



## What's in a Name? The University of Maryland Football Stadium Controversy



**Anne Turkos, University Archivist**

# Harry Clifton “Curley” Byrd



Byrd as MAC cadet



Byrd (at left in second row) and his football teammates

- **Born in 1889 in Crisfield, MD**
- **Received degree in civil engineering from MAC in 1908**
- **Multi-sport, star athlete while a student**
- **Returned to MAC in 1912 in multiple roles**
- **Served as president of UMD from 1935 to 1954**



# Old Byrd Stadium

- **Football competition at MAC began in 1892**
- **First stadium constructed in 1923**
- **Named for Byrd at request of the Alumni Association “as an expression of gratitude for his work in promoting sportsmanship and in perfecting the athletic organization of this university”**



Dedication plaque unveiled, November 24, 1923



# Current Stadium



Byrd showing William P. Cole, chair of the Board of Regents, the new facility, c. 1950

- **Board of Regents decides on January 20, 1950, to transfer the name of the stadium from the old facility to the new one**
- **Name of stadium provokes minimal public discussion until recent years**
- **Concerns raised about Byrd's racial views and whether he deserved to be honored in such a visible way**



# Controversy Gains Attention

- **Students petition and protest**
- **Editorials in student newspaper**
- **SGA resolution in support of name change**
- **President Loh forms work group to examine name change question on September 28, 2015**



Byrd Stadium protest at dedication of Frederick Douglass statue. Image courtesy of umdwritersbloc.com

# UMD Archives Involvement

- No formal role on work group
- Meeting with sub-groups or individuals on the work group
- Observing work group meetings and commenting as appropriate

## ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST CHANGING THE STADIUM NAME *and* ALTERNATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

REPORT *of the* BYRD STADIUM NAMING WORK GROUP  
4 December 2015

### Background and Charge

Over the last year, students at the University of Maryland, College Park have advocated that the President and the Board of Regents consider whether the football stadium should continue to bear the name of former President Harry C. "Curley" Byrd; these requests were communicated through a Student Senate vote as well as through individual student requests and communications. On September 28, 2015 President Loh charged the work group, made up of faculty, administrators, students, trustees and alumni with providing a report by December 11, 2015 addressing the following topics:

- Reasons/Information on why the name should be changed
- Reasons/Information on why the name should not be changed
- A list of alternatives to changing the name.

President Loh specifically asked that the report NOT make a recommendation on the name change. The report will be used to inform his decision and subsequent recommendation to the University System of Maryland Board of Regents.

The committee sought first to educate itself on the matter by organizing into a series of subgroups with the following tasks:

- Examine the history of Harry C. "Curley" Byrd's presidency, with specific attention to his position and actions on racial segregation in higher education;
- Examine the societal context – specifically how other institutions of higher education are addressing requests to rename buildings, due to a history of racial discrimination associated with those individuals (a context which changed rapidly during the course of committee deliberations);
- Consider whether, how, and when the committee might engage the community in a broader discussion of these issues; and
- Examine the UMD and University System of Maryland building naming policies.

Once information from each of these subgroups was reported and considered by the full work group, the larger committee began the work of responding directly to the charge. All of the work group meetings were announced on the University website and open to the public. Between one and four community members were present at each meeting and time was allotted for public response/comment at the end of each meeting. With the exception of the draft of this final report, documents distributed to the committee were made available to observers. Minutes of the meeting were shared upon request.



# Challenges



- **Attempting to ensure that Byrd's entire career and accomplishments, not just his racial views, received attention**
- **Dealing with virtual erasure of recognition of one of the most significant leaders in UMD history**

# Board of Regents' Decision



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

December 7, 2015

USM Chancellor Robert Caret  
cc: USM Board of Regents

Dear Chancellor Caret:

I respectfully submit to you and the Board of regents the following regarding Byrd Stadium:

**Recommendation for board action:**

I recommend that "Byrd Stadium" be changed to "Maryland Stadium."

**Planned follow-up actions by UMCP if this recommendation is approved:**

- **Memorialize President Byrd in the library:** UMCP will identify a suitable and visible location inside one of our main University libraries and install a permanent exhibit recognizing the enormous contributions of Harry Clifton "Curley" Byrd during his presidency (1936 – 1954) and in the 25 preceding years as teacher, football coach, and university administrator. As an institution of learning, we are duty-bound to memorialize his complete legacy.
- **Announce a moratorium on any other honorific renaming:** There will be a five-year moratorium on any honorific renaming of other buildings that recognize historical figures.
- **Move from symbolic change to institutional improvements:** True change is not realized by name change alone. This controversy is symptomatic of deeper divides on campus and in the nation at large. Early next semester, UMCP will launch a campus-wide "Maryland Dialogues on Diversity and Community" to help bridge the differences and to align better our practices and policies with our 21<sup>st</sup> century moral and academic vision.

**DUE DILIGENCE**

Over the summer, I talked informally with a wide range of stakeholders—people on campus, alumni, public officials, colleagues at peer universities—seeking their views and wisdom on this matter. Opinions are strong and divided. Some defy easy categorization.

This fall, I convened a 20-member workgroup of faculty, students, staff, administrators (including Deans), and other campus representatives (from the University Senate, student government, Intercollegiate Athletics, etc.) and alumni to study the subject. The workgroup was diverse and balanced. It included those who want to keep the name, those who want to change it, and those who are neutral.

I asked the workgroup not to make a recommendation. I did not want its members caught in the crossfire of the controversy. Instead, I charged the workgroup to undertake an assessment of the issues. The results are two very thoughtful reports: "*Arguments For and Against Changing the Stadium Name and Alternative*"

Page 1 of 4

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- Loh submits recommendation to BOR to change name, December 9, 2015
- Long list of witnesses for and against recommendation
- Each regent presents his/her own opinion
- Final vote 12-5 in favor of name change





# Fallout

- **Without prior consultation, UMD Libraries, and ultimately UMD Archives, tasked with installing a permanent exhibit to “memorialize President Byrd in the library”**
- **Reporters for student newspaper immediately wanted to know what other building names were controversial**
- **Series of dialogues on diversity and community in spring 2016 semester**
- **Minimal impact on donor relations and football season ticket sales**
- **Difficult conversations continue with individuals unhappy with decision**

## **The name Byrd Stadium is no more, but other UMD buildings have discriminatory namesakes, too**

Francis Scott Key Hall is one of the campus buildings named after a person with ties to slavery.

**By Lexie Schapitl**

Published December 13, 2015

The University System of Maryland Board of Regents approved UMD President Wallace Loh's recommendation Friday to rename Byrd Stadium as Maryland Stadium after months of discussion that the stadium's namesake — former university President Harry Clifton "Curley" Byrd — supported segregation.

Loh's recommendation included a five-year moratorium on changing names of other university buildings that recognize historical figures.

In its Dec. 4 report detailing the arguments for and against changing the stadium's name, the Byrd Stadium Naming Work Group — which Loh tasked with looking into the name change back in September — noted Byrd Stadium is not the only facility on the campus named after someone who supported racial inequality and discrimination. The group suggested that "the campus might undertake a broader initiative to discuss and debate building names and university values."

# Lessons Learned

- **Need to continue to strive to make University Archives program better known on campus.**
- **Have to be ready to insert UMD Archives into issues where historical perspective is needed and should be valued.**
- **Must remain neutral and sensitive to concerns of parties on both sides of an issue/question.**
- **Have to have a stake that is recognized by the university and the Libraries' administration in the damage control.**
- **Reinforced the reality that it's extremely difficult to overcome pre-conceived notions.**