

party, faced with such resistance, abandoned their work.

This simple action, carried out with gentlemanly firmness, established Riel as a man of action – a political leader for the Metis during this period of bewilderment and uncertainty.



THE RIEL-SMITH DEBATE

AS THE YEAR 1869 drew to a close, a youthful Louis Riel looked back with justifiable pride. He had taken full charge of the Metis resistance to the Canadian government's high-handed if not openly rapacious onslaught against the citizens of Red River. He had filled the political vacuum that occurred when the Hudson's Bay Company sold its charter to the Canadian government, and he was demanding a local, responsible government within the framework of Canadian confederation.

His militia had disarmed and imprisoned the radical counter-insurgents who had been organized into a military unit by John Christian Schultz and Colonel John Stoughton Dennis, although some of the more dangerous prisoners had escaped. The spurious governor, William McDougall, in attempting to take over the country prematurely, had been disgraced and sent packing unceremoniously back across the US border. But Riel's own volatile and hard-to-discipline Metis, along with his equally volatile and hard-to-discipline Irish allies, the Fenians under Bill O'Donoghue, still had serious political rifts that had to be repaired. O'Donoghue had argued bitterly with Riel, trying unsuccessfully to force him to join the American Republic. Meanwhile, some of the Metis were, in Riel's opinion, far too amenable to the advances of one of the three Canadian government commissioners who had been sent out to negotiate with him. This was the most dangerous of the commissioners, a man named Donald Smith. Smith was creating a favourable impression, particularly among the English-speaking Metis.

The other two commissioners, Lieutenant-Colonel de Salaberry and Vicar General Thibault did not worry Riel, but Smith, he knew, was capable of carrying out the formidable task given him by the Ottawa government: that of pacifying Red River and making the population amenable to the Canadian takeover of the territory.

As a means of finding out precisely what was contained in the impressive pile of government documents carried by Donald Smith, and in the hope that a public meeting focusing on Smith and himself would result in a tightening of Metis alliances, Riel made the arrangements for such a meeting to be held on January 19, 1870. Excitement spread throughout Red River and the neighbouring communities as the day of the meeting drew near.

The morning of the 19th dawned clear and brutally cold, as the thermometer hovered below minus 30 degrees. Dozens of horse-drawn cutters, sleigh runners protesting against the bitter cold, squealed across the deep-frozen snow to Fort Garry, pulled by frost-covered horses and steered by men whose beards lay buried beneath a centimeter of ice from their own frozen breaths. From nearby Kildonan, and from Headingly some twenty-two kilometers away, the Scotch and English came despite the bitter cold. From the nearby centers of St. Norbert and St. Vital came the French-speaking Metis on foot, in sleighs, and on horseback.

Then Riel and Smith appeared, and were instantly greeted with a ragged clatter of rifle fire from a contingent of Metis: a friendly salute to the speakers.

As the final arrangements for the rules of the meeting were worked out, the throng, numbering over a thousand people, crowded into the frigid grounds surrounded by the cold walls of Fort Garry. The crowd silently appraised the two speakers. Donald Smith, 50 years old, tall and impressively built, exuded a quiet, almost pompous confidence, as he in turn appraised the crowd with shrewd and penetrating blue eyes half hidden by bushy white eyebrows. With long, prematurely white hair and a flowing white beard, Smith appeared for all the world

like the stern and uncompromising image of the Old Testament Jehovah.

Riel, 25, stood tall and slim beside the hulking fur-clad figure of Smith. With wavy brown hair and flashing dark eyes, he stood lightly clad in the Metis capote adorned with its brilliant sash, warmed by the inner fires of youthful idealism. Louis' nervousness, which had been apparent when the two contestants met, vanished abruptly as he called the meeting to order.

But this was to be Donald Smith's day. The people wanted to hear in full detail what he had to offer. Riel was acclaimed as the interpreter for Smith, a duty that he reluctantly agreed to and carried out with meticulous honesty. He dutifully translated as Smith read from his pile of documents and from a prepared address, every word of which conflicted with Riel's own dreams and plans for Red River.

Hours passed. Despite the cruel cold, the crowd, attentive and silent but for the incessant stomping of feet in a vain attempt to keep warm, leaned on every word. Smith declared Canada's good faith and her willingness to grant "all rights that the people may prove themselves qualified to exercise."

The meeting was finally adjourned in the late afternoon. It had gone on for eight incredible hours without interruption, despite the dreadful cold of the outdoor amphitheatre. On the next morning, January 20th, with the temperature still below minus 30 degrees, the meeting was reconvened. Once again Smith took the stage. The crowd was even larger than that of the previous day. Smith read from documents while Riel interpreted. Five hours passed.

