

MÉTIS DEVELOPMENT AND THE CANADIAN WEST

4

*Conflicting
Plans*



Saskatchewan
Education

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Conflicting Plans

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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 4: *Conflicting Plans*

The objectives of this book are:

- to present, in chronological sequence, the events which had the greatest impact on the development of the North West from 1867 to 1885
- to show the contrast between the plans of the Métis and those of the federal government for the North West
- to provide information which will allow students to realize how various forces can alter decisions and affect livelihoods.

Summary of Book 4: *Conflicting Plans*

With the establishment of Canadian Confederation, the federal government made plans for the settlement of the Canadian West. These plans, which included building a railway system and populating the West with immigrant settlers, conflicted with the Métis' plans for western development. From 1867 to 1885, both sides attempted to establish their control in the area.

Conflicting Plans

National Policy

For eleven years, the Métis people of the North West Territories sent petitions to Ottawa asking for title to the land on which they lived. However, the federal government neither responded to nor acted upon these requests and by 1883 the settlers, as well as the Métis, were concerned about the situation. They interpreted the government's inaction as an indication that other plans were being made for the settlement of the Canadian North West.

Government plans for settling the North West had, in fact, been in existence since the time of Confederation but had never been put forward in a public document. Later known as the National Policy, these plans had been entrenched in the British North America Act when Canada was formed:

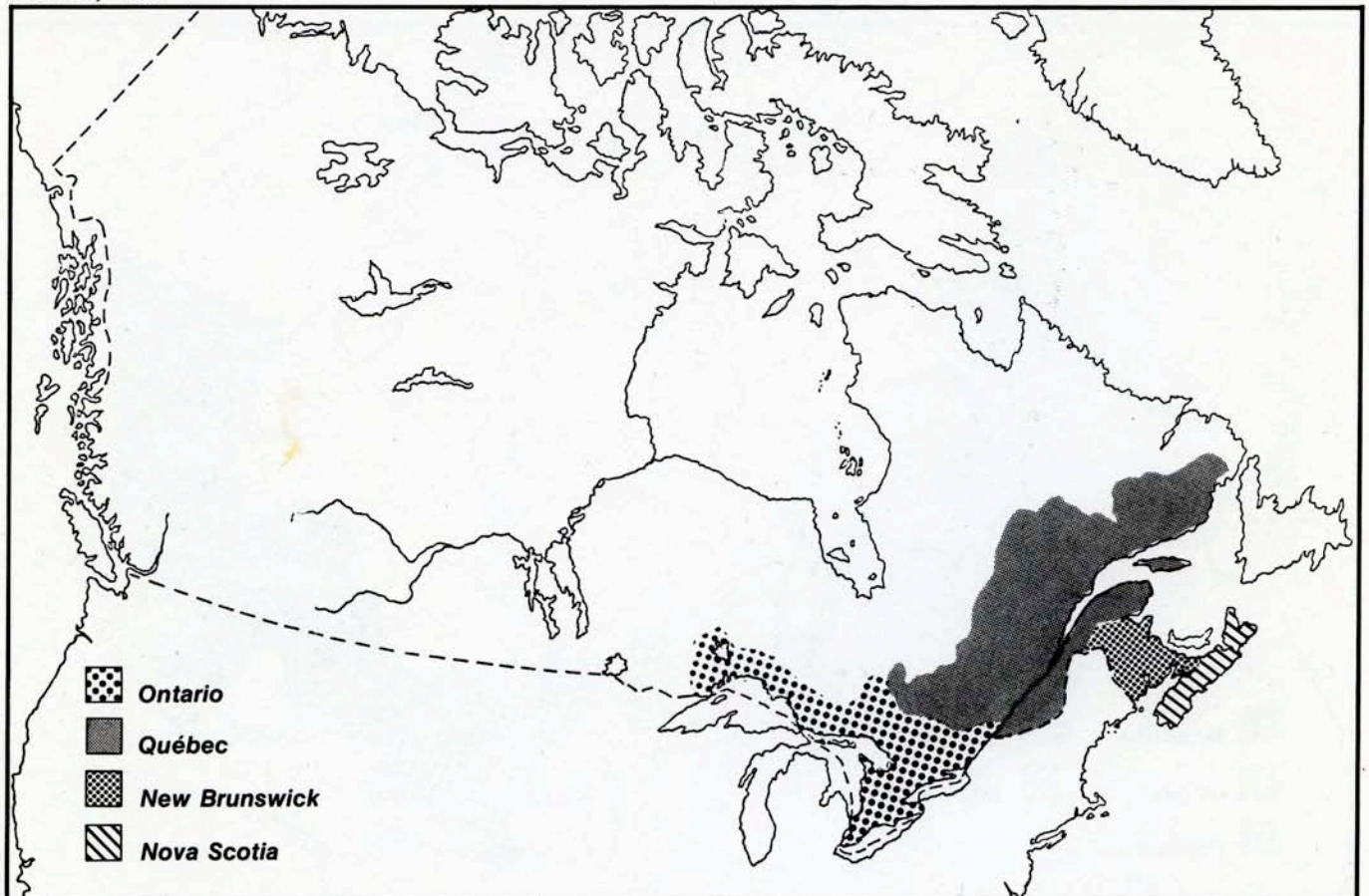
The British North America Act of 1867 established the political constitution, the first step needed for the elaboration and implementation of the national policy, and created the federal government, the major instrument by means of which the plan was to be carried out.¹

Plans for settlement had been included in the British North America Act as the means of retaining British control of the North West. Beginning early in the nineteenth century, the United States had wanted to gain control of the area north of the 49th parallel. The American policy of **manifest destiny** proclaimed:

*The right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which **Providence** has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us.²*

However, Britain and her North American colonies had no intention of allowing the area to be annexed by the United States. Instead of paving the way for American expansion to the north, the policy of manifest destiny served to hasten Canadian Confederation. It also impressed upon the newly formed federal government the need for populating the West with settlers who would support the British Crown.

