

BUSSEY STREET RENAMING INITIATIVE: CALL FOR COMMUNITY INPUT

Bussey Street Renaming Initiative

This call for community input is being requested in the rare opportunity to rename a street and honor a new individual whose meaningful story deserves recognition. This document is being distributed widely through member organizations of the working group and other means. The deadline for submitting your input is April 27 at 11:59 PM. Here is the link to the Google Form to submit your recommendations:

<https://forms.gle/SEmXpXfWDYvWJ1j17>

Background information on the process, criteria, and biographies of the five finalists are included below. There will also be a Zoom presentation for the community to learn more about the candidates in-depth on Thursday, April 11 at 7 PM. You can register for the presentation by emailing us at renamebusseystreet@gmail.com.

Introduction

Community groups and activists in Roslindale and Jamaica Plain, with the support of the districts' city councilors,¹ have established a working group to lead an initiative to rename Bussey St., that bisects the Arboretum, in order to recognize, elevate and honor a new individual whose story will be meaningful and in concert with current community values. As the only abutters,² the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University and Boston Parks and Recreation Department are eager to consider the community input so they can file the petition to the City of Boston to request the name change. We are asking you to add your voice and submit your input to help guide the abutters in their decision to choose a new name for Bussey St.

Bussey St. is named for Benjamin Bussey, whose legacy, like many of his peers, was complicated by some of his wealth deriving from the profits of trade in products produced by enslaved people in the American South and the Caribbean. He was a Revolutionary War veteran and wealthy 19th century merchant who bequeathed funds and the lands he owned in Jamaica Plain to Harvard University. That land would become the Bussey Institute, a school of agriculture, and the Arnold Arboretum with the funding from James Arnold to create the Arboretum. Bussey was a philanthropist to numerous organizations and a prominent member of Boston's upper class. His name will remain visible and remembered through Bussey Hill, Bussey Brook and Bussey Brook Meadow on the Arboretum grounds.

Activities to Date

Our working group was established in June 2023, composed of community residents and representatives of the organizations listed at the end of this document. City Councilors Lara and Arroyo were instrumental in establishing the group, and their office staff were active members. Newly-elected Councilors Weber and Pepén are similarly participating. Group members educated themselves about the process of changing street names in Boston, created a framework and rationale for making the change, and developed criteria

¹ According to the Boston Public Improvement Commission's (PIC) regulations, petitions to change a street name require a written recommendation from at least one city councilor or other elected official.

² PIC regulations require all abutters to petition for the renaming of a street. This rule presents a unique opportunity for this community to recommend the renaming of Bussey St., compared to streets with many more abutters that are named for individuals whose legacies were similarly complicated.

for new names to be considered (see below for list of criteria). Once the criteria were developed, the group identified names internally from its membership and also disseminated a “Call for Nominations” to the broader community for additional names.

In total, 20 names were submitted. The group met on December 13 to vet and review the names against the criteria, so as to narrow down the list to a smaller set of finalists to be presented to the community for their input.

Criteria for New Name

These are the two requirements for renaming by the Public Improvement Commission (PIC), the entity in city government empowered to rename streets:

1. If the proposed name is for a person, the nominee cannot be living
2. The proposed name cannot be identical to any other street name in the entire city, regardless of suffix (e.g., St., Ave.) That includes non-persons, as well (e.g., Oak or Walnut Street)

Our working group³ developed further criteria for the new name. The first criterion carried the most weight:

1. The nominee had a direct association with the land on which the Arboretum sits.
2. The nominee’s story is meaningful and consistent with present day values (e.g., equal rights, inclusion). This is necessarily a subjective determination.
3. The nominee was from an under-represented community, historically and/or currently, such as Indigenous people, women, formerly enslaved people, people of color, LGBTQ+ people, working class people.
4. The nominee accomplished or achieved something of value which had a positive impact on society (from local to worldwide, e.g., in the field of science, literature, the arts, politics, advocacy for equal rights)
5. While not disqualifying, nominees who are currently recognized in other Boston public settings (e.g., on buildings, statues, squares, historical sites) will receive a lower priority.

