

The History of Metis Petitions

By Lawrence J. Barkwell

Coordinator Metis Heritage and History Research

Louis Riel Institute

The Metis people have made extensive use of their right to petition government for redress of grievances. Unfortunately, the Canadian government has seldom responded to the Metis in a positive fashion.

The right to petition government for redress of grievances is the right to make a complaint to, or seek the assistance of, one's government, without fear of punishment or reprisals. In British parliamentary law that the right to petition the Crown or Parliament for the redress of grievances is a fundamental right that dates back to before the reign of King Edward I, in the thirteenth century. This found expression and was entrenched in British law by the British Bill of Rights (1688); an Act of the Parliament of England passed by Parliament on 16 December 1689. It was a restatement in statutory of the Declaration of Right presented by the Convention Parliament to William and Mary in March 1689 (or 1688 by old style dating), inviting them to become joint sovereigns of England. It lays down limits on the powers of sovereign and sets out the rights of Parliament and rules for freedom of speech in Parliament, the requirement to regular elections to Parliament and the right to petition the monarch without fear of retribution. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not list a specific right to petition, whereas this right is entrenched in the U.S. constitution.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Metis History of Petitions

Metis Petition from Penetanguishene, 1840. Petitioning that they receive the same presents (annuities) as the Indians and land and hunting rights. They note that they have always served willingly in the Canadian Militia.

Red River Petition of 1846. In 1847 Metis lawyer Alexander "Koonaubay" Isbister headed a deputation to the British Government presenting the petition of 1846 from 1,000 inhabitants of Red River for status as a recognized colony.

Memorial from the Half-Breeds, 1849. An October 1, 1849 petition to the House of Representatives of the Legislative Assembly of Minnesota regarding Metis rights.

Metis Petitions from Sault Ste. Marie, 1850. The Metis petitioned that they not lose their land as a result of the Robinson Treaty. At the same time the Ojibway Chiefs sent a similar petition in support of the Metis.

Metis Petition from Lake Qu'Appelle, 1874. On September 11, 1874 Augustin Brabant and the Metis of Lake Qu'Appelle petitioned for land and hunting rights.

Metis Petition to Join Treaty Four, 1876. On September 7, 1876, 30 Metis at Fort Walsh petitioned on behalf of the Metis of the four districts of Assiniboia to join Treaty Four.

Petition from Metis at Blackfoot Crossing, 1877. On September 19, 1877, John Munro and the other Metis at Blackfoot Crossing presented their petition to Lieutenant-Governor David Laird Lieutenant Governor, N.W.T. They petitioned for farm implements, seed and assistance in settling the land.

Cypress Hills Metis Petition for a Reserve, 1878. In 1878, a group of Metis at Cypress Hills had sent a petition requesting a re-opening of the buffalo hunt between November 14th and February 15th each year and the granting of Metis “reserve” land. The request was for a strip of land 150 miles long along the American border beginning where the Pembina River crosses the border. This strip was to be fifty miles from south to north.

Petition from the Metis and Old Settlers of Prince Albert, 1878. On February 21, 1878, the Metis and Old Settlers of Prince Albert sent a petition asking for an immediate survey respecting the river lot system, and a distribution of scrip.

Metis Petition from the Qu'Appelle Settlement, 1880. On September 2, 1880 the Metis of the Qu'Appelle Settlement petitioned for their land rights.

Metis Petition for a Reserve in Montana, 1880. On August 6, 1880 Louis Riel and the Metis of Montana petitioned General N.A. Miles for a reserve in Montana.

Petition from the Metis Residents of Edmonton, 1880. On May 19, 1880 Octave Majeau and the Metis of the Edmonton area petitioned for Metis scrip as had been issued under the Manitoba settlement scheme of 1870.

Metis Petition from Qu'Appelle Valley, 1882. On August 29, 1882, the Metis from the Qu'Appelle Valley petitioned for land rights.

Metis Petition from St. Antoine de Padoue 1882. On September 4, 1882, Gabriel Dumont, Jean Carron and others sent a petition to Sir John A. Macdonald, regarding land claims.

Petition of the Metis of St. Louis de Langevin, 1883. On November 19, 1883, the Metis of St. Louis (on the South Saskatchewan River) petitioned for land rights.



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