

The Metis Cultural Brokers and the Western  
Numbered Treaties, 1869-1877

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# Abstract

Throughout the history of the North West, Metis<sup>1</sup> people frequently used their knowledge of European, Indian, and Metis culture to mediate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social, diplomatic, and economic encounters. Though acknowledged in Metis historiography, this aspect of Metis identity has not been the focus of scholarly analysis, which has primarily centred on Louis Riel, Metis resistance, and ethnogenesis. By closely examining the primary documents, it is evident that the Metis interpreters present at Treaties 1 through 7 were more than merely translators. Prior to negotiations these Metis had interacted with First Nations in a variety of ways, whether in the fur trade or in missionary endeavours. Metis people were well versed in Aboriginal languages and cultural traditions, skills they had employed successfully in Rupert's Land prior to 1870.

In drawing upon this amicable relationship between Metis and First Nations, Canadian officials in the North West recognized the positive effect of personal diplomacy on securing First Nations signatures to the treaty documents. In this thesis many examples will demonstrate that the actions of Metis people were critical in preventing violence between groups, thereby enabling the treaty process to begin. These Metis individuals moved within a middle ground of context that developed in the era

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper the term Metis includes both English- and French-speaking mixed-bloods. I have chosen this term to represent the cultural, not political, similarity of the mixed-blood people.

prior to the 1870's, thus indicating a measure of continuity between the pre- and post transition period in the Canadian West.



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## Chapter 1. Introduction

They have been the ambassadors between the East and the West; the interpreters of civilization and its exigencies to the dwellers on the prairie as well as the exponents to the white men of the consideration justly due to the susceptibilities, the sensitive self-respect, the prejudices, the innate craving for justice, of the Indian race.<sup>1</sup>

The emergence of a distinct people in the West, the Metis, is hailed by observers as a fascinating aspect of North American history and draws attention from scholars and laymen especially in light of the constitutional amendment including the Metis as one of Canada's Aboriginal peoples.<sup>2</sup> Though neglected for many years, there is currently a great deal of interest in Metis history, principally in studies examining the experiences of various Metis communities within Canada and the emergence of a unique Metis identity. One area of Metis history that has received little attention is the involvement of the Metis in the numbered treaties signed in the 1870's.

Though perhaps neglected, further investigation has revealed that there is substantial evidence to suggest that the Metis were present in large numbers at the negotiations and indeed played a significant role. Even more striking is the evidence that demonstrates that the Metis frequently acted on behalf of the government commissioners by using their knowledge of First Nations diplomacy to create a bridge

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Morris, The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories (Calgary: Fifth House, 1991) 294.

<sup>2</sup> The 1982 Constitutional amendment defined aboriginal peoples as "Indian, Inuit, and Metis," and guaranteed, "The existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal people of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed." J.R. Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 350.

between the new officials and Indian people. This role was critical to the success of the treaties and the establishment of Canadian hegemony in the North West.

Prior to 1870, First Nations and Metis people shared a common land, aspects of a common heritage, and longstanding economic and social relations. As co-residents of the Prairies, both Aboriginal groups had an interest in Canadian government policy regarding Aboriginal title. Surprisingly, few studies manage to incorporate both Indian and Metis history, perhaps because unlike the Indian people, the Metis did not sign treaties and therefore did not have an official relationship with the Federal Government until the 1982 amendment. Metis involvement as interpreters, diplomats, and witnesses at the numbered treaties demonstrates the Metis played a critical role in forging a relationship between the First Nations and Canadian government. As participants in the process of treaty negotiation, they should be included in any understanding of the treaty-making process in the North West.

Through examining both primary and secondary sources, it is clear that Metis involvement in the treaties was not limited to the translation of negotiations and agreements. In addition, the Metis were government diplomats, providing presents to bands of First Nations prior to treaty-making, establishing the good will of the Canadian government, and engaging in discussions with the Indian leaders as to the nature of Canadian intentions. To better understand the actions of these Metis, this thesis will examine the nature of Metis identity, uncover the interpreters' relationship to parties involved in treaty negotiation, and finally determine whether these actors in treaty negotiation did so in order to gain better terms for First Nations, the government, or themselves and others belonging to the Metis community.

Alexander Morris, Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories from 1872-1876 negotiated treaties 3, 4, 5, and 6 and revised treaties 1 and 2.<sup>3</sup> In 1880 he published The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, which includes previous colonial treaties and materials relating to the numbered treaties. The book is one of the principal resources for any study of the numbered treaties, but must be critically evaluated alongside additional sources. The majority of the evidence of Metis involvement in the treaties comes from The Treaties of Canada.

Morris, as Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories and Manitoba, refers repeatedly to the involvement of the Metis in treaty-making, in particular the Hon. James McKay. For example, at a difficult point in the Treaty 3 negotiations, a private council took place between the Metis and Ojibway leaders. Morris credited the Metis who were present at the closed council with using their influence to persuade the chiefs to accept the government terms. In his dispatch recording the proceedings he wrote,

I have much pleasure in bearing testimony to the hearty co-operation and efficient aid the Commissioners received from the Metis who were present at the Angle, and who with one accord, whether French or English in origin, used the influence which their relationships to the Indians gave them, to impress them with the necessity of their entering into the treaty.<sup>4</sup>

According to Morris, the Metis decisively affected the course of events based on their “relationships to the Indians” and a critical element of the successful negotiation of Treaty 3 was the assistance of the Metis. This assertion by Morris raises several questions that may be answered by a fuller understanding of who these Metis were, their

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Friesen, “Alexander Morris,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography CD- ROM version, (Toronto: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000) 5 of 9.

<sup>4</sup>Morris, Treaties of Canada 51.

motives for assisting the Canadian government, and whether they had been involved in other treaties.

There is indication of Metis participation elsewhere in Morris' book. The Lieutenant-Governor frequently comments on the assistance he received from the Metis present at negotiations, and Metis signatures are often present on treaty documents as both interpreters and witnesses. Morris' inclusion of the observation of Lord Dufferin who visited the Prairies in 1877 suggests he felt the Metis had been pivotal in establishing positive relations between the First Nations and government:

There is no doubt that a great deal of the good feeling thus subsisting between the red men and ourselves is due to the influence and interposition of that valuable class of men the Half-breed settlers and pioneers of Manitoba, who, combining as they do the hardihood, the endurance and love of enterprise generated by the strain of Indian blood within their veins, with the civilization, instruction, and the intellectual power derived from their fathers, have preached the Gospel of peace and good will, and mutual respect, with equally beneficent results to the Indian chieftain in his lodge and to the British settler in his shanty. They have been the ambassadors between the East and the West; the interpreters of civilization and its exigencies to the dwellers on the prairie as well as the exponents to the white men of the consideration justly due to the susceptibilities, the sensitive self-respect, the prejudices, the innate craving for justice, of the Indian race. In fact they have done for the colony what otherwise would have been left unaccomplished, and have introduced between the white population and the red man a traditional feeling of amity and friendship which but for them it might have been impossible to establish.<sup>5</sup>

High-ranking officials like Morris and Lord Dufferin acknowledged that the Metis had acted as a bridge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies, but they failed to consider why they did so.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 293-294.



Lord Dufferin's and Morris' comments indicate they believed the Metis were well suited to such a position due to their inheritance of racial characteristics from both parents, a combination of "savage" and civilized. This view had gained ground much earlier in the 1820's and 1830's as European outsiders vocally proclaimed this deterministic view of Metis people and society, in particular Alexander Ross and HBC Governor George Simpson.<sup>6</sup> Evidence in The Treaties of Canada suggests the Metis played a critical role in the establishment of British-Canadian rule in the North West, but racial categorization does not provide an adequate explanation. Metis identity emerging as a result of racial antecedents is no longer an acceptable framework to consider questions of personal and ethnic identity. Since the 1970's, Metis researchers consider identity from the perspective of ethnicity and personal ascription and no longer consider blood to determine a people's potential or abilities.

Historically, people of mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry, whether French or English, were indiscriminately referred to as 'Halfbreeds' by European and Canadian observers. This term was in most cases inaccurate, and perceived by mixed-race people as derogatory. It became a symbol of the social and political marginalization of Metis people in the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> In the 1970's Metis scholars, Maria Campbell and Howard Adams, and Metis political organizations empowered by civil rights protests in the United States began to challenge racism and inequality in both Canadian society and Canadian history.<sup>8</sup> In the academic world, the new social history sought to rectify the triumphant colonialist narratives that reduced Indian, Metis, and female participation as

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<sup>6</sup> Jennifer Brown, "Metis" The Canadian Encyclopedia  
<http://www.canadianencyclopedia.ca/PrinterFriendly.cfm?ArticleId=A0005259> accessed July 15,2004.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Campbell, Halfbreed (Toronto: Seal Books, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Howard Adams, Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1989).

either irrelevant or as impediments to progress. Excising the term 'halfbreed' from new interpretations and establishing a new and more acceptable terminology were critical elements of this undertaking.

The term *metis* had mostly been used to designate French-Cree people, but rarely people of non-French and Indian ancestry. For the children of Scottish, English, and Canadian paternal antecedents, the term Country-born, or mixed-blood, is frequently used to distinguish English- from French- speaking mixed bloods. I have chosen the term Metis, a socio-cultural and political term for the nineteenth-century individuals of mixed ancestry who emerged as a distinct people in the particular period of time, because I believe it reflects the "mixed" ancestry and cultural identity shared by both French- and English-speaking mixed-bloods.<sup>9</sup>

Metis people did not generally leave written records, though there are exceptions. Peter Erasmus' Buffalo Days and Nights is a collection of his reminiscences told at the end of his life and a valuable tool to understand his participation as the main interpreter in Treaty 6.<sup>10</sup> The primary evidence for this topic is provided by the official documents. The Lieutenant-Governor Adams Archibald (1870-1873) papers and the Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris (1873-1877) papers held at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba contain many references to Metis people in the early 1870's. Additional materials on Metis interpreters who had been involved in the fur trade are located at the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, though many potentially useful sources no longer exist as a result of fire, loss, or damage.

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<sup>9</sup> Jaqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown, The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Metis in North America (Winnipeg : The University of Manitoba Press, 1985) Introduction. Brown and Peterson use *metis* as a term for any person of mixed aboriginal and European/Canadian ancestry throughout the book and give a detailed discussion of the origins of the terms and their usages.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Nights ed Irene Spry. (Calgary: Fifth House, 1999).

The Glenbow Archives is another location to find material on the Metis in the West. Its extensive genealogical inventory and private collections contain material on individual Metis families and are useful for acquiring a greater understanding of the vast web of fur trade connections in the West. The Traill Family Fonds, the Erasmus Fonds, and the Hardisty Fonds contain useful references to treaties and the Metis. The Department of Indian Affairs RG 10 Files, Black Series, and The Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports, and newspaper reports in the North West supplemented these resources and helped complete the picture. Finally, printed accounts from travelers and residents of the North West proved useful because of their occasional insights into the cultural and social conditions. They often included information on the Metis people involved in treaty-making since the Metis were often interpreters and guides to traveling parties. In conclusion, there was more than an adequate amount of information existing to create an imperfect picture of the Metis at treaty negotiations, though one missing perspective is the oral history from the Indian people involved.

The historiography of this topic is limited to a single article and a handful of small references in larger studies in either treaty-making or Metis history. David T. McNab authored the sole work that examines Metis participation in Treaty 3.<sup>11</sup> He asserts the Metis role was restricted to that of “facilitators, i.e. reporters, interpreters, and witnesses in the Treaty negotiations,”<sup>12</sup> similar to that of the fur trade. He also suggests that the most critical Metis participation took place through Indian spokesmen. While McNab acknowledges the presence of the Metis at Treaty 3 and provides an in-depth examination of the negotiations, he fails to consider earlier and later treaties or the

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<sup>11</sup> David T. McNab, “‘Hearty Co-Operation and Efficient Aid:’ The Metis and Treaty 3,” *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* III: 1 (1983): 131-149.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 132.

subtleties of diplomacy. As a result, McNab's analysis is unable to offer insight into the Metis participation in either Treaty 3 or the treaty-making process in general.

Scholarly articles examining the importance of interpreters and cultural brokers in American Indian history often look through the lens of ethnohistorical methodology combining documentary evidence with ethnological field work. Nancy L. Hagedorn's article "A Friend to go Between Them: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During the Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-1770,"\* demonstrates the importance of the interpreter, translating not only language but also culture. During this period, the Iroquois and English required the skills of a person who could be trusted by both parties to honestly conduct the negotiations. Her study looks at successful interpreters and the qualities that made them so, arguing that historians have often overlooked the important role of diplomats in inter-cultural relations.<sup>13</sup>

Yasuhide Kawashima, author of "Forest Diplomats: The Role of Interpreters in Indian-White Relations on the Early American Frontier," takes a corresponding position to Hagedorn regarding the importance of the interpreter in Indian-White relations. During this period, missionaries frequently acted as interpreters in inter-cultural settings, but Kawashima points out the majority of non-Indian translators found it difficult to correctly translate Indian languages. The period prior to and during the Revolutionary War saw the rising importance of the interpreter followed by a plunge in status as forest diplomats ceased to be relevant.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy L. Hagedorn, "A Friend to Go Between Them: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-1770," *Ethnohistory* 35:1 Winter (1998): 60-80.

\*I am grateful to Dr. Winona Wheeler for pointing out this article and suggesting the idea of the Metis as cultural broker.

<sup>14</sup>Yasuhide Kawashima, "Forest Diplomats: The role of Interpreters in Indian-White Relations on the Early American Frontier," *American Indian Quarterly* Winter (1989): 1-14.

Pertinent as well to this study is Ferenc Morton Szasz's look at mixed-blood interpreters in "The 'Scoto-Indian' as Cultural Broker in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century West." Szasz examines English-speaking mixed-blood children of the Western fur trade who used skills gained from both maternal and paternal sides to become cultural intermediaries, briefly mentioning the contribution of Metis at treaty negotiation.<sup>15</sup>

Historians who study intermediaries in the context of frontier encounters have developed a theoretical framework based in part on the work of Richard Paine and Malcolm McFee. Paine's study Patrons and Brokers in the East Arctic examines the development of the go-between mediating relationships between the Inuit and the government bureaucracy. Paine's three categories of middlemen are based on the motives of the person in-between acting as a self-interested party.<sup>16</sup> The difference lies in the way information is processed: a go-between interprets without alteration, whereas the broker will process the information, changing emphasis or content. Malcolm McFee's research looks at the level of acculturation on a Blackfoot reserve. McFee classifies most people as either Indian-oriented or White-oriented, but there is a small group he calls interpreters that possess attributes of both Indian and non-Indian culture. These interpreters freely embrace traditional Indian values yet are familiar with white values. Since their understanding of white culture does not compromise their Indian identity, McFee classifies them as the 150% men.<sup>17</sup> These studies point to a common occurrence in the meeting of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal societies, the development

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<sup>15</sup> Ferenc Morton Szasz, "The 'Scoto-Indian' as Cultural Broker in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century West," Journal of the West 40:1 Winter (2001): 30-35.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Paine, "A Theory of Patronage and Brokerage," ed. Richard Paine, Patrons and Brokers in the East Arctic Social and Economic Papers No. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press / Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1971) 21.

<sup>17</sup> Malcolm McFee, "150% Man, a Product of Blackfeet Acculturation," American Anthropologist, 70:6 December (1968): 1100.

of individuals who come to straddle the divide between groups. The necessity of communication for economic or diplomatic exchange requires the position of interpreter and middleman for smooth relations to occur.

The growing interest in people who operated at the cultural frontiers can be seen in the increasing number of articles and books devoted to this topic. Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker edited by Margaret Connell Szasz explores the topic of cultural broker and provides a historiographical overview of the concept, placing it firmly within the American ethnohistorical tradition. She notes the recent interest in the cultural broker comes as a result of the growing appreciation of the complexity of intercultural relations. Historically, there have been different types of brokers, for example linguistic, economic, spiritual, or educational brokers. People of mixed ancestry are only one example of numerous individuals who acted as brokers throughout the long history of Indian-white contact. Because of the disparate nature of those in that role, a scholar must consider both the historical and cultural circumstances in order to understand why people became cultural brokers.<sup>18</sup>

One example from the anthology is particularly relevant to understand the interpreters at the numbered treaties. Nancy Hagedorn's examination of interpreter Andrew Montour (1740-1772) provides insight into the complex and ambiguous life "in-between worlds." Following his mother, Madame Montour, Andrew was fluent in several Aboriginal and European languages. His marriages into Indian bands and knowledge of Indian protocol played a part in his success as a cultural broker, who worked for both European and Aboriginal employers. In particular, Hagedorn examines

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<sup>18</sup> Margaret Connell Szasz, ed. Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001) 294

personal motives and identity issues that arose from this ambiguous position. During this period, distinct Metis identity had not yet developed to incorporate a middle status and mixed-blood people chose either Indian or white culture. Hagedorn concludes that like many persons of mixed ancestry Montour left no written record of his feelings on these issues, and she can only speculate as to how he viewed his position in-between.<sup>19</sup> Cultural brokers can be seen as an important party to intercultural agreements who used their unique skills to cement alliances or prevent the emergence of hostilities between groups, frequently mediating Native-newcomer interactions.

Like those who study cultural brokers, historians conducting research on Canada's treaties appreciate the complexity in attempting to understand past agreements. Until the 1970's the majority of mainstream treaty research had focused on the benefits bestowed upon Aboriginal people from the generous treaty terms. The valuable contribution of more balanced historical approaches has resulted in historians acknowledging the important role of both Aboriginal and Crown negotiators in that process. Arthur Ray, Jim Miller, and Frank Tough have lately published the history of Saskatchewan Indian treaties placing each within a larger historical context. The authors describe how First Nations leadership approached the treaties using their experience in the fur trade with the Hudson's Bay Company. From the government perspective, the earlier treaties in Eastern Canada provided precedents when Canadian officials set about obtaining Aboriginal title to Indian lands following the acquisition of Rupert's Land.<sup>20</sup> In examining the Saskatchewan treaties, the authors of Bounty and Benevolence

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<sup>19</sup> Nancy Hagedorn, "'Faithful, Knowing, and Prudent': Andrew Montour as Interpreter and Cultural Broker, 1740-1772," ed. Margaret Connell Szasz, Between Indian and White Worlds 59.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur J. Ray, Jim Miller, Frank Tough, Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000) 32.

recognized the participation of the Metis in many of the treaties, though it was not the focus of their work.

Aboriginal peoples in North America have challenged the Euro-Canadian version of history and its reliance on the written record as the exclusive account of the past. Treaty history is an especially contested area where Indian people have historically asserted vastly different memories of what the treaties specified. A growing number of Aboriginal scholars are putting forward a version of history rooted in Aboriginal worldviews based on oral tradition. The companion to Bounty and Benevolence, Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan, provides an Indian interpretation of the treaties based on extensive interviews of Saskatchewan elders, placed in an Aboriginal historical and cultural context.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7 by the Treaty 7 elders and academics challenges traditional government interpretations of the treaty by combining elders' testimony with revisionist history. What emerges is an opposing account that demonstrates that either Indian people did not understand the treaty terms or were deliberately deceived by the commissioners and interpreters.<sup>22</sup> Treaty 7 First Nations understood and continue to believe that the Treaty 7 was an agreement to share the land with incoming settlers.

Both treaty history and Metis history have undergone revision in the past two decades, the result of which has been a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of all groups, Native and non-Native alike. In Metis history, many historians have been focusing on the ethnogenesis of the Metis in Canada, debating the nature of Metis society, the term Metis, and the identity of Metis peoples. Historiographical articles on

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<sup>21</sup> Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream is that our peoples will be clearly recognized as nations (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 325.



the Metis assert the importance of sensitivity when writing about peoples of mixed-heritage and significance of studies looking at various aspects of Metis identity.<sup>23</sup> At the heart of many of these studies is a desire to discover the origins of the distinct Metis identity that was so clearly articulated in the resistance of 1869-70 and 1885. Part of the answer may lie in the early fur trade of the Great Lakes area.

The circumstances contributing to the development of a “new people” in the Great Lakes area have been identified by Jacqueline Peterson in “Many Roads to Red River: Metis genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680-1815.” According to her research, the role of intermediary or cultural broker on the borders of the fur trade is a central factor in the emergence of Metis identity. She explains:

over time, this group may begin to serve as a conduit for goods, services, and information and see its function as a broker. It will not usually recognize, in the process of acquiring a group history and identity, that it is, to a large degree, a dependency of the nations or societies that it links or separates, to be snuffed out when there is no longer a need for its services.<sup>24</sup>

Peterson finds the declaration of Metis national identity in 1815 had historical roots in the Great Lakes Region after 1700 and the many fur trade villages established from Detroit to Red River. Metis identity was tied to the regional fur trade and it was in Red River between 1815 and 1820 where these people emerged as a “new people.”<sup>25</sup>

From the perspective of the fur trade, much understanding has come regarding Metis origins and the important role of women in that society. Until 1980 when Jennifer S.H. Brown published Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian

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<sup>23</sup> Frits Pannekoek, “Metis Studies: The Development of a Field and New Directions,” eds. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard Ens, and R.C. Macleod, From Rupert’s Land to Canada (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Jacqueline Peterson, “Many Roads to Red River: Metis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680-1815,” eds. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown, The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Metis in North America (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985) 37.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

Country, complemented by Sylvia Van Kirk's "Many Tender Ties:" Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870, fur trade history lacked a detailed analysis of gender roles and family life critical to understanding Metis origins in Western Canada. The long history of interracial marriage in the context of the fur trade, '*à la façon du pays*' translated meaning "according to the custom of the country," in both the Hudson's Bay Company and the French fur trade led to the creation of a new people, the Metis. Van Kirk also discovers that women's roles changed over the course of this period as nineteenth-century ideas on race marginalized Indian and mixed-blood wives of high-ranking officials within the fur trade. The appearance of white wives among the upper class officers created an increasingly stratified society based on racial categories, with Indian and Metis excluded from elite circles. In spite of the increasing racial tension, mixed-blood women maintained their position until the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1870.<sup>26</sup>

Jennifer Brown's book takes a different, yet equally innovative perspective. It compares employee makeup and business policies within the two primary fur trade companies, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. She examines the effect of variations between each Company on family makeup and identity of the fur trade marriage offspring. Brown believes the different social and cultural institutions that developed over time in the two companies contributed to the differences between the English-speaking mixed-bloods who generally identified with Anglo-British values and the French-speaking Metis who had a more cohesive sense of national identity.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties:" Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1980) 231.

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, Brown Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980) 111.

The division between English- and French-speaking Metis in Red River has led historians to investigate the reasons for that rift. Frits Pannekoek's argument, based primarily on Anglican Church documents, reveals the mixed-blood and Metis community in Red River divided along ethnic and denominational lines. These divisions were exacerbated by the Protestant clergy's racial prejudice and "slavish devotion to the creation of a society they believed was European, and which became exclusionist and inward looking,"<sup>28</sup> culminating in the Red River Resistance of 1869-70.

In contrast to the French-speaking community, Pannekoek contends that no effective leadership came from the ranks of the country-born residents of Red River between 1820-1870, when the children of the first settlers came of age. By that period, the French-speaking Metis had produced a wealthy and effective leadership encouraged by the Catholic clergy. Rather than support a Native elite, the Anglican clergy associated with the British upper classes in the 1860's, and dominated the affairs in English-speaking Red River. It appears that the divisions noted in Brown's and Pannekoek's studies do not apply to the Metis who acted as interpreters and diplomats. Both French- and English-speaking Metis joined in assisting with the negotiation of the treaties and appear to have shared a common desire to provide a link between the Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal inhabitants.

