

Tyler Zimmet Due:  
May 4, 2015

### Joseph Murray, Edward Antill, and New York City's Interlocking Elite

The historian Craig Wilder has described King's College as "a merchants' college." Nearly "ninety sons of the commercial class, more children of Atlantic traders than any other college in British North America," enrolled at King's in its first two decades. With students, faculty, donors, and trustees directly connected to colonial New Yorks City's commercial, and thus, slave economy, the founding of King's College in 1754, according to Wilder, cannot be separated from the interests of the city's merchants.<sup>1</sup> However, this is only part of the story. David C. Humphrey notes that "from its origins in the mid-1740s to its culmination in the mid-1750s, the movement to found a provincial college was dominated by a small but powerful group of New York City lawyers, merchants, and politicians."<sup>2</sup> Humphrey's argument challenges the notion that merchants alone contributed to the founding of King's College. Two prominent non-merchants were Joseph Murray and Edward Antill. Both men served as governors of King's College in its early years, thanks to their generous donations and their ideological influence on the college's founding. Murray was a self-made man who used his career to form important relationships, Antill used his personal connections and family inheritance to jumpstart his own career. Nevertheless, both Murray and Antill ensured their elite economic and social status through their personal, professional, and political connections. In fact, an interlocking elite of merchants, lawyers, and public officials within New York City, Murray and Antill included, not only facilitated the establishment of King's College, but also formed powerful relationships to increase and maintain their own political and economic status in New York. And this elite group's very existence was connected to the institution of slavery.

---

<sup>1</sup> Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivory: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 67.

<sup>2</sup> David C. Humphrey, *From King's College to Columbia: 1746-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 11.

\*\*\*

In an obituary on May 2, 1757, The New York Gazette proclaimed Joseph Murray "a Gentleman of the strictest Integrity, Fidelity and Honour."<sup>3</sup> The New York Mercury's tribute argued that "it was the Cause and not the Person that directed his Judgment; and neither Threats or Frowns could make him deviate from what he thought right." Along with these honorable traits, there was no denying that through his "Profession he acquired a large fortune," as he was considered "the most considerable Lawyer here in his Time."<sup>4</sup> Having no children of his own, Murray generously bequeathed "all the remainder of the monies arising by the sale of [his] real estate and also [his] personal estate" to the newly-created King's College.<sup>5</sup> Valued at approximately 8,000 pounds by some estimates, it was not only the largest single gift presented to a colonial college, but also the largest single philanthropic gift ever made in colonial America.<sup>6</sup> His fortune was in many respects the key to the school's financial survival; without it, the decades following would have been quite difficult.<sup>7</sup>

### **Murray's Early Career**

Arguably Murray's career as a prominent lawyer took off in the 1730s, thanks in large part to his associations with prominent New York individuals. In 1730, five years after signing an anti-competitive agreement with other prominent New York lawyers, Murray drafted a new charter for New York City, granting "a monopoly to himself and his closest legal colleagues... deeding them exclusive right to practice in the Mayor's Court."<sup>8</sup> Murray understood that associating himself with New York's interlocking elite would ensure a

---

<sup>3</sup> *New-York Gazette*, May 2, 1757, America's Historical Newspapers (10DE942671645538), 3.

<sup>4</sup> "New-York, May 2," *New York Mercury*, May 2, 1757, America's Historical Newspapers (10DEFFFAFA10DE0), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Murray's Last Will and Testament, September 19, 1756, Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box 1, MS#0248, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

<sup>6</sup> Robert A. McCaughey. *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 38.

<sup>7</sup> Humphrey, 115.

<sup>8</sup> Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (New York: Random House, 2005), 79.

prominent and financial successful career, and this monopoly only further guaranteed his elite status. One of Murray's first significant cases took place in 1734, a case that illustrated growing tensions between the interests of the landed elite and the interests of the city's merchants. The governor of New York at the time, William Cosby, who would in fact later become Murray's father-in-law, attempted to use the New York Supreme Court as a court of equity without the approval of the provincial assembly. A court of equity, which originated in English common law, handles lawsuits and petitions requesting remedies other than damages, such as injunctions and specific performance. Cosby was attempting to resolve a dispute with the prior governor, Rip Van Dam, without the case going to a jury. Landowning elites in the assembly were naturally threatened, and challenged Cosby's actions. However, Murray supported Cosby's action, and in his "Opinion Relating to the Courts of Justice in the Colony of New York," argued that since "the fundamental Courts, by the Laws of England, are as much Part of those Liberties and Privileges, and as much by the Customs and Laws of England," Cosby did not need approval to form such a court.<sup>9</sup> Though the case was dismissed, Murray's opinion reflects his defense of English common law, and of course, a defense of the powerful governor.

Cosby was only one of many prominent New Yorkers Murray worked closely with in his career. In 1737, Murray served as counsel to Adolph Philipse, a wealthy landowner and merchant active in trade with Europe and the Caribbean, in a case that argued whether Jewish votes should be counted in a municipal election. Following a disputed assembly election between Philipse and Garret Van Horne, another New York merchant, Murray urged "the authority of the election law, giving a vote to all freeholders of competent estates,

---

<sup>9</sup> William Smith, *The History of the Province of New-York, Volume One*, ed. Michael Kammen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 262-264.

without excepting the descendants of Abraham."<sup>10</sup> Murray lost this case and the Jewish votes were thrown out, although Philipse won the election anyway. However, following this incident, the votes of Jewish New Yorkers were never disputed in further elections.<sup>11</sup> And finally, following his appointment to the New York Council in 1744, Murray formed an important alliance with James De Lancey, Chief Justice of the New York Supreme Court and future Governor of King's College. Murray played an important role in supporting De Lancey's opposition to then New York Governor George Clinton's plan to wage war against the French and American Indians.<sup>12</sup> These three examples represent a small sample of Murray's illustrious career, yet serve as an illustration of Murray's attempts to form powerful and relationships with New York's elite.

