

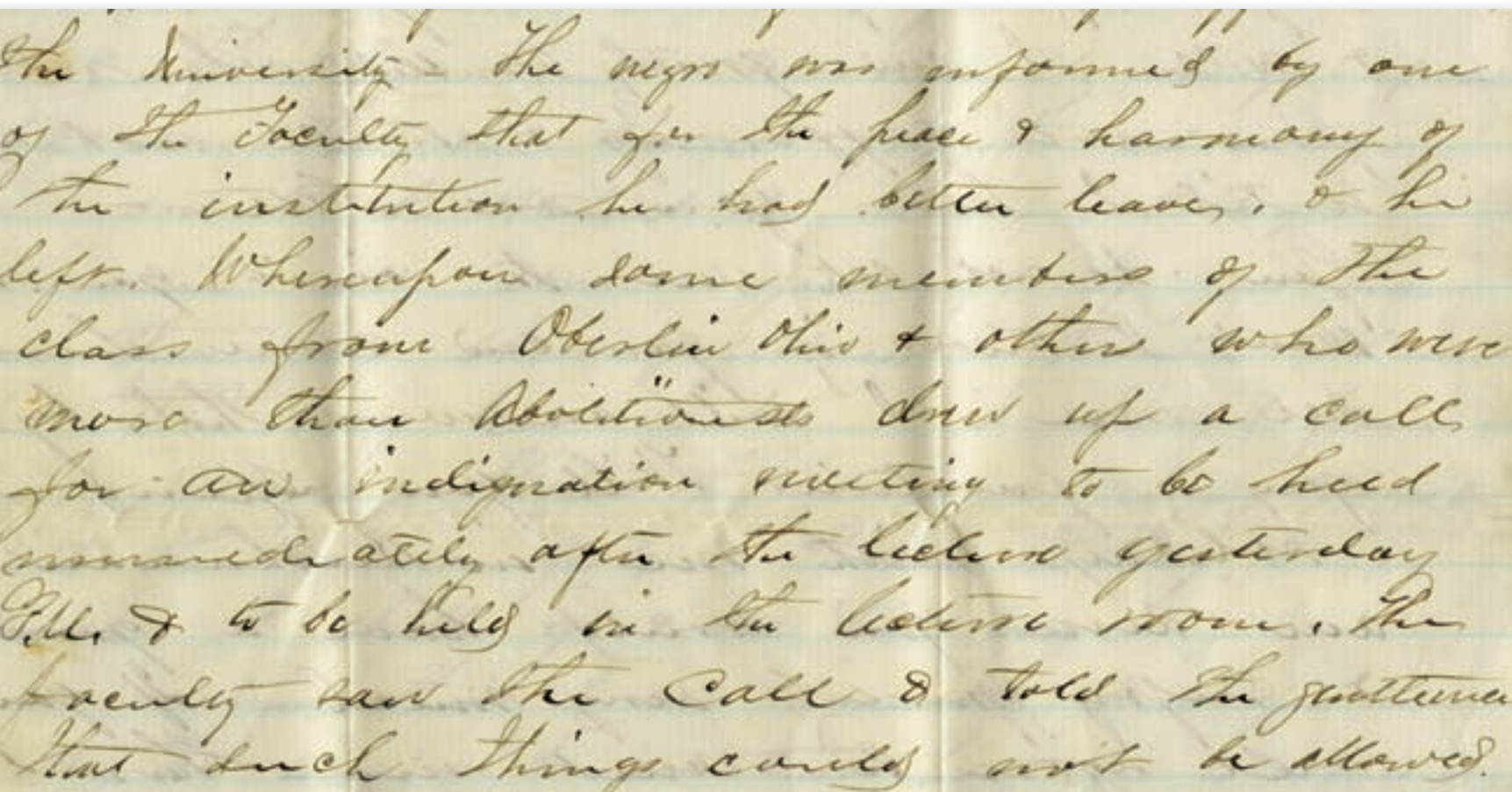
“COL[ORE]D MEN ARE NOT ADMITTED HERE”

In the morning hours of October 20, 1863, a young man in his late teens named Alpheus W. Tucker presented himself at the University of Michigan (U-M) Medical Department seeking to matriculate. He submitted his enrollment fee, and secretary Corydon L. Ford entered his name into the student register. Students had begun arriving for the semester on October 1st, and by the 20th of the month Tucker was already the 296th medical student to join the class of 1863-1864. By December, the student body would swell to 343 young men. For entrance into the program Tucker and his fellow enrollees were required to have “good moral and intellectual character,” a “good” English education, a “fair” knowledge of the natural sciences (including algebra and geometry), and a working knowledge of Latin. Tucker

brought these skills with him from Oberlin (Ohio) College’s preparatory school, where from 1861 to 1863 he pursued his studies. The prep school’s program did not have rigidly defined duration requirements and Tucker felt confident enough in his abilities to leave without formally graduating in order to pursue an opportunity at the U-M medical school.

