

# A VOICE FROM

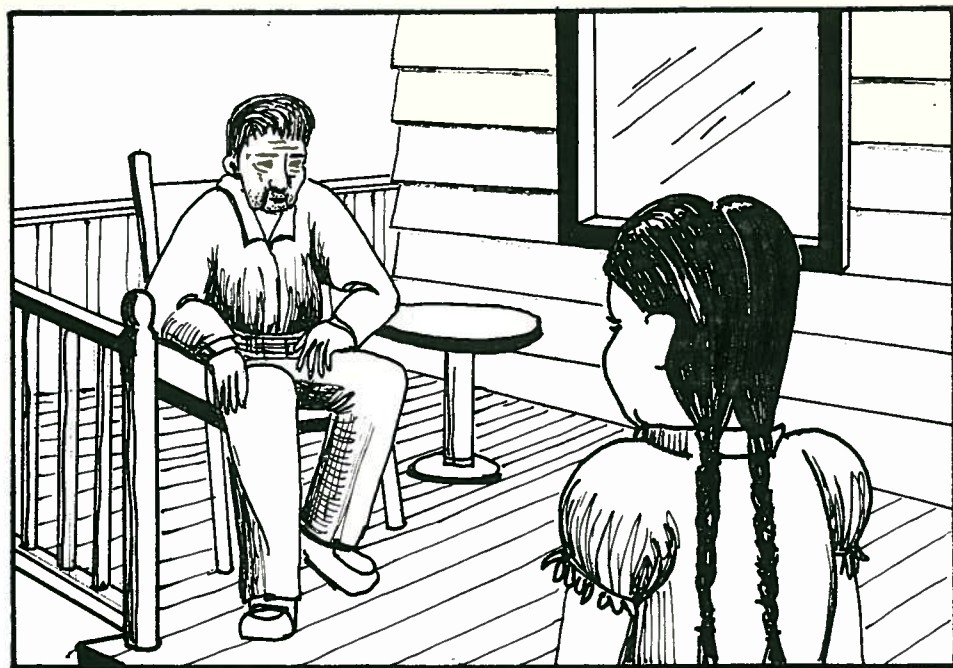


# THE PAST

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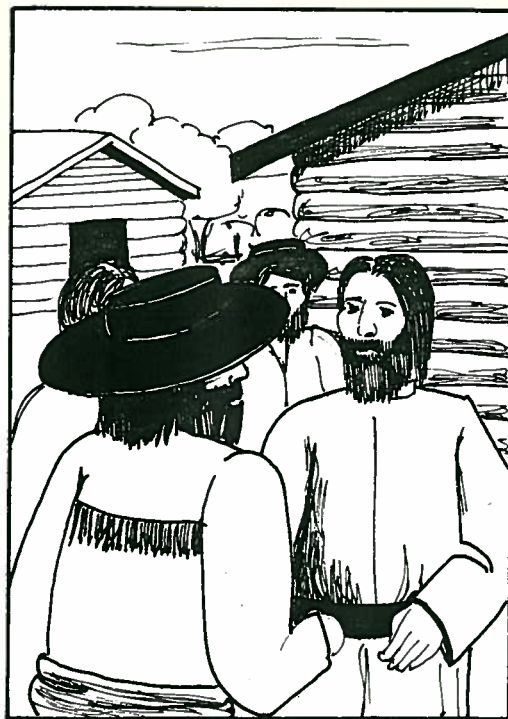
He was the oldest man I had ever seen. I could see him from the street and even from there I could see wrinkles on his face. He slowly lifted his head and with his hand he called to me. I didn't want to go to him but for some reason I couldn't stop myself. I walked up the sidewalk and climbed onto his porch. He was wearing an old shirt and pants. On his feet he wore moccasins and he had a sash tied around his waist. His face was even more wrinkled from up close. He looked at me and said, "You want to know about your people and I'm the only one who can answer your questions. Sit down and listen to my story. When I am done you will know all there is to know." I couldn't believe it. He knew that I had been asking my grandparents about my people, the Metis, and they just didn't have the answers. All they could tell me was that if I walked down this street and thought about all my questions I might get some of the answers I was looking for. I had been walking down the street every day for two weeks and nothing happened until today. I sat down and he started his story.



