

New Territories Join Canada

At the time of Confederation, the vast western area of **Rupert's Land** and the Red River Settlement were governed by the Hudson's Bay Company. For 150 years or more no one, except Aboriginal peoples and fur traders, cared very much about this western wilderness. But after Confederation, the people of Canada began dreaming of taking over these vast lands. If the West was turned into farms, their children could settle there under the British flag. Many people felt that the Hudson's Bay Company had held the land for too long. They began to dream of a Canada that stretched to the Pacific Ocean.

Macdonald feared that Canada and Britain would lose the West to the United States if nothing was done. In a letter in 1865 he wrote:

I am perfectly willing to leave Rupert's Land a wilderness for the next half century, but I fear that if the Canadians do not go in, the Yankees will, and with that fear I would gladly see a crown colony established there.

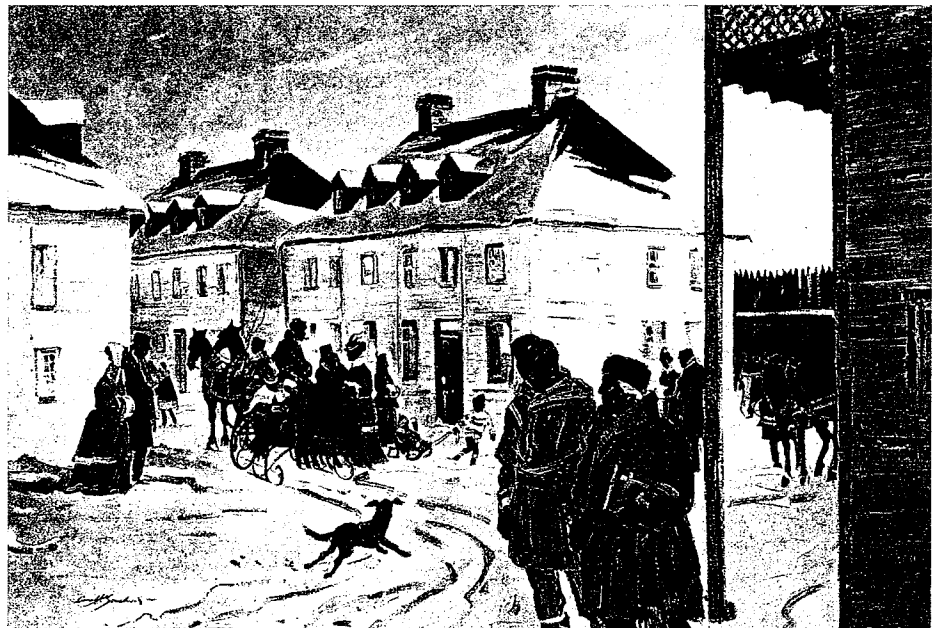
About 12 000 settlers lived at the **Red River Colony** around Fort Garry (near the present city of Winnipeg). Some of these people were

the original settlers. They had come with Lord Selkirk when he established the colony in 1811. Settlers in the Red River had sent petitions to London about the way the Hudson's Bay Company was ruling their settlement. They felt they did not have the rights and privileges British subjects should enjoy. They said they would prefer to be part of Canada.

Canada decided to send delegates to England to see if the Hudson's Bay Company would sell its empire to Canada. Of course, the Company was in no hurry to give up its claim to the land. Finally, a price was agreed upon. The Hudson's Bay Company would be paid 300 000 pounds and be allowed to keep 1/20th of the fertile land. Some day, it would sell parts of those 2.5 million ha to settlers. The Company kept its posts and the land around them. The whole region was to be transferred to Canada on 1 December 1869 and renamed the **North-West Territories**.

This was one of the greatest land deals in history. Before its third birthday, the young Canada would stretch almost from sea to sea. When British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871, Canada did reach from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Settlements like this one at Fort Edmonton grew up around the Hudson's Bay Company trading posts. The Hudson's Bay Company had received a royal charter to trade in Rupert's Land in 1670.



