

**Public Hearing on Renaming of Schools
October 29, 2020 School Board Meeting
Comments by Pamela Vetrini**

I want to start by saying that I'm very grateful to Dr. Hutchings and the School Board for taking on this project. I'm also very grateful to the nearly 200 members of our community who signed the petition. I want to thank the board for adopting a thoughtful process and, from my observations during this process, the Maury community stands behind a name change.

I am a Maury parent. I have a kindergartener and a third grader at Maury and I've been interested in Matthew Fontaine Maury since we moved to the neighborhood 8 years ago. I was a history major in college and sometimes I geek out over historical figures and Maury proved to be quite interesting in my research. The legend of Matthew Maury deserves scrutiny.

There are two things that I focused on when studying Matthew Maury. I wanted to understand his place in the Confederacy and I wanted to understand the significance of his name being chosen for our school.

In the early 1900s a picture was painted of Matthew Maury by the Daughters of the Confederacy with the publishing of propaganda booklets that emphasized his accomplishments in Oceanography and labeled him as a great scientist and global humanitarian. Upon further inspection, historians have noted that he was also a "proslavery internationalist." He attempted to negotiate a slave trade from the United States to Brazil and he tried to create a New Virginia Colony in Mexico after the Civil War where slave labor would continue with a new label of "indentured servitude." In fact, he convinced nearly 4,000 confederate soldiers to defect before his plan was thwarted by unrest in Mexico. When he joined the Confederacy at the start of the Civil War, his economic ideas that united the slaveholding American South with South America emboldened the Confederacy with the financial confidence to secede. Maury also invented an early version of the torpedo that sunk union ships during the Civil War and went to Europe to lobby for the Confederacy.

In the 1920s, the Cult of the Lost Cause led to a Jim Crow era South that rejected integration and glorified members of the Confederacy. Matthew Maury's name was plucked from Civil War history at that time and things were named after him as his statue was raised on Richmond's Monument Avenue. On January 16th, 1929, Matthew Maury Elementary was named by an unelected School Board who did not engage with the community to find a name for the school. In the minutes from the naming meeting, the notes read, "Moved, seconded, and agreed that the new Rosemont X school building be named 'Maury' after Matthew Fontaine Maury". There was no substantive discussion or community engagement as evidenced in the minutes.

The name "Maury" was chosen specifically to emphasize the South's intention to remain segregated and to honor the Lost Cause. It sent a message about our school, our neighborhood, our city, and about Virginia. It is past time to reject that message.

If anyone is interested in citations or links for any of this information, please post it in the comments or email me and I can send it to you.