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Introduction

Trinity College, founded in 1823, was formerly known as Washington College until 1845. Charles Sigourney was one of the first members of the Board of Trustees of Washington College. Specifically, he served as the first secretary. Sigourney has left behind a legacy in the state of Connecticut. He is known for being a diplomat, prosperous Hartford merchant, bank president, college trustee, as well as known to some extent for his marriage to Lydia Sigourney. All of these different roles brought him into contact with the systems of slavery, regardless of his personal stance on the topic of slavery and his non-ownership. He is a critical figure in the study of the history of Trinity's relationship to social, political, economic and cultural institutions of slavery. Sigourney is necessary to examine in the search to discover Trinity and Hartford's place in slavery's vast networks. While he did not directly own any enslaved individuals, as a founding member of the college, it is important to try to understand his beliefs and goals for the institution. He had a significant influence on the college during its formative years. Sigourney provides a window into Trinity College's ties to the capitalism of slavery. While he was not an owner of enslaved individuals, Sigourney was complicit in systems that benefitted off of slavery.

Lydia Sigourney – wife of Charles Sigourney

A significant part of Sigourney's life was spent with his wife, Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney. It is important to study Mr. Sigourney in light of her. While she was a self-proclaimed abolitionist, Mr. Sigourney's beliefs are not as inherently apparent. Lydia was

born in Norwich, Connecticut on September 1, 1791.¹ Her education began early in life. Lydia's father, Ezekiel Huntley was the hired man and gardener for Mrs. Daniel Lathrop, a childless woman who was in her seventies when Lydia was born.² Lathrop was well-to-do and introduced Lydia to the Wadsworths, which was the beginning of her connection to Hartford, Connecticut. In 1811, at the age of twenty, after spending some months in the best female seminaries of Hartford, Lydia and a friend, Nancy Maria Hyde, opened a school for young ladies in Norwich.³ Three short years later, Daniel Wadsworth invited her to head a school whose pupils were gathered from among the daughters of the first families of Hartford. Daniel Wadsworth later founded the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford.⁴ Lydia's career in education was promising, but she gave it up in 1819 to marry Charles Sigourney, a widower at the time with three small children.⁵

Lydia was a published writer at the beginning of her marriage, but sources suggest that her husband wished her to stop. She discontinued at least one work over the next decade and published several others anonymously.⁶ By the late 1820s, money had become an issue in the Sigourney family. Fetterley suggests this was in part due to their expensive establishment and because Lydia was providing the sole support for her elderly parents. She struggled between her desire to be a famous poet and expectations that she should be a dutiful wife. In 1833, Lydia published *Letters to Young Ladies, by A Lady* at her own

¹Judith Fetterley, *Provisions: A Reader from 19th Century American Women*, 105.

²Fetterley, 105.

³Fetterley, 106.

⁴John Lacy, "Sentimental Perhaps, but She Knew the 'Gift of Song'," *Hartford Courant*, December 15, 1991, Accessed May 9, 2019.

⁵Fetterley, 106.

⁶Fetterley, 106.

expense and with the copyright taken out in her maiden name, Huntley.⁷ Her authorial identity was quickly “discovered” and from then on she abandoned anonymity and openly pursued a career in literature, without regard to her husband’s reservations.⁸ Their limited income turned out to be a saving grace that gave Lydia agency to return to writing. According to Fetterley, Lydia was characterized by a sharp business sense, and became extraordinarily successful in terms of money, fame, and critical opinion.

Lydia and Charles Sigourney had an average sized family. When they married in 1819, Charles was a widower with three small children. Lydia bore five children, three of whom died at birth.⁹ Of the two who lived past infancy, only her daughter Mary survived her. Her son, Andrew, died of tuberculosis in 1850, and his death and dying were memorialized in her book, *The Faded Hope* (1853).¹⁰ This is noteworthy because when Charles died of apoplexy in 1854, no volume was ever written to memorialize his life or death. It is peculiar that a writer best known for her responsiveness to the phenomena of death, who was often willing to write memorial verses for strangers, never wrote a line to note the death of her own husband. Alternatively, his death may have been too painful for her to document, but research does not suggest that. Nonetheless, Lydia made poetry an acceptable and profitable profession for women which was no small feat at the time. She was an intensely public figure; Sigourney street in Hartford was named after her.¹¹ This information is significant in order to begin to understand the dynamic in the Sigourney household. Lydia was a very accomplished woman. According to sources, Charles was a

⁷ Fetterley, 107.

