

ARTICLE 23

TWENTY-THIRD ARTICLE

Submitted by: Deborah Brown, Anne Greenwald

To see if the Town will change the name of the Edward Devotion School to the Roland B. Hayes School, or other appropriate name consistent with 21st century values and the Town's commitment to diversity and inclusion by September 1, 2018.

or act on anything relative thereto.

PETITIONER'S ARTICLE DESCRIPTION

This Article calls for changing the name of a popular public school named after a slaveholder, Edward Devotion. Holding a slaveholder up as a beacon of virtue to young people sends the wrong message to our youth, people of color, allies and the broader Brookline community. Brookline cannot claim to be taking the moral high ground and also be comfortable having a school named after a slaveholder.

By way of background, in 1744, Edward Devotion, Brookline resident and slave-owner, bequeathed property to the Town for the building of a new school. Over two centuries passed when some residents had an interest in establishing the role that slavery played in the Town's development. In response to such interests, in 2006, the Hidden Brookline Committee was established by the Town to bring to light the history of slavery in Brookline. In the ensuing years, the Committee performed a great deal of research which resulted in 2012 a warrant article. In it, the Town acknowledged the history and pledged "vigilance against all practices and institutions that dehumanize and discriminate against people." It was the first time in Town Meeting that slavery in Brookline had been discussed since the 18th century.

On May 24, 2012, the Town passed the resolution called "A Resolution Regarding Slavery in Brookline." The Town has continued its commitment to inclusion. In 2017, the Town entered into a compact with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), agreeing to implement racial equity, eliminate implicit and explicit bias, and eradicate individual, institutional, and structural racism. Signs around Town celebrate the Town's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Despite some best efforts to support diversity and inclusion, few knew that Edward Devotion was a slaveholder. In August 2017, the Brookline School Committee received multiple requests, in writing, to discuss changing the name of the Edward Devotion School to something more compatible with 21th century values. Despite multiple attempts by residents to get the School Committee's attention, the request went without a substantive reply until a February 2017 article appeared in the *Brookline TAB*. Deborah Brown

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published an open letter to the community pressing that the School's name be changed. A subsequent editorial appeared two weeks later in the *Boston Globe* expressing a similar sentiment. The communication in the papers and direct communications with the School Committee provide actual and apparent notice of our intent to have the School's name changed. Following the Brookline TAB article, residents formed an organization to advocate for the name change. In March 2017, the School Committee agreed to discuss a renaming the Edward Devotion School.

Retaining the Edward Devotion's name on a school or a protracted debate creates a variety of issues for the Town. Beyond the social issues it has brought to light, there are potentially economic repercussions. While there are few Towns as livable as Brookline, people may choose to live elsewhere. In a competitive job market, people may actually elect to work elsewhere. Businesses may have concerns about whether people will want to travel to Brookline to do business. Finally, protracted debate may draw a heinous and horrific element to the community.

We believe that we have described why it is in the best interest of the Town to change the name of the Edward Devotion School to a more appropriate name.

MOTION TO BE OFFERED BY THE PETITIONERS

Voted: That the Town change the name of the Edward Devotion School to a name to be selected by the School Committee after receiving public input through a process to be determined by the School Committee. Town Meeting hereby requests the Naming Committee to consider the name so selected by the School Committee and make a recommendation to Town Meeting with respect thereto at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting. In the interim, the name of the School shall be Coolidge Corner School.

ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION OFFERED BY THE PETITIONERS

Petitioners submitted the Warrant Article in order to accurately reflect history in its context and to acknowledge that Edward Devotion's name should not rest above a school when applying the Town's and 21st century values. We expect that removing Edward Devotion's name and renaming the School will happen in an open and transparent manner.

Slavery as an institution cruelly dehumanized and discriminated against people of African Ancestry and Native Americans in our nation. By 1700, leaders like Samuel Sewall were decrying slavery and calling for its abolition in a document called "The Selling of Joseph: A memorial." Despite protestations by Sewall and John Eliot, the abomination continued.

Slavery was legal in Massachusetts from 1638 until around 1800. "The enslavement of Africans began soon after the start of English colonization proving to be the mirror process of Indian removal. The first documented shipment of enslaved Africans arrived in 1638, eighteen years after the Mayflower's journey.

In 1744, upon the death of the second Edward Devotion, his will, executed the year before his death, decreed that any money left over after payment of his debts and funeral expenses and other bequests be used "towards building or maintaining a School as near the centre of the said town as shall be agreed upon by the town." If a site for a new school could not be agreed upon, the money was to be used to purchase a wood lot for use by the town to support the town's school and church. An inventory of his property compiled after his death included land, livestock, household goods, and "one Negrow" valued at 30 pounds. "New England colonists wrote wills when they had an idea that death was approaching, and they wrote with at least one eye looking towards prosperity. Their careful dispersal of their human property underscores how even a single slave could loom large in an owner's understanding of his or her own estate.

