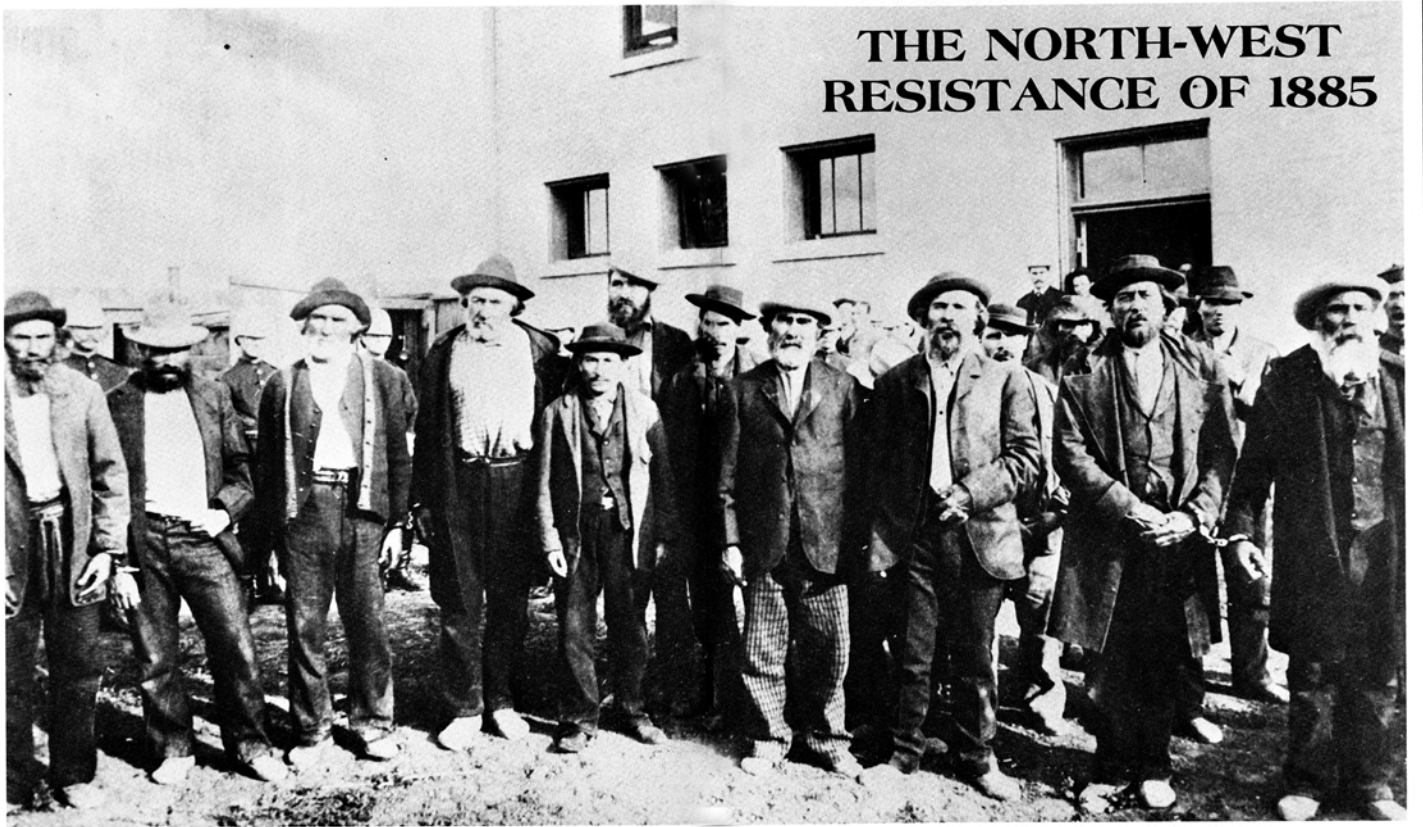


**THE NORTH-WEST  
RESISTANCE OF 1885**



Produced by  
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# NORTH-WEST RESISTANCE

## AFTERMATH OF THE RED RIVER INSURGENCE

The North-West Resistance of 1885 had its beginnings in the Red River Insurgence of 1869-70. The *Manitoba Act* of 1870 had incorporated the Province of Manitoba into Confederation, with full provincial status. However, rather than being treated as equal partners in Confederation, the Metis of the Red River were treated as a conquered people. Lt. Governor Archibald, in a letter to John A. Macdonald dated October 9, 1871, wrote:

You cannot conceive the worry and anxiety I have had for the last few days....on the one side the feelings of the French Halfbreeds were so excited not so much I believe by the dread about their land allotment as by the persistent ill-usage of such of them as have ventured from time to time into Winnipeg from the disbanded volunteers and new comers who fill that town. Many of them actually have been so beaten and outraged that they feel as if they were living in a state of slavery. They say that the bitter hatred of these people is a yoke so intolerable that they would gladly escape it by any sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the physical abuse suffered at the hands of the militia and Canadians, the land claims issue was so badly managed by the government that few families realized their benefits.

The *Manitoba Act* provided for 1.4 million acres to be allotted for Half-breed claims and specific townships had been set aside for this purpose. However, the government did not begin allotting land until 1873, three years after the *Manitoba Act* was passed through parliament. At that time the government arbitrarily decided that only the children of Half-breed families residing in Manitoba at the time of the transfer (July 15, 1870) were eligible to receive land; adults and heads of families were excluded. Children were to receive 190 acres each. Later, in 1874, the government reversed its decision and decided to grant land to the heads of families as well, each head to receive 160 acres or, in the interim, scrip equivalent to 160 acres. Still later the government once again changed its mind and decided that land should be granted at 240 acres per person and allotments previously made were cancelled.<sup>2</sup>

Admidst the bureaucratic confusion and delay the Metis also faced the problem of settlers moving in and claiming their lands while they were away on the annual buffalo hunt. Many Metis returned to their farms to find immigrant settlers firmly established on their lands, refusing to move. Most Metis had little faith in receiving justice in a court of law and abandoned their lands or sold their scrip for a fraction of its worth. While some did benefit from the issuance of scrip, most did not.

### **DISPERSAL OF THE METIS FROM THE RED RIVER**

With the introduction of the steamboat in the late 1850's, the Metis' role as freighter gradually diminished. This, coupled with the disappearance of the buffalo herds near the Red River, ever increasing numbers of immigrants and the Metis' preference for a less sedentary lifestyle, led to a steady migration of the Metis from the Red River settlement during the period of 1840-1870. In the decade immediately following the Red River Insurgence, the steady trickle of migration became a flood. Some Metis moved to the United States but most moved to the North-West and settled in communities such as St. Laurent and St. Antoine de Padou (Batoche). They established their long, narrow lots on the banks of the rivers where they engaged in subsistence level farming supplemented by trapping and fishing. Although the buffalo were also rapidly disappearing from this area, there were still sufficient numbers to supply the Metis' needs. For a brief period they were able to recreate the lifestyle of old. They went on the annual buffalo hunts in the summer months, returning each fall and winter to their small farms on the river banks.

### **MACDONALD AND THE NATIONAL POLICY**

The Pacific Scandal, in which the Macdonald government was accused of accepting bribes, was responsible for the defeat of the Conservative Government in 1873; an election platform based on the concept of a National Policy was largely responsible for its re-election in 1878. The National Policy was comprised of a protective tariff system for the fledgling Canadian industry, completion of a transcontinental railway and settlement of the Canadian west. Settlement of the Canadian west was essential to provide a captive market for

the tariff-protected Canadian industrial products. The west was also to become a source of raw materials and the prime producer of wheat. The transcontinental railway was necessary to bind the new nation together and to transport people and goods from east to west and vice versa.

