

(Rachel Creefield; Ebenezer Dickey, Jane Miller Dickey, and John Miller Dickey)

[Six Hollow-cut Silhouettes:] Of Rachel Creefield, an African-American Woman from Pennsylvania, and Members of Her Employer's Family, including John Miller Dickey, founder of Ashmun Institute (Lincoln University), circa 1825

[Oxford, Pennsylvania: circa 1825]

\$20,000

Six hollow-cut portrait bust silhouettes: of Rachel Creefield, an African-American servant, and members of her employer's family: Ebenezer and Jane Miller Dickey, two of their adolescent children, and their eldest son John Miller Dickey, who later founded Ashmun Institute, America's first degree-granting black university. All six are cut from off-white wove paper and backed with black paper (with a positive image of the bust transferred in brown onto the backing sheet). Each measures about 3½" x 4½". Modest toning, very good or better. All six have been removed from frames, of which two have accompanying autograph notes retained from the back sheet of the original frame.



An historically important suite of silhouettes from the Dickey family of Chester County, Pennsylvania, which includes one of the earliest known silhouette portraits of an African-American. We know of only one hollow-cut silhouette portrait that is earlier (circa 1803): of Moses Williams, who was born into slavery and later became the premier African American silhouette cutter at Peale's Museum in Philadelphia. This portrait of Rachel Creefield may very likely be the earliest known hollow-cut silhouette of an African American woman.

Creefield's employer Ebenezer Dickey (1771-1831), owned and operated a two hundred acre farm and was a prominent pastor of the Oxford Presbyterian Church. A former slave owner, in 1805 he married Jane Miller, daughter of John Miller, a Scottish emigrant who developed a successful marble business in Philadelphia. Miller was an early member of the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society and was involved in philanthropic enterprises with Benjamin Rush, Philadelphia's most prominent physician. Their marriage influenced Dickey's growing opposition to slavery and his decision to become a charter member of the local Colonization Society. Their son John Miller took his father's place as pastor at Oxford and was a great philanthropist throughout his life: in addition to founding Ashmun Institute in 1854, he established a private school for girls in Oxford in the 1830s.

Rachel Creefield is mentioned by name in several Dickey family letters and documents held at the Chester County Historical Society. According to John Bradley, in his history of the Dickey family, Ebenezer and Jane Miller Dickey had six children and a household that included an apprenticed male servant and "two black slave children, Phyllis and Hannah, whose births Ebenezer registered with Chester County authorities in 1807 and 1811. The Dickeys presumably owned the girls' mother as well." Whether this was true or not, the girls' mother must have been the Rachel Creefield referred to in several Dickey family letters, and in Ebenezer Dickey's will (proved in 1831):

"The remainder of my estate real & personal I appoint to be equally divided between all my above mentioned children. And I commend to them and my beloved wife Rachel Creefield who has been raised in the family with a request that they do always take a particular interest in her welfare." Jane Miller Dickey too, in her will from 1850, bequeathed \$250 to "Rachel Creefield".

Creefield is first mentioned in a June 9, 1817 letter from Ebenezer to his sister-in-law Margaret Miller, in which he described "one screech from Rachel" when their coach over-turned. Other letters dating from 1827 through 1850 refer to Rachel and Phillis. Jane Miller Dickey, who oversaw the formidable operation of the Oxford farm after Ebenezer's death in 1831, has a work account for "Rachel Creefield" recorded in her Account Book for 1831-47. Thomas Urbine, who edited the Account Book in 1977, notes that "This is the Rachel Creefield mentioned in Mr. Dickey's will."

The silhouettes of the five Dickey family members were almost certainly cut at the Peale Museum in Philadelphia (though only one, of their then youngest son, bears the "Peales Museum" embossed stamp). They most likely were cut at some point during the mid-1820s, when John Miller Dickey (born in 1806) was a young adult. The silhouette of Rachel Creefield is identified by a descendant of the Dickey family, Janet Cross Preston, in an accompanying autograph note retained from the back sheet of the original frame (in which she implies that Creefield was not a slave): "Rachel Creefield / Made at Peale Museum, Phila. / She lived with the Millers in Phil. Moved to Ebenezer Dickey's place at Oxford. Was paid in 1843 50¢ a week but was not charged for board and lodging. / From Jane Miller Dickey's account book – owned by J. C. Preston." The silhouette of Jane Miller Dickey also is identified by Preston on a retained back sheet.

A very scarce, possibly the earliest known hollow-cut silhouette of an African-American woman, together with those of her employer's family, including John Miller Dickey, documenting their rich and historically complex relations.

