

Penn Slavery Project
Research Report

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Penn Slavery Project
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PART 1: QUESTIONS

We began our research at the University Archives and Records website.¹ The page most significant to our research was titled ‘Penn Trustees 1749-1800. Read their stories... see their faces...’ The page listed all of the founders and early trustees and linked to short biographies about their families, their accomplishments, and other basic information. About one quarter of the way down the page, the viewer is encouraged to ‘engage in a scavenger hunt.’ This scavenger hunt was a list of questions that, presumably, could be answered by reading all of the biographies. Right above the question ‘Who were NOT native English-speakers’ was the question ‘Who owned slaves? Did anyone openly oppose slavery?’

One of the biographies directly identified William Allen as a slave owner, but his biography raised even more questions for our project.² We suspected that he was not alone in this regard but, how many trustees were slave owners? And how directly was that ownership related to the university? Did any of Penn’s original trustees, and thus their slaves, live near the school? Did any slaves live on campus? There had to be trustees who did not own slaves, but direct ownership was not the only way to contribute to slavery in Philadelphia. Most of the early trustees were quite wealthy. How much did involvement in the slave trade contribute to their socio-economic status? How much of the founder’s money used to found the University of Pennsylvania was a result of the slave trade? Did the trustees found our university with slave money?

¹ “Penn Trustees 1749-1800.” Penn Trustees in the 18th Century, University of Pennsylvania University Archives, www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/trustees.html.

² “Penn Biographies.” William Allen (1704-1780), University of Pennsylvania University Archives, www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1700s/allen_wm.html.

We were also curious about the enslaved people, themselves. We wondered how many slaves were eventually given their freedom. Did trustees grant this freedom during their lifetimes, or after their deaths? Who were these enslaved men and women? What were their names and how did they come into the trustee's ownership? Would it be possible to trace their descendents to anyone alive today? And if so, do they have any connections to the University of Pennsylvania? There were many other questions, and we knew it would be impossible to answer all of them in one semester; but, we aimed to do what we could to create an honest profile of the relationship between slavery and the University of Pennsylvania.

PART 2: RESEARCH, METHODS, AND STEPS

The University Archives page gave us insight on what the University already knew, and was willing to share with the public. Fortunately, the archives page did offer clues that some of these men might have been involved in the trade. Some of the trustees were merchants, and some were involved in trading goods overseas. We used this information to find connections in between their business ventures and slavery in Philadelphia.

After gathering this preliminary information, we expanded our collection of sources to several books detailing the history of Philadelphia's black community, and the history of slavery in Pennsylvania. This list included Gary Nash's *Forging Freedom*,³ David Waldstreicher's *The Struggle Against Slavery*⁴ and *Runaway America*⁵, *Liberty's Prisoners*⁶ by Jen Manion, and *Freedom by Degrees*⁷ written by Gary Nash and Jean Soderlund. Nash's studies were especially helpful, and we tracked mentions of the trustees to create a better profile of these men and determine whether or not they were

³ Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: the Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. ACLS History E-Book Project, 2005.

⁴ Waldstreicher, David. *The Struggle against Slavery: a History in Documents*. Oxford Univ. Press, 2001.

⁵ Waldstreicher, David. *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. Hill and Wang, 2004.

⁶ Manion, Jen. *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

⁷ Nash, Gary B., and Jean R. Soderlund. *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath*. Oxford University Press, 2011.

slaveholders. Based on these texts and the archive biographies, we created a list of ‘Trustees of Interest’ around whom we would focus our research.

With this list in hand, we sought help from the director of the University Archives and Records Center, Mark Lloyd. He agreed that Gary Nash was a valuable secondary source, but suggested we look at the sources Nash used when writing his book. He also directed us to two additional sources: *The Legislators of Colonial Pennsylvania* and AncestryLibrary.com.⁸ Using the Ancestry website, we could find records of Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768-1801. These records listed taxes paid on incomes and assets. We made a spreadsheet and using these tax records, gathered information about which of the trustees owned slaves, in which years they owned them, and how many slaves they owned. After we compiled a solid list of slave owning trustees, we split the list amongst us.

We continued to search for primary sources, and turned to other archives in Philadelphia. Our most helpful resource was the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Before going to the building, we used the online catalogue and basic information about the trustees to find call numbers for the family papers. Our other digital resources included using Penn’s Franklin database to access archives of local newspapers. This was helpful to gain a sense of how public, or private, the trustees might have been about their ownership of slaves. Before heading to the archives, we gathered our evidence and shared our information with one another.

PART 3: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

There are 126 men listed as university trustees in the 18th Century. We made predictions and preliminary research before narrowing the list. In total we investigated 28 trustees and we found documentation recording that at least 20 of the of the trustees of the University of Pennsylvania

⁸ Horle, Craig W. *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania: a Biographical Dictionary*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

owned slaves. We were each assigned four trustees. The trustees I was assigned to research were: Benjamin Franklin, John Inglis, Isaac Norris, and William Moore.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN played an undeniably important role in the foundation of the University of Pennsylvania. And it is a known fact that he owned slaves. It is worth noting that he did free his slaves and dedicated the latter part of his life to enforcing abolition. However, I avoided focusing my research on Benjamin Franklin. Benjamin Franklin was one of Penn's founders. The goal of our project was to get as well-rounded a view of the situation as possible. We had an excellent opportunity to find new information, and tell a deeper different story. I would be remiss not to take it.

