



Episode 017 – Dolores Huerta Middle School (transcript)

Introduction

You're listening to rememBURBANK, a podcast featuring stories from the history of Burbank, California, produced by the Burbank Public Library. Check out our collection of historic Burbank photos at burbankinfo.org.

Announcements

According to Charles Darwin, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." Burbank Public Library has responded to a wave of change in the public library world by eliminating all past, present and future overdue fines. Research has shown that late fines deter the public from using the library as the resource it was intended to be. You can check out most items for six weeks and automatic renewals have also been instated. Rejoice in your new and improved library perks!

Story

The naming of schools is steeped in tradition. The common custom that public schools across America have settled with is naming schools after important men from the country's history. Thomas Edison, George Washington, Theodore Roosevelt and Thomas Jefferson all have local elementary schools named for them. Burbank Unified School District also chose names for their schools based on other historical significance such as famous literary figures like Robert Louis Stevenson and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Additionally, they honored men who have made a historical impact in the state of California such as Joaquin Miller, Bret Harte, John Muir, Luther Burbank, and Walt Disney. But what happens when you name a school after someone that society deemed important only to realize decades later that his legacy may not simply be tainted, but offensive to society as a whole? This has been the case with the local middle school, David Starr Jordan, which was given that name in 1948.

So, who was David Starr Jordan and what's the big deal? Born in 1851 in New York, he grew to become a learned ichthyologist who earned his advanced degrees in the state of Indiana. He started as a natural history teacher and moved his way up to administration. By 1885, he was named the president of Indiana University at age 34, becoming the nation's youngest university president. In 1891, he was approached by Leland Stanford to come to California and become president of a brand new school: Stanford University. He agreed and served as Stanford's president until 1913. But where's the scandal, you ask? The short answer is that Jordan was a forefront advocate of eugenics, or the belief that we should set to improve the quality of the genetic pool by excluding those deemed inferior. Who else held those beliefs and sent the world into an all-out war? Nazis. So, eugenics is really just the scientific way of saying he was an unabashed bigot. Jordan wrote essays and delivered speeches on the benefits of racial segregation and racial purity. He was adamantly anti-war because he concluded that war killed off the best members of the gene pool. He also served on the board of an organization that championed

compulsory sterilization. So all around, just not a guy that we really want to portray as a hero by naming our educational institutions after.

But, you ask, the school has carried his name for more than 70 years? Why has it taken so long to get this changed? It is because it has taken that long to change society. The people who clasp onto tradition so vehemently often don't realize that if they'd just let go, they might open their world to an entirely new way to experience and appreciate life, along with simply making the world a better place for everyone else in the community. In early 2019, the Burbank Unified school board unanimously voted to change the name of David Starr Jordan Middle School. In an April 2019 Burbank Leader article, the president of the Burbank Democratic Club stated, "No longer should students of color, neuro-atypical students, and [those] with differing levels of physical disabilities be asked to walk through a building that bears the name of a person who opposed their very existence." Through much deliberation, the board has settled on a new name just this year and students returning to the school in the fall will be attending Dolores Huerta Middle School.

And now, you wonder, just who is this person that we're renaming our school after? First, it is important to point out, it will be the first Burbank school named after a woman, and a woman of color at that. But this particular woman is woven into the more recent history of civil liberties in California. Dolores Huerta is an American labor leader and civil rights activist. She co-founded, with Cesar Chavez, the National Farmworkers Association in 1962. She has worked tirelessly for more than 60 years on advocating for laborers, immigrants, and women. She originated the phrase, "Sí, se puede," which was later used in its translation by Barack Obama in his "Yes, we can" campaign. The fact that Dolores Huerta's lifelong crusade has greatly impacted the people of California made her an easy choice to receive the honor of having a local school dedicated in her name. This trend of renaming schools, streets, mascots, and the like to reflect the diverse society we live in should be wildly encouraged. We are currently in a primed position to reexamine the past, change tradition, and redefine the standards with which we determine future patterns of naming and dedication to encompass a more inclusive representation of our country's history. Hooray to change and welcome Dolores Huerta to the story of Burbank!

News from Burbank

Today's news comes from the May 28, 1973 *Burbank Daily Review*:

You don't have to be a big hero – A local patriot does just as well

He was a peppery little old guy with gleaming white hair and pink cheeks who loved nothing better than to deck himself out with half a dozen Civil War medals and give patriotic pep talks.

Around Memorial Day each year, Captain Henry M. Mingay would make the rounds of the local schools, telling kids what a grand country they lived in and how great it was to be free.

Captain Mingay is dead and gone now. But he's not forgotten – not completely anyway.

Children at Henry M. Mingay Elementary School in Burbank revived his memory this week by placing a large spray of gladioli, carnations, and daisies on Mingay's Grand View Memorial Park grave. Each of the 450 pupils took a nickel or dime to school to pay for the flowers, and three youngsters made the trek to the gravesite for the presentation. They placed American flags on his grave, too.

Mingay would have been proud. He was patriotic to a fault, and he nurtured vivid memories of his 10 months of combat duty with New York's famous "Fighting Sixty-Ninth" regiment during the Civil War. In fact, when Warner Brothers was filming "The Fighting 69th" with James Cagney, the studio employed Mingay as a technical consultant.

Captain Mingay got a kick out of having a school named for him, too, because his formal schooling ended when he turned 12. It was on December 5, 1946, just two days after his 100th birthday, that Captain Mingay dedicated Mingay School by turning the first shovelful of earth in the planting of three live oak trees. Not long after the dedication, on April 22, 1947, Mingay died.

Before he died, Mingay turned over most of his medals to Mingay school officials. The medals were displayed in the main hallway until last year when the school was vandalized. Mrs. Elaine Fritz, school principal, said that vandals ripped the medals from their velvet mountings. She hopes she can display the medals again someday, but the ribbons, she fears, are torn beyond repair.

There's still a large photo of Henry M. Mingay in the hall, though. "When your school is named for Washington or Lincoln, you know who it is," Mrs. Fritz said. "But somehow Henry M. Mingay got neglected. We're turning a new leaf, now. We've made a point of finding out who Mingay was and making the children aware. Even the youngest pupils know who he was. And I think the story carries an important message with it: You don't have to be a national hero to be important. You can be a local patriot."

And that's the news from May 28, 1973.

End Credits

rememBURBANK was researched, written, and hosted by Carolyn Alves, recorded and edited by Marcos Alves. Funding for the podcast came from the Friends of the Burbank Public Library, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting books and the library to the Burbank community. The proceeds from their fundraising efforts help fund Library programming and purchase special equipment for the library.

The music you hear now, and at the beginning of the podcast, is Burbank's 1924 official song "In Burbank" by Code Morgan.

You can find shownotes for this episode, learn more about the show, and view historical photos of Burbank at burbankinfo.org.

Thank you for joining us today.