

ACTIVITIES

1. Why was the bison hunt so important to Métis culture? How did the Rules of the Hunt help to shape Métis society?
2. Lord Selkirk can be said to have been an “unrealistic idealist.” Find evidence to support or refute this claim.
3. Was conflict over the Red River Settlement inevitable? Provide reasons for your answer.
4. How did the old HBC retain control over the new HBC after the merger with the NWC?
5. Describe the attitude of George and Frances Simpson towards the Native peoples and Métis. How were their views racist? What impact did these views have on the Simpsons? On the Red River Settlement?
6. How was the free-trade trial of 1849 a victory for the Métis?
7. What roles did women play in the daily life of the Red River Settlement? How does this compare to life for women colonists in the “wilderness” of Upper Canada?

CHANGES: THE RED RIVER SETTLEMENT BETWEEN 1860 AND 1870

The decade of the 1860s brought many profound changes to the Northwest. More people immigrated to the area; Canada became a dominion; and the HBC started to decline. Perhaps the most noticeable change was the arrival of Canadians moving west into the Red River Valley. The rapidly rising population in **Canada West** during the 1850s meant that most of the land suitable for agriculture had been settled and cleared. By 1860, many Canadians were looking for new areas to settle and farm. The Red River Valley, with its rich soils and small population, was an appealing prospect.

Most of the new Canadian settlers to the Red River were Protestant and members of the

Orange Order, a violently anti-French, anti-Catholic movement. Not surprisingly, they were prejudiced against the Métis. Not only were the Métis French-speaking and Catholic, they were also viewed as inferior because of their bicultural heritage. Although they were small in number, the presence of the Protestants increased tensions in the Red River Settlement.

One of the first immigrants to arrive in 1860 was Dr. John Christian Schultz. Schultz had never completed his medical degree and had no interest in practising medicine. Instead he wanted to start several businesses. He opened a general store, took over the only newspaper in the settlement, the *NorWester*, and championed Canadian interests

Canada West: Upper Canada, after the Act of Union in 1841

Figure 4–23 John Schultz



dominion: a country that rules itself

diversify: to branch out

by agitating against the Métis. By the late 1860s, he had organized a small group of supporters into the Canadian Party, which he hoped would eventually gain control of the settlement. Schultz used the *NorWester* as a platform for his anti-Métis views. In numerous editorials, he made statements that under current Canadian human rights legislation would be regarded as promoting hatred. Statements such as the following led to increasing tensions and uncertainty for the Métis:



[The Métis should] either be driven from the country, or kept as cart drivers.

[The Métis], the indolent and the careless, like the native tribes of the country, will fall back before the march of superior intelligence.

Economic problems during the 1860s also contributed to rising tensions at Red River. Crop failures were frequent, the bison were disappearing from the prairies (see

Chapter 3), and the cash-strapped HBC was losing interest in the area. An additional complication was that the Métis, although long-time farmers, had never made a legal claim to their territory. In the tradition of the Red River Settlement, all employees of the HBC were entitled to take up farmland and live on it after three years. On the surface, this posed no problem for the Métis, who believed that if a person cleared land and farmed it, he or she had a right to it. This attitude would lead to problems in the late 1860s.

Canada Purchases Rupert's Land

When the Fathers of Confederation drew up the British North America Act in London in 1866 and 1867, they included provisions for the eventual admission of all colonies in British North America and for the acquisition of Rupert's Land from the HBC. John A. Macdonald and D'Arcy McGee, in particular, were extremely interested in creating a **dominion** of Canada which would stretch from sea to sea. The HBC was also interested in relinquishing control of Rupert's Land. As the 1860s had progressed, the HBC had found it difficult to maintain control over such a vast territory. More and more settlers were moving into the Northwest, and the fur trade was declining. The HBC realized that if it were going to survive as a business, it would have to focus on and **diversify** its commercial operations and drop its administrative duties to the territory.

Between 1867 and 1868, the Canadian government and the HBC began negotiations to transfer control of Rupert's Land. The HBC did not consult the people who lived in the Red River Settlement, and it



Figure 4-24 Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory were joined together in 1869.

paid no heed to their special interests. Rumours of the impending deal circulated in the Red River Settlement and everyone felt ill at ease and angry, especially the Métis. The HBC and the Canadian government reached an agreement in November 1869. The Canadian government received title to Rupert's Land, which it joined with the North-Western Territory, and renamed them as the North-West Territories. Canada doubled in size. The HBC received a cash payment of 300 000 (\$1.5 million), 2.8 million hectares of prairie farmland, and the right to continue the fur trade, although without the monopoly it had previously enjoyed.

Both the Canadian government and the HBC knew they would make this deal long before negotiations concluded. In 1868, Dominion of

Canada surveyors had arrived in the Red River area to begin laying out the grids of townships. The surveyors operated on the assumption that the current occupants of the Northwest did not own their property, and the surveyors did not recognize the seigneurial pattern of farms that had existed along the Red and Assiniboine rivers since the 1820s.

