

2 Manitoba Becomes a Province

On October 11, 1869, a man named André Nault was escorting his cattle across a neighbour's land. (This was near today's LaBarriere Park just south of Winnipeg.) There he was met by a team of **land surveyors**. Nault tried to tell them that they were not allowed on the property. However, Nault did not speak English, and the surveyors did not speak French. Nault ran for help. More than a dozen men on horseback returned with him. One of the men spoke English. His name was Louis Riel.

Riel told the team to leave. The surveyors left, but not before one of the men on horseback purposely stepped on the surveyor's chain. It was a simple, but defiant act.

Today, a surveying team measuring a piece of farmland is a common sight. That was not the case, though, in 1869, near today's city of Winnipeg. The people who lived there were Métis hunters and farmers and Scottish farmers. Their families had lived on the land for many years.

The English divided their land into square-shaped lots. The French had always divided their land into long, narrow lots along the river. That is the system the people of Red River used.

AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT

- what life was like among the Métis of the Red River Settlement
- the concerns of the Métis, and what they wanted for their future
- the people who helped in the founding of Manitoba
- the events leading up to the founding of Manitoba

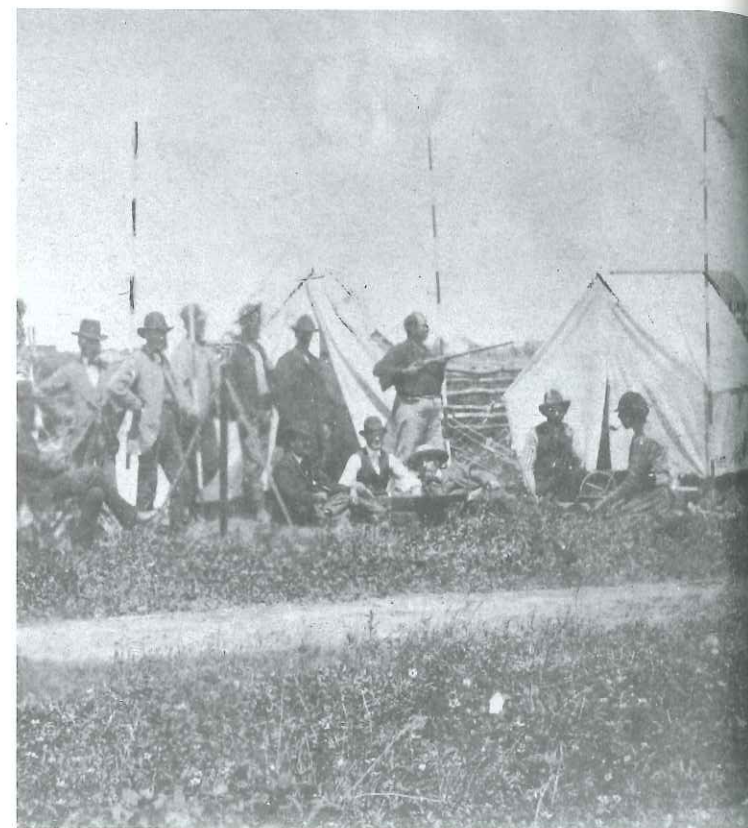


Figure 2.1 The arrival of surveyors in 1869 (above) alerted the Métis that the government wanted to take over their land and prepare it for new settlement. Under Louis Riel, the Métis began a movement to keep their traditional rights to the land.

When they saw that the land was being divided into squares, they were worried. They thought their land would be taken away from them and given to settlers from the east. People were angry.

The Macdonald government worried about the young country's growth. No one knew what would happen to the area west of Ontario.

