

Recommendation Regarding the Name of Tayloe Gymnasium

Reconciliation: Campus Spaces Task Force, May 2022.

This document applies the *Criteria for Evaluating Existing Campus Space Names at Hollins University* to the specific case of Tayloe Gymnasium. The *Criteria* were created to provide guidance for decision-making with regard to renaming requests for buildings on the Hollins campus. Our recommendation answers the primary question guiding reconsideration of a building name: does honoring the namesake's legacy impede the university's ability to pursue its mission going forward?

History and role of the task force

The Reconciliation: Campus Spaces Task Force was formed by President Mary Dana Hinton in September 2021, with a membership of students, faculty, staff, and alumnae/i. The task force charges were twofold: first, the group should work from established best practices to determine criteria for evaluating existing campus space names; second, the group should then apply those criteria to make a recommendation regarding Tayloe Gymnasium to the Board of Trustees and the president.

The task force released the draft criteria to the campus community in January 2022, then worked to facilitate discussions with the campus and alumnae/i communities: seven sessions were held for students, staff, faculty, and alumnae/i. Subsequently, the criteria were approved by the president and Board of Trustees in May 2022.

Introduction: criteria for decision-making

In preparing this document the task force considered best practices as developed and implemented at other universities, especially the University of Virginia, Yale University, the University of Cincinnati, and Stanford University (for information and references, see the *Criteria* document). These examples provided guidance for a process which is currently engaging many institutions of higher education. Using a series of questions, we examined the university's history and current values as we moved toward an informed decision.

To that end, the criteria incorporated the university's current priorities and values as articulated in the Hollins mission. Within the mission, the areas of academic excellence,

humane values, civility, integrity, and concern for others, diversity, and social justice were of particular importance to our inquiry.

When we compared these values to those expressed in the commemorative naming of the Tayloe Gymnasium, we reached the conclusion that a choice to retain the building's current name would obstruct Hollins' ability to pursue its mission. We believe our recommendation to remove the name will align our built environment with our stated values, moving the university toward a positive outcome instead.

I. What course of action is being recommended?

The task force recommends removal of the name Tayloe from current gymnasium signage and all relevant current and future university communications, policies, and procedure documents issued by athletics, marketing, and other university departments.

A new task force should be formed to design and facilitate a community-oriented process for selecting a new building name. In the meantime, the building's original name, which was simply "Gymnasium" (1924-1932), should suffice as a placeholder.

The new group will work with the campus community on the selection of a new name. We suggest a process in which students, faculty, staff, and alumnae/i can consider a few suggested names, and also submit suggestions. As removal of a name is a choice guided by Hollins' mission, so too should the new name be one for which honoring the namesake's legacy is in positive alignment with the values expressed in our mission.

The process for selecting a new name should include broad representation from across campus. Following best practices, campus dialogues should be held to support community education and participation; we also particularly recommend involving stakeholder departments such as athletics, alumnae/i services, student groups (in particular first-year students), and the Working Group on Slavery & Its Contemporary Legacies.

II. What is the building's function?

Since its opening in November 1924, the gymnasium has housed athletic events, social events, and other large gatherings. Hollins students, faculty, and staff gather in this building regularly, as do visitors to the campus. Its use is widely shared by all campus groups, and also the public. We believe the gymnasium to be a priority for this process.

III. What was the namesake's principal legacy?

According to the criteria, a person's principal legacy consists of those actions which are seen to have enduring consequences. With assistance from Chris Florio, Assistant Professor of History, the task force has considered the documentary evidence outlining George P. Tayloe's history as a businessman, political delegate, and slave owner. John Tayloe III, George's father, owned 700-800 people and held extensive land holdings at the time of his death; these were distributed among his surviving relatives. Among the resources George P. Tayloe inherited from his father were the Cloverdale Ironworks, where dozens of enslaved people labored.

While an exact total number is elusive, records clearly show that George P. Tayloe enslaved many dozens of people at the ironworks, at Buena Vista plantation in Roanoke, and at another plantation he established in Alabama. It is doubtless true that both his business dealings and his philanthropy intertwined with and depended in no small part on the wealth accrued from the value of the lives and labors of the people he enslaved.

The most relevant aspect of his political service was as representative to the body which effected Virginia's secession from the Union. On April 17, 1861, Tayloe joined the majority of his peers to vote for Virginia to join the Confederacy, a government formed for the purpose of preserving the institution of slavery.