That same year, Louis Riel returned to the Red River. Born in 1844, he was the son of Louis Riel, Sr., who had been leader of the Métis people until his death in 1864. The younger Riel was a literate and well-educated lawyer, and he was fluent in both French and English. Like his father, and Cuthbert Grant before him, Riel was an excellent orator. Although only twenty-four when he returned to the settlement, he soon assumed the role of leader of his people.

land speculator:
someone who buys
and sells land for profit

munitions: military
weapons, ammunition,
and equipment

**provisional
government:** a
temporary government

The Red River Rebellion

During 1869, the actions of the surveyors—and the **land speculators** who followed them—raised the level of tension within the Red River Settlement. The settlers were angry at the HBC for proceeding with the sale of Rupert's Land without consulting them. They were also angry at the surveyors, who were laying out square townships with no regard for their traditional strip lots. They wondered if the Canadian government was trying to take away their land. That summer, in an effort to preserve the rights of his people, Riel organized bands of Métis to observe and confront the surveyors.

→ One week later, he formed the Métis National Committee to fight for Métis concerns about their land. One of its first tasks was to greet the new governor of the North-West Territories, William McDougall. The welcome was not warm. Members of the committee told McDougall to go back to Ottawa because they intended to govern themselves. Next, several Métis under Riel's command occupied Fort

Garry and seized its **munitions**. The Red River Rebellion had begun.

Riel and his supporters had no intention of rebelling against Canada. They wanted only to ensure that the people of the Red River would retain their rights and traditions after the region was transferred to Canadian authority. Riel decided to set up a **provisional government** to maintain order and to negotiate an agreement by which the territory surrounding the Red River Settlement could enter Confederation as the province of Manitoba. Riel feared, with justification, that if Governor McDougall were allowed to take charge of the area, he would give members of the Canadian Party all the power and ignore the Métis. This would lead to the Métis losing all their rights. Angered by recent events, the Métis of Red River drew up a List of Rights (see page 159).

Riel was determined to work to protect the rights of not only the Métis, but of all groups in the settlement. However, he feared civil war because the Canadian Party was already armed and prepared to attack the Métis. In early December, Riel

Figure 4-25 Louis Riel and the provisional government



The Métis List of Rights and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The Métis List of Rights is an important Canadian document. Here are those rights, as agreed to by the convention of the Red River Settlement. These resolutions were adopted at a meeting held in Fort Garry on Wednesday, December 1, 1869.



1. That the people have the right to elect their own Legislature
2. That the Legislature have the power to pass all laws local to the Territory over the veto of the Executive by a two-thirds vote.
3. That no act of the Dominion Parliament (local to the territory) be binding on the people until sanctioned [approved] by the Legislature of the Territory.
4. That all Sheriffs, Magistrates, Constables, School Commissioners, and so on, be elected by the people.
5. A free Homestead and preemption Land Law.
6. That a portion of the public lands be appropriated for the benefit of Schools, the building of Bridges, Roads and Public Buildings.
7. That it be guaranteed to connect Winnipeg by Rail with the nearest line of Railroad, within a term of five years; the land grant to be subject to the Local Legislature.
8. That for the term of four years all Military, Civil and Municipal expenses be paid out of Dominion funds.
9. That the Military be composed of the inhabitants now existing in the Territory.
10. That the English and French languages be common in the Legislature and Courts, and that all Public Documents and Acts of the Legislature be published in both languages.
11. That the Judge of the Supreme Court speak the English and French languages.
12. That Treaties be concluded and ratified between the Dominion Government and the several tribes of Indians in the Territory to ensure peace on the frontier.
13. That we have a fair and full representation in the Canadian Parliament.
14. That all privileges, customs and usages existing at the time of transfer be respected.

Excerpts from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms was entrenched as part of the Constitution of Canada under the terms of the Constitutional Act, 1982. Here are some excerpts.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. How are these two documents similar? Dissimilar? Discuss in a group or with a partner.
2. Why do you suppose the provisions of the List of Rights are so precisely stated?

habeas corpus: requiring that the lawfulness of a person's arrest or detention be investigated by a judge or court



Fundamental Freedoms

2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) freedom of conscience and religion; (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication; (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and (d) freedom of association.

Democratic Rights

3. Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein.

Legal Rights

7. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice.
8. Everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure.
9. Everyone has the right not to be arbitrarily detained or imprisoned.
10. Everyone has the right on arrest or detention (a) to be informed promptly of the reasons therefore; (b) to retain and instruct counsel without delay and to be informed of that right; and (c) to have the validity of the detention determined by way of **habeas corpus** and to be released if the detention is not lawful.
12. Everyone has the right not to be subjected to any cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.

