

Governor McDougall Launches An Attack on Riel's Provisional Government



Compiled by Lawrence Barkwell
Metis Heritage and History Research
Louis Riel Institute

From the onset of his appointment as Lieutenant-Governor Designate for the North West Territories, William McDougall intended to establish his authority through military action. On September 22, 1869 he forwarded a request for arms and ammunition for use in the North West to cabinet. The Department of Militia received this request and issued memoranda to ship the rifles on September 28, 1869. All of this was illegal since there was a statute in effect that arms and ammunition were not to be shipped out of the Province of Ontario (Provincial Act, 22 Victoria, C35, Section 35). Note that these actions were taken long before there had been any confrontations with the Metis. Neither had there been any consultation with the residents of Red River as to Canada's plans.

The Metis learned of these plans to smuggle arms and ammunition into Red River and set out to stop both McDougall and his arms at the border. The newspaper of October 26, 1869 reported:

Intelligence of an unmistakable character reached this place on Friday last. On that day information was laid before the authorities, and sworn in the form of an affidavit, that the French [Metis] were already in arms upon the road between Stinking River (Rivière Sale) and Pembina. That such of them as took an active part in the uprising were adopting every precaution to intercept Mr. McDougall on his way in.

They were fully organized and were sufficiently under military discipline to throw out scouts upon all the approaches to the Settlement from the South; and to post pickets and sentries at night. These fellows had billeted themselves upon the inhabitants at their

After being stopped by the Metis, led by Ambroise Lepine and Toussaint Lucier, McDougall sent the rifles to Georgetown (now Grand Forks, N.D.). On the 25th of November 1869, McDougall wrote to Joseph Howe, the Secretary of State noting that he had received information from his spies that the Metis intended to send horsemen to burn the HBC warehouse at Georgetown and destroy these arms. He then took immediate action to send the rifles and ammunition to Major Hunt (U.S. Army) at Fort Abercrombie, about 40 miles from Georgetown.

McDougall's next move was to have Col. Dennis and Major Wallace enlist the Indians in a military move against the Metis.

THE SIOUX!

WINNIPEG IN ARMS!

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE CANADIAN ALLIES

On Friday last, news reached the town that a large band of Sioux, well armed and equipped, were on their way from Portage la Prairie for the purpose of attacking the French [Metis] soldiers at Fort Garry, and subsequently making a descent upon the town. A meeting of all citizens was at once called, and a company formed to act in unison with the military under President Riel. The following officers were appointed: Capt., H. S. Donaldson; 1st. Lieut., H. F. Olone; 2nd. Lieut., H. M. Robinson. The company were at once armed, and supplied with ammunition from the Fort, scouts sent out, sentinels posted and every precaution taken to guard against night attack. On Friday morning the Sioux had reached the residence of James McKay, where they were met by the French guard, and a council called. During their deliberations the Sioux exhibited new English silver medals, with the British coat of arms upon the one side, and a medallion of the Queen upon the other. To account for their coming in, they stated that Fox, chief of the Crees at Lake Manitobah, had urged them repeatedly to

join in the war against the Half Breeds—that they had received presents from the English and Canadians to do this—and that they had been armed and supplied with ammunition and clothing on condition of aiding in the establishment of Canadian rule. A lengthened parley took place, when having learned that our people were well-armed and determined to clean them out, they consented to return.

We learn from Mr. Cowley that they threaten to revisit soon, and remain longer. Mr Pierre L'Eveille [Léveill  ]¹, one of the French scouts—a gentleman of undoubted veracity, and perfectly acquainted with their language, reports having met the party on this side of Mr. House's place, and having endeavored to induce them to return. The chief received a present of tobacco, and expressed his readiness to go back, but the braves contended that, after the payment they had received, they were in duty bound to proceed, and refused to return. Mr. L'Eveille informs us that they are better supplied with arms than any Indians he had ever seen—some of the squaws carrying guns. All their powder-horns were filled, and their clothing and blankets perfectly new.