The Métis

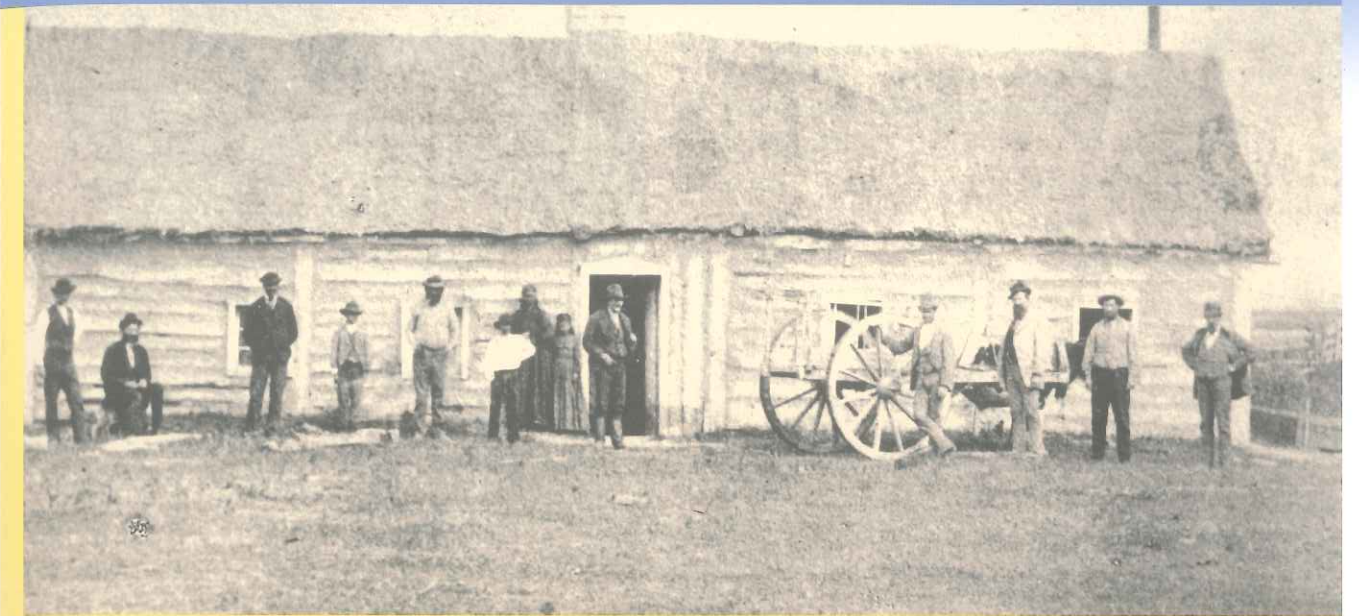


Figure 2.2 Métis at Red River, 1870.

The Métis are a people of European and First Nations background. French and British fur traders who settled in the West married First Nations women. Their children became known as the Métis. Between 300 000 to 500 000 people today consider themselves Métis. They live mainly in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, and the Northwest Territories. Some live in North Dakota and Montana.

The Métis are recognized in the Canadian constitution as one of the three Aboriginal groups in Canada. The other two are First Nations and Inuit people.

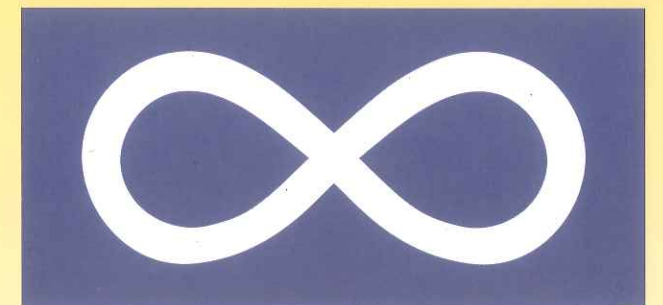


Figure 2.3 The Métis flag is a white infinity symbol on a blue background. It was flown more than 150 years before the Canadian flag.

The United States was eyeing the land in the northwest of the continent. In the 1850s, some Americans had started moving into the area.

Prime Minister Macdonald, however, did not sit idly by. He had just come to an agreement that spring with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The company agreed to sell a large area, called **Rupert's Land**, to the Canadian government.

Macdonald wanted the land for English-speaking settlers from Canada. That would stop the Americans. However, he gave no thought to the First Nations and Métis people who already lived there. Neither the Canadian government

nor the Hudson's Bay Company had talked to the Métis about taking over the land.

When the surveyors came, they went on people's land without asking. They did not speak French. They never told the local people what they were doing.

The Métis did not know what the future would hold for them. Within months, the act of a simple survey team led to a chain of events and series of conflicts between the government in Ottawa and the Red River settlers, led by Louis Riel.

Arrival of “The King”

William McDougall (1822–1905) was a Father of Confederation. John A. Macdonald chose him as lieutenant governor of the North-West Territories. When McDougall left Ontario, he told Macdonald that he now considered himself “King of the Northwest.”

