

9

A New Nation: The Métis

Sara and Ben were visiting Le Festival du Voyageur, a winter carnival that celebrates the life of the people who lived at the Red River settlement during the days of the fur trade. Many of the people who lived at the settlement were Métis, children of European men and Aboriginal women. The Métis made their living off the fur trade. They trapped and traded fur, and supplied items needed for the fur trade, like pemmican.

Sara ducked into a little cabin. Inside, a small fire was burning. The temperature in the cabin was warmer than it was outside, but just barely.

A park interpreter, dressed in a blue coat wrapped with a multi-coloured Métis sash, stood by the door. He was talking about the life of the Métis – as if he were one of them. Sara asked him why such a small fire was burning on such a cold day.

“This is how we built fires,” the interpreter answered. “We didn’t want to waste wood by making the fire larger than it needed to be. Most of the trees close to the fort had been chopped down to build homes and make fires. Every winter, we had to travel upstream, cut wood, pile it on the frozen river, and wait for the ice to melt to transport the wood

back to the fort. If we didn’t cut enough wood one winter, we would surely pay for it the next!”

Sara shivered and held her hands closer to the fire. It had been a lot of work back then just to cook and stay warm.

Still, Sara noticed, the Métis seemed to have found time for making things beautiful. Their clothing was colourful and combined European fabrics such as wool with



Figure 9.1 A Métis family on the prairie

traditional Aboriginal beading. Even the sash combined the Aboriginal craft of finger weaving with the European textile, wool.

As Sara and Ben wandered around the festival grounds, they learned the Métis also had time for fun. The music at the festival celebrated some of the traditional instruments of the Métis and the voyageurs such as fiddles and spoons and wooden boxes used as drums. The maple-syrup taffy, made by pouring boiled syrup into the snow and rolling it onto a stick, was as delicious as any candy Sara and Ben had ever tasted.

The Métis, they learned, was a unique culture, forged from the fur trade.

Origins of the Métis

When the Europeans first came to North America, almost all the newcomers were single and male. Most women they met were Cree, Ojibwa, or Saulteaux. Many of these European men married Aboriginal women. The men were young and lonely. The Aboriginal women they met could perform many useful tasks to make the Europeans' lives more comfortable. Marriage was also a way to build alliances with Aboriginal groups.

These people did not marry according to European customs. Few priests and ministers who performed marriages lived in North America. Instead, the couple married *à la façon du pays* – according to the “custom of the country.” The marriages



Figure 9.2 *A Man and His Wife Returning with a Load of Partridge*, a painting by W. Richards

were called “country marriages,” and wives became known as “country wives.”

The “country born” referred to children born to Aboriginal mothers and English-speaking fathers, often traders with the Hudson’s Bay Company. The term *Métis* referred to people descended from Aboriginal mothers and French-speaking fathers, often traders of the North West Company and their Aboriginal wives. Today, Métis refers to anyone of European and North American Aboriginal descent.

Many European men spoke fondly of their country wives, and they often had large families. However, some men left their country wives behind when they returned to Europe. Some husbands supported the wives and children they left behind, while

As you read, think about

- how the Métis people came to be
- where and how the Métis lived
- what threatened the Métis way of life
- what the Métis wanted

others did not. Some took their children to Europe to be educated.

Many men, however, decided to stay in North America with their families after their working contracts were over. Journal writer and fur trader Daniel Harmon wrote this about his country wife: “Our connection has been cemented by work and faith. We have wept together over the death of our children, and we have children still living who are dear to us both. How could I spend my days in the civilized world and leave my beloved children in the wilderness? And how could I tear them from a mother’s love and leave her to mourn over their absence?”

Most country wives helped their husbands adapt to a new way of life. Their hunting skills, their ability to sew moccasins and make snowshoes, and their understanding of Aboriginal customs aided their husbands’ careers. These women played an important role in the growth of the fur trade. Until recently, however, their stories were rarely mentioned in history textbooks.

Later, men brought women from Europe with them to their postings. Very few European women thrived in the way that country wives did, however.

The home guard

Just outside the walls of the forts on the Prairies were villages of Cree people. These Cree became known as the “home guard.” They hunted, trapped, and fished to supply food to the post, and they helped with other work.

Traditional Life

The Métis way of life combined both Aboriginal and European cultures. From the First Peoples, they took the skills necessary to live in the wilderness, prepare traditional medicines, and pass on oral traditions. From the Europeans, they took many tools and adapted them to the North American way of life. From both cultures, they inherited a love for storytelling, music, and dance. They spoke the languages of their fathers and of their mothers, and they learned the spiritual systems of both parents.

The semi-annual bison hunt was very important to the Métis. The bison hunt began as a means for Aboriginal peoples to obtain animal hides for clothing and shelter, bones for making tools, and meat to survive through the long, cold winters. By the early



Figure 9.3 Almost all parts of the bison were used by the Métis. Bison hides were used to make warm winter coats, like the one at right.

