

HISTORY OF THE HALFBREED CLAIM COMMISSIONS(?)

by

J P Brady

Transcribed by David Morin

The earliest phase of the Halfbreed claims and grievances are closely associated with the history of the Red River Colony. The Red River Project arose out of the efforts of Lord Selkirk who conceived and founded the colony as a buffer against the activities of the rival North West Fur Company. On gaining control of the Hudson's Bay Company's policy he secured from the Company on May 10th the transfer of 120,000 square miles of territory including the south portion of the present province of Manitoba and a large portion of South Western Saskatchewan. The district acquired was called Assiniboia. In 1812 it became a circular district of 100 miles radius with Fort Garry as a centre.

Lord Selkirk secured the extinction of the Indian claims over the lands of his settlement along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in return for the annual payment to the natives of 1000 pounds of tobacco. This treaty was extinguished in 1812.

THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY MONOPOLY

Following the death of Lord Selkirk and Sir Alexander Mackenzie the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Fur Company amalgamated. This event though immensely beneficial in many respects had some disadvantages for the Red River Colony. The union rendered more economical the administration of the fur trade but as a result a considerable number of halfbreeds formerly employed by one or the other of the companies were left without any adequate means of support. For a long time many members of this class lived in great poverty.

The Deed of 1812 creating Assiniboia stated that one tenth (1/10) of the Selkirk Grant was to be used for retired servants of the Hudson's Bay Company. A provision was made for the granting of lands to retired servants for services rendered. The size of estates were dependent on rank. Masters of a trading post were to receive 1000 acres even an ordinary labourer who had served the Company only three years was entitled to 100 acres.

In 1812 the guardianship of the Red River colony was transferred to the Hudson's Bay Company by secret agreement by the executors of Lord Selkirk's estate. Though Selkirk had spent 100,000 upon the settlement his executors accepted 100,000 (?) for full quittance of their claims.

There was in many quarters a strong conviction that no bona fide surrender ever took place as the terms of the agreement were distinctly to the disadvantage of the immigrants and halfbreeds. The re-conveyance of Assiniboia (1812) to the Hudson's Bay Company could not affect the previously established rights and interests of the retired servants as it could only involve nine tenths (9/10) of the district originally surrendered to the Hudson's Bay Company.

During the next two decades the chief topic of public interest in Rupert's Land was the persistent agitation for the abrogation of the Hudson's Bay Company's monopolies. The Company was the sole purchaser of the markets of the settlements and controlled all imports and exports. It alone could legally engage directly or indirectly in the fur trade. The Company enforced all their obnoxious charter rights to the last minute detail.

In 1793 Governor McTavish ordered that all persons importing goods from England leave their business letters open to his inspection.

The foremost opponent of the monopoly was James Sinclair, of a family long connected with the service of the Company. Engaging independently in the fur trade, he took his furs to London where the Company paid him handsomely rather than have a competitor arise in the open market. The Company undertook a test case in 1794 against William Sayer, a free trader of less prominent social position. James Sinclair acted as counsel for the defence. Sayer did not deny the facts. The intervention of Louis Riel, Senior, with four hundred armed halfbreeds, all ardent free traders, secured the release of Sayer. This broke up the monopoly and henceforth the Company made practically no attempt to enforce their inclusive trade rights. However, Sinclair was a dangerous man to their opinion, with the financial support and connivance of the British Government, they contrived to employ him in the Oregon Territory. From this period the power of the Company waned. This resistance to the Company's monopoly was brought to the attention of the British Government by a member of the House of Commons, Mr. A. K. Isbester (sic - Isbister). It resulted in a select committee of the British House of Commons to determine the status of the Hudson's Bay Company with respect to territory, trade, taxation, and government. Little resulted from the investigation, but it gave some support to the resistance to the Company's monopoly.

The first attack on the Company's charter was an attempt in 1793 to secure a cancellation of their extraordinary rights and privileges on the plea of "non user". One of the terms of the charter was that of promoting colonization and settlement. At this time the Company had four or five forts on Hudson's Bay and employed only 100 men, though it had carried on a tremendous trade for eight years. The Company emerged successful in the suit.

Upon the fusion of the rival companies in 1793 the lease was renewed for 10 years, with the extension of the criminal and civil jurisdiction of the Canadas into their territory, with concurrent jurisdiction on the part of the Company. This was a condition which generally speaking satisfied the whites.

An incident associated with this period was the Red River Disturbance of 1800, when Dickson, a self-styled "Liberator of the Indian Race," assembled his halfbreed followers and attempted to raise a revolt in the colony.

The Company's Charter was renewed in 1793 on the basis of the protection by the British Government of the present and future colonies within the Hudson's Bay territory, and their exemption from the Hudson's Bay Company's jurisdiction.

In 1793 a select committee of the British House of Commons proposed the ceding of Canada of certain districts in the Red River and

Saskatchewan The Privy Council believed that the Company should continue to enjoy the exclusive rights of trade but recommended that a bill should be prepared forth with to lay the foundation of a new order Despite all the efforts made to effect an adjustment the vested interests and long admitted rights of the Great company were too strong to be imperilled by any legal subtleties put forward on behalf of Canada

The losses were renewed in subject to these conditions – the exclusion of Vancouver Island and other prospective colonies from their jurisdiction; the boundary between the Hudson's Bay territory and Canada to be fully defined; suitable settlements to be free for annexation to Canada After the monopoly of exclusive trade was not renewed but the company continued to exercise rights of administration

THE FOUNDING OF GOVERNMENT

In consequence of the discontent aroused by the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly a petition had been forwarded from Assiniboia to the American Governments in desiring annexation of the Red River territory to the United States and promising assistance against the Hudson's Bay Company in the event of war

In a proclamation issued under instructions of the President of the United States prohibited trespassing into American territory caused much discontent as it precluded the people of Red River from their hunting grounds