Trouble at Red River

Stand-Off!

Time: 11 October 1869

Place: Red River colony

Event: Stand-off between Canadian surveyors and Métis.

It is 1869. Canada has bought Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company, but does not have the right to establish rule in the area until December. The Canadian government is eager to survey the land and get it ready for settlement. Crews of Canadian surveyors are sent into the region.

On 11 October, one crew steps onto André Nault's land. Nault is a French-speaking Métis in the Red River settlement. He tries to stop the surveyors, but the English-speaking surveyors do not understand him. Alarmed, Nault saddles his horse and rides for help. He returns with 16 Métis. One of them is Louis Riel. With the other Métis, Riel places his moccasined foot on the surveyor's chain and says, "You go no farther."

With that act, Louis Riel stepped onto the stage of Canadian history. He became the champion of the Métis people. He would speak for the Métis and was prepared to defend their rights. The Red River uprising was about to begin.



Reflecting/Predicting

1. Why do you think the Métis are alarmed at the arrival of the surveyors? How would you have reacted if you were there at the time?
2. Do you think the Canadian government should have sent in the surveyors?
3. What do you think will happen next?

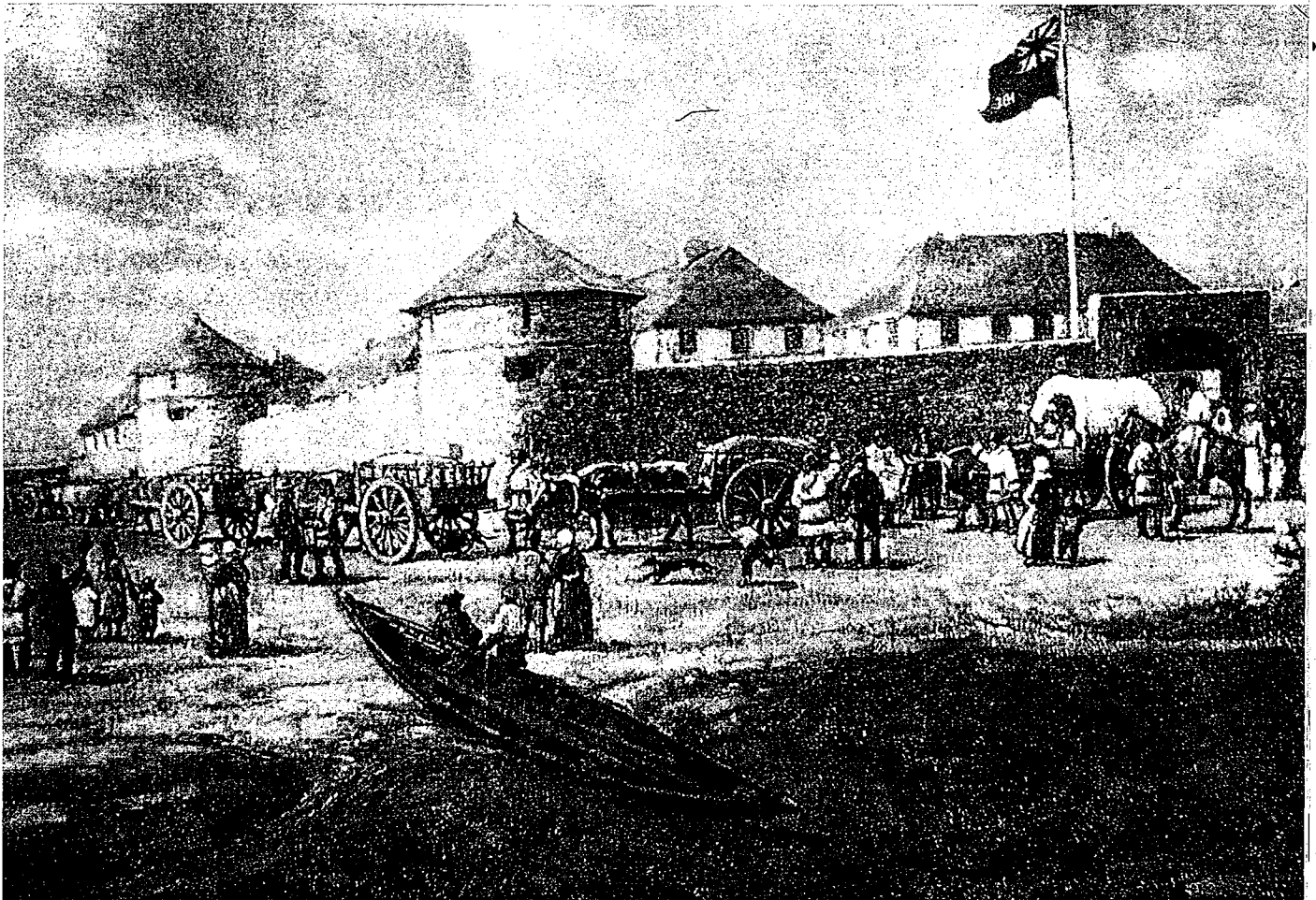
Peoples of the West

Aboriginal peoples lived in the vast territory of Rupert's Land long before the Hudson's Bay Company took over the land and sold it to Canada in 1869. Most of the Aboriginal groups in the West were **nomadic**. They moved from place to place hunting buffalo and trapping fur-bearing animals. The only European settlers were a few Hudson's Bay Company employees at lonely, scattered trading posts. Their job was to buy furs from Aboriginal people in exchange for Hudson's Bay Company goods.

The only large settlement in the region was the Red River colony. About 12 000 people lived in this colony around Fort Garry (near present-day Winnipeg). Some were the original Selkirk settlers or their descendants. They had come from Scotland with Lord Selkirk when he established the colony in 1811. Many of these original settlers were poor farmers who had been displaced from their lands in Scotland. They had endured many hardships in the early years of the settlement, including floods, hunger, and sickness.



