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Penn & Slavery Project Report

The University of Pennsylvania denied any and all ties to the institution of slavery on two separate occasions. In 2006, University Archivist Mark Lloyd reported to *The Daily Pennsylvanian* that the university's "18th century trustees are not known to have profited from the slave trade."¹ In 2016, University Communications Officer Ron Ozio, told *The Philadelphia Tribune* that "Penn has explored this issue several times over the past few decades and found no direct university involvement with slavery or the slave trade."² The university supported this claim by noting the strong Quaker presence in Philadelphia. However, a significant amount of scholarship has established that Philadelphia's Quakers were themselves involved in slavery and the slave trade in Philadelphia.³ Citing the Quaker influence on the early university to exonerate the institution from complicity in slavery raises more questions than answers. In 2017, 5 undergraduate researchers collaborated to found the Penn & Slavery Project (P&SP) and explore these questions. Under the direction of Professor Kathleen Brown, the team began conducting research to find more information about both of those claims, and examine any and all ties between the University of Pennsylvania and the institution of slavery.

Since its first public presentation, every P & SP research report begins with defining complicity. Many universities have looked for direct institutional ties to slavery. However, research efforts dedicated exclusively to the institution can leave a lot of stones unturned. Slavery did not exist in a vacuum. To this day, the damages caused by the ripple effect of slavery can be seen in the infrastructure of social, financial, political, legal, and educational systems in the United States. To better understand the nuances of complicity in slavery the Penn & Slavery Project explored ways to complicate the definition. A thorough exploration of complicity requires researching the 'many ways in which universities established during the colonial period relied on and contributed to America's slave society in the years prior to the Civil War.'⁴ This definition, and the extensive research conducted

¹ Heather Schwedel, 'Penn says 'all clear' as Ivies decry slave ties,' *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, Nov 3, 2006.

² Dylan Reim, 'Penn says it finds no direct connection to slavery,' *The Philadelphia Tribune*, Sept 14, 2016.

³ See: Wood, Betty, *Slavery in Colonial America, 1619-1776* (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2005).

⁴ Complicity as defined by the members of The Penn & Slavery Project

by every member of the P & SP team, has effectively disproven both of the university's claims.

This paper is a report of my contributions to the project. I began as an undergraduate member of the Penn & Slavery Project and because of my dedication to the project I was awarded the Provost's Public History Fellowship. The report details the questions we asked before beginning the research, the sources used to conduct the research, and the findings about the ways eighteenth-century trustees, founders, and the provost profited from the slave trade, the ways the legacy of slavery is tied to the university's original campus, and the traces of the institution present on the West Philadelphia campus today.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The research began with an exploration of the *University Archives and Records* on the page most relevant to the research of the Penn & Slavery Project (P&SP), 'Penn Trustees 1749-1800: Read their stories... see their faces...' The page listed all the founders and 18th Century trustees with links to short biographies providing details about their connections to the university, various accomplishments, and other basic information. Further down the page, a paragraph encourages the reader to 'engage in a scavenger hunt' and search through the biographies to answer a short list of questions. 'Who were NOT native English-speakers?' 'Who asserted that drinking rum led to lead poisoning and why?' And finally, 'Who owned slaves? Did anyone openly oppose slavery?'⁵

William Allen's biography identified him as a trustee, founder, and a slave owner, 'In 1779 he revisited Philadelphia and, by adding a codicil to his will, freed his slaves at his death the following year.'⁶ His biography raised the central question for the project: What role did slave ownership play in the foundation of the College, Academy, and Charity School of Philadelphia, now known as the University of Pennsylvania?⁷ This led to a series of additional questions: Was William Allen the only slaveholding trustee, and if not, how

⁵ 'Penn Trustees 1749-1800,' *University Archives & Records Center*, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

⁶ 'Penn Biographies: William Allen (1704-1780),' *University Archives & Records Center*, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

⁷ 'Constitutions and Charters,' *University Archives & Records Center*, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

NOTE: The 'College, Academy, and Charity School of Philadelphia' joined the medical school of the 'University of the State of Pennsylvania' in 1765 and, after changes in university charter and state charter the institution became the 'University of Pennsylvania' in 1791. For continuity, the institution is referred to as 'University of Pennsylvania' or 'Penn' throughout this report.

many trustees owned enslaved people? What was the proximity of slave ownership to the campus? Did any enslaved people live or work on campus? It stood to reason that some trustees did not own slaves; however lack of ownership did not necessarily mean a lack of connection to the institution of slavery in Philadelphia. Most of the early trustees had vast amounts of wealth. How much did the trustees profit from their involvement in the slave trade? How much of the university's foundational wealth relied on its trustees' involvement in the slave trade?