The rise of the Fenian Movement and incursions of the war like Sioux on the American Frontier cause such anxiety during this period and resulted in the arrival of a Military Force of men at Fort Garry in A memorial from the Red River Settlement under date of January th favouring confederation was forwarded to the officers administering the Canadian Affairs At the first session of the first Parliament of Canada the Hon William McDougall brought forward a series of resolutions for the union of Rupert's Land and the Territories with Canada Sir George Cartier and Mr McDougall in went to England as Canadian delegates to confer with the Hudson's Bay Company Terms were arranged and an Act was passed by the Imperial Parliament authorizing the change of control The Canadian Parliament accepted the arrangement in June and on November th the Hudson's Bay Company made the surrender The Company's Rights were extinguished by the payment of sterling – (sic) The right to claim within any township in the fertile belt one twentieth of the land set out for settlement; The right to carry on trade in its corporate capacity; That no exception tax be placed on the company's land trade or servants While the terms of the surrender were being considered the London Directors of the Company informed the employees that "should the Company surrender their chartered rights they would expect compensation for the officers and servants as well as for the proprietor" The spirit and letter of these promises were promptly forgotten then the surrender was made

The retired servants and the employees of the Company with their families included very many whites large numbers of English halfbreeds and the greater majority of the French halfbreeds in the West These people believed that one tenth of the territory ceded to Selkirk on the Red River rightfully belonged to themselves and their heirs and that these lands were

incapable of being surrendered by the Hudson's Bay Company. The Hudson's Bay Company deliberately concealed these facts when negotiating with the Canadian and British Government. The people of Western Canada have never been able to understand the bitter sense of wrong cherished especially by the Halfbreeds of the West. Those who realized the Metis grievances co-operated in a conspiracy of silence. This was the primary cause of the troubles of ' and '

THE REBELLION OF _____

It is necessary to review the troubles in Red River in _____ History records it as a rebellion despite the fact that Riel persistently proclaimed his loyalty to the British Crown. It is hard to see how resistance to the Government of a sister colony can be considered a rebellion. In a Report of a Committee of the Honourable the Privy Council December _____ the Premier of Canada declared that the resistance of the Halfbreeds "is evidently not against the sovereignty (sic) to her Majesty or the Government of the Hudson's Bay Company but to the assumption of the Government by Canada". The Provisional Government of _____ was a means of protest against the folly and bungling of the Imperial and Dominion authorities.

In annexing Rupert's Land the British and Canadian authorities ignored the _____ white and Halfbreed settlers of the Red River. The terms of the transfer were never discussed with them or their representatives. Various opinions existed. The more recent arrivals from Eastern Canada were anxious for annexation, some were indifferent and a great number were bitterly opposed to it. The lesser officials and traders of the Hudson's Bay Company believed that their interests were ignored in the transfer and the halfbreeds by virtue of their Indian Blood felt themselves to be with the Indians the natural possessors of the land. They resented the surrender by which they believed that their birth right would be forfeited and their natural heritage pass into the hands of strangers. The servants and retired employees of the Hudson's Bay Company believed that the lands assigned to them and their heirs under the terms of the Selkirk grant were included in the lands surrendered to Canada and the action of the Company at law was invalid.

These misapprehensions might have been corrected if the Government of Canada had not sent surveyors into the country before the actual terms of the surrender were concluded. They proceeded to lay out the land upon the rectangular plan of survey entirely ignoring the primitive system in use. The Common form in usage at this period was (sic) river lots of narrow frontage and of a few (_____ miles) miles in depth as adopted in the elder settlements of Quebec. These could not be made to fit in with the new survey and the settlers naturally believed that they were being robbed of their holdings. The misrepresentation and arrogance of many of these surveyors further aggravated the situation.

The Dominion Government then appointed Hon. Wm. McDougall as Lieutenant Governor who departed for Red River immediately. The excited Halfbreeds determined that entry should not occur until negotiations between the Red River settlers and the Federal Government resulted in a constitution satisfactory to them. An armed force seized the highway between Fort Garry and the boundary to prevent McDougall's entry while Louis Riel took possession of Fort Garry. Riel called a convention to form a Provisional Government. At the insistence of the English Delegates Riel consulted Governor McTavish of the

Hudson's Bay Company who consented to the formation of a Provisional Government. Then the President of the Provisional Government John Bruce and Riel distributed among the settlers a "Declaration to the people of Rupert's Land and the North West". In that document Riel declared on behalf of the settlements "that we refuse to recognize the authority of Canada which pretends to have the right to coerce us and impose upon us a despotic form of Government still more contrary to our rights and interests as British Subjects as was that Government to which we had subjected ourselves through necessity up to a certain date – we shall continue to oppose with all strength the establishment of a Canadian authority in our country under the announced form. Meanwhile we hold ourselves in readiness to enter into such negotiations with the Canadian Government as may be favourable for the good Government and prosperity of this people."

The English speaking (sic) settlers generally held aloof from the disturbance and expressed sentiments of regret that a portion of the French halfbreeds should prejudice the good name of the colony. However they declined to enter upon the responsibility of aiding the Canadian Government to establish their authority.

Governor McDougall adopted the unwise course of proclaiming his authority and appointed Col. Dennis to rally all loyal subjects for the overthrow of the insurgents. Dennis' volunteers succeeded in getting themselves into trouble and strengthened the hand of Riel. Dennis fled from Red River and a number of his volunteers became prisoners at Fort Garry. The Provisional (Government) was definitely organized in January with Riel as President; O'Donoghue a Fenian as Secretary Treasurer; and Ambroise Lepine as Adjutant General of the Military Forces. It may be said that at this time sums of money amounting to more than four million dollars men and arms were offered by Americans on condition that Riel espouse annexation. These offers he refused.

On the 17th January Donald A. Smith (Lord Strathcona) arrived as a special emissary. With great common sense and diplomacy he presented his papers at a large mass meeting of the people. The Governor General's Proclamation was read guaranteeing non prosecution for all parties who submitted to peaceable dispersion and obedience.

