Social Studies 10

Unit 5 Readings

The Northwest 1870-1885

Pages 1-26

Problems on the Prairies

Life changed greatly for the Native peoples of the Prairies during the 1870s. Some of these changes involved the whisky trade and the establishment of the North West Mounted Police. Other changes resulted from the treaties by which the Native peoples gave up much of their lands.

The Whisky Trade

In the early 1870s, Prime Minister Macdonald received several reports about problems on the Prairies. Missionaries such as Father Lacombe and railway surveyors such as Sir Sanford Fleming wrote to him that whisky traders, nearly all of them from the United States, were selling their product to the Native peoples of the West. For bottles of cheap "rotgut" whisky, Native peoples were trading valuable buffalo robes, furs, horses, food, and some even their wives and daughters. Many deaths and murders had followed drinking sessions in the Native camps. Disease and malnutrition were rampant as alcoholism interfered with traditional Native hunting and food-gathering activities.

The centre of the whisky trade was Fort Whoop-Up, in what is now southern Alberta. It was an impressive fortified trading post, with log walls more than four metres high. Two bastions with rifle slits and brass cannon guarded the fort from attack by rival whisky traders or Native people.

A bleak and isolated place, Fort Whoop-Up was a world of outlaws, men hardened to loneliness and violence. Most of these men had come from Fort Benton, 100 km to the south in Montana. Many were rough veterans of the American Civil War, finding new adventure in buffalo hunting. These frontiersmen were now bringing their lawlessness to Canada's North West Territories.

Few Canadians had travelled to the West in the early 1870s. The canoe routes of the fur traders were still the main link between the Prairies and eastern Canada. Most visitors to the Prairies had to go through the United States, then travel north by horse to Canada. As a result, the whisky trade around the isolated and distant fort went largely unnoticed in the rest of Canada. Macdonald and other political leaders knew about the situation, yet there was little public pressure on them to do anything about it.

Public attitudes changed significantly when an event that became known as the Cypress Hills Massacre brought the whisky trade to

the attention of eastern Canadians. The Cypress Hills straddle the Alberta-Saskatchewan boundary, close to the border with the United States. In early May of 1874, a party of whisky traders attacked a band of Assiniboine whom they believed to have stolen some of their horses. The traders, thoroughly drunk themselves, rained shot after shot from rapid fire rifles into the Assiniboine camp. When the firing was over, thirty of the Assiniboine were dead. In their vain attempt to defend themselves with their ancient muzzle-loading rifles, the Assiniboine had managed to kill only one of their attackers.

News of the Cypress Hills Massacre eventually spread across North America. Newspapers in the United States wrote about brave American frontiersmen facing hostile savages. Canadian newspapers described the event as an attack by American ruffians on the innocent Assiniboine. The Canadian public called for an end to the lawlessness on the Prairies.

Warned of the whisky trade problems, the federal government had already passed a bill to establish a police force in the West to be known as North West Mounted Police. However, nothing had been done to recruit members for this force. News of the massacre and the public reaction to it forced the government to begin this recruitment hastily.

The newly formed police force was trained in the Winnipeg area during late 1873 and early 1874. In July 1874, they began their patrol of the Prairies. During the march west to Fort Whoop-Up and to other centres like Fort Edmonton, the 300 new NWMP recruits travelled 2000 km across the Prairies in the summer heat. They reached Fort Whoop-Up only to find that the whisky traders had fled. The hot and gruelling march took a great toll on both men and horses as they trekked from Fort Garry to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. It was far tougher than any of the Mounties had imagined. But it was just a brief taste of what would lie ahead for them as they patrolled the vast North West Territories over the next thirty years.

"No person shall be appointed to the Police Force unless he be of sound constitution, active and able-bodied, able to ride, of good character, able to read and write either the English or French language, and between the ages of eighteen and forty."
[excerpt from the Act of Parliament establishing the NWMP, 1873]

1. How did the whisky trade affect the Native peoples of the Prairies? Suggest some reasons why the traders might want to sell alcohol to the Native peoples.
2. When and why did the government of Canada create the North West Mounted Police?
3. What differences in attitude are revealed in the American and Canadian newspaper accounts of the Cypress Hills massacre?

4. In the United States, settlement of the West took place before effective government and police services were introduced. The result was the legendary "Wild West" portrayed in western movies. In Canada, the police came to the West before the settlers. Can you suggest how the presence of the police might have affected the settlers? the Native population of the area?

The Aboriginal Treaties

Nomadic Native bands had occupied the vast Prairie grasslands for centuries, moving seasonally with the migrating bison herds. When the Dominion of Canada bought the region from the Hudson's Bay Company, the government decided that it had to end any claims Native peoples might have to these lands before the West was settled. Through a series of treaties, the Natives gave away their claim to ownership of vast areas of western Canada. In return, they received a small portion of their lands as reservations, some money and a promise from Ottawa that they would be looked after by the Canadian government. Many people argue that this promise has never been kept.

Seven treaties were signed by the government of Canada and the Native peoples during the period 1871-1877. The first treaty, signed at Fort Garry in 1871, saw bands of Cree and Ojibwa give up vast areas of Manitoba. In return, they received reserves amounting to sixty-five hectares for each family of five, a small yearly payment and some food.

Another treaty gave the Cree heartland, more than 350 000 km^2 along the North and South Saskatchewan rivers, to the Canadian government. The Cree chiefs were given military uniforms (to be replaced every three years) and silver medals. They were also given horses, wagons and agricultural tools. The Canadian government hoped that the Cree chiefs would encourage their people to give up their nomadic hunting way of life to become farmers. Each member of the tribe was given reserve land, a yearly payment of twelve dollars and a promise by the government to provide aid and rations if the Indians faced hard times.

The last treaty to be negotiated resulted in the Blackfoot Confederacy surrendering 150 000 km^2 of very fertile land in what is now southern Alberta. Let us look in more detail at the ceremonies that led to the signing of the treaty.

ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

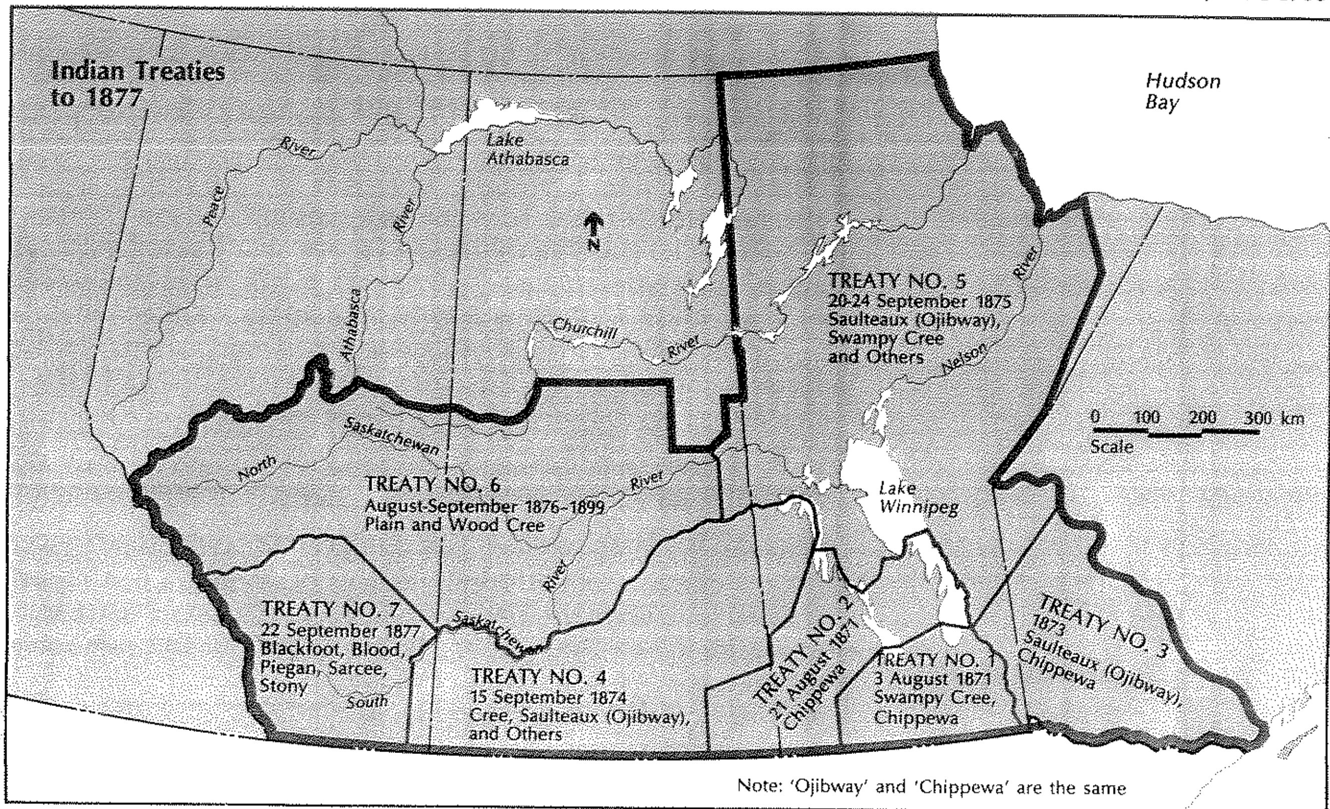
The seven treaties negotiated by the Dominion of Canada with the various Native groups in the North West gave the government title to lands once occupied by wandering bands of Native hunters. It is doubtful that the Native people fully understood the importance or impact of these treaty negotiations. They were seminomadic hunters, who moved with the seasons and with the animals they hunted. They had no concept of individual land ownership or even fixed boundaries to their hunting territories. The people were one with the land; it gave them food and shelter and they respected it as a sacred spirit-filled place. The idea of buying and selling land was totally foreign to these Native hunters. The land was theirs–but they did not own it.

However, the Native peoples of the North West were well aware of the fate of their brothers in the American West. There, the settlers and the United States army were engaged in constant warfare with the Native peoples. It was a one-sided war that saw heavy losses on the Native side and left bitter divisions between the newcomers and Natives for decades afterwards. The Natives of the Canadian West feared the same would happen north of the forty-ninth parallel. The promise of the Canadian government to help and protect them held great appeal. It is likely that it was the promise of protection, not an understanding of the implications of giving up their lands, that led to Native leaders signing the treaties.

Today, in many parts of Canada, Native peoples are concerned about the loss of their "aboriginal" rights as non-Native settlers have occupied the land. In most of Quebec, British Columbia, the Yukon and Northwest Territories, no treaties were negotiated with the Native peoples. In these areas of Canada, Native peoples are using the courts and other political and legal channels to press for restoration of their lands or compensation for the loss of lands traditionally occupied by their people.

Negotiations with the Blackfoot began in the spring of 1877, with the signing ceremony taking place in September of that year. The signing had to wait for fall because the Blackfoot were busy hunting bison during the summer. On September 17, the lieutenant-governor of the North West Territories, David Laird, arrived at Blackfoot Crossing, the site of the signing. He was accompanied by the NWMP Commissioner, Colonel James Macleod, and an escort of 108 Mounted Policemen. Here is how one of the NWMP men who accompanied Laird described the scene at Blackfoot Crossing that day:

> There must have been a thousand lodges. They were plentifully supplied with meat, having only just left a large buffalo herd downstream to the east. Their horses covered uplands to the north and south of the camp in thousands. It was a stirring and picturesque scene: great bands of grazing horses, the mounted warriors threading their way among them and as far as the eye could reach the white Indian lodges glimmering among the trees



This map shows the extent of the territory acquired through treaties with the Native peoples between 1871 and 1877.

along the river bottom. By night the valley echoed to the dismal howling of the camp's curs [dogs] and from sun to sun drums boomed from the tents. Never before had such a concourse of Indians assembled on Canada's western plains.

Two days later, some 4000 men, women and children gathered on the grass to watch the signing of the treaty. The chiefs of the Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan, Stoney and Sarcee seated themselves in front of the Council tent to hear Lieutenant-Governor Laird address the Blackfoot Confederacy. NWMP Sergeant-Major Sam Steele, another officer who was present at the signing, wrote down Laird's words as he spoke to the Indians:

> . . .the Queen has sent Colonel Macleod and myself to ask you to make a treaty. . . .in a few years the buffalo will be destroyed, and for this reason the Queen wishes to help you to live in the future in some other way. She wishes you to allow her white children to come and live on your land, and raise cattle and grain, and thus

give you the means of living when the buffalo are no more. She will also give you and your children money every year, which you can spend as you please. . . . Cattle will be given to you and potatoes, the same as are grown at Fort Macleod.

The commissioners strongly urge you to take cattle, as you understand cattle better than you will farming, for some time at least, and as long as you continue to move about in lodges. . . . as soon as you settle, teachers will be sent to you to instruct your children to read books like this [Laird held up a Bible] which is impossible so long as you continue to move from place to place. I have now spoken. . . . Go, therefore, to your councils, and I hope you may be able to give me your answer tomorrow.

The next day, Steele listened and took notes as Crowfoot, speaking through an interpreter, replied to Laird:

The plains are large and wide; we are the children of the plains; it has been our home and the buffalo have been our food always. I hope you look upon the Blackfeet, Bloods, Peigans and Sarcees as your children now, and that you will be indulgent and charitable to them.

The advice given to me and my people has proved to be very good. If the police had not come to this country, where should we

The signing of the treaty between the Blackfoot and the government of Canada involved much ceremony. The NWMP played a central role by representing the authority of the government.

all be now? Bad men and whiskey were indeed killing us so fast that very few of us indeed would have been left today. The Mounted Police have protected us as the feathers of the bird protect it from the frosts of winter....I am satisfied. I will sign the treaty.

The other chiefs followed Crowfoot, each speaking in favor of the treaty. It was signed on September 21, 1877. The first to make his mark on the document was Crowfoot. With the treaty signed, a thirteen gun salute was fired, and the police band played "God Save the Queen." The tribes had given up their land and, with it, their independence. Soon the buffalo, too, would be gone, marking the end of the plains peoples' traditional way of life. Out of these changes would come a bitter conflict. The harmony and trust that had marked the signing of the treaty would be shattered.

1. Why did the Canadian government want to sign treaties with the Native peoples on the Prairies? Why were the Native peoples prepared to sign these treaties?
2. What did the Native peoples give up under the terms of the treaties? What did they receive?
3. What was the role of the NWMP in the negotiations with the Native peoples? Why were they so important to the negotiations and to the creation of a climate of harmony and trust?
4. What problems would seminomadic hunters face in suddenly becoming ranchers or farmers?
5. In your opinion, were the treaties between the Native peoples and the government of Canada fair deals? Give your reasons.
6. Suggest what might have happened in the Canadian West if no treaties had been signed with the Native peoples prior to large-scale non-Native settlement.

Building the Railway

By 1875, Canada was a vast nation stretching from sea to sea. There were now seven provinces. (Prince Edward Island had joined Confederation in 1873.) These provinces and the North West Territories had a combined area of nearly 10 million square kilometres, but they were thinly populated and joined in a political union that had few economic, communication or transportation links, particularly in the West. It would take a cross-country railway, as promised to British Columbia in 1871, to provide these links.

