

## **Report to the City of Poughkeepsie School District on Names of the City's Elementary School Buildings**

**Students of History 276, Vassar College, May 2023**

In response to the City of Poughkeepsie School District's request for volunteer researchers we are submitting the following report, sharing information we can find on the lives and viewpoints of the men for whom the District's five elementary schools and Columbus administrative building are named. We are grateful for prior research by Mr. Tom Lawrence, Director of the Poughkeepsie Public Library District, which provided helpful references and information on when and how each school received its name.

In the case of Christopher Columbus, a widely known historical figure without local associations, we focused our research not on his life but on recent debates in other districts about whether to retain his name on school buildings. In the case of Samuel F. B. Morse, also, who was a Poughkeepsie resident but internationally known, we researched debates in other educational institutions about whether to keep or remove his name.

While it is beyond our purview to recommend alternative school names, we note that a number of other prominent men and women have lived in or were associated with Poughkeepsie. They include:

- Early Mohican historian Hendrick Aupaumut (1757?-1830)
- James Tallmadge (1778-1853), who represented Poughkeepsie in Congress in 1819 when he wrote and sponsored an amendment seeking to block the spread of slavery
- Uriah Boston (?-1889), Poughkeepsie barber, Black community leader, abolitionist, and voting rights advocate
- Sadie Peterson Delaney (1889-1958), pioneering African American librarian
- Jane Bolin (1908-2007), the nation's first African American woman judge

Our class also discussed recently prominent individuals such as Detective K. "Skip" Mannain who in 1999, after the tragic death of city resident Jaime Gil Tenorio, built bridges of solidarity and trust between families in Poughkeepsie and Oaxaca. We discussed alternatives to naming school buildings for individuals, for example, choosing a name such as *Mohicantuk*, the Mohican name for the Hudson Valley.

We hope our research assists in community deliberations and will be useful to all the leaders, teachers, students, and families of the City of Poughkeepsie School District. Thank you very much for this opportunity.

**Gov. George Clinton Elementary School, 100 Montgomery Street  
Named for New York Governor George Clinton (1739-1812)**

Governor George Clinton was born in Little Britain, New York.<sup>1</sup> He was educated by a private tutor because there were as yet no private schools in Ulster County. As a young man he worked both as a surveyor in the northern frontier territories of New York and as clerk for the court of common pleas in Ulster County.<sup>2</sup> He left home to serve as a steward's mate on a privateer; after serving at sea he enlisted in the French and Indian War under his brother in the New York militia and was part of the capture of Montreal in 1760.<sup>3</sup> He returned to New York City, studied law, and after passing the bar met and married Cornelia Tappen. In a politically advantageous but loving match, they had six children.<sup>4</sup> Clinton and his family lived in New York throughout his life. He personally owned eight enslaved people, whose names and manumission status our research was unable to determine.<sup>5</sup>

Clinton's political career began in 1768 when he was elected as representative for Ulster County to the colonial assembly, where he quickly made ties with patriotic factions. He was elected to the Second Continental Congress in 1775, where he became known as a quiet but strong anti-British voice and supported George Washington's appointment as commander-in-chief of the army. After he was appointed Brigadier General of the Ulster and Orange County militias, Clinton left Philadelphia to fill the post a few days before the Declaration of Independence was adopted and therefore missed signing it. During the Revolution, Clinton was responsible for raising troops for his militias and the Continental Army and for defense of the Hudson Valley. Clinton was elected governor of New York in 1777 and from then on divided

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<sup>1</sup> Ethan S. Rafuse, "Clinton, George (1739-1812)," *American National Biography*, February 2000.

<sup>2</sup> John P. Kaminski, *George Clinton: Yeoman Politician of the New Republic* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1993),

3. The clerkship was held for good behavior with no term limit, so Clinton held it in mostly an honorary context for 53 years.

<sup>3</sup> Rafuse, "Clinton."