In addition to working on important cases involving prominent New Yorkers, Murray also dealt with a number of civil cases regarding slavery. In his 1740-1741 Form Book, Murray details hundreds of specific cases, everything from mercantile disputes to tailors spoiling articles of clothing. However, some cases relate directly to slavery. One interesting case Murray detailed is a 1737 dispute involving a "negro woman slave called Judy." Although advertised in a sale as "sound and.. .able and fit to work," she was in fact "afflicted and troubled with Great Weakness."<sup>13</sup> In this case, Murray defended Charles Lushar, the man accusing Johannes Boerbach of deceiving him in the sale of Judy. Murray writes that "to maintain this action it must be proved that the Seller knew" of the weaknesses of the slave "before the time of Sale." The result of the suit, however, is known.<sup>14</sup> Another case Murray described in his Form Book involves a similar dispute. Elizabeth Berton purchased a "negro

---

<sup>10</sup> Smith, *The History of the Province of New-York, Volume Two*, ed. Michael Kammen (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 33.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, 130.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Murray, *Form Book, 1740-1741*, Law Library, Columbia University, 147.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 148.

woman slave" from George Gibbs for "a great price... of twenty seven pounds current money of New York," with the assurance that the slave was "with out any Infirmiry free from any Distemper or Disease." However, soon after this transaction, the "negro woman slave" died, leading Elizabeth to believe she was "falsely fraudulently and deceitfully" misled. The first line of the entry states that George is in custody, presumably as a result of Elizabeth's accusation.<sup>15</sup> These civil disputes offer a glimpse into Murray's legal connection to questions about the institution of slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. But more importantly, in a form book with hundreds of reported cases in a span of only a few years, these incidents are but a few of Murray's many cases, and thus, his role on matters of slavery is just as interesting as the insignificant place these disputes occupy in Murray's form book, and thus, his legal career.

### **The Conspiracy of 1741**

Arguably the most important trial of Murray's career became his closest involvement to questions regarding the institution of slavery. The Conspiracy of 1741, as it is commonly referred to, was one of the most important events in New York City's complex history of slavery. During the early spring of 1741, a series of fires erupted around New York, along with a number of thefts, including one fire near "the coach house and stables of the prominent attorney Joseph Murray."<sup>16</sup> Almost immediately blame fell on the black population of the city, many believing they were part of a larger conspiracy. As a result, hundreds of slaves and free blacks, and some white citizens, were arrested, thirteen Africans were burned at the stake, and seventeen more hanged. However, despite such horrific convictions and executions, some New Yorkers believed the conspiracy never existed, comparing this incident to the many false accusations made at the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. In fact, one

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 167.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas J. Davis, *A Rumor of Revolt: The "Great Negro Plot" in Colonial New York* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), 16.

New Englander proclaimed that "New York justly reproached us for, & mockt at our Credulity about" the events a half century earlier.

Presiding over the trials and leading the investigations of this conspiracy was Daniel Horsmanden, a city recorder and a provincial Supreme Court justice who was arguably "the most prominent personality in the investigation of the fires and thefts in 1741."<sup>17</sup> Much of what is known about The Great Conspiracy is due to the copious recounting of the events and trial in his *The New-York Conspiracy*. Despite believing that slaves revealed ingratitude, for "they are really more happy in this place, than in the midst of the continual plunder, cruelty, and rapine of their native countries," Horsmanden firmly believed black people were incapable of devising such a conspiracy on their own, although he was not a slave owner himself.<sup>18</sup> He was convinced instead that John Ury, a white Catholic priest, and John Hughson, a white tavern keeper, were responsible for leading this plot and "seducing [blacks] to such execrable purposes."<sup>19</sup> Ury, in his defense, argued that "it was the fear of Catholics that had catapulted [him] into the spotlight."<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, regardless of what actually took place in the spring of 1741, clearly a world "of prejudice and injustice ensnared the New Yorkers" of that time.<sup>21</sup> Years later, on March 8, 1758, in recognition for his role as "one of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Inducement of this Province," Horsmanden would take his seat as a Governor of King's College.<sup>22</sup> Following his death in 1777, his will bequeathed 500 pounds to the College.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Davis, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Horsmanden, *The New-York Conspiracy, or, A history of the Negro plot, with the journal of the proceedings against the conspirators at New-York in the years...* (New York: Southwick & Pelsue, 1810), 93.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com/ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY100202125&srchtp=a&ste=14>.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Great NY Conspiracy of 1741: Slavery, Crime, and Colonial Law* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 148.

<sup>21</sup> Davis, 263.

<sup>22</sup> *Early Minutes of the Trustees: Volume One, 1755-1770* (New York: The University, 1932), 111.

<http://archive.org/details/earlyminutesoftr1175colu>.

<sup>23</sup> Lepore, *New York Burning*, 221.

