

**MEMORANDUM**

**FROM: WWU Board of Trustees Ad Hoc Legacy Review Committee**

John M. Meyer  
D. Chase Franklin  
Karen Lee  
Faith Pettis

**TO: WWU Board of Trustees**

**RE: Findings of Fact and Recommended Conclusions with Respect to the Naming of Mathes Hall**

---

Condensing the extensive resources gathered through the Legacy Review process and posted to [the Legacy Review Task Force website](#), the Ad Hoc Legacy Review Committee presents for the full Board's consideration the following findings of fact and recommended conclusions from applying the principles of de/renaming that have been advanced through the process.

**Findings of fact with respect to the personal legacy of Edward Tilden Mathes:**

1. Mathes served as the first Principal/President of New Whatcom State Normal School, the forerunner of WWU, from 1899-1914. Some notable developments during Mathes' 15-year tenure:
  - a. While the charter for the Normal School was approved by the state legislature in 1893, it did not hold classes until 1899 due to lack of funds. Mathes was instrumental in persuading the legislature to allocate funding for the construction and serial expansion of Old Main and its annexes, a dormitory, an auditorium, and other facilities.<sup>1</sup>
  - b. There was a fourfold increase in faculty and more than a threefold increase in students, partially due to his personal direct recruitment efforts.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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." <https://president.wvu.edu/files/2021-10/Heritage%20Resources%20Mathes%20Supplement.pdf>

- c. The Campus School (originally known as the Model School or Training School), a beacon of progressive education designed to give future teachers hands-on classroom experience, was opened.
  - d. Mathes founded the Bellingham Bay Lecture Course to bridge the “town and gown” divide and bring culture to a part of the state that had very little of it at the time. The broad array of notable speakers included progressives such as Jacob Riis and Robert La Follette, as well as controversial speakers such as South Carolina Senator Benjamin Tillman.
  - e. Mathes 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. As part of the extension program Normal College faculty delivered lectures not only in Bellingham but throughout the state.
2. Mathes delivered hundreds of public lectures throughout his life, and while there are no transcripts of his lectures—he appears to have spoken without notes—there are newspaper clippings from the time summarizing two of his talks, “The Wandering Caucasian” and “Mexico and Her Problems.” In these talks, Mathes appears to advance a hierarchical ordering by race, and a conception of white supremacy in which white people have an obligation to educate and civilize “our benighted brothers.”<sup>2</sup> Neither of the newspaper articles present these views as controversial for the time.
  3. In September 1907, a mob of up to 500 white men attacked and drove from town Bellingham’s community of South Asian workers, mostly Sikhs (mistakenly labeled as “Hindus” by the local press). There does not appear to be any evidence that Mathes publicly condemned the riot. Research indicates that public condemnations of the violence were limited and includes an editorial in a local Norwegian language newspaper and excerpts from sermons delivered by four Bellingham church leaders.
  4. Two students from India studied at the Normal School during his administration, despite the overt hostility of some local residents toward non-whites. Mathes formed a particularly close relationship with one of the students, Nahbi Ram Joshi, who lived in the Mathes family home. Mathes’ support of educational access for Indian students was sufficiently well known that the Vancouver newspaper *Free Hindustan* called Mathes “a good friend of India.”<sup>3</sup>
  5. In support of Western’s first Black student, Alma Clark, and against a considerable backdrop of anti-Black sentiment in Bellingham, Mathes and the Board of Trustees passed a resolution supporting Ms. Clark’s right to receive an education at the Normal

---

<sup>2</sup> More details from the newspaper clippings describing these talks is available on pp. 14-15 of [the Legacy Review Task Force Report](#), and on p. 2 of Task Force Chair [Paul Dunn’s letter to the Board of Trustees dated June 28, 2021](#).

<sup>3</sup> Much more information about Mathes’ relationship with the students and his subsequent political career can be found in the [Western Libraries’ Heritage Resources Supplementary Report on Mathes](#), submitted at the Board’s request on October 1, 2021.

School. In recognition, the *Seattle Republican*, the city's first successful African American newspaper, praised Mathes and the Board for taking this stand.<sup>4</sup>

### **Findings of fact with respect to the historical process of naming of Mathes Hall:**

6. There is little record of detailed discussion or deliberation that may have taken place around the naming of Mathes Hall. [The minutes of the June 11, 1965 meeting of the Board of Trustees](#) note the following: "The administration recommended to the Board that the 1966 dormitory soon to be under construction be named Edward T. Mathes Hall, in honor of Dr. Mathes, who was president of Western from 1899 to 1914. [Board member] Mr. Sprague moved acceptance of the recommendation. [Board member] Mr. Chase seconded the motion; the motion passed."

### **Recommended Conclusions Based on Considered Principles of De/Renaming**

In the course of its deliberations thus far, the Board of Trustees has given special attention to the principles of de/renaming captured in [the Legacy Review Task Force charge](#), as well as those used by [the Yale University Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming](#). Based on the findings of fact above, the Ad Hoc Legacy Review Committee recommends the following application of those principles for consideration by the full Board.

