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Writing at the Williamsburg Bray School?

I've become interested recently in whether writing was taught to the pupils in the Williamsburg Bray School. I had assumed all along that it was, and that the discovery of 40 some slate pencils at the Bray School Dig was confirmation of that.¹

I'd not been alone in my assumption about the teaching of writing, for the great majority of those interested in the Bray School have affirmed that the curriculum included writing.²

¹ See Joseph McClain, "Digging for a Smoking Lunchbox: Three-year Archeological Search for the Bray School Enters its Final Month," *Ideation*, July 14, 2014. Accessed on-line, October 9, 2015: <http://www.wm.edu/research/ideation/social-sciences/digging-for-a-smoking-lunchbox123.php>.

² Mary A. Stephenson, to whom I was directed by Valerie Travato, wrote that the school "had as its purpose to instruct Negro children in Williamsburg in the doctrines of the Episcopal Church and to teach them to spell, read, and write" and that Mrs. Wager was to "teach spelling, reading and writing with especial attention to religious instruction" ("Notes on the Negro School in Williamsburg, 1760-1774," Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series – 0126 (Williamsburg VA Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, 1990). Accessed on-line October 9, 2015: <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/View/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR0126.xml>.

Thad Tate mentions at the school an "emphasis on reading and writing" (*The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* [Williamsburg VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1965], p. 81).

A CW consultant, Michael L. Nicholls, wrote that some local blacks were able to attain "a more formal education in reading and writing English at the school supported by the Bray Associates" (*Aspects of the African American Experience in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg and Norfolk* [Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series – 330; Williamsburg VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library, 1991]). Accessed on-line October 9, 2015: <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/view/index.cfm?doc=ResearchReports%5CRR0330.xml&highlight=#refn121>.

A CW resource book notes of Isaac Bee that "he received instruction in the Bible, reading, writing, and proper behavior from Mrs. Wager" ("Enslaving Virginia: Becoming Americans: Our Struggle to be Both Free and Equal, 1999" [Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1998], p. 605).

Julie Richter writes that children at the Bray School "were taught reading, writing, arithmetic, religion, and etiquette" ("Christiana Campbell [ca. 1723–1792]." *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 15 Jun. 2014). Accessed on-line October 9, 2015: http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Campbell_Christiana_ca_1722-1792#start_entry.

An unsigned and undated entry in the *Encyclopedia Virginia*, "Bray School," notes that at the

But one scholar, E. Jennifer Monaghan, asserts that the Bray students here were not taught to write in school: analyzing the curriculum proposed for the school, she notes “the implicit prohibition against writing instruction. No slave child was to be taught to write.”³

school were “taught reading, writing, arithmetic, religion, and etiquette”; Accessed on-line October 10, 2015: http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evr4440mets.xml.

The woman who portrays Mrs. Ann Wager in the CW interpretation of the school believes that the school mistress was “charged with teaching, reading, writing, spelling, pronunciation of proper names and the ‘stops’” (CWF Podcast Interview with Antoinette Brennan, March 25, 2013. Accessed on-line, October 9, 2015: <http://podcast.history.org/2013/03/25/the-bray-school-2/#transcript>).

Oral tradition says that “some of the children who had attended the Bray School were able to read and write [and] taught members of their families to read, write, and cipher” (Col. Lafayette Jones, Jr., *My Great, Great, Grandfather’s Journey to an Island of Freedom* [Williamsburg VA: Jenlaf Publishing, 2007], p. 28).

Antonio T. Bly seems to suggest that students at the Bray school may have been taught to write, that embroidery may have allowed girls “rudimentary skills in forming letters” and that inasmuch “embroidering represented a form of penmanship, it seems likely that some of the female scholars learned how to write and read” (“In Pursuit of Letters: A History of the Bray Schools for Enslaved Children in Colonial Virginia,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 51:4 [November 2011], 434n).

But Bly also seems to suggest that writing was a skill learned outside the school: “Presumably, after the school opened its doors, African Americans seized upon the opportunity to learn themselves how to write” (p. 447). Similarly, he suggests that blacks who could write, learned however, spread the skill to other blacks, all of whom

had a strong and purposeful reason to learn how to write as well.

Enslaved African Americans in Virginia demanded that they and their children obtain literacy in its fullest extent. If not encouraged by their owners, they did not wait; instead, they parleyed what few resources they had, be it a writing slate or dirt floor, and taught one another the useful art of penmanship. (p. 455)

For further discussion of local black literacy and whether writing might have been taught at the Bray School, see the appendix.

³ See *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p. 268.

In “Reading for the Enslaved, Writing for the Free: Reflections on Liberty and Literacy,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 108:2 (1998), Monaghan’s comments show why it seems unlikely Mrs. Wager would have been teaching her black students to write:

- “Reading was usually viewed [in colonial America] as a tool that was entirely compatible with the institution of slavery. Writing, on the other hand, was almost invariably perceived by southern slaveholders as intrinsically dangerous.” (p. 309)

- “Learning to read was, to a degree that is hard for us to appreciate, an entirely oral activity. ... children learning to read were ... never exposed to the alphabet in a manuscript form. it was considered very easy to teach reading. Even women could teach it ... all that was needed was a book.” (p. 312)

- “Writing was regarded as difficult. It required real skill on the part of the teacher; it needed a trained professional. So naturally it was entrusted to men—to young men who had received their training from a skilled writing master to whom they had been apprentices.” (p. 312)

- Writing required paper, a quill pen, a penknife, ink, pounce, and a rule and pencil: “the entire enterprise ... was a big deal.” (p. 313)

Though the votes are against Monaghan, an analysis of the documentary history of the Bray Schools suggests that she is right. And I now think the function and significance of those slate pencils from the Bray School site need to be reconsidered. If they were used by the Bray students, it was not, I am now convinced, for learning to write.

John C. Van Horne's edition⁴ of the correspondence between the Associates of Dr. Bray in London and the various people in the American colonies connected with the schools established or planned richly documents the Bray schools and their mission and curriculum. The teaching of writing is never mentioned by the Associates or their correspondents as a component of the skills anticipated to be taught in the Bray Schools.

And when the Associates asked for and received accounts of the progress and accomplishments of the pupils in the Bray schools, as they frequently did, those assurances came in terms of reading, sewing, knitting, marking, catechism, deportment, etc. That writing is never mentioned seems, again, to suggest it was not being taught.

The titles of the books sent to schools by the Associates are well-documented. None of them are books on writing.⁵

Simply put, writing is never mentioned in connection with the education offered to blacks.⁶ The few times writing is mentioned are in connection with

• “The single most powerful motive for reading instruction ... was religion.... In contrast, the motivations for writing instruction seem not to have been religious at all.... Conversion implied reading instruction. It did not, however, imply writing instruction.” (pp. 313, 314, 316)

• “The ability to write enabled slaves to forge their own passes with a view to escaping.” (p. 317)
In her article, Monaghan does not cite the Williamsburg Bray School specifically, but notes of all the Bray Schools that “the only literacy skill taught there was reading” and that “at no school was writing taught.” (pp. 318, 321)

Two other students of the Bray schools make no mention of the teaching of writing: Richard I. Shelling, “Benjamin Franklin and the Dr. Bray Associates,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 63:3 (July 1939), 282-293; Jennifer Oast, “Educating Eighteenth-Century Black Children: The Bray Schools” (MA Thesis, History Department, College of William and Mary, 2000).

⁴ *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: The American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717-1777* (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

⁵ See the index to Van Horne, “Books sent”; two representative lists are the “List of Books sent to New England” (pp. 76-77) and the list of titles to be sent to Williamsburg (p. 146).

⁶ To be sure, not all the correspondence between and among the parties has survived, so I suppose it is

classes that enrolled white children.⁷

It did pass through my mind that, perhaps, despite all, writing was being taught at the Williamsburg Bray School, and that, perhaps, if so, that was related to what I've argued⁸ was an intellectual unease about slavery at William and Mary in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

But though it seems a boldish move for the College to help establish a school for even just the religious education of local black children, it is inconceivable to me that the purely religious motives of the Associates would have been ignored, especially in a culture already fearful of educating the enslaved.

possible writing might have been mentioned in the lost letters. But that seems unlikely given the number of letters that do survive.

In any case, the teaching and learning of reading are mentioned without any mention of writing on the following pages in *Van Horne*: 98, 104, 109, 124, 125, 130, 135, 138, 143, 145, 155, 156, 167, 168-169, 170, 172, 174, 186, 189, 190, 191, 192, 197, 199-200, 201, 203, 205, 206, 209, 212, 213, 221, 231, 237, 238, 240, 246, 247, 251, 259, 267, 271, 284, 289, 306, 320, 327. P. 145 holds the Associates' directives concerning the Williamsburg school.

One word more about the local curriculum. I'd been struck a number of times by Mark Kostro's quoting Benjamin Franklin's words that the Bray pupils should also be taught "some useful Things besides reading" (*Van Horne*, p. 125), which might by inference include writing.

But I hadn't recalled those words being applied to the local Bray pupils—Valerie Travato directed me to the source in *Van Horne*, where Franklin is speaking of what should be taught in the Philadelphia Bray School. And I worried that what Franklin said of his own local school with which he was directly concerned should not be imported to apply to the Williamsburg Bray School, where Franklin was not directly involved and to which the Associates wrote their own directions.

I now think, however, that the local Bray School likely did receive word from Franklin of his expectations. The proposed rules for the local school formulated by William Yates (President of W&M) and Robert Carter Nicholas specify for the girls that they be taught "knitting sewing & such other Things as may be useful to their Owners" (*Van Horne*, p. 191).

Although the language applies only to the girls, it does closely echo Franklin's words; and it is striking that Franklin did write William Hunter "some Time" before February 16, 1761 (probably a year previously [*Van Horne*, pp. 153, 154n; the Associates knew Franklin was writing Hunter about February 29, 1760 [*Van Horne*, p. 145]) about Hunter's being "nominated as one of the Managers" (p. 152) of the Williamsburg Bray School. Franklin's letter has not been found (*Van Horne*, p. 154n), but it seems likely he would have used phrasing to Hunter along the lines of what he expected to have taught in Philadelphia.

But I'm not convinced that the phrasing about other useful things here points to writing. The context in the rules proposed by Yates and Nicholas seems to imply domestic arts useful to the enslaved girls' owners (as did Franklin's own comments about the Philadelphia school; *Van Horne*, pp. 125-126), quite a different thing.

⁷ See pp. 3 (where Bray is quoted before the Associates come into being about setting up "charity schools at home," i.e., in England), 92.

⁸ See my "Thinking about Slavery at the College of William and Mary," *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal*, 21:4 (May 2013), 1232+. <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmbrj/vol21/iss4/6/>

Appendix

Responses and Comments

- I. Michael Nicholls
- II. Jennifer Oast
- III. Neil L. Norman
- IV. Terry Meyers
- V. Mark Kostro
- VI. Susan Kern
- VII. Linda Rowe
- VIII. Terry Meyers (quoting also John C. Van Horne)
- IX. John C. Van Horne, "The Education of African Americans in Benjamin Franklin's Philadelphia"

**I. From Michael Nicholls, Professor Emeritus, Utah State University,
michael.nicholls@aggiemail.usu.edu:**

I have looked a bit at Monaghan's book, as much as I can on google book, and I believe she has made an important distinction between teaching reading and writing etc. My guess is that Mary Stephenson, followed by Thad Tate and the rest of us simply lumped reading and writing into the single term of education or assumed that the 3 r's was what was taught, with religion being the 3rd r in this case. I see that Monaghan does note the widespread distribution of spelling books to Bray schools, notes that they were used to teach writing, but also qualifies that by saying that after ca 1730 or so they served more for reading instruction and less for writing. Would the old teacher, Mrs Wager been up to speed in pedagogy? I didn't use power point. At the same time, I remember how a young man, decidedly older than the Bray students, named Frederick Douglas did not need pen, ink, pencil etc etc to learn to write. We forget about how one can scratch in the dust or damp earth with a stick, something that could be easily stomped out if someone threatening appeared. It would be great if any of the Bray students that Julie has been studying might have forced the creation of a runaway ad that might mention writing, that they acquired property, if free, and left a signature on a deed or will etc etc. Even then, it would not be definite proof that their writing skills came from the Bray experience. I also think that in Virginia fears of slave literacy grew as time passed and fears of black literacy grew with the growth of the free black population. The law dropping the requirement for teaching literacy to free black apprentices was passed in 1804, but it did not prohibit teaching reading and writing. More proscriptions will come in the aftermath of Nat Turner, I believe. In short, I think we shouldn't assume that writing was taught, but I don't see any explicit evidence it was not. Those runaway slaves who are described with the ability to write learned from someone someplace, though not likely at the Bray

II. From Jennifer Oast, Associate Professor of History, Bloomsburg University

<joast@bloomu.edu>:

I read your short paper on whether or not slaves were taught to write with interest. As I reviewed my old M.A. thesis on the subject, I find that I don't reference writing at all in relation to the school curriculum, only reading. I don't think it struck me at the time that writing was not also part of the curriculum. As I was looking over my old notes, I found the following, which I think can bolster your argument. I am cutting this from an unpublished article-length manuscript I wrote a few years ago based on my M.A. thesis:

“Fragments of information about the other children who attended the school remain. For example, fragments of the history of Isaac Bee survive in the *Virginia Gazette*. Isaac is listed as the slave of Governor's Council President John Blair on the 1765 list of Bray School students. In the fall of 1774, Isaac Bee was a runaway slave. His new owner, Lewis Burwell, wrote in the advertisement that “He is between eighteen and nineteen years of age, low of Stature, and thinks he has a Right to his Freedom, because his father was a Freeman, and I suppose he will endeavour to pass for one. He can read, but I do not know that he can write.”^[i] Growing up during the turbulent ten years before the outbreak of the American Revolution in the home of a politically active man, it is not surprising that Isaac Bee was thinking about freedom and his rights to it. With the ability to read, attributable at least in part to his education at the Bray School, he may have read revolutionary pamphlets or inflammatory opinions in the *Virginia Gazette*. If he also learned to write while at the school, he had a tremendous advantage in his attempt to pass for a free man.”

As I think about Burwell's advertisement in light of your paper, I wonder why he did not know if he could read or not. If writing was taught at the school, I imagine it would not be a secret to his new owner. I wrote that perhaps he learned to write at the school, but it is just as likely that he learned to write elsewhere (if he could write at all). Let me also draw your attention to the following from your own work, which I had included in my article and cited as follows: Colonel Lafayette Jones, *My Great, Great, Grandfather's Journey to an Island of Freedom in the Middle of Slavery* (Williamsburg: Jenlaf, 2007) 28, 79-80 in Meyers, ““Benjamin Franklin, the College of William and Mary, and the Williamsburg Bray School,” 370

“A descendant of Williamsburg-area slaves has written that “some of the children who had attended the Bray School were able to read and write and were referred to by many as ‘The first black teachers in Virginia’.”^[ii]

Of course, the fact they could write is not definitely attributed to their background at the Bray School, but it is implied. However, I think it is safe to assume that children who learned to read would find it much easier to learn to write later in life.

III. From Neil L. Norman, Associate Professor of Anthropology, W&M
<nlnorman@wm.edu>

This is a very interesting and provocative piece that highlights the limits of archaeological data and where spatial and documentary sources offer hope to wrest the last bit of interpretive essence out of material sources. I liked the article and really only have one major question: do you have sources on "standard" reading instruction for the 18th/19th centuries. I don't and this question stems from my own ignorance. I know that we are talking about an elite pursuit, but would it have been "normal" for school mistress to teach writing alongside reading. I think of the two as inexorably coupled, but that is probably a presentist perspective. As I get older, I think about how loathe I am to change the structure of my methods courses and wonder if someone tasked with teaching reading, who is accustomed to teaching reading/writing but instructed not to teach the latter, might have just done so anyway out of ease of instruction and the necessity of results. This moves (only briefly) the discussion out of the realm of anti-slavery vs. pro-slavery ideology (which I enjoy and I know is at the heart of much of your writing on the topic) and into pedagogy, historical context, etc.

