

Free Black Tenants of the University of Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century



Mona Hagmagid
May 2020

Penn & Slavery Project Final Report

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this course, during our inaugural class visit to the University of Pennsylvania archives, senior archivist Jim Duffin mentioned that he had found some names marked as African Americans listed in one of the university's early financial archival materials. Examining both the document mentioned by Mr. Duffin and other archival sources for names with similar racial markers, I collected a total of four names of black men who rented property from the university in the late eighteenth century. This final project chronicles the methods, challenges, and findings related to my primary research question for the Penn and Slavery Project: Who were the African American tenants of the University of Pennsylvania in the late eighteenth century?

To contextualize the significance of the information presented in this paper, it is important to understand the history of free African Americans in Philadelphia, and the realities faced by free black folk during the time period of the tenants highlighted (late 1700s- early 1800s). It is important to recognize that, at the time, chattel slavery was still a legal practice in the United States; but with gradual abolition policies in northern cities like Philadelphia, the population of free black individuals rose to over 1000 by the end of the American Revolutionary war in 1783.¹ Free black individuals were those who were no longer in bondage, or were born into freedom (by being the children of free individuals). Through examining what is known to us about the experiences of eighteenth century free black populations, there are three conclusions that help to frame the findings of this report. First, African American people who were able to access freedom still faced class barriers. Second, they continued to face racial discrimination. And third, as a response to their own unique challenges, they built community and organized around the black churches in Philadelphia. The class barriers that existed were not solely faced by black individuals, as poverty was also experienced by white Americans and immigrants. The ability to purchase property for example, was not only an economic freedom but a political one too. In colonial America, landowning white men would be the only citizens eligible to vote². The experiences of racism and prejudice were still very real threats on the lives of free black individuals. "Freedom" did not mean equality, and black Americans in

¹ Diemer, Andrew. "Free Black Communities." Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia. Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities (MARCH), 2017.

<https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/south-street-song/>.

² Ratcliffe, Donald. "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy, 1787-1828." *Journal of the Early Republic* 33, no. 2 (2013): 219–54. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2013.0033>, page 220,

Philadelphia bore the burden of proving to the rest of the nation and the western world in many ways that free African Americans could integrate into the structures of society.³ Part of that process, of integration and community development to ensure the survival and ability to thrive, took place within houses of worship. Philadelphia was the site of the first African Methodist church, the first African Presbyterian church and the first African Baptist church in the [American] north.⁴ Even the first, “fully independent black religion denomination in the [northern] hemisphere,”⁵ the African Methodist Episcopal church (AME) merged from Philadelphia. It is clear that the free black population in Philadelphia were pioneers not only in the very act of simply existing, but also in the ways they devised community and organizing tools to protect themselves and their families.

METHODS:

In this section of the report, I will describe the steps I took to investigate my research question, and present the findings available in this report. My first step was to collect the names of African American tenants from the University documentation. Examining the first document shown to me by Mr. Duffin, it was clear that the names of the men were listed as tenants of university property in the city. The document was a handwritten original ledger, recording transactions made by the University to others, and from others to the university. Beside each “debtor” name, the date of their rental payments was recorded as well as the amount paid. The properties they rented were denoted with terminology describing the property’s location (e.g. “5th and Walnut”) as opposed to a street address. Beside two names however, were the words “black man” written as descriptions for the men, in a similar manner to the ways that occupations were listed beside the names of other people mentioned. I took pictures of the pages and noted the names.

It is important to note that at this point in the process, as I was seeking to learn more about the names in the ledger, I contacted scholar Billy Smith, whose work surrounding the work class populations of early Philadelphia includes a very extensive database that he compiled of census data and other data relating to Philadelphia residents of the time. This was the second step in the process for me, gaining access to his database of Philadelphia residents, but his database only began with

³ Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: the Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988. <https://hdl-handle-net.proxy.library.upenn.edu/2027/heb.01388>. EPUB, page 5

⁴ *Ibid*, page 7

⁵ *Ibid*.

