THE UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

20 March 2024

Department of History
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Dear Mayor Gillingham and Council,

I am writing on behalf of the Committee of Community Members of the Welcoming Winnipeg in support of our recommendation against renaming Edison Park to Matheson Millstones Park. I am also writing as a historian of the Indigenous histories of Red River and Winnipeg.

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 CCM's recommendation on this application is a) the park not be renamed Matheson Millstones Park, and b) that the Indigenous Relations Division engage in further consultation to rename Edison Park and provide interpretation that reflects a much broader and more inclusive history of agriculture and food production in Winnipeg.

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. However, **the name Matheson Millstones Park is not an ideal name for the park for several reasons, which are outlined below.** In particular, **the Matheson family's connection to the millstones is already commemorated at the park in the existing historical plaque (Figure 2).** We recommend that, instead, the millstones themselves provide an opportunity to highlight the long histories of agriculture and food production that pre-date Winnipeg's incorporation as a city in 1873.

On March 14, the Executive Policy Committee voted against the recommendation of the CCM on this application. **The CCM calls on Mayor and Council to** reject the EPC's decision and **demonstrate their support for the Welcoming Winnipeg mandate** to re-center Indigenous perspectives and histories in Winnipeg's municipal spaces **by endorsing the CCM's recommendation on this application**.

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 four 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, the family's 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 Matheson'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 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 Indigenous and Red River histories at the park and contravenes the Welcoming Winnipeg mandate.**

Renaming the park to Matheson Millstones Park would also **misrepresent the Metis-led history of the Red River milling trade. Mr. Jim Smith's argument** to the Executive Policy Committee on March 14th **that there were no Metis settlements in area in the period that the mill operated is inaccurate,** as demonstrated in recent historical studies **commissioned by the City of Winnipeg** and in a public presentation by historians Dr. Anne Lindsay and Dr. Mary Jane Logan McCallum to the Glenelm Neighbourhood Association in February 2023. Mr. Smith's **erasure of these histories** in his presentation to the EPC is **an example of the long-term and on-going erasure of Indigenous histories in Winnipeg that necessitated the Welcoming Winnipeg Initiative in the first place**. Endorsing the renaming of Edison Park to Matheson Millstone Park **against the recommendation of the CCM would bring into question Mayor and Council's commitment to the Welcoming Winnipeg Initiative's mandate to make Winnipeg a more welcoming space for everyone, and to reconciliation in general**.



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



Figure 2: Plaque Commemorating the Matheson Grist Mill, image Jim Smith

I request that the content of this letter be addressed by Mayor and Council during the deliberations on Report 6 on March 21st. I am unable to attend to speak in person as I will be teaching my third-year Metis History class at the University of Winnipeg.

Sincerely,

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University of Winnipeg

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

Reanna Merasty, Chair
Elder Albert McLeod
Honoure Black
Dr. Mary LeMaitre
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Raymond Sokalski
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