

**Maria Campbell, *Eagle Feather News*, August 2013**

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**Canadian Historians ignored history of immigrants.**

“Marie Antoinette was here on July 18, 2013 and she ate bannock!”

So reads the inscription on the white board at Gabriel’s Crossing. Marie Antoinette is, of course, the Bell of Batoche, who was stolen by Canadian soldiers in 1885 and taken to Milbrook, Ontario where she was held hostage for 110 years.

These “honourable soldiers” stole other things too as they burned and looted Métis homes after the battle at Batoche. They stole cattle, horses, harness, saddles, housewares and even clothing but the prize was the bell. The irony of the theft was not so much that they stole a Métis bell but rather, that she was a Catholic bell.

Many of these soldiers were Orangemen from Ontario who hated the Catholics more than they hated the Métis. Probably most of them didn’t even know what a Métis was but they sure knew what a Catholic was. And led by British and Canadian officers, many of whom were high-ranking in both the Orange and the Masonic Orders, that hatred was manipulated and used.

Most people don’t realize that it was the hatred for the Catholics that was one of the strong undercurrents in the persecution and dispossession of the Métis in the prairies. A hatred that began in 1690 when William of Orange (founder of the Orange Order) defeated the Catholic King James at the Battle of the Boyne in Northern Ireland.

I grew up knowing our history because my great-grandmother made sure we never forgot how we had been robbed of our land, but I didn’t know all this other stuff until I was much older and started to read Canadian and British history as well. My, my, these immigrants came across that sea with a lot of “poop” and there is no way we can really understand that happened to us without understanding what happened to them.

It is always amazing to me why a long line of liberal Canadian historians rarely wrote or writes about this or mentions it when writing Aboriginal history. They always keep it separate and we think then think that this only happened to us which re victimizes us. I often wonder if they, the historians, do that because they are ignorant of their own history or if they really do believe it has nothing at all to do with this place and that makes me wonder how “cunning” the “cunning other” really is.

And Marie Antoinette, did you know she was the wife of the French King Louis the 16th? She was the queen of the most decadent court in Europe in the late 1700s. Their court was so decadent, immoral and corrupt and their people suffered so much that they finally revolted, thus the French Revolution. The story goes that when Queen Marie Antoinette heard the people crying for bread, she said "Let them eat cake then" because in her experience why ask for bread when there was so much cake in the world?

So that was one of the topics of discussion on the day of Marie Antoinette's visit to Gabriel's Crossing. Who named her anyway? Did priests and nuns give her a name and why? Or was it a community member who knew the story and thought it would be funny, you know people like that, and they have a really strange funny bone. Or was it a little old Nokom who loved the combination of two lovely names? Trivial I know, but knowing our people there has to be a good story there.

And oh by the way, the people and in particular the "leader" who was so quick to call our "noble BillyJo" and his equally "noble" cohorts "thieves" and I won't name that leader. But he and they, need to do some serious reflection before they start calling in defense of those Orangemen because one need not dig deep to find thieves in that group.

Dr. John Shultz, for example, who helped found the Orange Order in Manitoba and who as the editor of the local newspaper that stirred up hatred against Louis Riel and the Métis in Red River in 1869-70. He was not only a thief but he was also a liar and a fraud. He called himself a doctor and physician but never completed his training or graduated from medical school.

He was also a land speculator who stole thousands of acres of Métis land before he was rewarded the appointment of first Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba by Sir John A. Macdonald in 1888.

He may be one of the people who stole the land that has just come through land claims court in Manitoba and who knows, he may be an ancestor of David Chartrand's group of newly appointed "learned advisors."

And then there was General Middleton, whole role modeled for his soldiers that theft was okay by stealing the rifle and guns of George Bremner, a Métis trapper from North Battleford who was involved in the 1885 resistance but "was minding his own business when dah General came upon him." Well George charged that General and eventually won his case and Middleton, who had been knighted by the queen for putting down a pitiful little army, had to retire in disgrace.

The old man who once told his story appropriately said, "Imagine dat, dat general he gets dah chance to fight two mans like Gabe and Louis and he has to steal from a trapper.(lol) Dat kind of man he jus gots no respect."

Anyways, Métis leaders who feel they must put down their own people in defense of our enemies need to read, research and think before knocking their people.

Marie Antoinette was "liberated" not "stolen" and as far as the missing medals are concerned, as they are saying "their medals won for putting us down" were stolen when the bell was liberated.

Well, I personally do not believe "our guys" would do such a thing, but, I am a teller of stories and liberation of the medals by the Orangemen in 110 years will make a great story for their people to tell so justice will eventually be served.

Good job BillyJo – now organize those "good" Michif boys and get the land back.