Starting the Railroad

Construction of a 5000 km long rail line from the Pacific to central Canada involved many tasks. An appropriate route through the Canadian Shield and across the Rocky Mountains had to be selected and surveyed. Sufficient financial backing had to be found. Also needed were engineers and laborers to plan, build and operate the railway. As well, government support would be necessary, particularly assistance to secure financing for the rail line and to acquire land for the line's right of way.

The terms of union that had brought British Columbia into Confederation in 1871 called for construction of the railway to begin within two years. Macdonald's Conservative government realized that they would have to increase taxes to build the railway, an action unpopular with voters in the East. Instead, they looked for private investors to take on this great project.

In the United States, the men who had just constructed the Northern Pacific Railroad were eager to get the contract for the Canadian rail line. Their motives went beyond the profits they hoped to make. They hoped to see the trans-Canada rail line linked with the American route south of the Great Lakes. This link would reduce construction costs and, if sections of the line ran through the United States, the rail line would effectively be placed under American control.

The American railroad builders saw this control as an important step toward annexation of western Canada to the United States. But the government of Prime Minister Macdonald, suspicious of the Americans' intentions, insisted that there be Canadian participation in the financing of the railway. This would ensure at least partial Canadian control. In 1872, Sir Hugh Allan, a Montreal businessman, agreed to act as head of the company that would build the railway.

In exchange for the railway contract, Allan secretly paid thousands of dollars to prominent members of the government, including George-Étienne Cartier, Hector Langevin, and Macdonald himself. Much of this money came from Allan's American colleagues.

When Macdonald urged Allan to break off his connections with his American partners, the businessmen were outraged. They sold to Liberal members of Parliament a number of letters and telegrams showing that bribes had been paid. Aided by numerous newspapers, the Liberals made these documents public.

The resulting public outcry over these bribes was enormous. The affair became known as the "Pacific Scandal," and it led to the resignation of Macdonald's government in November of 1873. The Liberals, led by Alexander Mackenzie, were called upon to form the government. In the election of 1874, Mackenzie won an overwhelming majority. The new Liberal government inherited the pledge to begin construction of the railway to British Columbia.

However, Mackenzie decided that the federal government could not afford the cost of building the complete transcontinental railway. Instead, he focussed on smaller railway building projects. West of the Great Lakes, only two short sections of rail line were laid down in the first two years of Mackenzie's government. Construction of the first section, running seventy-five kilometres west from Fort William, was begun on June 1, 1875, and marked the actual start of the long-awaited rail route to the Pacific. The second section was in Manitoba, linking Selkirk to Emerson, and joining the railroad running north from St. Paul, Minnesota.

1. In your own words, explain the "Pacific Scandal." How did it affect the government of Sir John A. Macdonald?
2. Using your atlas, locate where the first two western sections of the transcontinental railway were built.
3. Suggest some reasons why the first two western sections were built so far apart. What is the physical geography of the region between the two sections?

Railway Building in Western Canada

The first steam locomotive in western Canada, the *Countess of Dufferin*, arrived in the fall of 1877 at St. Boniface, on a Red River barge. The rail link with Ontario to the East had not yet been completed but construction of the rail line across the Prairies had begun. The first spike of the St. Boniface branch of the transcontinental railway was driven on September 29, 1877, ten days before the arrival of the *Countess of Dufferin.* People were already beginning to call the new railway the Canadian Pacific. Soon, the *Countess of Dufferin* proudly sported the words "CPR No. 1" painted in white against the gleaming black paint of its cab. There was a sense of excitement in the towns and villages of the West, now that the long-awaited railway was finally under construction.

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MACDONALD'S NATIONAL POLICY

Canada in the mid-1870s was suffering from an economic depression. Despite large-scale importation of manufactured goods from the United States and Britain, Mackenzie's Liberals refused to increase tariffs to protect Canadian industries. They failed in 1874-1875 to negotiate a reciprocity agreement with the United States. Macdonald and the Conservative Party campaigned in 1878 on the promise of a "National Policy" with increased tariffs to protect Canadian manufacturers. The Conservatives won the election on their protectionist platform. In the budget of 1879, Macdonald set out a nationalist program that would strengthen Canada's economy and restore Canadian confidence in the development of the country. Duties were increased on imported manufactured goods, but decreased on imported raw materials used by Canadian manufacturers.

Over the next fifty years, Macdonald's National Policy became the central theme of the Conservative Party in Canada. This policy was expanded to include construction of the CPR, settlement of the West, harbor developments and support for fast steamship service to Europe and Asia.

construction of the railway as costly and unnecessary. He publicly stated that "all the power of man and all the money of Europe" would not be enough to build a transcontinental railway in Canada in the ten year period promised by Macdonald. Others, like Sir Richard Cartwright, a prominent Liberal politician, claimed the venture would bankrupt the country. Cartwright claimed that building the railway "would place upon every man's farm a mortgage so heavy that it would take two or three generations to clear it off."

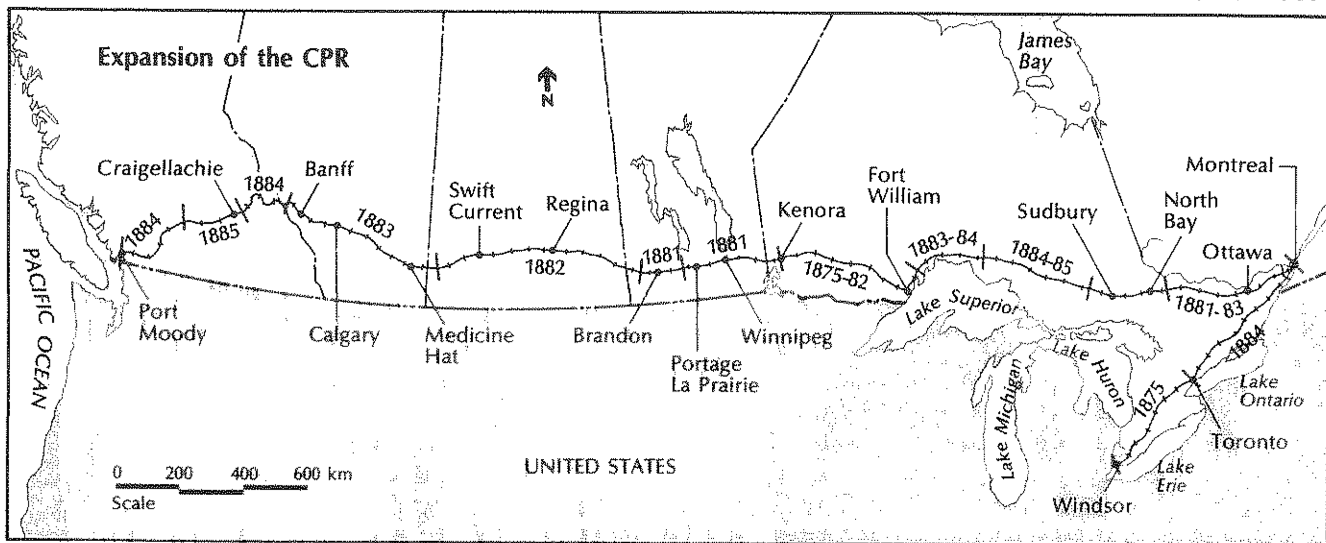
Vast in area and thinly populated, western Canada appeared to have little value in the eyes of critics of the transcontinental railway. With few farms or other economic activities, the West was unattractive to most Canadian and British investors. Their fears were reinforced by articles in British magazines, such as one in *Truth*, which stated that "the Canadian Pacific Railway, if it is ever finished, will run through a country as forbidding as any on earth." Manitoba was described in the article as a place where "men and cattle are frozen to death in numbers that would rather startle the intending settler if he knew." British Columbia was dismissed as "a barren, cold mountain country that should never have been inhabited."

