

It has been the destiny of the Metis in Western Canada to be the champions of the underdog, the fighters for human rights, and the historical conscience of the Nation. The Metis, as a distinct race of people with a diverse and colourful culture, have a history that is absolutely unique. Bigots from both worlds have suggested that the Metis are neither Indian nor White. The truth is that the Metis are both Indian and White and more - they are a new and unique blend of both.

The Metis are the synthesis of the meeting of the Old World and the New. Children of the fur trade in Rupert's Land, the Metis quickly became the masters of the crafts required to man the fur trade. Indian women married fur traders to cement, through marriage, a trade relationship between the tribe and the Company. The Hudson's Bay Company began its Rupert's Land Colony in 1760. One hundred years later most of its employees were Metis. These people made up a highly skilled and highly specialized work force. The Metis manned the canoes, drove the Red River carts, hunted buffalo, and acted as guides for the early "White" explorers. The Metis population grew rapidly in Rupert's Land as Indian women married men from both the Hudson's Bay Company and its only opposition, the North West Company. Indian women's skills were so important that the fur trade simply could not be carried out without them. Indian women were the only people whose traditional skills included the ability to make pemmican, make snow shoes, and make and repair canoes. All of these activities were necessary if the fur trade was to be carried out in the wilderness that was Canada then.

The Metis were the people that forced a military standoff with the mighty Sioux to the south, and in so doing opened up the trade route from Red River (now Winnipeg) to St. Paul, Minnesota. As the years went by, the Hudson's Bay Company could not support a large enough military force to guarantee its continued exploitation of the Western Natives. A war broke out in 1812, and the Hudson's Bay Company governor, along with twenty settlers, lost their lives at Seven Oaks. This was a Metis victory, although the North West Company was the real benefactor.

The warring Companies amalgamated in 1821. This resulted in the abandonment of many trading posts, and the laying off of most of the French-speaking Metis.

After 1821, the Metis launched a full scale resistance against the Hudson's Bay Company. As a result of Metis actions, the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly was broken in Rupert's Land. After 1849, the Metis traded to St. Paul without much hinderance from the Company. Millions of buffalo hides were carted by the Metis to the American market. The free trade struggle created a wealthy class of Metis merchants. These people soon became well educated, and it was they who first created the vision of a Metis nation in the West. The fur trade ended abruptly as Canada took over Rupert's Land from the Company in 1869. The new rulers of the West, unlike the old rulers, had no place in their plans for the Indians or the Metis. The new rulers wanted to make a fortune from wheat production in the west. For this they needed European immigrants already enculturated with concepts of private property and respect for the powerful ruling classes.

The Canadian confederation plan called for the ownership of the lands in the west by private corporations. The land had to be taken from the Indians and Metis. This was the same process that had resulted in the awful wars of extermination waged against the Indian tribes of the United States. The Metis, under Louis Riel, first fought back in Red River during the 1869 - 1870 uprising. This began as a peaceful struggle for responsible government in Red River. However, a federal government-inspired counter revolution led to some limited violence. Louis Riel's efforts, however, led to the creation of the province of Manitoba, through the Manitoba Act of 1870. Through this Act, the Manitoba Metis had their land rights extinguished through the issuing of scrip. Having no money to enter in commercial farming, the Metis sold their land scrip to the bankers and speculators and moved away, further out onto the prairies. Many settled in the colony at the branches of the Saskatchewan

River. Here, under the courageous Gabriel Dumont, the Metis colony flourished for a few years. But the Canadian federal government refused to give the Metis title to their small farms, despite 15 years of diplomacy and petitioning. As a result, war broke out in 1885 between Canada (population just under 4½ million), and the Metis Nation, (population about 10,000).

The Metis were defeated at Batoche, after winning two military victories over their giant opponents, at Duck Lake, and Tourand's Coulee (Fish Creek). Oppression followed defeat but the New Nation would not die. People were forced to live in ditches and on road allowances. Racism became an additional burden, heaping shame on a people who had courageously fought against a tyrannical and corrupt government. During the terrible depression of the 1930's, the Metis patriots Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady began the task of rebuilding the Metis nation in its original form - democratic, co-operative, without emulating Britain's cruel class structure.

The Metis are a people who were born into the struggle against oppression. As Louis Riel said before he was killed by his oppressors, "We shall fail, perhaps, but the rights for which we fought shall never die". Today the struggle goes on as AMNSIS negotiates Metis land settlements, and bargains with the government to have Metis rights entrenched in the Constitution. In 1985, as in 1885, the issues remain the same, a land base and self government for the Metis. The struggle has not died. Today, the Metis look back upon past heroes for inspiration, and forward, to a renewed struggle for a better life.

