

Riel's Prisoners (1869-70)

In anticipation of the transfer of Manitoba to Canada, the minister of public works, William McDougall, who along with George Etienne Cartier had been instrumental in securing Rupert's Land for Canada, ordered a survey party to the Red River Colony.

Bishop Tache, Anglican Bishop of Rupert's land Robert Machray, and the HBC governor of Assiniboia William MacTavish all warned the government that such surveys would precipitate unrest. Headed by Colonel John Stoughton Dennis, the survey party arrived at Red River on August 20, 1869.

In 1869 Major Boulton had joined the survey party led by John Stoughton Dennis that was sent in anticipation of a rush of settlers to the region after its annexation to Canada. When the Métis under Louis Riel resisted the imposition of Canadian rule, Boulton was called upon by Dennis to organize volunteers to put down the uprising. Dominion Government chief engineer, Lindsay Russell, issued a proclamation calling on all loyal citizens to protect the government property (the pork and beans in Schultz's store). Early in December about 50 of the volunteers barricaded themselves in a building belonging to John Christian Schultz.¹

As noted, the armed Canadian Volunteers ended up barricaded inside Schultz's drugstore — an indefensible and somewhat ludicrous position. Their activity had been watched from Upper Fort Garry. 'Fort Schultz' was surrounded and A.G.B. Bannatyne passed a note to those inside with an order: "to give up their arms and surrender themselves. Their lives will be spared should they comply. In case of refusal, all the English half-breeds and other natives, women and children, are at liberty to depart unmolested." Within 15 minutes, the Canadians opted to surrender. Dennis left the settlement shortly afterwards. Boulton, who had hoped to establish Canadian authority, lost his nerve after the capture of the volunteers and Dennis's departure. He decided to winter at the predominantly Canadian settlement of Portage la Prairie.

Peter MacArthur reported:

About forty-five of us, mostly young newcomers, responded; the British flag was raised and oath of loyalty administered. The rest of the 12,000 inhabitants of Red River were not interested for a number of reasons, the most obvious of which was that the guns of the fort, about 200 yards distant, were trained on the cache of provisions, where the company of volunteers made their headquarters.

Louis Riel then invited us all over to the fort for a conference and made us prisoners. We were taken to the upper floor of the courthouse and lodged in various rooms in groups of six or eight. Looking out of the windows we could see

¹ Norma Hall reports: The Canadian Volunteer Militia who signed on for 6 shillings a day, had been formed under Dennis who made Lower Fort Garry his headquarters. The Volunteers had begun to drill and to prepare uniforms. At Portage la Prairie they were organized under 'Captain' Webb — who had been ostensibly at Red River as leader of a survey crew.

cannon being trained on our prison and we sent two men to see what terms could be arranged with Riel. These two men were Thomas Scott and Alex McArthur, my brother. Scott was retained and McArthur returned with the report that the only terms were unconditional surrender. The unmarried men, about forty of us, were taken to the common jail outside the fort, which was enclosed in a stockade, and during the tedious weeks of imprisonment which followed, we put in the time story-telling, joking, singing, or any way we could. The guards were not rough with us and Riel had reason to complain of their humanity and tried to show by his example ferocity proper to the occasion. This is why Scott was ordered shot. Scott's death was a great shock to us; he had said loudly and openly what the rest of us quietly thought.²

Subsequently, in mid-February some Canadians who had escaped from their Métis captors and fled to Portage la Prairie determined to march on Upper Fort Garry to rescue the remaining prisoners. Boulton tried unsuccessfully to restrain the "hotheads," including Charles Mair and Thomas Scott. In an attempt to keep them out of trouble he gradually assumed leadership of the group, which planned to unite with another led by Schultz. The Métis had no difficulty containing the poorly controlled Canadians and took most of them, including Boulton, prisoner. He and three others were sentenced to be executed but were spared through the intervention of leaders in the Red River community. Upon his release from prison on 16 March 1870 Boulton returned to Ontario.

