NAME REVIEW WORKING GROUP (NRWG) REPORT
TO DESMOND FISH PUBLIC LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES
JANUARY 27, 2024

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1. NRWG Charge

At its May 13, 2023 meeting, the Board of Trustees of the Desmond-Fish Public Library (DFPL) approved moving forward with the third phase of its long-term response to aspects of the history of the library’s co-founder, Hamilton Fish III. This phase involves name review and possible reparative actions.

The Board charged the Name Review Working Group (NRWG) to make a summary recommendation for its consideration following the Group’s assessment of all relevant material, DFPL community listening sessions and a community survey.
2. NRWG Composition

The Name Review Working Group consists of ten members and two co-chairs. The members were selected via an application process consistent with the board approved long term response. The group is diverse in age, gender, ethnicity and background. It includes three library trustees, two library staff members and five members of the community. Three of the ten are members of the library’s Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee.

Co-chairs, Dede Farabaugh, DFPL Director, and Priscilla Goldfarb, a community member who is also a member of the DFPL’s Racial Equity and Social Justice Committee, facilitated the name review process and moderated the NRWG meetings but did not express opinions or otherwise engage in discussion or poll.

3. NRWG Operating Principles

At their first meeting, NRWG members committed to these principles:
-- listen with minds open to learn and able to change
-- ensure each person has space and feels heard
-- consider, not debate
-- be guided by facts
-- speak when it is productive to our goal
-- ensure meetings are a safe space, where each person can feel comfortable to share openly knowing that they are not being judged and that statements and conversations will not be repeated outside of the meeting
-- discuss working group matters only in person at working group meetings
-- use email communications between meetings for informational purposes, not discussion, in order to avoid lengthy, burdensome and potentially confusing email chains
-- ensure that communication with the DFPL board and with the public is done with one voice, at an agreed upon time and in an agreed upon manner, and is inclusive of diverse points of view when there is not unanimity.

4. NRWG Process

A. Meetings

Beginning in August, 2023, the NRWG met approximately biweekly in person, with a Zoom option available in the event of illness, travel, or extenuating circumstances. There were at least 10 people at every meeting. Z indicates the meeting was held on Zoom to ensure this quorum on occasions where illness, travel or library constraints prevented a full group meeting.

The number of meetings held reflects the seriousness of the group’s purpose and the complexity of its deliberations.
Meeting dates:

2023
August 17, 31
September 7, 14, 28
October 12, 26
November 9, 16
December 7, 14Z

2024
January 4Z, 11Z, 18

B. Information review
NRWG members individually reviewed existing materials, including research resources on the DFPL website, media, communications between community members and library staff, and transcript and video of three community conversations hosted by DFPL.

C. Community Survey
With the assistance of outside professionals, the NRWG created a survey to gather data about community concerns and ideas. To ensure maximum participation, the survey was made available on the DFPL website and publicized in local media, through library communications and through a postcard mailing to all Philipstown postal customers. Paper copies of the survey were made available at the library and DFPL staff were available to assist people who needed help taking the survey online.

NRWG members reviewed and discussed the 521 survey responses.

Regarding the library’s name:

52% of respondents thought the library name should remain the same, with 9% of those indicating reparative action should also be taken;

44% of respondents thought the library name should be modified (15%) or renamed with a new name (29%)

4% of respondents did not express an opinion

In its deliberations, the NRWG recognized that, to be true to the library’s mission to serve the entire community, its recommendation to the DFPL needed to account for both minority and majority opinions.
The NRWG noted that there was a great range of responses from detailed historical analysis to provocative statements. Survey responses suggest that any decision regarding the library name will need to acknowledge history and be consistent with community values.

There was a preponderance of survey respondents who professed admiration and respect for the library, its staff, programs, and its willingness to engage with the community on the naming question, regardless of the individual survey respondent’s opinion about the library’s name. There was a small number of respondents who expressed negative and polarized points of view.

A summary of the survey results is attached to this report.

5. NRWG Decision making

A. Considerations, Challenges, Observations

—The NRWG did its best throughout the process to understand aspects of Hamilton Fish III’s history and their impact on our community, and then focus on how our library expresses its values and accountability to the community it serves in its response. This meant centering and addressing harm rather than judging Hamilton Fish III. This proved to be a significant challenge, as assessment of harm often seemed inseparable from judgment about an individual.

-- Considerable effort was put into understanding the nature of harm that was felt in the community and how that might be addressed either with respect to the library’s name, or reparative actions, or some combination of the two.

-- The NRWG recognized that regardless of the outcome of its recommendation to the board and the board’s subsequent action, that no single outcome would satisfy all members of the community.

-- The NRWG agreed that it is important for all members of the community to feel heard in the board’s decision making process and in how the board communicates and implements its ultimate decision.

B. Decision Process

Based on its review of relevant information and of the community survey results, the NRWG identified and considered compelling points of view regarding the library name and reparative actions. The group then attempted to reach consensus regarding each.

The group agreed that if any member wished to provide a more detailed account of their point of view than was expressed in this NRWG report to the board, that member’s written account would accompany the report as an addendum.
i. Range of Individual Views of NRWG Members about the Library Name

Keep the Library’s Name

-- The library risks putting a band-aid on telling the truth about ourselves and our history if we change the name

-- Keep the name, educate about the history and be proactive in dealing with issues of bias, antisemitism, and injustice

-- The library’s focus should be on expressing its values through actions and not by what the library is called

-- Hamilton Fish III’s contributions and achievements from a lifetime of public service outweigh the harm that may have been caused by his anti-interventionism; his overall legacy is in keeping with the mission of the library that he and his wife founded

-- There is not conclusive evidence to warrant changing the name; many allegations against Hamilton Fish III are tainted by misinformation campaigns carried out against him by political enemies and foreign governments

-- Garrison might not have a library if it were not for Hamilton Fish; Alice Curtis Desmond could have used her wealth anywhere but chose Garrison in honor of her husband and worked together with him to plan and create a cultural resource of lasting good

-- Changing the name unfairly damages and dismisses the legacy of Alice Curtis Desmond and the family of Hamilton Fish III

-- Changing the name would be a lengthy and complicated process that would distract the library from serving its patrons

Change or Modify the Library’s Name

-- Changing the name does not erase history, it acknowledges it

-- Keeping the name would cause some people to feel hurt, disrespected, unwelcome, even fearful and might be viewed as encouragement by others who hold bigoted views; this could be dangerous at a time when antisemitism and other forms of racism are on the rise

-- The library’s name should reflect its current values not those of its co-founder that were shaped by another era; changing the library’s name is the most concrete, tangible act the library can take to express its current values

