

# Heath School Renaming Process

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School Committee Presentation, February 9, 2023

# Mission Statement

Heath School, nestled in the Chestnut Hill enclave in Brookline, has played a central role in so many lives for more than 100 years. Generations of children have established their educational foundations here, while their families have turned to this space with great trust, boundless hope, and expectations for excellence. Countless educators have made this place their professional home, dedicating part or all of their careers to the work inside these walls.

We have learned in recent years that our school was named for the street on which it originally sat (Heath Street), which in turn was named for a family that owned much of the land surrounding that street. Because the Heath family were also enslavers, our school therefore carries the name of a family that enslaved other people during their time here in Brookline.

*Knowing that our beloved school is named indirectly for a family that enslaved other humans has made it increasingly difficult to intentionally promote a vision that aligns with our stated values.*

Our school came to be called “Heath” somewhat unintentionally; we now have a chance as a community to affirmatively and intentionally choose a new name. We seek collectively to understand our history and the role of slavery in Brookline, the impact of that history on our school, and choose a name that represents us and our aspirations, and reinforces a safe learning environment for those in our care.

*Reckoning with this past is essential to building a better future for our students. Renaming our school is a part of that process.*

# The Research



# THE HEATH FAMILY: SLAVERY AND INHERITED WEALTH

*2020 photograph: Ebenezer Heath's home at 30 Heath Street, built in 1794 as a wedding gift from his father, John Heath*

From the Hidden Brookline website:

<https://hiddenbrookline.weebly.com/heath-the-school--the-family.html>

## THREE GENERATIONS IN THE HEATH FAMILY:

John Heath: 1732-1804

His son Ebenezer: 1765-1845

Ebenezer's son Charles: 1801-1868

John Heath (1732-1804) enslaved four people to work on his farms and in his stately home. [1]

They were Primus, Kate, Ben Boston, and Dinah. John and Susannah Heath had a son, Ebenezer (1765-1845) and two daughters. Ebenezer and his sisters grew up in luxury and came of age in an enslaving home. [2] In 1790, Ebenezer married at age twenty-five, about the time that slavery ended in Massachusetts. When he married, John Heath signed his wealth over to his son. John Heath built Ebenezer and his bride an elegant home, just a stone's throw from John Heath's own house. Ebenezer's oldest surviving son was Charles, who married in 1828 and moved to Boston. Some years later, Charles and his family returned to Brookline to live on Heath family land and to build a new house where his grandfather's home had once stood. Charles' home was also a mere stone's throw from his father's.



Charles Heath's home, built 1855

## **INHERITING WEALTH FROM SLAVERY**

First Ebenezer Heath and then his son Charles inherited the wealth that derived in part from John Heath's slavery practice.[3] John Heath's social capital was also passed down, first to his son and then his grandson, giving them entrée into elite society, where they could make valuable financial and social connections.

## HEATH: A STREET AND THEN A SCHOOL

In 1841, the Town chose Heath as the name for an existing road, stating that it “stretched from the Worcester turnpike or Boylston Street by Mr. Heath’s to the Newton line.” [4] In 1847, the school on that road changed its name from the “Middle District School” to the more specific “Middle District School on Heath Street”. For a number of years, teachers boarded with the Heaths, who prized their companionship.[5] A few decades later, the school shortened its name to the Heath School, a name it continues to carry today, even in its new location on Eliot Street.



Heath School, 2020



# Complete List of Nominees

(in no particular order)

**Roland Hayes**

**Bernard Pendleton (former art teacher) #**

**Ellen & William Craft**

**Heddy Lamarr**

**Michael Dukakis**

**Francis Ouimet**

**Edward Kirrane**

**Massasoit \*\*\***

**Eunice Kennedy Shriver**

**Bill Russell**

**Manuel Del Valle Jr**

**Ruth Bader Ginsburg**

*# Of note: early in our process, Mr. Bernie Pendleton, the art teacher here for 30 years, was listed as a nominee. Mr. Pendleton was appreciative of the consideration, but humbly declined the honor. We remain grateful for his service to our community!*

