

# MÜTTER MUSEUM POSITION 2

**Request for Haverford College intern/January, 2018**

**Contact:**

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**Description of organization:**

“The Birthplace of American Medicine<sup>SM</sup>” (National Historic Landmark) and one of the oldest professional organization in the country, The College of Physicians of Philadelphia was founded in 1787 “to advance the science of medicine and to thereby lessen human misery.” Today, over 1,500 Fellows (elected members) continue to convene at the College and work towards better serving the public. Throughout its 200 year history, the College has provided a place for both medical professionals and the general public to learn about medicine as both a science and as an art. This historic spirit continues in our current mission: advancing the cause of health, while upholding the ideals and heritage of medicine. The College collections exist within the Mütter Museum and the Historical Medical Library.

The Mütter Museum is one of the oldest medical museums in the country and houses one of the greatest collections of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century medical teaching specimens. The collection is comprised of approximately 25,000 objects including human remains (over 1,200 biological wet specimens, 1,400 human bones, lithics, dried preparations and corrosions); 12,000+ medical instruments and apparatus, primarily dating between 1750 and the present; approximately 400 anatomical models in plaster, wax, paper- mâché and plastic; 1,700 historical medical illustrations in the form of lantern slides, photographs and prints; and memorabilia of outstanding physicians and scientists. Our collections provide a particular insight into human biology and the history of medicine and medical education. By placing medicine and science in a broader context, we encourage patrons to consider the cultural and social aspects of health and medicine.

Many of our collections reflect the interest and involvement of Philadelphia physicians in national and international affairs. In 1865, a messenger from the Surgeon General conveyed to the Museum a specimen connected with one of the nation’s most tragic events: a “piece of the thorax of J. Wilkes Booth, assassin of President Lincoln,” which had been removed during the autopsy conducted by Philadelphia surgeon Joseph Janvier Woodward. The Museum continues to receive medical

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instruments and specimens donated by Fellows, other physicians, and their families. Recent acquisitions include a 1949 Emerson iron lung, 670 brain specimens encased in acrylic, a large collection of 19th-century fracture splints, and a portion of Albert Einstein's brain (on microscope slides).

Established in 1788, the Historical Medical Library was Philadelphia's central medical library for over 150 years, serving its medical schools, hospitals, physicians and other health professionals. Today, it is an independent research library devoted to the history of medicine and serves hundreds of scholars, health professionals, students, and popular writers each year.

The College's collection of early printed books includes more than four hundred incunables, or editions printed before 1501. Among our more than 12,000 other rare books are the majority of editions that laid the basis of modern biomedicine—including one of the world's best copies of William Harvey's *De motu cordis* [On the Motion of the Heart] (1628) which first described the circulation of the blood, and two copies of *De humani corporis fabrica* [On the Fabric of the Human Body] (1543) by Andreas Vesalius, which was responsible for the later development of both modern anatomy and modern medical illustration. Among the Library's first acquisitions was the founding book of modern pathology, *De sedibus et causis morborum* [On the Seats and Causes of Disease] by Giambattista Morgagni, published in Venice in 1761; it was presented by the author to visiting Philadelphia physician John Morgan, who later donated it to the College.

In addition to its rare books and 19th- and 20th-century collections, the College Library is notable for its manuscripts and archives. Within this collection are the College's own archives, the archives of other Philadelphia medical institutions, and letters, case books, and student notebooks that document the personal life and professional practice of doctors in the Philadelphia region and around the world.

## **The Mütter Research Institute (MRI)**

The Mütter Museum recently created the Mütter Institute, the research arm of the museum. The Mütter Institute establishes collaborations and partnerships with other historic, scientific or medical institutions with the goal of utilizing our collections to conduct research relevant to 21<sup>st</sup>-century human health. The Institute also provides professional consultation to other institutions and researchers who seek to create museums or exhibits with a medical historical dimension or maintain their collections of pathological anatomy. Some of the research conducted through the Institute has been of immense epidemiological value: a sampling of cholera tissue from a fluid-preserved specimen from 1849 yielded viable DNA that enabled construction of the cholera genome from that time. This marks the first time that such a specimen, in any collection anywhere, has yielded DNA, and this discovery proved of immense value in understanding how disease mutates over time. Only historical collections such as ours can produce such insights.

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## **Proposed work for an intern:**

### **Primary task:**

In late 2016, a construction crew working at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Arch St. in Old City, Philadelphia unearthed human bones from a cemetery thought to have been relocated in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Mütter Research Institute (MRI) along with Rutgers Camden agreed to excavate the remains along with a team of volunteers as no government agency would claim responsibility. It became clear that most of the remains were never relocated. We have now recovered almost 500 individuals from the site making it one of the most important archaeological and historical discoveries in Philadelphia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The MRI is in need of an intern to assist with research on the cemetery site, the associated church (The First Baptist Church of Philadelphia), as well as the Philadelphia Archives and other potential sources to help us get a better understanding of the population represented in the cemetery. The student will have the rare chance to work on a new and historically significant archaeological project that will potentially shed new light on our understanding of the life and death of Philadelphia's early population.

### **Secondary task:**

The Director of the Mütter Research Institute needs help researching potential grants and other funding opportunities to help finance some of the ongoing MRI projects. The intern will help identify possible funding sources that might support our current projects include:

- Working with the Centers for Disease Control and the McMaster University Ancient DNA Centre, Canada, on identifying 19<sup>th</sup>-century pox virus material from Mütter Museum vaccination tools.
- The Arch St. Project
- Working with a team of researchers on a global inventory and analysis of anthropodermic books (bound in human skin).

### **Skills and experience offered:**

As mentioned above, the student will gain the chance to work on a new archaeological and historical project with deep and long-lasting impact in the academic community. Strong communication and writing skills are required. Applicants will be expected to conduct research independently, maintain research records effectively, and report to the project director and historian. The work requires a background in either history though related fields (economics, archaeology, computer science, biological/health sciences, etc.) are acceptable. The position

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offers an excellent training opportunity to conduct research in a variety of fields such as epidemiology, archaeology, public history, and the history of medicine in Philadelphia.

Students would need to be meticulous, careful with rare and fragile materials, and be well organized. An ability to express oneself well in writing is important.

## **Challenges for undergraduate students:**

This work requires maturity and self-discipline in attending to the meticulous requirements of working with old documents and objects: sensitivity to wear and tear, respect for the materials, and a sense of their value. The work may be semi-independent in that the student may be working out of sight of the historian, curator, or other museum staff but will need to be inquisitive and not hesitant about asking questions.

## **Rewards for interns:**

The College draws much interest each year from prospective interns, although few are chosen. The College places priority on providing students with meaningful and necessary work. It is important to the College to work with “feeder” institutions of higher learning to create more understanding of the importance of historic collections in scholarship and public understanding. Finally, the student will be credited in any publications or exhibits that follow from the work.

## **Conditions of work:**

Work takes place during normal weekday working hours (9am to 5pm), Monday-Friday. No evening or weekend work is anticipated. No travel is anticipated.

## **Supervising the student:**

The Curator (or her designee) will train and directly supervise the student for work conducted in the Historical Medical Library or Mütter Museum, as appropriate.