Finalists

Five names were chosen as finalists for members of the broader community to provide input. All met the first and most important criterion of having a direct association with the Arboretum land. They are, in alphabetical order:

- Cuffe
- Dick Welsh
- Flora
- Margaret Fuller
- Shiu-ying Hu

Biographies for each finalist are included as an appendix to the document. Please review carefully and feel free to do further research on your own.

³ With input from the Arboretum.

Community Input

This document is being distributed widely through organizational and individual members of the working group. Your recommendation will be provided by rating each finalist on a five-point scale. You do not need to compare or rank the candidates against each other. You can give multiple candidates the same score if you so choose. You are required to rate each candidate, as well as provide the zip code where you live and any affiliation to a working group organization or individual from which you may have received this document.

The way to provide your input is through a Google Form which you can access by clicking on this link: <https://forms.gle/SEmXpXfWDYvWJ1j17>

The deadline for submitting your input is Friday, April 27 at 11:59 PM.

There will also be a Zoom presentation for the community to learn more about the candidates in-depth on Thursday, April 11 at 7 PM. You can register for the presentation by emailing us at renamebusseystreet@gmail.com

Next Steps

The working group will collect and analyze the data from the community input in order to share that information with the two abutters, the Arboretum and the city Parks Department, who will consider the advice provided by the community and will consult with the city councilors in choosing the new street name to submit to the Public Improvement Commission. The Commission will hold its own hearing on the petition to help guide its own decision-making process.

Long term, we are committed to working with the Arboretum and the Parks Department to provide on-going community education about the new person who the street will be named after.

Working group members and affiliated organizations (Endorsing organizations in **bold**):

Office of Enrique Pepén, District 5 Boston City Councilor

Roslindale Village Main Street

Steven Gag, WalkUP Roslindale

Jamaica Plain Historical Society

Hidden Jamaica Plain

Ginger Brown, JP Centre/South Main Streets

Office of Ben Weber, District 6 Boston City Councilor

Jerry Mogul, Roslindale resident

Raphael Sulkovitz, Longfellow Area Neighborhood Association

Laurie Jo Wallace, Roslindale resident

George Wardle, **Roslindale Historical Society**

Many thanks to the following resource people who provided advice and feedback about the finalists for whom they have expertise:

Megan Marshall, Author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life*

Lisa Pearson, Head of the Library and Archives, Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

Wayne William Tucker, Author of the *Eleven Names Project*, digital research project

APPENDIX: FINALIST BIOGRAPHIES (in alphabetical order)

1. CUFFE

In 18th century Boston, many Bostonians, including ministers, enslaved Black and Indigenous people to perform a range of household labor, including skilled work, such as carpentry, child care, spinning cloth, milking cows and domestic chores. One such minister was Rev. Nathaniel Walter, who was the reverend for the Second Parish Church of Roxbury, established in 1712, located on present-day Arboretum land on Walter St. near Mendum St. fronting the cemetery behind it that remains a feature of the Arboretum, with about a dozen or more tombstones still standing. (The church was relocated after fire destroyed it to South St. and moved and divided among multiple congregations, including the Roslindale Congregational Church and the Theodore Parker Unitarian Church on Centre St. in West Roxbury.)

Rev. Walter enslaved at least four Black people, including Cuffe and Grace, who married and had five children. “Cuffe” was a fairly common name among Black enslaved people, as it was the Anglicized version of Kofi, a West African male name (best known for Kofi Annan from Ghana, Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1997-2006 and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2001). In America before the Civil War, however, “Cuffe” became a pejorative in cartoons and in speeches by Jefferson Davis and others, meant to diminish and belittle Black people.

Cuffe and his fellow enslaved people likely lived in the church’s parsonage, at the corner of South St. and Walter St., currently occupied by the Green St. T coffee house. Their duties undoubtedly included taking care of the church and the surrounding land. According to vital records of births in Roxbury, the baptism of their children occurred in the church.

