



Western Libraries

516 High Street  
Bellingham, Washington 98225-9103  
(360) 650-3050 FAX (360) 650-3044  
[www.wwu.edu](http://www.wwu.edu)

October 1, 2021

Dear President Randhawa and members of the WWU Board of Trustees,

This letter is in response to your request for additional information from the Western Libraries' Division of Heritage Resources on the life and legacy of President Edward T. Mathes. We have completed this research and outline our findings in this letter. While questions remain, we hope that the new documentation presented here will inform your discussion of the Legacy Review Task Force's recommendations and contribute to a fuller understanding of Mathes's role as an educator and politician.

The Task Force recommendation to remove Dr. Mathes's name from Mathes Hall was based primarily on newspaper articles regarding two lectures, "The Wandering Caucasian" and "Mexico and Her Problems." These articles briefly describe the lectures, and as noted in our earlier reports, full transcripts of Mathes's presentations have not been located. The latest round of research has turned up no new information in this respect other than a 1917 newspaper article which states that Mathes's "addresses are delivered without manuscript."<sup>1</sup> In other words, he spoke without a prepared text. Thus, it is unlikely that further research would shed additional light on the context of his remarks. Nor can we verify whether newspapers accurately summarized the full content of his presentations.

The Task Force also noted that Mathes did not issue a public statement condemning the 1907 mob violence against Bellingham's community of South Asian workers. In our research over the past few weeks, we closely examined several local newspapers and other resources. No statements by Mathes on the 1907 riot were found. Overall, published condemnations of the violence appear to be limited. They include an editorial in a local Norwegian-language newspaper and excerpts from sermons delivered by four Bellingham church leaders.

Though Mathes evidently did not make a public statement about the riot—at least not one that was published in newspapers—two students from India, Akhoy Kumar (A. K.) Mozumdar and Nabhi Ram Joshi, studied at Western during his administration, despite the overt hostility of some local

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<sup>1</sup> "Dr. E. T. Mathes of Bellingham will give illustrated talk at Nelson School tomorrow night," *Anacortes American*, April 12, 1917.

residents toward non-whites and immigrants. Mozumdar enrolled in 1905. In 1913, he became a U.S. citizen, one of the first Indians to do so.<sup>2</sup> Nabhi Ram Joshi came to Bellingham in 1907 from British Columbia and had a particularly close relationship with Mathes. Historian Paul Englesberg points out that “The first issue of the nationalist *Free Hindustan* newspaper, published in Vancouver, British Columbia [then still part of the British Empire], by Taraknath Das, proclaimed Dr. Mathes as ‘a good friend of India’ who had ‘expressed his desire to and capacity to help a few more Hindu students in different institutions.’”<sup>3</sup> (The word “more” implies that he was helping some already.) Though it is not clear what specifically motivated Mathes in this regard, a statement found in *Free Hindustan* offers context for his support for Indian students: “The policy of the British government is to plunder Hindustan and oppress the people by keeping them in utter ignorance... We implore the aid and sympathy of our friends all over the world to help our educational movement. Education alone can change the condition of 300 millions of people in Hindustan.”<sup>4</sup> Why Joshi chose to leave Canada is an open question, but it may be attributable to the limited opportunities for higher education in British Columbia in 1907 (the University of British Columbia had not yet been founded and students at other schools were required to go on to McGill University in Montreal to complete their degrees). In any case, it is notable that Joshi chose to come to Bellingham to study under Dr. Mathes, who enrolled him in a special program of courses to prepare him for the University of Washington. He studied mechanical engineering at UW in 1908-09.<sup>5</sup>

Paul Englesberg has written that “Mathes grew concerned when the riot broke out and spoke with some labor leaders who gave him assurances that they would not harm the student from India. He [Mathes] later spoke about the issue of racial conflict and the Bellingham events during lectures to other educators, but no records of the contents have been found.”<sup>6</sup> Joshi lived with the Mathes family and affectionately referred to Dr. and Mrs. Mathes as “father” and “mother.”<sup>7</sup> As noted in Heritage Resources’ first report, Mathes and Joshi later corresponded for many years, and Mathes’s daughter-in-law, Miriam Snow Mathes, created a scholarship for Indian and Indian-American students at WWU. The scholarship is still awarded today.

