

# **Rights and Responsibilities: History of the Anatomical Preparations of the Pennsylvania Hospital Anatomical and Pathological Museum**

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This project is aimed to show the [“Rights and Responsibilities”](#) of the doctors at the [Pennsylvania Hospital](#) to obtain anatomical preparations. The responsibility is collect preparations of the human body and its parts in order for students training to become doctors can have everything at their disposal. Two of the most significant collections gathered by the Pennsylvania Hospital are those of Dr. John Fothergill and Dr. Abraham Chovet. The doctors and board of the Pennsylvania Hospital sought after and took on the responsibility of obtaining their collections to aid in the study of medicine for students.

*Please note: the Fothergill Collection is still held by the Historic Collections. The Chovet collection is not, but the correspondence around the collection is located in the Archives.*

## *The Fothergill Collection*

[Dr. John Fothergill](#) was a long-time contributor and friend of the Pennsylvania Hospital. His contributions have been pivotal to the creation of the Anatomical and Pathological Museum. It was Fothergill who recommended the museum be formed following his donation of the rare book, [“An Experimental History of the Materia Medica”](#) by William Lewis on July 27, 1762. Shortly after the founding of the Anatomical and Pathological Museum. Dr. Fothergill would return to donate one of the most prominent collections in the museum.

The collection he donated was of great interest to the Pennsylvania Hospital on November 8, 1762. In a letter accompanying the collection written by Fothergill, he states:

I need not tell thee that the Knowledge of Anatomy is of exceeding great use to Practitioners in Physic & Surgery & that the means of procuring Subjects with you are not easy, some pretty accurate anatomical Drawings about half as big as the Life have fallen into my hands & Which I purpose to send to your Hospital to be under the Care of the Physicians & to be by some of them explained to the Students or Pupils who may attend the Hospital. [3]

This collection of anatomical drawings and castings was an outstanding addition to the museum. This massive collection had two particularly significant castings. These two castings were preparations of a woman about nine months pregnant and the other being a dissection of that woman after her passing. Along with these pieces and the drawings, there were a number of organs and parts of the human body in different degrees of preservation.

## *The Chovet Collection*

Doctor Abraham Chovet was a very interesting man. [Dr. Thomas Morton](#) compiled one of the more in-depth examinations of who he was and what he contributed to the medical field. Dr. Chovet was given the position of Demonstrator of Anatomy in the United Company of Barbers and Surgeons in August of 1735. Morton's description of him described him as "always seemed to be hastening to a patient dangerously ill as fast as his aged limbs would permit, without looking to the right or left" (4). Chovet passed away on March 24, 1790. His collection following his death became a subject of great interest at the Pennsylvania Hospital shortly thereafter.

The collection of anatomical preparations of Dr. Chovet was first noted in a letter written by Benjamin Rush, William Shippen and a few other prominent doctors of the Pennsylvania Hospital on April 17, 1793. This letter [5] was an appeal to the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Hospital. These veteran doctors obtained a catalog of the collection and understood the beneficial nature that his collection could provide for students coming into the medical field. At a meeting of the Board of Managers, they addressed the letter brought forth by the doctors and responded:

[The Doctors are] recommending the Managers to buy the anatomical preparations, of the late Doctor Chovet; as likely to be useful, and ornamental to the Hospital; which offers, in behalf of the widow Abington, for a life annuity of thirty pounds sterling, to be secured to her by the Institution. [1]

The Board would choose to buy the collection on one condition. This would be that the charges of purchasing the collection be charged to the medical library's funds. The doctors agreed to this clause and the collection was purchased. The catalog of the anatomical preparations contained many unique and valuable specimens. Many of these specimens were preserved in excellent condition. Some of the most important pieces were those of a full man's body and the body of a woman "big with child", meaning pregnant.

### *The Significance of the Anatomical Preparations*

These two collections were some of the greatest contributions to the Anatomical and Pathological Museum at the Pennsylvania Hospital. Dr. Chovet and Dr. Fothergill provided anatomical preparations that the Hospital was desperately searching for. These anatomical specimens would provide students with some of the most valuable resources for education and if it had not been for the doctors and the work of the Board of Managers, they might not have been obtained. The doctors knew it was their responsibility to obtain them not only for the education of the students of the Hospital, but to the advancement of medicine that was being produced from the nation's first hospital, the Pennsylvania Hospital.

1] Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Hospital. *At a Special Meeting of the Managers, at the of Sam Coates*. April 17, 1793.

2] Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Hospital. July, 1762.

3] Fothergill, Dr. John. *Letter to the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Hospital Accompanying Casts and Diagrams for Teaching*. November 8, 1762.

4] Morton, Thomas. *The History of the Pennsylvania Hospital, 1751-1895*. Arno Press: New York. 1973. 360.

5] Rush, Benjamin, William Shippens, et. all. *Appeal to the Board of Managers*. April 16, 1793.