Murray's significant legal role during the many trials is a testament to his successful career representing many of New York's elite. Throughout the trials Murray served as an assistant prosecutor behind Attorney General Richard Bradley, and by 1741, Murray was certainly established as one of "the most successful lawyers in New York City."<sup>24</sup> An important element of Murray's prosecution strategy was his use of "Negro Evidence." The use of such evidence was extremely restricted: "not only was it only allowed against other slaves, it was only admissible in cases of conspiracy, arson, and murder," and its intent was, according to a 1730 law, for "the more effectual preventing and punishing the conspiracy and insurrection of negroes an other slaves." Horsmanden understood Murray's tactics, for Murray provided legal precedent within the colony for use of such evidence. On May 29, 1741, at the trial of two convicted slaves, Murray cited this 1730 law before "calling his Negro Evidence to the stand."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, as Horsmanden explained, Murray emphasized the "reasonableness and necessity" of using Negro Evidence to paint a picture of the circumstances of the alleged conspiracy.<sup>26</sup>

The conspiracy became quite personal for Murray when he helped prosecute two of his own slaves: Jack and Adam. As Murray continued to, "day after day, prosecut[e] black conspirators, he became more and more suspicious of the black men who lived in his attic, and in his cellar."<sup>27</sup> On June 25, one of Murray's slaves Jack was accused and arrested, and the next day, made quite the confession in front of Murray, admitting to wanting to "Destroy Mr. Murray, Mrs. Murray and all the family with knives."<sup>28</sup> Murray did not have any legitimate children of his own, so his "family" included, in addition to his wife, his

---

<sup>24</sup> Davis, 86.

<sup>25</sup> Lepore, *New York Burning*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> Horsmanden, 87.

<sup>27</sup> Lepore, *New York Burning*, 168.

<sup>28</sup> Davis, 151.

mistress and her children, as well as his three other slaves Congo, Dido, and Caesar. Jack's confession suggested, for the first time during the trials, that "blacks planned to kill other blacks."<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, Murray's other suspected slave, Adam, initially pled not guilty, but after being told that "the only way to recommend yourself to favor is by making a full confession," Adam gave in.<sup>30</sup> Black people were offered leniency in their punishment if they confessed to their crimes, which certainly calls into question the veracity of their confessions. Nevertheless, Jack and Adam were both convicted and were soon transported to Madeira, an archipelago off the coast of Portugal.<sup>31</sup>

Murray eventually concluded that a master plot did exist, deducing from a letter evidence that actually supported Horsmanden's theory about the Catholic priest John Ury. The letter, signed by General James Oglethorpe, founder and Governor of the colony of Georgia, revealed that the general had "some intelligence.. .that the Spaniards had employed emissaries to burn all the magazines and considerable towns in the English North America.. .And for this purpose, many priests were employed."<sup>32</sup> The jury announced Ury's verdict on July 29<sup>th</sup>, guilty, sentencing him to death by hanging two weeks later. To some, convicting Ury was "in effect convicting the Roman Catholic Church," perhaps suggesting that the Conspiracy of 1741 was as much a preservation of the Protestant order as an example of sharp racial tensions in New York.<sup>33</sup>

The Conspiracy of 1741 was certainly central to Murray's renowned career due to its complexity and widespread audience. In fact, thanks in large part to the fame brought about from these trials, in 1744, as mentioned earlier, Murray became a member of the New York

---

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, 152.

<sup>31</sup> Horsmanden, 385, 387.

<sup>32</sup> Lepore, *New York Burning*, 176.

<sup>33</sup> Hoffer, 151.



Council. Yet perhaps more importantly, the trials reveal much about the complicated relationship between Murray and the people he enslaved. In the interrogation of his slave Jack, Murray, who was present during the confession, "pressed for more details from his slave, perhaps having trouble believing his ears."<sup>34</sup> Yet interestingly, Murray, despite the harshness of Jack's confession, was "hardly surprised to learn that his own slave had placed live coals under a haystack in his coachhouse," and never really questioned or doubted his testimony.<sup>35</sup> As Horsmanden concluded, slaves were "enemies of their own households," underscoring a clear distrust of New York's slave population that emerged from the 1741 trials.<sup>36</sup> However, in his 1757 will, Murray ordered that "My negro Caesar and his mother are to be free, and to have 20 pounds yearly for support." Slaves were typically handed down from one generation to the next, but "only a handful of New Yorkers used their wills to free their slaves." Although Murray prosecuted so many black men to their deaths in 1741, freeing his slave Caesar and his mother "constituted an extraordinary act of generosity, and one that must have raised eyebrows." Even Jack and Adam admitted that Caesar did not take part in the conspiracy, so contrary to Horsmanden's above opinion on slaves, perhaps "Caesar was more than Murray's slave. Perhaps he was his only son."<sup>37</sup>

Unfortunately, the truth behind the confessions of Jack and Adam and the truth behind Ury's alleged actions will never be confirmed, along with the many other stories, rumors, and theories that resulted from the Conspiracy of 1741. It is difficult to argue against the notion that the "prosecution in 1741 of so many, so quickly, and upon so little evidence was motivated in part by perceived racial differences."<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Davis, 151.

<sup>35</sup> Lepore, *New York Burning*, 168.

<sup>36</sup> Horsmanden, 12.

<sup>37</sup> Lepore, *New York Burning*, 226.

<sup>38</sup> Hoffer, 171.

However, this conspiracy in many ways exposes the problems of a judicial system linked to the institution of slavery. The bribing of slaves to confess, the restrictiveness of the use of "Negro Evidence," and the obvious prejudices of judges, jurists, and prosecutors underscore major flaws in the proceedings, the use of evidence, and the convictions given of slaves, free blacks, and white conspirators. Murray's most significant case directly interlocks with the prejudices and biases of New York's slave culture.