1800s, the Métis needed the bison hunt to make pemmican that they traded to the North West Company in return for goods essential to their survival.

The bison hunt

The Métis hunted bison very differently from their Aboriginal ancestors, who herded them over cliffs or corralled them into ravines. The Métis hunted herds of bison from the backs of galloping horses. At first, they used bows and arrows. Later, with the arrival of firearms, they used rifles.

The bison hunt was always an important event. By the middle of the 19th century, however, it had become a huge event in which hundreds, and, sometimes, thousands of people gathered. In 1840, for example, the hunt at Red River was attended by 620 men, 650 women, and 360 children. With them they brought 586 oxen, 655 cart horses, and 403 horses suitable for running the bison. According to the census of that year, fully a third of those living in the settlement attended the hunt. Spring hunts lasted for up to three months. In the fall, smaller hunts were held. The meat from these hunts – 500 000 kilograms or more – was dried for pemmican, and the skins were made into clothing.

To keep order during these large gatherings, the Métis made a series of laws that governed the hunt. A president was elected, and captains and policemen selected by the president ensured that the rules of the hunt were followed.



Figure 9.4 Each day after the hunt, bison meat was dried on wooden racks.

Rules of the Hunt

1. No buffalo to be run on the Sabbath-Day.
2. No party to fork off, lag behind, or go before, without permission.
3. No person or party to run buffalo before the general order.
4. Every captain with his men, in turn, to patrol the camp, and keep guard.
5. For the first trespass against these laws, the offender to have his saddle and bridle cut up.
6. For the second offence, the coat to be taken off the offender's back, and be cut up.
7. For the third offence, the offender to be flogged.
8. Any person **convicted** of theft, even to the value of a sinew, to be brought to the middle of the camp, and the crier to call out his or her name three times, adding the word "Thief," at each time.

Paul Kane (1810–1871), a painter and traveller, described the bison hunt in his journal, which was later published (see box at right).

We all walked our horses towards the herd. By the time we had gone about 200 yards [183 metres], the herd perceived us, and started off in the opposite direction at the top of their speed. We put our horses to full gallop, and in 20 minutes were in their midst.

The scene now became one of intense excitement; the huge bulls thundering over the plain in headlong confusion, while the fearless hunters rode recklessly in their

midst, keeping up an incessant fire at but a few yards' distance from their victims. Upon the fall of each buffalo, the successful hunter merely threw some article of his apparel – often carried by him solely for that purpose – to denote his own prey, and then rushed on to another.*

The chase continued over an area of five or six square miles [13 to 16 square kilometres], where might be seen the dead and dying buffaloes, to the number of 500. In the meantime, my horse, which had started at a good run, was suddenly confronted by a large bull. He was taken by surprise and



Figure 9.5 When Paul Kane was on the Plains, he took part in a bison hunt. This painting by Kane captures some of the activity during the hunt.

sprung to one side, getting his foot into a badger hold. I was thrown over his head with such violence that I was completely stunned, but soon recovered my recollection. Some of the men caught my horse and I was speedily remounted, and soon saw reason to congratulate myself on my good fortune, for I found a man who had been thrown in a similar way, lying a short distance from me quite senseless, in which state he was carried back to the camp.

I again joined in the pursuit; and coming up with a large bull, had the satisfaction of bringing him down at the first fire. Excited by my success, I threw down my cap and galloping on, soon put a bullet through another enormous animal. He did not fall, but stopped and faced me, pawing the earth, bellowing and glaring savagely at me. The blood was streaming from his mouth, and I thought he would soon drop. I could not resist the desire of making a sketch. I dismounted and had just commenced when he made a dash at me. I had hardly time to spring on my horse and get away from him, leaving my gun and everything else behind.

When he came up to where I had been standing, he turned over the articles I had dropped, pawing fiercely as he tossed them about, and then retreated towards the herd. I recovered my gun and soon planted another shot in him; and this time he remained on his legs long enough for me to make a sketch. This done I returned with it to the camp, carrying the tongues of the animals I had killed, according to the custom, as trophies of my success as a hunter.

* Early travellers misidentified bison as buffalo. This misidentification continues today.