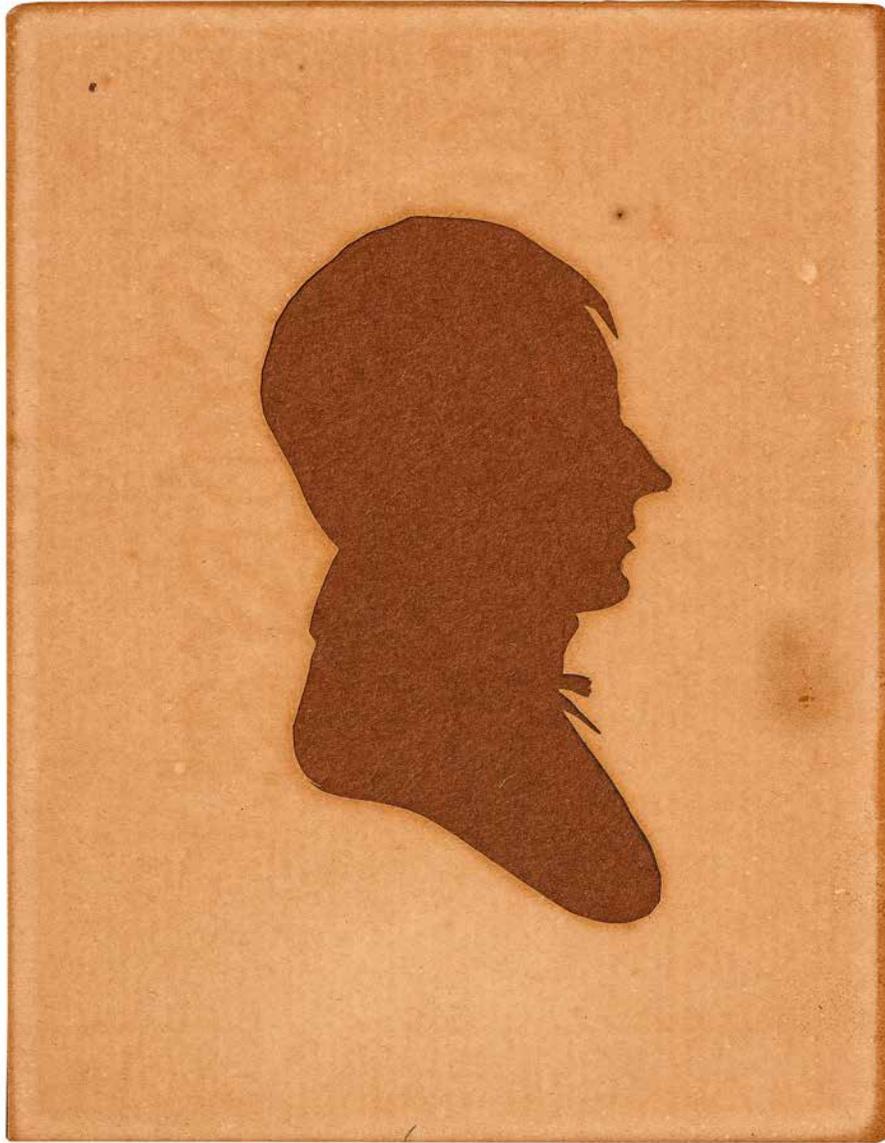
References: Chester County Historical Society. *Miller-Dickey Family Papers* (MS. Coll. 142); *Chester County Negro Servant Returns, 1788-1821; Account Book (1831 to 1847) of Jane Miller Dickey* Abstracts, Notes, and Comment by Thomas A. Urbine, Jr. (1977); John Bradley. *The Dickey Family* (1990). [BTC#424769]