Canada, 1867



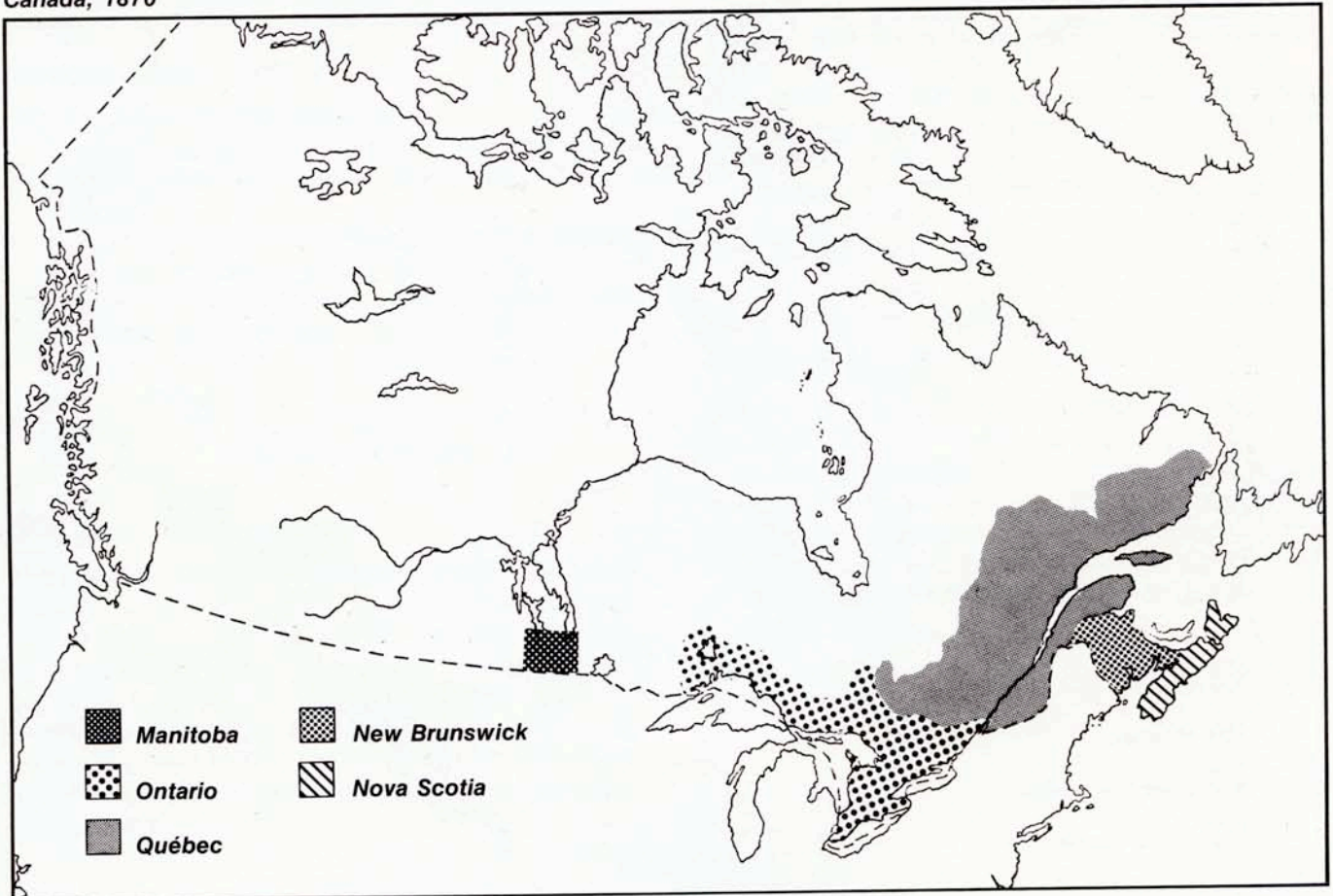
The **Fenian movement**, which was very strong in the northeastern United States, also had plans to free Canada from British rule. However, the Fenian plan became one more reason for strengthening the concept of unity among the Canadian people:

Fenians to the number of about two thousand, some of whom had seen service in the American Civil War, gathered near Buffalo and crossed into Canada under arms. They were beaten back after brisk fighting and their attempt at invasion was broken, but the threat of their hostility required Canada (which was then a union of Upper and Lower Canada) to keep a large body of men under arms for several months. Apart from their desire to make trouble for Great Britain, the Fenians no doubt expected that the people of Canada would hail them as deliverers from the British yoke, but the fact was just the opposite, and Sir Richard Cartwright is authority for the statement that these raids very much increased the feeling in favour of Confederation.³



Louis Riel, President of the Provisional Government of Manitoba, 1869-70.

