

HOW DID THE CONFEDERATION OF MANITOBA TAKE PLACE?

THE TRANSFER OF RUPERT'S LAND TO CANADA

In April 1869, the HBC and the Canadian and British governments reached a deal to transfer Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada. At no point did negotiators consult with First Nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples. The HBC received £300 000 to return the land to the British Crown. The company also retained a significant amount of territory, including 20 percent of all arable land and more than 20 000 hectares around its trading posts. Britain agreed to transfer Rupert's Land to Canada on December 1, 1869. Between April and December, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald expected the HBC to conclude any outstanding issues between the company and its residents, including issues related to land title. However, the HBC did not attempt to resolve these issues.

Many families had lived at Red River for several generations. However, not everyone had their farms recorded in the HBC's Land Register. When news of the land transfer reached Red River, residents were justifiably concerned about how the transfer might affect their homes and livelihood.

THE SURVEY

As soon as the agreement for the transfer concluded, William McDougall, the Dominion of Canada's minister of public works, sent a survey team to Red River, even though Canada could not take possession of the land for six months. McDougall wanted to survey the land and establish boundary markers to prepare for an anticipated influx of immigrants from Canada. No consultation was made or planned with the long-established residents of Red River.

Tensions began as soon as the surveyors arrived in the settlement and began their work. The survey crews trespassed on farms and did not inform residents what they were doing. Adding to the problems, the survey crew spoke only English, which hampered their ability to communicate with the many French- and Michif-speaking residents at Red River. The chief surveyor, John Stoughton Dennis, wrote to McDougall and suggested that their survey should be halted until the residents' land titles were resolved, but McDougall ordered Dennis's team to proceed.

On October 11, 1869, a Métis farmer, André Nault, tried to prevent surveyors from working on his land. When the surveyors ignored him, a group of neighbours, including Nault's cousin, Louis Riel, stepped in. Riel was bilingual and had recently returned to the settlement after studying law and politics in Montréal. The group stopped the survey by standing on the surveyors' chain, declaring firmly that the Dominion of Canada had no right to survey Red River without permission from its residents.

Figure 7-7 Louis Riel, c. 1865



THE COMITÉ NATIONAL DES MÉTIS

After the confrontation at André Nault's farm, Métis people at the settlement gathered to discuss their strategy for dealing with the Canadians. On October 19, 1869, they formed the *Comité national des Métis* (National Committee of the Métis). John Bruce became president and Louis Riel was the secretary. The *Comité* wrote a letter to William McDougall, who was by then the lieutenant-governor designate of the North-Western Territory. The letter stated that the people of the region had the right to be informed about any policies affecting their land and to be part of negotiations between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Dominion of Canada. The letter also stated that Canadian delegates had no right to enter Red River without permission from the *Comité*.

THE COMITÉ TAKES CHARGE

Despite the letter, on November 1, 1869, McDougall and a party of armed officials tried to enter Red River from south of the United States border. However, they were met by a group of armed Métis people led by Ambroise Lépine, and McDougall's party was escorted back across the American border. The Canadians were told that until negotiations with the Métis were complete, only the settlement's current residents would decide who was in political control. The next day, the *Comité* and 120 supporters took over Upper Fort Garry.

On November 6, 1869, the *Comité* called upon all parishes in the settlement—English and French—to elect representatives to discuss the future of Red River. Until this point, the English-speaking community had not participated in the efforts to stop the Canadians from taking over. On November 16, twelve French-speaking and twelve English-speaking representatives met to discuss their strategy. They decided to wait for the Canadians to make the next move.

By this time, Prime Minister Macdonald had heard about McDougall being escorted across the border. He sent orders to the British government and to McDougall to delay the land transfer until his government could investigate the problems. However, word of Macdonald's decision either did not reach McDougall in time or McDougall chose to ignore it. On December 1, 1869, McDougall rode to the border, read a proclamation claiming Rupert's Land for the Dominion of Canada, and then returned to the United States. McDougall's proclamation ended HBC authority, but by returning to the United States, McDougall removed the new government he had just announced. This left Red River in a political vacuum in which neither the HBC nor Canada had control.

E Read the Voices feature on this page. Why do you think Macdonald saw McDougall's actions as "humiliating" to Canada?

