

MÉTIS DEVELOPMENT AND THE CANADIAN WEST

3

Petitioning
for
Rights



Saskatchewan
Education

Gabriel
Dumont
Institute



Petitioning for Rights

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Introduction

Series Overview

Métis Development and the Canadian West is a series of five books which examine the development of the Métis culture and the role of the Métis in western Canada from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.

- *Book 1: Contrasting Worlds* is an overview of the Canadian West from the 1600's to the early 1870's when many of the Métis moved from the Red River area to Saskatchewan.
- *Book 2: Changing Times* is an examination of the governing bodies and the laws which were in effect in the Canadian West between 1821 and 1875.
- *Book 3: Petitioning for Rights* is a study of the period between 1872 and 1883 which focuses on attempts by the Métis to obtain title to the lands on which they lived.
- *Book 4: Conflicting Plans* is an examination of the conflict between the Métis' attempts to gain legal ownership of their lands and the federal government's national policy and plans for a railway.
- *Book 5: Ending an Era* is an examination of the resistance battles, Riel's trial, the political situation and the immediate aftermath of the resistance.

Series Objectives

The objectives of this series are:

- to present written, visual and primary materials in a form which is amenable to an inquiry-based approach
- to document Métis contributions to prairie settlement and the development of the West
- to challenge stereotypical images associated with the Métis by presenting information from which accurate perceptions of the historic Métis culture can be drawn
- to present the Métis perspective of the events which occurred between 1870 and 1885.

Suggested Methods

The material in *Métis Development and the Canadian West* is designed to provide a basis for increasing the students' understanding of the Métis culture through an inquiry approach. Issues are presented and data is provided. The students are expected to resolve the issues themselves in a logical and defensible way. Their opinions should be respected and the emphasis should be on the development of their analytical skills.

A recommended reading list has been included at the back of each book. These can be used as resources for both teachers and students, particularly when researching further material on some of the questions.

Organization of the Books

Each book contains:

- the objectives of the book
- a brief summary of the content
- a content section which incorporates a number of primary documents
- endnotes which indicate the source of the quotations used
- a vocabulary list which defines selected words from the content section **in this print**
- questions which can be used for discussion, research or assignment purposes
- a recommended reading list.

Objectives of Book 3: *Petitioning for Rights*

The objectives of this book are:

- to provide information about the changes in the Métis' lifestyle after the disappearance of the buffalo
- to explain the significance of Métis land title
- to examine the attempts of the Métis to obtain legal title to their lands.

Summary of Book 3: *Petitioning for Rights*

With the demise of the buffalo, the Métis turned to freighting and subsistence farming for their livelihood. However, since the bulk of the cargo carried by the freighters was pemmican, freighting soon ceased to be a viable form of employment. In an attempt to obtain legal title to their lands, the Métis sent petition after petition to Ottawa, to no avail.

Petitioning for Rights



Buffalo on the prairie

American Policy

By the mid-1870s, with the establishment of British law on the prairies, the buffalo lost the protection afforded them by the Laws of St. Laurent. Under British law, **free hunters** were permitted to hunt the buffalo for their own personal gain. Unable to reproduce fast enough to offset the number being killed, the vast herds of buffalo soon disappeared and the species was in danger of becoming extinct. With the decline in the number of buffalo, the Métis found their food supply and source of trade goods to be almost nonexistent.

The slaughter of the buffalo was not confined to western Canada. Throughout the plains of the United States, many thousands of animals were killed each year, partly for their meat and hides and partly to make way for immigrant ranchers and farmers. South of the 49th parallel, the westward expansion of immigrants was accompanied by great conflict which resulted in the Indian nations and the United States army becoming locked in a bitter struggle over land. By 1879 the effects of this conflict were being experienced by the Indian and Métis nations of Canada. A Saskatchewan historian, D.H. Bocking, explains:

A further **calamitous** blow for the Indians of Western Canada was the adoption by the United States of a systematic program of buffalo extermination. As early as 1867 the touring William Butler was told by American army officers along the North Platte in Nebraska to "Kill every buffalo you can; every buffalo dead is an Indian gone..." Following the defeat of Custer and the flight of the

Sioux into Canada, the United States decided to starve Sitting Bull into surrender. In 1879 a series of prairie fires were started at different points almost simultaneously by the Americans, and the country north of the boundary line was burnt from Wood Mountain on the east to the Rocky Mountains on the west and as far north as Qu'Appelle. To ensure the destruction of the buffalo, over 5,000 American hunters and skinners were placed strategically in a **cordón** of camps from the Upper Missouri west to the Idaho dividing line, thus "rendering it impossible for scarcely a single bison to escape through the chain of sentinel camps to the Canadian North-West".¹

Effects on the Métis

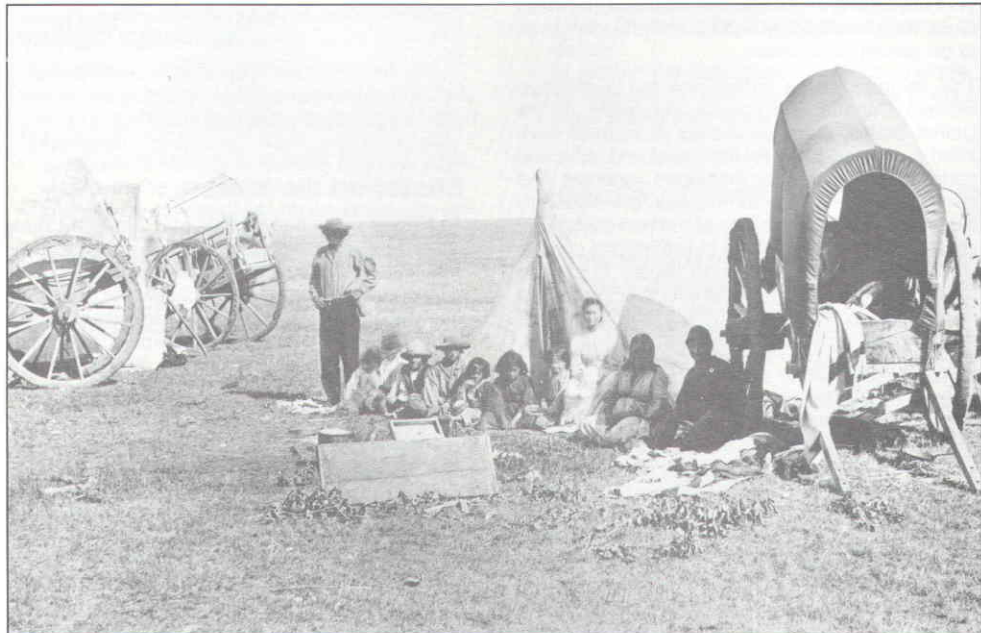
As a result of the buffalo slaughter, one of the three ways by which the Métis could make a good living was no longer practical. The decline of the buffalo ruined the economic system that was based on hunting buffalo and selling pemmican to the Hudson's Bay Company. Father André, the Oblate father in charge of the mission at St. Laurent, reported that:

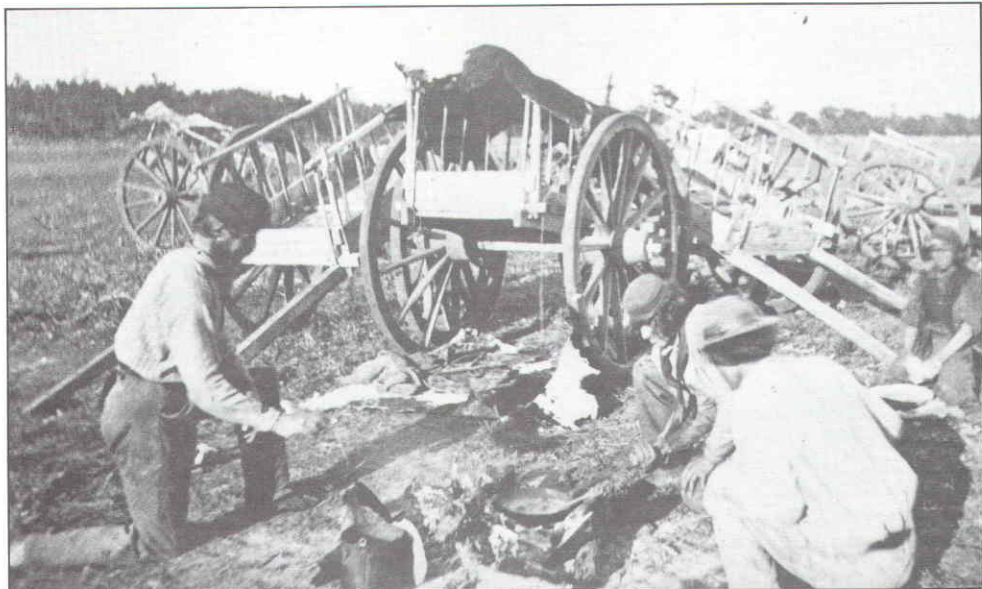
The hunters have had to go further than ever to reach the buffalo; still they've only encountered very meagre herds so that the hunt was very bad which has caused the price of pemmican to rise to 14 **sous** a pound. The autumn hunt was worse still. It obliged a good number of families to spend the winter far from the colony.²



Prairie hunters' camp, 1872.

Buffalo hunting camp, 1872.





Red River carts in camp, 1858.

The freighting industry was also placed in jeopardy. In the past, its cargo had consisted primarily of pemmican, hides and tallow. With the disappearance of the buffalo, many freighters became

unemployed. The competition for employment was so keen that the freighters who continued to work were forced to accept extremely low wages.

Freighters' camp, 1860.



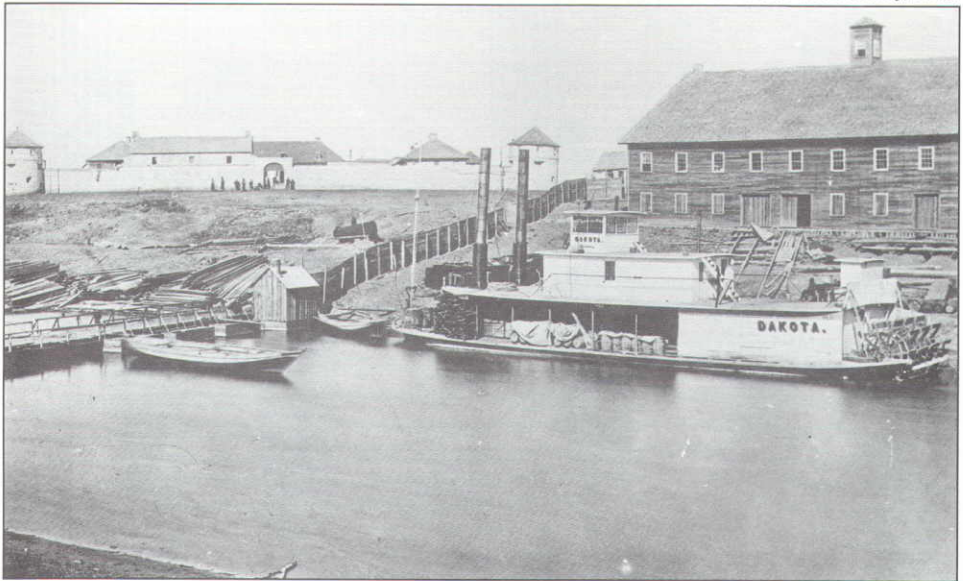


York boats, 1910.

Steamboats and York boats also affected the freighting industry. Their introduction on the river systems of the West and their capacity to handle large quantities of cargo made the Métis freight

business virtually unnecessary. With yet another means of making a remunerative living gone, farming remained the only source of livelihood for the Métis.

The Steamboat "Dakota" at Fort Garry, 1872.





Commercial farming (Oxen and binder). Early settlers to the North Battleford district.

As a means of making a living, farming proved to be very difficult. The Métis were unable to move from subsistence farming to commercial farming because of the high cost of machinery. Cultivating the land was not something the Métis had pursued with great enthusiasm. By their own choice, they had previously lived the life of buffalo hunters and traders. This does not mean that land ownership was never an issue with the Métis people; however, to them, ownership did not necessarily mean cultivation.

Métis involvement in land issues was documented as early as 1811 in the Selkirk Settlement. Norman Black states that:

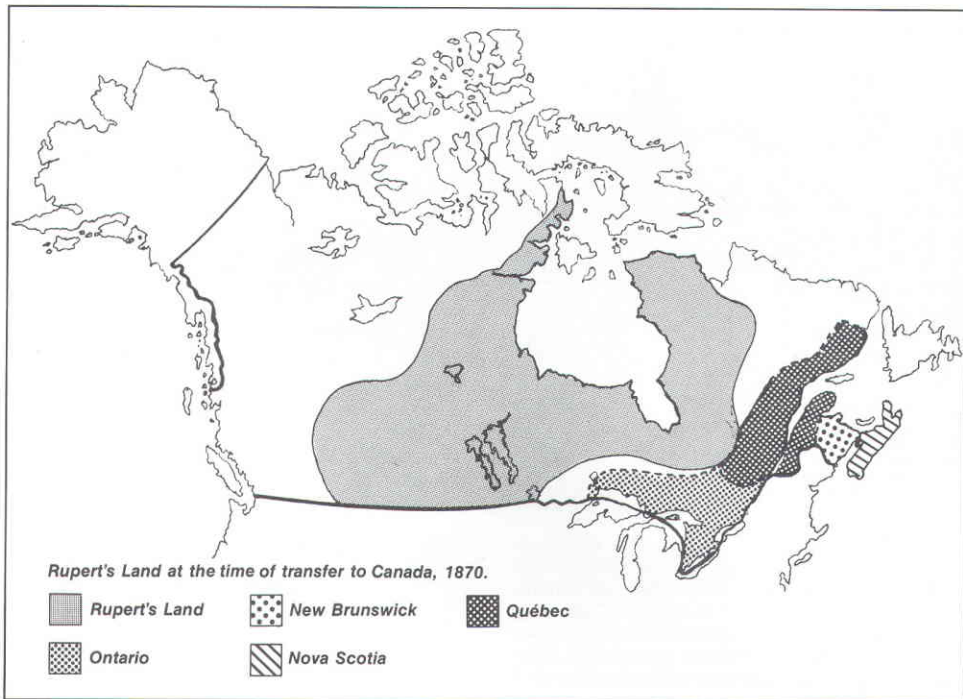
Under the deed of 1811, creating the colony of Assiniboia, it was expressly stated that one-tenth of the vast area included in the Selkirk grant, was to be reserved for retired servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, and "for no other use, intent or purpose whatsoever". The size of the estates to be granted these retired servants was dependent upon rank. The master of a trading post was entitled to 1,000 acres, and even an ordinary laborer who had served the company for only three years was entitled to 200 acres. These provisions were not faithfully observed, however. Many retired servants were not given deeds to any land, and many that did receive land grants had to be content with farms much smaller than those to which they felt themselves in law and right entitled.³

The Transfer of Rupert's Land

In 1870, Rupert's Land was transferred to the Dominion of Canada. The transfer, which was effected without consulting the residents of Rupert's Land, created hard feelings, particularly among retired Hudson's Bay Company employees.

