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The Jiggitts family: the value of a Penn education to an enslaver

Abstract

This research paper details the way in which enslavement and the extraction of Black labor changed over time through examining enslavement and emancipation in the lives of the white Jiggitts family and the people they enslaved. Along with the shift in their residence, this research details the ways in which the white Jiggitts continued to extract labor from formerly enslaved people even after emancipation. This paper documents the ways in which wealth and privilege, or the lack thereof, compounds over time.

Section 1: Research Process

When starting out I was primarily focussed on investigating obstetric and gynecological studies at Penn during the early 19th century, and its ties to research done on enslaved women. My preliminary course of research included looking for Penn medical school graduates from the years 1810 to 1850 who studied obstetrics and gynecology who were from slave owning states. I started by looking at the Penn medical dissertations listed at the Penn Library, and chose the ones from the medical school during my time period on OB/GYN topics. Through this method I found a Dr. Lewis Meredith Jiggitts who graduated from Penn Medical School and wrote his dissertation on amenorrhea in 1818. Then I looked him up in the *Catalogue of the Alumni of the Medical Department of the University of Pennsylvania 1765-1877*. Additionally, I looked him up in the *General Alumni Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania*. Through these sources I found that Dr. Lewis Meredith Jiggitts was originally from North Carolina. I was able to certify that the Lewis M. Jiggitts case matched all of the criteria for my preliminary course of research. After certifying this, I started to look for documents that could connect him to enslavement.

With the above information I did a preliminary search through Ancestry.com and found a Lewis M. Jiggitts listed in several documents. These included the U.S. School Catalogues 1765-1935, the 1830 U.S. Census, the 1850 U.S. Census, and Lewis M. Jiggitts' will from 1864. The U.S. School Catalogues 1765-1935 primarily repeats information found in the Catalogue of Alumni above. It lists a Lewis M. Jiggitts, who graduated in 1818 from Penn with a degree in medicine and a thesis on amenorrhea, as being from North Carolina. The 1830 U.S. Census lists Jiggitts' ownership of eleven enslaved persons in Bertie County, North Carolina. The 1850 U.S. Census lists Lewis M. Jiggitts as being born around 1800 in N.C. making him aged 50, and records his occupation as doctor, his ownership of 3000 in real estate, and residence in Oxford, Granville County, N.C. Finally, from my preliminary research, Jiggitts' will from 1864 mentions a total of approximately 128 enslaved persons {the uncertainty of the number due to inaccurate listing of children}. From these documents I was able to prove that Penn alum Lewis M. Jiggitts had been an enslaver. My next step was then accessing Jiggitts' publications and writings. I did this to see if he had conducted any research on enslaved women, specifically with regard to OB/GYN practices, or to find additional records proving his in enslavement or racist medicine.

In searching for Jiggitts' publications, I first ordered a copy of his dissertation from Penn, which I have transcribed. This document gave me a good idea of what the field of OB/GYN looked like at the time, but lacked any reference to an alms house patient or enslaved women being used in research. Moving forward from this, I started conducting research through online databases of 19th century medical publications to see if Jiggitts, who was mentioned as a prominent physician, had ever published in any medical journals. I did not find anything through this inquiry, though I have reached out to the University of Mississippi and the University of

North Carolina to look through their repositories. Despite not being able to find any of Jiggitts' writings, I went ahead with researching him while also considering other medical leads. While looking through the Alumni Catalogue, I have found other potentially interesting paths of research related to the use of enslaved persons in medical research at Penn. These came from multiple listings of research conducted about diseases that were popping up in northern Virginia counties. There are even theses entitled "Some of the physical peculiarities and diseases of southern negroes," as well as ones titled simply "phrenology." However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic I had a lot of trouble getting hold of these dissertations, which are not all available online. Due to this difficulty in accessing dissertations, I didn't follow through with this possible lead early in the semester.

In additional research on Jiggitts, a Google search enabled me to find a runaway slave ad placed by Jiggitts, as well as mentions of him within *History of Hertford County NC* by Benjamin Brody Winborne (1906), a listing within the Granville County Slavery Petitions, as well as within *Historical Sketches of North Carolina* by John Wheeler (1851). I found the runaway ad placed by Lewis M. Jiggitts through the UNC Greensboro site. It lists a \$50 reward for a man named Henry who was owned by Jane G. Sumner (aged 23). It states that Henry ran away from Messrs. Moss and CO. in Clarksville VA during March 1852. The ad is dated Aug. 8 1853, and was placed in Oxford Granville NC. Within *History of Hertford County NC* (1906) by Benjamin Brody Winborne, Jiggitts' marriage is mentioned, and he is listed as a member of the North Carolina House of Representatives and a prominent doctor. Furthermore, within the Granville County Slavery Petitions, Jiggitts is listed as buying a son named Eaton out of a family in 1849. Finally, within *Historical Sketches of North Carolina* (1851) by John Wheeler, Lewis M. Jiggitts is listed as part of the North Carolina House of Representatives in 1822. This would

indicate that he would have entered the House of Representatives at the age of 26, which though young, is still possible because the minimum age for that office was 21 in North Carolina. Based on all of this information I was able to more solidly prove that Jiggitts was an enslaver of some importance, but I also noticed some inconsistencies in marriage and location where he was living that at that point were unresolved.

