

Rock Point School Statement on Bishop Hopkins
May 19, 2021

John Henry Hopkins, whose son founded Rock Point School, has left his mark on our building as well as on our history. He was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1792. His family emigrated to the United States in 1801, and he became an American. In 1832, Hopkins became the first Bishop of the Diocese of Vermont. He claimed to believe in the principles of natural rights, freedom, and individualism, and read works by Locke, Paine, and Rousseau. Despite this, during his tenure as Bishop, Hopkins published an essay explaining his positive views on slavery. He argued that slavery was not a sin, and criticized abolitionists who described it as such.

A large portrait of Hopkins was featured in the front hall of the school until 2021. We looked at the painting of Hopkins and, in light of his racist views, deemed that it was inappropriate to be exhibited in such a prominent location of the school. Hopkins is one of countless leaders whose beliefs have shaped the legacy of racism in this country, a legacy we still see the effects of today. It was clear that the painting needed to be moved. However, our goal was not to sweep our school's, and by extension our country's history under the rug, but to appropriately recognize it. The painting was removed in May of 2021. The smaller portrait and this statement about the Bishop have replaced it.

Despite it being a largely symbolic gesture, this the first step we chose to take. It is not the face we want to show to visitors as they walk through the doors; the portrait was huge, eye-catching, and of a person who held unquestionably false beliefs about race. We did not want that picture and that person to be seen as a remarkable man. He is a part of the school's foundation and although that cannot be erased or forgotten, we hope that those who see his portrait will know both of his contributions to the world: his aid to slavery and his aid to education.

We hope that with this information, people will be reminded to think critically about people in power. We hope that this way of viewing the past becomes more common, as the heads of our past generations have both good and bad traits, and neither should be overlooked.

Written on behalf of the school community by

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