The University of Pennsylvania currently stands in West Philadelphia, but the first campus was farther east, in a part of the city now known as 'Old City Philadelphia.' A plaque of Benjamin Franklin hangs on the corner of 4th and Arch St. marking the location of the original campus. A thorough study the university's relationship with slavery would have to include research about the construction of this early campus. Was slave labor used during the construction of the Old City Campus? If so, who oversaw the project, and who received compensation for the labor of slaves? Were there any connections between the original and current campuses? Are there any traces of the original trustees and founders on the university's West Philadelphia grounds?

To thoroughly assess all of the connections between the University of Pennsylvania and slavery, the project tried to collect information about the relevant enslaved people. Who were these enslaved men and women, and what were their names? Were they ever freed? Would it be possible to trace their descendants to anyone alive today? And if so, do those descendants have any current connections to the University of Pennsylvania?

With these questions in mind, the P&SP researchers prepared to find the answers. The majority of archival research was conducted in University of Pennsylvania Archives, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and the Library Company of Philadelphia. The materials included probate records, family papers including letters and journal entries, and pamphlets distributed throughout colonial Philadelphia. When the institution was legal, slaves were considered property, and slaveholders had to file and pay property taxes. These tax records appear in the Pennsylvania Tax and Exoneration Records, compiled in an online database by Ancestry Library. Published primary sources include advertisements and

articles posted in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Secondary literature used in this project includes multiple works by Gary Nash, *Ebony & Ivy* by Craig Wilder, *Not All Wives* by Karin Wulf, and various academic journal articles about Pennsylvania history. The main objective of the project is to enable the University of Pennsylvania to present a candid profile of its connections to the institution of slavery. The Penn & Slavery Project has used these resources to answer many of these questions.

TRUSTEES, FOUNDERS & THE PROVOST

The University Archives web page displayed information the university had already gathered about the occupations of the 122 eighteenth century trustees, which provided clues about who may have been involved in the trade. Merchants and overseas traders were most likely to have connections to slavery through their business ventures. After eliminating the trustees unlikely to own slaves, P&SP created a smaller list of trustees to research. Due to the limited resources afforded by a one semester independent study undertaken by five students, the researchers chose to look in depth at a small number of trustees, and split the chosen trustees amongst the members. Of the 28 trustees we examined closely, tax records and wills suggested that at least 20 held slaves. The trustees researched in P&SP's first semester are as follows: ⁸

* William Allen: Founder; Trustee 1749-1780

* Dr. Thomas Cadwalader: Trustee 1751- 1779

**Benjamin Franklin: Founder; Trustee 1749-1790

**Isaac Norris: Trustee 1751-1755

**John Inglis: Founder; Trustee 1749-1790

* Benjamin Chew: Trustee 1757- 1791

* Samuel McCall Jr: Founder; Trustee 1749-1762

* Thomas Willing: Trustee 1760-1791

William Plumstead: Founder; Trustee 1749-1765

Amos Strettell: Trustee 1762- 1780

Robert Strettell: Founder; Trustee 1749-1762

* James Tilghman: Trustee 1775-1788

Philip Syng: Trustee 1749-1773

* Robert Morris: Trustee 1778- 1791

* Charles Willing: Trustee 1749-1754

** Joseph Reed: Alum *bon*; Trustee 1778-1785

Lloyd Zachary: Trustee 1749-1756

* John Cadwalader: Trustee: 1779- 1786

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* James Searle: Trustee 1779- 1781