A convention of twenty English and twenty French representatives was held to consider Smith's mission. The chairman was Judge Black a loyalist. A Bill of Rights was framed as (the) basis for legislation creating a Provincial Government and protecting the landed interests of the retired servants of the Hudson's Bay Company. On the invitation of Mr. Smith three delegates. Rather Ritchot Alfred Scott and Judge Black were selected to negotiate at Ottawa for the settlers. On their arrival at Ottawa Father Ritchot and Mr. Scott were twice arrested as rebels but there being no case against them they were released in April.

A number of loyalists of Portage la Prairie under Capt. Boulton took up arms against the Provisional Government. February 10th Boulton and a large number of his party were captured. On the 12th February Boulton was condemned to be shot and on the personal intercession of Mr. Smith's request he said "May I ask you a favour?" Smith replied "Anything that in honour I can do." Riel replied "Canada has disunited us; will you use your influence to unite

us? You can do so and without this it must be war – bloody civil war We want only our just rights as British Subjects ”

Riel's difficulties were further aggravated by the execution of Thomas Scott an irresponsible and hot headed loyalist and Orangeman who had previously attempted to murder his employer on the Dawson Road Captured at the time of Boulton's sortie he had been released on his personal parole within the garrison confines of Fort Garry He immediately utilized his parole to promote insubordination among the prisoners a state of affairs which threatened to tax the feeble powers of the garrison He further preyed upon the excitable passions and fears of his simple and untutored guards by personal threats and promises of reprisals on the arrival of the expected military intervention It was only in the face of threats and the clamour of the garrison and to sustain the visible power of the only existent force of law and order that Riel consented to the execution Many reports gained unlimited publicity of the manner in which the execution was carried out One report given wide credence was that of an ecclesiastic administering sacred rites to a superstitious and cringing execution squad Scott met his death bravely

Following the execution of Scott the Canadian Government made arrangements to send a military force to Red River The Colonial Secretary Earl Granville in a communication to the Federal Government sent the following warning "Troops should not be employed in enforcing the sovereignty (sic) of Canada on the population should they refuse to admit it " The admission is plainly evident that the Halfbreeds had every right to refuse to enter Confederation

On May 1st Sir John A Macdonald introduced the Manitoba Act The measure conformed generally to the Riel Bill of Rights with the exceptions that no provisions were made to protect that claim of those believing themselves entitled to a share in the tenth of the Selkirk lands which had been intended for the ex employees of the Hudson's Bay Company Provision was made for the extinction of special Halfbreed and Indian rights to the soil and for the establishment of provincial Autonomy The Bill became law May 12th

The arrival of Wolseley with a "punitive" expedition resulted in the collapse of the Provisional Government An important factor was the influence exercised by Archbishop Tache Archbishop Tache who was on a visit to Rome returned immediately to Red River on the request of Sir John A Macdonald's exhortations remonstrances and personal prestige succeeded in restraining the more inflammable elements The situation was further complicated by the issuance of an amnesty by Archbishop Tache which he believed he was empowered by Ottawa to proclaim A further complication arose when Lieut Governor Archibald officially accepted the armed support of Riel and his Halfbreed followers to repel expected Fenian invaders Mr Archibald reported to Ottawa that the French Halfbreeds loyally rallied to the support of the Government despite the troubles of 1869 and 1870 and that in the ranks of the Fenians were to be found only one French Halfbreed As for Riel and his associates the Government had officially and publicly recognized their assistance they felt that any enforcement of capital sentence would be grossly unjust The upshot was that the Federal authorities paid Riel and Lepine to leave the country under their (Federal Authority) connivance Lepine later returned stood his trial and was condemned to death but Lord Dufferin commuted his sentence to two years imprisonment

We have tried to picture some of the true character of the rebellion of _____ and review the acts of the French Halfbreeds who took up arms only against the ignorant arrogance of Ottawa and to whose loyalty to the British Crown Canada owes her Western Empire

THE HALFBREEDS OF THE PLAINS

When the North West was annexed to Canada Halfbreed settlements were gradually being established in the Territory West of Manitoba. The Halfbreeds in the country lived by hunting and the fur trade. Agricultural settlements had scarcely begun. The institutions of law and order as known in civilized communities were little known. Free trade in furs which meant free trade in whisky had demoralized the Indians.

The so called rebellion and the establishment of Canadian authority had disturbed the tradition of relative peace that had existed between the whites on one hand and the aboriginal peoples on the other.

The Metis viewed with great anxiety the gradual inroads of white settlers. The pernicious practices of white settlers, hunters and trappers caused the decrease and destruction of game. Worst of all the extinction of the buffalo was already in sight.

The Halfbreed element was chiefly of French and Scottish extraction and largely made up of former Hudson's Bay Company employees and their descendants. They had scattered settlements principally at Prince Albert, Batoche, Battleford, Willow Bunch, Wood Mountain, Qu'Appelle, Battle River and St. Albert. As a general rule they devoted little attention to agriculture. The summers were spent on the plains buffalo hunting and in the winter they traded and freighted for the Hudson's Bay Company.

An incident associated with this period and generally forgotten to day was the Halfbreed Confederacy. The Government at Fort Garry due to its remoteness exercised but little influence in the far settlements of the West. As a consequence the Halfbreeds of Batoche and Carlton districts formed a provisional Government in _____. The head of this Government was Gabriel Dumont, famous Metis plainsman and warrior who had come to the Saskatchewan Valley in _____. The Metis organized themselves on the basis of the old plains laws of the Buffalo Hunt which did not operate on a voluntary basis. Dumont and his associates arrested various hunters who declined to join the Confederacy and forbade all others to approach his territory unless they joined the Metis Confederacy. These proceedings were declared illegal and the Government interfered. Dumont to avoid arrest released the prisoners and confiscated property remitted the fines and made peace with the police.

