

From: [Brendan Wycks](#)
To: [Natasha Salonen](#)
Cc: [Harold O'Kraaka](#); [Lillianne Dunstall](#); [Jennifer Bouzane](#); [Greg Clark](#); [Stewart Cressman](#); [Jeff Molenhuis](#); [Harvir Sidhu](#); [Kris Wilkinson](#); [Prime Ministers Path](#); [Carly Pettinger](#); [Steven Martin](#); [Kaitlin Bos](#)
Subject: Paul W. Bennett: Restore our historic figures to strengthen our Canadian bonds
Date: March 26, 2025 12:07:37 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open any attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Wilmot Township Elected Representatives and Senior Staff:

For your information and consideration, the Opinion column below is relevant to the Township's current deliberations around the future of the Prime Ministers Path.

By way of this same communication, I hereby request that the Township's Municipal Clerk add this Correspondence to the Public Record.

Brendan Wycks



Paul W. Bennett: Restore our historic figures to strengthen our Canadian bonds

The current wave of Canadianism is beginning to open our eyes to the unintended consequence of erasing names and burying troubling aspects of our past

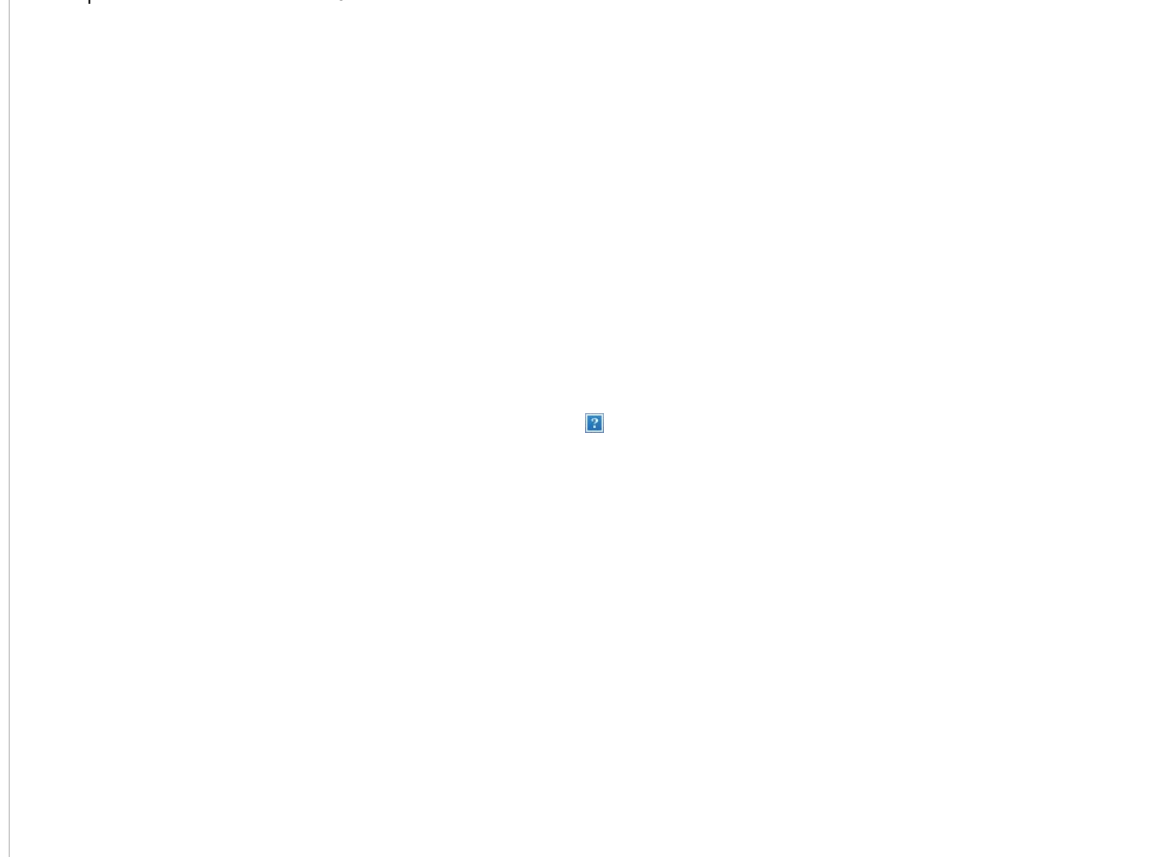
Author of the article:

Paul W. Bennett, [Special to National Post](#)

Published Mar 25, 2025 • Last updated 17 hours ago • 5 minute read

<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/restore-our-historic-figures-to-strengthen-our-canadian-bonds>

The decapitated head of a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald



The decapitated head of a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald is seen following a demonstration in Montreal in 2020. Photo by THE CANADIAN PRESS

All of a sudden, the small differences between Canada and the United States seem to [matter](#) once again. While flag-waving nationalism

gives us a saccharine rush, it's time to change the tune and stand up for Canada by ending the degradation of our nation-builders and returning their monuments to the public square.

First to be toppled was John A. Macdonald, then Egerton Ryerson. Now, Wilfrid Laurier is being [threatened with erasure](#). Tarnishing their enduring legacies and taking down their statues has wrought unanticipated consequences, which have become visible in the wake of U.S. President Donald Trump's threat to make Canada the 51st state. It has weakened our collective sense of identity and it's time to halt the purge.

When it comes to education, the public reputation and legacies of two prominent educators, Egerton Ryerson and his American counterpart, Horace Mann, provide a few salient lessons. While the reputed architect of Ontario's school system has been cast aside, even by the university that used to bear his name, Mann still stands, while somewhat diminished, as a pillar of the American republic.

My recent research report for the Macdonald-Laurier Institute (MLI), "[Historic Injustice](#)," touched on the subject, but stopped short of connecting the dots. It demonstrated, once again, that Americans tend to show greater respect for, and are kinder to, their most influential nation-builders. What I missed, in the space of a few months, was why this would matter so much for the future of our nation.