Heritage Resources’ collections have yielded additional correspondence with Joshi that sheds further light on his high regard for Mathes. The Mathes residence, where Joshi lived in 1907, was on High Street near the current location of the Viking Union and Mathes Hall. The house was torn down along with others to make way for the new buildings. In a 1964 letter to Miriam Snow Mathes, Joshi, by then retired from a successful business career in India, wrote: “I feel distressed to know that the authority of the college is taking our home, but I hope that the memory of father E. Mathes will be kept in some suitable shape by the college authority by having his statue in the compound or some hall named Edward Mathes Hall.” Another letter from Joshi, written in 1965

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<sup>2</sup> [“A spiritual guru’s curious journey to becoming the first Indian filmmaker in the US.”](#) The U.S. Supreme Court revoked Mozumdar’s citizenship in 1923 following the case of *U.S. vs Bhagat Singh Thind*.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Englesberg, [“The 1907 Bellingham Riot and Anti-Asian Hostilities in the Pacific Northwest,”](#) p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Sachidananda Mohanty, [Cosmopolitan Modernity in Early 20th-Century India](#) (Routledge, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> [“‘Hindu’ Students at the University of Washington,”](#) UW Special Collections website.

<sup>6</sup> Englesberg, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Nabhi Ram Joshi correspondence, Miriam Snow Mathes Papers, Special Collections, Western Libraries.

during the construction of Mathes Hall, continues: "I am so happy to know that the authority of your college and staff of it have appreciated the services of our father, late doctor Edward T. Mathes, that he rendered as principal of the Bellingham Normal School, now a college, and named their tallest hall in the campus of the college as the Edward T. Mathes Hall, and have fulfilled my humble wish as I requested them through my letter sent last year."<sup>8</sup>

As noted in our first report, and as Paul Dunn reiterated in his letter of June 28, 2021, Mathes affirmed the rights of Alma Clark Glass to study at Western. Heritage Resources staff have discovered no new information that would further inform the Board of Trustees on this topic. However, it may be worth observing that in 1913, Booker T. Washington spoke on campus about his work at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and "The Problems of the Negro Race." According to Miriam Snow Mathes, Washington was an overnight guest at the Mathes home. This was likely because African Americans were not allowed to stay in local hotels at the time.<sup>9</sup>

At your request, Heritage Resources has also searched for more information on Mathes's tenure as mayor of Bellingham and his candidacy in the gubernatorial primaries in 1920 and 1924. While an exhaustive study has not been possible, staff examined several key sources related to this period of Mathes's life. A summary of findings follows.

In 1919, five years after leaving Western, Mathes was nominated as the Democratic candidate for mayor of Bellingham. He was elected in December and took office the following January. At the time of the election, there was significant labor unrest in Washington, and the entire nation was in the grips of the First Red Scare. Mathes's main opponent, a local businessman named Henry Ford, was a hyper-nationalist who promised to crack down on socialists, communists, and "unamerican" activity.<sup>10</sup> Though Mathes himself did not hold far-left political views, he defeated Ford, partly because of support from Republican voters who crossed party lines. He promised "rigid economy" and said he would strive to be non-partisan.<sup>11</sup> After a two-year term that was "conspicuous for the absence of dissension," he was reelected in 1921.<sup>12</sup>

In its report and recommendations, the Task Force stated that "concerns and questions remain about Mathes' activities following his departure" from Western, specifically in regard to "white supremacist organizing in Whatcom County during the 1920s." The topic is vast and requires more in-depth investigation than we were able to give to it in the short amount of time we had to conduct this research. However, based on new documentation that we located and closer analysis

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<sup>8</sup> Nabhi Ram Joshi letters to Miriam Snow Mathes, Dec. 18, 1964, and Oct. 12, 1965, Miriam Snow Mathes Papers, Special Collections, Western Libraries.