<sup>4</sup> Kaminski, *George Clinton*, 4, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Julie Weil, Adrian Blanco, and Leo Dominguez, "More than 1,800 Congressmen Once Enslaved Black People," *Washington Post*, November 28, 2022.

his work between governing the state and military defense. When the war ended in 1783, Governor Clinton helped negotiate British cession of and evacuation from occupied New York.<sup>6</sup>

Clinton held the governorship in New York for six consecutive terms. In postwar politics he became a staunch Anti-Federalist, to protect New York's advantageous position in trade and because he felt his state had done more than most others to support and bear the costs of the war.<sup>7</sup> Clinton's Anti-Federalism was so well known that both his contemporaries and current scholars attribute to him the work of the author "Cato," who argued against ratification of the Constitution. Cato, possibly Clinton, argued that the United States was too big to function as a single republic, and that the vagueness of Congress's implied powers and the expansive powers of the president would lead to an all-powerful national government and perhaps a monarch in the executive branch.<sup>8</sup> Cato was refuted by "Caesar," attributed to Alexander Hamilton, driving a wedge between two friends that deepened when Hamilton unveiled plans to create a national bank and issue national debt.<sup>9</sup> Clinton's financial policies were more conservative than Hamilton's: he supported paper money only when it was absolutely necessary and advocated raising taxes to pay state and national debts, asking for a statewide assessment of property to ensure the wealthy bore an equitable part of the burden.<sup>10</sup>

Governor Clinton did not, however, risk alienating wealthy New York families over the issue of slavery. In 1789, a total of 8,500 families in New York—the Clintons among them-- owned enslaved people.<sup>11</sup> Governor Clinton did prohibit the slave trade in New York and eased manumission requirements, but he also strengthened slave codes to solidify slaveholders' control of human property.<sup>12</sup>

Clinton advocated for accessible education, though he had little success implementing this while in office. During the Revolution he proposed a system in which one college in each state would create an officer training program to ensure that well-trained officers would be available for the army. In peacetime Clinton asked the New York legislature to create a public school system so that children of all financial standings could get an education. While he never

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<sup>6</sup> Kaminski, *George Clinton*, 14-19, 21, 29, 30-54.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-134.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 100-2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-206.

won a majority vote for this plan he did convince the legislature to create a fund to pursue the project in the future.<sup>13</sup>

As governor, Clinton made many treaties with the First Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, particularly the Onondaga, Oneida, and Cayuga nations. The Onondaga argue today that these treaties were made on false premises. Clinton promised them a return to pre-war prosperity through “care and protection,” including land for 4,000 Onondagas to live on and sustain themselves in their traditional lifeways, and an annual payment of \$500 which was supposed to be more than they could get annually by trade and hunting. However, just one sample trade record with a British trader before the war listed the Onondagas’ profit at 2,694 pounds, an amount far greater than the total Clinton paid them; the cession of lands that Clinton demanded also included farmlands, the loss of which made traditional crop rotation impossible. Thus the Onondagas argue that Governor Clinton did not fulfill his promises or leave them the ability to follow their traditional patterns of agriculture.<sup>14</sup>

Clinton’s political career ended with two terms as vice president, the first with President Thomas Jefferson and the second with President James Madison. He wanted to run for president, but his supporters eventually found Madison a better choice. He died in 1812 while in office, the only vice president to have done so.<sup>15</sup>

### **G.W. Krieger Elementary School, 265 Hooker Avenue Named for George W. Krieger, Sr. (1855-1929)**

A prominent local banker and business owner in Poughkeepsie, George W. Krieger, Sr. helped found the Home Cooperative Savings and Loan Association in 1888 and was elected as its president seventeen times.<sup>16</sup> The organization helped home buyers obtain loans and received praise as one of the most “progressive” institutions in the state. Krieger was a Mason and a member of the Episcopal Church. He was raised in Poughkeepsie and attended its public schools, as did his two sons.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 53, 248, 266.

<sup>14</sup> Onondaga Nation. “Governor George Clinton's Promises: What the State of New York Really Owes the Onondagas.” Onondaga Nation, January 27, 2021. <https://www.onondaganation.org/history/2011/governor-george-clintons-promises-what-the-state-of-new-york-really-owes-the-onondagas/>

<sup>15</sup> Kaminski, *George Clinton*, 289-290.

<sup>16</sup> “George W. Krieger Sr. Dies Suddenly,” *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*, March 7 1929.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

By the time of his death Krieger had served three decades on the Poughkeepsie school board.<sup>18</sup> He seems to have been well-liked by colleagues in the school system. His reappointment to the board was opposed once, by Democratic Mayor John Kelsey in 1929, allegedly because the mayor considered the Kreiger family to be too Republican-leaning, though Krieger himself was a “lifelong Democrat.” In response, Poughkeepsie teachers circulated a petition advocating Krieger’s reappointment. An editorial in the *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News* wrote that not reappointing Krieger would be a “serious disservice” to education.<sup>19</sup> This appears to have been the only controversy surrounding Krieger that appeared in newspapers at the time.

