

Berkeley to bid Harold adieu, welcome Dharma Way

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Robin Caton, director of the Dharma College, walks on Harold Way in front of her school in Berkeley, Calif. on Thursday, June 21, 2012. Caton came up with the idea to rename the street to Dharma Way to reflect the concentration of Buddhist organizations located there. Photo: Paul Chinn, The Chronicle / SF



Say goodnight, Harold, whoever you are.

Berkeley's City Council is set Tuesday to rename Harold Way, a century-old downtown street christened by one of the city's founding families, to Dharma Way, in honor of a [Tibetan Buddhist](#)

[center](#) that recently opened on the tree-lined street near the library.

"We don't even know who Harold was. He seems to be lost in the mists of time," said [Robin Caton](#), co-director of [Dharma College](#), one of three buildings the [Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center](#) recently purchased on Harold Way. "We want to bring dharma to Berkeley, show we are committed to this community in a permanent way."

The Tibetan group paid \$800 and endured a year of paperwork to banish Harold and elevate Dharma, which in Sanskrit means "truth." The process included notifying the police, fire and public works departments, the post office and the [Alameda County Planning Department](#). If the council approves the change, the new street signs will be installed this summer.

So far, no one has objected to the name change, probably because every building on Harold Way is owned by the Tibetan center.

Monikers on streets

Not even Harold's family is rising to his defense.

"I don't really care," said [Jeffrey Shattuck Leiter](#), a former Berkeley mayor and great-grandnephew of the city's founding father, [Francis Kittredge Shattuck](#). "I'm not even sure who Harold was. I think it was his horse."

Historians say Harold was definitely human. In all likelihood, he was [William Harold "Hatch" Woolsey](#), whose mother was the niece of Shattuck's wife. The Shattucks and Woolseys imprinted their monikers on streets throughout Berkeley, including Blake, Hillegass, Kittredge, and, of course, Shattuck and Woolsey.

They could: Shattuck and his cohorts - mostly Gold Rush veterans - built the heart of modern Berkeley, acquiring 640 acres from the old Peralta ranch near the new [University of California](#), and persuading the Union Pacific to send a branch line from Oakland.



Jack Petranker, the director of the Mangalam Research Center, views a Tibetan text in the center's library in Berkeley, Calif. on Thursday, June 21, 2012. The city council is set to approve the renaming of Harold Way to Dharma Way to reflect the concentration of Buddhist organizations located on the one block street. Photo: Paul Chinn, The Chronicle / SF

Family's developments

They subdivided the land around the train station, where Shattuck Square is now, envisioning a bustling city for students and faculty, farmers and ranchers, factory workers and families.

"I think Francis Shattuck wanted to make a lot of money. He was essentially a [real estate](#) developer," said [Charles Wollenberg](#), author of "Berkeley: A City in History" and a history professor at [Berkeley City College](#).

"But in a lot of ways, that's the story of California," he said. "Making a lot of money in real estate, losing a lot of money in real estate."

One of Shattuck's grandest undertakings was the Shattuck Hotel, which, when it opened in 1910, was among the largest and swankiest buildings in the Bay Area.

The rear access road was Harold Way, a one-block lane serving the hotel, library, YMCA and other civic buildings around Allston and Kittredge streets.

According to the Woolsey papers at the [Bancroft Library](#) at UC Berkeley, Harold grew up to take over a ranch and vineyards in Tehama County, which, undoubtedly to his great-granduncle's horror, previously belonged to Leland Stanford.

Harold may have faded into history, but he still deserves his street, said historian [Richard Schwartz](#), author of "Berkeley 1900: Daily Life at the Turn of the Century."



Pedestrians walk across Harold Way in downtown Berkeley, Calif. on Thursday, June 21, 2012. The city council is set to approve the renaming of the one block street to Dharma Way to reflect the concentration of Buddhist organizations located there.
Photo: Paul Chinn, The Chronicle / SF

"Kittredge, Shattuck, Blake. ... To change Harold is like breaking a dinner set," he said. "It's not a dinner plate, but together those streets form a set, a story. This breaks that continuity. It really is a sweet little street. Do we really need to change it?"

The answer is yes, say the Buddhists. They're hoping to time the street change with the formal opening of [Dharma College](#), as a way of inviting the public to learn more about Tibetan Buddhism and the work of the center.

Honoring Buddhist tradition

The public will be able to take classes, meditate, shop at the Dharma Publishing bookstore, study rare texts at the Mangalam Center, volunteer and otherwise seek enlightenment.

Renaming the street is a nod to the city's future over its past, said [Jack Petranker](#), director of the [Mangalam Research Center](#), which is associated with the Nyingma Meditation Center, in Berkeley since the late 1960s.

"We want to honor a tradition that goes back 2,500 years," he said, referring to the birth of Buddhism about 500 B.C. "Changing the street name will help seal the impact we're trying to have here. We hope it gives people a sense that we're doing something here that matters."

But aren't Buddhists supposed to be detached from material things, such as street signs? And isn't the path to enlightenment about the journey, not the signage?

"Well," he said with a laugh, "if you're going to do something, like reach out to the public, we believe you should do it right."

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