**CHAPTER 8**

**THE METIS**

**Citizenships and Identity**

The contact between First Nations and Europeans was emergence of the Métis. The Métis population grew quickly. The different groups of Métis who lived in Red River came together as a solid community with a shared identity. They considered themselves citizens of an Métis Nation.

**AN EMERGING IDENTITY IN THE WEST**

Métis were the children of First Nations women and the Europeans men who came to North America.

In present day Manitoba the largest Métis community grew.

**The Demographics of Red River**

The French-speaking Métis were the largest group living at Red River.

Characteristics of people of a particular place is **demographics** (# of people living in a town, ratio of male to female)

Others at Red River Included:

1. Country Born Métis – First Nations Women and British Traders

2. Cree and Anishinabe

3. Roman Catholic missionaries

4. Canadiens

5. British employees of the Hudson’s Bay Company

**Shared culture of the Red River Métis**

They developed their own language, artistic style, poetry, music, dance, economy and values.

**Languages**

Parents of both First Nations and European descent raised the Métis.

They learnt several languages including French, English and one or more First Nations languages.

They had their own language called Michif. It linked their First Nations and Canadien or English identities by mixing French, English, Cree and Anishinabe words.

**Identity**

PIERRE FALCON – Métis poets and songwriter. Falcon Lake in Manitoba was named after him.

**Shared Economy**

Métis had a unique economy. They made a living based on the climate of their territory and on the resources found in it.

* Trading,
* Hunting
* Farming

**The Métis in the Fur Trade**

The Métis were very important to the success of the fur trade. Many Métis knew two or more languages so they often acted as interpreters.

To deliver the furs, the Métis rowed large **York Boats**. These boats replace canoes as the main means of transportation own western rivers and lakes.

**The Buffalo Hunt**

The Métis from Red River were expert buffalo hunters.

They chose a council to organize the hunt, and a set of captains to lead the hunt.

Pemmican – shredded meat with fat and berries

Pemmican was very import food for people in the West.

Red River Carts – hauled buffalo meat. These carts had large wooden wheels that were wrapped in buffalo hide. The cart was also used as a boat. The wheels were removed and hooked to the bottom.

Rules of the Buffalo Hunt

1. No hunting buffalo on Sunday

2. No lagging behind or going forward without permission

3. No running buffalo before the general order.

**CONFLICT AT RED RIVER**

LORD SELKIRK – bought a huge piece of land from the Hudson’s Bay.

Located at Red River and Assiniboine Rivers in present day Manitoba.

He brought dozens of families from Scotland to farm there. They only problem - a large Métis community already occupied the land.

**Métis Reaction to the Colonists**

Métis had no legal papers to say they owned the land they had been farming for more than 100 years. They feared the colonists would push them off their farms. They were concerned about their way of life.

The North West Company employees (called Nor’Westers) who were allied with the Métis also opposed the colony.

**Conflict over Resources**

Colonists relied on the buffalo for food. The governor of the colony worried that his colonists would starve if too much buffalo meat left the colony. In 1814 he banned the Métis from exporting any meat, fish or vegetables from Red River. This order was known as the **Pemmican Proclamation.**

Métis and Nor’Westers were determined to drive the Selkirk colonists from the area. They stole farm equipment and horses, and they shot off their guns to frighten the settlers. A locust infestation made matters worse and some of them left.

**Battle of Seven Oaks**

The tensions between the remaining Scottish colonists and the Métis remained high. A group of Métis led by Cuthbert Grant was passing by Fort Douglas. The fort was the headquarters of the colony. The governor, Robert Semple led an armed group out of the fort to challenge Grant.

Two sides faced each other. The settlers fired the first shot. Within a few minutes 21 colonists and one Métis lay dead.

The Battle of Seven Oaks was the first time the Métis stood up as a united group against the Canadian government.

Country Born Métis and Francophone Métis joined together.

**This event marked the Beginning of the Métis Nation**

**Migration Further West**

In 1821 the Hudson’s Bay Company took over its rival, the North West Company

Now all the land at Red River and surrounding it belonged to the British.

