

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REGENTS COMMUNICATION

SUBJECT: Building and Space Naming

ACTION REQUEST: Authorization to rescind and to remove the name of Alexander Winchell House in West Quadrangle Residence Hall

Background:

In January 2017 a review process was established for considering questions raised by the community about historical names in and on University buildings (the “review process”) based on the recommendation of the President’s Advisory Committee on University History (“PACOUH”). The PACOUH is a standing committee of expert faculty that advises the President on matters relating to the history and traditions of the University that require historical interpretation, sensitivity and expertise. The committee is currently chaired by Thurnau Professor of History Terrence J. McDonald, who is also director of the Bentley Historical Library, the University’s primary institutional archive. The review process articulates a set of principles that should be used in considering requests to review names as well as the steps that will be taken when requests are submitted.

On February 12, 2017, a UM undergraduate student submitted a request that the name of Alexander Winchell House in West Quadrangle Residence Hall be reviewed pursuant to the review process. The PACOUH carefully evaluated the request and in September 2017 unanimously recommended to me that the name be rescinded and removed. In doing so, the committee independently considered “the content of Winchell’s work, the trajectory of his life and career and the most recent findings of historians on the history of his period and his science.”

At the heart of the committee’s recommendation is their conclusion that by both contemporary standards and even in the context of Winchell’s day, his most notable work (the 1880 book “Preadamites, or a Demonstration of the Existence of Men before Adam”) was unambiguously racist and “out of step with the University’s own aspirations in those times as well.” According to the committee, portions of this book continue to be used today to support white supremacist views, thereby amplifying the negative contemporary effect of the Winchell naming, especially on “the actual building of communities” that we should aspire to in our residential housing. Additional factors underlying their conclusion are detailed in the appended recommendation.

After the recommendation was transmitted to me, I considered it carefully and discussed it extensively with the executive leadership of the University.

Action Requested:

The Board of Regents authorized the naming of Alexander Winchell House in 1939. As we articulated in the review process, the University community makes a significant commitment to

an individual or family when it names a space after a person and those who wish to change it carry a heavy burden. In this case, I believe that heavy burden has been met for the reasons articulated in the PACOUH recommendation.

Therefore, I request that the Board of Regents authorize the rescindment and removal of the name of Alexander Winchell House as soon as is practicable. Upon rescindment and removal, I will request that the Vice President for Student Life engage a process to bring forward a recommendation for renaming the house in accordance with the 2008 "Policy for Naming of Facilities, Spaces and Streets" ("the 2008 Naming Policy"). Until such time as it is renamed, a functional designation for the space will be determined by the Associate Vice President for Facilities and Operations, as specified in the 2008 Naming Policy.

Respectfully submitted,



Mark S. Schlissel
President

March 2018

September 13, 2017

Dear President Schlissel:

As you know, during the Winter term of 2017 your Advisory Committee on University History received a request to review the name of Alexander Winchell which is currently on a house in West Quad. With your permission we moved forward with this review and our report is attached.

At the heart of this request, very thoughtfully written by an undergraduate student, were these main points:

That “Alexander Winchell was a professor of geology in the late 1800s, and wrote a book titled ‘Proof of Negro Inferiority’ which circulates around white supremacist websites now.”

That “Professor Winchell was a supporter of biologically based white supremacy.”

That the University failed to conduct due diligence in the selection of this name originally in the 1930s, and that it is inappropriate to retain it today, especially in a residence hall and at a time when the University is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We have taken this request seriously and over the course of the summer investigated the content of Winchell’s work, the trajectory of his life and career, and the most recent findings of historians on the history of his period and his science. We received research help from archival staff at the Bentley Historical Library and conducted lengthy discussions of these issues in the committee.

We have followed our own procedures outlined in the memo we sent you in January

<https://president.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/01/PACOUH-memo-on-naming-1-13-17.pdf>

and attempted to answer the questions we posed there.

