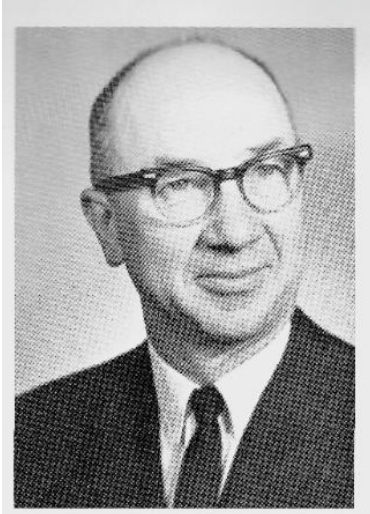


LEFT: W.A. Hough Jr. in 1966, during his tenure as principal at N. Meck High School.



RIGHT: One of Davidson Mayor John Woods' favorite photos of Mr. Hough is this yearbook snapshot of him joining in on batting practice one afternoon.



Displaying perfect form, Mr. Hough showed Sandy Lowrance and Mike Ray how the "better" players do it.

## It's official: Bailey Rd. school will be called Hough High

*Vote honors the longtime principal who led integration efforts and was known as 'Mr. North Meck'*

By **LAURIE DENNIS**  
*DavidsonNews.net*

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education voted Tuesday night to name the new high school on Bailey Road in Cornelius after a well-known principal from years past, **W.A. Hough Jr.**

For those who knew Mr. Hough, principal of North Mecklenburg High School in Huntersville from 1955 to 1974, the vote has deep and emotional significance. Mr. Hough, who died in 1998, is remembered as "Mr.

North Meck," a man devoted to his students and known for his fairness. He also shepherded an anxious and fearful student body through racial integration during the contentious 1960s, meeting behind the scenes with parents, pastors, politicians and whoever else it took to keep the school running smoothly.

"The name is pretty much a history lesson in itself as relates to race relations in this area," said **Garfield Carr**, a former Davidson Town Commissioner who served on the committee that recommended the Hough name.

Davidson Mayor **John Woods**, a 1967 North Meck graduate, said: "This is a decision that honors the history of our community and honors a man who had a tremendous impact on generations of students." Mayor Woods spent much of the past

year lobbying to get the new high school named after Mr. Hough.

### A PAUSE, THEN A VOTE

Tuesday's vote came after a long and contentious round of public hearings over unrelated matters at the meeting. It is one of a series of steps toward opening a new high school.

Several months ago, CMS asked for public input on a name for the new \$43 million school, which is under construction on Bailey Road. The school is on track to open in September.

This fall a committee of 20 students, parents, community members and educators from Davidson, Cornelius and Huntersville sifted through all the submissions to pick a slate of names to forward to the school board. "Hough" emerged as the

# New school name honors Mr. Hough

Pronunciation: "huff"

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committee's top choice, followed by "Unity" and "Rocky River."

At Tuesday's school board meeting, audience member **Rhonda Freeze** said during the comment period that people do not know how to say the name (it is pronounced "Huff") and might use it in derogatory ways. She urged the board to name the school "Bailey," after the road it's on

School board member **Larry Gauvreau**, whose District 1 stretches from north to west Mecklenburg, said he had received similar complaints and called for a 30-day delay in making a decision. This drew the ire of fellow board member **Joe White**, who was a teacher and coach under Mr. Hough in the 1960s.

"Mr. Hough led North Meck through integration," he exclaimed, adding that because of Mr. Hough's efforts, Mr. White was able to coach the first two African-American football players at the school, including **Garry McClain** of Davidson. "I'm a little emotional about this, doggone-it."

Mr. White ridiculed the idea of circumventing the naming committee's recommendation, and he gestured toward the audience, where Mr. Hough's son, **Dr. Bill Hough III**, of Winston-Salem, was watching. "He has come here tonight to see this school named for his father," Mr. White said.

