in religious burial grounds. Perhaps this anxiety was aggravated by Shippen’s refusal to address the Black and marginalized communities in his newspaper statements. Shippen appeared to reassure only the churchgoing white upper class, which offered no comfort to the lower classes. Perhaps it was this combination of Shippen’s public statements and the continuous grave-plundering that sparked such outrage amongst Philadelphia’s Black Community. The perpetual encroachment and Shippen’s reluctance to acknowledge the graveyards of marginalized citizens confirmed that he only sought to appeal to the religious elite and their concerns about the subject of anatomical lectures.

In April 1782, six free Black men—James Black, Samuel Saviel, Oronoco Dexter, Cuff Douglas, Aram Prymus, and William Gray—representing “the Black people of the City and Suburbs,” petitioned the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council for permission to “fence in the Negroes Burying ground in the Potter’s Field.” After a four-year delay, this petition was finally brought before the council for consideration in 1786, and was referred to the surveyor general’s

¹²“[Samuel Shoemaker; Mayor; isaac Jone; Aldermen; City; Joseph Harrison; Dr. Shippen; Apprentice].” *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), no. 2142, January 11, 1770: [3]. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.

office, but was never acted upon.¹³ Members of the Black community made several efforts to add protection to the potter's field, yet no changes were made until the mid-nineteenth century. By this point, Black community members began having some of their own men walk the burial grounds at night to protect the graves. The legal effort added another layer to the organized struggle of the Black community to protect their loved ones and conveys the ignorance by both legal officials and medical school professionals. The Executive Council's inaction and Shippen's neglect of the community in his statements demonstrates how the elite of Philadelphia ignored the city's poor and Black residents and allowed the medical professors to persist with their grave-robbing efforts.

Shippen's outward anger and frustration in his statements implied that the protests and complaints became obstacles to his obtaining and demonstrating with anatomical subjects. In January of 1786, Shippen wrote to his son asking for him to buy him a "good skeleton, 'a Child dissected for the Blood vessels'" saying it was "impossible to make them here & do business too."¹⁴ Perhaps the efforts of the Black community and the public complaints put Shippen's procurement of bodies to a halt or added new difficulty. The letter suggests an element of desperation, as his son was in England at the time, and Shippen presumed that it would be more feasible to obtain a skeleton and transport it overseas than to procure one locally. Shippen also noted, "We have been & are still at a great Loss for want of a Subject for dissection & Demonstration. Few die & the negroes have determined to watch all who are buried in the potters field - the young men have been twice driven off by Arms, once fired on & 2 wounded with small shot, on Saturday night with the assistance of 6 invalids with muskets they beat off the negroes & obtained a corpse &

¹³ Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. New York: ACLS History E-Book Project, 2005.

¹⁴ Bell, Whitfield J. *Patriot-Improvers: Biographical Sketches of Members of the American Philosophical Society*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997 pp. 26

lodged it in the Theater.” The letter was in essence a call for help in procuring cadavers, and Shippen acknowledged the difficulty of gaining access to the graveyard as Black people had begun to protect it with arms. While it is unclear who the “young men” and the “6 invalids” were, it appears they were pupils of Shippen or men he has hired to acquire the body. Both sides were armed with “muskets” and fired shots when the incident occurred.¹⁵ While it is unclear how exactly the “corpse” was obtained, a battle between the two groups of people clearly took place.

After Shippen’s students hid the corpse, “The resolute impertinent blacks broke open the house, stole the subject & reburied it - this transaction was made known to the friends of the dead who joined the negroes in great numbers on Sunday night & swore to death & destruction to the Faculty. The Chief was applied to who wrote me a friendly Letter & desired I would not allow another attempt to be made which would so much interrupt the peace of the city &c. We had determined to desist for this time & wait some favorable Windfall from some obscure quarter. I am afraid we shall be puzzled to obtain Subjects which makes it more necessary for you to send the preparation I mentioned in a late Letter.”¹⁶ It appears that Shippen instructed the individuals to hide the corpse in his own home, but Black community members refused to surrender the cadaver to the doctor and stole back the body by breaking into Shippen’s home. The community angrily protested the pillaging efforts of the medical school, and this seemed to spark the “Chief” who asked Shippen to stop disturbing the peace of the city. It is unknown whether this was the first official complaint brought against Shippen, however he suggested that he would “wait some favorable Windfall from some obscure quarter,” perhaps to continue with procuring cadavers.¹⁷ The official request for Shippen to stop with his grave-robbing efforts made it even more difficult

¹⁵ Bell, 28

¹⁶ Bell, 28

¹⁷ Bell, 28

for him to acquire anatomical specimens, which added weight to his request for the skeleton from his son.