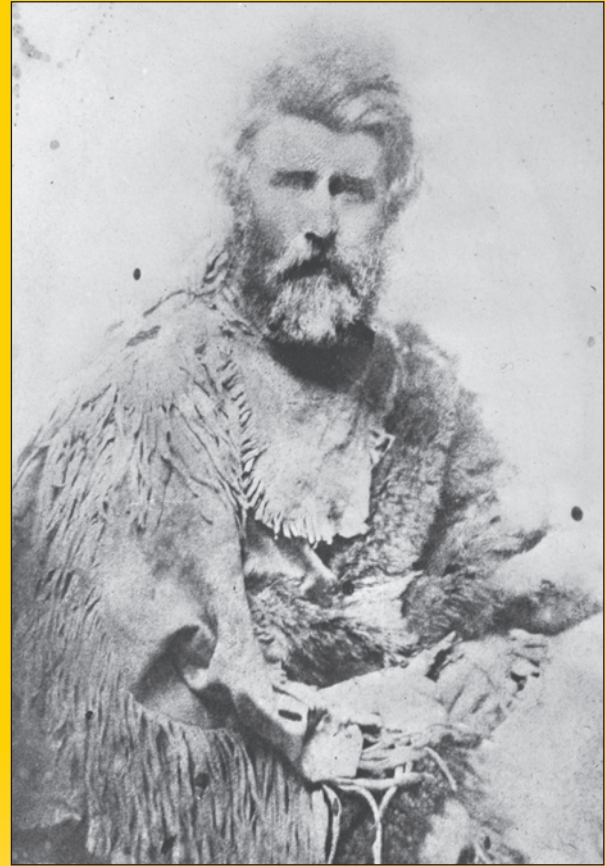


Figure 9.6 Paul Kane

Wandering artist

Paul Kane (1810–1871) was born in Ireland and came to Canada as a child. He learned to draw and paint as a child in Toronto, Ontario. As a young man, he set out on a two-and-a-half year adventure west, to the Great Lakes, Prairies, and West Coast, taking with him his notebooks, pencils, and paints. His pictures of early Aboriginal life and plant life showed North America before it became changed by European contact. His illustrated book of his travels, *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America*, was a bestseller. Kane can be compared to a modern-day photojournalist. In the days before photography, Kane's paintings and writings were important documents of North American life.

Food

Pemmican. As you have read, pemmican was the staple food of the fur traders and voyageurs. Sir John Franklin (see p. 128) described pemmican in the following way: “A very little of this rich, solid food satisfies one’s appetite. It is eaten, not because it tastes good, for it does not, but to live. It is almost like eating tallow candles. One must have a sharp appetite to eat it the way it is usually prepared.”

Pemmican was made by cutting bison meat (or meat from deer, moose, or other large animal) into long thin strips and letting the strips dry in the sun. In later years, the meat was dried over a small fire burning under the rack of meat. When the meat was dry, it was pounded into a granular powder and put into hide bags. Hot bison fat was poured into the powder and mixed well. The bags were then sewn shut and pressed into flat bundles and left to cool. If wild berries were available, they were added to the mixture to give it flavour.

Bannock. Like pemmican, bannock, a type of bread, was a staple of fur traders and voyageurs. Bannock was easy to transport, easy to prepare, and could last a long time without spoiling. Traditionally, bannock was cooked several ways. In one method, the dough was buried in hot sand close to the fire. When the dough was cooked, the sand was brushed off, and the bannock was eaten. Another method was to form the dough onto a stick and hold it over a fire. Settlers introduced baking powder and cooked the dough in cast iron pans. Bannock could then be cooked on a stove, and the baking powder made it fluffier.