### **Founding of King's College**

Having fully established himself as one of New York's prominent elite citizens, Murray turned his attention to what would eventually become King's College. After abandoning support for the establishment of a college in New Jersey, Murray looked to found a college "whose leaders placed a high value on political authority and social order."<sup>39</sup> One reason Murray's career was so successful was that he was able to put aside "religious differences and cooperat[e] with men of any faith." However, an Anglican "preference in the college struck [him] as a reasonable return for [his] proffered and prospective gifts of land and money," although he certainly agreed to "share the management of the college with representatives of other religious groups."<sup>40</sup> Taking an active role in the establishment of the charter of King's College, Murray was central in determining the location of the school near Trinity Church, and its "goals, curriculum, and policies on admissions and religion." He helped choose language for the charter to convince skeptics that the newly formed college, as its first president, Samuel Johnson, avowed, would not "impose on the scholars, the peculiar tenets of any particular sect of Christians," but would "inculcate upon their tender minds, the

---

<sup>39</sup> Humphrey, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Humphrey, 33-34.

great principles of Christianity and morality in which true Christians of each denomination are generally agreed." And fortunately for the founders, Murray, along with others involved in the charter's creation, served on the New York Council, almost guaranteeing its approval.<sup>41</sup> Murray's legal background reinforced his enthusiasm to establish a college. Noted for his "legal erudition," he had one of "the largest libraries in mid- century New York." His impact went beyond his law profession, for he placed a tremendous importance on the value of a liberal education, including for practicing lawyers. The "complete Lawyer," or the idea that an apprenticeship in law was not enough to "usher Men into a Profession the most complicated, difficult, extensive and accurate of others," appealed to Murray.<sup>42</sup> His efforts in establishing King's College are a clear reflection of his twin commitments to education and religion.

Though not a merchant himself, Murray brought his political, legal, and personal experience to King's College and naturally fit in with the motivations of a New York merchant: understanding the importance of fundraising and understanding the resources of extensive trading markets. King's College officially opened its doors on October 31, 1754, and Murray was soon thereafter selected as a Governor of the College after initially contributing 100 pounds to the school.<sup>43</sup> In May of 1755, Murray was appointed as Chairman of the Committee to consider Ways and Means, and in a letter to the Governors of the College on June 2, 1755, Murray outlined a plan to raise money for the construction of a new building for the college. Interestingly, Murray suggested to the Governors that attempts to raise money include, in addition to important Lords and merchants

---

<sup>41</sup> Humphrey, 48, 50.

<sup>42</sup> Humphrey, 83-84.

<sup>43</sup> King's College Subscription List, December 1755, Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box1, MS#0248, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

in England, "all the Islands in the West Indies," though the details of such attempts are not specifically outlined in this letter.<sup>44</sup> In the years following Murray's death, King's College did send solicitations to select "gentlemen in the several Islands in the West Indies," and eventually recruited West Indian agents active in the slave trade including Henry Livingston and Richard and William Moore, but whether these contacts were the result of Murray's initial suggestion is unclear.<sup>45</sup>

David Humphrey argues that Joseph Murray's "guiding hand.. .helped steer the college project through several stormy years," but only two-and-a-half years after the College's founding, Murphy died on April 28, 1757.<sup>46</sup> As mentioned earlier, in his Last Will and Testament, he directed that his entire estate be bequeathed to the College and "applied in Building and promoting the interest of the said Colledge."<sup>47</sup> His generosity is indisputable, and his commitment to King's College paralleled his commitment to education and religion. His connections made throughout his career perhaps further influenced his decision to actively support a college in New York. James De Lancey and Daniel Horsmanden were both donors and Governors of King's College; De Lancey worked closely with Murray on the establishment of the charter, and Horsmanden administered the Governors' oaths as board members of the College.<sup>48</sup> Though not directly connected to the Atlantic slave trade as a merchant or as a plantation owner, Murray's connection to the interlocking elite of New York's merchants, lawyers, and politicians, and thus his connection to the institution of slavery, certainly shaped his career and legacy. King's College certainly has Murray to thank for its founding and for its initial years of success - financially, structurally, and ideologically.

---

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Murray, Letter to Governors from Committee of Ways and Means, June 2, 1755, Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box1, MS#0248, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

<sup>45</sup> Wilder, 96.

<sup>46</sup> Humphrey, 115.

<sup>47</sup> Murray's Will, September 19, 1756.

<sup>48</sup> Wilder, 68.

\*\*\*

On May 12, 1761, at the annual meeting of the Governors of the College of the Province of New York in the City of New York, it was "unanimously resolved and Ordered that the Honorable Edward Antill Esquire of New Jersey be and is hereby Elected and - chosen one of the Governors" of King's College, replacing the seat previously held by the now deceased Joseph Murray.<sup>49</sup> According to historian David Humphrey, "Antill's membership in the colonial elite rested securely on a foundation of wealth, heritage, political influence, and family connections."<sup>50</sup> Antill, unlike Murray, would not be considered a self-made man, but like Murray, he formed the necessary relationships with New York's interlocking elite to maintain his political and economic status.

### **Three Merchants**

Edward Antill's connection to New York's interlocking elite, and thus, to the institution of slavery, was thanks in large part to his upbringing. Antill's father, Edward Antill I, was a prominent 17<sup>th</sup> century merchant in New York City. Antill the first was well connected in the West Indies trade markets, and in addition to trading goods, he "occasionally... ..picked up an Indian woman or lad to sell into slavery." For example, in April 1699, he purchased "an Indian boy named Wainca... ..but who was afterwards taken in charge by the city authorities of New York, [Wainca] being free born and a subject of the States of Holland." As further punishment, the city demanded "the release of a free born Indian woman, native of Curacao, now held as a slave, by Edward Antill."<sup>51</sup> This incident offers a brief glance at the rights of 17<sup>th</sup> century "Indians" in colonial America, but details of this

---

<sup>49</sup> *Early Minutes of the Trustees*, 139.