Not all historians embrace Pannekoek's position that the residents of Red River were divided between the Metis and country-born, precipitating a racial civil war in 1869. Irene Spry draws upon many examples in literature of unity and harmony between French- and English-speaking Metis in her article, "The metis and mixed-

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<sup>28</sup> Frits Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing, 1991) 37.

bloods of Rupert's Land before 1870."<sup>29</sup> By examining other sources she concludes the only evidence of strife comes from Panneleok's sources, the Anglican Church documents. Many references to cross-cultural marriage among French- and English-speaking Metis, and variety of languages spoken by Metis people demonstrate that the two groups shared more similarities than differences. To strengthen her argument, she uses the examples of James McKay and Peter Erasmus, both interpreters for the numbered treaties, whom she has also studied in detail. The men spoke a variety of languages, and neither felt a particular hatred toward French Metis. McKay was a Catholic and himself half French-speaking Metis.<sup>30</sup> Spry believes the divisions within mixed-blood society existed along class lines, rather than between ethnic and racial groups. In 1869 the challenge to the Metis came in the form of different systems of property.

Gerhard Ens' social and economic history of the Metis in the nineteenth century is the most detailed argument challenging Pannekoek's analysis. Ens compares two Metis parishes in Red River, the English-speaking Protestant parish of St. Andrew's and the French-Catholic parish of St. François Xavier, by using quantitative methods. The primarily economic study fills the gap in existing literature focused mainly on the fur trade, racial, or cultural characteristics of the Metis, and the political events.

Historians studying the transitional period where land holding went from "common property" to private property often characterized the Metis as unable to adapt

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<sup>29</sup> Irene Spry, "The metis and mixed-bloods of Rupert's Land before 1870," eds. Peterson and Brown, The New Peoples 96-113.

<sup>30</sup> Irene Spry edited the reminiscences of Peter Erasmus, interpreter for Treaty 6 at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt, in Peter Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Nights: as told to Henry Thompson (Calgary: Fifth House, 1999) and the papers of Captain John Palliser in "Captain John Palliser and the Exploration of Western Canada," reprinted from The Geographical Journal, CXXV Part 2, June 1959. Between 1857-59 James McKay (Metis interpreter for Treaties 1, 2, 3, 5, & 6) acted as guide and interpreter for the Palliser party.

to the change. By comparing the two parishes, Ens proves that the Metis were deeply involved in the change and often guiding it.<sup>31</sup> The 1840's saw the opening of outside markets to traders in Rupert's Land who, until then, could only trade with the Hudson's Bay Company. To take advantage of this new opportunity, Metis from St. François Xavier embraced the buffalo robe trade, a move that Ens believes should be seen as the emergence of a "proto-industrial" cottage industry on the Prairies. He finds:

These economic developments not only split the Metis along occupational and cultural ones, but began to divide Red River Metis society along economic and class lines as well. With the emergence of an identifiable Metis bourgeoisie and merchant class who employed Metis as labourers in the 1850's and 1860's, social and economic divisions within Metis society became more distinct. A concomitant was the emergence of a Metis laboring class. That there was a clear absence of identity between the various Metis groups is evident in the Resistance of 1869-70, when many of the Metis merchants, traders, and their kin opposed Riel, whose supporters included young Metis outside the power structure of Red River politics, and whose soldiers were drawn from the poorer Metis who labored annually on the York boats and cart brigades.<sup>32</sup>

Metis identity in Red River was primarily based on the economic specialization of the fur trade, and when that ceased to operate, some Metis moved west to continue the economic and social basis of their identity, the buffalo robe trade. The arrival in the 1870's of hostile immigrants from Ontario in combination with a decreasing economic base, contributed to a changing conception of Metis identity. Metis identity of those who persisted in Red River went from an ethnic to a racial category, leading to marginalization or assimilation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 175.

The life of Johnny Grant provides insight into the ability of Metis people to adopt an identity to suit the circumstances. In a later article, Ens looks at the personal life and professional career of Johnny Grant, an English-speaking Metis merchant who operated between the years 1860 and 1880.<sup>34</sup> Prior to the transfer, a dual economy existed, characterized by a local Native economy and one tied to international capitalism, requiring a middleman with knowledge of both systems. The Metis often assumed this position.

Based on an examination of Johnny Grant's many group affiliations, Ens characterizes Grant's self-definition as an instrumental identity. Grant frequently shifted identities to better suit his economic opportunities, identifying himself as Metis, Indian, or White depending upon the circumstances. It is important to note that Johnny Grant was a friend to the interpreters and government diplomats in the numbered treaties and that he also opposed Riel during the Resistance.<sup>35</sup> Like them, Grant put himself at the disposal of the incoming Canadian government and hoped to establish a place for himself among the new Canadian elite. Serious financial setbacks affected Grant, who later moved from Red River and never regained the position or fortune he possessed prior to the transfer. The existence of a dual economy permitted space for a people in-between. When it disappeared, Metis identity was no longer advantageous, and as a result Metis people either moved to reserves or assimilated to Euro-Canadian identity.

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<sup>34</sup> Gerhard Ens, "Metis Ethnicity, Personal Identity and the Development of Capitalism in the Western Interior: The Case of Johnny Grant," eds. Binnema, Ens, and Macleod. *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, 161.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 169.

An examination of Metis participation in the treaties signed in the 1870's can lend insight into how the Canadian government gained control of the North West from the Aboriginal peoples, while at the same time contributing to the knowledge of a particular class of Red River Metis. By looking at the cultural and historical circumstances experienced by the Metis interpreters, this thesis will explore the category of cultural broker and whether it applies to those who acted in the numbered treaties. Chapter 2 looks at Metis origins and identity, discussing the historic social and cultural circumstances in the period prior to the treaties. Chapter 3 will introduce the Metis who were involved in treaty-making and include biographical details about each individual, considering theories of Metis ethnic and cultural identity. The chapter will also examine the prior relationship between the Metis and First Nations in their various economic, social, and spiritual roles in the fur trade and through evangelization.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that the Metis provided a vital link between First Nations and Canadian officials in the West. Their role has yet to be examined in this light. By providing gifts to First Nations and by visiting their bands in advance of Police and survey parties, the Metis helped to avert violence that was bubbling below the surface. As a result, the Metis ensured the treaties took place between the government and the First Nations. Chapter 5 logically follows the discussion from Chapter 4, considering the contribution of Metis prior to the treaties to determine whether they may have influenced the outcome of the treaties to the advantage to the Canadian government. It also examines each treaty and the role of the interpreter in the negotiations. In many cases the interpreter was consulted by both sides, and well known to the First Nations prior to the treaty process. Clearly, the ability to communicate in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal languages was a critical skill required by the Metis interpreter.

The period following the transfer brought about a need for skilled interpreters who could not only translate languages but cultures. The uncertainty in this period for both First Nations and Metis created tension that could have led to possible violence, though it did not transpire. As messengers, diplomats, interpreters, and Government officials, Metis people used their knowledge of Indian customs, language, and protocol to re-create a middle ground, this time with the government officials rather than among fur traders. Through this position, the Metis succeeded in averting violence while acting within well-established systems of diplomacy in the North West, a function critical to any understanding of treaty-making.



## Chapter 2: Metis Origins in the Canadian West

When approaching the topic of Metis intermediaries in the 1870's North West, one cannot look to race as a sufficient explanation. In fact the rigid categories Indian, Metis, and "mixed-blood," based on biology are erroneous and misleading. The Rupert's Land fur trade brought a new people into being, the Metis. This highly diverse group combined cultural elements from both Aboriginal and European traditions, characterized by adaptation to the economic, environmental, and cultural conditions in the West. A portion of the Metis community in the mid-1800's specialized in carrying out economic relations with First Nations either through the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade or as free traders. As "cousins" to both First Nations and Europeans or Canadians, the Metis shared language and culture with two distinct groups. Familiarity with both worldviews enabled Metis people to effectively communicate with Indian people in both economic and diplomatic arenas. The ability to mediate interactions between Natives and non-Natives was a skill highly sought after by traders and missionaries. Many Metis chose to fill the position of intermediary by acquiring the requisite knowledge. By adopting the identity of cultural intermediary, these Metis gained the opportunity to secure a modicum of power and status in this period, and aided in establishing relations between the First Nations and Canadian officials in the West.

Initial contact between European and Aboriginal groups occurred in the context of the fur trade, an economic practice familiar to First Nations in North America. The

complex trade networks at the time of contact between Aboriginal people were well-established throughout the continent.<sup>1</sup> A middle ground of diplomatic and political relations emerged with the introduction of the European fur trade that, on one hand fit within existing Aboriginal traditions, but was modified to include European procedures.<sup>2</sup> The activities of the fur traders who eventually moved West are critical to understanding the emergence of the Metis as a unique entity in later years.

Acting on the advice of French-Canadian adventurers Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart, Sieur des Groseilliers, in 1670 King Charles II issued a royal charter to the Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson Bay including a royal monopoly for the trade of furs.<sup>3</sup> The Company established trade posts at the Hudson Bay, and remained there, allowing the Cree and Assiniboine to bring their furs by canoes from points further south. Traders from the colony of New France and later Montreal fur traders undertook an intense competition with the English Hudson's Bay Company, first vying over control of the trade at Bay, then by moving farther inland to avoid the middlemen and reap greater profits. Along the way, traders established personal relations with the Native bands often through the establishment of marriages "à la façon du pays."<sup>4</sup>

Marital arrangements in the fur trade did not always adhere to a particular formula, but in general were understood to be binding. The term, "à la façon du pays," encompassed the customs that arose combining Aboriginal and European forms. The

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur J. Ray, *We Have Lived Here Since the World Began* (Toronto: Lester Publishing) 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 52. White contends the middle ground was a creation of both French officials and Algonquian people to find a means, besides violence, to understand one another by using cultural forms of both groups in a new way.

<sup>3</sup> Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993 reprint) 50.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

arrangements could either be temporary or long-term, depending on the particular circumstances. In the fur trade, a woman played a critical economic and social role, to the advantage of both her trader husband and her band.<sup>5</sup> Traders would gain access to the women's skills and family connections, and Native families would also gain access to European trade goods. According to historian Sylvia Van Kirk, "In the Canadian west, alliances with Indian women were a central social aspect of the fur traders' progress across the country."<sup>6</sup> Women's roles in both the fur trade and emergence of Metis communities in the West contributed to the distinct nature of each of this period.

Some scholars focusing on the ethnogenesis,<sup>7</sup> or origins of a distinctly Metis culture, look to the world of adult males, adult females; and family life to determine how it evolved.<sup>8</sup> John E. Foster suggests one clue may lie in the freeman ethos that arose, enabling non-Native freemen to successfully integrate themselves into Indian groups.<sup>9</sup> Initially in the West, freemen from Montreal recognized their success as traders in many

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<sup>5</sup> The marital practices of the fur trade are detailed in Jennifer S. H. Brown Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980) and Sylvia Van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties" Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1980), and recent studies emphasize that understandings of distant relations are at best partial, and the term "custom of the country" implies more uniformity than perhaps warranted. See Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Partial Truths: A Closer Look at Fur Trade Marriage," eds. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard Ens, and R.C. Macleod, From Rupert's Land to Canada (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties 4.

<sup>7</sup> The term ethnogenesis is used "to refer to a people who seem to come into being as a definable group, aggregate, or category at some point in history- The concept of syncretism- the blending of distinct, even contrasting systems of culture to form a novel system- is a salient feature of ethnogenesis, when the phenomenon dealt with is a definable or stipulated people, rather than an institution or set of institutions." Quoted from Heather Devine, "Les DesJarlais: The Development and Dispersion of a Proto-Metis Hunting Band, 1785-1870" eds. Binnema, Ens, and Macleod, From Rupert's Land to Canada, 152.

<sup>8</sup> John E. Foster, "Some questions and perspectives on the problem of metis roots," eds. Brown and Peterson, The New Peoples, 74-91.

<sup>9</sup> John E. Foster argues the roles *coureur en drouine* (itinerant trader) or *commis* (clerk) are important to understanding Metis identity and states that "the critical feature in explaining Metis ethnogenesis is not mixed ancestry; rather, it is the historical circumstances and processes which saw some children enculturated differently than those children associated with Indian bands or with the very few Euro-Canadian Communities," John E. Foster, "Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Metis," eds. Binnema, Ens, and Macleod, From Rupert's Land to Canada 180.

cases depended on their creating alliances with Indian women. To compete with other males in the Indian band, the freeman displayed his superior hunting and spiritual skills, until he, his family, and followers, formed a band of their own. The freeman's dominant position could be enhanced through establishing a relationship with the fur trade post by successful hunting. Therefore, the freeman ethos was characterized by a display of qualities admired by Indian groups and traders alike that would have in turn influenced the freeman's children's experiences. The offspring of the freemen and their Native wives formed the early Metis communities. These proto-Metis children demonstrated variability in their ethnicity, perhaps due to the choices available to them in selecting a particular identity. For example, some aspired to positions of power among Indian bands through hunting or spiritual achievements, and others operated within the context of the post as interpreters and middlemen.<sup>10</sup> These studies on the early Metis communities indicate that Metis identity was marked by the acquisition of characteristics admired by both Native and non-Native groups. These skills in turn enabled the Metis to thrive in the bi-cultural milieu of Rupert's Land. In acquiring skills admired by both Native and non-Native societies, developing Metis identity was suited to a specific time and place.

Some of these mixed-blood children remained in the North West to live among First Nations, at the posts or in proto-Metis family groupings. However, in some cases fathers sent their sons, and in fewer cases daughters, east to Montreal to receive an education. There, many of these children were assimilated into Euro-Canadian society, died, or returned to Rupert's Land. One example, Cuthbert Grant, Jr., was sent to Eastern Canada to obtain an education and later returned to Rupert's Land. Upon his

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<sup>10</sup> Devine, "*Les DesJarlais*," 50.

return, he took a leadership position among the Metis in 1815 opposing the establishment of a colony at Red River.<sup>11</sup> Louis Riel followed the same path many years later. Their experiences both in their native homeland and as sojourners in Canada suggests the experience among both worlds may have contributed to their identity as members of a distinct nation, helping them articulate this as vocal leaders of the Metis in Western Canada.

In contrast to the actions of Montreal freemen, after 1684 the Hudson's Bay Company refused to allow their traders to establish relationships with Indian women, preferring a 'military monasticism' for its servants. In spite of this unenforceable dictate, fur traders established links with First Nations women and ignored Company orders. While early alliances were few, servants encouraged the Company to change its position and allow them to establish relationships with Native women.<sup>12</sup> The early contacts between Hudson's Bay Company men and Indian women differed markedly from those of the itinerant traders from Canada. For many years the Company conducted its trade from forts on the Bay and Indian women often came from the ranks of the Homeguard Cree. The Cree provided an economic function for the fur trade by hunting and provisioning the posts. Prior to 1774, women and children frequently returned to their Aboriginal families, to be raised among First Nations bands.<sup>13</sup> The creation of posts inland after 1774 led to greater numbers of alliances with Indian bands and hence a greater number of offspring.

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<sup>11</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Diverging Identities: The Presbyterian metis of St. Gabriel Street, Montreal" eds, Brown and Peterson, The New Peoples 203-204.

<sup>12</sup> D. Bruce Sealey and Antoine S. Lussier, The Metis: Canada's Forgotten People (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1975) 6.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, Strangers in Blood 154.

Through careful analysis, Jennifer Brown has determined that, over a period of two centuries, the mixed-blood offspring from these unions evolved into two distinct cultural groups, determined by their antecedents in either the Montreal-based trade, or the Hudson's Bay Company trade. Her evidence is based on the differences between the primarily French-speaking Metis children of the Montreal-based trade who asserted their nationhood in Red River, and the English-speaking children of the Hudson's Bay Company servants who lacked a similar social and political consciousness. The greater likelihood of paternal influence in the lives of English-speaking Metis children's lives often led the children to adopt a British identity, whereas the children of the French *voyageurs* identified themselves as a unique cultural entity against both the British and First Nations societies. While this approach may explain certain differing characteristics between English- and French-speaking groups, intermarriage and other factors worked to unite and create commonality among Metis.

Historical memory also played a critical role in the formation of the Red River Metis identity, and a unique sense of Metis group consciousness was forged during the period of intense competition between the rival fur trade companies. By the early 1800's increasing numbers of mixed-race children at the fur posts placed a strain on Hudson's Bay Company resources. Coinciding with the philanthropic desires of Lord Selkirk, a colony was established in 1812 at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in the heart of Metis territory and North West Company provisioning routes.<sup>14</sup> Both the local Metis and the North West Company converged in opposition to the formation of the Red River Colony. Its presence amid the North West Company trading domain threatened Company profits and as a result, the Metis employed by them.

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<sup>14</sup> W.L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957, 1970) 47-49.

In 1814 when food supplies dwindled, colony governor Miles Macdonnell prohibited the export of pemmican and demanded an end to the running of buffalo around the settlement by traders. This blow to the North West Company and the Metis brought Metis retaliation led by Cuthbert Grant. The violence escalated until, due to a series of accidents, an incident known as the Battle of Seven Oaks took place in 1817, when twenty-one colonists died along with one Metis. As a formative experience in the development of Metis identity, the ongoing struggles with the colony helped give the Metis a sense of nationhood that would later be articulated by Riel and Dumont.<sup>15</sup>

Red River was a growing center in the North West. The presence of schools and Catholic and Protestant churches hastened movement of families from posts after 1820. The French Metis under Cuthbert Grant who had established permanent settlements in Pembina, in the United States, moved to Red River at the insistence of the Catholic clergy, establishing the parish of St. François Xavier.<sup>16</sup> According to W.L. Morton, in Red River, "The metis as a group combined an attachment to a fixed residence in the colony with occupations which took them out into the western plains or along the northern waters as huntsmen, tripmen, and guides."<sup>17</sup> The increasing numbers of Metis who made up the majority of Red River also came to act as a military defense for the colony against incursions from the Sioux. By the mid-1800's a distinct Red River Metis identity emerged, combining elements of sedentary European culture with the plains culture of the buffalo hunt. In the process, Metis people developed a unique language,

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<sup>15</sup> Friesen, The Canadian Prairies 78-80.

<sup>16</sup> Morton, Manitoba: A History 61.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

Michif, a combination of Cree, Saulteaux, and French, and the now extinct Bungee comprised of Gaelic, Cree mixed with French and Saulteaux.<sup>18</sup>

The historical record differs as to the harmony of French- and English-speaking Metis in Red River. Some historians of Red River point out the typically English-speaking Metis descendants of Hudson's Bay employees engaged in agricultural pursuits, whereas French-speaking Metis tended to follow the buffalo hunt in a highly regulated and military-like fashion,<sup>19</sup> yet others assert class differences were more important than ethnic in the division of occupation.<sup>20</sup> In the period to 1840, the majority of mixed-bloods held a common socio-economic position in an economy dominated by the fur trade. Historian Gerhard Ens has noted "Despite the different cultural backgrounds of the Metis who sought refuge in Red River in the 1820's and 1830's, the Metis communities were bound together by common elements. In general these were economic forces...because there were few opportunities elsewhere."<sup>21</sup> According to Red River historians, life revolved around church, the buffalo hunt, and small-scale farming.

The presence of both Catholic and Protestant missionaries brought Euro-Canadian society and culture to Red River, introducing an additional element that could lead to division among residents. One key difference between the denominations was the method of evangelization. The Catholic clergy would minister to the French Metis

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<sup>18</sup> Leah Dorion and Darren Prefontaine, "Deconstructing Metis Historiography: Giving Voice to the Metis People", in *Resources for Metis Researchers* (Winnipeg and Saskatoon: The Louis Riel Institute of the Manitoba Metis Federation and The Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research, 1999) 14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Irene Spry, "The metis and mixed-bloods of Rupert's Land before 1870," eds. Peterson and Brown, *The New Peoples* 96-113 argues that the two groups shared many similarities and the divisions between groups occurred between classes not races.

<sup>21</sup> Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 27.



on the buffalo hunt, whereas the Protestant clergy insisted that their charges must abandon the hunt to adopt a strictly sedentary agricultural existence.<sup>22</sup> The Protestant clergy's view of the Metis reflected their preoccupation with forming Red River and the Metis into a British likeness, in opposition to the French Catholic Metis who embraced the buffalo hunt.

Though perhaps divided along religious lines, Metis people shared a common link to Aboriginal peoples that was increasingly viewed with disdain by British and Euro-Canadian elites intent on acquiring Native lands for agriculture. Reacting to the growing colonial presence of British citizens in distant locations inhabited by Indigenous people and the cultural/sexual interactions between those groups, nineteenth-century British theorists formulated increasingly callous and prejudicial racial doctrines of non-white inferiority that went hand in hand with colonial administration. Race took on new and elevated meanings in the context of European colonial encounters with others, using bogus science to bolster its legitimacy. The scientific classification of human types based on skull measurements, skull types, and facial angles catalogued different races in hierarchical groupings. Color also played an important role in creating a human hierarchy with whites on top and blacks on the bottom.<sup>23</sup>

Racial hierarchies have been thoroughly discredited, but why they developed is of interest to historians of culture and colonization. Colonial discourse analysis<sup>24</sup> has uncovered Victorian race theories as covert theories of desire. The ideological

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<sup>22</sup> Morton, *Manitoba: A History* 71.

<sup>23</sup> Christina Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (London: Routledge and Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) 12.

<sup>24</sup> Colonial discourse analysis is the study of colonialism through an examination of its discursive operations, showing intimate connections between the language and forms of knowledge used in literary texts, travel writings, memoirs and academic studies analysed as a means to understand the diverse ideological practices of colonialism. From Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race* (London and New York: Routledge 1995) 159.

construction of races as mutually exclusive categories was inherently flawed as the presence of hybrid offspring revealed sexual unions had taken place between races. As Robert Young has found, "Paradoxically...it was the very desire of the white for the non-white, the proliferating products of their unions that 'dislimmed boundaries,' in Gillian Beer's phrase, and undid the claim for permanent difference between the races while at the same time causing the boundary territories of the racial frontier to be policed ever more possessively."<sup>25</sup> In Rupert's Land, the racial tensions were emerging in the 1820's and 1830's motivated by the views of HBC Governor George Simpson and the clergy who expounded these theories. Simpson's own relationships with Native women and bi-racial children indicate his contradictory position, but do fit the theory of desire articulated by Young.

The effects of the increasing hostility toward those of non-white and mixed race heritage were felt by Metis people in the West, particularly as they were increasingly excluded from opportunities in the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade, which had merged with the North West Company in 1821. Upper class British officers, in particular Sir George Simpson, adopted strict racial categories that prevented mixed-bloods from advancing through Company ranks. In this period, Indian and Metis officers' wives were increasingly marginalized as European wives moved into Red River, bringing their racial pretensions.<sup>26</sup> The Anglican clergy, who persistently carried their beliefs of European superiority, aggravated this situation. In addition, the exclusion of Metis from

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, 180.

<sup>26</sup> Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties 240.

positions of power and status in both the community and company aggravated class divisions among the English-speaking portion of Red River.<sup>27</sup>

In Red River, neither agriculture nor the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade offered the prospect for Metis material or social advancement, and as a result many sought other economic opportunities. By 1835 land in Red River had filled up and left the next generation little chance to establish farms. For Metis children to gain access to land, one option was to obtain lots further from home, and supplement farming with the buffalo hunt. One historian has noted, "Some of the sons of the first generation were caught in a serious dilemma. Most had neither the desire to become farmers nor the opportunity to work for the Company. Many turned to free trade as the only viable alternative, an alternative sanctioned neither by the Church of England nor Company."<sup>28</sup> Though not officially sanctioned, many Metis chose to take their chances at free trade, challenging the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly, using it as an opportunity to exercise their power using their strengths and creating an alternative economy.

Until the arrival of free trade in Rupert's Land in May 1849, for the majority of Metis in Red River, the Hudson's Bay Company provided the only outlet for legitimate occupations. The cart brigades are one area where Metis excelled. This economic niche was required for the transport of goods between inland posts, a job that brought financial reward within the existing economic framework. Metis freighters transported cargo between York Factory and the colony, and also down to St. Paul. According to Marcel Giraud, "cartage became one of the most characteristic activities of the inhabitants of the

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<sup>27</sup>Racial antagonisms in Red River between Fur Trader Officers and Clergy and mixed-bloods are examined in detail by Frits Pannekoek and Sylvia Van Kirk.