**Frederick Law Olmsted**

**Ruth Batson**

**Sybil Holmes**

**John Wilson**

**The Settlement**

**Montowampate (aka Sagamore James)**

**Harmony**

**Kindness**

**Judith Heumann**

**Charles Sprague Sargent \*\*\***

**Quabbin Reservoir \*\*\***

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**Harriet Tubman**

# Narrowing the Field

# Student Renaming Committee: Name Criteria

## Required, by *Town Bylaws*

- Person, Place, or Event

## Required, as recommended by Student Committee in partnership with adult committee members:

- Connection to Greater Boston and Brookline
- A helper. Someone who contributed to the community and made a positive impact
- A connection to education and/or commitment to educating others
- \*\*\* Not an Indigenous Name. As our school has no historical or current connection to Indigenous Peoples, other than sitting on Native land, we do not want to appropriate Indigenous names or culture for our own gains

## Nice to Have, as recommended by Student Committee in partnership with adult committee members:

- Represented elsewhere? We strive to recognize those who are not honored elsewhere in our community
- Is the candidate a Person of Color? We strive to recognize those who are historically under invited into our community
- Is the person still living? Has the person passed? The preference is someone who has passed as we can examine their entire life, contributions, and impact

## \*\*\* More Perspective on Indigenous Nominees

In the spirit of reflection and reconciliation, the BHS student newspaper, formerly known as *The Sagamore*, **has begun the process of changing the newspaper's name**. Knowing this, recognizing that the student committee does not feel it is appropriate, and in consultation with Indigenous groups, *an Indigenous name will not be forwarded as a finalist for our school*. Thus, Sagamore James, Massasoit, and the Quabbin Reservoir will not be in consideration moving forward.

# Narrowing the Field

*Ruth Batson*  
*Frederick Law Olmsted*  
*John Wilson*  
*Roland Hayes*  
*Eunice Kennedy Shriver*  
*The Settlement*  
*Ellen & William Craft*

	Rank 0= need more data; 1= top candidate; 2= still in consideration, but unlikely; 3= no longer in consideration	Required					Nice to Have		
		Person, Place, or Event	Connection to Greater Boston and Brookline	A helper. Someone who contributed to the community and made a positive impact.	A connection to education and/or commitment to educating others	Not an Indigenous Name. As our school has no historical or current connection to Indigenous Peoples, other than sitting on Native land, we do not want to appropriate Indigenous names or culture for our own gains	Represented elsewhere? We strive to recognize those who aren't honored elsewhere in our community	Is the person BIPOC? We strive to recognize those who are historically under invited to our community	Is the person still living? Has the person passed? The preference is someone who has passed.
Norminee									
Ellen & William Craft	1	o	o	o	o	o	New book; referenced in Hidden Brookline website	o	Passed
Eunice Kennedy Shriver	1	o	o	o	? (educating others about special education)	o	center in Boston	no	passed
Frederick Law Olmsted	1	o	o	o	o	o	o	x	Passed
John Wilson	1	o	o	o	o	o	not too many	o	passed
Roland Hayes	1	o	o	o	inspired others	o	school of music, park named after him in greater Boston area	o	passed
Ruth Batson	1	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	passed
The Settlement	1	o	o	?	?	o	x	x	----
Bill Russell	2	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	passed
Manuel Del Valle Jr	2	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	passed
Charles Sprague Sargent	2	o	o	o	o	o	o	o	passed
Edward Kिरrane	2	o	o	o	o	o	x	x	living
Francis Ouimet	2	o	o	o	o	o	x	x	passed
Michael Dukakis	2	o	o	o in role as governor	o professor at northeastern	o	couldn't find much	x	living
Ruth Bader Ginsburg	2	o	x	o	o	o	x	x	passed
Sybil Holmes	3	o	o	o	x	o	o	x	passed
Harmony	3	x							
Harriet Tubman	3	o	x						
Heddy Lamarr	3	o	x						
Judith Heumann	3	o	x						
Kindness	3	x							
Massasoit	3	o				o			
Montowampate (aka Sagamore James)	3	o				o			
Quabbin Reservoir	3	o	o	?	?	o			

