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The Penn & Slavery Project

William Pepper Jr. and the Pepper-Hearst Expedition

Introduction

On April 8, 2021, more than 50 students and West Philadelphians protested outside the Penn Museum against the Morton Cranial Collection, a collection of approximately 1000 crania including some crania of Native Americans and enslaved African Americans.¹ The University of Pennsylvania and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, commonly known as the Penn Museum, have a troubled relationship with human remains. From the Morton Cranial Collection to the human remains of the victims of the MOVE bombing in Philadelphia, the issue of unethical collection of human remains is at the center of the controversy. This paper contextualizes the University of Pennsylvania's role in the unethical curation and collection of human remains in the 1890s in the case of Pepper-Hearst Expedition to demonstrate the role of higher-education institutions in promoting scientific racism.

Research Process

My first research interest as a student in the Penn and Slavery Project research seminar was Samuel A. Cartwright, a physician who argued that slaves' desire for freedom was a mental illness called drapetomania. Wikipedia claims he was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Given his medical theories supported slavery, I wanted to investigate to what extent did Penn influenced his medical theories and compounded scientific racism. However, I was unable to find relevant records on Cartwright's relations to Penn in the University Archives and

¹ Brandon Anaya. "Students, West Philadelphians Call on Penn to 'Return the Remains' of Morton Collection." The Daily Pennsylvanian. The Daily Pennsylvanian, April 9, 2021. <https://www.thedp.com/article/2021/04/protest-philadelphia-penn-museum-morton-collection-remove>.

the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts. Professor Brown mentioned that Cartwright was not an alumnus of Penn. Instead, he obtained his medical degree from Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky where he studied under Dr. Charles Caldwell, an alumnus of Penn.² Because it seems there was no formal affiliation between Cartwright and Penn and a lack of accessible primary sources on Cartwright, I turned my attention to alumni of the Penn medical school who had relations to slavery.

I began by looking at John Ker (1789-1850), a physician, slave-owner, and politician in Louisiana. His father, David Ker (1758-1805), was the first presiding professor of the University of North Carolina. Ker graduated from the Penn medical school in 1822 and wrote a medical thesis on amenorrhea, or the absence of menstruation. He was later involved with the American Colonization Society and co-founded the Mississippi Colonization Society. I was very interested in his medical thesis which is currently stored at the Kislak Center. I wondered if his interests in fertility and female reproductive organs were related to his financial interests in slavery. I also wondered if his medical thesis used enslaved women as research data. Unfortunately, his medical thesis is incredibly vague, and it does not indicate his research methods or research subjects. Furthermore, I was also interested in Ker's social networks with other physicians/slave-owners. For example, he was a close friend of Stephen Duncan (1787-1867), one of the wealthiest and largest enslavers in the United States. Duncan was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania and gained his medical degree from Dickinson College in 1805. Both Ker and Duncan owned plantations in Natchez District, Mississippi Territory. I wondered if Ker became acquainted with Duncan during

² Willoughby, Christopher D. E. "Running Away from Drapetomania: Samuel A. Cartwright, Medicine, and Race in the Antebellum South." *The Journal of Southern History* 84, no. 3 (08, 2018): 579-614, <https://proxy.library.upenn.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/running-away-drapetomania-samuel-cartwright/docview/2343679037/se-2> (accessed December 3, 2022).

his years in Philadelphia. The bulk of the primary sources on the Ker family is at the University of North Carolina and is currently inaccessible to me. Although I contacted their microfilm department as well as the Inter-Library Loan department at Penn, unfortunately, the only way to access these primary sources as of now is to visit the Wilson Special Collections Library at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

I then tried to find alumni of the Penn medical school whose papers are available at the Kislak Center. I found and became interested in Dr. William Pepper Jr. (1843-1898) because he founded the Penn Museum, and I wondered if he was involved with the acquisition of the Morton Cranial Collection. However, I learned that the Penn Museum did not house the collection until 1966. So, I turned my attention to the Pepper (Pfeiffer) family and specifically William Pepper Jr.'s father, grandfather and great-grandfather, William Pepper Sr. (1810-1864), George Pepper (1779-1846), and Henry Pepper (1739-1808). Scott Wilds, an expert genealogist, has been very helpful in guiding the genealogical research. Both Henry Pepper and George Pepper were successful businessmen in Philadelphia, and I was interested in whether their business involved slave labor. My preliminary research did not find evidence of the use of slave labor. When I visited the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts to see the William Pepper Jr. papers, I learned about Pepper's involvement in the Blockley Almshouse and the Pathological Museum of the Pennsylvania Hospital. I reached out to Paul Wolff Mitchell, who has published extensively on the Morton Collection as well as Penn's history with human remains. Mitchell offered significant feedback regarding my research question and guided me to some relevant primary sources. Future researchers should investigate Pepper's role at the Pathological Museum of the Pennsylvania Hospital, his potential involvement with the Pathological Museum of the Blockley Almshouse, and his social and professional network with other physicians such as Dr.