<sup>28</sup>Frits Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70* (Winnipeg: Watson & Dwyer Publishing, 1991) 29.

Red River colony and of the frontier post of Pembina. European and Metis merchants and American traders organized annual trains of carts which in varying numbers but also in groups traveled the trails that led to the center of St. Paul.”<sup>29</sup> The transport of goods necessitated an intimate understanding of the country, its inhabitants and specific geographic conditions that would later come to benefit Metis people who would act as interpreters and diplomats once the Dominion government arrived.

Prior to the agitation for free trade in the 1840’s, Metis traders openly moved onto the Plains, creating an alternative economy to the wage labor of the post, the buffalo hunt, or subsistence agriculture. Sir George Simpson licensed private traders James Sinclair and Andrew McDermott in 1825 to trade along the American border as an alternative to setting up posts. The success of these early entrepreneurs contributed to the fight for free trade in the 1840’s.<sup>30</sup> The legendary military strength of the Metis provided the muscle behind the legal ambiguity of free trade when Pierre-Guillaume Sayer and three other Metis were arrested for illegal trading. Spokesman James Sinclair acted as Sayer’s council, and though Sayer was pronounced guilty, he was not sentenced; the result was a sign the waiting Metis interpreted to mean the trade would now be free.<sup>31</sup>

The resolution of the free trade crisis greatly contributed to the emergence of a wealthy Metis merchant middle-class who became gradually more isolated from poorer segments Red River. Free traders traded at the American posts at Pembina that had opened in 1844, and combined with the increasing demand for buffalo robes, a new

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<sup>29</sup> M. Giraud, The Metis in the Canadian West vol II, trans. George Woodcock, (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1986) 280.

<sup>30</sup> Irene Spry, “The “Private Adventurers” of Rupert’s Land” ed. John E. Foster, The Developing West: Essays on Canadian History in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983) 55.

<sup>31</sup> Friesen, The Canadian Prairies 100-101.

prosperity came about for many in the North West after 1850.<sup>32</sup> The position of the merchants on the eve of Confederation differed markedly from Metis involved in other aspects of the fur trade or subsistence agriculture. Gerhard Ens' examination of the role of class in the Red River Resistance can provide a new perspective on both division and unity within Red River society. In one example, he determined that of the seventy-eight Metis who decisively opposed Riel, more than sixty percent were French. Wealthy merchants Pascal Breland, James McKay, and Pierre Leveiller, who would later participate in the treaties, remained neutral during the Resistance of 1869-70. Riel's supporters were drawn primarily from Metis boatmen who were unemployed during the winter months and had little loyalty to the Hudson's Bay Company. Ens points out, however, that Riel did have supporters from the merchant class and that the Red River Resistance of 1870 was a complex and multi-faceted event, but definitely not a racial civil war.<sup>33</sup>

Metis who remained neutral during the Resistance or assisted the incoming government were in a socially and economically advantageous position following the transfer of power. Class interests in preserving their property and position in the new order overrode their ethnic and racial loyalty to the majority of the Red River Metis. Men like James McKay and Pascal Breland profited greatly from their close relationship with the Canadian government. When they came to mediate encounters between First Nations and government officials, they used their ability to adapt to new circumstances by providing a bridge between two dissimilar societies.

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<sup>32</sup> Ens, Homeland to Hinterland 122.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

## Chapter 3: A Biographical Analysis of the Metis Interpreters

The various identities of the Red River Metis are apparent in the individuals who worked on behalf of the Dominion of Canada as intermediaries to Indian groups. A detailed biographical examination of the lives of these men demonstrates that they had a history of intermediary roles. Their function as interpreters can be seen in continuity with past practice and points to an identity marked by straddling the divide between Aboriginal and European societies. Looking at the lives of these Metis in the years prior to the transfer reveals a socio-cultural niche characterized by establishing a peaceful relationship between the First Nations and outsiders. Distinct from Indian people, Metis people prided themselves on the number of languages and dialects they could speak.<sup>1</sup> Many Metis were capable of communicating to both Euro-Canadians and Aboriginal groups, and the identities of these interpreters were in some part characterized by their capacity to broker relations between cultures.

The most prominent of the interpreters is James McKay and by the 1870's, he had emerged as a significant figure in both the North West and in Red River. However, there is currently little written on his life aside from two small biographies, an article,

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<sup>1</sup> Fur trader Isaac Cowie commented on the difference between Indian people who disdained any language but their own, whereas Metis people "generally took pride in the number of different dialects in which they could more or less make themselves understood." From Isaac Cowie, The Company of Adventurers: A Narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company During 1867-1874 on the Great Buffalo Plains, with Historical and Biographical Notes and Comments (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913) 195.

and an excerpt in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography.<sup>2</sup> McKay interpreted Treaties 1, 2, 3, and 5, and was a Commissioner for Treaty 6. Although he later became a highly regarded politician and businessman, he came from humble origins. He was born in 1828 at Fort Edmonton to Margaret Gladu, daughter of Charles Gladu of St. François Xavier and Margaret or Marie Ross, of French Metis extraction, and James McKay, a native of Scotland.<sup>3</sup> His father entered the Hudson's Bay Company service in 1815 initially as a middleman, eventually traveling with Peter Warren Dease and Thomas Simpson in an Arctic expedition as a steersman, guide, and fisherman in 1833-34. McKay, senior, returned in 1834-1835 with the expedition to make an arctic discovery. In 1840, McKay retired from Company service moving his family to the Scottish parish of Kildonan in the Red River Settlement.<sup>4</sup>

At the colony, James McKay, junior, obtained his education in both the European context at the Anglican Church school of St. John's in Red River and Aboriginal/French Metis context from his mother. His early influences among the multi-cultural fur trade post life at Fort Edmonton, the predominantly Scottish parish of Kildonan, and the experience of school and Church in the Red River colony likely shaped the course his life would take. These differing cultural milieus likely

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<sup>2</sup> Information on James McKay is pieced together from a variety of sources. Secondary sources are limited to Mary McCarthy Ferguson, The Honorable James McKay of Deer Lodge (Altona: D.W. Friesen & Sons, Ltd, 1972) and Agnes Grant, James McKay: A Metis Builder of Canada (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1994), and N. Jaye Goossen, "'A Wearer of Moccasins:' The Honorable James McKay of Deer Lodge," The Beaver, Autumn 1978 and John Turner, "James McKay," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, CD-ROM version (Toronto/Montreal: The University of Toronto Press/Université Laval, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> D.N. Sprague and R.P. Frye, The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation: The Development and Dispersal of the Red River Settlement, 1820-1900 (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, first Printing 1983, fourth printing 2000), for information on Gladu family.

<sup>4</sup> Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Search File: McKay, James (a).

necessitated a reconciling of Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian worldviews and provided an opportunity for McKay to become familiar with each.

While McKay's paternal antecedents would place him within the Anglo-speaking category of "half-breed," or more recently country-born, the presence of his maternal French-speaking Metis antecedents requires a more nuanced approach to understanding his identity as Metis. As Jennifer S.H. Brown points out in "Woman as center and symbol in the emergence of Metis communities," fur trade daughters more often remained in the West, contributing to the rapidly growing population of mixed offspring in the West. The influence of women's symbolic roles in Metis emergence remains little understood, but suggests that a distinctive identity may be traced to Metis mothers.<sup>5</sup> James McKay eventually acquired linguistic fluency in French, English, Cree, Ojibway, and Sioux, which he likely gained from his mother and through his experiences as a trader. McKay's facility with languages and his ability to move freely within a range of cultural milieus came to serve him well as an aide to the Canadian officials, where he used his skills in the context of intercultural relations.

McKay's reputation as a highly skilled guide to wealthy European travelers surfaced during his employment with the Hudson's Bay Company. His contract with the Company began in 1853 and was renewed for six consecutive years. In that period, McKay was selected as Postmaster for Qu'Appelle Lakes in 1854, in 1855 took charge of Fort Ellice, in 1858 became a clerk at Fort Pelly, and finally in 1859 was chosen to establish a post at Shayenne River and Buffalo River in Minnesota. McKay left the

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<sup>5</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Woman as Centre and Symbol in the Emergence of Metis Communities," The Canadian Journal of Native Studies, III:1(1983) 42.



service the following year.<sup>6</sup> His knowledge of the St. Paul-Red River route gained during his first year in the service of the Company made him a natural choice to establish the new post used for transportation of supplies between the two centers. During this period the St. Paul route had taken on greater importance to the Hudson's Bay Company as a result of the opening of American posts. Their presence led to growing competition from free traders following 1849 and the long trek to the Hudson Bay was becoming too costly.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 1. The 'Young McKay', 1857, Glenbow Archives

Also in this period, McKay's skills as an expert traveler drew the attention of HBC Governor Simpson, by whom he was chosen to act as a personal guide between Red River and St. Paul.<sup>8</sup> His reputation was such that he also guided the Earl of Southesk on his expedition between St. Paul and Fort Garry and later, Captain John Palliser. One example of his strength is given by Mrs. Cowan, a Red River pioneer, during a journey across the Territory of Minnesota with James Sinclair in the 1848,

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<sup>6</sup> Hudson's Bay Company, Search File James McKay (c).

<sup>7</sup> Marcel Giraud, *The Metis in the Canadian West* Vol II, translated by George Woodcock, (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1986) 102-103.

<sup>8</sup> Goossen, "A Wearer of Moccasins: The Honorable James McKay," 46.

James McKay, the best plainsman of that time, who was afterwards in the Legislative Council of Manitoba, was in charge of our party. I remember that when a horse trying to draw a cart across a swollen stream stuck in the middle helpless, James McKay unhitched the horse and got between the shafts himself and dragged the cart across. We had to keep on the lookout for the Indians, not the fierce Sioux of the prairies, but the Chippewas, who lived in the northern part of Minnesota, where there were lakes and forests.<sup>9</sup>

Physical strength, necessary for survival in the strenuous fur trade period, in part established a man's standing within his community. McKay's noted strength was an asset to the traveling party when the preservation of life and material goods was at stake.

The increasing presence of European travelers and scientists is indicative of the changes occurring at the international level regarding the future of Rupert's Land. McKay's reputation as a skilled guide made him a natural candidate to assist the travelers. The Earl of Southesk, in the North West hunting big game in 1859, provided a vivid description of McKay:

A Scotsman, though with Indian blood on the mother's side, he was born and bred in Saskatchewan country but afterwards became a resident near Fort Garry, and entered the Company's employment either as a guide or hunter, he was universally reckoned one of the best men. Immensely broad chested and muscular, though not too tall, he weighed eighteen stone yet in spite of his stoutness he was exceedingly hearty and active and a wonderful horseman.

His face somewhat Assyrian in type is very handsome: short, delicate aquiline nose, piercing dark grey eyes; long dark brown hair, beard, moustache, white small regular teeth; skin tanned to red bronze from exposure to the weather. He was dressed in Red River style- a blue cloth 'capote' (hooded frock coat), with brass buttons, red and black flannel shirt; which also served as a waist coat; black belt round the waist; buff leather moccasins on his feet; trousers of brown and white striped home-made woolen stuff.

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<sup>9</sup> W.J. Healy, Women of Red River (Winnipeg: Russell Lang and Co, Ltd, 1923) 29-30.

I have never come across a wearer of moccasins before, and it amuses me to watch this grand and massive man pacing the hotel corridors with noiseless footfalls while the excitable little Yankees in shining boots creaked and stamped about like so many busy steam engines.<sup>10</sup>

The Earl of Southesk's description of McKay presents the reader with the mental image of a robust and handsome Native resident of the North West. He embodied many qualities admired both by residents and outsiders and can be discerned as a Metis by his attire and manner, in opposition to the Americans.

In addition to Southesk's travel narrative, Captain John Palliser also kept a record of his journey through the North West and included a detailed account of both the region and its people. The purpose of his expedition was to determine the likelihood of successful agricultural settlement in the North West.<sup>11</sup> As assistants to the Palliser expedition, Metis guides and interpreters in the numbered treaties James McKay and Peter Erasmus were certainly aware of the purpose of the men traveling through the



Figure 2. The Honorable James McKay, 1870, PAM E-700

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt taken from Irene M. Spry, The Palliser Expedition: An Account of John Palliser's British North American Exploring Expedition, 1857-1860 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1973) 52-53.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Introduction.

West taking scientific measurements. As participants with the expedition, it would have given them insight not possessed by others into the future of the West. While the recommendations in Palliser's final report were not immediately acted upon, the transition from fur trade to agricultural economy was in its infant stages.

In August 1857, Palliser arrived in Red River and traveled to Fort Ellice, at the junction of Qu'Appelle and Assiniboine River, where he met up with Metis guide Henry Hallett's party. At Fort Ellice, Palliser was introduced to James McKay, whom he described as "a remarkable member of a remarkable family. He was one of the best men the HBC had on the prairies- fearless, knowledgeable, a splendid guide. He was detailed for many especially difficult and dangerous jobs."<sup>12</sup> McKay was to replace John Ferguson as chief guide and interpreter at Palliser's urgent request because Ferguson feared the Blackfoot and would not enter into their territory. Because McKay was an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, Palliser's request had to be processed by McKay's superiors. It was reluctantly acceded to by Chief Factor W.J. Christie<sup>13</sup> and Sir George Simpson, though they both felt McKay would be needed back at the fort in due time.<sup>14</sup>

As a young man working for the Company, McKay had gained a reputation as a skilled interpreter and guide. His resignation from the HBC may indicate he faced the racial prejudice barring his advancement through the ranks, or he could have simply left the Company to embark on his own business ventures. This transition to private enterprise was likely made easier by his marriage on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1859 to Margaret

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Chief Factor W.J. Christie to Sir G. Simpson dated Fort Ellice Swan River District Sept 11, 1857, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, (HBCA), Simpson's Correspondence Inward, July-Dec. 1857, James McKay (c) Search File.

<sup>14</sup> Sir G. Simpson to Chief Factor William J. Christie dated Lachine, Nov. 12, 1857 from Simpson's Correspondence Book, No. 26-1857-Pf 221/2. HBCA, James McKay (c) search file.

Rowand, daughter of Chief Factor John Rowand, who brought to the marriage both capital and connections. The couple then moved to Deer Lodge, becoming neighbors to his wife's brother John Rowand, Jr, of Silver Heights on the banks of the Assiniboine in Red River.<sup>15</sup> The magnificence of Deer Lodge indicates James McKay had become an incredibly wealthy man. His marriage into the prestigious Rowand family secured his place among the Rupert's Land elite. McKay was in no way typical of Metis in this period. For example he owned an imported thoroughbred stallion, and was a Vice President of the Temperance Committee in 1858.<sup>16</sup>

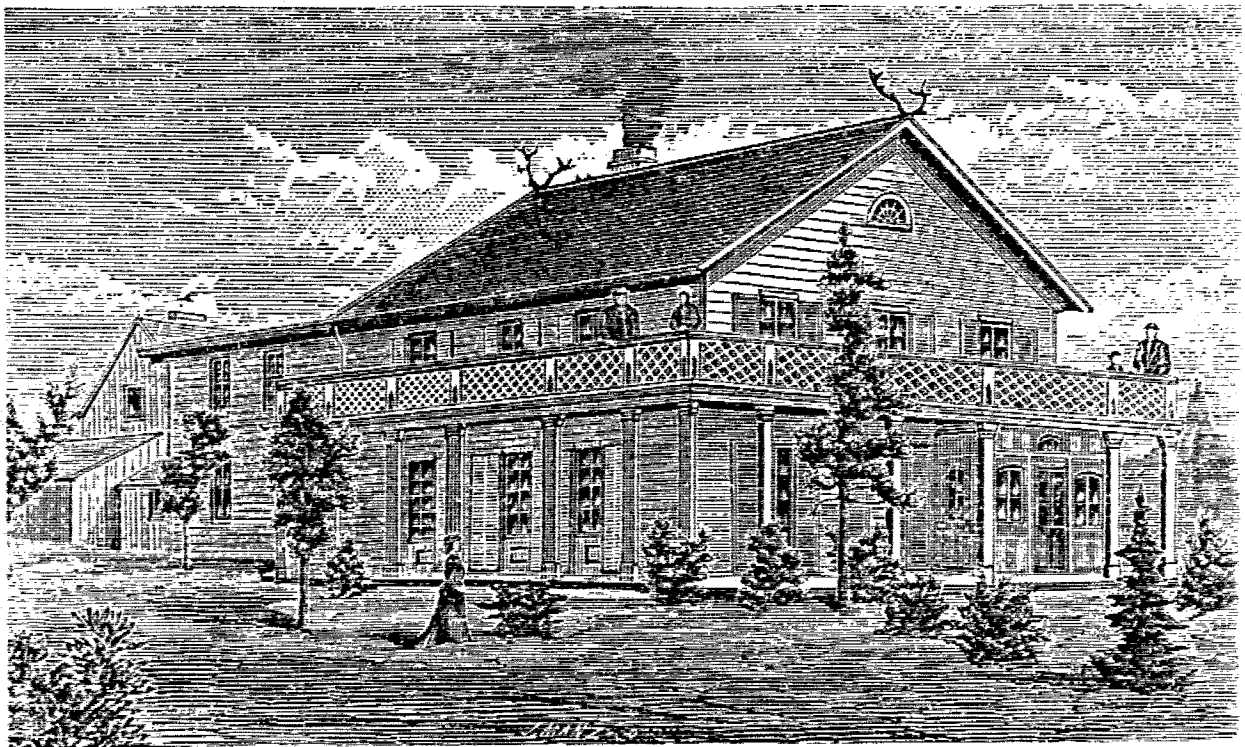


Figure 3. Deer Lodge, Home of the McKay Family, PAM E-700.

<sup>15</sup> Ferguson, The Honorable James McKay 22.

<sup>16</sup> Jemima Ross, Colony Gardens to Alex Ross, Toronto March 12, 1858 file 227 from the Alexander Ross Papers MG2 C14, PAM.

Among his business ventures were a farm at Rainy River, managed by D.R. Cyres, raising grains and root vegetables,<sup>17</sup> and a freighting business transporting goods for the building of the Canadian railway.<sup>18</sup> In 1876 McKay was also given the contract to carry mail to the C.P.R. surveys, also delivering personal mail to the interior from his house.<sup>19</sup> He also had the contract to supply flour, beef, and the transport supplies to different points. In particular, McKay frequently freighted supplies needed for treaty negotiation and annuity payments.<sup>20</sup>

McKay's entrance into Red River society coincided with his entrance into the colony's limited political life. The Council of Assiniboia, the government in the North West until the transfer, acted as a proprietary government with limited authority. Until 1834 it was merely an agent of the Selkirk family, rather than an actual colonial government. The Company obtained jurisdiction over Assiniboia in 1834, retaining the Council, and reorganized it by increasing the number of councilors to fifteen and adding a General Court in 1837. Because the court lacked substantial power, it was incapable of enforcing its dictates. Contributing to the negligible importance of the Council was the lack of representation from among the people. For example, despite their majority in the population in Red River, no Metis or French-speakers were included among the members.<sup>21</sup> To reconcile this glaring oversight, the council eventually came to include Bishop Norbert Provencher in 1837 and Cuthbert Grant, a Metis leader, in 1839. Several postings within the courts and police force included both French- and English-speaking Metis, rightly reflecting their economic and political importance in the

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<sup>17</sup> Ferguson, The Honorable James McKay 33.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Fort Garry 1875, W.J. Christie to Richard Hardisty Fort Garry July 26<sup>th</sup> 1875 File 114 Hardisty Fonds, M477, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Morton, Manitoba: A History 68-70.

colony.<sup>22</sup> Prominent Metis received appointments following 1857, though these generally came from the more conservative ranks of the community. In these years the Council lacked any significant power and its duties revolved around administering the colony, searching for a means to control the sale of liquor, and considering petitions from the community.<sup>23</sup>

Lionel Dorge's interesting observation on the divisions within the French-speaking Metis suggests not all Metis people shared McKay's eagerness to please the government officials arriving in Red River in 1869. Others viewed his acceptance of their offers of appointments and status with suspicion, and believed he had been influenced by their power. Dorge points out:

The two groups (French Metis from White Horse Plain and those from Upper Settlement) did not always see eye to eye and the former was to accept and adapt more quickly to the forthcoming changes in government. A witness writing in French, said that the people of St Charles were 'dazzled by the honor of seeing the new Governor [Lieutenant-Governor designate McDougall] about to take up residence in their locality, at Mr. Rowand's who has rented out his house for the purpose, and disarmed by the attitude of their oracle Mr. [James] McKay who has allowed the newcomers to sweeten him up and guides them himself in their surveys at the Ilets-au-Bois also supplying them with employees, [and they] do not appear to share the general enthusiasm in opposing the new government.'<sup>24</sup>

As a member of the Council of Assiniboia from 1865 onward, James McKay's participation in the years leading up the confrontation between Riel's supporters and the

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<sup>22</sup> Lionel Dorge, "The Metis and Canadien Councilors of Assiniboia," *The Beaver*, Summer (1974): 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 43

<sup>24</sup> Lionel Dorge, "The Metis and Canadien Councilors of Assiniboia", *The Beaver*, pt. III, Winter (1974): 51.

Canadian government indicates he was clearly a member of the more conservative faction among Red River leadership.

The Council's refusal to bring in new people to provide a fresh perspective has been cited as a contribution to the difficulties of 1869-70. McKay's appointment was likely made because of his ties to the French-speaking Metis community at White Horse Plain, a Roman Catholic community belonging to the parish of St. Charles, and his friendship with Bishop Taché.<sup>25</sup> In December 1867 he was appointed President of the White Horse Plain district court.<sup>26</sup> However, it was during his tenure that the Council became largely irrelevant to the people of Red River. "Throughout that period (1862-1868) fewer and fewer resolutions passed through Council; councilors appeared unable to legislate and powerless to implement any clear cut legislation."<sup>27</sup> A lack of effective leadership pervaded the Council and contributed to the growing disaffection felt particularly among the younger generations in Red River.

Clearly members of the Council eagerly anticipated the arrival of the new lieutenant-governor and Canadian rule, in contrast to other sections of the population. The address prepared to welcome Lieutenant-Governor McDougall expressed the anticipation felt by the council, but also carefully noted that not all in the community were as anxious for the transfer,

Your excellency can, then, well understand that there are mingled feelings in our community with respect to the great change that has taken place, and even misgivings as regards the future in the minds of some; but as we gladly see, in the appointment of your excellency, proof of the interest that the Government of the Dominion takes in this land; so we have the fullest confidence not

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>26</sup> Council Minutes, Council of Assiniboia Dec 17<sup>th</sup>, 1867, MG2 B1, HBCA.

<sup>27</sup> Dorge, "The Metis and Canadien Councilors" 55.



only that all just rights of the old settlers will be respected, but that the transition will be made as easy for them as possible.<sup>28</sup>

It is difficult to say whether McKay's feelings were in accordance with this hopeful anticipation; evidence does suggest that he certainly welcomed the economic and social opportunities the arrival of Canadian rule would afford him.

McKay's activities in the critical years leading up the eventual crisis in Red River illustrate a man whose choices were made in the interest of self-preservation. His adaptation and accommodation should be seen as another facet of Metis identity. He discovered a niche where skills such as his, knowledge of landscape and people, combined with the ability to mediate between each, were in high demand. By appearing to accept the terms of the Euro-Canadian power framework, he could preserve his autonomy and influence in subtle ways the creation of a new society while preserving elements of the old.

James McKay did not choose a side during the Resistance of 1869-1870, and took his family to St. Joseph on November 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>29</sup> One explanation for his actions are the close family and business ties he had to people on both sides of the Resistance that made it difficult for him to be involved in any obvious way. McKay acted as an intermediary between Canadian officials and the people of Red River Settlement. McDougall reported that before any decisive measures were taken against Riel and his supporters, Colonel Dennis was to confer with James McKay. McKay did not support Riel, particularly once the Stone Fort was overtaken. However, he did not want to risk losing

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<sup>28</sup> Council Minutes, Council of Assiniboia Papers May 1869, MG2 B1, HBCA.