The scant published record of Tayloe's life, with some sources dating back to the late 19th and early 20th century, focuses primarily on his family history, his wealth, and his philanthropic service to the local church and to Hollins University, then Hollins College. Tayloe is depicted as a generous and kindly gentleman, in a common narrative which depicts him and his peers as fundamental to Old South society – while omitting the brutal truth about the origins of their wealth and influence. In the case of George P. Tayloe, those origins have become abundantly clear with further research.

We conclude that Tayloe's principal legacy of enslaving and oppressing others clearly demonstrates documented actions and values which are strongly and unquestionably incompatible with the values expressed in the Hollins University mission.

IV. What was the namesake's relationship with the university?

In 1843, George P. Tayloe became secretary and treasurer of the Valley Union Education Society. This group revived Roanoke Female Seminary as Valley Union Seminary, which later became Hollins Institute. Tayloe arranged first the lease, later the sale, of property to the school. He remained involved in its governance and joined the Board of Trustees. In 1845 he became board president, a role which he held for almost five decades until his death in 1897. In a eulogy by the Hollins Board of Trustees and in Smith's book *Charles Lewis Cocke: Founder of Hollins College* (1921), Tayloe is credited together with Cocke as being responsible for the success of the school.

We acknowledge Tayloe's time with the Board of Trustees, which included making financial contributions to Hollins. However, the research makes it clear that Tayloe's larger legacy as a slave owner created his financial security that led to his fiscal involvement and leadership role with Hollins in its early inception. This committee has been tasked with evaluating the complex legacy of George P. Tayloe. While that legacy includes actions which benefited the university, we find those are vastly outweighed by his principal legacy of enslavement.

V. What was the original naming decision?

After extensive research into the original naming of the gymnasium, it has been confirmed that the gymnasium opened on November 17, 1924, but was not named for George P. Tayloe until Spring 1932. The naming was part of a plan to name several campus buildings. No additional details were found to indicate why "Tayloe" was chosen for this building; it is possible that this was an honorific naming, since no mentions of monetary donations or specific requests to name the building after Tayloe have been discovered. The Hollins campus has multiple examples of the honorific naming of buildings after people influential in Hollins' history, including Cocke, Eastnor, Pleasants, and Turner. During a renovation project to the athletic facilities in the late 1980s, the building was reopened as the Tayloe Fitness Center on October 20, 1989.

We consider that Tayloe's service to Hollins was acknowledged and honored at the time of his death; it was then memorialized when the gymnasium was named for him, more than three decades later. Hollins does not have an obligation to continue acknowledging his service in exactly the same way as was done in 1897, or 1932.

VI. How will we preserve the historical record and educate our community?

First, Hollins should celebrate this change which moves our university forward on a path to greater diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is also essential that the university clearly communicate with our extended community about the reason for, and steps taken toward, removing Tayloe's name. The task force suggests scheduling a campus event during fall 2022 to celebrate removal of the current building name. This event can also serve as the official start of a process in which students, alumnae/i, faculty, and staff are invited to participate in the process of considering a new building name.

Our educational mission also requires us to attend to the historical record: where our built environment has offered an incomplete version of history, the processes of name removal and renaming offer us the opportunity to create new physical markers that balance the narrative and memorialize our values of equity and justice.

In keeping with current practice in buildings such as Swannanoa and the Wetherill Visual Arts Center, we suggest the creation of permanent signage inside the gymnasium on which the community can read the history of the previous naming (1932-2022), including the reasons for removing the Tayloe name. The signage could refer readers to additional information online; to that end, all information about the renaming process should remain available on the task force website, which should become part of the university's permanent web presence.

Finally, we suggest that the university's historic ties to enslavement are acknowledged when new students, staff, and faculty are oriented to the university. Sharing this knowledge with people who are joining our campus community is our responsibility; it is an essential part of Hollins' commitment to acknowledging and understanding our complete history.

Conclusion

Over the past 180 years, the built environment of the Hollins campus has changed. Among the growing collection of buildings, functions, and names have changed to reflect the adapting needs of the university. The change we recommend today is both customary, and appropriate. It is about learning, in that it responds to our expanded understanding of our institutional history. It is about the needs and well-being of the current campus community, in that we prioritize our mission of social justice and effect a measure of reconciliation.

Both this task force and the Working Group on Slavery & Its Contemporary Legacies have learned from the campus community, including alumnae/i, about the importance of creating a campus environment in which everyone can feel valued, seen, and heard. These conversations, coupled with research and a process of informed deliberation, have brought us to our recommendation: remove the Tayloe name and allow Hollins to make a positive move forward.

Reconciliation: Campus Spaces Task Force

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