

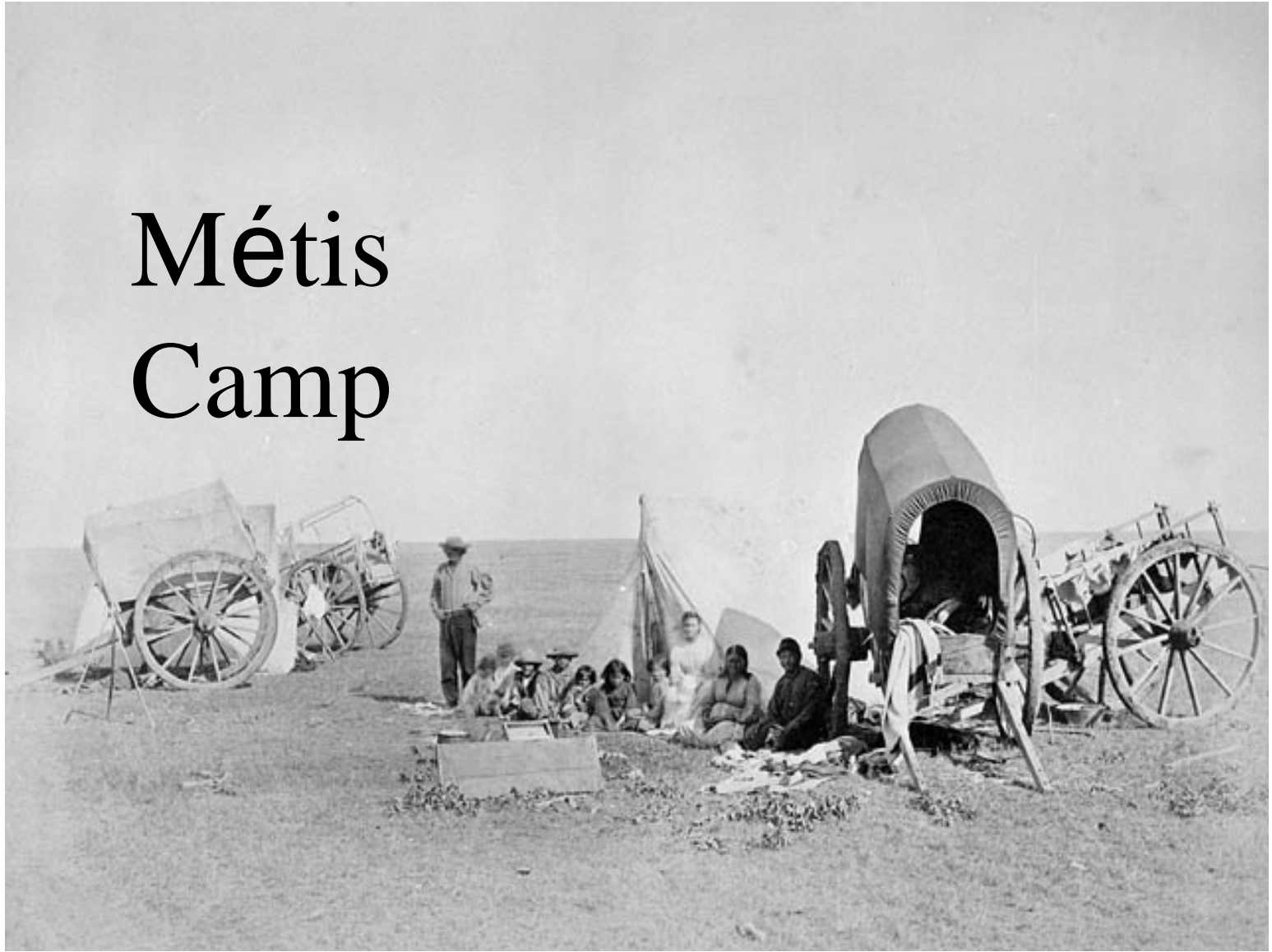
The Métis



- **The Métis People**
- **The achievement of the NWMP** in crossing the prairies to Fort Macleod would have made quite a different story without the Métis guides and drivers. The appointed commander of the newly-formed North West Mounted Police, Commissioner French came to rely on them, asking their advice while politicians in Ottawa sputtered with outrage that he would even consult with the "Half Breeds."