In January 1929, Krieger suggested that a newly constructed school be named for Dutchess County resident and Revolutionary War hero General Richard Montgomery. Krieger’s colleagues, however, proposed that the school take Krieger’s name. Krieger humbly opposed this. He passed away suddenly before the school’s construction was complete.<sup>20</sup>

During Krieger’s tenure on the Board of Education he created a free textbook system to help lower-income families, advocated the construction of better school buildings, and supported “progressive and modern educational methods.” Krieger’s death was front-page news in Poughkeepsie and comments by city residents, quoted in his obituary, suggest that he was admired. He was remembered especially for his dedication to teachers and students.<sup>21</sup>

### **Samuel F. B. Morse Elementary School, 101 Mansion Street Named for Samuel F. B. Morse (1791-1872)**

Born in Massachusetts, Samuel F. B. Morse became famous as inventor of the single wire telegraph and Morse code communication method.<sup>22</sup> After several years of collaboration with students and scientists in the 1830s, followed by extensive modifications and demonstrations, Morse submitted his electrical apparatus to Congress for funding. In 1843, Congress narrowly passed a \$30,000 appropriation bill and issued a formal patent. The telegraph profoundly impacted American society, making possible rapid cross-country and international

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> “Mr. Krieger Should Be Retained.” *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*, February 18 1929; “George W. Krieger Sr. Dies Suddenly,” *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*, March 7 1929

<sup>20</sup> “Naming the New School,” *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*, January 14, 1929.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> “Morse, Samuel Finley Breese (1791-1872), Artist and Telegraph Inventor.” *American National Biography*.

communications.<sup>23</sup> Prior to this work Morse had pursued a career in art, focusing on portraiture, but gave up these aspirations due to a lack of public interest in his work.<sup>24</sup>

Morse was well known in his lifetime for his nativist and pro-slavery views, and he was so strongly anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic that he launched a bid to become Mayor of New York City on the Nativist ticket in 1835. Although not elected, he went on to write several pro-slavery and anti-immigrant tracts. In *Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States Through Foreign Immigration*, Morse argued that allowing immigrants to enter the United States had detrimental consequences on culture and society.<sup>25</sup> In *The Ethical Position of Slavery*, Morse describes slavery as “divinely ordained” and “in perfect harmony...with the great declared object of the Savior's mission to earth.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, Morse claimed that abolitionism was sacrilegious, arguing that those who advocated the end of slavery should be excommunicated from their Protestant churches. Morse intensified his pro-slavery views during the Civil War and eventually called the Declaration of Independence “a mixture of truths, qualified truths, and fallacious maxims.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Morse was an accomplished artist and inventor whose telegraph was one of the most important inventions in modern history, and he also used the resources and influence he obtained as an inventor to oppose immigration, stigmatize Catholics, and argue for the continuation of slavery.<sup>28</sup> He engaged in strenuous efforts, both intellectual and political, to justify and uphold inequality.

Yale University has fourteen residential colleges, one of which bears Morse's name. The college opened and was dedicated to Morse in 1962, one year before Martin Luther King's March on Washington and just two years before the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Ironically, the college was built on land previously occupied by Hillhouse High School, named after James Hillhouse, a notable abolitionist and Yale alumnus. Yale's demolition of this school, along with concern over Morse's views, has generated proposals that Yale rename the college for Hillhouse. In 2016, amid an outcry over the name of Yale's Calhoun College, another residential college,

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel F.B. Morse, *Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States Through Immigration*, 1835, (New York: Arno Press, Inc), 8-14.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel F.B. Morse, *Ethical Position of Slavery*, 1863, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel F.B. Morse, *Letters and Journals*, ed. E. L. Morse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1914), 2: 416.

