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A Delicate Balance: Pennsylvania College in the Pennsylvania Borderlands, 1832-1860

Abstract

This paper discusses Pennsylvania College (now Gettysburg College) and its presence in the Pennsylvania borderlands region during the antebellum period, 1832-1860. The paper argues that Pennsylvania College's location and the "borderlands" identity of many of its students and faculty were integral to how discourse and actions surrounding slavery and abolition manifested themselves at the institution. The paper indicates that Pennsylvania College's antebellum history can serve as a microcosm of broader trends in American borderlands communities during this period. Crucially, this paper is shaped by primary source research conducted using minutes of Pennsylvania College's debating societies, the Philomathean and Phrenokosmian societies, available in Special Collections and College Archives, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

Keywords

Pennsylvania College, slavery, antebellum, college history, borderlands

Disciplines

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A Delicate Balance: Pennsylvania College in the Pennsylvania Borderlands, 1832-1860

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The college campus has had a peculiarly important place in American history. On the cusp of adulthood, college students are often imbued with an idealism that motivates them to engage in vigorous debates about the controversies of the day, speak out against perceived injustices, and strive to effectuate change. Therefore, when an event of national or global consequence occurs, how students respond to it can be quite informative. Consider, for instance, the Kent State Massacre, which epitomized the valiant but nonviolent resistance to the American government's actions during the Vietnam War. In a more contemporary context, college campuses have witnessed spirited disagreement and sometimes even incendiary rhetoric during the 2023 Israel-Palestine conflict. In the process, they have attracted the nation's attention.

It is against this backdrop that I approach the historical study of a college campus, namely Pennsylvania College (present-day Gettysburg College), located in Gettysburg, Adams County, Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania College's location in the Pennsylvania border region situated the institution as both a physical and intellectual borderland. This distinctive geography contributed to the institution's assiduous efforts to maintain a "delicate balance" on the issues of slavery and abolition during the antebellum period, 1832-1860.

Brian DeLay defines borderlands as "zones of plural sovereignty" — that is, "places where people interacted across multiple, independent political and legal systems."¹

Geographically speaking, the borough of Gettysburg is located mere miles away from the Mason-Dixon Line, a boundary that dictated where slavery was in force and where it was not.²

Originally drawn in the colonial period, the Mason-Dixon Line, which bifurcates Pennsylvania and Maryland, took on outsized significance during the antebellum period as a dividing boundary

¹ Brian DeLay, "Introduction," in *North American Borderlands*, ed. Brian DeLay (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 3.

² David Smith almost certainly notes this point of geographic proximity (a matter of mere miles) in his work, which will be cited at length in this paper.

between states that allowed and prohibited slavery.³ On paper, the Mason-Dixon Line is a clearly delineated border; however, as Max Grivno aptly notes in his book, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor Along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860*, it was sometimes difficult for a fugitive slave to decipher whether they were in the slave state of Maryland or the free state of Pennsylvania.⁴ This practical ambiguity which manifested itself along a theoretically defined border is a hallmark of borderlands study. It is axiomatic that constructing a borderline, particularly an arbitrary one, is much easier than enforcing it. Certainly, fugitive slave crossings along the Mason-Dixon line served as a constant reminder of the fragility of this supposedly definitive border and the limits of Southern sovereignty.⁵ Perhaps more importantly, the South Central Pennsylvania region fits into the contours of DeLay's definition of a borderland owing to the cross-sectional exchanges that occurred there. Grivno points out that both Pennsylvania and Maryland were both part of the fertile mid-Atlantic region; as such, farmers along the Mason-Dixon Line in both Pennsylvania and Maryland would have largely been growing the same crops and using the same cultivation methods.⁶ Because of these similarities, Pennsylvania provided a living example for Northern Maryland slave-owners of how an agricultural economy without slaves could ably sustain itself.⁷

That Pennsylvania College's geographical location marked it as a physical borderland is incontrovertible. I argue, though, that the institution can also be understood as an intellectual borderland. The concept that a borderland is a place where varying ideas can be discussed,

³ "Mason and Dixon Line," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mason-and-Dixon-Line>.

⁴ Max L. Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 14-15. This is an e-book.

⁵ Though I cannot pinpoint with certainty the text in which this point was made, both Grivno (p. 114, for instance) and Smith discuss the penetrability of the border. It is not an original point that I make by any stretch of the imagination.

⁶ Grivno, *Gleanings*, 15.