McDougall was to begin his new job in the Red River settlement on December 1, 1869.



Figure 2.4 Cover of the *Canadian Illustrated News*, January 29, 1870, shows “Miss Winnie Peg ... in doubt [about] which way to go.”



Figure 2.5 As a journalist and politician in Upper Canada (Ontario), William McDougall believed strongly in democracy, scientific progress, and the importance of land reform. As a commissioner of Crown lands in Ontario, he had granted Crown and reserve lands to be used for farming. He was a strong supporter of Canada taking over Rupert’s Land.

The settlement was far away and hard to reach. McDougall and his staff had to go through the United States to get to Red River from Ontario. In Minnesota, he got a letter from Chief Surveyor Colonel Dennis. The letter warned McDougall there could be violence when he arrived. Others he met along the way also told him to expect trouble. In fact, Métis spies were tailing McDougall, watching his every move.

At the same time, Louis Riel began to organize the people of Red River. He formed the Métis National Committee. They would present their demands to McDougall, who represented the Canadian government. The Métis people wanted to make sure they kept their rights. They had lived along the Red River for years and had set up most of the communities there.

People of Red River

In 1870, when Rupert’s Land was taken over by the Canadian government, there were many different groups of people living in the Red River Settlement. These included

- French-speaking Métis. These people were the children and grandchildren of French-Canadian fur traders from the North West Company and their First Nations wives. They were mostly Roman Catholic. They lived by farming, through the bison hunt each year, and as traders and freighters.
- Country-born Métis. These people were the children and grandchildren of English-speaking

fur traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company and their First Nations wives. They were Protestants, and mostly farmers, craftsmen, guides, and interpreters.

- Descendants of the Selkirk Settlers, originally from Scotland, who were farmers.
- Land **speculators** from Ontario and the United States, who had started arriving in the 1860s.
- First Nations peoples. These were the original people of the region.

When McDougall arrived in Pembina, North Dakota, on November 2, he was met by two representatives of the Métis. They gave him a letter from Louis Riel. In the letter, Riel told McDougall that he would not be allowed to enter the settlement. He would only be allowed in by Riel’s new committee.

McDougall’s party was forced to stay overnight in Pembina. In the morning, they made their way to the first Hudson’s Bay Company post on the Canadian side of the border. Fifty men, led by Ambroise Lepine, a member of the Métis National Committee, met the party at the tiny post. They sent McDougall and his men away.

Population of Red River, 1870

[Total: 11 963 people]

By background

- 5757 French-speaking Métis
- 4083 English-speaking Métis
- 1565 European or European-Canadian
- 558 First Nations