Canada, 1870



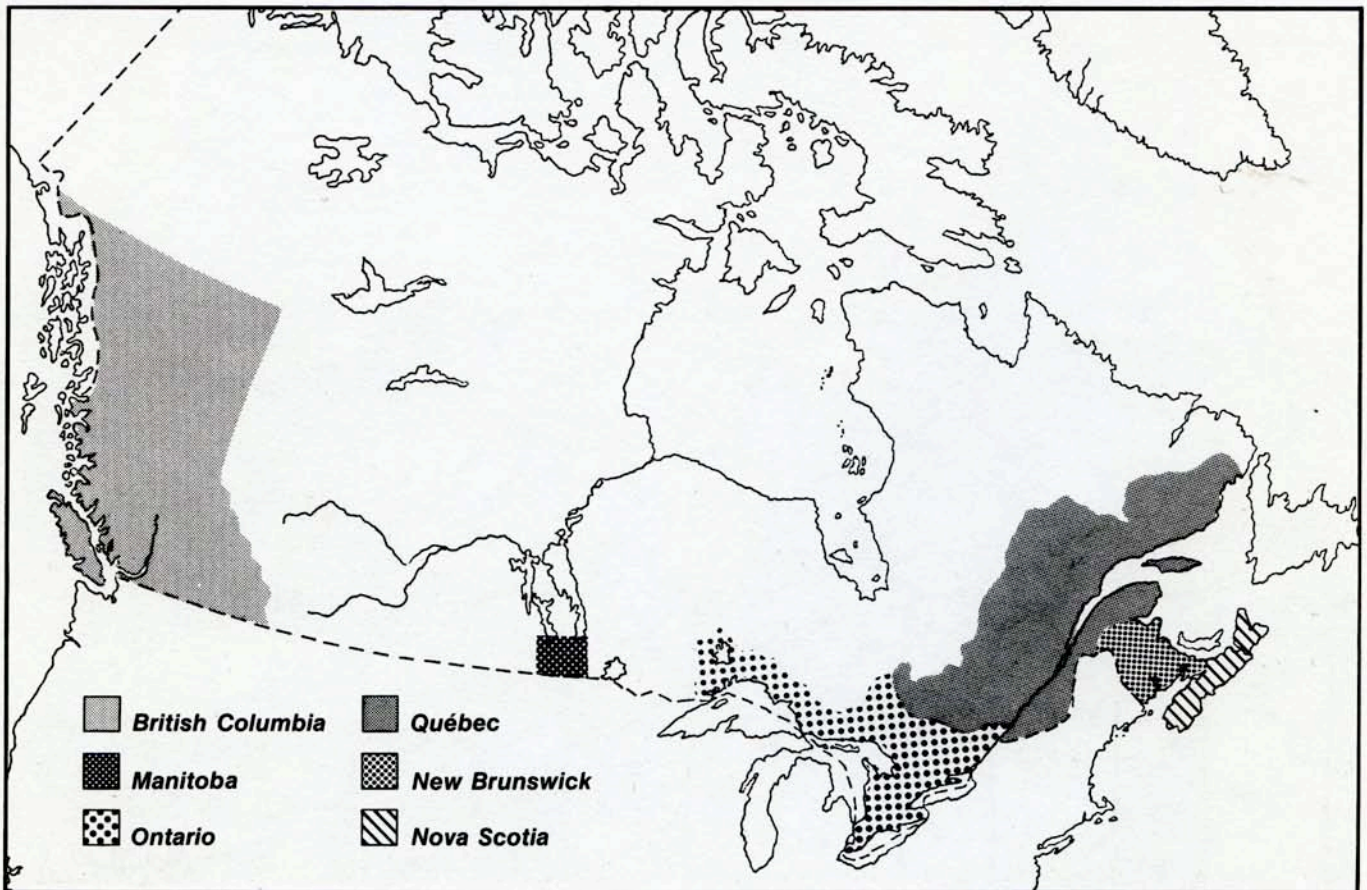
Manitoba Joins Confederation

The signing of the Manitoba Act in 1870 created Manitoba as the fifth province in the Dominion of Canada. Manitoba now came under federal jurisdiction and the making and enforcing of laws became a federal responsibility. Once troops from the east arrived in the Red River area, the interim government set up by Riel was to relinquish their authority. Many of the troops sent to the Red River had signed up with the intention of avenging the execution of Thomas Scott, an act carried out by Riel's provisional government. Although Riel and his followers had been granted amnesty for their role in the insurrection, Riel was uncertain whether or not it also covered the execution of Scott. Consequently, Riel was forced to flee the area to save his life. The troops, upon arriving in the Red River Settlement and finding Riel gone, began to direct their animosities toward the French-speaking Métis. A.S. Morton, a Canadian historian, wrote:

The French half-breed, whether he was connected with the Red River disturbances or not, was bullied and maltreated. Life and property were jeopardized. One

Elzear Goulet, thought to have been concerned in the murder of Scott, was chased on 13th September to the river and stoned as he swam over. Struck on the head, he sank, and was never seen again. Three "loyal" Canadians were concerned in this murder, two of them of the Ontario Rifles. They were never brought to trial. At least two deaths can be credited to this uncompromising and unchristian persecution, while the number of indignities, assaults, and threats and intimidations can be heaped high. Governor Archibald in a confidential letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, on October 9, 1871, under the stress of "worry and anxiety" wrote that "many of the French half-breeds have been so beaten and outraged by a small but noisy section of the people" mainly English-speaking from the East "that they feel as if they were living in a state of slavery.... Bitter hatred of these people is a yoke so intolerable that they would gladly escape it by any sacrifice." The oppressors "seem to feel as if the French half-breeds should be wiped off the face of the globe." Many half-breeds did escape to the plains at St. Laurent, Batoche, and Duck Lake.⁴

Canada, 1871



British Columbia Joins Confederation

Fearing American annexation of the prairies and British Columbia, the federal government realized that they were more likely to retain control of both areas if the West Coast were to join confederation. Control of the west coast would also allow a better trading system to be established between Britain and the Far East. An overland route across Canada would considerably shorten the travel time; the only trade route then in existence involved a long sea voyage. Another reason the federal government was anxious to welcome the territory as a province was that gold had recently been discovered along the Fraser River and in the Cariboo region of British Columbia.

In 1871, British Columbia joined Confederation. One of the conditions upon which the region agreed to join Canada was that the Canadian government construct a railroad linking British Columbia with the eastern part of the country by 1885. The popular slogan became "from sea to shining sea".

C.P.R. Surveyors in the Rockies, 1885. (E. Brown Collection B5880)

The Pacific Scandal

The idea of a nation-wide railroad began in the 1850's. Several companies were contracted to build a number of spur lines in the east, with extensions to the United States. With the entry of British Columbia into Confederation, surveying began near the west coast, in the mountains, on the prairies and in the east. Three years later, construction still had not begun. Prime Minister Macdonald put the railway contract up for tender on condition that the bidders possess sufficient money and equipment to complete the job, a move which eliminated many of the small contractors. In the end, two groups were considered for the contract: an American-based company and a Canadian syndicate of businessmen.

In an effort to secure the contract, Sir Hugh Allan, a Montreal financier, made a monetary contribution of \$350,000 to Macdonald's election campaign. In what became known as the Pacific Scandal, the Liberal opposition publicly stated that Sir Hugh Allan was trying to bribe the Macdonald government in order to secure the railway contract. As a result, Macdonald's government was forced to resign and, in 1874 under Alexander Mackenzie, the Liberals came to power.





Surveyors on the Saskatchewan Prairie, 1873.

Métis Boundary Scouts employed by the International Boundary Survey, 1872-74.



Setback For The Railway

Unlike Macdonald's government, the Mackenzie government did not consider the construction of a railway a priority. Only short surveys were done and very little track was laid. Concerned about the delay, the provincial government of British Columbia threatened to leave Confederation. Mackenzie was forced to compromise and a new agreement was proposed, as follows:

The time for the completion of the Pacific Railway was extended to the end of 1890. In return for this British Columbia was to receive the immediate building of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway, the expenditure of two million dollars a year on the railway when the surveys were finished, and active prosecution of the surveys in the meantime.⁵

The bill effecting the compromise was not passed by Parliament and the Esquimalt to Nanaimo section of the railroad was not completed until 1886.

The Treaties

To strengthen their control of the North West Territories, the Canadian government, on behalf of the British Crown, negotiated seven treaties with the Indian nations between 1871 and 1877. These treaties transferred ownership of the land from the Indian nations to the British Crown. As a result of the transfer, the Canadian government was in a legal position to establish the North West Mounted Police to maintain law and order in the West.

The treaties were successful from the federal government's perspective and received strong support from the Roman Catholic Church. In a letter to David Mills, Minister of the Interior, David Laird, Lieutenant Governor of the North West Territories, outlined the importance of the Church and its expected role in helping to control the Indian and Métis peoples:

May 29, 1877

Swan River, N.W. Territories

...the chief reason why I would strongly urge upon the Government to accede to the prayer of the petitioners is that they adhere to the Roman Catholic Church, and it is a great deal easier to manage bands in regard to schools, and general improvement if grouped together



N.W.M.P. Lancer, by H. Julien, 1875.

in one **denomination**. My observation here leads one to believe that the missionary is a great aid to the Government in creating a centre around which the Indians locate and gradually become weaned from their roving habits, which as long as they continue prevent them from becoming civilized.

I have the honor to be Sir,
Your Obedient Servant,
David Laird, Lieut. Governor
N.W. Territories⁶

Renewal Of Interest In The Railway

Macdonald was returned to office in 1878, and the building of the railroad again became a priority. Surveys were conducted at federal expense and construction began in British Columbia. The proposed route through the North West Territories was to pass through a fertile belt of land, of which Prince Albert was the centre. Therefore, it seemed only logical that Prince Albert was destined to become the capital city of the North West.

Settlers and land speculators flooded the area. Prince Albert became a boom town during 1882. Lawrence Clarke, now the elected official for the

Railway Construction in the Lower Fraser River Valley, 1881.



District of Lorne, which covered the Prince Albert and St. Laurent area, turned to land speculation. He purchased land in and around Prince Albert with the intention of selling it at a profit.