Charles Pettit: Trustee 1786- 1802

***William Moore*: Trustee 1781-1789

* William Bingham: Alum; Trustee 1789-1804

James Potter: Trustee 1781-1782

Caspar Wistar: Alum; Prof; Trustee 1789-1791

* John Dickinson: Trustee 1782 -1785

* Edward Tilghman Jr.: Alum; Trustee 1794- 1807

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN was the University of Pennsylvania's most notable founder. His contributions to the American Revolution, journalism, science, and countless other fields have made him a historical household name. In 1749, Benjamin Franklin proposed the foundation of a Philadelphia university saying, 'It has long been regretted as a misfortune to the youth of this province that we have no academy in which they might receive the accomplishment of a regular education.'⁹ Proof of his legacy is recognized on the University of Pennsylvania campus, with many buildings and organizations named in his honor: Franklin Field, the university's football stadium; Benjamin Franklin Scholars, a group of undergraduate students who receive research grants and fellowships; the Ben Franklin Room in Houston Hall, America's first student union; The Kite and Key Society, a group of tour guides who perform tours and organize events for prospective students; the 3 statues: Young Ben (1914), Ben in Front of College Hall (1938), and Ben on the Bench (1987). In addition, Franklin's famous maxims are carved into walkways are a few of the many pieces of evidence proving the undeniably important role he played in Penn's foundation.¹⁰ Benjamin Franklin was also a slave owner.

There was no mention of Franklin in the university's statement to the *Daily Pennsylvanian*. However, the university partially acknowledged Ben Franklin's ties to slavery in the statement made a decade later to the *Philadelphia Tribune* in 2016: 'It's well known that our founder, Ben Franklin, early in his life owned slaves,' and followed this point by mentioning

⁸ 'Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration Records 1768-1801,' *Ancestry Library* [database-online]; Family and Probate Papers from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Archives; Craig Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013). *Trustees held enslaved people. See research reports by Brooke Krancer, Caitlin Doolittle, Dillon Kersh and Matthew Palczynski for more information. **Trustees were assigned to VanJessica Gladney and are further examined in this report. 'William Moore' is italicized due to misidentification. Records suggest that William Moore of Moore Hall had connections with the university and owned enslaved people. Research into William Moore of Moore Hall contributed to the eventual discovery that Provost William Smith held enslaved people. Further details on Provost William Smith will also be examined in this report.

⁹ Benjamin Franklin, *Proposals relating to the education of youth in Philadelphia* (1749).

¹⁰ 'The Embodiment of Benjamin Franklin on Penn's Campus' *The Almanac* volume 63, [19], Jan 17, 2017.

his work as a Pennsylvanian abolitionist.¹¹ Because the intent of the statement was to deny university ties to the slave trade, the reference to Franklin's abolitionist efforts is worth a critique. Acknowledging his ownership and simultaneously denying ties supports the notion that if a slave owner changed their position on slavery, whether by granting their slaves freedom, or working as an abolitionist, their new stance negated any earlier involvement. The statement identifies Franklin as both a slave owner and an abolitionist and denies that any trustees profited from the slave trade. The disconnect expressed here was the inspiration for P&SP researchers to redefine 'complicity.' Overlooking the link between 'ownership' and 'profit' demonstrates a flawed characterization of slavery. Labor that requires worker compensation qualifies as an expense for anyone benefiting from said labor. However, relying on slave labor mitigates this expense and increases the slaveholder's profits. Any abolitionist work after the acquisition of those profits does not erase those profits or distribute that wealth to the enslaved people. The ownership of even one enslaved person, for any period of time, results in slaveholder benefits from slavery.

Additionally, Benjamin Franklin benefited from the institution of slavery in more ways than ownership. Franklin earned profits from both the domestic and international slave trade.¹² As the editor of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Franklin benefited financially from the advertisements for runaway slaves and slave auctions paid for by slave owners and traders. The university's statement was correct, however, about Franklin's subsequent abolitionism. A few months before he died, he wrote strongly against the institution, calling it an 'atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with solicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils.'¹³ However, focusing purely on the last months of his life does not paint an accurate picture of Benjamin Franklin's complicity in the slave trade. The goal of the Penn & Slavery Project is to complicate the definition of complicity, and in doing so, offer a more candid assessment of the University of Pennsylvania and its founders.

¹¹ Sheila Simmons, 'UPenn claims no traces of slavery in its DNA,' *The Philadelphia Tribune*, Sept 9, 2006.

¹² David Waldstreicher. 'Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the Founders: On the dangers of reading backwards,' *Common Place* volume 4 [4] July 2004.

¹³ Benjamin Franklin, Pennsylvania Society For Promoting The Abolition Of Slavery. *An address to the public, from the Pennsylvania Society for promoting the abolition of slavery, and the relief of free negroes, unlawfully held in bondage*. Philadelphia Nov 9, 1789.

