

School Committee Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names

Monday, August 6, 2018

5:30 PM – 7:15 PM

School Committee Room, 5th Floor, Town Hall

Ad Hoc Task Force Members Present: Helen Charlupski, Barbara Brown, Malcolm Cawthorne, John Dempsey, Mark Gray, Misti Jaynes, Ken Liss, and Pam Roberts.

Ad Hoc Task Force Members Absent: Lloyd Gellineau, Sari Gubar, and Farah Mamedova.

Staff Present: Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Strategy and Performance Ben Lummis and Robin Coyne.

Others Present: School Committee Members David Pollak and David A. Pearlman; Brookline residents including Lisa Cunningham, Catherine Donaher, Paul Harris, and Maya Norton.

1) Approval of Minutes of the June 18, 2018 Meeting

On a motion of Ms. Charlupski and seconded by Mr. Cawthorne, the School Committee Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names voted (Ms. Jaynes abstained because she was not at the June 18, 2018 meeting) to approve the June 18, 2018 minutes as amended.

2) Presentation of Research on Baldwin School Name

Mr. Dempsey presented research on the Baldwin School name.

GEORGE S. BALDWIN SCHOOL, Heath Street

This building contained both a school and a branch library. The land had been purchased in 1873 and in 1898 and had previously been the site of a fire station on Oak Street. The red brick Colonial Revival school and library, designed in 1926 by Kilham, Hopkins & Greeley, opened on September 12, 1927. The building held a kindergarten, three classrooms and a playroom. This school was forced to close in 1981 due to the financial constraints of Proposition 2 1/2 . It later was used for a staff-run day care program. It is now used as the site of Winthrop House, an alternative program of Brookline High School.

GEORGE S. BALDWIN

George Storer Baldwin (1866 – February 4, 1922) was a member of the Brookline Board of Selectmen in 1910 and 1911. He was elected to the Board again in 1920 and 1921. He served on the Park Commission until 1920. He was a member on - and for several years was chairman of - the Playground Commission and the Gymnasium and Bathhouse Commission until the time of his death. In 1918 he began a two-year term as Brookline's representative to the General Court.

Baldwin died of congestive heart failure at the age of 55 in his home at 91 Middlesex Road. His ashes are interred in Forest Hills Cemetery.

By all accounts Baldwin was a good man. At the time of his death he was described in the Brookline Chronicle as "one of the best known and prominent citizens of the town," a

person who “had taken a deep interest in civic affairs and given much of his time and attention to matters pertaining to the advancement of the town and the betterment of local conditions.”

Baldwin was born in Boston and attended the Boston Public Schools. He made a small fortune in the stock and bond business. He was a member of the Boston Stock Exchange for twenty-two years and was a prominent figure in financial circles. For example, in a letter to the forty-year-old Baldwin in July of 1906, Louis Brandeis wrote “...Glad to know you’re willing to work with me in this industrial insurance work ...”

His father, William Baldwin, was one of the founders of the Boston Young Men’s Christian Union (not to be confused with the YMCA) on Boylston Street near Tremont. George Baldwin served for many years as the vice president of the organization. The goals of the BYMCU were to “furnish the young men of Boston and vicinity a place of pleasant resort where the influences are beneficial and elevating, to provide them with opportunity of self-improvement and healthful recreation, at little or no expense; to give them opportunities for doing good, by engaging in charitable and benevolent work.” (The distinctive BYMCU building was shuttered in 2012 and is being turned into affordable housing.)

As reported in the Brookline Chronicle, the Board of Selectmen issued a statement at the time of Baldwin’s death. It included the following: “The town has lost one of its most valuable officers, and the community a citizen whose frank, sincere, and open conduct in all relations of life made him a useful and effective influence of good ... He has sacrificed his private interests for his public duties. A man of remarkable force and decision.... The town has heard much of his efficiency and success but too little of his widespread but quiet charity, genial hospitality, and warm friendships...Distinguished for his fairness, impartiality, executive ability, firmness, and kindness of heart...Most marked of his many attributes was his interest in the public welfare, physical training, and happiness of children and he leaves an example in his public service for his associates and successors to emulate.

Baldwin was survived by his wife, Nellie (Todd) Baldwin and children Frances Todd Baldwin, George S. Baldwin, Jr., James Todd Baldwin, and Nell Todd Baldwin.

Charles Stearns, the retiring president of the Brookline Historical Society, in his “Report of the President” on January 30, 1923, summed up what many people felt about George S. Baldwin: “He was a genial and hearty gentleman and had many friends.”

Sources:

- Brookline Chronicle, February 11, 1922*
- Proceedings of the Brookline Historical Society, January 30, 1923*
- Letters of Louis D. Brandeis, Volume III, 1913-1915, Progressive and Zionist*
- National Listing of Historic Places in northern Boston 1980*
- <https://www.mtlhouse.org/slavery/>*

It was noted that Mr. Baldwin's wife Ellen "Nellie Todd" Baldwin was a first cousin of Mary Todd Lincoln. It is likely that members of the Todd family living in Lexington, Kentucky were slave owners.