⁸ Fetterley, 107.

⁹ Fetterley, 107.

¹⁰ Fetterley, 107.

¹¹ “Sentimental Perhaps, but She Knew the ‘Gift of Song’.”

dour-looking and stodgy, but learned Hartford businessman.¹² It is possible that Charles was threatened by his wife's success, which is why he tried to force her to stop writing. Both Sigourneys were influential figures in the Hartford society.

Lydia Sigourney provides an intimate lens into Charles Sigourney's family life. It is most fascinating that she was a friend of and mentor to famous abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Lydia was a role model for young women who largely paved the way for women to have careers in writing. Her marriage to Charles Sigourney was described by Judith Fetterley in *Provisions: A Reader from 19th-century American Women*, as "safe." Fetterley writes:

Charles Sigourney, then a prosperous Hartford merchant and later a bank president, college trustee, and church warden, certainly fit the description of a "good" match and, when the gardener's daughter found herself established as mistress of a fine new house built by her husband from his own plans, she might well have felt that she was indeed Mrs. Lathrop's child.¹³

Lydia also had a relationship with John Greenleaf Whittier. She encouraged Whittier, who was torn between careers in politics and writing to do both.¹⁴ When Lydia died in her home in 1865, the church bells in the city tolled for one hour in her honor. Whittier wrote the verse for her memorial at Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford: "She sang alone ere womanhood had known the gift of song which fills the air to day. Tender and sweet music all her own may fitly linger where she knelt to pray."¹⁵

A marriage to Sigourney may very well have led to wealth and social status, but sources suggest that Lydia was unhappy in her marriage. Her writing was discontinued for a

¹² Norma Buchanan, "Lydia Sigourney was a famous poet – but was she a good poet?" *Hartford Courant*, April 21, 2019, Accessed May 8, 2019.

¹³ Fetterley, 106.

¹⁴ "Sentimental Perhaps, but She Knew the 'Gift of Song'."

¹⁵ "Sentimental Perhaps, but She Knew the 'Gift of Song'."

lengthy period of time, and she had three miscarriages as well as witnessed the untimely death of one of her children. Charles was busy with his roles in Hartford: founding a college, being a diplomat, and being a banker. It is likely that he expected Lydia to fulfill the traditional female role of the time period in the household by quitting writing to focus on raising their family. Lydia did not want to accept this. An important figure joined the Sigourney household that allowed Lydia to have more flexibility.

Census data was collected on the Sigourney family over a number of decades. In 1790, there was one free white male over sixteen years old, one free white male under sixteen years old, four white females, and zero other free people or slaves in the Charles Sigourney data.¹⁶ The next census was in 1820. The data collected lists one free white male under ten, one free white male ten through fifteen, two free white males sixteen through twenty-five, one free white male twenty-six through forty-four, two free white females under ten, three free white females sixteen through twenty-five, two free white females sixteen through forty-four, one person engaged in agriculture, two people engaged in commerce, four free white people over twenty-five, twelve total free white people, and twelve total people white, slaves, colored, and other.¹⁷ There is a noticeable growth in the Sigourney household because this census data was collected after Charles and Lydia's marriage in 1819. In 1840, the census marked one free colored person in the Sigourney household.¹⁸ This sheds light on the fact that Sigourney had a free person of color in his household at the same time

¹⁶ Charles Sigourney, 1790 United States Census, Hartford County, digital image, Ancestry Library, accessed February 20, 2019.

¹⁷ Charles Sigourney, 1820 United States Census, Hartford County, digital image, Ancestry Library, accessed February 20, 2019.

