

June 11, 2020

From Juliana de Luna, Laurel Queen of Arms, greetings to all those to whom these presents come.

### **Offensive Names and the Current Situation**

As you doubtless know, a great deal of concern has been expressed about the fact that *Wolfgang von Sachsenhausen*, a name registered in 2007, included reference both to a Nazi concentration camp and a scientist who did experiments there. We wish to share with you, so that you can share with your populace, an explanation of how this name was registered and a general road map of what the Laurel Office has been working on since we became aware of the issue in the morning of Saturday, June 6, 2020.

### **How this name was registered:**

The Standards for Evaluation of Names and Armory (“SENA”) ban the registration of names that are offensive. Specifically:

No name that is offensive to a large segment of members of the SCA or the general public will be registered. Offense is a modern concept; just because a name was used in period does not mean that it is not offensive to the modern observer. Offense returns are rare because the bar for determining offensiveness is quite high; it has not been unusual for years to pass between returns for offense.

Offense is not dependent on intent. The fact that a submitter did not intend to be offensive is not relevant. The standard is whether a large segment of the SCA or the general public would be offended.

In 2007, we were not as attuned to the problems of white supremacy in the SCA as we are today. At that time, we used a different set of rules, but the rules about offensiveness were substantially the same.

The people making decisions on names and armory are not experts in every topic that arises. For that reason, we rely heavily on commentary from our array of volunteer heralds from every Kingdom. In this particular case, no one at the Society level identified the link between this name and the concentration camp in commentary, so the issue was not considered at the time. I was a commenter at that time and can say that we rarely looked actively for such issues, assuming that submissions of hate were a thing of the past.

Now, in 2020, we are more alert to the problems of white supremacy and racism in the Society, as are our commenters. In addition, there is vastly more information available to allow us to identify potentially problematic names. We make a regular practice of checking Google and other available resources, such as the databases of white supremacist images and lists of offensive racial terminology, when making

decisions. Offensive racial epithets such as *the Gypsy* have been banned, as have certain depictions of the Celtic or Norse crosses that are commonly used by hate groups.

### **What has the Laurel Office been doing?**

Since becoming aware of the issue, the Laurel Office has been working on several projects:

(1) We have prepared a report to the Board of Directors discussing the issue, our plans for moving forward, and the calls for revocation of this person's registration (something that is regulated by Corpora rather than the Laurel office).

(2) We have prepared and will shortly be issuing a Palimpsest Letter for commentary adding a provision to SENA banning names that are morally offensive and proposing a multi-factor test for moral offensiveness.

(3) We have researched and prepared a proposal for how to handle names that incorporate place names of concentration camps, which will appear in an upcoming Cover Letter.

(4) On the April 2020 Cover Letter, we will be announcing a new policy allowing free changes of names and armory for people whose registered elements are offensive. For example, some period armorial motifs have been co-opted by hate groups in the years since they were originally registered. Likewise, the phrase *the Gypsy* once had a very different popular meaning, but is now considered hate speech by the Roma people and the United Nations. People who now find themselves with inadvertently offensive names may wish to change them and we are removing one barrier to doing so.

(5) Pelican Queen of Arms is forming a working group to identify other potential red flags in names so that we can maintain a list of problematic name elements going forward. Although Pelican and her staff have been doing this same work behind the scenes for several years, we now are actively reaching out to people who are not presently commenting to request their assistance.

### **What can people do?**

(1) Be patient. Many of the things we are trying to do require substantial research time or input from the Board of Directors.

(2) Become involved in researching and commenting on names and armory in OSCAR. The Sovereigns are not experts in every single area of language, history or armory. We need and rely on commentary from experts in a wide variety of fields. We remain particularly in need of people with expertise in languages and cultures outside of Europe.

(3) Become involved in researching and writing articles to help educate people on period names or armorial motifs that have problematic modern connotations.

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