Sir John A. Macdonald did not share the gloomy view of the West as presented by *Truth*. He saw the railway as a means of bringing prosperity, security and settlers to western Canada. Macdonald fought the 1878 election on a promise to restore the country to economic health: his "National Policy" emphasized the importance of the railway and western settlement. The voters of Canada returned the Conservatives to power.

Macdonald quickly set about getting the railway construction project back on track. In 1879 Macdonald and two of his cabinet ministers, Leonard Tilley and Charles Tupper, the former premiers of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, went to London, England, to seek funding and British government support for the railway. They failed completely in their efforts to obtain British backing for the project.

Macdonald's failure to obtain support for the transcontinental railway could not have come at a worse time. The people and government of British Columbia were outraged that the railway had not been built. Canada had not lived up to the terms of union, negotiated when the province agreed to join Confederation. By 1880, George Walkem, the premier of British Columbia, was threatening to have the province secede from Canada.

Macdonald now realized that the government of Canada itself,



without help from Britain, would have to finance construction of the railway. To honor the commitment to British Columbia, Macdonald committed his government to the building of a rail line west of Lake Superior, linking Port Arthur to Winnipeg. Contracts were quickly signed for construction of the railway through the Fraser and Thompson river valleys of British Columbia. The contracts were awarded to Andrew Onderdonk, a young American railway builder.

By 1880, nine years after British Columbia joined Confederation, little of a transcontinental railway was built. Still to be crossed were the Prairies and the formidable mountains.

Onderdonk started work on the Fraser River section of the line in the fall of 1880. Work on the rugged mountain section was hard and dangerous; hundreds of the railway builders were killed by falling rock and other hazards. Construction of the railway progressed slowly. By 1881, just over 400 km of track had been laid down. The federal government already had spent millions of dollars on the project, with very little to show for the money. With few remaining government funds available, Macdonald and his fellow Conservative politicians realized that private money had to be raised to build the railway.

In the fall of 1880, a group of Canadian, American, British and French investors came together to finance the building of the railway. Led by the former president of the Bank of Montreal, George Stephen, this group had the money and the skill needed to build the railway. Stephen and his cousin Donald Smith, head of the Hudson's Bay Company, had earlier purchased a bankrupt railroad in Minnesota. They had not only turned the railroad into a profitable operation, they had become multimillionaires in the process.

Stephen drove a hard bargain during negotiations with Macdonald's government. His demands were enormous: 10 million hectares in land grants and $25 million (more than $650 million in 1986 dollars) in subsidies for construction of the rail line. Macdonald's government was staggered by these demands. In the end, however, the Conservatives agreed to the terms set by Stephen. They had no choice. No other investors were willing to take on the enormous challenge.

1. What factors caused Mackenzie and other government and business leaders of Canada to be pessimistic about finishing the transcontinental railway within a few years? In the end, did it take "all the power of man and all the money of Europe" as Mackenzie had predicted?
2. How might newspaper accounts, such as the one quoted from *Truth* on page 196, have affected the British government's decision in 1879 regarding financial support for the railway?
3. Potential builders of the railway demanded huge sums of money from the government and enormous areas of land in western Canada. Did the government of Canada get a fair deal? Give reasons for your answer.

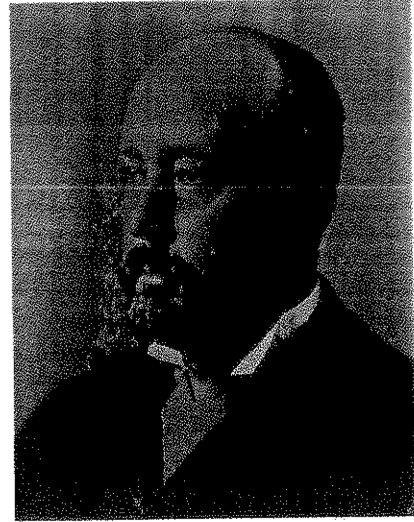
The CPR Incorporated

The act incorporating the Canadian Pacific Railway Company was approved by Parliament on February 15, 1881. In addition to the 10 million hectares and the $25 million agreed to by the government, the legislation included other terms favorable to the syndicate formed by Stephen. The lines being built in Manitoba and British Columbia were to be turned over to the CPR on completion. No charters were to be granted to any competing company seeking to build a railway within twenty-five kilometres of the Canada-U.S. border for a period of twenty years. During those twenty years, the CPR would not have to pay any taxes on the vast amounts of land it had been given. In return, Stephen and his partners were committed to building the transcontinental rail line by the end of 1890.

Meeting that commitment would require more than just money and land. It would take tens of thousands of workers, and the rail, wooden ties, dynamite and tools needed to run a ribbon of steel from the Pacific Ocean to the St. Lawrence River. The workers needed to be fed and housed during this enormous task. They needed someone who could inspire them to the almost superhuman

effort the work would require. Stephen found this leadership in the person of William Cornelius Van Horne, an experienced railwayman who had been superintendent of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad.

Van Horne arrived in Winnipeg to take up his new duties as general manager of the CPR on January 1, 1882. He was a huge, burly man, hard as a **navvy's** hammer, and filled with boundless energy. When he gave orders, he made sure that they were carried out. He provided the organization and equipment needed to ensure that the rail line could be built efficiently. Five thousand men and 1700 teams of horses were brought to the Prairies to build that portion of the CPR. Construction camps were set up, tonnes of food were made available and the best cooks hired to keep the men happy and well-fed. Trains reached the railhead at regular intervals, each carrying the rails, ties and hardware needed to build 1.6 km of track. Van Horne would show up at the construction site at any time of day or night, standing on a flat car or wagon to urge the workers to go faster. Under his direction, the railway advanced steadily westward from Winnipeg at a rate of six kilometres a day.



Sir William C. Van Horne

Van Horne had pledged to lay 800 km of track across the Prairies before freeze-up. By October 1882, trains were running between Winnipeg and Regina, then known as "Pile o' Bones." By the time snow and cold stopped work that fall, the railhead had reached Medicine Hat, Alberta.

Steel rails and sunbleached bones were symbols of the changes in Canada's West. The great herds of buffalo that once roamed the Prairies were all but gone and the Native people who had followed them were on reserves. Now, the trains brought settlers who took advantage of the free or low-cost land being offered by both the CPR and the government.