- **When Sir John A. Macdonald** first began to plan the NWMP in 1869, he proposed that the police force would be multicultural, with recruits taken from the local population. It didn't happen that way, of course. The Métis were caught in the middle, overlooked time after time because they were neither Indian Nations nor "respectable" white settlers. Who were they then?

Métis Camp



- **In the early days of the fur trade**, the big companies forbade settlement in the fur trading areas. Settlers were bad for a fur-trading economy. Trading posts were established on the waterways at the edge of the wilderness, and the Indians brought their furs to the company. Company staff were discouraged from bringing their families along, but it was a lonely life so they started new families, marrying Indian women. Sometimes the men stayed, sometimes they left. Most often, the children of these marriages were considered by proper white settlers to be illegitimate, and they suffered from racism and moral bigotry. The descendants of the Scots traders are known as the Country Born, while the Métis are descended from the French, but virtually all are now known as Métis.

Voyageurs



- **Gradually a closely-knit community** developed with a distinct culture drawing on the traditions of all their forebears. The fiddle music of the Métis is a wonderful example of how these traditions blended and became something original, but with flashes of its roots in Native rhythms, the highlands of Scotland and the songs of the voyageurs. The community grew in the area of the Red River settlement, and further west at Batoche. Gradually squeezed out of the big trading companies, some Métis settled into agriculture, others became outfitters and teamsters for white expeditions heading west. Still others continued to follow their Native traditions, hunting on the land. They were a well-established population, with farms laid out in the French fashion along the rivers.

National Aboriginal Day Share in the Celebration!

Journée nationale des Autochtones Soyez de la fête!