<sup>50</sup> Humphrey, 87.

<sup>51</sup> William Nelson, *Edward Antill, And His Descendants: A New York Merchant of the Seventeenth Century, Particularly Edward Antill, 2d, of Piscataway, New Jersey...* (Paterson: The Press Printing and Publishing Company, 1899), 6. <http://archive.org/stream/edwardantillnewy00nels>.

episode are limited. Antill's mercantile career led him to become involved in an important project at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that involved not only "the most reputable merchants of New York, but [also] members of the English Cabinet, and even the King himself." Profit seeking merchants, along with the British government, embarked on a "quest for sudden riches in the Arabian Gulf, by preying on the pirates who infested those waters."<sup>52</sup> One such pirate was Giles Shelley, the captain of the ship *Nassau*, a vessel "laden.. .with strong liquors and gunpowder." On a voyage to Madagascar in 1698, Shelley brought on board "a cargo of East India goods and slaves, and twenty-nine pirates," whom Shelley ensured would receive safe passage to New York.<sup>53</sup> Although the voyage was a success and Shelley received a fortune as a result, Shelley was soon captured and "committed without bail, for piracy," destined for execution.<sup>54</sup> Yet thanks to the help of Edward Antill, Shelley was "admitted to bail," and remained forever "grateful to Antill for having undoubtedly saved his life."<sup>55</sup>

With the death of his father at a young age, Antill II's childhood was anything but ordinary. Shortly before his death, Edward Antill I lived with his wife, his six children, and "two negresses and two negro children."<sup>56</sup> According to his will, Antill appointed Shelly, in addition to his wife Sarah, Executor of his personal estate. In fact, Edward Antill II "was adopted and brought up by Giles Shelley" following the death of his father in 1704.<sup>57</sup> Yet Shelley died shortly after adopting Antill, adding to what must have been a traumatic early childhood for the young boy. While crafting his will in 1708, Shelley appointed Robert Watts and Robert Lurting, two prominent New York merchants, Executors of a trust fund for

---

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> D.T. Valentine, *Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York* (New York: Chas W. Baker, 1857), 466. <http://books.google.com/>.

<sup>54</sup> Nelson, 9.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

Antill, to access when he was older. Shelley bequeathed to Antill "[his] two houses and land in the city of New York.. [and] all the rest of [his] personal estate," of which a sizable portion of this land and wealth was, as mentioned above, originally from Antill's father. In addition, the pirate left behind "all his messuage, farm and lands.. and the stock thereon, and the goods and the household stuff," and even "[his] Indian slaves, Symon, Betty and Jenny" to a woman named Mary Peters. This fortune would be added to Antill's trust fund upon Mary's death.<sup>58</sup>

The final chapter of Antill's childhood was under the guardianship of Robert Watts. He became Antill's third father figure, and was also the third merchant to raise the boy. Watts began his career "trading with the Dutch West Indies.. but [he] soon included British possessions in the West Indies among [his] southern stops."<sup>59</sup> Originally exporting grain and flour to the West Indies, Watts expanded his practice and by 1700, around the time of Antill's birth, he owned "four vessels and expanded business to Curacao, Jamaica, and the Leeward Islands."<sup>60</sup> Finally, following Antill's twenty-first birthday, Robert Watts "delivered to him a true and full account of his estate."<sup>61</sup> Officially inheriting his wealth and fortune from both his father and Shelley, Antill now possessed, among other properties, "a tract of land on the North Branch of the Raritan River." Antill would take up residency here at what was called Piscataqua, or Piscataway Landing, near present day New Brunswick, New Jersey, "a portion of the broad acres inherited from his father." He would reside at Piscataway most of his life. Raised by three different merchants, Antill grew up around and

---

<sup>58</sup> *Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office, City of New York, Vol. II, 1708-1728* (New York: Printed For the Society, 1893), 60-62. <http://books.google.com/>.

<sup>59</sup> Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 77.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, 78

<sup>61</sup> Nelson, 13.

financially benefited from the monetary successes of a growing merchant class in New York.

### **Antill's Slaves**

Though records of how many slaves Antill possessed and in what capacity these slaves worked are unknown, the historical record does provide some glances into Antill's direct relationship with slavery. For example, an October 1725 letter between Antill and Henry Lloyd, another wealthy landowner and merchant in New York, reveals a conflict over the price of a slave woman. Antill discusses one of Lloyd's slaves, Aurelia, whom Antill "had once hyred.. .out for Eight pounds." Antill disagrees with Lloyd's pricing of this slave, who "thought it not proper that Aurelia should be Hyred under Nine Pounds per Annum." After receiving this information about Lloyd's pricing of Aurelia in another letter, Antill had no choice but to "[take] her home again." Antill firmly believed Lloyd would not be capable of "Dispos[ing] of [Aurelia] till she be let at a lower rate."<sup>62</sup> Eventually, presumably after a lower price was agreed upon, in a letter on September 13, 1726, Lloyd tells a Mrs. Smith that "I just now received a letter from Mr. Antill by which I find Aurelia is with you in order to be forwarded me."<sup>63</sup> Hiring out slaves to others was often used "to rid a family of a troublesome slave," and advertisements for "slave hiring were abundant in this period."<sup>64</sup> Aurelia was one of these troublesome slaves, refusing to work again with Lloyd, so he asked Mrs. Smith to "hyre. [Aurelia] into some good family on as good terms.. . & be far more agreeable to me than to have her with me."<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, gaps exist in the letter exchanges between Antill and Lloyd so full details on their conversations about Aurelia are unclear. There must have

---

<sup>62</sup> *Papers of the Lloyd Family of the Manor of Queens Village, Lloyd's Neck, Long Island, New York, 1654-1826, Volume I, 1654-1752* (New York: Printed for the Society, 1927), 258. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89067950121;view=1up;seq=9>.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, 282.