Maxim Marion, a Métis guide. In the early days, the Métis formed the backbone of the fur trade in the West. They acted as agents between the Aboriginal peoples and the Europeans. From one parent, the Métis learned their Aboriginal language. From the other parent, they learned French or English. This meant they could act as translators for both sides in the fur trade. They bought furs from the Aboriginal peoples. Then they sold these furs to the agents of the fur trading companies.



Fort Garry, 1863. The fort was the seat of government for the Hudson's Bay Company in Rupert's Land before the area was sold to Canada. It was also the centre of the fur trade in the region. Métis trippers rode the famous York boats carrying supplies to fur posts. The boats travelled the waterways from the Red River further west and north to Hudson Bay. Red River carts also made the trek back and forth over land to St. Paul, Minnesota and to posts in Saskatchewan.

Other settlers were French-speaking Roman Catholic farm families from Lower Canada. They lived at St. Boniface. By the 1860s, English-speaking Protestant farmers from Canada West also began arriving. They were attracted by the rich prairie farmland and the dream that the region would one day become part of Canada.

But the largest group of people in the Red River colony were Métis. The **Métis** were people of mixed heritage, Aboriginal and European. Their ways were not entirely Aboriginal, nor were they European. They developed a distinct way of living. They called themselves the "Métis Nation."

In many ways, Métis culture combined elements of their varied heritage. Métis clothes were often made in a European style but decorated with quills and beads in Aboriginal fashion. Scottish jigs and square dances were combined with traditional dances of Aboriginal cultures. One of the most popular Métis dances was the Red River Jig. The fiddle was a favourite instrument. From their Aboriginal ancestors the Métis inherited their skill as riders. They were excellent buffalo hunters. Some also farmed small plots of land like their European ancestors. Others earned their living hauling goods in carts for the trading companies or as agents in the fur trade.