Through more research within the Ancestry.com database I pulled all documents related to Lewis M. Jiggitts and his immediate family. The documents that I found included the 1860 census, two separate 1860 slave schedules, marriage records from Jiggitts' first wife, as well as a legal dispute over land between Jiggitts and his second wife. Within the 1860 Census, Lewis M. Jiggitts was listed as a planter and physician with a real estate value of \$85,000 and a personal estate value of \$145,000 living in Madison County, Mississippi. Furthermore, within the 1860 slave schedules, Lewis M. Jiggitts is listed twice, enslaving 83 people in Madison County MS. and 52 people in Yazoo County MS. The marriage records indicated that the Jiggittses married in 1859, while within the land dispute records, it appears that they separated in 1861. Additionally, I found census records and gravestones of Jiggitts, his second wife, and all children mentioned as inheriting in the will. Furthermore, through a WorldCat database search I found a letter from Louis Jiggitts jr. which was written home during the Civil War. I have received this document but have not transcribed it yet due to its illegibility. Finally, I looked through online databases and through websites to see if I could find any more medical papers, but I was never successful in this, so I have no records of his medical practice. Based on all of these documents I was able to resolve some contradictions about his marriages, and found that Jiggitts became a much more prominent enslaver later in life while in Mississippi. I was curious about how the move between North Carolina and Mississippi changed his fortunes.

To answer that question, I looked up the counties listed in the census records from 1830, 1850, and 1860 and researched what they produced during these time periods that Jiggitts would have lived there. Granville County, North Carolina was mainly producing tobacco, while Yazoo and Madison counties in Mississippi were producing cotton, and were some of the counties most heavily reliant on sharecropping after the Civil War. I then tried to figure out who Jiggetts' father was to see if I could trace the enslavement back in time and see if the profits funded Jiggitts' education. The census records I found through Ancestry.com left me with two possible leads. They are listed in the correct county and right timeline, both have children of the right age on the census, and both have a few enslaved people (less than 10 people between them). With the help of genealogist Scott Wilds I found Elizabeth Ann Britton, Jiggitts' first wife, and her father William Britton, who appeared to have enslaved people on a large scale. From this I have gathered that Jiggitts most likely married into his status as an enslaver. Additionally, William Britton and Elizabeth Ann Britton both died in 1848, after which Jiggitts' personal value increased dramatically and he moved to Mississippi. Eleven years later, he would remarry. With help from Scott Wilds I also found deeds for land that Jiggitts bought in Mississippi, which I will be looking into in the future. All of this information provided more detail into what type of enslavement Jiggitts was engaged in, as well as how he got started out enslaving.

After looking through all of the information, based on where the Jiggetts family was living in Mississippi, I had hypothesized that after emancipation, they would likely have shifted to sharecropping. This was based on the fact that they were living in a cotton cultivating region that was the most densely populated with sharecroppers after the Civil War. Based on this hypothesis I went to Scott Wilds and asked where those documents would be available, and he referred me to the FamilySearch.org site where I could look through the county records. I started

looking at Land and Property records of Madison county in FamilySearch, and pulled all cases involving the Jiggitts family. In reviewing these, I found the record of a mortgage between David E. Jiggitts, son of Lewis M. Jiggitts, and George Gardner. This document detailed a mortgage that was along the lines of a sharecropping document, entered into in 1870.

Section 2: Research Analysis

While Dr. Lewis M. Jiggitts appears to have come from an enslaving family, this does not appear to be where his capital to enslave came from. After attending Penn, Jiggitts was able to return to North Carolina as a prominent physician. He was then elected to the N.C. House of Representatives, and was able to marry into a very wealthy family. With this new elevation of status and income enabled by a Penn education, Jiggitts was listed in 1830 as enslaving 11 people. It is likely that the initial 11 people whom Jiggitts enslaved came under his control when he married his first wife Elizabeth Ann Britton. However, this is speculative. During this time, Bertie County N.C. was a primarily tobacco economy, although it is unclear if Jiggitts operated a plantation at that time.