By religion

- 6247 Roman Catholic
- 5716 Protestant

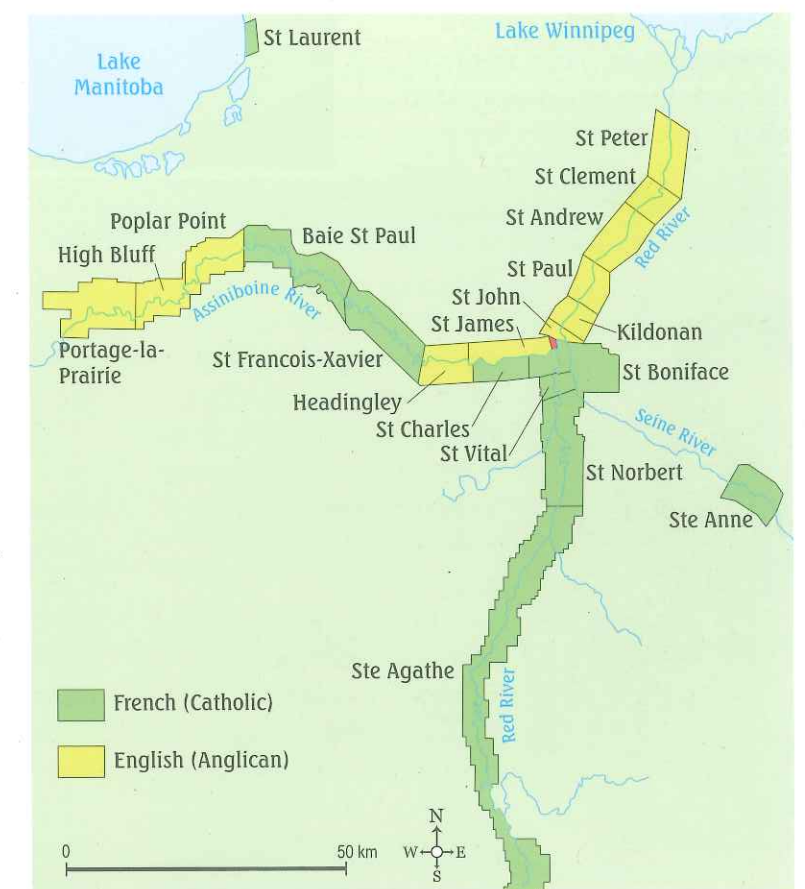


Figure 2.6 RED RIVER SETTLEMENT, c. 1870

Resistance

Within days of turning away McDougall at the border, Riel and his men took over Upper Fort Garry. (The fort was located near the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers.) There was a rumour that a man named John Schultz and his Canadian Party wanted to capture the fort and take all its guns. But Riel and his 100 men beat them to it. The Red River Resistance had begun.

Next, the Métis made a **proclamation**. They went through the settlement to tell all the people of Red River about their plans. They asked people from both **francophone** and **anglophone** communities

to form a council. Every community in the settlement sent a person to speak for them, even though John Schultz tried to stop them. In fact, most long-time anglophone residents of Red River supported Riel.

On December 1, 1869, McDougall crossed the border into Canada. He read aloud from a document. It said that Rupert's Land was now officially part of Canada.



Figure 2.7 John Schultz (1840–1896) arrived at the Red River settlement in 1860 from Ontario. He became a doctor and businessman. As part owner of the *Nor' Wester* newspaper, he spoke out against the Hudson's Bay Company. He promoted joining with Canada. As leader of the Canadian Party, Schultz led a movement to overthrow Riel's provisional government. Schultz later served in the Canadian Parliament and Senate, where he remained a controversial figure.



Figure 2.8 Louis Riel (centre) and some members of his council, 1869–1870. Riel, who had returned in 1868 from studying in Montreal, was an educated, well-liked leader.

McDougall did not know that Prime Minister Macdonald had postponed the transfer of land to Canada until the tensions had died down. McDougall had actually **forged** the document.

Colonel John Dennis, the surveyor, called on supporters to stop the Métis. A group of about 400 men set up their own headquarters at the Stone Fort (another name for Lower Fort Garry, located on the Red River 40 kilometres north of Upper Fort Garry). Most of the men were new to the Prairies. They supported the Canadian government. They thought it would be a good idea to settle the land with anglophone Protestants from Ontario.

Meanwhile, John Schultz turned his own home into a fort for his pro-Canadian force. On December 7, Riel had his men and their cannons surround Schultz's house. Local storekeeper A.G. Bannatyne came to talk to both groups. Riel ordered Schultz's group to give up. Schultz and his followers were imprisoned in Upper Fort Garry. On December 8, Riel said that his **provisional** [*pro-VIZH-eh-nel*] **government** was

taking over the unstable settlement, which at the time had no official government. McDougall soon returned to Ottawa.

Riel, as president of the provisional government, set up a public meeting for January 19, 1870. Donald Smith, a special commissioner and longtime Hudson's Bay Company man, was sent by Prime Minister Macdonald to speak on behalf of the Canadian government. Smith told the people about the government's plans for the land.

Then Riel spoke. He called on the crowd to set up a council. It would be made up of 20 francophone and 20 anglophone people. They could talk with the government in Ottawa. Shortly afterward, the council, known as the Convention of Forty, was formed. It wrote a list of rights for the territory. Smith agreed to take the demands to the Canadian government.