1790, as that was when the first census was completed. The individuals I investigated for this project were tenants in 1787, three years before the beginning of his data. So in step three, which was to cross reference the names and properties listed in the ledger, to observe for any overlap, my goals were (1) to find out if the black men listed in my document were recorded in the census anywhere else. This could help me to learn more about them, and gain more information on their life trajectories, and (2) to discover if any of the properties listed in the ledger were later on leased by black folk, which would allow me to connect more free black Philadelphians to the property of the university. Although I was able to find some of the buildings likely referenced in the database (it is very hard to verify due to the lack of house numbers), none of their residents were listed as black, and none of the names I had collected appeared in the database.

I returned back to the archives, determined to go through even more of the financial documents of the university, hunting for more names of African American tenants, while also gathering any information available on the property and real estate acquisitions of the university during the relevant time period. I spent several hours reading through many different documents in the archives and taking photos and notes on the different properties, continually cross referencing with the database to see if anything overlapped. By the end of the visit, I had lists of property acquired by the university, and two additional names of black men found within the archives, with the words “Blackman” or “negro” denoted beside their names.

In total, I ended up collecting 4 names, across all the sources I was able to examine in person. I am sure that there are more names to be examined that I simply did not have the chance to uncover yet, due to the closure of campus. The four men are listed below, along with the relevant information recorded about them in the university records.

1. John Eyres: He has been recorded as paying rent to the university in the years 1787 and 1788. In 1787, the university property listed is referred to as “5th and Walnut Street” property, and it is important to note that his rent is listed alongside Vergil White (below). This means that in the ledger, his name is beside that of Vergil in the “debtors” line, where the payer is listed.
2. Vergil White is another Blackman whose transaction with the university is recorded 1787, also listed for the 5th and Walnut Street property alongside John Eyres.
3. John Thomas, was listed in the archival documentation in 1787 as a renter to the university for what was described as a, “frame house on 5th street and Walnut”

4. Issac Siddens, documented as a tenant of university property in 1787, although the building is not specified

By	do	from John Dornaldson	50 16 3
By	do	from Joseph Mericars	68
By	do	from John Weidman	5 9 3
By	do	from Fred R Christian	22
By	do	from Sebastian Lybert	11 5
By	do	for sales of Formant Hay	5 15
By	do	from Joseph Mericars	30 7
By	do	from Robert Watts	7 6
By	do	from John Thomas blackman	1 17 6
By	do	from John Eyres	1
Carried forward			409 4 5 1/2

(left) John Eyres, John Thomas both listed here.

(Right) Virgil White listed twice, one as “blackman” and once as “Negro”

By	do	from George Linn	409 4 5 1/2
By	do	from Virgil White Negro	13 10
By	do	from Richard Watts	1 2 6
By	do	from Joseph Mericars	97 10
By	do	from John Coburn	9
By	do	from John Thomas blackman	3
By	do	from Virgil White blackman	11 1 2 1/2
By	do	from Marys Wrenford	3
By	do	from Matthew George	39 7 6
By	do	from John Wylke	2 16
By	do	from Robert Watts	32 10
By	do	from Margaret Chumman	10
By	do	from Daniel Morrison	3 5
By	do	from Joseph Mericars	1 13 9
By	do	from Robert Watts	12 10 6
By	do	from Robert Kellie	10
By	do	from Robert Kellie	3
Carried forward			697 10 11 1/4

By	do	from George Linn	697 10 11 1/4
By	do	from Daniel Morrison	30
By	do	from Margaret Chumman	3 15
By	do	from John Eyres	1
By	do	from Robert Watts	7 6
By	do	from Richard Watts	3
By	do	from John Coburn	2
By	do	from John Thomas blackman	12 3
By	do	from John Coburn	1
By	do	from Robert Watts	7 6
By	do	from John Wylke	4
By	do	from Casper Fluke	6 10
By	do	from John Eyres blackman	9 4 1/2
By	do	from John Eyres	15
By	do	from Daniel Morrison	2 17
By	do	from George Linn	7 10

Issac Siddons, referenced above as “blackman”

Unfortunately, these four names were the only individuals I could identify before COVID closures took effect. And so again, I shifted my research focus, committing myself to researching as much as I could about the four men whose names I did now know, and wanting to share even a

portion of their stories, with the wider Penn and Philadelphian community. This was step 7, the process of researching the lives of the men listed and assessing the degree to which information is available, while documenting as best as I could the narrative that forms around their story.