The list of prisoners shown below comes from Henry Woodington, "Diary of A Prisoner in Red River Rebellion," *Niagara Historical Society* 25 (1913):

² Peter MacArthur's account; "The Red River Rebellion", in *Manitoba Pageant*, Spring 1973, Vol. 18, Number 3.

hold of another and throwing him down or against the wall, yelling "pile on." Then there is a general rush to the scene, and pity the poor fellow that gets under. The most exciting and amusing one occurred on the 1st inst. It began by a discussion about the Irish and the Scotch, and an attempt was made by one side to expel the other.

Description of the Provisional Government's Flag.

It is made of white Duffle, 2x3 feet in size. There are three fleur de luce or flower of France ——across the surface with a shamrock in the centre of the bottom edge..

JAIL SCENES.

Frying pemican. A number around the stove, with tin plates, in which is a mixture of pemican and water, each striving for a place at the stove; a number more waiting their time, cursing their luck that they were too late; a number more with large pocket knives gathered round a large lump of pemican, each striving to prepare his mess; a number more making tea in pint tins. Another scene—Mounting the large window in the centre room after the hour of ten o'clock in the forenoon.

Names of Canadian and American prisoners confined in the common jail of Assiniboia by Riel and his associates on the 10th December, 1869:

Duncan N. Campbell, Chatham.
 William Spice, Fullerton.
 G. D. McVicar, Chatham.
 Joseph Coombs, London.
 A. R. Chisholm, Alexandria (Glengarry).
 George Fortney, Texas, U. S.
 Wm. Nemiuns, Elora.
 W. Davis, Durham.
 Mat Davis, Durham.
 John Morney, Mosnock.
 Peter McArthur, Toronto.
 F. C. Mercer, Caledonia.
 J. B. Harris, Stratford.
 Geo. Nicholson, Ottawa.
 Francis J. Manan, Guelph.
 John Eccles, St. Thomas.

James Dawson, Toronto.
 Jas. Develin, Durham.
 Dr. Lynch, Montreal
 Stewart Mulkins, Kingston.
 Hugh Wrightman, Barrie.
 Thomas Langman, Barrie.
 A. Wright Paisley.
 Jas. Stewart, Windsor.
 Alex. Murray, Dickinson Landing.
 Ja. Mulligan, Butts, Ireland.
 John Hallett, Red River.
 William Hallett, Red River.
 Charles Stodger, England.
 Donald Cameron, Ailsa Craig.
 Dr. O'Donnell, Montreal.
 Dr. Schultz, Amherstburg.
 Thos. Lusted, Windsor.
 Geo. Clyne, Boisbert, Red River.
 Wm. Kitson, Howard.
 W. J. Allen, Port Hope.
 Thos. W. Scott, Toronto.
 Chas. Palmer, London, Eng.
 F. Hyman, London, Ont.
 Geo Miller, Shefford, Que.
 John Ivy, Texas, U. S.
 J. W. Archibald, Truro.
 J. Ferguson, Smith's Falls.
 Wm. Graham, Allanburg.
 Henry Woodington, Brampton.
 Jos. H. Stocks Stratford.
 Jas H. Ashdown, Durham.
 James Robb, an American, escaped.
 Allen W. Graham, Alborough.
 Robert Smith, Winchester, Eng.
 C. Mair, Perth.
 Geo. Bootie, New Brunswick.
 Thos. Franklin, pensioner.

List of Snow's men of Point du Chien, captured by Riel after their arrival in town after the surrender of the Canadian Volunteers:

George Parker, Lanark.
 Geo. Brandon, Belgrave.

