

# Digital Cultural Heritage in Philadelphia



by Ryan Rasing

Mentor: Dr. Glen Muschio, Digital Media – Antoinette Westphal College



## James Oronoco Dexter

### Who was he?

James Oronoco Dexter was a manumitted slave who, after gaining his freedom, worked as a coachman for a wealthy Quaker family, the Pembertons. Living as a citizen of Philadelphia during the 1700s, James Dexter rented a house located on the grounds where the National Constitution Center now stands.

### What did he do?

Together with Absalom Jones, Cyrus Porter, William White, Doras Jennings and several others, James Dexter helped found the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, a church still active today. Dexter himself is known to have hosted a number of meetings for the church's establishment at his home in Philadelphia. Archaeological artifacts found at the house have provided clues as to what they ate, and what foods the Dexter family ate, and what possessions they owned.

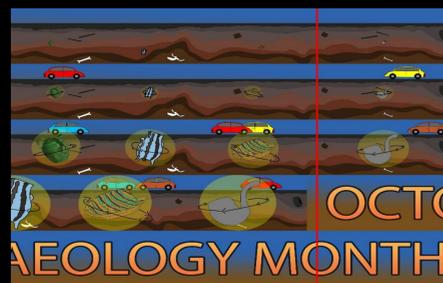
## Day of Archaeology

The Day of Archaeology is an international annual Internet event occurring every summer. People "working, studying, or volunteering in the archaeological world" share posts, i.e. text, photo, or video, describing archaeological projects they are working on that day.

This year, I submitted a post about my work on two sets of storyboards for two Public Service Announcements to be shown on the PECO Building Crown Lights in October.

(See Accompanying Slideshow for post and Storyboards)

### PECO PSA Storyboards



"October is Pennsylvania Archaeology Month"

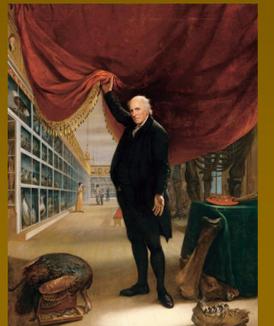


"Explore Philadelphia's Buried Past"

## Charles Willson Peale

### Who was he?

Charles Willson Peale was a painter, inventor, naturalist, and politician. He was well-known for his prowess in portrait painting and deep interest with natural history.



"The Artist in His Museum"

### What did he do?

While Peale may be best remembered as a painter, he is also honored for building his famous natural history and art museum, the Peale Museum, in Philadelphia. Within its walls were archaeological artifacts, mounted taxidermy specimens of animals, fossils, collections of insects and minerals, as well as portraits of notable figures (such as George Washington). Perhaps the most famous exhibit among Peale's collections was the bones of a mastodon. Moses Williams, as a slave of the Peale Family, was a worker in the Museum, managing a Physiognotrace, a device used to make silhouette portraits and eventually used the money he earned to buy his freedom at the age of 27.

## 3D Scanning and Photogrammetry at INHP's Archaeology Lab and ANS

This summer I went to the Archaeology Lab at Independence National Historical Park and the Academy of Natural Sciences with Dr. Glen Muschio and graduate student Jonnathan Mercado to scan and photograph archaeological artifacts and mounted bird specimens to be made into 3D models. During both trips, I recorded data on each selected object, logging their names, ID numbers, and completed scanning and photograph times.

Talking About Ceramic Archaeological Artifacts with Jed Levin, Chief Historian INHP



Photographing the Specimens at ANS

3D Scanning and Photogrammetry at INHP



Recording Names and IDs of Birds at ANS



## Looking Ahead: Applications with Serious Gaming

After researching the lives of James Oronoco Dexter and Charles Willson Peale this summer, I intend to pursue the creation of a draft for an educational serious game, teaching students and curious minds of all ages about the life of the people of Philadelphia during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Players will use problem-solving skills to find solutions to realistic obstacles that are either character-based (conversational segments with individuals found in the game) or non-character-based (segments involving objects, places, etc.). During gameplay, players will also encounter historical individuals like Absalom Jones, Rembrandt Peale, Benjamin Rush, Richard Allen, as well as Dexter and Peale themselves.



## Research Conducted at PAFA



At the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts with Dr. Muschio and graduate student Jonnathan Mercado, I observed and photographed paintings by the Peale Family. Painting styles observed will be used as references for backgrounds in dioramas featuring 3D models of the birds we collected at ANS. The digital dioramas will be used in an Augmented Reality treatment of the Peale Museum.

## References

1. Peale, Charles Willson. *The Artist in His Museum*. 1822. Oil on Canvas. Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
2. Douglas, William. *Annals of the First African Church*. Philadelphia, King & Baird, printers, 1862. PDF e-book.
3. Sacco, E. (1996), *Racial Theory, Museum Practice: The Colored World of Charles Willson Peale*. *Museum Anthropology*, 20: 25–32. doi: 10.1525/mua.1996.20.2.25
4. Otter, Samuel. *Philadelphia stories: America's literature of race and freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010
5. Nash, Gary B. *Forging freedom: the formation of Philadelphia's Black community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003, 1988.

## Acknowledgements

Jed Levin, Chief Historian and archaeologist, Independence National Historical Park  
Dr. Patrice Jeppson, Cheyney University and West Chester University  
Dr. Nate Rice, Manager Ornithology Collection, ANS