

Ryerson University has stated that its new name should represent its educational values and commitment to Indigenous issues. Of all the names that meet these criteria, one name stands out as uniquely meeting both requirements. The name is Edgerton Ryerson. That is the name that the University should now select. Of all of Canada's 19th-century leaders, Ryerson is preeminent in concern and advocacy for the indigenous. Early in his career, he lived with the Mississaugas, learned their language and worked in their fields. Throughout his career, he advocated for indigenous interests.

In the 1860s, concerned about the lack of indigenous educational opportunities, he established indigenous schools. The initiative was unsuccessful due to a lack of governmental financial support. Two principles distinguish these schools: i) participation by indigenous leaders in school design and curriculum formulation, and (ii) voluntary student participation. Given the reality of Ryerson's conduct and accomplishments, especially concerning the indigenous, it seems incomprehensible that the University has decided to remove his name. However, that is the reality we face. I believe it is important to assess how it came about.

In the late 2010s, a misguided but sincere student agitation developed, driven by a perception that Ryerson's 1847 paper was a precursor for the much later Residential Schools. The Administration became alarmed that the agitation would impact the Ryerson institutional image. It faced a choice as to how to respond. One choice was to undertake a student-focused educational initiative that would identify Ryerson's support for indigenous peoples. The second was to acquiesce in the student agitation, that it was in the best interests of the University that the name be removed.

To accomplish its name change decision, the Administration undertook a two-pronged strategy to vilify Ryerson and where appropriate a kind of "more in sorrow than in anger" approach. The vilification efforts focused on the student body; the other on the broader graduate and public audience. In the late 2010s, a misguided but sincere student agitation developed, driven by a perception that Ryerson's 1847 paper was a precursor for the much later Residential Schools. The Administration became alarmed that the agitation would impact the Ryerson institutional image. It faced a choice as to how to respond. One choice was to undertake a student-focused educational initiative that would identify Ryerson's support for indigenous peoples. The second was to acquiesce in the student agitation, that it was in the best interests of the University that the name be removed. To accomplish its name change decision, the Administration undertook a two-pronged strategy to vilify Ryerson and where appropriate a kind of "more in sorrow than in anger" approach. The vilification efforts focused on the student body; the other on the broader graduate and public audience.

A key and illustrative instance of the vilify tactic was the text of the 2018 unveiling of a Ryerson plaque. Conventionally, plaques are erected in order to honour their subjects and to commemorate their accomplishments. The Ryerson plaque text, which defames and denigrates its subject, must occupy a special place in plaque history. The text associates Ryerson not only with the design of the Residential School system but even more shamelessly with its ongoing operations. (That it was erected directly adjacent to a Ryerson statue honouring the man the Plaque defamed must be the ultimate irony.) Unrestrained by the University leadership, a student mob pulled down the statue.

It was clear that the removal of the statue suited the Administration just fine. The Plaque alone remains in place, representing the triumph of disinformation over truth. Importantly, the text sustains and augments student perception of Ryerson as implicated in the Residential Schools. Its influence should not be under estimated. This text speaks strongly of the Plaque content.

For a detailed illustration of this slanderous attack see the word by word unbundling of the text in my posted article, *Ryerson and the Residential Schools*, dated August 2021.

This document also presents Ryerson's relationship with the indigenous.