

# HOW DID CONFEDERATION AFFECT THE MÉTIS IN THE NORTHWEST?

How would you react if you owned land and it was sold without your permission? After Confederation, the Métis population in the Northwest faced this issue when the Canadian government purchased Rupert's Land.

As you learned in Chapter 1, the population of the Northwest was made up of First Nations peoples, Métis who were primarily French-speaking and Catholic, and Protestant settlers of Scottish and English descent. The largest groups of First Nations in the area included the Saulteaux, Maskégons, and Plains Cree, with a total population of about 17 000. The Métis in the region numbered almost 10 000. Look at **Figure 3.1**. What does it tell you about settlement and community in the Northwest at this time?

In 1868, the Canadian government began work on Dawson Road. This new, 120-kilometre road would link Fort Garry, located in present-day Winnipeg, with an existing route to present-day Thunder Bay, Ontario. Why would the government find it important to create this long stretch of road?

**FIGURE 3.1** This 1869 painting by William Armstrong, entitled *Fort Garry*, shows the Red River community. **Analyze:** What does this image reveal about why First Nations and Métis would live so close to Fort Garry?



## THE SALE OF RUPERT'S LAND

As you learned in Chapter 1, Rupert's Land was in the Northwest region. Rupert's Land included a large portion of present-day southern Alberta, most of Saskatchewan, all of Manitoba, northern Ontario, the northwest half of Québec, and Nunavut. In total, it covered about one-third of Canada's geographic area today. Rupert's Land was controlled by Hudson's Bay Company. In 1868, Hudson's Bay Company was preparing to sell Rupert's Land to the British government. The British government would then turn over the land to Canada, and the territory would become a colony under the control of the Canadian government. The sale, however, did not involve any consultation with the First Nations and Métis who lived there. Read Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald's view of the sale of Rupert's Land in **Figure 3.2**. What is his perspective on the sale?

## LAND RIGHTS

As part of the sale of Rupert's Land, the new Canadian government promised to uphold British laws and recognize Aboriginal land titles. These land titles are the legal Aboriginal right to land or a territory recognized by the Canadian government. However, the government did not recognize the Métis as having the same land rights as First Nations. The government's position was that any land agreements it made with First Nations did not apply to the Métis. Many Métis were worried they would lose their land if Rupert's Land was turned over to the Canadian government. Read **Figure 3.3**, a quote from Hudson's Bay Company Governor George Simpson about the Métis settlements. Then read **Figure 3.4**, an excerpt from a letter written by two Métis settlers of Red River. How does this perspective of Métis land rights compare to Simpson's?

"No explanation it appears has been made of the arrangement by which the country [Rupert's Land] is to be handed over.... All these poor people know is that Canada has bought the country from Hudson's Bay Company and that they are handed over like a flock of sheep to us."

— Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald

**FIGURE 3.2** Excerpt from a letter Macdonald wrote to George-Étienne Cartier in 1869. **Analyze:** Which of Macdonald's words reveal the missing voice of Aboriginal peoples in the discussions of expansion?

"We point out the situations where they may squat, we do not give them titles unless they make some arrangement for payment.... The majority have settled where they liked and we could not prevent them."

— George Simpson, Hudson's Bay Company governor

**FIGURE 3.3** In this 1857 quote, Simpson comments on the Métis settlements in Rupert's Land. "Squat" means to illegally settle on a piece of land. **Analyze:** What is Simpson's overall attitude toward the Métis?

"But at the same time, being settled, working and living on the land which they have assisted the Hudson's Bay Company [to open up, the people] of Red River, having acquired in the above manner ... the representatives of the Métis population of Red River loudly proclaim those rights."

— Two unnamed Métis settlers of Red River

**FIGURE 3.4** A translated excerpt from a letter by two Red River Métis, written on October 6, 1869, and published in French in the *Courrier de Saint-Hyacinthe* on October 28, 1869. **Analyze:** According to the two Métis letter writers, why do the Métis have rights to the land?



How was the sale of Rupert's Land a consequence of Confederation?

## RIEL AND THE RED RIVER RESISTANCE

The conflict between the Métis and the Canadian government around the sale of Rupert's Land is known as the Red River Resistance. Before the sale of Rupert's Land was scheduled to be finalized in December 1869, the Canadian government sent surveyors to map out the land into square lots to be granted as private property to new settlers. The first group of surveyors arrived in Fort Garry in August 1869. They did not ask the Métis for permission to enter their land. Read **Figure 3.5**, a quote from Louis Riel about the arrival of the settlers and surveyors. Riel was an emerging leader of a group of Métis in the Red River community. He was born and raised in the Red River area and had studied law in Montréal. What does this quote reveal about the Métis perspective?