There were at least a dozen major colonization companies in operation in the Canadian North West during 1882-83. One of the companies, the Prince Albert Colonization Company, had its headquarters in Ottawa but conducted its business in the Prince Albert area. The company was owned by high ranking government officials who wished to maintain federal control over the region. An article which appeared in the *Toronto Globe*, dated February 12, 1883, stated, "these colonization companies were deliberately called into existence in order to furnish an indirect bribery fund for the election campaign."⁷ The Prince Albert Colonization Company administered the area that had been set aside for the railroad and was in a position to realize huge profits.

The land companies were unable to obtain ownership to much of the Prince Albert area because the land had previously been settled by the Métis and they were petitioning for ownership title. Because no clear title had been established for the land, emotions often ran high. In a letter to David Laird, Minister of the Interior, Father André said, "The lack of patents gave rise at times to serious dispute over the boundaries of claims."⁸

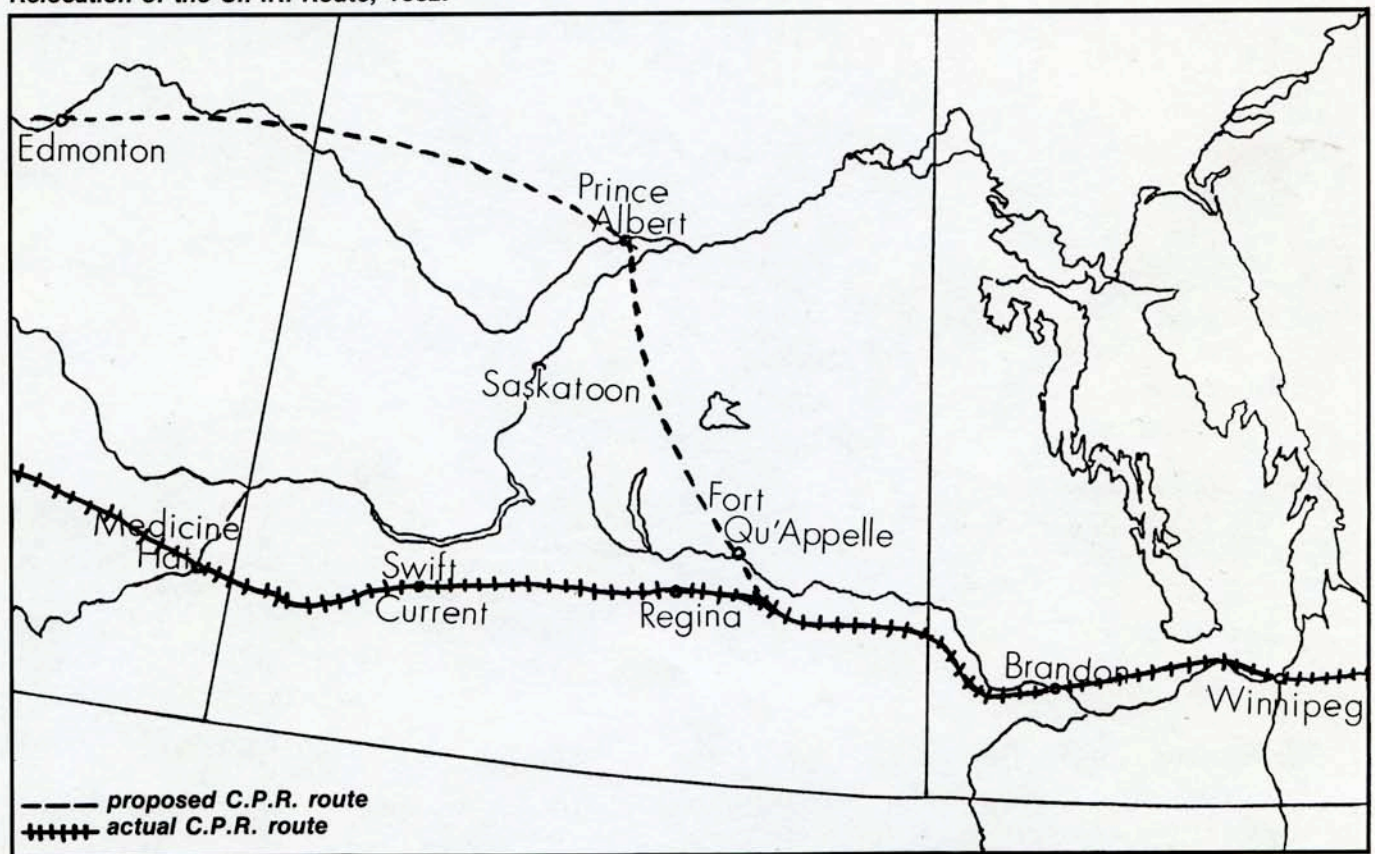
The Canadian Pacific Railway Syndicate

In 1880, the contract to complete the railroad was given to a **syndicate** which became the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. They received 25 million dollars, 101,174 hectares (25 million acres) of land and the guarantee of a twenty-year **monopoly** over transportation in the west. This was given as a gift from the Macdonald administration to the railway company. According to P.B. Waite, the Liberal party took a strong stand against the giving of the contract:

...Government construction had now proceeded so far that it was absurd to hand it all over to a private company to make money on. Frank Oliver's new *Edmonton Bulletin* [December 13, 1880] put it neatly.

"If the credit of Canada is good enough to raise \$17,000,000 to build the road from Lake Superior to Red River, through a country which is not worth a yellow dog, or raise \$9,000,000 to build 127 miles in British Columbia, beginning in nothing and ending nowhere [i.e. Kamloops to Yale], surely it is good enough to build the road through 1000 miles of fertile country."

Relocation of the C.P.R. Route, 1882.



Laurier asked in Parliament, "What great calamity has befallen this country that the Government should be compelled to surrender unconditionally to the [C.P.R.] Syndicate?"⁹

The twenty-year monopoly over transportation proved to be very important. It gave the C.P.R. Syndicate the power to override any government decision made in regard to the location of the proposed railroad. This was "an era in which plots and counterplots, sinister 'rings' and **cabals**, intrigues and conspiracies of all kinds, fancied or real, were part of the standard political and economic weaponry."¹⁰ In other words, the C.P.R. executive was able to influence and control the economic and political situation in Canada during the early 1880's.