One important business for the Red River Métis was the buffalo robe trade. The hides were made into blankets and coats. Buffalo fur was thickest during the coldest months.

As buffalo began to die out hunter had to travel far from the Red River Colony to find a herd. Métis were away from their homes and farms. Many gave up farming to hunt buffalos. The migrated (moved) west to set up communities near Batoche and St. Albert.

**RED RIVER RESISTANCE 1869**

The Red River Métis felt that Rupert’s Land belonged to them. The government of Canada was sending more Europeans colonists to Rupert’s Land

**Canada Takes and Interest in the West**

Territory known as Rupert’s Land was left to the Aboriginal people who lived there.

Scientific teams were sent out west to learn about the climate and resources. They reported that Rupert’s Land was well suited for farming. They also said the land had a wealth of natural resources. Suddenly people take notice of Rupert’s Land.

**Rupert’s Land Joins Canada**

Since some trade with United Sates was growing in Rupert’s Land many British colonists feared if it was not claimed by Canada then the United States would claim it.

In 1869 Canada purchased the territory from the HBC for 1.5 million.

**Fears of Assimilation**

Now Canada claimed to own Rupert’s Land. The First Nations and Métis living there felt uncertain about their future.

The Métis worried about Assimilation – when a culture or individual is absorbed into another culture. Aboriginal people worried that they would be forced to give up their way of life.

They had many questions.

1. Would there be a role for Métis and First Nations in government?

2. Would the Red River Métis be able to keep their French language and Catholic religion?

3. Would they be able to keep their farms and way of Life?

4. Would English speaking Protestants from the East overwhelm them?

**The Red River Resistance 1869**

Canada was ready to take control of Rupert’s Land on 1 December 1869, Federal government sent surveyors to Red River. They were to prepare the land for the expected rush of farming colonists. When the Métis saw the surveyors they asked what they were doing. They could not understand them. They sent for a Métis named Louis Riel, who spoke French, English and Cree fluently. Riel had stopped the surveyors in their tacks and told them to leave Red River immediately.

The Métis were use to governing themselves. They set up a National Committee to protect their right to the land. Louis Riel became an important member of the committee.

In December the Métis took control of Fort Garry a major fur trade centre in Manitoba. They established a Métis Provisional Government (a temporary government).

**Métis Bill of Rights**

The Métis wanted to negotiate terms so the Provisional government drew up a Bill of Rights to present to the government of Canada. They wanted to protect the interests of the people already living in the territory.

**Bill of Rights**

1. Either French or English would be used in the Legislature. Government documents would be printed in both languages.

2. The residents would decide laws for the new province.

3. The Métis would keep the rights to their land.

4. Local officials (sheriffs, magistrates, school commissioners and so on) would be elected by the local people.

5. The federal government would negotiate treaties with the First Nations living there.

**French and English Canada Take Sides**

The Canada Party who was made up of English speakers originally from Ontario or Britain. Some of them were took up arms against the provisional government.

The Métis put them in jail. One of these prisoners was Thomas Scott a 28-year-old laborer from Ontario. Scott threatened to kill Riel and insulted his Métis guards until they lost patience with him. He was put on trial and found guilty and placed in front of a firing squad. It is not clear if the guards were ordered only to scare Scott or to fire at him.

**The Anglophone Perspective**

The death of Thomas Scott set a huge British population of Ontario against the Métis Provisional Government. Newspapers in Ontario called for revenge against the Métis leaders who were responsible.

**The Francophone Perspective**

Many Canadiens saw the Métis as defenders of the Francophone Catholic way of life in the West. The Canadiens took up the cause of the Métis as their own and demanded that they be given their rights.

The conflict between the Francophone Métis and English-speaking colonists in the West revived the old anger between English speaking Protestants in Ontario and the French speaking Roman Catholics in Quebec. **The situation at Red River threatened to become a national crisis.**

**THE CREATION OF MANITOBA**

Prime Minister John A Macdonald wanted to find a solution that would seem to please all sides in the Red River crisis. The Métis Provisional Government sent representatives to Ottawa with its Bill of Rights.