Contemporary Canada has been described as a "post-national society" born of immigrants, open to newcomers, and less inclined to upholding its founding traditions and institutions. It was best encapsulated in then-prime minister Justin Trudeau's memorable 2015 proclamation in the [New York Times Magazine](#). Canada, he said, could be the "first post-national state," claiming, "There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada."

Trudeau's 2015 musings hearkened back to Bruce W. Powe's conception of Canada as a unique post-national state in "[Towards a Canada of Light](#)," which challenged the nationalist model best exemplified in George Grant's classic 1965 essay, "Lament for a Nation."

More recently, public intellectual and essayist John Ralston Saul likened this post-nationalist vision to an Indigenous concept of welcome. "Space for multiple identities and multiple loyalties," is how [he explained](#) the philosophy, the roots of which go deep in North American soil, "for an idea of belonging which is comfortable with contradictions."

Indigenous activism and support for Indigenous rights is much stronger in Canada and drove much of the public policy agenda during the statue-toppling phase from 2015 to the early 2020s. While the legacy of slavery and segregation are seared into the American consciousness, Indigenous injustices and inequalities exert a more potent influence in Canada.

Current trends in protests to remove statues and public figures like John A. Macdonald and Egerton Ryerson in Canada are driven by violence and injustices perpetrated against Indigenous peoples, most notably through colonial policy, oppressive actions, and residential school atrocities. In the United States, Mann has been spared because most of the focus of such protests, driven by Black Lives Matter, has been on symbols of slavery, lingering Confederate values and racial segregation.

Disruptive protests aimed at toppling historical founding figures elicit different policy and civic order responses in the two countries. Following the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, American authorities moved swiftly to protect and safeguard American public squares and monuments, including the Statue of Horace Mann outside of the state capitol building in Boston.

The general pattern in Canada, according to MLI fellow [Ken Coates](#), is one of "general government inaction and disturbing passivity in the face of disruptive protests." Where protests challenge explicit government mandates, such as COVID vaccinations or diversity in hiring policies, laws are enforced, but if such protests conflict with "soft policy" on protecting historic monuments or pipelines, governments are loathe to act quickly, if at all.

Today's angry and intolerant times have over-ridden traditional values of respect for historic nation-builders and tolerance for viewpoints that are at odds with the shifting popular consensus. Politeness and viewpoint diversity are endangered in what [Coates describes as](#) "the swirling mess that currently passes for public debate." Attempts to come to terms with, and weigh the legacies of, historical figures like Ryerson are met with "intransigence and condemnation from all across the ideological and cultural spectrum."

Serious and nuanced public debates are reduced to "black and white standoffs," with combatants on both sides ready to pounce on even the smallest deviation from perceived wisdom in the ongoing culture wars. Spooked by protests, politicians take the easy way out, removing statues of Thomas Jefferson, a Virginian slave-owner, in the United States and John A. Macdonald, who favoured Indian residential schools, here in Canada.

With a notable lack of historical accuracy or much of a deep understanding of Ryerson and his times, Canada's best known education reformer now stands condemned with what [Coates termed](#) "venom but little historical balance." What's more remarkable is the complicity and compliance of [public bodies](#), including Parks Canada, the National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and Library and Archives Canada.

Yet things have started to change recently. A precursor of this change was Darlene Bernard, chief of Lennox Island First Nation in Prince Edward Island, who broke ranks in 2024 by [calling for](#) the restoration of the statue of John A. Macdonald in a Charlottetown park that had been removed three years prior.

The looming American threat of manifest destiny exposed by the tariff war may be what turns the tide in the culture war in this country. Signs of the shift are emerging, perhaps best exemplified in the rebirth of Joe Canada's "I am Canadian" videos, albeit with a "[We are Canadian](#)" twist. There's a dawning realization that a break from the constant "Canada is broken" drumbeat is what we need right now.

The current wave of Canadianism, with its fresh infusion of patriotic fervour, is beginning to open our eyes to the unintended consequence of erasing names and burying troubling aspects of our contested past. When historical balance returns, our first prime minister will be accorded the respect he deserves and the first attempts to sully Laurier's reputation will likely disappear. The founder of what became Canada's public school system deserves to be among the first to be restored in the public square.

National Post

Paul W. Bennett is a senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, author of "Historic Injustice: Canada's misguided betrayal of school system founder Egerton Ryerson," director of the Schoolhouse Institute, an executive board member of the Canadian Association for the History of Education and an instructor at Saint Mary's University.


From: [Brendan Wycks](#)
To: [Kaitlin Bos](#)
Subject: Canadians need a proud, not guilt-ridden Canada
Date: March 26, 2025 12:11:03 AM


CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open any attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Ms. Bos:

Given that my correspondence below was previously communicated to the members of the Wilmot Township Council on March 18/25, I hereby request that you add this Correspondence to the Public Record.

Thank you,


Brendan Wycks


From: Brendan < >
To: Natasha <natasha.salonen@wilmot.ca>
Cc: Harold <harold.okrafka@Wilmot.ca>; Lillianne <lillianne.dunstall@wilmot.ca>; Jennifer <jennifer.smith@wilmot.ca>; Greg <greg.clark@wilmot.ca>; Stewart <stewart.cressman@wilmot.ca>; Jeff <jeff.molenhuis@wilmot.ca>; Harvir <harvir.sidhu@wilmot.ca>; Kris <kris.wilkinson@wilmot.ca>; pmp <pmp@wilmot.ca>; carly.pettinger <carly.pettinger@wilmot.ca>; steven.martin <steven.martin@wilmot.ca>
Date: Tuesday, 18 March 2025 1:51 AM EDT

Subject: Canadians need a proud, not guilt-ridden Canada

Wilmot Township Elected Representatives and Senior Staff:

For your information and consideration, the Opinion column below is relevant to the Township's current deliberations around the future of the Prime Ministers Path.