As we have put it in that memo, we believe first, that change in a duly authorized honorific name of a building or portion of a building on the campus should be unusual, but, second that such change is certainly possible in light of information unavailable or underutilized at the time the name was chosen. Enroute to our conclusion we have pondered the same principles we have asked others to consider in our policy document, such as: **The Principle of Pedagogy**: What lesson does this name teach today? **The Principle of Historical and Institutional Context**: How can we be fair to the work of someone writing in 1880? **The Principle of Contemporary Effect**: Does this name carry a different valence today than it did when it was selected in 1939?

At the end of our analysis we are unanimous in the view that it is inappropriate to continue the name of Alexander Winchell on a house in West Quad for the reasons we have elaborated in the attached report.

We understand that our report is a recommendation only and that it will be up to you to determine its next steps.

We are confident that our University’s history provides an exceptional number of names of others whose work justifiably should be celebrated in a dorm house

Although our analysis and recommendation were concluded before the recent upsurge of violent white supremacy in Virginia and elsewhere we believe our work speaks to that situation in two ways. First, our analysis reveals the intellectual bankruptcy of white supremacist ideology. That Winchell's work, backward looking when it was written in 1880, still is featured on contemporary racist websites, is evidence that these movements remain dependent upon ideas developed to justify slavery in America. There is nothing new in this hateful and corrosive ideology. That we need to state that in 2017 is evidence of our second point, namely, that Americans of goodwill can never cease their opposition to and exposure of these rhetorics and movements.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. McDonald', with a stylized flourish above the name.

Terrence J. McDonald
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor
Professor of History and Director
Bentley Historical Library
Committee Chair

Report and Recommendation on Alexander Winchell Name in West Quad

President's Advisory Committee on University History

At their meeting on January 31, 1939, the Regents named the "houses" in the then under construction "dormitory unit adjacent to the Michigan Union and to Allen – Rumsey house," which would become known as West Quadrangle. The names selected included the place names Michigan and Chicago and those of deceased former University faculty members including Robert Wenley, Philosophy (1861-1929), Henry Carter Adams, Economics (1851-1921), Alfred Henry Lloyd, Philosophy (1864-1927), Alexander Winchell, Geology and Paleontology (1824-1891), and George Palmer Williams, Mathematics and Physics (1802-1881).¹

The "house system" was introduced to the campus in those years, when federal funding supported major dormitory construction, and it was designed to stimulate academic activity and to prevent the problem of anonymity in large dormitories. The 457 rooms in West quad were divided into nine houses, each of which was led by a (male) resident advisor from the faculty and a (female) house director who together with the staff of graduate student advisors were to organize the academic and social life in each house.

The names for each house were proposed by the executive director of residence halls, Professor of English Karl Lichtenberg after consultation with the dean of women and dean of students. The idea apparently was that the names of former faculty who were thought to be outstanding teachers and spent their entire careers at Michigan might serve as an inspiration of a kind for the students living in the new concept small "houses."²

Although Winchell House remains in West Quad to this day, there is little information there about Winchell or, indeed, any of the other faculty names on the list. The mixture of names of people and places might lead a student to wonder if Winchell – or any other – House is named after a place or a person.

If a student wished to learn more about Winchell he or she might do a Google search, discovering a website called "Strange Science: The Rocky Road to Modern Paleontology and Biology" maintained by a science writer from the University of Colorado. On that website the section on Winchell quotes from his publication of 1878 the following that would be repeated in his 1880 book, *The Pre-Adamites or, A Demonstration of the Existence of Men Before Adam*: "...I am not responsible for the inferiority of the Negro. I am responsible if I ignore the facts. I am culpable if I hold him to the same standard as the White man." <http://www.strangescience.net/winchell.htm>

¹ University of Michigan. "Proceedings of the Board of Regents," (1939): 822.

² For a contemporary overview of the house plan see *Michigan Alumnus*, August 19, 1939, pp. 497-498.