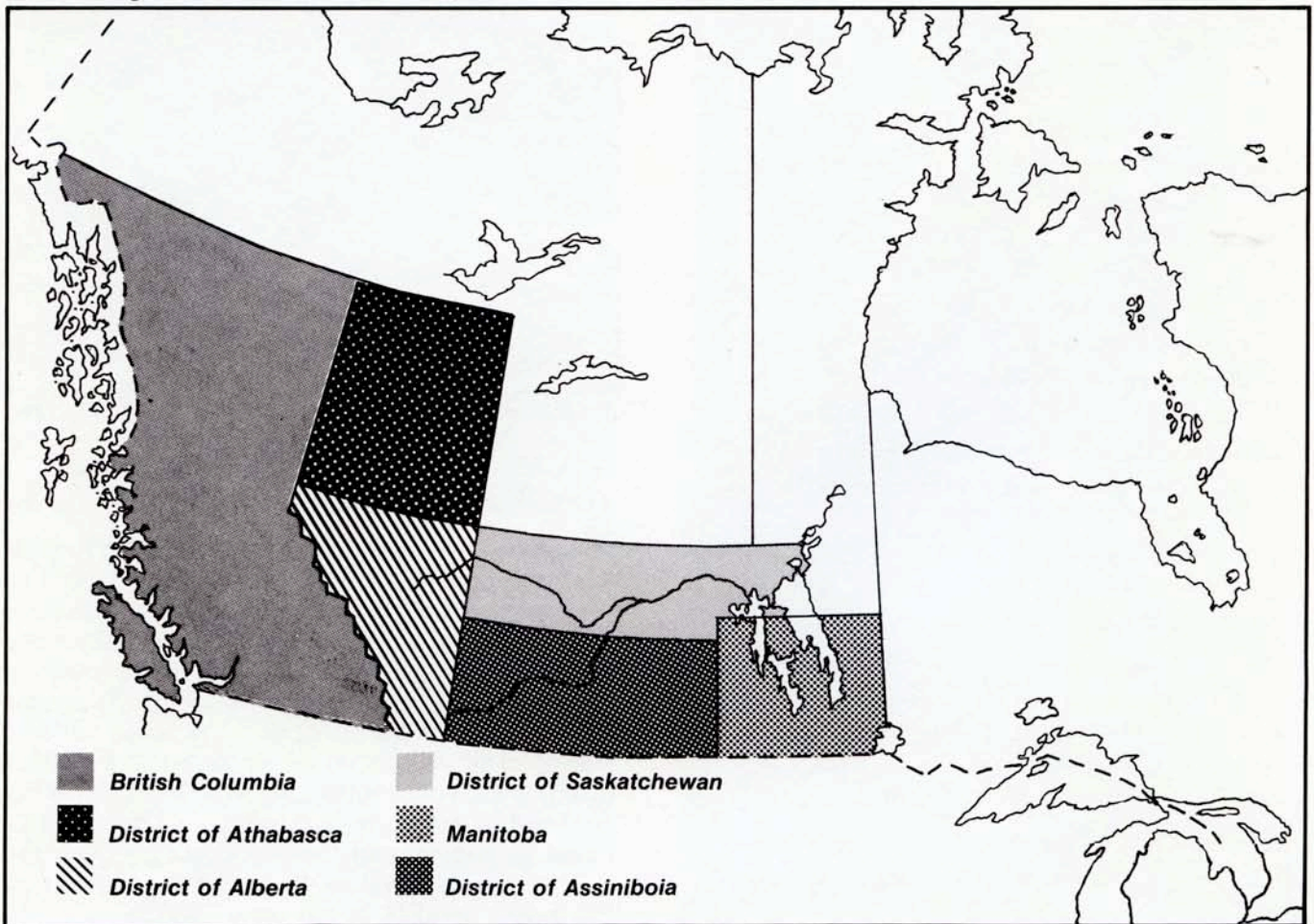
The Syndicate used the monopoly over transportation to shift the location of the railway. In 1882 they decided to go across the southern part of the North West. The reason given for the change was that a southern route would allow better protection against

American annexation. The real reason, however, was that too much of the area in the Prince Albert district had been taken up by land speculators involved in the land colonization scheme. A southern route would allow the C.P.R. Syndicate to control the land and realize huge profits from it.

Pile Of Bones

In 1882, the federal government divided the North West Territories into four major districts (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Athabasca and Assiniboia) for administrative purposes. The Lieutenant Governor of the North West Territories, Edgar Dewdney, was given the responsibility of choosing the capital city of the Saskatchewan District. He chose Pile of Bones, the name of which was later changed to Regina. Many of the C.P.R. Syndicate members wanted Moose Jaw or Qu'Appelle to be the capital because they had large holdings in these areas. Geographically, these locations would have been more practical than Regina, which lacked a natural water source. Dewdney owned land both at Regina and Qu'Appelle; in fact his holdings at Qu'Appelle were much larger than those at Regina. He chose Regina, however, not only because the land there

Establishing Districts in the North West, 1882.



would sell for a huge profit but, more importantly, because it meant that control of the area would belong to him and to the government rather than to the C.P.R. Syndicate, which did not own land in the area. Had Dewdney chosen Qu'Appelle, the C.P.R. Syndicate would have been the major land owner and would have controlled the area. In 1882, Dewdney wrote to Macdonald to justify his choice:

9 August 1882

My Dear Sir John.

I found on arriving here that it was unknown to some parties that Pile of Bones had been selected for Head Quarters and immediately wirepulling commenced to try and bring about a change—some wanting the Moose Jaw Bone others the Bell Farm. The **advocate** of the latter point was J. McTavish the Syndicate Land Commissioner (he has no good feeling towards me), he asked me why I did not recommend the Bell Farm, I told him because it was too far East and that the Pile of Bones was a better place, he said do you know we have been offered \$425,000.00 for a quarter of it, if it is the capital and \$300,000.00 if it is not. I told him I could not help that and he left me in great **dudgeon** but the secret is he is interested in the Bell Farm—and has a perfect understanding with Bell the Manager.

He is telling some of my friends I hear that the reason why I recommended Pile of Bones was because I was interested there—Now it happens that my interest in the H.B. Co. section on the Bell Farm is more than double what it is at the Pile of Bones and they both lie in the same position to the Town Sites....

I tell you this to show you that had I when recommending the Pile of Bones, any selfish motive in the selection I would have been more likely to benefit myself if I had recommended the Bell Farm in which I hold 100 shares as well as the interest in the H.B. Co. section.

The Syndicate are sore that they did not secure the H.B. Co. sections themselves, and are putting in temporary sidings as far as possible from us, but I have been made aware of the dodge....

If I understand right the arrangement you have made with the syndicate is your Government have the proceeds of the sales of your own sections and the Syndicate theirs. I think you will find that the Syndicate will locate the stations on Government Sections and will then say as Mr. Angus told me that

they want almost the whole of that for Railway works, if this is done the even numbered sections being surrounded by odd numbered sections the Syndicate will have nine tenths of the valuable portion of the town site. If they require such a large amount of land for their own works they should surrender an Equal amount of their land to the Government on an adjoining section if they use your land.¹¹



Edgar Dewdney, Lieutenant Governor, N.W.T., 1881-1888.

The Starvation Period

While Dewdney and others were planning to grow wealthy, conditions were becoming very difficult for the Indian and Métis peoples whose land was to be the source of the new wealth. The years following the decimation of the buffalo herds and the signing of the treaties became known as the Starvation Period for the Indian peoples. The Métis suffered starvation as well, but on the whole, not to the extent that the Indian peoples did. The Métis were not confined to reserves and many had subsistence farms to supplement their food supply. The two quotations which follow describe the conditions of the Indian peoples in the early 1880's:



Unloading ties near Regina for railway construction, 1882-83.

The native peoples attempted to cling to the nomadic existence they had always known, their outlook still geared to hunting and fishing. In their treaties they accepted land that was full of hills and bush as preferable to flat, treeless ground. However, the days of farming had arrived, and the European settlers on the flat lands had a great advantage.