A dean, a secretary, a professor emeritus, and nine professors managed the course of study in the Medical Department. Students were required to attend four didactic lectures per day from October until March, engage in practical studies in chemistry and pharmacology, and successfully complete regular testing and examinations. Alpheus Tucker arrived in time for the second lecture of the day, but on entering the lecture hall was greeted by jeers from students already seated for the lec-

ture. As a dark-skinned, mixed-race man, Tucker suffered shouts of “take him out!” and mocking cries of “Caw,” the latter taunt being “a manner of expressing disapproval peculiar to the Mich. University” according to a classmate. Tucker was visibly alarmed. After all, a motivating factor that led him to U-M was the knowledge that another mixed-race student—John H. Rapier, Jr.—had already been admitted to the medical school. Shortly, the professor arrived and, in order to quell the disorder in his classroom, he asked Tucker to leave. Although Tucker left the lecture, he continued to attend classes until about a week later when Professor Ford informed him that objections of the students compelled him to ask Tucker to leave the University entirely. Sometime between October 20 and November 1, 1863, the secretary scrubbed Tucker’s name from the stu-



The University. The nego was informed by one of the Faculty that for the peace & harmony of the institution he had better leave, & he left. Whereupon some members of the class from Oberlin Ohio & others who were more than Abolitionists drew up a call for an indignation meeting to be held immediately after the lecture yesterday. Mr. F. to be held in the lecture room. The Faculty saw the call & told the gentlemen that such things could not be allowed.

This passage in a November 1, 1863, letter from William Byrns to his wife set off a search for further details of the Alpheus Tucker incident. Byrns wrote, “The negro was informed by one of the Faculty that for the peace & harmony of the institution he had better leave.” Duane Norman Diedrich Collection.



The buildings of the University of Michigan's Department of Medicine & Surgery faced East University Avenue. They are shown here circa 1875 in a detail from a colored lithograph of A. Ruger's drawing titled University of Michigan Ann Arbor.

dent register with an abrasive object. This young man's presence in the records of the University was thus completely expunged.

William Byrns, a veteran of the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters, began his efforts toward a U-M medical degree the same semester as Alpheus Tucker. The Clements Library holds five letters from Byrns to his wife in the Duane Norman Diedrich Collection. Byrns's letter of November 1, 1863, offers information about the student response to Tucker's expulsion: "[S]ome members of the class from Oberlin Ohio & others who were more than Abolitionists drew up a call for an indignation meeting to be held immediately after the lecture yesterday P.M. & to be held in the lecture room. The faculty saw the call & told the gentlemen that such things could not be allowed & the meeting was squelched. Whether the matter will die quietly or be agitated still more remains to be seen, I am out of the affair & will remain so."

Alpheus W. Tucker explained his departure in a letter to the editor of the Republican, antislavery-leaning *Detroit Advertiser and Tribune* in early November. "Not expecting to receive such a reception, at an institution where men repaired to receive an education—treatment more suited to an uneducated than an educated community—and being inexperienced in such matters, I was guided wholly by Prof. Ford's advice, accepted the fee I had paid, and left, thinking it harsh treatment that I, a

native of the State, a supporter of the University through my taxes, am denied an attendance because, from accident of birth, I am a shade or two darker than my fellow students, many of them from other States, receiving an education at my expense, whilst I am denied an attendance." Rather than even mention his harsh treatment in the lecture hall, Tucker instead focused on the larger issue of African American access to tax-supported public education. According to the Michigan Constitutions (of 1835 and 1850), the taxes paid by Michiganians included an allotment for public education, though many individual public schools continued to refuse entry to black taxpayers. African Americans and their allies struggled to establish, municipalize, and desegregate public primary and secondary schools for black children in the decades prior to the Civil War. Alpheus Tucker addressed the issue as it applied to higher education and also the conflicting message of the government's call for medically-educated black men. "It has often been said by our enemies that the colored man is only fit to be a barber, or a waiter, and that he has no aspiration above that. Is this the way to attest it, by shutting the door of your public institutions in his face? When Government sees fit to appoint colored men educated abroad to the army, surely our Professors at home ought to be equally competent to fit them for such positions here." In an accompanying letter, George DeBaptiste, a militant abolition-