The speaker and interpreter, prevented by notions of propriety from warming their hands at one of the outdoor fires, or from stomping their feet in the snow to keep warm as the spectators were doing, turned the event into a marathon of perseverance. Speaking unemotionally to the crowd, Smith distanced himself from the foppish McDougall, who had failed his duty to the Canadian government and was now on his way back to Ottawa. "I would like to make it very clear that I have never known that individual" (Cheers) "And although I am not

a Native of Red River, my wife is a Native of Rupert's Land and the country is very close to my heart." (Cheers) "I represent Canada, but I will press her interests only insofar as they are in accord with the interests of the Northwest." (Cheers) "Under no other circumstances will I consent to act. True, I am connected to the Hudson's Bay Company, but I would resign from the company at this very moment if it would help Rupert's Land." Grimly, and with grave honesty, Riel translated. There were more cheers, this time from the French. Riel knew that Smith had swayed many in the crowd to the government's side, without giving any guarantee of the establishment of a local responsible government. Riel watched bitterly as Smith smiled benignly at the now friendly crowd.

The wan winter light was deepening into early twilight when Smith finally stepped aside and Riel took center stage. But the hour was late and the crowd was eager to find some warmth. Riel quickly moved that forty delegates be selected, twenty elected by the Scots of the district and twenty by the French. The motion carried. But a voice from the crowd asked "Why do you need these delegates? Are you casting doubt on Mr. Smith's commission?"

Riel was silent for a long moment. His bright eyes scanned the shivering crowd of spectators. Then they looked to the magnificent harshness of the plains beyond – that wild, uncompassionate but free land of the Metis buffalo hunters. He heard his own voice saying "No. We accept the commission as genuine. We are merely considering what is to be done under it."

The meeting was over. The crowd left believing what they hoped was true: that Canada would treat them fairly. No need now to think, to face the insecurity of the unknown utopia of the passionate young Metis intellectual, Louis Riel. As it turned out, Smith had won more than an empire for the Queen that day. He won a personal financial empire of incredible proportions.



Thomas Scott.

Photo Credit: Saskatchewan Archives Board.



THE EXECUTION OF THOMAS SCOTT

THE EXECUTION OF Thomas Scott by Riel's firing squad at 2:00 p.m., March 4th, 1870, changed the course of history in western Canada. Some people called the execution of Scott cold-blooded murder. Others, including Riel and members of his provisional government, claimed that it was necessary to restore order to Red River during the crisis of 1869-70. During this crisis Protestant extremists had made several serious attempts at the military overthrow of Riel's democratically elected government.

Thomas Scott was an obscure labourer who, had he not been swept up in these turbulent events, would likely have lived and died anonymously as did his hard-working, God-fearing Irish compatriots who immigrated to Canada with him.

Thomas Scott was only twenty-eight years old when he was killed. He was a Presbyterian, and a member of the radical Orange Order. He came west from Upper Canada (now Ontario) in the summer of 1869. Scott, who was described as a tall, handsome man built like Hercules, had no difficulty getting a job as a labourer on the construction of the Dawson Road.

The Dawson Road, a make-work project of the federal government for the poverty-stricken people of Red River, was designed to connect the Red River colony to Upper Canada. The road was used in 1870 to bring in troops to control Metis resistance to the federal government's take-over of Red River.

The wages paid to the labourers on the road were abysmal, described by the workers themselves as "starvation wages."

It was not long before Thomas Scott led a strike against John Snow, a demanding and miserly boss who seemed to enjoy the misery of his men.

In this action, Scott's volatile nature surfaced. During an argument between Scott and Snow, the young giant lost his temper and picked Snow up off his feet, threatening to throw him into the Seine River, upon whose banks they were standing. Scott was duly charged with assault, and the judge fined him. He paid the fine cheerfully enough, telling the judge, "Well, if I had known it was going to be so expensive, I'd have dunked him in the river and gotten me money's worth."

Scott, however, soon became known in Red River for his intolerance of the French-Catholic Metis. His Protestant extremism, together with his uncompromising personality and fighting spirit swept him into the camp of the counter-insurgents who were planning the military overthrow of Riel's legitimately elected provisional government. Scott became the dupe of the devious and cunning Dr. Schultz, who had escaped from Riel's prison and was involved in raising an armed force to overthrow the provisional government. Indeed, his efforts were so successful that an armed expedition from Portage La Prairie had set out to overthrow the provisional government and kill Louis Riel.

Thomas Scott was involved in this foolish affair. In fact, his courage and zeal set him up as a natural leader among the insurgents. He had been imprisoned by Riel prior to this armed foray, but had escaped. During the attempt on Riel's life, the insurgents, led by Scott and Major Boulton, surrounded the house of Henri Coutu, where Riel often stayed, hoping to capture the Metis leader. Scott forced entry into the house; when he found that Riel was gone he told Coutu that when Riel was found, "He himself would shoot the Metis scoundrel."

The plot failed, however, and Scott and the entire band, with the exception of Dr. Schultz, who made good his escape, were rounded up by the Metis. Major Boulton was sentenced to death by Riel. However, a deal was struck and Riel spared Boulton's life, setting him free in return for a guarantee from certain prestigious leaders of the Protestant community to

support his provisional government.