### **PETITIONS FOR RIGHTS**

The effects of the National Policy caused concern among the residents of the North-West Territories. Agitation for settlement of land claims had begun twelve years prior to the outbreak of violence in 1885. Petitions had been sent to the federal government as early as 1873. In addition to land claim settlements, these petitions also made other requests, such as: a pardon for Riel; fishing, hunting, trading and trapping rights to be guaranteed; freedom of religion to be guaranteed; surveys to be done on a river lot system; and surveys of townships to be completed. The following is a list of some of the petitions which were sent from the North-West Territories to the Canadian government:

<b>Date</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
May 3, 1873	John Fisher and ten others on behalf of Half-breeds of North-West	A.M. Burgess, Deputy Minister of the Interior
Sept. 11, 1874	Halfbreeds of Qu'Appelle Valley (31 signatures)	Governor Alexander Morris
Sept. 19, 1877	Halfbreeds of Blackfoot Crossing (43 signatures)	Lt. Governor Laird
Jan. 15, 1878	Settlers and residents of Prince Albert (80 signatures)	Minister of the Interior
Feb. 1, 1878	Gabriel Dumont and Halfbreeds of St. Laurent	Lt. Governor Laird

1878	Settlers and Residents of Prince Albert (148 signatures)	Governor General of Canada
Aug. 1, 1878	Halfbreeds of Cypress Hills (276 signatures)	North West Council
1880	Halfbreeds of Manitoba Village, NWT (16 signatures)	John A. Macdonald, Minister of the Interior
1880	Halfbreeds of Prince Albert and Edmonton (102 signatures)	John A. Macdonald, Minister of the Interior
1881	Halfbreeds of Qu'Appelle Valley (118 signatures)	Marquis of Lorne, Governor General
Sept. 4, 1882	Halfbreeds of District of Prince Albert (St. Antoine de Padou) (45 signatures)	John A. Macdonald, Minister of the Interior
Mar. 4, 1881	Residents of Battleford, NWT (73 signatures)	John A. Macdonald, Minister of the Interior
Nov. 19, 1883	Half-breed farmers and residents of St. Louis (32 signatures)	George Duck, Land Agent, Prince Albert
Oct. 18, 1881	Residents of Prince Albert (25 signatures)	John A. Macdonald, Minister of the Interior
Aug., 1882	Halfbreeds of Qu'Appelle Valley (44 signatures)	Edgar Dewdney, Lt. Governor of NWT <sup>3</sup>

These and other petitions, together with letters on behalf of the residents from parish priests, various individuals and the North-West Council, were sent up to and just before the resistance. The requests brought little more than formal acknowledgments from Ottawa and promises for "future

consideration". The Secretary of State, on June 6, 1885, even denied ever receiving petitions from the Halfbreeds and wrote in an open letter:

"If the Halfbreeds had serious complaints against the Canadian Government, the ordinary methods of petition was open to them as to every free citizen. They have not availed themselves of it."<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the situation for the Metis did not become desperate until the latter part of the 1870's and early 1880's when immigration increased tremendously.

### **THE INDIANS OF THE NORTH-WEST**

Imperative to settlement of the Canadian west was the signing of treaties with the Indian people of the plains. Negotiation of these treaties was necessary to extinguish Indian ownership of lands needed for settlement. Between 1871 and 1877, seven treaties were signed and the Indian bands were forced onto reserves.

The years following the extermination of the buffalo herds and the signing of the treaties were times of severe hardship for the Indian people. They were forced to become wholly dependent on inadequate government rations and suffered disease and starvation as a result of insufficient amounts of poor quality food. A reporter for the *Moose Jaw News*, June 13, 1884 edition wrote:

....The sufferings of the Indians in the Assiniboia reserves during the past winter are a burning shame to us, a lasting reproach to our Government. What would be thought of us in England, or in any other Christian country, were it clearly understood that for weeks large bands of Indians, the wards of the nation, poor, wretched creatures, whose primitive sources of supply had been cut off by our invasion, and whom we were bound by solemn treaty, as well as by every consideration of justice and humanity, to feed and care for, were dying by scores, partly from semi-starvation and partly from disease resulting from the bad quality of the food supplied by the agents!...<sup>5</sup>

## **THE SETTLERS OF THE NORTH-WEST**

The immigrant settlers of the North-West were experiencing hardship, as well. An agrarian protest movement had begun in the west and a Settler's Union was formed in Prince Albert in 1883. The settlers were dissatisfied with the low wheat prices, high freight rates and the tariff system which inflated the prices paid for farm machinery. They, like the Metis, were concerned about obtaining patent to the lands they held and were anxious to have the survey of their lands completed. Early frost in 1883 destroyed most of the crops and further impoverished the farmers. The settlers of the Prince Albert area held meetings to discuss their grievances and the obvious lack of concern for their well-being on the part of the federal government. At a meeting held in January 1884, the settlers decided to enlist the support of the French-speaking Metis to strengthen their cause.

The unrest and dissatisfaction did not go unnoticed by eastern politicians. Macdonald was kept well informed of the happenings in the North-West. In a letter to the Lt. Governor of Manitoba dated July 28, 1884, he wrote:

....In the North-West we have certain uneasy elements, to wit:—1. The Farmer's Union Agitators. 2. The French Halfbreeds, advised by Riel. 3. The Indian element headed by such loafers as Big Bear, Piapot, etc.

The last—the Indian element—is not to be dreaded unless there is a white or half-breed rising. If this should ever happen, the Indians would be apt to join any insurgent body....<sup>6</sup>

Macdonald was well aware of the various groups in the west who had grievances against the federal government (the Indians, the settlers, and the Metis) but no immediate action was taken to remedy the situation.



## **RIEL'S INVITATION TO RETURN TO THE NORTH-WEST**

At a general meeting held May 6, 1884, at the Lindsay School House, the following resolution was passed:

We, the French and English natives of the North-West, knowing that Louis Riel has made a bargain with the Government of Canada, in 1870, which said bargain is contained mostly in what is known as the 'Manitoba Act', and this meeting not knowing the contents of said 'Manitoba Act', we have thought it advisable that a delegation be sent to said Louis Riel, and have his assistance to bring all the matters referred to in the above resolution in a proper shape and form before the Government of Canada, so that our just demands be granted.<sup>7</sup>



**St. Peter's Mission, Montana, Where Riel Taught School.**

Photo courtesy Saskatchewan Archives Board.

Gabriel Dumont, together with James Isbister, Moise Ouelette and Michel Dumas were selected to go to St. Peter's Mission in Montana where Riel was teaching school. They were to bring Riel back to the North-West to act as spokesman for the Metis and settlers. The following was Riel's reply to their request:

ST. PETER'S MISSION, 5th June, 1884

To Messrs. James Isbister, Gabriel Dumont, Moise Ouelette and Michel Dumas.

GENTLEMEN,—You have travelled more than 400 miles from the Saskatchewan country, across the international line, to make me a visit. The communities in the midst of which you live have sent you as their delegate to ask my advice on various difficulties which have rendered the British North-West as yet unhappy under the Ottawa Government. Moreover, you write me to go and stay amongst you, your hope being that I for one could help to better in some respects your condition. Cordial and pressing is your invitation. You want me and my family to accompany you. I am at liberty to excuse myself and say no. Yet, you are waiting for me, so that I have only to get ready, and your letters of delegation give me the assurance that a family welcome awaits me in the midst of those who have sent you. Gentlemen, your personal visit does me honor and causes great pleasure, but on account of its representative character, your coming to me has the proportions of a remarkable fact; I record it as one of the gratifications of my life. It is a good event, which my family will remember, and I pray to God that your delegation may become a blessing amongst the blessings of this my fortieth year.

