

President's Message

May 5, 2013

Our recent Supreme Court MMF Land Claim was a hard-won struggle by the Metis People. It has its roots in the turbulent time of 1869-70. At that time, the Metis were Canada's negotiating partners in Confederation and, with the agreement by the Metis to lay down our arms, Manitoba became a province and Louis Riel became a Father of Confederation.

Each year on May 12th Manitobans mark what is known as Manitoba Day. Unfortunately, it appears that a vast majority is unaware of this special date. Not surprising, given the lack of recognition of the Metis role in the founding of our province and inadequate teaching of our history, very few Manitobans know the significance behind the naming of the day.

The Metis have been called the Forgotten People. Our MMF Land Claim presented evidence of the events leading to the creation of Manitoba and the dark times that followed. This is a period that we can rightly call our Forgotten History. Of course, we never forgot, and in court we presented the history Canada and Manitoba chose to ignore. The Supreme Court recognized the truth of our history and vindicated our People's 140-year-old struggle for justice.

To summarize this history, in 1869 to protect our rights, lands and families, a Metis National Committee was formed followed by the Metis Provisional Government. A list of rights was created as the basis for agreement and a negotiating committee sent to Ottawa. Following the negotiations between Father Noel Ritchot, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, and Sir George-Étienne Cartier, the Manitoba Act was passed and received Royal Assent on May 12, 1870.

Just over a month later on June 24, the Legislative Assembly of Assiniboia ratified the Manitoba Act. Following ratification, Manitoba became a province. Leading the Assembly, President Louis Riel was, in effect, Manitoba's first Premier. For generations, his critical role was omitted from the official history. Pictures of Louis Riel and his Assembly now grace the halls of the Manitoba Legislature.

This Forgotten History included the solemn promise made in the Manitoba Act to provide 1.4 million acres of land to our children to give them a head start before being swamped by newcomers. Forgotten, or possibly ignored, by most Manitobans is that this promise was not kept. The Metis children were swindled and their land stolen. In a fearful reign of terror, the Metis were assaulted, murdered, displaced and dispersed throughout and beyond our Homeland.

As I had written back on Riel Day that Manitoba's entry into Canada's Confederation is a legacy from Louis Riel and our Ancestors. For generations, Confederation has been protected and strengthened at home and abroad with the spirit of freedom and

democracy by the Metis People. This history is a gift that we must pass to our children and to future generations.

At Manitoba's Confederation, Upper Fort Garry was the Metis Provisional Government and Assembly's administration center. It is fitting that this downtown Winnipeg site be used to ensure our history is shared with Manitobans, Canadians, and visitors from around the world. Towards this we are working in partnership with the Friends of Upper Fort Garry to build the Metis National Heritage Centre.

The Louis Riel Institute, carrying our education mandate, will continue to be instrumental in integrating our history into Manitoba's grade school and university curriculums. Some say that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. The Metis experience of dispossession of our lands and our treatment as second-class citizens must never be forgotten and never happen again.

It has also been said that a People who never look back to their Ancestors will not look forward to the future. We must always remember where we come from. Our Ancestors, as mothers and fathers, and as children taught us about faith, hard work, determination, and loyalty to family, community and nation. These are the qualities that will give us the strength to overcome future challenges and seize opportunities.

The Metis are hard working taxpayers both as entrepreneurs and employees. We contribute to the strength of Manitoba's economy and society as teachers, engineers, contractors, fishers, business owners, doctors, nurses, and hundreds of other livelihoods. We have our roots here. We are not going anywhere. We will continue to live in and build this great province we once created.

I give best wishes to our family, friends, and neighbours who are sick or shut in. I also pray for those who have passed on and offer my condolences to their loved ones.

Meeqwetch.