⁷ *Ibid*, 86.

challenged, and debated is certainly not unprecedented. In a nod to intellectual divisions in the South Central Pennsylvania region, Smith identifies non-physical borders (which he terms “edges”) which, for instance, ideologically separated residents sympathetic and antagonistic to fugitive slaves.⁸ Pennsylvania College’s status as an educational institution where discussion and debate abounded only makes this borderlands intellectual exchange more explicit.⁹

To be sure, my study of Pennsylvania College from a borderlands perspective aims to be holistic. This requires an acknowledgement that the college’s location near the Mason-Dixon Line was not the only factor influencing conversations and decisions around slavery and abolition. At Pennsylvania College, several factors such as religion, sectionalism, ethnicity, and politics converged to create the “delicate balance” on the slavery question during the antebellum period.¹⁰ I choose, however, to study Pennsylvania College as a borderland because this borderlands status permeates virtually every other factor relevant to the institution’s approach to slavery and abolition.

The centrality of Pennsylvania College’s borderlands character becomes apparent when examining the history surrounding the institution’s founding. Pennsylvania College was not the first institution of higher learning to be established in Gettysburg; it was preceded by a Lutheran seminary that was established in 1826 under the direction of Samuel Simon Schmucker, a Lutheran clergyman of German origin who hailed from Hagerstown, Maryland.¹¹ Schmucker was

⁸ David G. Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom: The Fugitive Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania, 1820-1870* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 12. This is an e-book.

⁹ Cory James Young’s doctoral dissertation on gradual emancipation, which is cited in this paper, studies Dickinson College, another college in the Pennsylvania border region that was founded in the late 18th century. Establishing the role of slavery in Dickinson’s early history, Young notes that his approach can be replicated when studying other Pennsylvania educational institutions. I erroneously noted in the historiography that Dickinson was founded at the turn of the nineteenth century; it was a tad earlier than that.

¹⁰ My arguments about this “delicate balance” are premised upon Smith’s *magnus opus*, which brilliantly illustrates the peculiar nature of this region as defined by the actions that borderlands Pennsylvanians took in the antebellum era.

¹¹ Charles Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985*, vol. 1 (Gettysburg: Gettysburg College, 1987), 16-21.

affiliated with the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA).¹² The General Synod, which included representatives from regional Lutheran bodies, resolved to establish a theological seminary for the development of the clergy in the United States.¹³ In deciding where the seminary should be located, it was expected that its Lutheran leadership “would choose to locate the seminary somewhere near the center of the territory of the then-member synods of the General Synod”; in 1825, the three Lutheran synods that elected to send representatives to a meeting of the General Synod were West Pennsylvania (which included Gettysburg), Maryland and Virginia, and North Carolina.¹⁴

“Offers were made to the Board from Hagerstown, Carlisle, & Gettysburg,” explained Samuel Schmucker to his wife in a March 1826 letter written from Gettysburg.¹⁵ Yet, Schmucker wrote, Gettysburg was the clear choice of almost all of the members of the Seminary’s Board of Directors, including directors from Maryland and Virginia. Schmucker made it a point to inform his wife that directors from Virginia and Maryland supported establishing the seminary, which indicates that they may have ordinarily been predisposed to advocating for a location in the South. Though Schmucker does not explicitly mention Gettysburg’s borderlands location in his letter, it is possible, if not probable, that factored into the decision to select it as the seminary’s location. Because the West Pennsylvania Synod included territory in interior Pennsylvania and other member synods within the General Synod were located further south, Gettysburg, located

¹² Ibid, 18.

¹³ Ibid, 19.

¹⁴ Ibid, 20. As illustrated by the work of Robert Fortenbaugh and Maria Erling, the Lutheran Church was divided on the issue of slavery in the antebellum period.

¹⁵ Samuel S. Schmucker, letter to Mary Catherine Steenbergen, March 3, 1826. MS-022: Papers of Samuel Simon Schmucker and the Schmucker Family, Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

only a stone's throw away from the Mason-Dixon Line, would have served as a logical "bridge" between the Northern and Southern Lutheran bodies that the General Synod was comprised of.¹⁶

Schmucker also saw clear personal advantages in selecting Gettysburg as the site of the proposed seminary. In his March 1826 letter, Schmucker detailed to his wife an elaborate plan that he had devised for the couple to employ Black "servants" in Gettysburg:

Many persons I am told here have black servants, [deleted] and they are [deleted] precisely situated as in Virga until they are 28 yrs of age. [Sentence deleted] The only thing requisite would be, that you make some exchange of servants by which you get one of about 16 years of age who could, this spring & summer, be trained for a cook by our good Mother, & another of the same age or a little less, for other work. You would then be situated with regard to servants precisely as in Va for 12 or 13 years. Should we still be in the land of the living at that time, we would [deleted] let these go free, & again procure several again by a similar arrangement for 12 years more &e. With these arrangements we shall be happier far, than at Hag. or Fred. for we shall be surrounded by those who are friendly to us, & the institution with which our prosperity is connected.¹⁷