After exploring sites like ancestry.com and the University of Pennsylvania libraries database on my own, I reached out to genealogist and scholar Scott Wilds for assistance in navigating the world of genealogical databases. Scott's research was very helpful in opening the doors for me to begin to learn more about different family members of the men listed. Through watching his "tutorial" on research, I was able to learn better how to navigate the different sources and even the databases themselves. He also helped me find information on the family of Virgil White, the most accessible of all of the four men.

COVID-19:

It is important to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting university closure on my research when evaluating this project. Access to the archives was severely limited, and even being able to ask Mr. Duffin for sources wasn't useful, as much of my hours spent there were dedicated to simply rifling through documents looking for mention of real estate and "Blackman" and "negro" beside tenant names. Additionally, even access to the archives of the city became unavailable.

This distance from the physical sources that I had been relying on required me to shift my research focus almost entirely. One of my goals before the pandemic was to compile a list of almost all of the properties owned by the university during the late 18th and early 19th centuries and cross reference that list with the database of working class Philadelphians collected by researcher and scholar Dr. Billy Smith. I then intended to approximate how many free African Americans may have lived on university property and potentially compile a list of some of their names. I also hoped to find connections between some of the owned properties of Penn and locations and buildings significant to the African American community later on in history.

Although it has been very frustrating to have things come to a halt so abruptly, it has opened up the door for me to pivot from focusing on the quantity of names, and instead to zoom in on the few that I have, and search for as much of their stories as I can. It has reminded me that even I can fall victim to flattening the personhoods of black folk in history, and this has been a reminder to me that every time we speak about those enslaved or free, we are speaking about real people, with real

families, and real-life stories that are each uniquely their own.

FINDINGS:

This project produced six significant findings.

Finding A is that the university rented property to African American people during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This simple conclusion is significant, and although it may have been assumed by historians before, we now have proof through archival documentation from the university itself. Although it is fascinating and meaningful for historians and researchers, the very fact that that documentation for the university in the late 18th century included racial markers for those of African descent, and that it was important for some reason to denote this in the records is still unclear to me why this would have been done. Some, like Mr. Duffin, might suggest that it could be to clarify which of the possible Philadelphians of that same name were being referenced. A key issue with this argument is that that sort of distinguishing would then seemingly apply to anyone with that common name, and it isn't clear why there wouldn't be people of potentially multiple races with the same name. In that case, only identifying the race of the payer would not necessarily help in identifying the individual. Others might hypothesize that it could also represent something significant for the accountant or whoever was collecting the rent payments to ensure that they were receiving pay from the right tenants (or perhaps not to be shocked when they arrive at the house and see the skin color of the residents). Although it is unclear why these distinctions were made so clear in the documentation, they remain a central finding.

Finding B, simple yet also profound, is that we know the names of some of those African American individuals that rented from the University. The names are significant because they enable researchers to learn more about the actual black Philadelphians interacting financially with the university during this time, and even allow us to know more about the lives of the individuals, even if so little as where they lived for a time period long enough to make a documented rental payment. It is interesting to note that none of the black men listed had their occupations also listed beside them, unlike other tenants mentioned in the ledgers. This may perhaps support Mr. Duffin's theory about race being a specifier, potentially in place of an occupation, and to fulfill a similar function.

The third finding, C, is that some of the four African American men are listed repeatedly throughout the financial records, showing continual payments, while others only appear once or

twice. John Eyres for example, is listed multiple times, while Issac Siddens only once. This helps in mapping out the story of the men listed, as one can see if someone was a longer or more short-term tenant..

Finding D encompasses the families and additional information on some of the men listed in the university archival information with the help of Scott Wild's own research on the subject. Of all the men, additional information about Virgil White was the easiest to find. Virgil, who rented from the university in 1787 and submitted his rent along with John Eyres, was married and had at least three children that we know of. Through accessing records on ancestry.com and the records of the historically black churches Christchurch-St. Peters and St. Thomas in Philadelphia, the name Virgil (also seen as Virgel) White, a unique enough name to indicate accurate specificity was listed as having married Judith (also seen as Judy) White on October 14th 1784 at Christ Church and St. Peters.⁶ This means that in 1787, he had only been married for three years, making the couple still newlyweds. Judith, through a register of baptisms from St. Peters, is recorded as having been born on December 7, 1763 to parents Cuffy and Michal⁷. This information lets us know that Judith, was a Philadelphia native, born into freedom in the city to parents who were free and able to register her baptism. We also learn that she was twenty-one years old when she married Virgil. The Church of Christchurch and St. Peters, clearly holds much memory and significance for the couple, as they attended the church as a couple, but also as Judith was baptized there. Their first two known children, Thomas⁸ and Catherine,⁹ were also baptized at St. Peters, Thomas having been born on July 21, 1787, the same year that the White family rented from the university, and Catherine, having been born on November 30th, 1791, only a year after the first American census. The Whites were