“They have come here to chase us from our homeland... They assume that after fifty years of civilization our society has borne no fruit. Instead of respecting the laws established in the colony. They have publicly repudiated [rejected] them.”  
— Louis Riel, Métis leader

**FIGURE 3.5** In this 1869 quote, Riel comments about the new settlers in the Red River area. **Analyze:** What does Riel mean by “borne no fruit”?

When the surveyors reached the farm of André Nault on October 11, 1869, he tried to stop them from entering his land. Nault called his cousin Riel, and about a dozen other Métis, for help. The Métis, armed with weapons, drove the surveyors away and stopped them from continuing to survey the land.

### THE MÉTIS NATIONAL COMMITTEE AND WILLIAM MCDUGALL

In response to the conflict with the surveyors, the Métis organized the Métis National Committee on October 16, 1869. Settlers elected the members of the committee; Riel was elected as the secretary.

In late September of 1869, the Canadian government had chosen William McDougall of Ontario to be the first lieutenant-governor of the Northwest. Why might the Canadian government appoint someone from Ontario rather than the Northwest to be the lieutenant-governor?

McDougall never arrived in Red River. In early November of 1869, Riel gathered support from the Métis community. They forcefully stopped McDougall from crossing the border and entering the area. That same day, a group of Métis from the Métis National Committee occupied Fort Garry. The Métis now controlled Red River. This action delayed the transfer of Rupert's Land to the Canadian government, which had been scheduled for December 1, 1869. This meant that the Canadian government had no legal authority in the Northwest.

What types of evidence could help you understand the Métis' concerns?



**FIGURE 3.6** This 1869 photo shows Louis Riel (centre), surrounded by other members of the provisional government. **Analyze:** What does the photo reveal about Riel's significance?

### THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

The Métis established their own **provisional government**, or temporary government, to negotiate with the Canadian government, in December 1869. Riel was president of this new provisional government, shown in **Figure 3.6**. Riel took steps to prevent McDougall from creating an exclusively English and Protestant territory. The provisional government included French-speaking Métis and English-speaking Protestant residents of Red River. The provisional government wrote a bill of rights outlining its terms for joining Canada as a new province. Read **Figure 3.7**, an excerpt from the bill of rights. What issues are important to the Métis?

**provisional government** a temporary government created to keep law and order while a permanent government is being established

“1. The right to elect our Legislature.  
2. The Legislature to have power to pass all laws, local to the Territory, over the veto of the Executive, by a two-third vote.  
9. The French and English language to be common in the Legislature and Council, and all public documents and acts of Legislature to be published in both languages.  
15. That we have a full and fair representation in the Dominion Parliament.”  
— Métis bill of rights

**FIGURE 3.7** This excerpt is from the Métis bill of rights, written by the provisional government on December 1, 1869. **Analyze:** Why was the provisional government focused on fair representation and language issues?

## THE CANADIAN PARTY AND THE EXECUTION OF THOMAS SCOTT

“We must make Canada respect us.”

— Louis Riel,  
Métis leader

**FIGURE 3.8** In this quote from March 1870, Riel explains his justification for executing Scott.

**Analyze:** What does this statement tell you about Riel and his position in Canada?

A group of Red River settlers calling themselves the Canadian Party attempted to overthrow the provisional government soon after it was established. The Canadian Party was concerned with the rights and welfare of the new English Protestant settlers. The Métis captured about 50 members of the Canadian Party and imprisoned them in Fort Garry. Thomas Scott, a prominent Protestant of the Orangemen, was one of the men captured in a second uprising in February 1870. He was a difficult prisoner, often insulting his Métis guards. Pressured by angry Métis, Riel held a court to try Scott for contempt, or disobedience, of the provisional government. Scott was found guilty and executed in March 1870. How does Riel justify executing Scott in **Figure 3.8**?

Was the *Manitoba Act* significant? Why, or why not?

## THE MANITOBA ACT

After months of conflict, negotiations began between the provisional government and the Canadian government. The provisional government wanted to make sure that Manitoba became a province. Provinces are self-governing, while territories have governments appointed by the Canadian government in Ottawa. The Canadian government passed the *Manitoba Act* on May 12, 1870. Prime Minister Macdonald proposed the *Manitoba Act* as a compromise to please the Métis and French Canadians as well as the English Protestants in Red River and the rest of Canada.