And another Google search would lead to the discovery that a chapter from this same Winchell book entitled "On the Inferiority of the Negro Race" is prominently displayed on the "Race" page of the notorious website Stormfront, described in this way by the Southern Poverty Law Center: "Created by former Alabama Klan boss and long-time white supremacist Don Black in 1995, Stormfront was the first major hate site on the Internet. Claiming more than 300,000 registered members as of May 2015 (though far fewer remain active); the site has been a very popular online forum for white nationalists and other racial extremists." <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/stormfront>.

This chapter has also been published as a stand-alone pamphlet under the title, "Proof of Negro Interiority" by the now apparently defunct group called the "Sons of Liberty" connected with James K. Warner, pastor of the white supremacist organization New Christian Crusade Church and former Grand Dragon of the Louisiana Ku Klux Klan http://en.metapedia.org/wiki/James_K._Warner; [http://en.metapedia.org/wiki/Sons_of_Liberty_\(publishers\)](http://en.metapedia.org/wiki/Sons_of_Liberty_(publishers))

A search process very much like this one has led to a request from an undergraduate student that the President's Advisory Committee on University History follow its published procedures to review whether it is appropriate to have the name of a person so acknowledged on a dormitory house.

We have taken this request seriously and delved into the content and historical context of Winchell's work. The results of our work are presented in this report. We apologize in advance if this document seems lengthy to those outside of the field of history and, perhaps too short to those within it. There is a vast amount of historical interpretation connected with each topic we take up and we have focused only on the main lines of the most relevant works.

Let it be lost in these important details we state our conclusion here: based on a careful historical analysis of his work in his own time and its legacy since and reflecting on the principles we have asked others to consider in this situation, we believe that it is inappropriate to retain his name on any dormitory space.

It is important at the outset to say that, as far as we know, Winchell himself had no connection with these hate groups. His book, *Preadamites: or, A Demonstration of the Existence of Men before Adam* was published in 1880 and there a chapter is called "Negro Inferiority." The book has long been out of copyright and so contemporary hate groups have simply re-printed this chapter under various titles. The question the committee has wrestled with is why this work is so appealing to these groups.³

Winchell's Life:

Alexander Winchell was born in Dutchess County, New York in 1824 and died in Ann Arbor in 1891. He received a bachelor's degree from Wesleyan University in 1847 and began his teaching career in the natural sciences at college preparatory academies in the east (1847-1850) and south (1850-1853).

³ Alexander Winchell, *Preadamites: Or, A Demonstration of the Existence of Men before Adam*. (Chicago, S.C. Griggs and Company, 1880).

He was the “president” of the short lived Masonic University in Selma, Alabama when he was called to Ann Arbor by President Tappan and appointed to the chair of Physics and Civil Engineering beginning in 1854. In 1855 he was transferred to the chair of Geology, Zoology, and Botany, which he continued to hold until 1873, when he resigned to accept the chancellorship of Syracuse University. After 18 months in that position he resigned and became professor of Geology there. Between 1875 and 1878 he divided his time between Syracuse and Vanderbilt University. His position at Vanderbilt was eliminated by officials there. His view and that of his colleagues at the time and some historians since was that he was fired for teaching “evolution.” In 1879 he returned to the University as Professor of Geology and Paleontology, and he remained here until his death. In 1867 Wesleyan University conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws. He led the Geological Survey of the State of Michigan in 1859-1861 and 1869-1871.⁴

In politics Winchell was a Democrat which meant in those days a member of the party that supported slavery and states’ rights among other things. When the Civil War began he remained a Unionist but in his letters and diaries he was strongly opposed to the Civil War draft, critical of Lincoln – whom he called the “joking executive” -- and willing to accept an end to the War that led to the division of North and South into separate nations. At no time during the war that we could find did he evince sympathy for the abolition of slavery or the civil rights of African Americans, but in this respect he was like many Northern Unionists in the early years of the war, including Lincoln himself who famously declared that if he could save the Union without freeing a single slave he would do so. During and after the War the Democrats opposed every attempt of the Republicans to extend civil and political rights to the freed men and women and finally brought the era of Reconstruction to an end.⁵