For a time it seemed that peace might prevail in Red River. But Thomas Scott did not submit to Metis authority even as a prisoner. He and a companion named Murdoch McLeod attacked their guards, calling them cowards and traitors. The other prisoners signed an oath of allegiance to Riel's government and were consequently freed from prison. Scott and McLeod, however, refused to sign it. Instead, they abused their captors at every opportunity. The Metis guards eventually became so angry that they considered shooting the prisoners on the spot. They gave Riel an ultimatum, telling him that if he did not have Scott executed they would shoot Riel. The guards insisted on a court-martial for Scott. This was carried out, and on a vote of 3-2, Scott was condemned to death. Ambroise Lepine, Riel's Adjutant-General, concurred with the sentence. He set the date of execution for the next day.

Scott's coffin was built under the window of his jail cell and then carried to the place of his execution inside the walls of Fort Garry. Papers, pen and ink were supplied, and the doomed man wrote one last letter to his friends.

At noon on March 4th, a large crowd gathered in Fort Garry to watch the spectacle. Scott was brought out, praying as he walked. A bandage was placed over his eyes and he was forced to kneel in the snow. At a given signal, the squad fired. Four bullets struck Scott in the chest but he still did not die. The commander of the squad had to finish him off with his pistol. He simply walked up and shot Scott in the head. The fiery young Irishman was finally silenced.

But his execution was a political blunder of major proportions. It destroyed Riel's dreams for the West. Indeed, Riel himself was later executed by the federal government for his part in Scott's death. These two executions reawakened dormant hatreds between the French-Catholic Quebecers and the English-Protestant Ontarians. The executions, part of our often barbaric feudal past, cast a pall over Canadian politics that has lasted a hundred years, and still haunts our political realities.



THE CANADA FIRST PARTY

THE CANADA FIRST PARTY never ran for election, but its members, a shadowy group of speculators and businessmen based mainly in Ontario, had an impact on Canadian history. According to its own official rhetoric, the Canada First Party was set up in 1868 to “advance the interests of their Native land and to build a strong and powerful community in Canada.” Behind these innocuous statements, however, lurked land speculators, in Toronto and in the West, who had plans to acquire huge tracts of land in Red River once Canada took over Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company.

The chief spokesmen for the Canada First Party were George T. Dennison of Toronto and Charles Mair from rural Ontario. Mair was a Liberal, and wrote for the big Liberal paper of the day, the *Toronto Globe*. Mair moved to Red River early in 1869 to get in on the ground floor of the lucrative land deals that were going to be made possible when the Canadian government took over Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company. In Red River, Mair recruited Dr. John Christian Schultz into the Canada First Party. Schultz owned the controlling interest in the only newspaper in Red River, the *Nor’Wester*.

The *Nor’Wester* was a powerful tool for the moulding of public opinion in Red River. Schultz did not hesitate for a moment to put his paper at the service of the Canada First Party. In 1868 the paper editorialized: “The Wise and Prudent will be prepared to receive and benefit by the changes to be

made when Canada assumes sovereignty over Rupert's Land, whilst the indolent and careless, like the Native tribes of the country, will fall back before the march of a superior intelligence." During the period 1869-70, the *Nor'Wester*, despite the peaceful approach used by Riel and the Metis council, clamoured for "a loyal uprising to put the French rebels in their place."

Indeed, Dr. Schultz and Charles Mair were deeply involved in the plot to kill Riel and take control of Red River through armed force. They were captured by Ambroise Lepine and the Metis militia, however, along with nearly a hundred armed insurgents. They were imprisoned in Fort Garry from December 1869, to February 1870, when Schultz made good his escape during a raging prairie blizzard. During this same period the *Canada First Party's* Red River paper was taken over by Riel's militia. Schultz, who had made his way to Ontario, was preaching to crowds of Orangemen who flocked to hear him. He stirred up latent Protestant hatreds in Toronto, where he told a crowd of Orangemen "The situation at Fort Garry is simply this: that the Fenian flag floated from its flagstaff. The rebels hold high revelry within its walls, and Canadians lay in dungeons within it."

By appealing to blind patriotism, Schultz was able to play upon the fears and prejudices of the English Protestant population of Ontario. Then, in December 1869, the young Irish Protestant extremist Thomas Scott was executed at Fort Garry under the orders of Louis Riel. It was a colossal political blunder for Riel and the Metis.

The *Canada First Party* leapt upon Scott's execution as a means of drumming up hatred in Ontario for the Metis, enough hatred to force the federal government to send troops to Red River to dismantle Riel's provisional government, and, hopefully, to hang Riel. Dennison wrote: "We were much depressed at the apathy of the public over the events at Red River, but when we heard that Scott had been murdered, it was seen at once that there was an opportunity . . . to draw attention to the matter and by denouncing the murder of Scott, to arouse the indignation of the people, and foment a public opinion that

would force the government to send up an armed expedition to restore order."

Agitating for revenge and retribution, Schultz and Mair toured Ontario, speaking to large crowds of angry Orangemen. In Toronto, Orange demonstrators in front of city hall carried placards declaring "Orangemen, is brother Scott forgotten already? Men of Ontario, shall Scott's blood cry in vain for vengeance? Shall French rebels rule our dominion?"