Advices from the Portage area to the effect that there are encamped in that neighborhood about 500 Sioux—some of them belonging to the party that came here after the Minnesota massacre, and the remainder being late arrivals from Mouse River, Dacotah Territory. All the statements concerning them, go to show that these Indians have been brought over by Canadian agents. The officers upon the staff of Gov. McDougall do not pretend to deny it, but even go so far as to justify the action, on the ground that if they did not receive this allegiance, the Half Breeds would.

Major Wallace, one of the Governor's party, mentioned in the course of conversation, that there had been expended upon the Sioux, at the Portage and its vicinity, some £200 worth of provisions, clothing, arms, and ammunition; and the expenses of the Stone Fort Indians, enlisted by Col. Dennis, are reported at £700². That governor McDougall kept two Chippewas in his residence at Pembina is publicly known³; and that he made

¹ Pierre L  veill   from St. Francois Xavier was the guide who led the advance party of the newly-formed NWMP on their westward trek in 1874. He and his brother Gabriel were sons of Pierre Sr. and Julie McKenzie the illegitimate daughter of Sir Alexander Mackenzie.

² On December 2, 1869, Col. Dennis raised a force of 70 to 120 Indians from Chief Prince's Band at the Lower Fort. Major Boulton, his second in command met with the Sioux at Portage, later on his way to Pembina Dennis also met with them. (SP, 1870, Vol. III No. 12, "Correspondence and Papers Connected with Recent Occurrences in the North-West Territories." Memorandum of Facts and Circumstances. J.S. Dennis to Wm. McDougall, Stone Fort, Lower Settlement, Dec. 2, 1869.)

³ Enos Stutsman, a lawyer and member of the Territorial Legislature from Pembina, swore before a clerk of the U.S. district Court in Pembina that "I saw within the stockade surrounding said post, one F.D. Bradley, Deputy collector of Customs under the government of the Dominion of Canada at North Pembina in the act of enrolling, and arming a number of Chippewa Indians belonging north of the International boundary line..."

every attempt to procure the services of that tribe, in addition to his attempt to enlist Americans, can be proved beyond a doubt.

When Canada selected a governor for this Territory, she chose Mr. McDougall, as having been connected with the Administration in various capacities for over twenty years, and as one who, having conducted the negotiations for the purchase of the country between the Dominion and the Hudson's Bay Company, understood perfectly the policy the government intended pursuing towards us. The Press of Canada openly asserts that the instructions of the Governor left at his own option the measures he should employ to establish his authority. It is safe therefore, to conclude that his act of calling upon the savages to aid in his filibustering raid, and his persistent efforts to create civil war in our midst, was not only countenanced by Canada, but that he was supplied with money to accomplish, and official orders to guarantee, his purpose. That in this enlightened age, any Power should use such means for the accomplishment of its designs, is criminal enough, but it is only a hellish insanity which could induce the use of such means against a people whom they should have sought to conciliate.

The New Nation
January 7, 1870, pg. 2.

It was also rumored on December 3, 1869, that George Racette a Metis trader who had been active with the Sioux for many years was on his way to the Settlement at the head of 1,100 Sioux. Racette⁴ was a close associate of Dr. Schultz and it was generally believed that Schultz and the "Canada First" group had induced Racette to mobilize the Sioux. Alexander Begg speculated that Racette was a confederate of Dr. Schultz (who also had great influence with the Sioux) and "Schultz may have used Racette to make contact with the Sioux, or Racette may have anticipated his supposed wishes."⁵

Reference:

Shore, Fred J. "The Canadians and the Metis: The Re-Creation of Manitoba, 1858-1872." Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, Ph. D. dissertation, 1991.

⁴ On March 14, 1870, Racette advertized land near the Souris and Long Rivers as official agent for Chief Red Stone (Assiniboine) and Chief White Cap (Dakota Sioux).

⁵ Alexander Begg, *Red River Journals and Other Papers Relative to the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870*. Toronto: Champlain Society, 1956: 73.