In an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to raise money to pursue his scientific activities Winchell was involved in a war-time scheme called the “Ann Arbor Cotton Company,” which was incorporated with Ann Arbor financial backers to lease southern cotton lands in areas controlled by the Union army in the hopes of making a profit on it. In his history of this program, The New Masters: Northern planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction, Lawrence Powell has pointed out that several thousand Northerners went to the South in the later years of the Civil War in hopes of making easy money through this federally sponsored program. “Their primary motive was not to revolutionize the plantation order, but to perpetuate it. It was not to uplift the ex-slaves (though many hoped to improve the freedmen's lot), but to profit from their labor.” Winchell was granted a leave by the University Regents to go south to manage the company’s leased plantation, 2,000 acres in Tensas Parish, Louisiana in 1864.

⁴ For biographical information about Winchell, see Mark W. Harrington, *A Memorial Address on the Life and Services of Alexander Winchell* (Published by the University, 1891) and N. H. Winchell, “Alexander Winchell; Memorial Sketch and Eulogium,” *The American Geologist*, 9 (February, 1892), 71-148. Newton H. Winchell was Alexander Winchell’s brother and the two Winchell brothers were co-founders and co-owners of this journal. For a representative historical account of Winchell’s firing at Vanderbilt that emphasizes his teaching of evolution, see Walter P. Metzger, *Academic Freedom in the Age of the University* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 56-58.

⁵ Diary May 16 1864- November 1866, Box 6, Alexander Winchell Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan

Both President Haven and one of the members of the Board of Regents were apparently investors in the company.⁶

The Ann Arbor Cotton Company was a complete and tragic failure. Attacks by Confederate raiders destabilized the area and led to the death of Winchell's brother and Winchell returned to the University with no money from the venture. One can only imagine how and why Winchell thought someone with his training in science would make a good plantation manager, leaving aside the fact that he, like most of these northern "planters" had no experience with cotton, plantation work, slaves and their transition to wage labor or anything else involved in the investment. Powell has argued that many of the northern planters ascribed the failure of their work to the values of the newly freed slaves who worked on the plantations in this program as wage workers. "The freedmen refused to play their roles, for the ex-slaves had their own agenda, and it was not to earn quick profits for their liberators." Many northerners left the south, Powell argues, having "embraced a cultural racism.... If African Americans were unable to bootstrap themselves into farm ownership, it must be because of ingrained deficiencies in ambition, self-discipline, and thrift — virtues celebrated by the free labor creed. The fault, in other words, must lie with the victims, not the social and economic character of the new order."⁷

Winchell was a prodigious writer and important popularizer of science and the relationship between science and theology. In the years after his plantation experience he began writing popular books prolifically, perhaps finding a source of income in this work. His bibliography contains 565 works—about 8,000 pages -- published between 1853 and his death. His books included: *Sketches of Creation* (1870); *A Geological Chart* (1870); *Michigan Geologically Considered* (1873); *The Geology of the Stars* (1874); *The Doctrine of Evolution* (1874); *Reconciliation of Science and Religion* (1877); *Preadamites, or a Demonstration of the Existence of Men before Adam* (1880); *Sparks from a Geologist's Hammer* (1881); *World Life, or Comparative Geology* (1883); *Geological Excursions, or the Rudiments of Geology for Young Learners* (1884); *Geological Studies, or Elements of Geology* (1886); and *Walks and Talks in the Geological Field* (1886). His best known book, and one that went through five editions, was that on the Preadamites, the book from which the troubling chapter above has been taken.⁸

At the time that Winchell wrote this book, American science in general, and geology in particular were experiencing radical transformations. The publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 introduced a new way of looking at the history of life on earth. It proposed that the mechanism for "evolution," natural selection, was unguided and unpredictable and that the history of life was one of nearly ceaseless change. This theory was important for Geology which had grown up in America in close relationship to biology because of its use of fossil remains to help classify and date geological structures. Biologists, geologists, and paleontologists all proposed historical sequences of life on earth. But if the world developed in the way Darwin proposed the classificatory and historically descriptive work of

⁶ Lawrence N. Powell, *New Masters: Northern Planters during the Civil War and Reconstruction*. 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), xii, 16, 20-21, 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xii.