⁶ Register of marriage, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1835, vol. 36, unpaginated, imaged as page 75, entry for 14 October 1784, Virgil and Judith, Negroes, by the Rector; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/295#> : accessed 18 April 2020).

⁷ Register of baptisms, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1810, vol. 31, unpaginated, imaged as page 10, entry for 29 April 1764, baptism of Judith, daughter of Cuffy and Michal, born 7 Dec. 1763, by the Rector Rev. Richard Peters; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/287#> : accessed 18 April 2020)

⁸ Register of baptisms, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1810, vol. 31, unpaginated, imaged as page 243, entry for 9 October 1789, Thomas, son of Virgel and Judy White, born 21 July 1787, by the Rector Dr. William White; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/287#> : accessed 18 April 2020)

⁹ Register of baptisms, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1810, vol. 31, unpaginated, imaged as page 255, entry for 30 November 1791, Catherine daughter of Virgil and Judy White, born 16 June 1791, by the Rector; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/287#> : accessed 18 April 2020)

only married for three years when they had Thomas, when Judith was 24, and Judith was 28 when Catherine was later born. This information helps us to piece together the story and image of the White family.

When the Census was conducted in 1790, a Virgil White was listed as the head of a household of four people, which would include Judith, Thomas, but possibly not Catherine, if the church records detailing her birthday are accurate. Judith may have been pregnant at the time, and so it's possible that they counted the unborn child as an individual in the census record. It is also possible that the fourth individual was not a child but could have been another adult living with them at the time. It is important to note that John Eyres is listed as having lived with Virgil in 1787, and perhaps he could have continued to live with them though that time. The relationship between John and Virgil isn't clear through the information I have access to so far.

The 1790 census is also important because it records Virgil's address. This address is not the same as the one mentioned in the University archives as being at the corner of 5th and Walnut street. The address in the census references the west side of North 7th Street, between Market and Race Streets, house number 68.¹⁰ This means that, if this Virgil White is indeed the same Virgil White who rented from the University in 1787 and 1788, he had moved to a different home by 1790. It is also interesting to note that under the category, "occupation", is listed the term, "Negroe." This classification may validate theories elaborated on previously that the racial markers in the original university files served as an alternative to an occupation, aiding in specifying the individual listed.

When it comes to the occupation of Virgil White, there are two documents in the Philadelphia City Directory, one from 1794¹¹ and the other 1796¹², that record a Virgil White as being a laborer at 75 Shippen St., Southwark Philadelphia (also seen as Shippen Street near Third). It is highly likely that the two Virgil Whites are the same, as they worked at the same location. But there is no racial indicator in the city directories, which makes it more difficult to confirm his identity. We also have another document from those year, a 1795 record from the African Church of

¹⁰ Note from Genealogist Scott Wilds: this location was determined from surrounding pages in the original source.

¹¹ James Hardie, *The Philadelphia Directory and Register* (Philadelphia: Jaces Johnson, 1794), p. 166. Note the image is from the collection at Fold3.com (<https://www.fold3.com/image/78699953>), which has no title page. There is a digitized copy available through Internet Archive.

¹² Stephen's *Philadelphia Directory for 1796* (Philadelphia: Thomas Stephens, 1796), p. 197, entry for Virgil White; digital image, Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/philadelphiadire1796phil/page/196/mode/2up>)

St. Thomas, which notes a baptism of a child, Samuel White, with Parents Virgil and Jude White¹³. This may very well have been the third White child, born after the census data confirms them moving from the previous university owned property, and also denoting a new church for the family, possibly related to their move to another part of the city.