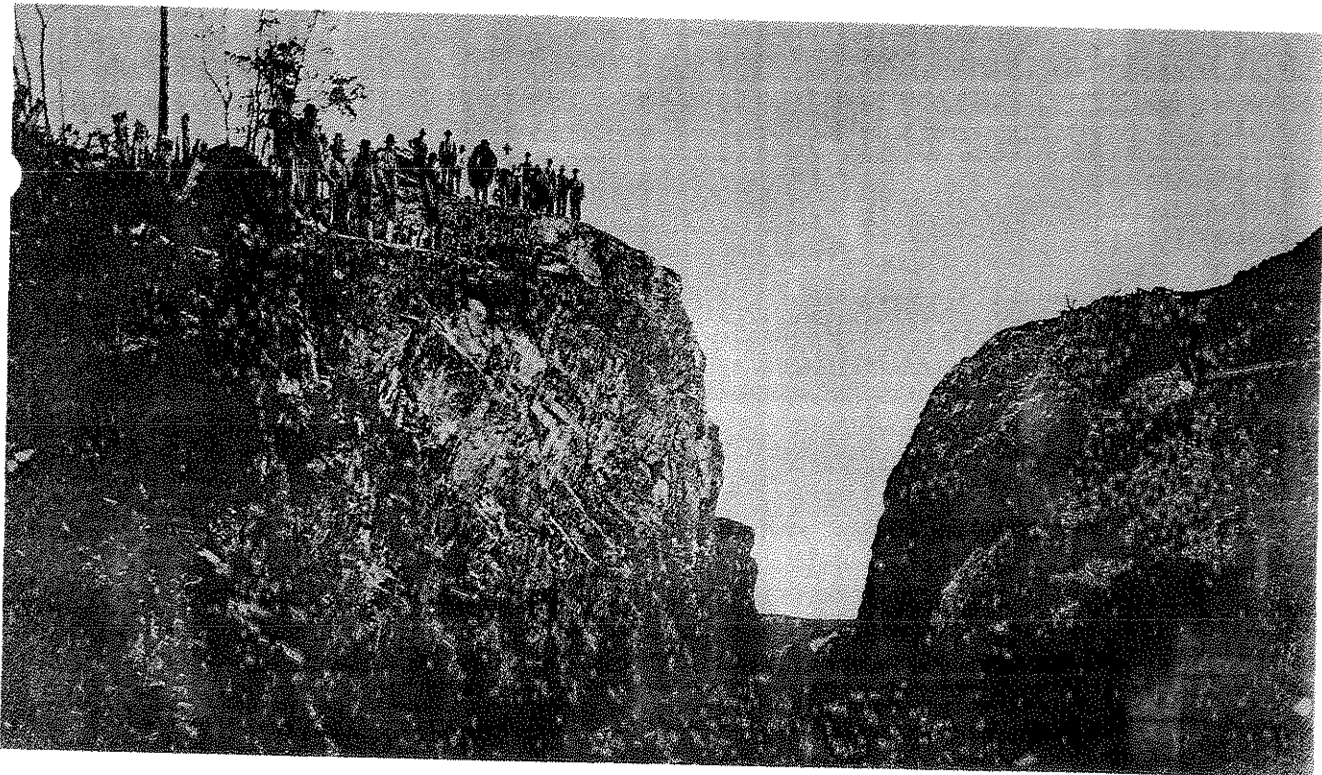
The Indians and Métis watched as the grasslands were turned into farms and the buffalo killed off by white hunters. In Alberta, the rail line was being laid on lands set aside as part of the Blackfoot reservation under Treaty 7. The Blackfeet were angered and prepared to attack and drive off the railway builders. Only the quick-witted intervention of Father Lacombe prevented bloodshed. He promised the Indians that he would make sure that the railway gave them land to make up for where tracks had been laid. When the CPR reached Calgary in August of 1883, both Chief Crowfoot and Father Lacombe were Van Horne's guests for dinner in his private car. Each was given a lifetime pass on the CPR; Crowfoot wore his proudly from his neck until his death.

Building the railway across the Prairies was relatively easy. The section north of Lake Superior was another matter entirely. This route had been chosen to ensure an all-Canadian route. As a result, the tracks had to run through the bare rocks, **muskeg** and waterways of the Canadian Shield. Van Horne himself called the route north of the lake "200 miles [320 km] of engineering impossibilities." But he liked nothing better than to make the impossible possible.

Van Horne hired 12 000 laborers, offering them "two dollars a day and upwards" to attract them to this rugged land. Five thousand horses and a newly-invented track-laying machine were brought in. Three dynamite factories were built to provide explosives needed to blast the rail line through the solid rock of the Shield. In other places, workers watched in frustration as newly-laid track vanished into the swamps. One section of track near Rat Portage (now Kenora) was swallowed by the muskeg seven times before a stable route was found. Some sections of track cost as much as $250 000 per kilometre to lay.

Still more challenging problems lay ahead as the rails neared the

In many places in the Canadian Shield and the Western Cordillera, huge volumes of rock had to be cut away to prepare the track bed. Trains cannot manage steep inclines so cutting and filling is necessary to smooth out the features of the natural landscape.



Rocky Mountains. Survey crews and engineers had been working in the Rockies since the summer of 1883. The railhead reached Lake Louise, on the British Columbia-Alberta border, by the end of that year. From this point west, the steep slopes and solid mountain rock would make construction of the rail line north of Lake Superior seem simple by comparison. In the Rockies, construction costs often exceeded $300 000 ($6 million in 1986 dollars) per kilometre.

CHINESE WORKERS ON THE CPR

More than 15 000 Chinese workers were brought to Canada during the period 1881-1885 to help build the CPR. Labor shortages in western Canada forced Onderdonk to import workers to build the railway. He also had an economic motive–Chinese laborers were paid seventy-five cents to a dollar a day, 50 percent less than other workers doing the same work. These wages, however, were much greater than they could earn in China or the colony of Hong Kong at this time.

Chinese agents were hired by the railway builders to recruit work gangs in China. The Chinese workers were carried to British Columbia in cargo ships, as many as 1000 to a ship. Crowded beneath the hatches of the cargo holds, hundreds died on route to Canada. Once in Canada, the workers were divided into gangs of thirty laborers, a cook and a "bookman," or overseer, who spoke both Chinese and English.

Many Chinese railway workers were killed in dynamite explosions, rockfalls, and other accidents. Their deaths were not counted in official CPR records of workers who died on the job. They also died of scurvy and other illnesses largely because their diet consisted mainly of rice and stale ground salmon. Ill-fed and ill-dressed, the Chinese workers suffered greatly during the harsh winters in the western mountains, yet their labor contributed enormously to the completion of the British Columbia section of the railway.

Faced with such tremendous costs, Stephen's syndicate ran out of money in 1883. A loan of $20 million had to be obtained from the Canadian government. To secure the loan, Van Horne offered to complete the railway in five, not ten years.

In the spring of 1885, the syndicate had again run out of money. The $20 million had not been nearly enough to cover the enormous costs of building the final section of the CPR through the Rocky Mountains and to complete the section through the Canadian Shield north of Lake Superior. Although most of the line had been completed, the most difficult and costly sections in the mountains remained unfinished. The CPR was on the verge of bankruptcy. The government turned down a request for an additional $5 million. In July, however, it changed its mind and passed a bill to authorize the loan. Earlier that year, during the North West Rebellion, examined

in the next section of this chapter, the government had realized the railway's importance as it had been able to send troops quickly to the West to suppress the rebellion.

1. What aspects of Van Horne's character made him an effective person to take charge of building the railroad?
2. In what ways did the coming of the railway change the way of life on the Prairies?
3. How did the geography of British Columbia and of the Canadian Shield affect the construction of the CPR? Why was construction of the railway cheaper and faster on the Prairies?
4. In the spring of 1885, the government turned down a request for a loan of $5 million to finish the railway through the mountains. What would have been the likely outcome of this action had they not reconsidered several months later?

THE FIRST TRAIN TO THE COAST

Sam Steele, who was present for so many important events during the early history of western Canada, was among those who stood and watched the driving of the last spike. He rode the first train as it travelled through the mountains to Port Moody. Here is how he described that trip in his journal:

> ...the train rushed along at the rate of 57 miles per hour [90 km/h], roaring in and out of the numerous tunnels, our short car whirling around the sharp curves like the tail of a kite, the sensation being such that when dinner was served Dickey [the Dominion Engineer], the manager [Onderdonk] and I were the only ones not suffering from train sickness. I think this was one of the wildest rides by rail that any of us had ever taken, and was, to say the least of it, dangerous, for had the train left the rails it would have plunged down a precipice a couple of hundred feet [65 metres] into the wild waters of the Fraser...