¹⁸ Charles Sigourney, 1840 United States Census, Hartford County, digital image, Ancestry Library, accessed February 20, 2019.

that he was working on the board of Washington College. It is important to question what Sigourney's relationship with this individual was like, and how that may have informed his opinions on slavery. Slavery in Connecticut dates back to the mid-1600s. In 1784, Connecticut passed an act of Gradual Abolition.¹⁹ The act stated that, "children born into slavery after March 1, 1784 would be freed by the time they turned 25."²⁰ As a result, slavery was practiced in Connecticut until 1848. It is unclear from the census why Sigourney decided to bring a free person of color into his household at this time, or what their exact role may have been. A decade later during the 1850 census, this person is identified as a fifty-four-year-old Black woman named Ann Prince.²¹ This makes it likely that Ann Prince was born in 1796 and may have served some time as a slave until she turned twenty-five. It is difficult to determine whether or not Ann Prince would have been an enslaved individual in the Sigourney household if the Gradual Abolition act had not been passed. The 1850 census also lists Charles, Lydia, their two children Mary and Andrew, and two of Charles' three children from his first marriage, Mary and Eliza, as members of the household.

Ann Prince

Ann Prince joined the Sigourney household mid-nineteenth century. She was a free Black woman. Lydia references her fondly in her book, *Letters of Life*, as an earnest helper, fair and dear to memory. Prince was small but had great energy and strength: "Her hands seemed always ready for action, and, by a spirit of order and systematic arrangement, she

¹⁹ "Connecticut Abolitionists," National Park Service, August 18, 2017, Accessed May 8, 2019.

²⁰ "Connecticut Abolitionists."

²¹ Charles Sigourney, 1850 United States Census, Hartford County, digital image, Ancestry Library, accessed February 20, 2019.

accomplished what was required in our large family without confusion or neglect.”²²

According to Lydia, Prince respected those who employed and provided for her, and because she was brought up as an enslaved individual until the age of eighteen, would have gladly referred to Lydia with the title, “Mistress,” had Lydia not refused it.²³ Lydia introduced Prince to the Episcopal Church and helped her to be accepted by local clergymen. Lydia stood as her sponsor in the baptismal rite, after which she was duly confirmed and partook in communion.²⁴ Lydia described her relationship with Prince to be “excellent.” She was in awe of Prince’s cooking and “operations in the laundry room,” as well as impressed by Prince’s apparent wanting to please Lydia. However, Lydia did highlight a number of Prince’s faults and referred to her at one point as a “devoted creature.”²⁵ This is troubling, racist rhetoric. Prince was of service to Lydia for twenty-five years, well into her widowhood. As Lydia described it, Prince was there for as long as age and disease permitted her to make any effort. Prince eventually died from cancer. Nonetheless, Lydia wrote, “Her color was no obstacle to my grateful attachment. She was to me as my own flesh and blood.”²⁶

There is no record of Charles interacting with Prince, or of his relationship with her. Inferences can be made as to what their relationship was like because of what is known about his relationship with Lydia. He was likely happy to have his household cared for, the traditional role of a woman during that time. However, Prince’s presence in the Sigourney house allowed Lydia more time for her writing – something that Sigourney did not want her to do. Lydia seems well intentioned in her account of Prince; however, the fact remains that

²² Lydia Howard Sigourney, *Letters of Life* 1866, 305.

²³ Lydia Howard Sigourney, 305.

²⁴ Lydia Howard Sigourney, 306.

²⁵ Lydia Howard Sigourney, 307.

²⁶ Lydia Howard Sigourney, 308.

Lydia and Prince were of different races and classes. Even if the Sigourneys did not own Prince, they certainly kept her in service most of her life. Prince relied on the Sigourneys for her home, food, and income. The Sigourneys relied on Prince to keep their household running and care for Lydia into her older age. Fascinatingly, Lydia was one year younger than Prince. It is possible that the women felt a sense of camaraderie despite their blatant differences in society.

Domestic workers in the nineteenth century were divided into two categories: “help” and “servant.” The term “help” was primarily applied to women in domestic service and indicated a joint work situation where the help was hired to assist an employer with the household tasks, often working on a part-time basis.²⁷ Christine A. Spencer wrote, *An Analysis of the Domestic Workers’ Place in the Late Nineteenth Century Household*, and found that “a familiarity between the employer’s and employee’s families was expected and common.”²⁸ Unlike servants, help was allowed to eat with the employer’s family and a shared atmosphere was common. Social changes began to convert help into servants in urban areas and among the upper classes in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to Spencer, “servants ‘were generally single women who lived in their employers’ homes, always on call and subject to their mistress’ whims...’”²⁹ Help allowed upper class, educated women to devote themselves to church, charitable work, and even a social life, while another person performed household tasks for them in order to free their time for other pursuits.³⁰

This is precisely what Prince did for Lydia. Spencer acknowledges that Black people

²⁷ Christine A. Spencer, *An Analysis of the Domestic Worker’s Place in the Late Nineteenth Century Household*, University of Pennsylvania, 1994, 4.

