

Written Public Comments
November 12, 2020 School Board Meeting
Comments by Gerald File

Matthew Fontaine Maury Elementary School

Alexandria's Public School System has recently heralded a significant "STEM" (Science, Technology, Engineering & Math) partnership with Virginia Tech's Technology Center. This partnership was supported by the City through the creation of the North Potomac Yard Innovation District. This is expected to assist our young graduates to qualify for the important positions and accompanying high compensation afforded by the new high technology companies establishing large presences in Crystal City and Potomac Yards commercial complexes.

Surprisingly, it appears a small group of community activists wish to sabotage and undermine this futuristic program by clamoring to rename Alexandria's only school named for a scientist, Virginia's and perhaps the United States' preeminent scientist, Matthew Fontaine Maury!

Not surprisingly, many ACPS alumni, long-time residents, and active voters in Alexandria have indicated their displeasure to us to rename one of our City's most highly rated and esteemed schools. However, many of these voters are reluctant to publicly voice their beliefs as they believe they will be unfairly charged as "racists" which, as stalwart members of the Democratic Party, is a characteristic they abhor!

Matthew F. Maury, a Northern Virginian from Fredericksburg, was a polymath with a life of extraordinary achievement:

As a distinguished, internationally renowned astronomer, oceanographer, meteorologist, cartographer, geologist, historian, author, and educator whose accomplishments rivaled those of Galileo!

He headed the U.S. Naval Observatory during his 36 years of U.S. Naval Service

His 1847 publication of "Wind and Current Chart of the North Atlantic" earned him international acclaim and the name "Pathfinder of the Seas."

He was also nicknamed "Father of Modern Oceanography and Naval Meteorology" for his extensive writings and publications on navigation

Later called "Scientist of the Seas" because of his novel, comprehensive book "The Physical Geography of the Sea" published in 1855

Influential advocate for the creation of the U.S. Naval Academy

Influential advocate for transcontinental railroad in 1849

In 1868, after his Presidential pardon for his loyalty to Virginia by his role in the Confederacy, he Chaired the Physics Department at Virginia Military Institute.

Influential advocate in 1872 for creation of Virginia Agricultural & Mining College (Virginia Tech) and turned down its offered Presidency

Declined Presidencies of College of William & Mary, St. John's College(Annapolis), and University's of Alabama and Tennessee to continue teaching at Virginia Military Institute

Authored and published "The Physical Geography of Virginia" in 1869 to assist war torn Virginia in discovering and extracting minerals, improve farming, and rebuilding its economy after the massive destruction of the Civil War

Honored by the naming of buildings at the University of Virginia, William & Mary, the United States Naval Academy and Madison Normal College(JMU)

The U.S. Library of Congress maintains the Matthew F. Maury Papers which comprise a collection of over 14,000 documents and items of scientific importance

In recognition of his international esteem and achievement, he is buried between President James Monroe and President John Tyler

It appears the 1929 Alexandria School Board was prescient in naming Maury School before the term "STEM" came into educational vogue. However, by his achievement, writings, and teachings; Matthew Fontaine Maury is clearly an early advocate and remarkable innovator in "science, technology, engineering, and math" which he demonstrated throughout his extensive scientific discoveries and their practical application.

If the leadership of our well-educated School Board members succumb to the pressure of the foolish leadership of the "cancel culture" advocates, whose educational experience and wisdom is uncertain, it clearly sends a powerful message that the ACPS gives only "lip service" to the importance of the supposedly innovative and acclaimed "STEM" programs.

Additionally, if an unwise renaming does occur, please do not pejoratively rename the school in honor of a past school board member as was the case with the last school naming. This establishes an unwelcome conflict of interest, undue self-importance to the Board, and a horrible future precedent!

Finally, If the historic Maury is unfortunately renamed, it is hoped the School Board will recognize that our school population is more than 37% Hispanic and demand a name of an

equally distinguished Northern Virginia Scientist of Hispanic origin with similar international achievement and recognition as the distinguished Maury.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deborah and Gerald File
Former ACPS Nurse and ACPS Alumnus
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