

THE ST PAUL HALF BREED RESERVE

by

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Transcribed by David Morin

The history of the St Paul Halfbreed Reserve is indissolubly bound up with the Canadian variant of Manifest Destiny. The story of Euro Canadian civilization and its march into the Northwest (sic). A minor episode during the war for the land with the native races which marked the Great tidal wave of whits (sic) settlers into the Great Lone Land at the turn of the century.

It is generally believed that St Paul dates its history from _____ when a great wave of colonization followed the opening of the St Paul Halfbreed Reserve. Vague references only are to be found in the published historical accounts of the town dealing with the pre colonization period. The town was in its embryo stages as early as _____. The first mercantile venture under Charles Logan was established in that year. The town owes its origin to the vision and efforts of Father Lacombe, the friend and protector of the Metis, who erected the first mission building in _____. Under date of _____ th March _____ he memorialized the Department of Indian Affairs with an application for "A Philanthropic Plan to Redeem the Half Breeds of Manitoba and the North West Territories". The Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporations of St Boniface, St Albert and Prince Albert requested the lease of a tract of land for the purpose of building a religious establishment and conducting thereon an industrial school for half breed children with a view to teaching them the different trades of civilized life. Four townships were leased () to the said Corporations at an annual nominal rental of _____ (One Dollar) on which poor half breed families would be located and helped to become self supporting under the direction of the Corporations. The Metis were usufructuaries of the land and the title remaining vested in the Crown. The Government furnished seed and a quantity of implements for the Metis. The school was conducted under their control and expense by means received from friends interested in the plan notably the Hon Patrick Burns. This institution was destroyed by incendiarism in _____.

Father Lacombe called the infant settlement "St Paul des Metis". The appellation (sic) St Paul commemorates an early pre Rebellion settler St Paul (Menoomen) Cardinal who in _____ erected a cabin on the site occupied by the old Roman Catholic cemetery. Cardinal later served as a government scout in the Riel Rebellion and received a Midleton (sic) grant for his services. The area was generally known among the early Metis as "St Paul's place" and in deference to custom Father Lacombe adopted the name. The additional name was given in allusion to the early native settlers.

A considerable number of Metis families were located on this tract prior to _____. The Federal authorities made a small initial provision of _____ of agricultural implements and other utilities. The results attendant upon this venture were remarkably successful. Many Metis were comparatively well to do. Many possessed large herds of cattle and horses and other holdings of a comfortable nature. Opponents stated that the Reserve had been terminated because the Metis had failed to become self supporting (). The Metis at this time were a happy, contented and prosperous people. Observations to that

effect had been made by visitors who passed through the Reserve. Notable among these were Sir George Eulas Foster and Sir Hughes who visited the Reserve in 1877. Good homes, vast herds and substantial parcels of cultivated land provided good livelihoods augmented by the natural resources and the trade and commerce of the virgin hinterlands.

- () Annex 'B' to P.C. Ottawa 15th December
- () Annex 'A' to P.C. Ottawa 15th December
- () Letter of Samuel Maber, Half Breed Claims Commissioner to Hon. Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior, Ottawa 15th January

Some opinion can be derived from the following figures:

Dion Laboucane	cattle (twelve hundred)
Elzear Poitras	cattle, horses, chain of trading posts
Lawrence Garneau	cattle, horses, chain of trading posts, Timber berth and sawmill
Louis LaFramboise	extra grade cattle, threshing machine
Jean Lariviere	acres of cultivated land
John Ross	cattle, etc, etc

The railway pronouncement by the provincial government in 1877 and the penetration of settlers into contiguous territory commenced an agitation among the white (sic) which proposed the opening of this tract. This preceded an intensive colonization campaign in Quebec and the New England States. The first intimation of this manoeuvre was the arrival of white settlers who squatted on various locations in the summer and fall of 1877 and were evidently introduced in accordance with some definite (sic) plan. A proposal suggesting the withdrawal of the Reserve was presented to Ottawa in 1877. Compensation was made to the Corporations for the expense incurred. Although the lands had been reserved by Order in Council in 1877, the leases for the property were not issued to the Corporations until 1878 ()

This proposal evoked a storm of protest among the Metis residents. A mass meeting was held at which 100 petitioners forwarded a petition to Ottawa expressing their collective demand that the tract remain under the status of a Metis reserve. This document forwarded to Ottawa through ordinary postal channels elicited no reply or consideration. To this day the final disposition of this petition is unknown. The Federal authorities claimed it had never been received. Thus the Metis had nothing to say about the opening of the Reserve or the manner in which it would be done. On the 15th day of April 1878 the Reserve was declared open to the march of Progress and "Modernization".