As is evident from this letter, Schmucker was crafting a complex scheme to bring slaves from Virginia to Pennsylvania. For context, Samuel Schmucker's wife, Mary Catherine Steenbergen, was born into a prosperous Virginia family; her family estate "embraced more than three thousand acres."¹⁸ The Steenbergens were also large-scale slaveholders. The 1830 United States Census reflects that Mary Catherine's father, William Steenbergen Sr., owned a total of twenty-one slaves.¹⁹ Mary Catherine was accustomed to a life of luxury on her family's Southern plantation, and being served by slaves would have been a marker of their exalted financial and social status. Schmucker appears to have been attempting to replicate some semblance of his

¹⁶ Glatfelter, *A Salutary Influence*, 20 [refer to n. 20].

¹⁷ Schmucker to Steenbergen, March 1826.

¹⁸ Abdel Ross Wentz, *Pioneer in Christian Unity: Samuel Simon Schmucker* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), <https://archive.org/details/pioneerinchristi0000wentz>.

¹⁹ "United States Census, 1830", *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XH5J-MRC> : Fri Oct 06 21:25:55 UTC 2023), Entry for William Steenbergen, 1830.

wife's Southern lifestyle at the couple's new Gettysburg residence.²⁰ In 1826, when Schmucker was writing, this process would not have been as simple as bringing slaves from Virginia over the Mason-Dixon Line to Pennsylvania and maintaining them in a perpetual state of bondage. In 1780, Pennsylvania passed a gradual emancipation law intended to end slavery in the state through a phased approach; it "declared that all children born to duly registered enslaved women after the law took effect could only be held for a twenty-eight-year term."²¹ The law was prospective and not retrospective, meaning that there was no reprieve from bondage for any slave who was alive when it was passed.²² Cory James Young aptly notes that, rather than putting a quietus to the issue of slavery, gradual emancipation carved out disparate categories of "enslaved" and "term-enslaved" people under the broader umbrella of "unfree" individuals.²³ Pertinently, Pennsylvania's gradual emancipation legislation included a provision that emancipated the slaves of out-of-state residents who permanently settled in Pennsylvania.²⁴ This provision precluded Schmucker from bringing slaves from Virginia to Pennsylvania and continuing their bondage indefinitely.

In a subsequent letter written in September 1826, Schmucker provided further instructions to his wife regarding his scheme to bring Black servants to Gettysburg:

With regard to servants, I am agreed to any arrangement you may make, only bring Easter along [] if you can Matilda or a substitute for her. I have consulted a lawyer who says that The Indenture must be executed in Va before two magistrates, & must specify the consideration (via manumission) for which, the individual binds herself to serve. I wish Easter to be indentured for 6 years. If you bring any other servant that is a minor, the indenture must be executed by her master or some other individual as her guardian till the age of 28 years.

²⁰ I am grateful to Amy Lucadamo, Gettysburg College's archivist, for drawing my attention to Schmucker's letters and for sharing this interpretation with me.

²¹ Cory James Young, "For Life or Otherwise: Abolition and Slavery in South Central Pennsylvania, 1780-1847" (Doctoral dissertation, 2021), <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1062658>, 47-48.

²² Young, "For Life," 48.

²³ Ibid, 4-5 [refer to *n.* 14].

²⁴ Ibid, 49.

The phraseology of the indenture must be as prescribed by the laws of Va which your Father can find in Hennings justice or the revised code. Unless this formality is observed they will be free.²⁵

Schmucker's second letter, which further elaborates on his first communication on this subject, sheds light on his attempts to navigate separate and complex legal systems in Pennsylvania and Virginia to ensure that he was endowed with Black servants in Gettysburg. The element of plural sovereignty that characterizes a borderland, per DeLay's definition, is evident here. In fact, Schmucker's plans to bring Virginia slaves to Pennsylvania as indentured servants was explicitly permitted under the gradual abolition statute, which mandated that they would have to be freed by the age of twenty-eight.²⁶ Similar to the children that enslaved Pennsylvania women gave birth to after 1780, these indentured servants would effectively have been considered "term-enslaved." Notably, Pennsylvania legislators who were supportive of abolition strove to preserve this portion of the gradual emancipation law because they believed that it offered Southern slaves a belated pathway to freedom that was preferable to a life of hard plantation labor.²⁷ Schmucker's plans were clearly quite meticulous; he took great pains to ensure that his Black "servants" would not immediately be released from bondage under the gradual abolition law.