THE HALFBREED CLAIMS AND THE REBELLION

In the journals of the Northwest Council under date of the _____nd of August we find a lengthy resolution with regard to the issue of Halfbreed scrip in the territories, a matter that reappeared year after year. Apparently nothing less than a rebellion as occurred eight years before could convince the Federal Government that satisfaction among the Halfbreeds of the Northwest could not be expected unless in the matter of land grants they were allowed terms similar to those given their brothers in Manitoba under the Manitoba Act of _____. The

Council advised that non transferable location tickets should be issued to each head of a halfbreed family and each halfbreed child resident in the Territories at the time of the transfer to Canada. The locations should be valid on any unoccupied Dominion lands. The title to remain vested in the Crown for ten years and if within three years of entry no improvements had been made upon the land the claim would be forfeited. The council further agreed that some initial equipment of agricultural and grain be granted. Had these wise proposals been accepted by the Federal Government much misery might have been avoided.

Governor Dewdney's Council which met at Regina August 18th firmly championed the rights of the Halfbreeds in a memorial presented to Ottawa at this time containing sixteen important grievances of the Northwest.

During 1877 a Mr W Pearce visited Prince Albert, Battleford and other points on behalf of the Government to investigate claims advanced by the old settlers (squatters) of long standing. A number of these claims were adjusted but Mr Pearce could not speak French. No inquiry was made into the special grievances of the French Halfbreeds. Mr A M Burgess, Deputy Minister of the Interior, also made an official tour at this time. He met with an accident and was obliged to cut his visit short. These untoward incidents involved the Government in a state of ineptitude which factor contributed in no small measure to the causes of the rising of

The Rebellion of 1870 arose chiefly from the same causes which brought about the trouble of 1869; the ignoring of the Halfbreeds of the Territories to participate in Indian title, the unexplained survey policy of the Government, and the total neglect of the Metis protests of the time. Under the Manitoba Act of 1870 a large area was set aside for the Manitoba Halfbreeds and a scrip issue of 160 acres issued to every Halfbreed head of family. This issue did not cover the Halfbreeds of Red River who were absent or resident in the Territories. However their rights were as binding and valid as the rights of their brethren in Manitoba.

In May 1877 John Fisher and a number of Halfbreeds in the Territories petitioned the Lieut. Governor for land grants. In 1878 the anxiety of the Halfbreeds of Prince Albert and St. Laurent over the land question was brought to the attention of the North West Council by Joseph McKay of Prince Albert. The same year a petition signed by thirty two Halfbreeds of Qu'Appelle was forwarded to Lieut. Governor Morris. In 1879 forty three Halfbreeds of Blackfoot Crossing presented a petition to the Lieut. Governor imploring assistance with a view to maintaining themselves by agriculture. The gradual influx of white settlers and the depletion of the Metis hunting grounds made necessary the pressing of their claims. Formal agitation began to take shape.

On February 18th 1879 the Halfbreeds of St. Laurent held a public meeting. Gabriel Dumont was President and Alexander Fisher Secretary. The memorial of this occasion was as follows:

"That the sudden transition from prairie to agricultural life necessitated by the rapid disappearance of the buffalo and the ordinance respecting hunting of the Northwest Council have brought your petitioners to their last resources and forced them to apply to the Federal Government for assistance in agricultural implements and seed grain like assistance

having been granted to certain foreign immigrants in the Province of Manitoba Those instruments besides being extremely scarce are only sold here at prices so exorbitant (sic) that it is impossible or your petitioners to secure them; if therefore the Government were unable to grant this help many of your petitioners however willing they might be to devote themselves to farming would be compelled to betake themselves to the prairie at the risk of infringing the ordinance providing for the protection of the buffalo however good it may be since the time during which hunting is permitted is too short and the buffalo too scarce to enable them to lay in a sufficient supply and provide for their own needs and those of their families during the rest of the year "

They further petitioned: "That there should be granted to all halfbreeds who have not participated in the distribution of scrip and lands in the Province of Manitoba like scrip and lands as in that province "

In January a petition was forwarded to Ottawa by the French Canadians and Halfbreeds of St Albert to the same effect The reply to the above petitions was a curt refusal as regards agricultural aid but promised a fair survey and allotment of lands would be made at some future time

This was followed in June by a petition from Prince Albert signed by persons asking that a census be made with a view of ascertaining the number of people entitled to share in scrip A like petition bearing signatures was presented from the Halfbreeds of the Cypress Hills the same year A resolution was passed by the North West Council urging the Federal Government to take action A deputation of Halfbreeds waited on the Lieutenant Governor at Duck Lake where they were told that the government refused to consider their requests Though in the Deputy Minister's report of December of this year are found proposals and recommendations that the government comply to the Metis requests The Deputy Minister also suggested a scheme of industrial schools As a result of this report Mr Nicholas Flood Devin was appointed Commissioner and the Departmental report and memorandum was forwarded for consideration to Archbishop Tache Bishop McLean and Governor Laird On Jan th Archbishop Tache replied in a very long letter interpreted as follows:

"The Halfbreeds are a highly sensitive race; they keenly resent injury or insult and daily complain on that point In fact they are daily humiliated with regard to their origin by the way they are spoken of not only in newspapers but also in official and semi official documents " (See footnote)

"It is desirable that the Halfbreed question be decided upon without further delay The requisite legislation ought to be passes in the coming session of the legislature "

"There is no doubt that the difficulties increase with delay "

The replies of Bishop McLean and Mr Laird were much to the same effect

N B Please note reference in Edmonton Bulletin of Jan re (Metis Breeds) The term being sufficient in itself and well designates these people The terms Breed displays gross ignorance of the traditions and history of the West

In the Saskatchewan Herald of March 1877 we find reference to a rumor that Riel and a large number of French Halfbreeds from the Red and Pembina Rivers were to come in the summer of 1877 to make settlements on the Saskatchewan

In May 1877 a resolution was passed empowering the Department of the Interior "To satisfy and claims existing in connection with the extinguishment of the Indian titles preferred by the Halfbreeds resident in the North West Territories outside the limits of Manitoba on the 1st day of July 1877 by granting land to such persons to such extent and on such terms and considerations as may be deemed expedient "