ist and Underground Railroad agent, furthered Tucker's discussion. "Why is it that while we pay taxes to support public education, and at a moment when colored men are responding to the call of the Government and enrolling themselves in the Union army, and offering their lives in support of the county, that they receive such treatment as this? Even now the Government is in special want of colored surgeons, but how are they to be educated?"

The experiences of Drs. Tucker and Rapier in Ann Arbor add complexity to our understanding of race relations on campus during the Civil War. Ann Arbor citizens had contributed to Underground Railroad activity and supported Union war efforts with volunteer enlistments and other aid. Wartime U-M was largely liberal, with a faculty predominantly sympathetic to anti-slavery causes and a student body mostly comprised of patriotic supporters of the Union, with a comparatively small number of nonconforming Copperheads (a biting political epithet for Confederate-supporting Northerners). And yet, over the course of the war the voices of the University's southern sympathizers grew louder, reflecting Washtenaw County's political shift toward the Democratic Party. Prior to 1861, the county leaned toward the Republican Party, but in the 1862 and 1864 elections the county favored Democratic candidates, even preferring George McClellan over Lincoln in the Presidential election of 1864.



Entry 296 of the University of Michigan Medical College student register for 1863 originally displayed the name of Alpheus Tucker. University officials saw to its removal and replacement with the name of James F. McCarrell. The abraded paper and darker ink of McCarrell's name provide evidence of the erasure. Courtesy, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Medical School Records. Photo by Austin Thomason.

The 1863 issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation (January 1) and the Military Draft Act (March 3) laid groundwork for a race riot in nearby Detroit (March 6). In the same month, a group of almost three dozen U-M students made a trip to Windsor, Ontario, to visit and show solidarity with Clement L. Vallandigham, an anti-abolitionist leader of Copperheads in the Midwest, whose strong verbal opposition to the war resulted in his banishment from the Union. Alpheus Tucker arrived at U-M during this tumultuous time, but so too did John Rapier, Jr. Mr. Rapier was an Alabama-born, mixed-race man who enrolled in the Medical Department as a Jamaican. While both young men were treated with hostility by Copperheads, only one—the one with darker skin, the one not considered to be a foreigner—was expelled from the school on account of his race. In his eloquent letter to the editor, Alpheus Tucker accused one unspecified member of the U-M faculty for giving legitimacy to the small number of bigoted students in the medical department. He wrote: “A negro-hating faculty will soon make negro-hating students. One large Copperhead can soon breed a nest of smaller ones. I do not doubt but some of the students did object to my being there. . . . But I question very much whether a dozen students out of the 300 in attendance ever said a word to the Professors in regard to my being there, and I have good reasons for believing that the objection originated with one of the Professors and not the students. But supposing that some of the students did object, have they a right to control the University in such matters? If they

have, perhaps they may object to one of the Professors teaching them from accident of birth having red hair, or to another who is nearly as dark as myself.”

Alpheus Tucker was born in Detroit around 1844. He was one of at least three children of Kentucky-born barber and abolitionist George Washington Tucker. At age six, Alpheus lived with Edward and Emily Hubbard (whose relationship to the Tuckers is currently unknown) in Detroit, and there he attended school. By 1860, Tucker and his siblings, Cassius and Georgetta “Georgie” A. Tucker, again lived with their father, now in Toledo, Ohio, where Alpheus and his brother continued their education. Oberlin Collegiate Institute (later Oberlin College) was established in 1833. Its foundation in strong Christian principles and its early dedication to a multiracial student body quickly made the school a prominent destination for African American students. Alpheus Tucker transitioned from Toledo to Oberlin’s prep school in 1861. There, in 1862, Tucker likely met John H. Rapier, Jr.