Brendan Wycks




Canadians need a proud, not guilt-ridden Canada

Our heritage should be about building up and adding on, not deleting

Author of the article:

[Christopher Dummitt](#)

Published Mar 17, 2025 •

-

The smart bet is that the ballot box question in the next federal election will be about national survival. Most of the debate will focus on economic choices, productivity, tariffs, trade and foreign policy. But what about culture?

To be a nation, we have to feel that we belong together, that we are more than a string of city lights in the night sky lined up along American border. It's suddenly popular to be proudly Canadian — to vehemently publicly diss the Americans, and want to buy Canadian. But aside from being justifiably angry at Trump, what is this based on?

Our national government is meant to foster a sense of Canadian identity. What are those running for office putting on offer? What is their vision of Canada?

Mark Carney's Liberals have the toughest challenge. For more than a decade, the Liberals ran a government that sought to reconfigure our national identity — eliminating Canadian symbols that the intelligentsia told us were shameful. Canadians had much to apologize for. We needed to decolonize, to become more diverse. Above all, the story was of the harm caused by Canadian history.

It ought to be clear now that this decade of guilt-ridden national shame left Canada vulnerable — faced with a genuine national threat but with an open-question. If Canada is such a terrible place why would anyone defend it?

Obviously, this isn't how most Canadians feel. It has just taken the threat of American annexation to awaken the latent stirrings of national sentiment.

Now that everyone seems to be rooting for "Team Canada" again, Canadians ought to ask those who want to govern this nation, how deep is their commitment? What are they really offering? And will their

nationalism slip away the minute it's convenient?

I have a few suggestions for what Carney and Poilievre, and even Singh (who probably won't), ought to be offering.

Above all else, the parties should promise that they will prioritize Canadian pride and dignity.

Heritage isn't about history. It's not about debate and criticism. And our national heritage institutions should operate with this in mind. This doesn't mean we're embracing simplistic jingoism. But it does mean recognizing that our support for heritage is to build the idea of Canadian-ness. Funding for national heritage is meant to show that we have a proud history — that there is something here worth belonging to.

The second key element of any national cultural policy ought to be a more realistic approach to pluralism. Canadians live in a country of different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. We aren't unified. But the fundamental error of the last decade was to do diversity wrong — to engage in a downward spiral of national subtraction. Out of a well-intentioned, but horribly mistaken desire to protect certain historically marginalized groups, we kept demoting our national heroes out of a belief that they "harmed" people in the present.

A pragmatic pluralism would recognize that one people's hero will be another's villain. This absolutely should not mean dis-honouring anyone because one group says they are hurt.

Heritage harm is a choice. No one has to be offended when they walk into a school named after someone whom they don't respect. Conservatives aren't psychologically damaged when they fly out of Pearson airport. Nor do Liberals suffer when they tour the [Diefenbunker](#). Francophones don't need to avert their gaze as they drive through Durham region just because Lord Durham once advocated for their assimilation. And a Wendat/Huron Canadian doesn't need to feel threatened when driving past Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory just because the Mohawk people once wiped out Huronia.

Any Canadian party that wants to be seriously considered as a defender of the nation should promise a pragmatic pluralism which builds up and doesn't tear down our country. Each group of Canadians should be allowed to keep their historical heroes. Instead of tearing down John A. Macdonald statues, a new federal government should promise to raise statues of figures like Tecumseh or Big Bear. Canada is a diverse country. We can have a diverse set of historical heroes. No one gets a veto. Individual Canadians can choose to be harmed by a name if they want — but our national government needs to be bigger than this — stronger and more resilient.

What's more, a third key promise ought to be the adoption of a culturally mature notion of diversity. Canada hasn't always looked the way it does today. People in the past didn't think the same or act the same. A responsible national government would take pride and celebrate this diversity.

Canada's prehistory was dominated by Indigenous peoples who have fascinating histories that long-predate the origins of Canada itself. We ought to celebrate these histories. And this shouldn't mean just pretending that pre-contact Indigenous peoples were benign environmental-loving hippies. We should tell the more accurate and much more fascinating stories of conflict and war and struggle.

From the time of New France up to the 1960s, most Canadians could trace their ancestors back to two places — France and the British Isles. This is just a fact of history and demography. We don't need to apologize for it. We were an overwhelmingly white western European colony. We shouldn't expect our historical figures for much of our history to represent the diversity of multicultural Canada in 2025. They didn't, and they don't.

We could instead celebrate the amazing fact of Canadian governments in the 1960s — first under Diefenbaker and then under Lester Pearson — which moved to remove racism from our immigration system. This was an astounding decision. Most groups, for almost all of human history, have wanted homogeneity — to insist on sameness. It's not odd that Canada was similar before the 1960s, but it is quite amazing that Canada changed its tune. A build-it-up national cultural policy would celebrate this fact, and the Canadians who came before. It doesn't have to be one or the other. Our heritage should be about building up and adding on, not deleting.

Finally, a more mature approach to diversity would acknowledge that Canadians are sophisticated and not bigoted. They don't have to share the same identity characteristics of our heroes to appreciate Canadian history. That kind of racial in-group thinking is a barrier to true national belonging. You don't have to be Black to admire Viola Desmond. You certainly don't need to be white or German-Canadian to be proud of Diefenbaker's "One Canada vision" and his championing of a Bill of Rights.

Who will offer this proud Canadian vision? Which party will turn its back on the subtraction-heritage distraction of the last decade?

The way ahead ought to be clear: a vision of the country where pride and dignity comes first; a proud pluralism that allows every Canadian group to have its heroes and its stories; and a mature approach to diversity that assumes a resilient Canadian population, one that sees and celebrates our differences over time, and assumes that any Canadian, regardless of their background or when their ancestors arrived here, can share in the

story.

National Post

From: [Brendan Wycks](#)
To: [Kaitlin Bos](#)
Subject: Ontario town at crossroads over future of John A. Macdonald statue
Date: March 26, 2025 12:13:26 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open any attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Ms. Bos:

Given that my correspondence below was previously communicated to the members of the Wilmot Township Council on March 12/25, I hereby request that you add his Correspondence to the Public Record.

