



Office for Strategic Affairs
Council on Virginia Tech History
800 Drillfield Drive
Burruss Hall, Suite 113
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
P: (540) 231-3703 F: (540) 231-3147
strategicaffairs@vt.edu

July 16, 2020

To: Commemorative Tributes Committee

From: The Council on Virginia Tech History, submitted on behalf of the Council by Menah Pratt-Clarke, Vice President for Strategic Affairs and Diversity

Re: The residence hall currently named Barringer Hall

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Menah Pratt-Clarke".

The Council on Virginia Tech History unanimously recommends immediately removing the name Paul Barringer from the residence hall currently bearing it.

Paul Brandon Barringer and Barringer Residence Hall

General approach — broad considerations

The Council has been asked, as part of its role, to make recommendations to the Commemorative Tributes Committee regarding the appropriateness of the University's retaining the names of certain campus buildings. During our deliberations on Lee Hall and Barringer Hall, we used the following criteria to guide our thinking. (In future we plan to further refine these criteria and develop a process that seeks further input from the campus community.)

- The **connection** of the individual to the institution and the appropriateness, on that basis, of honoring that individual via the monument of a building.
- The **value** of the individual's personal and professional contributions to the institution and society.
- The **alignment** of the individual's behavior and expressed values with those of the institution today; the symbolic value, positive or negative, constructive or destructive, that the person's name can create with regard to the University's current mission and goals.

The following thoughts came up in Council discussion with regard to Lee Hall in June and apply as well to Barringer Hall:

- It is time to review monuments, and a named building is a monument;
- Names themselves can create trauma; it is acceptable and appropriate to undo things that matter to the climate; and a name can be changed;
- If an institutional name is a symbol that causes gratuitous pain, and if we can ease that pain, this is a moment in time to use naming for a path for the future;
- The name creates an open wound for people of color especially, but indeed for anyone;
It is painful to live in a building where conversations are inevitable about why a school would honor someone who disparaged and denigrated people of color;
- Students should not have to live in a place where, given awareness of the namesake's quintessentially racist beliefs or behavior, they are identified with a name that reflects trauma and hate;
- Students express very real discomfort living in a residence hall with that name;
- Symbols can become obstacles and create an unnecessary noise and distraction to institutional goals, mission, and objectives;
- The name continues to emerge as an issue and will not go away.

Dr. Barringer — an introduction

Paul Brandon Barringer (1857–1941), born four years before the Civil War broke out, lived until the eve of American entry into World War II. A native of North Carolina, he lived most of his adult life in Virginia, in the Charlottesville area except for a little less than six years (1907–1913) as president of VPI. A medical doctor, a professor, and an academic administrator, he served as chairman of the faculty (the equivalent of president) at the University of Virginia before being recruited as president of VPI to take over when John McLaren McBryde stepped down.

His arrival at Blacksburg was heralded with enthusiasm and high hopes (see **Appendix A**), his actual experience mixed at best. He was prepared to make VPI over in various ways, but stakeholders that he had to cultivate — the alumni association, the engineering faculty — rose in arms against innovations he pushed. In addition, his administration brought disrepute upon the school in the sale of sickly livestock. Moreover, the governor had his own priorities and indicated to Barringer that a new board of visitors would terminate his presidency, so he resigned. Only two presidencies at Tech since McBryde arrived in 1891 (those of John Redd Hutcheson and James D. McComas, both of whom faced serious health issues) have lasted so short a time.

Pro-slavery and anti-black in the early twentieth century

Barringer generated various claims to fame in his institution-building roles at the University of Virginia. But (to use twenty-first century terms) he became a rock star when a speech he delivered in 1900 at a medical convention in Charleston, South Carolina — the original home of secession in 1860 — went viral. Asked to speak on “the influence of heredity upon the negro” (he had urged some such topic), Barringer gave a talk that appeared in print under the title ***The American Negro: His Past and Future*** (see **Appendix B**).

His characterizations of Africans and African Americans were nothing if not **white supremacist, pro-slavery, anti-black**: “The ages of degradation under which he [“the negro”] was formed and the fifty centuries of historically recorded savagery with which he came to us [in the South] can not be permanently influenced by one or two centuries of enforced correction if the correcting force [enslavement] be withdrawn” (5).

Barringer’s ideological orientation regarding race is revealed as well in the following quotations: “If you scratch a negro you will find a savage” (13). “But we all know that we had a good negro in this country once, and that was in slave times” (20). “Thirty-five years have passed since the negro changed from the condition of a slave to that of a freedman. In every part of the South, it is the opinion of every man of unbiased mind, that the second generation is infinitely worse than the first. . . . The question for us today, then, and the question of questions for the South, is, ‘**What is the cause of the change and what can be done to remedy the evil?**’” (15). In a passage that begins with “**And now to the remedy,**” he writes: “The people of the South [white people, of course] must act. **First they must remove the negro from politics**” (19).