²⁸ Spencer, 4.

²⁹ Spencer, 5.

³⁰ Spencer, 5.

accounted for only a small number of domestic employees in the North but the post-Civil War immigration of free Black people into the north resulted in an increase of Black people employed as domestic servants.³¹ This is entirely likely how Ann Prince came to be a part of the Sigourney household. While Lydia and Prince had a seemingly amicable relationship, it was Prince's presence in the Sigourney household that gave Lydia the agency to pursue her literary and abolitionist endeavors.

Charles Sigourney as a diplomat

Sigourney prepared himself for a role in higher education through his diplomatic network. Sigourney sought out guidance for starting a college from Thomas Jefferson. On July 20th, 1824, Sigourney wrote to Jefferson. In a roundabout way, Sigourney introduced the recent act of incorporation in Connecticut for a new college institution: Washington College. In the letter it becomes clear that Sigourney viewed Jefferson's University of Virginia as a highly respectable institution. The purpose of Sigourney writing to Jefferson was for advice on how to make Washington College a similar success. First, he discussed the economic funding. Sigourney referenced funds to an amount slightly over fifty thousand dollars by individual donations and otherwise that were "procured," in order to break ground for the college.³² He insisted that while the funds for Washington College may seem small for, "an Institution aiming to be respectable,"³³ they would be sufficient to place Washington amongst the rankings of other New England universities. This indicates that a large amount of wealth and funding were generally considered to be behind New England universities.

³¹ Spencer, 6.

³² Charles Sigourney to Thomas Jefferson, 20 July 1824, Jefferson papers, *Founders Online*.

³³ Charles Sigourney to Thomas Jefferson.

Sigourney addresses that Trinity may have a smaller amount of funding than other institutions being founded at that time, but he does not believe this should hinder the college's ability to be respectable. New England higher education has a reputation of being elite, and Sigourney wanted Trinity to rank among other elite higher education institutions. Sigourney argued that Jefferson's time spent reading this letter for a small college quite different than his own was not a waste. His letter then shifted to raise the question of educational practices for the youth of their respective schools. Sigourney wrote:

We desire to profit by learning all we can from the wisdom of others, & from those who possess experience which we have not yet attained... on the subject of a course of studies internal regulations, discipline, and system of government generally, -- I would ask of you the favour to send me whatever may have appeared in print on any, or all of these subjects, or which may be published by the time the University may be opened for the reception of students.³⁴

Sigourney wanted to base course studies, discipline actions, and administration systems off of University of Virginia and therefore wanted otherwise private documents to be made available to him. Further, according to Sigourney, there was an unusual striving after improvement in literary education in the United States at this time.³⁵ He wanted Jefferson's help to identify how to bring a European education to his new college. Sigourney's letter was both flattery and a request for advice from Jefferson that depicts him using his diplomatic connections to gain advantages for Washington College.

The makeup of the Trinity College student body during its early years reflects the ideals of some of the Board of Trustees. Trinity, known as Washington College at the time, had a presence of students from the south that set it apart from other similar institutions like

³⁴ Charles Sigourney to Thomas Jefferson.

³⁵ Charles Sigourney to Thomas Jefferson.