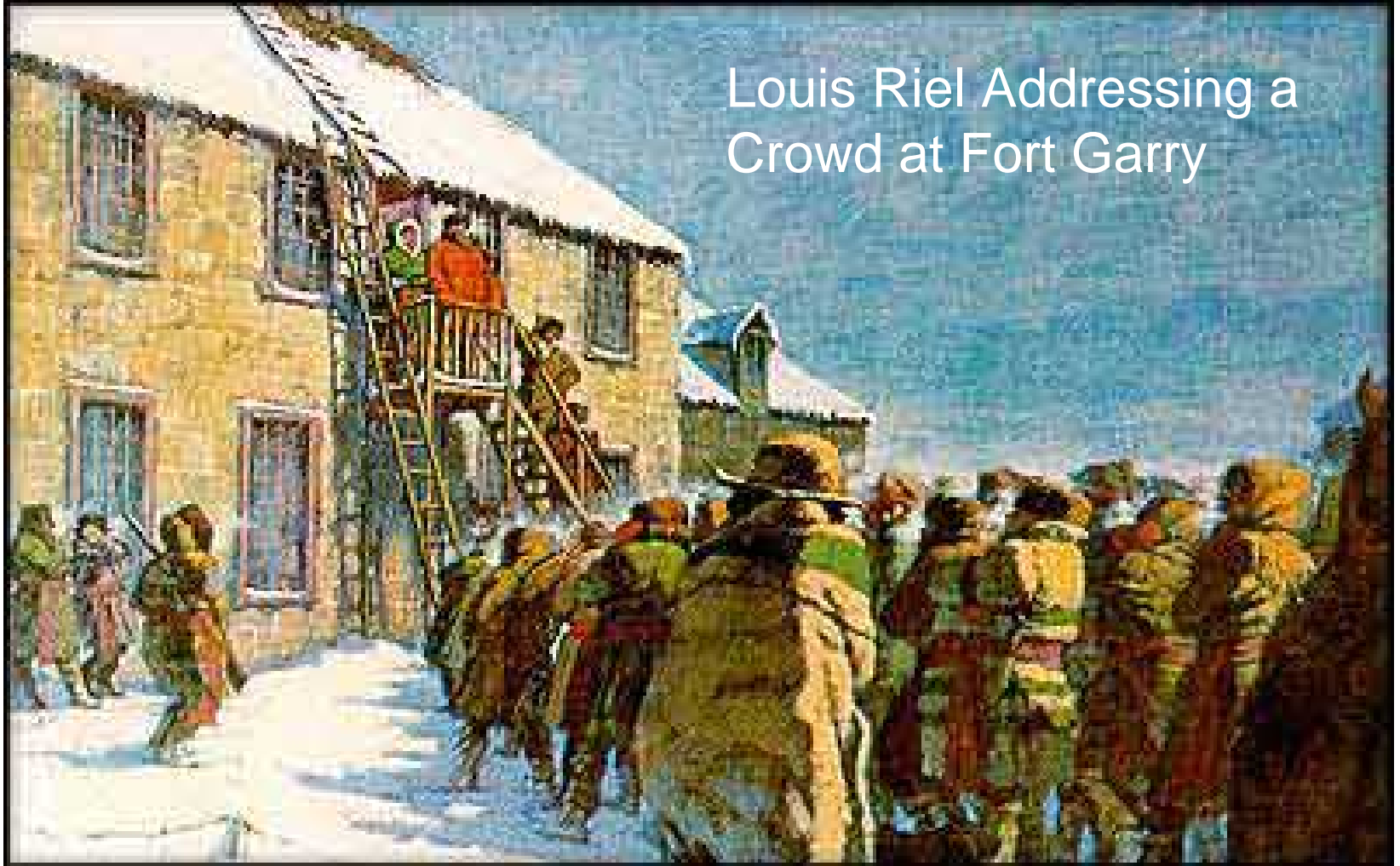


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- **Imagine their surprise** when the Hudson's Bay Company sold the whole territory to the Dominion Government far away in Ottawa. Without so much as an "oh, by the way. . ." surveyors turned up to lay out lots for *real* settlers! A Lieutenant-Governor and a non-elected Executive Council were appointed to govern the territory, without once consulting with the people who lived there. It is hardly surprising that the Métis stood up for their rights and formed a provisional government under Louis Riel in 1869. Their actions led to the creation in 1870 of the Province of Manitoba, with its own elected legislature.

Louis Riel Addressing a
Crowd at Fort Garry



- **It must have seemed** at first as though their problems were solved, but ongoing settlement and the desperation of the Native Peoples due to the disappearance of the buffalo caused the situation to deteriorate again, and the North West Rebellion broke out in 1885. Action by the federal government was swift and decisive: after the rebellion had been put down with tragic losses on all sides, Ottawa took a firm hold of western administration. Only very recently have we begun to re-examine this period of our history, and to look more carefully and objectively at the reasons behind the prairie revolt.