<sup>29</sup> Lieutenant-Governor William McDougall, Pembina, letter of December 2<sup>nd</sup> 1869 in "Report on arrival at Pembina and obstructions to his journey to Fort Garry, 1869." St. Paul Daily Press, Nov 21, in "Canada Legislative Assembly," HBCA.

his property in opposing him. McDougall offered his unkind opinion as to why McKay abstained from involvement,

I am disposed to think he ran away as much on account of the danger to his person as to his property. But his case illustrates the position and feeling of many others who have no sympathy with the French half-breeds, and no objection to the new Government. They will accept the latter if someone else will do the fighting and pay all the money necessary to establish it.<sup>30</sup>

This unflattering analysis may have missed McKay's aversion to opposing members of his home community with whom he had many familial and economic ties.

In typical fashion, McKay mediated between the rival parties in the Resistance by providing information about Riel's movements to the new Canadian authorities. In addition, McKay strongly cautioned Colonel Dennis not to incite one segment of the population against the other, warning that there would be serious repercussions if violence were to occur, and played an important role advocating for a peaceful solution to the hostilities through ongoing dialogue between both parties. He had a petition signed by one hundred of the principal French Metis to allow the Governor entrance into the settlement, indicating other Metis in the community shared his views.<sup>31</sup>

McKay again acted as peacemaker, delivering the French List of Rights to McDougall. McKay's plea for peace may have prevented an escalation of violence,

McKay begged that the order to arm, on the part of the rest of the Settlement, should be delayed further, as his belief was that matters could be settled amicably, and represented, in strong language, the outrages that would ensue, owing to the savage and revengeful instincts of these men, in case of hostilities. He expressed the opinion that if blood was shed in

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<sup>30</sup> Letter from William McDougall to Hon. Joseph Howe, Secretary of State for the Provinces, Pembina, Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1869, in Lieutenant-Governor McDougall's "Report on arrival at Pembina and obstructions to his journey to Fort Garry," Canada Legislative Assembly, HBCA.

<sup>31</sup> Memo 4A, Pembina, Dec 13<sup>th</sup>, 1869 in Lieutenant-Governor McDougall's "Report on arrival at Pembina and obstructions to his journey to Fort Garry," Canada Legislative Assembly, HBCA.

the Settlement, Mr. McDougall, and his family, at Pembina, would be murdered, and further, that even, at the present time, my own life was in danger from assassination, and cautioned me from what had come to his knowledge, to be very careful in my movements outside the fort.<sup>32</sup>

As an intermediary between the people of Red River and the exiled Governor languishing at Pembina, McKay's activity primarily took place on the level of the personal. He repeatedly established relationships with various parties and brought them together, an activity that was critical to the successful integration of the new Canadian government in the West.

McKay was most clearly an asset to Canadian authorities in the West when he was called upon for the creation and maintenance of peaceful relations with the Aboriginal inhabitants and participated in other aspects of Indian affairs besides treaty-making. In one example, McKay brokered an interaction between Indian and white newcomers during the Boundary survey. Between Red River and Pembina a marker separating the British and American territory in 1818 at the North Western Point of Lake of the Woods became covered by water. The scientific measurements made later by Americans in 1820 had been erroneous and therefore the missing marker would be needed as a reference point. James McKay was called in during his tenure as manager for the Dawson Route for the Dominion Government. Both his ability to communicate with the Ojibway and his experience working among them were seen to be an asset.

On this account, and because of his official position and strong personality, he has much influence with the Indians, and obtained one of the old chiefs, who said he knew where the monument had been, to go with him and point it out. Accordingly the Indian, accompanied by Mr. McKay, Major

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<sup>32</sup> Report from Colonel Dennis, Saturday December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1869 in Lieutenant- Governor McDougall's "Report on arrival at Pembina and obstructions to his journey to Fort Garry," Canada Legislative Assembly, HBCA.

Farquhar, and Captain Anderson, went in a canoe to the point of land which we had searched over so many times, and directed our attention to a place directly off the point among the rushes which everywhere fringed the shore, in about two and a half feet of water, which he said he knew to be the place where the monument had been...<sup>33</sup>

In what will become a common assertion, the Boundary Commissioners praised McKay for his “influence with the Indians.” The nature of his influence with Indian people was never fully explained, and neither can it be determined but it was repeatedly referred to in treaty negotiations. It is clear McKay’s ability to communicate to First Nations was based on trust and an adherence to Aboriginal diplomatic forms. Nonetheless, the ability to influence Indian people was viewed as a distinct asset, especially during the negotiations of the numbered treaties.

Like McKay, other prominent Metis who participated in Indian affairs or treaty-making, usually did not oppose Canadian annexation. French Metis leader Pascal Breland was likewise a significant participant in Indian affairs because of his later role as government diplomat to the Southern Plains Cree, distributing gifts in preparation for Treaty 4 and reporting on the conditions in the Fort Qu’Appelle region. He was born June 15, 1811 in the Saskatchewan River Valley to free trader Pierre Du Boishu, dit Berland, and Louise (Josephite) Belley.<sup>34</sup> The family later moved to the Red River Settlement to take up farming. After his father’s death, Breland took over the family farm and quickly became a prosperous farmer and trader. Like McKay, Breland married well, increasing his wealth and prestige. In marrying Marie Grant, the daughter of Cuthbert Grant who had traded freely with the Company’s sanction in spite of

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<sup>33</sup> Ed. C. Ian Jackson, Letters from the 49<sup>th</sup> Parallel, 1957-1873: Selected Correspondence from Joseph Harris and Samuel Anderson (Toronto: The Champlain Society 2000 Introduction, lxxxviii-lxxxix.

<sup>34</sup> Lynne Champagne, “Pascal Breland,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography, CD-ROM version (Toronto/Montreal: The University of Toronto Press/Université Laval, 2000).

monopoly, Breland's own independent trading was protected by his father-in-law's exemption. Following Grant's death, Breland took over his sizable estate. By 1878 he had amassed almost 154 hectares in St. Francois Xavier.<sup>35</sup> Breland came to be known as *roi de traiteurs*, and one of the wealthiest men in Red River. His trading activities took him out into the *hivernant* or wintering settlements around Souris River, Qu'Appelle Valley, Wood Mountain, and Cypress Hills.<sup>36</sup>

Breland, appointed in 1851 as Magistrate for White Horse Plains, then as Petty Judge the following year, became a member of the Council of Assiniboia in 1857. Like James McKay, he and his family left Red River during the Resistance. His objection to the murder of Thomas Scott overrode his aversion to the Canadian government's lack of consultation of the inhabitants. Once back in Red River, Breland used his authority among the French Metis of St. Francois Xavier to oppose Riel's leadership that resulted in a dispersion of many families into the wintering grounds further West.<sup>37</sup> Breland and McKay, both wealthy and prominent businessmen, objected to the confiscation of property by Riel. Historian Gerhard Ens infers, "It is probable, then, that prominent Metis traders such as Pascal Breland would have welcomed political union with Canada on equitable terms to improve their business, credit, and mercantile contacts with Montreal."<sup>38</sup> In addition to economic motivation, Ens also believes that those who did not support Riel may have had familial ties among his supporters, making it a difficult choice. The leadership of McKay and Breland may have greatly contributed to the

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<sup>35</sup> Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, "Pascal Breland," Historic Resources Branch (1984): 2.

<sup>36</sup> Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 86.

<sup>37</sup> Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation.

<sup>38</sup> Ens, Homeland to Hinterland 130.

success of the Metis cause, but would have cost them politically and



Figure 4. Pascal Breland, PAM P-80.



Figure 5. William McKay, HBCA SF.

financially. Breland's position, untarnished by involvement in the Resistance helped to ensure his position in the newly forming society. For example, the people of St. Francois Xavier elected him to the first Legislative Assembly and he was a member of the North West Council when he journeyed to Qu'Appelle in 1873 as a Government representative to visit the Cree and Assiniboine.<sup>39</sup>

A contemporary of Breland, Charles Nolin was active in Red River and Metis politics and a participant in the Treaty 3 negotiations. Charles Nolin was born to Augustin Nolin and Hélène-Anne Cameron in 1837 in St. Boniface Manitoba. The Nolin family was prosperous and respected among the French Metis in Red River. Charles later moved with his brothers, Joseph and Duncan, to farm at Pointe-de-Chêne

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<sup>39</sup> Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation.

in the 1850's.<sup>40</sup> The Nolin family had historic and kinship ties to the Ojibway. Originally from Sault Ste. Marie, they became prominent in the *pay d'en haut* as fur traders, siding with the British during the War of 1812.<sup>41</sup> Father Augustin was recognized for his victorious attack on the Americans at Fort Mackinac, leading the Ojibways under him. Louis, brother to Augustin, was thought to be the best Ojibway interpreter in the Lake Superior area. He interpreted for the Selkirk treaty, and acted as an interpreter for Lord Selkirk between 1815-1817, who encouraged the family to move from the Sault to Red River.<sup>42</sup>

Charles Nolin's political leanings placed him in the conservative camp with Breland, Hamelin, McKay, and others who welcomed annexation with Canada. He became the Minister of Agriculture in Premier Davis' cabinet, where he was the most prominent Metis politician. This position also brought him lucrative government contracts. He acted as interpreter for Lieutenant-Governor Morris, though he disapproved of the treatment Indian and Metis people received at the hands of the government. He resigned as Agriculture Minister in 1875 to protest the lack of assistance given to Metis farmers in the government policies.<sup>43</sup>

Present with Nolin at the negotiations for Treaty 3, Pierre Leveiller was frequently mentioned in the government documents pertaining to treaty-making. Evidence indicates he participated in some way in each treaty since his signature can be found on almost every treaty document. His role is much more difficult to determine and a great deal less is known about him. He was born in 1829 to Pierre Leveiller, a

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<sup>40</sup> Dianne P. Payment, "Charles Nolin," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, [www.biographi.ca](http://www.biographi.ca) accessed 12/01/2004.

<sup>41</sup> The genealogy of the Nolin family is provided in Donald Chaput, "The 'Misses Nolin' of Red River," The Beaver, Winter (1975): 14.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>43</sup> Payment, "Charles Nolin," 2 of 3.

French-Canadian, and Julie Mackenzie, a descendant of Sir Alex Mackenzie and Marie, an Inuit woman. He married G n vieve Fagnant in 1856 and resided in St. Francois Xavier.<sup>44</sup> Leveiller was noted for his involvement in the Resistance of 1869-70 initially as a supporter of Riel, then the Canadian government. He was elected at the first convention, after which he and Maxime Lepine represented Riel and the Provisional Government by carrying the notice to exiled Lieutenant-Governor McDougall demanding he leave the territory.

Leveiller withdrew his support for Riel's cause following Riel's seizure of Upper Fort Garry, an illegal violation of the HBC property rights, but returned to Riel's camp after he promised to return it.<sup>45</sup> When Donald A. Smith arrived in Red River in the summer of 1870, as a representative of some Metis in Red River Leveiller initially thought Smith's Commission from the federal government to be in accordance with those Leveiller represented, but after hearing Smith's offer, felt Metis rights would not be protected reinforcing his support of Riel.<sup>46</sup> At some point, he again abandoned the Metis cause, becoming a loyal Canadian supporter.

Why Leveiller came to play an important though enigmatic role in Indian affairs in the North West is unknown. Unlike other prominent Metis, Leveiller did not participate in the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade or as a noted free trader, nor did he engage in missionary activities. His profession is unknown, but he at some point developed a proficiency in both Indian and European languages: French, English, Ojibway, and Cree, and knowledge of Indian and Metis social and diplomatic protocol.

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<sup>44</sup> File 716,000, Pierre Leveiller, Charles Denney Genealogical Collection, M7144, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>45</sup> *Ens, Homeland to Hinterland* 128.

<sup>46</sup> *The New Nation*, May 27, 1870



Metis interpreters involved in the treaties frequently did not have direct ties to the Red River settlement or involvement in the Resistance. For example William McKay, James Bird, Nicholas Chasellaine, and Jerry Potts came to treaty negotiations with fur trade backgrounds, generally with the Hudson's Bay Company. In addition, some interpreters were related through marriage to Indian bands, or had gained experience through missionary work among the Indian bands, such as Rev. John McKay, Peter Erasmus, and Charles Pratt. Connections and skills gained through trade and missionary work were a foundation that would assist the Metis at treaty negotiations. As Arthur Ray, Jim Miller, and Frank Tough point out in their book, treaty negotiations were often approached by Native people as similar to the fur trade process and often took place at the trading posts.<sup>47</sup> The Metis interpreters possessed a common understanding of Indian protocol and local conditions that newcomers could not possibly have. Their contribution to Indian affairs, whether as interpreters, diplomats, intermediaries, facilitators, or Treaty Commissioners, in many cases reduced the possibility of misunderstanding that could lead to violence. This was in large part because of their willingness to respect First Nations diplomatic forms. Their knowledge came as a result of living as co-inhabitants of the North West, related yet distinct communities sharing land and family ties.

William McKay, intermediary to the Carlton and Pitt Indian bands prior to the signing of Treaty 6, was a member of the "Little Bearskin" McKays, but no relation to the Hon. James McKay family. The McKay family had historic ties to the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade beginning with Henry McKay, a Hudson's Bay employee from

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<sup>47</sup>Ray, Miller, and Tough, Bounty and Benevolence, see Chapter 1 describing the practices of yearly renewal of trader-Indian relationships, and the influence this had on subsequent treaties.

1790-1810. His son, John Richards McKay, became the Factor at Fort Ellice in 1833 and remained there for over a generation.<sup>48</sup> John Richards McKay was widely respected by all who knew him. He and his family came to be known as the “Mac-quay-ah-ness” or “Little Bear skin” by the Cree Indians.<sup>49</sup> William, son of John Richards McKay and Harriet Ballenden, took over trade at Fort Ellice from his father. Isaac Cowie, who worked at Fort Ellice under McKay, documented William McKay’s reputation as a superior trader. “Ever, with devotion to his duty to the Company, he was just and kind to the Indians, into whose affairs he brought the sympathy of knowledge, while his well-known courage prevented their attempting to impose upon him. He was the model of what a really good Indian trader should be.”<sup>50</sup> He was also known as “Wahannah,” a term possibly based on the Dakota word “Wahann” for Bearskin.<sup>51</sup>

William, according to family memory, was responsible for arranging a treaty of friendship between the Dakota, who had moved into Cree and Assiniboine territory following the Minnesota massacre of 1862, and this treaty of friendship has never been broken.<sup>52</sup> William joined the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1837 as middleman in the Swan River District, rising quickly through the ranks. He became interpreter at Fort Pelly in 1846, postmaster in 1850 and was appointed in charge of Egg Lake post in 1854. He moved from post to post in the Swan River District, becoming Chief Factor of

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<sup>48</sup> HBCA Employee Biography, William McKay “c”, William McKay born Feb 16, 1818 died Dec 25<sup>th</sup> 1883 at Edmonton.

<sup>49</sup> Isaac Cowie, Company of Adventurers 180.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pg 185.

<sup>51</sup> Margaret L. Clarke, “Sitting Bull’s Wedding Gift: The McKay’s Relations with the Dakota.” (Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg/University of Manitoba), paper presented at The Northern Great Plains History Conference, Brandon Manitoba, September 1995, from the Charles Denney Genealogical Collection, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 8.

Fort Ellice in 1865, then Fort Pitt in 1873.<sup>53</sup> The propensity for creating alliances seems to be an extension of the ethos of the Plains fur trade, where peaceful economic transaction was based on mutually agreed upon forms of dealing, at the basis of which was mutual respect and trust.

McKay's presence at Fort Ellice and later at Fort Carlton and Pitt in the 1870's and his economic relationship with local Bands trading in those places made him a natural candidate to prepare the Cree in the Carlton and Pitt region for the Treaty 6 negotiations. He likewise explained the purpose of the Boundary Survey and North West Mounted Police that entered Cree territory before treaties had been signed.

Like McKay, another Metis with ties to the Hudson's Bay Company fur trade was Nicholas Chastellaine.<sup>54</sup> Chastellaine was an interpreter for Treaty 3 and an advocate for the Metis adhesion to Treaty 3. He had been born between 1795-1799 in the area of Grand Portage to a French-Canadian father and Saulteaux mother.<sup>55</sup> He entered the employment of the Hudson's Bay Company as Postmaster at Hungry Hall in the Fort Francis District and remained with the Company until 1869 when he became an interpreter for the incoming authorities. In 1875 Chastellaine signed an agreement for the Rainy Lake and Rainy River Metis, known as the "Half-Breed adhesion to Treaty No. 3." In the adhesion, the Metis were promised two reserves and were to receive the same benefits as stipulated in the treaty.<sup>56</sup> It was never ratified, though some annuities were paid out, and the Metis at Rainy River were never able to induce the government to make good on its promise.

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<sup>53</sup> HBCA Employee Biography, William McKay "c".

<sup>54</sup> Spelled Chatelain, Chastellaine, Chatelaine, Chatelan, and Chattelaine. From David T. McNab, "Charles Chatelain" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, [www.biographi.ca](http://www.biographi.ca) accessed 12/04/2004.

<sup>55</sup> Nicholas Chastellaine file #352,000, C.D. Denney Genealogical Fonds, Glenbow Archives. Denney lists his birth as 1792.

<sup>56</sup> McNab, "Nicholas Chastellaine."

Chastellaine was described in 1889 by an Indian agent as “one of nature’s noblemen, six feet four inches in height, 98 years of age and totally blind,” who also stated that no one had “a greater influence over the Indians than this remarkable man.”<sup>57</sup> During the period of the Red River Resistance, Chastellaine was active among the Saulteaux who would eventually sign Treaty 3. By giving gifts and promoting the benefits of the treaties, he was to preserve the positive image of the Canadian officials among the First Nations. Chastellaine was likely chosen by officials because of his marital and familial ties with the bands, and knowledge of their language and culture.

Another significant figure in the treaty-making process was Peter Erasmus who originally interpreted on behalf of the Plains Cree, not the government. Erasmus was born June 27, 1833 to Catherine Budd, sister of Reverend Henry Budd, and descendant of Hudson’s Bay Company Chief Factor William Hemmings Cook.<sup>58</sup> His father, Peter Erasmus, Sr, worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company and later took up farming in the Red River Settlement around Fort Garry.<sup>59</sup> Peter Erasmus, Jr, learned the language and stories of the Ojibway people at the hands of his mother. Later in his life, he acquired knowledge of Swampy and Plains Cree, Blackfoot, Stoney (Assiniboine), and the ability to read Greek.

Like many Metis children, his upbringing reflected both Aboriginal and European parental influences. Though Erasmus himself did not actively engage in farming, his father taught him the importance of agriculture. Erasmus recalled his father

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> According to Sprague and Frye, Peter Erasmus Sr, born 1794 married Catherine Budd, Metis, born 1800, from Table 1: Genealogies of Red River House Holds, 1818-1870, Sprague and Frye, The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation.

<sup>59</sup> A genealogical table compiled by Irene Spry is located in The Peter Erasmus fonds, Box 1 file 1-3 Draft Introduction. Glenbow Archives.

was always active in his farm work, and frequently lectured us boys on the fertility of the soil and the great future in farm life for those who would develop its wonderful resources. He was among the very few in his day who realized that the vast herds of buffalo would someday be replaced with domestic animals and other agricultural pursuits.<sup>60</sup>

In the fall of 1849, when Erasmus was sixteen, his uncle Rev. Henry Budd took over as guardian of the family following his father's early death.

Erasmus attended school in Red River, but was forced to quit after his father's death to work on the family farm. Shortly afterwards, he was given the opportunity to become an assistant to his uncle, Henry Budd, at Norway House where he was starting up a Mission. It was there that he had his first opportunity to interpret before a big crowd. His natural ability to learn languages and his desire for excitement led him, at age twenty-two, to reject the opportunity to become an Anglican minister like his uncle. He entered the employment of Rev. Woolsey in 1856, interpreting and assisting him in his travels and missionary work.<sup>61</sup>

While at Fort Edmonton, Erasmus took the opportunity to learn the Blackfoot language, a skill that would assist him in his journey among them with the Palliser expedition. Erasmus' knowledge of both Aboriginal and Protestant Anglo-European world-views, his natural affinity for learning languages, physical hardihood, and intelligence enabled him to play a vital role in the cultural frontiers of the West. John and George McDougall considered Erasmus an "A-1 interpreter," when he joined them as a guide and interpreter. Likewise, he assisted the Reverend Steinhauer at Whitefish Lake where "he proved himself to be an earnest friend of this people and a prince of

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<sup>60</sup>Peter Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Nights ed. Irene Spry (Calgary: Fifth House, 1999) 5.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid, Introduction, xix.

interpreters."<sup>62</sup> His experience among the Palliser expedition as an interpreter and guide, combined with his work among the missionaries prepared him for his role in treaty negotiations.

Erasmus married Charlotte Jackson, the daughter of a Hudson's Bay Company Chief Factor and a Cree woman from the Whitefish Lake settlement, in 1864. His marriage created family ties among the Cree of Victoria Mission where he took up residence.<sup>63</sup> While at Victoria, Erasmus trapped furs with this wife and entered the free trade, trading and trapping around Whitefish Lake. As changes were taking place in the West with the arrival of the North West Mounted Police, the Cree sought his opinion on several occasions. He remembered the difficulty in reconciling the two dissimilar cultures and providing a clear translation.

During the interpretation some manipulation of meaning can occur to provide a more acceptable image. His comments on the difficulty of responding to questions about the British political system reveal the complexity of interpreting,

To say that we were ruled by a woman would be scorned as impossible and her representatives in this country would be deemed unfit to be taken as wise men or respected in council. That is why the Queen was always referred to as the Great Queen Mother by the men who negotiated the treaties at a later date with the Indians. Women were respected among the tribes after they became grandmothers to a degree hardly in keeping with their early years of service with the tribe or as mother raising families."<sup>64</sup>

In addition, people wondered what the intent of the Government was regarding land tenure. In early spring 1876 Erasmus received a letter from Mista-wa-sis and Ah-tuk-a-kup requesting he be the interpreter for the Plains Cree in the upcoming treaty, stating

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<sup>62</sup> John McDougall, Forest, Lake and Prairie: Twenty Years of Frontier Life in Western Canada- 1842-62 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (Toronto: William Briggs, 1910)141.

<sup>63</sup> Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Night 177.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

Lawrence Clarke had recommended him because of his reputation. Naturally he accepted their request.

Like Erasmus, Charles Pratt, or Askenootow gained experience reconciling vastly differing worldviews when reconciling Christian and Aboriginal religious issues. Pratt, interpreter for Treaty 4 and an Anglican missionary, was born around 1816 in the Cree-Assiniboine tribe of the Young Dogs in the Qu'Appelle valley. He was the son of an Assiniboine-speaking mother, and Zacharria Floremond, a Metis.<sup>65</sup> As a child, he was sent to Red River under the care of Rev. John West and educated at the Red River Academy. He then entered the employment of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1840, and was stationed at Fort Pelly until 1844. He returned to Red River under the tutelage of Rev. Henry Cochrane, eventually moving to the Touchwood Hills area as a Catechist and lay preacher among the Cree and Assiniboine.

Pratt straddled two cultures, one a nomadic and hunting culture, the other agricultural and sedentary. To provide an example to the Cree he attempted farming but quickly discovered that it was virtually impossible due to the climate, his lack of equipment, and experience and the predators in the form of Plains Indians.<sup>66</sup> He was remembered in his family's oral history as a man who loved his people and worked hard to help them cope with the changes taking place in the West, and was said to have instilled cultural pride in them, speaking Cree and passing down traditions.<sup>67</sup> This image contradicts his image in his journals, which fall into the category of European missionary discourse.

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<sup>65</sup> Winona Stevenson, "The Journals of a Church of England Native Catechist: Askenootow (Charles Pratt), 1851-1884," eds. Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native history (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996) 306.