Stories were spread that Scott had not been killed outright, but died a terrible death by freezing in his coffin. These statements fuelled the fires of hatred that had been smoldering throughout Protestant Ontario, and despite the efforts of Prime Minister Macdonald's powerful Quebec lieutenant, George-Etienne Cartier, an expeditionary force was recruited (mostly from the ranks of Ontario's Protestant extremists) to move out to Red River. To mollify Cartier, the federal government claimed the expedition was not punitive, but was merely to be used as a peacekeeping force. To satisfy Quebec, the federal government negotiated the details of the future Manitoba Act with Riel's Ottawa emissaries, Janvier Ritchot, John Black, and Alfred Scott, all of Red River.

In the end, however, Macdonald was tied to the wishes of his Ontario constituents. So, in the end, the efforts of the Canada First Party resulted in the overthrow of Riel's elected government, and in his banishment from Canada. The Canada First Party really ended any hope the federal government may have had for a negotiated settlement at Red River. And in so doing, the Canada First Party set the stage for a hundred years of mistrust and resentment between Quebec and the rest of Canada.



THE WOLSELEY EXPEDITION

LOUIS RIEL'S DELEGATES returned to Red River in June of 1870 with the welcome news that Ottawa had agreed to most of the demands of the provisional government. A motion was put forward and the Manitoba Act was unanimously accepted by the members of the provisional government at Red River. A twenty-one gun salute was fired at Fort Garry to celebrate the occasion. It seemed as though Manitoba's troubles were over. But this illusion was short-lived.

In late June, news was received that a military force of 1200 troops was being dispatched to Red River under the command of a British Colonel named Garnet Wolseley. Of this force, 800 were volunteers recruited in Ontario. Many had joined for no other reason than to avenge the death of Thomas Scott, who had been executed by Riel's men in March. But local fears were calmed when a proclamation from Colonel Wolseley arrived. In it, he assured the members of the provisional government that the mission was one of peace. He wrote: "The force which I have the honor of commanding will enter your province representing no party either in religion or politics, and will afford equal protection to the lives and property of all races and of all creeds."

Bill O'Donoghue, Riel's Irish ally, would have none of Wolseley's blarney. He pressured Riel to harass the column of troops along the entire course of their wilderness trek, so that they would never reach Red River. But Riel, on the advice of Bishop Tache and Father Ritchot, made preparations to

welcome the Canadian troops when they arrived. Riel had been assured that the Canadian government's new governor for the territory, a man named Adams Archibald, would be in Red River before the troops arrived. Riel felt confident that with the governor present, the troops would not dare to go on a rampage.

Meanwhile, the troops were pressing westward along the same water routes of northern Ontario that the Metis voyageurs had used for the previous 100 years. They had to disassemble and carry the heavy cannons over the many portages along the route. As well, they had to forage for fresh food throughout much of their wilderness journey. The troops had to walk, using the muddy Dawson Road, all the way from the Lake Of The Woods to Red River. To add to their discomfort, they were hounded by torrential rainfall, and windstorms that dropped trees across the trail.

Metis guides had been sent out from Red River to meet them at the Lake Of The Woods. They reported back that the troops were in an ugly mood, and were looking for trouble. On August 23rd, the troops made their last bivouac just 6 miles short of Fort Garry. That night the wind flattened their tents, and solid sheets of rain soaked them to the bone. They had been 96 gruelling days on the trail.