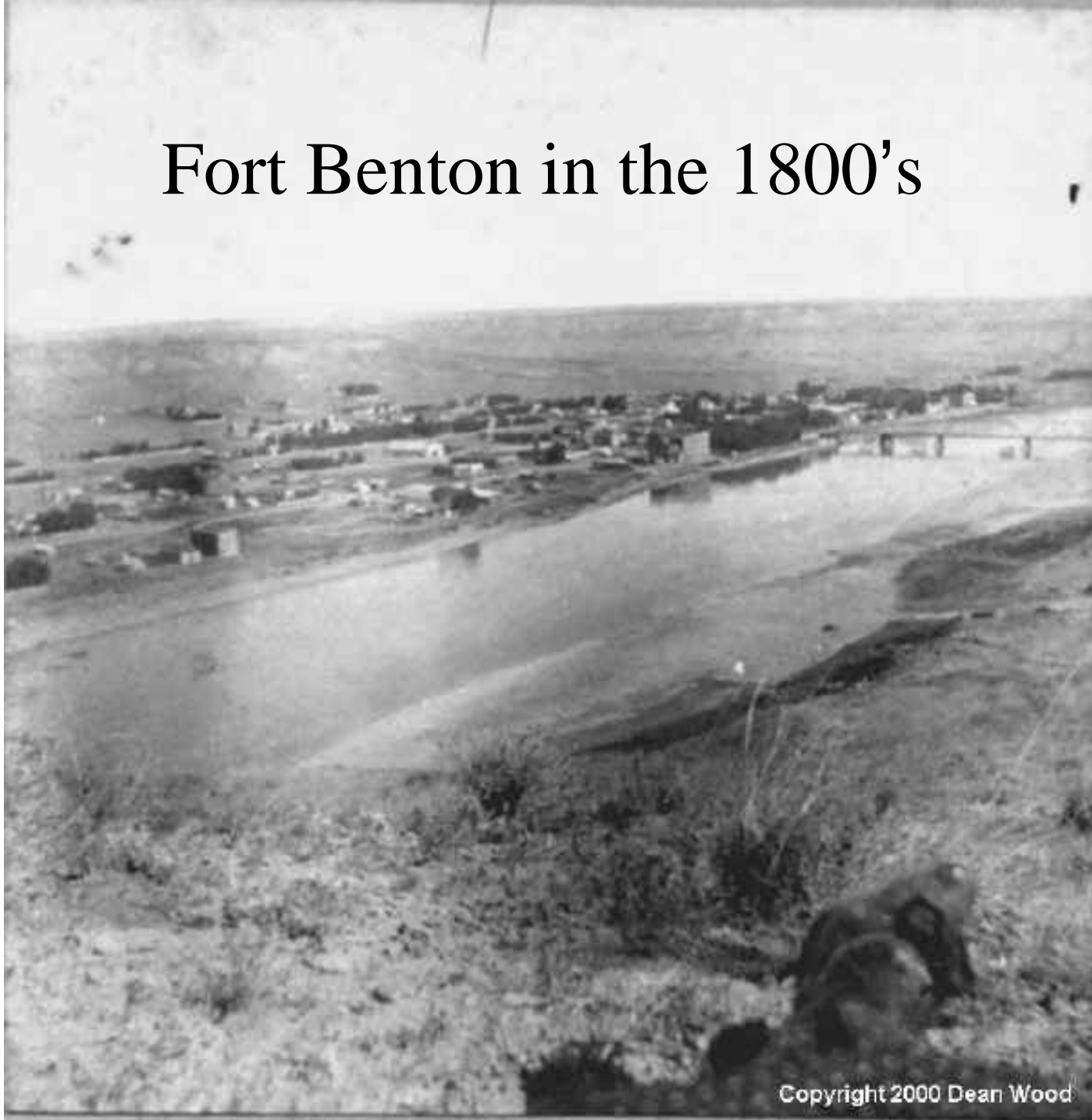
- **The NWMP took part** in putting down the Rebellion, but long before then they had learned to depend on the Métis. Their drivers and guides for the March West were all Métis. When they were lost and getting pretty desperate near the end of their trek, it was Jerry Potts, a Métis guide and hunter, who led them to their goal and taught them how to survive. Although they, too shared many Victorian prejudices, Commissioners French and Macleod realized that they had much to learn from a people who existed between the old order of the Native Peoples and the new ways of white law.

- Jerry Potts



- **Jerry Potts**
- **When Commissioner French arrived in Fort Benton, Montana on 24 September 1874, he was in desperate need of a reliable guide. The Mounties were lost, and in need of food and water. The manager of the trading post introduced him to Jerry Potts, a short, bowlegged, oddly dressed man who rarely spoke more than two words together. French was not impressed at first, but Potts turned out to be the Mounties' greatest asset, a man who could guide them unerringly through a blinding snowstorm, and a skilled diplomat who was trusted in every native community the Force encountered.**

Fort Benton in the 1800's



- **Jerry Potts was a Métis** whose father, Andrew R. Potts, had married Namo-pisi (Crooked Back), a Blackfoot woman. Jerry's father had come from Scotland to work for the American Fur Company at Fort McKenzie in 1836. He was well-liked and respected by his Indian trading partners, but had the bad luck to be mistaken for someone who *wasn't* - he was shot and killed one night in 1840 by a Piegan Indian, when Jerry was under two years old.