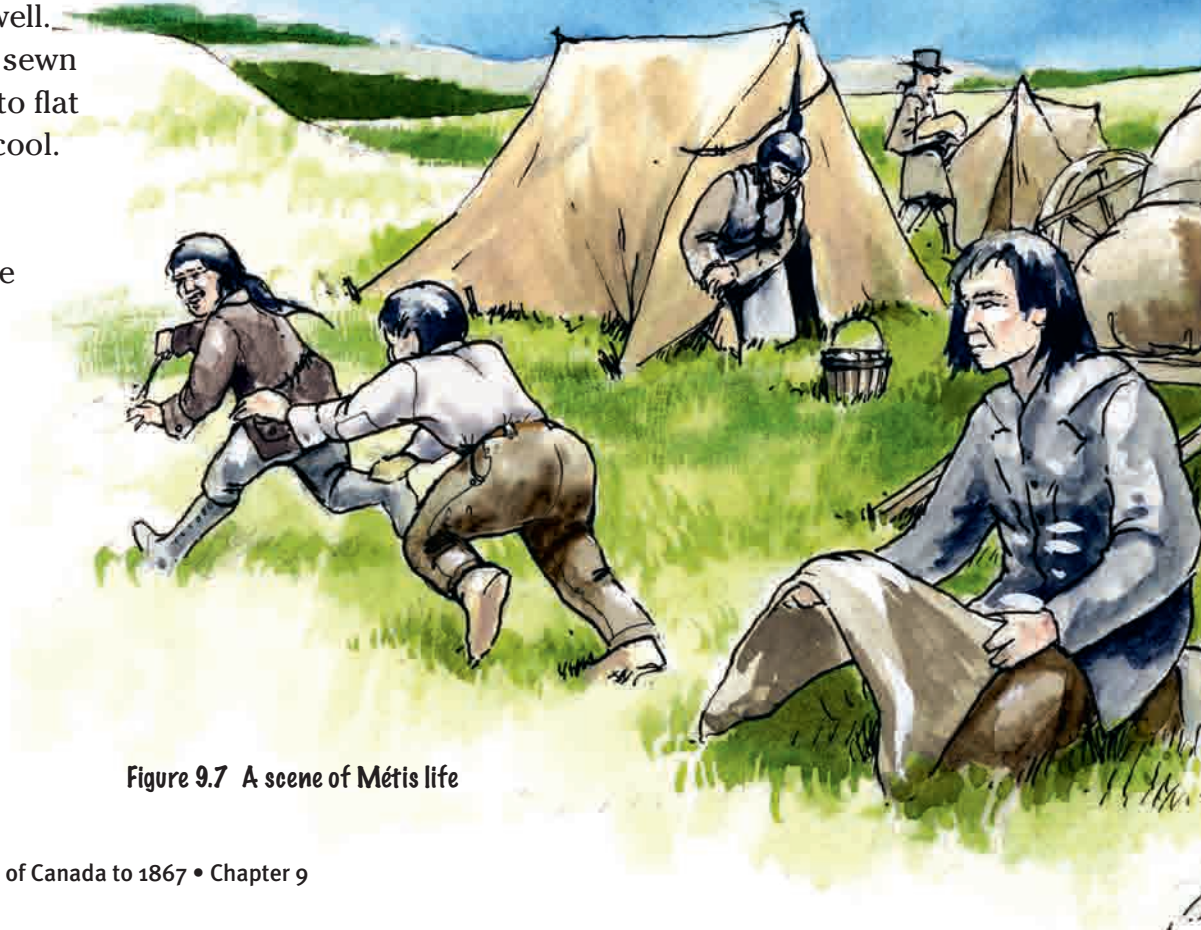
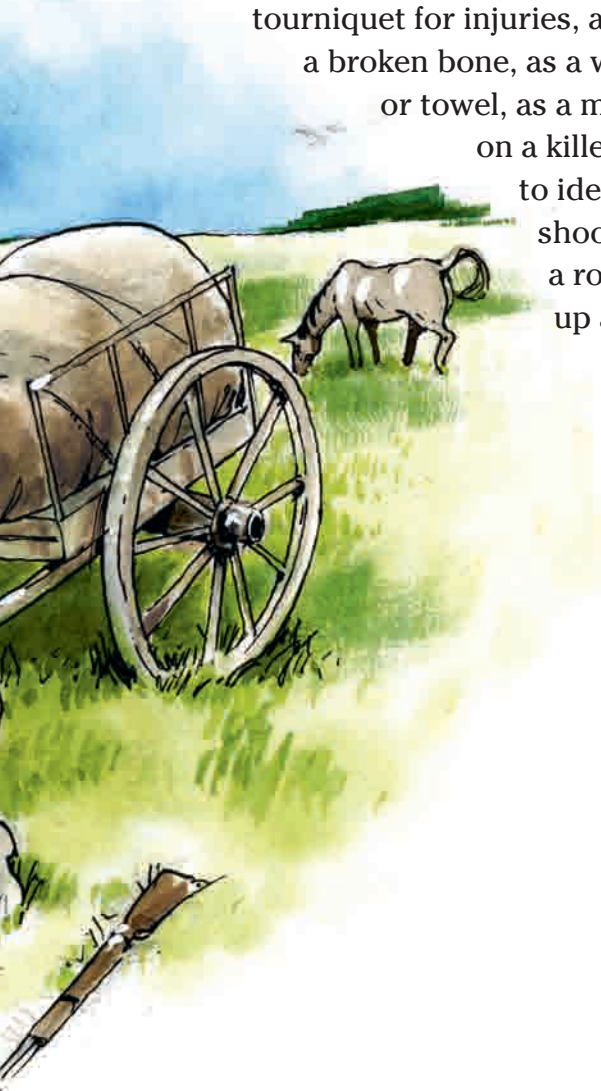


Figure 9.7 A scene of Métis life

Clothing

Métis clothing combined both Aboriginal and European heritage. Women wore European-style dresses, and moccasins decorated with floral beadwork unique to the Métis. Men wore a coat with a hood, and pants with an opening at the hip. Their clothes were often made of wool, with flannel or bright cotton shirts. They wore leggings decorated with beadwork on their shins, moccasins, and a sash.

Traditionally, the sash was tied at the waist to hold a coat closed. Its fringed ends and the threads in the fringe could be used as an emergency sewing kit. The sash itself had many other uses; for example, as a support to the back for lifting, as a tourniquet for injuries, as a wrap for a broken bone, as a washcloth or towel, as a marker left on a killed bison to identify the shooter, or as a rope to tie up a canoe.



