



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

7-16-2020

Naming Options Discussed by the Council on Virginia Tech History

The Oliver Family — **Andrew Oliver and Fannie Vaughn Oliver**. The couple had been among the two thousand-plus enslaved people in Montgomery County in the 1850s and through 1865. Andrew Oliver was employed as a janitor at the Preston and Olin Institute by 1870 and then continued on for a bit more than another decade (until past 1880) as the school underwent a change in organization, curriculum, and name: Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, an early name for Virginia Tech.

Their son Andrew Oliver Jr., born in 1862, assisted his parents as they carried out various custodial and other support tasks at the school; so it was a family affair. He went on to become a lawyer and practiced his profession in Roanoke until past World War Two. Andrew Oliver Jr. died in 1947; he had one child but left no descendants; his siblings likely did.

In addition to commemorating one family, the names would honor the local black community — would highlight the generations of black support staff across the years, perhaps especially during the last 75 years of Andrew Oliver Jr.'s long life, when neither he nor any of his family could attend the school his parents had worked at from the beginning. His parents and children could work there, not play any of the usual roles associated with institutions of higher education, whether as students or professors.

Hoge — **Janie and William Hoge**. Mr. and Mrs. Hoge hosted the first eight African Americans to enroll at VPI: Irving Peddrew beginning in 1953, three in 1954, a fifth freshman in 1955, a transfer sophomore beginning in 1956, and, for their first year, two more black students who enrolled in 1959.

One of those early students in particular, Lindsay Cherry, has emphasized just how critically important the Hoges were to the young men's ability to survive

as students in an alien environment. Mrs. Hoge in particular looked after their cadet uniforms, their hot meals, and all such domestic needs; the couple also, perhaps even more importantly, provided companionship and mentorship and introduced the young men to the local black community.

The Peddrew-Yates Residence Hall is a wonderful example of rightful honoring of the pioneer black students who began the process of change at institutions that had, before them, categorically excluded people who looked like them. But others individuals and groups, among them people like the Hoges, were just as instrumental, albeit playing very different roles. A residence hall honoring the Hoges would emphasize the tremendous shift from the 1950s black exclusion from full participation in campus life — even among enrolled students making their way toward degrees — to the full inclusion that the learning communities in the building currently called Lee Hall represent.

Adams-Brooks or Hoyle-Brooks — Tech’s first black female alumnae, undergraduate and graduate.

Linda P. Adams is a double-first at tech. She was evidently **the first African American to enroll** in a regular course of study at Virginia Tech. A child of the Covington-Clifton Forge area, as soon as she graduated from her local black high school she began classes at a brand new branch of VPI (a few years later it became a component of Virginia’s new community college system). So when she came to the Blacksburg campus in **1966**, together with five black female freshmen, she came in as a junior, but she did not transfer to Tech. Two years later, in **1968**, she became VPI’s **first black female graduate**, in any degree program, at any level, when she completed her upper-division work, in statistics. She promptly went off to a career with the US Census Bureau and is now retired. Her married name is **Linda P. Hoyle**. (We do not at this point know which name she would want to be commemorated by.)

Dr. Camilla Anita Brooks enrolled in the M.S. program in statistics in 1968 and graduated in 1970, the first black alumna of any Tech graduate program. She went on to complete her doctorate. I do not currently know very much at all about her subsequent career, but she is still out there. (We cannot say about her that she was Tech’s first graduate student enrolled, or for that matter that she was the first to finish, since another student, Franklin McKie, also finished his M.S. in statistics, also in 1970, and Alphonso Smith, a black male student, finished a Ph.D. program, in fisheries and wildlife, at the same time.)

The pair are prospective candidates for the building currently called Lee Hall

— also for a nearby residence hall, the still-unnamed (and still called “new” after a quarter-century) twin to Peddrew-Yates. They would complement the current honoring of the first African American to enroll (Irving Peddrew, in 1953) and the first to graduate (Dr. Charlie Yates, in 1958). Whether at what is now Lee Hall or at the twin structure to P-Y, their names would be on a building adjacent to P-Y.

Carmen Venegas came to the U.S. from Costa Rica, first enrolling at The College of William and Mary in 1934, then transferring to VPI in 1935. She graduated in electrical engineering in 1938. (As a double-E student, she studied with Claudius Lee.) The first Latinx female student (women had been enrolling in small numbers as degree candidates only since 1921), and the first female student from another country, let alone from Latin America, she is a double-first herself. At a time when graduating female students (let alone all female students, those from every class) could not yet appear in *The Bugle*, she appears in multiple pictures of groups of which all the other members were male. (Full inclusion in *The Bugle*, as well as the construction of Hillcrest Hall as an on-campus place of residence for female students, came a few years after she graduated.)

New Town. Not a person but a community and a location, the name **New Town** has been placed into consideration to honor the local black community. Virtually vanished these days, with the **St. Luke and Odd Fellows Hall** just about the only remaining structure to indicate a once-thriving African American community, New Town was largely obliterated to make space for commercial development and, more directly connected to the history of Virginia Tech, to make way for the university’s expansion, including the North End Center.