

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT RENAMING THE EDWARD DEVOTION SCHOOL

1. Why change the name of Brookline's Edward Devotion School?

Answer: He was a slaveholder whose name rests above a grade school and has for approximately 125 years.

2. Does anyone really support a name change?

Answer: Yes, many residents do support a name change that is consistent with 21st century values and the Town's commitment to racial equity, diversity and inclusion. When you ask about the name, most are first surprised that a Brookline school is named after a slaveholder and then they express support for a name change.

3. Why are you doing this now?

Answer: As President George W. Bush said at the dedication ceremony for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, "A great nation does not hide its history. It faces its flaws and corrects them." Once we learned about Devotion's history, we could not turn away. The School is under construction, which makes this the perfect time to assess and change the School's name.

4. Is the School on property donated by Devotion?

Answer: It's complicated. On his death in 1744, Edward Devotion bequeathed any money left over after payment of his debts and funeral expenses and other bequests to be used "towards building or maintaining a School as near the centre of the said town as shall be agreed upon by the town." An inventory of his property compiled after his death included land, livestock, household goods, and "one Negrow" valued at 30 pounds. 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.

After passing through several owners, the Edward Devotion property, including the Edward Devotion House, was purchased by the town in 1891 from the estate of a later owner, Nahum Smith.

5. It seems like the name change is happening too quickly. Is it?

Answer: The Town began to explore its history of enslavement and freedom when it established the Hidden Brookline Committee in 2006. As the explanation in the March 8, 2018 Warrant Article indicates, our engaging the Town began at that time, when Edward Devotion's slave holdings were brought to light. By 2012, many of the Town's leaders and many residents had been made aware of Devotion's and other Town residents' slave-owning pasts.

6. Will a Devotion name change result in the names on other public institutions being changed?

Answer: We are not here to change names on other institutions like streets and parks. A school is a place where we send our children to develop their character and academic skills, not to feel diminished. A host of municipal institutions would have to weigh in on whether streets should be renamed.

For example, we have not suggested changing the name of Washington Street. Compare Washington's contributions during the Revolutionary War and after to that of Edward Devotion's contributions. Likely Washington would meet the Town's naming standards, but it is less clear whether Devotion would.

7. What becomes of Devotion's legacy? Are we erasing history? Will all signs of slavery be erased from the Town's past?

Answer: We do not want to erase Devotion's legacy, but rather tell his complete story in a place that is both visible and accessible. We just don't want a slaveholder's name resting above a grade school.

A school's name symbolizes the values of that institution. Renaming the school would reaffirm our commitment to a future where each citizen is guaranteed the uniquely American gifts of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

We must also affirm the contributions made by enslaved people of color who have never been recognized by the Town, the Commonwealth or the nation. Let us celebrate our rich, diverse history as a Town and help set the tone for the next 300 years.

8. Anyone who cared about Edward Devotion's use of slaves is long since gone. Why does it matter now?

Answer: The legacy of slavery cannot simply be put aside. A great body of research explores the significant impacts of slavery today. Although owning slaves was a personal decision, state and federal laws enforced the institution of enslavement. After the Emancipation Proclamation, state and federal laws were rewritten to support and enforce institutional racism. Most of us can identify racism in the criminal justice system, housing, voting rights and education. More subtle versions of racism exist in employment, education and even shopping. We also know about more indirect, equally harmful forms of racism called micro-aggressions. Finally, there is a growing body of research that has concluded that the stress of racism has literally been encoded onto our DNA leading many to replay physically and emotionally harmful acts on ourselves and others.

Whites also suffer from a failure to acknowledge our past. By ignoring how enslaved black labor helped create America's wealth, and how state institutions continue to exclude non-whites from benefiting from that wealth, white persons protect themselves from the effects of racism and can pretend they are exempt from righting those historic burdens. Without truly addressing the effects of

racism, we will continue to suffer because we, the people, cannot all come to the table of democracy as equals. What Devotion and other slaveholders did continues to affect us today.

See some articles below about the impact of slavery today.

How the legacy of slavery affects the mental health of black Americans today, Alma Carten, <https://theconversation.com/amp/how-the-legacy-of-slavery-affects-the-mental-health-of-black-americans-today-44642>; *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, <http://joydegruy.com/resources-2/post-traumatic-slave-syndrome/>; *Understanding the long-run effects of Africa's slave trades*, Nathan Nunn, 27 February 2017, <https://voxeu.org/article/understanding-long-run-effects-africa-s-slave-trades>, *How does slavery benefit white people today?*, Luke Visconti, <http://www.diversityinc.com/ask-the-white-guy/how-does-slavery-benefit-white-people-today/>

9. **Will changing the name of the Edward Devotion School be expensive?**

Answer: Apparently not. Based on discussions at a School Committee meeting, the masonry work has not been done yet. The idea is to place a temporary name where Devotion's name otherwise rests, until a permanent name has been selected.

JOIN US IN ESTABLISHING A MORE SUITABLE NAME FOR THE DEVOTION SCHOOL
www.renamedevo.com