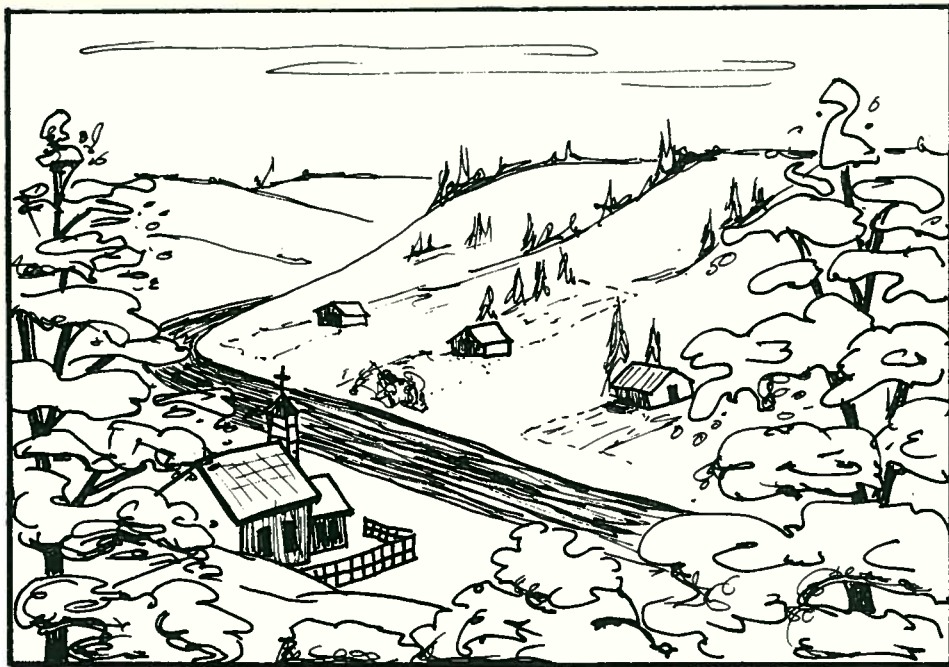
Our people came to this land over 100 years ago. During the 1840's we started to use this land as our winter camp. We would live here during the summer and prepare the meat we had caught on our summer and autumn buffalo hunt. The hides would be cured and guns, clothes and other equipment would be readied for the spring hunt. Our homes were small and our land uncleared but we knew what we were doing. Everything we needed was close by. Even the great Hudson's Bay Company had a post near our settlement. They called their post Fort-a-la-Corne but later they moved their main post to Fort Carlton. Life in our settlement on the Saskatchewan River was good. We worked hard but there was plenty of time for fun. Story telling, singing and dancing were some of the things we would do during the night to have fun. During the day we would teach the children all that they needed to know to become adults. They would learn the skills needed to make clothes, hunt, fish, make canoes and carts and all of the other things they needed to know to live in our land. Much time would be spent visiting the Indian Peoples living near our community. There the children would learn the languages of the Indians. The work was hard but the life was good.



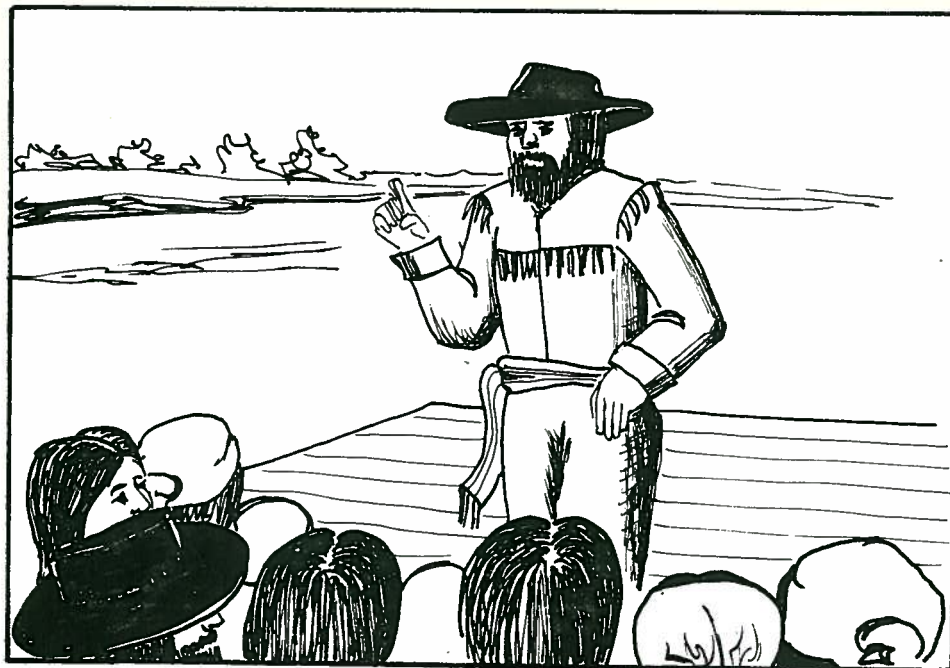
By 1871 we knew that our way of life was about to change. The buffalo were harder to find and we always had to ride further away to find any. Our priest and the man in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company kept telling us we should settle down. This was nothing new because the priests had been trying to get us to settle down and live their kind of life for over a hundred years. Lawrence Clarke of the Hudson's Bay Company wanted us to settle down because he needed us to work for the company. He wanted our carts to take goods back and forth to the fur trading country and to the Red River country. We never listened to them because we knew what was best for us. In 1871 we knew that the time had come to settle down so we called a meeting and invited Clarke to run the meeting and Father Andre was asked to be secretary. At this meeting we spoke of the buffalo problem, the need to start farming more, the chance to work more for the company and of the people starting to move into the land that used to be Indian and Metis country.