<sup>64</sup> Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 83.

<sup>65</sup> *Papers of Lloyd Family*, 283.



been a financial incentive or reward for Antill if Lloyd reduced the price of Aurelia to less than nine pounds per annum, or maybe, although less likely, Antill was genuinely trying to get Lloyd the best possible deal. Antill and Lloyd were business partners, and although Antill did take part in mercantile transactions in the early part of his career, most likely through connections from his guardian Robert Watts, the majority of his career would be defined otherwise.

As mentioned earlier, Antill found a home at Piscataway Landing, a "farm of 370 acres...and comprising [of] an easy well-built farm house and brew house" that Antill built himself.<sup>66</sup> Obviously, Antill could not manage this enormous plot of land on his own, and naturally required slave labor to help him maintain the property. By 1752, according to an advertisement in the *New-York Gazette*, Antill was ready to sell his "good and profitable farm," which nearly 30 years after inheriting it, contained, in addition to the farm house and brew house "about a 100 Acres of...Timber... a Barn, Baracks and Out-Houses...[and] an Orchard containing near 500 Apple Trees."<sup>67</sup> The exact date of the sale of his property is unknown, although the last known advertisement was printed in September of 1753. However, in 1757, Antill posts yet another advertisement in the *New York-Gazette* for more of his assets. In the same announcement, Antill offers for sale "A Pair of bright-bay Horses...Cattle of different Ages, and Negro Men, Women, and Children, well acquainted with all kinds of Husbandry, or Farmers Work." As in the case with Aurelia, slaves are marked with a price tag, and their value is negotiated between buyers and sellers. Although the quality or value of Antill's slaves cannot be determined from this advertisement, it is clear that 18<sup>th</sup> century New

---

<sup>66</sup> *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society, January-April, 1909* (Newark: Library of the Society, 1909), 10. <http://books.google.com>.

<sup>67</sup> *New-York Gazette*, December 11, 1752, *America's Historical Newspapers* (10DAACEBE7A8BD90), 3.

Yorkers casually treated the sale of slaves as they would horses and cattle. This advertisement only mentions in passing that "Negro Men, Women, and Children" are available, but other slave advertisements of the day provided positive qualities of available slaves in a similar manner to how Antill promotes his "birght-bay Horses."<sup>68</sup>

### **A Profitable Marriage**

The trajectory of Antill's political career was heavily influenced by his marriage into the Morris family. Shortly following the death of his first wife Catherine, Edward Antill married Anne Morris, the daughter of Governor Lewis Morris of New Jersey, on June 10, 1739.<sup>69</sup> Like Antill, Morris' father, and mother, died at a young age, and his uncle, Col. Lewis Morris, a successful sugar planter, raised the young orphan. And like Antill, Morris inherited a significant fortune from his guardian; Morris' inheritance came from his uncle. According to Col. Morris' will, included in nephew's inheritance, of which he was the sole executor, were "22 man negroes, 11 women, 6 boys, 2 garles, [and] 25 children," with each grouping assigned a monetary value for a total of 844 pounds.<sup>70</sup> Upon the Colonel's death, Morris instantly became one of the most prominent landed elite in New York, and with his sixty-six new slaves, Morris became the largest slaveholder in New York and New Jersey.<sup>71</sup> There is no doubt Morris saw a connection between his and Antill's upbringing, making Antill an acceptable husband for his daughter.

Many historians consider Governor Morris a pre-founder of King's College. In a letter written in 1703 to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPGFP),

---

<sup>68</sup> *New-York Gazette*, October 24, 1757, America's Historical Newspapers (10DAAEB133534070), 3.

<sup>69</sup> Nelson, 15.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Bolton Jr., *History of the County of Westchester from Its First Settlement to the Present Time* (New York: Alexander S. Gould, 1848), 300. <http://books.google.com/>.

<sup>71</sup> Kristen Block, "Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 8 (2010): 518. <http://www.academia.edu/1841707/>.

Morris declares "New York is the centre of English America and a fit place for a Colledge."<sup>72</sup>

Fifty years before its founding, Morris understood the importance of having a school in New York City because of its "advantageous location between the crown's New England colonies and those to the south around Chesapeake Bay, in the Carolinas, and in the West Indies."<sup>73</sup>

Though Morris would never live to see King's College open its doors in 1754, his grandchildren, Edward Antill III (KC 1762) and Gouverneur Morris (KC 1766), a future US Senator, along with other prominent descendants including future 19<sup>th</sup> century Columbia trustees Lewis M. Rutherford and Gouverneur M. Ogden (CC 1833), would benefit from Lewis Morris' vision of an educational epicenter thought in New York City.<sup>74</sup>

In much the same way as Antill's inheritance guaranteed his financial standing in colonial America, his marriage to Morris' daughter guaranteed a successful political career. Around the time of his marriage to Anne, Antill was "elected to the Provincial Assembly," and "quite naturally voted in that body to sustain Gov. Morris." Through Morris' influence, Antill was not only appointed to become "one of the Judges of the Middlesex County Court of Common Pleas," but he also was recommended "in 1740 for a seat in the Provincial Council," the upper house of the New Jersey Legislature. He would assume this position in 1743 and remain on the Council until 1762.<sup>75</sup> Antill's political career dominated nearly thirty years of his life, catalyzed by his marriage and affiliation with Morris. However, the Governor's Last Will and Testament, bequeathed nothing to his daughter Anne or Edward. Now, Morris bestowed to his wife Isabella "one fourth part of all my negroes, cattle, sheep, hogs, [and] beds," and she "shall have the disposal.. .to such of my children as she shall think

---

<sup>72</sup> Lewis Morris, To the Secretary of the Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, February 1703, Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box1, MS#0248, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

<sup>73</sup> McCaughey, 4.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Nelson, 15-16.

it, either by her last will or during her life, as she shall judge best." It is certainly possible, however, that Edward and Anne inherited some of Morris' slaves or other pieces of his property and wealth from Isabella either before or after her death in 1752. Overall, as Humphrey argues, Antill's career was one formed on wealth, heritage, political influence, and family connections. Antill was a member of New York's interlocking elite, ensuring a politically and financially successful career.