– There is sufficient evidence that Hamilton Fish III’s isolationism involved him in activities that served to promote the Nazi cause prior to the US involvement in WWII, putting his overall legacy fundamentally at odds with the library’s mission
-- Leaving the name as is causes greater harm than taking it down because in some parts of the public consciousness the name of Hamilton Fish III is associated with antisemitism and may continue to be so in the event of further media attention

-- Naming a public building after a person, even a benefactor, is always problematic and never advisable; it’s possible to acknowledge the good people do without naming a building after them

-- Hamilton Fish III has had 40 years of recognition and approval; it’s time to move on and be forward looking while still remembering that generation

-- Removing Hamilton Fish III’s name should not preclude keeping Alice Curtis Desmond’s name in recognition of her role in founding the library

-- There are many options for another name, for example: Garrison Public Library makes the most sense for a name since we’re a publicly funded library in Garrison; Alice Curtis Desmond Library recognizes Alice’s contribution; Renaming the library after a feature of the natural world, for example Red Maple, the tree on library property and in its logo, is engaging and welcoming to all people

NRWG Conclusions about the Library Name

The group was divided on whether or not the name of the library should remain the same or be changed/modified.

The Garrison Public Library founded by Alice Curtis Desmond and Hamilton Fish III was suggested by a group member at one point as a possible bridge building solution.

When the group was unable to arrive at consensus regarding the name, an informal poll of the 10 voting members present resulted in:

Keep name 3
Change name 7
Open to keeping name 2*

* Two members who voted to change the library name were open to keeping the name contingent on what reparative action would be undertaken

A second poll of the 9 of 10 voting members present at a subsequent meeting was similar:

Keep name 2 (one person was absent)
Change name 7
Open to keeping name 3*

* Three members who voted to change the library name were open to keeping the name contingent upon what reparative actions are undertaken, including but not limited to ensuring there is a clear statement that keeping the name is not an endorsement of Hamilton Fish III’s action/inaction that led to harm and a clear disavowal of such action/inaction.
ii. Consensus on the importance of taking reparative action and what that action might look like.

The NRWG agreed that, to be meaningful, a reparative action must:

-- clearly show the library’s commitment to stand for the values of respect and against intolerance

-- be educational and focus on the reality of antisemitism and bias; acknowledge that they exist and are harmful

-- be multi-faceted, dynamic and continuous so it shows how the library is evolving

-- be well thought through, undertaken over time and presented in a way that the community perceives its benefit

-- reflect that the mission of the library is inherently reparative, doing good for all members of the community every day

iii. Recommendations for Reparative Actions

Many survey respondents shared suggestions for reparative actions. Some included programs the library has already instituted. NRWG members discussed, expanded upon and agreed to recommend these actions to the library board:

-- strengthen programs the library is already engaged in, and to which the library budget is already committed, including but not limited to its resource list, collections, book groups, annual MLK and Holocaust Remembrance programs, RESJ committee, partnership with Garrison School, Manitou School, and Philipstown DEI Committee

-- partner with other community organizations in developing and presenting materials/programs, including but not limited to those with knowledge of the history of intolerance in our area, e.g., Philipstown Reform Synagogue, Putnam History Museum, Putnam Pride, Beacon Pride, Dutchess Pride, Peekskill NAACP, NYU Brennan Center, Butterfield and other libraries

-- remove Hamilton Fish III’s portrait

-- ask for community submission of new artwork with anti bias, tolerance and social justice themes; the work could be evaluated by a committee and then hung in place of existing portraits to change the look and feel of the library to be warmer and more welcoming

-- continue to be a resource for schools and support anti-bias curricula
-- install a plaque or plaques explaining the history of our co-founder, his isolationist views, the harm people have felt, the gratitude from the community that impelled the library board to name the building after him and his wife

-- make Hamilton Fish III’s papers more accessible to library patrons by having links to NY State and Library of Congress holdings prominent

-- identify and address needs of underserved patrons; examples of concrete action include helping people who lack transportation get to the library, providing services outside of usual business hours, e.g. offer lockers for people to pick up materials at a time that fits with their work schedule

-- expand the library’s collection with more books by and about marginalized groups including Jewish authors and subjects

-- explore resources available through the Never Again Education Act (HR 943) passed by the 2019-2020 Congress

-- engage in annual evaluation of structure, process and outcomes to ensure the effectiveness of programs the library undertakes as part of its reparative action; worth seeking institutional funding to support this

6. NRWG Recommendation to the DFPL Board

The NRWG recommends to the DFPL Board of Trustees that:

1. The board take under consideration the range of individual NRWG member viewpoints in 5. B. i. above to arrive at its decision regarding the library’s name.

2. The library move forward with reparative action consistent with 5. B. ii, and 5. B. iii. above.

3. The board communicate its decision to the community in a thoughtful and inclusive manner.

7. ADDENDA TO THE REPORT

   A. Community Survey Results
   B. Individual NRWG Member Detailed Views

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the DFPL Name Review Working Group,

NRWG Co-chairs
Dede Farabaugh   Priscilla Goldfarb
DFPL Director   Community Member
Q1 How long have you been familiar with, or a user of, the Desmond Fish Public Library?

Answered: 521    Skipped: 0

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<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>13.24%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>16.12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>9.02%</td>
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<tr>
<td>16-20 years</td>
<td>10.75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>46.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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</table>
Q2 Thinking about the past year, how often have you visited DFPL?

Answered: 521  Skipped: 0

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>0.96%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>5.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>6.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>24.38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Once every few months</td>
<td>30.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>20.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a year</td>
<td>12.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td></td>
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TOTAL: 521
Q3 What are the usual reasons for you to visit? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 521   Skipped: 0

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<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Borrow library materials</td>
<td>55.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read or work at the library</td>
<td>28.79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use the Wi-Fi or public computers</td>
<td>8.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the children's room</td>
<td>19.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a program, event, or meeting</td>
<td>55.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with neighbors</td>
<td>11.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy the library gardens and paths</td>
<td>27.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get technology training or support</td>
<td>7.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>15.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 521
Q4 Are you aware of the general history of our co-founder Hamilton Fish III and/or any allegations concerning him? (Visit desmondfishlibrary.org/hfiiiresponse)

Answered: 521  Skipped: 0

Yes. Go to Questions 5 ...

No. Go to Question 7.

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**ANSWER CHOICES** | **RESPONSES**
--- | ---
Yes. Go to Questions 5 and 6. | 88.68% 462
No. Go to Question 7. | 11.32% 59
TOTAL | 521
Q6 What are the primary sources of your knowledge? Check all that apply.

