

President's Message

February 11, 2016

On Monday, February 15th everyone will celebrate Louis Riel Day here in Manitoba. This is the first of two important annual days of remembrance for our province as we acknowledge our great Métis leader, Louis Riel.

Riel was a visionary who worked to defend the rights of all people – Metis, First Nations, English and French. It was his provisional government's list of rights that formed the framework for the Manitoba Act (1870) – Canada's Treaty with the Metis – that led to the creation of the province of Manitoba and joined it to Canada in Confederation. Despite his vision and passion for a province that protected and respected all people, he was condemned a criminal and hanged.

Riel was wrongly accused, and he was tried under an old British law for treason. He was brought to Regina, then a part of the Northwest Territories. He was accused of treason – a crime punishable by death under British law. He should have been tried under Canadian law, but the government of the day wanted him dead. Riel was sent to be tried under laws that would ensure his death. This is nothing short of judicial murder.

His 1885 death was during the dark period of oppression for the Metis that followed the Reign of Terror of 1870. For years we were maligned, shunned and marginalized. We were denied the rights assured by our Treaty with Canada. The wrongs done against the Metis Nation has taken over a 100 years to correct. We never gave up defending our Nation. As predicted by Riel, our people rose again and are now taking their rightful place in history, living in the present for a better future.

I am thankful that the province of Manitoba is finally realizing how the Metis protected and stood for all people. We still stand for fairness, respect, democracy and strength in diversity. Riel did not die in vain. The work of the MMF, guided by our Metis Elders, has realized many of the dreams and aspirations of Riel and those who stood with him. Our time has come.

This Louis Riel Day I encourage you to sit down with your family and talk about our Metis Heritage. The Days of Shame are gone. Metis – young and old – can lift high their heads and rejoice in their Metis Pride. Our great leader, Louis Riel, the Founder of Manitoba is deserving of the recognition.

Riel stood for the Metis and for others. He stood for family. It is fitting that the province of Manitoba, the MMF, our Metis Citizens and our Youth celebrate on this family day. The MMF will continue to ensure Riel is recognized for his leadership and that the Metis rightly receive the recognition we deserve as the Founders of Manitoba and Canada's Negotiating Partner in Confederation.

Remember, the Metis founded a beautiful province built on the strong values of family, fairness, equality and democracy. Spend time with your family this Louis Riel Day – go for a sleigh ride, ice fishing, have a family gathering. Take the time to show each other just how important family is. The Metis are One Family, One Nation.

In closing, I offer my best wishes for those who are sick or shut-in. May they be blessed with healing, health, and peace. I pray and share my heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathies for all our neighbours, friends, and families who have lost loved ones.

Meeqwetch,