The retired servants of the Company, with their families, included very many of the whites, a large portion of the English Half-breeds and the great majority of the French Half-breeds in the British West These people believed that one-tenth of the territory formerly ceded to Selkirk belonged rightfully to themselves and their heirs, and that these lands were therefore legally incapable of being surrendered by the Hudson's Bay Company. These facts seem to have been deliberately concealed by the Company during the progress of negotiations with the Governments of the United Kingdom and Canada. Consequently the people of the East never to this day have been able to understand the bitter sense of wrong cherished especially by the Half-breeds of the West. Those who were in a position to realize their grievance cooperated in a conspiracy of silence. This was a primary cause of the troubles of 1870 and 1885.⁴

By establishing a provisional government and **petitioning** with the List of Rights, the Métis were instrumental in the creation of Manitoba as a



province of Canada. However, once the provisional government was removed and Canadian government policies implemented, the Métis experienced serious difficulties. While many of them were away on hunting expeditions, new settlers arrived and created homesteads on the land to which the Métis expected to return.

Canadian troops, under the command of Colonel Garnet Wolseley, were established in an attempt to bring law and order to the new province. However, the troops actively persecuted the Métis for the execution of Thomas Scott, an act carried out by the provisional government of Louis Riel. As a result, many of the Métis people moved further west (to the area now known as Saskatchewan and Alberta).

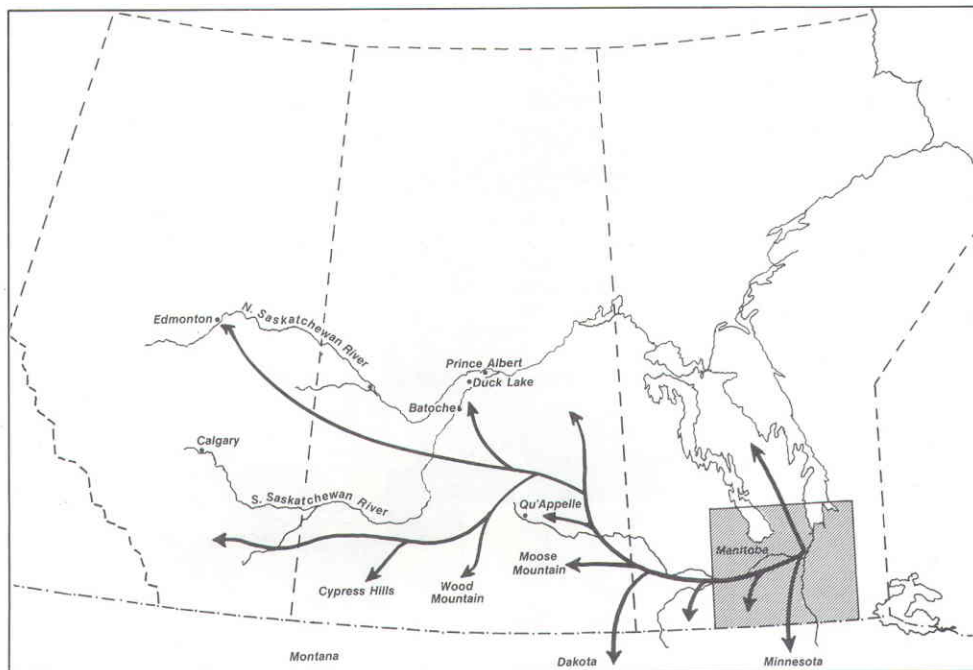
Louis Riel and Ambroise Lepine, in a letter to Lieutenant Governor Morris dated January 3, 1873, expressed their objection to the treatment received by the Métis at the hand of the Canadian troops led by Colonel Wolseley.

In place of treating us as friends as the law of nations entitled us to be, Wolseley entered the Province as an enemy, and as a return for the care which we had

taken of the Province and of the Territory of the North West, from the moment of its transfer, he gave up to pillage everything in the Fort belonging to us.

He hurried away to prison, and allowed to be ill-treated by his soldiers, peaceable and respectable citizens. The commander of this expedition (of peace and civilization) when leaving for Canada, publicly branded as bandits the political friends of the President of the Provisional Government with whom the Canadian Government has been negotiating, — and that Government which had only existed for the maintenance of order and peace in spite of exceptional difficulties.

Wolseley thus revived in our midst the unfortunate animosities which for some months had begun to be allayed, and which our friendly understanding with Canada contributed much to diminish, and which the Canadian government itself, by its faithful execution of its agreement with us, could not have failed still further to decrease.⁵



Métis Dispersal from Manitoba (1870).



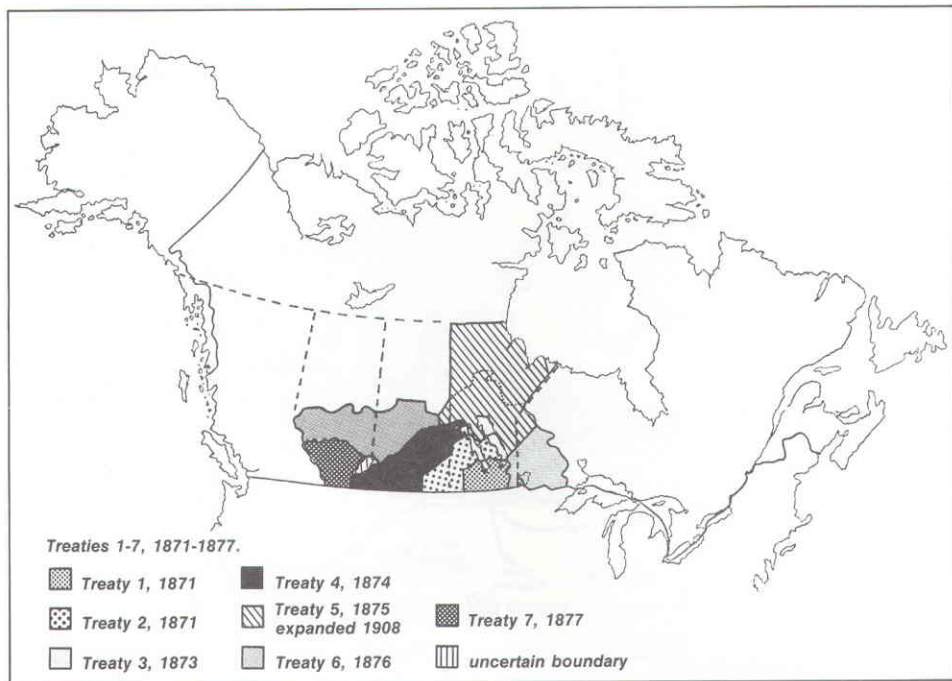
Colonel Garnet Wolseley, Commander of Red River Expedition, 1870.