⁸ The spelling of the term "Preadamites" varies from author to author. When referring to a specific work we will follow the spelling of that author.

stratigraphy practiced by geologists and paleontologists would need to be replaced by experimental work that sought to explain the structure of change. Both Darwinian theory and laboratory science would find their homes in the new research universities. As Richard Allen Bolar has argued in his study of it, by 1875 nearly all elite scientists in America had become Darwinists⁹.

Winchell did not. Although he believed in a kind of “evolution” -- and braved some criticism for this -- he was not a Darwinian and did not accept the principle of natural selection or its notion of random fluctuations leading to biological change. And he remained comfortable with the basically descriptive science that he had practiced all his life. Importantly, he believed that the world was orderly and guided by a divine intelligence and that much of it -- especially its racial types -- was changeless. In part for these reasons, standard histories of American geology acknowledge him as one of the organizational founders of the field, but not as a leading scientist. He was an editor of a significant journal and an early president of the Geological Society of America. But his scientific work is not remembered as foundational to the field and even the journal and society he led in his day were seen as strongholds of the descriptive field of stratigraphy and the work of state geologists rather than the frontiers of geological science.¹⁰

Winchell’s Work on the Pre-Adamites:

As David Livingstone has pointed out in his study of the preadamite theorists, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins*, two views of the origins and age of the earth and its peoples began to emerge in the 17th century. After an exhaustive analysis of ancient secular and religious texts the Irish Archbishop James Ussher concluded in his *Annals of World History* published in 1650 that the world’s birthday was October 23, 4004 B.C. and that every generation on the earth could be traced back to the creation of Adam and Eve shortly thereafter. But looking at some of the same sources the French lawyer Isaac La Peyrere argued in 1655 that men existed on the earth before Adam in a book entitled (in its English translation) *A Theological System Upon the Proposition that Men Were Before Adam*. Ussher’s view rapidly became religious orthodoxy and there are those in the United States today who still believe this. La Peyrere’s was denounced by the church as heretical. But as European explorers began to discover new continents and peoples and amateur and professional geologists and paleontologists began to emerge the orthodox view was placed under pressure. People like Ussher assumed that Adam and Eve were white. But if so, from where did people of color come? And as the ages of geological

⁹ There is a vast literature on this and we cite only the works related to our report, including James Moore, “Deconstructing Darwinism: The Politics of Evolution in the 1860s.” *Journal of the History of Biology* 24, no. 3 (1991): 353–408; Wendy Elizabeth Lynch, “Modernizing Culture: Geology, Moral Order, and the Idea of Science in the United States, 1800-1920.” (PhD. dissertation, Stanford University, 1996). Richard Allen Bolar, “There’s Power in the Blood: Religion, White Supremacy, and the Politics of Darwinism in America.” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, San Diego, 2014). Metzger, *Academic Freedom*, 46, also notes that “By any reckoning, the acceptance of Darwinism by American scientists was remarkably rapid.”

¹⁰ Harrington, *Winchell*, pp. 18-19 notes that “evolution throughout the universe, in the sense of gradual development from preexistent conditions, always received his unqualified adhesion and was the guiding line of his thoughts....toward organic evolution, and especially toward the doctrine of the struggle for existence, he was more reserved.” Lynch, “Modernizing,” pp. 145-46 discusses the journal and society in which Winchell participated.

strata and accompanying fossils were understood it appeared that the earth was much older than Usher had proposed.¹¹

Around the world the so-called “monogenists” who held that all were descended from the single creation of Adam and Eve and “polygenists” who argued that there were multiple “creations” and therefore people on the earth before Adam would engage in combat. But in the United States the stakes of this debate were considerably higher because they became entangled in the debate over slavery. If everyone descended from Adam and Eve then the rationale for slavery was endangered: how could members of the same human family enslave one another? In his magisterial work on this topic, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, first published in 1971, George Fredrickson pointed out that the most prominent group of analysts committed to the polygenist framework came to be known as the “American School” of Anthropology and their work was deeply connected with the defense of slavery. In the hands of the leaders of the American school, such as Samuel Morton or Josiah Nott the conclusion of the pre-Adamic narrative was the “practical fact” of a racial hierarchy with whites at the top. Ironically the end of the Civil War and slavery with it made the works of the polygenists even more popular in the South. For as the battle over voting and other civil rights for African Americans raged during the Reconstruction period religious and ethnological evidence for black inferiority was even more important to their opponents.¹²

By the time Winchell entered this debate in his 1880 book Darwinian theory – which called for a single originary “pair” of humans -- had fatally wounded the theory of polygenism among serious scientists and many of them had moved away from the need to reconcile theology and science. The modern compromise between science and theology – that they were two different realms of knowledge – was well underway. In focusing on the “debate” between monogenism and polygenism and attempting to “reconcile” scientific findings with biblical truth Winchell, therefore, situated his work in the backwater of science. His book was more thoroughly reviewed in religious publications because it was more relevant to the question of biblical authority.

Based both on the fossil record and the growing acceptance of evolutionary theory he wrote, as he put it, as a monogenist who also believed that there had been people on the earth before Adam. After exhaustive textual analysis and extrapolation from biblical texts he calculated that Ussher’s estimate of the age of the earth and people on it was wrong. Adam and Eve had probably been on the earth at least 6,000 years ago and there had been people on the earth for many thousands of years before that, likely emerging from an original pair which he called “Preaustralians.” Although all people on the earth had been placed there by divine creation and all were part of the plan of redemption Adam and Eve had descended from earlier ancestors.¹³

¹¹ David N. Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008). See also Richard H. Popkin, “Pre-Adamism in 19th Century American Thought: ‘Speculative Biology’ and Racism.” *Philosophia* 8, no. 2–3 (November 1, 1978): 205–39.

¹² George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind; the Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. 2nd ed. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987).

¹³ Winchell, *Preadamites*, 217-218

But which earlier ancestors? American monogenists – unlike most of the rest of the world – had a problem: race. Winchell signaled a concern with this issue early in the preface to his book where he wrote “we have now the facts of race–histories, and the discovered laws of animal life, past and present, to summon to the sanction and support of the conclusion [that there were people on the earth before Adam]. I have not contented myself with the employment of the direct argument, but have attempted to show that the old hypothesis of the descent of the black races from Ham is equally unscriptural and unscientific.” Almost a third of the book was devoted to his attempt to bring the racial arguments of the American polygenists back into the picture. In his hypothetical table of the generations of human life on earth the “Preaustralians” gave birth to two main branches, the Ulorichs and the Australians. From the latter emerged all the races on the earth except one, but including the Dravida, a white race that led to Adam and Eve. From the former emerged the one remaining race, the Hottentots and the Negroes. Whites and Blacks shared very ancient ancestors (and thus blood and their roles in the scheme of redemption), but their racial fates had separated thousands of years before Adam and Eve.¹⁴