### **A Vision for King's College**

Edward Antill had an active voice in the early years of King's College, conceiving of a plan for the College different from that of many of its other founders and early donors. In a 1759 letter to Samuel Johnson, the first president of King's College, Antill asserts that "the erecting & establishing of the College of New York has from the Beginning laid very near my heart." King's College, according to Antill, was necessary "for the happiness & true Glory of the Province."<sup>76</sup> Whether his father-in-law directly influenced him is unknown, but Antill certainly shared the same passion for the creation of a College in New York City. However, unlike many of the other founders of King's College, Antill "doubted that the college could fulfill its function by educating only those students who could afford to attend." He believed that if "the colony [took] steps to exploit the talent in all ranks of its young people," not just the children of affluent parents, then "[the colony] could become the Metropolis & Mistress of America." His plan was well conceived: first, a tutor would "instruct a group of poor children and identify those of marked ability;" then, those of "marked ability" would receive a more liberal education, thus becoming "Able Masters;" finally, these new Masters would spread out "throughout the colony.. [and] identify other qualified youths tnad prepare them

---

<sup>76</sup> Edward Antill to Samuel Johnson, January 16, 1759, Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box1, MS#0248, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

for the college." Antill argued that in no time a "Sufficient number of Sensible judicious Men [would be] capable & worthy of filling the different Seats & Offices of [the] State."<sup>77</sup>

Motivated to ensure that his plan took effect at King's College, Antill offered the new school a generous gift to launch his program. In a 1757 letter to the Governors of the College, Antill announced that he had "ordered the Executors of.. [Joseph] Murray to pay into the hands of Your Treasurer the Principal and Interest of three Bonds, which I had lodged in his hands, amounting to.. .about eight hundred Pounds." Additionally, Antill will "execute an assignment of mortgage and judgement.. .on a Valuable part of Mr. Henry Longfield's Estate," amounting to 1000 pounds, for a grand total of approximately 1800 pounds.<sup>78</sup> This donation clearly had a specific purpose in mind, to initiate a plan that made perfect sense to Antill. After all, according to Antill, the "children of the rich were not always of great Abilities [and] did not readily apply themselves to their studies," whereas the children of the poor could be "compelled to keep close to their studies and behave themselves well.. .And their incentive to succeed was much greater."<sup>79</sup> All Edward Antill needed was the endorsement of this plan by the Governors of King's College. Unfortunately for Antill, his plan was rejected, but, of course, his money was not. One would expect at least some "token experimentation [of Antill's plan] since a gift from a figure of his prestige should have influenced the Governors in some capacity," but as a result of the proposal's denial, the Governors "accentuate[d] the elitist and exclusive character of the college."<sup>80</sup> Antill's generous donation would earn him a seat as a Governor of King's College in 1761,

---

<sup>77</sup> Humphrey, 87.

<sup>78</sup> Edward Antill to the Governors of the College, November 7, 1757, Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box1, MS#0248, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

<sup>79</sup> Humphrey, 87-88.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 93.

but presumably, his plan for the College was rejected shortly after his appointment, as Antill never attended a recorded meeting of the Governors.

An important factor to consider when examining Antill's plan for the College is not who would be included among the "Able Masters" but rather who would be excluded. Though never explicitly mentioned, it is doubtful that free black children, let alone slave children, were ever considered to be included in this program. In his final recorded plea of his vision of King's College, from a 1761 letter to Leonard Lispenard, a New York merchant and landowner who served as a Governor of King's College, Antill once again argues that it would be a great pleasure to "train up a number of [poor children] in the Paths of Virtue, of having prepared and fortified their minds by Knowledge, and Truth."<sup>81</sup> Yet one would suspect that Antill, along with most elite New Yorkers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, does not believe a slave or a free black's mind is capable of being properly prepared or fortified, and as a result, black people were never a part of his equation for expanding the educational opportunity for low-income children.

\*\*\*

Through this thorough examination of the lives and careers of both Joseph Murray and Edward Antill, it becomes clear that the institution of slavery in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was unavoidable, as New York's merchants, lawyers, politicians, and landowners were all politically, economically, and even personally connected. In many ways, King's College served as a reflection of this interlocking elite of prominent New Yorkers, an intellectual center for New York's leading figures to contribute a lasting mission to an institution.

## Bibliography

---

<sup>81</sup> Edward Antill to Leonard Lispenard, February 19, 1761, Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box 1, MS#0248, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

*Abstracts of Wills on File in the Surrogate's Office, City of New York, Vol. II, 1708-1728.*

New York: Printed For the Society, 1893.

[https://books.google.com/books?id=x7EFAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=x7EFAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbg_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).

Block, Kristen. "Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World." *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 8 (2010): 515-548.