Treaties

Between 1871 and 1877, seven treaties were signed between the Indian nations (Cree, Ojibwa, Dene, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and Blackfoot) and the Canadian government on behalf of the British Crown. The Indian nations agreed to surrender ownership of the regions defined by the treaties. The surrendered territory included the southern half of present day Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Provision was made in the treaties for reserves or block areas of land to be set aside for the exclusive use of the Indian people. Most of the land allotted was based on 65 hectares (160 acres) of land per family of five.

The terms of the treaties were substantially uniform. Provision was made for reserves, and it was agreed that, except upon occupied lands, hunting privileges were not to be abridged....Each chief was to receive an **annuity** of twenty-five dollars, each of his head men fifteen dollars, and each other member of his band five dollars. Provision was also made for the supply of agricultural implements and other necessary tools, and for the establishment of schools upon the reserves.⁶



The Indian nations, through signing the treaties, relinquished millions of hectares of land. Although they did retain a land base, it was much smaller than their original holdings.

The Métis, with the exception of those who lived with their Indian relatives, did not participate in signing the treaties nor did they receive either annuities or land.

Métis Land Claims

With the establishment of British law on the prairies in 1873, the question of Métis land claims once again became an issue. The Métis of the North West Territories expressed their concern by asking the Canadian government for title to the lands they occupied. They also requested that the land be surveyed in strips rather than squares, in accordance with the existing layout of their farms. The petitions and negotiations of 1869 and 1870 had resulted in the creation of Manitoba as a province and a guarantee of 566,572 hectares (1.4 million acres) of land; with this in mind, the Métis began again to petition the Canadian government. The petition of 1873 from the Métis of Fort Qu'Appelle read, in part:

We beg of you, our worthy Lieutenant Governor, to listen to what we have to say, and although we do not know how to express ourselves, we wish to manifest the sense of respect we have for you. We consequently request you to listen to our just prayer and give us your protection in preventing strangers from disturbing us on our lands, although they do not form part of the Province.

We also ask of you, our Lieutenant Governor, to give us lands in compensation of our rights to the lands of the country as Métis.

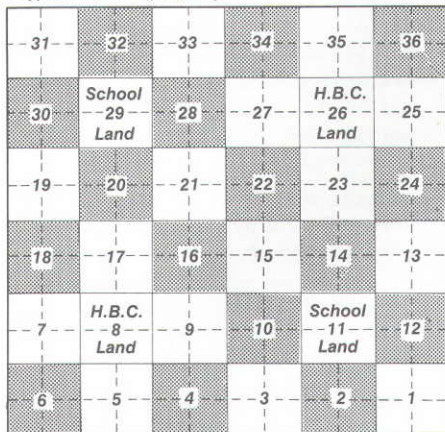
*And we also beg to call your attention to the fact that a preference is shown towards the strangers in the Province, and we would like a stop being put to such a state of things, even in our midst, who do not belong to the Province although those are but a few strangers, still they are trying to **supplant** us.*

We also tell you, as our Lieutenant Governor, that we find it hard of the Canadian Government not having as yet fulfilled the agreements entered into with

the people of the Province; for the last three years those agreements have remained a dead letter, and if the people of the Province is so badly treated we cannot expect to be treated otherwise.

We would be very glad to see the Canadian Government adopting a frank and open course, and if they were to give our people of the Province the lands which in their agreement with the Canadian Government they were to have.⁷

A Typical Township Survey



- ▣ Homestead and Pre-emption land
- Railway or Public land

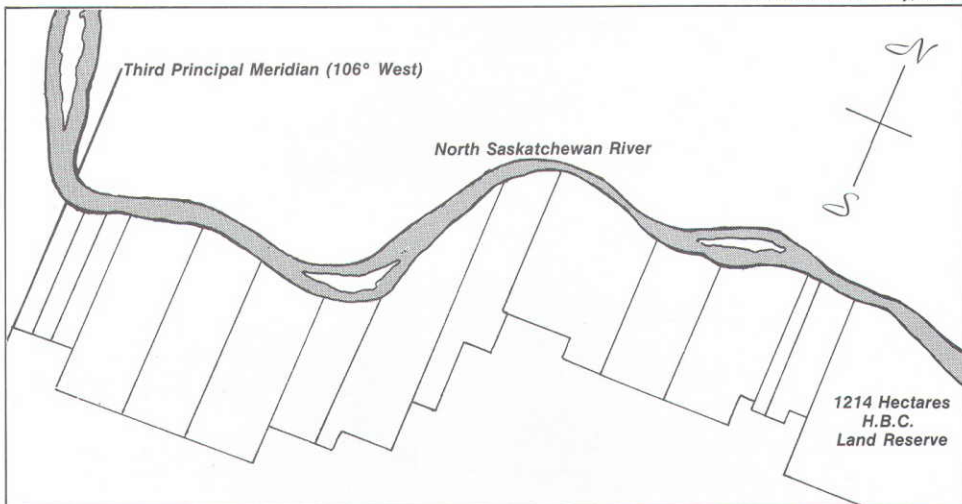
Government Surveys

The flow of immigrants from eastern Canada to the North West Territories increased after 1870. By the late 1870's, not only the Métis but the immigrants, as well, wanted the land surveyed and titles granted. In 1877 and 1878, the settlements of Prince Albert and St. Laurent were surveyed on the river frontage principle, but the surrounding countryside was either surveyed on the township principle or designated to be so surveyed at a later date. This created a number of difficulties for the Métis who had settled beyond the limits of the settlement and for those who had not yet chosen permanent locations.

With the lesson of 1870 fresh in their memories the Canadian Government did not, at first, insist upon the square survey along the rivers of the North-West Territories. When the Métis demanded the right to hold their lands as they had taken them, the Government conceded the principle of river lots without delay. In March 1877 the Surveyor-General wrote:

"It is proposed, in all cases where settlements have been formed along the rivers in the Territories, to adopt the surveys of the farms accordingly, that is to say, giving an average (where practicable) of 10 or 20 chains frontage on the river and letting the lots run back far enough to make 160 acres each, the lines between lots (as a rule) to be made to conform to the

Prince Albert Survey, 1878.



direction of the section lines in the regular survey adjoining.”

Hence, during 1877 and 1878, special surveys were made of the settled districts at Prince Albert and St. Laurent on the river frontage principle.

Beyond the settled districts the township survey was carried out as originally intended. This fact was responsible for much of the bitterness and misunderstanding which followed. Many of the Métis had not yet settled down at the time of the survey of the parish of St. Laurent. Thus, when they came to choose their permanent locations, they had no choice but to settle upon land which had been wholly or partially laid out upon the township principle, or which was designated for the square survey....The township survey disregarded the meandering of the river and it was impossible to know the numbers or to adjust the frontages, depths or improvements. Not a Métis farm outside the special survey made in 1878 fitted into the new system.⁸

In a letter to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald dated January 16, 1883, Father André described the problems of the Métis in the St. Laurent area. Although the letter refers only to St. Laurent, these problems were common to all the Métis of the North West Territories.