Look at the map in **Figure 3.10**. The *Manitoba Act* officially created Manitoba as a province. The rest of the North-Western Territory and Rupert’s Land was renamed the North-West Territories. The area remained under the jurisdiction of the federal government. The act also accepted most of the Métis terms from the bill of rights. Manitoba was now a province where Métis religious and language rights were guaranteed. Over 5000 square kilometres of land, including present-day Winnipeg, were to be set aside for the Métis. However, the Métis inhabitants had to apply for title to their own properties and register their legal ownership of the land.

## HISTORY AT WORK

# ARCHIVIST

Would you like to pass your family’s stories down through the generations? You could do so by creating a family archive of photos, letters, journals, and oral histories. Or maybe you would like to research historical documents about your ancestors in an archive.

An archivist, such as Anne Lindsay (**Figure 3.9**), could help you create your family archive as well as help you find historical records about your ancestors. Archivists research and preserve the histories of organizations, nations, communities, and people. They may also give tours and create online or travelling exhibits.

For Lindsay, the best part of her job is helping people “find records that are meaningful to themselves, their families, and communities.”

Lindsay believes archives are important because they enable people “to preserve their own stories.” This is of particular importance to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Lindsay says that their “stories of strength and accomplishment may not always be included in ‘official’ histories” of Canada.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) preserves Aboriginal peoples’ stories and it holds the memory of Canada’s residential school system. Through the NCTR, Lindsay works with Métis residential school survivors. She helps these survivors connect their Métis history with their experience of residential schools in Canada. According to Lindsay, “this history can help them to understand questions they have about their own lives and the lives of family members.”

**FIGURE 3.9** Anne Lindsay (right) works with a residential school survivor to help her find records relating to her history.



## MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. What skills would you need to create a family archive or find historical records about your ancestors?
2. Make an oral history archive for your school. Record the personal memories, identities, and experiences of the people at your school today.

Canada after the *Manitoba Act*, 1870



**FIGURE 3.10** This map shows Canada after the *Manitoba Act* was passed in 1870. **Analyze:** What do the Manitoba borders tell you about settlement in the Northwest?



# GATHER AND ORGANIZE

After formulating and choosing an inquiry question, you are ready to begin gathering information. You will then organize your information in a meaningful way that will help you understand and analyze it.

Graphic organizers can help you record and sort your information. For example, you can use a t-chart to compare and contrast ideas or a fishbone diagram to examine cause and effect.

When you collect your evidence,

- keep your inquiry question in mind
- organize and record your evidence in a way that will help you understand it
- make sure that you use reliable sources
- investigate different sources and perspectives
- make a list of all the sources you have chosen to use

## CASE STUDY: THE EXECUTION OF THOMAS SCOTT

Thomas Scott is not known for his life, but for his death. Consider this inquiry question as you gather and organize the information in this case study: How did different people view Scott's execution?

Scott was an Irish Protestant who emigrated to Canada West in 1863 and moved to Red River in 1869. He worked as a labourer on the Dawson Road but lost his job for leading a worker's strike. He joined the Canadian Party and took part in uprisings against Louis Riel's provisional government. These actions led to his execution in 1870.

Read **Figure 3.11**, an excerpt that provides an example of a perspective held by many English Protestants in Ontario. What other sources would help you to understand the views in Ontario?

Read **Figure 3.12**. In this excerpt from the memoirs of Riel's secretary, Louis Schmidt shows his perspective on the execution. How would you organize the information in **Figure 3.11** and **Figure 3.12**?



"Brother Thomas Scott, a member of our Order was cruelly murdered by the enemies of our Queen, country and religion, therefore be it resolved [decided] that ... we ... call upon the Government to avenge his death, pledging ourselves to assist in rescuing Red River Territory from those who have turned it over to Popery [the Roman Catholic Church], and bring to justice the murderers of our countrymen."