IV. From Terry Meyers <tlmeye@wm.edu>, responding to III:

Yes, that disconnect between writing and reading is something I found hard to believe, but Monaghan really is the go to person on this:

<http://www.umass.edu/umpress/title/learning-read-and-write-colonial-america>

I have the book out from the Rockefeller Library but will try to return it later today or tomorrow. It was very well received. She retired to Charlottesville, but, alas, died about a year ago.

You raise the question of what Mrs. Wager had been teaching to her white charges, the elite sons of planters, before she took on the Bray School (and she was required to give up those other responsibilities, required by Nicholas explicitly according to one of his letters.. Good question, but I infer from Monaghan's comments that there would have been a writing master to teach the writing, that she would have taught reading only.

V. From Mark Kostro, Staff Archeologist, Colonial Williamsburg and PI for three summer field school digs at the Bray School Site mxkost@wm.edu:

In Terry's response [IV] to Neil, citing Monaghan, Terry suggests not only were reading & writing separate lessons, but were taught by different individuals. I haven't read Monaghan, but I'd like to push-back on the separation of reading and writing. I don't dispute they were taught as separate subjects, but I'm less convinced they were taught by different instructors as Terry suggests. To that point I'd cite the Nov. 1, 1773 entry in Philip Vickers Fithian's journal:

*Monday Novemr 1st (1773)
We began School—The School consists of eight—Two of Mr Carters Sons—*

One Nephew—And five Daughters—The endest Son is reading Salust; Gramatical Exercises, and latin Grammer—The second Son is reading english Grammar Reading English: Writing, and Cyphering in Subtraction—The Nephew is Reading and Writing as above; and Cyphering in Reduction—The eldest daughter is Reading the Spectator; Writing; & beginning to Cypher—The second is reading next out of the Spelling-Book, and begining to write—The next is reading in the Spelling-Book—The fourth is Spelling in the beginning of the Spelling-Book—And the last is beginning her letters—

Fithian was tutor to Robert Carter III's family -- one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the American colonies -- recently removed from Williamsburg to Virginia's Northern Neck. The Carter children had no other tutor, and I read the above quote as an indication of the broad range of subjects, including both reading and writing, that Fithian (a recent Princeton grad.) was teaching. This raises the possibility for me that Anne Wager, as the Burwell family's tutor in the 1750s, was similarly responsible for teaching both subjects to the Burwell's -- although I haven't looked into this one way or another. Circling back to Neil's point, I think it is plausible that Wager was accustomed to teaching reading and writing, and thus may have included writing as part of the Bray school's curriculum.

Another example is the case of John Harrower, tutor to the Daingerfield family on the Rappahanock River (near Fredericksburg). He recorded in his diary on 27 May 1774:

*This morning about 8 am the Colonel delivered his three sons to my Charge to teach them to **read write and figure**. His oldest son Edwin 10 years of age, intred into two syllables in the spelling book, Bathourest his second son 6 years of age in the Alphabete and William his third son 4 years of age does not know the letters. He has likeways a Daughter whose name is Hanna Basset __ Years of age.My school Hours is from 6 to 8 in the Morning, in the forenoon from 9 to 12 and from 3 to 6 in the afternoon.*

As for the slate pencils...

....the CWF archaeology lab has thus far inventoried 43 slate pencil fragments from the Bray / Digges site, and at least one very small fragment of a writing slate or tablet (see attached photo). Although tiny, several score marks are visible on the surface. As I've said on several occasions, we recovered more slate pencil fragments at Bray/Digges than anywhere else in Williamsburg -- the latest count is 196 for all of Williamsburg including Bray/Digges. I think the fact that nearly a quarter of the slate pencil fragments recovered in Williamsburg have come from Bray/Digges is significant and deserves more consideration. The next largest assemblage (n=36) was recovered from the site of the present-day Charlton's Coffeehouse reconstruction -- most of which came from 19th-century contexts long after the 1760s coffeehouse had been converted into a residence for the Dickson and Morrison families. Another 21 fragments were recovered from the Wren Yard and 5 more from the Brafferton -- significantly, both sites

affiliated with education. The site of James Anderson's blacksmithing operations -- a combination industrial/domestic site -- yielded an additional 15 slate pencil fragments. No other site in Williamsburg had more than 10 fragments. I think there remains lots more to do with this data to tease out what kind of sites slate pencils are being recovered on. Notably, a slate pencil fragment was recovered at two near-town slave quarter sites -- Rich Neck and Palace Lands. Bly (2008) also notes the archaeological recovery of slate pencil fragments from slave quarters at Monticello and at Fairfield Plantation in Gloucester, Va. Bly (2008) also notes the recovery of writing slates at several different slave quarter sites.

Back to the Bray/Digges site. In this context, the question remains, do they represent evidence of writing instruction? While a provocative connection, previous studies seem to argue against this conclusion. Although various Virginia Gazette advertisement indicate merchants frequently sold slate pencils and writing slates in the second half of the 18th-c., no real evidence supports their educational use by children until the 19th-c. Researcher Nigel Hall (n.d.) suggests that Joseph Lancaster, an English proponent of mass education, was at least partly responsible for the widespread development of slate as an education tool beginning in the first decade of the nineteenth century. To that point, excavations of 19th-c. schoolhouse sites in diverse contexts such as Michigan, Bermuda and Australia have all yielded large quantities of slate pencil fragments. Because education was largely an informal endeavor in the 18th-c., formal schools were rare and I am not aware of an archaeological excavation of a school site contemporary with the Bray school.

Aside from writing letters, another possibility is the slate pencils were used in the context of teaching arithmetic. Two sites in Maryland provide intriguing anecdotal evidence. Slate pencils (and telescope lenses) were recovered from the 18th-c. home of Benjamin Banneker -- a free black man who was a self-taught astronomer and mathematician -- who attended a Quaker school as a boy. More direct evidence of an association between slates and teaching arithmetic, although 19th-century, is a writing slate recovered from the site of the Juvenile Justice Center in Baltimore. Found in a privy filled between 185 and 1830, this slate was incised front and back with a grid and numbers from 1 to 72. If not for writing letters, I wonder if the Bray school slate pencils could have been used for calculations. Perhaps the documentary record could provide some additional clues?

For additional discussion and a photo of the Baltimore Juvenile Justice Center slate, see here:

<http://www.jefpat.org/CuratorsChoiceArchive/2008CuratorsChoice/Sep2008-WritingSlate.html>

Finally, Terry closed his essay with two speculations: 1.) The slate pencils were actually clustered away from the Digges House, 2.) the slate pencils may have an association with the Wray site across the street. I'd also push-back on both of these suggestions. [I removed these speculations from my essay. TLM]

Firstly, while we never found the actual footings of the Digges House, we were most certainly well-within the yard space that served as an extension of the 18th-c. house & school. Traces of that yard include the brick footings for a detached kitchen and dairy/smokehouse outbuilding, as well as the extensive 18th & 19th-c refuse midden that accumulated between the structures. Even if we had access to the Digges House foundations, I would have predicted it unlikely that artifacts related to the Bray School were located within the foundations....any household refuse (domestic or school-related) would have been tossed into the yard behind the building. In other words, we had a much better chance of recovering school-related artifacts (trash) in the yard than inside the foundations.

Secondly, although in relatively close proximity, I think the Wray carpentry yard and the Bray/Digges site are sufficiently far enough from one another that it was very unlikely that artifacts from the two occupations were mixing with one another. Additionally, as a barricade between the two, James Wray's dwelling house and outbuildings were situated on Prince George Street (under Aromas) with the various carpentry-related structures located much further north and under the present-day parking garage. Interestingly, only a single slate pencil fragment was recovered during the year-long excavation of Wray's carpenter's yard. Likewise, only a single slate pencil fragment was recovered from the 18th-c. Kendall-Gardner carpentry yard behind George Wythe's Williamsburg home on Palace Green, suggesting that Williamsburg's 18th-c. carpenters typically didn't write out their calculations on slates. Amazingly, etched window glass fragments from the Wray site, however, do indicate the carpenters were using scrap window glass as paper to scratch out calculations!



VI. From Susan Kern, Executive Director of the Historic Campus, W&M, and Adjunct Associate Professor of History, W&M, sakern@wm.edu:

We had numerous slate pencils and fragments of items with writing at Monticello slave-related sites. A number were on Mulberry Row but a really key site was not on Mulberry Row but away from that active area. The Elizabeth “Betty” Hemings site, which was known to be a “day care center” (my words) for enslaved children. Jefferson directed that Hemings serve as the minder for children too young to work (under 8). A number of slaves at Monticello could write, including a number of the Hemings family (Betty’s sons), who came to Monticello (and left Monticello) with skills in trades and domestic arts that were essential to a functioning gentry household. It’s clear that Jefferson’s body servant Jupiter read, did math, carried money, and operated as Jefferson’s proxy in the consumer realm. He’s the one that goes to the silversmith to buy mourning buckles for Jefferson’s shoes for Gov. Bot’s funeral

Shadwell also produced slate pencils and fragments of writing from slave-related sites and I have wondered whether we (archaeologists) are too quick to associate their presence with children’s activities. Many of these home sites were also sites of production – the kitchen at Shadwell was clearly both work space and living space for the cook and her family. We should think about how the pencils might relate to work or other adult activities. However, Mark points out that they weren’t in evidence at the Wray carpentry yard, an important observation (although plenty of wood and glass there for notes).

Which is not to dismiss pencils as a tool of basic elementary education. I am in total agreement with Mark’s explanation of the disposal of pencils on the Bray site. I also think we should be flexible in how we interpret education. Structured instruction in “writing” isn’t necessary for one to be able to write. Drawing, tallying, writing, arithmetic, could all be done and take coordination of mental and physical capacities. Jefferson allowed children he owned to join schooling with his grandchildren if the slave children were interested. (I also don’t know how much “writing” means penmanship, as opposed to being able to form words and sentences.) I’ve been struck by the idea that education can fall into “strata” of learning, but that doesn’t mean that students are learning only that. In Jefferson’s 1779 Plan for a More General Diffusion of Knowledge he suggests educating “all the free children, male and female” in local schools. “At every of these schools shall be taught reading, writing, and common arithmetick, and the books which shall be used therein for instructing the children to read shall be such as will at the same time make them acquainted with Græcian, Roman, English, and American history.” After that, public education is just for boys. In his advice to his daughters, he tells them that boys should learn to speak, read, and write French, but girls need only be able to speak it (to enhance their ornamental qualities). His daughters and granddaughters were not impressed by this logic.

I don’t think Jennifer Monaghan’s 1998 article is the last word. On p. 321 she makes sweeping statements based on a pretty specific record group. Early American history is positively full of official records that don’t reveal what is happening on the

ground. Monaghan's work is good on the big picture and New England, but someone could write a weighty response to her and put it in the context of how the last generation of scholars has re-written how we understand sources for African American history – the ground-breaking news is often from broken ground. In your essay, p. 2, you might say that her statement about the Bray curriculum in general doesn't play out that way at the Williamsburg school. Really, she's not talking about this school, but you are.

VII. From Linda Rowe, Colonial Williamsburg historian, LRowe@CWF.org:

Baptist historian Robert Semple, a contemporary of Rev. Gowan Pamphlet (1753?-1808?) of the black Baptist church founded in 1776 in this area, noted that "Gowan baptized them, and was, moreover, appointed their pastor. Some of them knowing how to write, a church-book was kept." Robert Semple, The Rise and Progress of Baptists in Virginia (1810), pp. 125, 148. I'm not the first to wonder if there was a connection between pupils at the Bray school and the literate slaves and/or free blacks in Pamphlet's congregation who kept a church book (whereabouts unknown). Pamphlet's association with Jane Vobe (he was her slave) and the children she sent to the Bray school is also interesting. Since we don't know when he came into her household, there's the possibility that Gowan attended the Bray school. He was almost certainly literate but I can't prove it.

Robert Carter of Nomini Hall sent Dennis to the Bray school [on 1769 student list] while the Carters were living in Williamsburg. After the family's return to Nomini Hall, Fithian reported "Dennis the Lad who waits at Table, I took into the School to day at his Fathers request, He can spell words of one syllable pretty readily. He is to come as he finds opportunity."

[another communication:]

In addition to Wager's two-year stint with the Burwell children, she also had twelve white students in Williamsburg. She appears to have had these twelve white students at the time she applied to take the schoolmistress position with the Bray school and possibly concurrently with the Bray school students until the number of Bray scholars was increased from 24 to 30 soon after William Hunter's death (14 August 1761):

Robert Carter Nicholas to Rev. John Waring
Williamsburg in Virginia 16th. February 1769.
Van Horne, p. 276

"... soon after Mr. Hunter's Death [14 August 1761] I had the Number [of scholars] increased to 30 & obliged the Mistress that there might be no partiality shewn to white Scholars, of which she then had about a dozen, to discharge them all & this at the Risque of the Displeasure of their Parents, with whom she was in high Repute for her Care & Method of teaching."

This does not prove that Wager taught anyone, black or white, male or female, to write, but I think it pushes us in that direction. She never received instructions that she should NOT teach her black scholars to write. Negative evidence, I realize, but Nicholas's letter shows no evidence that he told her to change her "Method of teaching," admired by the parents of her white students, for her black pupils. Moreover, what to make of Nicholas's directing Wager to discharge her white students so as not to show them partiality? It doesn't seem very likely, but were black and white students in close proximity? In the same room? On different schedules? This bears more thought.

As for Lewis Burwell's uncertainty about whether or not Isaac Bee could write, recall that it was Bee's previous owner Blair who enrolled him in the Bray school. Six years later, Burwell (of Mecklenburg County) acquired Bee through inheritance, so he would not have had first-hand knowledge of instruction at the Bray school. No doubt slaves who knew how to write attempted to hide the fact from their wary owners.

[another communication:]

Take a look at the attached research⁹ I did several years ago. Note that reading

⁹ **Virginia Laws Restrict Educational Opportunity for African Americans in the Early 19th Century**
1805

CHAP. 11.—An ACT further to amend the act, entitled, "An act to reduce into one the several acts concerning slaves, free negroes and mulattoes."
(Passed January 31, 1805.)

...
5. And be it further enacted; That it shall not be lawful for the overseers of the poor, who may hereafter bind out any black or mulatto orphan, to require the master or mistress to teach such orphan reading, writing or arithmetic.

Source: Samuel Shepherd, ed. *The Statutes at Large of Virginia, from October session 1792, to December session 1806*. 3 vols. Richmond, 1835; reprint New York, 1970, 3: 124.

1819

C. 111—An act reducing into one, the several acts concerning Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes
(Passed March 2, 1819)

[Phrases in single quotation marks (‘) represent amendments to previous acts.]