John H. Rapier, Jr., was born in Florence, Alabama, the son of John [Thomas] Rapier, a mixed-race barber from Virginia and Nashville, Tennessee. Whereas Alpheus Tucker spent his youth within relatively confined geographical bounds, John Rapier, Jr., traveled extensively, seeking the most suitable position, occupation, and social standing he could muster. He went to Nicaragua with his uncle James P. Thomas in 1855 to join Tennessean William Walker in his efforts to establish an English-speaking colony in Latin

America. Rapier later became personal secretary to Walker’s one-armed associate Parker H. French at Havana, Cuba, before embarking with him on a fundraising tour that ended (for Rapier) in Minnesota Territory in 1856. He then considered migrating to West Africa, but ultimately decided to travel to the Caribbean in December 1860. In Kingston, Jamaica, he began an assistantship with a Canadian dentist named Dr. William Beckett. Armed with dental training, Rapier returned to the United States in 1862 and began further education at Oberlin College. Neither Rapier nor Tucker could realize doctoral ambitions at Oberlin, however, as the school did not have a medical program.

In 1860 the University of Michigan was not recognized as an institution that admitted black students. Rapier’s desire to attend the U-M was based in part on the knowledge that it was one of thirteen U.S. medical schools recognized by the British Medical Council. U-M also happened to be the closest non-homeopathic medical school to Oberlin. Rapier arrived in Ann Arbor on October 1st and became the 62nd student to matriculate in the 1863–1864 academic year.

John Rapier, Jr., was an astute observer, and he carefully crafted his societal interactions to leverage the greatest advantage. While in the Caribbean in the late 1850s, he sent correspondence to his family in which he ruminated at length on gradations of social status based on race and the opportunities available to persons of differing racial constitution and nativity. In Ann Arbor he was able to put his observations to practical use by deliber-

ately presenting himself as a mixed-race man from Kingston, Jamaica, when he registered in the U-M Medical Department. He correctly anticipated that his status as a foreigner and his relatively light complexion would result in different—more favorable—treatment than if he were recognized as a black U.S. citizen. In a letter to his cousin on November 12, 1863, Rapier assured her that he had “some funny stories to tell [her], of a West Indian’s adventures among live Yankees and Copperheads.”

When writing to her of Tucker’s arrival on campus, he remarked with sarcastic and characteristically grim humor that “an ‘American of African descent’ dared to present himself as a candidate for Admission to the medical class[.] Who ever heard of such impudence.” Rapier continued, noting that Tucker’s entrance into the lecture hall “was the signal for commotion among the Copperhead Students, and many unprincipled republicans—The Faculty willing to pander to this prejudice invited Mr Tucker to leave the University[.] He did so after receiving his fees back—So you see Col[ore]d Men are not admitted here. This I am afraid will blast James’ hopes of studying Law in this University.” As Rapier was not asked to leave—either on admission or in the first few weeks of class—he received harsh criticism from the black community of Tucker’s hometown of Detroit. In Rapier’s words, “They say I pretend to be white when I am nothing but a ‘Nigger’.” (All quotes in this paragraph are from John H. Rapier ALS to Sarah Thomas; November 12, 1863. Rapier Family Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University).

Although John H. Rapier, Jr., retained his seat in class following Tucker’s removal, he ulti-

mately decided to abandon U-M in February 1864. He suffered from stress-related illness, dealt with abuses from Copperheads, and felt that his existing training and education had prepared him sufficiently for work as a physician. Rapier left Ann Arbor for Keokuk, where he enrolled (again, identifying himself as a man from Jamaica) at the Iowa College of Physicians and Surgeons, which had recently added inclusive admissions clauses to their by-laws. He completed his medical degree in the winter/summer session of 1864. Before graduation, Rapier applied to Surgeon General of the Army William Hammond for a position as a medical officer. Adroitly emphasizing his ties to the United States, he assured Hammond that he was born in Alabama and of African descent. He gained his commission and began work at the U.S. Army

Contraband Hospital in Washington, D.C. The hospital and camp had been established to accommodate indigent free persons of color following President Lincoln’s Compensated Emancipation Act of April 1862, which ended slavery in the District of Columbia. Dr. Alexander T. Augusta was surgeon-in-charge at the hospital, and with the rank of major he was the U.S. Army’s highest-ranking African American medical-officer. Dr. Rapier joined Dr. Augusta’s staff in the summer of 1864, and remained in Washington until his death circa 1865.