1. The Legacy Review Task Force charge states that consideration for removing a name should be guided by at least the following factors:
  - A. The harm caused by retaining the name.** Does the behavior or legacy of the person for whom the feature is named compromise or conflict with the University's mission, including both its commitment to intellectual integrity and its commitment to diversity and inclusion of all members of the Western community?
  - B. The potential harms of de/renaming.** The names of certain University features may have a positive value for students, faculty, staff, or alumni, who may find de/renaming disrespectful of their views.
  - C. Considering and weighing relevant factors.** Such factors include:
    - i. The relation of the honoree to the University's history.
    - ii. The behavior of the honoree in terms of creating a significant negative impact on the core mission of the University and its teaching and learning environment.
    - iii. Broader community identification with the feature.
    - iv. The strength and clarity of the historical evidence.

---

<sup>4</sup> More detail is available on pp. 15-16 of [the Legacy Review Task Force Report](#), pp. 4-6 of [Paul Dunn's letter to the Board of Trustees dated June 28, 2021](#), and Western Window magazine, "[The Story of Alma Clark Glass](#)"

- v. Whether the harm [of retaining or removing a name] can be mitigated, and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing an individual's wrongful behavior.

### **Recommended Conclusions Based on Principles of De/Renaming in the Task Force charge**

#### **2. The harm caused by retaining the name.**

- A. Knowing that Mathes expressed racist sentiments in two lectures, and that there is no evidence that he publicly condemned the Bellingham riots of 1907 may be considered inconsistent with the idea of being the namesake of a residence hall at Western.

#### **3. The potential harms of de/renaming.**

- A. Given the preponderance of evidence that Mathes made significant contributions to the institution, that he personally supporting students of color at some potential cost to himself, and contextualizing factors about his remarks (or lack thereof), de/renaming Mathes Hall on this basis would undermine confidence in the University's intellectual integrity and set a precedent for a very low threshold for de/renaming that could alienate potential namesakes.

#### **4. Considering and weighing the relevant factors.**

- i. The relation of the honoree to the University's history. **Mathes was the first Principal/President of the institution and made significant and lasting contributions to its capital and programmatic advancement.**
- ii. The behavior of the honoree in terms of creating a significant negative impact on the core mission of the University and its teaching and learning environment. **While the records of Mathes' two public lectures reveal them to be unacceptable by today's standards, their obscurity would seem to have little effect on the core mission of the University or its teaching and learning environment.**
- iii. Broader community identification with the feature. **Students have been living in Mathes Hall since 1966.**
- iv. The strength and clarity of the historical evidence. **As noted above, the historical evidence with respect to Mathes' two lectures is via summaries in newspaper clippings, rather than copies of his lectures. Likewise, while there is no evidence of Mathes' public denunciation of the 1907 riots in print, it is unknown whether he addressed the issue in any other way. By contrast, the evidence with respect to Mathes' support of Alma Clark and Nahbi Ram Joshi is extensive.**
- v. Whether the harm [of retaining or removing a name] can be mitigated, and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing an individual's wrongful behavior. **While the names of campus features have significant symbolic value, the most important way the institution can mitigate any harms from retaining the name would be to increase focus and funding toward**

advancing concrete, measurable efforts to increase inclusive success for underrepresented students, faculty, and staff.

**Recommended Conclusions Based on [The Yale University Principles of Renaming](#)**

- A. Is a principal legacy of the namesake fundamentally at odds with the mission of the university? **Despite Mathes' clearly offensive remarks in the two noted speeches, his legacy was overwhelmingly supportive of the mission of the University. It also includes two significant episodes of support for the few students of color at the institution long before this was an articulated component of the mission.**
- B. Was the relevant principal legacy significantly contested in the time and place in which the namesake lived? **Mathes' principal legacy as the first Principal of the Normal School, and as an advocate for Western's sole Black student, was praised in his own time. There is no evidence that these two speeches or any other public remarks of Mathes' were seen as controversial or offensive in their time.**
- C. Did the University, at the time of naming, honor a namesake for reasons that are fundamentally at odds with the mission of the University? **No. Records indicate that he was honored for his role as the first Principal/President of Western.**
- D. Does a building whose namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, or which was named for reasons fundamentally at odds with the University's mission, play a substantial role in forming community at the University? **Mathes Hall is a residential community and plays a significant role in building community.**
- E. Decisions to retain a name or rename come with obligations of non-erasure, contextualization, and process.
  - i. When a name is altered, there are obligations on the University to ensure that the removal does not have the effect of erasing history. **Given the facts above, removing the name would significantly erase or alter history.**
  - ii. When a name is retained, there may be obligations on the University to ensure that preservation does not have the effect of distorting history. **Retaining Mathes' name on the building would not distort history.**
  - iii. The University ought to adopt a formal process for considering whether to alter a building name on account of the values associated with its namesake; such a process should incorporate community input and scholarly expertise. **Developing a formal process of this kind going forward, based on lessons learned from this process and best practices from other institutions with more experience, could be among the actions taken by the Board in rendering its decision on these cases.**