<sup>28</sup><https://yalestandard.com/missions/samuel-f-b-morse/>

questions about the name of Morse College also arose but are less well documented. An article, “Yale Students Ask Why Honors go to Famous Alumni with Links to Slavery,” noted that Samuel F. B. Morse was a Yale alumnus who invented the telegraph but “also published proslavery pamphlets and presided over proslavery political movements.”<sup>29</sup>

On April 28, 2016, in response to a petition campaign to remove Calhoun’s name, Yale announced that they would officially keep the name Calhoun College. Yale’s president justified this decision by saying, “We cannot erase American history, but we can confront it, teach it and learn from it.” He argued that “eliminating the name Calhoun would reduce the likelihood that slavery was taught.” In February 2017 Yale reversed this decision, changing the name of Calhoun College to honor instead Grace Hopper, a Yale alumna who was an early pioneer in computer programming. Yale did not grapple with the legacy of Morse in the same way, perhaps because Calhoun was a far more prominent and influential defender of slavery than Morse was. The name of Yale’s Morse College remains.

**W.W. Smith School, 372 Church Street  
Named for William W. Smith (1830-1913)**

W. W. Smith was born in Canada and arrived in the United States at two years old with his Scottish family. At age seventeen he joined the ice cream and restaurant business his father had started in Poughkeepsie, which later began to manufacture candy and cough drops. W. W. Smith and his brother Andrew turned this into the nationally prominent and successful Smith Brothers Cough Drop Company. As a successful businessman W. W. Smith was known for his local philanthropy. He donated \$770,000 to various organizations and causes throughout Poughkeepsie. The largest was the Y.M.C.A., for which Smith donated both the land and structure. Smith also donated \$140,000 to the Young Woman’s Christian Association. Smith took “a most active interest in the city’s civic affairs” and briefly worked at Vassar College. Smith was also the first president of the Poughkeepsie Chamber of Commerce.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup><http://www.yaleslavery.org/WhoYaleHonors/morse.html>. Calhoun College was named after John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, a Yale graduate and U.S. vice president who was one of the nation’s leading pro-slavery voices.

<sup>30</sup> “City Mourns Death of William W. Smith,” *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle*, November 17th, 1913; “William Smith: Steward to Vassar College,” [vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/documents-and-views-of-early-vassar/william-smith/](http://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/documents-and-views-of-early-vassar/william-smith/).

Smith was a strong advocate of the temperance movement. The Smith family were yearly exhibitors at the Dutchess County Fair but stopped participating in 1896 because the fair would not guarantee that no alcoholic drinks would be served.<sup>31</sup> Smith was a Republican early in his adulthood but eventually joined the Prohibitionist Party and became a prominent national figure in the party. Between 1887 and 1896 he ran for several state and national offices on the Prohibitionist ticket, including a campaign for New York governor in 1896. (He came in fifth place with 1.2 percent of the vote.)<sup>32</sup>

According to the *Eagle's History of Poughkeepsie* W. W. Smith was a major supporter in the building of Poughkeepsie's Presbyterian Church. His financial support for the Women's Christian Temperance Union allowed that group to purchase the Poughkeepsie Female Academy in 1889. He built parks and playgrounds and supported several local African American churches, including Hedding M.E. Church, Smith Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church (named in Smith's honor when he financed its new building), and Ebenezer Baptist Church. Smith is said to have consulted his wife on every financial decision he made, and the couple made a significant number of donations in her name.<sup>33</sup>

### **C. B. Warring Elementary School, 283 Mansion Street Named for Dr. Charles B. Warring (1825-1907)**

Dr. Charles Bartlett Warring was a local educator whose life appears to be sparsely documented. Warring was teaching at the Poughkeepsie Collegiate School in 1857 when its principal, his uncle-in-law, retired and Warring and fellow teacher Otis Bisbee became associate principals. In 1862, amid the Civil War, Bisbee and Warring added military training courses to the curriculum. Apparently these were successful, because in 1863 Warring left the Collegiate School and founded the Poughkeepsie Military Institute. Although he sold the school in 1871 to Henry Jewett, Warring reassumed ownership a few years later and continued to lead the school until it closed around 1902.<sup>34</sup>

Warring wrote a book seeking to reconcile Christian faith with modern science. Possibly intended for classroom use, *The Mosaic Account of Creation* was published in 1874 with a second

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<sup>31</sup> Dutchess County Historical Society, *Year Book* (New York: 1947), 84.

<sup>32</sup> "City Mourns Death"; "William W. Smith," [www.prohibitionists.org/history/votes/William\\_W\\_Smith\\_bio.html](http://www.prohibitionists.org/history/votes/William_W_Smith_bio.html).