Red River cart

The two-wheeled Red River cart, invented by the Métis, was used for transporting goods on land. The two wheels were up to two metres in diameter each. These large wheels enabled the cart to roll over bumps without tipping and to go through mud without getting stuck. The wheels could be removed and strapped to the bottom of the cart so that it could float across a river. The cart was light, sturdy, and easy to make and repair. The carts were extremely noisy because the wheel axles could not be greased. Trails were usually very dusty. Grease on the axles would become coated with sand, causing the wheels to stick. Some people said that every cart had its own special squeal. The carts were especially helpful for hauling meat after bison hunts – a horse or ox could pull the cart and a 450-kilogram load. The Hudson’s Bay Company used Red River carts as well, for travelling to St. Paul, Minnesota, and to Fort Edmonton.

Michif

Many Métis children grew up speaking two languages – French and Cree. In time, these languages evolved into a completely new language called “Michif.” Michif is a blend of French nouns, Cree verbs, and some vocabulary from languages such as Saulteaux and Dene. Today, Michif is an endangered language, spoken by less than a thousand people. Some Michif words are *lī blōwân* (blueberries), *nimâmâ* (mother), and *moshkwa* (bear).

The term *Michif* may also refer to the Métis people.

Arrival of the Selkirk Settlers

Since the late 1700s, Lord Selkirk had been looking for a place where poor, homeless families from Ireland and Scotland could resettle. He decided the Red River area in Rupert's Land looked like a good place to start an agricultural settlement. To fulfill his dream, Lord Selkirk became a shareholder in the Hudson's Bay Company. He convinced the company to grant him approximately

300 000 square kilometres of land in Rupert's Land (see map, p. 151). In return, Selkirk promised he would create a settlement and supply employees of the Hudson's Bay Company with servants from Scotland and Ireland.

The North West Company traders and the Métis were not happy when they learned about Selkirk's plans for a colony at Red River.



Figure 9.8 Thomas Douglas, the Fifth Earl of Selkirk (1771–1820) was born in Scotland, and became earl after the death of his father in 1799. As a young man, Lord Selkirk had been shocked to see the farmers of the Scottish Highlands uprooted from their homes. He became a fervent supporter of emigration, and thought that the Highlanders would adapt well to the rigours of North America. He started a colony in Prince Edward Island in 1803, and by 1811, his plans for an agricultural settlement at Red River were well under way. Selkirk did not foresee the hardships that his settlers would face, nor the anger of the Métis at Red River. Before he died, he spoke sadly of the settlement as a place “where we had the prospect of doing so much good.”

Many Métis families were already living on land he claimed for the settlement. As well, the settlement was to run alongside the North West Company's most profitable trade route. Settlement would ruin the fur trade by cutting Métis off from their fur-trading grounds farther west. Another great worry was that settlement land included territory traditionally used in the bison hunts. The Nor'Westers and Métis tried their best to make Lord Selkirk reconsider. They argued that the Red River area was too isolated. They tried to convince him that travelling there from the east was too difficult. They also argued that produce would go bad on long trips east, south, and west.

Lord Selkirk refused to listen to them. In 1812, the first settlers arrived from Scotland. Under the leadership of Governor Miles Macdonell, they set up camp close to the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers (present-day downtown Winnipeg). There, they prepared for another group of settlers – 120 men with women and children – who arrived with sheep, seeds for planting, and not much else.

The colony was doomed from the start. The long trek made it impossible for the settlers to bring farm tools. Most did not even have a plough. They could plant only small gardens. They had to hunt and fish for most of their food. During the winter, the settlers struggled to get enough food, and they were forced to eat their sheep. The Nor'Westers and the Métis, who resented the arrival of these settlers, did nothing to help them. The *Saulteaux* who lived nearby, however, helped them enough to keep them from starving to death.



Figure 9.9 The Selkirk settlers began to arrive at the Red River settlement.

The Pemmican Wars

Miles Macdonell, the governor, wondered why his settlers were going hungry, when so much bison meat was available as pemmican. When he found out that the Métis were sending almost all of the pemmican to far-ranging posts of the North West Company, he issued the Pemmican Proclamation. This stated that no food could be exported from the colony. The Métis were very upset, because they depended on making and selling pemmican to the fur traders to earn a living.

Macdonell also demanded that all North West Company employees in Rupert's Land leave their forts within six months. The Nor'Westers were angry. They decided to do all they could to end Selkirk's colony:

- They persuaded many of Selkirk's colonists to leave for **Upper Canada** by offering them free land and free transportation.
- They got the Métis to harass the settlers.
- They arrested Miles Macdonell for "Illegal Pemmican Seizure" and sent him back to Montreal for a trial, leaving the colony without a leader.

Newcomers



Jean Luc peeked out from behind the bushes. He saw a boy, about his age, and a younger girl. Their hair was red, and he imagined the sun would soon redden their thin faces, as well.