Written history has lauded and recorded the good deeds of Rev. Walter and his peers, but we know nothing of the character and suppressed potential of Cuffe and enslaved people like him throughout the region. Renaming Bussey St. for Cuffe would elevate a person from the most marginalized community in our past of enslaved people, who did not even have last names, by creating a street sign and intersection that equalized the names of Walter and Cuffe. It would also reclaim the proud African history of his name, so denigrated by slaveholders and white supremacists in our country, and would redress, in a symbolic and public way, the wrongs of slavery perpetrated and profited from by so many, including Nathaniel Walter and Benjamin Bussey.

2. DICK WELSH

Dick was born to Binah, the negro slave of John Morey, in 1781 on a farm that today is a portion of the Arboretum. Binah (or Bino) was listed as about 7 years-old with a value of £16.0.0 in the estate inventory of land and property inherited by John Morey from his father. When Dick was born Binah would have been about 16 years old.

When Dick was very young, his master was preparing to move to Middleborough, Massachusetts and began divesting all his Jamaica Plain properties. The farmland was divided and sold to neighbors, Lemuel Child, Lemuel May, and Eleazor Weld. Dick, too, was sold on July 30, 1785, for £5 to David Stoddard Greenough, who lived on the estate at 12 South Street in Jamaica Plain today known as the Loring Greenough House.

The “Bill of Sale” clearly treated young Dick as Morey’s property, transferring him to Greenough “in the Capacity of a Servant until he shall attain to the Age of Twenty one Years.” Though born enslaved in 1780,

Dick was referred to as indentured, not enslaved, and thus would be free when he attained adulthood. In the intervening 16 years he would be forced to provide unpaid labor to Greenough. The 1785 bill of sale states that Dick was the son of an enslaved Black woman named Binah; Dick's father is not known. But because Dick's mother was of African descent and Dick was referred to as "Molatto," it meant that his father was not of African descent. Dick was five years old, taken to a new place to work, and separated from all he knew.

The next year, on September 6, 1786, Greenough changed the legal basis to a formal indenture using a standard printed form that would be more legally enforceable in light of changes in Massachusetts case law stemming from the 1783 Quock Walker court case which opened the way to emancipation for enslaved people in Massachusetts. Greenough crossed out the part of the form that stated that Dick "doth voluntarily and of his own free Will and Accord, and with the Consent of his parents, bind himself to Greenough." No mention was made of Dick's mother Binah.

Indenturing – a labor system that forced many poor children, children of unwed mothers and orphans to serve as servants or apprentices – was commonly used by local towns to handle vagrancy and homelessness. In return for room and board, these children were forced to provide unpaid labor to their indenturers. Dick's involuntary indenture until age 21 was to work as a farm apprentice. In return for Dick's labor, Greenough promised in the indenture document to supply "good and sufficient meat, Drink, Washing, Lodging & Clothing." Dick presumably worked for Greenough in Jamaica Plain for the next twelve years, but according to a newspaper ad placed on June 25, 1798, Dick ran away seeking his freedom. Dick would have had three years left on his indenture. Greenough's \$1 reward was more than some indenturers offered for their missing apprentices, but that might have reflected Greenough's wish to be seen as a wealthy landed gentleman. The ad's focus on Dick's clothing is typical of runaway ads of the time. Clothes were difficult to discard or replace in a pre-industrial world so the exactness of their description was aimed at recapturing Dick.

Did Dick succeed in his 1798 escape? It appears not. Federal census records for 1790 and 1800 show one person (possibly Dick?) in the Greenough household listed in the category "All Other Persons Except Indians Not Taxed." Dick's indenture presumably ended in 1801 when he reached 21 years of age. He most likely left the Greenough household to pursue his own life. By the 1810 census, all members of the Greenough household are listed as "White."

In the runaway ad, Dick is referred to by the name, Dick Welsh. The description as an indented "Molatto" about 18 years old is consistent the same indentured person but who has acquired or adopted a new last name other than that of his original enslaver.