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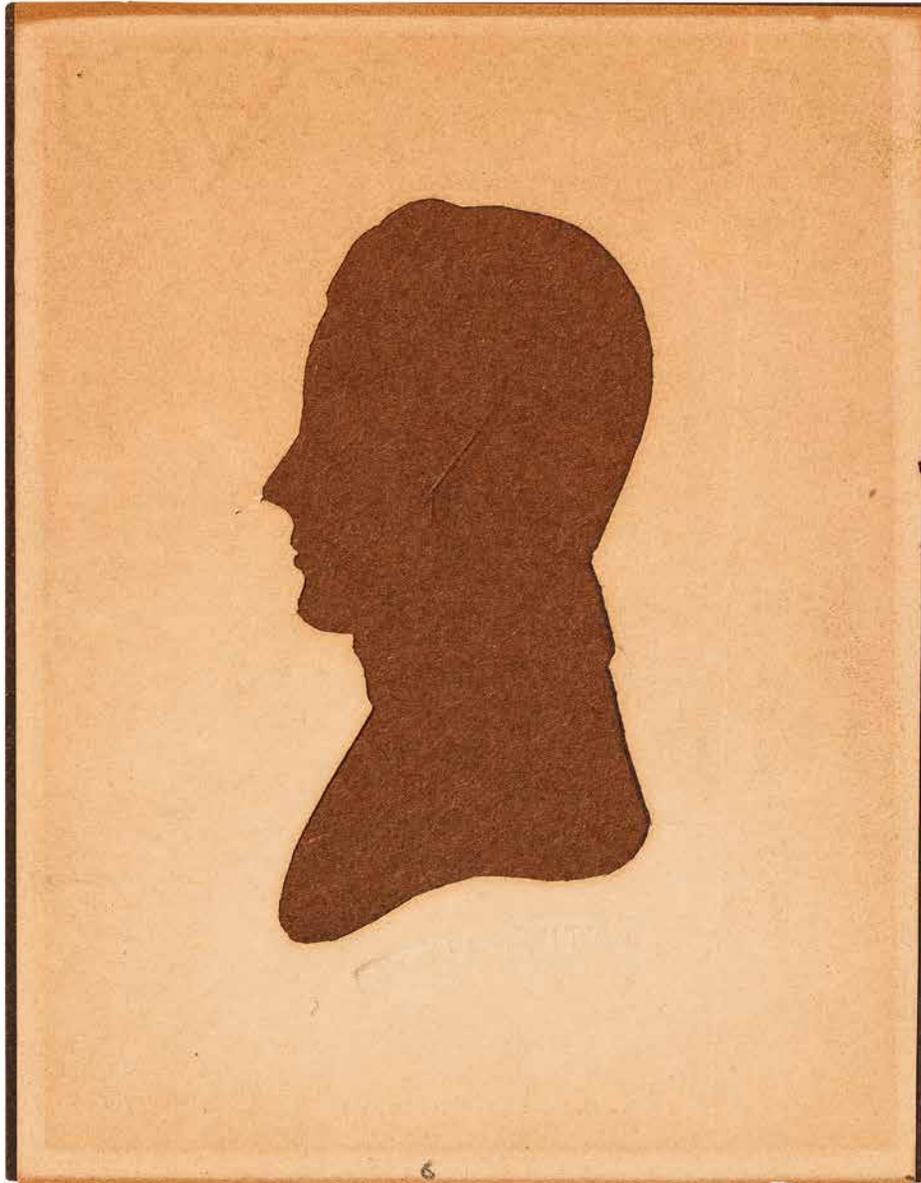
From Jane Miller Dickey's
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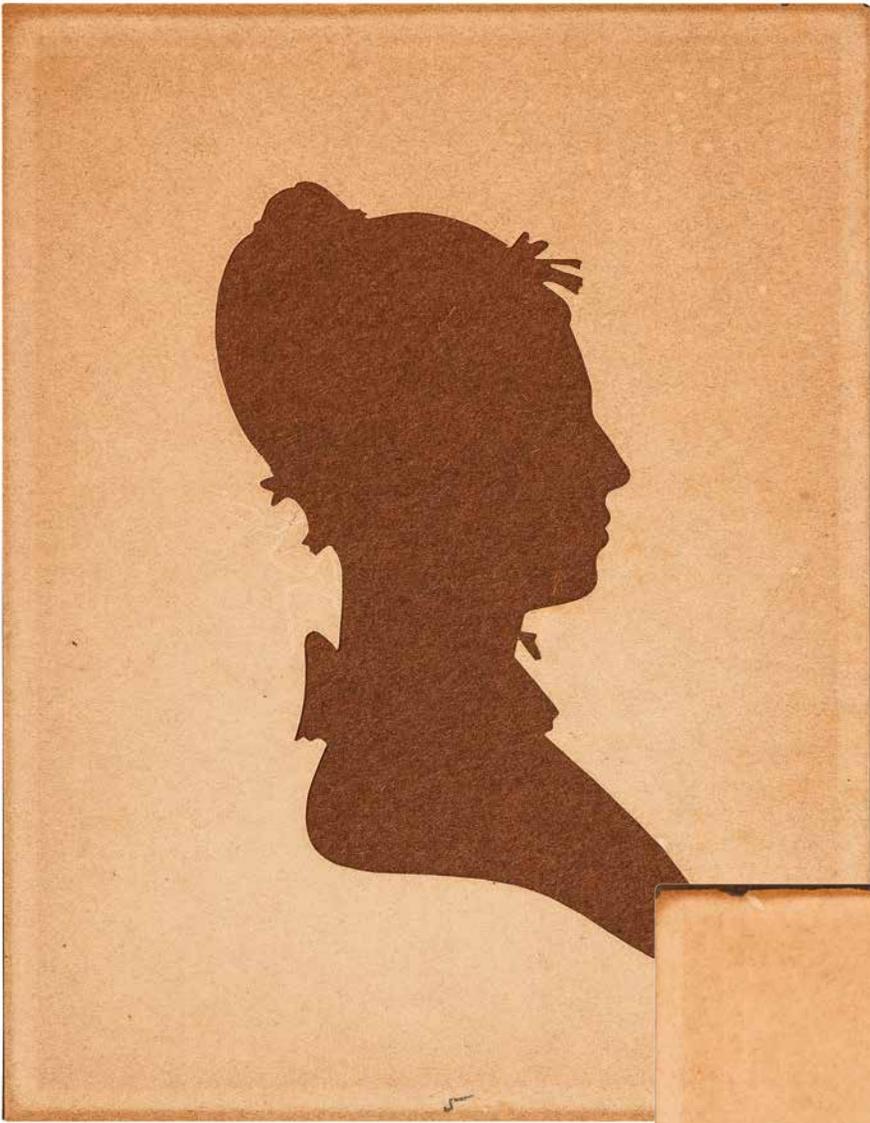
[Ebenezer Dickey]



[Jane Miller Dickey]



[John Miller Dickey]



[Dickey's daughter and son]