Answered: 464  Skipped: 57

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<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Desmond-Fish Public Library website</td>
<td>41.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National media</td>
<td>39.87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local media</td>
<td>52.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books and other resources in DFPL collection</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal research</td>
<td>41.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking with friends</td>
<td>31.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>12.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>15.95%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Total Respondents: 464
Q7 Should the library keep its official name - Alice Curtis Desmond and Hamilton Fish Library - or be renamed?

Answered: 521  Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Choices</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep the current name</td>
<td>42.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep the current name and take reparative actions</td>
<td>9.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify the current name</td>
<td>15.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be renamed with a new name</td>
<td>28.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>3.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
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Q11 Please indicate where you live and whether it is full or part time.

Answered: 505  Skipped: 16
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<th></th>
<th>FULL TIME</th>
<th>PART TIME</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cold Spring</td>
<td>94.08%</td>
<td>5.92%</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>143</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental Village</td>
<td>97.22%</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Garrison</td>
<td>91.07%</td>
<td>8.93%</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>204</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelsonville</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Highlands</td>
<td>91.67%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>96.43%</td>
<td>3.57%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2</td>
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Q12 If you answered "Other" to Question 11, please indicate if you work in Philipstown (Cold Spring, Continental Village, Garrison, Nelsonville, North Highlands).

Answered: 82  Skipped: 439

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<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>23.17%</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>76.83%</td>
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### Q14 What is your age? (Optional)

Answered: 491  Skipped: 30

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<td>30-39</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
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<td>50-59</td>
<td>14.87%</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>25.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>24.03%</td>
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<tr>
<td>80 or older</td>
<td>6.92%</td>
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TOTAL 491
INDIVIDUAL VIEW FROM
A MEMBER OF THE NAME REVIEW WORKING GROUP

To the board of the Desmond-Fish Public Library,

I write to you with gratitude for the opportunity, and with admiration for the Library’s willingness to engage with the history of its founders and the future of its position in the community. Generations of community members have seen and continue to see the Library as a haven, as a place of welcome, of safety, of nourishment, and whose esteem is tied to its status in the community’s eye as a place that aligns with its values of education, knowledge, creativity, tolerance, and justice.

However, as knowledge of the history of one of the Library’s cofounders has become widespread, these are values that the Library signifies in spite of its history and title, rather than alongside them. It is incumbent upon the Library’s governing body to address the shift in values communicated by the Library’s name and assert its continued stance at the vanguard of justice and acceptance. Although name changes alone are insubstantial gestures, I see no way to communicate the Library’s stance honestly to the community without a change to its name, and recommend this course of action to the Board.

Hamilton Fish III’s legacy - a legacy exclusively of his own making - is one of collateral damage done to marginalized groups, most notably Jews, in the pursuit of personal status and gain. Even setting completely aside those actions for which history provides us only murkiness and doubt, we can see the known facts quite clearly take this shape. Fish was not only close with Viereck, but with Friedrich Auhagen, and Nigel West’s British Intelligence in the Americas also reveals that Fish accepted money for unclear purposes from the Nazi agent G. Hansen-Sturm. It beggars belief that someone who associated with such a wide array of American fascists and nativists, with so many Nazi connections - Fish, after all, was the one who introduced Viereck to Hill (and aware enough of wrongdoing that he suggested Prescott Dennet as a middleman) - remained blissfully unaware of the deeds done around him or even in his name. Were he as catastrophically ignorant as he claimed, he still bears responsibility for that blindness. And he was not blind to Jewish suffering in Europe; he condemned it repeatedly at the same time he and his office offered active aid to the people perpetrating that suffering, even confirming that he knew (or suspected) that Germany’s aim was Jewish extinction before continuing to support a policy favorable to — if not dictated by — that same nation.

And while credence must be given to the recent theory that British Intelligence manipulated public perception of Fish and his actions (though amongst our group, there is disagreement as to the nature and extent of this meddling), one must not let manipulation of context obfuscate that even in context, Fish’s actions are at the least not in agreement with the values of this institution. I do not find persuasive the idea that the Pelley mailing was manufactured by the BSC. Absent any real evidence in favor of this theory, only conjecture based on what they "might" have done and things looking “fishy” (and I see nothing in Fish’s history to support taking him at his word), we have a transcript of Fish’s own words which he did not dispute (merely their subsequent use out of context, though I would submit that even in context, they are damning), and ample records that Fish knew Pelley and permitted him to use his frank, as Professor Anthony Troncone describes: “While he did
know him and allowed him the use of his frank, Fish did not consider the Silver Shirt official a friend. Though both were nationalists, Fish felt uncomfortable with the Silver Shirt’s virulent anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, Fish considered him a useful ally in the crusade against war."

This, to me, is a apt summary of Fish’s failures: I do believe that Fish had genuine moral feelings in regards to the welfare of the Jews of Europe, as he did for Black Americans, but it seems quite clear that for Fish, ethics never stood in the way of personal gain, political advantage, and spite for those against whom he had vendettas. The Fish Committee hearings, built on a foundation of racism and antisemitism, contextualized the conversation about communism in America as one about Jews in America (and thus about Jews as one about communists), and in its "tacit recognition" of the Protocols, contributed to the perception in the American consciousness of the impossibility of Jewish loyalty to America, or even that Jews could be fully American — a position Fish explicitly held as far back as 1922, when he advocated for the Zionist theft of Palestinian land in order to stem Jewish immigration and preserve the national character by slamming the doors on Jews. It is not an accident that today, far-right groups continue to reference and quote the Fish Committee's proceedings.

Whether or not Fish personally harbored ill feelings toward Jews — apart from a vague distrust, I don't see real evidence either way — his actions quite clearly contributed to racially-motivated hatred toward Jews, and echo to the present day. One cannot insult an antisemite at dinner and claim to be a champion of Jews when one's career has been so profoundly consistent in affirming or inspiring the beliefs that that antisemite carries.

However, just as I am not swayed by the farcical argument that changing the name of a building "erases" history (the very nature of this institution affirms that it is in books and scholarship — not building names — that history is learned), I am not naive enough to believe that a name change will fix a legacy of ongoing harm. It is the continued dedication of the institution to justice and liberation that is meaningful. I have complete faith that the uniquely dedicated and compassionate Board and staff of which this Library is composed are up to the challenge. That said, names have meaning, and names express values. It bears differentiating history from commemoration — history is for the past, and commemoration is for the present.

It seems to me that it would not be possible to keep Fish’s name on the Library, for a not-insignificant part of the community, and not send the message that what the institution values most is excusing the actions of a white man of status simply because he was a white man of status, no matter how clearly wrong those actions, no matter to whom they brought harm; that harm done to Jews is less important than harm done to a dead man’s name; that acknowledging his wife’s monetary contribution to the library second-hand by it bearing his name it is more important than the values of the community and staff that benefit from her gift.

