

15 December 2018

Mr. Eli Basch  
Interim Chairperson, College Council  
SUNY New Paltz  
1 Hawk Drive  
New Paltz, NY 12561

Dear Mr. Basch:

My name is Jennifer LeFevre and I am a ninth-generation descendant of Simon LeFevre, an original patentee of New Paltz. I grew up on Mohonk Avenue just on the edge of the SUNY New Paltz campus and am myself a graduate of the SUNY system, having graduated from SUNY Geneseo in 1994.

I am deeply troubled by the initiative to rename the six student halls on campus that are named after founding families of New Paltz. Slavery is a fact of our nation's history, including New Paltz. An element of history that should be neither ignored nor celebrated. It is my understanding that Historic Huguenot Street (HHS and legally known as the Huguenot Historical Society) now includes details of all former inhabitants of Huguenot Street as a part of their historic tours, which includes both Native Americans and slaves. And, certainly, if information about the founding families are included within the Halls themselves for which they are named (it has been several decades since I have been in any of the Halls), such details could and should be included to provide a clear picture of those families. However, to bow to pressure to reject the town's heritage simply because some elements of that history are distasteful to some is a disservice to history. NO historical figure is without distasteful elements. Should our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., have its name changed because George Washington was a slave owner? The concept is ridiculous. Should the nation's first and premiere library – the Library of Congress – give back all the many volumes donated to it by Thomas Jefferson (the very reason the Library of Congress was established in the first place) because Thomas Jefferson was a slave owner? Again, the concept is unthinkable. Honoring historical figures in the context for which they are being recognized – in this case as refugees fleeing religious persecution to establish a new community in a new world – is NOT honoring them because some of them were slave holders. It seems to me that those who want the Hall names changed are looking at the history of New Paltz ONLY through the lens of slavery and that, in itself, is an injustice to history.

This situation provides an opportunity for a teachable moment: to demonstrate that slavery is not the sole reason to accept or reject an element or figure of history by itself but an opportunity to look at the historical figure as a whole, including both admirable and regrettable attributes, and to understand history in its entire context. I hope SUNY New Paltz chooses to continue to honor the town's history and encourage those seeking this change to consider the bigger picture rather than to pigeon hole it.

Sincerely,



Jennifer LeFevre