Culture Link

The Métis of the Prairies

The Red River Cart

Long before the railroad reached the West, the Métis had their own special “freight trains.” These were trains of **Red River carts** tied together. Sometimes there were 500 carts in one train. Whole families rode the carts carrying furs,

pemmican, dried buffalo meat, moccasins, and skin garments to trade. **Pemmican** was dried buffalo meat mixed with fat and berries. To cross rivers and streams, the wheels were removed from the cart and

attached to the bottom of the box. Then the cart floated across the rivers like a raft. Many of the early cart trails became today’s roads and highways over the prairies.

Descriptions of the carts speak of their horrible, shrieking noise. Ungreased wheels grinding against wooden axles sounded like a “thousand fingernails being drawn across a chalkboard.” People sometimes joked that the reason the buffalo left the plains was that they were trying to get away from the noise of the Red River carts!

Facts

- made entirely of wood with parts held together by wooden pegs and strips of rawhide
- had strips of buffalo hide wound around the wheels like tires to soften bumps
- wheels about 2 m across; height of the wheels prevented tipping
- usually pulled by an ox
- could carry up to 450 kg



The Buffalo Hunt

Each year, hundreds of Métis men, women, and children gathered for the buffalo hunt. On Red River carts and horses they travelled for hundreds of kilometres across the prairies. At camp before the hunt, they chose 10 captains. Each captain led a group of hunters. The hunt followed a strict, military-like organization. During the hunt, all captains and hunters were required to follow the rules and the leadership of the appointed guides.

After the hunt, the women skinned the many carcasses strewn across the prairie and cut the meat to be dried. They made pemmican, which was one of the most important trade goods of the Métis. Fur traders and voyageurs relied on pemmican for food on their long treks. It would keep for years without going bad.

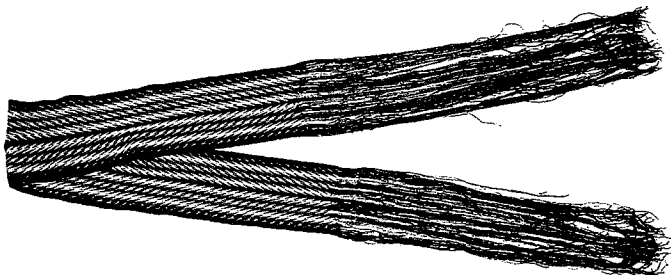
The Métis Sash

Métis clothing reflected their unique culture and environment. Many Métis wore a distinctive colourful sash tied around the waist. The sash was both decorative and practical. Because it was woven from wool, it could become a scarf in cold weather. In an emergency, it could be used as a rope, bandage, towel, bridle, or even a saddle



It took great discipline and skill for the riders to gallop among the stampeding buffalo and shoot the animals at close range. The huge beasts fell to the ground with a thud. It was highly dangerous. If a hunter was thrown from his horse, he would surely be trampled by the herd.

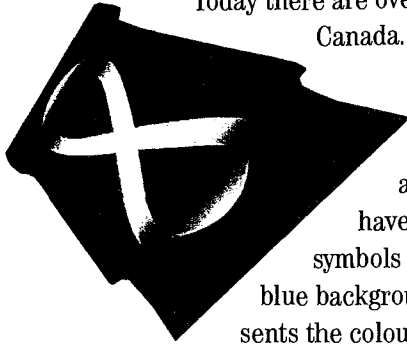
blanket for a horse. Some sashes were up to 6 m long. The fringes on the end could also become an emergency sewing kit. For many, the sash is a symbol of Métis culture. Like the sash, the Métis people have been woven together from different backgrounds (French, English, Scottish, Cree, Ojibway, and other Aboriginal cultures) and speak a variety of languages.



1. Use a cardboard box to construct a model of a Red River cart. Include a short description of its features and how it was used.
2. Investigate other aspects of Métis culture such as their clothing, food, and homes. Use your resource centre and the Internet to find photos and descriptions. Then create a photo collage or bulletin board display. Start with this web site www.vcn.bc.ca/michif/mlife.html.