Resident Lisa Cunningham provided some background on the Baldwin family of Brookline. She stated that Mr. Baldwin, the son of a minister, owned a fair amount of land in the town and was very active in the community. Mr. Baldwin's grandson Jay lived on Middlesex Road. Another resident stressed the importance of considering community values when assessing the appropriateness of school names.

3) Update on Renaming Process/Timeline

Mr. Lummis provided an update on the Coolidge Corner School renaming process and timeline. He noted that the May 2018 Town Meeting approved both renaming the Devotion School as the Coolidge Corner School and directed the School Committee to determine a process to select a new permanent name. Working with the School Committee, Superintendent Bott has developed a process by getting input from a broad range of people including Coolidge Corner School parents and teachers, the warrant article petitioners, and the Coolidge Corner School PTO. Before finalizing the process School Committee members and Superintendent Bott are reaching out more broadly to get input on the proposed process. As laid out, the process would include both the Coolidge Corner School Community, students, and the broader town community in an open and inclusive process that would lead to the School Committee recommending a name to the Town Naming Committee. As prescribed in Town by-law, the Naming Committee would then review the proposed name before referring it to Town Meeting in May 2019. The proposed process will be posted on the School Website for public feedback and will be sent directly to the Ad Hoc Task Force members (and other relevant groups) for their input. It is important that the name selected represent the values of the school and the community. Students will play a significant role in the process.

Members appreciated the thoughtful approach and the opportunity to provide input into the process; stressed the importance of reaching out to alumni and past administrators for their input; and suggested the Town review the Naming Committee criteria and consider a sunset provision so that all names are reviewed after a certain length of time. A resident suggested that possible names not be limited to people who resided in Brookline and be expanded to include people who may have lived elsewhere in Massachusetts.

4) Update/Discussion on Heath School Name Research (efforts to recruit researchers and scope/timeline)

Dr. Brown stated that at the last meeting, it was agreed that she would seek out a graduate student or scholar who could do a small piece of research on the Heath family. The Task Force also laid out key questions. *Members suggested that it would be helpful to have a family tree of the Heath family in Brookline and to address questions such as the following: Who lived on Heath Street? Was it the nuclear or extended Heath family? Did anyone else live on Heath Street? Were there other Heaths in Brookline? If yes, where did they live and what were their connections? Did any of the Heaths of the time say or do anything to oppose slavery?*

Dr. Brown reported that she asked several major scholars at Boston University who agreed that it would be quite difficult to find a graduate student to do this work. The head of Boston University American Studies Dr. Nina Silber, a nationally known scholar of the Civil War, recommended Dr. Kerri Greenidge of Tufts Center for the Study of Race and Democracy. Her Tufts biography is below. Dr. Brown wrote to Dr. Greenidge who replied that she is interested. Because the Task Force had not decided how to proceed on this research, Dr. Brown thanked Dr. Greenidge and said she would be back in touch when she knew more. In addition, Dr. Brown reported that there may be some first-year Boston University students available to provide non-research assistance, e.g., publicity.

Dr. Kerri Greenidge

Co-Director, African American Freedom Trail Project [at Tufts Center for the Study of Race & Democracy]

Dr. Kerri Greenidge received her Doctorate in American Studies from Boston University, where her specialty included African-American history, American political history, and African-American literature from 1850 through the 1910s. She has taught at Suffolk University, Boston University, the University of Massachusetts, Emerson College, and Brown University. Her work includes historical research for the Wiley-Blackwell Anthology of African-American Literature, the Oxford African American Studies Center, and the Boston History and Innovation Collaborative. For nine years she worked as a historian for Boston African American National Historical Site in Boston, through which she published her first book, Boston Abolitionists (2006). Her forthcoming book is a biography of African-American activist, William Monroe Trotter, which explores the history of racial thought and African American political radicalism in New England at the turn of the century. She teaches at Tufts University and the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Mr. Cawthorne will follow up with Brookline High School students that had expressed an interest in assisting with this research. Dr. Brown reported that she asked Dr. Gellineau whether his department might have any available funds to pay a stipend (no funds available) and has also contacted the Brookline Community Fund. She asked whether the Superintendent might have any discretionary funds that could be used for this purpose. Mr. Liss stated that the project will involve reviewing primary sources such as letters and diaries, and could be an extensive amount of work. The consensus of the Task Force was that additional research is needed before the Task Force can make a recommendation on the Heath name. Mr. Liss said he will visit the Massachusetts Historical Society to get more information on what sources might be available and to estimate how long it might take to complete the research. Ms. Charlupski and Ms. Brown offered to go with him and see what information they might be able to gather on the Heath family. Dr. Brown will update Dr. Greenidge.

5) Meeting Schedule and Agenda for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Ad Hoc Task Force will take place on Monday, September 17, 2018, 5:30 PM-7:00 PM, in the Walsh School Committee Room, 5th Floor, Town Hall. The agenda will include an update on the school naming process, a report on Heath

School name research, discussion of the report to the School Committee, and future meeting date(s).

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 PM.