1. (METIS FAMILY IN TRADITIONAL GARB) .

The traditional Metis family was a lot different than today's family. It included grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and their offspring, as well as many people who really were not related at all. In fact, the whole community was seen as being an extension of one's own family. This created a high quality of life for people in the community because it brought people closer together.

In the traditional family, elders were revered. Age didn't matter. The grandparents took care of the children while the parents made the living. Life was hard as workers for the fur trading companies, or as fur traders on the plains, but the Metis family structure, based upon co-operation and mutual respect, made life good for the people of the community.

## 2. (VOYAGEURS)

Throughout the two hundred year history of the fur trade in Canada the voyageurs played a most prominent part. This was the most difficult and dangerous work in the fur trade. Canoes were launched from Montreal, and travelled thousands of miles into the Canadian North West, or they were launched from the forts near Hudson's Bay, headed for the same destination. The return journey of a single canoe from Montreal to Fort MacMurray required an astounding 3,930 man-days of work.

These canoes carried over 4 tons of freight on the journey. They were about 35 feet long, 4½ feet broad and required a crew of seventeen men. These men often worked a sixteen hour day. Pay was so poor, however, that the voyageurs often found themselves in debt to the Company when they returned to Montreal. The voyageurs, more than any other group, met and married the Indian maidens, and it was these robust and devil-may-care group of adventurers who left their stamp on the Metis personality.

Even today, the Metis maintain the rough but friendly traditions of their voyageur forefathers.

### 3. (THE BUFFALO HUNT)

The Metis were the undisputed masters of the buffalo hunt. The buffalo hunt was not a wild free-for-all with the Metis; it was a well co-ordinated, highly disciplined co-operative endeavour. The buffalo hunt was the single most important activity of the Metis nation throughout the early 1800's. It provided the economic foundation for Metis nationhood, as millions of buffalo hides were sold through the free trade movement to merchants in the United States. As well, the Metis buffalo hunt supplied the vital pemmican for the fur trade. Finally, buffalo meat was the staple food supply of the Metis themselves.

The scale of the Metis hunt is astounding, even by today's standards of mass production. Between 1840 and 1845, there was an average of 1,300 Red River carts, and nearly 2,000 people involved in five major hunting expeditions. These five hunts took a total of 1,309,000 buffalo. By 1855, 2,000 carts were being used in a single hunting expedition. Between 1855 and 1870, over 11,549,000 buffalo were taken by the Metis. When the species disappeared from the Great Central Plains in the 1880's, it took with it the economic base upon which the early Metis nation had been built.

#### 4. (THE SAYER TRIAL OF 1849)

The Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly of the fur trade depended upon its judges and its judicial system. Free traders had to be caught and punished if the Company's monopoly was to be maintained. In 1837, a Metis petition containing 977 names, addressed to the Queen requested greater freedom to trade in Rupert's Land. The free trade movement in Red River gained momentum under the leadership of Jean Louis Riel (the famous Louis Riel's father) and, by 1849, the situation was becoming explosive.

When young Guillaume Sayer was arrested by officers of the Company for illegally trading in furs, he resisted arrest. Others were arrested for the same felony. The Metis of Red River were infuriated by these arrests. They were angry because they simply could not survive without the free trade. It was their economic life-line. The judge set the trial for May 17, Ascension Day, hoping that the Metis would be in church on the day of the trial. However, when 500 armed Metis attended the trial, judge Thom let discretion be the better part of valour. Sayer was set free. The Company could no longer enforce its unjust laws. From that day onward, Metis free trade flourished in Rupert's Land.

## 5. (1869 PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT)

Louis Riel issued a Declaration on December 8, 1869, stating that Red River was under the jurisdiction of a Provisional Government. The document described the situation that had brought about such action. The Hudson's Bay Company had handed over the lands occupied by the Natives and the settlers to a new and distant power (Canada) without even consulting the local people. The Provisional Government was legal, and was democratically elected.

On December 10, Riel took down the Hudson's Bay Company flag and ran up a new Metis flag over Fort Garry. The arrogant governor who had been sent out by the Prime Minister was refused entry into Red River. On December 27, Riel became the official president of the Provisional Government. The Provisional Government ran the affairs of the settlement with fairness and justice to all, including the "white" settlers. However, some "white" elements staged a rebellion against the new government. Before it ended, one man, Thomas Scott had been executed. On August 24th, 1870, the Provisional Government's reign ended when Canadian armed forces, under Colonel Garnet Wolseley, arrived in the midst of a rainstorm, and took Fort Garry. Riel escaped to Montana.