Fast Forward

The Métis Nation Today



Today there are over 210 000 Métis in Canada. They make up about a quarter of the Aboriginal population. Their flag and traditional sash have become important symbols of their Nation. The blue background of the flag represents the colour of the North-West Company. The flag has its origins in 1841 when the North-West Company presented its loyal Métis workers with uniforms and their own flag. The figure eight suggests the joining of cultures. The eight also stands for infinity. It means that the Métis Nation will go on forever. The traditional sash is also a symbol of pride. In Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the "Order of the Sash" is an honour bestowed on Métis who have made important contributions to the political, cultural, or social lives of the community.

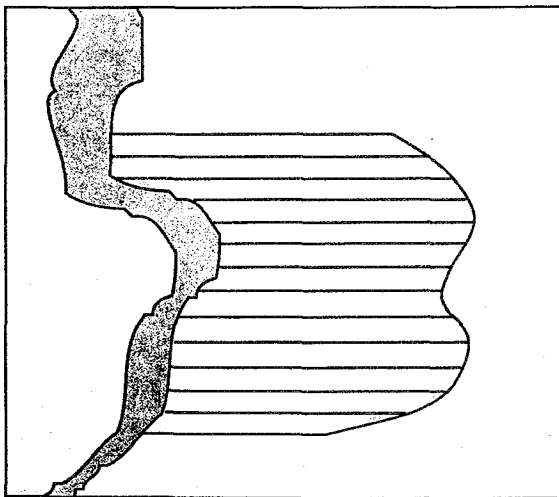
Background to Resistance

The Hudson's Bay Company had withdrawn its rule from Rupert's Land in January 1869. The Canadian government was not entitled to establish rule until December. For almost 12 months, the people of the territory had no legal government. Who would protect their rights?

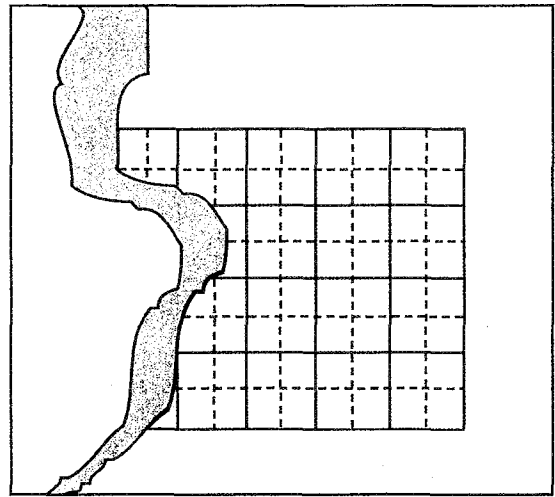
On sunny June days in 1869, crews of Canadian surveyors appeared on the farms of the Métis in the Red River settlement. The surveyors were driving stakes into the ground. This was ground the Métis people thought was theirs to use. They were not consulted about the methods and reasons for the surveys.

Métis people were worried because they had no papers to prove they owned their homes and their lands. The thought of settlers coming in and taking over their lands alarmed them. Many were also disturbed by the rumours that the Canadian government was planning to build a railroad right through the buffalo country. Some were ready to fight to keep what they thought rightfully belonged to them.

The Métis of the Red River gathered in a council meeting. They turned for leadership to a young Métis man, Louis Riel.



Métis strip farms



Government survey of land in squares

The Métis were told by the government surveyors that the land would be marked out in large squares as it was in Ontario. But the Métis farms were already laid out in narrow strips facing the rivers, in the same way the people of New France had laid out farms along the St. Lawrence. This way all families had some land along the river and they could live close together. Were the Métis not to be given any choice in the surveying of the land?