As the settlers took over more and more, the native peoples were ever more restricted in their movements and more restricted in their available food supply. Deprived of their adequate, if marginal, living, the... [Indian peoples] affected were becoming desperate. They were slowly starving to death.

Inspector Norman, of the N.W.M.P. in the winter of 1882, told of dreadful suffering, and reported that he was doling out flour and meat sufficient for two days, but which Indians had to make do for a week.

The fulfillment of the promises made to the Natives became subject to the **vagaries** of the federal budget and the whims of politicians and civil servants in Ottawa. Worse still, the Natives suffered under the administrations of Indian agents who were political appointees rather than career civil servants.

By most treaty agreements Ottawa was to supply people with adequate food, tea and tobacco. These people were used to eating game, buffalo meat and beef, but much of the meat supplied to them was pickled pork from the U.S. **Unscrupulous** Indian agents sold the good quality rations, distributing the poorer quality meat, which was often **rancid**.¹²

The MOOSE JAW NEWS, on the 13th JUNE, 1884, discussing the injury inflicted by this Government on Chief Piapot in compelling him to remain on a swampy and unhealthy reserve and declining to change it for one of a more healthy character says:

But even this will be utterly insufficient to wipe out the past. Its record will remain a foul blot in our history. The sufferings of the Indians in the Assiniboia reserves during the past winter are a burning shame to us, a lasting **reproach** to our Government. What would be thought of us in England, or in any other christian country, were it clearly understood that for weeks large bands of Indians, the wards of the nation, poor, wretched creatures, whose primitive sources of supply had been cut off by our invasion, and whom we were bound by solemn treaty, as well as by every consideration of justice and humanity, to feed and care for, were dying by scores, partly from semi-starvation and partly from disease resulting from the bad quality of the food supplied by the agents! It is no excuse to say that the facts were not known. Why were they not known? Were there not high officials whose first duty it was to know the facts? If it should prove that the want of knowledge or the fearful ravages of scurvy, were due in any degree to a petty economy which dispensed with the services of a competent medical inspector in order to save his fees, this would be an aggravation of the guilt of those responsible for it.

We write thus strongly because we feel strongly on this subject. It is a subject on which every Canadian

and every settler in the North-West in particular, is in duty bound to feel strongly. As we have before pointed out, the gravest issues, involving not only the **paramount** claims of humanity and right, but also the security of life and property, are wrapped up in the maintenance of friendly relations and good faith with the aborigines.

We do not remember to have met with a settler from the neighborhood in which those events occurred, who has not sympathised with Pi-a-pot and admitted that, however wrong-headed and cantankerous the chief may have shown himself on other occasions, he is, in this instance, the injured party. We have returned to the matter because it is of the first importance that the record of last winter's treatment of the Indians should be thoroughly examined, and such measures taken as will render the **recurrence** of such scenes impossible.¹³

The attitude of Lieutenant Governor Dewdney toward the condition of the Indian peoples is reflected in a letter sent to the Minister of the Interior, David MacPherson, in 1881. A portion of the letter reads:

Many, do what you will for them, will be dissatisfied, but the majority will work, the advances already made satisfies [sic] me that they can be made self supporting, but it will take time. The more contained, however, you can keep these wild fellows now the sooner will the end be accomplished. In a year or two with the Railway in the continent we shall be in a position to dictate to the Indians, we are not so now, and any outbreak occurring this year or next would be most disastrous.¹⁴

The immigrant settlers of the North West were also experiencing hardship, the District of Lorne in the Prince Albert area being the hardest hit. The shifting of the railway line caused the collapse of the land speculation business and brought financial ruin to many settlers who had bought land when the prices were high. Early frost in 1883 destroyed most of the crops, further impoverishing the farmers. These failures brought business to a standstill and, consequently, the merchants were also affected.

Riel's Return

The settlers of the Prince Albert area held meetings to discuss the problems they were experiencing in receiving title to their lands and to prepare a petition to send to Ottawa. They decided to appeal to the Métis for support in order to strengthen their case. Their grievances were sent to Ottawa but were ignored by the federal government. Agitation increased and, on May 6, 1884, a general meeting of settlers and Métis decided that Louis Riel should be consulted. Their decision was put in the form of a resolution which read:

We, the French and English natives of the North-West, knowing that Louis Riel has made a bargain with the Government of Canada, in 1870, which said bargain is contained mostly in what is known as the 'Manitoba Act', and this meeting not knowing the contents of said 'Manitoba Act', we have thought it advisable that a delegation be sent to said Louis Riel, and have his assistance to bring all the matters referred to in the above resolutions in a proper shape and form before the Government of Canada, so that our just demands be granted.¹⁵

Four men, Gabriel Dumont, James Isbister, Moise Ouelette and Michel Dumas, were given the task of locating Louis Riel and requesting his help. They found him teaching school at St. Peter's Mission in Montana. Riel agreed to return to the North West Territories with the delegation. On June 10, 1884, Riel, accompanied by his family and the delegation, set out for the Canadian North West. The letter which follows is his written answer to the four men who sought him:

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

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

GENTLEMEN,—You have travelled more than 400 miles from the Saskatchewan country, across the international line, to make me a visit. The communities in the midst of which you live have sent you as their delegate to ask my advice on various difficulties which have rendered the British North-West as yet unhappy under the Ottawa Government. Moreover, you write me to go and stay amongst you, your hope being that I for one could help to better in some respects your condition. **Cordial** and pressing is your invitation. You want me and my family to accompany you. I

am at liberty to excuse myself and say no. Yet, you are waiting for me, so that I have only to get ready, and your letters of delegation give me the assurance that a family welcome awaits me in the midst of those who have sent you. Gentlemen, your personal visit does me honor and causes great pleasure, but on account of its representative character, your coming to me has the proportions of a remarkable fact; I record it as one of the gratifications of my life. It is a good event, which my family will remember, and I pray to God that your delegation may become a blessing amongst the blessings of this my fortieth year.

To be frank is the shortest. I doubt whether my advice given to you on this soil concerning affairs on Canadian territory could cross the borders and retain any influence. But here is another view. The Canadian Government owe me two hundred and forty acres of land according to the thirty-first clause of the Manitoba treaty. They owe me also, five lots, valuable on account of hay, timber and river frontage. Those lots were mine according to the different paragraphs of the same thirty-first clause of the above mentioned Manitoba treaty. It is the Canadian Government which have deprived me, directly or indirectly, of those properties. Besides if they only pay attention to it a minute, they will easily find out that they owe me something else.

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

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

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

LOUIS RIEL.¹⁶



St. Peter's Mission, Montana. Louis Riel taught school here until 1884.



Louis Riel, 1874.

Immediately upon his return, Riel set about organizing the inhabitants of the North West to put as much pressure as possible on the Canadian Government. Drought and grasshopper infestation during 1884 added to the problems in the West and many people faced the prospect of starvation during the coming winter.



Marguerite Riel, wife of Louis Riel, 1885.