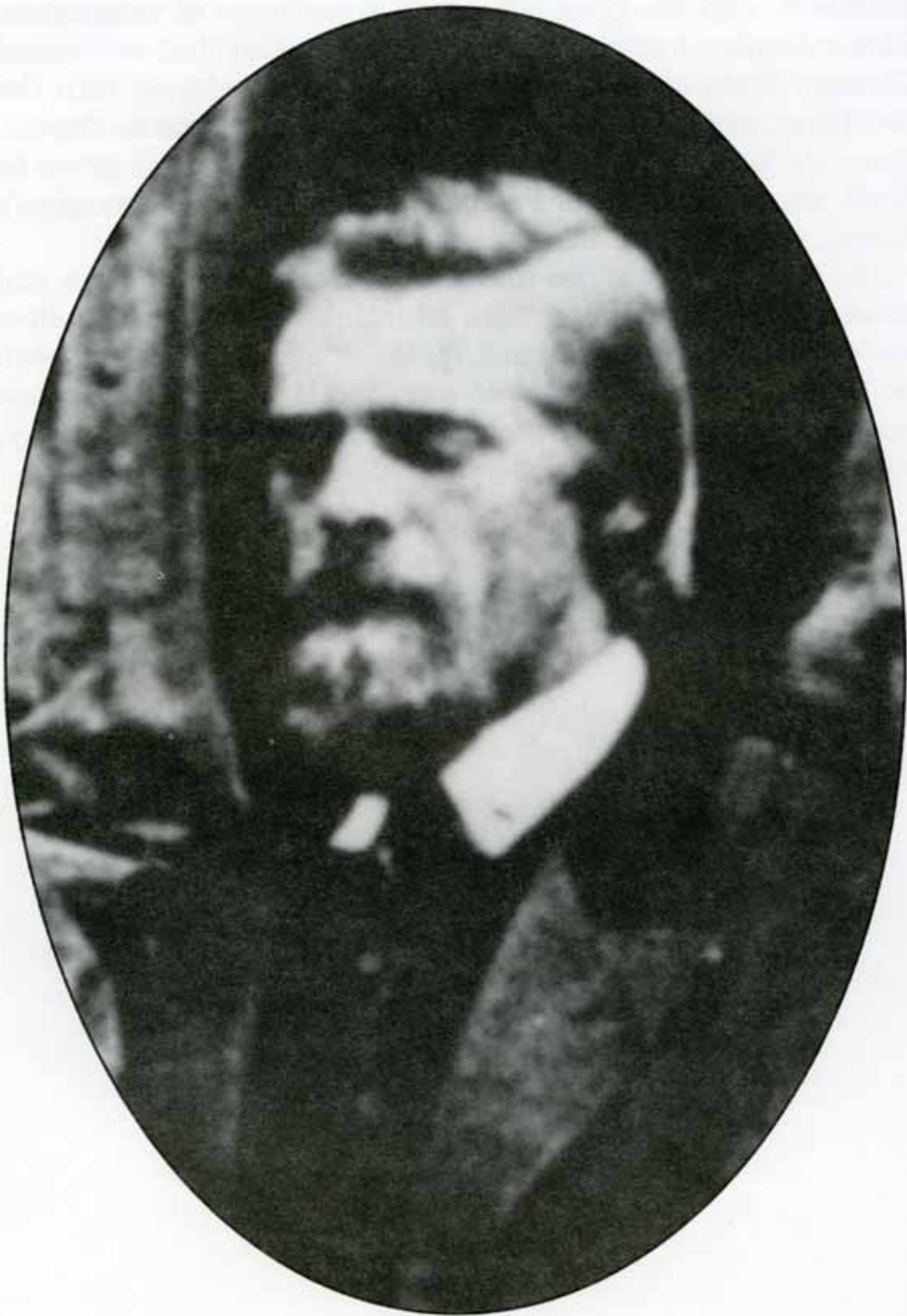
On the morning of August 24th, Riel and O'Donoghue watched from a window in Fort Garry as the troops of B Company appeared out of the rain and the mist. They were advancing, not in a column as a peacekeeping force might be expected to, but in a skirmish line, ready for action. Then a local school teacher, a man named James Stewart, came riding up at full gallop, shouting to Riel, "For god's sake get away. The troops' only topic of conversation is the slaughtering of you and yours."

Riel and O'Donoghue crossed the river to St. Boniface, then cut the ferry's cable. They watched for an hour as the troops stormed Fort Garry and searched in vain for Riel. Then they set out on horseback for the US border.

The governor did not arrive before the troops as had been

promised, and the troops went on a rampage of vengeance. Elzear Goulet, a member of the court-martial that sentenced Thomas Scott to death, was killed. He was chased into the Red River, and stoned until he sank unconscious into its depths. Francois Guilmette, who had delivered the *coup de grace* to Scott, was murdered near Pembina. Hugh O'Lone, O'Donoghue's friend, was killed in his saloon in Winnipeg.

The Riel family's house was searched, and Louis' mother and sisters were threatened. The Manitoba Act was a hollow victory for the Metis; Colonel Wolseley's expedition had been punitive after all. Many of the Metis packed their few belongings and headed west to the Saskatchewan Territory, where freedom could be pursued for a few more years.



*Bill O'Donoghue, Treasurer of Riel's Provisional Government.
Photo credit: Manitoba Archives.*



THE SHAMROCK, THE HARP AND THE FLEUR DE LIS

HISTORY IS FULL of tales of strange alliances. Perhaps one of the strangest was that of the Metis intellectual Louis Riel with the Irish Fenian, "wild" Bill O'Donoghue. O'Donoghue, and his countryman Hugh O'Lone sat as members of Riel's provisional government during its ten month tenure in Red River from November 1869 to August 1870. This Irish alliance was reflected in the symbols used on the Metis flag of the provisional government: the shamrock, the harp and the fleur de lis.

Bill O'Donoghue was born in 1843 in County Sligo, Ireland. During the next decade over a million of his countrymen died in what became known as the Irish potato famine. It was said that during the famine, the wind of mourning sobbed ceaselessly over the stricken island. The tragedy of the Irish people left a deep mark on O'Donoghue's soul.

O'Donoghue left Ireland when he was little more than a child. He emigrated to New York along with hundreds of thousands of his countrymen. In New York he joined the radical Fenian Order, dedicated to the military overthrow of England both at home and in the colonies. The Fenians in America were a real threat to Canada. Just after the American Civil War the Fenians had over ten thousand men in arms inside the United States.

O'Donoghue met Bishop Grandin at Port Huron, Michigan in 1868. The Bishop was so impressed with O'Donoghue that he took him to St. Boniface. There the Bishop found him a job teaching mathematics at the Catholic college. For a few

months O'Donoghue considered training for the priesthood, but gave this up when he joined Riel's Metis resistance movement in 1869.

