

# The Mutter Museum

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A large, dark blue, diagonal shape that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, covering the lower half of the page.

Note: this presentation  
contains images of human  
remains in a museum  
setting



Facade of the Mutter Museum

# Part of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia

- Founded in 1787
- Originally provided formalized medical education
- Now not a school, but rather a nonprofit
- Mission: “advancing the cause of health while upholding the ideals and heritage of medicine”
- Now consists of almost 1500 elected Fellows
- Host a number of educational events for the public
- Home to the Mutter Museum and the Historical Medical Library

# Interior of the Mutter Museum



# The Mutter Museum has become the public face for the College

- Originally established as a teaching collection for medical students
  - Majority of collections donated by College fellow Dr. Thomas Dent Mutter in 1856
  - Museum opened in 1863
- Later opened to the public
- Displays human remains (often pathological) and historical medical instruments
- Often viewed as a collection of “oddities”, but staff hope visitors view it as a way to learn about medicine and the human body

# Major exhibits include:

- The Soap Lady (natural mummified woman)
- Tallest skeleton on exhibit in North America
- Many “wet” specimens
- Slides of Einstein’s brain
- President Grover Cleveland’s jaw tumor
- and....

# The Hyrtl Skull Collection





# The Hyrtl Collection was assembled in the 19th century by a world-famous doctor, Joseph Hyrtl

- 139 human skulls
- Skull collecting was a popular pursuit in the 19th century, usually in attempts to prove phrenology: the (very discredited) theory that the morphology of the cranium determines intelligence and character
  - Particularly used in “scientific” racism
- Hyrtl assembled his collection in an attempt to DISPROVE this idea
  - Didn’t align with his devout Catholicism
- Still collected skulls in very dubious ways, likely including grave-robbing
- Each skull is labeled with some degree of information about the individual: name, age, ethnicity, city where they died, notable pathologies, etc.
- Mutter Museum bought the collection in 1874

# My internship:

- Measured the Hyrtl skulls and documented information about them
- Photographed each skull from a variety of angles
- Assisted the collections manager, curator, and other staff with exhibit maintenance, research, organization, and other duties as assigned

# Staff



← Anna Dhody, curator

Lowell Flanders, collections manager & registrar



I am writing my  
senior  
Anthropology  
thesis based on my  
research on the  
Hyrtl Collection

- By using specialized forensic software to analyze the measurements of each skull, I will be able to estimate each individual's ancestry (what geographic locale they were most likely from)
  - This is possible because certain morphological traits tend to become common within groups
  - **NOT** the same thing as biological race (which does not exist in humans!)
- I will compare these estimates to the limited records of the Hyrtl Collection to see if:
  - the provenance lines up with what is written
  - more information can be concluded about the individual's story
- Since skulls often came from poor individuals or criminals, information is often sparse and not necessarily accurate

Images I took of some skulls within the collection:

