



WILLIAMS COLLEGE

TO: President Adam Falk
FROM: Committee on Campus Space and Institutional History
RE: Report on the Log Mural (“The Bloody Morning Scout”)
DATE: May 18, 2016

Summary of Recommendations

After spending spring semester 2016 investigating what was available about the history of the Log mural, and the history of the building, the committee recommends that the College keep the mural and take responsibility for contextualizing it. The latter should involve providing some textual explanation within the Black Room of the Log to help viewers understand the mural and the history of the mural; supporting the website begun by the committee to serve as a resource for further information about the mural and the Log; and encouraging pedagogical and artistic use of the work and the room. The committee further recommends that the College reimagine some of the interior decoration of the Log, bringing it more into line with the current student community.

Introduction

President Adam Falk appointed our committee at the end of November 2015 after the renovation of the Log when the building’s reopening brought to many people’s attention a World War II-era mural in the Black Room, depicting Colonel Ephraim Williams and Mohawk leader Theyanoguin (Hendrick)¹ before they were both killed in “the Bloody Morning Scout” at the Battle of Lake George in 1755. Some members of the Williams community raised concerns that the mural portrayed Native Americans stereotypically and in its image of the relationship between the British and Mohawks misrepresented the history of that relationship. These concerns, in turn, raised questions about whether the room felt like an inclusive space to diverse groups of students.

¹ As historian Eric Hinderaker notes, the name “Hendrick” was given to Theyanoguin when he was an infant in a baptismal ceremony in 1692. From the 1740s onward, as Theyanoguin made more public appearances in conferences with British officials, his “prematurely old” appearance gave them the misimpression that he was a “chief”; at some point he may also have been confused with an earlier important Mohawk leader, also given the name Hendrick, who had visited England and was sometimes called “King Hendrick.” Theyanoguin was therefore also sometimes called “King Hendrick.” Although Theyanoguin was a leader (or sachem) among the Mohawks, “the Iroquois . . . were well known to have been a confederacy without chiefly or kingly leadership.” Eric Hinderaker, *The Two Hendricks: Unraveling a Mohawk Mystery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010): 159-162. That said, at the time of his death, as the French and Indian War was underway, Theyanoguin was “the most famous Indian in the English-speaking world” (1).

In an all-campus email on December 1, 2015, President Falk then announced to the community that he decided to have the mural covered and that he had assembled a committee to consider such questions as how “forms of decoration, conceived in an earlier time, affect our capacity to be a fully inclusive community in this century? And what should be done about historical images that portray Williams as less welcoming than we are or aspire to be?” (The full-text of President Falk’s email can be found in Appendix A.) His email gave two charges to the committee: to make specific recommendations about what the College should do with the Log mural, and how the College should be guided in the future when community concerns emerge about institutional history within public spaces.

After President Falk appointed faculty and staff members to our committee, conversations ensued between committee chair, Karen Merrill, and College Council president Marcus Christian ’16 and Minority Coalition co-chairs, Penny Sun ’16 and Bushra Ali ’17, about how students would be represented on the committee, following MinCo’s decision not to send a representative, arguing that one student alone could not represent the diversity of MinCo’s points of view. All three student leaders recommended increasing the number of student representatives from three to six, with which President Falk agreed. College Council collected nominations and self-nominations for student representatives in December and selected the six students in early January, at which point the committee began to meet.

Background to the Recommendations

In our first meeting, we decided to separate the two charges given to us by President Falk and focus our efforts during the spring on working toward recommendations concerning the Log mural. We thought we could then use that experience during the fall semester of 2016 as we considered more general principles about public spaces and Williams history.

We therefore met at the Log and spent time considering the mural; began researching it and the history of the Log itself; sought the advice of Professor Doug Kiel, Assistant Professor of American Studies and historian of Native American history, and Annie Valk, Associate Director of Public Humanities; and split into several working groups to prepare for a public forum, which the students on our committee planned over the course of several weeks and ran on Sunday, April 24, 2016. (See Appendix B for the Williams *Record* article on the forum.) A small group of us met with the Executive Committee of the Society of Alumni during its on-campus meeting on April 15, 2016. We also arranged to have the mural uncovered for public viewing, beginning a week before the forum, and provided both a timeline that suggested relevant historical events for contextualizing the mural, as well as notebooks for viewers to record their thoughts for the committee. (We received a few comments through our email address as well). Finally, we developed a website that has information and materials related to the Log mural and that will help us communicate about our continuing work in the fall.

Throughout our work we were guided by a simple but central question about the mural as both a visual and historical object: *what is it?* Could we describe visually what we saw in the mural and could we try to answer the inevitable historical questions that arose as we asked what it’s doing in the Log? To both

these questions a range of interpretations could follow in answer, but we would like to emphasize a core group of relevant points for the Williams community to consider about the mural:

*The mural was painted by Stanley Rowland, an artist who made his living painting “historical scenes” from American history for institutions, corporations, and wealthy individuals.

*It was completed in 1942. A second mural depicting Ephraim Williams preparing his will (on the other wall of the Black Room) was added in 1946.

*The Log opened in 1941 as a place specifically designed to welcome returning alumni who had not been affiliated with, or who had been excluded from, fraternities during their undergraduate years. The period in which it became a student space was relatively brief: from the mid-1970s through the 1980s, and largely involving the years when the legal drinking age was eighteen.

*The scene depicted in the painting is the artist’s rendering of the setting for a historical event, the Battle of Lake George; it is an artistic attempt to depict the alliance between the British and the Mohawk before that battle. But the term “alliance” does not capture the complex nature of that relationship.

*The portrayal of Mohawk leader Theyanoguin and the other Mohawk scouts is in keeping with many romanticized portrayals of Native Americans popular in visual arts in mid-twentieth century America.

*The mural is the most visible depiction of Native Americans in constant public view on campus; Native Americans have historically been underrepresented within both the student body and among the faculty, against the backdrop of little but stereotyped representation (e.g., signposts along “the Mohawk Trail”) in North Berkshire County.

Recommendations

Our central recommendation, that the mural stay in the Log and that the College assume responsibility for providing “contextualization” for it and for its relationship to the Log, begins with two disparate observations. First, the uncovering of the mural helped begin a productive conversation about how we in the Williams community can take stock of our institutional history, as made visible in our public spaces. While hardly a statistical sample, of the 55 handwritten responses about the Log mural in notebooks we left in Log, only 3 responses indicate the mural should be removed from the space, and responses at the forum on April 24 uniformly supported keeping the mural uncovered and in the Log.² As challenging as it might sometimes be to open conversation about difficult institutional history we believe there are many opportunities in it, especially for students but also for the entire Williams community. Considering how many institutions of higher education are thinking through and

² In uncovering the Log mural, the committee left notebooks asking viewers to record their thoughts about the mural. We received 55 responses, although it is difficult to discern whether they are all from 55 separate individuals. Of those responses, 18 responses include an explicit opinion that the mural should remain uncovered; 13 state simply that they could find nothing “offensive” in the mural, indicating implicitly that they would not object to the College’s keeping the mural in the Log; 8 responses state that they would find “contextual” material helpful; and 3 state unequivocally that the College should remove the mural.

responding to their histories, we commend the College for being proactive on this issue and devoting institutional resources to such an effort.

Our second observation is more of an acknowledgement of what many students have noted: the Log is neither a student-centered nor a student-“owned” space. In this sense, it stands very much in contrast to Goodrich, for instance. In the 75 years of the Log’s operations, the heyday of the period in which the Log was a space over which students felt ownership ran roughly from the early to mid 1970s – when the drinking age dropped to 18 – through 1983, when the drinking age was raised again to 21. Even after the change in the drinking age, the Log continued for a time to offer students a space all their own, but it eventually fell into disrepair and saw little use other than the Friday Log Lunches sponsored by the Environmental Studies program.

We don’t believe the Log can be a Goodrich-like space for students: the drinking age will always divide those whom it serves, as will the financial constraints on its operations, unless the College comes to a different decision about how to discount the food it serves students. Currently managed by a private vendor, Hops and Vines, the Log has much less opportunity to be shaped directly by student input than is the case with a space like Goodrich.

Instead, the Log presents a kind of “Williamsiana” to a diverse group of patrons: the campus community of students, faculty, and staff, and also to townspeople and out-of-town visitors, including many prospective students and their families. Although in this report we’ll limit our comments about the overall interior design and decoration, we do want to highlight that the Log feels currently in limbo: “I Am Williams” posters have been put on the walls, but it nonetheless gives the feeling of a Williams caught in the amber of time, with vestiges of a period in which athletics (and predominantly athletics for men, especially football) was one of the defining features of the college.

The Williams of today not only has a much more diverse student body, but also a much more diverse set of activities in which students are engaged. As one of the few public-facing spaces of the college, the Log may offer opportunities for the college to acknowledge and represent its history with sophistication and in a multitude of voices.

It is within that larger frame – of seeing possibilities in the Log for understanding the connections between past and present at Williams – that we recommend keeping the mural uncovered. We believe that covering it again, moving it, or taking it down closes down conversations about our institutional histories rather than opening them up.

Further, we recommend that the institution take responsibility for providing “contextualization” for the mural within the Black Room. Of all the questions that have come before the committee, however, this is the one that has elicited the liveliest and most prolonged discussion. What does it mean to “contextualize” a work of public art? How much context and what kind of context does one provide? A little *context* to our recommendation for contextualization might be helpful here.

At the student forum on April 24, the individuals who volunteered comments all advocated that there be some form of contextualization for the mural. Likewise the Williams *Record*’s lead editorial on April

27 argues that written contextualization alongside the mural is essential (see Appendix C). The idea that seemed to gain the most traction at the forum was to provide contextual support that had built-in “flexibility” – an approach, in other words, that takes into account that plaques and captions become outdated; the *Record* editorial somewhat similarly notes the importance of providing some contextualization from outside the institution. That is, the contextualization for the mural will need both to anticipate changes in points of views over time as well as make space for points of views both within and outside the College, in particular opening up to indigenous perspectives.

Making specific recommendations about “contextualization” turns out to be challenging, in fact: there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Between minimalist and maximalist approaches lies a rich and fascinating set of questions about what information should be conveyed to viewers in the room about the mural to help them understand both it and its presence in the Log. Too little information, and the mural may not make much sense to many viewers; too much information, and viewers may lose sight of the visual image and feel too steered into a singular interpretation.

The committee believes that the most fruitful approach requires thinking about “contextualization” on several fronts, and we therefore recommend the following:

- 1) that a caption be placed near the mural that describes the historical setting that the artist sought to render;
- 2) that within the Black Room, a somewhat longer wall text be placed that describes how the mural came under scrutiny this year, poses some of the questions the mural has raised, and refers viewers to further information about the Log on the website that the committee is developing about public spaces on campus;
- 3) that the College use this website as a community resource onto which further material can be uploaded for public viewing (such as historical research);
- 4) that the Williams community begin to imagine the wide array of ways the mural might be contextualized, considered, and publicly engaged with. A number of classes could certainly make pedagogical use of the mural. We are also encouraged by proposals made at the forum and elsewhere that the College consider using funds to bring in artists, especially indigenous artists, for either short-term periods or for a semester or longer, to create responses to the mural.

The committee recommends further that the College should begin a process of reimagining the interior decoration of the Log, including the Black Room. We do not have specific recommendations about what precisely should be done, or how, but believe that that process should engage a wide constituency within the community. We feel that the Log presents an apt space for displaying a far wider range of “Williamsiana” memorabilia that could evoke many pivotal moments, eras, issues, changes in the course of our history. We also hope that, while keeping the historic quality of the Log

that is essential to the integrity of the building, the College would also consider updating how Williams, as an institution and as a community of people past and present, is visually shown in the Log.³

Finally, although our committee is not empowered to make recommendations on larger policy questions, we do want to recognize that the discussion around the mural has raised much larger questions. These questions revolve particularly around the need for Williams to look at its historic relationship to Native communities in its early history but also its contemporary institutional commitment to Native students and its need for more Native American faculty. We are encouraged by the start of these conversations and hope that the Log mural can help engage us further in reflecting on those questions, produce robust dialogue, and create meaningful courses of action within the College.

Jake Bingaman '19

Matthew Hennessy, '17

Alexander Jen '19

Elizabeth Poulos '19

Thomas Riley '18

Ariana Romeo '19

Joseph Cruz '91, Professor of Philosophy

Karen Merrill, Frederick Rudolph Professor of American Culture

Katarzyna Pieprzak, Professor of Francophone Literature, French Language,
and Comparative Literature

David L. Smith, John W. Chandler Professor of English

Keli Gail, Secretary of the College

Ferentz Lafargue, Director of the Davis Center

Kevin Murphy, Eugenie Prendergast Curator of American Art

Richard Spalding, Chaplain to the College

Leila Jere '91, Alumni Representative

CSIH website: <http://sites.williams.edu/csih/>

CSIH email: campus-space-institutional-history@williams.edu

³ In the course of our semester's work the committee received a list of concerns that the Committee on Undergraduate Life has about the interior decoration in the Log, and that committee should be involved in this conversation.

APPENDIX A

[Email from President Adam Falk to the Williams Community, December 1, 2015]

To the Williams Community,

Built over a period of more than two centuries, the Williams campus is a collection of structures old and new. We are fortunate to have been bequeathed such a remarkably diverse set of facilities, and in our commitment to sustainability we renovate and reuse old buildings as often as we reasonably can.

But it is also true that as many campus buildings were constructed in eras quite different from our own, at times they were decorated in ways that seem problematic in a modern context. The same is true of some of the monuments that are found on our campus. How do such forms of decoration, conceived in an earlier time, affect our capacity to be a fully inclusive community in this century? And what should be done about historical images that portray Williams as less welcoming than we are or aspire to be?

I would like our community to consider these questions—which go beyond any one object—in a thoughtful and comprehensive way. With that purpose in mind, I’m assembling a special committee of students, faculty, staff, and alumni to bring forward recommendations of a nature both general (what principles should guide us?) and specific (what should we do about a particular piece that’s of concern?).

My thanks go to Karen Merrill, chair of the history department and former dean of the college, who will lead the committee. Additional members will include:

Joe Cruz '91, professor of philosophy
 Katarzyna Pieprzak, professor and chair of Romance languages
 David L. Smith, professor of English
 Keli Gail, secretary of the college
 Ferentz Lafargue, director of the Davis Center
 Kevin Murphy, curator of American art, WCMA
 Rick Spalding, chaplain to the college
 Leila Jere '91, president of the Society of Alumni

The committee will also include three students, whom I will name in consultation with College Council and the Minority Coalition. The committee will begin its work in the new calendar year, at which time it will outline the process for engaging the wider community about these questions.

Finally, I should note that one item is of particular concern, a mural in the Black Room of the recently renovated Log depicting Mohawk Chief Hendrick, Ephraim Williams, and others before a battle. Because the mural portrays the Mohawks in a way that is potentially problematic, I have instructed that it be temporarily covered while the committee considers the larger questions with which it is

charged. I expect that in the course of its work the committee will issue a recommendation regarding this particular mural. Covering it now is not intended to be a prejudgment—of any kind—of the committee’s eventual recommendation, which we anticipate in due course.

I’m grateful to the committee members for undertaking this important task. We begin this work out of genuine care and concern both for the Williams we inherited and the Williams we continue to create together.

Sincerely,
Adam Falk
President

APPENDIX B

The link to the *Williams Record* article on April 27, 2016 about the forum on the Log mural may be found here:

<http://williamsrecord.com/2016/04/27/committee-hosts-discussion-on-mural-2/>

Below is the text of the article:

Committee hosts discussion on mural

APRIL 27, 2016 by Caitlin Ubl, Staff Writer

Last Sunday, the student contingent of the Committee on Campus Space and Institutional History led a forum concerning the contentious mural at the Log.

Students, faculty and staff members have raised concerns over its depiction of Mohawk Chief Hendrick, Commander Ephraim Williams and their various aides studying battle plans before the Battle of Lake George on Sept. 8, 1755.

Earlier in the year, calls for the mural's removal, combined with fervent testimonies in its defense, prompted President Adam Falk's December campus-wide email, covering the mural and tasking the committee with examining its value to the College community ["New Committee will address historical representations," Dec. 9, 2015].

The student members of the committee – Jake Bingaman '19, Elizabeth Poulos '19, Ariana Romeo '19, Tom Riley '18, Alex Jen '19 and Matthew Hennessy '17 – each told stories about different aspects of the mural before inviting the audience to share its views.

Bingaman, a SEAL Team 8 veteran, spoke to the military and strategic aspects of the scene depicted. With a military background focused on developing ties with SEAL counterparts in various African countries and the United States' NATO allies, his impression of the mural was one of "camaraderie and trust" between the two allied forces.

From the depiction, it is unclear who is in command, but to Bingaman, the image is primarily an image of war, of the strategy before the chaos of battle. Bingaman's concerns were encapsulated in his pivotal comment: "War is often immoral, often unfair. Will we cover World War II memorials, Vietnam, Operation Iraqi Freedom? Who decides what will be censored?"

Poulos raised questions related to the heroic portrayal of Williams in College mythology. Ephraim Williams' will designated a sum to the establishment of a college in western Massachusetts, which would be the second institution of higher learning in the Massachusetts Bay Colony at the time, the first being Harvard. She asserted the need to maintain a holistic view of the founder as a soldier as well as a champion of education.

Romeo, speaking as one of the five self-reported Native American students on campus, pointed out historical inaccuracies in the Mohawks' attire, but surmised that the problematic element of the mural is not inauthenticity in the composition of the piece itself but rather the lack of context given to the historical events depicted. Romeo stated that the mural "white-washes the broader history of the era" as a naïve "snapshot of an instance that might have happened," but idealizes and simplifies the bloody, tumultuous history of Native American-colonist relations.

In order to understand the mural and to evaluate its appropriateness, the committee deemed it necessary to understand the space in which it resides.

Riley gave a brief history of the Log, which was originally established in the 1940s as an alumni house for those not part of fraternities. In the 1980s, it was converted into a student-run bar with JAs serving as bartenders. The newly renovated space reflects this rich, varied history, furnished with original tables with previous students' names carved in the weathered wood. "The Log, in a lot of ways, is trying to create the shared identity that is Williams," Riley said.

Jen examined the purpose of the mural and the motivation of its artist, Stanley Rowland, a local who grew up on Church Street in North Adams. Rowland, an artist known for his depictions of historical scenes, was commissioned by the College to produce the image in 1942. Jen characterized the mural as "naïve and ahistorical," a romantic depiction of the interaction between Williams and Chief Hendrick. "The mural was exactly what it needed to be: an immediately accessible piece of history in a place of communal gathering," Jen said. "It depicts America how we once chose to see it."

Hennessy concluded the student remarks with an explanation as to why the committee chose to cover the mural during its deliberation process. He rejected concerns, largely from alumni, that the recommendations of the committee were predetermined with the "premature" covering of the mural. "We all needed to take a step back, take a deep breath, collect ourselves to begin answering the biggest questions at hand," Hennessy said.

Hennessy also explained the decision to finally uncover the mural last week. Due to the plywood boards covering the mural, many students never had the chance to see it, and this lack of access to the piece led to its memorialization and mysterious character.

Following the student remarks, the committee invited members of the audience to voice comments and criticisms about the mural. The many students, faculty and staff who spoke unanimously agreed that the mural should remain in the Log, albeit with accompanying material to contextualize the moment in history. The consensus was that removing the mural would also remove the need to address the many issues it raises, both historical and current.

Approximately 75 people attended this panel in Goodrich Hall.

APPENDIX C

The link to the Williams *Record* editorial about the Log mural may be found here:

<http://williamsrecord.com/2016/04/27/logging-our-history-why-the-college-should-keep-and-contextualize-the-log-mural/>

Below is the text of the editorial:

Logging our history: Why the College should keep and contextualize the Log mural

APRIL 27, 2016 by The Williams Record Editorial Board

On Sunday, the Committee on Campus Space and Institutional History held a forum in order to receive student input on the currently contentious mural at the Log, which is a constructive step towards determining the fate of the mural. Ultimately, the mural should remain in the Log, but there should be a written contextual element to accompany the mural, enabling viewers to understand its place in history.

While an initial concern about the Committee was that student input would not play a large role in the decisions it makes, the Committee now includes six, rather than three, students (“On committees and community: Examining the College’s response to issues of historical representation,” Dec. 9, 2015). By soliciting the student body’s opinions, the forum allowed students to play an even larger role in the committee’s decision; the students who are most passionate or concerned about the topic could attend and share their concerns with the committee. In part because of its financial exclusivity, the Log can be somewhat unwelcoming to students for reasons in addition to the mural (“Log leaves much to be desired: Examining student accessibility of revamped Log,” Nov. 11, 2015). Accordingly, student involvement in the resolution of this particular issue is critically important. Though a forum may not reveal the majority opinion, it does solicit the opinions of those who attend, which is more valuable in this instance.

While the committee and forum effectively considered the mural overall, and it does take time to research such complicated issues, the Committee should have tried to hold a forum earlier. As a whole, committee often take too long to take action, causing salient issues to be forgotten.

Concerns about the mural revolve around the depiction of the relationship between white settlers and Mohawk Indians. While the mural does depict a historical event with reasonable accuracy, in which Ephraim Williams and his ally Chief Hendrick strategize before the Battle of Lake George, it paints a rosy picture of the relationship between white settlers and Mohawks, despite the fact that the relationship was largely violent. Despite this, the proper way to acknowledge the College’s colonial legacy is not to cover the mural. Instead, written context should appear alongside the mural. This is analogous to how one should address speech with which one disagrees; it should be combated with more speech, not censorship. In this manner, those who view the mural can gain an understanding of what it does and does not depict. If the College covered the mural permanently, the community would begin to forget the issue, and, more poignantly, doing so would erase an important part of the

College's history. Some may be more hurt or offended by the presence of the mural due to identity markers that make them victims of the College's or the country's colonial legacy, and the board is perhaps limited in its ability to speak for these viewpoints. While we are aware of this potential bias, we still believe that contextualizing the mural is more constructive than covering or removing it.

If we were to add context to the mural display, it is important that some comes from a non-institutional source. The mural issue relates to how the College depicts its institutional history. If an institutional source were to provide all the context for the mural, it would be perpetuating the same issue of the College writing its history in a way that fails to encompass valuable and often excluded viewpoints. Simply installing a plaque with objective historical context, though important, would be insufficient. To provide meaningful context, there should be an interactive element, as is found at many museums, so that visitors are able to add their own thoughts when they see the mural.

The Log mural is just one of a number of items that the Committee was created to address and it is important to remember that these other issues still exist. The College should not view the Committee's decision about the mural, whatever it may be, as having placated those who have raised these concerns. Once the Committee arrives at a decision about the mural, it must not end its work, but rather continue to fulfill its purpose and examine the College's institutional history. Leaving the mural up and providing some background for Log patrons should be the beginning, not the end, of a continuing process and promise to address and reconcile problematic parts of our history as an institution.