His own dark skin was used to the sun, and his hair was black. He was sturdy and well fed on his mother's garden and the meat from the bison his father hunted each year. He reached in his pocket and nibbled at the pemmican he almost always carried. Some days, he wandered far from his home while he played, and he didn't always want to return home for lunch.

As he ate, he saw the boy and girl eyeing his food. He could tell they wanted to try some, but were afraid to approach.

"Voulez-vous manger mon pemmican?" he asked. They didn't respond. He realized they couldn't understand him. He held out his pemmican and offered it to them, showing them that they could take it. He knew that there was more food for him at home, and these children looked hungry.

He decided that they must be with the people Lord Selkirk was bringing to the settlement. His father was against the new settlement. He was worried that the bison hunt would be ruined. His father sounded angry when he talked about the settlers, and Jean Luc had wished that they would leave.

But these strangers seemed nice, and it was hard for Jean Luc to imagine that they would cause problems. They said "thank you"



Figure 9.10

many times over, and Jean Luc knew that it meant *merci*. Soon they traded words while gesturing. They started laughing at each other's pronunciations.

"Sky."

"Ciel."

"Grass."

"Herbe."

"Feet."

"Pieds."

It was time to go. Jean Luc knew that his older brother would come looking for him any minute now, and he wanted to keep this meeting a secret. He wanted his new friends to understand that he needed to leave, and he hoped that they could play together again.

"A demain."

"Tomorrow."



Figure 9.11 Robert Semple (1777–1816) was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to Loyalist parents. Semple moved to England with his family during the American Revolution. He became a merchant and travelled throughout Europe, Africa, South America, and the Middle East. Semple wrote several books about his travels, and he even had a novel published. In 1815, he was appointed governor of the Hudson's Bay Company territories by Lord Selkirk.

The calm before the storm

By 1815, only 13 families remained in the Red River settlement, and they took refuge on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. Meanwhile, some Métis destroyed farms, trampled the fields, and burned buildings.

That fall, to create peace in the area, the Hudson's Bay Company and the Métis signed a treaty. According to the terms of the treaty, it sounded like the Hudson's Bay Company would never again try to establish a settlement at Red River. However, it was not long before Robert Semple, the new governor, arrived in Red River with another group of settlers.



Figure 9.12 LORD SELKIRK'S LAND. Present-day boundaries show the extent of land granted by the Hudson's Bay Company to Lord Selkirk, land that had traditionally been used by Métis.

Treaty between the Hudson's Bay Company and Métis, 1815

1. All Settlers to retire immediately from this river, and no appearance of a colony to remain.
2. Peace and amity to subsist between all parties, traders, Indians, and freemen, in future, throughout these two rivers, and on no account any person to be molested in his lawful pursuits.
3. The honourable Hudson's Bay Company will, as customary enter this river, if they think proper, from three to four of their former trading boats, and from four to five men per boat as usual.
4. Whatever former disturbance had taken place between both parties, that is to say, the honourable Hudson's Bay Company and the *Métis* of the Indian Territory, to be totally forgotten and not to be recalled by either party.
5. Every person retiring peaceable from this river immediately shall not be molested in their passage out.
6. No person passing the summer for the Hudson's Bay Company, shall remain in the buildings of the Company but shall retire to some other spot, where they will establish for the purpose of trade.

Signed

Cuthbert Grant, Bostonais Pangman,
Wm. Shaw, Bonhomme Montour, The Four
Chiefs of the *Métis*, James Sutherland,
James White

Red River Indian Territory, Forks, Red River,
25 June, 1815.

The Rise of the Métis

Tensions were growing between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. The Hudson's Bay Company was still interested in settling the land around the Red and Assiniboine rivers. The North West Company wanted to keep the land for fur trading and hunting. In the spring of 1816, the Hudson's Bay Company captured Fort Gibraltar, the stronghold of the North West Company. The North West Company answered back



Figure 9.14 SITES OF CONFLICT BETWEEN NWC AND HBC

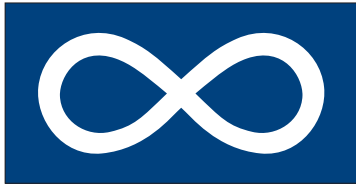
by capturing Brandon House. Some of the North West Company men then marched to Fort Douglas.



Figure 9.13 At the Battle of Seven Oaks, Métis supporters of the North West Company fought with the settlers of Red River.

The Battle of Seven Oaks

Governor Robert Semple had ignored warnings about the Métis' concerns. As the Métis approached the fort on June 19, 1816, he went out to talk with them. They met at Seven Oaks, which the Métis called the "Frog Plain" because so many frogs lived there. After a brief conversation, fighting broke out between Semple and his group of



settlers and the Métis, led by Cuthbert Grant. The Métis were the better **marksmen**.

Figure 9.15 The Métis created their own flag in 1815, just before the Battle of Seven Oaks. The infinity symbol represents the joining together of Aboriginal and European cultures into a single people.