...
15. AND, whereas it is represented to the General Assembly, that it is a common practice, in many places within this Commonwealth, for slaves to assemble in considerable numbers, at meeting-houses, and places of religious worship, in the night, ‘or at schools for teaching them reading or writing,’ which, if not restrained, may be productive of considerable evil to the community;

...
BE it therefore enacted, That all meetings or assemblages of slaves, ‘or free negroes or mulattoes mixing and associating ‘with such slaves,’ at any meeting-house or houses, or any other place or places, in the night, ‘or at any school or schools for teaching them reading or writing, either in the day or night,’ under whatsoever pretext, shall be deemed and considered as an unlawful assembly; and any justice of the county or corporation wherein such assemblage shall be, either from his own knowledge, or the information of others, of such unlawful assemblage or meeting, may issue his warrant directed to any sworn officer or officers, authorising him or them to enter the house or houses, where such unlawful assemblages or meetings may be, for the purpose of apprehending or dispersing such slaves, and to inflict corporal punishment on the offender or offenders, at the discretion of any justice of the peace, not exceeding twenty lashes.

...
17. If any white person, free negro, mulatto, or Indian, shall, at any time be found in company with slaves at any unlawful meeting, such person, being thereof convicted before any justice of the peace, shall forfeit and pay three dollars for every such offence, to the informer, recoverable with costs, before such justice; or, on failure of present payment, shall receive on his or her bare back, twenty lashes, well laid on, by order of the justice, before whom such conviction shall be.

AND writing figure in these laws restricting education for African Americans. My colleague, Harvey Bakari, thinks this suggests that we ought to at least consider these in any discussion of educating enslaved and free blacks, because blacks being taught to write was on lawmakers' minds in the early 19th century—which means they were addressing something that was in practice for who knows how long before that.

VIII. A Final Note from Terry Meyers, College of William and Mary:

It had been suggested to me that I submit my draft essay to John C. Van Horne for any enlightenment he might be able to offer. I did so along with comments I-VII (plus one not included here at the request of the author), and received the following reply:

I think you're on the right track; I know of no evidence that writing was taught in a Bray school in Williamsburg or anywhere else. (And I'm relieved that you didn't quote me having said so without evidence!) If writing had been taught at any Bray school it would have been in Philadelphia, and even in that case I have found no evidence. I wrote a piece a few years ago about "The Education of African Americans in Benjamin Franklin's Philadelphia," which of course treats the Philadelphia school in detail [see IX, below]. If you skip ahead to pages 90 and 91 you'll see some examples of student penmanship, but these examples come from a Quaker school and date to the end of the 18th century. Also, in my dissertation (an early version of the Bray book) I included a Bibliographical Appendix that reproduced all the lists of books sent to the 13 colonies (extracted from the Associates' "Catalog of Books for Home and Foreign Libraries, 1753-1817"). I scanned all

...

Source: Virginia. *The Revised Code of the Laws of Virginia: A Collection of all such Acts of the General Assembly* Richmond: 1819, 1: 424—5.

1831

[Note: The General Assembly enacted this statute several months before the August 1831 Nat Turner rebellion.]

CHAP. XXXIX.—AN ACT to amend the act concerning slaves, free negroes and mulattoes.
(Passed April 7, 1831.)

4. *Be it further enacted, That all meetings of free negroes or mulattoes, at any school-house, church, meeting-house or other place for teaching them reading or writing, either in the day or night, under whatsoever pretext, shall be deemed and considered as an unlawful assembly; and any justice of the county or corporation, wherein such assemblage shall be, either from his own knowledge, or on the information of others, of such unlawful assemblage or meeting, shall issue his warrant, directed to any sworn officer or officers, authorising him or them, to enter the house or houses where such unlawful assemblage or meeting may be, for the purpose of apprehending or dispersing such free negroes or mulattoes, and to inflict corporal punishment on the offender or offenders, at the discretion of any justice of the peace, not exceeding twenty lashes.*

5. *Be it further enacted, That if any white person or persons assemble with free negroes or mulattoes, at any school-house, church, meeting-house, or other place for the purpose of instructing such free negroes or mulattoes to read or write, such person or persons shall, on conviction thereof, be fined in a sum not exceeding fifty dollars, and moreover may be imprisoned at the discretion of a jury, not exceeding two months.*

6. *Be it further enacted, That if any white person, for pay or compensation, shall assemble with any slaves for the purpose of teaching, and shall teach any slave to read or write, such person, or any white person or persons contracting with such teacher so to act, who shall offend as aforesaid, shall, for each offence, be fined at the discretion of a jury, in a sum not less than ten, nor exceeding one hundred dollars, to be recovered on an information or indictment.*

...

8. This act shall be in force from the first day of June next.

Source: Virginia. *Acts Passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia . . . Begun . . . the Sixth Day of December . . . 1830.* Richmond: 1831, pp.107—8.

the lists and didn't find any titles relating to writing. So I think (although it's hard to prove a negative) that you (and Jennifer Monaghan) are on solid ground in asserting that writing was not taught at the Williamsburg Bray School. Best, John

John C. Van Horne
 Director Emeritus
 The Library Company of Philadelphia

I myself don't currently find the various arguments for local exceptionalism in this appendix to be compelling, but there's a good deal of information here on local black literacy and I can see the shape a sustained argument against my position might take. I think it's worth preserving that possibility.

One further work on the history of writing and the teaching of writing is worth consulting for its exploration of what to us seems easy but what had in past times considerable complexity: Joe Nickell, *Pen, Ink, & Evidence: A Study of Writing and Writing Materials for the Penman, Collector, and Document Detective* (New Castle PA: Oak Knoll Press, 2003).

And I would add that though learning to write and slates seem overwhelmingly a 19th Century phenomenon, I have found some evidence that slates and schools were associated in both 18th C. England and its former colonies.

See, for example, these two translations from the *Satires* of Horace :

All this was from my father's hand,
 Who poor, and with a little land,
 Yet cou'd not bear to have me brought
 To the low school, that Flavius taught;
 Where hulking lads in clumsy gait,
 Bearing their satchel and their slate,
 Sprung from tall soldiers, to a day
 Went duly with their quarter's pay.

Translated by Christopher Smart (London: 1767)

<http://www.poetrynook.com/poem/satires-horace-satire-16>

Thanks to the Prudence of my Sire I owe:
 Though small his Farm, he chose not I mould go
 To *Flavius'* School, where great Centurions sent
 Their Sons, who with their Slates and Pencils Went,
 And Satchel cramm'd with Books, and could account
 How high would Interest every Month amount.

Translated by John Duncombe (London: 1757-1759)

<https://goo.gl/nHMVfe>

And the two advertisements below, from 1784 and 1786, from Massachusetts and South Carolina, mention slates for schools specifically and describe them among accoutrements connected with instruction in writing:

[Home](#) > [America's Historical Newspapers](#) > [Results](#) > [Publication 35 of 51292](#) > [Printer Friendly](#)

To print, select from the options below. First choose what to print: image only, image and citation, or citation only.
Next choose a paper size and page layout, making sure your printer settings match. Then click your browser's print function.

Headline: [No Headline]; Article Type: Advertisement

Massachusetts Spy, published as THOMAS'S Massachusetts Spy; Or, WORCESTER GAZETTE. (Worcester, Massachusetts) • 12-23-1784 • Page [4]

For the Use of Schools.

W RITING BOOKS,
Copy Books.
Slates, and Slate Pencils.
Ink Pots, various sorts.
Ink-Powder.
Pounce, and Pounce Boxes.
Penknives, and Dutch Quills.
Writing Paper, various kinds and
and prices.
Bibles for Schools, English and Scotch.
Testaments, English, Scotch, and A-
merican editions.
Pfalters, English, Scotch, and Ame-
rican editions.
Dilworth's Spelling Books, British
printed, on good Paper, and exceeding well bound.
Dilworth's Spelling Books, various
American editions, at different Prices.
Webster's Spelling Books, and a vari-
ety of others.
British and other English Grammars.
Spelling and other Dictionaries.
Small Dictionaries at 2s. each, for
children.
A great variety of Children's gilt
Books, with Cuts.

To be SOLD, by

ISAIAH THOMAS

[Home](#) > [America's Historical Newspapers](#) > [Results](#) > [Publication 80 of 51297](#) > [Printer Friendly](#)

To print, select from the options below. First choose what to print: image only, image and citation, or citation only.
Next choose a paper size and page layout, making sure your printer settings match. Then click your browser's Print function.

Headline: [No Headline]; Article Type: Advertisement

Charleston Morning Post, published as The Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser (Charleston, South Carolina) • 08-09-1786 • Page [3]

JUST IMPORTED, by
S. WRIGHT, & Co.
 At their **BOOK STORE,**
 No. 7, Elliott-street,
 A COLLECTION OF
New Books
 in various bindings, which they
 will dispose of on moderate terms.
 A L S O,
 A GREAT VARIETY OF
Stationary,
 such as School Slates and Slate
 Pencils, Quills & Pens, Ink Pow-
 der, London & Dublin best Cake
 Ink, playing and visiting Cards,
 wrapping, printing and writing
 Paper, Wax and Wafers, red and
 black ready-made Ink, Office Files,
 Bills of Lading, Pocket Books,

http://infoweb.newsbank.com/tw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product...7C34033303F8&l_mode=PrinterFriendly&l_article=10EC7C3330DE5C58

Page 1 of 2

IX. John C. Van Horne, "The Education of African Americans in Benjamin Franklin's Philadelphia"

PL 1700
A BRIEF
EXAMINATION

OF THE
Book
Practice of the Times,

By the Foregoing and the Present
DISPENSATION: Whereby
is manifested, how the Devil works
in the Mystery, which none can un-
derstand and get the Victory over but
those that are armed with the Light,
that discovers the Temptation and the
Author thereof, and gives Victory o-
ver him and his Instruments, who are
now gone forth, as in the Beginning,
from the true Friends of *Jesus*, having
the Form of Godliness in Words, but
in Deeds deny the Power thereof;
from such we are commanded to turn
away.

By R. Sandiford
Remember them that are in Bonds, as bound with them;
and them that suffer Adversity, as being your selves
also in the Body, Heb. xiii. 3.

If any Man love the World, the Love of the Father is
not in him.

He that leadeth into Captivity, shall go into Captivity,
Rev. xiii. 10.

Printed for the Author, Anno 1729.

Figure 4.1.

Ralph Sandiford, *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times, by the Foregoing and the Present Dispensation . . .* ([Philadelphia]: Printed [by Benjamin Franklin and Hugh Meredith] for the author, 1729).

The Library Company of Philadelphia.

The Education of African Americans in Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia

John C. Van Horne¹

Benjamin Franklin’s *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* (1749), publication of which gave rise to the Academy of Philadelphia and, ultimately, the University of Pennsylvania, did not mention the colony’s African Americans. Pennsylvania’s black inhabitants, whether slave or free, make no appearance in one of Franklin’s best known and most influential writings; they are simply not comprehended within Franklin’s definition of the “youth of Pensilvania.” One might be forgiven, then, for assuming that the education of African Americans in Franklin’s adopted city of Philadelphia was of no moment to the University’s founder, that the issue simply did not intersect with the busy life of a multifaceted man whose mind was constantly engaged by seemingly more pressing matters. In fact, however, Franklin was personally involved for the last three decades of his life in efforts to educate Philadelphia’s blacks undertaken by the Associates of Dr. Bray, a philanthropic organization affiliated with the Church of England, and he was never far from the epicenter of other similar ventures from his earliest days in Philadelphia.

Franklin played his role in the education of African Americans in the context of colonial Philadelphia, which was the capital—both political and intellectual—of a province in which slavery was well entrenched and yet in which a history of antislavery activism dated back to the late seventeenth century. There are no censuses for colonial Philadelphia, so estimating the population, and especially the black population, is no easy matter. Yet by using a variety of sources, historians have been able to approximate the population at various times. In 1723, the year of Franklin’s arrival in the city, the total population of Philadelphia was probably about 6,500, of which about 650 were blacks, mostly slaves. What later, after the American Revolution, became a large and thriving free black community had not yet begun to form. By mid-century the population had reached almost 13,000, of which about 1,000 were blacks, again mostly slaves. From about 1760 through the Revolution, the black population actually declined from 1,300 to fewer than 1,000, owing in part to a large influx of European indentured servants and the disruption of the slave trade. Following the Revolution, however, the black population doubled from 1,000 to a little more than 2,000 between 1780 and Franklin’s death in 1790. The proportion of slaves to free blacks quickly reversed itself, so that by the end of the century less than one percent of Philadelphia’s blacks were slaves. The city had the first large free black community in the colonies.²

When Franklin settled in Philadelphia in October 1723, though, slavery was legal in Pennsylvania, having existed since the days of William Penn, himself a slave owner, and would continue to be legal well into the nineteenth century. The 1780 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery freed no slaves immediately; in fact, it stipulated that the children of slave women then in bondage would only become free when reaching the age of twenty-eight. Thus a child born into bondage immediately before the passage of the act could have had a child twenty or thirty years later who would also be born into bondage and would become free at twenty-eight. There were still sixty-four slaves in Pennsylvania as late as 1840, the last year the census enumerated slaves. Abolition was indeed gradual in Pennsylvania.³

The antislavery activism that finally brought about abolition had its origins in the 1688 petition of four German Quakers and Mennonites of Germantown, just north of Philadelphia, the first antislavery petition in the New World. From that time until abolition became a reality, Quakers were in the forefront of the movement, although paradoxically Quakers were also among the largest slave owners until the 1770s, when the sect officially took a stand and threatened to disown Quakers who continued to hold slaves.

Benjamin Franklin himself lived out the ambivalence felt by many as the eighteenth century advanced. Franklin printed antislavery tracts by the outspoken Quakers Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay, although he did so without affixing his name to the pamphlets (see Figure 4.1).⁴ Franklin owned slaves from as early as 1735 until 1781, and he never deliberately freed any of them. And his wealth, derived principally from the profits of his printing business, owed much to the numerous advertisements for slave sales and runaways that he published and to the actual sales that he facilitated. However, by the end of his life Franklin had taken a very public stand against slavery. As president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage (usually known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society), Franklin is credited with writing the 1789 petition to Congress urging the abolition of slavery. The circuitous route by which Franklin arrived at that point—indeed, the long and complex story of his relationship to the black race, to the institution of slavery, and to issues of freedom and bondage—has been addressed by many scholars and is not properly the subject of this essay.⁵ For our purposes we will be concerned with Franklin’s statements and actions concerning the education, and educability, of African Americans.



Before 1750, when the first sustained efforts to educate Philadelphia’s blacks began under the auspices of the Quakers, there are only tantalizing hints of such activity. By a rather remarkable coincidence, one such attempt was by Samuel Keimer, a man who would cross paths—and swords—with Franklin on numerous occasions. Keimer, a native Londoner, had arrived in Philadelphia late in 1722 or early in 1723, having already had a career that involved religious enthusiasm (as a “French Prophet,” or Camisard), the writing and printing of disputatious literature, many periods of imprisonment (one for as long as six years), and printing work for Daniel Defoe. In Philadelphia Keimer established himself as a printer and hired Franklin as a journeyman the day after the young runaway apprentice arrived from Boston. Both men, it seems, had been intended by their fathers for a religious vocation, but both ended up being apprenticed to printers.⁶

In February 1723, just eight months before Franklin arrived in Philadelphia, Keimer placed advertisements in two successive issues of Andrew Bradford’s *American Weekly Mercury* (see Figures 4.2a and 4.2b). The *Mercury* was Philadelphia’s only newspaper until Keimer himself began publishing a paper with the rather cumbersome title of *Universal Instructor in All Arts and Sciences; and the Pennsylvania Gazette* at the end of 1728—the very paper Franklin would take over in 1729 and continue as the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Keimer’s first advertisement (February 5–12) reads:

Take Notice,
There is lately arriv’d in this City a Person who freely offers his Service to
teach his poor Brethren the *Male Negroes* to read the Holy Scriptures, &c.

