

# Caltech

RUDDOCK HOUSE RENAMING COMMITTEE



REPORT

An Honor for  
**GRANT DELBERT**

# VENERABLE

BS, Civil Engineering, Class of 1932



**Venerable's passion  
for education and  
achievement  
exemplifies the  
best qualities of  
Caltech's spirit and  
culture.**



## **Background**

On January 15, 2021, the Committee on Naming and Recognition (CNR) released its report to the Caltech community. In the report, President Rosenbaum accepted the Committee's recommendations on renaming multiple buildings on campus, including Ruddock House (hereinafter referred to as "House"), and agreed that a new name for the House would be chosen through an inclusive and supportive process involving current and former House students as well as Caltech staff and faculty.

## **Committee's Official Charge**

In accordance with the January 15 report, a committee was created to rename Ruddock House and this committee, called the Ruddock House Renaming Committee (RHRC), was established and charged with collecting, reviewing, and making a final list of suggested recommendations for the House's new name.



## **Membership on the Ruddock House Renaming Committee**

The RHRC was chaired by the President of the Caltech Alumni Association, Satoshi Ohtake, PhD (BS '00), and Ruddock House President and graduating senior Paulina Ridland (BS '21). The Committee's full membership consisted of:

### ***Ruddock House Student Leadership***

Abigail Jiang, Junior, Materials Science  
Elaine Lowinger, BS '21, Mechanical Engineering  
Paulina Ridland, BS '21, Mechanical Engineering (co-chair)  
Aditi Seetharaman, Junior, Bioengineering  
Tarini Singh, BS '21, Computer Science

### ***Ruddock House Alumni***

Debra Dison Hall, JD (BS '74)  
Leigh Engen, MA (BS '99)  
Alexandra Lockwood, PhD (MS '10 and PhD '14)  
Satoshi Ohtake, PhD (BS '00) (co-chair)  
Angela Poole, PhD (BS '99)  
Daniel Velez, MS and JD (BS '98)

### ***Caltech Faculty/Staff***

Ralph Amos, Assistant Vice President of Alumni Relations and Executive Director of the Caltech Alumni Association  
Adam Blank, Teaching Assistant Professor of Computing and Mathematical Sciences  
Anastasios (Taso) Dimitriadis, Interim Director, Caltech Center for Inclusion & Diversity  
Felicia Hunt, Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and Residential Experience  
Michelle Rodriguez, Department Administrator for the Vice President of Student Affairs

## RHRC Meeting Schedule

The RHRC met for one hour each week via Zoom, beginning on April 22, 2021. Listed below are the dates and times that the RHRC met:

Thursday, 4/22 at 12:00 pm

Friday, 5/7 at 9:00 am

Friday, 5/14 at 10:00 am

Wednesday, 5/19 at 11:00 am

Wednesday, 5/26 at 11:00 am

Wednesday, 6/2 at 11:00 am

Wednesday, 6/9 at 10:00 am

Tuesday, 7/20 at 2:00 pm

Wednesday, 7/28 at 1:00 pm

Monday, 8/2 at 1:00 pm

Monday, 8/9 at 11:00 am

Thursday, 8/19 at 11:00 am

Tuesday, 8/24 at 2:00 pm

## Committee Activities

The initial activity of the RHRC was to organize three central initiatives. Structure detailed below.

### I. Principles for Decision Making

As one of its first orders of business, the RHRC articulated principles to guide the deliberation and decision process. The RHRC agreed that the principles should be representative of Caltech's mission to expand knowledge and benefit society. At the same time, the RHRC agreed that the principles were not a checklist in which every criterion would need to be satisfied in rote form. Instead, the principles would serve as an aid to the RHRC and would help ground its review and recommendation. To this end, the RHRC accepted the following principles of the California Institute of Technology ("Caltech" or the "Institute") to help guide its renaming work:

- **Relevance:** The Institute should honor exemplary individuals and concepts relevant to its history, its present mission, values, and Honor Code, and its future aspirations.
- **Inclusivity:** Naming should strive to reflect the Institute's aim to forge a diverse and inclusive community of excellence.