Thomas George Morton, head physician of the Pennsylvania Hospital, a collector of human remains, and son of Samuel George Morton, both of whom were alumni of Penn.

William Pepper Jr.'s Wikipedia page shows that he funded an expedition to Florida, named Pepper-Hearst Expedition. Interestingly, there is no mention of the expedition in the Pepper papers at the Kislak Center. I was able to access a report by Frank Hamilton Cushing, the leader of the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, through HathiTrust Digital Library. Although there is some personal correspondence of Frank Hamilton Cushing at the American Philosophical Society where he originally presented the report, this report remains the central primary source of this research project. After reading the report, I found that the Pepper-Hearst Expedition excavated the remains of many Native Americans. I decided to pursue this topic for this research project. After I chose my topic, I corresponded with Dr. Paul Wolff Mitchell and Dr. Stacey O. Espenlaub, the Kamensky NAGPRA Coordinator at the Penn Museum. Mitchell pointed out that an inventory of Native American human remains and cultural artifacts at the Penn Museum and the Wistar Institute can be found in the NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) databases. NAGPRA requires institutions that receive federal funding to return Native American human remains and artifacts of cultural and spiritual significance. My email correspondence with Espenlaub has also been fruitful.

Research Findings

In 1896, British Lieutenant Colonel Charles Durnford, a retired British military officer and amateur expeditionist, discovered some well-preserved wooden artifacts in Key Marco, a site in Marco Island, Florida and brought them to Dr. William Pepper Jr. (1843-1898).³ Pepper was then chair of the archaeology department at the Penn Museum, former professor of medicine and

³ Frank Hamilton Cushing. *Preliminary Report on the Exploration of Ancient Key-dweller Remains on the Gulf Coast of Florida*. Vol. 35, no. 153. MacCalla, 1897, 1-2.

provost at the University of Pennsylvania, and the founder of the Penn Museum as well as the Free Library of Philadelphia. Graduated from the college in 1862 and from the medical school in 1864 at the University of Pennsylvania, he taught morbid anatomy and clinical medicine at the medical school. After seeing the artifacts from Key Marco, Pepper immediately recognized the need for an expedition to Key Marco “in the interest of the department he represented.”⁴ He believed these artifacts would be great additions to the collections at the Penn Museum. Frank Hamilton Cushing, a patient of Pepper and a field anthropologist at the Bureau of American Ethnology, volunteered for the expedition, which was approved by Major J. W. Powell, the founding director of the Bureau.⁵ The expedition, known as the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, was funded by the Penn Museum, and named after Pepper and Phoebe Hearst,⁶ a major patron of Penn Museum.⁷

At the southwest corner of Pine Island, Florida, Cushing excavated his first human remains for this expedition, including “large bones and small, many of which had been split or shattered, mingled with skulls, some few fortunately still entire, although very fragile.”⁸ He recognized that the site where he excavated bones was a Native American cemetery of spiritual significance, likely belonging to the Seminole Tribe of Florida. At Tarpon Springs, Florida, Cushing excavated “more than six hundred skeletons” at a burial ground for the duration of several weeks and later excavated at another burial ground “some nine miles to the northwestward of Tarpon Springs” near Anclote, Florida where he found “abundant similar interments and relics of like kinds, similarly

⁴ Cushing, 2.

⁵ Cushing, 2-3.

⁶ Phoebe Elizabeth Apperson Hearst (1842-1919) was a philanthropist and suffragist. She was the founder of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley and the National Parent Teacher Association. A close friend and patient of Dr. Pepper, Hearst sponsored many expeditions and donated more than two hundred objects to the Penn Museum.

⁷ Department of the Interior. “Notice of Inventory Completion: The Wistar Institute, Philadelphia, PA, and University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, PA.” *Federal Register*. Vol. 79, No. 144, July 28, 2014, 43774.