Leaping backward and away from the Darwinian notion of flexibility and unpredictable change in biological development, Winchell based his chapters on the black race almost entirely on the work of the “American School” of Anthropology and thereby, as Livingston has written, “did not hesitate to marshal his pre-adamites in the cause of white supremacy.” According to Winchell, the racial characteristics of the “Negro” race were fixed and permanent. Although blacks in America were “as good as they can be,” they were structurally and irredeemably inferior. His framework for racial classification was taken straight from Nott and Glidden’s *Types of Mankind*, a work published in 1854 or almost 25 years before Winchell published his own book and one deeply committed to the pre-Civil War racial hierarchy. As Frederickson has pointed out, Nott had admitted in a letter that “The Negro question was the one I wanted to bring out and I embalmed it in Egyptian ethnography to excite a little more interest.”¹⁵

Winchell’s chapters on the Negro race and its history were a catalogue of racist aspersions delivered in a polemical tone that began with the declaration that “the Negro race is an inferior race I shall show by an appeal to anatomical, physiological, psychical and historical facts,” and that “nature has established a wide range of gradations among races, which cannot be obliterated by any influences having less than secular duration. For these reasons it was “proper to raise the question whether the Negro is capable of appreciating, desiring and conserving the benefits of civilization. His answer was no. Indeed, “If the Negro is constitutionally incapable of availing himself of Caucasian civilization, how many lives shall we sacrifice and how many millions shall we lavish in attempts to foist it upon him.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., iv, 352-353

¹⁵ Ibid., 275-276; Livingstone, *Adam’s Ancestors*, 186; Josiah Clark Nott and George R. Gliddon. *Types of Mankind: Or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races* ... (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1857). Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 78.

¹⁶ Winchell, *Preadamites*, 245, 265, 268

Contemporary critics objected to this work. A shorter version of his book published as a pamphlet in 1878 was denounced in the official newspaper of the Southern branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the *St. Louis Christian Advocate*:

“...earnestly does he labor to prove the physical, intellectual and social inferiority of the Negro. And, all this coming from a professor in a University... If the black races have no interest in the son of Jesus the Christian Churches ought to know it, as it may save them a vast amount of labor and expense. Of course, an obscure individual, like the present writer, does not attempt, at least here and now, to counteract the positions of the learned Professor in Vanderbilt, but, when we call to mind the scenes of bygone days, when we preached the gospel to so many colored people and saw them when they seem to have been convicted like other sinners, to repent like other sinners, to be converted like other sinners, to shout like other converts, to live and die like other Christians, somehow or other we cannot help thinking that, however long or short their existence on this earth as a people, they have a blessed Savior who is able to save to the uttermost all who come to Him. And this too in full view of all the theories, the speculations, the guessing and the drawing of large inferences from very small premises on the part of the learned professor.”¹⁷

And his most thorough-going contemporary critic – ironically an Ann Arbor minister – pointed out that he had ignored scientific evidence that contradicted his racial views. Writing in the *Unitarian Review* in 1881 Jabez Sunderland noted that “another point at which many will take decided issue with this book is its exceedingly low estimate of the Negro, not only as regards his past achievements and present condition, but also his physical structure and possibilities. Devoting a chapter to the task of proving the non-Hamitic origin of the Negro race, the author devotes another to showing their essential inferiority to nearly or quite all the other races of the world. Of course, he is able to cite a great many facts and figures in support of such a position. But it is one of those cases where facts and figures are apt to be of very little value, because there are just as many on the other side. [the great German naturalist Wilhelm von] Humboldt declares that there are no races which are to be accounted naturally inferior races. We are prone to forget that, just as we set down all forms of religion which are not our own as inferior to our own, so we set down civilizations which are unlike ours, and physical characteristics—as hair and color of skin, etc. — which are not like ours, as inferior to ours, when very possibly, in a just estimate, they may be superior. We forget that though we, the white nations of the world, happen to be taking the lead in civilization now, it has not always been so. And very likely the time may come again when it will not be so.” Sunderland, too, was critical of his theological work: “we can only express again our astonishment that a man accustomed to the accurate methods of science, as Prof. Winchell is, could have put forth, as sound exegesis, such vagaries as many of his interpretations of Scripture are.”¹⁸

At the time that he wrote Winchell’s work was out of step with the University’s own aspirations as well. In their historic 1870 decision to admit women, thus making the University of Michigan the first all-male institution of higher education to accept coeducation in America, the Regents declared that the

¹⁷ “Adamites and Preadmites...,” *St. Louis Christian Advocate*, May 22, 1878. The notice is of an earlier, briefer version of Winchell’s book, *Adamites & Preadamites; Or, A Popular Discussion Concerning the Remote Representatives of the Human Species & Their Relation to the Biblical Adam*. (Syracuse: J.T. Roberts, 1878).