Then follows a long list of representations letters recommendations and petitions

In December 1877 Representations by Judge Richardson at Ottawa on behalf of the Metis of the West

February 1877 Meeting at Duck Lake widely attended

Spring of 1877 Petition from the Halfbreeds of Manitoba Village

May 1877 Petition signed by 100 names from the Halfbreeds of Edmonton and Prince Albert

Summer of 1877 Petition of 100 signatures from the Halfbreeds of Qu'Appelle

June 1877 Memorial presented to the Northwest Council on behalf of the Metis by Mr Lawrence Clarke Member for Lorne

Despite all the efforts of people conversant with the situation and its implications the Federal authorities could not be stirred to consider the Metis grievances The Metis at this time found staunch champions in the persons of John McKay Prince Albert; Bishop Grandin; Inspector Falker N W M P ; Frank Oliver and Others

An incident illustrating the criminal carelessness of Ottawa (sic) On March 1877 Pr Geo Dick Dominion Lands Agent at Prince Albert wrote about the possibility of re surveying the land in the St Laurent district in accordance with the way it had been settled The letter remained unanswered for over six months On September 1877 the Department replied in the negative

September 1877 Petition from the French Halfbreeds of the Saskatchewan Valley as follows and reproduced in full on page 10 :

St Antoine de Padou South
Saskatchewan Sept 1877

"To the Right Honourable Sir John A Macdonald
Minister of the Interior
Ottawa Ont

Sir:

"We the undersigned French Halfbreeds for the most part settled on the west bank of the Saskatchewan in the district of Prince Albert North West Territories hereby approach you in order to set forth with confidence the painful position in which we are placed with reference to the lands occupied by us in this portion of the Territory and in order to call the attention of the Government to the question which causes us so much anxiety

"Compelled most of us to abandon the prairie which can no longer furnish us the means of subsistence we came in large numbers during the course of the summer and settled on the mouth branch of the Saskatchewan Pleased with the land and country we set ourselves actively to work clearing the land in the hope of moving next spring and also to prepare our houses for the winter now rapidly approaching The surveyed lands being already occupied and sold we were compelled to occupy lands being not yet surveyed being ignorant for the most part also of the regulations of the Government respecting Dominion Lands Great was our astonishment and perplexity when we were notified that when the lands are surveyed we shall be obliged to pay per acre to the Government if our lands included in the odd numbered sections We desire moreover to keep close together in order more easily to secure a school and a church We are poor people and cannot pay for our land without utter ruin and losing the fruits of our labour and seeing our lands pass into the hands of strangers who will go to the land office at Prince Albert and pay the amount fixed by the Government In our anxiety we appeal to your sense of justice as Minister of the Interior and head of the Government and beg you to reassure us speedily by directing that we shall not be disturbed on our lands and that the Government grant us the privilege of considering us as occupants of even numbered sections since we have occupied these lands in good faith Having so held this country as its masters and so often defended it against the Indians at the price of our blood we consider it not asking too much to request that the Government allow us to occupy our land in peace and that exception be made to its regulations by making the Halfbreeds of the North West free grants of land We also pray that you would direct that the lots be surveyed along the river ten chains in width by two miles in depth this mode of division being the long established usage of the country This would render it more easy for us to know the limits of our several lots "

On October th the Government replied that all the lands of the North West Territories would be surveyed according to the system then in force Notwithstanding that the lands of the English and Scottish Halfbreeds of the Prince Albert district were surveyed according to the river frontage system the government insisted on and adopted the forty square chain method when dealing with the French Halfbreeds

Further representations followed on January from St Laurent January th from St Louis de Langevin and November from St Louis de Langevin In the summer of Rev Father Leduc went to Ottawa as a delegate for the people of St Albert and Edmonton The Government promised a survey of all the located lands on the Saskatchewan which they promptly forgot to institute Notwithstanding the protestations of the Metis new arrivals and settlers commenced to take possession (legal) of the land ignoring the previous claims of the Metis Many of the Metis lost all hope of retaining their lands some went away some sold their lands for a nominal price others abandoned them without indemnity

The Metis held a meeting in the summer of _____ the following among other resolutions were passed:

“That the French and English natives of the North West Territories knowing that Riel has made a bargain with the Government of Canada in which said bargain is contained mostly in what is known as the Manitoba Act and this meeting not knowing the content of the said “Manitoba Act” we have thought it advisable that a delegation be sent to Louis Riel and have his assistance to bring all 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 ”

A delegation consisting of Gabriel Dumont James Isbester (sic) and educated English Halfbreeds Moise Ouellette and Michel Dumas visited Riel who was teaching school at St Peter’s Mission near Fort Shaw Montana The fiery leader of the insurgents of _____ had changed in the intervening years from an impulsive youth of twenty five to a sombre and prematurely aged man of forty His work was done His compatriots in Manitoba had secured a settlement of their grievances A province had been established and his Bill of Rights had been in effect adopted He was an exile from Canada not even allowed to take his place in Parliament to which he had been elected In the knowledge that he had made a contribution to the welfare of his people he was satisfied to accept his fate

Then had come the Metis delegates from the Saskatchewan Valley They wanted him to return Their land was being taken away from them Food was scarce The buffalo were disappearing The Metis were feeling the pinch The whites and the Indians alike were sending appeals eastward for help from the Government But these things were as nothing compared to the fundamental cause of unrest amongst the Indians and Metis Back of it all was the protest of a named and hunting people against the encroachments of civilization Riel decided to return to assist his people once more To those who came for him he said – “Your lands belong to you Once by virtue of the Indian title twice by your conquest and defence of them with your own blood three times by having built fenced worked and inhabited them ”

