

Louis Riel and the Eight First Nations Men Executed Following the 1885 Resistance

The Eight First Nations Men Executed in 1885

In 1885, seven First Nations warriors were executed for their role in the Frog Lake killings (April 2, 1885), in which nine whites were killed. Itka was also executed for having earlier killed a non-Aboriginal farm instructor (March 29, 1885) on the Mosquito Reserve. The eight First Nations warriors were hanged on November 27, 1885 within the stockade at Fort Battleford. They were:

Kapapamahchakwew (Wandering Spirit)

Itka

Wawanitch (Man Without Blood)

Napase (Iron Body)

Manetchus (Bad Arrow)

Pa-pa-mek-sick (Round the Sky)

Kitiemakyin (Miserable Man)

Little Bear (Apistaskous)

They are not buried in the fort, but are rather buried north of the fort, in the "Camping Grounds," approximately one-half to one kilometre away. The burial site, which is only marked by tipi poles, is at the foot of the hill and is adjacent to the North Saskatchewan River.

Louis Riel

Louis Riel was executed on November 16, 1885 at the old Regina Court House, the remains of which no longer exist. The site, which has no marker, is on the RCMP Training Barracks, just east of the RCMP Museum. The execution site is between the Museum and the modern Driving Training Building, which are about 30-50 metres apart.

According to Major Charles A. Boulton, one of the Canadian officers who fought against the Métis during the 1885 Resistance, Louis Riel met his fate with great courage:

During the night of the 15th and the early hours of the 16th, he wrote one last letter to his mother and received the last rites. At 8:00 a.m., he climbed the stairs to the scaffold for his execution.

On November 19, a service was sung for the repose of his soul at St. Mary's Church in Regina. On December 9, his body was returned to St. Vital where it lay in state for 2 days in his mother's house. A requiem mass was sung December 12 at St. Boniface Cathedral and his body was buried in the churchyard.

On the morning of the 16th November, the time came when Riel had to undergo the same ordeal he had put Scott through fifteen years previously, and the similarity of proceedings in both cases is a coincidence. Riel for some time had had the benefit of the constant attendance of Père André, his spiritual adviser, who was with him during the whole of his last night on earth. About eight o'clock in the morning, the deputy sheriff, Mr. Gibson, went to his cell and told Riel that his time had come. Riel at the moment turned pale, realizing his position, but braced himself up and a procession was formed. Father McWilliams, who was also in attendance on Riel, went first, Riel next, and Father André followed, the deputy sheriff leading the way. After them came the orderly officer of the Mounted Police, Captain White-Fraser, with ten men who had been on guard all night. They were followed by Colonel Irvine, four or five officers of the Mounted Police, Dr. Jukes, as medical officer, and four correspondents. They all marched up some steps to the room above the guard-room and through this barrackroom to a small building which had been erected to contain the gallows. As they passed through the barrack-room, Riel exclaimed, "Courage, mon Père!" The gallows was entered by a window, temporarily used as a door, where the hangman awaited them.

Before stepping through the window the priests knelt down with the prisoner. The remainder, with the exception of the guards, removed their hats, and Father André prayed, Riel making the responses in a firm voice and praying also. His demeanour betokened suppressed excitement; his brow was covered with drops of sweat. Contrary to popular expectation, Riel met his death like a man, all the while holding a candle in one hand and a crucifix, which had been lent to him by Madame Forget, in the other. After praying for some time, at twenty-five minutes past eight o'clock, the deputy sheriff touched Father McWilliams on the shoulder and told him the time was up. Père André saw this, and notified Riel that they must cease. They then all rose up and Père André, after explaining to Riel that the end was at hand, asked him if he was at peace with men. Riel answered "Yes." The next question was, "Do you forgive all your enemies?" "Yes." Riel then asked him if he might speak. Father André advised him not to do so. He then received the kiss of peace from both the priests, and Father André exclaimed in French, "Alors, allez au ciel!"

Source: Boulton, Major Charles, A. *Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions*. Toronto: 1886. <http://wsb.datapro.net/rebellions/chap19.html>. Taken from the World Wide Web on November 4, 2004 at 2:20 PM.

A recent donation to the St. Boniface Museum was Louis Riel's crib board. Riel had played crib on the nights leading to his execution, which demonstrates that he went to the gibbet calm and determined to martyr himself for his people.