Middlebury, Williams, or Amherst.³⁶ In *The History of Trinity College: Volume One*, Glenn Weaver discussed that many southerners considered Washington College a “safe haven” from abolitionist influence. He claimed:

At Washington College, slavery was not a topic of polite conversation, and the single Negro student who was enrolled during the early decades never associated with his fellows, receiving instruction in the evening at the professors’ homes and never appearing either at chapel or on any public occasion. In such an atmosphere, the young southerner could feel pretty much at home, and could even tolerate the inefficiency of “Professor Jim” and the persistence of the Puritan Sabbath to which the College was obliged to accommodate itself even to the extent of inscribing “No Admittance on Sundays” upon the college gates.³⁷

This type of rhetoric against diversity and racist atmosphere were flourishing during Charles Sigourney’s leadership at Trinity College. This leads to the point that while Charles Sigourney did not own any enslaved individuals himself, he was complicit in the systems that benefitted off of slavery. Whether passively or aggressively, Sigourney allowed for these kind of thought processes to fester at Trinity College during its formative years. In fact, Sigourney and the other Board of Trustees members fostered this environment by admitting these students and effectively segregating the one student of color from classes with the other white students at that time. It is also important to note that the European education that Sigourney sought to bring to Trinity is a largely whitewashed educational system. Research suggests that diversity was not one of Sigourney’s goals for Trinity College.

Jefferson responded to Sigourney the following month. The tone of Jefferson’s letter in return suggests that Jefferson was pleased to be of support to the diplomat, Sigourney. His

³⁶ Glenn Weaver, *The History of Trinity College: Volume One*, (Trinity College Press, Hartford CT, 1967). 50.

³⁷ Weaver, 50.

response letter to Sigourney was written on August 15th, 1824. Jefferson described there to be nothing more he would rather see than a spirit of cordial fraternity cultivated among the various seminaries of the United States.³⁸ At Sigourney's request, he included the original report made by the commissioners of University of Virginia under the order of their legislature for reference. Jefferson humbly acknowledged his perceived shortcomings by writing, "Our's has not yet proceeded far enough to enable me to answer all your enquires."³⁹ He spends the rest of his letter expressing his ideologies, which are of great interest to Sigourney. The two men are of the same race and class and therefore find interest in each other's requests and networks.

One of the main points of Jefferson's response letter was to converse about his beliefs on education. Like Sigourney, Jefferson was an advocate of European instruction. He said, "We considered too that a country which is willing that it's science should be stationary, where it is, may employ it's own élèves; but if it wishes to advance, it must seek instructors from countries already in advance of them."⁴⁰ In analysis, it is useful to recognize that both men were basing their educational structure off of a European model. Jefferson acknowledges that men like him and Sigourney must put aside their "pride and prejudices" that bristle at the thought of employment of foreigners.⁴¹ He believes this is a price one must pay: "no good in life can be obtained pure and unmixed. we must take it as it is offered, alloyed always with some evil. and at what other price have we obtained all our arts and

³⁸ Thomas Jefferson to Charles Sigourney, 15 August 1824, Jefferson papers, *Founders Online*.

³⁹ Thomas Jefferson to Charles Sigourney.

⁴⁰ Thomas Jefferson to Charles Sigourney.

⁴¹ Thomas Jefferson to Charles Sigourney.

science?”⁴² While Jefferson does not address it in his letters, he is an owner of enslaved individuals, and consequently anti-abolitionist. This is important to recall in Sigourney’s correspondences and with the rhetoric of *The History of Trinity College: Volume One*. After these comments, Jefferson explains the roles of his professors within their respective departments. Based off of Jefferson’s response to Sigourney, it seems like he was pleased to provide guidance. His last line says, “with every wish therefore for the prosperity of your undertaking, be pleased to accept the assurance of my great esteem and respectful consideration.”⁴³

Charles Sigourney as a banker

Sigourney made a portion of his wealth from his position as president at the Phoenix National Bank. Hartford has had many notable structures over the years, dating back to the seventeenth century. The first marble building in Hartford was the Phoenix National Bank in 1817.⁴⁴ The block of Main Street across from the Old State House has been home to a number of the city’s most important buildings. Phoenix National Bank had a prominent place among them for almost 150 years.⁴⁵ Between 1815 and 1964, there were four different versions of the bank that reflected the growth and changing architecture over the years. The Phoenix National Bank was incorporated in 1814 and reorganized as the Phoenix National Bank in 1865.⁴⁶ It was nicknamed the “Episcopal Bank” because it was the first bank in Hartford not controlled by Congregationalists. The bank erected its first building in 1815 on

⁴² Thomas Jefferson to Charles Sigourney.