I found tax records proving that JOHN INGLIS owned 8 slaves. These records were taken in 1774. I haven't been able to find any records from Inglis earlier than that, and sadly, he died in 1775. It is unclear whether he freed his slaves or bequeathed them to his eldest son, as I was not able to find a copy of Inglis's will. Any tax information I found about his son, listed him as either a 'Singleman', or owning 3 acres. I could find no record that suggests that George Inglis, the son of John Inglis, owned slaves.

Throughout my research I constantly found links between the early history of the University of Pennsylvania to the early history of the United States of America. I took great care to keep this in mind when searching through wills and bills. Some of the men responsible for founding the University spent time discussing national sovereignty, and establishing agency from a foreign state. At the same time, some of these men kept people in chains. There were men who worked to remedy the disconnect between the two. Those types of contradictions manifest in fascinating ways.

ISAAC NORRIS is a perfect example of these complications. Isaac Norris served as a trustee from 1751 to 1755. His father, Isaac Norris, Sr., not only owned slaves but was an active participant in the slave trade. In the Historical Society of Philadelphia, I found a memorandum of sale stating

that Norris, Sr. purchased 2 slaves, and several pounds of coffee from an English ship in 1707. He and his wife, Mary Lloyd freed many of enslaved people in their wills, but they also bequeathed a number of these people to their children. His sister, Elizabeth freed the slaves that their mother bequeathed her in her will.⁹ I was unable to find evidence that his son, and trustee, Isaac Norris, Jr., had ever owned slaves.

While serving as trustee, Norris also served as the speaker of the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly. During his first year, the assembly ordered a bell for the Pennsylvania State House. Norris suggested that the bell be inscribed with the Bible verse, 'Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.' Leviticus 25:10. Almost 70 years after Norris's death, the statehouse bell gained the name "The Liberty Bell."¹⁰ It was first used to criticize Philadelphia's weak attempts to support abolition. It later became a symbol for the abolition movement. Had Isaac Norris suggested a different verse the bell might not have gained the symbolism it has today. Isaac Norris Sr. sold, owned, and bequeathed slaves. Through those actions, the Norris family was implicated in the slave trade. However, he had a direct connection with dismantling the slave trade. While it is up for debate whether his efforts were any more intentional than his ownership of slaves, his actions deserve recognition.

I began my research on WILLIAM MOORE with the same strategy that I used with all of my other trustees. I quickly found Pennsylvania tax records verifying that William Moore owned slaves 3 slaves in 1769 and 2 slaves in 1774.¹¹ I also found a 'runaway slave' advertisement posted in the Pennsylvania Gazette on August 10, 1730.¹²

'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 ticking

⁹ Wulf, Karin A. *Not All Wives Women of Colonial Philadelphia*. Cornell University Press, 2000.

¹⁰ Nash, Gary B. *Icons of America: Liberty Bell*. Yale University Press, 2010.

¹¹ *Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768-1801*

¹² Moore, William. "RUN Away from William Moore." *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 20 Aug. 1730.

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.’

After further research, I learned that the William Moore who served as a trustee to the University of Pennsylvania was born to Robert and Elizabeth Moore. I could not find anyone named ‘John Moore’ that was related to the trustee. Furthermore, the advertisement was posted in 1735, which means it was posted 5 years before the trustee was born. The first line of the ad makes it clear that the advertisement was paid by William Moore of Moore Hall. William Moore of Moore Hall was 31 years old when the advertisement was printed, and he is the son of John Moore. This does not prove that William Moore, trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, did not own slaves. One of the ‘William Moore’s paid taxes on slaves in 1769 and 1774. While I do not have enough information to determine with absolute certainty which Moore paid, it is my hope that future scholars will attempt to differentiate between the two William Moores.

Out of curiosity, I turned my attention to William Moore of Moore Hall. After scouring his family papers at the Historical Society of Philadelphia, I found a series of wills.¹³ In his will William bequeathed all of his slaves to his wife Willamina Moore. He died on May 30, 1783, before she did. During the last year of her life (December 6, 1784), she drafted numerous versions of wills. In the first few iterations, she divided the slaves amongst her children referring to one of the slaves as a mulatto girl. However, in the final draft, in which she specified that all other drafts were made ‘null and void’ she freed the slaves. This final draft, written on January 10, 1784 was the only will, from both Moores, 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 Boy Harry, be free

¹³ Pennsylvania, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Cadwalader family. *Cadwalader family papers*. ‘Material primarily relating to the affairs of William Moore of Moore Hall’

at twenty eight years of age, or earlier, at the discretion of my Executive, to whose Care I commit his Education.’ Solomon, George, Rachel, and Harry, were granted freedom--eventually, in the case of Harry.