It is not necessary to decide if Fish’s positive actions "outweigh" the negative ones. This is a false choice. You are not asked to sentence a man to prison; you are asked to signal to the community that the Library is a place of trust — an honest place, and a humane one. I remain expressly grateful for the opportunity to be heard in that pursuit and thank you for your consideration.
INDIVIDUAL VIEW FROM
A MEMBER OF THE NAME REVIEW WORKING GROUP

It is in the best interest of the library and the community to remove Hamilton Fish III’s name from the library.

The name on a public library, like a statue in a public square, puts someone on a pedestal, conferring approval or even honor. The name on a library broadcasts its values. Hamilton Fish III’s name does not represent the values of the library because it is inextricably and justifiably associated in the public consciousness with Nazism and antisemitism.

Fish’s actions prior to the U.S. involvement in WW II were apparently driven by isolationism, rather than by antisemitism or Nazi sympathies. However, there is a preponderance of evidence that, in furtherance of his goal of keeping the U.S. out of the war, Fish was responsible for promoting Nazism and antisemitism through actions or inactions that lent his imprimatur to Nazi and antisemitic individuals and activities (Note 1), including the distribution of Nazi propaganda in franked envelopes bearing his name, and his appearance as keynote speaker at a 1938 German Day rally featuring a swastika as decoration, a Nazi anthem, Nazi salutes, and speakers supporting Nazism in Germany (NY Times, 10/3/38). There is credible evidence that Fish was aware at least by 1939 of the Nazi plans for the genocide of Jews (Note 2).

I fear that a desire to keep the current library name may unconsciously bias the review of Fish’s actions in the direction of minimizing his culpability, or deeming it unknowable. The fact that disinformation about Fish was disseminated does not mean that nothing is sufficiently knowable about this chapter of Fish’s life. There is an onus to demonstrate that disinformation was the sole basis for a specific allegation against Fish. Care must be taken that history not be whitewashed to reduce cognitive dissonance by shoehorning a narrative about Fish’s actions to fit the desire to keep the library’s name.

The harm done to people by leaving the Fish III name on the library would be greater than the harm done to people by taking it down. Although not intended to intimidate (unlike many Confederate statues), keeping the Fish III name on the marquee would similarly make many people feel hurt, uncared for, disrespected, or unwelcome, and possibly fearful that white supremacists will feel encouraged.

It would be less harmful for the library itself to be viewed by some as ‘woke’ or as bowing to ‘cancel culture’ than to be viewed as minimizing the threat posed by Nazism and antisemitism at a time when these sentiments are dangerously on the rise.
As one survey respondent wrote, there should not be “even a whisper of antisemitism - even if it’s antisemitism adjacent” (Q8 #512).

It has been suggested that keeping the library’s name would serve as a beacon for the library’s commitment to educating about Nazism and antisemitism (which, incidentally, implies that Fish III symbolizes those ideologies). It is far more likely that Fish III’s name on the library would be viewed, at least by many in the community, as downplaying Nazism and antisemitism, or even, in the words of a community member, as “a muted Nazi flag.”

Changing the name would not be to punish Hamilton Fish III, but to avoid broadcasting values antithetical to the library’s mission.

No matter what other reparative actions could be taken, nothing will be seen by the public as symbolizing the values of the library more than its name.

END NOTES

Note I

Survey response to Question 8 (‘why do you want to keep/change the library name’) by a member of the Name Review Working Group (used and attributed with permission from the author)

Q8, response #14

Fish was not only close with Viereck, but with Friedrich Auhagen, and West’s British Intelligence in the Americas also reveals that Fish accepted money for unclear purposes from the Nazi agent G. Hansen-Sturm. It beggars belief that someone who associated with such a wide array of American fascists and nativists, with so many Nazi connections - Fish, after all, was the one who introduced Viereck to Hill (and aware enough of wrongdoing that he suggested Prescott Dennet as a middleman) - remained blissfully unaware of the deeds done around him or even in his name. Were he as catastrophically ignorant as he claimed, he still bears responsibility for that blindness. And he was *not* blind to Jewish suffering in Europe; he condemned it over and over at the same time he and his office offered active aid to the people perpetrating that suffering, even confirming that he knew (or suspected) that Germany’s aim was Jewish extinction *before
continuing to support a policy favorable to — if not dictated by — that same nation*. I do not find persuasive the idea that the Pelley mailing was manufactured by the BSC. Absent any real evidence in favor of this theory, only conjecture based on what they "might" have done and things looking "fishy" (and I see nothing in Fish's history to support taking him at his word), we have a transcript of Fish's own words which he did not dispute (merely their subsequent use out of context, though I would submit that even in context, they are damning), and ample records that Fish knew Pelley and permitted him to use his frank, as Troncone describes: "While he did know him and allowed him the use of his frank, Fish did not consider the Silver Shirt official a friend. Though both were nationalists, Fish felt uncomfortable with the Silver Shirt's virulent anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, Fish considered him a useful ally in the crusade against war." This, to me, is a apt summary of Fish's failures: I do believe that Fish had genuine moral feelings in regards to the welfare of the Jews of Europe, as he did for Black Americans, but it seems quite clear that for Fish, ethics never stood in the way of personal gain, political advantage, and spite for those against whom he had vendettas. The Fish Committee hearings, built on a foundation of racism and antisemitism, contextualized the conversation about communism in America as one about Jews in America (and thus about Jews as one about communists), and in its "tacit recognition" of the Protocols, contributed to the perception in the American consciousness of the impossibility of Jewish loyalty to America, or even that Jews could be fully American — a position Fish explicitly held as far back as 1922, when he advocated for the Zionist theft of Palestinian land in order to stem Jewish immigration and preserve the national character by slamming the doors on Jews. Whether or not Fish personally harbored ill feelings toward Jews — apart from a vague distrust, I don't see real evidence either way — his actions quite clearly contributed to racially motivated hatred toward Jews, and echo to the present day. One cannot insult an antisemite at dinner and claim to be a champion of Jews, when one's career has been so profoundly consistent in affirming or inspiring the beliefs that that antisemite carries. In this, in his advocacy for appeasement of Hitler, even in his later support for Reagan and perplexing support for the Gulf War — and in a clear instance of domestic abuse toward Alice Desmond mentioned by Professor Troncone — Fish seemed bafflingly committed to the wrong side of history.