By the late 1840s Lewis M. Jiggitts was still living in North Carolina but had moved his large scale slave enterprise to Mississippi. Jiggitts was listed in Madison County, Mississippi in 1850 as enslaving 49 people, while the 1850 census for Dr. Lewis M. Jiggitts says that he is living in Oxford Granville N.C. Additionally, Elizabeth's father died in 1848 which also could have meant that Jiggitts could have gained funds to allow him to move out to Mississippi and make large land purchases to invest in larger slave holdings. However, I am still looking for William Britton's will to track this generational transfer of capital. In moving from North Carolina to Mississippi, Jiggitts reflected a larger trend of wealthy planters moving westward towards the cotton cultivating regions of the deep South where he was buying up large amounts of land for large scale cotton cultivation.

This westward movement necessitated the buying of more people to work on those larger cotton plantations. Records from the Granville County Slavery Petitions of 1849 show that Jiggitts purchased an individual and separated him from his family. This specific petition lists Lewis M. Jiggitts as buying Eaton from Allen Bridges in 1849 and splitting up three brothers and a mother. Together they are listed as Piety (mother) and Ben, Eaton, and Gabriel. Due to the massive increase in the number of people he enslaved in Mississippi, it is likely that Jiggitts purchased Eaton to work on Jiggitts' new cotton plantation. This would have meant not only family separation but also being taken to the deep South where work was harsher and mortality rates were higher among the enslaved.

Additionally, during this time period there are records of Lewis M. Jiggitts filing a runaway ad for a hired out enslaved person in 1853, with the location to return to listed as Oxford Granville NC. This ad states that Henry ran away from Messrs. Moss and CO. Clarksville VA in March 1852. Within another article from the same time period and town, this company is listed as being a stagecoach company working in travel and transportation. This indicates that, at this point, the people Jiggitts enslaved in N.C. were being hired out, with the benefits of their labor reverting to the Jiggitts family.

During the early 1850s, Jiggitts moved his family out to his new cotton plantation in Mississippi, where he had already bought large tracts of land, and was enslaving 49 persons. However, Jiggitts would very quickly compound this wealth through the labor of the people he enslaved. By 1860, the census listed Lewis M. Jiggitts as a planter and physician with a real estate value of 8,500 (\$2,575,757 now) and a personal estate value of 145,000 (\$4,393,939 now). In 1860 he enslaved 83 people in Madison county M.S. and 52 in Yazoo county M.S. However, this number does not take into account how many people his sons and children owned; altogether

that number was well over 200 people. This extravagant wealth enabled Jiggitts at age 64 to remarry Margaret L. Jones, who was 29 at the time.

Madison and Yazoo counties at this time had both developed an economy heavily invested in cotton production, which in turn depended on the labor of enslaved persons. “Yazoo had more enslaved persons (16,716) than all but two other counties, and slaves accounted for three-quarters of the county’s total population. In 1860 the economic value of Yazoo farms was the highest of all Mississippi counties, in large part because of its cotton production.” In Madison County the enslaved population numbered 18,118, a number that trailed only Hinds County. Madison ranked tenth among Mississippi’s sixty counties for the percentage of the population enslaved. Madison’s farms and plantations ranked third in the state for corn, fourth for cotton, fifth for Irish potatoes, and first in sweet potatoes. Slave-based plantation agriculture would fund Jiggitts’ sons’ educations at the University of Mississippi and at the University of North Carolina and would allow for the expansion of his slave ownership up to the Civil War.

The Union victory at the siege of Vicksburg in early 1863 meant that the area of Mississippi that the Jiggitts were living in was at some point attacked and controlled by Union forces. This was shown through a journal entry by Harry St. John Dixon who writes about meeting Dr. Lewis M. Jiggitts on March 4th 1864. Within this journal entry, Dixon details Jiggitts’ account of the Union troops moving through Madison county and seizing all of his property, although the entry lacks any mention of the enslaved people. However, Jiggitts’ will, written in November 1864, after the Emancipation Proclamation, nonetheless bequeathed 128 (+/-) people to his multiple children. This figure, compared to the 1860 slave schedules which listed him as enslaving 135 people shows very little fluctuation in the numbers of enslaved people despite the movement of Union troops through the region.

It is unclear how exactly the emancipation process worked for people enslaved by the Jiggitts. It is possible that some of the enslaved self emancipated in 1863 with the battle of Vicksburg and documented movement of Union troops through Madison and Yazoo counties. Additionally, there were high levels of Black enlistment into Union forces from Madison County to fight in Vicksburg, which was one possible route to freedom for the previously enslaved under Jiggitts. The enlistment records do not name previous enslavers so this is only a conjecture. Furthermore, it is also possible that Jiggitts' will in 1864 was an attempt to recoup any enslaved people after the war if the Confederacy won, and was not necessarily a reflection of how many people he actually had control over at that time. There is no clear explanation of how emancipation worked in this case.