JOHN INGLIS was a founder and trustee, who held several positions in public office including city councilman and deputy collector for the port of Philadelphia.¹⁴ Inglis's biography on the University Archives page names Samuel McCall Jr., Inglis' brother-in-law and fellow university trustee, as a partner in a 'business of trade.'¹⁵ Inglis and McCall were in the 'business' of investing in slaving voyages to the West Indies and the Carolinas.¹⁶ The pair, and additional members of McCall's side of the family invested in over a dozen slaving voyages.¹⁷ Inglis sold these slaves and British indentured servants throughout the greater Philadelphia area.¹⁸ He placed advertisements in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* to announce the sale of 'A Likely young Negro woman, who can Wash, Iron and cook well; also a young Negro Girl, about 14 Years of Age,' in 1739, and an additional advertisement in 1742 to sell a 'Negro woman and her daughter.'¹⁹ The Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration Records from 1774 suggest that John Inglis owned 8 slaves but he died in 1775 before the state could collect additional taxes. Two of his sons, Samuel and John, attended the University of Pennsylvania. According to the Pennsylvania Tax and Exoneration Records, Samuel Inglis owned one enslaved person in 1782.²⁰

The Penn & Slavery Project's research into colonial slavery has shed light on many contradictions. Several of the men who held enslaved people in their homes fought for American independence. The connections between ISAAC NORRIS, Penn's history, and American history are notable examples of slaveholding freedom fighters. Isaac Norris served as a Penn trustee from 1751 to 1755. Isaac Norris, Sr. owned slaves and actively participated in the slave trade. A memorandum of sale stated that Norris, Sr. purchased 2 slaves, and several pounds of coffee from an English ship in 1707. However, both he and his wife, Mary Lloyd, freed many of their enslaved people in their wills. Norris, Sr.'s will declared that his slave, Will, should be free 3 years after his death 'on condition he serve his mistress whose

¹⁴ 'Penn Biographies: John Inglis (1708-1775),' *University Archives & Records Center*, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Craig Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy*, 72-3.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Darold D Wax, 'Negro Imports Into Pennsylvania, 1720-1766,' *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* Volume 32, [3] (1965), 254-87.

¹⁹ John Inglis, 'To be SOLD by John Inglis,' *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 19, 1739;

John Inglis, 'To be SOLD by John Inglis,' *Pennsylvania Gazette* June 24, 1742.

²⁰ 'Pennsylvania Tax and Exoneration Records, 1768-1801,' *AncestryLibrary* [database online].

property he will be.’²¹ When Mary Lloyd Norris died she bequeathed her ‘negro girl Dinah’ to her daughter, Elizabeth.²²

While serving as a university trustee, Norris also served as the Speaker of the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly. In 1751, his first year as speaker, the assembly commissioned a bell for the Pennsylvania State House. Norris ordered that the bell be inscribed with the Bible verse from Leviticus 25:10, ‘Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.’ Though he was a slave owner at the time, he spoke on American independence saying he ‘prized liberty and thought of it as a universal right.’²³ Both Isaac Norris Jr. and his sister held slaves for significant periods of their lives before eventually freeing them.²⁴ In 1835, almost 70 years after Norris’s death, the abolition movement was approaching its peak. An abolitionist journal in New York, *The Anti-Slavery Record* published an article titled ‘The Liberty Bell’ highlighting the hypocrisy of a bell with a quote that praises liberty hanging over a slave holding city. ‘The bell has *not* obeyed the inscription; and its peals have been a mockery, while one sixth of ‘all the inhabitants’ are in abject slavery.’²⁵ In 1839, *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper distributed in Boston contained a poem by H.R.H. Moore, also titled ‘The Liberty Bell.’ The sonnet calls on Philadelphians to ring the Liberty Bell ‘till the slave be free.’²⁶ Because of these two publications, the statehouse bell earned the name ‘The Liberty Bell’ and became a symbol for the abolition movement.

Had Isaac Norris suggested a different verse the bell may not have gained the significance it still carries today. Isaac Norris Sr. sold, owned, and bequeathed slaves and, thus, involved his family in the slave trade. However, his son continued the family tradition of slave ownership while making a direct contribution to dismantle the institution of slavery, not only in his own family, but also in the nation. These actions complicate the Norris family’s complicity in the slave trade. They also speak to the importance of a deeper look into the connections, beyond simple ownership. Blanket denial of involvement with

²¹Karin Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia*. (Cornell University Press, 2000), 108.

²² Ibid.