To be frank is the shortest. I doubt whether my advice given to you on this soil concerning affairs on Canadian territory could cross the borders and retain any influence. But here is another view. The Canadian Government owe me two hundred and forty acres of land according to the thirty-first clause of the Manitoba treaty. They owe me also, five lots, valuable on

account of hay, timber and river frontage. Those lots are mine according to the different paragraphs of the same thirty-first clause of the above-mentioned Manitoba treaty. It is the Canadian Government which have deprived me, directly or indirectly, of those properties. Besides if they only pay attention to it a minute, they will easily find out that they owe me something else.

Those my claims against them are such as to hold good, notwithstanding the fact that I have become an American citizen. Considering then your interest and mine, I accept your very kind invitation. I will go and spend some time amongst you. By petitioning the Government with you, perhaps we will all have the good fortune of obtaining something. But my intention is to come back early this fall.

Montana has a pretty numerous native half-breed element. If we count with them the white men interested in the half-breed welfare, by being themselves heads of half-breed families or related to them in any other way, I believe it safe to assert that the half-breed element of Montana is a pretty strong one. I am just getting acquainted with that element. I am one of those who would like to unite and direct its vote so as to make it profitable to themselves and useful to their friends. Moreover, I have made acquaintances and friends, amongst whom I like to live. I start with you but to come back here sometime in September.

I have the honor, gentlemen delegated to me, to be your humble servant.

Louis Riel<sup>8</sup>

From Riel's reply we can see that it was his initial intention to return to Montana in the fall of 1884. He also stated that he intended to negotiate with the Canadian government on behalf of the residents of the North-West both to effect settlement of their claims and to attempt a settlement of his own outstanding claims.

## **RIEL RETURNS TO THE NORTH-WEST**

After travelling for three weeks, the small party comprised of Riel, his wife, Marguerite, their two children and the delegates arrived in Fish Creek and the next day moved on to Batoche.

Riel held meetings with the English and French-speaking settlers throughout the summer of 1884. His purpose was to organize the inhabitants of the North-West in order to put as much pressure as possible on the Canadian Government to negotiate a settlement of their grievances.

Riel's actions were being closely monitored, not only by the North West Mounted Police, but by the clergy as well. Major Crozier, officer in charge of the North West Mounted Police, had alerted Ottawa to the troubles that were brewing in the west. Father Andre, who worked with the Metis and had set up missions at Duck Lake, Fort Carlton and Batoche, was in direct communication with Edgar Dewdney, Lt. Governor of the North-West Territories. In a letter dated July 21, 1884 he wrote:

...all his endeavors, as far as I know, are to make the people understand that in answering their call he has in view no other object than to help them by legitimate and peaceful means.<sup>9</sup>

## **FINAL PETITION SENT TO OTTAWA**

Riel and William Henry Jackson, leader of the Settler's Union in Prince Albert, drafted a petition which listed the grievances of the inhabitants of the area. The petition was mailed December 16, 1884 to Adolphe Chapleau, Secretary of State. Receipt was acknowledged by the Secretary of State in January 1885. The government's ultimate response to this petition was that it intended to appoint a committee to investigate Metis claims "and with that view has directed enumeration of those who did not participate in [the] grant under [the] Manitoba Act".<sup>10</sup> Once again the Canadian government totally ignored the points of grievance set out in the petition. Their only commitment was to set up a commission to make a list of the Halfbreeds in the North-West who did not participate in the Manitoba scrip allotments. This would by no means settle the grievances set forth in the petition.

**William Henry Jackson, Leader of the Settler's Union, Prince Albert, and Riel's Secretary.**

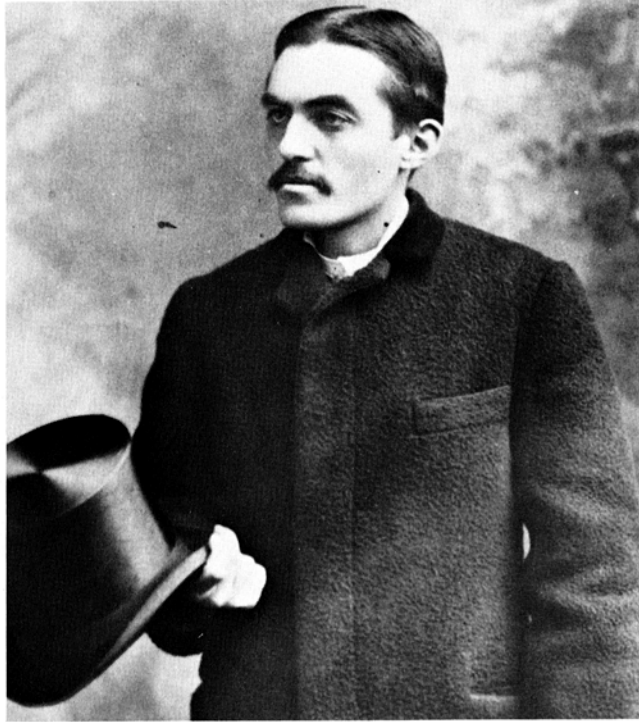


Photo courtesy Public Archives of Canada.

### **CANADIAN GOVERNMENT IGNORES GRIEVANCES**

The failure of the final petition of the Metis sent to Ottawa on December 16, 1884 prompted Riel to initiate more drastic methods. If constitutional means would not gain settlement of their grievances, other measures would be used.

At a public meeting held in St. Laurent on March 8, 1885, Riel put forth a motion for the formation of a provisional government. A newspaper reported:

Nolin and Riel then moved that, as the Government has for fifteen years neglected to settle the half-breed claims, though it had repeatedly (and more especially by providing for their adjustment in the Dominion Land Act of 1883) confessed their justice, the meeting should assume that the Government had abdicated its functions through such neglect; and should proceed to establish a provisional government."<sup>11</sup>

At the same meeting the following Bill of Rights was passed:

## BILL OF RIGHTS

1. That the Halfbreeds of the North-West Territories be given grants similar to those accorded to the Halfbreeds of Manitoba by the Act of 1870.
2. That patents be issued to all half-breed and white settlers who have fairly earned the right of possession of their farms.
3. That the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan be forthwith organized with legislatures of their own, so that the people may be no longer subject to the despotism of Mr. Dewdney.
4. That in these new provincial legislatures, while representation according to population shall be the supreme principle, the Metis shall have a fair and reasonable share of representation.
5. That the offices of trust throughout these provinces be given to residents of the country, as far as practicable, and that we denounce the appointment of disreputable outsiders and repudiate their authority.
6. That this region be administered for the benefit of the actual settler, and not for the advantage of the alien speculator.
7. That better provisions be made for the Indians, the parliamentary grant to be increased and lands set apart as an endowment for the establishment of hospitals and schools for the use of whites, Halfbreeds, and Indians, at such places as the provincial legislatures may determine.
8. That all the lawful customs and usages which obtain among the Metis be respected.
9. That the Land Department of the Dominion Government be administered as far as practicable from Winnipeg, so that settlers may not be compelled as heretofore to go to Ottawa for the settlement of questions in dispute between them and the land commissioner.
10. That the timber regulations be made more liberal, and that the settler be treated as having rights in this country.<sup>12</sup>

## THE CHURCH OPPOSES RIEL

While the church may have been sympathetic to the Metis and their grievances, it was opposed to Riel and his methods. On March 2, 1885, Riel discussed with Father Andre the plan to form a provisional government. Riel demanded: "You must give me permission to proclaim a provisional government before twelve o'clock tonight"<sup>13</sup>, but Father Andre refused. On March 15, during the mass held at St. Laurent, Father Vital Fourmond refused absolution "to all those who took up arms"<sup>14</sup>. The Metis were devout Roman Catholics and their religion played an important role in their daily lives. A split between the Metis and the Roman Catholic Church would be devastating and disheartening for the Metis. When Batoche surrendered to Middleton's troops Dumont explained: "What contributed greatly to the confusion of our soldiers, was that they were refused all religious aid, for themselves, their wives and their children!"<sup>15</sup>

Father Andre was continually in direct communication with the Canadian government. In a letter to Edgar Dewdney, Lt. Governor of the North-West Territories, dated January 11, 1885, he outlined one possible solution:

To

E. Dewdney  
Governor of the N.W. Territories

Your Honour,

...Now Governor I think it is really the duty of the Government to get Riel out of mischief as soon as possible. As I told you from the beginning there has never been any fear of an outbreak but the presence of that man in the country will be a source of anxiety to the government and we do not know what may happen at last....