Métis list of rights

The list of rights, below, was written by the provisional government at Red River. The document set out the terms for an agreement with the Canadian government to become a new province. Some key points of the agreement were

- the new province would be represented in Parliament and the Senate
- the provincial government would control all public lands
- French and English languages would be used in both government and the courts, as well as in any laws and official documents
- an **amnesty** would be granted to Riel and members of his provisional government
- the lieutenant governor and head of the Supreme Court would be bilingual
- a steamboat route would be set up between Lake Superior and Fort Garry
- the federal government would take on all debt of the territory and pay for all new public works, such as buildings and roads

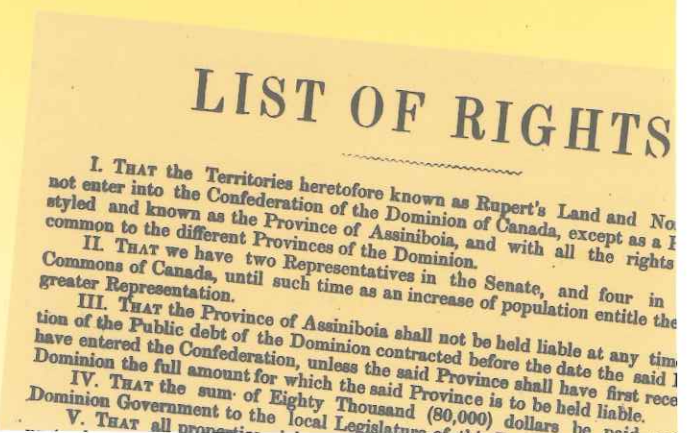


Figure 2.9 On November 2, 1869, Riel's provisional government took control of Upper Fort Garry from the Hudson's Bay Company. It set up its headquarters there. Today, all that remains of the fort is its front gate.

Another point was later added that required separate French and English schools, modelled on the Quebec school system.

The document was the basis of the Manitoba Act (1870) that created the province of Manitoba. Most of the terms were agreed to. However, the federal government did not give the new province control over public lands. Amnesty was promised but was never fulfilled.

Figure 2.10 The list of rights



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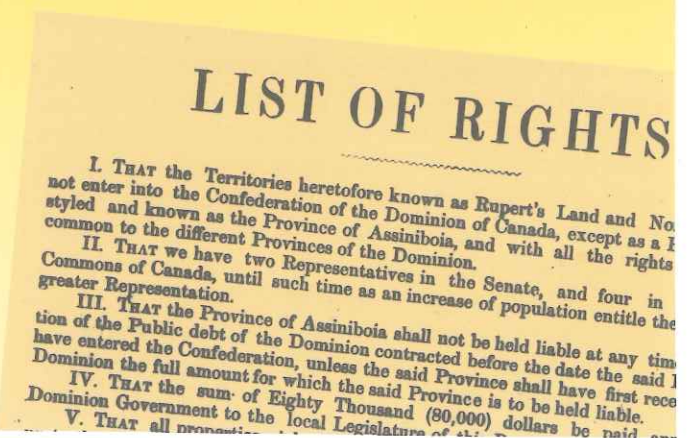
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Confrontation

Seven of the men arrested at John Schultz's house escaped from jail in early January 1870. Among them was Thomas Scott, an unpopular hooligan. Schultz broke out of the fort a few weeks later. He used a knife that his wife smuggled to him in a pudding. The rest of the prisoners were let go in February. They joined the groups of anti-Riel forces ready to march on Riel's headquarters at Upper Fort Garry. There, they planned to drive out the provisional government. The groups came from Portage la Prairie, from the Stone Fort of Lower Fort Garry, and from St. Norbert.

The Portage la Prairie group marched eastward to meet Schultz's group. On their way, they came across a Métis woodcutter named

Norbert Parisien. They arrested him as a spy. Parisien soon escaped, stealing a gun. When a man rode up to him, Parisien, who was mentally challenged, wrongly believed the man was after him. He shot the man, who later died. The man Parisien shot, Hugh Sutherland, knew that it was an accident. He asked the nearby mob, including Thomas Scott, to spare Parisien. They did not. They beat Parisien so badly, he later died.

After learning what happened, Riel called for calm. The mob broke up, but some of the men were jailed as they passed Fort Garry.

In prison, Thomas Scott made nasty remarks to the guards about their race and Catholic religion. He even upset his fellow prisoners. Finally, Scott tried to break out of his cell by overpowering the guards.

Alexandre-Antonin Taché (1823–1894)

As archbishop of St. Boniface, Alexandre-Antonin Taché was both a spiritual and political leader to the French-Catholic community in the Red River settlement. Throughout the 1860s, he became concerned about English-speaking Protestant people from Ontario moving to the area. He wanted to make sure that the language and religious rights of the community would be respected. When the Canadian government sent its survey crews without talking to the people of Red River, he made a trip to Ottawa (on his way to Rome). There he spoke to members of the federal government about his concerns.

