

## Exploitation of Metis Lands

During the 1970s Metis political organizations such as the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan and the Manitoba Métis Federation began to commission research in support of their land claims. In doing so, these organizations began to discover inequities of process.

Funded by grants from the Secretary of State, the Manitoba Métis Federation conducted several research projects to determine whether or not the Canadian government administered sections 31 and 32 of the Manitoba Act in a legal and morally responsible manner. One such project was D. Bruce Sealey's *Statutory Land Rights of the Manitoba Métis*, published in 1975. Another was Emile Pelletier's *Exploitation of Métis Lands* (1975)

The findings of Pelletier's report were:

- There were 6,267 allotments of 240 acres made under section 31 (for 1,504,080 acres).
- That 259 grants were cancelled for 62,160 acres.
- That patents were issued for 3,863 grants for 947,120 acres.
- That patents were not found for 1975 grants or 473,000 acres.
- That proper registration was not found in 2,901 cases for 696,240 acres.
- That 529 land grants covering 126,960 acres were sold illegally.
- That 580 sales involving 139,200 acres were ambiguous cases.
- That only 2,254 sales could be categorized as legal, for 540,960 acres.
- That 590 land grants covering 141,600 acres consigned to Métis children were obtained by land speculators for resale who earned profits for themselves of 100 percent to 2000 percent.

They detailed the following problems that resulted in the Metis not receiving their land:

1. Many land grants were issued but never delivered.
2. When land was assigned under agent's returns and recommended for patent, in many cases it was never received,
3. The wrong land was assigned.

4. Many lands were lost through tax sales.
5. Land was issued to non Metis people and charged to the Metis grant.
6. Children who were minors had their land sold and assigned to others without appearance before the County Court for determination that there was free and voluntary consent of the child to convey the land.
7. Failure to deliver Metis money scrip for redemption before April 13, 1948 was debarred from exercising the claim by statute.

The conclusion that one can draw is that in the administration of sections 31 and 32, the federal government made a concerted effort to dispossess the Métis.

Based upon the works of Sealey, Pelletier and others, the Manitoba Métis Federation published an official statement in 1978 in which the native political organization concluded that the federal government's record in the treatment of Métis concerning river lots and scrip was racist. According to their findings, "all elected representatives as well as members of the bureaucracy knew that the Métis were being exploited and indeed they contributed to the exploitation." The findings of the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan confirmed those of the Manitoba Métis Federation and its consultants.

References:

Emile Pelletier, *The Exploitation of Métis Lands*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1975.

Manitoba Métis Federation, *Riverlots and Scrip: Elements of Métis Aboriginal Rights*. Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation, 1978.



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