²³ Gary B. Nash, *The Liberty Bell: Icons of America*, (Yale University Press, 2010), 3-6.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ R. Williams, ‘The Liberty Bell,’ *The Anti-Slavery Record* volume 1 (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1835), 22.

²⁶ H.R.H. Moore, ‘The Liberty Bell.’ Published in *The Liberator*(Boston, 1839).

the institution of slavery, and blanket condemnation of that same involvement are both irresponsible. Doing either threatens to erase or ignore the complex legacy of men like Isaac Norris.

Isaac Norris is not the only trustee with connections to the larger narrative of American history. There are many links between the early histories of the University of Pennsylvania and the early history of the United States of America. JOSEPH REED was a trustee, paid taxes on a slave in 1774, and helped pass the Gradual Abolition Act while President of the Supreme Executive Council of Philadelphia.²⁷ It is important to consider the contradiction that many of the men responsible for founding the University spent time discussing national sovereignty, and establishing independence from a foreign state. At the same time, some of these men denied that same freedom and sovereignty among the people they had enslaved. This complexity extends not only to the founders of the nation, but to the city in which the founders met, Philadelphia. In 1780, Philadelphia passed America's first abolition legislation, *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*. It states, 'that all persons, as well Negroes and Mulattoes as others, who shall be born within this state from and after the passing of this act, shall not be deemed and considered as servants for life, or slaves.'²⁸ However, some slave owners, such as George Washington, would use the law's 6-month grace period for residence in the state as a loophole and continue to own slaves in the city for the better part of a decade.²⁹

The research on WILLIAM MOORE was conducted in the same manner as that of the other trustees. Pennsylvania tax records verified that William Moore owned three enslaved people in 1769 and two enslaved people in 1774.³⁰ Moore also posted a 'runaway slave' advertisement in the Benjamin Franklin's newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*:

'RUN away from William Moore of Moore-hall in Chester County, a likely young Negro Man named Jack, speaks but indifferent English, and had on when he went away a new ozenburg Shirt, a pair of strip'd home spun Breeches, a strip'd

²⁷ 'Pennsylvania, Tax & Exoneration Records 1768 -1801,' *AncestryLibrary* [database online], 1774.

²⁸ 'An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery,' *Pennsylvania Gazette* Dec, 29, 1779; Supreme Executive Council of Philadelphia, *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*, Pennsylvania State Archives March 1, 1780.

²⁹ Erica Armstrong Dunbar, 'George Washington Slave Catcher,' *New York Times*, Feb, 16, 2015.

³⁰ 'Pennsylvania, Tax & Exoneration Records, 1761-1806,' *AncestryLibrary* [database online] 1769; Ibid. 1774.

ticking Wastecoat, an old dimity Coat of his Master's with Buttons of Horse teeth set in Brass, and Cloth Sleeves, a Felt Hat almost new. Whoever secures the said Negro , and will bring him to his Master, or to John Moore , Esq; in Philadelphia, shall receive Twenty Shillings Reward and reasonable Charges.’³¹

The advertisement was posted in 1730, five years before William Moore, trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, was born. The first line states that William Moore of Moore Hall paid for the advertisement. William Moore of Moore Hall was 31 years old when the advertisement was printed, and he is the son of John Moore. William Moore, trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, was born to Robert and Elizabeth Moore. Trustee William Moore has no direct familial connection to a ‘John Moore.’³²

Although William Moore of Moore Hall was not a trustee, he did have connections to the institution of slavery. His family papers in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania were stored in the Cadwalader family box and contained a series of wills from Mr. and Mrs. Moore.³³ In his will, Moore bequeathed all of his slaves to his wife Willamina Moore. He died in 1783, survived by his wife and children. His wife died one year later, but during the last year of her life, Willamina drafted numerous versions of her final will. In the first few drafts, she divided the slaves amongst her children, referring to one of the slaves as a ‘mulatto girl.’³⁴ However, in the final draft, she specified that all other drafts were made ‘null and void’ and freed the slaves.³⁵ This final draft, written on January 10, 1784 was the only will, from either Moore, that identified the slaves by name.

‘My Will is that my three Mulatto Slaves, Solomon, George and Rachel at Moore Hall, be free as soon as the Plantations can be sold or Rented out, and the Possession thereof delivered to the Purchasers of Tenants, and that my Negro

³¹ William Moore, ‘RUN Away from William Moore’ Advertisements, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 20 August 1730

³² While William Moore, trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, did not post this advertisement it is still unclear if he held enslaved people. Pennsylvania Tax & Exoneration Records show that a William Moore paid taxes on slaves in 1769 and 1774. To date, there is insufficient information to determine with absolute certainty which Moore paid taxes. Further research is underway.