Note 2

Excerpt from Anthony Troncone dissertation*, pp. 326-327

What is really tragic about Fish's position is that he was fully aware how ethically and morally bankrupt the Nazis were. He was, for instance, quick to perceive the threat that war posed to Europe's Jewish
population. During his stopover in Berlin he interceded on behalf of
dozens of German Jews, anxious to leave Germany. At the request of Fanny
Holtzman, a New York attorney who he had in the past aided in getting
Jewish immigrants through Ellis Island, Fish hastily arranged for three
month exit visas for these Jews to visit the Worlds Fair in Flushing
Meadows, New York. According to Holtzmann, Fish had "personal knowledge
of the German plans" for Jews. Holtzmann also quotes Fish as telling her:
"Their solution, Fanny, is concentration camps, where the entire Jewish
population will be wiped out." Fish later agreed that Holtzmann's account
of their conversation is fairly accurate. In view of this, his insistence
that the democratic powers should accommodate themselves to Nazi Germany
becomes particularly disturbing.

INDIVIDUAL VIEW FROM
A MEMBER OF THE NAME REVIEW WORKING GROUP

The Case for Keeping the Name: The Alice Curtis Desmond and Hamilton Fish Library

Note: References in this piece are to works found on the Library’s Hamilton Fish III Resource List, or to books in the Library’s collection. Because there are many links to sources, here is a QR code for those reading this on paper.

Why are buildings renamed?

At universities and public institutions around the country, buildings have been denamed and renamed because the building’s namesake has a principal legacy fundamentally at odds with the mission of the institution. If such a disconnect exists, a name may prevent the work of fostering community; people may feel that the name causes them harm.

So the question is: What is the legacy of our Library’s co-founder, Hamilton Fish III? Is his legacy fundamentally at odds with the values of the Library that he founded with his wife, Alice Curtis Desmond and that bears their names?

Up until December 2022, the consensus amongst library patrons, the Board, staff, and any interested community members would have been that Hamilton Fish III’s overall legacy indeed was compatible with the values of the Library. Hamilton Fish III (HF III):

● Took heroic combat actions during World War I

● Throughout his life, was a strong advocate for civil rights for Black Americans, particularly those who were military veterans, and all veterans

● Initiated the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, a monument that has brought comfort and closure to thousands of military family members unable to retrieve the remains of their loved one for burial

● Developed a horror of war from his combat experiences in World War I and took a strong non-interventionist and anti-munitions makers position from 1918

● Represented Putnam County in Albany from 1914 to 1916 and chaired the County’s Bull Moose Party

● Was an effective Hudson Valley congressman for 24 years, popular with his constituents (who were also non-interventionist and included Americans of German, Italian, Jewish, and African descent) and was respected by colleagues in the House of Representatives

● Was the ranking Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and Rules Committee

● Delivered the first speech on the House floor supporting FDR’s Declaration of War on December 8, 1941
After his electoral defeat in 1944, Fish never held elected office again. He stayed engaged with politics and the insurance business, and wrote several books. He and his wife founded, designed, and built the Library and, from 1980 until his death in 1991 at the age of 102, stayed involved as a trustee. His son, grandson, and great-granddaughter have served the community as board presidents and trustees while also contributing through significant public service. Hamilton Fish V among other accomplishments co-produced highly-esteemed films on the legacy of the Holocaust, including Hotel Terminus, winner of the 1989 Academy Award.

However, in December 2022, doubts about Hamilton Fish III’s legacy were raised by MSNBC’s Rachel Maddow in a podcast called Ultra, and in 2023, in a book called Prequel. Some individuals listened to her podcast and immediately demanded that the Library change its name. The reasons given were that Hamilton Fish III was a Nazi, a Nazi sympathizer, and an antisemite.

Some within the Library family felt that Ms. Maddow’s allegations alone were sufficient grounds to remove Fish’s name from the Library. Others felt that as an institution devoted to open inquiry, research, and learning, that further investigation should be conducted before Ms. Maddow’s statements were accepted as fact.

What does Ms. Maddow allege; what is true? What is omitted that impacts his legacy?

Briefly, Ms. Maddow’s allegations contain much that one patron described as “recycled British propaganda;” concerted efforts to discredit Hamilton Fish III by forces who wanted the U.S. to enter World War II. A four-year campaign against Fish by the British Service Corporation (the cover name for the U.K.’s secret and illegal undercover operation supported by FDR), which was only revealed to the public in 1997, obscures the facts to such an extent that finding the truth 80 years on may be impossible. Ms. Maddow never mentions the involvement of British espionage and their campaign from 1939 to 1944 to discredit Fish and defeat him at the polls. Her failure to acknowledge this taints her allegations.

Other things Rachel Maddow never mentions:

- HF III’s service in the trenches in World War I, as a captain in the 369th Infantry Regiment, earning him a Silver Star and the French Legion of Honor
- HF III’s critical role in establishing the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier
- HF III’s position as an active reservist in the army who regularly participated in training up until 1942. He was promoted to colonel in 1932. FDR denied him the opportunity to serve in World War II
- HF III’s deep distrust of Stalin and of the Soviet Union, based in part on his trip there in 1923 as part of a Congressional delegation effort (unsuccessful) to try and achieve independence for Armenia and his knowledge of gulags and the Holodomor in Ukraine
- HF III’s speech in 1930 at a national Jewish day of protest (organized by the American Jewish Congress) against the suppression of the Jewish religion and the persecution of Jewish religious leaders in Russia
HF III’s resolution in Congress in June 1933 condemning Hitler’s treatment of Jews; further resolutions condemning Hitler in 1938 and 1942

HF III’s consistent support throughout his Congressional career for improved civil rights for Black Americans, including anti-lynching bills and working with the NAACP

HF III’s excellent record of service to his constituents, including helping this Black officer at West Point regain his rank in 1932

HF III’s consistent support for Jews and for Israel, including sponsoring the Lodge-Fish Resolution in 1922 supporting the British Balfour Declaration, supporting Zionists in 1923, his proposal in March 1939 that the US spend $10 million in helping European Jews resettle in Palestine, and his efforts to work with Bernard Baruch in 1939 to resettle European Jews

HF III’s efforts to have the Nazi German-American Bund, led by Fritz Kuhn, outlawed in 1938; Fish was supported by the American Jewish Congress.

HF III speaking at an anti-Nazi rally in January 1938

HF III’s efforts to help Jews, including those on the liner St. Louis, and those remaining in Europe. (An example from the US Holocaust Memorial and Museum.)

HF III’s assistance to Jewish lawyer Fanny Holtzmann with exit visas for Jews from Poland and Germany on many occasions, from 1932 to 1939. Fish helped her when FDR and his administration would not. (See pp. 190-192 and 199-204.)

HF III’s speech in Congress on December 8, 1941, pledging his support to FDR and the war

HF III’s genuine distress when accused of antisemitism by the interventionist/British-supported Fight for Freedom Committee

HF III’s support for Israel in 1970.

