

February 5, 2025

Dear Mr Shan and all school trustees

Yet again a bad recommendation by staff on renaming schools has come to you: Ryerson Community School, Dundas Junior Public School and Sir John A. Macdonald Collegiate. As the Friends of Egerton Ryerson the school named after him is our concern, but we note also that Henry Dundas was as squeaky clean of the accusations made against him (for the street renaming, since put on hold) and that Macdonald, our first prime minister, yes, with negatives, but NOT responsible for bringing in residential schools. You should get the villains right!

We note, further, that staff concerns, as stated by National Post reporter Tyler Dawson, were the impact “that these names may have on students and staff based on colonial history, anti-indigenous racism and their connection to systems of oppression,” We ask what the impact might be on minds by false accusations? We believe that students should be introduced to evidence, from research, not preposterous claims. On Ryerson, note that he was the major founder of the free public school system, when few children attended school at all, no teachers were trained and all schools charged fees. He did NOT advocate or implement the residential school system. He supported the voluntary day schools, using English and Ojibwe, that Indigenous parents and leaders wanted. Did you know that the words “residential school” do not appear in any of his writing?

Name a source, if you can, but I have looked through the three biographies on him (Burwash, Thomas and Damania), the two-volume *Life and Letters* (Sissons), his own memoir, *Story of My Life*, two doctoral theses on him (Toronto and Oxford) and publications on his work in education (Putman). The words are not there.

Note also that his suggestions for “industrial schools” a letter of 1847 do not relate to the harmful residential schools brought in years later. His suggestions were only for Indigenous young people who wanted to learn farming, and then only for the last years of their schooling, starting at a day school and living at home. Work they did on the farm would be paid, the money to go into a trust fund and be given them on leaving. The academic component was significant, in strong contrast with the “half-day” system usual in residential schools, where pupils spent half their day in doing chores, to keep the costs down.

For coverage of the issue see: Donald B. Smith, “Egerton Ryerson and the Mississauga, 1826-1856. An Appeal for Further Study,” *Ontario History*, 113 (Autumn 2021):222-43.

Lynn McDonald, “How a ‘Maker of Canada’ was Framed: The unjust treatment of Egerton Ryerson.” *The 1867 Project: Why Canada should be cherished—not cancelled*, in Mark Milke, ed., Aristotle Foundation for Public Policy, 2023, 108-18. Note also that *The 1867 Project* is also a good source of information on Macdonald.

Ronald Stagg and Patrice Dutil. “The Imbecile Attack on Egerton Ryerson.” *Dorchester Review* (3 June 2021).

Yours sincerely,

50 Friends of Egerton Ryerson and Other Sensible People