³³ The Cadwalader family has close connections with Penn. Studies of the Cadwaladers are included in research by other members of the Penn & Slavery Project. See the research report of Dillon Kersh. Connections to the Cadwalader family raised the potential for connections to the university and prompted my continued research into Moore of Moore Hall. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Cadwalader family. *Cadwalader family papers*. ‘Material primarily relating to the affairs of William Moore of Moore Hall.’

³⁴ Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Cadwalader family. *Cadwalader family papers*. ‘Material primarily relating to the affairs of William Moore of Moore Hall.’

³⁵ Ibid.

Boy Harry, be free at twenty eight years of age, or earlier, at the discretion of my Executive, to whose Care I commit his Education.’³⁶

After William and Willamina Moore died, Solomon, George, Rachel, and (eventually) Harry, were granted freedom.³⁷

After learning the names of William Moore’s enslaved people, it was important to find information on William Moore of Moore Hall and verify his connection to the University of Pennsylvania. Another search through the University of Pennsylvania Archives revealed that William Moore of Moore Hall was a friend of WILLIAM SMITH, the first Provost of the University of Pennsylvania. The two Williams were arrested together by the Pennsylvania provincial assembly after attacking the assembly’s military policy.³⁸ Smith eventually married Moore’s daughter Rebecca. Together William Smith and Rebecca had two sons: William Moore Smith, who graduated from Penn in 1775, and Thomas Duncan Smith, who graduated from Penn in 1776. William Smith served as Provost from 1755 to 1779, and again from 1789 to 1791. According to Pennsylvania tax records, William Smith owned ‘1 Negro’ in 1769.³⁹ This suggests that William Smith, the first Provost of the University of Pennsylvania owned an enslaved person during his first term as Provost.

THE CAMPUS

The University of Pennsylvania prides itself on being America’s first University and names 1740 as the founding year.⁴⁰ However, Benjamin Franklin’s *Proposal Relating to the Education of Youth* did not circulate until 1749. Furthermore, the *University Archives* states that the first classes were not held until 1751.⁴¹ Originally, the P&SP researchers dismissed the discrepancy as product of the numerous name changes around the time of the university’s foundation. However, after further research, the basis for the university’s claim to its

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Early in the project, P&SP researchers committed to shifting the narrative off of the slave owners, and onto the enslaved people. This has since proven to be extremely difficult, as many slaveholders referred to their slaves as ‘boy’ or ‘wench’ in lieu of names, William Moore of Moore Hall was not founder or an early trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, but he did have a connection to the university and he did own enslaved people. Their names were: Solomon, George, Rachel, and Henry. They were slaves. Then they became free.

³⁸ ‘William Smith (1727-1803),’ Penn Biographies, *University Archives & Records*. University of Pennsylvania Archives.

³⁹ ‘Pennsylvania, Tax & Exoneration Records 1768-1801,’ *AncestryLibrary* [database online], 1769.

⁴⁰ Penn’s Heritage,’ *University of Pennsylvania History*, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

⁴¹ ‘Penn’s First Campus, 1749-1801,’ *University Archives & Records*, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

founding year presents a strong connection between the University of Pennsylvania and the institution of slavery.

The University of Pennsylvania was founded in Old City, Philadelphia, on the corner of 4th & Arch St. The building was originally intended as a church, and then converted to a school at the request of Benjamin Franklin. Robert Smith was hired as an architect to renovate the building. Smith was a member of the Carpenter's Company of Philadelphia. Founded in 1724, the Carpenter's Company was a group of architects, building contractors, and engineers that helped build many historic buildings in Philadelphia. As a member of the Company, Smith helped build historically significant buildings in Old City, Philadelphia including: Carpenter's Hall, the meeting place of the Carpenter's Company and, eventually, the First Continental Congress; Christ Church, with a steeple that reached the highest point in the colonies for a little over 50 years; Benjamin Franklin's Philadelphia home.⁴²