Ms. Maddow’s Allegations

The main allegations against Hamilton Fish III are that he was friendly with Germans and that he used his office to mail isolationist propaganda. These allegations and accusations are reviewed in documented detail beginning on page 5 below. (I have previously written a response to the Ultra accusations here and to Prequel here.)

What is Hamilton Fish III’s legacy?

Congressman Fish fell onto the wrong side of history for a period in 1940 to 1941, when he spoke on behalf of the America First organization after FDR’s reelection. He later said that he believed that the delay in the US entering the war may have saved one million American lives - something we can never verify. (He wrote home to his mother in World War I that he would never send American men and women into foreign wars.) His constituents and the country were anti-interventionist.
Was the US strong enough militarily to take on both Germany and the Soviet Union in 1940? Historians differ, but most concur that Hitler and Stalin assumed the U.S. would join the war on Britain’s side. Although Hamilton Fish III’s time in Congress from late 1941 until his defeat in 1944 - and his consistent military service in the Army reserves - showed him acting with patriotism, his anti war views up until December 1941 had attracted people who could not be described that way and some of whom were antisemitic, attracted by fascism, and generally unhinged.

More seriously, the animosity between Hamilton Fish III and FDR harmed both and in some way harmed the country, in that foreign powers could take advantage of Fish’s criticisms of FDR. Fish supported many of FDR’s actions, but always spoke out against FDR’s assumption of powers that should rest with Congress. Even though Fish voted for FDR in 1932, they grew apart, and Fish spoke harshly of FDR and the New Deal. FDR became implacably opposed to Fish, illegally wiretapping his phone and having him investigated (to no avail) by the FBI, Army Intelligence, and the IRS. And, FDR approved of the British campaign to defeat Fish. FDR himself made isolationist statements until after the October 1940 election.

The interventionists worked as hard as they could to discredit isolationists, painting them always in the worst possible light. We just cannot know the truth of much of what went on in 1939-1945. Besides the British and the Germans, the Soviets also had propaganda agents at work in the U.S., embedded in FDR’s administration where they worked to bring the U.S. into war against Japan, and in the polling services. (Representative Samuel Dickstein, a Democrat, spied for Russia.)

Richard Hanks says:

“Just as the British labored to promote the point of view and influence of the internationalists and the interventionists, the German government worked carefully to promote views in the United States that would be in line with its own best interests.

One of the strategies of the interventionist groups was to discredit isolationism, and there was no better way to accomplish that end than accusations of collaborationism between the isolationist leadership and the Nazi government.” (p. 318)

On August 7, 1997, an Editor’s Note appeared in The New York Times correcting an earlier article and reporting that they could find no evidence that Fish had accepted funds from the Nazis or been influenced by them.

Hamilton Fish III was full of contradictions and complexities. A non-interventionist, he kept up his active military service for 28 years. In 1938, he worked with the NAACP to improve conditions for Blacks in the military, suggesting he knew that armed conflict was coming. He helped Jews on many occasions over many years and spoke out against antisemitism beginning in 1923, while taking views on neutrality that had the result of apparently benefiting the German desire for the U.S. to stay out of WWII.

Fish’s non-interventionism was born in the crucible of the horrors of World War I, and followed a long American tradition, beginning with George Washington, and continued in modern conflicts such as the Balkans. Fish was always a defender of American democracy; he served his
constituents faithfully, stood up for what he believed in, fought to help veterans, and was always loyal to his country and willing to fight for it.

If in his non-interventionism he was on the wrong side of history, that is a story the Library can and will tell through reparative actions. But **the positive contributions he made to his country and to this community over his long life warrant keeping his name on the Library he and his wife co-founded.**

**And there is no doubt that Garrison would not have a library if it were not for Hamilton Fish III.** Alice Curtis Desmond could have used her wealth to start a library or support other causes in her longtime home of Newburgh or in other places she had lived. Instead, she chose Garrison in honor of her husband. They worked together to plan the Library, choose a location, speak with the community, and create a cultural resource of lasting good.

*Anita Prentice January 2024*

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**Rachel Maddow Allegations Against Hamilton Fish III**

1. **Hamilton Fish III was friendly with Nazis.** This is based on two separate incidents: Fish’s trip to Germany in 1939, and Fish’s relationship with George Viereck.

1A. **Fish’s 1939 trip to Germany does not show that he was a Nazi sympathizer or was friendly with Nazis.** His trip to Germany was part of a two-pronged plan that Fish had adopted to avert war in Europe. Fish proposed, first, a plan developed with Bernard Baruch identifying areas in Africa suitable for Jewish resettlement, and, second, a 30-day moratorium to postpone the breakout of war. Before meeting with Ribbentrop for the first and only time, Fish met with foreign ministers in Ireland, England, and France. Late to reach Oslo for an Inter Parliamentary Union Conference, he accepted a ride in Ribbentrop’s plane, careless of appearances but not guilty of friendship with Nazis. ([See Richard Hanks dissertation, pp. 163-188.](#) Fish met with no other Nazis. (In contrast, American corporations were deeply involved with Germany up until the end of 1941.)

Ms. Maddow cites former assistant United States attorney general John Rogge, prosecutor in the failed Great Sedition Trial, as her source. After the war, Rogge visited Germany to interview imprisoned officials there. In his book published in 1961, he quotes Ribbentrop: (p. 270) “Fish came to see me. We talked over the general situation and how we could establish better relations with the United States. He wanted to come to better relations. He was counted on our side as one of the people who would be likely to collaborate with us. I remember him telling us that things were rather difficult and that an anti-German wave was going very high in America.”

Another German, Friederick Gaus, is quoted as saying: “**This man called on Ribbentrop and I remember that Ribbentrop had a very interesting conversation with him. He gave Ribbentrop some helpful advice about the situation in the United States.**” These comments are Rogge’s unverified recollections, with no indication of what they might really mean.
Rogge himself was also accused of using “Gestapo” techniques when he brought Germans back to the U.S. to testify against sedition trial defendants. See articles in Washington Times Herald, April 1947.

The only documented comment Rogge reports is from the German Foreign Office official record on Fish. “Visit to Salzburg. In Ribbentrop’s plane to Oslo, where he will submit the German-Polish conflict to the Inter Parliamentary Union.” That conflict was Danzig (the German city given to Poland in the Treaty of Versailles). This is when Fish was trying to prevent Germany, France, Britain, and the United States from going to war.

At this very same time in August, Ribbentrop was secretly negotiating with Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov the Nonaggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin, which would enable Hitler to focus all his military strength on the September 1 invasion of Poland and the subsequent conquest of Western Europe. Fish was a very minor concern to Ribbentrop at that moment.