Dick was born into slavery, was sold into indentured servitude, and sought freedom.

3. FLORA

In 18th century Boston, many whites of all classes enslaved Black and Indigenous people, mostly for household labor and chores. While the greater Boston area and New England as a whole did not have large agricultural plantations, as in the south, that required many enslaved people to work the fields, there were quite a few small commercial farms that raised crops for market and extracted profit from the labor of enslaved people to enrich their enslavers.

One such farm in the rural reaches of Roxbury, which at the time included current-day Jamaica Plain and Roslindale, was owned by William Dudley, son of Governor Joseph Dudley and grandson of Governor Thomas Dudley, a founding father of the Mass Bay Colony. Lacking a will, upon his death in 1845, his various properties, including four enslaved people, were listed in the probate court inventory of his estate. Three of the enslaved people were males – two adults and one boy – and one was a female, Flora, described as an “old woman” and valued at 40 pounds, considerably less than the male field hands, along with a listing for her shoes, apron and other accouterments needed for her household chores.

Renaming Bussey St. for Flora would elevate a person from the most marginalized community in our past of enslaved people, who did not even have last names, and would redress, in a symbolic and public way, the wrongs of slavery perpetrated and profited from by so many, including not just the Dudleys but Benjamin Bussey, as well. Written history has lauded and recorded the good deeds of Bussey and his peers, but we know nothing of the character and suppressed potential of Flora and enslaved people like her throughout the region.

The Dudley property where Flora worked was near the land that the Arboretum became, across Walter St. in the direction of South and Centre streets. We can never know whether Flora ever visited the Arboretum land, but there is a direct association with the land by the second meaning of her name, Flora, that describes the bountiful trees, shrubs, flowers, greenery and landscapes that grace and enrich the lives of those of us fortunate to enjoy that magnificent treasure in our midst- of our neighborhoods, our city and the greater Boston region.

4. MARGARET FULLER

Margaret Fuller was a pre-eminent mid-19th century feminist, Transcendentalist, writer, and reformer who lived for a few years in Jamaica Plain on the other side of Forest Hills Station from the land that became the Arboretum. She frequented what became Hemlock Hill for nature walks and meet-ups with colleagues, memorialized on the Hemlock Hill timeline page of the Arboretum website.

Fuller was born in Cambridgeport in 1810 and early on faced the pernicious effects of discrimination due to her gender. Steeped in the classics by her father from a young age, she was a brilliant scholar as a teen and was a star in a small group of male friends that included Oliver Wendell Holmes. The boys, of course, went on to Harvard, a path that was closed to her. Later in her teen years, her family moved to rural Groton where she was expected to help manage the household, while also caring for and educating her younger siblings, isolated from any intellectual stimulation she so desperately needed.

In her early 20s, she was able to leave home and found her way to Concord and Ralph Waldo Emerson. What started as a disciple relationship turned into an intense intellectual partnership of equals over 10 years where she was instrumental in the development of Transcendentalism, especially from a feminist perspective. By the time she moved to Jamaica Plain in 1839, she had been named as the first editor of the first Transcendentalist journal, *The Dial*.

The other way in which she came out as a public intellectual during this formative period was to design and run annual *Conversations* for women for five years in downtown Boston. She facilitated and led discussions to challenge and empower women, to help them find their voice and moral center, so they can take action and make change in the world. Over a 16-week period, each annual set of Conversations focused on a

particular theme, such as fine arts, ethics, education. Many of the graduates of the Conversations either had been or went on to become abolitionists, feminists or other social reformers.

