

From: [Web NoReply](#)
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Subject: Email - Communication - Wilf Popoff - Renaming John A MacDonald Road - File CK 6310-1
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Attachments: [renaming_john_a._macdonald_road.docx](#)

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Submitted on Sunday, June 20, 2021 - 08:12

Submitted by user: Anonymous

Submitted values are:

Date Sunday, June 20, 2021

To His Worship the Mayor and Members of City Council

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Name of the organization or agency you are representing (if applicable)

Subject Renaming John A. Macdonald Road

Meeting (if known) Governance and Priorities Committee

Comments My comments are offered in the attached document.

Attachments

[renaming_john_a._macdonald_road.docx](#)

The results of this submission may be viewed at:

[REDACTED]

Arguments Against Renaming John A. Macdonald Road

A submission to Saskatoon City Council's Governance and Priorities Committee, June 21, 2021, by Wilf Popoff, former writer and editor at the StarPhoenix and later researcher and writer for the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.

Introduction

I have read the history of New World Indigenous peoples, notably their period after the arrival of Europeans, and specifically of the interaction between the two cultures in what became Canada.

Building the Canadian nation was sometimes compatible with Indigenous interests, as during the fur trade, but more often incongruent with their welfare, as when settlement became expedient.

The latter was facilitated by treaty with our Indigenous peoples, pursuant to *The Royal Proclamation of 1763*. There is no doubt in my mind that the Crown failed to honour the spirit of these treaties.

Indigenous Education

The question before this committee arises from a universal abhorrence with Canada's Indian Residential Schools and the responsibility of Canada's first prime minister in their creation. Ironically, the conception of these schools addressed promises made during treaty consultations.

Alexander Morris, who on behalf of the Crown signed Treaties 3, 4, 5 and 6 and revisions to Treaties 1 and 2, references in his chronicle¹ the requests for schools from Headmen. They understood their economy was vanishing and that learning to farm was necessary.

Of course Morris and the Headmen had reserve schools in mind. Remote residential schools, however, devised in the heads of bureaucrats, were deemed to be more efficient and economical. It is little wonder. Boarding schools had existed throughout much of the world for a millennium. In fact Macdonald attended school in Kingston, far from his family home, and boarded at private residences.

It is implausible that the abuses that ensued in these residential schools were part of their design. The schools' custodians assumed this responsibility and for that we may blame Christian hubris.

¹ *The Treaties of Canada With The Indians of Manitoba and The North-West Territories Including The Negotiations on Which They Were Based, and Other Information Relating Thereto.*

Indigenous Assimilation

Residential schools are condemned primarily because their purpose was to facilitate Indigenous assimilation into the European-Canadian culture. The current view that promoting assimilation is racist has only developed in the last 50 years. To impose it on nineteenth century attitudes is a flagrant example of *presentism*. This is the fallacy of viewing the past on the basis of current values.

When my grandparents immigrated to Saskatchewan in the nineteenth century there was little option to assimilation and my parents' generation enthusiastically embraced it. In retrospect Macdonald and his government colleagues seem to have been misguided but they believed that assimilation into European society would benefit Indigenous peoples economically and culturally.

An Alternative History

Richard Gwyn, Macdonald's last biographer, has famously quipped: "No Macdonald, no Canada." Was he exaggerating? There may have been a truncated version, stalled at Ontario's western boundary. What about the rest of us?

We'd all be singing the "The Star Spangled Banner," our land mass having been absorbed by ambitious America, already titleholder of Alaska. The U.S. Cavalry would have been despatched to deal with Indigenous residents. *The Royal Proclamation of 1763*, regarded as Indigenous peoples' *Magna Carta* in British North America, would have no effect. In fact, the edict was a principal reason for the Declaration of Independence 13 years later.

When dealing with Indigenous peoples the Americans preferred guns to treaties. And even when there was a treaty they could not resist using force, as witness President Grant's ordering Lt. Col. Custer and 1,000 soldiers into the Black Hills of Montana in 1876. Their objective was to remove the Lakota inhabitants from a territory the Lakotas owned by virtue of a treaty with the U.S. government.

And the Americans had and still have Indian Residential Schools whose malevolent purpose, abusive practices and tragic mortality mirror Canada's.

The Intent of Reconciliation

There seems to be a streak of vindictiveness in the now fashionable statue and name removal exercise. While activists may view their measures as justified they fail to recognize that cancellation undermines the spirit of reconciliation. This is an initiative that requires the participation of two estranged parties, both affirming forgiveness and both expressing a desire to espouse harmony.

The current activity appears to be accomplishing the opposite and is probably counterproductive. Canadians support the goal of reconciliation but distrust the methods. A public opinion poll last September by Leger found that 50 per cent of Canadians "oppose

removing statues/monuments from public spaces of politicians where it has been demonstrated that they harboured racist views or implemented racist policies.” Only 31 per cent supported removing such statues.

Once activists have picked all the low hanging fruit they will search for lesser politicians and bureaucrats, possibly priests and nuns as well, pronounce them guilty and banish them to cancellation purgatory.

Macdonald, the builder of a great country, was either a good man who did bad things or a bad man who did good things. In either respect he was like all of us.