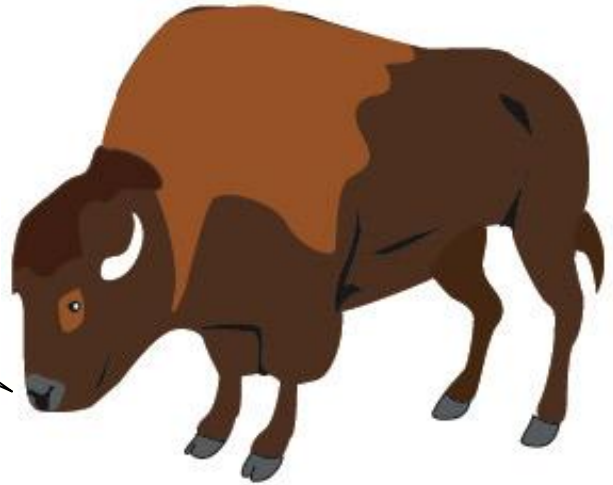


The Birth of Manitoba

... and the Rebellion that created it



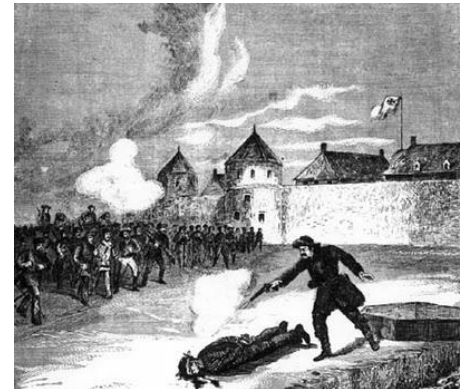
Who was Louis Riel?

- Métis leader and founder of Manitoba, born at Red River Settlement [Man] 22 Oct 1844 - died at Regina 16 Nov 1885.
- Riel was educated at St Boniface and studied for the priesthood at the Collège de Montréal. In 1865 he studied law.
- The Red River and the North-West was to be transferred from the Hudsons Bay Company(HBC) to the Canadian government in 1869.
- 1869, the federal government, anticipating the transfer, appointed William McDougall as lieutenant-governor of the new territory.
- John A. Macdonald then sent survey crews to Red River even though the land was not yet part of Canada.
- The Métis were fearful of what would happen because of the transfer. They were also wary of the aggressive Anglo-Protestant immigrants from Ontario. The Métis organized a "National Committee" of which Riel was secretary – because of his education he became an obvious leader.
- The committee halted the surveys and prevented McDougall from entering Red River.
- On Nov 2 the Métis seized Fort Garry (HBC trading post) and the HBC officials offered no resistance.
- The committee invited the people of Red River, both English and French speaking, to send delegates to Fort Garry.
- A Canadian armed resistance tried to take Fort Garry but failed and surrendered to the Métis. They were imprisoned in Ft Garry and Riel issued a "Declaration of the People of Rupert's Land and the Northwest," becoming head of the "provisional government" of Red River. The provisional government included 20 French and 20 English members.

- The Canadian government sent special commissioners "of goodwill" to Red River including Donald A. Smith, chief representative of the HBC in Canada.
- The Canadian prisoners taken in Dec were released and plans were made to send 3 delegates to Ottawa to negotiate the entry of Red River into Confederation.
- Meanwhile a force of Canadians including surveyor Thomas Scott gathered hoping to enlist support in the Scottish parishes of Red River. The appearance of this armed force alarmed the Métis who promptly rounded them up and imprisoned them in Ft Garry.

- The Métis convened a court-martial at which Thomas Scott was sentenced to death. Scott was executed by firing squad on 4 Mar 1870.

- Bishop A.A. Taché of St Boniface in Montreal reached Red River 4 days after Scott's death. He brought a copy of the Canadian federal proclamation of amnesty which he believed included any actions by the Métis up to that date. Taché persuaded Riel's council to free all prisoners and send the delegates to Ottawa.



- In spite of opposition from the Orange Lodges of Ontario, of which Thomas Scott had been a member, the Canadian government and Riel's delegates came to an agreement leading to the Manitoba Act passed 12 May 1870, with the transfer was set for July 15.

- Also, the federal government agreed to give 1 400 000 acres (566 580 ha) to the Métis and to make bilingual services for the new province.

- Other than verbal assurances, there was no specific mention of the amnesty, however.

- The federal government sent a military force to Red River in the summer of 1870. The Red River Expedition was supposed to be "a mission of peace" however Riel had good reason to fear its arrival and fled to the United States, later returning quietly to his home at St-Vital

- When Manitoba was threatened with a Fenian (Irish) raid from the US in the autumn of 1871, Riel offered a force of Métis cavalry.

- In Ontario Riel was widely denounced as Thomas Scott's "murderer" and a reward of \$5000 was offered for his arrest.

- In Québec he was regarded as a hero, a defender of the Roman Catholic faith and French culture in Manitoba.