The Carpenter's Company allowed their members to use slave labor while constructing buildings. "If any member takes a slave apprentice, he shall pay to the President, for the use of the Company, Twenty Pounds; or hire a slave as a journeyman, shall pay the sum of One Dollar for every month that he employs him, for the use aforesaid."⁴³ After converting the building into the school from 1750-1755, Robert Smith continued to work for the University of Pennsylvania where he became known as the 'House Carpenter'. Smith built the university's first dormitory in 1763, and a house for Provost William Smith in 1774. It is unclear whether Smith paid the required fees to the Carpenter's Company while working for the University of Pennsylvania, and thus, unclear if any enslaved people helped Smith. However, he did pay taxes on "2 Negroes" in 1769 and "1 Negro" in 1774.⁴⁴ Regardless of whether slave labor was used to construct the campus, the original building was not completed until 1755, 15 years after the university's claimed start date.

The University of Pennsylvania claims the year 1740 as their founding year because of one man: George Whitefield. Whitefield is considered the 'Founder' of Methodism and

⁴² Constance M. Greiff, Charles Emil Peterson, Maria M. Thompson, *Robert Smith: Architect, Builder, Patriot 1722-1777* (Athenaeum of Philadelphia, 2000).

⁴³ Article 8, *Articles of the Carpenter Company*, American Philosophical Society.

⁴⁴ 'Pennsylvania, Tax & Exoneration Records 1768- 1801,' *AncestryLibrary* [database online], 1769; Ibid, 1774.

the Evangelical movement in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American Atlantic.⁴⁵ In 1740, George Whitefield published an open letter to the 'Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina concerning their Negroes' in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. In the letter, Whitefield chastised slave owners for mistreating their slaves. 'Your Dogs are caress'd and fondled at your Tables-- But your Slaves... do not have equal Privilege.'⁴⁶ His main concern was that the slave owners were not 'teaching them Christianity,' claiming they had fear that conversion would 'make them proud.'⁴⁷ Whitefield reminded the slave owners that such beliefs were 'a dreadful Reflection... on your Holy Religion.'⁴⁸ But a closer look at Whitefield's letter reveals that he never condemned the institution itself, and instead, focused solely on converting slaves to Christianity.

George Whitefield's opinions about slavery appeared to soften over the next decade. The same year he wrote the letter to slave owners, he founded an orphanage in Georgia, where slave labor had been outlawed 5 years earlier. In 1741, he realized the difficulties of taking care of large amounts of land and remaining financially solvent. Whitefield wrote an *An Account of the Orphan House in Georgia* expressing his desire to use slave labor, 'as for manuring more land than the hired servants and great boys can manage, it is impracticable without a few negroes.'⁴⁹ The shift in his opinion of slavery became more apparent in his 1747 letter to 'a generous benefactor unknown' in which he exclaimed, 'God has put into the hearts of my South Carolina friends, to contribute liberally towards purchasing a plantation and slaves in this province which I purpose to devote to the support of Bethesda... One negroe has been given me- Some more I purpose to purchase this week.'⁵⁰ In 1747, as the orphanage continued to struggle, Whitefield began to campaign for Georgia to allow slavery within the colony. He explained that slavery would benefit his business and the colony as a whole. 'The constitution of that colony [Georgia] is very bad, and it is impossible for the inhabitants to subsist without the use of slaves.'⁵¹ He wrote to the trustees of Georgia about the missed opportunity regarding the success of his orphanage, 'Had negroes been allowed I

⁴⁵ 'George Whitefield' *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.

⁴⁶ 'Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina concerning their Negroes,' *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 17, 1740.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ George Whitefield, 'An Account of the Orphan House in Georgia, 1 Jan 1742,' *Works of Whitefield* eds. John Gillies (Quinta Press, 2001)

⁵⁰ George Whitefield, 'Letter to a generous benefactor unknown, 15 Mar 1747,' *Works of Whitefield* eds. John Gillies (Quinta Press, 2001)

⁵¹ Mark Gailli, 'Slaveholding Evangelist: Whitefield's Troubling Mix of Views,' *Christian History* [38] (1993).

should now have had a sufficiency to support a great many orphans.’⁵² He claimed that his orphanage would not succeed and that Georgia would fail without the institution of slavery. The most successful part of the argument was when he gave the trustees an ultimatum, threatening ‘I cannot promise to... cultivate the plantation in any manner’ if the anti-slave laws were not overturned.⁵³ The trustees were convinced. In 1751, George Whitefield’s campaign was a success and the trustees once more allowed the institution of slavery to exist and thrive within the colony of Georgia.

