

July 18th, 2014

President and Board of Trustees
Chatham University
Woodland Rd.
Pittsburgh, PA 15232

To President Barazzone and the Chatham University Board of Trustees:

Following the co-ed vote on May 1st, we, as daughters of Chatham College, determined that we could no longer retain ties to our alma mater and informed you that we would be creating our own alumnae organization. We chose to organize under the name we were all most familiar with, a name that had meaning to each of us as something more than simply a campus of ivied walls. We chose a name that accurately identified ourselves as independent Chatham Alumnae, and we maintain that we have every right to do so.

Since that decision, however, it is you that has pursued us. You have threatened legal action not once, but twice. You threw us off campus and threatened us with arrest when we were protesting peacefully. Then when we exercised our First Amendment Rights to accurately identify our group, you threatened to sue us, sending a lawyer's "Cease and Desist" letter to four of your daughters.

So take the family name. Chatham, as both an institution and a brand, no longer holds real value. Your daughters are breaking ties.

In the last several years the Chatham that we knew and loved has ceased to exist. First it became a university, a fundamental change that designated the women's college and its students as second-class citizens. Then Chatham stopped engaging its alumnae, reducing the incredible sisterhood of the past to a scattered collection of women. In the past ten years, beloved traditions that have been honored for decades have disappeared, turning Chatham from the unique college environment it once was into a cookie-cutter experience.

On top of these emotional upheavals, Chatham has devalued itself in other more tangible ways as well. The misguided marketing and recruitment of undergrad students has failed miserably, causing the low enrollment that you have touted as a reason behind the co-ed decision. Chatham continues to incur significant debt to fund the Eden Hall campus that just a handful of undergrad students will call home in the next few years. Tied to that is the very real negative forecast, stemming from their concerns about the transition to co-ed, issued for the university by Standard & Poor's – which also assigns a bond status for the university hovering just barely above junk bond.

We, now, are abandoning the Chatham that has abandoned its own mission and history of women's education and empowerment, even in light of continued women's inequality, all while searching for greener pastures at Eden Hall. The Chatham that we are leaving behind is not the same Chatham that created this group of passionate women committed both to each other and the continuance of women's college education where it still exists. While our allegiance to Chatham has waned given the hostility, disrespect, and blatant disregard for alumnae, our allegiance to the sisterhood created at Chatham has only been strengthened – and will continue to be – in a way that Chatham has failed to achieve in decades.

So we leave you the name “Chatham.” But we take with us something much more valuable: the cornerstones who have always stood true. We take “our daughters.” In doing so, we will do what Chatham should have been doing all along. We will give alumnae an opportunity to network, to shine the spotlight on them and their success, to support institutions who value a women’s only environment, to reinvigorate former relationships, and to build new ones with women from former and current women’s colleges. This was supposed to be your mission, and you’ve failed us for the last time.

As our parting message to you, we’d like to remark on Chatham’s official motto, “Filiae Nostrae Sicut Antarii Lapides” – “That our daughters may be as cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace.” The phrase comes from the Bible, Psalms 144:12, which reads:

12 That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.

Psalm 144 is attributed to David, traditionally believed to be the same David who (in 1 Samuel 17) fights the giant Goliath and later becomes King of Israel. In verse 12, the psalmist prays to God to bless His sons and daughters. Just before that, in verse 11, the psalmist curses his enemies as false people, whom he accuses of lying and lifting their right hand to make false promises:

11 Rid me, and deliver me from the hand of strange children, whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

The irony of Chatham using David’s Psalm as its motto is not lost on us, as you threaten your daughters with a legal battle for which you can call on far more resources than we can. But rather than continuing to leverage time and resources for a brand that we no longer value or believe in, we instead choose to focus on what has been our mission from the very beginning – to honor the past, hope for the future, and join with our sisters to create an organization that will honor and preserve the spirit of the real Chatham, with or without the family name. Unlike the Chatham that has failed its daughters, this organization will focus its time, energy, and resources to be the cornerstones of the alumnae network that your daughters were always promised.

As for further legal action, we will leave it to David to send you a cease and desist letter for stealing his motto.

Sincerely,

Your independent daughters,

The Filiae Nostrae Society