In December 1869, the Canadian government asked Taché to return from Rome. They wanted him to act as an **emissary** to the people of Red River. The government told Taché that the demands of the provisional government would be met. He was also told that amnesty would be granted to all who were part of the resistance. When Taché returned to Red River, he convinced Riel to send a group to Ottawa to make a deal with the Canadian government. Unfortunately, because Thomas Scott had been killed, amnesty was taken away. Taché felt that he had been lied to by the government. He continued to fight for amnesty.



Figure 2.11 Alexandre-Antonin Taché

Riel's supporters wanted to make an example of Scott. Scott was charged with **treason** against the provisional government. On March 3, 1870, a six-man jury voted four to two for the death penalty. On March 4, Scott was killed by a firing squad in front of the fort. His last words were, "This is horrible. This is cold-blooded murder."

A New Province

Prime Minister Macdonald and his representatives finally began to talk with the people of Red River. Archbishop Taché of St. Boniface, a supporter of Riel and the people of Red River, had been talking to the federal government about the colony's future. The provisional government was invited to send people to Ottawa.

On March 23, 1870, Father Joseph-Noël Ritchot, Judge John Black, and Alfred Henry Scott went to Ottawa. They went to hammer out the terms of entry into Confederation based on the Métis' list of rights (see p. 27). The two sides finally reached an agreement. Manitoba would become a province. French and English would be official languages. Religious rights would be protected. The Métis would receive title to their lands, as well as a land grant of about 570 000 hectares for future generations. The Manitoba Act was passed on May 12, 1870. It came into effect July 15, 1870. Canada's fifth province was born.

At the same time as these talks were going on, John Schultz and his **cohort** Charles Mair were going throughout Ontario, stirring up hatred for Riel and the provisional government. Many people in Ontario were furious about the death of Thomas Scott. They demanded that justice be done.

Manitobah

In 1867, before Manitoba was a province, the town of Portage la Prairie became the centre of the Republic of Manitobah. A man named Thomas Spence, concerned because the area had no government, wanted to transform it into a recognized part of Canada. In January 1868, the settlers formed a council for the new republic. Spence tried to raise money for Manitobah by taxing imports. However, few of the town's businesses, including the Hudson's Bay Company, would pay. Things got worse when a shoemaker named McPherson suggested that the collected tax money was being spent on liquor for members of the council. McPherson was charged with treason, but his trial, in a log cabin, turned into a brawl. The Republic soon collapsed.

Spence himself soldiered on. At one time, he had been the editor of John Schultz's *Nor'Wester* newspaper. A few years later, he became editor of Louis Riel's *New Nation*.



Figure 2.12 The Manitoba Act promised a large amount of land to the Métis at Red River. However, instead of land, each Métis person was given scrip. This was a paper certificate that could be traded for land or money. This plan did not work well. Many Métis never got money or the land they were promised.

The Wolseley Expedition

In June 1870, Prime Minister Macdonald sent 1100 hearty troops west on “a friendly expedition.” They went to make sure that power was transferred peacefully from the provisional government to the federal government. Many of the soldiers had read the anti-Riel newspaper articles. They agreed with the hateful message of Schultz and his men. Riel had sent guides to help the expedition. They listened to the fireside chat of the soldiers. They reported that the troops were set on revenge.

The force was led by Colonel Garnet Wolseley. It arrived at Red River in late August 1870 after a difficult trip. Riel feared that the soldiers wanted to kill him. Just hours before they arrived, Riel escaped to the south.

THE NAME OF THE COUNTRY is already written in all hearts, that of Red River. Fancy delights in that of ‘Manitoba,’ but the situation seems to demand that of ‘North-West.’ Friends of the old government are pleased with that of Assiniboia [but] it is not generally enough liked to be kept. Choose one of the two names ‘Manitoba’ or ‘North-West.’ —*A letter from Louis Riel to Father Ritchot on April 19, 1870*

Wolseley’s soldiers settled in for a long stay. It soon became clear that many in the force were not there to protect anyone. They were there to punish the settlement for the resistance and for Scott’s execution. Many soldiers beat and looted their way across the settlement. André Nault, the

man who had spotted the surveying party the year before, was beaten and left for dead. Nault lived, but a number of people were killed. These included a man who was on Scott’s jury, one who was in Scott’s execution party, and the owner of a well-known saloon in the town.