Profile

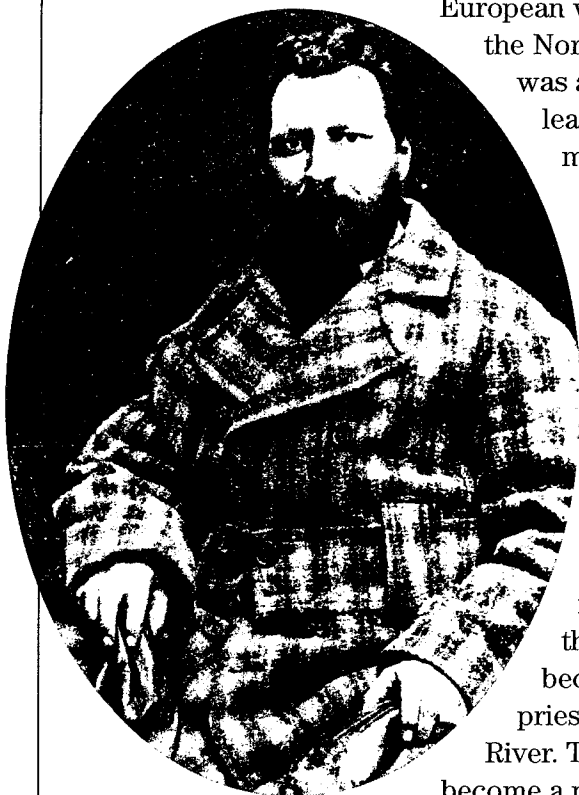
Louis Riel

Louis Riel was born in 1844 at St. Boniface, across the Red River from the main settlement. He was the oldest of 11 children. His mother was the daughter of one of the first European women to settle in the North-West. His father was an important Métis leader. From his mother, Louis gained a deep faith. From his father, he inherited a pride in the Métis people.

Louis was a bright boy and a good student. Local priests arranged for him to be sent to school in Montréal in 1858. They hoped that Louis would become the first Métis priest from the Red River. Though he trained to become a priest, he did not complete his studies. Instead, in 1865, he went to work in a law office in Montréal. At that time, Confederation was being talked

about everywhere in Montréal. Louis's employers were opposed to Confederation. They were strong supporters of the rights of French-speaking Canadians. Their beliefs seemed to have influenced Louis Riel. He became deeply involved in the struggle to improve the lives of his people, the French-speaking Métis.

From 1866 to 1868, Riel worked as a store clerk in the United States. But he remained homesick for his family and the Red River settlement. By the summer of 1868, he had drifted back to his Métis homeland. Riel could speak well in both French and English. His speaking ability and his interest in his people made him a defender of the Métis cause. He was to become one of the most controversial figures in Canadian history.



1. What qualities do you think would make Louis Riel a leader of his people?
2. What do you think might make him controversial?



Resistance at Red River 1869-70

One week after Louis Riel stepped on the surveyor's chain, he forms the **National Committee of the Métis**. The committee is to decide how to protect Métis lands.

The National Committee hears that John A. Macdonald has appointed a lieutenant-governor for the North-West Territories—William McDougall. He is on his way to the colony to set up a Canadian government for the territory. McDougall has to travel to the settlement through the United States because there is no road joining Ontario and the North-West Territories. The Métis hear rumours he is bringing cases of rifles and ammunition.

When McDougall arrives at the border of the settlement, he finds the road to Fort Garry blocked by the Métis. They will not have any governor without being consulted first. McDougall has to turn back to the closest American frontier town.