Now you will ask if Riel is satisfied will the other Half-breeds be satisfied? Really I believe most of them will be, for their grievances are fanciful. Let government give sure titles to their lands and remove some other grievances and they will be quiet and peacefully disposed. Riel and some other agitators are the only ones who have interest to excite the mind of

the people; Riel disappearing everything will quiet down. Now I write to your Honor what I think is the best thing for the country, give us a prompt answer and let there be no equivocations about it. If the government are willing to offer Riel 4000 to 5000 dollars as indemnity for the losses made by him we want a right answer, that sum ought not to be an obstacle to the peace and security of this part of the country.

Excuse me, I am writing in a hurry. With the best wishes for you.

I remain  
(sgd.) A. Andre<sup>16</sup>

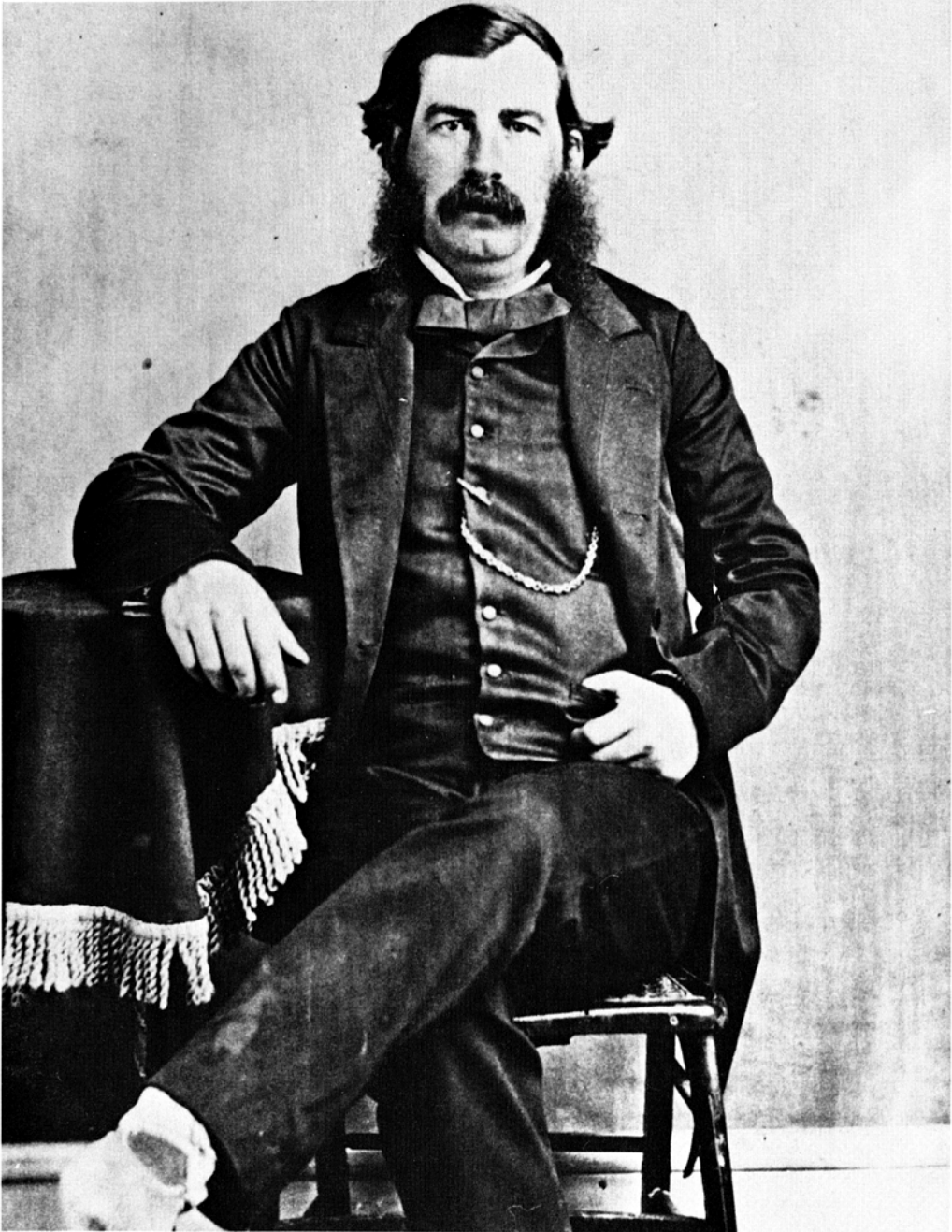
### **LAWRENCE CLARKE**

By 1885 the provinces known today as Alberta and Saskatchewan were part of the North-West Territories and were divided into districts. Each district could elect a representative to the Territorial Council, however, these elected representatives served solely in an advisory capacity. The only person who had any authority on the council was the Lt. Governor, who was appointed by the federal government. In consequence, even though the residents of the North-West Territories participated in an election process, the government was by no means a representative one.

Lawrence Clarke, the elected representative for the District of Lorne, had been requested by the Metis leaders to plead their case with the Canadian Government. On March 18, 1885, he returned to the North-West with news that greatly alarmed the Metis. Norman Black, author of the *History of Saskatchewan*, wrote:

Early in the spring, Mr. Clarke visited Ottawa. On his return, while driving north from Qu'Appelle to Fort Carlton, he met a group of halfbreeds who inquired of him what answer the Government was going to make to their petitions. His reply was that the only answer they would get would be bullets, and that, indeed, on his way northward, he had passed a camp of five hundred policemen who were coming up to capture the halfbreed agitators.<sup>17</sup>





**Lawrence Clarke, Elected Representative for the District of Lorne.**

Photo courtesy of Manitoba Archives.



Louis Riel's Council in 1885, taken beside Regina Court House at the time of their trial.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Johnny Sansregret                    | 7. Babtiste Vandall  |
| 2. P. Paranteau (Famous Buffalo Hunter) | 8. Touissaint Lucier (Reputed Strongest Man in the North West) |
| 3. Pierre Gardiepui                     | 9. Maxime Dubois   |
| 4. Philip Garnot (Riel's Secretary)     | 10. Timmus Short   |
| 5. Albert Monkman                       | 11. ....Tourond  |
| 6. Pierre Vandall                       | 12. Emmanuel Champagne   |

Photo courtesy Saskatchewan Archives Board.

## **PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT**

Riel's response, when informed that the Halfbreed petitions would be met with bullets and five hundred soldiers, was to form a provisional government and make immediate preparations for armed resistance.

At a meeting held in Batoche on March 19, the Provisional Government was formed and a council elected. The officers were as follows:

President	—Pierre Parenteau
Commissaire	—Charles Nolin
General	—Gabriel Dumont
Secretary	—Philip Garnot
Members of the Council	—Baptiste Boyer —Donald Ross —Damase Carriere —Ambroise Jobin —Norbert Delorme —Moise Ouelette —Bte. Parenteau —David Tourond —Pierre Gariepy —Maxime Lepine —Albert Monkman —Bte. Boucher <sup>18</sup>

Raiding parties were organized to scour the countryside for available supplies and weapons. Anyone suspected of being a spy was taken prisoner.