- **Things went from bad to worse** for the boy. His new stepfather was a violent, cruel man who mistreated the native people. He and his cronies were eventually driven out and the fort was burned to the ground in 1843. It was rebuilt as Fort Benton by more responsible traders by 1845. Namo-pisi had returned to her own people, so young Jerry was raised by Andrew Dawson, the new manager of the fort..

- **For about five years, Jerry worked and traveled with Dawson, learning the country, the fur trade, and several native languages. When he was 12, he joined his mother's family in Alberta, and learned to track and hunt with the Blackfoot. For the rest of his life, Potts moved back and forth between these two worlds. He worked for the white men, but in his heart he was an Indian.**

- **As time went by**, Potts, or Ky-yo-kosi (Bear Child) became a legend. They say that he was protected in battle by powerful medicine. His tracking abilities were amazing, and he was known as a warrior and a leader. In 1869 he was hired by I.G. Baker & Co. to help out at Fort Hamilton, their trading post in Alberta. This was none other than the notorious whiskey post, Fort Whoop-Up. Potts provided meat for the traders, and acted as a go-between with the Indians.

Fort Whoop-Up in the 1800's



Fort Whoop-Up today

(near what is now Lethbridge Alberta)



- **During this time Potts saw firsthand** the terrible results of the whiskey trade for his people, who fell into poverty, sickness and violence while the traders grew rich selling their vile home-brewed "whiskey". In 1872 Potts' mother and his half-brother were killed in an alcohol-related incident. Potts took revenge on the murderers, quit the whiskey post and returned to work for I.G. Baker at Fort Benton.

- **It was there in 1874** that Potts began his 22-year career with the NWMP. He quickly proved that he was indispensable, leading the lost column directly to water and pasture, finding suitable campsites and hunting buffalo. He also taught Macleod how to do business with the Indians, according to their own traditions. Macleod offered Potts a permanent position with the Force, and over the years he served the Mounties in many ways.

- **A superb tracker**, he proved over and over his skill in navigating across the trackless plains, and taught these skills to the police. He was a familiar and trusted character in both white and native communities, and kept his ear to the ground wherever he was for information that would be useful. He was always there when the Mounties were negotiating with the First Nations, advising the officers about how to behave and what to say. When things got tense during the 1885 Rebellion, it was Potts who calmed the Blackfoot and prevented them from joining Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont.

- **Despite his long list of accomplishments,** Potts was no saint. He drank heavily and lived a hard life. A solitary man who spoke little in the company of whites, he lived with his extended family on the Piegan Reserve in the Porcupine Hills of Alberta. The buffalo were gone, so the great hunter became a rancher to feed his family. Still loyal to the NWMP, "Old Jerry" could be counted on to come out of seclusion when he was needed, but as the years went by he kept to himself more and more. In 1896, at the age of 58 Jerry Potts died. To the end he had the respect and gratitude of the Force. He is buried at Fort Macleod.

Louis Riel

- Louis Riel, a leader of his people in their resistance against the Canadian government in the Canadian Northwest, is perhaps the most controversial figure in Canadian history. His life and deeds have spawned a massive and diverse literature.



- He was born in the Red River Settlement (in what is now Manitoba) in 1844. A promising student, he was sent to Montreal to train for the priesthood, but he never graduated. An attempt at training as a lawyer ended similarly, and by 1868 Riel was back in the Red River area. Ambitious, well educated and bilingual, Riel quickly emerged as a leader among the Métis of the Red River. In 1869-1870 he headed a provisional government, which would eventually negotiate the Manitoba Act with the Canadian government. The Act established Manitoba as a province and provided some protection for French language rights.