[http://www.academia.edu/1841707/Cultivating\\_Inner\\_and\\_Outter\\_Plantations\\_Property\\_Industry\\_and\\_Slavery\\_in\\_Early\\_Quaker\\_Migration\\_to\\_the\\_New\\_World](http://www.academia.edu/1841707/Cultivating_Inner_and_Outter_Plantations_Property_Industry_and_Slavery_in_Early_Quaker_Migration_to_the_New_World).

Property\_Industry\_and\_Slavery\_in\_Early\_Quaker\_Migration\_to\_the\_New\_World.

Bolton Jr., Robert. *History of the County of Westchester, from Its First Settlement to the Present Time*. New York: Alexander S. Gould, 1848.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=mUcVAAAAYAAJ&q=morris#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

Columbia College Records, 1750-1961, Box 1, Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

Davis, Thomas J. *A Rumor of Revolt: The "Great Negro Plot" in Colonial New York*.

New York: Macmillan, 1985.

*Early Minutes of the Trustees: Volume One, 1755-1770*. New York: The

University, 1932. <https://archive.org/details/earlyminutesoftr1175colu>. Hodges,

Graham Russell. *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey,*

*1613-1863*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999. Hoffer,

Peter Charles. *The Great New York Conspiracy of 1741: Slavery, Crime, and*

*Colonial Law*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003.

Horsmanden, Daniel. *The New-York conspiracy, or, A history of the Negro plot, with the Journal of the proceedings against the conspirators at New-York in the years...* New York: Southwick & Pelsue, 1810.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/servlet/Sabin?af=RN&ae=CY100202125&srchtp=a&ste=14>>.

Humphrey, David C. *From King's College to Columbia: 1746-1800*. New York:

Columbia University Press, 1976. Lepore, Jill. *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*. New York: Random House, 2005.

Lepore, Jill. "The Tightening Vise: Slavery and Freedom in British New York," in

*Slavery in New York*, edited by Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, 57-89. New York:

The New Press, 2005.

Matson, Cathy. *Merchants and Empires: Trading in Colonial New York*. Baltimore:

The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. McCaughey, Robert A. *Stand,*

*Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of*

*New York, 1754-2004*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Murray, Joseph. *Form Book, 1740-1741*. Law Library, Columbia University.

Nelson, William, *Edward Antill, And His Descendants: A New York Merchant of the Seventeenth Century, Particularly Edward Antill, 2d, of Piscataway, New Jersey...*

Paterson: The Press Printing and Publishing Company, 1899.

<https://archive.org/stream/edwardantillnewy00nels>.

*New-York Gazette*, December 11, 1752. America's Historical Newspapers

(10DAACEBE7A8BD90).

*New-York Gazette*, May 2, 1757. America's Historical Newspapers



(10DE942671645538).

*New-York Gazette*, October 24, 1757. America's Historical Newspapers

(10DAAEB133534070). "New-York, May 2."

*New York Mercury*, May 2, 1757. America's Historical Newspapers

(10DEEFFFAFA10DE0).

*Papers of the Lloyd Family of the Manor of Queens Village, Lloyd's Neck, Long Island, New York, 1654-1826, Volume I, 1654-1752*. New York: Printed for the Society, 1927.

<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89067950121;view=1up;seq=9>.

*Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society, January-April, 1909*. Newark: Library of the Society, 1909.

[https://books.google.com/books?id=DSov8M\\_eqaQC&pg=RA1-PA7&lpg=RA1-](https://books.google.com/books?id=DSov8M_eqaQC&pg=RA1-PA7&lpg=RA1-)

[PA7&dq=ROSS+HALL+AND+ITS+VARIOUS+OWNERS+Edward+antill&source=bl&ots=lxKgPp9Jjk&sig=o3\\_Xy-oyTF7slMZ-sKfosQ9nQ3s&hl=en&sa=X&ei=-](https://books.google.com/books?id=DSov8M_eqaQC&pg=RA1-PA7&lpg=RA1-PA7&dq=ROSS+HALL+AND+ITS+VARIOUS+OWNERS+Edward+antill&source=bl&ots=lxKgPp9Jjk&sig=o3_Xy-oyTF7slMZ-sKfosQ9nQ3s&hl=en&sa=X&ei=-)

[MFFVbDsKYGANrmEgZgE&ved=0CCQQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=DSov8M_eqaQC&pg=RA1-PA7&lpg=RA1-PA7&dq=ROSS+HALL+AND+ITS+VARIOUS+OWNERS+Edward+antill&source=bl&ots=lxKgPp9Jjk&sig=o3_Xy-oyTF7slMZ-sKfosQ9nQ3s&hl=en&sa=X&ei=-MFFVbDsKYGANrmEgZgE&ved=0CCQQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Smith, William. *The History of the Province of New-York, Volume One*. Edited by

Michael G. Kammen. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972. Smith,

William. *The History of the Province of New-York, Volume Two*. Edited by

Michael G. Kammen. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972. Valentine, D.T.

*Manuel of the Corporation of the City of New York*. New York: Chas W. Baker, 1857.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=Nws1AAAIAAJ&pg=PA466&lpg=PA466>

[&dq=giles+shelly+nassau&source=bl&ots=IXrwcfyTyE&sig=IjgGs-](https://books.google.com/books?id=Nws1AAAIAAJ&pg=PA466&lpg=PA466&dq=giles+shelly+nassau&source=bl&ots=IXrwcfyTyE&sig=IjgGs-)

3CLkP0XA1UOkJlnRFNS9s&hl=en&sa=X&ei=WMdBVbz\_EcyzggSIwYHwA

Q&ved=0CCcQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q&f=false.

Wilder, Craig Steven. *Ebony and Ivory: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013.