<sup>9</sup> "Booker Washington speaks to big audience," *Bellingham Herald*, Mar. 14, 1913; Miriam Snow Mathes memoir, "Ninety Years of Living," Miriam Snow Mathes Papers, Special Collections, Western Libraries, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> "'Americanism' the issue declares Henry Ford," *Bellingham Herald*, Oct. 16, 1919.

<sup>11</sup> "Mathes is surprised by victory," *Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 3, 1919; "Dr. E. T. Mathes, Mayor-Elect," *Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 3, 1919.

<sup>12</sup> "Smooth sailing," *Bellingham Herald*, Dec. 5, 1921.

of one source cited in the Task Force report, some of the earlier conclusions regarding Mathes and the Ku Klux Klan may require additional scrutiny.

The Task Force report asserts that “Evidence of Ku Klux Klan activity in Bellingham first appears in 1921.” That claim is based on a newspaper article about a fake document circulated by the Klan to discredit *Seattle Times* publisher C. B. Blethen’s efforts to expose the Klan. The article also mentions that the *Bellingham Sunday Reveille* had joined in denouncing the document.<sup>13</sup> We located the *Reveille* article, and it is clear that it is not evidence, as the Task Force suggests, of Klan activity specific to Bellingham or Whatcom County in 1921. Instead, it discusses the fake document and advocates for the right of American Catholics everywhere “to be unafraid and unassailed in the exercise” of their religious freedom.<sup>14</sup> More research is needed to ascertain the level of Klan organizing in Bellingham between 1920 and 1923, when Mathes was mayor. Available sources suggest that the bulk of Klan activity in and around the city occurred in the late 1920s and 1930s, after Mathes left politics.

The report also faults Mathes for not making a statement against the Klan or sending authorities to curb the activities of those who burned a cross on Sehome Hill on July 4, 1923. Our recent research did not uncover such a statement. However, it may be worth considering that neither the *Bellingham Herald*, the *Bellingham Reveille*, nor the Western student newspaper, the *Weekly Messenger*, reported on the incident, even briefly. The Task Force report cites an article on the history of the Klan in Washington by Trevor Giffey. That article in turn references just one source about the Sehome Hill incident—a short article in the Seattle KKK newspaper, *Watcher on the Tower*, which is told from the Klan’s perspective. Without more evidence, it is difficult to know what exactly happened or what Mathes’s views on the matter were.

More abundant documentation is available about Initiative 49, a Klan-sponsored 1924 referendum that was widely seen as an attack on Catholics and, if it had been passed, would have banned private schools in Washington. Though Mathes was no longer Bellingham mayor in 1924, he ran for governor that year in the Democratic primaries. The Task Force report states that “Mathes, despite his high profile as an educational leader, did not register public opposition to Washington Initiative 49.” Documents in Heritage Resources and online reveal that Mathes did, in fact, publicly oppose the bill. In Seattle on September 6, 1924, he and fellow Democratic candidate E. F. Blaine “agreed on opposition to an initiative measure sponsored by the Ku Klux Klan and intended to abolish parochial schools in Washington. Dr. Mathes said he believed the attitude of all his rivals on the school bill was the same, although Ben F. Hill, Walla Walla, and Walter J. Robinson, Spokane... avoided the issue in speeches here.”<sup>15</sup> A second newspaper article added that Mathes “attacked the klan in his last few speeches, particularly directing his remarks to the klan school bill. Blaine has done the same thing. Hill did not speak on the measure until his chief rival, Mathes, did so.”<sup>16</sup> An article about the governor’s race in a Snohomish County newspaper mentioned that

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<sup>13</sup> [“Federal departments are seeking evidence of law breaking,”](#) *Catholic Northwest Progress*, Sept. 23, 1921.