Alpheus Tucker had moved to Washington, D.C., in 1863 or 1864 and once again followed Rapier’s lead—this time by enrolling at the Iowa College of Physicians and Surgeons. Tucker completed his degree at Keokuk in the winter/summer semester of 1865, with a thesis on yellow fever. Dr. Tucker returned to Washington and set to work at the Contraband Hospital beside Drs. Alexander Augusta, Charles B. Purvis, John Rapier, Anderson R. Abbott, William P. Powell, Jr., and William B. Ellis. Following the war, administration of the Contraband Hospital shifted from the U.S. Army to the Freedman’s Bureau and the hospital acquired significantly improved facilities by relocating to the U.S. Army’s former Campbell Hospital.

Information about Dr. Tucker’s postwar life is sparse. He married Martha E. Wood, a mixed-race woman from Virginia, on January 24, 1867. He lived with his wife, daughter Sarah Estella, and in-laws in



John H. Rapier, Jr., photographed in uniform, 1864–1865. Courtesy, Annie Straith Jamieson Fonds, J. J. Talman Regional Collection, Western University Archives and Research Collection Centre, London, Ontario.

Washington, D.C., in 1870. In the summer of 1868 Tucker was elected physician of the District's Fifth Ward. Because no D.C.-area medical society would accept black membership, an integrated group of physicians formed the National Medical Society of Washington, D.C. (NMS), between 1868 and 1869. The NMS sent a delegation of physicians, including Dr. Tucker, Dr. Augusta, Dr. Purvis, and first Dean of Medicine at Howard University Robert Reyburn, to the 1870 annual meeting of the all-white Medical Society of the District of Columbia (MSDC), an affiliate of the American Medical Association (AMA), in an attempt to gain admission. When the MSDC refused to admit the black physicians—stating clearly that the refusal was on account of their race—Republican Senator Charles Sumner submitted an unsuccessful bill to revoke the MSDC charter. The issue of membership ultimately fell to the AMA and after multiple deliberations, reports, and votes, the organization rejected racial integration. The AMA permitted local affiliated groups to forbid black membership until civil rights legislation of the 1960s forced the organization to end its discriminatory policies.

Dr. Alpheus W. Tucker established his own medical practice in the “Colonization Building” (where the



Carte de visite portrait of Charles B. Purvis from the Theodore Weld Family Photograph Album, Weld-Grimké Family Papers.

American Colonization Society held its meetings) at 450 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., where he spent his career as a general practitioner. In 1878, Dr. Tucker traveled to Ontario and Detroit to visit family; but he contracted a cold in Canada and died in Detroit during January 1880.

As part of the University of Michigan's 2017 bicentennial, we have already begun to celebrate moments in U-M history when we advanced scholarship, shaped and improved lives, secured notable victories, and otherwise contrib-

uted to the betterment of humanity. One reason we celebrate our “first” female, African American, foreign, or minority students is because they represent milestones in overcoming color, gender, and national barriers. Equally or more important, these persons remind us that prior to their admission others of their background were not present or were denied entry to the academic community in Ann Arbor.

Alpheus Tucker's short time at U-M reminds us that these “firsts” do not imply acceptance, tolerance, or the conclusion of inequality.

Samuel Codes Watson, a mixed-race man from South Carolina, joined the medical program in 1853. He is now recognized as U-M's first African American student, although his physical appearance likely allowed him to pass as white. Alpheus Tucker, a decade after Watson, met with rejection. Had Tucker graduated from U-M, we would now be celebrating his presence here. He rose to achievement from modest beginnings. He was a successful doctor who contributed to medical care in the nation's capital during and after wartime. He was part of a delegation that sought racial equality in our national medical society. And he did these things with an institutional and societal deck stacked against him. But the University cannot celebrate the memory of his time here. We cannot claim him as a notable alumnus. Nor can we include the remarkable John H. Rapier, Jr., or Rapier's associate, James, who might have become a U-M Law student. While we observe two hundred years of the achievements of students, professors, staff, and administrators, our future improvements will depend in part on the recognition and review of our failures, missteps, and shortcomings.

The author drafted this article with an almost complete lack of writings by Dr. Alpheus W. Tucker. If readers of *The Quarto* are aware of letters, diaries, documents, business records, or other materials pertinent to the life and career of Dr. Tucker or his family, please contact the William L. Clements Library.

— Cheney J. Schopieray
Curator of Manuscripts



Campbell U. S. General Hospital, Washington, D.C., seen in a colored lithograph published in New York by Charles V. Magnus. The complex was transferred to the Freedman's Bureau at the end of the Civil War.