Thank you,

[REDACTED]

From: Brendan <[REDACTED]>
To: Natasha <natasha.salonon@wilmot.ca>
Cc: Harold <harold.okrafka@Wilmot.ca>; Lillianne <lillianne.dunstall@wilmot.ca>; Jennifer <jennifer.smith@wilmot.ca>; Greg <greg.clark@wilmot.ca>; Stewart <stewart.cressman@wilmot.ca>; Jeff <jeff.molenhuis@wilmot.ca>; Harvir <harvir.sidhu@wilmot.ca>; Kris <kris.wilkinson@wilmot.ca>; pmp <pmp@wilmot.ca>; carly.pettinger <carly.pettinger@wilmot.ca>; steven.martin <steven.martin@wilmot.ca>
Date: Wednesday, 12 March 2025 12:29 AM EDT
Subject: Ontario town at crossroads over future of John A. Macdonald statue

Wilmot Township Elected Representatives and Senior Staff:

For your information and consideration, please see below.

Brendan Wycks

[REDACTED]

Ontario town at crossroads over future of John A. Macdonald statue

<https://nationalpost.com/news/ontario-town-at-crossroads-over-future-of-john-a-macdonald-statue>

Wilmot could become one of the first municipalities to propose re-erecting a statue of Macdonald after many were vandalized and torn down across Canada

Author of the article:

[Ari David Blaff](#)

Published Mar 11, 2025 • Last updated 17 hours ago • 5 minute read

John A. Macdonald statue.

A statue of John A. Macdonald that was removed from downtown Regina park in 2021. Across Canada, various statues of the country's first prime minister have been vandalized, toppled or put in storage over the last few years. Photo by Michael Bell/Postmedia/File

An Ontario town is considering bringing a statue of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald back out of storage after it was defaced in 2020 amid a heated debate over the legacy of Canada's first prime minister.

Wilmot, a small community outside of Waterloo, Ont., has been mired in controversy since 2013 after a group of citizens offered to privately finance the construction of 22 statues of former Canadian leaders. Macdonald was the first statue constructed for the project, known as the Prime Ministers Path. It was first displayed in 2015, moved in 2016 and put into storage after it was splashed with red paint in 2020. Four years later, the town restarted consultations on the value of the project, and in April will hear recommendations about what to do with the statues of Macdonald and other prime ministers.

Wilmot could become one of the first municipalities to propose re-erecting a statue of Macdonald after tributes to the founding father were vandalized and torn down across the country.

City council member Steven Martin said he views the conversation unfolding in Wilmot as part of a broader pattern across the country.

"When the Prime Ministers are portrayed, they can represent painful times in peoples' lives, such as the Residential Schools or even Canada turning down ships of Jewish people during World War II who then went on to their deaths," Martin told National Post in an email. "I believe that across Canada as we deal with our history and rename streets, buildings and other locations, in order to not glorify painful events, then we are dealing with issues in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission."

The Macdonald statue was briefly displayed on the Waterloo campus of Wilfrid Laurier University in 2015. [However, a petition](#) created by a Laurier professor accused the Canadian founding father of playing a central role in the residential school system, eventually leading the school to remove the monument.

"It is politically and culturally insensitive (if not offensive) to celebrate and memorialize all Canadian Prime Ministers in the form of bronze statues on land that traditionally belongs to the Neutral, Anishnawbe and Haudenosaunee peoples," Jonathan Finn wrote in his [online petition](#) that received over 1,000 signatures.

In 2016, Wilmot's city council re-located the statue to Castle Kilbride, a Victorian home built by an industrialist in neighbouring Baden, where it was joined by sculptures of former prime ministers Robert Borden, Mackenzie King, Lester B. Pearson and Kim Campbell over the next two years.

The murder of George Floyd in May 2020, and the subsequent summer riots that rocked America, charged debates in Canada about the country's founding fathers and historic treatment of Indigenous people. In June 2020, the Macdonald statue in Baden was [graffitied with red paint](#), one of a string of vandalisms that targeted Macdonald monuments at the time.

Macdonald became a [focal point](#) of anger for many protesters who characterized the former prime minister as having played a central role in discriminatory policies against Indigenous people.

Historian Patrice Dutil [rejects such depictions](#) of Macdonald as ahistorical and an example of Canadians judging historical figures according to modern views and attitudes. "Compared to how his contemporaries treated Indigenous people, Chinese workers and the Métis, Macdonald's actions were relatively progressive, and it is high time this be recognized," the senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute

wrote in 2023 in response to the removal of a statue in Montreal.

When Wilmot [restarted its project](#) in 2024, it hired Land Use Research Associated Inc. (LURA) as consultants to facilitate community conversations — including “tea circles” — with the public to gauge interest. Last Wednesday, it held a meeting with residents to reveal some of the proposals the working group had assembled to deal with the statues and their future in the community.

The meeting included several potential recommendations, including educational signage beside the statues and even leaving red paint on the Macdonald statue. It was the first time community members could see the proposals before the final recommendations are expected to be introduced at a council meeting in April.

“I think the impression I had,” Councilmen Stewart Cressman told National Post last Thursday, “is it’s a very complex issue.” Cressman said his general impression of community feedback was that residents “didn’t want to see the township spending any more money on the Prime Minister’s Path; it would have to be funded privately.”

“The educational piece,” he continued, referring to the creation of plaques beside the statues, “would likely continue to evolve, and there would be many iterations, and likely anything that would be in, or the potential for things to be included in that, would cause controversy.”

Martin echoed Cressman’s belief that Wilmot residents were increasingly weary of the project’s mounting expenses. Between 2020 and 2024, the project [cost the township](#) over \$150,000, including over \$10,000 in legal expenses as well as nearly \$60,000 in storage and statue removal costs. Roughly a quarter of expenditures was covered by a federal grant.

