



710-A One Lombard Place
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0X3

March 27, 2025

To Mayor Gillingham, and City of Winnipeg Council,

Re: Supporting the Expropriation and Rezoning of Lemay Forest

The Manitoba Historical Society strongly supports that the City of Winnipeg rezone to a PR 'Park' zoning classification, the required City of Winnipeg Right-Of-Way (ROW) backing onto homes located on the north side of Lemay Avenue, abutting up and connecting to an eastern portion of the Rue Landry ROW. B. and Immediately expropriate all of the privately held lands known as the Lemay Forest, which includes forested lands, newly unforested lands, and open lands, that constitute the privately-owned land, popularly referred to as the Lemay Forest lands or property, to create a new City of Winnipeg Regional Park.

The Lemay Forest and Asile Ritchot Cemetery located in the Lemay Forest is a natural heritage and cultural heritage site of massive significance. The Asile Ritchot was an orphanage and home for unwed mothers run by a Catholic order, the Sisters of Misericordia, in St. Norbert from 1904 to 1948. Children, unwed mothers/Madeleines, Sisters, as well as others connected to the community were buried in a Cemetery in Lemay Forest.

The Société Historique de St-Boniface (SHSB) has documented 16 registers that together record 3,383 deaths of children at the Asile. There is no evidence to support that they were exhumed, or reinterred, and the cemetery deconsecrated. Recent oral testimony from the manager of Desjardins Funeral Chapel confirms this. Therefore, **it is highly probable that the mass graves of human remains of thousands of children remain**, and would be disturbed by all development, including deforestation. Independent researchers have been able to obtain records from the Sisters of Misericordia Archives in Montréal that indicate that the children were still in the cemetery in 1974.

The Historic Resources Branch has stated that historic burial patterns in cemeteries are known to also occur around the cemetery grounds, and it is possible that mothers or families whose infants died could have privately buried their children outside the formal boundaries of the cemetery. Further, deforestation, heavy equipment, and elevation grading would alter the drainage of the site and impact the cemetery and deposition of human remains in-situ there. The Lemay Forest is a low-lying river-bottom forest, and the forest and its understory and root systems help to prevent erosion and disturbance of human remains.

A number of these children were orphans of Indigenous backgrounds. As the SHSB press release states, "Preliminary analysis of existing sources suggests that most of these children were of French-Canadian or

European descent, as well as Indigenous, Scottish, French, and those of unknown heritage. **From a community perspective, there has been a complete absence of consultation about this development project with rights holders, Indigenous groups, the Manitoba Métis Federation (according to their Resolution #8 framework for consultation), and limited information of specialized knowledge shared with all levels of government. Development of this site may violate UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.**

No Precedents for the exhumation of mass burial sites exist in Canada. This is potentially the largest mass burial site known in Canada. It is important to feel the weight and responsibility in that statement. While the context is not a Residential School, it is a context of an institution in the City of Winnipeg that reflects our lack of care for Women, children, the poor and the disenfranchised, and we must ensure that these souls are now treated with dignity and care.

As part of the City of Winnipeg's Climate Action Plan, they set targets to achieve the endurance of: An urban forest and committed to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the urban forest systems. Preserving the Lemay Forest aligns with the City of Winnipeg's climate action plan. Further, Winnipeg's Indigenous Accord makes the commitment that "The city of Winnipeg... is a place where people and the environment come first, where everyone has fair access...Be a leader that thinks for yourself and speaks up for change." **It is time for the City of Winnipeg to lead the way for the expropriation and protection of the Lemay Forest Lands.**

Heritage sites like Lemay Forest and Asile Ritchot Cemetery offer unique opportunities to confront political issues in a meaningful way. We must embrace this responsibility—not as a burden, but as an opportunity to foster societal growth. The disturbance of this sacred resting place, where many children lie in unmarked graves, should not be seen as an obstacle, but rather as a chance to reflect and grow as a community. Sites of Conscience, such as Lemay Forest, and Asile Cemetery, bear witness to the abandonment of basic human rights. Yet they also provide a powerful platform for the creation of a collective public memory that acknowledges these injustices.

Preserving this site through expropriation is essential. It is our responsibility to foster a future where this site serves as a beacon for human rights, inviting visitors to engage with its history and consider how they, too, can contribute to shaping a more just and compassionate future. Therefore the Manitoba Historical Society supports the expropriation of the Lemay Forest Lands, and the creation of a City of Winnipeg Park to protect and memorialize these thousands of children - The Children in the Forest.

Regards,



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Executive Director, The Manitoba Historical Society