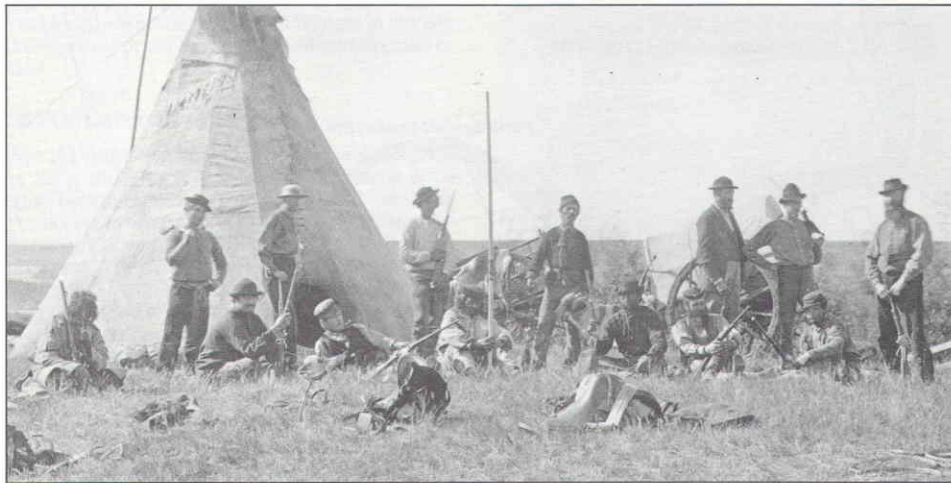
What is the result of this abnormal division? Our half-breeds are overwhelmed with difficulties on account of their land, and this proceeding will now sow division and discord among our people, and will render the Government **odious** in their eyes, considering it as guilty of a gross injustice towards them.

This survey **lamentably** mixes things; some lose their land, which is being grabbed by their neighbors; others see the fruits of their industry and their improvements **dissipated**.

This unhappy state of things could be easily made to cease by giving ear to their just claims. And how can this be refused them when you granted a similar favor to Prince Albert? All the lands along the branches of the Saskatchewan have been surveyed in this manner; everybody was satisfied; and not the least complaint was heard about the survey.

I cannot understand, Sir, why your surveyors should have two different methods of parcelling the public domain; one for Prince Albert, ten chains in width by two miles in depth, which we approve, and which we claim as a right, seeing you have granted it to Prince Albert; the other, of blocking out the land in squares of forty chains, without taking the river nor location of the settlers into consideration. The latter method we protest solemnly against, all of us, and humbly pray, Sir, that you order a new survey, and thus validate our request.⁹

Surveying in Saskatchewan, 1871.



Letters And Petitions

In an attempt to obtain recognition of their claims to land, the Métis throughout the North West Territories sent numerous petitions to the federal government requesting land settlement. Some of the petitions sent between 1873 and 1884 came from:

St. Laurent — 1873

Lake Qu'Appelle — 1873

Lake Qu'Appelle — 1874

Blackfoot Crossing — 1877

Prince Albert — 1878

Cypress Mountain — 1878

St. Albert — 1878

St. Laurent — 1878

Manitoba Village, N.W.T. — 1880

Edmonton — 1880

Battleford — 1881

Prince Albert — 1881

Qu'Appelle Valley — 1882

Batoche — 1882

Lake Qu'Appelle — undated

St. Louis — 1883

Some of the Petition Sites (1873-1883).



The Blackfoot Crossing Petition

The Blackfoot Crossing petition, which was sent to the honourable David Laird, Lieutenant Governor of the North West Territories, is representative of the Métis' petitions.

Blackfoot Crossing, 19th September 1877

Honorable Sir, — It is with sentiments of intermingled hope and fear that we, the undersigned, your petitioners, approach you today. It is to claim your kind sympathy and help in our present deplorable circumstances that we undertake to present you this paper, and to that end we will briefly state our reasons, to which we humbly pray Your Excellency would give the kindest consideration. Before the year of the small-pox, 1870, memorable for its disastrous effects on the native population of this country, we, your petitioners, although not rich, were, however, in comfortable circumstances. We had small homes of our own near Edmonton, and cultivated the soil more or less. Hunting was plentiful, and we were encouraged by the Hudson Bay Company to follow it as much as possible, because their only interest in the country was the fur trade. They were the only merchants amongst us, and this unique interest prevented them from giving any encouragement to the **husbandman**, and consequently from bringing farming implements for sale, except very few, which were sold at such an enormous price that the poor man could not think of buying them. Thus, Hon. Sir, the only encouragement to farming was given by the ministers of the different denominations in our country, and their means also were limited. It was by their advice and assistance that we took to farming as much as our poverty would allow us. Our little gardens, our few cattle and the produce of our hunt supplied us with plenty, and we were happy. But the year 1870 came, that year so terrible to remember, in which the dire malady decimated the whole population, and following in its wake was famine. This combination of evils ruined us, driving us from our homes and compelling us to lead an entirely nomadic life, as the Indians on the plains. Since that time we have had nothing to depend upon but our guns. The game we kill feeds ourselves and our families, and the furs we gather are our only money wherewith to buy clothing, and God knows we do not see how we are to rise above our present condition. It is on this account, Hon. Sir, that we now appeal to the charity you bear towards all your subjects. We hail your arrival at the opening of a new and better era for us all. We humbly approach you today and beg you to help us. The help we implore is farming implements and seed to begin with. We want to settle and till the land, but we have no capital — nothing at all to start with. Also, Hon. Sir, we beg that the game laws be not too **stringent**, until such time as we have something else to subsist on; otherwise we shall be unable to live.

Will your Excellency give these things the kindest consideration?

In conclusion, Hon. Sir, we, the half-breeds, your petitioners, welcome you to this country and wish you many years of happiness and prosperity, whilst we sign ourselves the devoted and humble subjects of Her Majesty the Queen and the most obedient servants of her delegate.

John Munro,	Jean Baptiste Dumont,	Francis Munro,	Paul Fayant,	Baptiste Anas, sen.,
Francois Larocque,		Isaac Dangon,		Baptiste Deschamps, sen.,
Francois Deschamps,	William Campion,		Baptiste Deschamps,	James Ward,
Narcisse Cardinal,	Basile Favel,		Richard Collin,	Antoine Godin,
Henry Collin,	Francis Vandal,		Michel Grey,	Roger Paul,
Magloire Grey,	Alexis Bruno,		Alexis Bellecourt,	Thomas Cameron,
Basile Lawrence,	Pierre Nadon,		Johanny Lawrence,	Alexandre Petitcouteau,
Joseph L'Hyrondelle,	Joseph Deschamps,		Francis Semyre,	Johanny Deschamps,
Pierre Boucher,	Louis Rouselle,		Joseph Bellecourt,	Joseph Allard,
Louison Boucher,	Augustin Goin,		Jules Boucher,	Edward Boucher,
Baptiste Anas, jun.,		Daniel Dagnon,		Louis Rouselle ¹⁰

The following is the response from Mr. Laird to the Blackfoot Crossing petitioners.

Hon. D. Laird, Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories.

Messrs. John Munroe, Francois Munro, Baptiste Anas, sen., and other half-breeds in the Western portion of the North-West Territories.

Gentlemen, — I am much pleased with the respectful tone of your petition, and cannot but feel that sympathy for you in your circumstances which you claim.

Doubtless the small-pox visitation of 1870, to which you allude, tended to drive you from your homes, and to induce you to lead an entirely nomadic life, as the Indians on the plains. Several years, however, have elapsed since that calamity occurred, and it is to be regretted that ere the buffalo became so thinned in number by their promiscuous slaughter at all seasons, you had not endeavored to resume the cultivation of the soil.