Wilmot initially paused the installation of statues following the defacement of Macdonald’s statue in 2020 and commissioned a group to conduct a public engagement study polling the community. That report, published the following year, [recognized “the unbalanced historical representation](#) within the Prime Ministers Path project” and approved the removal of all “existing statues related to the Prime Ministers Path and to discontinue any future expansion or investment in the Prime Ministers Path as it exists today.” It also encouraged the township to form a diverse “working group ... to discuss, develop and suggest plans for the implementation of next steps centred in community cohesion and healing.”

Condemnation of historical Canadian figures accelerated in the wake of media reports in May 2021 that unmarked graves bearing the remains of 215 children were found at a former residential school in British Columbia, although no remains were ever unearthed.

In Charlottetown, the city council unanimously approved the removal of its Macdonald statue despite consultations with local First Nations groups who preferred the inclusion of an Indigenous statue nearby and signage explaining the former prime minister’s role in the residential school system. The following month, demonstrators ripped down a Macdonald statue in Kingston, the founding father’s former hometown. Later that summer, activists [destroyed his statue](#) in Hamilton.

Denise Soueidan-O’Leary, a program manager with LURA, wrote the Post commending Wilmot for its commitment to “meaningful conversations, truth and reconciliation, and the potential for collective healing,” noting the town served as a model “reminder that as Canadians, we resolve issues through dialogue, not division. We work toward collaborative solutions, not brute-force victories.”

From: [Brendan Wycks](#)
To: [Ka Ho Bos](#)
Subject: Before he died, one of the founders of the Prime Ministers statue project wrote me a letter. Here's what it says
Date: March 26, 2025 12:16:24 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open any attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Ms. Bos:

Given that my correspondence below was previously communicated to the members of the Wilmot Township Council on January 22/25, I hereby request that you add this Correspondence to the Public Record.

Thank you,

[REDACTED]

From Brendan <[REDACTED]>
To Natasha <natasha.salonen@wilmot.ca>
Cc Harold <harold.okrafka@Wilmot.ca>; Lillianne <lillianne.dunstall@wilmot.ca>; Jennifer <jennifer.smith@wilmot.ca>; Greg <greg.clark@wilmot.ca>; Stewart <stewart.cressman@wilmot.ca>; Jeff <jeff.molenhuis@wilmot.ca>; Harvir <harvir.sidhu@wilmot.ca>; Kris <kris.wilkinson@wilmot.ca>; pmp <pmp@wilmot.ca>; carly.pettinger <carly.pettinger@wilmot.ca>; steven.martin <steven.martin@wilmot.ca>
Date Wednesday, 22 January 2025 1:43 PM EST
Subject Before he died, one of the founders of the Prime Ministers statue project wrote me a letter. Here's what it says

Wilmot Township Elected Representatives and Senior Staff

For your information and consideration, please see below.

Brendan Wycks

[REDACTED]

Before he died, one of the founders of the Prime Ministers statue project wrote me a letter. Here's what it says

https://www.newhamburgindependent.ca/opinion/columnists/before-he-died-one-of-the-founders-of-the-prime-ministers-statue-project-wrote-me/article_41e0d563-73b4-50ef-ba90-9dbfac951b71.html?source=newsletter&utm_content=a02&utm_source=ml_nl&utm_medium=email&utm_email=7AF7A90431AF70E2802DD8C2679207A5&utm_campaign=hihl_14527&utm_term=latest

Jim Rodger, co-founder of the Prime Ministers Path project, pointed to rich learning opportunities that were being planned as part of the project. These should be considered as Wilmot once again wrestles with the issue, Luisa D'Amato writes.

[Luisa D'Amato](#)



By [Luisa D'Amato](#) Waterloo Region Record
Wednesday, January 22, 2025

Jim Rodger stands with the statue of John A. Macdonald next to Castle Kilbride in Baden. Rodger died from pancreatic cancer in May 2024 before the Prime Ministers Path could be completed.

Before Jim Rodger died, he wrote me a letter.

He didn't have time to finish it before pancreatic cancer took him in May 2024.

His widow, Alison, shared the letter with me this week. With her permission, I'm sharing parts of it with you.

[Rodger](#) was a retired high school principal, an art lover, and a founder of the Prime Ministers Path project, which aimed to create statues of all Canada's prime ministers as a focal point for research and discussion.

At first, the project was warmly welcomed by Wilmot Township. The first five statues were installed at the grounds of Castle Kilbride in Baden.

More than \$700,000 was raised for the project, mostly from Wilmot donors. There were hopes the project would become a tourist and educational destination.

But during the pandemic, and rising public anger with Canada's history of poor treatment of Indigenous people, fierce opposition developed.

Red paint was thrown several times over the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, the architect of Canada's residential school system, which traumatized generations of Indigenous people.

After a divisive and painful public discussion, township council voted in 2021 to [remove all the statues and place them in storage](#).

Now, a completely new group of elected officials represent Wilmot. And they're trying again to [find a meaningful way forward](#).

Rodger's letter shows how that could happen, by pointing to richer learning opportunities with the project than have been previously understood.

"Wilmot Township certainly has a way to make life interesting!" he said at the beginning.

"I thought this might be an appropriate time to pass along some personal thoughts pertaining to me and Wilmot Township. It is very much a potpourri and may be of little value but I felt a need to do this.

"I have recently been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and unfortunately my treatment will only be palliative. As part of tidying up and resolving issues in my mind I wanted to relate some of my observations to a credible journalist while I have the strength and acuity."

Rodger went on to say that he'd seen a "resurgence in interest" for the Prime Ministers Path.

He reminded me the township owns the likenesses of nine prime ministers, four of which have never been seen by anyone except the artist who created them.

In addition to the five statues that had been displayed and removed (Macdonald, Sir Robert Borden, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Lester Pearson, and Kim Campbell), a bronze sculptural tableau had also been commissioned, featuring the images of the "forgotten four" — Sir John Abbott, Sir John Thompson, Sir Mackenzie Bowell and Sir Charles Tupper, who led Canada between 1891 and 1896.