He arrived in Saskatchewan July st _____ He addressed many meetings during the summer and fell _____ No unconstitutional measures were advocated or expected The cause he championed was approved by practically everyone in the country In September _____ the “Bill of Rights” was adopted and forwarded to the government The following seven provisions or demands were contained therein:

- () The subdivision into Provinces of the N W Territories
- () The Halfbreeds to receive the name grants and other advantages as the Manitoba Halfbreeds
- () Patents to be issued at once to the colonists in possession
- () The sale of half a million acres of Dominion lands the proceeds to be applied to the establishment in the Halfbreed settlement of the schools hospitals and such institutions and to the equipment of the poorer Halfbreeds with seed grain and implements
- () The reservation of one hundred townships of swamp land for distribution among the children of the Halfbreeds during _____ years

- () A grant of at least _____ for the maintenance of an institution to be conducted by the nuns in each Halfbreed settlement
- () Better provision for the support of the Indians

These demands the Government treated with absolute silence. Very many warnings were offered to the Government by men who understood the situation. But in vain the Government refused to believe that an armed uprising could occur. Nevertheless the possibility was freely discussed on all hands. Apparently the Federal authorities had neither ears nor eyes nor any knowledge of the long period of agitation, petition and remonstrance that had failed to procure any inquiry into the Western complaints and the removal of their causes. On the _____th June _____ the Secretary of State for Canada stated in a public interest letter:

“If the Halfbreeds had serious complaints against the Canadian Government the ordinary methods of petition were open to them as every free citizen. They have not availed themselves of it.”

In view of the facts this was a most damaging admission. It has never been denied that the Metis had good grounds for grievances. By the Manitoba Act the Government had recognized the right of the Halfbreeds to share in the Indian titles. It stood to reason that if they had rights in the soil of Manitoba they also had rights in the soil beyond. In spite of the manifest and unanswerable logic of the Halfbreed cause the government for years had refused to move in the matter. They believed that the Halfbreed settlements of the far West were without political influence and would be none the worse for the pigeon holing of their complaints and requests. The way in which the Government officials treated the just demands of the Metis was inexcusable and contributed to bring about the rebellion. Had they had votes like the white men or if like the Indians they had been numerous enough to command respect and overawe red tape without doubt the machinery of the government would have functioned for them; but being only Halfbreeds they were put off with eternal promises until patience ceased to be a virtue. It was the callous and cruel neglect of this portion of the population that led to armed insurrection. The above is a plain statement of the evidence and facts regarding an affair where judgement has often been blinded by political, racial and religious prejudices. The reader must draw his own conclusions.

THE REBELLION OF _____

To trace the story of the outbreak of the uprising of _____ we must consider the attitude and policy of Riel and the Metis leaders. Riel counselled moderation and patience when dealing with the government and advocated constitutional methods to procure the same rights as those secured in Manitoba. But rumors began to circulate that the Government would not deal with Metis as long as they were led by Riel. All persons familiar with the facts and principal figures concerned admit that right up to the last minute they fully believed that the trouble would be settled without resort to arms.

The actual resort to arms was caused by a rash remark of Hon. Lawrence Clarke who had long sympathised with the Metis cause but withdrew his support on the arrival of Riel. Early in the spring he had visited Ottawa. On his return he was met on the Fort Carlton trail by a number of Halfbreeds who inquired of him what the Government was going to do about their petitions. His

reply was "The Government will answer you with bullets " He further stated that on his way north he had encountered police who were coming to capture all the Halfbreed agitators While this incident has never figured in any English accounts of the Rebellion the facts are common property to this day among the Halfbreeds and all others acquainted with the true facts This indiscreet remark was like a match applied to tinder The announcement of an impending attack by the police spread like wildfire The Metis determined to defend themselves and their leaders to the death

Riel organized the Provisional Government making Batoche his headquarters His council included the following whose descendants to day are numerous in the Province of Alberta and Saskatchewan – Johnny Sanregret Pierriche Parenteau a famous buffalo hunter Pierre Garipy Philippe Garneau Secretary; Albert Monkman Pierre Vandal Baptiste Vandal Tousaint (sic) Lucier reputed at that time to be the strongest man in the North West Maxime Dubois Jimus Short Emanuel Champagne and ...Tourond The Halfbreed military forces at no time ever exceeded three hundred men There were only thirty Halfbreeds and Indians engaged in the Duck Lake encounter At Batoche the principal battle of the Rebellion the Metis mustered ninety men

The actual conflict was precipitated by the action of Major Crozier of the Police who was commanding at Fort Carlton who noted under the impression that a show of force would disperse the rebel forces Upon these plans coming to the intelligence of the Metis Riel called upon Crozier to surrender This was of course rejected Crozier despatched a police transport convoy to get the personal effects of several loyalists at Duck Lake Seven miles out of Fort Carlton they were met by Dumont and a party of Metis and Indians who were in pursuit of two Mounted Police scouts and who compelled the convoy to turn about and return to Fort Carlton The escaping scouts in the meantime returned to the fort and told Crozier of the predicament of the convoy Crozier moved to the support of his men with a force of men (of) all ranks The nature of the country provided admirable facilities for ambush About three miles outside of Duck Lake the column came upon a small party of Metis who occupied the centre of the road Crozier realized his party was entrapped With Joseph McKay his interpreter he advanced to parlay with the opposing force who came out to meet him The interpreter commenced to carry on a conversation in Cree French and English An Indian caught hold of McKay's rifle McKay drew his pistol Crozier asked what the rebels were saying and McKay answered that nothing could be done whereupon Crozier gave the rash command "Fire away boys " The first shot was fired by McKay who felled his assailant Instantly came an exchange of volleys The rebellion had commenced in earnest and from that moment it was apparent that the campaign would open with a rebel victory The rebels fired from cover and the police had little opportunity to use their firearms with effect Dumont received a sever scalp wound The Metis who lost their lives at Duck Lake were Jean Batoche Jos Montour Isidore Dumont and Auguste LeFramboise One Indian also lost his life Several of the Metis were wounded – five all told in the first battle The Metis later abandoned Duck Lake and retired to Batoche Crozier then foolishly swayed by a challenge "to teach the rebels a lesson if he were not afraid of them" thus what might have been a gust of passing excitement resolved itself into a genuine rebellion

