

THE RED RIVER REBELLION 1868-70

In 1869 the new Canadian Government purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company and appointed as governor English-speaking William McDougall. He was opposed by the French-speaking, mostly Métis, inhabitants of the Red River Settlement. When McDougall sent out land surveyors who redrew boundaries and property lines forcing the Metis off their lands, the Metis, under the leadership of Louis Riel, proceeded to set up their own provisional government, to which they invited an equal number of Anglophone representatives. Riel undertook to negotiate directly with the Canadian government.

However, by late 1869 a small anti-Riel group had formed under the title of the Canadian Party. Major Charles Arkoll Boulton of Cobourg (*see Northwest Rebellion*), son of D'Arcy Edward Boulton (*see Fenian Raids*), was one of their leaders. While Boulton had served with the Cobourg Volunteer Rifle Company and been in action during the Fenian Raids, he was not in military service during this uprising, but had come with the Canadian survey party.

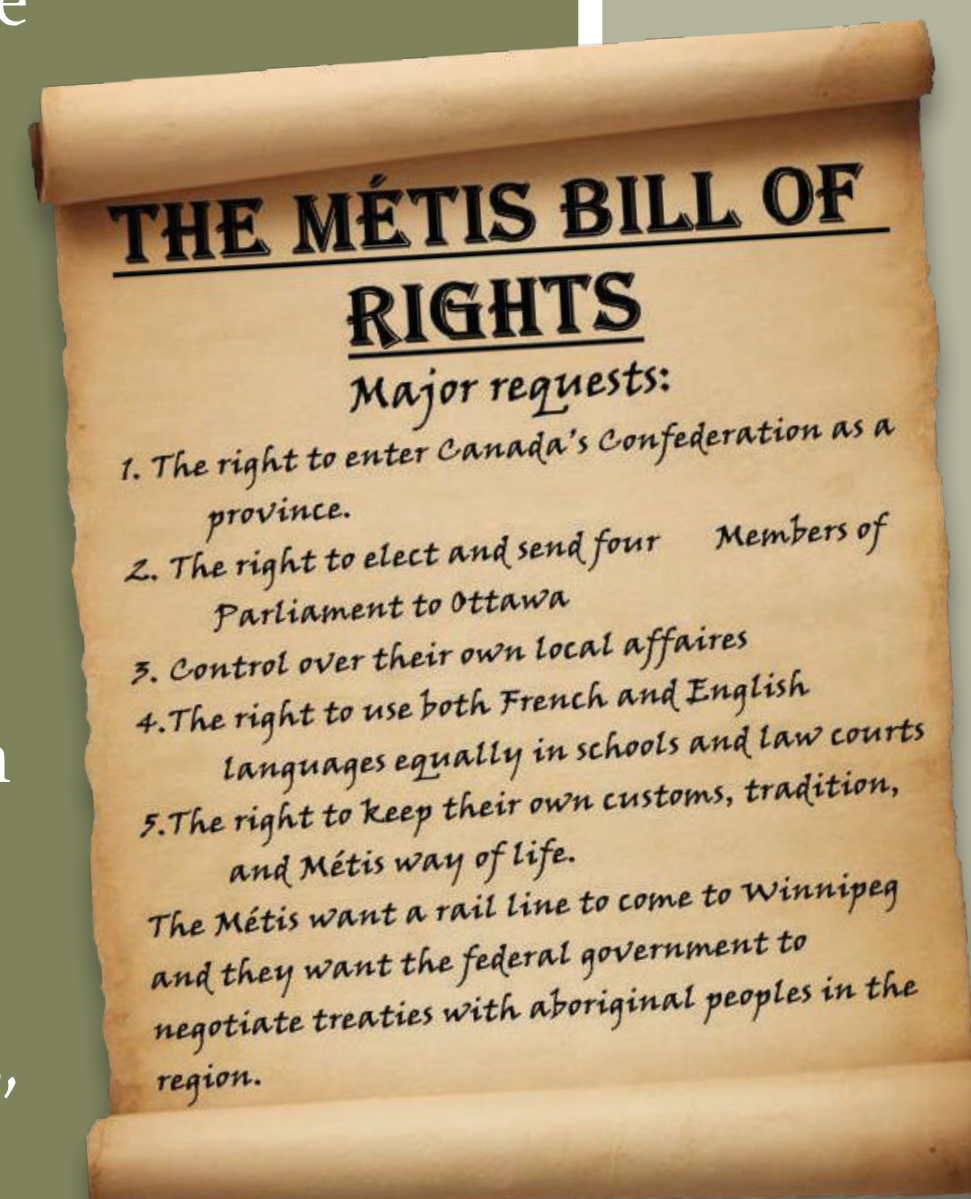
On February 10, about fifty of the group, including Boulton, were captured by the Metis following an aborted attempt to overthrow the provisional government. Boulton was sentenced to be executed. However, pressure from Red River residents to have him spared had a positive effect and he was later released to return to Ontario.

However, Thomas Scott, a particularly rancorous member of the Canadian Party, was not so fortunate. In consenting to his execution Riel is reported to have commented: ***"I have done three good things since I have commenced; I have spared Boulton's life at your instance, I pardoned Gaddy, and now I shall shoot Scott."***

The Canadian Government's response was to send a force under the leadership of Colonel Garnet Wolseley. Not allowed to travel through United States territory, the expedition has been called *"among the most arduous in history. Over 1,000 men had to transport all their provisions and weaponry including cannon over hundreds of miles of wilderness. At numerous portages, corduroy roads had to be constructed. All this was endured for over two months, along with the summer heat and the inevitable plagues of blackflies and mosquitoes."*

When Wolseley arrived at Upper Fort Gary, Riel and his supporters left for the safety of the United States and the fort was taken without bloodshed. Among those accompanying the Wolseley Expedition were four men from Cobourg: Joe Thomson, Harry Pentland, Harry Gravely, and William R. Whitelaw.

The negotiations initiated by Riel were successful to the extent that in 1870 an act was passed allowing the Red River Settlement to enter Confederation as the Province of Manitoba. However, many of the provisions to protect the interest of the Metis were ignored.



Louis Riel



The Red River Rebellion ultimately failed and Louis Riel was exiled to the USA.

But that is not the end of the story...