The information about the family of Virgil White also provides us with the names of black women who were also tenants of the university at the time, as their names wouldn't be listed in the financial records because they were not the payers. The stories of black women are often difficult to find in archival and census data, as the heads of households are often listed without the names and details of the other members of their homes. In a patriarchal society like America, women's identities were folded into those of their husbands. It is important for historians and researchers to place the stories of black women within the larger narrative of African American history.

The second free black tenant of the university that I was able to find information on, was John Eyres, who is connected to Virgil White as they were listed as Co-Debtors on the 5th and Walnut street property for which they paid rent in 1787. There is a John Eyres listed in a city directory for Philadelphia as being an "artist"¹⁴, and in a record of Philadelphia Crafts persons from 1730-1760 as being a "joiner."¹⁵ Additionally, in the records for another Church in Philadelphia, Old St. George's Church, in 1802, there is a recorded attendance of a man named John Eyres¹⁶. However, whether this is the right John Eyres is hard to determine. Old St. George's did have black members, but many of them famously left the church following the leadership of Richard Allen, in an attempt to form a new black church¹⁷. This date is recorded as either 1787, or 1792.¹⁸ Either way, the date of 1802 is long after, and about fifteen years after the University data indicated Eyres as a tenant, making it harder to confirm that these were the same individuals.

¹³ Register and Records, Absalom Jones, Rector, 1796-1837, African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, unpaginated, imaged as page 3, entry for 4 August 1794, Samuel, son of Virgil and Jude White baptized, born 25 August 1795, by A. Jones Rector; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/454#> : accessed 18 April 2020)

¹⁴ Ancestry.com. *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

¹⁵ Ancestry.com. *U.S., Craftperson Files, 1600-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014

¹⁶ Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*; Reel: 389

¹⁷ Melton, J Gordon. "African American Methodists in the Antebellum and Reconstruction Periods: A Timetable, 1760-1876." Squarespace.com, 2013.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5776ca76d2b8573a1eb3d822/t/579a6deab8a79bd38b839728/1469738477433/AFRICAN+AMERICAN+METHODISTS.pdf>, page 3

¹⁸ Ibid, page 3-4

Lastly, John Thomas, listed as having rented from the University in 1787 as well, could have been the parent of a John Thomas Jr., recorded as having been baptized by at St. Thomas Church, another historically black church in the city, on July 12th, 1801.¹⁹ This is dated several years after the recorded university tenancy, but it is possible that they are the same person. If so, then John Thomas's wife would have been Matilda Thomas, also mother of John Jr.²⁰ What is particularly interesting, is that Absalom Jones, the Rector for the church, was one of the two leaders of the black congregation split with Old St. Georges, the church referenced for John Eyres above. Absalom eventually split with Richard Allen, with Jones founding the Episcopal St. Thomas, and Allen founding the Methodist Bethel Church.²¹ It is likely that if this is the same John Thomas, that he may have been a part of the initial split from Old St. Georges, making him a pioneering member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). There are some potential records that also point to a John Thomas of color in the city of Philadelphia, but for one of them dates of his birth would make him only ten years old at the time of the rental (unlikely).²² There is a second document, that references a John Thomas, a free person of color living in Philadelphia's in 1810 who may be more likely to be the same man as the one referenced in the university archives.²³

The last of the six findings is finding F: what I *didn't* find. This project was not a smooth road from start to finish. There were several dead ends that I faced in trying to seek out information on the men listed. I searched for many hours, lots of dead ends when it came to researching both the other two men (John Thomas and Issac Siddens) and the children of Virgil White. At one point in the process, I thought that what I read in the university ledgers as Issac Siddons might have actually been Issac Snowden, who was a founding board member of the St. George church and mentioned multiple times in their church minutes. But upon further examination of the original ledger, I realized that I had read the name Siddons correctly all along, significantly decreasing the probability

¹⁹ St. Thomas' Church (Philadelphia, Pa.) and Jones, Absalom, 1746-1818, "Register and records, Absalom Jones, Rector, 1796-1837," *Philadelphia Congregations Early Records*, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/454>

²⁰ St. Thomas' Church (Philadelphia, Pa.) and Jones, Absalom, 1746-1818, "Register and records, Absalom Jones, Rector, 1796-1837," *Philadelphia Congregations Early Records*, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/454>, pages 30-31