## **THE ENGLISH HALF-BREEDS AND SETTLERS WITHDRAW SUPPORT**

With the formation of the Provisional Government and the decision to take up arms, the support of the immigrant settlers and English-speaking Half-breeds was withdrawn. While supporting, in theory, the grievances and points in the Bill of Rights, they were unwilling to support this method of gaining social and political justice. George F. Stanley, the Canadian historian wrote:

More significant to Riel than the alienation of the clergy was the attitude of neutrality now assumed by the English half-breeds and white settlers. From the

beginning Riel had been assured of their co-operation. They not only contributed to the agitation which brought about Riel's return from the United States, but openly supported him and acknowledged his leadership of the new political movement on the prairies. Jackson's letter to Chapleau even implied that the English-speaking elements were only holding themselves back from more radical action. Had the Settler's Union not encouraged Riel by the in attendance at his meetings, their collaboration in drawing up the petition to Ottawa, and by supplying him with money, thus misleading him into the belief that the whole of the white population of the North Saskatchewan was behind him, his actions might have been restrained and the rebellion avoided. But in spite of the fact that they had encouraged Riel politically and financially, it is questionable whether any of the whites or English half-breeds anticipated for a moment that their agitation would end in a resort to arms. They were disinclined to proceed to extremes, and although many continued to sympathize with Riel, the majority regarded desperate actions with apprehension.<sup>19</sup>

### **THE CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY**

Meanwhile in the east, the Canadian Pacific Railway, an integral part of the National Policy, was bankrupt. Even though the CPR had become a private company after 1880, it was still largely subsidized with public funds. The CPR had been granted existing railways built prior to 1880 which were valued at \$32,000,000. It also received 25,000,000 acres of western land and a subsidy of \$25,000,000. In 1884 the government had approved a loan to the financially troubled CPR for \$14,000,000. In 1885 the railway was bankrupt and in trouble once again. It applied to the government for more federal funds in order to continue. Macdonald, who was a seasoned politician, was certain the cabinet would not support another CPR loan. Official application for the loan was received on March 18, 1885. Only a truly desperate situation could prompt the cabinet to vote for allocating additional funds to the CPR. For Macdonald, the solution lay in the troubled North-West.

In the event of armed conflict, troops would have to be sent west to put down the resistance. If the Canadian government

had learned anything from the Red River Insurgence of 1870, it was that speedy and efficient detachment of troops to the front line was essential. A direct railway line was necessary to transport the troops.

The movement of troops from the east had begun before the outbreak of violence at Duck Lake. Mobilization orders were issued on March 23 and immediately troops were organized to fight the Metis in the North-West.

### **RIEL DEMANDS CROZIER'S SURRENDER**

Riel had seized the church at Batoche and established his headquarters there. He also planned to seize Fort Carlton and force the North-West Mounted Police to surrender, in an effort to force the government to negotiate a solution to the Metis' demands. On March 21, 1885, Riel sent a letter to Superintendent Crozier, demanding the surrender of the North West Mounted Police:

Major:—The Councillors of the Provisional Government of the Saskatchewan have the honor to communicate to you the following conditions of surrender:—You will be required to give up completely the situation which the Canadian Government have placed you in, at Carlton and Battleford, together with all Government properties.

In case of acceptance, you and your men will be set free, on your parole of honor to keep the peace. And those who will choose to leave the country will be furnished with teams and provisions to reach Qu'Appelle.

In case of non-acceptance, we intend to attack you, when to-morrow, the Lord's Day, is over; and to commence without delay a war of extermination upon all those who have shown themselves hostile to our rights. Messrs. Charles Nolin and Maxime Lepine are the gentlemen with whom you will have to treat.

Major, we respect you. Let the cause of humanity be a consolation to you for the reverses which the governmental misconduct has brought upon you....

Yours,  
Louis 'David' Riel,  
Exovede. <sup>20</sup>

Crozier's reply was similar to that of Riel's ultimatum. He demanded that Riel and his followers surrender themselves to the police. An amnesty would then be granted to all except the leaders of the so-called rebellion.

In the stalemate which developed, neither party seemed willing to take the first offensive action. Events remained fairly quiet until March 26, when the opening skirmish of the resistance took place.

**Major Crozier, Superintendent of the North West Mounted Police.**



Photo courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

### **DUCK LAKE**

On March 26, Crozier sent a party of mounted police to Duck Lake to obtain supplies and ammunition. They encountered a party of Metis led by Gabriel Dumont and were forced to return to Fort Carlton. Crozier then sent out a force of 95 policemen and volunteers to confront the Metis. They encountered the Metis and a small party of Indians near Duck Lake the same day. Dumont sent his brother, Isidore, and a Cree, Assywin, out to talk with Crozier. Crozier was accompanied by an English-speaking Halfbreed, Joseph McKay, and they came forward to meet Dumont's party. During the interchange a scuffle broke out. McKay fired a shot, killing Isidore Dumont. Crozier then gave the command to fire and Assywin was shot. In the fighting which followed, the police force of approximately 100 men was defeated by the Metis force, whose numbers vary according to which account you read. Dumont places their number at 30 men. After a brief period of fighting, the police and volunteers were forced to retreat. A few years later in 1888, while in Montreal, Dumont dictated his account of the resistance. An extract from this account reads as follows:



**Gabriel Dumont, General of the Provisional Army.**

Photo courtesy Saskatchewan Archives Board.

We went back to Duck Lake, and we had scarcely let our horses out to eat, when we heard someone shout again, "Here come the police." We immediately jumped on horseback, and without delay I had my men occupy a hillock which commanded the plain, and from where the enemy would have been able to level their guns on us.

We were only a few men on horseback and a few men on foot, waiting for the police who had been reinforced by eighty men commanded by Crozier, who had rejoined Mackay's forty runaways. They had a cannon with them.

I sent in pursuit of their scouts several men to whom I gave orders not to shoot, because Riel had asked us not to be the first to fire.

I gave orders to my horsemen, who numbered 25, to go down into a hollow, where we were under shelter from the cannon.

Crozier, accompanied by an English half-breed, approached one of our Indians who was unarmed and, it seems, gave him his hand. The Indian then tried to grab the gun out of the hands of the English Metis who was, I believe, John Dougall Mackay. This English Metis fired, and I think it was this rifle shot which killed my brother Isidore and made him fall from his horse, stone dead....

As soon as the shot was fired, the police and the volunteers commanded by Crozier, fired a round, and the Indian who was with my brother, was killed....

As soon as the shooting started, we fired as much as we could. I myself fired a dozen shots with my Winchester carbine, and I was reloading it to begin again, when the English alarmed by the number of their dead, began to withdraw. It was time they did, for their cannon which until then had kept my infantry men from descending the slope, was silenced because the gunner, in loading it, put in the shot before the powder. My infantry men then began to surround them.

This first encounter had lasted half an hour.



In their flight they had to go through a clearing, so I lay in wait for them saying to my men, "Courage, I'm going to make the red coats jump in their carts with some rifle shots". And then I laughed, not because I took any pleasure in killing, but to give courage to my men.

Since I was eager to knock off some of the red coats, I never thought to keep under cover, and a shot came and gashed the top of my head, where a deep scar can still be seen; I fell down on the ground, and my horse, which was also wounded, went right over me as it tried to get away. We were then 60 yards from the enemy. I wanted to get up, but the blow had been so violent, I couldn't. When Joseph Delorme saw me fall again, he cried out that I was killed. I said to him, "Courage, as long as you haven't lost your head you're not dead."

While we were fighting, Riel was on horseback, exposed to the gunfire, and with no weapon but the crucifix which he held in his hand....

The enemy was then beginning to retire, and my brother, who had taken command after my fall, shouted to our men to follow and destroy them. Riel then asked, in the name of God, not to kill any more, saying that there had already been too much bloodshed....