⁴³ Thomas Jefferson to Charles Sigourney.

⁴⁴ Daniel Sterner, *Vanished Downtown Hartford*. Arcadia Publishing, 2013.

⁴⁵ Sterner.

⁴⁶ Sterner.

land donated by Thomas Olcott, an original director of the bank, and his two unmarried sisters.⁴⁷ As stated, it was Hartford's first marble structure, and it had a classical-inspired design that reflected the popularity of the Federal style of architecture. A figure of the phoenix bird, first carved in wood, and later in stone, surmounted the building's façade.⁴⁸ This was the only Phoenix National Bank structure that Sigourney knew, as he died in 1854. However, the bank continued to grow after Sigourney's passing. The first Phoenix National Bank was replaced by a new one in 1873-74.⁴⁹ By 1905, the bank required larger quarters. The old building was expanded with a new façade of five stories and a rear addition. The new entrance was moved to street level, in keeping with the times and the demand for greater accessibility: "Modern banking methods require that the bank shall be closer to the people, on a grade with the street, so that people can do business quickly and get out."⁵⁰ By the 1920s, the Phoenix National Bank was again in need of additional space. The fourth and final Phoenix National Bank Building was a nine-story structure built in 1923-24.⁵¹

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, corporate governance lapses were reported to stockholders and not to government regulators. There were few government regulators at the time. In 1801, a former cashier blew the whistle on a competitor bank by publishing a two-page open letter to stockholders showing that the directors had borrowed on shaky security about seven-eighths of the bank's \$400,000 capital, and that the intrinsic value of the bank's stock was about 50% of par.⁵² Over thirty years later, Phoenix National

⁴⁷ Sterner.

⁴⁸ Sterner.

⁴⁹ Sterner.

⁵⁰ Sterner.

⁵¹ Sterner.

⁵² Robert E. Wright and Richard Sylla, *Origins of Shareholder Advocacy*, 240.

Bank president, Charles Sigourney, warned stockholders that his cashier was untrustworthy. The cashier, Mr. Beach, was unable to steal from the bank due to Sigourney's diligent monitoring. He engineered a takeover of the presidency by duping stockholders out of their proxies. Once in control of the bank, Sigourney warned, Beach would make large, risky loans to himself and his family to finance their mercantile and land speculations.⁵³ He is quoted in *Origins of Shareholder Advocacy* for a famous statement he made while Phoenix National Bank president: "Every instance, without exception, which has yet occurred, of a bankrupt Bank has grown out of the overweening confidence of stockholders in some one individual."⁵⁴ This phrase is remembered for its astute timeless quality. Sigourney was a banker at the same time that he was on the board of Washington College. His grounded, rational decision making at Phoenix National Bank must have carried over well to his responsibilities as part of the board. His wealth management skills and reputation throughout the city of Hartford were also undoubtedly important parts of his election to the Board of Trustees. His position at the bank is another example of Sigourney being complicit in systems that benefitted off of slavery.

Charles Sigourney as a philanthropist

In one of Sigourney's notable correspondences with slave owner and founder of the University of Virginia, President Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson responded to a postscript. Sigourney sent Jefferson "the last Report of the Directors of the Deaf & Dumb Asylum," because he thought it would interest him. Jefferson responded, "I thank you for the report on

⁵³ Wright and Sylla, 240.

⁵⁴ Wright and Sylla 245.

the deaf and dumb. Nothing can interest more the feelings of benevolence.”⁵⁵ This matter of shared interest between the two men led to the examination of Sigourney’s relationship to the Deaf and Dumb Asylum to identify how he was involved in philanthropy.

In study of Sigourney as a Board of Trustees member of Washington College, it is relevant to study another board that he was a member of: The Deaf and Dumb Asylum. Sigourney’s role on multiple boards speaks to his professional experience. It is also at The Deaf and Dumb Asylum that Sigourney met his wife Lydia. Lydia gave up her school to marry Charles in 1819, while he was serving on the board of directors.⁵⁶ Lydia Sigourney was a warm-hearted human being, interested in the welfare of young students, involved in numerous charities, and generous in the use of her literary gifts.⁵⁷ While Charles and Lydia had opposing views on Lydia’s writing and possibly enslaved individuals, philanthropy may have been a common ground for the Sigourneys.