It is unclear whether Schmucker's plans to bring Black "servants" to Gettysburg ever materialized — the 1830 Census reflects that Schmucker did not have any slaves or free African-Americans residing with him in his Gettysburg household.²⁸ It is possible, though, that these servants resided separately from Schmucker. In any event, Schmucker's attempts to

²⁵ Samuel S. Schmucker, letter to Mary Catherine Steenberg, March 3, 1826. MS-022: Papers of Samuel Simon Schmucker and the Schmucker Family, Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

²⁶ Young, "For Life," 87.

²⁷ Ibid, 87-88.

²⁸ "United States Census, 1830", *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XHPV-PFD> : Thu Oct 05 17:01:56 UTC 2023), Entry for Samuel S Smucker, 1830.

maintain some form of bondage in his new home in South Central Pennsylvania speaks to its position as a borderland where competing ideas of slavery and freedom converged to create a system that offered something in between.²⁹ Schmucker was not born into a slave-owning family; rather, his efforts appear to have been primarily directed towards ensuring his wife's comfort in a new setting.³⁰ However, his instructions to Mary Catherine about specific slaves that he wanted to have with him in Gettysburg suggest that he, too, had grown attached to the "peculiar institution" to some degree. It appears that Schmucker was referring to slavery when he wrote in his March 1826 letter of "the institution with which our prosperity is connected," suggesting that he appreciated the pecuniary advantages it invited. Though Schmucker would eventually become an opponent of slavery, his own experiences with slaves through his wife's family certainly allowed him to appreciate the ramifications of immediate abolition.³¹

Slavery was more than just an abstract concept for many residents of the Pennsylvania borderlands like Schmucker. Even if they did not personally own slaves, it was quite possible that their neighbors or kin on the other side of the border did. Though they may have been sympathetic to slaves' plight, they could understand the implications of instant emancipation better than most of their Northern counterparts.³² Indeed, David Smith remarks that the South Central Pennsylvania borderlands had "a distinctive, almost Southern character."³³ Schmucker himself heralded Gettysburg to his wife as a better location than two towns across the Mason-Dixon Line, namely Hagerstown and Frederick, Maryland. This distinctive borderlands

²⁹ This is the crux of Young's argument.

³⁰ Once again, I am grateful to Amy Lucadamo for sharing this interpretation with me. She has conducted research to attempt to ascertain whether Schmucker actually brought any "servants" to Gettysburg, but her investigation has been inconclusive.

³¹ Smith explains Schmucker's transition from a promoter of colonization to a supporter of abolition in his work.

³² I believe that this tracks with and is premised upon the argument that Smith makes in his text.

³³ Smith, *Edge of Freedom*, 39.

atmosphere influenced the course that Pennsylvania College would adopt on the burning issues of slavery and abolition during the antebellum period.

Pennsylvania College itself would not be founded until 1832, six years after Schmucker was establishing himself in Gettysburg and writing to his wife about Black “servants.” The Seminary’s administrators began to find that incoming seminarians were not sufficiently prepared for the academic rigor of the institution; therefore, they reasoned, a preparatory institution needed to be established for prospective seminarians to receive adequate academic training.³⁴ The college’s initial 21-member Board of Trustees was composed of Lutheran ministers and local personages.³⁵ Interestingly, Daniel Sheffer, one of the college’s original trustees and the then-associate judge of Adams County, was one of the county’s last remaining slaveholders.³⁶ He was listed as owning at least one slave in Huntington Township in 1832, the year the college was founded.³⁷

Two years later, Thaddeus Stevens, a local lawyer who would later become a member of the United States House of Representatives, was appointed to the Board of Trustees.³⁸ Stevens, who would later advocate for abolitionism and racial equality vociferously, had already made his anti-slavery views known while in Gettysburg as early as 1823.³⁹ These powerful personalities on the Board of Trustees, who were clearly on opposing sides of the slavery question, point to Pennsylvania College’s role as an intellectual borderland during the antebellum period. True to

³⁴ Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence*, 26. This point is also referenced in a book about Pennsylvania Hall that Glatfelter also wrote, where I first encountered it in writing.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

³⁶ “SHEFFER, Daniel,” in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present*, n.d., <https://bioguideretro.congress.gov/Home/MemberDetails?memIndex=S000316>.

³⁷ Larry Bolin, “Slaveholders and Slaves of Adams County,” *Adams County History* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 4-92, <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ach/vol9/iss1/3>.

³⁸ E.S. Breidenbaugh, ed., *The Pennsylvania College Book. 1832-1882* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1882), 190.