British Columbia artist Nathan Scott "worked feverishly" to finish the tableau on time, and sent the crates to Castle Kilbride. But the COVID-19 pandemic made the scheduled unveiling of the statues impossible.

"When the project was suspended by council, the unopened crates went into storage with the other five sculptures. Beyond Nathan Scott, these finished bronzes have never been viewed by anyone else," Rodger wrote.

He also said that John English, University of Waterloo distinguished professor emeritus of history and a former Kitchener MP, was "an ardent supporter of the project since its inception."

In January 2019, English co-ordinated a meeting at University of Toronto with project leaders and a panel of academics from across Canada.

"The mutual goal was to establish a prime ministers resource centre in Wilmot Township and possibly, but at that time, yet to be explored affiliation with a local university."

Rodger said the inaugural project for the resource centre was to have been an annual symposium on Canada's prime ministers. The first meeting was to have happened at the same time as the unveiling of the "Forgotten Four." It would have offered "lectures and presentations with streams for academics, local historians and the public. Indigenous issues were to be one focus."

Rodger said a benefactor was interested in supporting the project, including a physical redesign of the grounds.

Design work had already begun, and "envisioned an Indigenous herbal/medicinal garden which a local ecumenical organization wished to administer and co-ordinate," Rodger wrote.

"An open air amphitheatre suitable for activities and performances and a modest four season interpretative centre were also to be included."

That's where the letter stops.

Although unfinished, it is very clear that the statues, if returned, come with an enormous opportunity for teaching history.

Dave Caputo, who co-founded the project with Rodger but no longer has a leadership role, told me that he and Rodger both saw the throwing of red paint over Macdonald's statue as "part of the journey" for that artwork.

"Peaceful protest should be, absolutely, part of the Prime Ministers Path," Caputo said.

He said Rodger had insisted the statues all be life-sized and not mounted on pedestals. They were to be at eye level with the observer, so that the good, the bad and the ugly could all be considered.

I find myself incredibly moved that at the end of his life, battling a dreadful disease, Rodger found the time and energy to express the wider public interest embedded in this project.

Statues of leaders aren't history. But in the right hands, they can spark an understanding of history. Something we badly need.

Luisa D Amato is a Waterloo Region Record columnist. Reach her by email at ldamato@therecord.com

From: [Brendan Wycks](#)
To: [Kaitlin Bos](#)
Subject: It's time to bring John A. Macdonald out of his confinement
Date: March 26, 2025 12:22:07 AM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open any attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Ms. Bos:


Given that my correspondence below was previously communicated to the members of the Wilmot Township Council on or about August 10/24, I hereby request that you add this Correspondence to the Public Record.

Thank you,

Brendan Wycks


Wilmot Township Elected Representatives and Senior Staff:

For your information and consideration, please see below.

Brendan Wycks


<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/toronto/article-its-time-to-bring-john-a-macdonald-out-of-his-confinement/>

It's time to bring John A. Macdonald out of his confinement



[Marcus Gee](#)

Toronto

Published August 9, 2024

For Subscribers

[Open this photo in gallery:](#)



Boards encase a statue of Canada's first prime minister, John A. Macdonald, at the base of the lawn of Queen's Park in Toronto on June 21. Cole Burston/The Globe and Mail

What kind of country keeps its founder in a box?

At Queen's Park, the seat of Ontario's government in Toronto, a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald, a father of Confederation and Canada's first prime minister, stands boarded up on all sides, hidden from the public.

The boards went up after [protesters vandalized the statue](#), blaming Macdonald for the establishment of the residential school system for Indigenous children. They have remained there for the past four years – so long that rodents began using the box as a home.

A legislative committee is finally debating what to do with the statue, but what its decision will be or when it will come is unclear. In the meantime, the box bears a cryptic message: "Though we cannot change the history we have inherited, we can shape the history we wish to leave behind." No mention at all is made of the man who stands inside. He has been rendered a non-person, his name unmentionable.

Absurd. Winston Churchill said some awful things about Indian nationalism and Mahatma Gandhi, whom he called a "malignant subversive fanatic," but his statue still stands proudly in London's Parliament Square. Another version stands outside [Toronto's](#) City Hall, an acknowledgment of his heroic leadership in the fight against fascism in the Second World War.

George Washington's estate at Mount Vernon was populated by more than 300 enslaved people at the time of his death, yet the Washington monument still looms over the U.S. capital. Napoleon Bonaparte unleashed years of war in Europe, bringing much of the continent under his heel until his final defeat at Waterloo. Today tourists can visit his grandiose tomb in Paris.

Self-respecting countries remember their great historical figures, recognizing their virtues while conceding their sins. In the past several years, all of the emphasis has been on the sins. Egerton Ryerson has his statue toppled and his name erased from what is now Toronto Metropolitan University. His critics said his ideas laid the groundwork for the residential schools, though he spoke Ojibway and supported the land claims of the Mississaugas of the Credit. All but eclipsed in the controversy was his role in establishing [Ontario's](#) public-school system.

Henry Dundas is [having his name removed](#) from Toronto's Yonge-Dundas Square, which is being rechristened Sankofa Square after a word, taken from the Akan Tribe of Ghana, that suggests the value of reflecting on the past. His defenders say that the charge against him – helping to delay the abolition of the slave trade – is false. In fact, they insist, he was a determined abolitionist who once defended an escaped slave before the courts.

If it's wrong to lionize our national champions, glossing over their failures and their crimes, it is equally wrong to villainize them. Most of them are neither complete heroes nor utter rogues. A true understanding of history demands we view them in the round, considering all their human complexity.