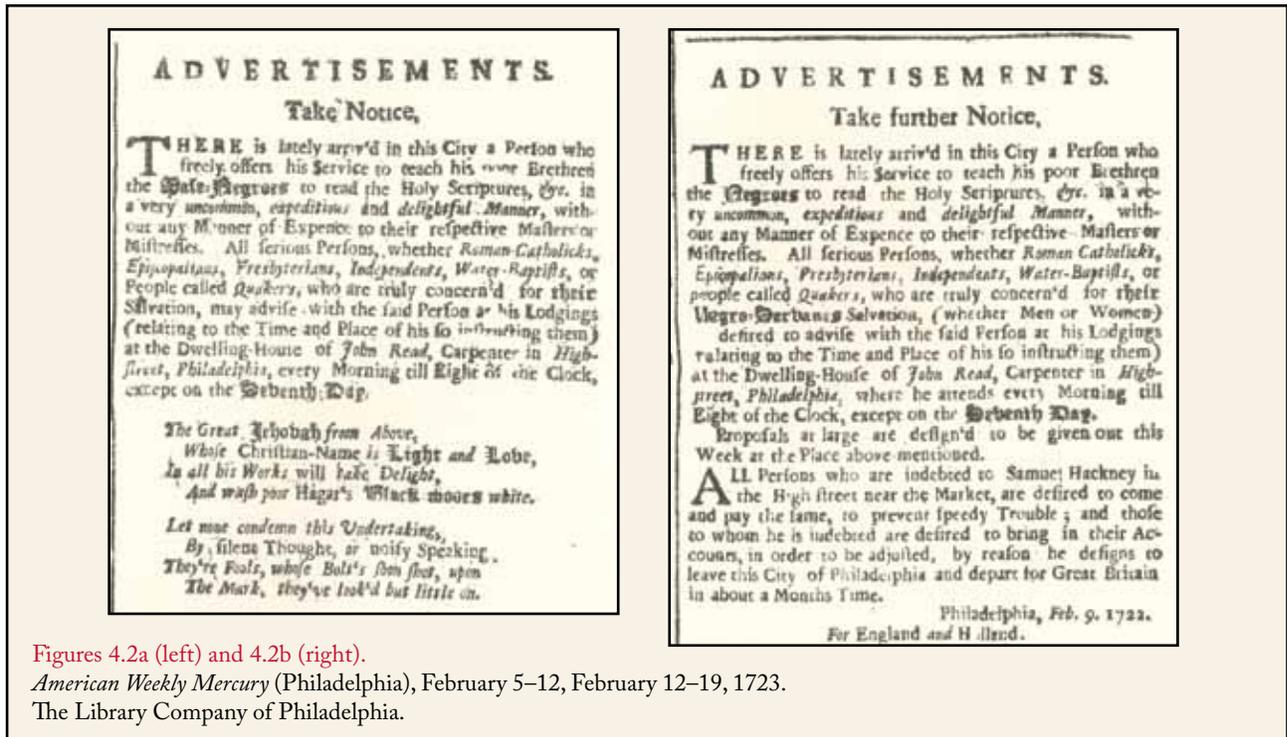
in a very *uncommon, expeditious and delightful Manner*, without any Manner of Expence to their respective Masters or Mistresses. All serious Persons, whether *Roman Catholicks, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Water-Baptists*, or people called *Quakers*, who are truly concern'd for *their* Salvation, may advise with the said Person at his Lodgings (relating to the Time and Place of his so instructing them) at the Dwelling-House of *John Read*, Carpenter in *High-street, Philadelphia*, every Morning till Eight of the Clock, except on the *Seventh Day*.

The notice was followed by these two quatrains:

The Great *Jehovah* from Above,
Whose Christian-Name is *Light* and *Love*,
In all his Works will take Delight,
And wash poor Hagar's *Black moors* white.

Let none condemn this Undertaking,
By silent Thought, or noisy Speaking
They're Fools, whose Bolt's soon shot, upon
The Mark, they've look'd but little on.

Keimer notes that he has lodgings at the home of John Read (at present-day 318 Market St.). Just a month after Franklin's arrival in the city, about November 10, 1723, Franklin himself took up lodgings at the Read house, next door to Keimer's printing shop. This was of course the home of his future common-law wife Deborah Read and her father.



Figures 4.2a (left) and 4.2b (right).

American Weekly Mercury (Philadelphia), February 5–12, February 12–19, 1723.

The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Keimer's advertisement must have left more than a few heads shaking in wonderment and confusion. Did his school already exist, or was it only in the planning stages? When he referred to "*their* Salvation," was he speaking of the slaves or their owners? And why "*Male Negroes*" only? Keimer ran another advertisement the following week (February 12–19), which was headed "Take further Notice" and answered these questions. The phrase "*Male Negroes*" became instead "*Negroes*." Keimer then rephrased "All serious Persons . . . who are truly concern'd for *their* Salvation" as "All serious Persons . . . who are truly concern'd for their *Negro-Servants* Salvation, (whether Men or Women)."

Keimer's plan was to open a free school for teaching Philadelphia's black slaves to read so that they could study the Bible. Although his revised advertisement did much to remove the ambiguities of the first version, we do not know whether Keimer ever opened his school. A hint that he might indeed have gotten his scheme off the ground comes several years later, and from the pen of another of Keimer's adversaries. Late in 1725 Keimer seems to have been searching for a new venue for his school. He was involved in a dispute with rival almanac-publisher Jacob Taylor, who accused Keimer of publishing a spurious edition of Taylor's almanac for 1726. Taylor lashed out at Keimer in a long piece in the *Mercury*, which included this bit of doggerel:

A school for thee; a most commodious place
To Nod, and Wink, and point with such a Grace —
Thy black disciples, now immerg'd in folly,
Shall start out clerks, and Read, and Speak like Tully:
The pref'rence to the sable Sort belongs,
The Whitemen next must learn the sacred Tongues.
Thus, in just Order are thy Legions led
To realms of Science, *Keimer* at the Head.⁷

Taylor's attack on Keimer suggests that the school did indeed exist—else why suggest that his "black disciples" are *now* "immerg'd in folly," and why excoriate Keimer for an unfulfilled fantasy then several years old?

With virtually no surviving evidence of Keimer's educational venture, it is hard to discern his motive in proposing—and perhaps creating—a school for Philadelphia's black slaves. A hint may be found, however, in an apology for a delay in publication that Keimer published in his newspaper: he believed himself to be so beleaguered by enemies that he had thought of writing up his experiences for general entertainment under the title of the "White Negro."⁸ It seems that Keimer's travails and disputes had given him a persecution complex and increased his empathy for blacks, and that he therefore sought to identify himself with them. Within three months of venting his spleen and likening himself to a "White Negro," Keimer had quit the printing business and sold his paper to Franklin and Hugh Meredith.⁹

Regardless of Keimer's motive or whether his school ever actually opened, his proposal must be credited as a very early attempt to address the lack of educational opportunities for Philadelphia's black inhabitants, and it can safely be asserted that the ever-observant young Franklin would have been well aware of this curious episode in the life of his employer and later rival. Franklin did not leave any evidence of his thoughts on the subject of black education at this stage of his life. But years later, in his *Autobiography*, he heaped scorn on Keimer and ridiculed him mercilessly, suggesting perhaps that the young Franklin was something less than enthusiastic about the idea and was also unwilling to credit Keimer for his unorthodox yet forward-thinking plans.



Almost two decades later another controversy erupted in Philadelphia over plans to educate the city's blacks, and again Franklin was not far from the epicenter. This time the catalyst was the English revivalist preacher George Whitefield, who played such a signal role in the Great Awakening in the American colonies and who made eight visits to Philadelphia between 1739 and 1770. Franklin and Whitefield had a close and interesting relationship. Franklin welcomed the preacher to Philadelphia; published his sermons and other writings; measured the distance his voice carried to corroborate reports that Whitefield had preached to 25,000 auditors; and, when Whitefield was denied the pulpits of Philadelphia's more orthodox congregations, took part in buying land and building a house "expressly for the Use of any Preacher of any religious Persuasion who might desire to say something to the people of Philadelphia."¹⁰ (Later, after the enthusiasm for Whitefield had died down, the building was taken over by the newly founded Academy of Philadelphia.)¹¹ Franklin's *Autobiography* records two amusing stories about Whitefield. In one, Whitefield is said to have prayed for Franklin's conversion, "but never had the Satisfaction of believing that his Prayers were heard."¹² In the second, Franklin reported that he went to hear Whitefield preach and solicit funds for his orphanage in Georgia, and

silently resolved he should get nothing from me. I had in my Pocket a Handful of Copper, Money, three or four silver Dollars, and five Pistoles in Gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the Coppers. Another stroke of his Oratory made me ashamed of that, and determin'd me to give the Silver; & he finish'd so admirably, that I empty'd my Pocket wholly into the Collector's Dish, Gold and all.¹³

In April 1740 Whitefield purchased 5,000 acres of land at the forks of the Delaware River, near present-day Easton, Pennsylvania, about 75 miles from Philadelphia. He called it Nazareth. On this vast tract he intended to settle Moravians from Georgia, build a school for black children, and create a haven for English debtors.¹⁴ Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* published solicitations for contributions for the school, and Franklin himself was authorized to receive such contributions (see Figure 4.3).¹⁵ Whitefield's project was short-lived, however. Within a year, he recognized that his project was impracticable, and he and the Moravians were parting ways over theology; they bought the entire 5,000 acres and went on to establish the settlements of Nazareth and nearby Bethlehem.

THE Rev. Mr. Whitefield having taken up
5000 Acres of Land on the Forks of Delaware, in the Province of
Pennsylvania, in order to erect a Negroe School there, and to settle a Town
thereon with his Friends; all Persons who please to contribute to the said
School, may pay their Contributions to Mr. Benezet, Merchant, in Phila-
delphia, Mr. Noble at New-York, Mr. Gilbert Tennent, in New-Brun-
swick, New-Jersey, or to the Printer of this Paper.

Figure 4.3.
Pennsylvania Gazette, November 27, 1740.
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Yet Whitefield’s evangelism and his plans for a school for blacks had struck a chord in Philadelphia. Though a slave owner himself and in no sense an opponent of the institution (indeed, he played a leading role in introducing slavery into Georgia), Whitefield nonetheless preached the importance of bringing slaves to Christ through education and Bible. (In this regard, he and Keimer shared a concern for the slaves’ souls rather than for their temporal condition.) Whitefield also inveighed against such “devilish diversions” as dancing. One of the thousands who heard him preach in Philadelphia must have been dancing-master Robert Bolton. Bolton was a Philadelphia shopkeeper who left the colony for Maryland in 1737 and returned about a year later to open a dancing school, “considerable Encouragement being given him for that Purpose.”¹⁶ Bolton apparently took Whitefield’s words about sinful activities to heart, for he acquiesced when in April 1740 Whitefield’s traveling companion William Seward locked up the dancing room and took away the key. The “great Stir” between Seward and the gentlemen (the self-styled “better sort”) who had rented the room boiled over into the press, and Franklin ended up in the middle, not only printing pieces from both sides in his *Pennsylvania Gazette*, but even joining the controversy by writing as “Obadiah Plainman.”¹⁷

No longer having a dancing school for adults, Bolton announced the opening of a school in which children would be taught “all kinds of Needle-work, Dancing, &c. Where also Children may board, as usual with Mr. Brownell.”¹⁸ (As it happened, Brownell was Franklin’s first teacher in Boston before both of them relocated to Philadelphia.)¹⁹ And no doubt inspired by the other part of Whitefield’s message, Bolton took a step both courageous and foolhardy by proposing to admit to his school black students along with his white students. The evidence for this plan comes from newspapers in Charleston and Boston, which reported on the furor Bolton’s plan caused (see Figure 4.4):

We hear by a private Letter from Philadelphia, that one Mr. *Boulton*, who formerly kept a Dancing School, Ball, Assembly, Concert Room &c. there, being convinced that such a Practice was contrary to the Gospel of Christ, has lately set up a School for teaching Children to read, &c., and that upon his giving Notice that he would teach Negroes also, had in 23 Days no less than 53 Black Scholars. For this he was sent for, and arraign’d in Court, as a Breaker of the Negro Law, but on making his Defence was dismiss’d. And the next Day order’d by the Foreman of the Grand Jury to continue his School without Interruption.²⁰

Curiously, this incident does not seem to have been recorded in the city where it took place. If Bolton did indeed “give notice” of his intention to teach blacks, he did not do it in either of the two newspapers then being published in Philadelphia—the *American Weekly Mercury* and Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Nor is it certain just what law Bolton was arraigned for breaking. The 1725 Act for the Better Regulating of Negroes in This Province includes no prohibition against teaching blacks to read. Perhaps he was accused of violating the 1705 Act for the Trial of Negroes, still in force, which included a clause prohibiting the assembly of more than four blacks “upon no lawful Business of their Masters or Owners,” on pain of a public whipping not exceeding thirty-nine lashes.²¹

Could Franklin have been the source of the private letter cited by the *South-Carolina Gazette*? The *Gazette* was established when Franklin sent Thomas Whitmarsh from Philadelphia to Charleston in 1732 to begin the publication. When Whitmarsh died of yellow fever shortly thereafter, Franklin sent Louis Timothée to succeed him. Timothée, a Huguenot immigrant who later anglicized his name to Lewis Timothy, had

Charlstown, South Carolina, July 15.

We hear by a private Letter from Philadelphia, that one Mr. Bolton, who formerly kept a Dancing School, Ball, Assembly Concert Room &c there, being convinced that such a Practice was contrary to the Gospel of Christ, has lately set up a School for teaching Children to read. &c. and that upon his giving Notice that he would teach Negroes also, had in 23 Days no less than 53 Black Scholars. For this he was sent for, and arraign'd in Court, as a Breaker of the Negro Law, but on making his Defence was dismiss'd. And the next Day order'd by the Foreman of the Grand Jury to continue his School without Interruption.

Great Indignation being left Week from Parismouth

Figure 4.4.

Boston Weekly News-Letter, August 21, 1740.

Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

been one of Franklin's journeymen and the first librarian of Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia. Timothy died in 1738, with one year remaining of his six-year contract with Franklin. The paper was then taken over by Timothy's widow Elizabeth and their thirteen-year-old son Peter. Given the close business relationship between Franklin and the Timothys, and given Franklin's intimate knowledge of the closing of Bolton's dancing school and concert room, would not Franklin have been a likely source of the report of Bolton's arraignment for teaching Philadelphia's blacks?