³⁹ Bradley Hoch, *Thaddeus Stevens in Gettysburg: The Making of an Abolitionist* (Gettysburg: Adams County Historical Society, 2005), 231.

his legal profession, Stevens had a penchant for debate, and he sparred with Henry Baugher, a Lutheran minister who became Pennsylvania College's second president in 1850, on theological questions.⁴⁰ Edward McPherson, a Pennsylvania College graduate and mentee of Stevens, recalled that, “[a]s he [Stevens] grew older and the slavery question became a prominent subject of discussion, and the clergy, as a rule, were either ‘doughfaces’ or pro-slavery, he withdrew himself from their teachings.”⁴¹ Stevens was likely quite disillusioned by what he perceived as excessive kowtowing to the South by Baugher and those of his ilk at Pennsylvania College.

Given Stevens' longstanding association with the college — he served as a member of the Board of Trustees until his death in 1868 — it is not inconceivable that he took issue with the institution's tenuous stance on the slavery question, particularly as the issue started to intensify nationally in the 1840s and 1850s. In the decade preceding the Civil War, Henry Baugher was taking a markedly different approach to these issues compared to Thaddeus Stevens. Specifically, Stevens took issue with the Compromise of 1850, which was a congressional attempt to cool raging sectional passions that were threatening the nation's unity.⁴² Importantly, the Compromise of 1850 included the Fugitive Slave Act, a provision meant to placate Southern slaveholders whose slaves were fleeing north of the Mason-Dixon Line.⁴³ While Henry Baugher was not a Southern sympathizer, he certainly did not condemn the Fugitive Slave Act openly, as Stevens did. Rather, in a September 1852 speech entitled “Subjection to Law: The Constitution of Man's Nature,” Baugher advised graduating Pennsylvania College students that obeying the law was of paramount importance. “I have been led to select this theme [...] because of the prevailing

⁴⁰ Ibid, 241.

⁴¹ Ibid. I had learned about McPherson through Ross Hetrick, President of the Thaddeus Stevens Society; a small portion of a Civil War Institute documentary; and a Google/Wikipedia search.

⁴² Eric Foner, “Thaddeus Stevens and the Imperfect Republic,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 60, no. 2 (1993): 140–52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27773614>, 143. I referenced this piece very sparingly, only for this information.

⁴³ Ibid.

inclination, especially of the young, to throw aside the restraints of law, and follow simply the impulses of passion,” Baugher explained.⁴⁴

Discussions surrounding questions of slavery and abolition were not confined to Pennsylvania College’s administrators and trustees, however. Students also played an important role in conversations around these topics. In many ways, Pennsylvania College’s student body mirrored the college’s borderlands character, for the majority of students called Pennsylvania home.⁴⁵ More out-of-state Pennsylvania College students were from Maryland than from any other state. In short, there were relatively few Pennsylvania College students from either the Upper North or the Deep South, which engendered a sense of balance and moderation on the question of slavery. The table below illustrates the geographic distribution of Pennsylvania College students from the institution’s founding to 1860. I define South Central Pennsylvania as Young does — “the counties of Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, and York” — except that I also include Franklin County, drawing from David Smith’s work.⁴⁶

Classes of	Students from South Central PA	Students from Other PA Counties	Students from MD/DC	Students from Other Northern States/Canada	Students from Other Southern States	Total Students
1834-1840	17 (42.5%)	8 (20%)	11 (27.5%)	0 (0%)	4 (10%)	40
1841-1850	47 (38.2%)	23 (18.7%)	29 (23.6%)	5 (4.1%)	19 (15.4%)	123
1851-1860	45 (23.9%)	102 (54.3%)	20 (10.6%)	9 (4.8%)	12 (6.4%)	188

⁴⁴ H.L. Baugher, *Subjection to Law: The Constitution of Man’s Nature; A Discourse to the Graduating Class of Pennsylvania College*. September 16, 1852. Pamphlet Collection, Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. I learned of this pamphlet through Smith’s work. Baugher discussed “law” as something beyond a legislative enactment alone in his speech, and he encouraged his audience to advocate for what they believed in. However, I would argue (and Smith would likely agree) that Baugher’s speech can be read as a call to stay within the bounds of what was prescribed and “proper.”

⁴⁵ Pertinently, Glatfelter discusses the geographical distribution of Pennsylvania College students in his work, including the Maryland origins of some of them; this helped shape my thinking on the subject.

⁴⁶ Young, “For Life,” 7.