These lands were actually in possession of the squatters prior to entry. The provision for patrol had not been implemented by the Corporations. The misgivings of the Metis resulted in the visit of an official of the Department of the Interior, Mr. James Bannerman, accompanied by an officer of the R.N.W.M.P. (sic) who warned the squatters to withdraw. These warnings were countermanded (sic) by the agents of the Corporations and ignored by the squatters who immediately commenced to consolidate their positions and treated the Metis with impunity. A number of Metis had their locations invaded, succumbed to the following intimidation and moved away. The first official sitting of the Half Breed Claims Commission took place December 1878.

The Commission composed of Mr Samuel Maber Ottawa Half Breed Claims Commissioner and Mr James Bannerman Red Deer a well known official of the Dominion Lands Branch The Commission returned in March and allotted acres to each head of a Half Breed family with the right to an additional acres under ordinary homestead provisions ()

A notice barely discernable in small type was posted in the Edmonton newspaper to the effect that all available lands in Townships and in Ranges and West of the Fourth Meridian would be available for entry April th This was a mere formality to protect the squatters Everybody applying at the Edmonton Land Office went there knowing what parcel he would take up having previously allotted by the agent of the Corporations At the time of the official opening the majority of entrants were already in occupation of their lands Under the Dominion Lands Act at that time on making entry all applicants had to swear that there

() Para P C – Ottawa th August
() Para P C – Ottawa nd June

was nobody in occupation and no improvements There had been mass violation of government regulations inspired by a concerted organized grouping as the squatters had no legal right to trespass within the Reserve ()

In the long queues familiar at this time at the Dominion Lands Agency Edmonton an incident occurred which shows how the secret was kept There were some parties who were not desirous of taking up lands in the St Paul Half Breed Reserve One spectator remarked to another "What are all these people doing here?" The reply was "Oh it is some Indian lands that are being opened The land is no good anyway " Actually it was the best available land in North Eastern Alberta at this time

Following opening of the Reserve many of the Metis removed to other inaccessible frontier areas motivated mainly by the economic spoliation (sic) and intolerance which followed the inflooding (sic) white colonization An Edmonton syndicate was formed aimed at securing as much of the remaining Metis holdings as possible Prominent in this ring was a Dominion Lands surveyor a local trader and the former resident agent of the Corporations The local agent of the syndicate with his mercantile ally began dealing in unpatented Half Breed lands Deals to purchase these lands were made with the Half Breeds remarkably in every instance with illiterate Metis They signed a document whereby when the patent was issuable (sic) they were transferred to a legal firm in Edmonton who were the undercover agents of the syndicate When the required homestead duties had been performed this legal firm forwarded the transfers to Ottawa requesting the patents be validated in the name of the purchaser This attracted the attention of an official of the Department N O Cote who immediately contacted the late Half Breed Commissioner Samuel Maber who was resident in Ottawa Meanwhile these irregularities were discovered by local literate Metis who brought it to the attention of the Minister Prompt action followed in the cases of Joseph Hamelin and Henri Dufresne Metis who had been defrauded of their lands ()

Mr Luke Conner (sic) private investigator of the Minister was despatched to St Paul followed by Mr James Bannerman Assistant Lands Inspector who conducted a full investigation The syndicate agent fled to Mexico and the

resident agent of the Corporations departed for Massachusetts for reasons of ill health. A Royal Commission followed due to the intervention of the Minister. The scandal was acridly debated in the Federal Cabinet of Sir Wilfred (sic) Laurier. Due to political reasons the cabinet were averse to the sitting of the Commission as the Reciprocity election of _____ was engaging their attention. The Commission sat at St. Paul and found widespread irregularities. Of significant illumination (sic) were the reports of Mr. James Bannerman ()

"I have found the homesteader had been trafficking in his land prior to obtaining patent. This I think the evidence will show. While I have no doubt the transaction was carried out through ignorance on part of the homesteader and through pressure brought to bear on him by his spiritual adviser still I consider it a case well worth looking into". Due to the personal intervention of the Minister of the Interior, Hon. Frank Oliver, a doughty friend and champion of the Indian and Metis people, the lands restored to the Metis by Order in Council during the dying hours of the Laurier administration.

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- () Letter of Hon. Frank Oliver, Minister of the Interior to Mrs. A. Brady _____ th November
 - () Reports of J. A. Bannerman, Assistant Dominion Lands Inspector to the Department of the Interior, Red Deer _____ June _____ in the cases of Mrs. Marguerite Berard, Francis Poitras and others