After the enemy had fled, my companions tied me on my horse, and we went to Duck Lake, where my wound, which was a deep one, was dressed....<sup>21</sup>

## **TROOPS ARRIVE IN THE NORTH-WEST**

In order to ward off a general uprising in the North-West, Macdonald's plan was "to localize the Insurgence".<sup>22</sup> Additional provisions were to be distributed to the Indians and a commission was set up to investigate the Metis claims.

Military forces were dispatched to the west and General Middleton, who was in charge of the entire operation, divided the forces into three columns. The main column was stationed at Qu'Appelle under his own leadership. A second column was situated at Swift Current under the command of Colonel Otter. The third column was located at Calgary under the command of Major General Strange. The forces were to move from different directions against the Metis at Batoche.

The Metis' entire force was comprised of approximately 350 men, 200 of whom Dumont says were armed. This small fighting force was facing the formidable resources of the entire Canadian army. Middleton had at his disposal:

...5,456 junior officers and men. Supplies would include 586 horses, 8, 9-pounder cannon, 2 Gatling guns, 6,000 Snider-Enfield .50 caliber rifles, 1,000 Winchester repeating rifles. For the Gatling guns there were 70,000 rounds of ammunition; for the Snider-Enfield rifles, 1,500,050; for the 9-pounder cannon, 2,000 shells. Also food for the men, fodder for the horses, clothing, two field hospitals and medical supplies. Middleton's officers alone outnumbered the entire Metis fighting force.<sup>23</sup>

Photo courtesy of Public Archives of Canada.

**Right: General Middleton,  
Commander of Canadian Forces.**



**Below: Colonel Otter,  
Commander of Canadian Forces  
at Swift Current.**

**Bottom Right: Major General  
Strange, Commander of  
Canadian Forces at Calgary.**



Photo courtesy of Public Archives of Canada.

Photo courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

## MIDDLETON ADVANCES ON BATOCHÉ

Dumont learned from his scouts that Middleton had left Qu'Appelle and was on his way to Batoche. The column commanded by Middleton arrived at Clarke's Crossing on April 17.

Dumont wanted to harass the troops by night, in an effort to demoralize them, but Riel would not agree to this. Finally, Dumont was able to convince Riel that Middleton could not be allowed to march on Batoche unimpeded. On the evening of the 23rd, the Metis set out to meet Middleton's forces. In his account Dumont wrote:

About twenty days after [Duck Lake skirmish], we learned, from our scouts who had gone as far as Qu'Appelle, about 260 miles from Batoche, that Middleton was on the way.

We were then 350 men all told, of whom 200 were armed. I proposed we go ahead of the troops, harass them by night, and above all prevent them from sleeping, believing this was a good way to demoralize them and make them lose heart. But Riel did not agree...

We therefore set up our tents at Batoche, following the route of the troops, by our scouts, who saw them every day. They were going towards Clarke's Crossing thirty miles above Batoche....

Impatient to meet him [Middleton], and convinced that it was wrong to let him move about as he wished, I notified Riel that I could no longer follow his humanitarian counsels, and that I had decided to go and fire on the invaders and that my men backed me up in this.

Riel then said to me: "All right! do as you wish".

We set out at dusk, the night of April 23rd. Our band consisted of 200 men: Metis, Sauteux, Crees, Sioux and Canadians. Riel accompanied us. At our halts he made us recite the rosary....<sup>24</sup>

## **FISH CREEK**

By April 24th, Middleton and his troops reached Fish Creek. It was here that Dumont and his men encountered Middleton's forces. Initially, Dumont's force numbered 150 men, but the number was reduced to 54 during the battle, when some of his party fled. His numbers were later reinforced by 80 men from Batoche, under the command of Edouard Dumont. Gabriel placed his men along the coulee. From here they could fire down on Middleton's troops in the bottom of the ravine. The battle lasted the whole day and ended with the Metis temporarily halting Middleton's march to Batoche.

In describing his first encounter with Middleton, Dumont stated:

It was daybreak before we were in sight of Middleton, who was encamped at the McIntosh farm.

I thought it wise to retire and go and wait for the enemy at Fish Creek Coulee, known among us as Little Beaver River, which flows from the west to the east, into the right of the Saskatchewan River. The Tourond family lived on the right bank of this stream....

Around seven o'clock, a scout, Gilbert Berland, warned us that a column of about 80 men was advancing upon us. I therefore placed 130 of my men, in a hollow, on the left bank of Fish Creek, opposite the Touronds' house, and I had the horses hidden in the woods. I left with 20 horsemen to take cover further ahead along the path to be followed by the troops, with the idea of not charging them until they should be thrust back by the others, and I gave orders to my principal force not to attack them until they were all in the coulee. I wanted to treat them as we would the buffalo....

We kept them in check all day, because I kept firing hard, and so that I could do so more quickly, the young fellows about me kept supplying me with cartridges which were rapidly becoming exhausted. When I saw there were only seven cartridges left, I decided to set fire to the prairie grass to make the enemy, who found themselves facing the wind withdraw. I figured on going, under cover of the

smoke, to pick up ammunition and arms which they would abandon in their flight. I instructed my men to shout and sing during this operation....

I was hoping for help from Batoche. But Riel did not want to let the men go; he reassured the people, telling them no great harm would come to us.

However my brother Edouard, hearing the cannon, had begged Riel to let him go. Finally he said, "When my own flesh and blood are in danger I cannot stay here", and he hastened to us with 80 horsemen.

I had already succeeded in working around the enemy lines, and the police had fallen back although the volunteers continued the battle.

They dived into clumps of trees behind them and hearing our shouts, they fled, leaving a lot of baggage....

Thanks to Providence, in the whole day of continuous and desperate fighting, we lost only 4 men....

It is useless for Middleton to estimate our forces at 300 men, of the 150 we were when we met the enemy, we remained 47 and 7, and we were only 54 in number, when at the end of the day, Edouard Dumont's 80 horsemen came to our assistance....<sup>25</sup>

### **THE NORTHCOTE**

Middleton's troops returned to the right bank of the Saskatchewan River and set up camp, waiting for additional supplies. On May 5, the supplies and reinforcements arrived on a steamer, the Northcote, and Middleton began to prepare for his attack on Batoche. Dumont sent a party of men out to cripple the steamer by lowering the ferry cable, thereby preventing it from reaching Batoche. The plan partially succeeded. The lowered cable severed a funnel and the steamer was forced to dock to put out the fire. Dumont said:

When I learned that the enemy had torn down my stables to strengthen their steamer, I concluded the steamer was descending to Batoche to take part in the impending attack and to divert attention of a part of the defenders. These were in fact the orders which Middleton had given.

I had a body of men placed opposite the Batoche church, to keep the crew from landing. Since the boat, which had set out on the 9th, had to pass through a rapid caused by a bend in the river, before it could continue its way, I had suggested that at this spot we cripple the helmsman, so as to set the boat adrift, and that an iron cable, thrown across the river, would make the vessel capsize.

My men did, in fact, fire on those who were on deck and several of them threw themselves into the water. And the boat, as I had foreseen, went adrift. I galloped on horseback along the bank to give the signal to lower the cable, but it was done too slowly, the cable only caught the funnel which was torn away and a fire started. The crew however extinguished it, although my men fired on any that showed themselves on deck.<sup>26</sup>



**The Steamer, Northcote, Fortified with Boards from Dumont's Stables.**

Photo courtesy of Public Archives of Canada.

# BATOCHÉ

The attack on Batoché was set for 9:00 a.m. on May 9, 1885. The fighting lasted for four days and ended on May 12 at 2:00 p.m. when the Metis completely ran out of ammunition.

PLAN  
OF POSITION AT  
**BATTLE OF BATOCHÉ,**  
May 12<sup>th</sup> 1885.

SCALE 20 CHAINS = 1 INCH.