The Last Spike

With the additional loan of $5 million, in the summer of 1885, work resumed on the railway. By the end of September, Onderdonk's crews had completed the western section through the mountains. In October, the eastern and western sections were joined at Craigellachie, near Salmon Arm, B.C. All that remained to be completed was a short section in the Rockies, a task that took less than a month. The last spike was driven on November 7, 1885.

The ceremony marking the completion of the CPR was a simple one. Contrary to popular belief, there was no gold spike to mark the event. The CPR could hardly have afforded such an extravagance. Called upon to make a speech, Van Horne simply said, "All I can say is the work has been done well in every way." A few minutes later, a train whistle blew. The conductor called out, "All aboard for the Pacific."

In 1887, the western terminus of the CPR was moved twenty kilometres westward from Port Moody to where the city of Vancouver now stands. There deeper water permitted large ocean-going vessels to dock. The CPR now owned and operated 8000 km of railway lines. Of these, nearly 5000 km were mainline tracks stretching from Montreal to the Pacific. The CPR had a monopoly of transportation through western Canada and owned vast areas of fertile land, just waiting to be settled.

Riel and Rebellion

The North West Rebellion of 1885 was a relatively brief episode in the history of western Canada. It lasted fewer than four months, but it would have lasting effects, both in western and in eastern Canada.

Background to Rebellion

Following the events of 1870 (see pages 147-153), many Métis moved west from Manitoba as settlers crowded into the new province. Seeing their traditional way of life threatened, the Métis sought lands where they could continue to hunt buffalo and create their own farms. Many of them settled along the Saskatchewan River, where, as they had traditionally done, they established long, narrow farms running down to the river banks.

Métis, Native peoples and the few white settlers in the area lived peacefully together for nearly fifteen years. Gradually the three groups became unhappy with the government in Ottawa.

Settlers in the area were faced with high costs and weak markets for their farm products. They wanted economic assistance from Ottawa and a stronger voice in the political affairs of the region. There was no elected Assembly for the North West Territories: power lay in the hands of a lieutenant-governor appointed by Ottawa. Unlike the provinces, the North West Territories did not have responsible government, and they had no elected members of Parliament in Ottawa to speak on their behalf.

The Métis resented the way land was being divided as the federal government readied the Prairies for the settlers expected to come with the railway. Government surveyors divided the landscape into townships in a square, grid pattern similar to that used in Ontario. The long thin Métis farms, similar to those of Quebec, did not fit into this gridwork system. Without proper surveys, the farmers could not receive title to their lands.

The Native peoples faced far more severe problems during the early 1880s. Over the short time the West had been open to settlement, they had suffered many hardships. They had been exposed to smallpox, sold rotgut whisky and seen the loss of their lands. The destruction of the great buffalo herds left many Native bands facing starvation.

In an attempt to save money, Macdonald's government had slashed the funds given to the Indian Department in both 1883 and

1884. The rations and supplies promised the Natives by treaty were now cut back and the number of Indian Agents appointed to carry out the terms of the treaties was reduced sharply. The hungry Natives were becoming more and more angry over the government's failure to live up to the terms of the treaties:

Early in 1884, a group of starving Salteaux attacked a government food storehouse on their reserve. They took a white employee hostage and carried off sacks of flour and bacon. A NWMP detachment was sent to arrest the Salteaux, who had barricaded themselves in a building on the reserve. While the incident ended without bloodshed, the Native people no longer saw the NWMP as their protectors.

Métis and Indian frustrations reached the boiling point late in 1884. Repeated petitions to Ottawa had brought only vague replies and no results. The Métis sent for Louis Riel who was living in Montana at the time. They still remembered his leadership during the events of 1870 that had resulted in Manitoba becoming a province of Canada. After the Rebellion of 1870, Riel had been declared an outlaw–$5000 was offered for his arrest and conviction. Nevertheless, the people of Red River elected him to the Canadian Parliament, but he had not been able to take his seat in the Commons. In 1874, Riel was granted an amnesty by the Liberal government of Alexander Mackenzie on the condition he remain in exile for another five years. Rejected by Protestant Ontarians because of the death of Scott and shunned by many francophone Catholics for his religious views, the now bitter and frustrated Riel suffered a breakdown and began a period of emotional despair. In 1876, friends smuggled him back into Quebec where he spent two years in mental hospitals. By 1881 he was back in the American West, in Montana, where he taught school.

The delegation that visited Riel in Montana convinced him to come back and to help his people. He arrived in the summer of 1884, welcomed eagerly by both the Métis and white communities. Riel felt that the same strategies that he had used in the Red River settlement fourteen years earlier would work effectively in the new territory.

Riel undertook a speaking tour of the region, seeking to unite Natives, Métis and white settlers in a common effort to get a better deal from the federal government. After four months of efforts, a Petition of Rights was sent to Ottawa in December 1884, outlining the demands of the Métis and the settlers. Foremost among the demands was the Métis concern over land titles.

Macdonald and his government ignored the demands sent by Riel, whom they considered to be a dangerous agitator; so did the government administrators sent to the North West. Only a few NWMP officers tried to call attention to the increasing resentment in the area. They could not understand why the government was unwilling to respond to what they saw as the not unreasonable demands of the Métis. Catholic Church leaders, fearful that their authority was being undermined by Riel's presence, also sent a warning to Ottawa. They urged that Riel be bribed to return to Montana. Macdonald rejected the suggestion:

> We have no money to give to Riel and would be obliged to ask for a Parliamentary vote. How would it look to confess we could not govern the country and were obliged to bribe a man to go away? This would never do. He has a right to remain in Canada, and if he conspires we must punish him, that's all.

Talk of the proposed bribe, combined with the government's refusal to address the Métis' concerns, fuelled Riel's anger. In early 1885, his speeches became more powerfully emotional, ringing with calls to take up arms. Repeatedly, phrases like "striking a blow against Ottawa" and "ruling this country or perishing in the attempt" were heard spoken by Riel over the next few months as he drummed up support. Alarmed at these meetings, the local NWMP officers sought and received additional Mounted Policemen for the area. The force grew from eighty to 200 Mounties, and new police posts were established and fortified. Riel's speeches also alarmed the white settlers, who abandoned their support for him. Many of them armed themselves to defend their homesteads against possible attack. The settlers were aware of Native uprisings in the 1870s against settlers who had occupied their lands in the western United States. Now, they feared similar uprisings might occur on the Canadian Prairies.

In March 1885, Riel gained support for his planned rebellion from starving Cree bands led by Big Bear and Poundmaker. Riel promised them that the Mounted Police would be "wiped out of existence" in less than a week.

