

Editorial ? Keep Sir John A. Macdonald where he is

Canadians have a reputation, that may or may not be deserved, of not doing enough to honour the heroes from the past.

We saw another example of that recently when the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario passed a motion at its annual meeting calling on all school districts in Ontario to rename schools and buildings named after Sir John A. Macdonald.

Sir John, as all Canadians should be well aware, was Canada's first Prime Minister, who can take a great deal of the credit for the country expanding, eventually from sea to sea to sea. He was also very instrumental in forging the link that stretches across the country in the form of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

Was he perfect? By no means. Even casual students of Canadian history know he had a temper. There was at least one well-documented occasion when he almost got into a fist fight with a fellow MP on the floor of the House of Commons. It was also known that he drank, sometimes to excess; something it seems the public was inclined to tolerate.

And his position on several issues would not be in step with contemporary thought here in the 21 century. But is it not wrong to judge anyone according to today's standards when they were making active contributions 150 years ago?

Sir John was a man of his time. What else could we realistically expect of him?

The teachers' union is upset because of what it calls Sir John's role as the ?architect of genocide against Indigenous Peoples.?

The argument is he was Prime Minister when the federal government approved the first residential schools in the country.

One can look at just about any period of history and find examples of shame. And was there ever a mortal man or woman who did not have faults? All people make mistakes, and sometimes these errors aren't regarded as such at the time. And there are other times when they are just acting according to the standards in place at a given time. Societies and cultures learn and progress. That is the way it has always been.

We are always so much wiser with hindsight.

Rather than playing down Sir John for some of the wrong he might have done, should we not praise him for what he started?

The Canada of today is seen as a haven for many in the world living in intolerable conditions. Granted, he can't be given all the credit for that, but Sir John certainly helped get the process going.

It is wrong to judge figures in history based on some of what they did. It is important to look at the whole package.

In the case of Sir John A. Macdonald, we think the whole package measures up quite well.