

Recommendations for February

Name of the Event:

As a committee, we strongly recommend changing the name from Founder's Day to a new and more inclusive name such as Hollins Day or Hollins History Day. It is our opinion that the name Founder's Day is tainted and is, rightly or wrongly, connected to a long standing denial of our past connections to slavery and racism on campus. Following similar discussions regarding renaming taking place at Yale University and many of our peer institutions in the Universities Studying Slavery (USS) consortium, the committee weighed issues of tradition and memory along side contemporary considerations regarding issues of race, power, and how to reconcile a difficult and complicated past. We have not come to this decision lightly and believe it is the right decision for a number of reasons. These include:

- First and foremost, student feedback on this matter has been overwhelmingly in favor of changing the name. As part of the committee's charge, we have asked the Hollins community for their suggestions for changing the event. Among a variety of suggestions about format and content, there has been a consistent call for changing the name. It is worth noting that students haven't been asking us to rename the Coker building; just the name of this celebration. This suggests that their requests are not arbitrary. Rather, they are specifically grounded in consideration of this event to which they are also being asked to contribute, and which they are expected to attend.
- History constantly changes and traditions/rituals change along with these changing times. Many of the rituals held as long lasting, sacred, and eternal are invented traditions with a fairly recent and somewhat mixed history. Academic work on collective memory and heritage argues that there are always ambiguities in even the most "cherished" of traditions. Nothing is ever as truly fixed and as timeless as it appears. It should be noted that we have not recommended changing the wreath laying ceremony at Charles Coker's gravesite, a ritual that is also controversial to many students and is certainly embedded in complex narratives of historical memory. Rather, we see the second wreath laying (see recommendation below) as a way to provide an additional tradition that complicates and challenges the hegemonic Lost Cause tinged version of the past present at Hollins University and many other Southern academic institutions.
- The history of Founder's Day at Hollins suggests a very fluid and dynamic event that has involved many different interpretations, activities, and events over time. It has always changed with the changing times. While renaming is a significant political act, changing the name of the event is also in the spirit of what has been an ever-changing and mutating event throughout the history of Hollins University.
- Founder's Day, almost by definition, is focused on the events 175 years ago. As such, slavery is embedded in that narrative as long as that name exists. We believe the event should become a day that not only acknowledges our beginnings, but also recognizes our shortcomings and our many accomplishments since the founding of the school. It

should be a day when we embrace a vision of what we aspire to be going forward. Inclusion would certainly be central to that vision.

- This is not a proposal to remove Charles Lewis Cocke from his rightful place as a person important to the history of our school. It is also not an attempt to rewrite or distort history. However, at this time, our students are asking that we focus on inclusion. In the context of this celebratory event, the term Founder is primarily associated with a single white man. If we hope to make the celebration of the history and mission of our school a more inclusive one, renaming it will send an unequivocal message that *all* are welcome to this event.
- Moving the apostrophe from Founder's Day to Founders' Day fails to engage a critical aspect of power related to the building of the institution: choice and freedom. One group of founding members had free will in choosing their role in establishing and building Hollins College. However, the largely unrecognized labor extracted from enslaved African-Americans occurred not as a result of free will but of human misery and bondage. Changing the apostrophe does nothing to address these issues of power and slavery.
- Finally, a change in name is of massive symbolic value because it illustrates that the university is actively engaged in a total reconsideration of its past and its future. Many of our committee members attending the USS Conference in September where we drew strength from the academics, students, and staff members at other institutions wrestling with many of these same issues of how to engage with their slave pasts. From discussions with our peers, we began to recognize the importance that small acts can make as part of a much larger and more coordinated effort. Changing the name of Founder's Day is an example of just such an act. It will provide hope to marginalized student communities that the work of the committee is resulting in action being taken.

Format of the Event

As a committee, we strongly recommend moving the event from the Chapel to the Theatre and making the event an inclusive and honest engagement with our 175 years of operation as Hollins University. Students, faculty, and staff will be encouraged to sit together and not wear formal academic garb. It is our hope that the Cocke family relatives will be seated alongside African-American staff members and invited visitors with connections to the long standing African-American community from what was formerly called The Old Fields Community. We hope this is a tradition that will continue with future events on this day, as we believe the day should always focus on some element of our past, present, and future. For the 175th celebration this year, we propose the following:

Events Held During the Week (before and after the event itself)

1. Workshop and Talk from USS Colleague (William and Mary Lemon Project, Georgetown, UVa): Might be best on Friday after the event at lunch for campus involvement.
2. Service Project coordinated by Jeri TBD

3. Campus wide reception after the event with a direct lead in to the Beth Macy talk that evening.
4. Wreath ceremony to include new addition recognized labor performed in bondage. That site will either be at the cemetery nearby or at a proposed monument location.

The Event Itself

1. Short contextual talk from President Gray
2. Music including school songs and chosen piece focused on difficult histories
3. Dance w/175 moves to celebrate the 175 years
4. Shorter reading from EMS play
5. Comments from USS Colleague about history, reconciliation, and university past
6. Voices from the Crowd: Audience members read excerpts from Hollins students, staff, and faculty from the past
7. Imagine 2042: Pass out paper and pencils and have all audience members write down their vision of Hollins in 2042.
8. Announcements (status of new monument, scholarships, and possible history position.)