<sup>66</sup> Frits Pannekoek, "Charles Pratt," Dictionary of Canadian Biography (Toronto and Montreal: University of Toronto, Université Laval) CD-ROM version, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Stevenson, "The Journals of a Church of England Native Catechist," 308.

Charles Pratt can be seen as a bi-cultural individual mediating the world between Native and non-Native. His experience in the Red River settlement, educated by John West, the first Anglican Missionary in Red River (1820-1823) who believed that 'civilization must go hand in hand with Christianity,' would have given him an understanding of white values and cultural practices, whether or not he accepted them. The English missionaries perceived Metis and Indian lifestyles that centered on the buffalo hunt and community as savage and inferior to the sedentary agricultural pursuits practiced by the British and Euro-Canadians.<sup>68</sup>

Pratt also studied under Reverend William Cochrane, who arrived in Red River in 1825 and stayed until his death in 1865. His preaching catered mainly to the English-speaking Metis, Orkeneymen, and Scots. He, like other Anglican missionaries, held the same biases. According to historian Frits Pannekoek,

The clergy saw themselves as warriors in a moral battle against the diabolical temptations and licentiousness inherent in the vast barbaric wilderness- to them the very antithesis of civilization. The Protestant missionary was convinced that the Indian, Metis, and Halfbreed were infected by the contagion of barbarism, and that they were lost to civilization.<sup>69</sup>

The views of these Protestant missionaries must have had an effect on Charles Pratt. The cultural milieu of the Protestant mission and that of the Qu'Appelle Lake area were vastly different, but equally familiar to Pratt. His ability to walk in both worlds enabled him to participate in an intermediary role during the negotiation of Treaty 4.

Familiarity with dual cultural systems is a common characteristic shared by the majority of the Metis interpreters. James "Jimmy Jock" Bird and Jerry Potts, both

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<sup>68</sup> Pannekoek, *A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1991) 62-63.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



mixed-blood interpreters for Treaty 7, create a unique dilemma when attempting to uncover the role of interpreters. The historical record differs on their ability to translate and truthfully convey the actual intentions of the Canadian Government. James Bird, the eldest son of Chief Factor James Bird and a Cree woman, was born in 1798 around Carlton House and raised at Edmonton House where his father presided over the fort. He entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Saskatchewan District where he acquired five Indian languages, in addition to English and French. He often lived among Indian bands in order to obtain their furs, and spent time in what is now southern Alberta. He took up free trading and married a Peigan woman in 1825, fluctuating between the American Fur Trade Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. He acted as interpreter for Methodist Rev. Robert Rundle until 1848, then for Father Pierre-Jean De Smet, a Catholic, and for the American government in the 1855 treaty negotiation between Blackfoot tribes and the Americans.<sup>70</sup> He later moved to Red River to live among his relatives in 1856, but left after the Resistance, returning to Blackfoot country. Because of his reputation as an interpreter he was engaged to translate Treaty 7.<sup>71</sup>

What emerges from the historical record detailing the life of James Bird, who would have been seventy-nine at the time of Treaty 7, is a man who lived according to his own rule, a true "gen libre". James Bird either felt disdain for the missionaries or simply felt no obligation to stay at their service because he frequently abandoned them or refused to interpret. The rival fur Companies likewise had a poor opinion of him. He

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<sup>70</sup> James Doty, "A visit to the Blackfoot Camp," ed. Hugh Dempsey, Alberta Historical Review, Summer (1966): 22.

<sup>71</sup> David Smyth, "James Bird" Dictionary of Canadian Biography, (Toronto and Montreal: University of Toronto and Université Laval, 2000) CD-ROM version.

found acceptance in various Blackfoot Tribes and frequently moved between groups.<sup>72</sup>

Paul Kane came across Bird during his voyage West and recounts his encounter at Rocky Mountain House where Bird was temporarily in charge:

(April 1848) called Jemmy Jock, a Cree half-breed, who had temporary charge of it; he had obtained much Blackfoot celebrity. He was sent out when a clerk of the Hudson's Bay Company by them, to the Blackfoot Indians in order to learn their language, for the purpose of facilitating trade with them. He then married a daughter of one of their chiefs, and taking a fancy to their mode of life, he left the Company's services and stayed with them. He afterwards became one of their chiefs, and being a man of singular acuteness, soon acquired great influence. The missionaries entertained very little respect for him, and have spoken very badly of him throughout the whole country; but as far as my intercourse with him went, I always found him trustworthy and hospitable. I learned much from him relative to the customs of the Blackfoot tribe, of which, owing his long residence among them, thirty or forty years, he possessed a greater knowledge probably than any other man with the same education.<sup>73</sup>

James Bird's experience among the Blackfoot as a member of their tribe, long residence in the territory, combined with his skills and experience translating for the earlier American treaty with the Blackfoot are examples of a history of inter-cultural relations within the context of both the fur trade and treaty-making.

Finally, perhaps the most famous mixed-blood interpreter for the treaties was Jerry Potts, Kyi-yo-kosi, or "Bear Child". He was born in 1840 to Namo-pisi, Crooked back, of Black Elk's band of Bloods, and Andrew R. Potts, a Scottish clerk with the American Fur Trade Company at Fort Mackenzie on the Missouri River. In 1840, the elder Potts was killed by One White Eye and Jerry was adopted by Alexander Harvey, a man with a reputation for violence. The child then changed hands when Andrew

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<sup>72</sup> Charles Denney Genealogical File. James Bird File 26,000. Glenbow Archives

<sup>73</sup> Paul Kane, Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America from Canada to Vancouver Island and Oregon and back again (Toronto: Radisson Society of Canada, 1859, 1925ed) 288.

Dawson adopted him, teaching Potts the fur trade and Indian languages.<sup>74</sup> He joined his mother's people sometime during 1840's, drifting between the Blood tribe and American Fur Trade posts, gaining fame as an Indian warrior.

Potts' first wife was a Crow woman named Mary with whom he had one son, Mitchell. In 1869, she returned to her father's band taking their son with her. Between 1869-1874, he worked for whiskey traders as a hunter, and was also noted as a warrior at the Battle of the Belly River. He spent the years 1873-74 with Peigans and was also employed with the I.G. Baker Company at the post on Badger Creek. Potts is likely most noted for the assistance he provided for the North West Mounted Police in 1874 as a guide, scout, and interpreter. In the early settlement period Potts explained the presence of the Police to the Indians, and brought Blackfoot chiefs Crowfoot, Red Crow (Blood), and Bull Head (Peigan) to meet Colonel MacLeod.<sup>75</sup> He also provided information to the Police about the ways of the Indians. His reputation as a cultural broker, based on his experience with the Police and Blackfoot, is undeniable.

The record suggests that Potts' skills as an interpreter were less than satisfactory. Potts preferred to condense long orations into a few, simple words. One observer noted "...the chief difficulty about his interpretations were that after he interpreted from the Blackfoot into English language, you weren't very much further ahead, for his English was weird- particularly if he had a few volts of one of his favorite toddies."<sup>76</sup> In spite of

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<sup>74</sup> Information on the life of Jerry Potts comes from Hugh Dempsey, Jerry Potts: Plainsman, (Calgary: Glenbow, 1966) 4-5.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

his lackluster reputation as an interpreter he was credited with preventing bloodshed between the Police and the Blackfoot tribes.<sup>77</sup>

As bi-cultural Natives of Rupert's Land, Metis people had the requisite skills to mediate between First Nations and Euro-Canadian newcomers. This role was not officially recognized by politicians in Ottawa, and was frequently ignored in preference for the opinions of missionaries like Father Constantine Scollen, Reverend John McDougall, or Hudson's Bay Company officials. Unlike outsiders, government officials in the territory valued their input and made a point of employing Metis people as mediators and diplomats in the context of Indian affairs.

Lieutenant-Governor Archibald Adams and Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris both believed that men like James McKay, Pascal Breland, and others could secure benefits for the government by using their skills in the field. As businessmen with class interests, these Metis used government ties to their own advantage, and occasionally for the benefit of the Metis people. In the diverse ethnic environment of the North West, cultural mediation was common in the context of the fur trade, missionary activities, and among travelers and scientific expeditions. The transition from Hudson's Bay Company to Canadian government presented another opportunity for these Metis to use their skills. The Metis who interpreted the treaties were at ease in various milieus, and, rather than being limited to an existence in one cultural context, moved freely between many.

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter 4: Brokering a Relationship: Metis Diplomats in the 1870's

Do not bring Settlers and Surveyors amongst us to measure and occupy our lands until a clear understanding has been arrived at as to what our relations are to be in the time to come.

Ojibwa spokesman, 1869<sup>1</sup>

If there was uncertainty in the North West Territories following the transfer from Hudson's Bay Company control to the Dominion of Canada, it was primarily the result of a failure to consult with the inhabitants. Nonetheless, First Nations actively sought to establish a relationship with the newcomers. Through petitions, emissaries, and threats, Indian people demanded recognition of their rights, sovereignty, and control of the land. Throughout the West, exasperation, lack of communication, and neglect contributed to increasingly chaotic conditions where occasionally violence threatened. Government response to threats of violence was generally swift. Violence was usually averted by sending out diplomats, who were in many cases Metis, to explain the position of the government and bring gifts and messages of goodwill. Threats of violence from Indian groups often came once all other avenues had been exhausted. Ignored and rebuffed, Indian leaders forced the government to the "middle ground" as it had been understood in the fur trade. Only by following the established diplomatic protocol did First Nations allow trespassers onto their lands.

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<sup>1</sup> NA, RG 11, vol. 265 report to government 1869. Quoted in A.J. Ray, Jim Miller and Frank Tough, Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000) 55.

Metis people had long been familiar with this context and were well suited to undertake missions to First Nations. Their involvement in the pre-treaty period included heeding the warnings coming from Indian leaders and alerting officials as to the likely outcome of trespassers in Indian lands, and by doing so contributed to the success of treaty negotiations that took place in the 1870's. Prior to treaty-making, government officials carefully managed the image of the Queen and her representatives, continually bolstering that positive image among the First Nations through gifts and proclamations. As they provided their input and understanding of how best to accommodate Indian leaders, Metis people participated in shaping this newly emerging though short-lived context. This politically expedient method obtained the desired ends, the signing of treaties and control of the North West.

G.F.G. Stanley, historian of the North West, characterized the encounter of Euro-Canadian society and Aboriginal society as a clash between primitive and civilized peoples. In his influential history of the Prairies he declared, "By character and upbringing the half-breeds, no less than the Indians, were unfitted to compete with whites in the competitive individualism of white civilization, or to share in the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. They did not want to be civilized, they only wanted to survive."<sup>1</sup> The influence of Turner's frontier thesis is evident throughout the book as Stanley's methodological framework for understanding the period prior to large-scale commercial development and agricultural settlement. Violence between Indian and settler society in Turnerian historiography is an inevitable by-product of colonization in newly acquired territories. A close examination of Canada's experience in the North

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<sup>1</sup> G.F.G Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada, A History of the Riel Rebellions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1936, 1978 ed.) preface, vii.

West suggests another explanation of confrontations between First Nations and Canadian officials. The process leading to treaty-making often involved periods of tension and misunderstanding that contributed to the subsistence crisis in its infant stages and as a result, violence threatened.

An alternative to Stanley and Turner's characterization of violence as primitive resistance is the middle ground theory of Richard White. White explains early European and Indian contact through the idea of the "middle ground," a space where each group encountered one another in the fur trade and military campaigns between 1650-1815 in the *pays d'en haut*. The middle ground was a process undertaken by both Indians and Europeans in order to make sense of the incomprehensible world of the other, both at the formal political level and through the private lives of individuals. Through intermarriage, seeking common meaning, and establishing diplomatic protocols a mutually comprehensible world was thus created.<sup>2</sup> In White's theory, Indian and European actions become intelligible when understood as a process of accommodation. Indian groups often used violence to restore a lost balance, forcing the British and French back to the middle ground. The history of confrontation in the West can also be understood in similar terms. During the fur trade period gift exchange became associated with recognition of political alliances, but the acceptance of gifts did not undermine an Indian leader's position. Its importance continued into the treaty-making period.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Richard White, The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Arthur Ray, Jim Miller and Frank Tough in Bounty and Benevolence note the similarities between fur trade ceremonies and treaty negotiations.

<sup>3</sup> Sharon Venne, "Understanding of Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective," Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equity, and Respect for Difference, ed. Michael Asch. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997) 190.

Metis in Red River led by Louis Riel resisted annexation by the Canadian government and forced the Dominion to negotiate Manitoba's entry. The efforts of Louis Riel's provisional government succeeded in obtaining an agreement between the Metis in Manitoba and the Dominion Government that established a negotiated entry into Confederation and created the Province of Manitoba.<sup>4</sup> The Manitoba Act created the Province of Manitoba, guaranteed the existing land titles of the Metis and included a land grant of 1,400,000 acres in reserve for their children. It also guaranteed English and French language equality and preserved denominational schools.<sup>5</sup> Riel's victory was short lived. The majority of Metis people in Red River were never able to benefit from Riel's achievement. The hostility of new immigrants from Ontario from the execution of Thomas Scott and the failure to quickly implement a system to allocate the land of Metis children forced many out of Manitoba westward into the North West Territories. Indifference in Ottawa and the failure of Metis leadership to act decisively in this period resulted in large-scale speculation in the scrip offered in lieu of actual land. The experience of the majority of Metis differed significantly from that of the interpreters and diplomats in this period, whose positive relationship with the government conferred wealth and prestige.

The remainder of Rupert's Land was admitted into the Dominion on July 15<sup>th</sup> 1870 by an Order in Council giving the Canadian parliament full legislative power over

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<sup>4</sup> Many excellent studies on the Red River Resistance of 1869-70 explore this in great detail including, A.-H. Tremaudan, Hold High Your Heads: History of the Métis Nation in Western Canada, translated by Elizabeth Maguet, (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1982), W.L Morton, Manitoba: A History, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), Frits Pannekoek, A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70. (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1991), Gerhard J Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1996), D.N Sprague, Canada and the Metis, 1869-1885, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> Morton, Manitoba: A History 141-142.



the new territory. The terms of transfer indicated Canada must pay the Hudson's Bay Company £300,000 sterling. This allowed the Company to retain its posts and within twelve months of the surrender, it would be able to select land adjoining each post. To compensate for the small monetary sum, in the fifty years following the surrender, the Company would select one-twentieth of the lands set aside for settlement in the Fertile Belt. In addition, the responsibility for extinguishing Aboriginal title now belonged to the government. Article Fourteen of the transfer stated:

Any claims of Indians for compensation for lands requested for purposes of settlement shall be disposed of by the Canadian government in communication with the Imperial government and the company shall be relieved of all responsibility in respect of them.<sup>6</sup>

This term also implied that the Government had agreed to take on the social and economic responsibility for the Indians that had belonged to the fur trade company. During the negotiations between the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian government, Indian and Metis inhabitants were not informed or consulted about the impending transfer, despite warnings from those familiar with conditions in the West.<sup>7</sup>

A lieutenant-governor and council appointed by Ottawa were to administer the North West Territories. The enormous geography of the North West, the diversity of its inhabitants, and the number of tasks to be undertaken, compounded by the unfamiliarity of officials with the region, meant that the period following the transfer would indeed be challenging. The acquisition of Rupert's Land by the Dominion had added millions of

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<sup>6</sup> Article Fourteen of the Order in Council admitting Rupert's Land and the North-West Territories into the Dominion of Canada in George Brown and Ron Maguire, Indian Treaties in Historical Perspective, (Ottawa: Research Branch of Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1979) 32.

<sup>7</sup> Morton, Manitoba: A History 118-119.

acres of land to Canada, and by 1871, 43,000 people.<sup>8</sup> It was also home to different cultural and linguistic groups of Aboriginal people: Swampy, Woods, and Plains Cree; Saulteaux, also known as Ojibway; Assiniboine; the Metis; members of the Blackfoot Confederacy; and the refugee Sioux from the United States. These First Nations in the West were aware that a drastic change had taken place. Early responses of First Nations through petitions sent to the lieutenant-governor indicate that some among the First Nations sought a relationship with the new power that had been traditionally established through a formal diplomatic process. Indian people hoped to be informed of the intentions of the new government regarding their lands. Because missionaries or Hudson's Bay Company officials often wrote the petitions, it is difficult to determine the actual feelings of Indian people and what they hoped to achieve. Whether the feelings expressed in the petitions were representative of every group also cannot be determined, but the theme of desire for establishing a relationship runs throughout each.

In a petition signed by Peter Erasmus and Rev. Henry Steinhauer from January 1871 at the Whitefish Settlement, the Cree expressed their hopes for a treaty relationship with the new government, "We are taught by the missionaries that the British Government has never taken advantage of the ignorance of any tribe of Indians with whom they have treated. We therefore hope our rights shall be recognized."<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Plains Cree who had not been ministered to by missionaries were said to be afraid their lands would be stolen from them. The Cree, white, and English-speaking Metis from Victoria Mission welcomed the new lieutenant-governor but noted the

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<sup>8</sup> Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987, 1993 ed), appendix Table 4, prairie population.

<sup>9</sup> Reverend Henry Bird Steinhauer on behalf of the Cree at Whitefish Mission to A.G. Archibald, Jan 9<sup>th</sup>, 1871 from Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

absence of law and order. They requested an emissary not acquainted with the Company or missionaries to be sent to explain to the Plains Cree, who feared their lands would be taken:

We are deeply anxious that British authority should be established, without a conflict of races. We would also ask that a qualified commissioner be appointed, to visit the different Plains Tribes, and explain to them the policy of the government. At present they have the most erroneous views; they believe that their hunting grounds will be destroyed, and their lands taken from them without compensation: and last winter's transactions have greatly increased this state of feeling. If some qualified person, altogether unconnected with either mercantile or ecclesiastical interests, would visit them, much good might be accomplished.<sup>10</sup>

The government followed the policy of treating with groups whose lands were most urgently required, though it was clear that these Indians also anxiously awaited a treaty.

Lieutenant-Governor Archibald responded by informing the Cree that the law of the Queen was for both White children and red, and further, "When she requires lands from your friends the Crees of the Plains, or has need of their hunting grounds, she will let them know and treaty[sic] with them and deal fairly by them. But they must wait till the lands are required. They may make sure that when that time comes they will be treated justly."<sup>11</sup> Treaty 6, signed in 1876, covered the lands inhabited by the Plains and Woods Cree. Between 1871 and 1874, no one visited the Plains to speak with the Cree.

At Edmonton House, Chief Factor Christie reported that whiskey traders from the United States relished the absence of authority in the North West by freely distributing alcohol in the territories, in spite of the ban on liquor. Also, Plains Cree Chiefs had visited him "to ascertain whether their lands had been sold or not and what

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<sup>10</sup> Petition signed by Richard Hardisty and Rev. George McDougall to Archibald signed Jan. 10, 1871 in Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

was the intention of the Canadian government in relation to them.”<sup>12</sup> He included messages from a number of their chiefs. Sweet Grass sent a message, “I shake hands with you, and bid you welcome. We heard our lands were sold and we did not like it; we don’t want to sell our lands; it is our property, and no one has a right to sell them.”<sup>13</sup> A critical part of their message was a need for a personal visit from the lieutenant-governor, or someone in his place.

In the view of authorities, treaties were most needed where immigrants and troops would be passing through. The Dawson route was an overland all-Canadian passageway linking Thunder Bay and Fort Garry. The initial discussions had taken place with the Ojibway to pass through the road in 1869. However, Indian people were not satisfied with the activities of the government, food supplies were becoming scarce, and still no treaty had been made. Simon Dawson, the official in charge of the route, warned the officials in Ottawa that the grievances of those at Rainy River would likely have an impact on the treaty negotiations scheduled to take place there the following summer.<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere First Nations voiced their unhappiness over the absence of Government attention. In the Qu’Appelle region, Indian and Metis were increasingly in competition for land and resources. Reports indicated that the possibility of violence between the indigenous inhabitants was compounded by the uncertainty of the land tenure. Reporting from Fort Qu’Appelle in February 1871, a Hudson’s Bay Company

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<sup>11</sup> The Manitoban, Saturday March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1871.

<sup>12</sup> Chief Factor Christie Edmonton House, Saskatchewan District April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1871 to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald Reel 2, file 272 from Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

<sup>13</sup> Message from Cree Chiefs to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald, in Alexander Morris, The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North West Territories (Calgary: Fifth House Publishing, 1880, 1991,ed) 170.

employee claimed that the Metis in the area were claiming large tracts of land with their cleric's approval.<sup>15</sup>

In a report from Prince Albert, a settlement of 200-400 English-speaking Metis from Red River, Rev. John McKay reported the inhabitants were anxiously awaiting a treaty with the Cree around Fort Carlton so that the land question could be settled. In his report, McKay distinguished between the French Metis community of St. Laurent, headed by Gabriel Dumont whose economic specialty was the buffalo hunt, and the Metis of Prince Albert, who were primarily farmers. As sedentary agriculturalists, the concern of the Prince Albert Metis about the security of land tenure makes sense. Interestingly, McKay also reported that the French Metis had been influencing the Plains Cree, contributing to their suspicion of the Canadian Government.<sup>16</sup> But, he added, in spite of the influence of the St. Laurent Metis, "The people however of all nationalities are anxious to see civil and criminal laws established and are growing impatient that something should be done."<sup>17</sup> Several examples suggest that Metis influence on Indian people could often be detrimental to the positive image the government wanted to portray to Indian people. Metis experience in Red River communicated to First Nations could become an obstacle to treaty-making.

Closer to Red River, Yellow Quill's Band felt that the newcomers did not properly appreciate the importance of signing treaties with the First Nations. In a petition brought to John Garrioch, a Red River Metis, Yellow Quill warned,

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<sup>14</sup> Howe passing along Dawson's Report to Archibald Feb 9<sup>th</sup>, 1871 Reel 1 file 193 in Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

<sup>15</sup> From Donald McDonald, Fort Qu'Appelle, Swan River District to Archibald, Feb. 20<sup>th</sup> 1871 Reel 1 file 1200 in Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

<sup>16</sup> Report from Rev. John McKay of Prince Albert to Morris, June 22, 1874, RG10 Reel C10106 Vol. 3610, file 3529-2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

As you have encroached somewhat on our rights, both from one side and the other, we have thought it proper to say a few words... When we speak first we speak softly; but when we speak again we will speak louder. For they know that we have not yet received anything for our lands, therefore they still belong to us. We now beg of you, one and all, to give us no more trouble until we are spoken to by the person with whom we expect to treaty[sic] with.<sup>18</sup>

As First Nations implored the government to come and meet with them, Ottawa had other priorities.

The failure of the authorities to address the early concerns of First Nations in the North West Territories and Manitoba led directly to dissatisfaction among the tribes. Only when the threat of violence was imminent did authorities respond. The Metis were often called upon to assist. The slow pace of treaty-making and lack of proper communication in the West posed serious difficulties, especially when non-natives attempted to enter First Nations' land. The entrance of the Boundary Commission and North West Mounted Police are two examples where violence was averted by heeding the warnings of locals and following Native protocol of messengers and gift-giving.

Administration of the vast territory in the early 1870's was hampered by the lack of properly qualified personnel, limited communication, and Ottawa's refusal to devolve responsibility to locals. Lieutenant-Governor Archibald<sup>19</sup> appointed a council because of Ottawa's snail's pace in responding to the needs of the North West. The first council was composed of three individuals: French, English, and a representative of the

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<sup>18</sup> The Weekly Manitoban and Herald of Rupert's Land and the North West, July 1, 1871.

<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Adams George Archibald, born May 17, 1814 in Truro Nova Scotia, agreed to serve for one year in the North West in exchange for a seat on the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia at the end of his term. He resigned from office in Nov. 1871, frustrated over the lack of confidence Ottawa placed in his input. He remained in office after the federal election of 1872. F.G. Pryke, "Adams George Archibald," Dictionary of Canadian Biography CD-ROM version, (Montreal/Toronto: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000).

Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>20</sup> In the original draft, the council was to contain seven members at least, but not to exceed fifteen. Likewise, Archibald faced serious difficulties establishing a representative Provincial Cabinet in Manitoba. Sentiment of Ontario newcomers in Red River toward the Metis was increasingly hostile, and many qualified leaders among the Metis had been involved in the Resistance. To accommodate Metis interests, Archibald appointed James McKay to Manitoba's Legislative Council.<sup>21</sup> Archibald's tenure as lieutenant-governor was characterized by a division between the local needs of the people, and the unwillingness of the government in Ottawa to recognize those needs.

Alexander Morris took over as lieutenant-governor in the North West following Archibald and negotiated Treaties 3, 4, and 6, and revised Treaties 1 and 2.<sup>22</sup> Like Archibald, Morris faced distant and unresponsive officials in Ottawa. During the drafting of the North West Territories Act of 1875, Morris was not consulted for his input. The newly drafted Act of 1875 allowed for the appointment of a lieutenant-governor for the North West and a reorganized council of five, more closely approximating a representative body. When the appointments were made and none of the members were Natives of Rupert's Land, Morris commented, "it is a crying shame that the half-breeds have been ignored. It will result in trouble and is most unjust."<sup>23</sup> The reorganized North West council was able to legislate on local issues relating to taxation, property and civil rights, administration of justice, health, and roadways. The

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<sup>20</sup> Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada 191.

<sup>21</sup> Pryke, "Adams George Archibald" 5 of 9.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Morris, born March 17, 1826 in Perth, Upper Canada into a privileged political family he entered law, and eventually politics. He assumed the position of lieutenant-governor after a stint as first chief justice of the Queen's Court Bench of Manitoba. Jean Friesen, "Alexander Morris", Dictionary of Canadian Biography, CD-ROM version, (Montreal/Toronto: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000).

federal government reserved the power to disallow the ordinances passed by the council and retained the power to administer Indian affairs and the police.<sup>24</sup>

Ottawa's ongoing refusal to recognize the abilities of the Metis in Red River seems to indicate that John A. Macdonald and others viewed the administration of the North West as the domain of Euro-Canadian politicians. Perhaps influenced by racial theories and unacquainted with the conditions, Eastern officials thought the Metis incapable of working together with the new administration in bringing about Canadian control. Clearly once men like Archibald and Morris attempted to affect the changes Ottawa envisioned, they quickly recognized that the Metis were critically important because of their knowledge of the land, the inhabitants, and the protocol when establishing relations with the First Nations.

Knowledge of the land and its inhabitants was critical to effective administration, and Ottawa's initial answer to acquiring that information was to send a British officer to travel through the North West, interview the locals and compose a report. Lieutenant-Governor Archibald sent Capt. William Butler, a British army officer, to report "on the whole question of the existing state of affairs in that territory, and to state your views on what may be necessary to be done in the interest of peace and order."<sup>25</sup> He was also to describe the inhabitants, the fur trade, and the extent of smallpox in the territory.

In his report to Archibald Butler indicated that a critical element to acquiring hegemony over the territory and making way for agricultural settlement was the establishment of law and order. To do this, he recommended the appointment of civil

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 7 of 9.

<sup>24</sup> Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada 192.



magistrates, organization of a mounted police force, and the establishment of government stations.<sup>26</sup> He suggested a person should be selected to encourage better relations with the Indian inhabitants,

I would urge the advisability of sending a Commissioner to meet with the tribes of the Saskatchewan during their summer assemblies...Upon one point I would recommend particular caution, and that is the selection of the individual for this purpose. I have heard a good deal of persons who were said to possess great knowledge of the Indian character, and I have seen enough of the red man to estimate at its real worth the possession of this knowledge. Knowledge of Indian character has too long been synonymous with the knowledge of how to cheat the Indian.<sup>27</sup>

He felt the Commission should first establish peace between the Cree and Blackfoot and provide medals to the chiefs. The men best suited for the position should come from the ranks of Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>28</sup>

While traveling throughout the country, Butler was questioned by First Nations curious about the new government's policy. One question the tribes addressed to the government was whether they would be deprived of their lands. Butler responded, likely as he was instructed by Ottawa, "Of course there is no immediate need of their lands, and for that reason treaties will not at once be entered into; but they can rest assured of this that when ever their country is required for the purpose of settlement, treaties will be made and just compensation will be awarded."<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, the recommendations

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<sup>25</sup> Fort Garry, 10<sup>th</sup> October from Lt. Governor Archibald to W.F. Butler, Esq, 69<sup>th</sup> Regiment in W.F. Butler, The Great Lone Land: A Narrative of Travel and Adventure in the North West of America (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle and Co Publishers, 1968 and 1970, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed), appendix.

<sup>26</sup> The Manitoban, Saturday June 3, 1871. Butler's journey to the North West has also been published as W.F. Butler, The Great Lone Land.

<sup>27</sup> Butler, The Great Lone Land, appendix, 384-385.

<sup>28</sup> The List includes, Mr. Chatelain of St. Albert Mission, Mr. Brazeau, Mr. McKenzie, Mr. Escarpote, Mr. Wm. Borowick, and Mr. McGillis.

<sup>29</sup> The Manitoban, Saturday March 11, 1871.

in Butler's report were not immediately acted upon, though his suggestion of the use of diplomats would become an important aspect of Indian affairs prior to treaty-making.

An example of a concerted policy by the Canadian government to preserve a positive image of the Crown in order to ensure a future treaty and permit safe passage of troop can be seen in the area around Fort Francis. Troops moving through the Dawson route from Fort William to Fort Garry to put down the Metis Resistance led by Riel were to travel through unceded Saulteaux lands. Officials in Ottawa feared that Metis from Red River were planning to convince the Saulteaux to refuse their passage. To neutralize this negative message from the Metis, government officials enlisted the aid of a Hudson's Bay Company employee, Robert Pether from Fort Francis, and Nicholas Chastellaine, a Hudson's Bay Company employee and Metis. Chastellaine was described by Dawson as "a half-breed...who is highly esteemed by the tribe...who has on previous occasions rendered valuable service in dealing with them."<sup>30</sup> Pether and Chastellaine were to distribute tobacco among the Saulteaux, determine their expectations, and explain that a treaty would follow. Dawson suggested to Ottawa,

the former (Pether), should be sent as soon as possible to Fort Francis to procure the services of Chatelain. The two might keep up friendly intercourse with the Indians and disabuse their minds of evil reports they might hear in the meantime and next summer Commissioners might be sent to negotiate a treaty.<sup>31</sup>

By then, though, Pether and Chastellaine had been employed as Indian agents at Fort Francis. Their presence at the fort was intended to be private and the Indians were not to know their true intentions.

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<sup>30</sup> Memorandum S.J. Dawson to Ottawa, Dec. 17, 1869 file no1, Reel 1 in Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Dawson explained Pether's role among the Saulteaux, mentioning that it would help to have Chastellaine constantly among them to distribute tobacco and other articles "to act with becoming generosity."<sup>32</sup> The assignment by Howe to Pether was officially to "keep up friendly intercourse with them [the chiefs] and disabuse their minds of any idle reports they might hear as to the views and intentions of the government of Canada in reference to them."<sup>33</sup> In this same period, Wemyss Simpson was appointed by Ottawa to the position as Indian Commissioner in the North West responsible for Indian affairs and entering into treaty negotiations. He proceeded from Fort William to Fort Garry to obtain information from Pether who was strengthening the favorable image of the government and calming Saulteaux apprehension about the march of troops and the survey party.<sup>34</sup>

Once there, Simpson found Pether and Chastellaine, and, while he admired Pether's work and felt his reputation was deserved, he was not impressed with Chastellaine. "Mr. Chatelain who I have often seen before, is a half-breed much given to favor the Indians in any negotiation and I do not think much to be trusted, but kept down by Mr. Pether who has been very useful."<sup>35</sup> Simpson also experienced difficulty when he tried to get the Saulteaux to act as guides. When they refused, he postulated that the Metis had been active among them. He discovered the Saulteaux treaty expectations were a great deal more than what officials planned to offer. They anticipated \$10 annually for every man, woman, and child as long as the sun shone, and

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<sup>32</sup> Dawson to Pether, Jan 6, 1870, file 1 reel 1 in Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

<sup>33</sup> Howe to Pether Memorandum, March 11, 1870, file 1 reel 1 Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Howe to Wymess Simpson May 19, 1870, file 1 reel 1. Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

food for a feast at the time of the annual payment. They were willing to allow the Queen's subjects the right to pass through their lands, build steamers, canals, and railroads, and take lands for buildings, but they did not want farmers among them. They planned to wait and see how the Red River Indians did during their treaty negotiations. Simpson blamed Simon Dawson for their extravagant demands, believing he had been too generous, and thought the Indians would expect such treatment in the future.<sup>36</sup>

Ottawa's selection of Wemyss Simpson as Indian Commissioner in Manitoba and the North West was unfortunate. The Commissioner was to be responsible for negotiating treaties, administering the treaties, and maintaining contact with the various tribes. Mr. Simpson, a cousin to Sir George Simpson and a former employee of the Hudson's Bay Company, performed unsatisfactorily in his position. In a dispatch to Ottawa, Lieutenant-Governor Archibald complained that Simpson was frequently absent from Manitoba, treaty terms had not been fulfilled, and he hoped the Department of the Interior would send a better representative.

It will be a matter of profound regret if by neglect or indifference we should forfeit the advantages of treaties and pave the way for a [condition] of things that has arisen in the United States, much of which is due to indifference, to neglect of the Indians and failure to fulfill the obligations incurred in the treaties made with them.<sup>37</sup>

Despite his substandard conduct, he was given a commission to meet with Blackfoot in the summer of 1872 to allay the increasing tensions, but never arrived.

One example of Indian Commissioner Simpson's failure to act in accordance with Indian notions of diplomacy was described in the local newspaper. The paper

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<sup>35</sup> Wemyss Simpson to Joseph Howe Sault Ste. Marie Aug 19<sup>th</sup> 1870, file 1 reel 1, Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

frequently mentioned the “hostile intentions of Indians,” but in this case it seems their concerns were legitimate. American Sioux from the vicinity of Fort Ellice, led by Little Knife, arrived at Fort Garry to visit the Indian Commissioner to determine the intentions of the joint Canadian/American Boundary Commission. Once there, Indian Commissioner Simpson treated the Sioux poorly and according to Little Knife, acted contemptuously toward them. On the other hand, a local resident attempted to ease the tension:

As they have always done, and as all the Indians in the Province do, they called on the residence of Hon. James McKay, where having been hospitably treated, they explained the object of their visit was to find out whether an alliance had been entered into between the Canadians and Americans with a view to their (the Sioux) extermination. McKay, of course explained to them, that they had been misinformed, that the Boundary Commission in which the Canadians and Americans had joined had no such object as the Indians feared.”<sup>38</sup>

The paper also noted that Pascal Breland had been sent among the Sioux, “whose single presence among them just now is better than any army”<sup>39</sup>

Simpson’s conduct had been substandard on a number of occasions, and the paper commented, “Mr. Simpson’s knowledge of Indians and Indian matters was limited, and he would take no advice at the hands of those, better acquainted with their habits than himself; so in consequence we have a positive danger staring us right in the face which is not the less because it could have so easily been avoided.”<sup>40</sup> The paper also noted, “the exercise of a very little tact and judgment on his part would have prevented it altogether. Had Mr. Simpson been better acquainted with the races he was

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Archibald to Joseph Howe, Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, 1872 file 26, Correspondence and Papers of A.G. Archibald MG12 A1 Reel M2, PAM.

<sup>38</sup> The Manitoban, Saturday March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1873.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

sent here to deal with, he would in all probability have thought twice before endangering the lives of those who live in the more distant interior.”<sup>41</sup> The knowledge of local inhabitants was instrumental in this period. Preventing misunderstandings and providing the appearance of continuity are two important reasons for using the skills of locals. Even with their assistance, the government maintained control over the encounters and manipulated the interactions between the groups.

The arrival of the Boundary Commission illustrates several recurring themes of Native-newcomer relations in this period. Firstly, beyond the limits of Treaty 1 and 2, no treaties had yet been undertaken. The presence of Sioux refugees fleeing American military, the growing numbers of Metis establishing permanent homes in and around Qu’Appelle combined with the dwindling numbers of buffalo created a tense atmosphere among the Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux, the area’s primary inhabitants. Reports from residents of the area or those familiar with the situation reported to Lieutenant-Governor Morris the likelihood of violence taking place as the Boundary Commission arrived in unceded territory.

Morris’ solution was to include the participation of skilled Metis residents who were capable of communicating with Indian people and fully loyal to the Dominion government. In several dispatches to Ottawa, Morris advocated a greater role in the conduct of Indian affairs in the West for the Metis. Morris recommended:

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<sup>40</sup>The Manitoban, Saturday April 26, 1873.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

I believe that they [Indian bands] can be retained in close alliance and friendship by treating them fairly, kindly and justly. They should be advised by men they trust, of the real meaning of boundary surveys and explanations should be given them as to the intended railway surveys; and all stipulations of the treaties should be scrupulously carried out.

To attain these ends, I would propose that there should be a Resident Indians Commissioner who should be a good business man, competent to draw up treaties...assisted by two commissioners, natives of the country, familiar with Indian dialects, and in whom they have confidence taken from the ranks of the English and French half-breeds, such a man as for instance the Hon. James McKay who has great influence with the Indian tribes, and who gives largely to them of his own means, having done so, in one year alone, to the extent of \$1,500 would be of great value in such a position, and I believe the services of such men could be secured at a very small sum.<sup>42</sup>

Morris was not the only official who saw the advantages of conducting Indian affairs using Metis as front men, able to communicate and “in whom they [the Indians] have confidence.”

Members of Parliament for Manitoba, Donald A. Smith and Robert Cunningham, made a report to the House of Commons on the Indian people in 1873. They believed there to be three causes of the “Indian troubles.” The first was the transition from Hudson’s Bay Company to Canadian rule; the second was the presence of American whiskey traders; and lastly the growing numbers of gold miners in Saskatchewan. Exacerbating these issues was the Government failure at treaty-making. What was needed besides a military force was an Indian Commission, unlike the one proposed by the government with the lieutenant-governor at the head, but rather:

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<sup>42</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Morris Dec 13, 1872 Annual Report of the Indian Branch of the Department of the Minister of the Interior for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1873, pg 12, reproduced with permission of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from the National Library of Canada’s Website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>) accessed Aug 12, 2003, 10:58 am.

to send to them men who know them, their habits, their mode of reasoning, and their prejudices. And in the Province to-day there were men ready and willing, and thoroughly capable of taking this work upon them. Men of education too, and were this matter entrusted to such men, armed with ample powers to treaty[sic], he could look forward with some hope of a satisfactory result; but with the Commission such as it has been indicated, he anticipated nothing but failure and trouble.<sup>43</sup>

The Commission proposed by Prime Minister Macdonald for the purpose of negotiating treaties was to be composed of three gentlemen: the lieutenant-governor of the North West Territories, the head of the Land department, and the Indian Commissioner appointed from Ottawa. Donald A. Smith felt it more appropriate to have members with knowledge of the country, preferably without connections to the Hudson's Bay Company. He stated:

But there are other men in the country, well fitted for the work, to be found among what is known as the "Half-breed population". And here I would remark that this term, not infrequently employed as a title of inferiority, appears to me to be entirely a misnomer. Those who have an opportunity of residing with this people know that they are nowise inferior. You may, in any city of the Dominion find men who are neither pure Scotch, English, Irish, nor French, but who are not for that reason inferior to men of unmixed blood, and such is not less the case in Manitoba and the North West. Therefore, having such men in Manitoba, capable in every respect of rendering good service, it would manifestly be of the utmost advantage to have their assistance in this manner.<sup>44</sup>

The suggestion to include the Metis was not well received by Sir John A. Macdonald, who believed what was necessary for the future of Manitoba was a firm and just administration. He also thought the treaties should be negotiated by the lieutenant-governor "whose red coat and appointments had considerable effect," and it should be

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Cunningham, M.P. and Hon. Donald A. Smith, M.P., Speeches on the Indian Difficulties in the North-West. The House of Commons, (Ottawa: Free Press April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1873) 8-9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



directed by a Board consisting of the Governor, Provincial Land Commissioner, and the Indian Commissioner, still to be appointed.<sup>45</sup>

The troubles alluded to but not included in the publication were a direct result of a *faux pas* committed again by Commissioner Simpson. Lieutenant-Governor Archibald had promised the Indians in the West that Indian Commissioner Simpson would meet them in the summer of 1872 at Edmonton, but he did not arrive, and finally the tribes left, creating a bad feeling. The reason for his failure to arrive was the unsuccessful treaty attempt at Fort Francis that same year. Because of this failure, Simpson postponed any other treaties, but failed to inform the Indians in the interior.<sup>46</sup>

The disagreement between those familiar with local conditions, like Archibald, Morris, and Donald A. Smith, and the authorities in Ottawa who hoped to maintain a tight control over the development of the North West is evident in these exchanges. Morris did not quit advocating for greater Metis participation in Indian affairs though, despite Ottawa's indifference to his proposals. Morris received several requests directly from Indian people who strongly desired treaties in the West and he usually passed on this information to Ottawa. Until August 1873, Ottawa was still hesitant about signing a treaty at Fort Qu'Appelle.

Morris again offered a proposal for better operation of Indian affairs. He thought it would be better conducted in the North West Territories and Manitoba carried out by two branches, one responsible for negotiating treaties and the second for implementing them. He felt that fulfilling the promises in the treaties had been unsatisfactory and recommended a new organization for more efficient administration. The chief Indian

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<sup>45</sup> From The Dominion Parliament, House of Commons Ottawa, March 31, 1973, The Manitoban, Saturday May 10, 1873

agent should be confined to carrying out the dictates, and the sub-agents should be responsible for visiting the tribes and reporting. Morris was particularly unhappy with the Privy Council, which had adopted a plan "which practical experience has satisfied me will not be found to accomplish the object proposed in a satisfactory way." Those responsible for treaty negotiation, the lieutenant-governor, the Indian Commissioner, and Chief Land officer in Manitoba, could not work efficiently at their own duties. The treaties were often a great distance from the center, resulting in a long absence from other duties.

Because of his experience in the role of negotiator, Morris recommended that the best policy to be adopted with regard to the Indian tribes should be entrusted to the North West Council:

a body composed of intelligent and representative men. I fully concur with that council in the objections they have submitted against the Indian board, as creating in the NWT a divided authority. I hold that the North West Council is far more competent to advise on such subjects, than the Indian board can possibly be and believe that the duty of doing so naturally falls in their executive functions of the council. I therefore respectfully suggest that the North West Council should be entrusted with the duty of making further treaties, should be entrusted to 3 special commissioners to be appointed from time to time, as occasion may arise for negotiating each treaty. Fitting men for such duty could be found among the members of the North West Council or elsewhere in the country here of good business habits and familiar with the Indian character, and some with their languages, and if such men were selected for such a mission they would with or without someone directly responsible to the Privy Council doubtless discharge it with success.<sup>47</sup>

In a later dispatch, Morris hoped that when a new lieutenant-governor was appointed, the new council would include a representation of half-breeds and residents. Alluding to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to the Minister of the Interior, Jan 24, 1874, file 94, Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

the Resistance of 1869-70, Morris remarked, "I wish to obviate any chance of a repetition of the McDougall difficulty which its irritation largely arose from a fear of a foreign council, and I therefore throw out the suggestion, I trust you will find a good man as my successor in the North West Governorship."<sup>48</sup> Morris recognized the importance of allowing local residents a role in the administration in the West. As able and competent individuals, Metis like McKay, Breland, and others, could easily undertake many tasks given to outsiders.

James McKay would come to play a critically important role in Indian affairs in the 1870's, and Morris placed a great deal of trust in his judgment and ability. His service to the Dominion was certainly appreciated by Morris, who repeatedly implored Ottawa to allow him a greater role. McKay's appointment to the North West Council came from the strong recommendations of Morris. In this case, the officials in Ottawa heeded Morris' suggestions. From Ottawa, Campbell replied to his request, "I will not recommend anybody for appointment in the North West Council until I hear from you and will be very glad to take special care that the Hon. James McKay whom you speak so highly of shall be included in your list as one of those appointed."<sup>49</sup> Morris' response, though illegible in places, indicates the value he placed on McKay's participation at Treaty 3: "I recommend James McKay will be appointed without delay. He richly deserves the position and I promised to recommend him. He has rendered great services."<sup>50</sup> McKay's linguistic ability and familiarity with the customs of Indian

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<sup>48</sup> Letter from Alexander Morris to Alexander Mackenzie, August 20, 1875, file 160, Alexander Morris Papers, Ketcheson Collection MG12 B2, PAM.

<sup>49</sup> Private Campbell to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris Sept 26, 1873, file 62. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

<sup>50</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to Campbell October 24, 1873 file 70. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

people aided treaty-making. These skills were highly valued by Morris who recognized the importance of the Metis ability to assist in the smooth operation of the government.

James McKay's actions toward the disgruntled Sioux in Winnipeg displayed an awareness of how to relate to Indian people that succeeded in preventing violence and maintaining good relations. These good relations were tested on several occasions because of a lack of understanding on the part of Euro-Canadian officials regarding proper protocol. In the documents of this period there is a pervasive fear of violence that must be examined critically. Reports by residents in the region around Fort Qu'Appelle steadily trickled into the lieutenant-governor's office from 1871 onward. The Sioux, hereditary enemies of the Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux, had taken up residence in that vicinity. Metis people had also been moving in. Contributing to the tension, the Hudson's Bay Company had passed an order to end the forwarding of credit to Native hunters and trappers, a staple of the fur trade.<sup>51</sup> In 1872, Lieutenant-Governor Archibald had enlisted the aid of Pascal Breland who wintered near Fort Qu'Appelle and was familiar to and trusted by local inhabitants. Breland was to visit the Indians in Saskatchewan, learn their wishes, and explain the Government's intentions, and offer assurances. He was also to let them know that the treaty would not be made that year, 1872, and that it would be a while before the commissioners would be able to visit them. In the meantime, they were not to interfere with the white settlers, nor come to Red River.<sup>52</sup> Shortly after Breland's visit, dissatisfied Metis who had suffered poor treatment in Red River by the government attempted to unite with the Sioux against the new

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<sup>51</sup> Isaac Cowie, The Company of Adventurers, (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913) 440.

<sup>52</sup> Dispatch from Lieutenant-Governor Archibald to Pascal Breland, Feb 22, 1872 file 585, the Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 2 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

inhabitants of Red River. The Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux received tobacco from the Sioux who hoped to enlist their support. Though they refused, tension remained.<sup>53</sup>

Lieutenant-Governor Morris also received word of the increasing tension in that area from several sources. Two reports in February and March 1873 from Donald A. Smith and Archibald McDonald requested troops be sent out at once. There had been pillaging at Egg Lake, knives and guns drawn at Hudson's Bay Company employees in February 1873, perhaps due to termination of advancing credit to Indian hunters. Threats to the settlers from Ontario in the settlement of Palestine by the Sioux raised serious alarms both with Morris and in Ottawa. Settlement would be seriously hampered if the threats from Sioux and others were to continue.

Morris felt that if he had Breland dispatched to Cree and Assiniboine at Fort Ellice to assure them of a coming treaty, it would help to calm the situation. He also planned to send scouts out to the Sioux, and if necessary, a force of Metis.<sup>54</sup> Morris explained, "Mr. Breland is a very reliable man, a native of the province of Quebec, who has for many years been a resident here, and has extensive acquaintance among the Indian tribes."<sup>55</sup> Breland took with him a proclamation to impress upon the Sioux and the Metis the love and kindness of the Queen, "It is her desire to do what is just and right by all, and therefore the Queen has sent the foresaid Hon. Pascal Breland to bear this her message of Peace and Goodwill."<sup>56</sup> In the copy of Pascal Breland's report from Wood Mountain, he stated he had met with the Sioux and Metis and explained his

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<sup>53</sup> Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers* 444.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Morris Fort Garry 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1873 from *Annual Report on Indian Affairs*, year ending 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1872 pg 17, reproduced with permission of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from the National Library of Canada's Website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>).