In a *Hartford Courant* newspaper column Sigourney is recognized for his involvement with the Connecticut Asylum. Under a section headlined “Public Acts,” an act to incorporate the Connecticut Asylum for the education and instruction of “DEAF and Dumb Persons” is enacted in May of 1816. According to the article, the Governor, Council, and House Representatives in General Court passed the act. Sigourney is one of dozens of men and their associates who formed the *Connecticut Asylum for the education and instruction of Deaf and Dumb persons*.⁵⁸ As such, these men and their successors, “shall be capable of suing, and being sued, pleading, and being impleaded, in all suits of what nature

⁵⁵ Thomas Jefferson to Charles Sigourney.

⁵⁶Edna Edith Sayers and Diana Gates, "Lydia Huntley Sigourney and the Beginnings of American Deaf Education in Hartford: It Takes a Village," *Sign Language Studies* 8, no. 4 (2008), 385.

⁵⁷ “Sentimental Perhaps, but She Knew the ‘Gift of Song’.”

⁵⁸ "PUBLIC ACTS." *Connecticut Courant (1791-1837)*, 11 Jun 1816.

soever [sic], may have a common seal and may alter the same at pleasure, and may also purchase, receive, hold and convey, any estate real or personal, the annual income of which shall not exceed five thousand dollars.”⁵⁹ Sigourney and eight other men selected a “well-educated but perplexingly unemployed Hartford resident,” Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, to travel to Europe to study deaf education.⁶⁰ Sigourney’s involvement in the Deaf and Dumb Asylum was approximately seven years before his involvement in the Washington College Board of Trustees. This provides contextual information on Sigourney’s interest in education and philanthropy that may have directed him down the path towards being involved in higher education. Certainly, his philanthropic endeavors influenced the way he made decisions.

Sigourney at Trinity College

Sigourney is in the founding charter of Washington College in 1824. When comparing the list of Board Members of The Deaf and Dumb Asylum and the members in the founding charter, there appear to be no overlapping members besides Sigourney. The Washington Charter states that great advantages would accrue to the state, as well as to the general interests of literature and science, by establishing within the state another collegiate institution.⁶¹ As part of the assembly, Sigourney was, “constituted a body politic and corporate for ever, by the name of the “Trustees of Washington College.”⁶² The source describes the responsibilities that trustees hold within the college. One of the major responsibilities of the Board of Trustees is managing the wealth of Trinity College. The

⁵⁹ "PUBLIC ACTS."

⁶⁰ Sayers and Gates, 380.

⁶¹ Trinity College, "Charter of Washington College, 1824" (1824). Trinity College Bulletins and Catalogues.

⁶² "Charter of Washington College, 1824."

document states, “the said Trustees and their successors shall for ever hereafter have full power and authority to direct and manage the Funds for the benefit of the Institution.”⁶³

Sigourney’s knowledge of running Phoenix Bank is a critical skill to the way that he contributed to the college’s board. Other responsibilities are listed on the Washington Charter as:

To prescribe and direct the course of study, and the discipline to be observed in the said College; and also to elect from their own number or otherwise, a Board or Committee, to be called the Fellows of the College, to whom they may commit the superintendence of the course of study and discipline; and also to select and appoint a President of the said College, and such Professor or Professors, Tutor or Tutors, to assist the President in the government and education of the Students belonging to the said College, and such other officer or officers as to the said Trustees shall seem meet, all of whom shall hold their office during the pleasure of the Trustees.⁶⁴

Additionally, the trustees did not have the power to dismiss a President without a two thirds agreement, a written statement, and an opportunity for the President to defend their self.⁶⁵ It is not allowed for a professor, tutor, or other assistant officer to be eligible as a trustee. It can be assumed that Sigourney had a role in drafting this charter. The charter serves as the first governing body for the college. In that role, he must have had to draw on his experiences in other leadership roles in Hartford. Sigourney came into his position at Washington College with an expanse of knowledge and experience, and a vast network of connection in Hartford and beyond that shaped the way he contributed to the college.

Sigourney was the first secretary of the Board of Trustees. He notarized the first Statement of Washington College: “By the Board of Trustees, Charles Sigourney, Secretary,

⁶³ "Charter of Washington College, 1824."