John A. Macdonald expressed some vile – and, sadly widespread – opinions about Indigenous peoples. He had many other flaws and made many mistakes in his long tenure as Canada's dominant political leader. But as one of his leading biographers, Richard Gwyn, argued, all of this must be set against his accomplishments, among them the creation of the transcontinental railway and the North-West Mounted Police. Before he died, said Mr. Gwyn, Macdonald made sure that "Canada had outpaced the challenge of survival and had begun to take the shape of a true country."

Here is how the Canadian Encyclopedia summarizes him: "Macdonald helped unite the British North American colonies in Confederation and was a key figure in the writing of the British North America Act – the foundation of Canada's Constitution. He oversaw the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and the addition of Manitoba, the North-West Territories, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island to Confederation. However, his legacy also includes the creation of the residential school system for Indigenous children, the policies that contributed to the starvation of Plains Indigenous peoples, and the 'head tax' on Chinese immigrants."

The past few years have seen an overdue reckoning with the tremendous and lasting harms done to [Indigenous peoples](#) during European colonization. But there are other remedies than erasing names and pulling down statues. One is to raise memorials to the victims of those times. Mount Vernon has a slave memorial close to the tombs of George and Martha Washington. Another is to explain and educate. A few years ago the foundation that runs Thomas Jefferson's plantation at Monticello, Va., unveiled a series of nuanced exhibits about Sally Hemings, the enslaved woman who bore several children by the man who drafted the U.S. Declaration of Independence.

Instead of hiding Macdonald away, why not install a display at Queen's Park about residential schools and his role in their story? Putting the statue of our first prime minister in a wooden box achieves nothing and satisfies no one. It is time to bring Sir John A. into the light.

From: [Brendan Wycks](#)
To: [Natasha Salonen](#)
Cc: [Harold O'Krafka](#); [Lillianne Dunstall](#); [Jennifer Bouzane](#); [Greg Clark](#); [Stewart Cressman](#); [Jeff Molenhuis](#); [Harvir Sidhu](#); [Kris Wilkinson](#); [Prime Ministers Path](#); [Carly Pettinger](#); [Steven Martin](#); [Kaitlin Bos](#); [Clerks](#)
Subject: Nigel Biggar: Residential schools were no "atrocities." Just look at the evidence
Date: April 2, 2025 11:23:18 PM

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open any attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Wilmot Township Elected Representatives and Senior Staff:

For your information and consideration, the article below is relevant to the Township's current deliberations around the future of the Prime Ministers Path.

By way of this same communication, I hereby request that the Township's Municipal Clerk add this Correspondence to the Public Record.

Brendan Wycks



Nigel Biggar: Residential schools were no 'atrocities.' Just look at the evidence

Too many people know full well that the data is being misrepresented and yet have failed to offer any correction

Author of the article:

[Special to National Post](#)

Published Apr 02, 2025 • Last updated 16 hours ago • 9 minute read

When in February, Dallas Brodie, a British Columbia MLA, declared on X that the number of burials of missing children confirmed at the Kamloops Indian Residential School was "zero," her fellow Conservative, Á'a:liya Warbus, condemned her for "questioning the narratives of people who lived and survived ... atrocities." And the president of the Métis Nation of

B.C., Walter Mineault, responded that the residential school experiences were “not objective truths for Métis people,” but their “lived experiences.”

Well, no experience is raw; it’s always interpreted. And interpretations are based on perceptions that can be mistaken or distorted. To claim that only white people can misremember and fabricate would be racist. Racial equality requires, therefore, that we test Indigenous claims of “lived experience” against objective evidence, to find out if they’re true. Because they might not be.

So, what is the evidence about Canada’s residential schools?

On Kamloops, Brodie was quite correct: no graves of missing children have been discovered, because no disinterment has been attempted almost four years after the claim was first made. What [we do know](#) is that the alleged “mass grave” may be the site of a century-old septic system, whose trenches lined with clay tiles may match the direction and depth of the suspect “sub-surface anomalies” identified by ground-penetrating radar in 2021. There is no concrete evidence of hidden graves — either in Kamloops or anywhere else in Canada.

More generally, is it true that the residential schools were forced on Indigenous people? For most of their history, no. The residential school idea had the support of some Indigenous leaders, who recognized the need of kids in remote areas to adapt to the new world that had unavoidably come upon them, by learning English and agriculture. As late as the 1920s, Indigenous bands in Alberta and in the Northwest Territories were lobbying for more such schools. Parents had to apply in writing for their children to attend, since boarding was over three times more expensive than day school. And 50 per cent of Indigenous kids left both day and residential schools after Grade 1. In short, admission was only at parental request and exit was at will.

It is true that in 1920, the authorities acquired the legal power to compel attendance, but that’s only because all Canadian kids, regardless of ethnicity, were required to go to school. And that coercive power was used sparingly. However, by the 1940s, the residential schools had changed their main function from being educational institutions to being care homes for native children who had been removed from abusive, dysfunctional or simply overcrowded homes for the sake of their own welfare — sometimes with parental consent, sometimes without it. That must be the period to which most contemporary testimony refers. In which case, how far memories of childhood unhappiness are due to oppressive schools, and how much to disturbed homes, must surely be a moot point.

The widespread condemnation of the residential school system, however, is not confined to its last half-century. It’s commonly believed that, out of a total of an estimated 150,000 pupils between 1883 (when the federal

government started to fund residential education) and 1997 (when the last residential school closed), over 4,000 died because of culpable neglect, abuse or murder. Where does that figure come from?

Its basis is the number of deaths given in the 2015 final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC): 3,201. Yet the report actually identifies only 423 named children who died on the premises of residential schools. And it admits that some, at least, of a further 409 unnamed kids may be duplicates of them. It also admits that in 1,391 cases (43.5 per cent), the location of death is unknown, yet it assumes that all the former pupils who died within one year of leaving did so because of poor conditions in their schools.