He concluded *The American Negro* with the following plea regarding the nature, purpose, and administration of schooling appropriate for all black southerners: “The temporary elevation produced by the discipline of slavery is not being maintained by the efforts we have made at common school education, in the hands of his own race, [so] we must at once, if we would save the negro and the South, try something else. I would finally urge that we try henceforth an education of trade or industrial type, given at the hands of well-chosen white teachers, who will teach them **to respect, to obey and to work**” (23). In that last phrase, Barringer repeats exactly the language he had used earlier to laud the effects of slavery: “The things in which the training of all slaves agreed were in the three essentials: **to respect, to obey and to work**” (11).

Three months later, on the road again, Barringer made his way to Montgomery, Alabama — the first home of the Confederate States of America — where he gave an address (“**The Sacrifice of a Race**,” subsequently published under that title as another short book; again, see **Appendix B**) that pursued major themes from his earlier presentation. It might still be possible for black southerners to be “saved”, he urged, if “industrial education” were “simplified or limited to agriculture” (4). It was not yet sufficiently “appreciate[d],” Barringer told his audience — adding the weight of scientific authority to beliefs already widely shared — “how far he [“the negro”] has already gone back to original racial tendencies” (3). The exceptions, and some could be found, “as a rule, were born slaves” (3).

The theme of sacrificing black southerners Barringer premised on slavery having been their salvation — and emancipation their doom (28). The nation’s founders “knew that underneath his dusky skin the simple intelligence of a child was combined with the instincts of a veritable savage. They felt and knew that the negro as a freeman could not exist in America” 9). Moreover, “the negro was contented and happy in slavery. Had they been but let alone they would have remained contented” (10). He was, after all, “fitted only for slavery” (17).

But then emancipation came and, with it, said Barringer, the abrupt shift “from pagan to citizen” (12). In this tract, too, Barringer spoke of politics as well as education as sustainable only if fitted for white supremacy, black subordination. The Reconstruction period he characterized as featuring “a degraded and alien race, but recently slaves, [who] had, by congressional enactment, been placed in control of eleven once sovereign Southern States” (13). “The negro was duly crowned with the ballot and given control of the South” (29). Whatever else one might say about such statements, black “control of eleven” states during Reconstruction is a flagrant fiction, whether his utter disregard for historical fact stemmed from deep ignorance or deliberate deception.

Barringer’s fame as a commentator on the leading issues of his day endured well past his time as president at VPI. A story in the *Washington Post* (21 January 1918) identified Barringer as “former president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and the **well-known writer and speaker on things Southern**.” His various lectures and publications on race — among them certainly *The American Negro* and *The Sacrifice of a Race* — significantly reflected and mightily contributed to that renown.

Barringer Hall

Barringer Hall was one of the new residence halls constructed in the early 1960s, shortly before a 1,000-per-year growth in student enrollment swiftly led to construction of the high-rise residence halls of the late 1960s and early 1970s, among them Lee Hall. Dedication took place in 1966.

Barringer Hall replicates the characteristics that the Council on Virginia Tech History relied upon in recommending that Claudius Lee's name be promptly removed from the residence hall currently known as Lee Hall. The structure is a residence hall, home each year for two hundred-plus Virginia Tech undergraduates, and the name currently on it is prominently and expressly identified with a rabidly racist worldview

Barringer's words from his 1900 speech are unavoidably harmful and flagrantly at odds with Virginia Tech's professed values of the twenty-first century. Residents of Barringer Hall have no more need to be associated with the world of Paul Barringer than do the students (past and more recent) at Lee Hall who in June voiced their great discomfort with living in a home that by its very name made them, as some said, wonder whether the institution really cared about their well-being and their personal and professional growth.

Tech presidents and campus buildings

A myth has developed into a practice that all presidents get buildings. All presidents beginning with McBryde, to be sure, have a building. Lavery actually has had two since Lavery Hall was dedicated in 2012; tucked away across campus at the Virginia–Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine is a large complex that, far sooner and more appropriately, has long commemorated that president: the William E. Lavery Animal Health Research Center, dedicated in 1995.

Never, however, has there been a structure at Virginia Tech that bore the name of any president from before McBryde — not Charles L. C. Minor, the founding president; not John Lee Buchanan or Thomas Nelson Conrad; and not Lindsay Lunsford Lomax, who last preceded McBryde.