— *Toronto Orangemen*

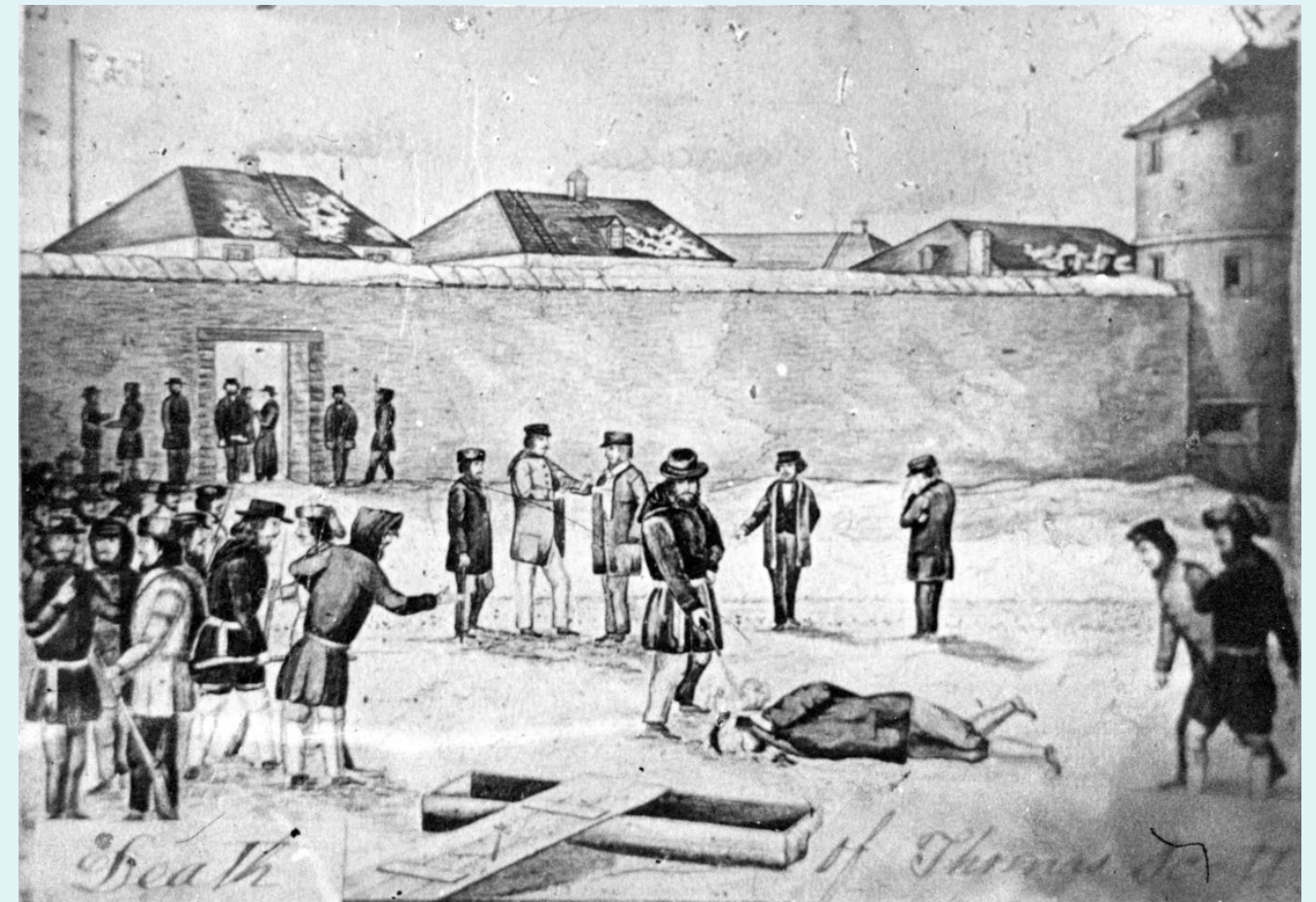
**FIGURE 3.11** This excerpt by Toronto Orangemen appeared in the *Globe* on April 13, 1870. **Analyze:** What does it tell you about how Orangemen viewed Scott and his death?



"I will not stop myself from trying to justify this execution, which the people of Ontario used for so long to stir up prejudices and hatred, not only against the Métis, but against everything French and Catholic. I believe that every impartial man today agrees that Riel and his government were absolutely right to act this way. This government was the only one in the country; it had been established and recognized by its representatives. Did it not have the right to put to death, as do all governments, those who disturb the peace and only seek insurgency and mass murder?"

— *Louis Schmidt, secretary to Louis Riel*

**FIGURE 3.12** This quote is translated from the French memoirs of Schmidt, written on April 4, 1912. **Analyze:** Why might Schmidt's perspective on the events be different from that of the Orangemen?



**FIGURE 3.13** This drawing by Roland Price Meade is entitled *Death of Scott*. It was likely created soon after the execution or in the early 1870s. **Analyze:** What reaction do you think Meade wanted to provoke in the audience?