⁸ Cushing, 19.

distributed.”⁹ What happened to the large number of human remains excavated by Cushing remains unknown. It is very likely that Cushing brought them back to the Penn Museum and the Smithsonian Institution where other cultural artifacts he found are currently housed and displayed. Among the remains and artifacts he brought back, Cushing reported that he had given 13 crania belonging to the people he considered to be “the true key-dweller” to Dr. Harrison Allen, professor of physiology at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School who was “studying them preparatory to full publication,” in 1897.¹⁰ However, Allen died shortly after receiving the human remains and never finished or published his study. The Penn Museum housed the remains of at least one individual obtained through the Pepper-Hearst Expedition from 1901 to 1915.¹¹ Penn Museum donated those remains to the Wistar Institute on January 11, 1915, and the Wistar Institute transferred the same remains to Penn Museum “on a long-term loan in 1956.”¹² On October 12, 2015, “representatives from the Seminole Tribe of Florida’s Tribal Preservation Office traveled to Philadelphia to formally receive the human remains,” which were reburied shortly after the representatives returned to Florida.¹³

Research Analysis

Just as Dr. Samuel George Morton used the Morton Cranial Collection to justify racism with allegedly scientific methods, Frank Hamilton Cushing also used the crania he obtained through the Pepper-Hearst Expedition to develop racist scientific theories about racial hierarchies.¹⁴ In his report to the American Philosophical Society, Cushing argued that “an

⁹ Cushing, 25.

¹⁰ Cushing, 119.

¹¹ Department of the Interior. “Notice of Inventory Completion,” 433774.

¹² Department of the Interior. “Notice of Inventory Completion,” 433774.

¹³ Penn Museum. “2015, Seminole Tribe of Florida.” Penn Museum. Accessed October 22, 2022.

<https://www.penn.museum/about-collections/statements-and-policies/nagpra-compliance/repatriations#23>.

¹⁴ Paul Wolff Mitchell. “The Fault in his Seeds: Lost Notes to the Case of Bias in Samuel George Morton’s Cranial Race Science.” *PLoS biology* 16, no. 10 (2018): e2007008, 9.

environment and the essential conditions of human existence therein, makes indeed, not only a culture, but goes far toward making a race.”¹⁵ Although Cushing’s statement implicitly supported monogenism, the theory that all human races have a common ancestry, his derogatory categorizations of the Indigenous people indicated his racial biases. He called “the key-dwellers” “primitive,” their “high development in government” “abnormal,” and their civilizations “barbaric.”¹⁶ This racial bias was an integral part of scientific racism.¹⁷ Although Dr. Harrison Allen did not publish on the human remains associated with the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, he previously published *Crania from the Mounds of the St. John’s River Florida: A Study Made in Connection with Crania from Other Parts of North America* in 1896, concerning Native Americans living in the eastern coast of Florida. In this work, Allen used anthropometry, or the measurement of human crania, to determine racial differences in terms of physical sizes and mental capacities. Specifically, Allen used his observation of “infantile characters” in adult crania belonging to “the Esquimaux, natives of the Sandwich Islands and many North American Indians” to support the claim that “a skull is of high grade in proportion as it departs from the fetal characteristics.”¹⁸ In other words, he was arguing that the child-like features of Native American crania proved that Native Americans were not as developed as white people, a scientific judgment that is essentially identical to the racist judgment of Cushing. Allen received 13 Native American crania from the western coast of Florida after Cushing returned to Philadelphia, likely for the purpose of

¹⁵ Cushing, 78.

¹⁶ Cushing, 82, 86-87.

¹⁷ Stephen Jay Gould, and Steven James Gold. *The Mismeasure of Man*. WW Norton & company, 1996, 101; Mitchell, "The Fault in his Seeds: Lost Notes to the Case of Bias in Samuel George Morton’s Cranial Race Science." 11; Halford H. Fairchild. "Scientific Racism: The Cloak of Objectivity." *Journal of Social Issues* 47, no. 3 (1991): 109.

¹⁸ Harrison Allen. "Crania from the mounds of the St. John's River, Florida." *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. New Series* 10, no. 4 (1896), 432-433.

supplementing his research on crania from the St. John's River and to bolster his racist scientific theories about human evolution.