# Timeline

## *Proposed and Not Finalized*

<b>February &amp; March</b>	<b>April &amp; May</b>	<b>June &amp; Summer</b>
<p>Continued educational work with students</p> <p>Continued research into proposed finalists</p> <p>Messaging in school community</p> <p>Messaging throughout Town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Meet with Renaming Committee; need to be re-convened</li><li>● Meet with School Committee, continued</li></ul>	<p>Voting; process TBD</p> <p>April:</p> <p>Decide final 2 or 3 finalists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● School-wide &amp; Town-wide</li></ul> <p>May:</p> <p>Decide final choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● School-wide &amp; Town-wide</li></ul>	<p>Announce proposed new school name</p> <p>Education about and celebration of proposed new school name</p> <p>Write/prepare Remove and Replace Warrant Article for fall Town Meeting</p> <p>Submit WA at Fall 2023 Town Meeting</p> <p>Continue education and outreach</p>



# Opportunities to Learn

# Roland Hayes



**“The beauty of what  
could be done with  
the voice just  
overwhelmed me.”**



**ROLAND  
HAYES**

Roland Hayes was the first African American singer to achieve success on the classical concert stage. For more than 40 years he performed in major cities throughout the United States and Europe.

# Ellen and William Craft

Ellen and William Craft were a married couple who escaped slavery. William came up with a plan for Ellen to pretend to be a white, male, cotton planter travelling with William as her slave. They successfully escaped by train to Philadelphia before moving to Boston and later to England where they raised a family.

**“We felt perfectly justified in undertaking the dangerous and exciting task of running a thousand miles.”**



# Ruth Batson



For more than than thirty years, Ruth Batson fought for fair and equal education for Boston's public school children and for the civil rights of African Americans. She started out as a young mother trying to improve her children's neighborhood school and ended up improving all the schools of Boston *and* Brookline through her work launching the METCO program.

**“When we fight about education, we’re fighting for our lives. We’re fighting for what that education will give us, we’re fighting for a job, we’re fighting to eat, we’re fighting to pay our medical bills; we’re fighting for a lot of things”**

# John Wilson

John Wilson was a sculptor, painter, printmaker and educator whose art reflected the Black experience. He lived and worked out of his Brookline home/studio for over 50 years. He is best known for a bronze bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Washington, D.C.



**“I wanted to  
make a Black  
image you could  
not ignore.”**



# We Thank Our Volunteer Committee Members

## Adult Committee

Asa Sevelius, Principal  
Kirtan Patel, Vice Principal  
Tatiana Beckwith, Teacher  
Alex Borns-Weil, Teacher  
Karen Shashoua, Teacher  
Emily Redburn, Teacher  
Kysandra Perkowski, Teacher  
Melissa Gordon, Teacher  
Bob Miller, Former Teacher/Community Member  
David Gacioch, Parent/Community Member  
Lauren Post, Parent/Community Member  
Miriam Aschkenasy, Parent/Community Member  
Karla Weathers, Parent/Community Member  
Margaret Monteith, Parent/Community Member  
Jennie Lopez Segel, Parent/Community Member  
Angelica Contreras, Parent/Community Member  
Arif Bhimani, Parent/Community Member

## Student Committee

Marin Cagnina, Grade 4  
Elisa Eddy, Grade 5  
Bruno Rona, Grade 5  
Madison Searcy, Grade 6  
Francesca Taranto Montemurro, Grade 6  
Sofi Ugalde, Grade 8  
Asha Hug, Grade 10  
Rowan Packard, Grade 10

### *Special thanks to:*

- *Dr. Barbara Brown, founder and chair of Hidden Brookline*
- *The team who shepherded the name change process at the Florida Ruffin Ridley School*
- *Dr. Linus Guillory, Superintendent*
- *Our school's students, faculty, and families*

*We thank the many others who have help along the way and who will continue to help as we continue on this journey!*

# Resources to Explore & Staying Connected

Each week, we report updates on the renaming process here. Past "*Community Notes*" newsletters can be found here:

<https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/domain/718>

The "*School Name: History & Resources*" website page is also updated regularly:

<https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/renameheath>



Thank you! Questions & Answers