The help for which you pray, to be assisted with implements and seed to begin farming, it is not in my power to promise. I shall, however, forward your petition to the Government of Ottawa, with a recommendation that it may receive the favorable consideration of His Excellency the Governor General in Council.

With respect to the game law in force in the Territories, I may state, in reply to your request, that for the approaching winter, until its provisions become more generally known, it is not the intention of the authorities to be very stringent in enforcing its penalties.

It affords me much pleasure to learn that you desire to settle and cultivate the land. Such a course is the true one for you to pursue, and until the crops and stock you may be able to raise are sufficient for your support, the privilege of hunting buffalo three months every autumn will enable you to lay in a winter's stock of provisions.

I can assure you that the Government feels a kindly interest in your welfare, and it is because they desire to see you enjoying the full franchise and property rights of British subjects, and not laboring under the Indian state of **pupilage**, that they have deemed it for the advantage of half-breeds themselves that they should not be admitted to the Indian treaties.

In conclusion, I tender you my sincere thanks for so kindly welcoming me to this country, and for wishing me many years of happiness and prosperity.

I am, Gentlemen, yours respectfully,

David Laird, Lieutenant-Governor

North-West Territories

Blackfoot Crossing of the Bow River

22nd September, 1877.11



David Laird,
Lieutenant Governor,
N.W.T., 1876-1881.

As he had promised, the Lieutenant Governor forwarded the Blackfoot Crossing petition to the federal government. His letter appears below.

Government House, Battleford, 19th November, 1877.

Sir, — I have the honor to transmit to you, to be laid before His Excellency the governor General in Council, a copy of a petition presented to me at the Blackfoot Crossing of the Bow River on the 22nd September last, by certain half-breeds of the south-western portion of the North-West Territories.

This petition sets forth the **destitute** condition of these half-breeds, and prays that they may receive some assistance from the Government in procuring agricultural implements and seed, to enable them to commence farming. Their case is deserving of favorable consideration, inasmuch as though they have a large **admixture** of Indian blood, and have been living, in a great measure, like Indians, yet they have not been admitted into the Indian treaties. I, at least, deem it my duty to bring their petition under the notice of the Hon. and Privy Council, as it appears to me that if any help is afforded them it can only come through the Dominion Parliament.

I likewise transmit a copy of my reply to the said petition.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

David Laird, Lieutenant-Governor

North-West Territories.¹²

The letter was received by the federal government, which responded as follows:

Ottawa, 27th December, 1877.

Sir, — I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your despatch, No. 71, of the 19th **ultimo**, covering a petition presented to you at the Blackfoot Crossing of the Bow River on the 22nd September last, by certain half-breeds of the south-western portion of the North-West Territories, praying, for the reasons set forth in the petition, that assistance be given them in agricultural implements and seed, and also transmitting a copy of your reply.

Your despatch with its enclosures will be brought under the notice of the Minister of the Interior on his return to the seat of Government.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

E. A. Meredith, Deputy Minister
of the Interior.¹³

The Qu'Appelle Petition

The following petition, from the Métis of the settlement of Qu'Appelle, expressed similar concerns. In addition, they requested an allotment of land which they felt the government owed them. They based their request on the fact that they had been living in Manitoba but had been absent at the time of the creation of that province. Therefore, they had not participated in the division of the 566,572 hectares (1,400,000 acres). They felt they should have been included in this allotment and that the government still owed them land.

Peter Lapierre, Esq., Qu'Appelle, N.W.T.

To the Most Honorable the Marquis of Lorne, Governor General of Canada, and Vice Admiral of the same, K.T., G.C.M.G., &c., &c.

The humble petition of Peter Lapierre, Simon Blondin, John Fisher, Alexander Fisher, John Simpson, Xavier Denommie and other, half-breeds of Qu'Appelle settlement, humbly sheweth:

That owing to their being temporarily absent from the now Province of Manitoba at the time of the transfer of the said Province and the North-West Territories to the Dominion of Canada, they have been deprived of and **debarred** from several remunerative advantages which were accorded to their **confreeres** who were residents in the Province of Manitoba, at the time of the aforesaid transfer, and that your petitioners are of the opinion that they have been unjustly treated, as their conduct and actions at the time referred to deserves the kind consideration of the Government.

Therefore your petitioners humbly pray that they be dealt with and treated similar to the half-breeds of Manitoba, and that the Government will grant even scrip to the heads of families, and grants of land to the children of the heads of families of half-breeds in the North-West Territories, in like proportion as was granted to half-breeds and old settlers in the Province of Manitoba.

Your petitioners also humbly beg to bring before Your Excellency's notice, that when Her Majesty's commissioners came here, in the autumn of 1874, to treat with the Indians of this region, they, on behalf of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen, ceded a promise to your petitioners that their rights would be recognized and respected.

Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that the Government will be pleased to cause a survey to be made of their present holdings, similar to the old settlers' claims on the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, in the Province of Manitoba, allotting to each actual settler a certain number of chains frontage fronting on the lakes or rivers, as the case may happen, throughout their settlement, and running two miles back, north or south, as the case may be, with a privilege of two miles additional for hay and wood purposes.

Your petitioners humbly beg further to represent to Your Excellency that many of them are in a very destitute condition and helpless state, more especially since the buffalo have disappeared and receded to beyond the international boundary line, and have thereby been deprived of the means upon which they have been, to a great extent, subsisting for a number of years past, and are totally without the means requisite and necessary to till the soil, from which a livelihood can be made. Your petitioners therefore humbly pray that Your Excellency be pleased to lay before Her Majesty's Government of the Dominion of Canada the necessity of extending to such of them as require it a certain amount of assistance in farming implements and seed grain, to enable them to make a start in farming, and become able to support themselves and families. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