However, records reveal that some of them died because of accidents suffered, or tuberculosis contracted, on their home reserves. Many Aboriginal children arrived at the residential schools already infected with TB, because of poor living conditions at home. Even now, Indigenous communities in remote areas suffer an extraordinarily high incidence of it: among Canadian-born, non-Indigenous people, the current rate is 0.4 per 100,000, while among First Nations it is 18.5, and among the Inuit, 204.2. To what extent the schools inadvertently exacerbated the problem through overcrowding and poor ventilation, before reforms were made in response to Peter Bryce's reports in 1907 and 1909, is impossible to determine.

The TRC's figure of 3,201 was inflated to 4,117 in June 2021 by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba, which claimed that the deaths had been caused by malnourishment and disease in the schools and amounted to "atrocities." Yet, again, that figure includes pupils who died up to a year after leaving a residential school, no matter what the cause of death. At least one was murdered months after his departure at the age of 19. What's more, it also includes the names of any pupil whose family simply wanted their attendance memorialized, including one who died at the ripe old age of 85.

So, how many inmates of the schools died on the premises? Assuming no duplication of the named and unnamed recorded deaths, the only firm figure is 832, or 0.55 per cent of the total of 150,000 pupils. (The death rate for non-Indigenous children throughout Canada in the 1880s was 2.5 per cent.) How many Indigenous kids subsequently died because of poor conditions in the schools? We don't know. But we do know that many of them died from other causes, or would have died from TB anyway. The claim that over 3,000 pupils were deliberately killed or died through culpable neglect — and that their deaths amount to an "atrocities" — is patently false, lacking any evidential basis whatsoever.

Yes, there is evidence of some sexual abuse of minors by adults at the

residential schools. While lamentable, however, such misconduct is not confined to history. It happens now, and it will happen tomorrow. Sin can be contained; it can't be abolished — not even in Canada. As for the scale of the abuse, again, we don't know. J.R. Miller, whose measured 1996 book, "Shingwauk's Vision," is the standard history of the residential schools, notes it is impossible to know the true scope of the abuse and at least some of it occurred between pupils.

OK, but what about the "racist" repression of native languages? One of the main aims of the schools was to have Indigenous kids learn English, so that they could participate fully in the new Anglicized society that was enveloping them, and we all know that the most efficient way to acquire a new language is to be totally immersed in it. That said, there do appear to have been cases where the prohibition of native language-speaking was excessive. Yet, we also know that there were schools where teachers themselves took the trouble to learn native languages and permitted pupils to speak them outside of the classroom. The record falls a long, long way short of systematic "cultural genocide."

Finally, there is the charge of inadequate funding — but if anyone was to blame for that, they resided in Ottawa, not in the schools themselves. J.R. Miller, for one, is scathing about tight-fisted government bureaucrats. Yet elected governments and civil servants are more sensitive than academics to the fact that public funds and borrowing-capacity are not infinite, and that more money spent in one direction may well mean less spent in another. Moreover, we do need to remember that governments in the past had nothing like the resources they do now. For example, today in the United Kingdom, the government has the equivalent of almost 45 per cent of GDP at its disposal; in the early 1900s, it had only eight per cent. In the 1870s, the United States government spent more on fighting frontier wars in the Wild West than the whole of the Ottawa budget. Nonetheless, in 1884, John A. Macdonald's government spent more on Indian Affairs than it did on defence. Was Ottawa unreasonably stingy in its expenditure on residential schools because of racist prejudice? Not obviously.

So, when all is said and done, what do we know about Canada's residential schools? We know that conditions were invariably poor by our standards, but so they were everywhere in the late 19th and early 20th centuries — and they were often worse in the homes from which Indigenous pupils came. We know that the crowding of diseased children together and the lack of ventilation probably, although inadvertently, increased the spread of TB, until reforms were made. We know that some repression of native languages was unreasonably strict and some sexual abuse of minors by adults took place. And we know that the compulsory removal of kids from dysfunctional families was distressing, notwithstanding the benevolent intention. There is, however, no firm evidence that Indigenous kids died in the schools in excessive numbers

from culpable negligence. And there is no evidence at all of mass murder.

And yet, in what amounts to a national scandal, the “atrocities” tale prevails. Why? One reason is that positive witness from former pupils has been suppressed, while negative testimony has been solicited. Miller observes that, even back in the 1990s, a sensation-seeking media had an appetite only for stories of abuse. And while the body of the TRC’s 2015 report contains a lot of positive testimony, its summary volume permits it only a brief appearance, before dismissing it with the observation that “survivors” found it distressing to hear. This imbalance of testimony has surely been exacerbated by the subsequent compensation system that offered significant sums of money to any former pupil claiming to have suffered abuse, without subjecting the claims to much or any kind of testing.

Beyond that, blame for the tyranny of a false public orthodoxy about the residential schools rests with representatives of the TRC and academics, who know full well that the data is being misrepresented and yet have failed to offer any correction. It lies with journalists and editors who have declined to ask questions. It lies with politicians who have tied their careers to the mendacious narrative. And, most of all, it lies with those who have — shockingly — persecuted skeptics and critics to the point of destroying their reputations and careers, even (like NDP MP Leah Gazan) pressing for the totalitarian criminalization of “denialism.”

Nonetheless, the truth is wrestling its way inexorably to the surface. The past four years have seen three books appear, each of which dismantles the “atrocities” fabrication: Rodney Clifton and Mark DeWolf’s “From Truth Comes Reconciliation” (2021), Chris Champion and Tom Flanagan’s “Grave Error” (2023) and my own, “Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning” (2023).

And last month, the plight of silenced dissidents in Canada received a major uplift with the launch of the country’s own Free Speech Union (FSU). In the U.K., in just over 60 months, the original FSU has attracted over 25,000 subscribing members, has proven very effective in publicly exposing and fighting cases of free speech repression and is now sufficiently bold and well-resourced to take the U.K. government itself to court.

The time is coming in Canada when the Warbuses, Mineaults and Gazans — and not the Brodies — will find themselves called to account. It can’t come soon enough.

National Post

Nigel Biggar is Lord Biggar of Castle Douglas, chairman of the Free Speech Union (U.K.) and author of “Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning.”