Examine **Figure 3.13**, an image of Scott's execution, created by Roland Price Meade, a house and sign painter. Images like this appeared in newspapers that were sold throughout Canada. Meade had been jailed for opposing the provisional government in December 1869. Do you think his drawing is a reliable source of information about Scott's execution? Why, or why not?

### TRY IT

1. Create a graphic organizer to organize the information you have gathered. How does your organizer relate to the inquiry question?
2. Research and examine secondary sources that show different perspectives on Thomas Scott's execution. Record your findings using your organizer.
3. Review the criteria on page 82 to identify any areas where you need more information. For example, ask yourself these questions: Are there multiple perspectives? Are the sources reliable? Record your sources and add this information to your graphic organizer.





**FIGURE 3.14** This 1877 painting by Frances Anne Hopkins, entitled *The Red River Expedition at Kakabeka Falls, Ontario*, shows the Canadian military force on its way to Red River in 1870. **Analyze:** What challenges do you see in transporting the troops from Ontario to Manitoba?

## THE RED RIVER EXPEDITION

Despite the passing of the *Manitoba Act*, there was still conflict in the area. Many people in Ontario were upset by Scott's execution. Macdonald sent armed forces to secure Red River, claiming it was to provide protection from Americans looking to annex Manitoba. This military force was known as the Red River Expedition and was led by Lieutenant-Colonel Garnet Wolseley. This expedition was not a part of the agreement with Riel's provisional government. Wolseley's troops left Toronto in late May 1870 and arrived in Fort Garry at the end of August. It took four months for the more than 1200 troops to reach Red River using the unfinished Dawson Road. Examine a scene from the expedition in **Figure 3.14**. How might the Métis in Red River view this expedition?

The expedition arrived to find Fort Garry deserted. Riel heard that the troops planned to kill him upon their arrival in retaliation for Scott's execution. By the time the expedition reached Red River, Riel had fled in voluntary exile to the United States. Read **Figure 3.15**. What does the excerpt tell you about Wolseley's reaction to Riel's actions?

“Personally I was glad that Riel did not come out and surrender, as he at one time said he would, for I could not then have hanged him as I might have done had I taken him prisoner when in arms against his sovereign ... So ended this Red River Expedition sent by the Government of Canada to put down Riel's rebellion and restore order.”  
— Lieutenant-Colonel Garnet Wolseley

**FIGURE 3.15** In this 1870 excerpt from his diary, Wolseley describes arriving at Fort Garry and finding out Riel had fled. **Analyze:** How does Wolseley's view of the Red River Resistance compare to the different perspectives in **Figure 3.11** and **Figure 3.12**?

## THE MÉTIS LEAVE MANITOBA

Within months of the *Manitoba Act*, settlers from eastern Canada quickly moved to the new province. They took over much of the land that had previously been inhabited by the Métis. To fulfill the land requirements of the *Manitoba Act*, the government issued scrip, or coupons, to the Métis. Scrip could be exchanged for land or money. For example, scrip, such as the certificate shown in **Figure 3.16**, could be valued at \$160 or 160 acres of land. If a Métis person accepted scrip, they lost their right to their Aboriginal land title. The Métis who had already settled in the area did not have any advantage over new settlers. The Métis requests for their land claims were often delayed while the new settlers received title to their land soon after they applied for it. By the time the Métis applications were reviewed, much of the land had already been given away. How does the government's scrip process compare to how the Métis viewed their land in **Figure 3.4**?

The arrival of immigrants from Ontario also brought a cultural change to Manitoba. Settlers from Ontario soon dominated the new province. Amendments to the *Manitoba Act* were introduced that made land ownership harder for the Métis to obtain. By 1880, almost all of the Métis had decided to give up their land claims and move out of the province. Many headed west to present-day Saskatchewan. After they thought they had successfully negotiated for their rights in the *Manitoba Act*, how do you think the Métis felt leaving the land?

What impact do you think the scrip process had on the Métis?



**FIGURE 3.16** This is an 1885 scrip coupon for \$160. **Analyze:** What visual techniques were used to make scrips seem appealing?

## CHECK-IN

- CONTINUITY AND CHANGE** How was the sale of Rupert's Land a turning point for the Northwest?
- COMMUNICATE** Write two short bio poems or diary entries about an event or development in this section from the perspectives of two of the following: Louis Riel, William McDougall, Thomas Scott, John A. Macdonald, or a Protestant Ontarian. How do their views compare?
- CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE** Identify and explain the causes of the creation of Manitoba. What were the intended and unintended consequences?
- HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** How do the actions of the Canadian Party show common values and beliefs during the time of Confederation?