Philip Otwell, Owen Sound.
 Jas. Jeffrey, Middleton.
 Andrew Hall, Dunn (Haldimand).
 John Lattmore Arran (Bruce).
 Robt. Holland, Tudor (Hastings).
 John McLeod, Stornoway, Scotland.
 R. P. Meade, Windsor (Ed. Norwester).
 Chas. Garrett, Orillia.
 Arthur Hamilton, Ottawa.
 — Heath, Ottawa.

After the escape there is a break in the narrative, as there is nothing to show what occurred between escape and being retaken, but singularly enough, however, there has just appeared in an educational paper, "The School," an article on the Red River Rebellion by A. W. Graham, whose name we find in the list of prisoners. This hiatus is thus partially filled, and we find the names of several mentioned in the diary, among them that of J. Ashdown, who, Mr. Graham says, was his bedfellow and is now a millionaire in Winnipeg. He states that on Jan. 24th Dr. Schultz cut his robe into strips and let himself down from his window and thus escaped. Riel was very angry, as Dr. Schultz was his star prisoner. Hallett was handcuffed and several were to be shot. On Feb. 12th all were offered their liberty on taking the oath of allegiance, which several did, but fourteen refused and were placed in a room 8x12; fed with nothing but pemican and water. Meanwhile a force of fifty, chiefly those who had escaped, and 200 Indians, under Major Boulton and Dr. Schultz had come from the Portage to rescue the prisoners, but found that Riel had released them on parole on 15th February, on which the force disbanded, but most of them were again arrested. Riel now had full control the stores, the weapons, the money of the Hudson Bay Company; the Canadians either out on parole or prisoners. Major Boulton was also sentenced to death, but by the influence of D. A. Smith (afterwards Lord Strathcona), Rev. E. Young, Arch. McLean, he was spared. But no pleading availed for Scott. The writer (Mr. Graham) says he was in his company four weeks in prison. He was quiet, civil and gentlemanly; tall, straight, athletic, a fine specimen of young manhood, and about twenty-five years of age.

There is no reference in the diary of how long they were

A list of prisoners including those from the “Portage Gang” captured in February is given by Alexander Begg in his book *The Creation of Manitoba*: Begg says;

“Several of the Portage party refused at first to give up their arms ; but ultimately they consented to do so, and were all taken to Fort Garry, where they were imprisoned in the same rooms which had only recently been vacated by the first lot of prisoners. It is said that the Portage party gave themselves up, on the understanding that Riel merely wished to speak to them and explain matters. If this is the case, they were not justly dealt by, for immediately upon their arrival at Fort Garry, they were put in prison, and Major Boulton, their leader, placed in irons. What a singular change in affairs this occasioned; — twenty-four prisoners liberated on the 15th, — forty-eight prisoners taken on the 17th.

The following are the names of those captured in the way we have described : “

Major Boulton.
John McLean.
Robert McBain.
Wilder Bartlett.
James McBain.
Dan Sissons.
A. Murray.
W. Farmer.
Lawrence Smith.
Charles McDonald.

R. Adams.
J. Paquin.
M. McLeod.
Archibald McDonald.
James Jock.
Thomas Scott.
James Sanderson.
George Wylds.
D. Taylor.
A. Taylor.

John Switzer.
H. WiUiams.
Alexander McPherson.
W. G. Bird.
Alexander McLean.
Joseph Paqnin.
William Paquin.
George Sandison.
J. Dillworth.
William Dillworth.

Thomas Baxter.
John Taylor.
John McKay.
G. Parker.

George Newcomb.
H. Taylor.
J. B. Morrison.
W. Salter.
Magnus Brown,
N. Morrison.
W. Sutherland.
Robert Dennison.
Joseph Smith.
Charles Millan.
Alexander Parker.
Sergt. Powers.
John Ivy.
One name unknown.

According to the *New Nation* edition of February 25, 1870, by February 15th, 24 prisoners remained in the gaol. They were those who had refused to take an oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government of Assiniboia and refrain from taking up arms against the government. On February 15th, they finally agreed to the terms of the oath and all prisoners were freed.



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