

Historical Event:

The trial of Louis Riel, 1885

Historical Scene Under Investigation:

July 6, 1885, Riel is accused of high treason.

The trial begins July 20, with Riel pleading not guilty.

Background Information & Context:

The jury was made up entirely of English-speaking, Protestants. Riel's lawyer wanted to plead insanity. Riel objected so strongly to this strategy, that his lawyers petitioned the judge to not allow Riel to speak during the trial.

The testimonies of the witnesses were damning. They insisted that Riel was mentally instable before, and during the Northwest Rebellion.

Towards the end of the trial, Riel received permission to speak. After a short prayer, he delivered a speech outlining the troubles in the North-West, beginning with the suffering that his people endured and the inaction of the government.

He stated with dignity that he was not insane, and that although he had had some mental instability in the past, he had been cured through the use of medication.

He finished his speech by outlining the sacrifices that he had made and demanded justice for the Metis people.

Subject of the Inquiry:

Was Louis Riel insane?

The Scope of the Investigation:

The actions of Riel during the Northwest Resistance (1885), and during his trial (1885)

The Method of the Investigation:

Analyze Riel's journals (primary sources), the transcripts of the trial (primary sources), and various historical texts (secondary sources).