¹⁸ Jabez Thomas Sunderland, “Dr. Winchell’s “Preadamites.” *Unitarian Review*, 15, (March, 1881), 204-224.

University was open to “any person who possesses the requisite literary and moral qualifications,” thereby removing barriers to admission related not only to gender but to race. And in President James B Angell’s famous 1879 address, “The Higher Education: A Plea for Making it Accessible to All,” he specifically praised the University’s role in the state of “furnishing the higher education to all her sons and daughters, without distinction of birth, race, color, or wealth.” The admissions policy known as “admission on diploma” adopted in the early 1870s automatically admitted all those who had graduated from a high school certified by University of Michigan faculty. In part because of this, 43 African Americans attended the University over the course of Winchell’s career.¹⁹

That the University was not always able to meet these historical aspirations to diversity is true, also. While admissions of underrepresented students was possible, once they arrived on campus they found a less warm welcome. At the very time that Winchell’s name was added to the West Quadrangle space African American students and parents had been fighting an unwritten policy preserving dormitory space for white students only for more than ten years. Broad scale change in this stance would occur only after World War II.

Evaluation and Recommendation

As far as we can tell those who proposed Winchell’s name in 1939 did little or no research into his work. If they had, ironically, they would have discovered – as we have – that even then Winchell’s work was little remembered by the mainstream of either science or theology. His work plays no important role in the history of science in general or geology in particular and even his work on race has been mostly forgotten. In Fredrickson’s important work, for example, Winchell rates only a footnote, but it is an important one. Fredrickson points out that Winchell’s book provided the “scientific” foundation for one of the most racist works ever written in America, “The Negro as Beast” published in 1900 by Charles Carroll.²⁰

This again was an appropriation, Winchell was dead in 1891. But to return to one of our original questions the successive appropriations of Winchell’s work by generations of white supremacists tells us something too. By basing his racial “science” on the outmoded and unscientific work of the defenders of slavery he looked backward rather than forward to where modern science was going. In this sense his work appealed more to white supremacists than to scientists because the former, too, can try to justify their extremist positions only with outmoded “science.”

Because Alexander Winchell’s work was out of step with the trajectory of modern science in his own time and with the University’s own aspirations in those times as well we see no reason for his commemoration in any named University space. Based on our evaluation we find it particularly inappropriate that his name is on a dormitory space. The openness to which we have historically aspired and to which we are deeply committed must extend beyond admission policies to the actual building of

¹⁹ Howard H. Peckham, Margaret L. Steneck, Nicholas H. Steneck, and Bentley Historical Library, *The Making of the University of Michigan, 1817-1992*. 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, MI.: University of Michigan, Bentley Historical Library, 1997), 72. James Burrill Angell, *Selected Addresses*. (New York: Longmans, Green, and co., 1912), 48.

²⁰ Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 277 n51.

communities reflecting that principle and reaping the social and intellectual benefits of the diverse communities we help to create. Because much of this work occurs in the dormitories retention of this name there sends exactly the wrong message about our commitment to this work.

We conclude with an important distinction, that between memory and commemoration. Our society depends on its history and because it does we should remember everything. But our choices about what we commemorate must reflect our values. One of our colleagues has pointed out that the names on campus buildings form a kind of "moral map" of the University. For all of the reasons we have previously stated Winchell's life and work should not be forgotten, indeed they carry many lessons for today. But we are confident that the University's history provides other names more worthy of addition to that moral map.

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