- Riel's leadership in the agitation, especially his decision to execute a Canadian named Thomas Scott, enraged anti-Catholic and anti-French sentiment in Ontario. Although chosen for a seat in the House of Commons on three occasions, he was unable to take his seat in the house. However, in May of 1874, he tried for a second time to take his seat, and this time he succeeded in signing the Member's Register.

- In 1875, Riel's role in the death of Scott resulted in his exile from Canada. These years in exile would include stays in two Quebec asylums and the growing belief in Riel that he had a religious mission to lead the Métis people of the Canadian northwest.



- In 1877, the new Prime Minister, Alexander MacKenzie, granted Riel amnesty for the trouble in 1869 and '70 on condition that he not return to Canada for five years.

- In 1884, while teaching in Montana at a Jesuit mission, Riel was asked by a delegation from Northern Saskatchewan consisting of: Gabriel Dumont, Moise Ouelette, Michel Dumas and James Isbister to present their grievances to the Canadian government. Despite Riel's assistance, the federal government ignored Métis concerns. By March of 1885, Métis patience was exhausted and a provisional government was declared.

- Riel was the undisputed spiritual and political head of the short-lived 1885 Rebellion. He never carried arms and hindered the work of his military head, Gabriel Dumont. Riel was increasingly influenced by his belief that he was chosen to lead the Métis people. On May 15, shortly after the fall of Batoche, Riel surrendered to Canadian forces and was taken to Regina to stand trial for treason.

- At his trial, Riel gave two long speeches which demonstrated his powerful rhetorical abilities. He personally rejected attempts by his defense counsel to prove he was not guilty by reason of insanity. On 1 August 1885, a jury of six English-speaking Protestants found Riel guilty but recommended mercy. Judge Hugh Richardson sentenced him to death. Attempted appeals were dismissed and a special re-examination of Riel's mental state by government appointed doctors found him sane. He was hanged in Regina on 16 November, 1885. His execution was widely opposed in Quebec and had lasting political ramifications.

- **Gabriel Dumont**
- Gabriel Dumont is best known as the man who led the small Métis military forces during the Northwest Resistance of 1885. He was born in the Red River area in 1837, the son of Isidore Dumont, a Métis hunter, and Louise Laframboise.

- Although unable to read or write, Dumont could speak six languages and was highly adept at the essential skills of the plains: horseback riding and marksmanship. These abilities made Dumont a natural leader in the large annual Buffalo hunts that were an important part of Métis culture. At the age of fourteen Dumont received his initiation in plains warfare when he took part in a Métis skirmish with a large group of Sioux at the Grand Coteau of the Missouri River.

- Gabriel Dumont



- By the 1860s, Dumont was the leader of a group of hunters living in the Fort Carlton area. In 1872, he took advantage of the growing traffic on the Carlton trail and opened a ferry across the South Saskatchewan River and a small store upstream from Batoche. In 1873, his position as a leader was formalized when he was elected as president of the short-lived local government created by the Métis living on the south branch of the Saskatchewan.

- His leadership role in the South Branch community continued. In 1877 and 1878, Dumont chaired meetings which drew up petitions to the federal government asking for representation on the Territorial Council, farming assistance, schools, land grants, and title to already occupied lands. Dumont was also a member of the delegation which convince Louis Riel to return to Canada and plead the Métis case to the federal government.

- When a provisional government was declared in 1885, Dumont was named "adjutant general of the Métis people." He proved himself an able commander and his tiny army experienced some success against government forces at Duck Lake and Fish Creek. The Canadian militia, however, proved too large and too well equipped for Dumont's army, which collapsed on 12 May 1885 after a four day battle near Batoche.

Métis front line during the Battle of Batoche





- Dumont avoided capture by escaping to the United States where, in 1886, he accepted an offer to demonstrate his marksmanship by performing in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. After visits to Quebec (where he dictated his memoirs in 1889) Dumont returned to his old homestead near Batoche. He lived there quietly until his death in 1906.