The takeover of Manitoba, which the residents had so feared, had begun. But the people did have a province, with their historic rights guaranteed.

After the Red River Resistance

Even though he was living in exile in the United States, Riel was elected to the Canadian Parliament to represent the **riding** of Provencher in 1873. However, Riel was a wanted man. Charged with Scott’s murder, he never took his **seat** as a **member of Parliament**. Still, he is considered by many Canadians as the founder of Manitoba. You will read more about Louis Riel in chapter 4.

Conclusion

Life began to change for the Métis after Manitoba became a province in 1870. New people came. They soon gained power in the province. The Métis had trouble proving ownership of their land. Their ways of life were disappearing just as the bison herds were dying out. Many of the Métis moved farther west to the North-West Territories or to the American states just south of the border.

DID YOU KNOW? In 2007, the Manitoba government announced a new holiday, Louis Riel Day, to fall on the third Monday of February. The holiday honours Riel as the founder of the province of Manitoba.

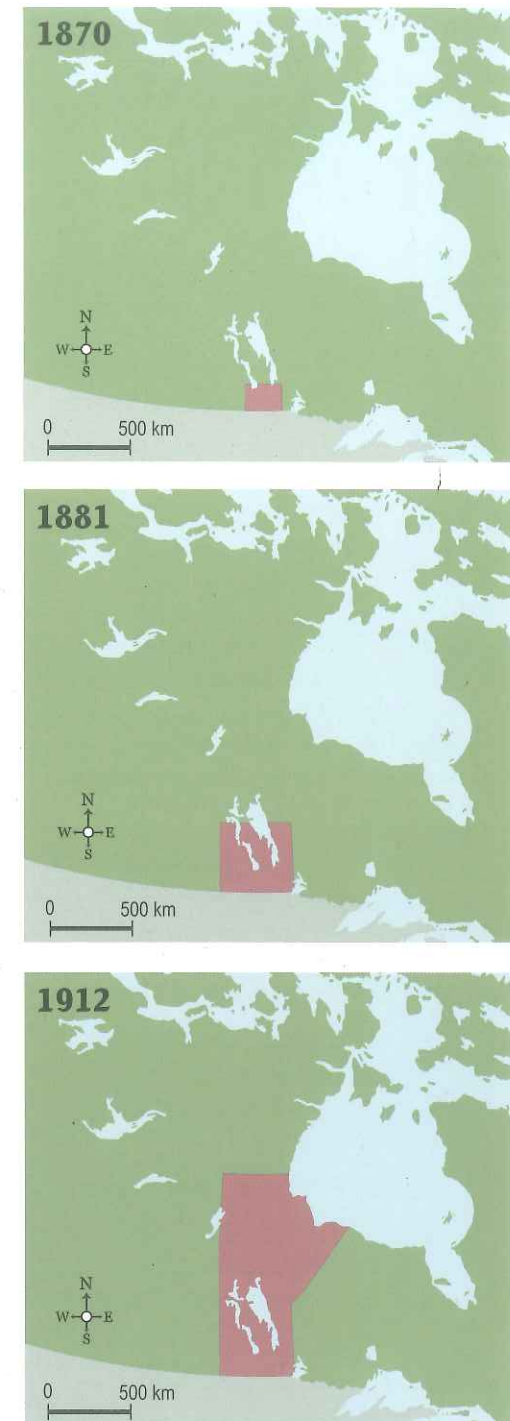


Figure 2.14 MANITOBA IN 1870, 1881, AND 1912
The Postage Stamp province was Manitoba’s nickname when it became a province in 1870. It was roughly square in shape. Compared to its size today, it was also very small. It was only 209 by 177 kilometres – around 37 000 square kilometres or about 1/18th of the province’s present size. Manitoba’s boundaries were extended twice: once in 1881, then north to the 60th parallel in 1912.



Figure 2.13 Red River Expedition, Colonel Wolseley’s Camp, Prince Arthur Landing on Lake Superior, by W. Armstrong