Figure 1: Table of Pennsylvania College Students' Geographic Distribution, Classes of 1834-1860 (Compiled from student listings in *The Pennsylvania College Book, 1832-1882*, E.S. Breidenbaugh, ed.)⁴⁷

The figures above reflect that a sizable portion of the student body came from Maryland throughout the antebellum period, though this proportion decreased in the decade preceding the Civil War. At least some Southern students were displeased with the administration's approach to slavery and abolition; one such student charged President Baugher with supporting William Lloyd Garrison, the Northern abolitionist.⁴⁸ Writing about the Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania soon after the Civil War ended, one chronicler remarked, "The professors at the College and at the Theological Seminary [at Gettysburg] were anti-slavery in sentiment and contributed to the cause but they had to do it cautiously, as many of their students were from the Southern States."⁴⁹ Who were these Southern students that college administrators and faculty purportedly feared? One among them was John Marshall Clement, a North Carolinian who was a member of Pennsylvania College's Class of 1846.⁵⁰ Writing to his father during his early days at Pennsylvania College, Clement remarked that "our Diet [...] is somewhat different than what I've been used to – yet I begin to like it pretty well."⁵¹ Though he does not comment on it in his letter, Clement likely also found Adams County starkly different from his North Carolina estate; his father, John Adam Clement, was recorded in the 1840 Census as owning thirty-seven slaves.⁵² In his letter, Clement also informed his father that he had found a roommate, "a tremendous

⁴⁷ These figures are necessarily imprecise, but they provide a general idea of geographical enrollment trends during this period.

⁴⁸ Smith, *Edge of Freedom*, 178.

⁴⁹ R.C. Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, PA, 1883), <https://repository.wellesley.edu/object/wellesley30523>, 36.

⁵⁰ Breidenbaugh, *Pennsylvania College Book*, 223.

⁵¹ J.M. Clement, "letter to Father," October 24, 1844. Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

⁵² "United States Census, 1840," *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XHYZ-6GL> : Fri Oct 06 04:28:47 UTC 2023), Entry for John Clement, 1840.

Mississippian standing 6 ft 4 inches in his stocking feet.”⁵³ This towering figure was Charles Albert Brougher, who went on to become a lawyer and served as Mississippi’s Secretary of State for much of the Civil War.⁵⁴ The camaraderie between Brougher and Clement may have been fostered by their shared upper-class upbringing in the Deep South. Like Clement, Brougher appears to have been raised on a prosperous estate. According to the 1840 Census, his father, Frederick Brougher, owned twenty-seven slaves.⁵⁵ Given their background, Brougher and Clement represented an anomaly at Pennsylvania College during the antebellum period. Their plantation upbringing was a far cry from that of their classmates who had been raised in the Pennsylvania and Maryland borderlands, yet their presence at the college served as a reminder that the “delicate balance” that characterized the borderlands was partly produced by pressures on either side of the border.

If Clement and Brougher were drawn into a debate on the merits of slavery, they would probably have defended the institution vociferously. Pennsylvania College students were pondering and discussing questions of slavery and abolition during the antebellum period. The minutes of the Phrenakosmian Society, one of the college’s two debate societies in its early years, stand testament to these intellectual ruminations. Though the Phrenakosmian Society’s minutes do not usually reflect the specific arguments that were offered for and against a particular proposition, the questions that its members discussed at their regular meetings offer a window into issues that students believed were worthy of discussion. Some of the issues that students chose to debate were philosophical; on one occasion, they considered whether it was preferable to be single or married. Other questions were more historical; whether the execution

⁵³ Clement, “letter to Father.”

⁵⁴ Breidenbaugh, *Pennsylvania College Book*, 223.

⁵⁵ "United States Census, 1840", *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XHTX-LFP> : Thu Oct 05 22:34:39 UTC 2023), Entry for Frederick Brougher, 1840.

of Mary, Queen of Scots was justified, for instance? The very fact that students were debating a particular issue indicates that they viewed it as contentious and that there were plausible arguments that could be presented to support either side. Slavery and abolition featured among the Society's debate topics on many occasions. In January 1834, students considered the question, "Should slavery be abolished by the general government [?]"⁵⁶ On January 19, 1834, the Phrenakosmian Society debated the topic, "Should the United States espouse the principles contended for by the Abolitionists[?]" The minutes are remarkably and uncharacteristically detailed in their description of the discussion that ensued on this day; they note that "a part of the constitution of the Abolition Society was read" at the meeting.⁵⁷ The minutes recount that one student, Theophilus Stork of North Carolina, "rose in all his dignity & [?] made a first rate speech in the negative."⁵⁸ The students were not the only ones debating the issue at the Society's meeting; "L.F. Bittle, Esq.", presumably a local lawyer, also joined in on the action. His remarks were subsequently crossed out of the minute book, but from what can be made out, they do not appear to be favorable to the abolitionist cause. "The society was however honoured with the sentiments of Mr Cooper who debated at some length also that of Mr Reynolds who was [?] quite antagonistic," the minutes tell us. James Cooper, a Maryland-born lawyer practicing in Gettysburg, would go on to serve as a member of the Pennsylvania state legislature and both houses of Congress.⁵⁹ Cooper served as a Union officer during the Civil War and was "authorized by President Abraham Lincoln to raise a brigade of loyal Marylanders."⁶⁰ Politically, it appears