Barringer failed to obtain recognition as the namesake of a campus structure until a full half-century after he left office. Had there been any commitment to the proposition that every former president ought to have a building — or had there been any enthusiasm for honoring him in this fashion — he would have no doubt been so recognized no later than the end of the spate of new construction in the 1930s.

An emerging sense that Barringer ought not to be honored

When publishing a history of Virginia Tech for the institution’s official 125th anniversary in 1997, historian Peter Wallenstein determined that, breaking the pattern in which a photograph appeared for every former president, Barringer would be an exception. He would get no such pictorial recognition (*Roanoke Times*, 5 July 2020).

Some months later, when Claudius Lee’s KKK page came to people’s attention, President Paul Torgersen appointed an ad hoc Committee on Claudius Lee and Lee Hall to make “suggestions” to him as to how the institution might respond. After exploring the sources and considering possible responses, the committee sought to come up with criteria regarding Lee in a broader context, one that might apply to other figures from early Virginia Tech history.

The committee’s November 1997 report (on page 4; see **Appendix C**) raised for consideration the question of how other figures at Tech from that time should be evaluated: “If Lee Hall gets a name change because of . . . discoveries in a century-old yearbook, what does the school do in the event of a[n even] more serious challenge to today’s preferred values (one that is more recent, the product of a more mature person)?”

A follow-up report, dated February 1998, was more pointed when it spoke of Lee (on page 1; see **Appendix D**) in the context of other “Tech people who can be linked with apparently racist statements or behavior in that era (an early twentieth-century president offers more mature and less ambiguous evidence in this regard).”

Given the current climate regarding race, civil rights, and full inclusion, the name of Barringer Hall has already come under scrutiny through student petitions, though yet again the focus was on Lee Hall.

Deep concerns over Barringer Hall will only grow — and cannot go away until the name does.

Council recommendation

To sum up our evaluation of Dr. Barringer’s suitability to have a campus building, in particular a residence hall, named in his honor: At least some Council members doubt

Barringer's presidency as deserving any such recognition. **Regardless** of merit on that account, we cannot see how the structure currently called Barringer Hall ought to honor him any longer. He left a lasting imprint at the University of Virginia's medical program — and there, his name was recently taken off a wing of the medical complex. He served as president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute, albeit with a mediocre performance.

Yet his major claim to fame in his time relates to statements he made to wide audiences on race. His **unapologetic defense of slavery** — decades after the Confederacy had suffered military defeat and slavery had been declared at an end — was only a part of his racial legacy. His insistence that **schooling for black southerners** be left to whites to handle — and be aimed only at training docile workers, modeled after enslaved workers of an earlier generation — defies the mission of a modern teaching college or research university.

Most of all, the language on race with which he peppered his talks jumps off the page. Why should, why would, Virginia Tech continue to honor him with his name on a campus residence hall? Barringer's **statements about education** alone should disqualify him from honor at any institution of higher education, or indeed at any school at any level.

By none of the criteria proposed as the basis for deciding the matter does what is currently called Barringer Hall have a significant claim on retaining the name. To the contrary.

Barringer Hall should be no more.

The next question is what name/s should replace it.

Names given particularly prominent consideration to replace Claudius Lee were

- Janie and William Hoge, whom we have urged to replace the Lee name; and
- Andrew and Fannie Vaughn Oliver, and we have urged that they be recognized at an Oliver Family Park, in lieu of Henderson Lawn.

Potential candidates for renaming Barringer Hall (or another building) include

- Carmen Venegas (a 1938 graduate in electrical engineering; the first female Latinx student; and the first female international student, from Costa Rica; she went on to put her VPI training toward creating the planes that helped the U.S. win World War II);



Office for Strategic Affairs
Council on Virginia Tech History
800 Drillfield Drive
Burruss Hall, Suite 113
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
P: (540) 231-3703 F: (540) 231-3147
strategicaffairs@vt.edu

- Linda Adams Hoyle (the first female African American to enroll at VPI, in 1964, and the first to complete a degree, in 1968) and Camilla Anita Brooks (the first African American female graduate student, in 1968, and the first to earn a degree, in 1970, the same year as two black male graduate students also completed their degrees); and
- James Leslie Whitehurst Jr., whom the 1997 committee named along with Irving Peddrew (the first African American to enroll, 1953) and Charlie Yates (the first to graduate), both of whom were recognized in 2003 with Peddrew–Yates Residence Hall. Whitehurst was the first black student to get VPI to permit him to live on campus, in 1961; a pilot with the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam; and the first African American on the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors, 1970–1974.

New Town, the name of a once vibrant black community since displaced by commercial development and university expansion, has been identified in Council discussion as a strong candidate for one of the main structures — or the entire complex — at North End Center.