The Federal authorities were convinced of the necessity of military action. General Middleton started immediately for the West. He arrived in Winnipeg shortly after the Battle of Duck Lake where he heard of the reverse to Canadian arms. The same day he proceeded West with part of the 10th Winnipeg Rifles. Little black Devils, so called by the Metis because of their black uniforms. Qu'Appelle was chosen as the base for operations against Batoche. Three columns moved against the rebels. The greater part of the troops consisted of infantry. Middleton did not consider ordinary cavalry suited to meet the guerilla (sic) tactics of the Metis who moved to and from the attack with extraordinary rapidity. These were used on the lines of communication. Middleton moved northward and detached Colonel Otter's column to the relief of Battleford. On reaching the Saskatchewan, Middleton divided his forces, detailing a column to the opposite of the River under Colonel Montizmabert. The columns then proceeded down the river on either side.

During the advance on Batoche, Dumont was in favour of harassing the Canadians by systematic raids, alarms and ambushes. However, he was overruled by Riel. The Metis were governed simply by a desire to protect their homes and settlements from what they considered foreign aggression. On the morning of April 10th, Middleton clashed with the Halfbreed outposts at Tourond's Coulee (Fish Creek). Here Dumont planned a surprise. The Canadians stumbled into a deadly fire from the Metis marksman who lay concealed in the bluffs and were invisible at short range. In Dumont's account and from various Metis sources, we gather an account of the Fish Creek engagement. On the 13th April, Dumont set out from Batoche to meet Middleton with a force of Metis, a few French Canadians, and a motley group of Indians...Saulteaux, Crees and Sioux. The Metis halted at Goulet's farm where they were informed by two Metis Scouts, Champagne and Carriere, that the Mounted Police were advancing on Batoche by the Qu'Appelle Road. Dumont sent seventy-five men back to Batoche to reinforce the garrison under command of his brother, Edouard Dumont.

At dawn, Dumont and his men sighted Middleton's camp while carrying out a preliminary reconnaissance. The Metis fell back upon the steep and precipitous coulee of Fish Creek. Leaving his men in the coulee, Dumont with fifteen picked horsemen set out to prepare an ambush (sic) on Middleton's flank but abandoned this plan when he saw marks left upon the trail by some of his men who had passed recently. Dumont's advance guard came under fire at 10:00 A.M. They retired to the protection of the coulee. Many of the Indians and a few of Dumont's fainter-hearted followers fled from the Coulee. Dumont rallied forty-five men to meet the attacking Canadians. This defection reduced their effective fighting strength to an inconsequential number. They, however, put up a most courageous fight. Isadore Dumont himself holding the East side of the coulee with seven men. Isadore to keep up courage of his comrades sang an old French chanson of Napoleon and all joined in the chorus. Riel would not let reinforcements come from Batoche during the battle, but towards evening, Edouard Dumont, refusing to remain in the village, came to the aid of his brother with eighty mounted men. By this time the fighting was over. Dumont, with a handful of Metis, had successfully withstood an overwhelming force of 1000 Canadians and four guns, and carried his dead and wounded from the field. The Canadians lost 100 killed and 100 wounded. The Metis who fell in this engagement were Joseph Vermette, Francois Toyer (sic - Boyer), Michel Desjarlais and Pierre Parenteau, and a number were wounded. Middleton stated that the Metis casualties were 100 killed and 100 wounded.

Another authority Captain G. Mercer Adams corroborated this statement. It is improbable that under the conditions that surrounded this encounter that the Metis fighting from concealment could have suffered casualties exceeding more than half their effective fighting strength (Battle of Cut Knife Hill)

THE BATTLE OF CUT KNIFE HILL

While Middleton's forces were recuperating from the Battle of Fish Creek, General Otter's column engaged in the Battle of Cut Knife Hill in the end of May with warriors of Poundmaker's band. This was purely an Indian Battle. The Metis were not present. On the night of May 5th, Otter left Battleford with 100 men and three guns and forty-eight wagons. Poundmaker possessed the reputation of being one of the most sagacious Indians in the North West. After six hours' march from Battleford, Otter halted and then pressed on to attack Poundmaker's camp at daybreak. While the main body was fording Cut Knife Creek, the police scouts came in contact with an advanced party of Indians. The troops dashed up the hill where they established themselves. The Indians then moved down out of sight into the coulees. The troops were obliged to fight in the open against an invisible enemy ranking both flanks. There was plenty of mismanagement in the conduct of the battle. At the commencement of the battle, the mounted advance guard had made a movement on Poundmaker's camp. Due to a blunder, this movement was countermanded. Had this movement been followed, the Indians would of necessity come out into the open to defend their camp. After five hours of fighting under the blazing sun had failed to dislodge the Indians, the order was given to retreat. This defeat might well have been turned into a terrible disaster if the Indians had pursued the troops into the woods. This the young men wanted to do, but Poundmaker held them back out of pity. It was declared later from reliable sources that Poundmaker brandished his whip and threatened to flog any Indian who dared to go after the white men. "If you shed any more blood, the Great Spirit will punish us for it." The Canadians lost 100 killed and 100 wounded. According to an Oblate missionary among the Indians, their losses were five killed. The assault on Cut Knife Hill does not reflect especial glory on the attacking forces. The fighting lasted seven hours, the honours remaining with the Indians whose cover gave them tremendous advantage. It must be placed to the credit of Poundmaker that with 100 (?) poorly armed warriors he succeeded in saving his camp from destruction at the hands of the superior body. After Colonel Otter had given the order to retire, Poundmaker made no attempt to follow up his victory. Had any spirit of revenge actuated the chief, there is no doubt that his warriors would have cut Otter's flying column to pieces and turned the affair at Cut Knife Hill into a terrible disaster to British Arms.