O'Donoghue was tall, slim and erect, a strikingly handsome man with a deep and brooding air, the legacy of his tortured childhood. When the priests found out he was a Fenian, they disowned him, describing his brooding looks as satanic.

O'Donoghue became the treasurer of Riel's provisional government. In this position he pushed hard for the annexation of the West by the United States. O'Donoghue had powerful American allies in the colony and, were it not for Riel's adamant stand against annexation, it is likely that O'Donoghue's efforts would have resulted in an American takeover of the prairie west.

A major break in the Riel-O'Donoghue alliance came about as a result of Riel's decision to fly the Union Jack on the flagpole at Fort Garry. O'Donoghue was outraged. He took the flag down. Riel ran it up again, posting a guard at the pole with orders to shoot anyone attempting to take it down. O'Donoghue sulked for two days, then he put a flag pole up beside the one with the Union Jack. He ran up the flag of the provisional government, the one with the shamrock, the harp and the fleur de lis. Riel accepted the compromise and the two flags flew side by side for several months.

But O'Donoghue was still angry about the Union Jack. He left for the United States, returning several days later with four officers and twenty-five men. His intentions were to mobilize the Metis and force Riel to let the territory be annexed by the United States. The new governor, a shrewd Nova Scotian named Adams Archibald, learned from Riel that the Metis would assist him in expelling O'Donoghue's Fenians. Riel's men captured them without incident, and Riel received a warm public handshake from the governor.

In August of 1870 the Canadian government's attitude shifted sharply, however. Colonel Garnet Wolseley's troops arrived in Red River, not as a peacekeeping force, but in full combat order. Their intentions were clear; they were going to kill Riel.

Riel, and O'Donoghue, who had been released from prison, escaped to St. Boniface where they watched for an hour as Canadian troops stormed the undefended Fort Garry and searched for Riel throughout the Red River settlement. Then Riel and O'Donoghue fled across the US border and went their separate ways.

Weeks later, O'Donoghue, wandering through Minnesota, ran across a fellow Irishman who was a successful farmer. His name was Jim Callen. He took O'Donoghue into his family, where the revolutionary promptly fell in love with Callen's daughter, Mary. O'Donoghue obtained a job as a teacher, and might have married and lived a peaceful existence, but tragedy struck again. O'Donoghue came down with tuberculosis, a disease fostered by the poverty of his childhood. He died on March 26, 1877. He was only 35. On May 3 of that same year, Mary Callen died of the same disease. O'Donoghue is buried in Rosemont, Minnesota. Inscribed on his tombstone are these words: *In memory of W. B. O'Donoghue, Native of County Sligo, Ireland. He loved liberty and hated oppression, therefore he died in exile.*



THE MANITOBA ACT

THE MANITOBA ACT OF 1870 was a major defeat for the federal government. It represented much more than the capitulation of the federal government to the demands of a handful of Metis "radicals" in the West; through the Manitoba Act, a western province was created, and responsible government was granted to the people of the North West Territories. This occurred far sooner than Sir John A. Macdonald and his eastern business cronies had planned.

The Manitoba Act of July 15, 1870 came about through diplomacy and political compromise, but only as a result of stout political resistance and serious social turmoil. The unrest at Red River took the lives of at least six people: Hugh Sutherland, Norbert Parisien, Thomas Scott, Francois Guilmette, Elzear Goulet, and Hugh O'Lone were killed as a direct result of the struggle for responsible government in Red River. Louis Riel was eventually hanged, mainly because of his execution of Thomas Scott.

The violence in Red River in 1869-70 forced the federal government to negotiate with westerners for the first time. The negotiations were as tough and uncompromising as any in Canadian history. On the one side were Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and his Quebec lieutenant, Sir George-Etienne Cartier. On the other side, with considerably less political clout, were the delegates of Riel's provisional government, Father Ritchot and Alfred Scott.

Macdonald's first ploy during his Ottawa meeting with Riel's

delegates was his insistence that the meeting be regarded simply as an informal and private discussion. Ritchot responded that they must be formally recognized as accredited delegates of the provisional government. Their acceptance as such was a major victory, since it enabled them to negotiate with the federal government as legitimate representatives of a recognized government. But a few days later Macdonald denied that he had recognized them. Since minutes of the meeting had not been kept, there was no proof available to Riel's delegates to indicate their acceptance as legitimate delegates.

Despite these rather shoddy tactics, the western Bill of Rights was presented, and with a few important exceptions was accepted as the basis of the Manitoba Act which followed. Basically, the Bill of Rights called for provincial status as defined under the British North America Act. As well, the Bill demanded the entrenchment of both French and English language rights, and the right to maintain Catholic schools in the province of Manitoba.

Article 1 of the Bill of Rights would have brought into confederation a province called Manitoba that would have been larger than either Quebec or Ontario. Under the terms of the Bill of Rights, Manitoba would have controlled its own lands and forests as did the other four Canadian provinces. The Bill also called for a guarantee of amnesty for those involved in all phases of the Red River resistance.