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Alexander Morris to Secretary of State for the Provinces March 11, 1873 from RG10 Black Series, Vol. 3571 Reel C 10101 File 109.

<sup>56</sup> March 22, 1873, Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

mission as one of peace. The Sioux replied they had always been friends with the English and showed him their medals.<sup>57</sup>

The mission to the Sioux had succeeded in bringing a degree of peace, but there was still a need for a military presence in the area. The Cree, Saulteaux, and Assiniboine were also anxious for their rights to be upheld. Morris felt an additional mission should be carried out to ascertain the exact situation in the interior. The absence of treaties and the diminishing buffalo compounded a deteriorating situation. In order to gather more information, Morris requested that "I should also be authorized to send a reliable agent, familiar with the Indian tongue in advance of those who are to treat with the Indians, in order to convene their chief men at the points to be selected for making the treaties."<sup>58</sup> Response from Ottawa quickly overruled the idea of signing treaties west of Manitoba because there was "no use in making treaty so far in advance of our requiring the land." If anything, Morris was authorized to send J.A.N. Provencher, the Indian Commissioner, to Lake Qu'Appelle with presents and a speech, but was not to promise a treaty that year or the next.

Morris' suggestion that James McKay or John Norquay be appointed as Indian commissioners had been likewise overruled. The Ministry of the Interior felt that it "should be our own officers, no object in bringing non-officials into it."<sup>59</sup> Perhaps Minister of the Interior Campbell thought that men like James McKay or John Norquay, the future premier of Manitoba, were too closely tied to Indian interests to be on the Indian Commission, and therefore not capable of carrying out Ottawa's plans.

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<sup>57</sup>Copy of the Report from Pascal Breland's trip to Wood Mountain, file 27. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

<sup>58</sup>Letter to Campbell from Lieutenant-Governor Morris, 35 July, 1873 file 35. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

Nonetheless, Morris again felt that Breland was the best person to carry out another commission to the West, especially once he received word that the Cypress Hills massacre had taken place in May of 1873.

In addition to the threats from the Sioux, in the late 1860's and early 1870's American whiskey traders frequently crossed the border into Canada peddling alcohol to the Canadian First Nations. That May at Cypress Hills, in the south-western corner of what is now Saskatchewan, a violent confrontation took place between American wolf hunters and Assiniboine Indians. About twelve wolfers had arrived in the British territory and were staying with American whiskey traders Moses Soloman and Abel Farwell. The hunters believed the Assiniboine, who were camped nearby, had stolen their horse and set off to their camp to retrieve it. When talks broke down, the hunters used Winchester and Henry repeating rifles to level the camp, leaving twenty Indian men dead, and several of the women violated, while only one non-Native was killed.<sup>60</sup> The Cypress Hills massacre was unusual in its ruthlessness and hastened the dispatch of the police force and the signing of treaty 4 at Fort Qu'Appelle.

In August, 1873, a response from the Ministry of the Interior gave Morris permission to send an official to visit the Indian tribes that summer, offering presents to them and informing them at the same time that a treaty would take place the following year. In the meantime they would not be interfered with in their hunting grounds without a treaty.<sup>61</sup> The Minister also suggested that if no members of the Indian Board

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<sup>59</sup> Letter from Campbell to Morris Aug 5, 1873 file 38 Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

<sup>60</sup> Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* 134-135.

<sup>61</sup> S.H. Meredith, Deputy to the Minister of the Interior to Morris, Aug 22, 1873 file 42 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.

were available that season, Morris could select either McKay or Breland to carry out its directives.<sup>62</sup>

Again, Breland was dispatched to report to the Cree, Chippewa, and the Assiniboine inhabitants bringing them a message from the North West Council. This time, he had an additional responsibility, to determine the perpetrators of the Cypress Hills. The letter stated:

Son honneur désire aussi, que vous tâché d'apprendre, si c'est possible, des details des meurtre récent des Indiens par des negociants Américains chez Cypress Hills. Aussi les noms [des] personne [ceux qui] concernes ainsi que les délinquants recevoir la justice, et à l'avenir que les sujets Indiens de sa majesté aient un protection convenable.<sup>63</sup>

Morris also included a message for Breland: to visit the Cree, Chippewa, and Assiniboine in the Southern regions explaining the Queen's goodwill and, "Son honneur vous envoie quelque présents, pour donner aux Crees et autre nations dans la district..."<sup>64</sup>

The dispatch from Morris to Department of the Interior reported he had sent Breland to the Qu'Appelle region: "Mr. Breland takes with him a number of appropriate presents, and is instructed by me to inform the Indians that they will be visited next summer, and that their rights will be respected, and all things connected with their lands arranged to their satisfaction, as I was authorized to say."<sup>65</sup> By repeatedly sending Breland, a man who knew the First Nations in the region personally from his trading in the area for many years, Morris recognized the importance of personal diplomacy in the prevention of violence. Presents and messages of goodwill brought by Breland would have certainly fit the traditional diplomatic understanding of the Cree, Assiniboine, and

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<sup>62</sup> Telegraph from A. Campbell to Morris, Aug 28, 1873 File 429 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant- Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.

<sup>63</sup> Urquhart to Breland Sept 14, 1873, file 54 Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.



Sioux. Likewise, the information provided by Breland assisted the government when they began planning for treaty-making and settlement.

According to his report concluded in November 1873, Breland left Fort Garry with presents on September 18<sup>th</sup>, arrived October 9<sup>th</sup> at Table Mountain, and arranged to meet with Cree, Saulteaux, and Assiniboine. He then proceeded to Vermillion Hills, where he read the letter from Morris to the assembled Indians, "But they were not entirely satisfied and there was great excitement among them, they fearing that by accepting the said presents they would compromise their lands and their rights, but after considerable explanation I was [able] to convince them and dispel their mistrust."<sup>66</sup> The chief, Ka-ki-chi-war, accepted the gifts as presents only, not as an agreement, ensuring he had not compromised their position at treaty negotiations. He also had a message for Morris, "You will thank him in my name and that of all my men who are here for the magnificent presents which he has sent us that we shall always keep him in kind remembrance, and we hope he will continue to assist us in our deep distress."<sup>67</sup> While presents were accepted in the short term, Indian people hoped formal treaty negotiations would take place sometime soon.

During the period when Breland was in the territory gaining the trust of the Cree and Assiniboine inhabitants, a band of Saulteaux chiefs at Fort Ellice forwarded a letter to Morris objecting to the presence of a surveyor in their territories. They were dismayed because no treaty had been undertaken and therefore the land still belonged to

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> RG10 Files Black Series, Vol. 3604, Reel C101004, File 2543.

<sup>66</sup> Copy of Pascal Breland's Report Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>, 1873 from RG10 Files Black Series, Vol. 3604, Reel C101004, File 2543.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

them. They simply could not understand why their land was being surveyed.<sup>68</sup> Morris then received a confidential statement from Dr. Robert Bell of the Geological Survey shortly after he had received the report from the chiefs. While surveying and collecting specimens, accompanied by Charles Pratt, Bell had been ordered back at the Elbow of the South branch of the Saskatchewan River.<sup>69</sup> Dr. Bell reported that a bad feeling existed in Territories among Indians and Half-Breeds because there was no visible government. The Indians had made it clear that they wanted no strangers in their country. Morris recommended to Ottawa, "I am led to fear from various sources of information movement there which gives trouble and think the government should reconsider their decision as to making treaty with the Indians in the region."<sup>70</sup> Campbell adopted the plan suggested by Morris to give chiefs salaries, though he would wait for the report from Breland before making a final decision about a treaty.<sup>71</sup>

A conversation between Morris and Kanoosees, a Cree Indian from Qu'Appelle, took place during a personal visit to the lieutenant-governor. He hoped to determine whether someone was coming to see them about their lands, "They wanted someone to represent their interests and would like Mr. Breland to do so." At Fort Qu'Appelle, the leaders had had councils about their lands, and believed they would be fairly dealt with by government, and claimed the territory between Fort Ellice and Qu'Appelle.<sup>72</sup> Another issue for officials to consider was the information provided by Joseph Tanner

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<sup>68</sup> From Fort Ellice to Morris, October 11, 1873 file 530 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.

<sup>69</sup> Cowie, Company of Adventurers 457.

<sup>70</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to Campbell, October 23, 1873, file 69. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

<sup>71</sup> Campbell to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, October 28, 1873, file 71. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

or, Kissoway, a Saulteaux trader in the vicinity of Fort Ellice. He reported Indians in the region were distressed by the Boundary Survey, particularly the Sioux. They feared the presence of the American force, and had asked the Metis to join them in stopping it. In order to prevent misunderstanding and potential confrontation, Morris recommended that messengers be sent out in advance of the survey to explain its purpose.<sup>73</sup>

The use of messengers in advance of incoming parties in the West, particularly if treaties had not been signed, permitted peaceful entry into the territory. The case of the Geological Survey turned back at the Elbow provides a striking illustration of the determination of Indian nations to hold the government to its promises of signing treaties. The relative power and unity of the First Nations on this point and the inability on the part of the government to control conditions is evident in these actions. Until the arrival of the North West Mounted Police in 1874 the only method to communicate with First Nations and monitor the situation in the West was by using locals, primarily the Metis. By dispatching Metis emissaries, violence could be averted, settlement would not be compromised, and the treaties could be negotiated. The arrival of the Boundary Survey and the North West Mounted Police in advance of treaties could have precipitated a serious confrontation. Through adopting a policy of alerting First Nations about the purpose of those parties and offering gifts, while at the same time promising future treaties, both groups passed through unmolested.

The threat to the police and Boundary Survey was brought to the attention of officials by information provided by a Metis, James Whitford or Whiteford. Whiteford,

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<sup>72</sup> Memorandum of Conversation between Kanoosees, a Cree Indian of the Qu'Appelle and the Lieutenant-Governor May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1874, file 739 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.

a cousin of James McKay, was introduced to Morris by Pierre Leveiller and was considered to be a reliable source by both Leveiller and McKay. He provided information on the threatened action on the part of the Sioux against the Boundary Survey and the Cypress Hills Massacre. Most importantly, the Sioux were prepared to stop the Survey because they believed the English (Canadians) and Americans were acting together. Morris commented: "Whiteford, who also appears an intelligent man, expressed the opinion that if the object of the survey were properly explained by a messenger there would be no trouble, as the Indians would prefer to have the boundaries between the two countries clearly defined. He also believed that the arrival of the police

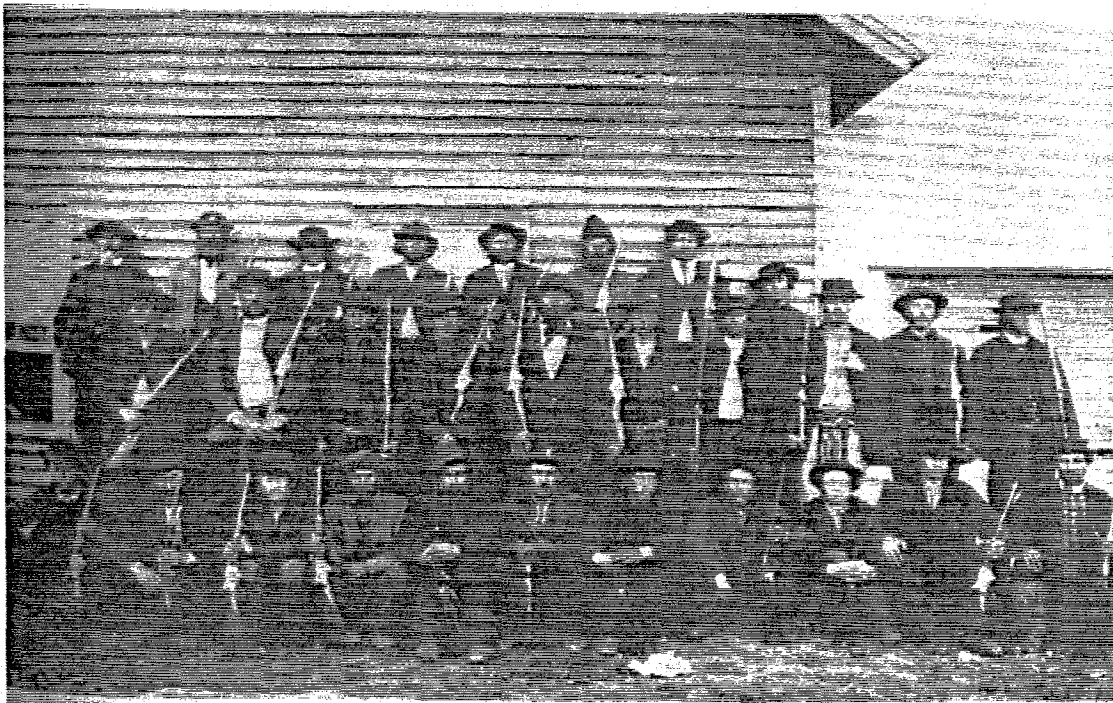


Figure 6. The "49<sup>th</sup> Rangers", Metis scouts for the Boundary Commission. Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, pg 157.

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<sup>73</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to Minister of the Interior, June 23, 1874 relaying information from interview Kissoway on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1874 RG 10 Reel 10106, Vol. 3610, File 3528.

would be welcomed if their coming were known.”<sup>74</sup> Morris then recommended that they should select a messenger along with an interpreter who could be sent ahead of the boundary survey and the police. By doing this, confrontations could be averted.<sup>75</sup> Morris did not merely alert one official. In order that his messages received top priority, he also warned the Minister of Justice and Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie.<sup>76</sup>

Minister of the Interior David Laird responded to Morris’ suggestion, giving him permission to do so.<sup>77</sup> A contingent of Metis was assembled to accompany both the Police and the Survey, and emissaries sent out to alert other groups to the purpose of each party. Morris selected Pierre Leveiller to lead the Metis traveling in advance of the Police. Morris describes how he “met MacDougall at the barricade (to the Red River Settlement) [in 1869]. He is a very reliable, intelligent and influential man, subsequently to the barricade affair” and that “the others are all good men”<sup>78</sup> His reputation as a well-traveled guide and skilled interpreter made him a good candidate for the position. The message to Leveiller was explicit:

The Chief duty which you are to perform is to inform the Indians and others what are the objects which the Queen had in view when she ordered the Police Force to proceed into the North West Territories.

You will therefore tell them that the police force going to the North West for the purpose of preserving law and order, and suppressing aggressions on the part of American traders or others upon her Indian subjects...What is desired however, is, that the Indians should thoroughly understand that the police are sent by the

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<sup>74</sup> Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to the Minister of the Interior May 24, 1874, file 114 from Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Morris to Minister of Justice Dorion, May 29<sup>th</sup> 1874 and Alexander Mackenzie on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1874 File 116 and file 117 to Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

<sup>77</sup> David Laird, Minister of the Interior to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1874, file 763 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.

<sup>78</sup> Morris to Alexander Mackenzie July 16, 1874 file 122, Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7 PAM.

Queen, and constitute them as friends, and as the protectors of their lives and properties. They are therefore asked to welcome the force, fully assured that it is the desire of the Queen and her advisors to deal justly and fairly with the people of the NWT.<sup>79</sup>

Leveiller was also given presents to distribute as tokens of the Boundary Survey's good will.

The assistance of a force of about 100 to 200 men to accompany the Boundary Survey as guides, interpreters, and scouts for a period of two to three years indicates the gravity of the situation. A commentator in the Manitoban remarked:

The presence of such, well kept in hand, will no doubt have good effect on the tribes through whom they may pass. But more potent still will be the presence of men such as William Hallett, John Grant, George Flett, or some of the Leveillers, Delormes, and Gentons, who know every inch of the ground between here and the mountains, can converse with the Indians in their own tongue, and are thoroughly conversant with their habits. Men like these and others we have named will do more towards carrying such an expedition safely through than all the troops that will accompany it; and for the sake of the speedy settlement of this boundary line dispute we hope than an important point like the engagement of men familiar with the Indian life and character, to navigate the expedition over the plains will not be neglected.<sup>80</sup>

Indian groups in the interior also knew in advance of the arrival of a mounted red-coated contingent.

Morris recruited the assistance of Hudson's Bay Company officials to arrange for messengers to be sent out. First, the Force was sent by the Queen for the preservation of law and order and to prevent aggression by American whiskey traders. The messengers were therefore to ask the Indians to give good will to the force, but their assistance was not required. Second, the messenger was to inform the Indians of the Boundary Survey

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<sup>79</sup> William I. Urquhart, Sec. of the North West Council to Pierre Leveiller from, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1874, file 789 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.

passing through to mark a line between British and American territories, and they were to regard it with good will. Third, treaties were to be made with the tribes to the south. And fourth, "Finally you will be good enough to impress upon the Indians that it is the view of the Queen and her Servants to deal fairly and justly by them as She and they have always done in her Territories wherever situated and that their welfare is dear to her as those of her white subjects."<sup>81</sup> Providing simple information as to the origins and purpose of the two expeditions would on one hand clarify any questions Indian people had, but the messages also included a promise to undertake treaties to ease any fears about that issue as well.

People knowledgeable of "the Indian character" having expressed fears that the entrance of North West Mounted Police into the territory would lead to violence were relieved to discover that messengers had been sent in advance of the expeditions:

Pains have been taken at the suggestion of the North West Council who shared the fears of the above mentioned, to communicate before hand with the Indian tribes through whose territories the force was to pass, and explain to them, by means of trustworthy persons having their confidence the nature and objects of their movement. As a result, the force has everywhere been welcomed by the Indians as their friends and benefactors.<sup>82</sup>

Metis messengers in advance of the expeditions may have prevented a serious confrontation that would have certainly hampered treaty-making efforts at later dates.

In the area around Fort Carlton, the Cree had also been anxious for some form of communication from the government regarding their lands. Hudson's Bay Company

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<sup>80</sup> The Manitoban, Saturday Jan. 18 1873.

<sup>81</sup> Confidential Letter from James A. Grahame to Richard Hardisty, from Fort Garry 8<sup>th</sup> August 1874, including a letter from Alexander Morris Fort Garry 19<sup>th</sup> June 1874, R. Hardisty Papers, M477 Glenbow Archives.

<sup>82</sup> Report of the Department of the Interior for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1874 pg 3, Report of David Laird, Minister of the Interior from, reproduced with permission of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from the National Library of Canada's Website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>)

employees grumbled about the lack of treaties, complaining: "The Canadian government have been too dilatory in the Question of Indian Treaties, and I am afraid there is trouble ahead for them. We have had news from the Saskatchewan of all that is going on there, and the Government in Ottawa have had Telegraphic communication of the same..."<sup>83</sup> Also, "I have told the government that the longer they delay the treaty, the harder it will be to make, and the more exacting will be the Indians, and their advisors. The government may delay too long."<sup>84</sup> The lieutenant-governor was all too aware of the deteriorating conditions at Fort Carlton, but the response from Ottawa was still to wait. Morris saw parallels between Carlton and the area around Qu'Appelle. There were settlers moving in from Red River and Metis settlers around the Prince Albert and St. Laurent area. Morris thought if no treaty was going to be made in the short term, a messenger was needed to report on the extent of the settlements.<sup>85</sup>

The popular mind in Manitoba perceived the Blackfoot and Cree as more "warlike" than First Nations in Manitoba. The possibility of their combined military power was intimidating, and newspapers echoed the sentiments of others who warned that messengers were critical to preventing confrontation. Because treaties had not yet been undertaken: "Care must be taken, however, that this existing faith in our good intentions may not be stretched to too great a length, as it is difficult to convince the Indian that you mean well when he begins to distrust. Too much time has already been lost in treating with the tribes of the interior; and worse than that is a promise given by

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<sup>83</sup> Fort Garry General 1875, W.J. Christie to Richard Hardsity Fort Garry 9<sup>th</sup> August 1875. File 114, R. Hardisty Papers, M477, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>84</sup> W.J. Christie to Richard Hardsity, Fort Garry July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1875. File 114 Fort Garry General 1875, R. Hardisty Papers, M477, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Morris to A. Campbell, Minister of the Interior Aug 18, 1873, file 398 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant- Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.



Governor Archibald to meet them at Fort Edmonton has not even been kept.”<sup>86</sup> Survey parties and the arrival of the North West Mounted Police prior to a treaty would be perceived as antagonistic to the Cree and Blackfoot if they did not have prior warning of the peaceful intentions of parties. The newspaper was also critical of the government’s hesitation to negotiate treaties: “The Dominion Government have not taken the first step towards treating with them, nor have shown the slightest interest in their welfare.”<sup>87</sup> It also hoped that arrangements could be made for a treaty the next summer before any others are sent into the country because inhabitants feared a combined Cree and Blackfoot alliance.

Chief Factor William McKay of Fort Pitt was selected to go on a mission to the Plains Cree in order to explain the purpose of the police and survey party. His charge instructed him:

You will therefore ask the Indians to give the force their good will, as coming from Her Majesty the Queen, and as being designated to promote the peace, harmony, and happiness among her People in the North West. I would particularly observe, however, that the co-operation of the Indians is not sought in any action which the Police Force may find it necessary to take, nor are they asked to act as allies for any military purpose.<sup>88</sup>

McKay was advised to describe the purpose of the boundary survey making its way across the Plains at that time and to explain to the Indians the Queen’s intention to deal fairly with them, impressing upon them her good intentions. To further ensure the goodwill of the Cree, McKay distributed presents among them in the amount of \$500.

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<sup>86</sup> The Manitoban, Oct 25<sup>th</sup>, 1873.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Carlton House, NWT 6<sup>th</sup> July 1874 unsigned (James A. Grahame) to Factor William McKay, File 96. Hardisty Papers, M477 Series X, Glenbow Archives.

During his travels, McKay visited approximately 259 tents in a total of six bands. (See Table 1) As he had been instructed, he explained to the Cree the purpose of the North West Mounted Police and the Boundary Commission. In addition to the mission of William McKay, the Reverend John McDougall also proceeded to the Blackfoot and Stony tribes for the same purpose. He believed the Bands he had visited “are well disposed towards the Dominion Government, that they are now anxiously waiting for a Commissioner to come among them and prompt action may secure permanent and easy terms of treaty, on the other hand delay will most probably prove dangerous and at least create a vast deal of expense and trouble.”<sup>89</sup>

**Table 1. William McKay’s Mission**

Plains Cree Bands Visited by McKay <sup>90</sup>	No. of Tents
Big Bear	65
Kees-Kay-Yous	80
Way-sha-we-kesion	18
Sweet Grass	56
Ta-lac-lees-quasi	16
Pa-pa-see-see-moos	24

The following year Rev. George McDougall and the Rev. John McKay again visited the Cree with presents. He noted, “If one thing is quite clear, that if no treaty should be made with the Crees next year, there will be trouble.”<sup>91</sup> By this point, Cree patience was wearing thin. During McDougall’s mission of 1875 he was bluntly told by a united band of Cree and Assiniboine they would not accept any government presents until a treaty date was set, and would refuse entry to any party running lines or survey as

<sup>89</sup> Report from Rev. John McDougall to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris nd. Morleyville Mission, Bow River from Hardisty Papers, M477 Series X File 96, Glenbow Archives.

<sup>90</sup> Numbers taken from McKay’s Report, William McKay to Richard Hardisty, Fort Pitt 28<sup>th</sup> August 1974 File 96. Hardisty Papers, M477 Series X, Glenbow Archives,

well.<sup>92</sup> While some Chiefs received the message from McDougall with gratitude, members of Big Bear's band again refused the gifts. In his speech, Big Bear said: "We want none of the Queen's gifts; when we set a fox-trap we scatter pieces of meat all round, but when the fox gets into the trap we knock him on the head; we want no bait, let your chiefs come like men and talk with us."<sup>93</sup> This insistence on meeting with the government to sign treaties became clear when that same year, the Plains Cree had turned back the Geological Survey and those constructing the telegraph line.<sup>94</sup>

Treaty-making between the Dominion and First Nations can be seen as the fulfillment of an earlier promise to Indian leaders for just treatment by the Queen. Preserving the image of a fair and honorable Crown was crucially important to the success of the eventual treaties. The Metis people who visited First Nations provided a vital link between the distant government officials and the First Nations. As people familiar to the First Nations through economic relations or as relatives, Metis people assured Indian people of the government's intentions to negotiate with them to obtain title to the land and distributed gifts on behalf of the government as a symbol of their new relationship. It is clear through an examination of this period that Metis emissaries were an integral part of establishing a connection to the new authority once the transfer had taken place. As a preliminary to treaty-making, these men became a part of the process, drawing on their knowledge of both worlds and experience as scouts, guides, and interpreters.