Shippen evidently waited for “some obscure quarter.” Two weeks later, he wrote, “By the watchfulness and intrepidity” of one of his apprentices, a “‘subject’ was obtained.” This makes it more likely that the previous individuals conducting the grave-plundering were his students, and that he instructed them to do so, which undermines the credibility of his previous public statements. However, this incident was also met with conflict as when Shippen began to dissect the subject, “His friends found it out, raised a Mob, dragged him out of the hay loft where we had concealed him - put him on a board & brought him down to my door attended by 3 or 400 Sailors, Negroes &c.” Shippen and his wife were forced to leave their home for two days as the mob attacked the house. What was notable about this protest was the union of “sailors” and “Negroes,” Members of Philadelphia’s marginalized communities joining forces to challenge the depredations of Shippen and the medical school professors. The sailors and Black community were reluctant to let Shippen get away with any more corpses, and yet “after 10 days of peace,” Shippen “procured a Subject from the Bettering house as secretly & the back window of the Theatre & returned to Mr. Clymers stable.”¹⁸ The Bettering House was an almshouse located on south Spruce street built in 1766 or 1767 and housed many of the ill and wounded soldiers during the Revolution.¹⁹ The robbery was met by “15 or 20 Blacks armed (who patrol every night round the potters field & down our Street & saw them)... The young men flew over the Catholic burying ground & escaped - the blacks broke 2 locks, entered the Theatre, brought out the body, paraded it before the door, raised the alley & buried it in the potter's field and say they determined I shall not have a Subject this

¹⁸ Bell, 28

¹⁹ “Sickened Marylanders and the Philadelphia Bettering House.” Finding the Maryland 400, November 7, 2018. <https://msamaryland400.com/2016/10/14/sickened-marylanders-and-the-philadelphia-bettering-house/>.

Winter.”²⁰ The Black community appears to have taken pride in retrieving the stolen corpse and defeating Shippen’s efforts once again.

The practice of grave-robbing took a political and even violent turn. As a result of not receiving legal support, Black communities took the matter into their own hands and began to ardently fight back and seek new means of protecting their loved ones. Shippen complained in the letter that “We have no police in this city to correct this lawless proceeding, & 9, 10ths of the Citizens join or countenance these black Devils - tis difficult to find out in the night who they are, & if I could & prosecute them to punishment my house & life might answer for it.”²¹ It became increasingly challenging for Shippen to obtain bodies for dissection as community members began to physically protect the graveyards and retaliate when they were encroached on. While previous historians have thought that tensions peaked in 1765 with the Sailor’s Mob protest, these accounts from Shippen prove that the anatomical professors neither stopped in their quest for cadavers nor abandoned their sense of entitlement to the graves of marginalized communities. This produced a long-term social conflict, one that could even be considered a grave-robbing war, between the local community and the medical school’s staff.

The civil unrest resulted in negotiations between Shippen and the local black population, yet it is unclear who mediated the agreement. On January 4, 1788, Shippen wrote to his son ““The Negroes are appeased & have given us a Subject & we apprehend no danger from Mobs.”²² While Shippen’s letters convey a racist attitude toward the Black community, it appears that he was able to set aside his arrogance and sense of entitlement for the purpose of coming to an agreement to obtain a cadaver. Shippen expressed how he felt threatened and endangered by the public and

²⁰ Bell, 28

²¹ Bell, 28

²² Bell, 29

questioned whether it was worth continuing with his lectures. The next year, as the bodies were once again harder to procure and armed watchers guarded the burying grounds, Shippen resolved to give up teaching anatomy.

Further Research

My research thus far has raised several questions, in particular the nature of the relationship among medical professors, Philadelphia city officers, and the Black community. For over twenty years, Shippen was able to continue with his grave-plundering pursuits without once confronting legal obstacles. The only challenges to his procurement of cadavers were the violent protests and mobbing of the victimized sailors and Black community members. The marginalized communities were forced to take the issue of grave-robbing into their own hands, as their official complaints were never acted upon by city officials. This raises the question of who was policing the city at the time and the nature of their relationship with the College of Philadelphia's medical school. Their inaction protected the grave-plundering efforts of the medical professors, as they left the potter's field and unmarked burial grounds unprotected and open for pillaging.

In addition, the correspondence between Shippen and his son in the 1780s reveals that the protests and mobbing of the sailors and black community members turned violent and that those who partook in the protecting or plundering of the graves were armed. I was left questioning if Shippen or any of his pupils were ever harmed in the pillaging? Did he hire other individuals to risk their lives while seeking cadavers because the practice had become so dangerous? The findings of my research transformed my previous notions regarding the emergence of anatomical procedures and grave-robbing. The topic of grave-robbing proved to be more than just an ethical or religious issue; it produced a series of violent uprisings amongst the marginalized communities of Philadelphia against the predatory advances of the medical professors on the unprotected burial grounds.

Conclusion

While the studies and lectures of William Shippen Jr. for the College of Philadelphia were undeniably crucial for the development of the school, we need to recognize the subjects he exploited and the marginalized communities he relied on to steal bodies. Shippen's determination to keep up with the modern field of medicine came at the expense of procuring bodies from unprotected and anonymous graves for nearly two decades. The complaints arose within the first few weeks of Shippen's lectures, and despite years of assuring an anxious public that he would never steal from a religious burial ground, the doctor ignored the demands of those who had loved ones in the unprotected potter's field. This produced a series of back-and-forth stealing of cadavers and violent protests between Shippen and the city's Black and maritime communities. Despite the Black community's efforts to obtain legal protection of loved ones buried in the potter's field, their requests were never acted upon which raises the question of the relation between the medical school and the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council during the eighteenth century.

The plight of the Black community, their countless protests, and their own protection of the graveyards obstructed Shippen's grave-plundering endeavors. His negotiations with the black community over one cadaver, in particular, appear to have been the final straw for Shippen as his anatomical lectures stopped shortly after, presumably due to a shortage of anatomical subjects. While Shippen's contributions to the field of medicine should not be diminished, the means by which he obtained his success and the Philadelphia community members victimized by his practices must be acknowledged. The lack of consent amongst Philadelphia's marginalized community serves as a testament to the societal norms of the time and the institutionalized racism.

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