



**FRIENDS OF
EGERTON
RYERSON**

May 2, 2023

Hon Jill Dunlop, MPP
Minister of Colleges and Universities

Dear Ms Dunlop

The Friends of Egerton Ryerson do not contest the name change at Ryerson University--a done deal, if regrettable. However, we do seek to correct the flawed record on the subject, particularly the false accusation that he was responsible for the Canadian residential school system.

He was not. He supported, rather, the voluntary, bilingual (English and Ojibway) day schools that Indigenous parents and leaders wanted. He himself learned an Indigenous language, Ojibwa, when he was a missionary to the Mississaugas of the Credit. He supported their land claims and their claim for exclusive rights to their traditional salmon fishery—both unsuccessfully. Governments of the day, in the United Kingdom and Upper Canada, turned them down. He assisted the Mississaugas with economic development, to make the move from hunting and fishing—no longer viable-- to farming.

Indigenous leaders appreciated his support. An Ojibwa chief named him a “brother,” and gave him an Indigenous name, “Cheehock.”

Yet, contrary to this pro-Indigenous record, the false accusations continue to be made, and the university administration did nothing to correct the record.

Indeed, the university president, Dr Lachemi, added to the misinformation, when in 2018, he unveiled a plaque that accused Ryerson of responsibility for “the design and implementation” of the residential school system, or that he was both the architect and manager! For three years students, faculty and staff walked past the statue, with the damning plaque next to it. Indigenous passers-by were especially hurt by it. By promoting such hurtful misinformation, the university administration failed in its duty to care for its students.

Your own remarks in introducing Bill 26 to rename show the commonly accepted false accusation, with the “legacy of its namesake and his role in the design of Canada’s residential school system.” Yet even the university’s Standing Strong Task Force that recommended the name change never called him the “architect” of the system. Rather, it concluded that because he was associated with it—which he was not, except by false accusations--that they needed a new name. And this at a university, which should be in favour of careful research, and correct misinformation.

A university Senate meeting of 5 November 2021, after the name change was decided, also confirmed that it was the association with residential schools, not that Ryerson was their architect, that made the name change desirable.

His real legacy is entirely suitable for a university name, especially one with the range of subjects and its background as a polytechnical institute, all in line with Ryerson’s own work. He was, after all, the major founder of the free, compulsory public school system in Ontario—revolutionary when he began to advocate it, when there were few schools, all were fee paying, and there was no teacher training.

A final point, the provincial House cancelled its afternoon session on the day of Ryerson’s funeral, 23 February 1882, so that members could attend. He deserves to be remembered for his enormous contribution to education, throughout Canada, and his friendship and support for Indigenous people.

Yours sincerely,
Friends of Egerton Ryerson