6. (GABRIEL DUMONT AT ST. LAURENT)

Gabriel Dumont was much more than a military leader of the Metis. Gabriel was responsible for setting up the Metis community of St. Laurent. He became the elected political leader of this northern community that received so many of the Metis refugees from Red River after 1870. Gabriel was beloved by all in the community, not only for his courage as a warrior and his skill in the hunt, but for his wisdom and compassion as well.

Gabriel helped to draw up the Laws of St. Laurent, which provided for the poor, ensured that the spoils of the hunt would be shared by all, and laid down civil rules of conduct for the Metis people. As well, Gabriel was involved in the wording of petitions sent to the federal government, asking for title to the lands occupied by the Metis of the region. The Council that existed in this Metis district was perhaps the most democratic political institution ever to exist in this nation. This miniature Metis government was disbanded in 1875 by the federal government, who used an agent provocateur and political subversion in order to undermine the power of the Metis Council, and its leader, Gabriel Dumont.

## 7. (1885 COUNCIL)

By March, 1885, it had become clear to the Metis of the North Saskatchewan territory that the Conservative government, under Sir John A. Macdonald, had no intention of granting them title to the lands they occupied. Riel had been called back from Montana in the summer of 1884 to help them in their peaceful program of diplomacy.

Lawrence Clarke had been sent to Ottawa as an emissary of the Metis in February of 1885. As the weeks passed, rumors of impending armed invasion spread among the Metis. On March 19th, Riel formed a Metis Council to co-ordinate the struggle for human rights. In case peaceful efforts failed, Gabriel Dumont was made Adjutant-General and placed in charge of all military matters. On March 25, Lawrence Clarke returned from Ottawa with the disconcerting news that the police were on the way to answer the Metis petitions with bullets. The Metis Council of 1885 was thus reluctantly turned into a War Council, sworn to protect its leader to the death.

## 8. (DUCK LAKE)

March 26 was a fateful day for the people of the North West. On that day, 56 police and 43 volunteers clashed with an unknown number of Metis at Duck Lake. This battle marked the beginning of armed hostilities between the Canadian government and the Metis. The police and volunteers, led by the fiery Major Crozier, marched into a trap set for them by Gabriel Dumont. It was Riel's intention to surround the police and volunteers, demand surrender, and keep them as hostages. The hostages were to be used to bargain with the federal government, who had adamantly refused to deal peacefully with the Metis.

Major Crozier, however, who had been goaded into taking this foray to Duck Lake by Lawrence Clarke, refused to accept defeat by surrendering to an unseen enemy. The battle began when two Metis had advanced under a flag of truce to parlay with Crozier. As they talked, the Metis moved up, nearly surrounding Crozier's force. When Crozier saw what was happening he gave the order to fire. When the battle ended, Crozier's force had been routed leaving 12 of their members dead in the snow. The first battle of the war was decidedly a Metis victory, thanks to the brilliant guerilla tactics employed by Gabriel Dumont.

9. (BATTLE OF BATOCHE)

The end came for the Metis on a brilliant May morning in 1885. Big Bear and Poundmaker had failed to provide reinforcements for the Metis following their victories at Duck Lake and Tourand's Coulee (Fish Creek). As a result, the Metis, some 300 strong, stood alone at Batoche, awaiting the inevitable onslaught of the slow-moving and cumbersome Canadian field force.

Middleton's force contained about 850 men, as it cautiously approached Batoche. The Metis, under the command of Gabriel Dumont, were dug in and well camouflaged. They were, however, desperately short of ammunition. Before the battle ended on May 12, the Metis had fired nails and stones from their old smooth bore weapons. The Canadians, on the other hand, had been equipped with snider rifles, 2 batteries of artillery, and a gatling gun. On the last day, May 18, the Canadians charged the Metis positions, and the brave defenders were finally defeated. Louis Riel was captured on May 15. He and the Provisional Government were put in chains and transported to prison to await trial. Gabriel Dumont refused to be captured. He escaped the police net and crossed over into Montana.

10. (RIEL BEING HANGED)

Louis Riel was tried at Regina in July of 1885. He could have saved his life by entering a plea of insanity. However, Riel knew that by doing so he would have denied the justice of the Metis cause. Riel was sentenced to death. Despite appeals for clemency from dignitaries and politicians from across Canada, the United States, and around the world. Prime Minister MacDonald was adamant. Riel must hang. Said Canada's Prime Minister, "He will hang though every dog in Quebec should bark". Riel's trial and his execution were both essentially political, rather than legal acts.