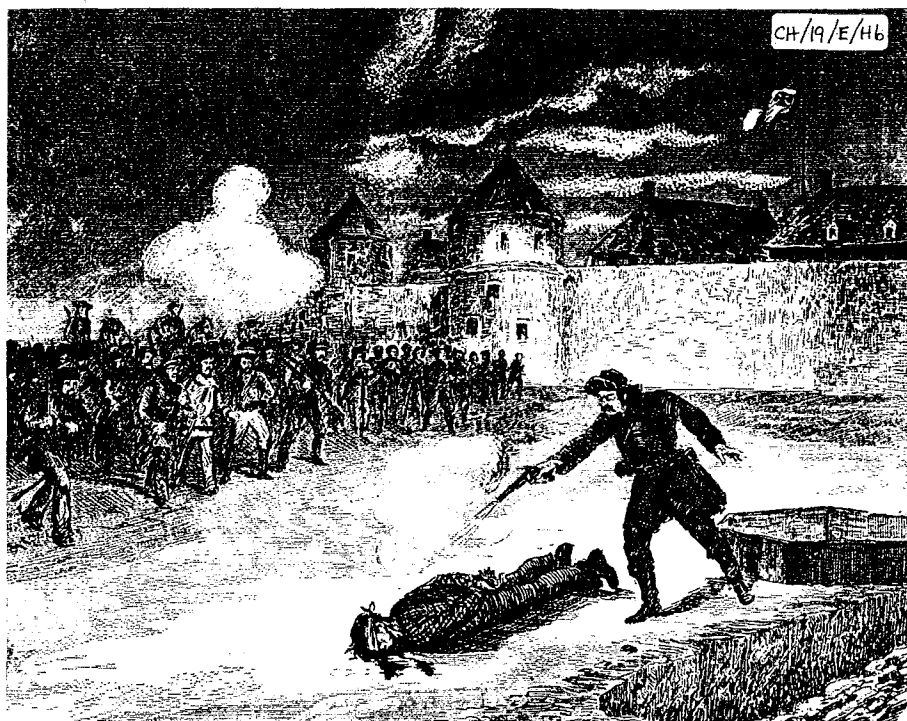
Louis Riel and the Métis take over Fort Garry. The fort has large supplies of food and ammunition. From this strategic position, they can control the colony.

The Métis set up a **Provisional government** to replace the Hudson's Bay Company rule. Riel says it speaks for their area in any dealings with the Canadian government.



Louis Riel and the National Committee of the Métis, 1869. The Committee set up the Provisional government. Some people in the settlement thought that this was an act of rebellion. Riel never considered himself a rebel. His people were loyal citizens of the Queen. They were fighting against two things. First, the Hudson's Bay Company had sold their land to Canada without telling them. Second, the Canadian government was taking over without consulting them.

John A. Macdonald sends a messenger to find out what the people of Red River want. The Red River colony does not belong to Canada until 1 December 1869. John A. wants peace in the region before Canada takes over. He does not send in troops right away. The Métis draw up a **Bill of Rights** with their requests and send it to Ottawa.



An artist's view of Thomas Scott's execution. What impression does this picture give of the execution? Do you think it was drawn by a supporter or opponent of Riel?

Some settlers from Ontario in the colony riot to protest Riel's Provisional government. They are jailed by Riel. One, Thomas Scott, threatens to escape and kill Riel. He strikes his guards, calls the Métis a pack of cowards, and insults their Roman Catholic religion. Riel orders Scott brought to trial. He is found guilty of disobedience to the lawful government. Within 24 hours, Scott is brought before a firing squad.

Riel's Provisional government works out an agreement with Ottawa called the **Manitoba Act**. On 15 July 1870, Manitoba enters Confederation as the fifth province.

Macdonald decides to send troops to the Red River in case of further trouble. With troops in the West, it would also be clear to the United States that Canada was claiming the territory.

Fearing for his life, Riel flees to the United States.

The Métis Bill of Rights

Major requests:

1. the right to enter Canada's Confederation as a province
2. the right to elect and send four Members of Parliament to Ottawa
3. control over their own local affairs
4. the right to use both French and English languages equally in schools and law courts
5. the right to keep their customs, tradition, and Métis way of life.

The Métis also want a rail line to come to Winnipeg and they want the federal government to negotiate treaties with Aboriginal peoples in the region.