The next event of importance was the advance upon and the capture of Batoche. The siege began on May 12th. Middleton had planned a concerted attack to take place in conjunction with the steamer Northcote, which was to shell the village from the river. The steamer approached Batoche one hour in advance of the land force and exchanged vigorous fire with the "rebels". Receiving no support from the land forces, she swept down the river and became stranded where she ceased to be of any further military value.

With great activity and excitement, the Metis prepared to make a determined stand around their homesteads. Nature helped them in their work. Her land had raised a rampart of woods around them. The whole country in a mass of wooded ravines, some of great depth, and the valleys were covered with

underbrush. In these shelters the tribal skill and natural tactical skill of the Metis planned a defence well calculated to keep the Canadians at bay. The Metis adopt the Indian mode of fighting but they graft upon it something they have learned from the white men. Guerilla (sic) warfare from ambush is distinctly Indian and when utilized with the added military knowledge of the white men is a factor of potent value in defence. In all their previous encounters the Metis were amazed at the folly of sending horseless warriors against them. At the commencement of the battle Middleton found himself frustrated in his plan of a concerted attack on the village. The Metis upon this day checked the advance of the troops and brought them to a stand at the church a short distance above Batoche. Bitter dissatisfaction existed among the higher officers of the Canadian command a result of the mutual jealousy which universally prevails between professional soldiers and militia men. The troops retired that evening to their camp on the outskirts of the village. They were followed by a desultory fire for a time. The troops bivouacked in the open. At dawn Middleton's forces returned to take up the position they had retired from the evening before. In this they were unsuccessful as the Metis held the high ground about the cemetery and the church and held their position throughout the day. The troops retired in the evening to their previous camp of the night before.

On the next day of the siege Middleton led a mounted reconnaissance (sic) or feigned attack north from the camp past the Humboldt trail. They found that the village was defended by rifle pits which offered strong opposition from whatever quarter the village was approached. This movement withdrew the "rebels" from the main front and the Midlanders succeeded in carrying the position below cemetery which was held by a party of Indians. In the evening the troops returned once more to camp and the advanced parties were recalled. The Canadians were eager to close with the "rebels" and bring the matter to a close by a single decisive action. Dissatisfaction was prevalent on the return to camp. It must be said that General Middleton showed discretion by not risking everything in a premature attempt to carry the village by frontal assault. The country in which the fighting took place was admirably suited for defence and Middleton was still under the impression that the Metis were more numerous than they really were. Furthermore he was doubtful of the fighting quality of his inexperienced militia men.

Thursday the 11th of May saw the third day of the investiture of Batoche. In three days fighting no appreciable blow had been struck at the "rebels". Middleton commenced the operation by a feigned attack from the East to be delivered in conjunction with a direct frontal assault by the infantry under Colonel Van Staubonzie. Middleton executed the preliminary movement. He galloped back to the main body which he expected to find engaging the enemy. To his exasperation they were still in camp. The infantry moved immediately against the village and pushed forward to the cemetery. The Metis poured hot fire from their pits. The infantry moved forward extending their lines for the charge. Under the cover of their guns the Canadians charged into the rifle pits. The occupants gave way and retired through the village. The Metis and Indians who held the inner defences seeing the day lost for a time fought with the courage of despair but they could not withstand the enormous superiority of men and guns and ammunition. Batoche became history. Hopelessly outnumbered in every engagement totally unprovided (sic) with artillery and possessing but a scanty supply of arms and those of the crudest and most diverse description the Metis fought gallantly in defence of their homes and their leaders. The Canadian today (sic) who visits the humble graves of the

fallen Metis In Batoche and does not feel for their memory a measure of respect is not worthy of Canadian citizenship. It would be an ill day if the vigor and valor which distinguished them should be extinguished in Canadian manhood be they white men or half breeds. Due to the skill with which the Metis conducted their military operations the loss of life among them was remarkably small. The following Metis gave their lives for their cause at Batoche: Joseph Ouellette, Jos Vandal, Donald Ross, Isidore Boyer, Michel Trottier, Andre Letendre, Damase Carriere, John Swan, Calixte Tourond, Elzear Tourond, and A. Jobin. Four Indians also lost their lives in the various Metis engagements.

It is admitted to day (sic) that the rising of _____ was used by political mismanagement and governmental procrastination. It cost Canada the death of many brave soldiers and the useless maiming of many others and the expenditure of _____ for every Indian and Halfbreed killed in action to crush the rising cause by the maladministration of guilty officials who escaped unpunished. Whatever the cause of the Rebellion, it succeeded in focusing attention on the North West and brought about the settlement of the Prairie Provinces.

A STORY OF CONTRASTS

The year _____ saw Canada at the height of development, rapidly filling with men eager to make homes in a land of peace, harmony and prosperity. Among its citizens none were more patriotic and law abiding than the earlier inhabitants, the Metis. Then the Great War broke out. Many of them responded to Canada's call for men.

Where the terrible storm of steel and slaughter inundated the smiling fields of France and Flanders were to be found men of the name Riel, Lepine, Nolin, Trottier, and many descendants of the old Metis Plainsmen of the West, beside military annals of Canada. Four thousand of our Indian cousins served Canada during those four dire years.

On Canada's Roll of Honour list will be found the name of Private Patrick Riel, nephew of Louis Riel, killed in action near Massines, France, January _____.

"Paddy" Riel was a woodsman and trapper who followed the ways of his ancestors. Upon the accuracy of his shooting he depended for a livelihood. He arrived in France with the _____th Battalion, Little Black Devils, the regiment which thirty years before had stormed the Metis stronghold at Batoche. Attached to the sniping section he accounted for thirty of the enemy between March _____ and January _____th.

A story of contrasts. Two men, uncle and nephew, rebel and hero. Or shall we say two men fighting for the rights as they each saw it. Impelled by that impulse which gives birth to the dynamic power of free men who loved liberty, justice and peace.