Peter La Pierre,	Joseph Blion,	Simon Blondin, sen.,	Xavier Denommil,
John Fisher,	John Blondin,	Alexander Fisher, sen.	Simon Blondin, jun.,
Louison Blondin,	Napoleon Hamelin,	Zachary Blondin,	Iseaid Poitras,
Napoleon Blondin,	Francois Desmarais,	Antoine Fayant, sen.,	Samuel Turcotte,
William Fayant,	Francois St. Dennis, sen.,	Antoine Fayant jun.,	Alexis Heneré,
Jean Louis Fayant,	Cutbuth St. Dennis,	Francois St. Dennis, sen.,	Francois Morin,
Baptiste Robillard,	Xavier Morin,	Francois St. Dennis, jun.,	Xavier Plante,
Joseph Racette,	Pierre Bonnotte, sen.,	Charles Racette, sen.,	Pierre Bonnotte, jun.,
Tousaint Gallarmeau,	Charles Bonnotte,	Thomas La Pierre,	Julien Bonnotte,
Jean Bapt. Daupninais,	Baptiste Morin,	Baptiste Laliberte,	Camile Morin,
Norbert Welch,	Archil Klyne,	Isidore LaPlante,	Theophile Klyne,
John Sinclair, sen.,	Elie Blion,	Mathias Sansregret,	Gregoire Ledoux,
Alex. Pelletier,	Pierre Fisher,	Hilaire Boucher,	William Fisher,
Edouard St. Germain,	George Fisher (John's son)	Augustin Brebaut, sen.,	Moysé Vallee,
Augustin Brebaut, jun.,	Charles Desjarlais,	Michael Desjarlais,	James Grant,
Edbert Desjarlais,	Clement Pelletier,	Michel Desjarlais,	Antoine Laroque, sen.,
Thos Sinclair,	Antoine Laroque, jun.,	John Sinclair, jun.,	Joseph James Grant,
Louison Flammand,	St. Pierre Blondin,	Maxim Flammand,	Ambroise Blondin,
Andre' Flammand,	Joseph Blondin,	Pierre Poitras, jun.,	Stanislas Desjarlais,
William Daniel,	Joseph Racette, sen.,	Modeste Daniel,	Joseph Marion,
Joseph Daniel,	R.T. Marion,	Alexis McKay,	Daniel Dumas,
Joseph Paresien,	Lazarus Laliberte,	Roderick Ross,	Joseph Delorme,
Pierre Ross,	Thomas Desjarlais,	Roderick Ross, jun.,	Mathias Desjarlais,
Urbain Ross,	Alex. Laroque,	Alfred Fisher,	William Laroque,
John Simpson, jun.,	Edward Brebant,	Andrew Klyne,	William Daniel, jun.,
George Fisher, sen.,	Joseph La Pierre,	St. Pierre Potras,	Theophile La Pierre,
Bte. Desjarlais,	Thomas Kavanagh, on behalf of Elsie Klyne, his wife,		Pierre Desjarlais
Isidore Desjarlais,	Thomas Kelly, on behalf of his wife, Veronique Klyne,		Joseph Poitras,
Joseph Pelletierou Bouvette,	Joseph Hugomard, Ptre., O.B.I.	Pierre Pierre Pelletier,	Louis Boucher.
Napoleon Pelletier ¹⁴			

The federal government's response to this petition was:

Department Of The Interior, Ottawa, 20th September, 1881.

Sir, — I have the honor, by direction of the Minister of the Interior, to acknowledge the receipt of the petition of yourself and others, praying that you may receive, as residents of the North-West Territories previous to their transfer to Canada, the same consideration as was accorded to those living in Manitoba at the same period, and to inform you that your petition will be duly considered. I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant, A. Russell, Acting Surveyor-General.¹⁵

The St. Antoine de Padou Petition

The main concerns of the Métis of St. Antoine de Padou (now Batoche) were the method of land division and surveying techniques. In their petition to Prime Minister Macdonald, the petitioners stated that being required to pay for the survey and for the land which they occupied would place them in a position of destitution.

St. Antoine De Padou, South Saskatchewan, 4th September, 1882.

To the Right Hon. Sir John A. Macdonald, Minister of the Interior, Ottawa:

SIR, — We the undersigned French half-breeds, for the most part settled on the west bank of the Saskatchewan, in the district of Prince Albert, N.W.T., hereby approach you, in order to set forth with confidence the painful position in which we are placed, with reference to the lands occupied by us in this portion of the territory, and in order to call the attention of the Government to the question which causes us so much anxiety.

Compelled, most of us, to abandon the prairie, which can no longer furnish us the means of subsistence, we came in large numbers, during the course of the summer, and settled on the south branch of the Saskatchewan; pleased with the land and the country, we set ourselves actively to work clearing the land, but in hope of sowing next spring, and also to prepare our houses for the winter now advancing rapidly. The surveyed lands being already occupied or sold, we were compelled to occupy lands not yet surveyed, being ignorant, for the most part, also, of the regulations of the Government respecting Dominion lands. Great then was our astonishment and **perplexity** when we were notified, that when the lands are surveyed we shall be obliged to pay \$2 an acre to the Government, if our lands are included in odd-numbered sections. We desire, moreover, to keep close together in order more easily to secure a school and a church. We are poor people and cannot pay for our land without utter ruin, and losing the fruits of our labor and seeing our lands pass into the hands of strangers, who will go to the land office at Prince Albert and pay the amount fixed by the Government. In our anxiety we appeal to your sense of justice as Minister of the Interior and head of the Government, and beg you to reassure us speedily, by directing that we shall not be disturbed on our lands, and that the Government grant us the privilege of considering us as occupants of even-numbered sections, since we have occupied these lands in good faith. Having so long held this country as its masters and so often defended it against the Indians at the price of our blood, we consider it not asking too much to request that the Government allow us to occupy our lands in peace, and that exception be made to its regulations, by making to the half-breeds of the North-West free grants of land. We also pray that you would direct that the lots be surveyed along the river ten chains in width by two miles in depth, this mode of division being the long-established usage of the country. This would render it more easy for us to know the limits of our several lots.

We trust, Sir, that you will grant a favorable hearing to this our petition, and that you will make known your decision as soon as possible. We await it with great anxiety, and pray God to protect you and keep you for the direction of this great country which you so wisely govern.

Your humble Petitioners

Gabriel Dumont,
Baptiste Rochlot,
Pierre Glonory,
William Fidler,
Damase Carriere,
Andre Neault,
Patrice Tournon,

Baptiste Vandale,
Baptiste Vandale,
William Vandale,
Theophile Carron,
Mathias Parenton,
Zephirin Duma,
William Natome,

Jean Carron,
Moise Parenton,
Baptiste Delorme,
Baptiste Boyer,
Napoleon Neault,
Napoleon Carriere,
Callixte Tournon,

Antoine Ferguson,
Joseph Tournon,
Jean Carron,
R.P. Tseshier,
Moise Glonory,
Elzeard Parisien,
A. Fidler,

Antoine Vandale,	Isidore Villeneuve,	Gervais,	Adolphe Nolin,
Charles Lariviere,	Ignace Poitra,	Francois Tournon,	Theophile Goulette,
Joseph Parenteau,	Jerome Racette,	Xavier Batoche,	Charles Gareau,
Joseph Vandale,	Maxim Poitra,	Francois Fidler,	Emmanuel Champagne,
Alexis Gervais,	Louis Batoche.		Joseph Delorme,

I hereby certify that the list of Petitioners is correct.
Chas. Nolin, J.P.¹⁶

The St. Antoine de Padou petition was acknowledged by the federal government and the petitioners were informed that their cases would be dealt with at "the proper time":

Department Of The Interior, Ottawa 13th October, 1882.

Sir, — I have the honor, by direction of the Minister of Interior, to acknowledge the receipt, through you, of a petition, dated the 4th ult., from 47 French half-breeds, on the subject of certain lands on the Saskatchewan, in the district of Prince Albert, on which they have squatted.

In reply, I am directed to request you to inform the petitioners that when the proper time arrives the case of each bona fide settler will be dealt with on its own merits; but as regards the surveying of the land in question, that all lands in the North-West Territories will be surveyed according to the system now in force.

I have the honor to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

Lindsay Russell, D.M. Int.¹⁷

Government Inaction

All of the petitions followed a similar pattern. They requested land rights and a survey system which would accommodate the established lifestyle of the Métis. Government responses to the petitions were also similar: they invariably assured the petitioners that the situation was under consideration and would be dealt with in due time. To the Métis, the phrase "in due time" became synonymous with inaction.

The first Métis petition to the federal government requesting settlement of the land issue in the North West Territories was sent in 1873. Eleven years later, this petition and many others like it remained unresolved.

By 1884, the only viable means by which most Métis could make a living was farming. In order to be assured of a land base, the Métis needed title to their lands and they wanted the land issue settled. Unrest began to grow as they considered their alternatives. However, by not dealing with the issue, the federal government was able to implement other plans for developing the Canadian West.