They were used to shooting bison while riding horses. They were also more experienced fighters. When the fighting ended, 21 settlers, including Semple, were dead. One Métis had been killed.

The leaders of the Métis were sent to Upper Canada to stand trial for Seven Oaks, but no one was ever convicted. For the next five years, the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company engaged in many fights as each struggled for control of the territory. A Royal Proclamation called it "open warfare in the Indian Territories." It was a time of "anything goes." Young beavers were trapped, liquor was used in ever-increasing quantities, and employees and supporters of both companies fought and killed each other, and captured forts.

Bard of the Métis

Pierre Falcon, a Métis poet, composed a song about the battle at Seven Oaks. Here are the first two verses, in French, as he wrote it, and an English translation.

Voulez-vous écouter chanter
Une chanson de vérité?
Le dix-neuf de juin, la band' des Bois-Brûlés
Sont arrivés comm' des braves guerriers.

En arrivant à la Grenouillère
Nous avons fait trois prisonniers;
Trois prisonniers des Arkanys
Qui sont ici pour piller not' pays.

Would you like to hear me sing
Of a true and recent thing?
It was June nineteen, the band of Bois-Brûlés
Arrived that day.

Oh the brave warriors they!
We took three foreigners prisoners when
We came to the place called Frog, Frog Plain.
They were men who'd come from Orkney
Who'd come, you see,
To rob our country.

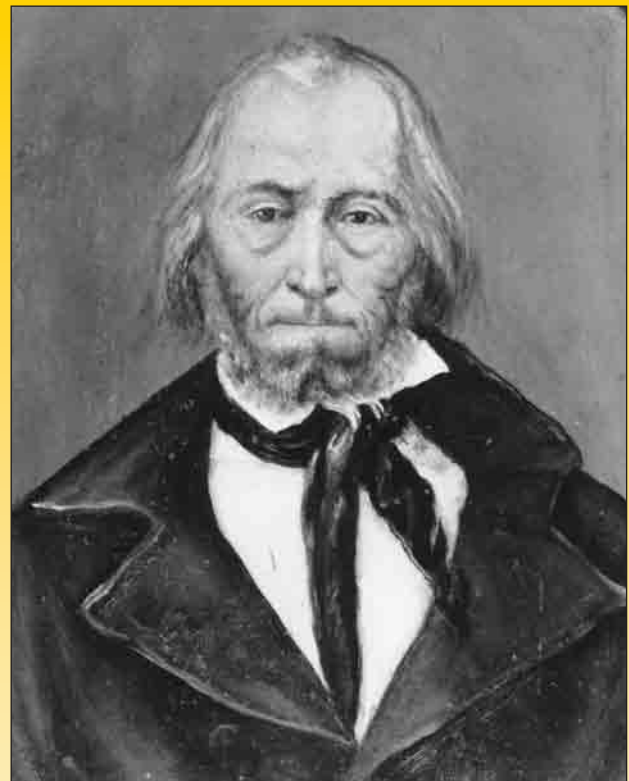


Figure 9.16 Pierre Falcon

The Enemies Unite

By 1820, profits were at an all-time low for both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. The companies were struggling because of their constant fighting and the drop in demand for furs. Something had to be done.

In 1821, representatives of the two companies met at Fort William to discuss the terms of a **merger**. On March 26, they agreed to join together as one company. The Hudson's Bay Company had more money to see them through years of losses, and so the new company kept the name Hudson's Bay Company. It was now the largest trading company in the world. Many people were not happy with the merger, however.

- The new company had no competition.

Across the northern part of North America, the Hudson's Bay Company was the only company that bought pelts, and the only company that sold supplies. This meant it could pay less for fur and charge more for supplies.

- There were a lot of extra forts and traders. Forts needed to be closed and employees laid off.



Figure 9.17 Cuthbert Grant's father worked for the North West Company. His mother was Métis. When Cuthbert Grant (1793–1854) was only six, his father died. William McGillivray, the head of the North West Company, became his legal guardian and sent Cuthbert to Scotland for school. Cuthbert later rose through the ranks at the North West Company. In 1814, he was appointed the "Captain General" of the Métis at the Red River settlement. Sadly, his body lies buried under a Manitoba highway near the town that originally bore his name.

Scottish-born George Simpson was appointed governor of Rupert's Land and given the responsibility of making the Hudson's Bay Company profitable again. He crisscrossed the country, visiting every post and closing down the ones that were less efficient. He fired over half the work force, and he replaced canoes with York boats and even steamships wherever he could.

Because of George Simpson's cost cutting, many people who once worked for the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company returned to Europe. Most of those who stayed were married to country wives and had families. At the time, the Red River settlement was a perfect place for them to raise their families. There was little of the racism they would experience farther east.