Jean Louis Riel, Marie Angelique Riel, children of Marguerite and Louis Riel, 1885.

Petitions to Ottawa

During the fall of 1884, Riel began preparing petitions to send to Ottawa. Riel and the leaders of the Settlers' Union, Andrew Spence and William Jackson, drafted a final petition which included a list of the grievances of the inhabitants of the area. In December 1884, the petition was sent to Ottawa where it was received and acknowledged by Chapleau, the Secretary of State but, once again, no action was taken by the government. According to P.B. Waite:

Nothing happened. January came and went. Early in February, the Cabinet agreed to investigate the claims of half-breeds. But the Government had promised investigation since 1879. That was no answer to the Metis leaders. By the end of February, Riel had been forced to think of more drastic measures.¹⁷



William Henry Jackson, one of the leaders of the Settlers' Union and friend of Riel, 1884.

In February, in an attempt to obtain an answer to their petition, the Métis and the Settlers' Union sent Lawrence Clarke to Ottawa to plead their case. Meanwhile, Father André attempted to provide a peaceful solution to the situation. In a letter to Governor Dewdney, dated January 11, 1885, Father André outlined a plan that would both rectify the grievances of the inhabitants and remove Riel from the North West:

E. Dewdney
Governor of the N.W. Territories

Your Honor,

You must have received by last mail a letter from the Honorable Monsieur Macdowall in which that gentlemen entertains your Honor of an interview that him and I had last week with the notorious Monsieur Riel; it was by my suggestion that Mr. Macdowall consented to see Mr. Riel and last Monday 22nd instant we went together to St. Laurent to meet the gentlemen in question; the interview lasted about three hours, Riel behaved well and spoke in a sensible and right way. Mr. Macdowall acted with a skill and a diplomacy that I could not but admire, he said nothing to compromise himself nor the government, he heard what Mr. Riel had to say and notwithstanding all the entreaties and tactics of Mr. Riel to draw him out he acted as a thorough diplomat as he is keeping his own counsel to himself.

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

Riel is anxious to leave and we must provide him with the means of leaving, he has certainly certain claims against the government and those claims must be settled in some way. He wants to go down to Québec and once there to obtain some **indemnity** for the losses he incurred after annexation, the time he was obliged to run away to save his life. Riel has among the Halfbreeds a great power which he may turn to good or evil according how you use him. Now he seems willing to put all the influence he enjoys on the side of the government if he gets the help he requires, he asks thirty thousand dollars as a first installment, but obtain for him four or five thousand dollars and I am bold in saying Mr. Macdowall and I will make him agree to any conditions, but in duty bound I am obliged to say that it will be better to concede him that amount than to keep him in the country. I know that if Riel is satisfied all the Half-breeds will be united in the next election and as a man they will vote for Mr. Macdowall and we will carry everything before us; so I strongly recommend you to use all your influence at Ottawa to obtain for Riel that sum, if things are settled satisfactorily we will not hear much of Riel after that, for he desires to go back to Montana.

Now you will ask if Riel is satisfied will the other Half-breeds be satisfied? Really I believe most of them will be, for their grievances are fanciful. Let government give sure titles to their lands and remove some other grievances and they will be quiet and peacefully disposed. Riel and some other agitators are the only ones who have interest to excite the mind of the people; Riel disappearing everything will quiet down. Now I write to your Honor what I think is the best thing for the country, give us a prompt answer and let there be no **equivocations** about it. If the government are willing to offer Riel 4000 to 5000 dollars as indemnity for the losses made by him we want a right answer, that sum ought not to be an obstacle to the peace and security of this part of the country.

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

I remain
(sgd.) A. André¹⁸

The Bill of Rights

On March 2 of the same year, Louis Riel discussed with Father André a plan to form a provisional government. Father André would not support Riel and his followers and this led to a split between Riel and the Church.

At a public meeting in St. Laurent on March 8, Riel put forth a motion to form a provisional government. At this meeting the Bill of Rights, formulated on the

basis of the petitions that had been sent to Ottawa, was adopted. However, Sir John A. Macdonald "boldly declared in the Dominion Parliament in March 1885, that no North-West 'Bill of Rights' had ever been 'officially, or indeed in any way, promulgated so far as we know, and transmitted to the Government'".¹⁹



Sir John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada, 1867-1873, 1878-1891.

Bill of Rights

- (a) That the half-breeds of the North-West Territories be given grants similar to those accorded to the half-breeds of Manitoba by the Act of 1870.
- (b) That patents be issued to all half-breed and white settlers who have fairly earned the right of possession to their farms; that the timber regulations be made more liberal; and the settler be treated as having rights in the country.
- (c) That the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan be forthwith organised with legislatures of their own, so that the people may be no longer subject to the **despotism** of Mr. Dewdney; and, in the new provincial legislatures, that the Métis shall have a fair and reasonable share of representation.
- (d) That the offices of trust throughout these provinces be given to residents of the country, as far as practicable, and that we denounce the appointment of disreputable outsiders and **repudiate** their authority.

- (e) That this region be administered for the benefit of the actual settler, and not for the advantage of the alien speculator; and that all lawful customs and usages which obtain among the Métis be respected.
- (f) That better provision be made for the Indians, the Parliamentary grant to be increased, and lands set apart as an **endowment** for the establishment of hospitals and schools for the use of whites, half-breeds, and Indians, at such places as the provincial legislatures may determine.
- (g) That the Land Department of the Dominion Government be administered as far as practicable from Winnipeg, so that settlers may not be compelled, as heretofore, to go to Ottawa for the settlement of questions in dispute between them and the land commissioner.²⁰

Provisional Government

On March 18, 1885, Lawrence Clarke returned from Ottawa. He was met by a group of Métis and his response to their questions caused great concern among them:

Napoleon Nault and Michel Dumas had news for Riel. With other Métis they had met Lawrence Clarke on his way from Regina to Prince Albert. The Métis had asked Clarke if he had word about the government's answer to their petitions. Clarke answered that the answer was on the way: 500 mounted police to crush the Métis agitation.²¹

At a meeting held at Batoche on March 19, Riel formed a provisional government and began to prepare for armed resistance, placing Gabriel Dumont in charge of military operations. Although many of the immigrant settlers and the English-speaking Métis were in agreement with the Bill of Rights, they had no desire to be involved with violence and they withdrew their support of Riel. G.F. Stanley noted:

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

beginning Riel had been assured of their co-operation. They not only contributed to the agitation which brought about Riel's return from the United States, but openly supported him and acknowledged his leadership of the new political movement on the prairies.²²

Riel had formed the provisional government with the intention of forcing the federal government to negotiate the terms of settlement. This strategy had worked in 1869-70 and had resulted in the formation of Manitoba as a province with a guarantee of land for the Métis. He felt that similar results could be obtained in the Saskatchewan District, but he needed the support of all the inhabitants of the North West.

Riel continued to seek the support he needed. He sent several requests asking for the assistance of the settlers and the English-speaking Métis. One of these requests was made immediately after a meeting of the English-speaking settlers which had been conducted by Superintendent Crozier of the North West Mounted Police, and read as follows:



Gabriel Dumont, military commander of the Métis in 1885.