Endnotes

1. D.H. Bocking, *Pages From the Past: Essays on Saskatchewan History*, Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1979, p. 7.
2. Public Archives of Alberta, Oblate Collection, St. Laurent de Gradin Parish Records, "St. Laurent Chronicles", 1878, p. 67.
3. Norman F. Black, *History of Saskatchewan and the North West Territories*, Regina: Saskatchewan Historical Company, 1913, p. 117.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
5. Report of the Select Committee on the Causes of the Difficulties in the North-West Territories in 1869-70, Appendix No. 6, Ottawa: I. B. Taylor, 1874, p. 204.
6. See Black, p. 206.
7. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, John Fisher to Alexander Morris, Lieutenant Governor, May 5, 1873, pp. 1-2.
8. G.F. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961, pp. 255-257.
9. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, Father André to Sir John A. MacDonald, Minister of the Interior, January 16, 1885, p. 55.
10. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, Métis of Blackfoot Crossing to David Laird, Lieutenant Governor, North-West Territories, September 19, 1877, pp. 22-23.
11. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, David Laird, Lieutenant Governor, North-West Territories to Métis of Blackfoot Crossing, September 22, 1877, p. 23.
12. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, David Laird, Lieutenant Governor, North-West Territories to E.A. Meredith, Deputy Minister of the Interior, November 19, 1877, pp. 21-22.
13. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, E.A. Meredith, Deputy Minister of the Interior to David Laird, Lieutenant Governor, Northwest Territories, December 27, 1877, p. 21.
14. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, Peter La Pierre to Marquis of Lorne, undated, pp. 44-46.
15. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, A. Russell, Acting Surveyor-General to Peter La Pierre Esq., Qu'Appelle, N.W.T., September 20, 1881, p. 44.
16. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, Chas. Nolin to John A. MacDonald, Minister of the Interior, September 4, 1882, pp. 47-48.
17. Canada Sessional Papers, No. 116, A. 1885, Papers and Correspondence, Lindsay Russell to Chas. Nolin, October 13, 1882, p. 46.

Vocabulary

All definitions denoted by an asterisk (*) are from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, third edition, Oxford University Press, 1973. Other definitions are explained in the context in which they appear.

- p. 3 * **Free Hunters:** men who hunted for sport and capital rather than for food.
- p. 3 * **Calamitous:** full of affliction or misery.
- p. 3 * **Cordon:** a line of men placed at detached intervals, to prevent passage to or from the guarded area.
- p. 3 * **Sou:** a French coin, formerly the twentieth part of a livre, now used to designate the five-centime piece. (A livre is about equal to the franc, which was valued at 14 cents Canadian in 1984.)
- p. 6 * **Remunerative:** profitable.
- p. 7 * **Petition:** a written supplication addressed to a superior, or to a person or body in authority (as a sovereign or legislature), soliciting some favor, right or mercy, or the redress or some wrong or grievance.
- p. 8 * **Allay:** to subside, cease.
- p. 9 * **Annuity:** a yearly allowance or income.
- p. 10 * **Supplant:** overthrow.
- p. 11 * **Township:** a division 15.6 kilometers square.
- p. 11 * **Chain:** 19.8 metre.
- p. 12 * **Odious:** deserving of hatred, hateful.
- p. 12 * **Lamentable:** full of or expressing sorrow; wretchedly bad.
- p. 12 * **Dissipate:** to scatter; to cause to go off in all directions.
- p. 14 * **Husbandman:** one who tills and cultivates the soil; a farmer.
- p. 14 * **Stringent:** rigorous, strict.
- p. 15 * **Pupilage:** the conditions of being a minor or ward.
- p. 16 * **Destitute:** to forsake, abandon, leave or neglect.
- p. 16 * **Admixture:** the action of mingling as in ingredient.
- p. 16 * **Ultimo:** of last month.
- p. 17 * **Debar:** to shut out, exclude; prevent.
- p. 17 * **Confreere:** a fellow member of a learned profession.
- p. 19 * **Perplexity:** puzzled condition, bewilderment.

Questions

The questions which follow have been selected to reinforce the objectives of *Book 3: Petitioning for Rights*. They can be used for discussion research or assignment purposes.

Students should not be expected to answer all of the questions. It is suggested that the teacher select an appropriate number and variety of questions for the class.

Objective 1: to provide information about the changes in the Métis lifestyle after the disappearance of the buffalo.

Questions

1. After examining Quotation 1, explain why the extermination of the buffalo would have a serious effect on the Métis of western Canada.
2. Explain how the buffalo hunting and freighting industries were virtually destroyed by 1875.

Objective 2: to explain the significance of Métis land title.

Questions

1. Examine Quotations 3 and 4 and use the content to support or refute the opinion that the Métis had just claim to land holdings.
2. Explain why Métis land claims became an important issue after the establishment of the North West Mounted Police on the prairies.
3. Examine Quotations 8 and 9. Decide which method of survey would be more appropriate for the Métis and explain why.
4. Paraphrase Quotation 16, which describes the situation faced by the Métis of St. Antoine de Padou.

Objective 3: to examine the attempts of the Métis to obtain legal title to their lands.

Questions

1. Explain what a petition is and how it is used.

2. Explain why the Métis chose to petition the federal government for settlement of land claims.
3. Derive the main ideas from the Blackfoot Crossing petition of September 19, 1877 (Quotation 10).
4. Examine the response to the Blackfoot Crossing petition (Quotation 11). Compare this quotation with the Blackfoot Crossing petition (Quotation 10) and list the problems which were identified by both parties. Were any solutions proposed?
5. Examine the letters pertaining to the petition from Blackfoot Crossing (Quotations 12 and 13). What was the response from the federal government?
6. Examine the petition from Qu'Appelle (Quotation 14). Describe the four major requests of the Métis of Qu'Appelle.
7. Examine Quotations 13, 15 and 17. What was the most common response by the federal government?

Enrichment Questions

1. Paraphrase Quotation 5 and write a paragraph which provides a plausible explanation of Colonel Wolseley's conduct following his arrival in the Red River Settlement.
2. Explain why the Canadian government signed treaties with the Indian nations.
3. The Indian nations which signed the treaties negotiated for and received certain things. What were these?
4. "By not dealing with the issue, the federal government was able to implement other plans for developing the Canadian West." Using this quotation as the opening sentence, write a paragraph or two describing what these plans might be.
5. As an individual project or in groups, prepare a petition pertaining to an issue that affects your age group.

Recommended Reading List

- Archer, John A., *Saskatchewan: A History*, Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980, pp. 52-83.
- Bocking, D.H., *Pages from the Past: Essays on Saskatchewan History*, Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1979, pp. 1-16.
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- Lower, J. Arthur, *Western Canada: An Outline History*, Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983, pp. 104-120.
- Owram, Doug, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980, pp. 168-191.
- Schilling, Rita, *Gabriel's Children*, Saskatoon: Saskatoon Métis Society, Local 11, 1983, pp. 25-39.
- Stanley, G.F., *The Birth of Western Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961, pp. 177-193.
- Thomas, Lewis G., *The Prairie West to 1905: A Canadian Sourcebook*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975, pp. 83-100.
- Thomas, Lewis H., *The North-West Territories: 1870-1905*, Ottawa: The Canadian Historical Association, 1970, pp. 2-9.

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