



Historic Resources and Museum Program

Pope FAQs

Why was Dr. Pope born of free heritage?

- Dr. Pope was born free due to his great-grandmother. We don't know when or how she gained her freedom, but when Elias Pope (Dr. Pope's grandfather) was born in 1793, he received free status. The legal status of slaves and free people can be traced back to a Virginia law from the

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1660s that granted free status to children whose mothers were born free.

Did Pope have any siblings?

- Dr. Pope had a half-sibling named Jonas Elias Pope Jr., born in 1898 to his father, Jonas Elias Pope Sr., and Mattie T. Reynolds. Pope Sr. will die in 1899, and Reynolds will remarry.

Why did Dr. Pope's father need to carry freedom papers?

- In 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act. This law made it illegal for enslaved African Americans to escape to free territories, such as the Northern and Western regions of the country. If an enslaved person was discovered, citizens were required to return them to their enslaver. This law also had indirect consequences for free African Americans. Since they were not considered citizens, they lacked the same protections as White citizens. Consequently, if a free person was sold into slavery, they had limited options. Freedom papers ensured that the individual carrying them could move “freely”.

Did only White men find Historically Black Colleges and Universities? (HBCUs)? Where and when was the first HBCU?

- No, not all HBCUs were founded by White men. Cheyney University of Pennsylvania was the first HBCU, and Richard Humphreys was the founder. During and after the Civil War, White people from Northern states came down south to educate the formerly enslaved. Some people who came up North founded schools or ran the schools at the

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government's behest. North Carolina has the distinction of having many HBCUs that Black people founded. Some examples include North Carolina Central University, Winston-Salem State University, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, Fayetteville State University, and Livingstone College.

Why did Leonard Medical School shut down?

- The medical college faced financial issues and racism. In 1910, Abraham Flexner's report on US and Canadian medical colleges criticized Leonard Medical School for lacking a library and museums and for inadequate professor pay. He deemed only Howard Medical School and Meharry Medical School worthy of saving. The report influenced funding decisions by White philanthropists and the government. Flexner suggested African Americans focus on hygiene education over becoming doctors, stating that “a well-taught negro sanitarian will be immensely useful; an essentially untrained negro with an M.D. degree is dangerous.”

He believed Black doctors should educate their communities on preventing diseases like hookworm and tuberculosis. Consequently, White philanthropists withdrew support for Leonard Medical School, leading to its closure in 1917 and contributing to a shortage of Black medical professionals in North Carolina. The perception that African American doctors are less qualified than White ones persist in the US today.

Why is Dr. Pope considered one of the first licensed doctors in North Carolina?

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- North Carolina did not require doctors to get a license with the state until the late 1880s. Dr. Pope received his license in 1887 along with two other Black men, Dr. Lawson A. Scruggs and John T. Williams. Dr. James F. Shober was the first Black doctor to practice medicine in North Carolina. Though he did not have a license, he was highly educated, attending Lincoln University in Oxford, Pennsylvania, and then Howard Medical School in DC.

Did he have children with Lydia?

- No, nothing indicates that Lydia and Dr. Pope had children.

What is the square footage of the house?

- The house is about 1500 square feet and sits on less than an acre.

Did Dr. Pope treat patients in the home?

- Yes! Towards the back of the house is the examination room and kitchen. The downstairs bathroom, which was added in the 1990s, was originally where patients could enter to see Dr. Pope.

Where was Dr. Pope's doctor's office?

- Dr. Pope had an office on East Hargett Street, which was Raleigh's Black Main Street.

Did Ruth and Evelyn marry or have children?

- No, nothing indicates that Ruth and Evelyn married or had children.

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