THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

11 March 2024

515 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2E9
e.millions@uwinnipeg.ca
(204-918-4435)

Dear Members of the Executive Policy Committee:

This letter is in support of, and to provide additional context for, the recommendation of the **Committee of Community Members (CCM) of the Welcoming Winnipeg Initiative** against the Application to rename Edison Park to Matheson Millstones Park (Report 10). We agree that the park, named after the adjacent street, which in turn was named for American inventor Thomas Edison, is a good candidate for renaming; we thank the Proponent for bringing the millstones and Edison Park to our attention. **The name Matheson Millstones Park is not an ideal name for the park for several reasons, which are outlined below. The millstones themselves, however, provide an opportunity to highlight the long histories of agriculture and food production that pre-date Winnipeg's incorporation as a city in 1873.**

The millstones at Edison Park are from the Matheson Grist Mill, built prior to 1861 by Angus Matheson. Matheson was a Selkirk Settler who arrived at Red River in 1823, along with his parents and several siblings to join his brother, John Matheson. Contrary to claims made in the Application*, the Matheson Mill itself is not particularly important to the history of milling at Red River; it was one of the water-powered mills in the Settlement in this period*. The proponent argues in the application that "the new name and new sign would help tell the historical story of North East Winnipeg that has largely been forgotten, for present and future generations." In relation to the Matheson family specifically, their contributions to Winnipeg history as Selkirk Settlers and founding members of the Lord Selkirk Settlers' Society have been well-documented in historical literature and in commemorations throughout Winnipeg, including an existing historical plaque at Edison Park (Figures 1 and 2) and Winnipeg's Matheson Avenue (named for Angus's nephew Alexander Matheson).

**What *is* historically significant about the millstones is that they represent long histories of Indigenous-led food production and agricultural developments at Red River, including in the Metis-dominated milling trade.** The Proponent is correct that the longer agricultural histories of Winnipeg, including North Kildonan, are not well-reflected in Winnipeg. However**, it is the CCM's position that naming the park after one non-Indigenous family limits the opportunities to interpret key aspects of Red River history at the park and, it could be argued, misrepresents the Metis-led history of milling at Red River**.



*Figure 1: Millstones at Edison Park, Matheson image Manitoba Historical Society*




*Figure 2: Plaque Commemorating the Grist Mill at Edison Park, image Jim Smith*

**The mandate of the Welcoming Winnipeg Initiative is to re-center Indigenous histories and perspectives in how we understand and reflect Winnipeg's past.** The Matheson family's connection to the millstones is already commemorated at the park in the existing historical plaque. **We strongly encourage EPC and Council to:**

a) **endorse our recommendation that the park *not* be renamed Matheson Millstones Park, and**
b) **direct the Indigenous Relations Division to engage in further consultation to rename Edison Park and provide interpretation that reflects a much broader and more inclusive history at Edison Park than the name 'Matheson Millstones Park' is able to convey.**

Sincerely,

Dr. Erin Millions
Assistant Professor
Department of History
University of Winnipeg

on behalf of the Committee of Community Members, Welcoming Winnipeg Initiative

Reanna Merasty, Chair
Elder Albert McLeod
Raymond Sokalski
Amanda McLeod
Dr. Mary LeMaitre
Honoure Black
Angelina Pelletier
Dr. Erin MIllions

cc: Indigenous Relations Division, City of Winnipeg