GENTLEMEN: —The Councillors of the half-breeds now under arms at St. Anthony have received your message of the 22nd of March, 1885. They thank you for the sympathy with which you honor them, even in this crisis, and of which you have given ample proof before. Situated as you are, it is difficult for you to approve immediately of our bold, but just uprising, and you have been wise in your course. Ottawa has followed with us neither the principles of right nor constitutional methods of government. They have been arbitrary in their doings. They have usurped the title of the aboriginal half-breeds to the soil, and they dispose of it at conditions contrary to equity in every manner, and which are already weighing very hard on all classes of the North-West people. They deprive their own emigrants of their franchises, of their liberties, not only political but even civil, and as they respect no right, we are justified before God and man to arm ourselves, to try and defend our existence, rather than to see it crushed.²³

Bankruptcy Of The C.P.R.

Meanwhile the federal government, under Macdonald, was in a very difficult position. The C.P.R. was bankrupt and had applied for more federal funds in order to continue building the railway. In 1884 the C.P.R. had received \$22,500,000 from the federal government and, in 1885, they applied for a further \$5,000,000. Macdonald was certain that the cabinet would not support another C.P.R. loan. Tilley, the finance minister, was totally against lending the C.P.R. any more money.

The official application for a loan from the C.P.R. arrived on March 18, 1885. To delay the presentation of the C.P.R. loan application in parliament, Prime Minister Macdonald introduced the **Franchise Bill**, a bill which would give the federal government the power to determine who had the right to vote. The concept of a franchise bill had been talked about since Confederation. It had always been the right of the provincial legislatures to determine the voters' list and the provinces viewed the federal bill as an infringement on their decision-making powers. The introduction of this bill created an uproar in parliament, giving Prime Minister Macdonald the time necessary to plan a new strategy for funding the C.P.R.

Conclusion

During the spring of 1885, both the C.P.R. Syndicate and the Métis of the Saskatchewan District faced major crises. The Syndicate was on the brink of bankruptcy; the Métis faced armed resistance from a government that ignored their pleas and petitions for land title. The outcome of both situations rested

ultimately with Sir John A. Macdonald, a man who had supported the building of a railway against almost insurmountable odds and who had no intention of allowing Riel a repetition of the Red River Insurgence. As tension mounted on the prairies and in the Syndicate's office in Ottawa, Macdonald pondered his alternatives.

Endnotes

1. V.C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957, p.40.
2. *Ibid.*, p.26. Taken from New York Morning News, Dec. 27, 1845, Statement of John L. O'Sullivan.
3. J.C. Martin, "History in The Courts", R.C.M.P. Quarterly, April 1941, p.435.
4. A.S. Morton, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71, Being a History of Rupert's Land, the Hudson's Bay Company's Territory and of the North-West Territory Including the Pacific Slope*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, c.1939, pp. 919-920.
5. Peter B. Waite, *Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971, p.30.
6. Morris Papers (No. 1522) David Laird, Lieutenant-Governor, N.W.T. to David Mills, Minister of the Interior, May 29, 1877.
7. From an article in *The Globe*, February 12, 1883, as cited in *Settlement in the North-West Territories by Colonization Companies* by André N. Lalonde, Ph.D. Dissertation, Laval University, 1969.
8. Canada Sessional Papers (No. 116) A, 1885, Papers and Correspondence, A. André to David Laird, enclosed in Laird to the Minister of the Interior, June 14, 1881, p.98.
9. See Waite, *Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny*, p.111.
10. Pierre Berton, *The National Dream: The Great Railway 1871-1881*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970, p.232.
11. Dewdney Papers (Volume 21B), Edgar Dewdney, Lieutenant Governor, N.W.T. to Prime Minister J. A. Macdonald, August 9, 1882, pp.89712-31.
12. Peter Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1978, p.125.
13. House of Commons Debate, Dominion of Canada 1885, Vol. IV, July 8, 1885, p.3166.
14. Macdonald Papers (MG26A Vol. 210) Edgar Dewdney, Lieutenant Governor, N.W.T. to David Macpherson, Shoal Lake, July 4, 1881.
15. Canada Sessional Papers (No. 431) Vol. XII, 1886.
16. Canada Sessional Papers (No. 52) A, 1886, 49 Victoria, pp. 34-35.
17. See Waite, *Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny*, p.154.
18. Macdonald Papers (M.G.26A, Vol. 105) Father A. André to E. Dewdney, Governor, N.W.T., Jan. 11, 1885.
19. G.F. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961, p.307.
20. Adam G. Mercer, *The Canadian North-West; Its History and Its Troubles, From the Early Days of the Fur-Trade to the Era of the Railway and the Settler; with Incidents of Travel in the Region, and The Narrative of Three Insurrections*, Toronto: Rose Publishing Co., 1885, pp.237-238.
21. See Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel*, p.141.
22. See Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, p.317.
23. *Ibid.*, p.319.

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 **Manifest Destiny**: the policy pursued by the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, under which they intended to take possession of the entire North American continent.
- p. 3 * **Providence**: the foreknowing and beneficent care and government of God.
- p. 4 * **Fenian Movement**: a group of American Irish, the main goal of which was to overthrow British rule in Ireland.
- p. 9 * **Denomination**: a class, sort, or kind distinguished by a specific name; a religious sect or body designated by a distinctive name.
- p. 10 * **Syndicate**: a combination of capitalists or financiers formed for the purpose of prosecuting a scheme requiring large resources of capital; a combination of persons formed for the promotion of an enterprise.
- p. 10 * **Monopoly**: exclusive possession of the trade in some commodity.
- p. 11 * **Calamity**: deep distress arising from adverse circumstances or events.
- p. 11 * **Cabal**: a private intrigue of a sinister character formed by a small body of persons.
- p. 12 * **Advocate**: one who argues on behalf of a proposal or tenet.
- p. 12 * **Dudgeon**: a feeling of anger or resentment.
- p. 13 * **Vagary**: a fantastic, eccentric, or extravagant idea or notion.
- p. 13 **Unscrupulous**: not troubled by conscience as to the right or wrong of an issue.
- p. 13 * **Rancid**: having the rank, unpleasant taste or smell of oils and fats when no longer fresh.
- p. 13 * **Reproach**: discredit.
- p. 14 * **Paramount**: above all others in rank, order or jurisdiction.
- p. 14 * **Recurrence**: return (of a thing, state, event, etc.).
- p. 15 * **Cordial**: sincere, genuine, warm.
- p. 17 **Indemnity**: a sum paid by way of compensation.
- p. 17 **Equivocations**: the use of words or expressions which have a double meaning, in order to mislead.
- p. 17 * **Promulgate**: to publish or proclaim formally.
- p. 18 * **Despotism**: the rule of a tyrant or oppressor; the exercise of absolute authority.
- p. 18 * **Repudiate**: to reject.
- p. 18 * **Endowment**: property, possessions.
- p. 19 * **Franchise**: the right of voting at public elections.



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WEST**
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