

**To: Regina City Council**

**Re: Written Submission Regarding John A MacDonald Statue**

**Date: March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Madam Mayor and Councillors,

Please accept the following written submission concerning the John A MacDonald statue in Victoria Park. As an Indigenous Studies instructor at the University of Regina, a long-time resident of oskana-ka-asasteki (Regina) and an Indigenous person of this territory, I have spent much time pondering the presence of the statue in question. I would first like to explain why some of the possible solutions presented are problematic and subsequently present my own idea as to what should be done with the statue.

Many believe the statue should remain in the park and that an information plaque should be added to explain MacDonald's role in the destruction of Indigenous societies and the imposition of genocidal policies on Metis and First Nations peoples. Oral history and academic scholarship has long established the role MacDonald played in disrupting traditional practices through racist policies such as:

- The building of the national railway which disrupted the migration patterns of the bison (which most Plains cultures had built entire economic and social systems around) which brought settlers to the plains disrupting land usage patterns which had existed for thousands of years
- The imposition of residential schools, the reserve system and pass/permit system which broke up Indigenous communities and prevented First Nations people from living lives of dignity and independence
- The withholding of seed, implements and rations to those Indigenous groups accused of participating in the Northwest Resistance
- The 15 year long persecution of Louis Riel and his people for their role in creating Manitoba
- The unfair and illegal trial of Louis Riel which MacDonald insisted be held in a territory rather than the province of Manitoba which would have secured Riel a fair trial
- The implementation of the Metis scrip system which decimated a Metis land base and dispersed Metis people and communities

Adding an information plaque to the statue (regardless of who contributes to the information) does not diminish the role MacDonald played in these acts of genocide, nor does it ameliorate the trauma that Indigenous Peoples must endure every time they walk passed the statue in a prominent area of downtown Regina that is hard to avoid.

Some observers have noted that the statue is an invitation to have difficult discussions about the colonialist legacy of MacDonald. For Canadians, there is no more ubiquitous name than MacDonald's. It is on currency, buildings, and roads. It is in textbooks, curricula, and indeed our national consciousness and is not in danger of being forgotten if we remove one statue. For Indigenous Peoples, the stories of trauma and genocide related to MacDonald are embedded in our oral histories. Moreover, they are present in any number of social conditions our communities experience such as poverty, marginalization and cultural loss which are a direct consequence of MacDonald's legacy. We live, breathe and navigate MacDonald's legacies daily and do not require a statue to remember them or to have these difficult conversations with settler Canadians. The benefit of having the statue remain with added information does not outweigh the harm of traumatization. One of the main functions of a city is to protect its citizens (as is evidenced by the City of Regina's steadily increasing police budget). The City of Regina has a fundamental obligation to prevent harm to its Indigenous citizens by not prominently displaying a figure which causes such harm and discomfort.

As a city and as a society we have made great strides in hearing and understanding Metis and First Nations perspectives. However, we have come to this place, largely through the work of Indigenous Peoples themselves. It should not continually be the responsibility of Indigenous Peoples to bear the brunt of teaching, explaining, and sharing the true history of Canada which at its heart is the story of one people coming to possess the territory, resources and livelihoods of another. We live in an era of reconciliation where it is incumbent upon settler Canadians and governments to make brave and moral decisions that demonstrate a real willingness to listen to and work with Indigenous Peoples to create a better society for all.

The statue needs to be removed. No plaque, no added information or landscaping will make it any less traumatic for Metis and First Nations citizens. A brave and moral decision would be for the City to work with the RCMP Heritage Center to move the statue to that site. Doing so accomplishes several goals:

- The statue remains intact but is moved to a spot where people can choose to see it rather than being forced to experience this act of ongoing colonial violence as they pass through a prominent section of downtown Regina
- It allows for a space to be created (in the existing spot) where a plaque could be added to explain what once stood there and why it was removed. Additional information could be added explaining the Indigenous histories of this particular territory. (eg. Buffalo hunting grounds, Riel history, etc.)
- It removes the burden placed on Indigenous Peoples to constantly explain their resistance to the statue. In doing so, it creates an invitation to the RCMP to examine, explain and teach about their role in upholding the genocidal policies of John A MacDonald

I want to thank the City of Regina for engaging in a consultative process. Although many municipalities have already removed their John A MacDonald statues, I am encouraged by the thoughtful engagement used during this process. As a teacher of history and someone who has travelled Canada extensively, I have long bemoaned the absence of Indigenous culture and symbols in Regina that feature prominently in other cities such as Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Vancouver. I look forward to an era of Indigenous inclusion in Regina where citizens can be reminded of our contributions and histories around every turn. I was part of a group of Metis citizens in 2010 who advocated for the permanent inclusion of the Metis flag at City Hall, which made Regina the first city in Canada to do so, made even more remarkable by the fact that this was the city in which Louis Riel was executed. I was so proud to be a member of the Metis community and a citizen of Regina on that day. Today, instead of discussing an inclusion of an important symbol, we are discussing the removal of one and I will be equally as proud of the City (as I was on the day of our flag raising) when and if they make the right decision to remove this harmful and constant reminder of legislated racism and genocide against Indigenous Peoples.

Respectfully Submitted,

Russell Fayant, M.Ed