<sup>33</sup> Edmund Platt, *The Eagle's History of Poughkeepsie: From the Earliest Settlements, 1683 to 1905* (Dutchess County Historical Society, 1987), 250-252.

<sup>34</sup> "History of the Collegiate School Poughkeepsie," *Dutchess County Historical Society 1937 Yearbook*, 204; *Commemorative Biographical Record of Dutchess County* (New York and Chicago, J. H. Beers, 1897), 29, 782 (accessed online through Internet Archive); Platt, *Eagle's History of Poughkeepsie*, 204-5, 254.

edition in 1877; a portion was revised and republished in 1876 as *Studies upon the Inclination of the Earth's Axis*.<sup>35</sup>

All of Warring's work was as a private educator. It appears to be only happenstance that the City of Poughkeepsie decided to build a new elementary school at the corner of Smith and Mansion Streets, near Warring's school. "Warring school" appears to have been colloquial usage for the new school. If at any point the school board officially named the new public school after Warring, documentation of that decision is not evident.<sup>36</sup>

### **Columbus School (Administrative Building), 18 S. Perry Street Named for Christopher Columbus (1451-1506)**

According to Mr. Tom Lawrence's research, the Columbus School was originally located on lower Church Street and was known as the No. 3 School. Dr. Frank C. Furlong, a physician and leader in the local Italian-American community, urged in 1921 that the school be named for Columbus; Superintendent Ward C. Moon agreed.<sup>37</sup>

In recent years, a growing movement has prompted school districts to debate whether or not to continue memorializing Christopher Columbus by keeping his name on their school buildings. The public has become more aware of Columbus's participation in the enslavement and torture of Indigenous peoples and the spread of slavery, as part of increased awareness of racism in our society and history, in the wake of the killing of George Floyd.<sup>38</sup> School board decisions about Columbus are most fully documented in New England. The board of the New Haven Public Schools in Connecticut, after debate, voted to change the name of Christopher Columbus Academy, renaming it the Family Academy of Multilingual Exploration (FAME). The board of Medford Public Schools in Medford, Massachusetts, changed the name of Columbus

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<sup>35</sup> Warring, Charles B., in Ockerbloom, John Mark, ed., "The Online Books Page," [onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu](http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu)

<sup>36</sup> "History of the Collegiate School Poughkeepsie," *Dutchess County Historical Society 1937 Yearbook*, 204. *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*: "The Warring School" 23 Jul 1898, 2 Feb 1899, 31 Oct 1910.

<sup>37</sup> "City to Honor Dante and Columbus Today in Great Celebration," 12 Oct. 1921, "Columbus School is Presented with Sign," 13 Oct 1922, both in *Poughkeepsie Eagle-News*.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah Mervosh et al., "Reconsidering the Past, One Statue at a Time," *New York Times*, June 16, 2020. For more information on wrestling with Columbus' complicated history see Melissa Marinaro, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Columbus," Heinz History Center, September 15, 2020, <http://www.heinzhistorycenter.org/blog/western-pennsylvania-history-how-do-you-solve-a-problem-like-columbus/>, and Lakshmi Gandhi, "How Columbus Sailed Into U.S. History, Thanks To Italians," *NPR*, October 14, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/10/14/232120128/how-columbus-sailed-into-u-s-history-thanks-to-italians>.

Elementary School and, after receiving input from the public, chose to name it Missituk Elementary (*Missituk* being the Native American name for the river that runs through Medford). The school board in Bridgeport, Connecticut, debated the possibility of removing the name “Columbus” from a school building but ultimately decided to keep the name. In several instances, members of the public criticized boards for not leading a public discussion and seeking input from residents. “Not even the Italian community are suggesting that name should remain Christopher Columbus,” stated a dissenting board member in New Haven, “but they want to have a voice.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Bridgeport’s School Board Will Debate Name Change for Columbus School,” *Connecticut Post*, December 24, 2020; “Vote to Change Columbus School Name Sparks Controversy in Medford,” *Boston Globe*, June 26, 2020; “New Columbus School Name Chosen By Medford School Committee,” *Patch*, June 15, 2021; “Name Of Columbus School Officially Changed To Family Academy of Multilingual Exploration,” *New Haven Independent*, June 15, 2021.