From a sketch made by Messrs.  
Burrows and Denny, of the  
Surveyors' Intelligence Corps.

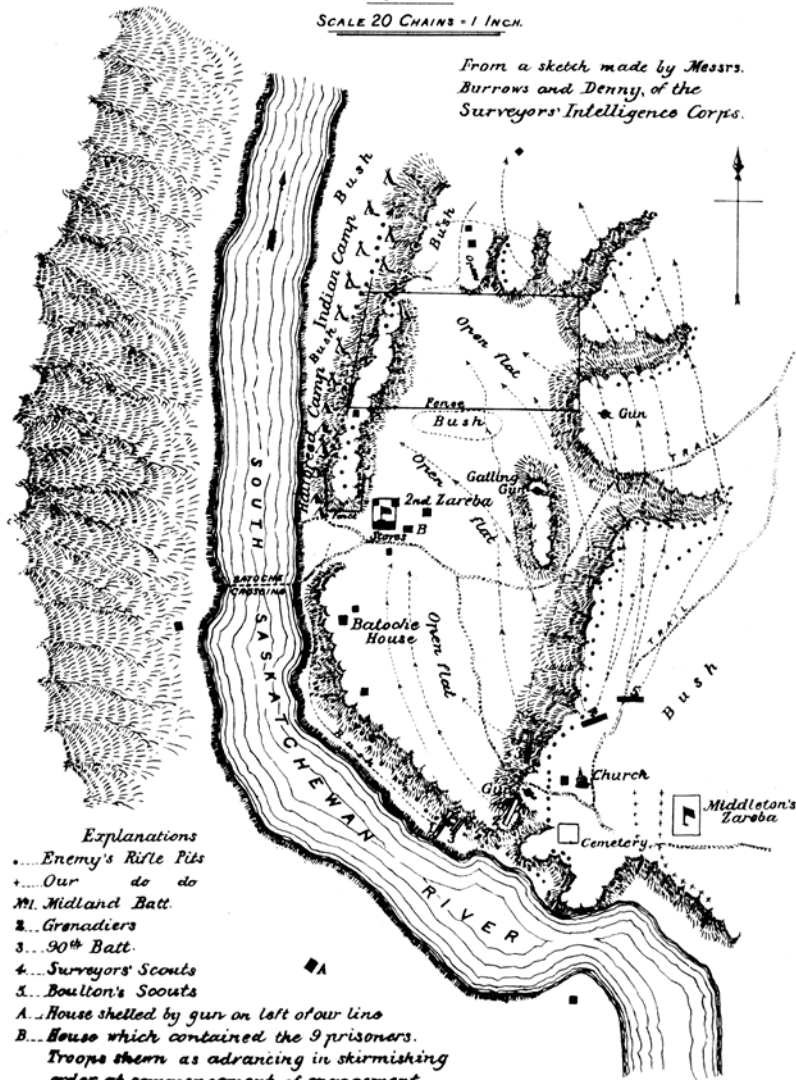


Photo courtesy of Manitoba Archives.



Greatly contributing to their distress was the fact that they had been refused religious support from the clergy, both for themselves and for their wives and children. When the Metis ran out of ammunition, Middleton ordered a cease-fire. His order was disobeyed by Colonel Arthur Williams, who led a bayonet charge into the Metis trenches. Dumont described the attack on Batoche and the bayonet charge on the Metis who were surrendering:

The enemy began firing with several shots from the Gatling gun, and then advanced to the top of a little hill dominating Batoche....

We numbered about 175 men, besides the squad of 30 men who were watching the Northcote.

The fighting began around nine in the morning and lasted all day without the enemy being able to advance....

We held the enemy in check for three days, and each night they went back into their holes. And during those three days, they didn't kill a single man; they only hit some dummies which we stuck up for them and on which they concentrated their shots....

What contributed greatly to the confusion of our soldiers, was that they were refused all religious aid, for themselves, their wives and their children!!

On the fourth day, the 12th of May, around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, on definite information furnished by those who betrayed us, that we had no more ammunition, the troops advanced and our men came out of their trenches; it was then (they) were killed: Jose Ouellet, 93 years of age; Jose Vandal, who had both arms broken first and was finished off with a bayonet, 75 years; Donald Ross, first fatally wounded and speared with a bayonet, also very old; Isidore Boyer, also an old man; Michel Trottier, Andre Batoche, Calixte Tourond, Elzear Tourond, John Swan and Damase Carrier, who first had his leg broken and whom the English then dragged with a rope around his neck tied to the tail of a horse. There were two Sioux also killed.<sup>27</sup>



**First Shot Fired at Batoche.**



**Donald Ross, killed in Bayonet Charge at Batoche.**

Photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board.

Photo courtesy of Public Archives of Canada.

## THE AFTERMATH OF BATOCHÉ

When the Metis surrendered at Batoche, Middleton's troops advanced on the area, taking prisoners. Most of the women and children hid in caves along the river banks to avoid capture. Riel surrendered himself three days after the battle at Batoche, but Dumont refused. When advised by Moise Ouelette that Middleton had assured both Dumont and Riel justice if they surrendered, Dumont replied, "You tell Middleton...that I am in the woods, and that I still have 90 cartridges to use on his men."<sup>28</sup> Shortly after, Gabriel Dumont and Michel Dumas escaped to the United States.

The members of the council of the Provisional Government who were arrested were charged with treason-felony. They received prison terms ranging from one to seven years.

After Riel's surrender, he was taken to Regina where he was jailed at the North West Mounted Police barracks. There he awaited trial on a charge of high treason. The trial date was set for July 20, 1885. Riel was found guilty by a jury of six English-speaking men and sentenced to death by hanging. On the morning of November 16, he was removed from his cell, taken to the gallows and hanged.

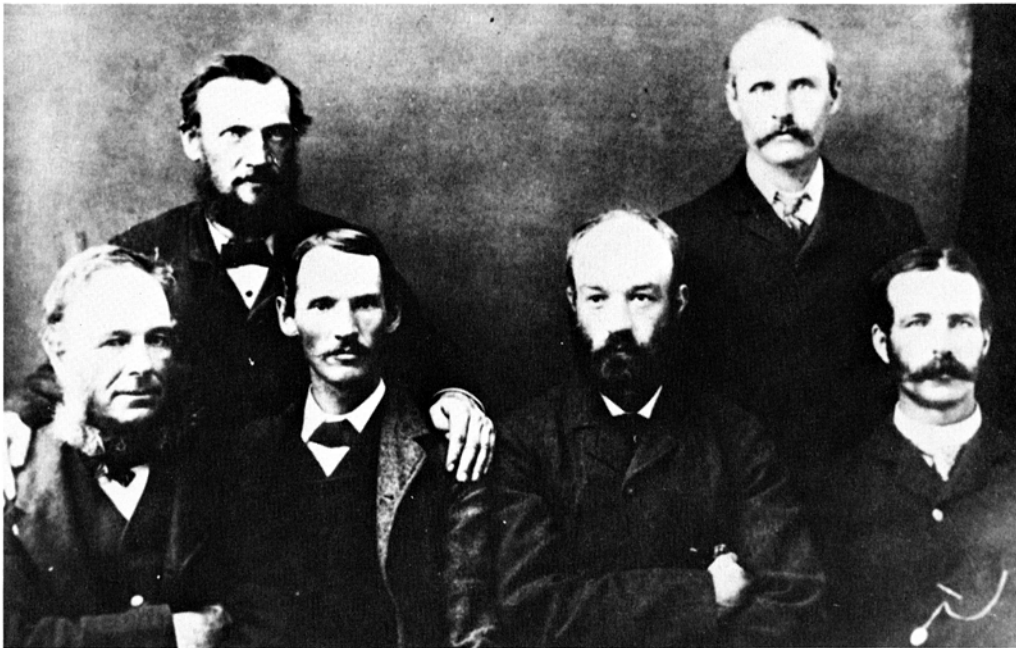


Riel as a Prisoner.