⁵⁶ MS-006: Papers of the Philomathæan and Phrenakosmian Societies, Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Separate footnotes for details of specific meetings will not be provided; all references are to this collection.

⁵⁷ Details of this meeting are featured in the *Pennsylvania College Book*, which directs the reader to the minutes of the Phrenakosmian Society for further details.

⁵⁸ Details of Stork's origins were found in the *Pennsylvania College Book*.

⁵⁹ "COOPER, James (1810-1863)," in *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present*, n.d., <https://bioguideretro.congress.gov/Home/MemberDetails?memIndex=C000753>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

that Cooper was the quintessential borderlands moderate.⁶¹ His debate opponent, William Morton Reynolds, a Lutheran minister and a professor of languages at Pennsylvania College, was anything but. Reynolds, an avowed abolitionist, “was a most earnest champion of the Abolition movement, during his residence at Gettysburg.”⁶² Reynolds did not stick around very long at Pennsylvania College; he tendered his resignation to the Board of Trustees in 1835 for “fear that his zeal in this direction [of abolition] was operating against the College, in alienating the Southern patronage.”⁶³ By terming Reynolds’ speech “antagonistic” while recording the meeting minutes, the Phrenakosmian Society’s secretary implicitly nodded to the discordance of the professor’s voice in the borderlands landscape. Though Reynolds was certainly not the only abolitionist in Adams County, his story reflects that unbridled support for abolition was not always welcomed with open arms in this borderlands region.

For many residents of the Pennsylvania borderlands⁶⁴, colonization was a much more palatable alternative to abolition during the antebellum period. Indeed, the Phrenakosmian Society’s minutes indicate that “after an extremely long debate the Anchor decided for the Negative — The vote [?] of Society was called for + it was decided for colonization & a great majority.” Colonization, which entailed sending African-Americans to Africa, their “ancestral homeland,” posed an advantage on two levels. On the one hand, it was a supposedly humanitarian move that allowed slaves to be liberated from lifetime bondage. Clearly, Gettysburg students weighed the moral implications of slavery; one Phrenakosmian Society meeting featured the question of whether “slavery [was] inconsistent with the will of God.”

⁶¹ Smith discusses Cooper in his work, and I believe he makes reference to his moderate stance. The descriptor of a “borderlands moderate” draws from Smith’s language about borderlands figures discussed in this paper.

⁶² Breidenbaugh, *Pennsylvania College Book*, 162.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ This is a term that Peter Miele of the Seminary Ridge Museum, Gettysburg used in a presentation and which I adopt in my own paper.

Colonization allowed borderlands residents to assuage their consciences without having to reckon with the “threat” of free or slave African-Americans in their midst.⁶⁵ In the 1830s, both Samuel Schmucker and Henry Baugher attended a colonization meeting in Gettysburg; Schmucker even purchased a subscription to the American Colonization Society’s journal for the college.⁶⁶ Small wonder, then, that students were embracing colonization as a “moderate” solution that did not present the pitfalls that abolition may have entailed. Though Schmucker himself evolved into an abolitionist from a proponent of colonization during the antebellum period, the idea certainly did not go out of vogue. On January 5, 1853, the Phrenakosmians weighed the question, “Provided the South would liberate her slaves Should this Government colonize the Free blacks by sending them to Liberia willing or unwilling to go [?]” After the question was debated and discussed, twenty-one students voted for the proposition and nine opposed it.

The Phrenakosmians were also contemplating questions related to race that went beyond slavery alone. On August 3, 1853, the question for debate was, “Has a state a right to exclude negroes from her soil?” After the question was debated by several members and was discussed by the general body, fourteen students voted in the affirmative and twenty-two students voted in the negative. Likewise, on December 15, 1841, the society considered the question, “Can any two races of men enjoy equal rights and privileges in the same country and at the same time [?]” By a lopsided margin of eight members in favor and twenty-one against, the proposition, which can be understood as implicitly referring to race relations in the United States, was defeated.