Equality Rights

15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Official Languages of Canada

16. (1) English and French are the official languages of Canada and have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and government of Canada.

led a party of armed Métis to Schultz's home, which was used as headquarters for the Canadian Party. Schultz's house was surrounded, and he and forty-eight of his followers were taken to Fort Garry. Riel now declared that he was prepared to negotiate with the Canadian government. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, however, refused to recognize Riel, let alone negotiate with him. Macdonald said:



Smith goes to carry an olive branch. We must not think of military force until peaceable means have been exhausted. Should these miserable half-breeds not disband, they must be put down.

Undaunted, the provisional government met to draft a proposal for the creation of the province of Manitoba, which Métis representatives could take to Ottawa.

In the meantime, Schultz had escaped from Fort Garry and plotted to free the other prisoners. But before Schultz could attack, his raiders clashed with the Métis, and several of his followers were arrested yet again. One of these prisoners was Thomas Scott, the most belligerent member of the Canadian Party. In prison, Scott loudly publicized his anti-Métis views, verbally and physically abused his guards, and threatened the life of Louis Riel. On March 4, he was executed by firing squad by Riel's provisional government.

Many people in the Settlement regretted the execution of Thomas Scott, but many also believed the crisis had passed. On March 9, Riel formally proclaimed that the trouble had subsided. A few weeks later, the Ottawa delegation departed in an optimistic mood—they were on their way to negotiate the creation of the

province of Manitoba. Unfortunately for Riel and the Métis, Schultz had also left the Northwest for Ontario. Arriving in early April, he began to publicize his views on the Métis and the execution of Thomas Scott. Gradually the Orange Order created a mythology around Thomas Scott—he was transformed into a Protestant martyr who had been cruelly murdered by the Métis. The circumstances of Scott's execution fuelled this interpretation. Although the six members of the firing squad had taken careful aim together, they did

JD

RED RIVER OUTRAGE.

A Public Meeting of the inhabitants of Hullett, Morris and Wawanosh will be held in the

Village of Blyth,

WEDNESDAY, 20th APRIL,

AT 4 O'CLOCK, P. M.

To afford Loyal People an opportunity of expressing their deep indignation at the vile crimes committed in Rupert's land, by imprisoning and murdering British and Canadian subjects. The honor of England was never outraged with impunity, and never will be. Let Canada not be degraded, the honor of the country must be maintained, the blood of the Martyred Scott must not cry in vain for vengeance. Let Canada speak out now, and let the assassin Riel feel that a Canadian must be like an ancient Roman, free from injury wherever he goes. The men that went to Magdalla can go to the Red River. Come all Loyal Men to the meeting, this is the common cause of all Canadians.

DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS WILL BE IN ATTENDANCE.

HURRAH FOR CANADA.

A ROPE FOR THE MURDERER RIEL!

GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!

Printed at the New Era Cheap Job Printing Establishment, Clinton.

Figure 4-26 An anti-Riel poster announcing a meeting in 1870

not kill Scott instantaneously. The squad director, Francois Guillemette, had to step forward and deliver one more bullet to Scott's head. Cries for justice and retribution soon reached government ears in Ottawa.

The delegates from Red River had a hard time getting recognition from Macdonald's government. Their case was finally heard in late April, and the government agreed to the terms for Manitoba's admission to Confederation. Macdonald refused to allow provincial control of public lands, but he did offer a compromise: a grant of 200 000 hectares of land for the Métis, in

recognition of their aboriginal title. On May 2, legislation confirming Manitoba's admission was passed by the House of Commons.

Macdonald was also determined to show his support for the calls demanding justice from Ontario. He dispatched a force of 1200 to Winnipeg under the command of Colonel Wolseley, with the instructions that they keep the peace until the transfer of power to a new provincial government could be made. He also made it clear that they were not to treat Riel or his followers as being a legitimate government. When Wolseley's force arrived in late

August, Riel had wisely fled the area—fearing, with justification, that his life was in danger. Eventually, all members of the provisional government were granted amnesty, with the exception of Riel. The Canadian government decreed that he be banished from Canada for a period of five years. The architect of Manitoba departed quietly, and spent the next fifteen years in exile in the United States.

Figure 4-27 These troops have arrived too late to “restore order” to the Red River area. Although the troops are clambering up the hill in great anticipation, Riel has already fled.



ACTIVITIES

1. Did immigrants from Canada drastically change the composition of the population of the Red River Settlement between 1860 and 1870? Why?
2. How was the Orange Order racist? Why would politicians like Macdonald be influenced by such an organization?
3. What did Canada need in order to acquire Rupert's Land? How did this action precipitate a rebellion?
4. Was Riel's provisional government legal? With a partner, discuss this question and share your findings with the class.
5. Evaluate key incidents of the Red River Rebellion. Consider the execution of Thomas Scott, the Métis List of Rights, and the actions of John Shultz and Macdonald's government. Refer to Figure 4-26 and then create a poster that you think presents a fair view of Riel.
6. Did Sir John A. Macdonald demonstrate a lack of understanding about the Northwest? Explain your answer, with reasons.