The board then voted 7-1, with Mr. Gauvreau opposed, to name the school Hough High. (The vote also included approval of "Rocky River High School" as the name for the other new CMS high school, located south of Charlotte in the Mint Hill neighborhood.)

## NEW ERA AT NORTH MECK

For **Ruby Houston** of Davidson, an administrator in the CMS North Learning Community and also a member of the naming committee, the Hough name symbolizes "respect, dignity, courage."

"I really think that he came up the rough side of the mountain," she said of Mr. Hough during the years of school desegregation. "I think he was a good principal and a good role model and he walked us through some very challenging times."

Both Ms. Houston and fellow naming committee member Mr. Carr were teenagers in fall 1965, when their all-black school in Huntersville, Torrence-Lytle

(now the Waymer Community Center), was closed and all of their classmates were reluctantly bused to the white school down the road. North Meck was one of six schools to completely integrate that year, ending an era of parallel schools for white and black children.

Ms. Houston recalls riding the bus to her first day at North Meck High.

"I was afraid," Ms. Houston recalled. "We walked up the steps and there was Mr. Hough, and the first thing he said to us was, 'Hi, y'all.' I will never forget that."

"None of us really wanted to go," Mr. Carr said. "We didn't know how we would be accepted. This was something that was forced on all of us. But Mr. Hough took a bad situation and went with it. We got a lot of personal attention."

This is not to say that the transition occurred without challenges and hostility. Ms. Houston recalls a girl getting up and moving to a different desk to avoid sitting by her, and, worst of all, a white boy spitting at her through an open bus window.

Both Mr. Carr and Ms. Houston also cited vivid memories of their revulsion for their new school's mascot.

"In the back of the gym, by the south basket, there was a life-size rebel with a confederate flag," said Mr. Carr. "The school did 'rebel yells' and when we went to school assemblies, they'd play 'Dixie.' We would just sit down. We were just not going to honor that. Some of us would take the chance and get up and walk out."

Ms. Houston, a member of the newly integrated band, recalls putting down her clarinet and refusing to play "Dixie" during band rehearsals.

"If things had not changed, we would have had a volatile situation," noted Mr. Carr.

But things did change, in no small part due to the intervention of Mr. Hough, they said.

## FROM THE 'REBS' TO THE 'VIKINGS'

Mr. Hough's son, who graduated the spring before full integration, followed events at North Meck from college at Wake Forest. Dr. Hough said two things stand out in his mind about his father's efforts in those years. The first was the need to change the mascot.

"He absolutely thought that rebel mascot was not appropriate," Dr. Hough recalled. "There were

The 1967 North Meck yearbook includes photos from a student-led celebration, Mr. Hough Day. Among those joining a standing ovation in this photo (the honoree is seated at center) is English teacher Estelle Mott of Davidson.



## Naming school for Hough invokes history

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some who tried to suggest it was a Revolutionary War rebel, but Daddy knew it had to be changed.”

North Meck soon adopted its current Viking mascot.

The other incident that stood out in Dr. Hough’s memory involved the cheerleading squad, which consisted of all white students, even though teams the girls were cheering for had been integrated.

“A group from the basketball team came to ask about letting some of the black girls try out for cheerleaders – Daddy made that happen too,” said Dr. Hough. “This was a period of terrible turbulence, but at North Meck, as far as I recall, the school was never closed, the police were never called. For my father, making integration work was just part of making the school run. These were monumental changes, but he did it with ease and grace.”

Dr. Hough said his father was especially proud of his work to integrate North Meck, even though those years were one small part of a long career in education that began in 1936, the year Mr. Hough graduated from Wake Forest and got a job as a teacher in Person County. There he met his future wife, Ruth Starling, also a teacher. The two married in 1938 in the midst of a mumps epidemic that forced schools to close.