Now that the fighting between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company had ended, the people of the Red River settlement enjoyed a time of relative peace. There were some conflicts over the bison hunt between the Métis and the

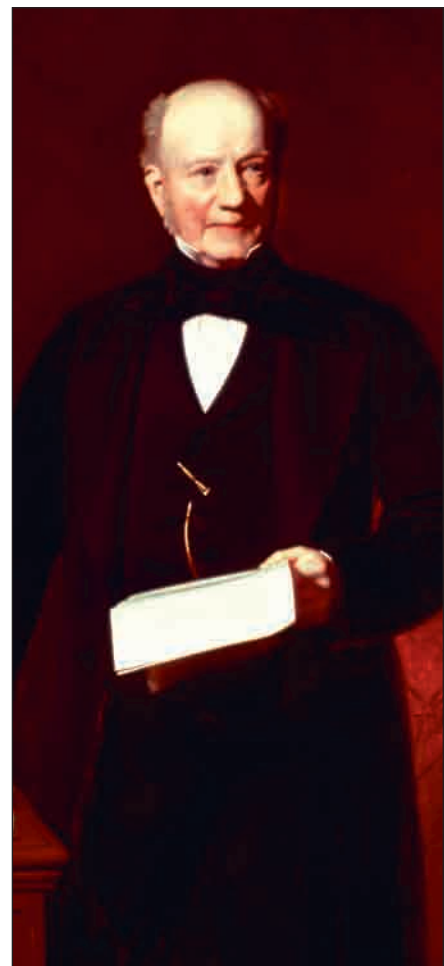


Figure 9.18 George Simpson was governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from the time of its merger in 1821 until 1856. He expanded the company and made it more profitable than ever. Knighted in 1841, he was often called "the Little Emperor."

Dakota, but most of the time, people were able to get along.

In 1828, the Hudson's Bay Company appointed Cuthbert Grant as Warden of the Plains. With this title, Grant was recognized as leader of the French-speaking Métis. Eleven years later, he was appointed to the Council of Assiniboia, which governed the Red River settlement.

Grant's Old Mill, located by Sturgeon Creek in Winnipeg, was built in 1829 by Cuthbert Grant. It was the first time anyone had used hydro power in Manitoba. Grant Avenue in Winnipeg, and Grantown (now the town of St. Francois Xavier) were also named for Cuthbert Grant.

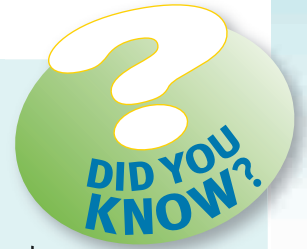


Figure 9.19 *View of the two Company Forts on the level prairie at Pembina on the Red River, by Peter Rindisbacher, shows the HBC's Fort Daer (left) and NWC's Fort Pembina (right). Fort Daer was originally established by Miles Macdonell and Red River colonists in 1812. Following the merger of the two companies in 1821, it was torn down, and its lumber was floated down the Red River to Fort Douglas.*

The Colony Grows

In the 1820s, the settlers at Red River faced many challenges – failed crops, grasshopper infestations, and, in 1826, the worst flooding on record. Despite these problems, the colony continued to grow. People farmed and hunted, and built churches, hospitals, and schools.

The Hudson's Bay Company was both the biggest employer in the area and the government. Not all of the people living

in Rupert's Land approved. To the Métis, the Hudson's Bay Company had too much power. The Métis were used to making decisions based on the consent of all, not the orders of one person. They were upset that they were not well represented in the colony's government.

The Hudson's Bay Company also wanted to keep its monopoly on the fur trade. By the 1840s, however, many Métis were trading with others.



Figure 9.20 Red River settlement c. 1820s. At left is St. Boniface Cathedral. At right is the Grey Nuns' Convent, which still stands. The oldest building in the city of Winnipeg, the convent is now home to the St. Boniface Museum.

Guillaume Sayer

In 1848, the Hudson's Bay Company had a chance to test if its monopoly was legal. That year, Guillaume Sayer, a Métis from the Red River settlement, was arrested for illegal trading. He had been trading directly with a merchant from North Dakota rather than with the Hudson's Bay Company. Sayer believed he should be able to trade with whomever he chose. The Métis and independent traders supported him.

During the trial, Sayer admitted he was trading. However, he said that the furs he was trading had been a “present exchange,” which was an Aboriginal tradition. He was found guilty, but the court did not punish him. This decision was important. It meant that the trading monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company could no longer be enforced.



Figure 9.21

Conclusion

The Métis engaged in many struggles. For example, with the increasing number of European immigrants moving into the Red River area, the Métis were sometimes discriminated against. Their struggles would continue later in the century as they tried to hold onto their territory and traditions.

Today, Manitoba has a large Métis population. Métis people also live across Canada, and throughout North America. The Métis continue their fight to have their traditional lands recognized through land claims.

In part 4, you will learn more about the settlement of English-speaking Canada. In chapter 10, join Sara and Ben as they learn about the British Empire Loyalists.