⁶⁴ "Charter of Washington College, 1824."

⁶⁵ "Charter of Washington College, 1824."

Hartford, Aug. 10, 1824.”⁶⁶ The Statement of Washington College announces that the institution will be ready for the reception of students on September 23, 1824. It details professors appointed by the Board of Trustees and courses that will be offered in each term and year of college. The document written by Sigourney is specific about money:

To prevent dissipation and extravagance, it is required that no money shall be placed in the hands of students by their parents or guardians. The funds designated for their use are to be lodged in the hands of the College Bursar, who will apply them, with a parental discretion, to the payment of their necessary expenses, and no other expenses will be allowed.⁶⁷

Sigourney continues to provide further preventive measures to extravagance and aims to promote a proper “*esprit du corps*” and responsibility of character at the college through uniform dress. This document provides an insight as to how Sigourney and the other Board of Trustees members sought to have Washington College appear from the outside, and amongst its other peer institutions. Wealth and education are focuses of the statement. Both are characteristics that help to place Trinity in the vast networks of slavery. Much of the wealth in the United States in the nineteenth century was from slavery or institutions and organizations that relied on systems of slavery in order to make their own profits. It takes a large amount of funding to start a college, and it must be considered that some of that money or the people who contributed money were in one way or another connected to slavery.

Conclusion

⁶⁶ Trinity College, "Statement of Washington College, 1824" (1824). Trinity College Bulletins and Catalogues. 7.

⁶⁷ "Statement of Washington College, 1824," 6.

Charles Sigourney left behind a legacy in Hartford, Connecticut. His name will forever be recognized in the capital and at Trinity. He is known for being a diplomat, prosperous Hartford merchant, bank president, and college trustee. A large part of his life and the information that was found about him came from his marriage to the famous author, Lydia Sigourney. Lydia shaped the way that Charles lived his life. Lydia's views on slavery were clear – she was an abolitionist. Charles' views were not as apparent, but inferences can be made based off of his relationship with Lydia, the presence of a free Black woman in his household, and some of his diplomatic correspondences. Charles was not as readily prepared to openly denounce slavery as his wife was. While he was not an owner of enslaved individuals, Sigourney was complicit in systems that benefitted off of slavery.

In conclusion, there are certain key points to Sigourney's behavior that should be considered. Sigourney was the president of the Phoenix National Bank. He made a portion of his wealth in this position and developed rational decision making, wealth management skills, and a respected reputation throughout the city of Hartford that were undoubtedly important parts of his election to the Board of Trustees. These skills must have carried over well to his responsibilities as part of the board. Banks in the nineteenth century provided money to institutions that were involved in the systems of slavery. By association, Sigourney was doing so as well. Sigourney's philanthropic endeavors are largely tied to The Deaf and Dumb Asylum in Hartford. It is at this institution that he met his wife, Lydia. Sigourney was the only man on both the Board of Trustees of Washington College, and the board of The Deaf and Dumb Asylum. Sigourney's role on multiple boards speaks to his professional experience. In his diplomatic network, Sigourney corresponded with slave owner and President of the University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson. The men bonded over their shared

interests in The Deaf and Dumb Asylum and European instruction. Sigourney wanted to base course studies, discipline actions, and administration systems off of University of Virginia. It is imperative to recognize that Sigourney was looking to employ the practices, values and beliefs of an anti-abolitionist man at Trinity College during its formative years.

Finally, Sigourney's role on the Board of Trustees was impactful to Trinity College. He served as the first secretary and worked with the other Board of Trustees members to shape Trinity College into the institution that it is today. In an attempt to understand the history of Trinity College and its place among the vast networks of slavery, studying figures like Charles Sigourney is important. He is a critical figure, especially in the study of the history of the college's relationship to social, political, economic and cultural institutions of slavery. While Sigourney did not directly own any enslaved individuals, as a founding member of the college, it is important to try to understand his beliefs and goals for the institution. He fostered many of the ideals that are still present on campus today. In order for future generations of Trinity students to understand the history of the college, it must be recognized that Sigourney was complicit in systems that benefitted off of slavery.

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