The decision was made by us to settle down and the community of St. Laurent was started. Over the years, our numbers grew until we lived in Duck Lake, Batoche, St. Louis and other places. Other towns started to appear and people from other places started to move into them. The oldest town was Prince Albert which started in the 1860's. Our community grew quickly. We started farming the land and grew more food than ever before. Our relatives started to come from the troubles in the Red River and spoke about the land ownership problem they had been having. We spoke to Clarke and he said that the government of Canada would give us ownership of our land and he sent a letter off for us to tell them that they should do this. We never did hear anything from them about this letter.



In 1873 the time had come for us to do something to protect ourselves from all of the people living in our area. We formed a government and passed laws for our community. Our first president was Gabriel Dumont. He was the greatest man on the prairies. Whenever you needed help he would come and whenever you needed somebody to listen he was there. He was a true Metis leader. The people would tell him what was needed and he would do what the people wanted. This was the Metis way. Our leaders did not tell us what to do, we told them. Gabriel was our leader for many years. Not only did he lead us in our government, but he was always our leader on the buffalo hunts. He made sure our laws of hunting were obeyed and this way everybody on the hunt had a fair chance to get some meat for themselves and to sell to the company. Everything was going great but one man did not like what we were doing. Lawrence Clarke was a man who wanted to tell us what to do and we weren't listening.



Things got really bad in 1875. We asked other groups of people to join us. We then sent an invitation to the people of Prince Albert. This upset Clarke even more. We then decided not to hunt buffalo to supply the company. He became angrier. We didn't need or want their money. We were growing enough food for ourselves. Clarke sent a group of hunters out to hunt for the company. They went out just before us. Their leader was named Ballendine, who was a long time employee of the company. Dumont went to see Bellendine to tell him that he was breaking the laws of the hunt. One rule of the hunt was that everyone hunted together, so everyone could get their share. Otherwise, the last group of hunters would have poor hunting if groups were used. Dumont invited him to join us. He refused. We took his supplies and sent him back to Fort Carlton. We promised to return his supplies when we got back from our hunt.

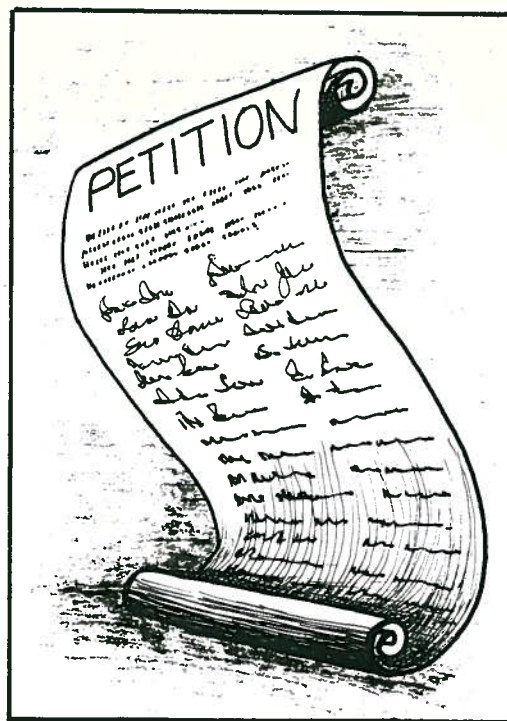


This was what Clarke was waiting for. He called the North West Mounted Police and said that we were breaking away from Canada by forming a government and by using our laws of the hunt. They came out and started to find out what had happened. They saw what Clarke was doing and said that our laws of the hunt were fair for all. Even though they knew this they still arrested Dumont. He was brought before a judge. The judge was Lawrence Clarke. He was fined a small amount of money but this meant nothing. Our laws were broken and any chance of saving the buffalo was gone. The police asked the government to do something to save the buffalo but they didn't really care or understand the situation. Besides, they had plans of their own for the area.