Fish was also accused in 1942 by journalist Drew Pearson (closely collaborating with the Fight for Freedom interventionist group and the BSC) of receiving $3,100 in donations in 1939 (three years earlier) from the Romanoff Caviar Co., owned by German-Americans, Ferdinand Hansen, Gunther Hansen-Sturm and Carl Maack. Fish and Hansen said these funds went to the National Committee to Keep America Out of Foreign Wars, a committee composed of 50 congressmen. Sturm and Maack were called to testify before a grand jury but not charged. Pearson never revealed how he received check copies three years after they were written.

1B. Fish’s connection with George Viereck. Viereck is the only German-American affiliated with the Nazis with whom Fish appears to have had an ongoing connection. Viereck worked for the German government during World War I. Later he found the terms of the Treaty of Versailles onerous on Germany. Fish sponsored a resolution in 1923 calling for humanitarian relief for starving German women and children. Viereck approached Fish at that time, according to Viereck’s biographer, Neil Johnson. Viereck developed an official secret alliance with the Nazis later in the 1930s; they paid him well to write, publish, and distribute isolationist propaganda and provide information. Viereck reported to consul-general Hans Thomsen and was considered by the Germans a useful confidential agent. Viereck denied to anyone who asked that he was a Nazi.

Nazi testimony at Nuremberg is collected in an 11-volume publication called Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression. In Supplement A, Capt. Sam Harris interviews Herbert Von Stempel, especially about Viereck. Von Stempel only mentions Fish’s name once on page 564, as one of a group of congressmen with whom Viereck said he worked; Von Stempel could not verify this. Von Stempel also reported that Viereck cautioned the Germans against using antisemitic attacks.

Fish is alleged to have interceded for Viereck in 1938 so that he did not have to testify before the Dies Committee on UnAmerican Activities. If he did this, it is a mark against him, since by 1938 it was clear that Viereck had strong German ties.

Fish introduced Viereck to George Hill, a clerk in Fish’s office, in July 1940 and allowed the former to use his mailing list. Hill and Prescott Dennet used Dennet’s office to mail antiwar speeches using the franks of many congressmen. Rogge has a list of these mailed out “in which Viereck had a hand;” only one of 37 examples he gives is by Fish, whose speech was called “No Convoys! No
speeches - but there is no evidence that Viereck did actually have a hand in it and no evidence that Viereck ever wrote a speech for Fish. (Rogge p. 164.) Viereck extracted large sums of money from the Germans for his own publications. It is still a question as to how important Viereck really was; he may have exaggerated his own importance to the Germans in order to get paid more money. Thomsen also may have exaggerated his importance to his superiors. But Viereck was definitely paid by the Nazis and did go to prison for failing to register as a Nazi agent.

Congressman Fish was also accused of associating with Friedrich Auhagen, who was arrested in 1941 and convicted for failing to register as a German agent. Auhagen had published an article by HF III in a 1939 publication, “Today’s Challenge,” of which Viereck was the deputy editor. The article was on the role of the press and designed to appeal to midwest voters, according to Fish biographer Anthony Troncone Fish wrote a letter to the New York Times in 1942 denying that he had ever met or had any contact with Auhagen, nor is there any evidence he did so.

2. Ms. Maddow accused HF III of letting his office be used to mail German propaganda.

Congressman Fish did not have good control or oversight of who used his franking privilege in 1940 and 1941, and his employee George Hill carried out a franking operation distributing isolationist speeches by many congressmen - although not from Fish’s own office. Ms. Maddow relies on Henry Hoke, a direct mail professional who disliked the competition of the Congressional frank, to criticize Fish. A further concern about Hoke’s reliability is that he was receiving information and financial support from the British undercover operation, as detailed in part in British Security Coordination: The Secret History, and Desperate Deception. The British and Hoke fabricated ads against Fish showing him with pro-Nazi figures.

Hoke in his publication Black Mail lists speeches that were sent out using Fish’s frank. Some of the list is pasted below; see Black Mail pp. 33-36. Most of these speeches had to do with normal Congressional business, such as his anti-lynching bill, his resolution on allowing Blacks to serve in combat, and Republican policy positions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tides Appearing on Envelope</th>
<th>Who Ordered</th>
<th>Who Paid</th>
<th>How Much Paid</th>
<th>Whose Frank Was Used</th>
<th>No. of Copies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/11/40</td>
<td>A National Referendum Before Conscription for Foreign Wars</td>
<td>W. L. Reynolds</td>
<td>W. L. Reynolds</td>
<td>$ 9.79</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/16/40</td>
<td>A National Referendum Before Conscription for Foreign Wars</td>
<td>W. L. Reynolds</td>
<td>W. L. Reynolds</td>
<td>12.72</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/18/40</td>
<td>Anti-Lynching Bill</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>14.99</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/19/40</td>
<td>Relief of Distressed and Starved Women and Children of Europe</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>14.99</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/26/40</td>
<td>Dies Committee Should Investigate Foreign Agents</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>17.10</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2/40</td>
<td>A National Referendum Before Conscription for Foreign Wars</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>12.72</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/6/40</td>
<td>Increased Farm Income Would Restore Industry</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>13.16</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/9/40</td>
<td>Resolutions of the St. Louis Society of America Penciling to Finland and Our Diplomatic Relations with Russia and Germany</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>17.10</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/12/40</td>
<td>A National Referendum Before Conscription for Foreign Wars</td>
<td>W. L. Reynolds</td>
<td>W. L. Reynolds</td>
<td>12.72</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/29/40</td>
<td>Dies Committee Should Investigate Foreign Agents</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>House Page</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>Cong. Fish</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The only mailing of any size is a January 1941 America First mailing, for which Fish’s frank was not used. None of these speeches are antisemitic.
Ms. Maddow also praises Washington Post reporter Dillard Stokes, who was also working with the British and Hoke. Stokes and other columnists received tip offs from British spies.

In her podcast and book, Ms. Maddow implies that Fish’s main congressional office was used as a busy clearing house for propaganda. However, a close reading of the New York Times articles about the franking scandal and the Hanks dissertation about Hill’s trial reveals that much of the mailing was done not in Fish’s office but in the office of Prescott Dennett’s Committee to Keep America Out of Foreign Wars. Hill and Dunnett did collect money from Viereck to mail out isolationist speeches, but it was not under Fish’s nose. Fish first defended and then later expressed his disapproval of Hill.

3. Ms. Maddow criticized Fish for speaking at a 1938 German day rally in Madison Square Garden.

Hamilton Fish III did speak at a German Day Rally in October 1938 at Madison Square Garden with swastikas on the stage. This was a rally to commemorate the 255th anniversary of the arrival of Germans in America. The German-American community in the US at the time - some 12.2 million Americans were German-born or had one or both German parents - was not a monolith. German Day rallies were a long tradition, and in 1937 and 1939 were controlled by the German-American Bund, the unofficial American arm of the Nazi party, headed by Fritz Kuhn. But the 1938 rally was not organized by the Nazis; Nazis and the Bund were to be kept out. No German government official would agree to appear.