The first sustained efforts to teach Philadelphia's blacks began in 1750, ten years after the Bolton imbroglio and less than a decade before Franklin's own deep involvement with the Associates of Dr. Bray. The Quaker initiative was led by the teacher and ardent and prolific antislavery activist Anthony Benezet, a French Huguenot who had emigrated from London in 1731.²² Benezet must have been well aware of Whitefield's abortive effort to establish a Negro school in Nazareth; the two men had known each other in England, and Benezet's father, John Stephen Benezet, was Whitefield's collector of subscriptions in Pennsylvania to support the school. Despite the fact that surviving correspondence between Franklin and Benezet does not exist before 1772,²³ there can be no doubt that the paths of these two prominent civic figures crossed frequently, at least during the years Franklin was resident in Philadelphia. Benezet was a subscriber to Franklin's Pennsylvania Hospital (and a manager in 1757), a shareholder of the Library Company, and a customer of Franklin's shop.²⁴ They were practically neighbors, too, Benezet living on the north side of Chestnut Street between Third and Fourth, and Franklin living for many years along or near the first three blocks of Market Street, and then beginning in the mid-1760s at Franklin Court, almost directly behind Benezet's house. They were distantly related by marriage, as well, for in 1745 Benezet's brother Daniel had married a cousin of Deborah Franklin.²⁵

Anthony Benezet had been teaching white pupils since 1739, first at the Germantown school established by Francis Daniel Pastorius, and from 1742 at the Friends' English School (now known as the William Penn Charter School). Beginning in 1750, Benezet taught black pupils in the evening at his home (see Figure 4.5). After carrying on this independent enterprise at his own expense for two decades, he convinced other Quakers to erect a school for the instruction of black children (see Figure 4.6). (This was just at the time when the Quakers were adopting an antislavery stance and encouraging their members to free their slaves.) The new school opened in June 1770 with twenty-two pupils, a number that grew to thirty-six within two months. By 1774 a new building had been erected to house the school. It is said that 250 pupils passed through the school in the years from 1770 to 1775. Benezet provided supervision for the school for a number of years, and then took up his teaching role again in 1782, devoting himself to the school for the last two years of his life. After making provision for his wife, Benezet stipulated in his will that his entire estate should be used to endow the school.²⁶



In 1757, just as Franklin was embarking for England as the agent of the Pennsylvania Assembly in its dispute with the Proprietors over the taxation of Proprietary lands and other issues, the Reverend John Waring, secretary of the Associates of Dr. Bray, wrote a letter to Franklin. The Bray Associates was an Anglican organization based in London that promoted the conversion to Christianity and the education of blacks in the American colonies. The Associates had been founded in 1724 and for its first thirty years had tried to achieve its goals by sending small libraries to colonial clergymen, with which they could teach and catechize among their black parishioners, and by sending catechists to the colonies. By the mid-1750s, neither of these methods had accomplished much, and the Associates began to think about other avenues for reaching their goal—hence Waring's letter to Franklin concerning the work of the organization. At that time the Associates had apparently not yet thought of establishing organized, formal Negro schools in America, for Waring cited the example of the Welsh "circulating schools" and asked Franklin if a similar scheme could "be set on foot in Your province for the Service of the blacks?"²⁷ The Associates were thus still thinking in terms of itinerant schoolmasters.

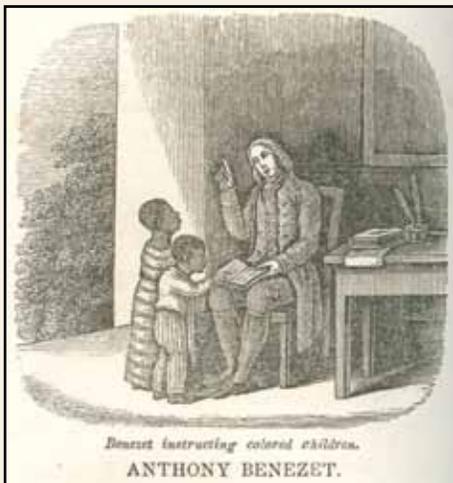


Figure 4.5.
"Benezet Instructing Colored Children," from J. W. Barber,
Historical, Poetical, and Pictorial American Scenes (New Haven:
Published by J. W. & J. Barber; for J. H. Bradley, [1853]).
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

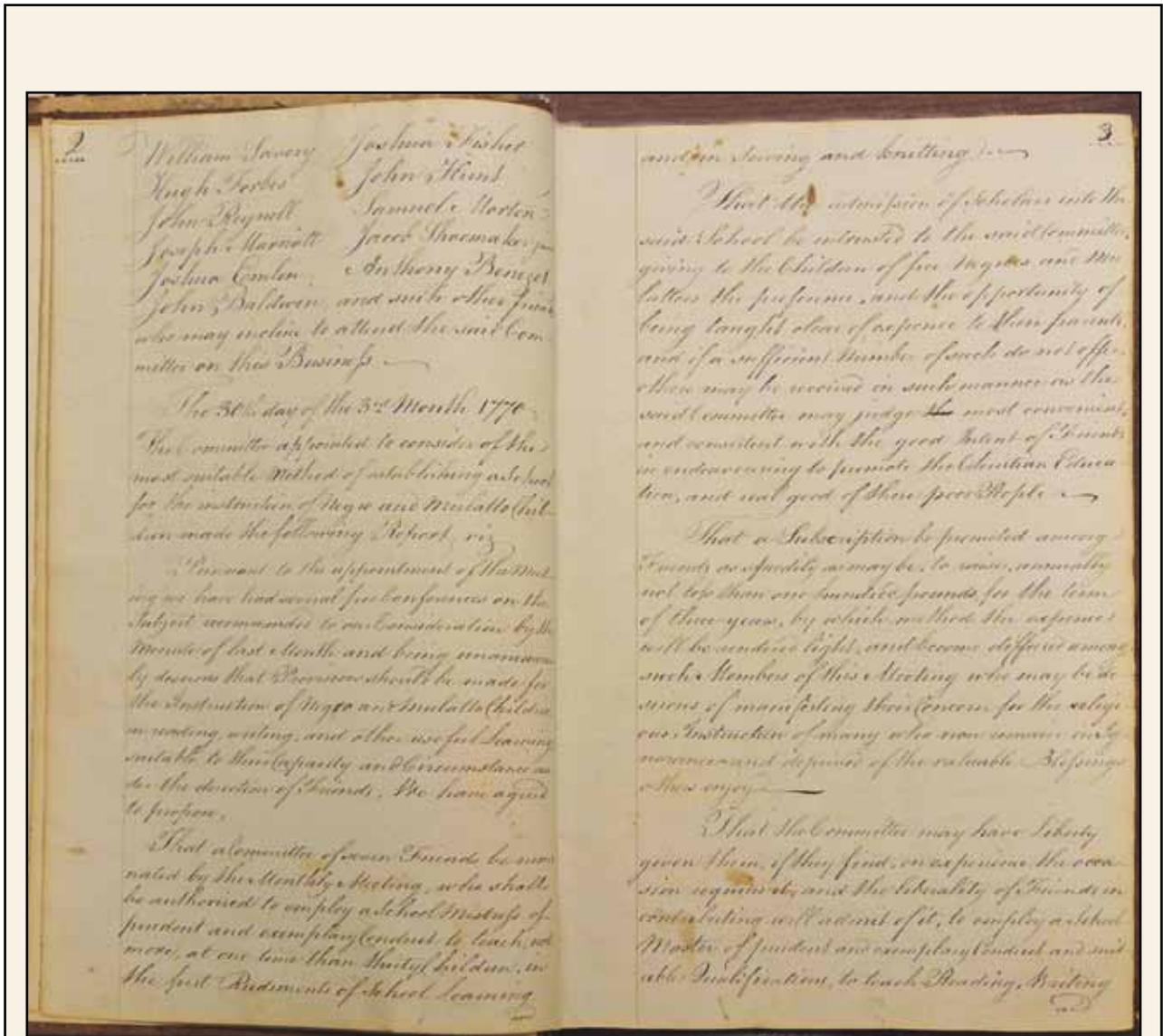


Figure 4.6. School for Black People (Africans' School), Overseers Minutes, vol. 1, 1770–1811, pp. 2–3. Archives of the Monthly Meeting of Friends, Philadelphia; Haverford College Library, Quaker Collection.

These early pages from the Minute Book of the Africans' School present a March 30, 1770 report made by a committee of Friends recommending the creation of a "school for the instruction of Negro and Mulatto children." Names of some of the committee (including Anthony Benezet) appear at the top of p. 2.

Craven Street Jan. 3. 58. —

Rev^d Sir,

I send you herewith the Extract of
M^r Stungen's Letter which I mentioned to you
He is, among us, esteemed a good Man, one that
makes a Conscience of the Duties of his Office, in w^{ch}.
he is very diligent, and has behaved with so much
Discretion, as to gain the general Respect & Good-
will of the People. — If the Associates of D^r Brey
should think fit to make Toyal of a School for
Negro Children in Philadelphia, I know no Per-
son under whose Care it would be more likely
to succeed. At present few or none give their
Negro Children any Schooling; partly from a
Prejudice that Reading & Knowledge in a Slave
are both useless and dangerous; and partly from
an Unwillingness in the Masters & Mistresses of
common Schools to take black Scholars, lest
the Parents of the white Children should be dis-
gusted & take them away, not choosing to have
their Children mixed with Slaves in Education, Play,
&c. — But a separate School for Blacks, under
the Care of One, of whom People should have an
Opinion that he would be careful to imbue the
Minds of their young Slaves with good Principles,
might probably have a Number of Blacks sent
to it; and if on Experience it should be found
useful,

M^r Waring

Figure 4.7.

Benjamin Franklin to John Waring, January 3, 1758.

Miscellaneous Benjamin Franklin Collections, courtesy, American Philosophical Society.

Waring's letter arrived in Philadelphia after Franklin had sailed to London, so his wife Deborah showed the letter to the Rev. William Sturgeon, a graduate of Yale College who since 1747 had been the assistant minister of Christ Church and catechist to the Negroes in Philadelphia, supported by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Sturgeon in turn wrote to Franklin in August 1757, recommending that a school be opened in Philadelphia "under the Care and Inspection of the Minister, or some other prudent Person or Persons."²⁸ Franklin then communicated Sturgeon's proposal to Waring in January 1758 (see Figure 4.7). Obviously enthusiastic about the plan, Franklin even saw its importance extending beyond Philadelphia:

At present few or none give their Negro Children any Schooling, partly from a Prejudice that Reading & Knowledge in a Slave are both useless and dangerous; and partly from an Unwillingness in the Masters & Mistresses of common Schools to take black Scholars, lest the Parents of the white Children should be disgusted & take them away, not chusing to have their Children mix'd with Slaves in Education, Play, &c. But a separate School for Blacks, under the Care of One, of whom People should have an Opinion that he would be careful to imbue the Minds of their young Slaves with good Principles, might probably have a Number of Blacks sent to it; and if on Experience it should be found useful, and not attended with the ill Consequences commonly apprehended, the Example might be followed in the other Colonies, and encouraged by the Inhabitants in general.²⁹

In recommending the establishment of a school to the Bray Associates, Sturgeon and Franklin may well have had in mind Anthony Benezet's successful experience over the preceding six years, while at the same time perhaps doubting that the ardent abolitionist Benezet was imbuing the minds of his pupils with the "good Principles" that they recommended.

Upon learning of the plan the Associates hesitantly proceeded toward an implementation of Sturgeon's and Franklin's vision. On February 1, 1758, they agreed to consider at the next meeting whether it would be proper to open a school for black children in Philadelphia, and in the meantime they commissioned Waring to "get the best Information he can of such Particulars as may enable the Associates to Judge of the Propriety & Usefulness of such a School there."³⁰ Such information could, of course, be had most readily from Franklin himself. Waring consulted Franklin about the expediency of opening a Negro school in Philadelphia, and at their meeting of April 5, 1758, the Associates agreed to a three-year trial of such a school at a maximum expense of £20 sterling per annum.³¹

The Philadelphia school opened on November 20, 1758, with a mistress and thirty pupils under Sturgeon's direction.³² Boys were to be taught to read and girls to read, sew, knit, and embroider. The mistress was to attend church with the children every Wednesday and Friday, and "all her Endeavours [were] to be directed towards making them Christians." The books the Bray Associates sent to the school were primarily religious in nature.³³ The school was immediately successful, and in June 1759 Sturgeon reported that thirty-six scholars attended regularly.³⁴ Of the thirty-six pupils, twenty-five were slaves and eleven free.³⁵ Deborah Franklin wrote to her husband on August 9, 1759, that she "went to hear the Negro Children catechised at Church. . . . It gave me a great deal of Pleasure, and I shall send Othello to the School."³⁶ Yet the Franklins' own slave is not included in the only surviving list of students that postdates Deborah's letter.³⁷

Perhaps because of Sturgeon's report, the Associates agreed in January 1760 to open three other American schools "with all Convenient Speed." They also asked Waring to inform Franklin of the decision and to solicit Franklin's assistance in the establishment of the other schools. Although the idea of establishing Negro schools was implanted in the minds of the Associates by Sturgeon and Franklin and nourished by Sturgeon's early report of success, the Associates apparently reached the decision to increase the number of schools before seeking Franklin's advice. The Associates elected Franklin a member on January 2, 1760, however, and when he attended his first meeting fifteen days later, they readily accepted his recommendations concerning the locations of the three prospective schools. Franklin suggested that New York, Williamsburg, and Newport were the most proper places in the British plantations for the additional Negro schools, and he recommended particular men to superintend them.³⁸ Waring then wrote to the three men to inform them of the Associates' intentions and to request their assistance in establishing schools in order to advance the Associates' "pious Undertaking." The response was quite favorable, and the schools in New York and Williamsburg opened on September 22 and 29, 1760, respectively.³⁹ The Newport school did not begin its operations until 1762. The Associates opened one other Negro school, in 1765, at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Of these five schools, only that at Philadelphia survived the Revolution.⁴⁰ Each school typically had between twenty and thirty students and was supported by an annual grant from the Associates of £20 or £25, usually £20. Most, and perhaps all, of the schools were open to both slave and free black children, although the preponderance of students were slaves.⁴¹ And the Philadelphia school (and perhaps others) welcomed as students slaves whose masters were not members of the Church of England.⁴²

Before the Revolution, four mistresses and four superintendents served the Philadelphia school.⁴³ Important changes began to occur in 1766. First, on July 31, Sturgeon resigned his position as assistant minister of the United Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter's because of ill health, and it seems likely that he ceased to superintend the Associates' Negro school at that time. Franklin wrote from England to Francis Hopkinson late in 1767 that the Associates had not heard from Sturgeon "these two years past" and conveyed the Associates' request that Hopkinson and Edward Duffield "enquire into the State of" the school.⁴⁴ After receiving Franklin's letter early in 1768, Hopkinson and Duffield succeeded Sturgeon as the school's administrators. Under the diligent mistress Mrs. Ayres, the school had apparently not declined during the lapse between the administrations of Sturgeon and of Hopkinson and Duffield. When the latter two first examined the school there were twenty-seven students in attendance.⁴⁵

About the same time that Sturgeon left the school, the Bray Associates were acting to strengthen the institution. At their meeting of July 24, 1766, Waring reported the receipt of a letter from the secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge revealing that the Reverend Abbot Upcher, a wealthy clergyman from Suffolk, intended to donate £1,000 to the Associates for the purchase of an estate in America. The following October 2 the Associates asked Franklin to write to Upcher "to acquaint him with the Circumstances of purchasing Lands in America."⁴⁶ Franklin of course recommended Philadelphia, advising Upcher "to empower three Persons in Philadelphia to purchase Ground Rents within that City."⁴⁷ On May 7, 1767, the Associates appointed Franklin and four Philadelphians undoubtedly recommended by Franklin—the Reverend Jacob Duché (minister of the United Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter's), Hopkinson, Duffield, and David Hall (Franklin's former partner in the printing business)—to serve as trustees for the land to be purchased.⁴⁸

After the Associates had received Upcher's third and final benefaction, bringing his total gift to £500, they consulted Richard Jackson, an influential London lawyer and great friend of Franklin, "on the most

proper Method of securing to the Associates the full Right & Title to such Lands as shall be purchased in Pennsylvania with Mr. Upchers Benefactions.”⁴⁹ Jackson recommended that the five trustees in whom the lands would be vested should “be chosen out of such Associates as are resident in England,” and that those trustees could “grant a Letter of Attorney to empower five persons resident in America to act as Attorneys for Them.” The five Americans originally named as trustees—Franklin, Duché, Hopkinson, Duffield, and Hall—were then named attorneys under the trusteeship of five of the British Associates.⁵⁰ Not all of the five Americans involved themselves in the affairs of the Associates in Philadelphia, however. In 1769 Duché, who was “much engaged in the Duties of a large Parish,” declined “to take the Negro School under my particular Inspection,” and David Hall “insist[ed] on another Person’s being appointed in his Room as it does not suit him to undertake the Charge . . . put upon him.”⁵¹ With Franklin in London (see Figure 4.8) and Duché and Hall resigned, Hopkinson and Duffield were the only two of the five appointees remaining as trustees in Philadelphia for the purchase of land.