Alfred Scott and Father Ritchot had to make major concessions to the federal government in order to secure provincial status. They did get the religious and language rights that they wanted. They did get 1,400,000 acres set aside as extinguishment of Metis land title. But they did not get the government to agree to provincial control of local resources such as land and forests. The federal government retained control of the land. Unallocated land was to be retained and sold as a means of obtaining money for the construction of the CPR's transcontinental railway. As well, the size of the new province of Manitoba was reduced to an area little larger than the old District of Assiniboia. It was called the postage stamp prov-

ince, and included a small portion of what is now the southern part of the province of Manitoba. As for amnesty – there was only a verbal promise, with nothing in writing.

The provisional government unanimously accepted these compromises, and the province of Manitoba was born. But this did not end the West's conflicts with the federal government. It simply shaped the political arena in which these conflicts would continue to be fought out.



EXODUS TO THE NORTH WEST

THE MANITOBA ACT OF 1870 set aside 1,400,000 acres of land to be used specifically to extinguish the land claims of the Metis. Scrip notes were issued by the federal government to the Metis for either \$160 or 160 acres of open Crown land. This scrip process did serve to legally terminate the land claims of the Manitoba Metis, but it failed to provide them with an economically viable alternative to their old way of life.

With insufficient capital for machinery to enable them to enter into the commercial production of grain, it was virtually impossible for the Metis to become farmers. Even if they could have produced grain in commercial quantities, there was no rail line connecting Red River to the markets of the outside world. Since the land obtained through scrip could not provide them with a sure means of survival, the Metis sold most of it. These lands were soon acquired by the speculators who poured into Manitoba from the Canadian East. These speculators purchased Metis scrip for a fraction of its face value. In this way, the Metis recipients of scrip became simply the middlemen who passed it on to the land speculators, who became the real beneficiaries of the land grant.

The land speculators made overnight fortunes from the purchase of Metis scrip, as did many of the chartered banks. In fact, 60 per cent of all Metis scrip sold in Western Canada was purchased by the chartered banks. The end results of the scrip transactions were twofold: they legally extinguished Metis land claims, and they opened up Metis land for investment and eventual land settlement.



Land and money — scrip.

Photo credit: Provincial Archives of Alberta.

Bereft of their lands, the Manitoba Metis began the exodus to the last remaining unoccupied fertile regions of the continent – the prairie and bush country of what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta. As Red River carts crammed with families and their belongings left Red River, small Metis communities sprang up along trails to the west. Predominantly Metis communities were founded at Turtle Mountain, Fort Ellice and St. Rose Du Lac in Manitoba. Further west, Metis communities emerged at Fort Qu'Appelle, Willow Bunch, Battleford, and along the south branch of the Saskatchewan River, near the present site of Prince Albert. These were the settlements of St. Laurent, St. Antoine-de-Padoue (now Batoche), St. Louis and Duck Lake. Other Metis communities came into being further west at St. Albert, near the present site of Edmonton, and further north at Lac La Biche and Lac Ste. Ann.

The Metis villages across the West were of a similar type. They were usually established in fertile river valleys bordering a major river. The lands were utilized as subsistence-level farms where only enough grain and vegetables were grown for domestic consumption. These farms stretched back from the river front in the same long, narrow pattern that was used by their predecessors along the Red River. The Metis of the West still depended on the buffalo hunt as their major source of food. Thus, the old Red River economy, based upon buffalo hunting and subsistence-level farming, re-emerged across the West.

This method was particularly well suited to the communities along the South Saskatchewan River because it allowed each settler some river frontage, providing access to river transportation as well as the necessary water for domestic purposes. As well, it tended to make available to all a share of the wild hay meadows that often ran parallel to the river a short distance back from its banks. Most settlers cultivated some land, usually no more than an acre or two for a garden and for growing feed for the livestock. As long as buffalo were plentiful, a small plot of cleared land was all that each family required.

Initially, the Metis lived well in their new settlements in the North West Territories. As was the case in Red River, these Metis of the North West plains enjoyed a social life that mixed the co-operative tribalism of their Cree mothers with the *joie de vivre* of their Canadien fathers. Their parties and social events, accompanied by the sound of the homemade fiddle, helped to pass the cold winter months. Most homes had at least one fiddle player, and practically everyone, from the youngsters to the grandparents, joined in the jigging and dancing.

These remote communities in the North West provided the Metis with their last sanctuary against the inroads of settlement. For a few more peaceful years they could still hunt buffalo, trap for furs, and work as cartmen and voyagers for the Hudson's Bay Company. Here, along the south Saskatchewan River, Metis culture flourished and the old way of life was preserved for another decade and a half – until it was washed away by the events of 1885.



THE FOUNDING OF ST. LAURENT

WHEN THE METIS were driven out of Red River by the crush of settlers after 1870, many moved to the village of St. Laurent, located on the south branch of the Saskatchewan River about 100 kilometers southwest of the forks, adjacent to the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Carlton.

