EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All artifacts courtesy, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA unless otherwise noted.

THE PORTRAIT

Sully, Thomas. Benjamin Rush, c. 1813, oil on canvas, 32 x 26 in. Acquired through gifts from Lockwood and Jacklyn Rush, the Rush Trust Endowment, the Helen E. Trout Memorial Fund, and the Friends of The Trout Gallery, 2009.

Rush, Benjamin. Cash Ledger Accounts for Dickinson College, 1783–1785. Record Group 1/1, Board of Trustees (1783–1833).

Eighteenth-Century Doctor


Rush, Benjamin. An Account of the Bilious Remitting Yellow Fever, as it Appeared in the City of Philadelphia, in the Year 1793. Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1794.


Rush, Benjamin. Six Introductory Lectures to Courses of Lectures Upon the Institutes and Practice of Medicine, Delivered in the University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: John Conrad & Co., 1801.


Patriot and Revolutionary


Educational Ideals and Dickinson College

Rush, Benjamin, to John Jay, 16 January 1785. Record Group 1/1, Board of Trustees (1783–1833).


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover: Thomas Sully, Benjamin Rush [detail].

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A Revolutionary Image

Thomas Sully’s Portrait of Benjamin Rush

OCTOBER 9, 2009–FEBRUARY 20, 2010

THE TROUT GALLERY / Dickinson College
During what were to be the last years of his life, Dr. Benjamin Rush (1746–1813) sat for a series of portraits by celebrated American painter Thomas Sully (1783–1872). In a version at The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College, Rush appears at his desk before an open notebook. In the background, a curtain is drawn to the left to reveal a view of the Pennsylvania Hospital (now part of the University of Pennsylvania), where Rush served as a physician. Surrounded by books, the doctor's reading glasses are pushed back on his head as he glances up in retrospect. Sully's portrait of Rush is one of the painter's finest, as it exhibits the bold brushstrokes of a painter well versed in the current English trends. Sully, known for his ability to capture the personality of his sitters, emphasizes Rush's likeness as well as the doctor's pursuits in both medicine and intellectual matters.

Benjamin Rush was portrayed by leading artists over the course of his life, including Charles Willson Peale, Edward Savage, and his cousin William Rush. In 1812, Dr. David Hosack wrote to Thomas Sully to commission a painting of Benjamin Rush. Dr. Hosack requested that it contain “the character of Dr. Rush” and also had “a distant view of your City Hospital [Philadelphia Hospital] … to which Dr. Rush’s labours have been so much and so long devoted.” While it is unclear if Dr. Hosack’s request relates directly to the painting at The Trout Gallery, such features are clearly represented in this work. It is also not certain where the painting was originally displayed, but it remained in the Rush family until it was acquired by The Trout Gallery in 2009.

Eighteenth-Century Doctor

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Benjamin Rush began his medical career as an apprentice to Dr. John Redman (1775), a pamphlet that called for American Independence. Rush suggested the title "Patriot and Revolutionarian" to Paine and found a printer for the controversial text. In 1776, Rush was elected to the Second Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence. Throughout his life, Rush promoted the principles of the American Revolution and advocated other social ideals, such as abolition and prison reform.

Dr. Rush was a pioneer of medicine; in other areas, however, he remained rooted in older traditions. Most notably, Rush was a strong proponent of bleeding, a practice based on the belief that disease was caused by an imbalance of bodily fluids, which could be restored by draining a portion of the patient's blood. Even as many physicians began questioning the efficacy of bleeding, Rush remained a strong supporter of the method.

Patriot and Revolutionarian

In the 1770s, Benjamin Rush joined the struggle for separation from England, participating in circles where he actively promoted American Independence. He worked closely with many Founding Fathers, such as John Adams, John Dickinson, and Thomas Jefferson. He also worked with Thomas Paine, author of Common Sense (1776), a pamphlet that called for American Independence. Rush suggested the title to Paine and found a printer for the controversial text. In 1776, Rush was elected to the Second Continental Congress and signed the Declaration of Independence. Throughout his life, Rush promoted the principles of the American Revolution and advocated other social ideals, such as abolition and prison reform.

Educational Ideals and Dickinson College

Benjamin Rush’s desire to serve the newly created United States of America inspired him to create a college that would teach “republican education,” instructing the American youth to become citizens who could support the newly formed government. Rush advocated the teaching of subjects he deemed useful for the cultivation of individuals, such as government, modern languages, science, and history. He also stressed the importance of religion in education, which he believed was a source of virtue that would enable citizens to function responsibly in a democracy. As Rush wrote to John Dickinson, the current governor of Pennsylvania and the man after whom Rush named the college, “May you long live to enjoy the fruits and triumphs of your benevolence in beholding your College—(the vehicle of your name to posterity)—the bulwark of liberty—religion and learning in Pennsylvania.”

Rush chose Carlisle as the site for the college for many reasons. Located in rural central Pennsylvania, an area far from the colleges on the eastern seaboard, Rush intended the college to teach republican ideals to those well removed from the political and urban centers. Secondly, the college was formed during the political feuds that followed the American Revolution. Whereas the Constitutionalists resisted intellectualism, believing that the rural populations could assist in government, the Republicans preferred that leadership roles go to the educated. Dr. Rush, who sided with the Republicans, aimed to promote education within his native Pennsylvania. Working with John Montgomery, Rush laid the foundation for what would become Dickinson College. Though the college suffered many setbacks during its early years, Rush continued to support it through his work as an influential trustee. He raised funds, aided in the creation of the curriculum, and donated numerous books and scientific instruments. He remained an ardent supporter of Dickinson College until his death in 1813.

Rush’s service to medicine, American Independence, and education were all essential endeavors in his life. His ideals and passions remain instilled in Dickinson College today. Through a useful education, the college continues to teach students to serve their communities. Thomas Sully’s painting, as well as the artifacts and documents that belonged to Benjamin Rush, reveal a studious man committed to a life of purpose.

Emma Bennett ’10