



“You say tomato, I say...”

The dedication of Stephen Mather High School, Chicago, Illinois

In the Homestead attic, a large manila envelope contains “Material Relative to Stephen Tyng Mather High School...” Among the materials are several letters, a photograph of the school, and the dedication program from May 17, 1960.

At that ceremony, Conrad Wirth, the Director of the National Park Service delivered the Dedicatory Address. He was immediately preceded by Stephen Mather McPherson who said of his grandfather...

“Stephen Mather’s great desire was to educate the American people to appreciate more fully the natural wealth and beauty of their own country. How fitting it is that the city of Chicago has paid tribute to its adopted son in the field of education...”

However, a year before the dedication, a controversy erupted: What is the proper pronunciation of ‘Mather?’

In a letter to Bertha Mather McPherson, an Associate Chicago School Superintendent wrote...”*it was noted that the name Mather was pronounced both with a long “a” and a short “a” by different persons...Would you be good enough to furnish me with the information as to whether the first syllable sounds like the month of May, or like the first syllable in Mathematics.*”

In a subsequent memorandum to the Superintendent, another Associate wrote...

- 3. Of forty Mathers who are listed in the telephone directory, a call to them by one of the men in our offices reveals that it is almost 50-50 whether their names are pronounced Măther or Māther...*
- 5. To resolve this problem with finality, I telephoned long distance to Mrs. Edward R. McPherson Jr....*

Mrs. McPherson stated that all through New England, the local people pronounce the name –Mawther and with the “th” soft. Mrs. McPherson stated that her father and the family have always pronounced their name Măther as in the word “rather”...

Under the above circumstances, it seems reasonable to conclude that the surname for the new high school at Peterson and California Avenues should be pronounced Măther.”