

Montgomery Johns

Dr. Montgomery Johns, a member of the MAC faculty during the Civil War, was among those charged with Rebel sympathizing activities in 1864 after Confederate troops briefly occupied the college grounds.

Montgomery Johns was born in Washington, D.C., about 1830 to an Episcopal clergyman who later tended churches in New York, Ohio, and Maryland.

An 1847 graduate of the College of New Jersey, which became Princeton University, Johns earned his medical degree from the University of Maryland in 1853. Shortly afterwards, he published a German-English clinical phrase-book, a particularly valuable contribution to the increasingly German-speaking population of the eastern seaboard. He taught natural science at Baltimore City College, a preparatory school, for about a year and briefly held a professorship at Iowa College. In the late 1850s, he chaired the Mathematics and Natural History faculty at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland.

Johns was appointed to the MAC faculty in 1860 as “Professor of the Science of Agriculture, including chemistry, and its application to the Arts - Geology, and Mineralogy.” He also had the means to invest financially in the college, purchasing \$6,800 worth of bonds. He stayed at MAC for six years and, during that time, treated students and fellow faculty members with medical ailments. A year after he started at MAC, he also joined the faculty of Georgetown Medical College, where he provided evening lectures on anatomy for nine years, training numerous Union surgeons during the war.

After Confederate General Bradley T. Johnson’s troops came to campus on July 12, 1864, unsigned articles entitled “Disloyalty Unmasked” appeared in Washington and Baltimore newspapers. The anonymous writers insinuated that Dr. and Mrs. Johns, President Henry Onderdonk, and others welcomed the Rebels and entertained them in high fashion, referring to the lot as “classic Rebels who have been reclining under academic bowers and basking in the enjoyment of republican liberty.”

In particular, Johns was accused of providing directions and personal assistance to General Johnson. His newspaper response, published in the *Baltimore American* on July 27, 1864, stated,

Mr. Questioner, you have been simply misinformed... you do not write under your own name, but hide yourself behind an anonymous newspaper article. I should not have deemed your article deserving a reply, had I not been an officer in a public institution, receiving pay from the State of Maryland, and hitherto deemed worthy to be entrusted with a share in the tuition of many boys and young men in my native state.

Johns claimed he was summoned by Johnson, a distant relative, and accompanied soldiers as requested. Rather than a lavish meal, it was bread and butter served by the females of his family. The length of the stay, he said, was under an hour. Johns went on to ask “an impartial and discriminating public to suspend their judgment. Our College is worthy of your esteem only so long as its faculty can be shown to be honorable and loyal citizens...”

The investigation into the Confederates’ visit requested by MAC trustee William H. Purnell turned up consistent witness accounts about campus sympathies, but little hard evidence. President Onderdonk resigned several months later, but Dr. Johns stayed at the college through the next two academic years. Financial troubles ultimately prevented MAC from redeeming his bonds, but his debt was partially satisfied with a grant of 62 5/8 acres of college-owned land, where he lived until he died on July 28, 1871.