<sup>14</sup> “Knights of Columbus cleared,” *Bellingham Daily Reveille*, Sept. 18, 1921.

<sup>15</sup> “Mathes opposes Klan initiative,” *Bellingham Sunday Reveille*, Sept. 7, 1924.

<sup>16</sup> “The Democratic contest,” *Bellingham Reveille*, Sept. 9, 1924.

“E. T. Mathes is the strongest of the four [Democratic candidates] in western Washington, but faces Ku Klux Klan opposition...”<sup>17</sup>

Heritage Resources was also asked to provide additional information about Mathes beyond these points of controversy. Born in Fulton, Michigan, in 1866 and educated at Heidelberg University in Tiffin, Ohio, Mathes was already familiar with the educational challenges that people in developing parts of the country faced when he went west to Kansas around 1890 to work as a school superintendent. In 1896, he joined the faculty of the newly established Idaho State Normal School in Lewiston, where he prepared teachers to work in mostly one-room schoolhouses. Three years later, he came to Bellingham to lead the New Whatcom State Normal School, now Western Washington University.

Approved by the Washington state legislature in 1893, the school did not hold classes until 1899 because of a lack of funds. Though financial challenges continued, Mathes’s leadership and vision helped persuade the legislature to pass new taxes in support of education. One account recalls that “When he came in May 1899, Dr. Mathes found, instead of the beautiful green campus seen here today, a mass of swamp land and stumps... During his administration, the main building and its annexes [including a science annex] were built, the campus was beautified, and the Normal began to enjoy a most phenomenal growth.” In 1899, there were nine faculty; by 1914, the number had grown to 38, and several new academic departments had been added. Statistics for student enrollment over the same period vary but, at minimum, tripled, thanks in part to Mathes’s direct recruitment of students.<sup>18</sup> In addition to Old Main, other buildings that Mathes oversaw the construction of included a dormitory, auditorium, gym, social halls, and a greenhouse. The library, then housed in Old Main, grew, and Mathes even served as the school’s unofficial librarian until the hiring of Mabel Zoe Wilson in 1902.

The years between 1899 and 1914 also saw the opening of the Campus School (originally known as the Model School or Training School). Designed to give future teachers practical, hands-on classroom experience, this elementary school operated until 1967 and introduced Western’s students to new trends in teaching. This was especially significant because most of the Normal School’s students in the early 1900s came from rural areas where there was little if any awareness of innovative pedagogy. According to a speech given by Helen Mathes, Dr. Mathes’s wife, at a campus event in 1948, “A rough survey showed that 99 percent of our students [around 1901] went to rural school, that a third were one-room schools, the remainder two-room schools.”<sup>19</sup> At a time when Washington’s “pioneer days” were not long past, Mathes was influential in bringing a progressive educational outlook to the state.

His outlook and influence extended beyond the campus. Reflecting on the school’s foundational period, Miriam Snow Mathes wrote that life “on the hill” was “a very lonely one,” and the faculty felt “academic isolation and lack of contact with the people of the town.” Bellingham itself was

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<sup>17</sup> [“Political pot getting hotter,”](#) *Monroe Monitor*, Sept. 5, 1924.

<sup>18</sup> Enrollment statistics for 1899 range from 88 to 264; for 1914, from 615 to 1,361.

<sup>19</sup> “Paper given by Mrs. E. T. Mathes to the Faculty Wives at their meeting, May 13, 1948, in the club room of Edens Hall,” Special Collections Vertical File (Presidents—Mrs. Edward T. Mathes).

isolated, too, and many felt the need for cultural programming (as the wife of one early faculty member put it, “we couldn’t live by salmon and shingles alone”). Partly to address the “town-and-gown” divide and connect both Bellingham and the Normal School to a wider cultural scene, Mathes organized talks, concerts, and other public programs. In 1901, he founded the Bellingham Bay Lecture Course, which a committee of Normal School faculty subsequently ran. Over the next two decades, the lecture course brought an array of notable speakers to the community. Some, like Jacob Riis (1904) and Robert La Follette (1909), were prominent progressives. Others, such as South Carolina senator Benjamin Tillman (1907), were highly controversial.<sup>20</sup>