The former Devotion land and house on Harvard Street reverted to Devotion's widow Mary upon the failure of Solomon Hill to pay the mortgage on the property in 1762. It was then sold, and the town, as stipulated in the will, received funds. In 1837, these funds were recorded as amounting to \$2,281.01. The town added additional funds received from the Federal government, bringing the total amount to just over \$4,500.

The Town did not ignore or forget Edward Devotion's gift. As in 1844, the money in the Edward Devotion Fund was allocated toward the construction of the new Brookline Town Hall on Prospect Street, near the location of the current Town Hall. The building contained two rooms used as schoolrooms. Again in 1884, the Town Meeting, apparently considering the use of the funds for the Town Hall not to have fulfilled Devotion's bequest, voted to add \$5,000 to the Devotion Fund to be put toward expansion of the Brookline High School on School Street. A large hall in the school was named the Edward Devotion Hall in recognition of Devotion's bequest, and a plaque commemorating his gift was placed in the school. (The plaque was lost when the old Brookline High School was replaced by a new building on Greenough Street in 1893.)

It was not until 1891 that a large portion of the former Edward Devotion property, including the Edward Devotion House, was purchased by the Town from the estate of a later owner, Nahum Smith, for \$61,000. The property had passed through several owners after 1762, including William Marshall, Israel Thorndike, and George Babcock.

Finally, or approximately 150 years later in 1892 a new school named the Edward Devotion School was built on the site. (No record of a discussion of the naming at the time has been found.) Other buildings were added in 1898 and 1913. The 1892 and 1898 buildings were later replaced.

In 2006, the Hidden Brookline Committee was established by the Town to bring to light the history of slavery and freedom in Brookline.

In 2012, the Hidden Brookline Committee put forward a warrant article on slavery acknowledging the history and pledging "vigilance against all practices and institutions that dehumanize and discriminate against people." It was the first time since the 18th century that slavery in Brookline was discussed in Brookline Town Meeting. On May 24,

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2012, the Town passed the resolution called "A Resolution Regarding Slavery in Brookline."

In 2017, the Town entered into a compact with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), agreeing to implement racial equity, eliminate implicit and explicit bias, and eradicate individual, institutional, and structural racism.

Moreover, that is also arguably true about Edward Devotion is that he would not meet today's naming standards. Records do not indicate that Devotion set an example of outstanding citizenship; made an exemplary contribution of time, service, or resources to or on behalf of the community; represents a core value of the school system; and demonstrated lengthy and/or exemplary service to the students of Brookline. Who was he? Edward Devotion collected funds for the church and encouraged people to attend church. He also held for a brief period some public employment. He did value education and he died childless. As described above the Town has recognized Devotion's contributions to the Town, but going forward his contributions will have to be better contextualized. Tools like the yellow historic house; the Hidden Brookline materials and tour, Brookline Historic Commission materials and the School's curriculum provide forums and vehicles for everyone to learn more about Edward Devotion and the Town's history of enslaving Africans and Native Americans.

Knowing what we now know in 2018, it is unconscionable that a Brookline elementary school would continue to be named after a slave-owner, as to do so undermines the core values of equality and mutual respect that our educational system strives to impart to our children, and that form the foundation of our democracy.

Since 2006, the Town of Brookline has grappled with how best to acknowledge the history of slavery and racism in Brookline and to understand its impact on the present. Hidden Brookline has provided a great deal of education and advocacy, but many issues remain. This warrant calls for changing the name of a public school named after a slaveholder, Edward Devotion. Removing Edward Devotion's name from the grade school is the first step.

We are advocating for an open, transparent and robust public involvement process. Finally, no later than March 2019, petitioners will submit a warrant article with a new name for the school that Town meeting will vote to approve or not.

The School Committee will support the Town during this process. The School Committee has established an Ad Hoc Task Force to review the names of all of the buildings and spaces in the Public Schools of Brookline to ensure that they meet the School Committee and the Town's naming criteria. They will solicit feedback from historians and community members, including students, teachers, alumni and citizens at large. They will also review legal aspects of removing a name from a building. The Task Force will present their findings and recommendations to the School Committee and provide a written report by Labor Day 2018, with an interim update to the School Committee in early May 2018. Once the process has been completed, the School Committee will recommend a new name to the Naming Committee.

This entire process will enable the Town to better uphold its stated values by not only removing the name of a slaveholder, but also approving a process and name consistent with our values. Moreover, we can send a message to our students, their parents and the Town's ethnically diverse residents that we are willing to change according to the knowledge we have now. Let us identify the name and values of someone whom all can admire and perhaps even wish to emulate. Finally, let us acknowledge the enormous contributions made by African Americans and other People of Color in building this community and this nation.

SELECT BOARD'S RECOMMENDATION

A report and recommendation by the Select Board under Article 23 will be provided in the Supplemental Mailing. The Board is aware that a potential motion was still in flux when they met on May 1, and will take a position on a finalized motion at their meeting on May 15, 2018.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION:

A report and recommendation by the Advisory Committee on Article 23 will be provided in the Supplemental Mailing.

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