The Metis settlement of St. Laurent bore little resemblance to any of the villages that dot the prairie today. It consisted of a church, a parish residence, and several other small houses. The main population, considered to be part of the village of St. Laurent, lived in houses scattered along the bank of the river stretching for a few kilometers on either side of the church.

Each home marked a separate, subsistence-level farm, which stretched back from the river front for about 3 kilometers in the same long, narrow lots used by their predecessors of Red River. The houses were built from poplar logs squared off with an axe and peeled of their bark. The houses usually consisted of one large room with a plain plank floor. The exterior was often painted white, with bright trimmings around the windows and doors.

The fertile lands around St. Laurent had been familiar to Metis hunters for generations prior to 1870. This was the winter home of the buffalo that grazed the treeless southern plains during the summer months and migrated to the sheltered northern river valleys for the winter. As well, the region was rich in fur and other game animals such as deer and moose. Lush and green throughout the summers, drought and plagues

of grasshoppers were rare occurrences, here, unlike the arid regions to the south. Thick green meadows were nurtured by the rich black soil of the river valley. Gently rolling hills with a profusion of pine, poplar and birch trees provided shelter from the winds, an abundance of logs for building purposes, and plentiful firewood for the long winter months.

Gabriel Dumont, the renowned buffalo hunter and statesman, had settled down here with his wife, Madeleine, in the late 1860s. It was largely through his influence that the Metis of Red River chose St. Laurent as one of their future settlements. But other forces influenced this decision as well. The Catholic priests who ministered to the Metis wanted them to settle down at St. Laurent and take up farming in a serious way. The priests felt that they could exercise more religious control over the Metis once they ceased their wanderings and became sedentary citizens of the West like their English-speaking mixed-blood cousins.

A Catholic mission was established at the future site of St. Laurent in 1871. Within a year, fifty Metis families settled near the mission. On December 31, 1871, a meeting was held in the winter camp of the Metis, a few miles south of Fort Carlton. At this meeting a council was elected to govern the village of St. Laurent. Lawrence Clarke, the Irish-born factor of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Carlton, was elected chairman.

Lawrence Clarke spoke eloquently. He condemned the old nomadic way of life. "Now that buffalo are becoming scarce," he argued, "the Metis should settle down at St. Laurent." He described how the Metis could begin the transition from the old life of the hunter to the new one as a permanent settler. Clarke talked about the three resources available at St. Laurent: the land that could grow food for people and their livestock; the buffalo that could still be hunted; and his company, the HBC, that could offer jobs to the Metis as freighters and voyagers. Father André supported Clarke in his efforts to have the Metis settle down at St. Laurent. André reminded all those at the meeting that Lawrence Clarke had contributed gener-

ously to the Church, having donated \$100 for the church bell at St. Laurent.

But it was Isidore Dumont, Gabriel's father, who spoke what was in the minds of the Metis people at St. Laurent. He told of how the buffalo were becoming so scarce that the Metis could no longer depend upon them for survival. He said that it was good that the Metis were settling down to become farmers. Isidore Dumont said that he had been all his life a hunter. He could remember when herds of buffalo covered the prairies from the foothills of the Rockies to Fort Garry. Now they were only to be found in the Saskatchewan River valleys, and as the country became settled they would disappear even from here. He told the Metis that they must do like white men and cultivate the ground, or they must live and die like the Indians.

The settlement of St. Laurent was formally established as a direct result of the meeting of December 31, 1871. The Metis took up subsistence farming with an enthusiasm that both pleased and surprised Father André. As a result, the community prospered for the first two years. Just as Lawrence Clarke suggested, the people combined hunting and farming with work as freighters for the Company. St. Laurent grew rapidly. By 1872, 250 families had moved to the settlement. But the good times were short-lived.

Lawrence Clarke had not been altogether candid with the Metis when he spoke at their meeting. He was only concerned with providing his company with a cheap source of labour, and that was the real reason he had been involved in the establishment of the settlement at St. Laurent.

On January 15, 1872, Clarke wrote to the Hudson's Bay Company's chief Commissioner, Donald A. Smith. Describing the large population of Metis at St. Laurent, Clarke wrote:

As carriers for the northern districts, it will ensure us a reliable source from which we can draw all freighters we may require, and as the settlement increases in population, so will competition arise amongst them for fuller employment in this their favourite occupation, and

enable us to reduce the rates of freight to the minimum standard . . .

We will save hundreds of Pounds on oxen, carts, harness and thus be enabled to reduce our staff of employees to a third of our present force and thus diminish our expenditure by the lowest calculation two thousand Pounds sterling per annum.

The settlement at St. Laurent was doomed to only a brief existence. Tied as it was to the Hudson's Bay Company for employment, the community failed when the company ceased paying wages in cash in 1875, using trade goods instead. With no capital, and no means of earning any, the Metis had no way of buying the necessary implements to commence large scale farming. So the dreams of old Isidore Dumont did not become reality. In the end, the settlement at St. Laurent failed when the Hudson's Bay Company ceased its activity in the fur trade, and the settlement did not become a successful agricultural enterprise.