- Because he didn't want a political confrontation between Ontario and Quebec, Sir John A. Macdonald tried to persuade Riel to remain in voluntary exile in the US, even providing him with funds. Instead Riel entered federal politics.

- Riel was successful in a by-election in 1873 and in the general election of 1874. He went to Ottawa and signed the register but was expelled from the House of Parliament. Riel did not attempt to take his seat again.
- In Feb 1875 the federal government finally adopted a motion granting amnesty to Riel conditional on 5 years' banishment from "Her Majesty's dominions."
- Shortly after, Riel suffered a nervous breakdown and was admitted to hospital at Longue Pointe (Montréal) as "Louis R. David."
- Riel became obsessed with the idea that he had a religious mission - to establish a new North American Catholicism with Bishop Bourget of Montréal as Pope of the New World. Riel was convinced that God was directing him and saw himself as the "Prophet of the New World."
- Riel was released in Jan 1878 and he went to the US, eventually settling in Montana, married and began teaching.
- June 1884 Riel was asked by a group of Canadian Métis to help them obtain their legal rights in the Saskatchewan valley.
- 1885, Riel encountered opposition in Saskatchewan because of his unorthodox religious views, old memories of Thomas Scott's execution. Riel became frustrated and began to contemplate direct action. On March 19th Riel seized the parish church at Batoche, armed his men, formed a provisional government and demanded the surrender of Fort Carlton.
- By 1885 the North-West Mounted Police had been established and a railway to the West almost completed.
- This meant the Canadian government was able to supply troops and munitions quickly. This was very different than during the Red River Rebellion.
- After two months of fighting Riel surrendered – this was called the North-West Rebellion.
- On 6 July 1885, a formal charge of treason was laid against Riel and on 20 July his trial began at Regina. His counsel proposed to defend him on the grounds of insanity, but Riel denied the label. Three examining physicians found Riel excitable, but only one considered him insane.
- The jury found him guilty however they recommended a light sentence. The federal government decided in favour of hanging. Riel was executed at Regina 16 Nov 1885.
- His body was sent to St Boniface and interred in the cemetery in front of the cathedral.
- Politically and philosophically, Riel's execution has had a lasting effect on Canadian history.

"The cap was pulled down, and while he was praying the trap was pulled. Death was not instantaneous. Louis Riel's pulse ceased four minutes after the trap-door fell and during that time the rope around his neck slowly strangled and choked him to death. The body was to have been interred inside the gallows' enclosure, and the grave was commenced, but an order came from the Lieutenant-Governor to hand the body over to Sheriff Chapleau which was accordingly done that night."

Louis Riel "Murdered by the Crown" **CTV News report, 2009**

CTV.ca News Staff

Date: Tue. Nov. 17 2009 8:51 PM ET

Louis Riel's conviction for treason should be overturned, says a Manitoba MP, who adds that the hero of Métis across the Prairies should be recognized as a Father of Confederation more than 100 years after his death.

NDP MP Pat Martin has introduced a private members' bill in the House of Commons, calling for Riel's 1885 conviction to be reversed and to recognize him both as the founder of Manitoba and for his work in defence of Canada's Métis population.

"On the Prairies there's a very strong movement that wants to recognize him not only as the founder of Manitoba but one of the founders of Confederation, and he should be considered one of the Fathers of Confederation because it was he who brought Manitoba into Confederation in 1870 as our fifth province," Martin told CTV's Power Play on Monday, the 124th anniversary of Riel's death.

"So my bill is simply stating that it's overdue that we reverse the conviction of Louis Riel. Not just pardon him -- because pardon says that you're guilty of something but we're going to forgive it somehow. To reverse the conviction is to exonerate Louis Riel and state that he was never guilty of treason."

In 1869, Riel led the Red River Rebellion to assert Métis rights in what was to become Manitoba. Later that year, he was elected head of a provisional government in Red River and in 1870, helped usher Manitoba into Confederation.

While Riel was elected to the House of Commons three times, he did not take his seat in Ottawa. Instead, he left Canada, but returned to lead the Métis in the Northwest Rebellion.

The federal government convicted Riel of high treason and executed him on Nov. 16, 1885, for his role in the rebellion.

Martin has been trying for years to rehabilitate Riel's image in Canada. His latest bill to exonerate Riel, C-258, went through its first reading in January, and will likely not come up for debate until next year.

According to Martin, the Canadian government did not have the authority to charge Riel.

"These events took place outside of the realm of the Crown, and he was charged with treason as it pertains to the realm of the Crown. Any good lawyer should be able to drive a truck through a loophole like that but he didn't have a good legal defence," Martin said.

"(The government) had made up their minds early on that they were going to get rid of this nuisance agitator who was fighting for the rights of the Métis, and more and more as the history comes to the surface, we see that the government of Canada wanted Louis Riel out of the way and they worked backwards from that conclusion. Really, it's safe to say he was murdered by the Crown."