By July 1773, Hopkinson and Duffield were able to inform the Associates that after careful inquiry they had found a suitable lot at the corner of Market and Ninth streets.⁵² After the Associates had agreed to the purchase, Hopkinson and Duffield concluded the transaction and reported the results in May 1774. At the same time, they announced that Hopkinson had left Philadelphia and that Duffield “intended very soon to retire into the Country, & therefore requested that some other person might be appointed Inspector of the Negro School in their Stead.”⁵³

In May 1774, as these land negotiations were being completed, the school had thirty pupils, three free and twenty-seven slave. The mistress taught “2 at their Needles & Spelling, 1 at Knitting, Needle, & Testament, 7 at Spelling, 3 in the Testament, 1 at Needle & Testament, 1 in the Psalter, 10 in the Alphabet, 1 in Fables, 1 at Sampler & Testament, 3 in the Primer.”⁵⁴ Knowing that only the girls were taught skills with the needle, we may surmise that of the thirty pupils, five were certainly girls. In the fall of 1774, the Reverend Thomas Coombe, assistant minister of the United Congregations of Christ Church and St. Peter’s, undertook the supervision of the school. In July 1775, Coombe sent his last communication before the Revolution, reporting that “the School continues full [with thirty pupils] & the Mistress discharges her Duty with diligence & a reasonable Degree of Success.”⁵⁵ Despite the Associates’ difficulties in ensuring a



Figure 4.8.

Invitation from the Associates of Dr. Bray to Benjamin Franklin, London, May 21, 1772 (recto and verso). Benjamin Franklin Papers, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania.

strong financial footing for the school, it would seem that the school itself had performed its educational mission with “Success” for nearly fifteen years.

The school fell into abeyance during the war, as communications with and funds from Britain were cut and the ties between Christ Church and the Anglican metropolis were severed. After the war, Hopkinson and Franklin (once again back in Philadelphia) resumed their correspondence with the Associates. Their first letters concerned the disposition of the lot owned by the Associates, and by October 1786 Hopkinson was able to report that he had leased out a portion of it: “This, I expect, will answer three good Purposes—it will fix a Value on the rest of the Estate; will forward the letting out more of the Ground on as good Terms & will enable me to renew the Negroe Charity School according to the Designs of the Associates.”⁵⁶ The school did reopen in December 1786, and within a year’s time it was again full.⁵⁷



Franklin expressed different views at different times concerning the temperament and intellectual faculties of blacks, and it is possible to discern a change in his thinking over time. In his 1751 *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.*, in which he compared the economics of slavery with Britain’s domestic manufacturing, Franklin listed pilfering as one of the costs of slavery, “almost every Slave being *by Nature* a Thief.”⁵⁸ When he reprinted the *Observations* in 1760, that appraisal had changed; slaves pilfered “from the nature of slavery.”⁵⁹ Franklin also began to attribute blacks’ apparent lack of intellect to the stultifying effects of slavery. His letter to the Bray Associates after visiting the Philadelphia Negro school in 1763 is instructive in this regard (see Catalogue no. 67). Franklin reported that the black students were making good progress:

I was on the whole much pleas’d, and from what I then saw, have conceiv’d a higher Opinion of the natural Capacities of the black Race, than I had ever before entertained. Their Apprehension seems as quick, their Memory as strong, and their Docility in every Respect equal to that of white Children. You will wonder perhaps that I should ever doubt it, and I will not undertake to justify all my Prejudices, nor to account for them.⁶⁰

Franklin seems almost surprised to discover that his experience had belied his expectations. This visit to the Bray school to witness for himself the progress the black pupils were making was revelatory for Franklin. In the years following that visit, Franklin became more outspoken in his views on slavery. In 1774 he expressed the belief that blacks “are not deficient in natural Understanding, but they have not the Advantage of Education.”⁶¹

In holding this view, Franklin was expressing a sentiment shared by many of his contemporaries. In his own *Pennsylvania Gazette* (April 17, 1740) he had published George Whitefield’s “Letter . . . to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina” in which Whitefield argued that blacks and whites, “if born and bred up here, I am perswaded, are naturally capable of the same Improvement.” And perhaps Franklin was influenced by Anthony Benezet, whose long years of instructing black pupils had led him to believe in the intellectual equality of whites and blacks. Benezet’s first statement on this subject appeared in his 1762 *A Short Account of . . . Africa*, in which he wrote that “Negroes are generally sensible humane and sociable, and . . . their capacity is as good, and as capable of improvement as that of white people.”⁶²

Late in life Franklin became an active leader of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS). He served as its president, in which capacity he is credited with the authorship of two documents that are the most significant writings of his final year. One was *An Address to the Public*, published by the PAS in October 1789 (Figure 4.9), which also took an environmental view of blacks, asserting that because of slavery the bondsman “too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains, that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart.”⁶³

The *Address* was accompanied by *A Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks*, which charged a committee of twenty-four PAS members with the responsibility for transacting “the business relative to free blacks.” The committee was to do its work through four subcommittees, one of which was the Committee of Education,

who shall superintend the school-instruction of the children, and youth of the Free Blacks; they may either influence them to attend regularly the schools already established in this city, or form others with this view; they shall in either case provide that, the pupils may receive such learning, as is necessary for their future situation in life; and especially a deep impression of the most important, and generally acknowledged moral and religious principles.

The *Plan* and *Address* were followed early in 1790 by a petition to Congress, signed by Franklin as president, seeking to put slavery in America on the road to extinction.⁶⁴ Franklin died in April 1790, two months later, without having won this battle.

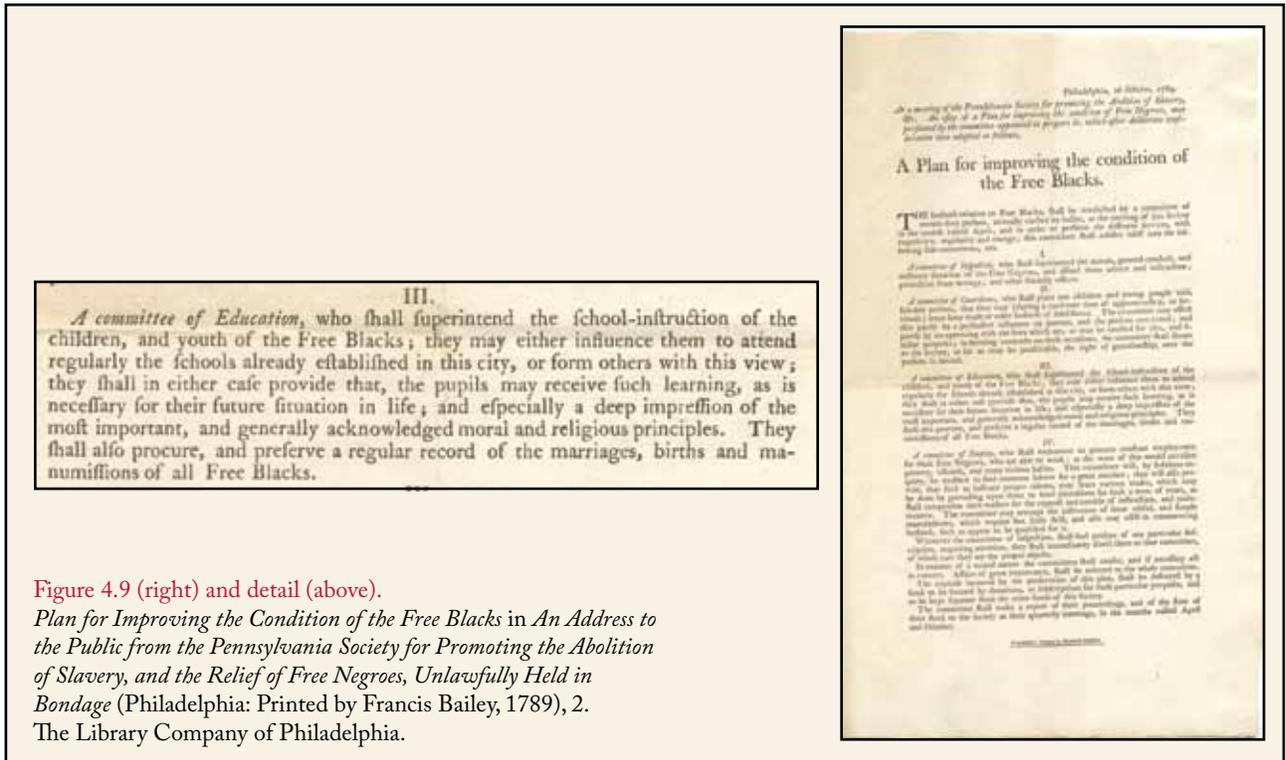


Figure 4.9 (right) and detail (above). *Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks in An Address to the Public from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage* (Philadelphia: Printed by Francis Bailey, 1789), 2. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

What happened in the years following Franklin's death? After the death of Hopkinson (in 1791), the Bray Associates' Philadelphia Negro school came under the superintendence of Bishop William White, and by 1795 the institution had begun to flourish. In a letter to the Associates of June 4, 1795, White noted that Philadelphia blacks had erected "a very convenient Church," partly at their own expense and partly through subscriptions from whites (Figure 4.10). The church, called the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, declared its conformity to the Episcopal Church in "Doctrine Discipline & Worship." White also recommended the construction of a schoolhouse out of the future profits from the rents of the lot, which the Associates agreed to.⁶⁵ A year later the Associates approved the establishment of another school in conjunction with the African Church, and on March 5, 1804, they resolved to establish yet a third school in Philadelphia.⁶⁶ From its modest beginning in 1758, the Philadelphia Negro school had grown and thrived, surviving numerous changes in personnel and the upheavals of revolution, and it had given impetus to the development of other educational facilities for Philadelphia's blacks.

The Quakers in 1789—five years after Benezet's death—had formed the Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, which sought to do for adults what the Quakers had been doing for forty years for children (see Figures 4.11a and 4.11b). Sessions were held at night, and by 1792 there were fifty pupils (see Figures 4.12a and 4.12b). This was just about at the time when the Education Committee of the PAS purchased a lot on Cherry Street onto which they moved a building and in 1793 opened "a free school for the instruction of children of color of both sexes." They hired a black woman, Eleanor Harris, "being judged well qualified," to teach the children spelling, reading, and needlework. They paid her \$100 a year and provided her with a room in the school and firewood.⁶⁷ In 1795 Quaker women formed a society for educating black women and opened a school for them that met on five evenings each week (see Figures 4.13a and 4.13b).⁶⁸ Thus in the waning years of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, the Bray Associates, the Quakers, and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (many of whose members were also Quakers) provided at least a modicum of education for Philadelphia's burgeoning population of free blacks.

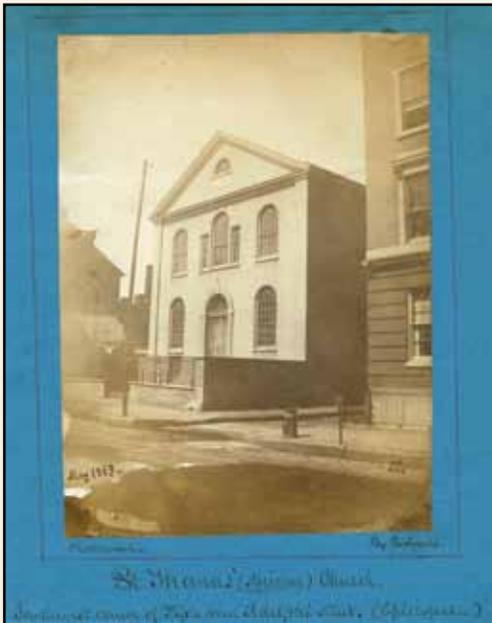


Figure 4.10.
Frederick De Bourg Richards, photographer, "St. Thomas'
(African) Church, Southwest corner of Fifth and Adelphi Street"
(photographic print: salted paper mounted on paper, 21 x 16 cm.,
May 1859).
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

1798

DECEMBER 8. 1798

OF A SOCIETY INSTITUTED IN PHILADELPHIA THE 24th OF THE
FIRST MONTH 1775, FOR THE FREE INSTRUCTION OF COLORED
PEOPLE BY BLACKS AND PEOPLE OF COLORED

Withdrew not paid from them to whom it is due, when it is in
the power of them Read to be at: *Minutes III. 27.*

For consideration of the Dead savings which many
well-disposed Blacks and People of Colored labors undergo
from not being able to read write or cast accounts, which
would qualify them to act for themselves, or provide for
their Families, the whose names are subscribed agree to
undertake their tuition; and bind themselves by the follow-
ing Regulations for said Purpose.

- I. The affairs of the Society shall be transacted on the
evening of the second Sabbath-day in every month, which the
Schools are held, at the time and place occasionally fixed on.
- II. One of our Members shall act as Clerk, take regu-
lar minutes of our Proceedings, and procure our Reports.
- III. In case of absence without sufficient cause, a fine
of 25cts. or a Dollar shall be paid to our Collectors; and if
voluntary contribution shall be made when necessary, to
defray the expenses of the Society. The Money so collected to
be paid into the hands of a Treasurer, who shall produce
his Accounts, properly adjusted, once in six months.
- IV. Any Person requesting to join the Society, with the
consent of two or more Members, may be proposed at
any

1798 DECEMBER 8.

any Extra Meeting for consideration; but such request
shall be decided upon before the next evening.

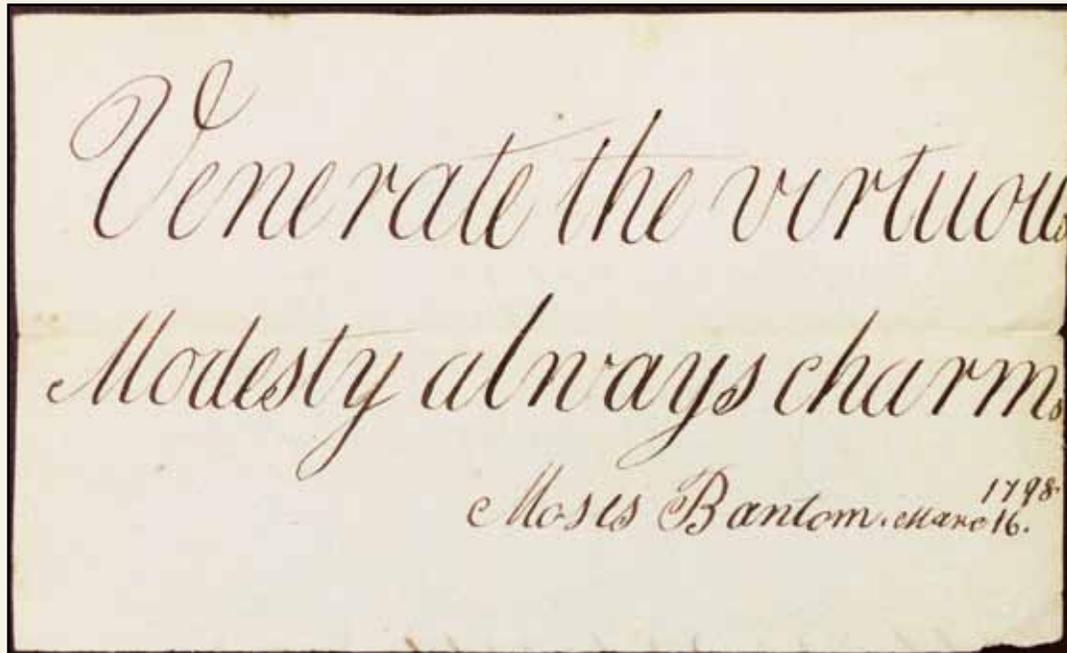
Finally, In regard to the order, order, and usefulness of this
Institution, we will endeavor to avoid any unbecomingly
individually engage to submit to the judgment of the Society,
if the exclusion of any of us should become necessary for the
good of the Institution.