Photo courtesy of Public Archives of Canada.



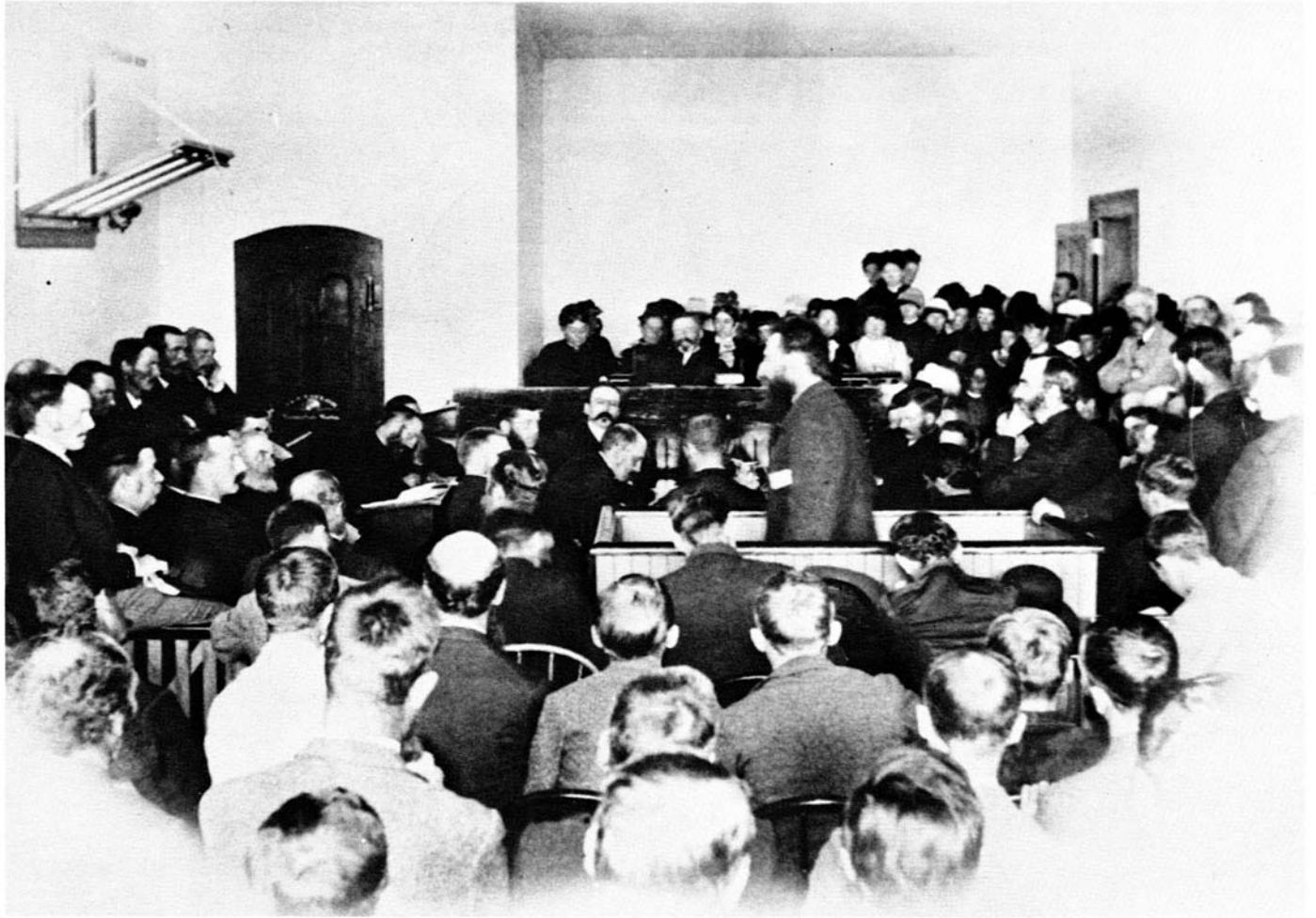
**Judge Hugh Richardson,  
Riel's Trial Judge.**



**Louis Riel's Jury.**

Photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board.

Photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board.



**Courtroom Scene of Riel's Trial Showing Riel in Prisoner's Box.**

Photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board.

The years following the Resistance of 1885 were not easy ones for the Metis. Riel had been hanged and their leaders were in exile or serving prison terms. Many had their homes looted and burned and their property destroyed in the aftermath of the fighting. As they had done in 1870 following the Red River Insurgence, many Metis dispersed: some to the United States, others to more remote communities in northern Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Some of the Metis chose to stay and attempt to rebuild their lives. Those who had not taken up arms were given scrip or patents to their lands. However, without funds to purchase implements and provisions, most were unsuccessful in their attempt to farm. Most sold their scrip for a fraction of its worth to land speculators.

In order to re-establish themselves with the Catholic Church, the Metis were forced to sell their remaining cattle. In a letter to Edgar Dewdney, L.E. Herchmer wrote:

It is said that the half-breeds have been selling cattle lately to make up the money required by the Priest before he will re-admit the backsliders to the privileges of the church; \$25.00 a man is the figure.<sup>29</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

It has often been said that when Riel died on the gallows, the Metis Nation died with him. However, such is not the case. Recently, new leaders have emerged and the people are once again speaking out and demanding their inherent rights as one of the founding peoples of Canada. Although the Metis lost the resistance battles of 1885, the cause was not lost.

## FOOTNOTES

1. *Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North-West Territory in 1869-70* (Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1874), p. 156.
2. D. Bruce Sealey and Antoine S. Lussier, *The Metis Canada's Forgotten People* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Metis Federation Press, 1975), pp. 96-7.
3. Canada Sessional Papers, 1885, Vol. No. 116, "Papers and Correspondence in connection with Half-Breed Claims and other matters relating to the North-West Territories", pp. I-III.
4. Norman Fergus Black, *History of Saskatchewan and the North West Territories* (Regina: Saskatchewan Historical Company Publishers, 1913), p. 263.
5. *Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1885), Vol. XX, p. 3166.
6. Sir Joseph Pope Papers, Correspondence of Sir John A. Macdonald, July 28, 1884, p. 314.
7. Canada Sessional Papers, 1886, Vol. XII, No. 431.
8. Canada Sessional Papers, 1886, No. 52, pp. 34-5.
9. Macdonald Papers, Vol. 105, Andre to Dewdney, July 21, 1884.
10. Macdonald Papers, Vol. 105, Macpherson to Dewdney, February 4, 1885.
11. Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1984), p. 135.
12. *Ibid*, p. 136.
13. *Ibid*, p. 134.
14. *Ibid*, p. 138.
15. George F. Stanley, "Gabriel Dumont's Account of the North West Rebellion, 1885", *Canadian Historical Review*, V. 30, 1949, p. 266.
16. Macdonald Papers, Vol. 105, Andre to Dewdney, January 11, 1885.
17. See Black, p. 267.

18. George F. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. 316.
19. Ibid, p. 317.
20. Ibid, p. 324.
21. See Stanley, "Gabriel Dumont's Account of the North West Rebellion, 1885", pp. 253-5.
22. Sir Joseph Pope Papers, Correspondence, Macdonald to Middleton, March 29, 1885, pp. 340-1.
23. Peter Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel* (Toronto: NC Press Limited, 1978), p. 155.
24. See Stanley, "Gabriel Dumont's Account of the North West Rebellion, 1885", pp. 256-9.
25. Ibid, pp. 259-63.
26. Ibid, pp. 264-5.
27. Ibid, pp. 265-6
28. Ibid, p. 268.
29. Dewdney Papers, Vol. 21B, L.M. Herchermer to E. Dewdney, January 15, 1886, pp. 90405-8.



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