### CAREER STARTED IN 1942

Mr. Hough first became a principal in 1942, at an elementary school in the town of Dunn, north of Fayetteville. Seven years later the Hough family – which by then included daughter Zoe and son Billy – moved to Mecklenburg County, where Mr. Hough became principal of Berryhill School, which served grades 1-12. In fall 1955, Mr. Hough became the second principal of North Meck High, where he served until his

retirement in 1974. He and his wife moved to Huntersville and stayed, becoming members of the local First Baptist Church.

Mr. Hough was also a life-long member of the Huntersville Lions Club and enjoyed playing golf, hunting quail and growing vegetables.

### MOWED THE LAWN AND DROVE THE BUS

**Bill Strong**, who graduated from North Meck in 1967 and later returned to the school as a teacher, recalled Mr. Hough’s astonishing ability to remember the names of so many of his students. He said Mr. Hough would buy junior high annuals and study names to prepare for greeting new students on the first day of school in the fall.

“He was that interested and devoted,” Mr. Strong said. “And his theory of education was, ‘get the best teachers you can, and get out of their way.’”

Mr. Hough was a constant and visible presence on the school campus. He and his wife lived in a house next to the school. Mr. Hough mowed the lawn and drove the activities bus.

“He was the janitor, he was at all the sports games – he was everywhere,” said **Jimmy Poole**, class of 1963, who, like Mr. Strong, also served on the teaching staff under Mr. Hough. Then from 1994-2005, Mr. Poole was the school’s principal, once again following in his mentor’s footsteps.

Mr. Poole said that when faced with difficult situations, he often tried to think of how his former principal would handle them.

“By the time I was principal, the school had 3,000 students and I couldn’t greet them all by name like Mr. Hough could,” he said. “But I tried to be like him by being available, by being trustworthy, by looking for that personal connection.”



LEFT: Gathering at Summit Coffee to chat about North Meck and Mr. Hough were, from left, Jimmy Poole, Class of 1963; Garfield Carr, Class of 1968; and Bill Strong, Class of 1967. RIGHT: William Amos & Ruth Hough in 1992. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Bill Hough). BELOW: Bailey Middle School 8th graders Eric Vest (at left) of Davidson and Mackenzie Alge of Huntersville were on the 20-member naming committee for the new high school.

## New high school named for Mr. Hough

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For Mr. Strong, who transferred to North Meck from Michigan in 1966 when his father got a job at Davidson College, it took time to digest the significance of Mr. Hough's role in guiding the school and the community through integration.

"It wasn't until I was a teacher that I had a perspective on what a momentous event that was," he explained. "Mr. Hough first came to North Meck when it was a small school of about 600 white students. By the time he left, it had grown to 1600 students, it had integrated, and he had made all that work. A lot of the principals at other schools in Charlotte chose to retire early rather than take all that on. Mr. Hough did not."

### A WELCOMING SPIRIT FOR A NEW GENERATION

Mr. Strong acknowledged that the boundary maps for the newly-christened Hough High indicate that the school named to honor a champion of integration will likely be 80 percent white, part of a trend toward voluntary re-segregation that Mr. Strong says "makes me want to weep."

However, he adds, "that's an even better reason to name the new school for Mr. Hough."

Dr. Hough said he thinks his father would be thrilled to have the new northern-most high school in Mecklenburg County named in his memory.



"He'd be over the moon about it," Dr. Hough said.

Dr. Hough hopes the new school name will offer students the same sense of acceptance that Ruby Houston felt back in 1965 when she first heard her new principal call out: "Hi y'all."

"My father was certainly not perfect, but he did look for the best in people, he was honest, and he was fair," Dr. Hough said.

"This is what I would like for the young students and their families to know as they enter their new high school next year. After all these many years, the spirit of W.A. Hough, Jr. will still be there to say, 'Welcome!'"

*Have memories or thoughts about W.A. Hough and the school name? Leave a comment with our online story, or send a letter to the editor, editor@davidsonnews.net.*