It was part of British Imperial policy, during the 1880's, to make an example of any people who dared to rebel against the Empire, anywhere in the World. Metis houses had been destroyed, and their crops burned, not for vengeance, but because it was British policy to do so. Likewise with the leader of the resistance, the Empire would not rest easy while he was alive. Riel died with great courage and a quiet dignity that suited his stature as a brilliant, though enigmatic leader of a people who were ready to die for the cause of freedom.

11. (BRADY AND NORRIS)

After 1885, the Metis sank into a nightmare of poverty and oppression. The people who for two centuries had prided themselves in a unique form of co-operative democracy and communal sharing, became separated from one another. Racism was added to their burdens. During the terrible depression of the 1930's, the unemployed workers and the destitute "white" farmers began a fight-back campaign against the economic system that had caused so much human misery.

Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady, two Metis patriots, began the task of organizing the Metis so that they would once again speak to the government with a united voice. Malcolm Norris was a brilliant and emotional public speaker, Jim Brady was a brilliant political theorist. Before these two men died, they rekindled the Metis fires of freedom. In later years, the Metis organizations that followed moved away from the original concept of Brady's, which was to unite the cause of the Metis with that of the working class. However, these two humble, yet heroic men did rekindle the Metis spirit. And their work lives on after them.

12. (AMNSIS)

Today AMNSIS is the political voice of the Metis. AMNSIS has waged a campaign to improve the living conditions of the Metis and non-status Indians in Saskatchewan. Its efforts in dealing with provincial and federal governments have resulted in some victories, although much is yet to be done.

AMNSIS has worked to obtain decent education, to improve housing and obtain decent jobs for its members. In the political field, AMNSIS has carried, on the diplomatic front, a compelling argument for self-government and the entrenchment of Metis rights in the Canadian Constitution. Today, as the economic situation becomes precarious once more, the struggle for a better life will once again accelerate. Given the proud tradition of the Metis in the struggle for freedom and justice, it is likely that they shall once again be in the forefront of this age-old conflict.

## GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE RESEARCH UNIT

The Research Unit came into being in September of 1980. At that time it had a total staff of one person. Today it is staffed by a research Co-ordinator and two researchers. The Research Unit is mandated to supply historical and contemporary materials for use in the school curricula throughout Saskatchewan. It is supported in this task by the Gabriel Dumont Institute library, which consists of a collection of secondary source materials and books, as well as a large quantity of primary research material collected from archives across Canada over the past decade.

### GOALS OF THE RESEARCH UNIT

The specific long-term goals of the Unit are summarized as follows:

collect information and prepare analyses of historical and contemporary significance to the Metis and Non-Status Indians of the province.

aid them in a developmental process that will ensure cultural integrity and improve their economic and social circumstances by facilitating a better educational process for Natives throughout Saskatchewan.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH UNIT

These goals are to be achieved through the attainment of the following objectives;

facilitate and conduct primary research into the history of Metis and Non-Status Indians.

facilitate and conduct primary and secondary contemporary research and interpretive analysis into the cultural, social, economic and political circumstances of Metis and Non-Status Indians that will be of immediate or long-term value to the Native movement generally.

act as a research support service to other units within the Gabriel Dumont Institute, particularly in relation to projects concerned with the development of

educational programming generally and, in particular, to instructional programming in which the Institute is directly involved.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES OF THE RESEARCH UNIT

At present the Unit is engaged in the following:

- i) conducting historical research that more accurately reflects the events that led to the Metis resistance of 1885. This is to be made available in a publishable format,
- ii) gathering pertinent information and making it available, upon request, to Native community leaders for use in their work in community planning and development,
- iii) providing information, analyses and publications for direct use in planning, development and the implementation of adult education and occupational training programs,
- iv) the production of analyses based upon empirical research to inform issue-oriented dialogue both in the Native community, and between the Native community and the general public, particularly such groups as government, trade unions, professional educational institutions, voluntary organizations and political organizations,
- v) the provision of material for other Units within the Institute, the Publications Committee, Board Members, and the Area Education Committees, to ensure that these groups have access to relevant data. The Research Unit also assists in transforming this data in to accessible information formats for these Native and non-Native people,
- vi) the provision of methodological guidance and expertise to Native communities interested in conducting community-based research for both culture strengthening and community development purposes.

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