Signed in Philadelphia, according to each Member as
ought to discontinue his services, on giving pub-
lic notice at some State Meeting of the Society:

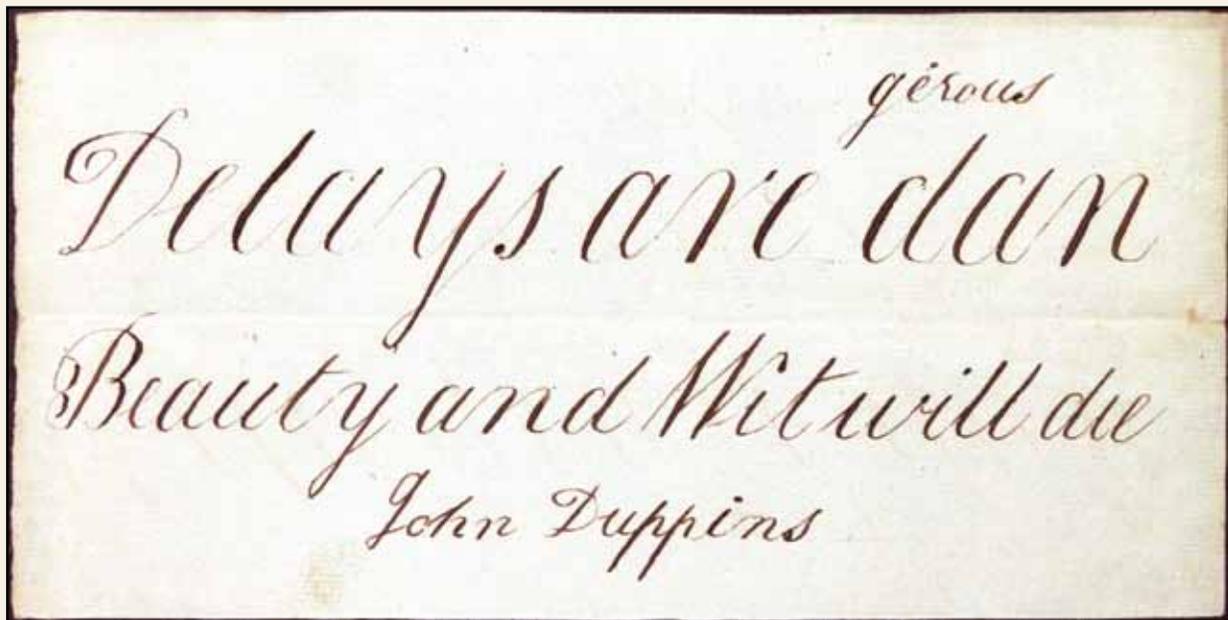
Thomas B. Barton	Benjamin Hornor Junr
Joseph Garrison	Aaron Clarke
James T. Towell	Sam Richards Junr
John Biddle	James Reed
Edu Thayer Russell	John Garrison
Arthur T. Southwick	Benjamin Chamberlain
George Williams	Nathanah Sharp
Calh. Hopkins	John Lambert
Samuel Bolton	William Thompson
Samuel Paul	Eliza Hughes
Joseph Scallenger	Mrs. Wilcox
Oliver Knicker	Henry Lawrence Junr
Charles Donaldson	Benjamin C. Lister
Thomas Rogers	Paul P. Hopper
Robert Johnson	
Samuel Lawrence	
Wesley Webb	
Edward Ross	
Samuel Barnes	

Figures 4.11a and 4.11b.

Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, Records, Minute Book 1, 1790–98, pp. [1–2].
Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.



Venerate the virtuous
Modesty always charms
Moses Bantom, March 16. 1798.



Delays are dan^{gerous}
Beauty and Wit will die
John Duppins

Figures 4.12a (top) and 4.12b (bottom).

Writing samples of Moses Bantom, 16 March 1798, and John Duppins, n.d. (between 1790 and 1802).

Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, Records (RG 4/009), Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

Figures 4.13a (upper right) and 4.13b (lower right).

Letters of Mary Brown, March 11, 1790, and Frances Richardson, n.d. (between 1790 and 1802) to the Women's Association.

Association of Friends for the Free Instruction of Adult Colored Persons, Records, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

Esteemed friends I am lead by a humble
 Sense of gratitude and duty to return you most
 affectionate acknowledgments for the kind atten-
 tion you have condescended to wards the improve-
 ment of our useful Learning as well as the inculcat-
 ing us in the more excellent precepts that of our
 Religious Duties earnestly trust will be
 Blessed in the ardent endeavours to persevere
 for that promotion which will afford a com-
 fortable satisfaction to you, and a lasting
 happiness to our lives with most grateful
 regards I am your obliged
 Mary Brown March 11 1777.

dear masters; I am very thankful to you for
 the favour that I received from you to think not
 most affected people a. using our talents but
 o. my dear masters if you ~~did~~ ^{had} not tedious to
 know you is Good to our home should I presume to
 set it down; I wonder you think thousand think for
 the pains that you has taken with me o. my dear
 masters; now not how to wonder you thinks a nuff but I
 hope god all mighty will bless all if you for your
 trouble James B. Richardson

Yet the education of Philadelphia’s blacks was not dependent solely on the actions of certain benevolent whites. Philadelphia’s African Americans sometimes took the initiative and assumed responsibility for their own education and that of others in the black community, or acted in concert with the whites who were connected to the Bray Associates, the Quakers, and the PAS. There is a tantalizing record in 1775 of what was likely a school run by a black man, presumably for black pupils. In July of that year someone known as Black Abraham bought three dozen spelling books from the Philadelphia printer-bookseller Robert Aitken for fifteen shillings a dozen (see Figure 4.14).⁶⁹ This was just one year before Benezet published his famous *Pennsylvania Spelling-Book*, which taught reading by inculcating moral and religious lessons and was likely used in the education of both white and black pupils (Figure 4.15).⁷⁰ No further trace of Black Abraham or his school has been found. But it was after the Revolution, as Philadelphia’s free black population grew so dramatically, that leaders of the African American community became involved with educational ventures.

The two most prominent African Americans of that time were to a large extent self-taught. “The personal experience of men such as Richard Allen . . . and Absalom Jones taught them that literacy had been a cardinal element in getting freedom and in getting ahead.”⁷¹ Absalom Jones (Figure 4.16) was born a slave in 1746 on a Delaware plantation. He related in an autobiographical sketch that

being very fond of learning, I was careful to save the pennies that were given me by the ladies and gentlemen from time to time. I soon bought myself a primer, and begged to be taught by any body that I found able and willing to give me the least instruction. Soon after this, I was able to purchase a spelling book; for as my money increased, I supplied myself with books, among others, a Testament.⁷²

Jones moved to Philadelphia with his master in 1762 and purchased his freedom in 1784. Soon thereafter he was one of the leaders, with Richard Allen, in the creation of the Free African Society, and in 1794 became the first pastor of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. In 1766 his master allowed him to attend night school, where he learned “Addition, Troy weight, Subtraction, Apothecaries’ weight, Practical Multiplication, Practical Division, and Reduction.”⁷³ And in 1799 Jones received funds from the Abolition Society to open a preschool for young children in his home.⁷⁴

Richard Allen was also born a slave, in 1760, to Philadelphian Benjamin Chew. During his youth, Allen and his family were sold to a man with property near Dover, Delaware. Allen, like Jones, acquired literacy in Delaware, and he landed in Philadelphia after traveling as an itinerant Methodist preacher. After founding the Free African Society with Jones in 1787, Allen later became the founder (and first bishop) of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (see Catalogue no. 131). Allen intuitively understood the importance of education to African Americans. His biographer notes that Allen “was in the front rank of those who were leading in the education of both children and adults. It was said that no man of his group was more interested in the education of his people.”⁷⁵ He challenged white society to “try the experiment [a very Franklinian notion!] of taking a few black children, and cultivate their minds with the same care, and let them have the same prospect in view, as to living in the world, as you would wish for your own children, [and] you would find upon the trial, they were not inferior in mental endowments.”⁷⁶ In 1795, in collaboration with the administrators of the Bray Associates’ school, Allen opened a day school for sixty children, and in 1804 he founded the Society of Free People of Colour for Promoting the Instruction and School Education of Children of African Descent. Both Jones and Allen knew from their own experience that blacks who received education could become accomplished members of the community.





Figure 4.14 (above). Robert Aitken, Waste Book, Robert Aitken Papers, 1771–1802, p. 267. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

The entry for July 25, 1775, records the sale of spelling books to Black Abraham.

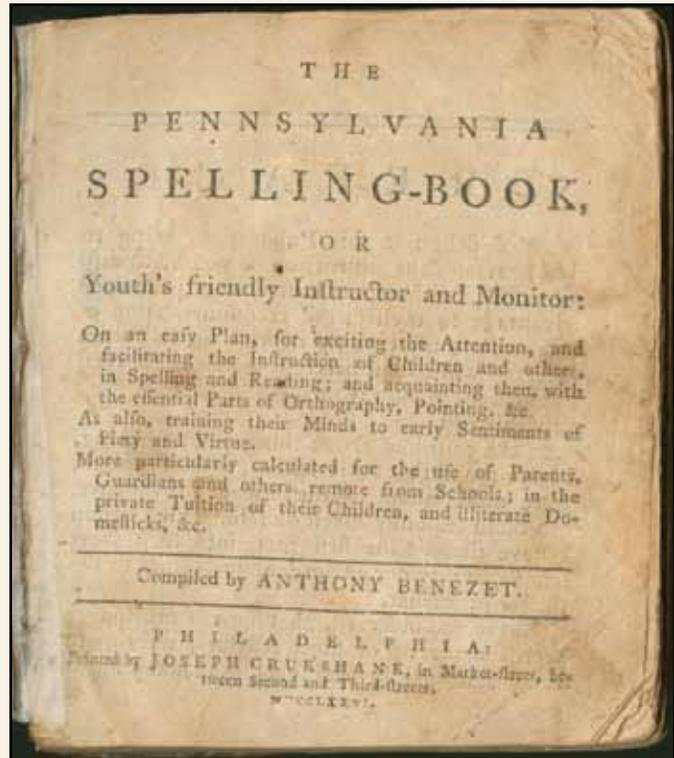


Figure 4.15 (upper right). Anthony Benezet, *The Pennsylvania Spelling-Book, or Youth's Friendly Instructor and Monitor* (Philadelphia: Printed by Joseph Crukshank, 1776). The Library Company of Philadelphia.

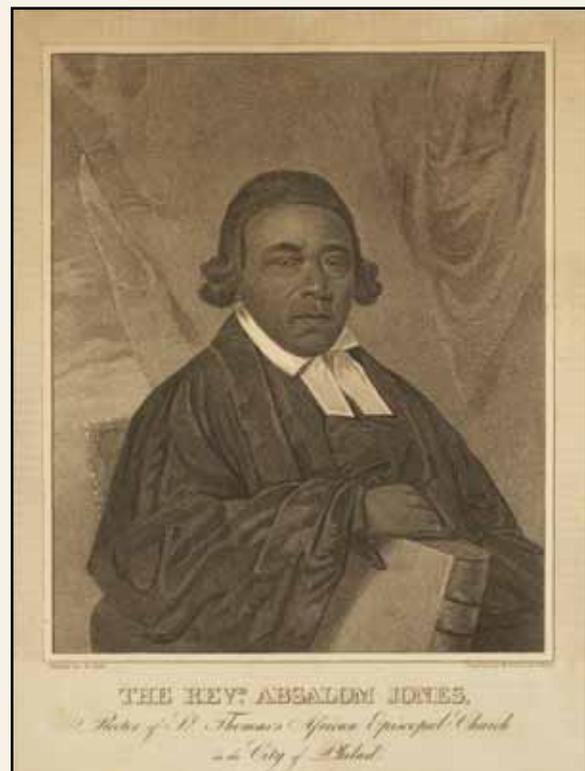


Figure 4.16 (lower right). W. R. Jones and J. Boyd, *The Revd. Absalom Jones, Rector of St. Thomas's African Episcopal Church in the City of Philad.*, engraving, n.d., after painting by Rembrandt Peale. Courtesy of Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, Pa.

The schools run by the Bray Associates, the Quakers, the PAS, and by blacks themselves (and by 1811 there were no fewer than eleven such schools for blacks in the city) represented the best hope for Philadelphia's African Americans of becoming literate prior to the availability of public education. "Public" education in the modern sense—that is, free, tax-supported education—began in Philadelphia in 1818. Prior to that time, indigent children could attend private schools and receive reimbursement from tax funds, but the list of such children for the years 1811–1816 includes no black children. When that arrangement was superseded by the new public school system beginning in 1818, once again black children were denied access. Although entitled to receive this education by the state laws authorizing public education for Pennsylvania's children, in reality they were excluded. The first segregated public school for black children finally opened in 1822, and the subsequent period of inadequate, segregated schools continued until the mid-twentieth-century era of mandatory integration.⁷⁷



At the outset we noted that Franklin's plan for the Academy of Philadelphia did not allow for the education of blacks, and indeed the Academy (and later the College and University) did not provide such education for 150 years. How and when did the University of Pennsylvania come to terms with a century and a half of exclusion and begin to provide for the higher education of African Americans?⁷⁸ There is no indication in the historical papers of the University—in the Minutes of the Trustees, the office correspondence of the Provost, or the administrative records of the individual Schools—that there was a conscious policy of excluding black students.

The first African American students to enroll in classes at the University of Pennsylvania did so in 1879. James Brister, who earned the degree of doctor of dental surgery in 1881, was the first to graduate. Nathan Francis Mossell, who enrolled the same year as Brister, earned an M.D. in 1882. William Adger, the first African American to enroll in the College, earned a bachelor's degree in 1883. Aaron A. Mossell, younger brother of Nathan, enrolled in the Law School in 1886 and in 1888 became the first African American to graduate with a bachelor of laws degree. Aaron was the father of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander who, in 1921, as a student at Penn, was the first African American woman in the nation to earn a Ph.D. in economics and in 1927 the first woman in Pennsylvania to earn the LL.B. (The Penn Alexander Partnership School in West Philadelphia is named for her.) Penn granted its first modern Ph.D. in 1889. Louis Baxter Moore was the first African American to earn that degree, receiving a doctorate in 1896 in classics.