These debates are particularly relevant when viewed in the context of two free African-Americans who spent time at Gettysburg College during the antebellum period, namely

⁶⁵ Smith, *Edge of Freedom*, 50.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Daniel Alexander Payne and James Hopkins.⁶⁷ Payne was a Black student at the Gettysburg seminary in the 1830s; an April 1835 report from the college's faculty to the Board of Trustees notes, "Application having recently been made by Mr. Payne a coloured man Student of theology in the Seminary, for the use of a room in the college edifice for holding a bible Class of coloured people on Sunday afternoons, the matter is referred to the decision of the trustees."⁶⁸ It is quite possible that Pennsylvania College students ran into Payne during his weekly Bible study sessions. Likewise, James Hopkins, a free Black man, was a longtime janitor at Pennsylvania College who endeared himself to the student body during his tenure.⁶⁹ The Phrenakosmians' debates about free Blacks and racial equality as they interacted with free Blacks smack of cognitive dissonance. It is puzzling how students could have adored their janitor while at the same time considering whether he could ever be equal to them on account of his race. Yet that is the paradox of the borderlands — while many borderlands Pennsylvanians were willing to acknowledge that slavery was a flawed system, racial equality would have still been anathema to them.⁷⁰

Ultimately, borderlands Pennsylvanians, including Pennsylvania College students, held steadfastly to the paramountcy of preserving the Union. In many cases, Unionism would have dwarfed the personal beliefs that one may have held on slavery and abolition. Given their position along the Mason-Dixon Line and their exposure to competing legal systems and

⁶⁷ I am grateful to local historian Debra Sandoe McCauslin for taking me on a tour of Underground Railroad-related sites in Adams County *gratis*. McCauslin has written about Yellow Hill, a free Black settlement in Adams County. It is quite possible that residents of that settlement frequented Gettysburg and that Pennsylvania College students would interact with them in some capacities.

⁶⁸ RG 2.0.1: Office of the President, Charles Philip Krauth, Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. I was exposed to Payne's story through Smith's book.

⁶⁹ Peter Vermilyea, "Jack Hopkins' Civil War," *Adams County History* 11 (January 1, 2005): 4–21, <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ach/vol11/iss1/3/>. I did not read this article in great detail. Anna Moyer, a former librarian at Gettysburg College, also writes about Hopkins in her book.

⁷⁰ Smith writes of the "contradictions" that were characteristic of the Pennsylvania borderlands, where abolition and colonization could go hand in hand. This is a prime example.

ideologies, borderlands Pennsylvanians probably understood better than most just how fragile the nation was and that it needed to be preserved at any cost. On July 4, 1851, “the Students of Pennsylvania College assembled [...] in the Linnaean Hall in order to celebrate the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.”⁷¹ This celebration featured two keynote speakers; fittingly, one of them was from Pennsylvania while the other was from Maryland. At the gathering, the attendees declared by way of formal resolutions “[t]hat, Northerners and Southerners, we go heart and hand for the integrity and immortality of the Union” and that “[t]hat, we have sympathy, neither with the Abolitionists of the North, the Agitators of the South.”⁷² In other words, these borderlands Pennsylvanians repudiated “extremists” on both sides that they saw as a threat to the Union’s stability. Put simply, Unionism was at the heart of Pennsylvania College’s approach to slavery and abolition in the antebellum period and beyond. In 1861, a decade after this Fourth of July celebration, President Baugher stood firmly on the side of the Union when Southern secession became a reality.⁷³

On February 12, 1851, the Phrenakosmian Society considered a rather simple question, “Whether is slavery right or not?” Twelve members voted in the affirmative; fifteen voted in the negative. At Pennsylvania College, a liminal and intellectual borderland where North and South converged, discussion around questions of slavery and abolition did not boil down to a simple binary. Rather, a host of circumstances and figures converged at this then-fledgling institution to produce a much more complex outcome. Pennsylvania College attempted to thread the needle between competing interests such as slavery and freedom, North and South, and colonization and

⁷¹ “Celebration at Pennsylvania College,” *The Adams Sentinel and General Advertiser*, July 14, 1851, <https://access.newspaperarchive.com/us/pennsylvania/gettysburg/adams-sentinel/1851/07-14/page-5/>.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Smith, *Edge of Freedom*, 178-79. I must credit Smith for providing insights about Baugher’s dedication to the Union and the general characterization of Schmucker and Baugher as being rooted in the borderlands. The point is his, not mine.

abolition. As the legatees of these early members of the Pennsylvania College community, it is for us to reflect on how they went about establishing their “delicate balance.”

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⁷⁴ Breidenbaugh's book contains various vignettes written by different authors, whom I do not individually cite.

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