An African American family with the last name Jiggetts were absent from the 1860 Census but registered in the 1870 Census, indicating prior enslavement. Some of the older members of this family were born in North Carolina, and then had children in Mississippi, meaning that they were likely brought to Mississippi by the Jiggitts family. While the names of this family were not listed in Jiggitts' will, it is still possible that they belonged to other members of the Jiggitts family. Additionally, the Black Jiggitts and white Jiggetts families were living in close geographic proximity, based on dwelling numbers listed on the 1870 Census.

Furthermore, I have found a sharecropping document between David E. Jiggitts and George Gardner. George Gardner is listed under the 1870 Census as an illiterate black male, born in North Carolina, who was working as a farm laborer. Additionally, there are a few Georges listed within Lewis M Jiggitts' will. From this I gather that Gardner was previously enslaved by the Jiggitts family. This document lists a mortgage which Gardner will pay with profits from the crops raised on the land during his lease. The document stipulates that at least $\frac{1}{2}$ of the crop

must be cotton, and that all animals that Gardner owned or used will revert to Jiggitts.

Additionally, Jiggitts will provide the Gardner family with supplies, farming implements, and seed that Gardner must repay with interest while also providing a commission. Altogether, this leads me to conclude that after the emancipation process, the Jiggitts family instituted a system of sharecropping amongst some of the previously enslaved to continue cotton production.

Section 3: Further Research

With regards to future research, what I have conducted thus far has raised several questions. I am still uncertain as to what the immediate effects of emancipation were and how the sharecropping system took hold in such a large number of cases. Additionally, why was sharecropping as an extraction method so universally adopted and why were these particular methods so successful at maintaining the racial hierarchy? With regards to the specific life course of Jiggitts, I would still like to clarify how Jiggitts started enslaving. I am still curious whether he ever conducted medical research on enslaved people, and for what reasons. Finally, how long did this economic extraction last from people he had formerly enslaved, and for how many generations?

I am still looking for more documents to answer some of these questions. I want to try to find out whether Jiggitts used his medical education to do research on enslaved people and to see if this was ever documented. I may also look into some of the names and practices listed in Jiggitts' dissertation to see if there is mention of alms house patients and to gain a general understanding of what the field of OB/GYN was like at the time he studied. Furthermore, I intend to look for additional sharecropping documents to see if I can find more examples like that of George Gardner. Additionally, I plan to look through the land purchases on family search and document how much land he bought and when he actually moved to Mississippi. In tracking his beginning in enslavement, I plan to look for Elizabeth Ann Britton's father and find his will,

that might help explain how Jiggitts started enslaving. I may read some diary entries from Lewis M. Jiggitts' great grandson who wrote home to Mississippi in WWI, to see if he references sharecropping or people renting from the family to show the perpetuation of intergenerational wealth through the exploitation of Black labor. Finally, I plan to read through the letter from the son written home during the Civil War to see what if there is anything of value in that document.

Section 4: Conclusions

The Jiggitts family as a case study illustrates the ways in which the extraction of Black labor would continue beyond slavery but change over time. Jiggitts began enslaving small numbers of people in North Carolina, who possibly worked in tobacco or were hired out. Then there was a move to the deep South and a shift towards cotton, as it boomed as an export. Finally, there would be a shift to sharecropping after the emancipation process to support the continued cultivation of cotton. This details the way in which enslavers found ways to ensure the continued exploitation of Black labor.

Furthermore, this case details the ways in which wealth is intergenerational. Through obtaining a Penn education, Lewis M. Jiggitts became a prominent physician, who was elected to the N.C. House of Representatives, married into wealth, and propagated that wealth through enslaving laborers and cultivating cotton. This wealth would pass to his sons, who would create an extractive economic system to maintain economic primacy over previously enslaved individuals. In this way, although the methods of extraction changed over time, the basic premise of the extraction of Black labor did not.

This case study can additionally be seen as a wider commentary on prevailing economic inequality. Due to the privilege of attending university and pursuing economic advancement, white people as a whole have had longer to build networks of power and accumulate intergenerational wealth, as seen here. Due to a long history of repression and violence, Black

people within the United States have had a much shorter window of time during which they were able to pursue economic advancement. Even after emancipation, systems of racism and the extraction of Black labor for white benefit did not stop, but merely shifted to sharecropping and other methods.

This case details the ways in which racial economic inequality from the early 19th century was designed to continue past the abolition of slavery, and has had an effect today. This story serves as a concrete example of the ways in which privilege, or lack thereof, compounds over time.