Mathes also established the Normal School’s Extension Department in 1910 to help educate students’ parents and other adults in the community, many of whom had only an elementary education. The school’s annual catalog stated that “The general purpose of this new department will be to bring some of the opportunities, and in a limited way, some of the actual daily work of the normal school within the reach of the parents of our public school children. Naturally the efforts of the normal school are very largely centered upon the preparation of the teacher, but it is the desire of our faculty to render helpful service to the parent as well as to the teacher... For this work the general equipment of the institution is available... [T]here is no intention to make money out of the lectures.” As part of the extension program, faculty delivered lectures not only in Bellingham and Whatcom County, but throughout the state.<sup>21</sup>

After leaving Western in 1914, Mathes operated a bookstore and the Avalon Theater in Bellingham. The theater was the first in this part of the state to show talking movies. It also presented educational films. In 1917, Mathes’s daughter Virginia died. To help take his mind off the loss, he volunteered to lecture to American soldiers in Europe through the YMCA. Enroute to Europe, the British steamer he was traveling on was torpedoed and sunk, and Mathes narrowly survived. He spent fifteen months with the American army in France and Germany.<sup>22</sup>

Returning to the U.S., he continued his lecture work, ran for mayor, and contributed to charity efforts (in April 1920, for example, in his first months as mayor, he gave a talk in support of Armenian genocide relief).<sup>23</sup> He ran unsuccessfully for governor as a Democrat in the 1920 primary election. According to one newspaper article, “Dr. Mathes stands for the development of our agricultural lands, for a revision of our taxation system, believes in the best schools, advocates the consolidation of state boards, and pledges strict economy in all state offices.”<sup>24</sup> Another article reinforces his commitment to education and improving the lives of underserved populations. The article quotes him directly: “Statistics tell us that better children are reared in homes owned by the

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<sup>20</sup> Heritage Resources’ first report and subsequent communications stated that the Lecture Course brought in British suffragette Emmaline Pankhurst and prominent eugenicist David Starr Jordan, whose name was recently removed from buildings at Stanford and Indiana Universities. While this is correct, it has subsequently been learned that Pankhurst and Jordan did not visit campus during Mathes’s presidency.

<sup>21</sup> WWU annual catalog, 1914, p. 85.

<sup>22</sup> “College Founded 40 Years Ago; Early-Day Struggles Recalled,” 1937 newspaper clipping, Special Collections Vertical File (President—Mathes).

<sup>23</sup> See *Lynden Tribune*, April 22 and April 29, 1920.

<sup>24</sup> “Dr. Mathes Democratic candidate for governor,” *Colville Examiner*, Sept. 11, 1920.

parents... The state... must, in some safe manner, provide the opportunity for every industrious citizen to buy a home and pay for it upon terms that can be met by his individual income. The building of five thousand new rural homes in our state every year for ten years will make Washington the happiest and most prosperous state in the union."<sup>25</sup> At his death in November 1937, Mathes was eulogized by Western president Charles Fisher for having done "pioneer work in laying a splendid foundation for the advantages which we today enjoy."

In conclusion, Heritages Resources is deeply appreciative of the important and challenging work that the Legacy Review Task Force undertook. It is our hope that the additional sources presented here offer broader context for the life and legacy of Edward T. Mathes and will be helpful in reflecting on his place in the university's history. We would like to thank our colleagues in Western Libraries, Heritage Resources for their contributions to this research. Please let us know if we can be of assistance in locating further documentation.

Sincerely,



Michael Taylor  
Special Collections Librarian  
Western Libraries, Heritage Resources



Elizabeth Joffrion  
Director of Heritage Resources  
Western Libraries

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<sup>25</sup> "Let us clear land and build homes," *Washington Standard*, August 13, 1920.