

**J.R. Miller, PhD, OC, SOM, FRSC**

**Professor Emeritus of History**

**University of Saskatchewan**

**10<sup>th</sup> St. E.**

**Saskatoon, SK S7H**

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Civic Naming Committee

City of Saskatoon

c/o Ms. Janice Hudson and Daniel McLaren

Dear Committee

I write to comment on the proposal to change the name of McPherson Avenue, which you discussed on March 9 and will discuss again on June 3, 2021.

I am a historian, retired from the University of Saskatchewan in 2014 after forty-four years of teaching and doing research on Canadian history. I have remained active in retirement, working as a historical consultant and publishing two books. Over my career I have published ten books, nine of them on topics in the history of relations between Indigenous peoples and newcomers. These titles include works on residential schooling (*Shingwauk's Vision* [University of Toronto Press, 1996]) and on reconciliation (*Residential Schools and Reconciliation* [University of Toronto Press, 2017]). My scholarly publications have received a number of awards: Officer of the Order of Canada, Saskatchewan Order of Merit, Gold Medal of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada "for excellence in research," and The Canada Council's Killam Prize in the Humanities. The Officer of the Order of Canada was awarded, according to the citation, for my "even-handed and definitive scholarship" that "has contributed to the healing and reconciliation process by chronicling the shared history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians." Given my record, then, I believe I am qualified to contribute to your deliberations concerning the name of McPherson Avenue.

The main reason advanced for renaming the Avenue is that the minister of the interior, D.L. Macpherson, ordered surveyors in what became part of Saskatoon to stop surveying riverbank lots to incorporate narrow, strip lots, and switch to a grid survey. As well, some critics have suggested that Macpherson was active in the creation of the residential school system, and that removing his name will advance reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, especially Saskatoonians.

Senator David L. Macpherson, as he and the authoritative *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* spell it, was acting Minister of the Interior 1881-83, and was formally designated Minister of the Interior in 1883. He resigned from cabinet in August 1885.

In 1882, John Lake visited the future Saskatoon area on behalf of the TCS. Prior to this date the government of Canada had granted a large area along the southern bank of the South Saskatchewan River to the TCS as part of its strategy for accelerating the

settlement of farmers in the North West Territories. Lake knew that the lands he examined in 1882 had been granted to the TCS, subject to fulfilling land-granting conditions. He was surprised to discover that government surveyors were surveying the land in a manner he and his colleagues did not approve. Therefore, he travelled hurriedly to Ottawa and requested that the government switch the survey method for lands he and the TCS believed belonged to the Society to the square grid pattern. The government quickly acquiesced to the request.

Macpherson and the TCS were simply asserting what they assumed were their rights. Furthermore, there is no recorded evidence that Métis had established narrow river lot farms in the TCS land grant by 1882. The nearest Métis settlement then was at Round Prairie (Dundurn), about forty kilometers to the south.

As for an assumed connection between Macpherson and the residential school system Canada created in 1883, that assumption is unfounded. The creators of the schools in 1883 were Sir John A. Macdonald, prime minister and Minister of Indian Affairs; Lawrence Vankoughnet, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs; and Nicholas Flood Davin, a journalist who in 1879 provided the government with a commissioned report that recommended a system of residential schools for First Nations and Métis children. Macpherson would have had nothing to do with the policy, save perhaps (we don't know if he attended the 1883 cabinet meeting at which the government decided to begin creating residential schools) giving tacit approval to a proposal from the prime minister to cabinet.

Moreover, renaming McPherson Avenue will do nothing to advance the important cause of reconciliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] did not recommend such action in its 94 Calls for Action in 2015, and the former Chief Commissioner, Murray Sinclair, has indicated that he thinks Canadians should avoid such actions as removing statues and renaming buildings, schools, or streets and concentrate on measures that actually improve the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples and advance the cause of reconciliation.

I agree with Mr. Sinclair. Saskatoon and its Council should take measures to highlight the contributions Indigenous peoples have made to the city and the region, and leave McPherson Avenue alone.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours truly  
J.R. (Jim) Miller

P.S. It appears the misspelling of Macpherson's surname was begun by John Lake, who spelled Macpherson as McPherson in his 1903 Narrative of events in the early founding of Saskatoon,