Macdonald met with them and agreed to almost all the items on the list. In July 1870 the government passed the **Manitoba Act**, which created the province of Manitoba.

**The Manitoba Act**

1. The Manitoba Act created Canada’s fifth province.

2. Manitoba would have its own provincial government

3. Both French and English would be used in government and courts

4. The province would be able to send four elected members to the House of Commons in Ottawa and two members to the Senate

5. There would be two publicly funded school systems

6. An area of 560 hectares would be set aside for the Métis to use

7. The natural resources of the new province would remain under the control of the federal government.

**Soldiers on the March**

Macdonald set 1200 soldiers to Red River. Their job was to keep peace and defend the territory in case the United States tried to claim it.

Many of the soldiers were Ontario volunteers who thought their job was to punish the Métis and capture Louis Riel. Knowing his life was in danger Riel escaped across the border into the United States. He was banished from Canada for five years.

**SECOND METIS UPRISING 1885**

There were still disagreements over land ownership.

**Problems Persist**

Each family was supposed to receive scrip given them for land but the system did not work well and many Métis did not receive their land. Feeling cheated and frustrated many Métis left Manitoba to move farther west and north where they could live as hunter, trappers and farmers. As the buffalo began to disappear Métis turned to ranching, logging and running small businesses.

Gabriel Dumont became president and elected council collected taxes and governed the community.

**Métis and First Nations Grievances**

Métis faced starvation and poverty that resulted from the drastically reduced buffalo population. First Nations people were facing similar threats. The First Nations people had no other option but to make treaties with the Canadian government. The Métis were not allowed to join the First Nations treaty and they did not qualify for their own treaties.

**The Government Ignores Warnings**

The federal government would not listen to the Métis. They were more concerned with the railway going through the prairies.

**Riel Returns**

The Métis and First Nations sent at least 15 petitions to Ottawa to address their concerns. The government ignored all of them.

A group of Métis and Gabriel Dumont went to United States to invite Louis Riel back to Canada.

Led by Riel the Métis set up their own government at Batoche. They wanted two new provinces created west of Manitoba. They also demanded more food rations. When nothing happened Riel suggested they take up arms. Dumont decided to join Riel and Dumont was named general of the Métis forces.

**Rising in Arms**

The Northwest Resistance of 1885 was violent but brief. At Frog Lake they killed nine people and captured a police post. The police and neighborhood farm families were allowed to leave unharmed.

**The Government Reacts**

The federal government rushed thousands of soldiers to advance on the Métis at Batoche. The Métis women helped in whatever way they could.

They carried food, messages and supplies to the men. They melted down lead plates to make bullets. When they ran out the men were firing stones and nails.

After three days of fighting the Métis, Cree and Dakota allies surrendered.

**The Fate of Louis Riel**

Louis Riel surrendered and stood trial for treason – betrayal of ones country. A jury found him guilty and Riel was sentenced to hang. Macdonald could have saved Riel’s life. Twice he delayed the execution while he debated what to do.

Macdonald’s government was heading into a federal election after the trial. The decision he made would cost him votes. Ontario had more voters than Quebec. If Macdonald sided with Ontario his part would likely win the election.

Macdonald knew that Riel’s supporters in Quebec would not be happy. When news reached Quebec, flags were dropped to half-mast.

**REVIEW CARTOON ON MACDONALD AND RIEL**

Why is Riel on top of Macdonald’s shoulders?

Why is Macdonald standing on two horses?

What do the horses represent?

How does Macdonald make his decision?

Title Riel Ugly Position – A Real Ugly Position

**The Government Tightens Its Grip**

Once the uprising was under control the government could respond to some of the complaints that led to it. Manitoba did not become two provinces as the Métis demanded. The government began giving out scrip for land again. Since this did not go well the first time the Métis sold them and often got much less than it was worth.

Aboriginal people in the West were punished for their role in the resistance. The government stopped food rations and people were told to stay on their reserves unless they had permission from a government agent to travel.

These restrictions on the First Nations opened up the land to more European farmers. And also allowed the government to continue expanding the CPR (Canadian Pacific Railway).