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Becca Stout, 20, left, and Cooper Wingert, 20, both Dickinson College students, discuss the wide variety of photographs and documents they accumulated for the Dickinson and Slavery exhibit opening Friday as part of the college's House Divided Project at 61 N. West St., Carlisle.

# 'Dickinson and Slavery'

Exhibit looks at college's complicated history with slavery

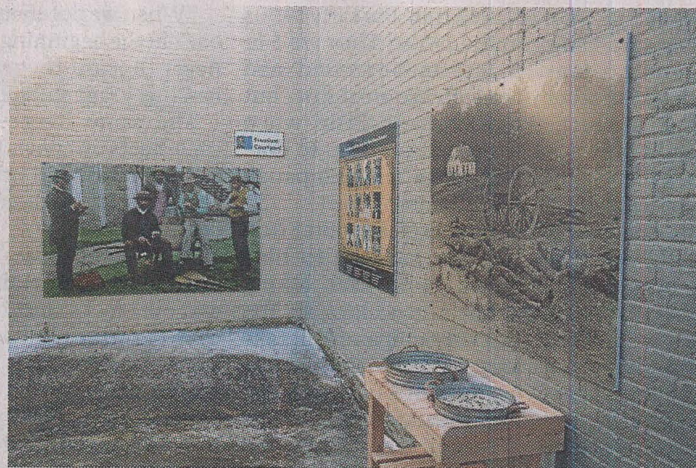
**TAMMIE GITT**  
The Sentinel

Dickinson College founder Benjamin Rush is celebrated as an educator and abolitionist, but student Cooper Wingert said there's more to the man that can be found by digging deeper into the biographies.

Rush owned at least one person for 12 to 15 years. The explanation was that Rush bought the man to keep him from being sold into slavery and the man worked off the investment over the next decade plus.

"With Rush, you find that he did some great things. He also did some things that we look today and it makes us shudder. When you peel back that layer, you see that nobody is perfect," Wingert said.

"Dickinson and Slavery," a new exhibit at Dickinson College, peels back those layers by



The Dickinson and Slavery exhibit will be opening Friday as part of the college's House Divided Project at 61 N. West St., Carlisle.

bringing to light the school's complicated history with slavery.

A public open house and exhibit launch will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday at the House Divided Studio, 61 N. West St. in Carlisle. The exhibit is slated to remain indefinitely and will be open to the public most Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to noon.

The genesis of the exhibit

came during Dickinson Professor of History Matthew Pinsker's "American Slavery" class during the fall 2018 semester in which Wingert, a junior, and senior Becca Stout were students. The two have remained with the project since then, discovering little-known connections between Dickinson College and the



# Exhibit

From A1

nation's slaveholding past.

One person, Richard McAllister, graduated from Dickinson College in 1840. There's a dry, perfunctory entry about him in the alumni record that doesn't touch on what the man became most famous for.

"It doesn't talk about that he was the most notorious fugitive slave commissioner in the country. He returned more people than anyone else during the Fugitive Slave Laws in the 1850s," Wingert said.

The exhibit starts with a section focused on the founders that attempts to raise awareness about some of the conflicts those men had. On one side of the display are familiar names like John Dickinson and Rush, who were known for their abolitionist views and yet owned slaves, Pinsker said.

The other side talks about lesser known figures including Thomas Cooper, a famous scientist who was anti-slavery but became a slaveholder and pro-slavery figure after taking a position as a president of a college in South Carolina.

Stout worked on a series of topics within the project starting with Cooper and moving on to uncovering the stories of the janitors in the post-Civil War era, like Henry Spradley, a former slave who escaped during the Civil War and fought in the Union Army. He was so beloved by the college community that the college even closed for a day in his honor when he died in 1897.

The exhibit moves on through the Civil War and its aftermath, and includes a portion dedicated to the Carlisle residents — some born as slaves and others born free — who were familiar figures on campus at the end of the 19th century.

One of those people, Noah Pinkney, was a former slave who served in the Union Army and was at Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox. He became a food vendor for students on the campus before serving them at a restaurant at his nearby home.

Information came from ledgers and letters, newspaper articles and archives, many of which were accessible online. Some stories would have remained hidden had it not been for

databases, Pinsker said. One such story came from a newspaper in Ohio that reported a near-lynching at Dickinson in the 1870s.

The Cumberland County Historical Society was also a partner in the project.

Uncovering the history offered insight into the world of Dickinson in the 19th century, Wingert said. Alumni who were students in the 1870s wrote recollections of the janitors 33 years after the fact, which indicates the importance of the role those men played in college life.

At the same time, there were serious realities including the story of Robert Young, who fought to get his son admitted to Dickinson, prompting a huge backlash, Winger said.

"While they are members of the community, there are certain spaces that are clearly off limits to them as well," he said.

Senior Sarah Aillon said it's important to realize that this tension-filled history stretches into the modern day, and is relevant in such things as naming buildings.

During the research, Stout said students found a memo from the early 1990s in which a college official offered his rationale for the names he proposed for 10 college buildings. In it, he said he saw no point in naming a building after the first black or Native American to attend the college or to name one after the first female professor.

"Given the heritage of this college, that leaves me only with other dead white men to choose among," the memo reads.

So one of the buildings was named after Cooper for his scientific accomplishments while not consider-

ing his pro-slavery view, Stout said.

"His scientific accomplishments were incredible while he was here, but he was only here for four years, so it wasn't even like he had a long span in history," she said.

Aillon said working on the exhibit prompted her to think more critically about what led them to act the way they did or believe the things they believed.

"When you approach situations like this in history, you have to approach it with a level of empathy and sympathy. You have to maybe not necessarily agree with what people did or their actions, but, with history, you have to understand why they did those things," she said.

Pinsker said the purpose of the exhibit is to get people to rethink what they thought they knew and to think about what to do with the knowledge they acquire, adding that people like Young, Spradley and Pinkney need to be commemorated in Carlisle.

"The next stage would be: How do we want to commemorate it? Do we want to change some names? Do we want to add some names? What does the community want to do?" Pinsker said.

Email Tammie at [tgitt@cumberlink.com](mailto:tgitt@cumberlink.com). Follow her on Twitter @TammieGitt.

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