While living in Boston, she began to develop her theory of feminism, first through an article in *The Dial* and then as a full-length book, that was far ahead of its time. Her call for equality was not merely to overcome the many ways that women's lives were circumscribed by laws and custom that excluded them from owning property, voting, attending college and so many other indignities, but to develop an equality between men and women at a deeper level that enabled each to aspire to the "fullness of being," that encompassed both male and female energies and attributes. Her book, *Woman in the 19th Century*, was a foundational feminist work that helped inspire the Seneca Falls conference in 1848. Fuller was held in such high esteem among her peers that she was invited to preside over the first national Women's Rights Convention in Worcester in 1850. It is not known whether she even received the invitation, as she was returning from Europe months earlier and tragically drowned off Long Island in a shipwreck. In the four years prior to her untimely death, she had cemented her reputation as the first female public intellectual in her role as front page columnist for the New York Tribune, writing anti-slavery editorials, literary reviews, investigative journalism exposes, such as on women's prisons, and dispatches from Europe during the 1848-49 period of popular revolutions.

Fuller was recognized in Boston by having an elementary school on Glen Rd. in JP named for her from 1912-2004, when it was renamed the Community Academy. Since then, there has been no public recognition in Boston of Margaret Fuller. Formerly an early 20th century settlement house named for her, a community center still operates in Cambridgeport, from the house in which she was born.

5. SHIU-YING HU

Shiu-ying Hu was an internationally acclaimed botanist- researcher, scholar, teacher, mentor and writer - whose life long goal was to improve the health and well-being of the rural poor in China. The Arnold Arboretum served as her laboratory and place of employment for nearly 30 years, beginning in 1948 as a research assistant and ending as an Emeritus Senior Research Fellow. She lived to 102, and was active making botanical contributions almost to the end of her life.

Dr. Hu was born to a poor family in rural China in 1910 and never forgot that her life was saved as an infant by an herbal remedy, inspiring her to collect and study medicinal plants. She took an academic path, eventually teaching and researching for 8 years at a Chinese university from 1938-1946, fearlessly going alone into remote mountainous regions to collect specimens. In 1946 she was accepted at Radcliffe to study botany with then-Arboretum director and Harvard professor Elmer Merrill, and got her doctorate from Harvard in 1949, only the second Chinese woman to reach that pinnacle in academia at Harvard. Dr. Hu was a pioneer in her field who blazed a trail both in China and in Boston, at Harvard and at the Arboretum, fighting sexism and racism.

Her dissertation was on the holly plant in China, a major ingredient in a health-promoting Chinese herbal tea. Researching and cataloging hollies was one of her life-long pursuits; she named almost 300, or three-quarters of all known species of holly. In recognition of her achievements, the American Holly Society named an award in her name, and she herself was nicknamed "Holly Hu" for groundbreaking research.

In her early years at the Arboretum, she was a key contributor to the Flora of China project, writing the first volume of the research in a project that today engages over 600 researchers. In her lifelong devotion to

studying the flora of China, Dr. Hu cataloged 185,000 plants from the collections of various institutions, including the Arnold Arboretum. The Hu Card Index she created to document her work has now been digitized. While working for 30+ years at the Arboretum, she also maintained ties with Chinese universities and key botanical institutions. She facilitated cross-cultural exchange from the 1950s to the 1970s, when China was closed to the West, by acting as a bridge between Chinese and western researchers. After her retirement from the Arboretum in the late 1970s, she continued her teaching in China where she received numerous honors and was revered as “Grandmother Plants,” always accessible to people of all classes and ethnicities.

One of the plants she helped distribute early in her career at the Arnold Arboretum was the *Metasequoia* (dawn redwood), an ancient species discovered in China in the 1940s. Hu and her Arboretum colleagues packaged and mailed dawn redwood seed to 200 botanical institutions worldwide in 1948, thus saving this living fossil from potential extinction. Years later, she was walking on the Arboretum grounds with famed composer John Williams when they passed the majestic tree. Williams was so captivated by both the tree and his companion that he was inspired in 2000 to write *Tree Song for Violin and Orchestra*, with a section of the musical composition named for her. Williams also wrote about his encounter with both the tree and Dr. Hu: “If you look at [the tree] long enough, it seems to be speaking to you with the wisdom of the age and with great intelligence...Dr. Hu is a brilliant scientist...she knows the plants and they are like children to her. This woman has a spiritual aura about her which is very still and penetrates very deep into her subject almost like a religious person...”