

COMMEMORATIONS AND MEMORIALS NAMING AND REVIEW COMMITTEE
Minutes of meeting held November 17, 2020

The meeting was called to order at 1105 over Zoom.

Attending were members of the committee:

Mr. Richard K. Hines, V '66, Chair
CAD Parker Davis '21
Mr. Hugh M. Fain III '80
COL Keith Gibson '77
MAJ Catharine Ingersoll
Mr. Lester Johnson '95
Mr. Anthony Moore '78
COL Kim C. Parker
Mr. S. Waite Rawls III '70
Mr. Gene Scott '80

Also in attendance were:

Mr. John William Boland '73, VMI Board of Visitors
Ms. Deborah Love, Office of the Attorney General of Virginia
COL William Wyatt, Communications and Marketing, VMI

It being the first meeting of this committee, Mr. Hines called on the members in alphabetical order, asking each to provide a short biographical introduction.

Opening Remarks

When the introductions concluded, Mr. Boland—President of the Board of Visitors—spoke briefly about the creation of the committee, expressing his gratitude to Mr. Hines for agreeing to chair it and to the committee members for their service. He then turned the floor over to Mr. Hines.

Mr. Hines delivered remarks about the importance of the work of the committee, citing in particular the portrayal of VMI's culture in recent media publications. He emphasized the need for the physical fabric of Post more clearly to reflect the actual values of the Institute as set forth in the committee's charter. Mr. Hines closed by saying that while the issues facing the committee were complicated, its job was simple: its job was to get it right.

The Committee's Charter

Mr. Hines then read the draft of the proposed charter of the committee, and asked for comments from the committee members.

Mr. Rawls made two comments. First, he asked if the term "commemorations" should be augmented by something that also encompasses actions and not just physical memorialization. Secondly, he noted the distinction between places on Post that are named for people who served as VMI faculty or staff, and those that are named for major donors, asking if the committee should consult with the

VMI Alumni Agencies about what purview it has over names resulting from financial donations to the Institute.

COL Gibson responded to Mr. Rawls that “commemorations” are interactive and participatory in nature (such as events and awards) whereas “memorials” are passive (such as building names and statues). He also suggested clarifying the language in the charter so that it stipulates that membership include a representative of the VMI Museum System, rather than just the VMI Museum. Mr. Hines duly amended the proposed draft charter.

Mr. Hines noted that Main Post is the area that, for the most part, has historical (i.e. non-donor) names, whereas North Post and South Post have structures and places named for those who have made significant financial contributions to the Institute. COL Gibson remarked that it was unusual for a college campus to have the core buildings named for those who have served the institution rather than donors, although Mr. Rawls did mention that Moody Hall is on the Parade Ground and is named for a donor, so the distinction between areas of Post is not a hard and fast rule.

Mr. Boland explained that the committee’s focus should be on-Post landmarks and facilities, and not structures located off-Post, even if the head of the VMI Museum System is also in charge of certain off-Post areas.

Public Comments

Mr. Hines opened the meeting to public comments.

COL Tinni Sen, Professor in the Department of Economics and Business at VMI, joined the Zoom call. She introduced herself, noting that she is the faculty co-advisor to the Promaji Club (the VMI extracurricular organization for minorities and their allies, founded in 1975). COL Sen expressed that the “faculty love for VMI rivals the love of alumni” and that the committee’s work is very important to the faculty. While acknowledging the presence of a faculty member as a member of the committee, she requested that other faculty members also be involved in this initiative. She also noted a lack of communication from the committee to the faculty, explaining that she only found out about the meeting by accident; while it was posted on the VMI Board of Visitors’ website, she encouraged notice of future meetings to be distributed to faculty members via email. COL Sen also passed along three comments she had received from other faculty members: 1) that the committee might consider commemorations that honor abstract virtues rather than individuals; 2) that the committee might consider items located in the VMI Archives that are problematic (as an example, she cited a letter written by VMI’s first Superintendent Francis H. Smith); and 3) that BG William H. Cocke had specified that his building should be named for his Brother Rats, and that something like “Class of 1894 Hall” could be an appropriate way to rename certain features on Post.

Mr. Hines thanked COL Sen for her comments and assured her that the VMI faculty’s input would be solicited and taken into consideration by the committee.

There being no more public comments, Mr. Hines moved on to the next agenda item.

Discussion of the Commemorations and Memorials on Post

As a preamble to a discussion of the objects themselves, Mr. Hines called on COL Gibson to give a presentation on the history of VMI.

COL Gibson shared his screen with the attendees and delivered an image-rich presentation outlining key points in VMI's history and highlighting notable alumni from the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries.

Mr. Hines thanked COL Gibson for his presentation, then asked him to go over the draft list of commemorations and memorials that he and his staff had identified as having ties to the Confederacy, either due to the memorialized individual or because of some other iconography.

COL Gibson again shared his screen and gave an overview of the objects in the draft inventory, noting that the list is not necessarily complete. The list included named buildings, statuary, inscriptions, monuments, paintings, and plaques.

Mr. Hines thanked COL Gibson and his staff for compiling the list. Mr. Rawls asked if amendments to the inventory should be sent via email to COL Gibson; Mr. Hines agreed.

Mr. Hines then remarked that he had attempted to research governmental criteria directly addressing controversial commemorative works, and was frustrated by the lack of guidance available. Some Virginia statutes are pertinent to the issues at hand but none specifically address controversial commemorative works. Mr. Rawls agreed that there is no Commonwealth guidance on this matter. Mr. Hines said he had reviewed two federal guidance documents, identifying one as particularly useful in potentially determining the committee's guiding principles. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, a federal agency founded in 1966, issued a statement on March 22, 2018 on controversial commemorative works, outlining a set of principles by which Mr. Hines suggested the committee operate. Mr. Hines read from the ACHP statement, explaining that the members of the committee should work to: balance stewardship responsibilities with recognition of the sensibilities and emotions of constituents; realize that societal values are fluid; recognize the historical context and consider the historical significance of a commemoration/memorial; and be attentive to consultation with and inclusion of affected parties.

Mr. Hines then asked COL Gibson and his staff to prepare preliminary criteria to guide the committee's decision-making and determine a list of priority objects from the draft inventory, to be shared with the committee next month. COL Gibson agreed to that course of action.

Mr. Fain thanked Mr. Hines for a good first meeting and reiterated the importance of the work at hand. Mr. Boland emphasized the need to agree upon criteria first before discussing any potential changes. CAD Davis noted that he will talk with a variety of cadets to gauge their opinions, which he will pass along to the committee.

Motions

Mr. Hines proposed a motion to refer to COL Gibson the responsibility to prepare recommendations for this committee, consisting of 1) the criteria to be used in the committee's review and 2) once the criteria for review has been established and agreed upon by the members, a review of the items on the draft inventory with a view towards identifying priority items. Mr. Fain so moved, and Mr. Scott

seconded the motion. Mr. Hines called for any discussion. There being no discussion, the committee voted; the motion was passed unanimously.

Mr. Hines then proposed a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Fain so moved, and Mr. Rawls seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 1255.

Respectfully submitted,

MAJ Catharine Ingersoll