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Sent: June 5, 2025 12:35 PM

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Subject: A proud country cannot keep its first prime minister in a box

Wilmot Township Elected Representatives and Senior Staff:

For your information and consideration, The Globe and Mail Opinion column below, published May 29/25, 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

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Opinion

A proud country cannot keep its first prime minister in a box



[Robyn Urback](#)

Published May 29, 2025

For Subscribers

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A statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in Toronto, which has been encased since it was vandalized in 2020, will be unveiled again this summer. Cole Burston/The Globe and Mail

Sir John A. Macdonald has been in a box, literally and figuratively, for years.

A statue of Canada's first prime minister on the lawn of the Ontario legislature was encased with hoarding after it was vandalized in 2020, and it has remained like that for the past five years. Everyone knew what was in the box but we pretended not to see it: the same type of fiction we abet when a child playing hide-and-seek believes that he disappears when he covers his own eyes. It was a timorous half-measure by those clearly wary of running afoul of one group or another, and so we boxed up our history and left it there, assuming that the hoarding would be less ugly than the public's reaction to an actual decision.

This week, however, a decision was finally made: the Macdonald statue will be unveiled again this summer, because, as Speaker Donna Skelly said, "We cannot run away from our history." The statue will be [accompanied by a sign](#) that tells observers that while "we

cannot change the history we have inherited, we can shape the history we wish to leave behind.”

Statues of Macdonald became a target for protesters in Canada around the time of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in the U.S., when issues of racial inequality, discrimination, and historical and contemporary oppression were top of public mind. Macdonald was and is seen, with justification, as one of the architects of Canada’s residential school system, and thus statues of him all across Canada were [vandalized](#), [toppled](#) and [removed](#).

Reports of the discovery of potential unmarked graves at the Kamloops Residential School in British Columbia in 2021 compounded efforts to purge Canada’s institutions of tributes to former leaders: Ryerson University, for example, was rebranded because of its namesake’s 1847 report on “industrial schools” and its presumed role in the conception of residential schools. And it wasn’t just about Indigenous reconciliation; Toronto City Council began the process of renaming Dundas Street because of Henry Dundas’s support for the “gradual abolition” of slavery, rather than its immediate abolition.

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Demonstrators threw pink paint on the statue of the former prime minister at Queen's Park in July, 2020. Carlos Osorio/The Canadian Press

But this rather illiberal movement, which sought to erase the legacies of former leaders rather than discuss or deconstruct them, was never going to be sustainable.

One, because it was hopelessly disjointed; while Ryerson University has since been renamed, Wilfrid Laurier University – named for a prime minister who oversaw terribly racist immigration policies – has kept its branding.

Two, because the number of people who genuinely believed that the way to deal with complicated legacies was to tear down statues always seemed to be much smaller than those who simply feared what they would be called if they pushed back.

Three: because social climates change, and the one we're in now appears to be less amenable to largely performative actions done in the name of equity and inclusion.

And four, and perhaps most importantly: a country cannot run away from its history, disparage its present, and yet still maintain a sense of national pride. Indeed, there appears to be newfound recognition that we must find a way to grapple with our past, rather than simply boxing it up and pretending it isn't there.

The actions and rhetoric from U.S. President Donald Trump have, ironically, helped Canada to get here. Indeed, threats about making Canada the 51st state have reignited our pride in country and, with it, an appreciation of our traditions, our origins, and our past. We saw that in perhaps its most ostentatious form with King Charles [delivering the Throne Speech](#) this past week, which was a powerful demonstration of our sovereignty as a constitutional monarchy. At the same time, King Charles made reference to Canada's commitment to reconciliation and prosperity for Indigenous people, in effect marrying the symbols and institutions of our past with the promises for our future.

It's easy to imagine, in another world where Mr. Trump *hadn't* repeatedly threatened to make Canada the 51st state, King Charles's arrival would have been met with much more public protest about the monarchy's colonial past. In fact, he likely wouldn't have been invited to deliver the Throne Speech at all. It is a good thing, however, that the national pride that Mr. Trump has inadvertently provoked is moving us away from a reactionary impulse to shed our past, and toward a more reasoned attitude that involves wrestling with the complicated legacies that made Canada what it is today.

In the case of John A. Macdonald, that might be as straightforward as putting a sign beside a statue. It's taken five years, but finally we've realized that a proud country does not put its first prime minister in a box.