While it was satisfying to finally attach names to numbers, I needed to know if William Moore of Moore Hall had any connections to the University of Pennsylvania. Thanks to the University of Pennsylvania Archives the answer was pretty easy to find. William Moore of Moore Hall was friends with William Smith, an early Provost of the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁴ They were arrested together after attacking the assembly’s military policy. 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 1769.¹⁵ This suggests that William Smith, the first Provost of the University of Pennsylvania owned a slave during his first term as Provost.

My first question after finding this information was: What is a ‘Provost?’ Because the University of Pennsylvania was founded so early, the position was the equivalent of today’s college President. Regardless of the title, William Smith was the head faculty member of the University. He was selected for the position because he was assumed to have good judgment and sound morals. I find myself confused by the idea that the man deemed intelligent enough to run an academic institution, could have such an obvious flaw in logic. Ironically enough, he was also Professor of Ethics. It is one thing to help pay for a university. Money spent does not directly translate to influence. The same cannot be said for the head of faculty.

¹⁴ “Penn Biographies.” *William Smith (1727-1803)*, *University of Pennsylvania University Archives*, www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1700s/smith_wm.html.

¹⁵ *Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768-1801*

Smith's position of leadership and slave ownership, complicates the history of the university. By putting Smith in such an exemplary position, every member of the College faculty is implicated in slavery. The issue with these implications is that they leave a lot of stones, unturned. Did anyone challenge his fitness for the position? Were there any conflicts between Smith and other faculty members? Did these conflicts have anything to do with slavery? And by identifying these conflicts, do we run the risk of highlighting the 'good' members of the early faculty as a way of pitting them against the 'bad' faculty? Do we run the risk of overreaching and drawing connections where there are none? For example: William Smith, slave owner, became Provost in 1755. That same year, Isaac Norris resigned from the trustee committee. It is important to point out the timeline of the events. It would be inappropriate for me to suggest that one had to do with the other, without the evidence to prove it. However, it is an idea worth exploring. I want to know if anyone stood against Smith over the issue of slavery or Smith's slaveholding. If not, this can lead us to the conclusion that a number of early faculty members did not interpret slave owning as a character flaw or ethical lapse. While that conclusion is an ugly one, it is legitimate. However, it does not let Smith off the hook.

The University of Pennsylvania Archives webpage was so helpful during our research, that I would like to incorporate the information we found into the website. Perhaps we should include it in each trustee's mini biography. But, I am not sure how that would work within the biographies. I do think the question on the main page, mentioned at the beginning of this paper, 'Who owned slaves? Did anyone openly oppose slavery?' should be changed from text into a hyperlink. Upon clicking said link, the viewer would find the results of our research. The format of this research should make it clear that we do not have the whole picture, this was after all a preliminary research project. It should also be made clear that lack of mention does not prove lack of ownership. The University of Pennsylvania should acknowledge the ways in which the trustees were involved while more research needs to be conducted.

PART 4: FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

We collected a lot of information this semester. However, our research is only the beginning of an extended project. I hope to participate in this research project next semester, and have several plans and suggestions for future research.

The first is that future researchers do further exploration on the list of trustees, with special attention to those we were not able to research. Our group conducted its research for a limited amount of time. There is far more information buried within the 250+ years of history than we were able to find. That does not mean it's not there.

The second, is to differentiate between William Moore of Moore Hall and William Moore the trustee. Look through family trees and family papers to find more information about one of the 'Moore's, and determine if it contradicts or supports information. While dates before the birth of William Moore the trustee and after the death of William Moore of Moore Hall are easy to separate, the dates where their adulthoods overlap make things a bit more complicated.

Sadly, I stumbled across the fact that William Smith owned slaves quite late in the project. If this project is to expanded, my third suggestion is to continue researching William Smith. What were the duties of Smith's enslaved man? Were they connected to his duties at the University? Are there any policies that Smith instituted that would protect and preserve the presence of slavery in Philadelphia, or in the University itself? Were there any other early faculty who owned slaves? How did this complicate the relationship between members? Did these faculty members have any children and did those children inherit their slaves?

My fourth, and most important suggestion for future research: find the names. Our research resulted in more numbers than it did names. But the reason slavery was able to thrive for so long in this country is because of the dehumanization of people of color. It was easy to enslave a person when you didn't consider him or her a person. Also, when ownership becomes measured purely by

numbers, we run the risk of undermining the horrors of the institution of slavery. It doesn't matter how many slaves one family owned. It is unimportant how well fed those slaves were. 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.

This new information does not taint my understanding of the University of Pennsylvania. As a woman of color attending an Ivy League Institution, it does not surprise me that my University was founded by men with misguided ideas of racial equality. It does surprise me that such misguided ideas bled into academia. When we started this project, I suspected we would find connections between slavery and the trustees. It is a fair assumption that men who were wealthy enough to fund a university, were wealthy enough to own slaves. I did not suspect that someone deemed worthy enough to teach ethics at a university whose motto is *Leges sine Moribus vanae*, which translates into English as 'Laws without morals are useless' would be so ethically compromised himself. Such a compromise cannot go unnoticed any longer.

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