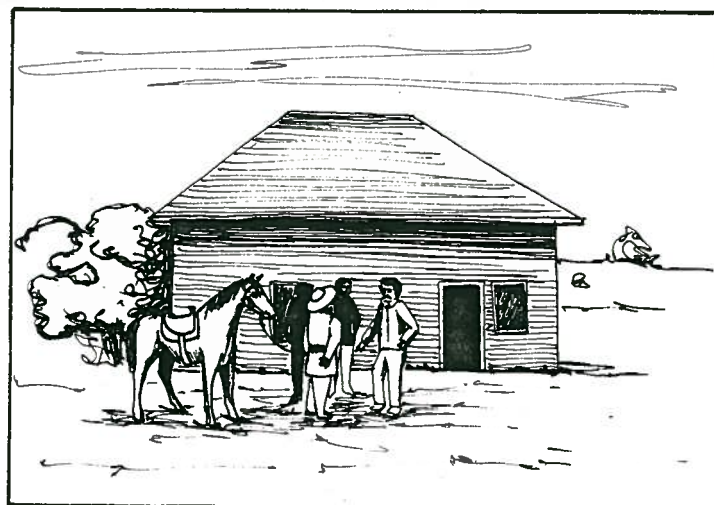
Over the next 7 or 8 years we worked towards getting title to our land. Petitions were sent to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Ministers and to the Governor General in Ottawa. We weren't the only ones sending petitions. Other Metis communities sent petitions, the people who had settled in Prince Albert sent petitions and even people like Lawrence Clarke sent petitions. The petitions were answered with promises and good news but we never got title to our land. They gave us excuses like our land was set up differently than they wanted or we were given land in Manitoba. For some of us this was true but most of us never got land in Manitoba. Our land was set up the same as people in Prince Albert and they soon got title to their land. It seemed that the government didn't care about us.



The government was worried about things that they thought were more important than us. They were busy building telegraphs across the prairies. These were followed by the Canadian Pacific Railway and land surveyors. It seems that they wanted to settle the area with wheat farmers. This explained why they didn't do anything to save the buffalo. You can't wheat farm with herds of buffalo running across your fields. They didn't care about us because we weren't wheat farmers. We grew vegetables. They didn't need railways to send vegetables to the East. Wheat was what they needed and we just didn't fit into their plans. At one point they even gave some of our land where St. Louis is to a group of people in the East. They even told them to throw us off the land. Luckily we didn't listen and eventually these people went away. But we were getting worried because even though we sent in petitions they weren't listening to us.



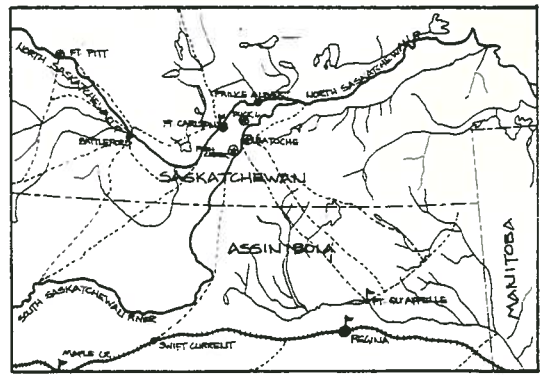
In 1884 we all got together to decide what to do. Dumont and others were there and we discussed plans for the future. Somebody finally said that we should get Louis Riel to come and help us. He had helped us in the Red River and because of his work the province of Manitoba was made. We knew that he was a true Metis leader. He listened to the people and did what they wanted. Dumont and a few others went off to ask him to come back. Riel thought about it and decided to come and help us. He returned and everybody in the country was sure that he would help solve our problems.



Father Andre and Lawrence Clarke thought there was going to be a fight. They were wrong. Louis Riel came to our communities and told us that it was time to calm down and try to get the government to see that we were right in asking for title to our land. Once again we were able to get everybody in the area to come together and ask for rights for all. In 1875 Dumont had tried to get all of the communities together. In 1884 and 1885 Riel was able to do this very thing. He held public meetings where he spoke about our rights. He spoke of everybody's rights to land and to the trees that grew on the land. You see, we were paying people in the East for the trees that grew on our land. He helped us put together a Bill of Rights and got everybody to sign it. We sent it to Ottawa with a man we thought would try to help us. This man was Lawrence Clarke. He had told us that Riel was doing a good job and that he supported us. We were wrong to trust him.