William Pepper, Jr., M.D., who was provost from 1880 until 1894, has been credited as the person responsible for conferring degrees upon these pioneer African Americans. It is said that Pepper, who was a faculty member in the School of Medicine, mentored Nathan Mossell. The precise factors behind the opening of the University to these African Americans are simply not documented or have yet to be discovered. What we can know, however, is that Benjamin Franklin's early efforts to secure educational opportunities for Philadelphia's African Americans are now reflected in the University's commitment to providing the best possible education to black scholars from many states and nations.⁷⁹



1. The author wishes to acknowledge the late J. A. Leo Lemay and thank Richard Newman and John Pollack for their incisive comments about this essay.
2. For estimates of Philadelphia's black population, see Susan E. Klepp, "Seasoning and Society: Racial Differences in Mortality in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 51, no. 3 (July 1994): 473–506, esp. 474–77, 495–96; Gary B. Nash and Billy G. Smith, "The Population of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 3 (1975): 362–68; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 33–34, 36, 38; Sharon Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully": *Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), table A3.
3. Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
4. Ralph Sandiford, *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times* (Philadelphia, 1729); Benjamin Lay, *All Slave-Keepers That Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates* (Philadelphia, 1737). Of the fifteen pamphlets that Franklin printed, according to their title pages, "for the author," his name appeared on ten. Of the five that did not carry his name, three were the Sandiford (two editions) and Lay tracts, one was an almanac for a rival almanac-maker, and one was an anonymous allegorical poem. Thus it could be reasonably inferred that Franklin did not wish to be publicly identified as the printer of the antislavery tracts (although his *Pennsylvania Gazette* did carry brief notices by the two authors that so identified him [December 22, 1730, August 17, 1738]). After Franklin had retired from his active printing career, the successor firm of Franklin and David Hall printed another Quaker antislavery tract, the second part of John Woolman's *Considerations on Keeping Negroes; Recommended to the Professors of Christianity, of Every Denomination* (Philadelphia, 1762).
5. See David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin and Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Emma Jones Lapsansky-Werner, "At the End, an Abolitionist?" in *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*, ed. Page Talbott (New Haven, Conn. and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 273–96; and John C. Van Horne, "Collective Benevolence and the Common Good in Franklin's Philanthropy," in *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993), 425–40.
6. Robert T. Sidwell, "'An Odd Fish': Samuel Keimer and a Footnote to American Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 16–30; Joshua Francis Fisher, "Some Account of the Early Poets and Poetry of Pennsylvania," *Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, 2, part 2 (Philadelphia, 1830): 61–65; Stephen Bloore, "Samuel Keimer: A Footnote to the Life of Franklin," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 54, no. 3 (1930): 255–87; C. Lennart Carlson, "Samuel Keimer: A Study in the Transit of English Culture to Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 61, no. 4 (1937): 357–87.
7. [Jacob Taylor], *A Compleat Ephemeris for the Year of Christ 1726* ([Philadelphia]: Samuel Keimer, [1725]); *American Weekly Mercury*, January 18–25, 1726. Two years later Franklin printed Taylor's next (and authentic) almanac while working for Keimer. Jacob Taylor, *An Almanac for 1728* (Philadelphia: Samuel Keimer, [1727]).
8. In the July 3, 1729, issue of his newspaper, Keimer sought to explain why he had failed to print his paper the previous week. Beset by creditors and other spiteful people who wished him ill, he had committed one of the gravest sins a newspaper publisher could commit: he had missed a deadline. One part of his long-winded apologia reads: "Twould swell a Volume to a very considerable Bulk only to relate the various Scenes of Life and Circumstances the Publisher hereof has gone thro'; no History he has ever read, (keeping exactly to Truth) could ever come up to it; and as his whole Life has been truly an Original; so it has been long design'd to present the World with a true Copy thereof, for their Entertainment, under the Title of the *White Negro*." *Universal Instructor in All Arts and Sciences; and the Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 3, 1729.
9. Keimer moved to Barbados, where he published the *Barbadoes Gazette*. The issue of May 4, 1734, included his "Sorrowful Lamentation," a lengthy poem attacking his newfound set of enemies, in which he noted that he worked like a slave. Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, ed. Marcus McCorison from the 2nd edition (New York: Weathervane Books, 1970; orig. publ. 1874), 605–6.
10. Franklin, *Autobiography*, in *Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1406.
11. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1419.
12. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1408.
13. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1407.
14. *Whitefield's Journals, To Which Is Prefixed His "Short Account" and "Further Account,"* ed. William Wale (London, 1905), 408; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 24, 1740; *American Weekly*

- Mercury*, April 17–24, 1740; David Cranz, *The Ancient and Modern History of the Brethren: Or, A Succinct Narrative of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren* (London, 1780), 258–59; John Gottlieb Heckewelder, *A Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren Among the Delaware and Moberg Indians* (Philadelphia, 1820), 18.
15. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 27, December 4, 1740. The *American Weekly Mercury* also carried such solicitations, and its printer, Andrew Bradford, was likewise authorized to accept contributions. *American Weekly Mercury*, November 20–27, 1740, et seq.
 16. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 13, 1738.
 17. Seward’s account of the dispute is given in his *Journal of a Voyage from Savannah to Philadelphia, and from Philadelphia to England, M.DCC.XL* (London, 1740), 6–7, 21–22, 61. The dispute degenerated into a newspaper exchange between Franklin (writing as Obadiah Plainman) and Tom Trueman (who may have been Richard Peters), with Franklin mocking the members of the dancing assembly, who had styled themselves as the “better sort.” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 1, May 8, May 15, May 22, May 29, 1740; “Note on Closing the Concert Room,” in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1959–) (hereafter *Franklin Papers*), 2:257–59; J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2: *Printer and Publisher, 1730–1747* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 427–35; William Pencak, “Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship: Benjamin Franklin, George Whitefield, the ‘Dancing School Blockheads,’ and a Defense of the ‘Meaner Sort,’” *Proteus* 19 (2002): 45–50 (photocopy at the Library Company of Philadelphia).
 18. *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 3–10, 1738.
 19. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 1313; *Franklin Papers*, 2:213, 214.
 20. (Charleston) *South-Carolina Gazette*, July 12–18, 1740. The story was picked up in Boston and reported in the *Boston Weekly News-Letter* on August 21, 1740. Whitefield recorded in his journal on May 11 that many Philadelphia blacks had begun to read. *Whitefield’s Journals*, 422.
 21. *A Collection of All the Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania: Now in Force* (Philadelphia, 1742), 335–40; 83–86. Both laws were repealed by the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery of 1780.
 22. For biographies of Benezet, see George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937) and Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).
 23. In the earliest surviving letter between the two (from Benezet to Franklin on April 27, 1772, in response to a letter from Franklin), Benezet calls Franklin “a real friend and fellow traveler on a dangerous and heavy road” (*Franklin Papers*, 19:113).
 24. *Franklin Papers*, 2:128; 5:283; Minute Books of the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1:144–45 (May 6, 1745).
 25. *Franklin Papers*, 5:283. Interestingly, at the same time Anthony Benezet began his teaching of blacks, his brother Daniel was advertising a slave for sale in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (June 21, 1750).
 26. Nancy Slocum Hornick, “Anthony Benezet and the Africans’ School: Toward a Theory of Full Equality,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 4 (1975): 399–421; *A Brief Sketch of the Schools for Black People, and Their Descendants, Established by the Religious Society of Friends* (Philadelphia, 1867).
 27. Rev. John Waring to Benjamin Franklin, January 24, 1757, in *Religious Philanthropy and Colonial Slavery: The American Correspondence of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1717–1777*, ed. John C. Van Horne (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 121–23. The Welsh circulating schools were the work of Gruffydd (Griffith) Jones (1683–1761), a Carmarthenshire clergyman who in 1731 began establishing schools held from September to May, when pupils (both children and adults) were better able to attend classes than during the heavy farming season. The itinerant schoolmasters taught pupils to read the Welsh Bible and to learn the Anglican catechism. After three or four months the teachers would move on (“circulate”) to another location. Geraint H. Jenkins, *The Foundations of Modern Wales 1642–1780* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 370–81.
 28. Rev. William Sturgeon to Benjamin Franklin, August 22, 1757, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 125.
 29. Benjamin Franklin to Rev. John Waring, January 3, 1758, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 124.
 30. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:112, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, University of Oxford.
 31. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:114.
 32. Rev. William Sturgeon to Rev. John Waring, November 9, 1758, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 135–36.

33. A first shipment of books, of which no details are known, arrived in October 1758. Books sent to Sturgeon in 1759 “for the Use of the Negro School opened there 1758” were “40 Childs first Book, 15 Church Catechism, 40 English Instructor, 30 Easy Method of Instructing Youth, 30 Church catechism with Texts of Scripture & Catechism paraphrased, 20 Friendly Admonition to the Drinkers of Brandy &c., 2 Preliminary Essays on the Exposition of the Church Catechism, 24 Christians Guide, 70 Sermons preached before the Associates & Trustees for Georgia &c. [total] 271.” Further shipments were sent later in 1759 (192 books), 1764 (130 books), and 1771 (40 copies of John Waring’s pamphlet *A Letter to an American Planter from His Friend in London*). “Catalog of Books for Home and Foreign Libraries, 1753–1817,” Manuscripts of the Associates of Dr. Bray, United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, University of Oxford.
34. Rev. William Sturgeon to Rev. John Waring, June 12, 1759, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 136–37.
35. “List of Negro Children” enrolled in the Philadelphia school from the time it opened in November 1758 until June 1759, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 162–63.
36. Deborah Franklin to Benjamin Franklin, August 9, 1759, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 137.
37. The list, dated November 20, 1762, was enclosed in a letter from Benjamin Franklin to Rev. John Waring, June 27, 1763. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 198–200.
38. The men Franklin recommended were the Rev. Messrs. Samuel Johnson, Henry Barclay, and Samuel Auchmuty of New York; William Hunter and the Rev. Thomas Dawson of Williamsburg; and the Rev. Thomas Pollen of Newport. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:126, 129, 130–31. Franklin may have suggested these towns because they all had good communications with the metropolis, active Anglican churches, and black populations large enough to provide an adequate number of pupils.
39. Rev. John Waring to Rev. Thomas Dawson, February 29, 1760; Rev. Samuel Johnson to [Rev. John Waring], July 28, 1760; Rev. Thomas Pollen to [Rev. John Waring], August 12, 1760; William Hunter to Rev. John Waring, February 16, 1761; and Rev. Samuel Auchmuty to Rev. John Waring, April 4, 1761, all in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 144–48, 151–56.
40. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 22–23. The Fredericksburg school closed in 1770 because few black children in the neighborhood could attend; the New York and Williamsburg schools closed late in 1774 following the deaths of their school mistresses; the Newport school was still open as late as April 1775.
41. See various letters to the Associates in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 162–63, 166–69, 188, 199–200, 266, 277–78, 304–5, 307, 318.
42. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, November 20, 1769, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 288.
43. The first mistress was dismissed in May 1761 following complaints of her bad management. The next mistress was Elizabeth Harrison, wife of Richard Harrison, master of the charity school of the Academy of Philadelphia. From November 1764 to about May 1768 the mistress was Mrs. Ayres (or Ayers). She moved to the country and was replaced by Sarah Wilson. Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 161–62, 222, 270.
44. Benjamin Franklin to Francis Hopkinson, December 16, 1767, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 263–65.
45. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, ca. March 1768, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 266.
46. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:245–46, 1:248.
47. Benjamin Franklin to Rev. Abbot Upcher, October 4, 1766, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 248–49.
48. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 1:260.
49. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:10 (June 2, 1768).
50. The British Associates were Rev. John Waring, Peter LeKeux, John Spiller, Samuel Waring, and Rev. Juckes Egerton. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:11–12 (June 16, 1768).
51. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, June 30, 1769, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 286.
52. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, July 3, 1773, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 313–14.
53. Francis Hopkinson and Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, May 3, 1774, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 317.

54. Edward Duffield to Rev. John Waring, May 20, 1774, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 318.
55. Rev. Thomas Coombe to Rev. John Waring, July 18, 1775, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 326.
56. Francis Hopkinson to Rev. Thomas Lyttleton, October 24, 1786, Manuscripts of the Associates of Dr. Bray.
57. The school reopened under the direction of Ruth Lewis, and by May 1788 there were eleven boys and twenty-one girls in attendance. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:152–53.
58. Originally printed as an appendix to William Clarke, *Observations on the Late and Present Conduct of the French* (Boston, 1755), in *Writings*, 367–74, quotation on 370 (emphasis in original).
59. Reprinted in Franklin’s pamphlet *The Interest of Great Britain Considered with Regard to Her Colonies and the Acquisitions of Canada and Guadaloupe* (Boston, 1760), quotation on 54, and later in his *Experiments and Observations on Electricity*, 4th ed. (London, 1769), quotation on 200.
60. Benjamin Franklin to Rev. John Waring, December 17, 1763, in Van Horne, *Religious Philanthropy*, 204.
61. Benjamin Franklin to the Marquis de Condorcet, March 20, 1774, in *Franklin Papers*, 21:151.
62. Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of That Part of Africa Inhabited by the Negroes* (Philadelphia, 1762), 8. Benezet made the same point in *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (Philadelphia, 1766), 12. And in 1781 Benezet wrote: “[Benezet] can with Truth and Sincerity declare, that he has found amongst [blacks] as great variety of Talents, equally capable of improvement, as amongst a like number of Whites; and he is bold to assert, that the notion entertained by some, that the Blacks are inferior to the Whites in their capacities, is a vulgar prejudice, founded on the Pride or Ignorance of their lordly Masters, who have kept their Slaves at such a distance, as to be unable to form a right judgment of them” (*Short Observations on Slavery Introductory to Some Extracts from the Writing of the Abbe Raynal, on That Important Subject* [Philadelphia, 1781], 11–12). A similar sentiment was expressed by “A Friend to the Oppressed” in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of January 30, 1772: “[Slaves] Education is generally very low and illiterate . . . most of those, who have been tried with Freedom, are such as have begun to feel the Decline of Nature: I would therefore advise those in Possession of young Negroes, to give them an Education suitable for a rational Being; learn them to read and write, which will qualify them for Business; give them the Privilege of reading the Scriptures, and other History, and then, I doubt not, but they would devote their Leisure Hours in Search of useful Knowledge, which, for Want of such Education, are employed in Actions destructive to their Morals.”
63. *Plan for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks; An Address to the Public* (Philadelphia, 1789), in *Writings*, 1154–57. For a general treatment of the issue of educability of blacks, see Charles H. Lyons, *To Wash an Aethiop White: British Ideas about Black African Educability, 1530–1960* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1975), chap. 2 (“Endued with Equal Faculties” or “Lusus Naturae?”: Eighteenth-Century Attitudes).
64. Petition of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to the Senate and the House of Representatives, February 3, 1790, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, Digital Edition (<http://www.franklinpapers.org/franklin/>).
65. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:235–37 (January 7, 1796).
66. Minute Books of the Associates of Dr. Bray, 2:248–49 (February 6, 1797); 2:351.
67. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fourth Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1797), 31–34. Harris taught at the school until her death in 1797. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 204.
68. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fourth Convention*, 31–34; Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery, Servitude, Freedom, 1639–1861* (Washington, D.C., 1911), 128–29.
69. Robert Aitken Waste Book, entry for July 25, 1775, 267, Library Company of Philadelphia, cited in Edwin Wolf 2nd, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen, and Booksellers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 62.
70. Anthony Benezet, *The Pennsylvania Spelling-Book, or Youth’s Friendly Instructor and Monitor* (Philadelphia, 1776).
71. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 203.
72. “Sketch of the Rev. Absalom Jones,” in *Annals of the First African Church, in the United States of America, Now Stiled The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1862), 118–22 (quote on 119–20).

73. "Sketch of the Rev. Absalom Jones," 120.
74. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 204.
75. Charles H. Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1935), 92.
76. Richard Allen, "Address to Those Who Keep Slaves, and Approve the Practice," appended to Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the year 1793: And a Refutation of Some Censures, Thrown upon Them in Some Late Publications* (Philadelphia, 1794), 24.
77. Harry C. Silcox, "Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia, 1800–1860," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 97, no. 4 (1973): 444–64.
78. The information in this section was kindly provided by Mark Frazier Lloyd, Archivist of the University, to whom I am greatly indebted.
79. Today, African Americans comprise just over 6 percent of the undergraduate student body and just under 6 percent of the overall university enrollment.