Figure 7-8 William McDougall



VOICES

McDougall has made a most ignominious fiasco at Red River. He has ingeniously contrived to humiliate himself and Canada, and to arouse the hopes and pretensions of the insurgents.

—Prime Minister John A. Macdonald,
Letter to the
Hon. John Rose from Ottawa,
December 31, 1869

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT IS FORMED

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McDougall's claiming of Rupert's Land prompted the *Comité* to begin work on a list of demands to negotiate terms for the entry of their territory into the Canadian federation.

In the meantime, John Schultz and his supporters had become increasingly impatient and wanted to bring about the transfer of power to Canada. On December 7, 1869, the *Comité* arrested a group of these men who were planning to attack the *Comité* and take control of the settlement.

The next day, the *Comité* declared the formation of a provisional government at Red River, with Riel as its president. The *Comité* declared that the provisional government was necessary to keep peace and order in the settlement until negotiations with the Dominion of Canada could take place. Due to McDougall's proclamation on December 1, the HBC

no longer governed the region, and the Métis were not willing to recognize Canadian authority until their rights were guaranteed. The provisional government would take charge until negotiations were complete.

In January 1870, a delegation of Canadian officials arrived at Red River to meet with the provisional government and other members of the community. On February 7, Red River community members formally elected a new provisional government of twenty French-speaking and twenty English-speaking representatives to begin negotiations with the Dominion of Canada. Riel was again named president. This government, called the Convention of Forty, continued work on a list of rights to be used in negotiations with Canada.

Figure 7-9 The Convention of Forty debated and passed a fourth and final list of rights on March 22, 1870. The list had widespread, although not unanimous, support from the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the community. What does this list tell you about the concerns, values, and goals of the Red River community?

SELECT TERMS FROM THE LIST OF RIGHTS, 1870

- I That the Territories heretofore known as Rupert's Land and North-West, shall not enter into the Confederation of the Dominion of Canada, except as a Province; to be styled and known as the Province of Assiniboia, and with all the rights and privileges common to the different Provinces of the Dominion.
- V That all properties, rights and privileges [enjoyed] by the people of this Province, up to the date of our entering into the Confederation, be respected; and that the arrangement and confirmation of all customs, usages and privileges be left exclusively to the local Legislature . . .
- IX That in this Province, with the exception of [First Nations people who are not permanent residents], every male native citizen who has attained the age of twenty-one years, and every foreigner, other than a British subject, who has resided here during the same period, being a householder and having taken the oath of allegiance, shall be entitled to vote at the election of members for the local Legislature and for the Canadian Parliament. It being understood that this article be subject to amendment exclusively by the local Legislature . . .
- XI That the local Legislature of the Province of Assiniboia shall have full control over all the public lands of the Province and the right to annul all acts or arrangements made, or entered into, with reference to the public lands of Rupert's Land, and the North West now called the Province of Assiniboia.
- XII That the Government of Canada appoint a Commission of Engineers to explore the various districts of the Province of Assiniboia, and to lay before the local Legislature a report of the mineral wealth of the Province, within five years from the date of our entering into Confederation.
- XIII That treaties be concluded between Canada and the different Indian tribes of the Province of Assiniboia, by and with the advice and cooperation of the local Legislature of this Province . . .
- XVI That the English and French languages be common in the Legislature and in the Courts, and that all public documents, as well as acts of the Legislature be published in both languages . . .
- XIX That all debts contracted by the Provisional Government of the Territory of the Northwest, now called Assiniboia, in consequence of the illegal and inconsiderate measure adopted by Canadian officials to bring about a civil war in our midst, be paid out of the Dominion Treasury; and that none of the members of the Provisional Government, or any of those acting under them, be in any way held liable or responsible with regard to the movement, or any of the actions which led to the present negotiations . . .

THE DEATHS OF PARISIEN AND SUTHERLAND

Support for the Convention of Forty and their list of rights was not unanimous. John Schultz and other members of his group refused to support the provisional government and made plans to overthrow it. On February 16, a group of Schultz supporters known as the “Portage Gang” harassed and beat a Métis woodcutter named Norbert Parisien on his way home from work. As the terrified Parisien tried to escape, he shot a passerby named John Sutherland, which further enraged the Portage Gang. Parisien died in April of the injuries he received at their hands.