- **Revisability:** While names are meant to be durable, the Institute should always reserve the right to review their appropriateness in the future.

The RHRC also adopted the following supplemental principles:

- The renaming of Ruddock House is a community decision and effort. This process must include all members of the community – past and present – and provide us with the opportunity to embrace change and move the Institute forward.
- We recognize that Ruddock House was, and is, a home to many students.
- Understanding that the character of an undergraduate student house can vary to some extent over time, we submit that Ruddock House has had an enduring character – which can be described as a passionate pursuit for all things in life.

## II. Supporting Students

Throughout the naming process, the RHRC felt that it was imperative to maintain a focus on and direct resources to supporting students and current House members. The students expressed concern with the timing of the decision, how they would be involved in the process, and how the new decision would impact rotation. The RHRC wanted to offer proactive support. Throughout the RHRC's deliberation process, every effort was made to listen to the input, ideas, and concerns of students, offer them resources, and collaborate with them. The student perspective for how best to manage this process was invaluable.

## III. Communications

The formation of the RHRC was initially announced to the Caltech community by President Rosenbaum via email on April 12, 2021. Following this announcement, an update on the Ruddock House renaming process was provided to the community by the Chairs of the RHRC on June 1, 2021. In that communication, all community members were invited to submit name suggestions and were provided two weeks to offer potential names, input, or feedback.

## **Nomination and Selection Process**

A request for nomination from the current campus community and alumni was put forward in June 2021. There were 90 total responses to the RHRC's request, with 55 unique names offered. Of those, 24 nominations met the RHRC's criteria for consideration in that they aligned with Caltech's values and the RHRC's guidelines and were distinct from the name Ruddock or any abbreviation of Ruddock. The RHRC collectively discussed, deliberated on, and ordered the nominations, removing from further consideration those which had minimal support within the Committee.

With a short working list of names, the RHRC engaged the support of the Helen Brown Group Consulting Firm (HBG) to perform a due diligence investigation of potential candidates. With this research complete, the RHRC considered: (i) input from current students which had been solicited by the student members of the Committee and (ii) the rankings solicited from the Committee members. Based on the Committee's review, the list under consideration was narrowed further until we were at a place where we could make a final recommendation.

## **Determining a Final Recommendation**

The Committee considered how best to engage the Ruddock alumni in the final selection process. Some members of the RHRC believed it was important to ask alumni for their input on the names it was considering. The Committee outlined this step in the initial communication for renaming. The students and alumni believed such engagement was necessary to mitigate a potential loss of identity and connection to the Institute. While this commitment was made initially, the Institute felt the risks of sharing the names publicly, and doing so without consultation with heirs, was unfair to the families involved. As a result, it was decided not to share the information broadly to respect the privacy of the potential honorees.

After many hours of deliberations, the Committee determined that current House students and the alumni would most benefit from a name that recognized the undergraduate student experience. The Committee's final recommendation is Venerable House, to honor Grant D. Venerable—a Caltech undergraduate who never had the opportunity to live in a student House. The nominations for Venerable House were submitted by members of Ruddock House—past and present.

# GRANT DELBERT VENERABLE

Grant Delbert Venerable was the first Black undergraduate student to graduate from the California Institute of Technology. Much of the information we have collected about the life and contributions of Grant Venerable comes from his son, Grant Venerable III, with whom Caltech leaders have been in contact. He notes: “Grant’s moment at Caltech (1929-32) linked him with virtually inexorable forces larger than even he may have realized. For they had to do with people reaching across centuries-old chasms of race and culture to touch that ‘irreducible human essence’ that lay deep within themselves.”