²¹ Melton, J Gordon. "African American Methodists in the Antebellum and Reconstruction Periods: A Timetable, 1760-1876." Squarespace.com, 2013.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5776ca76d2b8573a1eb3d822/t/579a6deab8a79bd38b839728/1469738477433/AFRICAN+METHODISTS.pdf>, page 3

²² <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-994K-MDXD>

John Thomas, free black man, aged 29, proof of citizenship to be a seaman in 1807, native of Philadelphia, signs his name – found by Scott Wilds

²³ <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9CYD>

John Thomas, free person of color, household of 4 people, living in Cedar Ward, Philadelphia, 1810 – found by Scott Wilds

that they were the same person. Through navigating false leads, I gained skills in determining the race of a person who appeared in archival documents²⁴ based on some identifiers and through tracing black people's family trees. If someone was listed as associated with a black church, it increases the likelihood that they are also black. If someone was associated as living in Europe, for example, it decreases that likelihood. Sometimes, upon further investigation, some of the people I thought I had found, were listed as dead or as children, which of course ruled them out as tenants to the university. In other instances I could tell that someone wasn't who we were looking for because their place of death was in a southern part of the country, like Virginia or Maryland, and assuming that the tenant had moved that far from Philadelphia did not seem like a reasonable assumption.

Part of the process is also realizing how easy this would be if they were white! White Americans with similar last names have very detailed and lengthy family trees that are easy to access! I got so frustrated I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes as I realized that, were they white American people, they would have been so easy to document. But the ways that black folks were deliberately and systemically excluded from both the legal and public sphere mean that documentation is limited, scarce, and hard to validate and connect to other pieces of information. The saving grace, among it all, has been the church records, for the historically black churches here in Philadelphia. The information gleaned about Virgil White, John Thomas, and John Eyres rely on Church records significantly. This is important, and to recognize the importance of organized institutions and religious houses of worship in not only the cultivation of community, but also in the organization of communal knowledge and information (record keeping, etc.) For the wider American public, the "separation of church and state" might be woven into the political fabric of their reality, but it seems that for free African Americans in Philadelphia, the church was that "state" acting as the record keeper of births and deaths and marriages, and attendance (census-type information) just as a government agency might. The ability to have records of births and marriages of African American people is important for genealogical work. For white American and Europeans, finding birth and marriage records can be much easier. But when you have individuals who are fleeing enslavement, facing systemic discrimination, and excluded from certain legal resources due to class and education, alternative sources of authority and government step in to provide the records necessary to piece together the story. In the case of these gentlemen and their families, the black church served that purpose.

²⁴ a term I have made up for the purpose of this paper. It means someone who is located in an archival material.

NEXT STEPS & CONCLUSION

The next step for future researchers is to continue the research in the archives to complete a list of all African American tenants listed in the university records before 1865. A list of their names, properties rented, and time periods of payment and tenancy would be very helpful, as well as the amounts collected from each person. The more names that can be collected, the more research can be done into their individual genealogies, allowing for their stories to be fleshed out and shared.

This project so far however, has already generated many probing questions for related projects in the future. How did the university find these black tenants? Were they being charged differently than others (discrimination)? What was the condition of the properties rented to African Americans during this time period? Were they dilapidated, well-constructed, or “on par” with the rest of the neighborhood? Being able to understand the ways that university interacted with these individuals further, and can help shed light on the existing sentiments surrounding free African Americans by the university and its leadership.

This project is important. So much of the PSP research thus far has been, and rightly so, about unearthing the unethical monetary ties held by the university with those in the business of enslaving others and those whose businesses relied upon and profited off of slavery. These financial ties reveal to us about the foundational funding of the institution we are a part of today. Although those decisions were made centuries ago, they still form the foundation upon which the university was constructed, and thus, paving an important role in the historical chain of events that has produced this very moment. What do we owe to those who were horrifically enslaved and violated, so that we could have the University of Pennsylvania? These are the questions left lingering in most students and community members’ minds and hearts after taking a journey through the PSP website and hearing about the ongoing projects.

This research that I have been working on this semester does something else distinct. Real estate is a financial investment, and the rent money collected is revenue, that in the case of the University, is used to cover operational costs. This means that renters to the university, whether aware of it or not, are financial contributors to the institutions. In the early days of the university, this money was even more crucial, enabling the foundation to be laid for the decades to come.