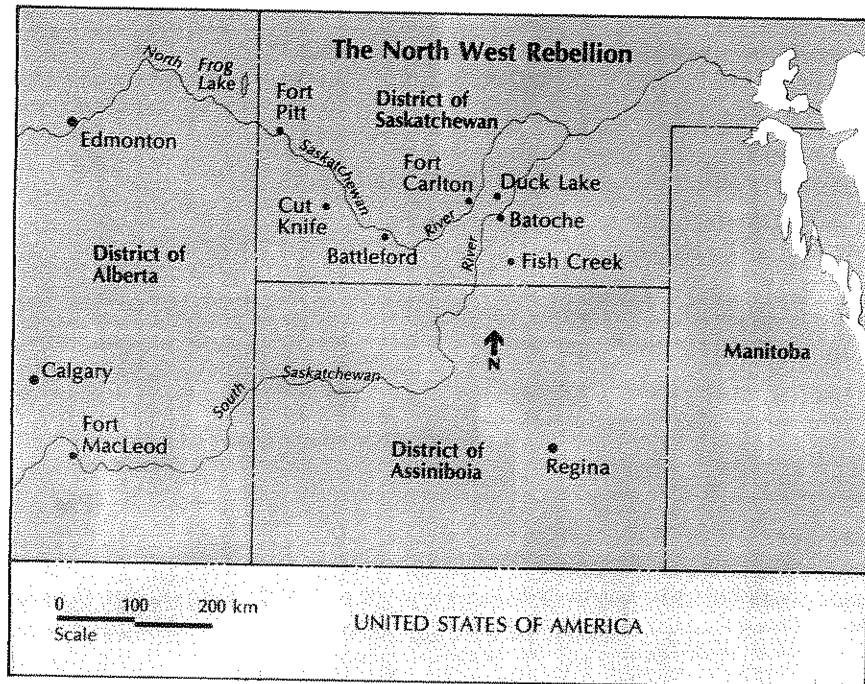
1. Summarize the discontent the Indians, Métis and settlers felt towards the government in Ottawa in the early 1880s.
2. Why did the Métis and Indians turn to Riel for leadership in 1884? What did they hope to gain?

3. Some recent historians have suggested that the reports of Riel's mental breakdown and emotional despair were either created or exaggerated by people in eastern Canada. Why would eastern Canadians believe that Riel was unbalanced? Would all people in eastern Canada share that view? Explain.

Rebellion Breaks Out

On March 13, 1885, Superintendent Lief Crozier of the NWMP sent a telegram from Battleford to Ottawa saying "Half-breed [Métis] rebellion liable to break out at any moment. If half-breeds rise Indians will join them." Five days later, after hearing a rumor that 500 NWMP were on their way to arrest the Métis leader, some of Riel's Métis followers cut the telegraph line at Batoche. They seized the government buildings there, raided the stores and took the employees hostage. At Batoche, Riel declared a provisional government with himself as leader. Riel then sent a message to Superintendent Crozier demanding the surrender of the police post at Fort Carlton. The Métis leader vowed that, should Crozier not surrender, full-scale war would follow. Crozier did not surrender his post: the rebellion had begun.

The first battle between the Métis and Indians and the government forces was at Duck Lake. Sites of other battles are shown on the map.



Blood was first shed on March 26, 1885, when Crozier led a force of ninety-eight men to attack the Métis rebels near Duck Lake. Crozier's party of Mounted Policemen and volunteers from Prince Albert was eager, but ill-equipped and poorly trained. What the excited attackers thought would be a picnic turned into a nightmare.

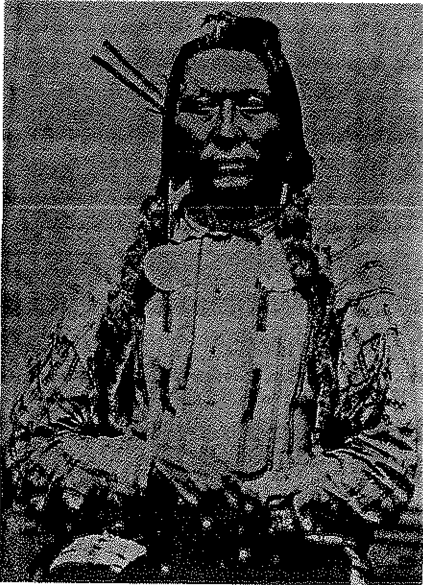
Travelling in sleighs and dragging a seven-pounder artillery piece, Crozier's fifty-five NWMP men and forty-three Prince Albert volunteers were forced to follow a narrow trail through the sticky, deep, wet snow. About three kilometres from Duck Lake, Crozier's party halted in what one policeman called "a wretched position, in an exposed hollow, surrounded on three sides by scrubby bush." Concealed in the trees on the hillsides were several hundred Métis, led by Gabriel Dumont, Riel's deputy and military commander.

Two Natives approached Crozier and his Métis intepreter, Joe McKay. After a brief discussion, Crozier realized that his force was in a vulnerable position and turned to withdraw. As he did so, one of the Native men tried to seize Crozier's pistol. As the two struggled, McKay shot the man. McKay's shot was answered by deadly fire from the Métis positions less than 150 m away. The Battle of Duck Lake lasted less than thirty minutes. When the firing ceased, twelve of Crozier's men lay dead or dying. A similar number, including Crozier himself, were wounded.

Four Métis and one Indian were killed at Duck Lake; three were wounded, including Gabriel Dumont whose scalp was grazed by a bullet. Without their commander, the Métis forces were reluctant to pursue the retreating NWMP force. Louis Riel, who had watched the battle from a hillside armed only with a crucifix, refused to order the Métis to press their advantage. Had he done so, Crozier's ill-advised raid might have been a greater failure than it was.

The events of Duck Lake forced Louis Riel to change his strategy. Riel had hoped that the threat of force, combined with negotiations, would yield the results the Métis were seeking. This strategy had worked well for the Métis at Red River in 1869-1870, but fifteen years later it was doomed to failure. The telegraph and railway allowed the Canadian government to respond quickly to the threats and they were not willing to negotiate. A force of 260 militiamen was dispatched from Winnipeg on March 27, 1885. Using the newly-constructed CPR line, they reached the Duke Lake area the following day.

The Métis victory over Crozier's forces strengthened their cause. It also brought the active support of Natives led by the Cree leaders



Big Bear

Big Bear and Poundmaker, who had earlier been reluctant to join the rebellion. On March 29, Poundmaker marched on the small community of Battleford seeking food. The 600 residents of the town took refuge in the police fort. From there, they watched as the Cree leaders spoke with the Hudson's Bay trader, William McKay. The Cree promised to leave if they were given food, clothing and ammunition, but McKay was unable to obtain government approval to meet their demands. Frustrated, the Cree looted the town, out of range of the NWMP rifles. Nearby farms and homesteads were attacked and burned, and two settlers were killed. The rebels occupied Battleford for almost a month before abandoning it to an advancing party of Canadian militia led by Colonel William Otter.

Even less fortunate was the small settlement of Frog Lake. There, on April 2, 1885, a party of Cree led by Big Bear's war chief, Wandering Spirit, attacked during a mass at the Frog Lake mission. They seized food and attempted to lead the settlers off as hostages. The local Indian Agent, Thomas Quinn, resisted and was shot dead. Two Catholic priests and nine settlers also were killed. The rest of the settlers were taken prisoner.

The Cree then besieged Fort Pitt, a small NWMP post on the banks of the Saskatchewan River. Two weeks after the Frog Lake killings, Fort Pitt was abandoned to the Cree. It would be the last major victory for the Indian and Métis rebels, as news of the rebellion had reached Ottawa swiftly along the recently strung telegraph lines. A large militia force of 5000 men was being assembled in Ontario and Quebec. Van Horne approached the government, offering to move these men and their equipment to the West.

Four sections of the railway north of Lake Superior, totalling 140 km, were unfinished. Men had to march and equipment be moved by horsedrawn sled over these sections. Nevertheless, Van Horne was able to move the troops from Ottawa to the Prairies in less than five days. By mid-April, all of the troops had reached their jumping off points at Qu'Appelle, Swift Current and Calgary.

The value of the newly arrived troops was immediately known. The Métis came close to winning the Battle of Fish Creek on April 24, when Gabriel Dumont and 150 of his men surprised Major General Frederick Middleton's column of Canadian Militia. The Métis held the upper hand killing ten militiamen and wounding forty-three others, but withdrew when reinforcements arrived to relieve Middleton's troops.