Some who were there did give the Nazi salute. Fish spoke about the contribution of German-Americans in WW I, and praised Chamberlain for keeping peace in Europe. See this New York Times article about the rally. This article by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and articles by UP and AP about the rally, do not mention any Nazi presence.

If Fish had not spoken at this rally, it could have been seen as a victory for the Nazis, who were working against the rally organizers. Maddow in her book uses this same New York Times article but mentions only the swastika and Nazi salute.

4. Ms. Maddow criticized Fish for trying to change the 1940 Smith Act.

The Great Sedition Trial saw the Roosevelt Administration bring charges against 33 defendants. In Ultra Podcast Episodes 6, 7 & 8, Ms. Maddow accuses Fish of trying to amend the Smith Act of 1940, which made it a criminal offense to advocate the violent overthrow of the government, so that it would be harder to convict those accused of sedition. Rogge himself would try to get the Smith Act changed after the war when he defended a group of American Communists. The Smith Act was generally criticized for failing to distinguish between sedition and free speech. The sedition trial was a sad debacle; most of the defendants were Nazi sympathizers or worse but a mass trial proved a disaster to administer. The simultaneous charging of 33 defendants created chaos in the courtroom and appeared to be a political ploy by FDR to discourage isolationists. Hanks and Troncone say that this action by Fish concerning the Smith Act was also in aid of several German-American and Italian-American women constituents who were losing their jobs and potentially their homes.
This article by Philip Deery about Rogge’s post-war career shows an individual who moved his political position dramatically, breaking the Rosenberg case and being part of the prosecution of W.E. B. DuBois; Rogge appears to be a much more complicated individual than Maddow portrays him - perhaps as complicated as Hamilton Fish III. Rogge’s FBI files, mostly of news clippings, are here.

5. Other Allegations

In her podcast but not her book, Ms. Maddow repeated other stories about Hamilton Fish, including that he recommended a book praising Hitler for defeating communism in Germany, that he rented his house in New York to Germans, that he took funds from Trujillo and owed income tax. These are not correct and are addressed in this document.

6. Antisemitism

Rachel Maddow did not specifically label Fish an antisemite, but others have, based on her podcast and book. Did Fish make antisemitic remarks and did he distribute antisemitic literature?

Of all Fish’s years in Congress, and in his 102 years of life, he is accused of making only three antisemitic remarks. The first is the comment “There’s enough Jewism going around here.” The second refers to his use of the phrase “fanatical Jew.” The third is when, after the primary in his redrawn district in July 1944, he used the phrase a “certain group of people,” to say they had voted against him and for the New Deal.

The first two alleged antisemitic remarks are related to the same incident: the apparently fabricated accusation that Fish mailed out a William Pelley pamphlet that contained an ad for ordering the Protocols of Zion. This charge was made by the Fight for Freedom interventionist group, which also published the antisemitic remarks above attributed to Fish.

I researched this closely and summarized the available Fight for Freedom documents at Princeton University here, “Anatomy of an Accusation.” A typed transcript of the FFF phone call with Fish shows omissions and that he said “There’s enough Jewisms going around,” and mentioned the work he had done for the Jews in Rumania. The FFF included the “enough Jewisms” phrase, taken out of context and modified, and issued a press release accusing Fish of the mailing.

Fish is a speech responded:

I have never sent out any antisemitic literature or authorised anyone to do so. No American in public life has made more speeches against religious and racial persecution in Germany, Roumania, and at home than I have. I was the author of the Zionist Resolution for a Homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine that passed Congress in 1923. I challenge anyone to show one single utterance of mine that was antisemitic during the twenty-one years that I have been in Congress.

When the Fight for Freedom Committee telephoned my New York Office several days ago about antisemitic enclosures being inserted in my franked envelope, I told its spokesman that he should not waste his time or mine calling me as he knew perfectly well that I knew nothing about it, that no friend of mine could have sent it and that it was a false as hell and
just another smear attack against me for doing everything within my power to keep this country out of war unless attacked.

Such a contemptible and false attack might have come from any enemy, Communist, hysterical refugee, fanatical Jew, or Christian war-monger, but whoever is responsible has only succeeded in spreading the flames of antisemitism in America.” (His full speech is included in Anatomy above.)

The FFF in a press release then chose to use just part of his statement, accusing him of using only the phrase “fanatical Jew.” Fish appears to have been set up, based on the NY postmark of the mailing and the unsigned partial transcript of an alleged phone call with Fish. Neither Hoke nor Rogge found any antisemitic literature mailed by Fish.

The FFF, while American, was funded in part by the British secret service (BSC), which also provided funding to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. (See British Security Coordination Secret History p. 58 and p. 74.)

No other evidence is available that shows that Fish or Hill mailed out antisemitic literature.

The only other instance where Fish was accused of making an antisemitic remark was when he was fighting his last Congressional race in 1944. He had been redistricted and was campaigning in unfamiliar counties. He stated that “a certain people” in Fallsburgh in his new district had voted Democratic. This comment was described as a “racial slur.” Fish was defended by columnist George Sokolsky. Unlike other isolationists, Fish protested against accusations of antisemitism.

Fish's chairmanship in 1930 of the “Special Committee to Investigate Communist Activities in the United States,” also known as the Fish Committee, has been raised as possibly representing antisemitism on Fish’s part. Fish and the congressmen on the committee held hearings around the country, gathering thousands of pages of testimony from the Communist Party USA, labor leaders, industry leaders, and popular cultural figures including Father Coughlin and Harry Jung, who both later emerged as strong antisemites. The final report of the committee noted that many CPUSA leaders were Jewish (p. 18), and expressed concerns that Jewish children were being educated in communist summer camps (p. 18). The report also accused the Soviet Union of building prison and forced labor camps and being out to destroy all religions:

“...The Communist Party began in 1929 a relentless campaign to up-root and destroy every semblance of religious belief among Russian Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Moslems, and by brutal methods, to exterminate religion. Thousands of Russian priests, Jewish rabbis, Zionists, Catholic priests, and Protestant ministers have been arrested on flimsy charges and exiled to Siberia, or shot.” (p. 52)

In 1930, the U.S. had yet to recognize Stalin’s government, which owed the U.S. government and private citizens hundreds of millions of dollars for confiscated assets. FDR would recognize the U.S.S.R. in 1933 forgiving most of the Soviet debts. Fish would later strongly criticize FDR for handing over large quantities of military equipment to Stalin under Lend Lease; equipment that would be used to seize Eastern Europe.

Anita Prentice January 11, 2024