Over the years, Caltech has featured Venerable in multiple publications and communications. From conversations with the Caltech Archives and Grant Venerable III (his eldest son), it is clear that Venerable was an extraordinary man with an incredibly interesting history.

Grant D. Venerable entered Caltech in 1929 as a transfer student from the mathematics department at UCLA. Venerable was of African, Cherokee, and Scottish descent, and his father was born in Missouri in the latter days of slavery. During his time at Caltech, Venerable applied to live on campus in one of the Houses, where most undergrads lived (and continue to live). In response, Robert Millikan “took to the Board of Trustees the issue of whether a ‘colored’ student should be permitted to live there” [citation: [Caltech News](#)]. Although Caltech eventually granted Venerable permission to live in a campus House, he could not afford it and continued to live off-campus. He earned money to pay his rent by mowing lawns for faculty and working as a butler for a wealthy Beverly Hills family.

Venerable was a member of the YMCA (now the Caltech Y), the American Society of Civil Engineers, the track team, and the Exhibit Day committee. He wrote for the Caltech student newspaper, The Tech, from 1929 to 1932. Venerable also served as president of Caltech’s Cosmopolitan Club, which was formed in 1925 to promote fellowship among students of different nationalities.



# GRANT DELBERT VENERABLE

In 1932, at the pinnacle of The Great Depression, Venerable earned his B.S. in Civil Engineering from Caltech. Despite his prestigious college degree, the lack of jobs in his field forced him to work where he could – at a gold mine in Montana, then at the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company, which was then the only Black-owned insurance company west of the Mississippi River. His early promise and excellent education began to pay off in 1940, when a friend and former Caltech classmate connected him with several mining engineering jobs and later the Hayward Spyglass Company, where he applied his knowledge of optics. In 1945, he bought a hotel with his brother and moved to central California to be closer to his family. Eventually, Venerable purchased the George R. Healy Company of Montebello, California, which manufactured dining room table pads and blackboard erasers – and ever the scientific engineer, he perfected the blackboard eraser. He served as the president of the company until his death in 1986.

In 1989, the Venerable family endowed Caltech with a book fund in memory of Grant D. Venerable and his wife, Naomi T. Venerable. The family has asked that the endowment be used to purchase books that, “bear upon the human condition, especially of African-American and Native American cultures, and which bear upon the impact of modern technology on the human condition.”

## **Venerable House**

Two individuals, an alumnus and a current undergraduate student, originally nominated the name “Venerable House.” Both nominators are/ were full members of the House. We find it necessary and important to recognize that BSEC (Black Scientists and Engineers of Caltech) previously suggested Grant D. Venerable as an individual to honor via renaming, and that both nominators cited BSEC’s work as instrumental to their nominations.




# GRANT DELBERT VENERABLE

Grant Delbert Venerable lived every moment of his life with joyful intensity. He embraced adventure and discovery, and claimed numerous accolades and accomplishments against formidable odds. His passion for science, technology, and life, which he passed on to his children, will remain vital for decades to come. His courage opened doors for countless others, and his impact on the Caltech community is tangible even today.

Throughout the years, the community of Ruddock House has had an enduring character: a passionate pursuit of all things in life. The same can be said of the man we propose as its new namesake. Like past and present members of this House, Venerable was a brilliant student and an engaged member of the community.

The renaming of Ruddock House is part of Caltech's forward movement, an effort to revisit past decisions from new perspectives, and to provide inclusion to all members of the community. By renaming Ruddock House after Grant D. Venerable, we hope to highlight an exemplary and underrecognized individual whose contributions shaped Caltech for the better, while continuing to honor the identity and culture of past and present House members. We look forward to the continually bright future of Venerable House.



# Grant Venerable lived every moment of his life with joyful intensity.

*The Ruddock House Renaming Committee thanks  
the many Caltech individuals and organizations who  
helped identify Grant Venerable as a graduate  
worthy of recognition and honor*

# Caltech

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