THE EXECUTION OF THOMAS SCOTT

On February 19, 1870, a group of Schultz supporters was arrested for attempting to take over Upper Fort Garry. One of the men arrested was a labourer named Thomas Scott. An Orangeman who had moved to Red River from Ontario, Scott made his anti-French, anti-Catholic views insultingly clear to his captors. The provisional government tried Scott and two others, found them guilty of treason, and sentenced them to death. Riel pardoned two of the men—Major Boulton and William Gaddy—but allowed Scott’s sentence to stand. On March 4, Scott was executed by firing squad.

On March 24, a delegation from Red River, led by Father Noël-Joseph Ritchot and including Judge John Black and Alfred Henry Scott, went to Ottawa to begin negotiations with the Dominion government. However, news of Scott’s execution preceded them. The delegates were arrested upon arriving in Ontario, but were quickly released so that negotiations could begin. Public opinion, however, remained divided over Scott’s execution. In Ontario, public opinion was against the Red River delegation. Many Ontarians held Riel personally responsible for Scott’s death. In Québec, however, some people viewed Riel as a hero and a defender of Catholicism and French culture. Scott’s execution highlighted a growing divide between Canada’s largest provinces.

HP Examine Figure 7-10 closely. What perspective on the execution did the magazine take? Based on what you have read here, do you think its coverage of the event was accurate? What effect might this paper have had on public opinion in Canada? What might people in Red River have thought about the article?

THE MANITOBA ACT

Despite the controversy, negotiations proceeded and the Canadian government passed the Manitoba Bill on May 12, 1870, with a vote of 120 to 11. In June, the British government approved the *Manitoba Act* and set July 15, 1870, as the date the act would take effect. Back in Red River, the provisional government voted to accept the terms of entry into Canada as set forth in the *Manitoba Act*.

VOICES

This bold, ambitious and aggressive man [John Schultz] had become the focus of all the dislike and distrust of Canadians and things Canadian in Red River.

—Historian Alexander Begg, in *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Sir John Alexander Macdonald, G. C. B., First Prime Minister of the Dominion of Canada*, by Joseph Pope, 1894

(A)

Figure 7-10 The execution of Thomas Scott made headlines across North America, including the front page of the *Canadian Illustrated News*, which was published weekly in Montréal between 1869 and 1883. What kind of media coverage do you think the death of Norbert Parisien received? Why?