In recognizing and uncovering the names and stories of the African American tenants of the university, we recognize and uncover the monetary contributions of African American peoples to the founding of this university. In a sense, the African American community has contributed to the

financial grounding of the university in ways beyond the industry of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also as free people seeking to provide a home and shelter for their families. We owe to them, even if only a fraction, of what was seeded to birth the place that we call our intellectual home. These individuals and their families are a part of the reason we are all here today.

SOURCES:

- Archival Materials from the University of Pennsylvania Archives
- Diemer, Andrew. "Free Black Communities." Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia. Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities (MARCH), 2017. <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/south-street-song/>.
- Densmore, Christopher. "Aim for a Free State and Settle among Quakers: African-American and Quaker Parallel Communities in Pennsylvania and New Jersey," *Quakers and Abolition*, Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Plank, eds. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014, 120-134
- Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: the Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988. <https://hdl-handle-net.proxy.library.upenn.edu/2027/heb.01388>. EPUB.
- Melton, J Gordon. "African American Methodists in the Antebellum and Reconstruction Periods: A Timetable, 1760-1876." Squarespace.com, 2013. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5776ca76d2b8573a1eb3d822/t/579a6deab8a79bd38b839728/1469738477433/AFRICAN+AMERICAN+METHODISTS.pdf>.
- Ratcliffe, Donald. "The Right to Vote and the Rise of Democracy, 1787-1828." Journal of the Early Republic 33, no. 2 (2013): 219–54. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jer.2013.0033>.
- Dr. Billy Smith's Database, "1791 Master File", excel document
- Ancestry.com
-

Virgil White:

- Register of baptisms, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1810, vol. 31, unpaginated, imaged as page 10, entry for 29 April 1764, baptism of Judith, daughter of Cuffy and Michal, born 7 Dec. 1763, by the Rector Rev. Richard Peters; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/287#> : accessed 18 April 2020)
- 1790 U.S. federal census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Middle District [see book title at Ancestry frame 64], page 76 (crayon p. 116), [west side of N. 7 th St. between Market and Race], household of Virgil; digital image, Ancestry, citing NARA M637, roll 9.
- Register of marriage, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1835, vol. 36, unpaginated, imaged as page 75, entry for 14 October 1784, Virgil and Judith, Negroes, by the Rector; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/295#> : accessed 18 April 2020.)
- Register of baptisms, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1810, vol. 31, unpaginated, imaged as page 243, entry for 9 October 1789, Thomas, son of Virgel and Judy White, born 21 July 1787, by the Rector Dr. William White; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/287#> : accessed 18 April 2020)
- Register of baptisms, Christ Church and St. Peter's Church, 1763-1810, vol. 31, unpaginated, imaged as page 255, entry for 30 November 1791, Catherine daughter of Virgil and Judy White, born 16 June 1791, by the Rector; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project

(<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/287#> :
accessed 18 April 2020)

- Register and Records, Absalom Jones, Rector, 1796-1837, African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, unpaginated, imaged as page 3, entry for 4 August 1794, Samuel, son of Virgil and Jude White baptized, born 25 August 1795, by A. Jones Rector; digital image, Philadelphia Congregations Early Records Project (<https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/454#> :
accessed 18 April 2020)
- James Hardie, The Philadelphia Directory and Register (Philadelphia: Jaces Johnson, 1794), p. 166. Note the image is from the collection at Fold3.com (<https://www.fold3.com/image/78699953>), which has no title page. There is a digitized copy available through Internet Archive.
- Stephen's Philadelphia Directory for 1796 (Philadelphia: Thomas Stephens, 1796), p. 197, entry for Virgil White; digital image, Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/philadelphiadire1796phil/page/196/mode/up>)

John Thomas:

- St. Thomas' Church (Philadelphia, Pa.) and Jones, Absalom, 1746-1818, "Register and records, Absalom Jones, Rector, 1796-1837," *Philadelphia Congregations Early Records*, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://philadelphiacongregations.org/records/items/show/454>
- Link to a file I cannot access:
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-994K-MDXD>
- Link to another file I cannot access:
<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33S7-9YB6-9CYD>

John Eyres:

- Ancestry.com. *U.S., Craftperson Files, 1600-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.
- Ancestry.com. *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.
- Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*; Reel: 389