George Whitefield’s major contribution to the University of Pennsylvania was the building on 4th and Arch St. intended for his church in Philadelphia. He abandoned that building to found his Bethesda orphanage, and went on to overturn the anti-slave laws in Georgia. The University of Pennsylvania uses the date that George Whitefield began building his church, which Robert Smith eventually renovated, as its start date. Without a claim to George Whitefield, the founding year would be between 1751 and 1755. In fact, the University moved its official start date on two separate occasions. The date 1750 appears on the original university seal. Shortly after, the university named 1749 as its start date, even celebrating the centennial in 1749. But Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania’s historic rival, was founded in 1746. By claiming George Whitefield as a founder the University of Pennsylvania could officially name itself America’s first university.

The connection between George Whitefield and the institution of slavery is undeniable. And one can argue that the connection between George Whitefield and the University of Pennsylvania is motivated by prestige. In 1899, the university trustees voted to, once again, change their starting date to 1740 thus naming themselves America’s first university. Professor Edward Potts Cheyney wrote in his study of the University of Pennsylvania (his alma mater), ‘It will have been noted that 1740 is the date of the creation of the earliest of the many educational trusts the university has taken upon itself.’⁵⁴ Today, George Whitefield has a statue on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. He stands on a pedestal in The Quadrangle, a freshman dorm built in 1894–1930 and renovated in

⁵² George Whitefield, Letter to a generous benefactor unknown, 15 Mar 1747, *Works of Whitefield* eds John Gillies (Quinta Press, 2001).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania 1740-1940* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940).

1953–59. The Quad, as it is less formally known, consists of 39 smaller dormitories, at least 10 of which are named after slave owners.

The university's voluntary connection with Whitefield points to an institutional pattern of prioritizing reputation over truth, which encouraged the University of Pennsylvania to deny their connections to slavery in 2006 and 2016. Their attempt to gain prestige by being the 'first,' created a direct connection to the institution of slavery in colonial America, which they would later attempt to deny. It is the job of projects like the Penn & Slavery Project to discover these connections and call into question whether or not they should remain intact.

GOING FORWARD

The Penn & Slavery project has collected a great deal of information in a short time. However, our research is only the beginning of an extended project. I have participated in this research since its conception. I have had the pleasure of watching and assisting undergraduate students at the University of Pennsylvania as they invest their time and energy into uncovering the history of their university. I hope the project will continue for several semesters and I am excited to watch it grow and progress.

This information does not fundamentally alter my understanding of the University of Pennsylvania. As a woman of color, it does not surprise me that elite white men with beliefs in racial inequality founded an Ivy League Institution. But what has changed my view of Penn is the support this administration has given to the Penn & Slavery Project. The ultimate goal of academia is to find the intersection between truth and fact. It has been an honor to be a member of a project that has presented facts and helped shift the University of Pennsylvania closer to the truth. It is an uncomfortable truth, but a burden of truth shared by the nation and every institution founded during the colonial era. The University of Pennsylvania did have connections with the institution of slavery; nothing can be done to change that. But we can change, and have changed, our position on the issue.

I have two suggestions for future research. The first is to find more names of enslaved people whose labor supported the early university. Thus far, our research resulted

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in more numbers than names. But slavery was able to thrive for so long in the United States because of the dehumanization of people of color. It was easy to enslave a person when you considered them less than a person. Also, when numbers measure ownership, we run the risk of belittling the horrors of the institution of slavery by quantifying complicity. It is irrelevant how many or few slaves one family owned. It is unimportant how kindly those slaves were treated. The importance lies in the value of a human life, and what we can do to make sure that the slaves owned by early trustees and faculty are remembered by more than a tally mark. I know from experience how difficult it is to find names and identities, but this difficulty should not deter our research.

My second suggestion for the future members of The Penn & Slavery project: keep complicating complicity. One danger when discussing the institution of slavery is to draw lines between 'cleared of all charges' and 'complete condemnation.' However, the most fruitful conversations and considerations of an individual exist in the space between the two. As you study the complex history of our university and reconcile with its past actions, expand that complexity to the analyze the history of our nation and its relationship with slavery. Slavery did not exist in a vacuum. It touched almost every aspect of our young nation, and the results of it still influence our country today. It is key for projects like the Penn & Slavery Project to complicate the conversations we have about the past, and thus enrich the conversations we will have in the future.