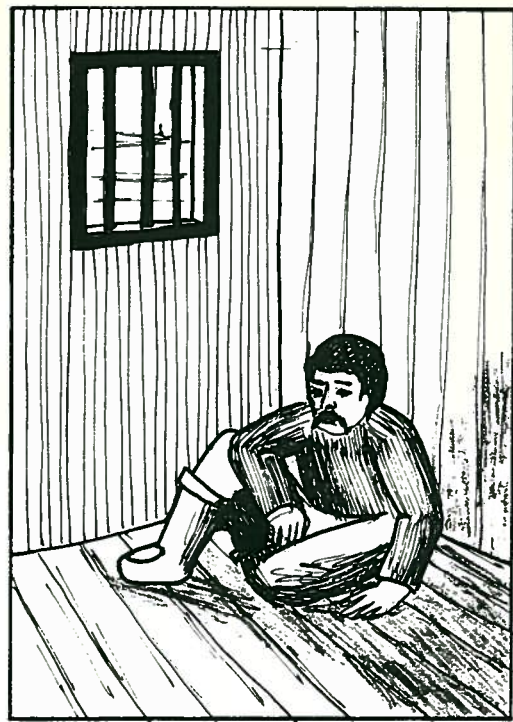


Clarke was really working for the government. On March 18, 1885 he came back on the mail wagon with the answer to our petition. Dumont met him and Clarke told him that the government was sending soldiers up to fight with us. This was their answer to our petition. When we all heard this we decided to form a new government. We all started to prepare for the attack by the government soldiers. On March 26 the attack came. While we were in Duck Lake getting ready for the attack the police and people of Prince Albert came to get us. We heard after that it was Clarke who convinced them to come. After they came we decided to fight back. Dumont led us during this but was soon injured. Biel stopped the battle after we won and prevented any more harm to the people. The fight was under way. People now call this period the Rebellion of 1885 but we always think of it as the Resistance of 1885. Battles were fought at Fish Creek, Fort Pitt and the final battle was fought at Batoche. We lost the struggle and much more.



RAIL ROAD  
TRAILS  
MOUNTED POLICE  
BATTLES

After the Battle of Batoche most of the people escaped. Riel and Dumont met shortly after to talk about what should be done. Dumont wanted to go to the United States and get the people back together again. Riel said that their cause was just and that they shouldn't run away. They split up and Dumont went to the United States. Riel turned himself in because he thought that if he went to trial the rest of the country would see that the Metis had been treated unfairly. He was wrong. At his trial he convinced the jury that maybe the Metis were treated unfairly. The jury said that Riel was guilty but that he should be treated fairly. The judge didn't listen. Louis Riel was sentenced to hang and he did on November 16, 1885. When he died we knew that we had lost.



Our life after Riel died was hard. The government sent out people to give us SCRIP. This meant that we had the right to get some land but only in the areas they wanted us in. Our people were poor and often we would sell our SCRIP to get money to buy food with. Other times people would cheat us by taking our SCRIP and telling us that they would give us the land when the SCRIP was used. You see, SCRIP was only a promise of land. It could take years before the land was finally given. Other times people in the area would be given SCRIP that meant they could get land hundreds of miles from their community. They would sell their SCRIP because it was no good to them. People all over treated us as if we were their enemies. We were turned away and we couldn't find jobs. Often we would find work as road builders getting welfare money called a Road Allowance. It was not until the 1930's that we started to get back together under leaders like Jim Brady and Malcolm Norris.



The history lesson was over and the old man fell asleep. I slowly got up and thought about all that he had taught me. It was the most interesting lesson I had ever heard because it was about me and my people. I ran back to my grandparents to tell them what had happened. They smiled as I told them my story. My grandpa looked at me and said that the same old man had taught him the same lesson. I asked why he hadn't told me the history. He said that Metis custom was to let the elders teach the children. I told him that he was an elder but he just laughed. He told me that he was only an old man and my teacher was a true elder. I decided to go and talk to my grandma. As I went into the kitchen to talk to my grandma I thought it would be a good idea to give the old man a gift in thanks for teaching me. My grandma asked what I was doing when I pulled a chair over to her cupboards. I climbed on the chair and told her that I was getting some jam to give to the old man. She told me not to bother. That was strange because they had always told me to be thankful when somebody helped me. Then I asked for the old man's name because I wanted to give him a thank you card. My grandma told me his name was Andre Ouellet. I never did send him the thank you card. You see, he died in 1931 and has come back ever since to teach any child looking for answers about their past.