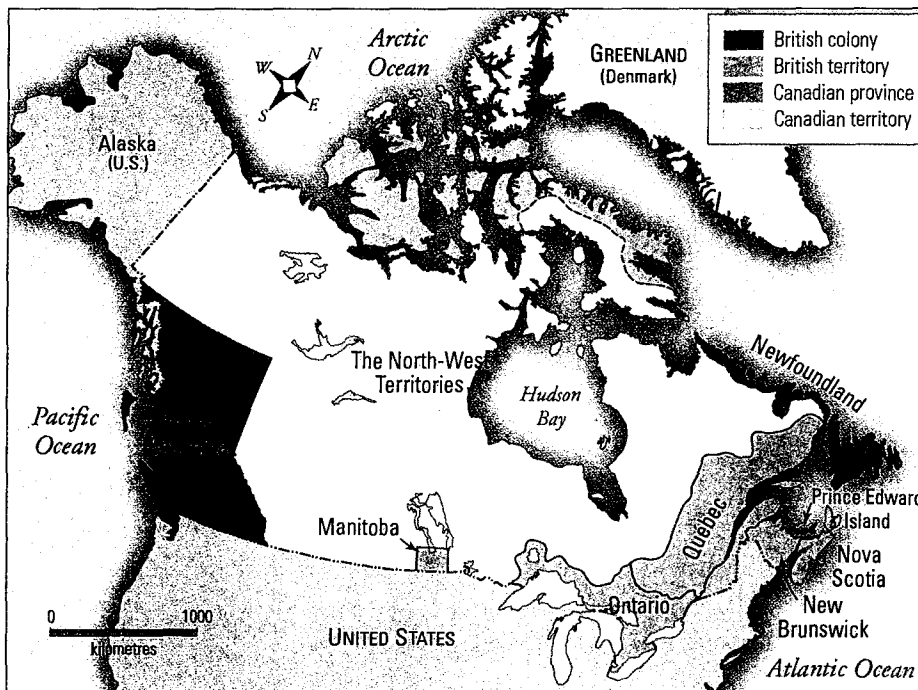
TERMS OF THE MANITOBA ACT

The *Manitoba Act* included many terms from the Métis List of Rights passed by the Convention of Forty in March. Most significant was that Manitoba entered Canada as a self-governing province, not a territory with an appointed council. This provision meant Manitoba residents were guaranteed the right to elect their local government. Sections 22 and 23 of the *Manitoba Act* guaranteed government support for denominational schools (those run by churches) and enshrined official bilingualism in the Manitoba legislature and courts. Section 31 promised that children of Métis and Country-born households would receive title to 1.4 million acres of land (approximately 567 000 hectares). Section 32 guaranteed people title to the land they already owned and occupied as of July 15, 1870. These lands along the Red and Assiniboine Rivers—known as the Old Settlement Belt—were important to the Métis as they were the basis of their economic, social, and political cohesion. These were the lands where people lived, farmed, and ran their businesses.

The new province was so small that Manitoba was sometimes called the “postage stamp province.” In addition, Manitoba did not have the same rights to its natural resources that other provinces had. Nevertheless, the provisional government believed it had secured the rights and land the residents of Red River would need to protect their unique culture, even with increased immigration.

Figure 7-11 Canada, 1870

Upon taking control of Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory in 1870, Canada combined both territories and renamed them the North-West Territories.



THE RED RIVER EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

As soon as negotiations for the *Manitoba Act* were complete, the Dominion government sent a military force to Red River. Prime Minister Macdonald told the Red River delegation that the troops would help the new province's lieutenant-governor, Adams Archibald, keep order.

Under the leadership of Colonel Garnet Wolseley, the Red River Expeditionary Force left Toronto in May 1870. It took the force of British soldiers and Canadian militia four months to reach Manitoba. They arrived at Upper Fort Garry in late August.

THE REIGN OF TERROR

Upon arrival, the troops, especially the Canadian militia, took control of the settlement in a period that was called a “reign of terror” by newspapers from St. Paul, Minnesota. Many militia members were Orangemen who were determined to punish members of the provisional government for the execution of Thomas Scott. However, members of the provisional government, including Riel, had been forewarned of the troops’ hostility and had left the settlement. Riel found refuge at St. Joseph’s mission across the American border. The absence of provisional government members, however, did nothing to calm the rowdy militia. The militia beat, threatened, and otherwise harassed any Métis people they encountered, whether they had been part of the provisional government or not. In addition, the troops committed rape, theft, and arson throughout the settlement.

On September 13, 1870, a group of men, including members of the militia, chased Elzéar Goulet from a saloon. Goulet had been a member of the court martial that gave Thomas Scott his death sentence. When he jumped into the river to escape, the mob threw rocks at him, and Goulet drowned. As with the other crimes in the community, no one was punished for Goulet’s death. Realizing they had no protection from the Canadian troops, Métis residents began to avoid Fort Garry in fear for their safety. Military commanders were unable or unwilling to control their men and the Canadian government turned a blind eye to the violence.

Once Archibald arrived on September 2, he had tried, unsuccessfully, to restore control over the troops, but the violence against Red River’s Métis residents continued until 1872. In the midst of the turmoil, Archibald set up a temporary government and prepared for the province’s first election, which took place December 30, 1870. Archibald called for a reconciliation, or mending of differences, between the Dominion and provisional governments. In response, the Dominion of Canada granted **amnesty**—a pardon—to some members of the provisional government, except those it held responsible for Scott’s execution, including Riel and Lépine.

... SHAPING CANADA TODAY.

5 One of the members of the Red River Expeditionary Force was Hugh John Macdonald, the son of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald. Only twenty years old at the time of the expedition, he went on to become a Member of Parliament from Manitoba and, in 1899, the premier of Manitoba.

Figure 7-12 This illustration shows the Red River Expeditionary Force in a drill at Upper Fort Garry in 1870. In what ways does the illustration contradict the information on this page? How do you account for this difference?



RECALL... REFLECT... RESPOND

1. Take a historical perspective and think about the decision to execute Thomas Scott. Develop two research questions that could help you explore the ethical dimensions of this decision.
2. In what ways was the execution of Thomas Scott historically significant?
3. What would you expect would be some of the consequences of the reign of terror? Include some possible long-term consequences. Add to or revise your list as you read the rest of this chapter.