On May 2, Poundmaker and his Cree warriors scored one final victory against the militia at Cut Knife Hill, just west of Battleford.

Anxious to end the conflict with the Canadian government, however, Poundmaker restrained his warriors and kept them from wiping out the retreating troops.

On May 12, 1885, following a four-day assault on their headquarters at Batoche, the Métis rebels were convincingly defeated. Before Batoche fell, both Riel and Gabriel Dumont escaped. Dumont fled to exile in the United States. There, he built for himself a career as one of the attractions of Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show. Riel surrendered to two NWMP scouts two days after the fall of Batoche. He was taken to Regina to await trial on charges of leading an armed rebellion against the government of Canada. On hearing of the defeat of the Métis at Batoche and the capture of Riel, Poundmaker surrendered to the soldiers on May 24, 1885.

Following an intense but inconclusive battle at Frenchman's Butte (with a militia force led by Sam Steele), Big Bear withdrew from the rebellion when he heard of Poundmaker's surrender. His Cree warriors, led by Wandering Spirit, continued to hold their hostages for another month as they moved north across the Prairies and into the woodlands, trying to avoid the soldiers searching for them. Big Bear and his people finally surrendered to the NWMP on July 2, 1885, at Fort Carlton. The North West Rebellion was over.

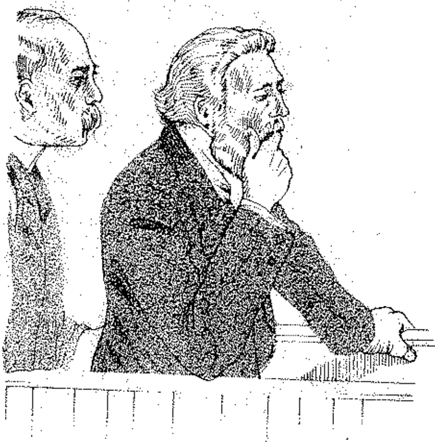
The railway had played a major part in the defeat of the rebels. Had troops from eastern Canada not reached the Prairies swiftly, the rebels might well have won. The North West Rebellion had proved to Ottawa the importance of the rail link to western Canada. In return, the government agreed to provide the financing needed to complete the railway to the Pacific.

1. In your opinion, who started the Rebellion of 1885? Give reasons for your opinion.
2. What role did the railway play in the Rebellion of 1885?
3. Suppose the Métis and Indian forces had been able to push back the NWMP and the militia. What do you think the government would have done then? What would the rebels have done?

THE JURY JUDGES RIEL

After the trial and execution of Louis Riel, members of the jury that had convicted him made these comments:

> We, on the jury, recommended mercy. The prisoner was guilty and we could not excuse his acts. But, at the same time, we felt that the government had not done its duty. It did nothing about the grievances of the Métis. If it had, there would never have been a second Riel Rebellion. We strongly condemned the dawdling of Macdonald and his government. If they had been on trial as accessories, the jury would have shown them little mercy. We tried Louis Riel for treason, but he was executed for the murder of Thomas Scott.



Riel at his trial in 1885.

The Trial of Louis Riel

While the shooting had stopped, the aftermath of rebellion had yet to be played out. Dozens of Cree and Métis were tried for crimes related to the rebellion. Eleven Cree were sentenced to death; eight, including Wandering Spirit, were sent to the gallows in the NWMP barracks yard at Battleford, and three had their sentences commuted to prison terms. Five other Cree were jailed for treason, among them Poundmaker and Big Bear, who each spent two years of their three-year sentences in the Stoney Mountain Penitentiary. Within six months of leaving jail both would die, old and broken men. Eighteen Métis were convicted of treason and given sentences of one to seven years.

One trial, that of Louis Riel, caught the attention of the nation. Although Riel was charged with treason resulting from the Rebellion of 1885, many Canadians felt he was really on trial for the 1870 rebellion in which Thomas Scott had died. English-speaking Protestants demanded that Riel be convicted and executed. Many Quebeckers saw Riel as a hero, who had simply been fighting to defend the rights of French-speaking Catholics. A Riel Defence Committee was set up in Quebec. Money raised by the committee was used to hire three Quebec lawyers to defend the Métis leader.

Riel's trial took place in a small, rented building in Regina. The makeshift courtroom was crowded on the afternoon of July 20, 1885, as it began. Newspaper reporters from all over Canada had gathered to observe the trial. Their stories, sent by telegraph, would appear in newspapers of eastern Canada the next day. It was a trial that fascinated the public, not only because of the crimes of which Riel was accused, but also because of the complex nature of his personality.

Riel's lawyers hoped to win an acquittal using a defence based on the Métis leader's apparent madness. They urged Riel to plead not guilty by reason of insanity. But Riel undermined this defence by making an impassioned speech insisting that he was sane. The Métis leader did not wish to see his mission and his struggle dismissed as the actions of a madman. Riel told the judge and jury that he had led his people into rebellion only because the Canadian government had done nothing to help the Métis. He cried out to the crowded courtroom that he would rather die than see his actions dismissed as those of an insane man.

Louis Riel, a bilingual, Catholic Métis was tried before a judge and jury who were all white, English-speaking Protestants. The jury took only one hour and twenty minutes to find Riel guilty of treason. The jurors added a recommendation for mercy to their verdict. This recommendation was ignored by Judge Hugh Richardson who sentenced Riel to be hanged on September 18, 1885. The execution was twice delayed while the sentence was appealed. Many Canadians, both French- and English-speaking, appealed to

Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald to intervene. Macdonald replied that he found the sentence "satisfactory," saying "He shall hang though every dog in Quebec bark in his favour." Finally, on November 16, 1885, Louis Riel went calmly to his death on the gallows in the Regina police barracks.

News of Riel's execution quickly reached Montreal. The night of his death, 400 students marched through the streets of the city. They carried red, white and blue flags draped in black. As they marched, they sang *La Marseillaise*, the anthem of the French Revolution. The protest marchers stopped only once, to burn a straw dummy dressed as Sir John A. Macdonald.

Quebec's French language newspapers all carried angry editorials denouncing Riel's execution. They accused the Conservatives of betraying the rights of all French-speaking Canadians. Many Montrealers agreed with these sentiments. The following Sunday, 40 000 Montrealers gathered in the Champs de Mars at a mass meeting to protest Riel's death. There, they heard thirty prominent speakers defend Riel and the cause he had died for. Wilfrid Laurier, the future prime minister, told the crowd "If I had been on the banks of the Saskatchewan, I would have shouldered my musket too." Honoré Mercier, another speaker, drew wild cheers as he opened

THE LEGACY OF RIEL

The North West Rebellion of 1885, combined with the execution of Thomas Scott during the earlier Red River Rebellion of 1869-1870, would leave many bad feelings, specifically toward the Métis and more generally toward Catholics and the French language. In 1890, the government of Manitoba created an English-only school system, without making any provision for separate schools. The move, which had the support of Ontario Conservatives, badly split the federal government of the day. Prime Minister Macdonald recognized that the Manitoba government's action was in violation of the terms of the Manitoba Act, but he felt powerless to stop it.

Following only five years after the execution of Riel, the Manitoba schools question added to deepening divisions between French- and English-speaking Canadians, leaving wounds that have endured to the present. Macdonald and his Conservative Party were seen to be the supporters of English-speaking Protestants in Canada. The Manitoba schools question saw the people of Quebec swing their support strongly to the Liberals led by Wilfrid Laurier. The Conservatives were defeated in the 1896 federal election. In 1979, and again in 1985, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that any Manitoba laws that did not conform to the terms and conditions of the Manitoba Act of 1870 were unconstitutional.