Although efforts of individuals such as Pepper and Cushing were pivotal in creating the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, what set it apart from the Morton Cranial Collection is that both governmental and private institutions were ultimately responsible for the expedition and for the possession of Native American human remains. Recognizing institutional roles in appropriating Native American human remains is particularly important because it speaks to the structural and institutional racism in the realm of academia. The United States Congress established the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1879 to transfer Native American materials from the Department of the Interior to the Smithsonian Institution. Under the direction of the Department of the Interior and the United States Congress, the Bureau of American Ethnology conducted anthropological and ethnographic research on Native Americans.¹⁹ The Bureau, under the leadership of J. W. Powell, also placed Native Americans "in the savage stage, except for the Pueblo Indians of the U.S. Southwest who were viewed by Powell as having achieved a higher stage of evolution than most other groups."²⁰ This racist opinion is again in accordance with Cushing's judgment of Native Americans in Florida, showing a governmental and institutional role in promoting scientific racism. The Pepper-Hearst Expedition is only one of many expeditions associated with the Bureau of American Ethnology that excavated and collected Native American human remains and cultural artifacts.²¹

¹⁹ Richard B. Woodbury and Nathalie F. S. Woodbury. "The Rise and Fall of the Bureau of American Ethnology." *Journal of the Southwest* 41, no. 3 (1999): 284. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40170100>.

²⁰ Woodbury and Woodbury, 285.

²¹ Smithsonian Institution. Bureau of American Ethnology. *Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution*. US Government Printing Office, 1895.

The Pepper-Hearst Expedition was also not a singular event for the University of Pennsylvania. As early as 1765, William Shippen, co-founder and Professor of Anatomy of the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, was accused of stealing bodies from burial grounds.²² Because he admitted to stealing corpses from a potter's field, it is possible that "Shippen stole the corpses of enslaved or free African Americans for dissection in his anatomy class."²³ An entry of the catalog of the anatomical collection at the Wistar Institute notes the existence of an "artificial skeleton of a Cherokee Indian, who fought under General Jackson, at the battle of the Horse Shoe, disinterred in 1822, near Warrenton, in Virginia, where he died, by Dr. Horner."²⁴ While Horner did not explain what an artificial skeleton is, I suspect that it is a model made of wood and paper-mâché by William Rush, a sculptor in Philadelphia. Rush created 21 such models for Horner²⁵, and it is likely that the artificial skeleton is one of the models. The Wistar-Horner Collection contained about 675 human remains in 1850, with many of them belonging to ethnic minorities including Asians, African Americans, and Native Americans.²⁶ On May 21, 1894, the Wistar-Horner Collection became a part of the newly founded Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, a separate institution from the University of Pennsylvania despite their close relationship.²⁷ In other words, the housing of Native American remains obtained through the Pepper-Hearst Expedition from 1915 to 1956 at the Wistar Institute again was not a singular event. It was a part

²² Carson Eckhard. "William Shippen (Body Snatching)." Medical School. Penn and Slavery Project. Accessed October 22, 2022. <http://pennandslaveryproject.org/exhibits/show/medschool/southerndoctors/williamshippen>.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ William E. Horner. Catalogue of the Wistar, or Anatomical Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. Third Edition. L. R. Bailey, 1850, 8.

²⁵ *Wistarabilia: 125 Years of Research Achievements and Improving Human Health*. Philadelphia: Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, 2017, 10.

²⁶ Horner, 8.

²⁷ *Wistarabilia: 125 Years of Research Achievements and Improving Human Health*, 17.

of a long history of grave-robbing and body-snatching that intentionally targeted racial and ethnic minorities for the development of race science.

In conclusion, my research found that the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, funded by the Penn Museum, appropriated Native American human remains and promoted scientific racism. My finding suggests that the Morton Cranial Collection is not an abnormality. It, along with the human remains obtained through the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, was a part of the systematic effort to seek and obtain human remains. It also demonstrates that other institutions such as Penn Medicine and the Wistar Institute were equally complicit in promoting scientific racism.

Future Research

Apart from the aforementioned sources, future researchers should consult Jim Duffin at the University Archives and John Pollack at the Kislak Center. They are both great scholars and archivists who are eager to work with students and researchers. I interned at the University Archives and the Kislak Center during this past summer and became aware of some of the sources at these institutions. Future researchers should take their time and explore these great archives.

If future researchers have the capacity to travel, I suggest that they continue my research on John Ker. I think it is a particularly important project because not only does it relate to the University of Pennsylvania, it also speaks to the complicity of other institutions of higher education, namely the University of North Carolina and Dickinson College. I am interested in how the cross-institutional networks of educated elites supported scientific racism and slavery for their own interests.

It goes without saying that I believe future researchers should further investigate the Pepper family and William Pepper Jr. in particular, given his prominent role at the Penn Museum, Penn medical school, Wistar Institute, and the university in general. His statue still stands on the south

side of College Hall, or the north side of Houston Hall. I personally don't believe that his statue should be removed because of his involvement in the Pepper-Hearst Expedition, but its continued presence certainly warrants further discussion.

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