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<sup>91</sup> Extracts from George McDougall Sept. 13, 1875, South Branch, file 1109 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1, PAM.

<sup>92</sup> Rev. George McDougall to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, October 23, 1875 in Morris, The Treaties of Canada 173.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 174.

<sup>94</sup> J.R. Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 209.

## Chapter 5: The Metis at the Numbered Treaties

The diplomatic activities of Metis in the period prior to the treaties helped prevent the development of animosities between First Nations and the new administration. As representatives of the Canadian government, these Metis filled an important socio-cultural position using their knowledge of the First Nations culture to act as a bridge in the pre-treaty period. A change in function occurred once treaty negotiations occurred. Rather than acting as government representatives, the Metis took on the role of interpreter, though in some cases were advocates for the treaty to the First Nations. Interpreting at treaty negotiations required an intimate understanding of both Native and Canadian diplomatic protocol and the ability to accurately convey complex and important messages. Lieutenant-Governor Morris makes clear that these Metis frequently assisted in bringing about the successful conclusion of several numbered treaties through advancing the government's treaty terms to First Nations leadership. For the Metis, their role as intermediaries in the arena of Indian affairs made them indispensable to the administration in the North West territories. As interpreters evidence suggests that these Metis used their position in-between to persuade Indian leaders to trust government promises, maximizing their unique bi-cultural ethnicity and trusted position.

In the Rupert's Land fur trade prior to the 1870's Indian peoples had a distinctive means of coping with outsiders, enabling them to preserve their autonomy and peacefully co-exist with European traders. The 1670 Royal Charter gave the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly trading rights, but the Company had to follow Aboriginal protocol to carry out its trade. Traders and First Nations used gift exchange, pipe ceremonies, and intermarriage to cement relationships.<sup>1</sup> The relationship between First Nations and the Hudson's Bay Company had been based on balanced reciprocity. In the Indian world, the guiding force was a search for security, and others were considered hostile until peace had formally been declared. Indian protocol traditionally eased this situation by establishing kinship relations, either physically or metaphorically, and establishing a treaty for peace and stabilization. Agreements were always balanced in terms of both sides participating equally.<sup>2</sup> The fur trade evolved to incorporate these concepts and First Nations took this understanding into treaty negotiations. As the descendants of European traders and Indian women, Metis people embodied a unique kinship relationship often referred to in the speeches of Indian leaders. Metis presence at treaty negotiations was unexceptional due to their dual ancestry, familiarity, and former role in the fur trade.

When the Dominion government began the process of treaty-making in the North West Metis people played a critical role as cultural brokers. Once at treaties though, they were primarily involved in treaty-making as interpreters. In this role, the bi-cultural Metis drew on both their linguistic skills and their position in-between. The term Metis

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Ray, Jim Miller and Frank Tough, Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000) 31.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Freisen, "Magnificent Gifts: Treaties of Canada with the Indians 1869-76," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Series 5:1, (1986) 43-45.

in modern Sioux “is *iyéska* 'interpreter,' reflect[ing] the historical social position of mixed peoples.”<sup>3</sup> While Metis people had their own distinct culture and national aspirations, the interpreters generally understood highly divergent Aboriginal cultures and possessed a full comprehension of each. These skills were indispensable during this period. The use of local Metis with connections to the First Nations to bridge the cultural chasm was a critical aspect of government policy in establishing relations with First Nations, cementing alliances through treaty while extinguishing Aboriginal title in order to facilitate settlement. The North West in the 1870’s provided a unique advantage not possessed in other cultural frontiers in that there were a multitude of bi-cultural individuals who embraced their abilities as interpreters and intermediaries. These attributes were highly valued in the fur trade economy of Rupert’s Land, and naturally, when the Dominion sought to enter treaty talks, men like James McKay, Peter Erasmus, Pascal Breland, and others were more than capable of acting in these capacities.

An example from the fur trade indicates the importance of the interpreter for smooth relations between the Euro-Canadian servants and the First Nations traders when they encountered one another at the post. It is clear that the role of interpreter involved more than the translation of language, and can lend insight into the skills required to successfully mediate relations. “Jerry” McKay or John McNab Ballenden McKay was the interpreter at Fort Qu’Appelle in the 1860’s and 1870’s. Defined as a ‘native’ of the country, McKay was brother to William McKay, and descended from a long line of

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<sup>3</sup> Diane Paulette Payment, "Plains Metis" in Smithsonian Institution Handbook of North American Indians, volume 13 Plains, edited by Raymond J. DeMaillie (Washington: Smithsonian Institution 2001) 676.

prominent Hudson's Bay Company officers and Native mothers.<sup>4</sup> His position at the fort was to interpret for the Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, and Metis who came to trade.

According to Isaac Cowie,

Not only was he required on important occasions simply as interpreter, for his sympathetic knowledge of the diverse ideas and interests between the natives and the European officers of the Company enabled him to act the delicate and diplomatic part of the mediator, in the not uncommon event of the Indians making unreasonable demands and the master refusing reasonable concessions. Too little credit entirely has been given to such really good interpreters in so preventing trouble between the Indians and the whites.<sup>5</sup>

As a successful interpreter McKay was required to also prevent conflict by subtly mediating between the needs of the Indian clients and the economic objectives of the Company. Though McKay was not an interpreter for the treaties, it is likely the same process would be at work in that situation.

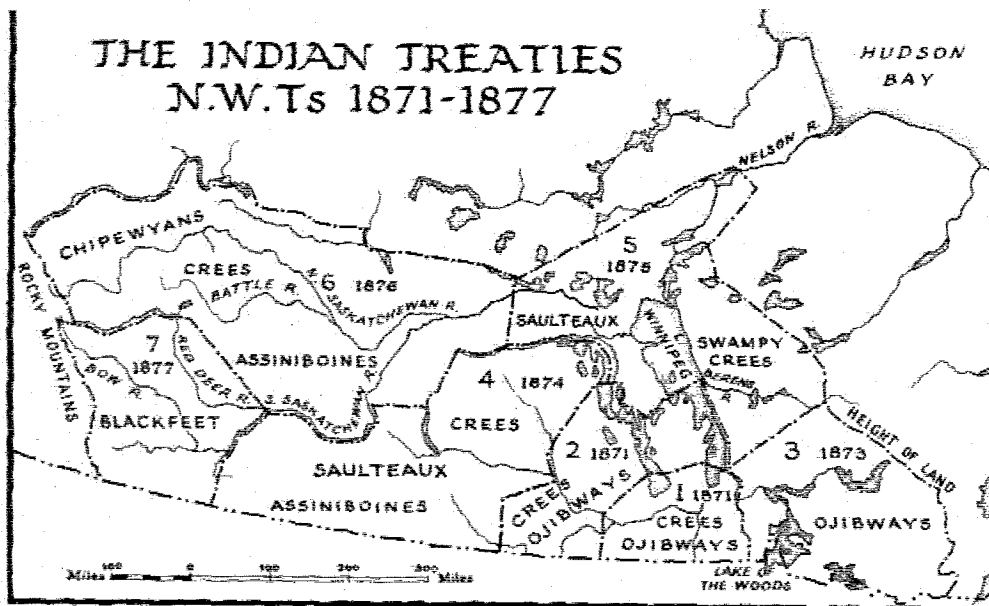


Figure 7. The Numbered Treaties. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, pg 211.

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers: A Narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company during 1867-1874*, (Winnipeg: William Briggs, 1913) 216.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

Highlighting the importance of the interpreter in high-level intercultural negotiations requires a refocusing of attention from the terms and meaning of treaties onto the processes at work in diplomacy. There are no substantial studies examining how the presence of familiar locals may have affected the negotiations and the eventual outcome of the treaties. This neglected approach may shed light on how the government was able to successfully obtain agreements with First Nations when in many cases there seemed to be little basis for agreement. When investigating the Metis role at treaty negotiations, the credit Alexander Morris repeatedly ascribes the Metis with affecting the outcome of the negotiations presents a difficulty because it is not explained further. Metis influence mentioned by Morris in Treaty 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 is a fascinating aspect of The Treaties of Canada and clearly was an important aspect of the negotiations.

Regarding the notion of Metis influence in the negotiations leading to Treaty 3, historical opinion is divided. David T. McNab has investigated the role of the Metis by critically examining the published documentation, primarily the Morris account. He has determined there is no evidence to conclude the Red River Metis in any way influenced the outcome of that treaty. He concludes, "The Metis of Manitoba likely had a minimal direct influence in the negotiations prior to this Indian Council, and there is no evidence that the Metis involvement in that Council would have made any difference whether or not the Ojibway nation signed Treaty 3 the next day."<sup>6</sup> An additional aspect of his argument is that rather than acquiescing to the offered terms, the Indians then brought forward additional requests, thus indicating the Metis had had little influence during the council. McNab concludes they were merely interpreters, witnesses, and facilitators.

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<sup>6</sup> David T. McNab, "'Hearty Co-Operation and Efficient Aid:' The Metis and Treaty 3," The Canadian Journal of Native Studies III:1(1983) 144.



The only evidence of Metis influence was in The Manitoban when Chief Mawedopeness told Morris he “owed the Treaty much to the half-breeds,” a statement not noted in Morris’ report. According to McNab, the influence Morris mentioned was based on his views of the Metis as a ‘race’ and was an attempt to curry favor with the Metis of Manitoba.<sup>7</sup> This analysis of Morris’ reasons to praise Metis involvement does not hold up when a fuller understanding of Metis participation prior to and during the numbered treaties is taken into account.

McNab’s analysis of Metis participation fails to consider the prior relationship of Ojibway and Metis that would significantly figure into how First Nations viewed diplomacy. Historian Jean Friesen has perceived the Metis contribution at Fort Francis in another manner. Based on the significance of kinship obligations, an examination of the language of kinship in the treaty negotiations indicates Indian people understood the treaties in terms of the reciprocal obligations involved in creating alliances. Aboriginal exchanges had always been understood in either real or fictive kinship terms. The kinship terms specify obligations of family members to assist one another in many situations, sharing resources, and aiding in times of crisis. The Treaty Commissioners agreed to this responsibility when they engaged in treaty discussions. She believes it is in this sense that the Metis role can be understood.<sup>8</sup> In several examples the Metis were referred to as cousins to Indian people who often acted in intermediary roles on both sides. Friesen sees an additional aspect to the kinship relationship between Indian and Metis. The importance of Metis influence bringing about a successful conclusion of Treaty 3 made them a part of the alliance in Indian understanding. When Lake of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Friesen, “Magnificent Gifts,” 47.

Woods chiefs met with the lieutenant-governor in 1874 to ask for fulfillment of treaty stipulations, Indian leaders said, "Do by us as it was done to you last autumn. You needed the help of the half-breeds to make the treaty and they helped you-Well today we want you to help us."<sup>9</sup> Friesen concludes the triangle of relations meant the Indians required the assistance of the government, as the government had needed the assistance of the Metis.

An examination of the period leading up to the treaties clearly reveals that Metis people played a critical role in acting as government diplomats and messengers to the First Nations, in some cases to counteract the negative messages being promulgated by disgruntled Indians or Metis who had experienced the government's failure to uphold its promises. It is likely, then, that the same Metis would have advanced the case of the government to First Nations to improve the likelihood of securing terms beneficial to the government. The reasons the Metis assisted the government are complex and varied. Individually, each person had private motives that remain obscure. Looking at each interpreter biographically has helped to make clear that generally, there was a personal history of acting in intermediary capacities. In addition, these services brought Metis the opportunity to secure financial remuneration from their positive relationship with the government. (see appendix A) It is also possible that these Metis truly believed that treaties would offer First Nations people an opportunity to obtain assistance and secure a land base ahead of settlement. Peter Erasmus, paid by Mistawasis and Ahtahkakup, was initially sympathetic to the Cree position but was swayed by the government's promises, convinced of the fairness and justice of the treaty terms.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Nights, edited by Irene Spry, (Calgary: Fifth House, 1999) 245.

Theoretical personality studies of such individuals indicate that in periods of cultural conflict certain people, based on their individual make-up, tend to emerge and fill roles as interpreters and intermediaries for a variety of reasons. Sociology professor Everett V. Stonequist labels these "Marginal Men," and describes them as,

a personality type that arises at a time and a place where, out of the conflict of races and cultures, new societies, new peoples and cultures are coming into existence. The fate which condemns him to live, at the same time, in two worlds is the same which compels him to assume, in relation to the worlds in which he lives, the role of a cosmopolitan and a stranger. Inevitably he becomes, relative to his cultural milieu, the individual with the wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached rational viewpoint.<sup>11</sup>

The "Marginal Men" in Stonequist's understanding were familiar with more than one culture and were often people of mixed ancestry. As Marginal Men, they often fluctuated between cultures, feeling frequently ambiguous about both.

Lending further insight into bi-cultural individuals is anthropologist Malcolm McFee's study. It is based on the level of acculturation on a Blackfoot reservation, and classifies the majority of residents as either Indian-oriented or White-oriented. There is a small cluster of individuals that he labels interpreters, possessing bi-cultural attributes, who primarily identify with Indian values but are familiar with white values. These few unique individuals he calls 150% men because their knowledge of an additional culture does not impede their adherence to traditional Blackfoot values.<sup>12</sup> They do not become assimilated to white mores, but provide an intermediary role among their people. Both studies attempt to explore why particular individuals seem to arise in inter-cultural

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<sup>11</sup>Everett V. Stonequist, The Marginal Man: A Study in Personality and Culture Conflict, (New York: Russell & Russell Inc, 1961), introduction, xvii-xviii.

<sup>12</sup>Malcolm McFee, "150% Man, a Product of Blackfeet Acculturation," American Anthropologist, 70:6 December, (1968): 1100.

situations. It appears that individual personality and particular events play a role in determining who will emerge to fill this position. The Metis interpreters who operated in this transitional period can be seen as brokers promoting the treaties to Indian people.

Looking at the Metis present at treaties 1 through 7 signed between 1871 and 1877 reveals a pattern of Metis influence at various points throughout the negotiations. Treaty 3 provides the most remarkable illustration of Metis involvement and influence. It highlights the importance of the pre-treaty relationship, particularly between First Nations and the Metis interpreters. This relationship, based on kinship, shared culture, and economic relations proved to be critical when government promises were insufficient to sway Ojibway leaders. The first two attempts at securing a treaty at Lake of the Woods had been unsuccessful. In July 1871 at Fort Francis Indian Commissioner, Wemyss Simpson, S.J. Dawson, and W.J. Pether, met with the Ojibway to secure a treaty to extinguish land title from the watershed of Lake Superior to the North West Angle of the Lake of the Woods down to the American border. The area was needed for the Dawson route for immigrants traveling west from the Dominion. These negotiations were unsuccessful and did not result in a treaty. When the Commissioner and Ojibway met again in 1872 again they did not conclude a treaty.<sup>13</sup> To assist with treaty negotiations at Fort Francis, Lieutenant-Governor Archibald appointed Robert Pether, a Hudson's Bay Company employee, and Metis, Nicholas Chastellaine. Pether received \$1000/annum and Chastellaine \$250/anum.<sup>14</sup> The reasons for the failure to come to an agreement are not given in Morris' account of the Treaties.

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<sup>13</sup>Alexander Morris, The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North West Territories, (Calgary: Fifth House Publishing, 1880, 1991,ed) 45.

<sup>14</sup>Letter from Howe to A.G. Archibald, March 29, 1872, File 238, Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel M2 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

In 1873, Morris, Simon Dawson, and J.A.N. Provencher made a final attempt to treat with the Ojibway at Fort Francis. By that time, J.A.N. Provencher had replaced Wemyss Simpson as Indian Commissioner. At the 1873 negotiations both Pether and Chastellaine were again present. They had been active among the Ojibway from 1869 onward advocating for the treaty and distributing gifts to maintain a positive image of the incoming government. The government's fear of Metis interference at Lake of the Woods dated back to the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 when the government believed that the Metis were trying to prevent the entrance of Wolseley's troops to put down the Resistance. The nature of the Manitoba Metis' interference is never given, and it is likely that the Ojibway and Metis were familiar with one another, perhaps even related. By 1873, Morris felt that the treaty would be successful, but still feared the possibility of "Metis interference" that would make an agreement more difficult. To gain information on this, he sent Metis Pierre Leveiller in advance to report on the gathering and Leveiller confirmed all was calm.<sup>15</sup> Though not as prominent among government commissioners as James McKay, both Leveiller and Chastellaine acted as intermediaries between First Nations and government, using their skills and knowledge to advance the government position.

Metis participation is most striking in the negotiations of Treaty 3 as interpreters, messengers, advisers, and assistants. Pierre Leveiller was also responsible for alerting the Indians to the treaty and convincing them to attend where Morris stipulated. The Ojibway had preferred to meet the Treaty Commissioners at Fort Francis, but Morris rejected this site, preferring to meet at North West Angle. Morris sent "special agent

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<sup>15</sup>Confidential Alexander Morris to Sir John A. Macdonald, Sept 20, 1873 file 57, in Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection, PAM.

Mr. Pierre Leveiller to warn them that I would meet them as arranged at the North-West Angle on the 25<sup>th</sup>, or not at all this year, to which they eventually agreed.”<sup>16</sup> For negotiations the government interpreters were Mr. McPherson, described as an intelligent half-breed trader, and Nicholas Chastellaine. Chastellaine’s presence at negotiations indicates there was continuity with the pre-treaty period. His role in the actual negotiations was never mentioned, but it is likely he would have encouraged the Ojibway to enter the treaty based on his position beforehand. Former Indian agent Simpson had commented that he was sympathetic to the Ojibway’s position, and may have supported their appeals for better treaty terms.

In addition to the government interpreters, the Ojibway had chosen their own interpreters and an Indian reporter to remember everything spoken at the meeting. To ensure that the government included everything that had been discussed, the Ojibway also obtained the services of another Metis, Joseph Nolin, of Point du Chène, to take notes in French of the negotiations.<sup>17</sup> This additional step was likely taken to prevent the omission of important aspects of the agreement as had been done in the official record of Treaties 1 and 2. The translated copy of these notes is now referred to as the Paypom Document and it differs in many respects from the official copy of Treaty 3.<sup>18</sup> Interpreters, who were primarily Metis, acted both for the Ojibway and government, but their role entailed more than translation. The government hired Chastellaine because of his presumed influence among the Fort Francis groups. His presence at treaty

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<sup>16</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada 47.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>18</sup> The Paypom Document – came to be the set of notes taken by Joseph Nolin. Printed on the original “The copy was given to me by Chief Powasson at Butkey-the Northwest Angle- Lake of the Woods, signed C.G. Linde” Elder Paypom then obtained it from Linde. This copy was obtained from the website of the Treaty 3 Grand Council at [www.treaty3.ca/pages/paypom.html](http://www.treaty3.ca/pages/paypom.html) but can also be found on the website of Canadian government digital collections at <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/lan/treaty3/paypom.htm>.

negotiations as an interpreter may also mean he was in attendance to support the government perspective of treaty-making, and it is unlikely the Ojibway were aware of his agreement with the Dominion.

The determined position of the Ojibway had prevented an agreement in 1871 and 1872, and by 1873, they still firmly held to their insistence on greater monetary compensation than the government was willing to offer. At the outset of negotiations, Morris made the Ojibway an offer of \$5 per head, a present of \$10, and provided for reserves not exceeding 1 square mile per family. The following day, the Ojibway proposed a sum of \$15 for a gratuity and \$10 as an annuity for each person, and \$50 annually for chiefs, a package the commissioners rejected. In response, Indian leaders declared that the people were all of one mind and would make a treaty only if government officials were to accept their counter proposition. Upon noticing a division within the groups, the lieutenant-governor ended the conference saying he would treat with those bands who were willing. He advised them to return to their council so they could reconsider before the next morning, bringing matters to a crisis.

Contrary to what the chiefs said, they were not united. Chief Blackstone urged the other chiefs to return to council to consider the Commissioner's proposals. Morris then said:

I told them that I had known all along they were not united as they had said; they ought not to allow a few chiefs to prevent the treaty, and that I wished to treat with them as a nation and not with separate bands, as they would otherwise compel me to do; and therefore urged them to return to their council, promising them to remain another day to give them time for consideration. They spent the night in council, and next morning having received a message from Charles Nolin, a French half-breed, that they were becoming more amenable to reason, I requested the Hon. James McKay (who went to the Angle three times to promote the treaty), Charles Nolin and

Pierre Leveiller to go down to the Indian Council, and as men of their own blood, give them friendly advice.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, the Council discussion was off the record and there is no existing account of what was discussed.

It is possible to hypothesize about what may have occurred. The Metis were acting on the direction of Morris, to “offer friendly advice” or more likely, to assist in convincing the Ojibway of the benefits of entering a treaty. James McKay had been well known in the Lake of the Woods area and from many accounts was on friendly terms with the Ojibway. He had participated in the previous treaty attempts in 1871 and 1872, and had conducted business in the area. In one account, the First Nations were said to be starving due to the failure of both fishing and hunting. In order to provide assistance, James McKay employed many of them to cut wood for the steamers, and gave them an order at the store for provisions. As the local paper noted, “This as might be expected, has diffused feelings of joy among the aborigines, and gone farther towards inclining them to make a treaty than all the effort of the ex-Indian Commissioner. They are more contented and it is to be hoped will be all the more easily induced to treaty[sic] for the surrender of their lands next summer.”<sup>20</sup> As the commissioner of the Dawson road that went directly through their territory, McKay was likely well known in the area.

McKay’s connections to the Treaty commissioners were equally well entrenched. He must have attended negotiations on the government’s behalf to assist when difficulties arose, since both sides had their own interpreters and officials. His ability to communicate with the Ojibway and relationship to them placed him in an ideal position to advise on the government’s terms in the private council. Both he and Leveiller were

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<sup>19</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada 49.

<sup>20</sup> The Manitoban, Saturday March 29<sup>th</sup>, 1973.



clearly associated with the government. Charles Nolin, on the other hand, was present at the Council as interpreter for the Fort Francis band, although he too was affiliated with the conservative Metis who had been supportive of the incoming administration.<sup>21</sup> These men were highly skilled in Native diplomacy and could likely craft a persuasive argument in support of the treaties. The presence of Leveiller, McKay, and Nolin advocating the position of the government on terms First Nations could identify with may have indeed influenced the eventual outcome, though it is impossible to be certain.

During the private council, the Treaty commissioners met and decided to include an additional \$2 per head, raising the gratuity to \$12 and add agricultural items to the treaty terms. When the conference reconvened, Indian spokesmen made additional requests, but when their requests were denied, they did not appear upset. It is interesting that at this critical point the commissioner agreed to increase their offered treaty terms. At this juncture, a softening on both sides occurred.

The account in the Manitoban from October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1873 gives more credit to the presence of the Metis in the private council for the decision to accept the treaty and provides a more detailed account of the speeches from the parties involved. According to Morris, the paper's version was an accurate view of the negotiations and "a vivid representation of the habits of Indian thought."<sup>22</sup> The Metis, who in Morris' version had been sent by him, were at the private Council by the request of the chiefs in the newspaper account. According to the Manitoban, "A council was held by the Indians in the evening, at which the Hon. James McKay, Pierre Leveiller, Charles Nolin, and Mr. Genton *were present by invitation of the Chiefs* [italics mine]. After a very lengthy and

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<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>22</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada, 52.

exhaustive discussion it was agreed to accept the Governor's terms, and the final meeting was announced Friday morning."<sup>23</sup> Morris' account indicates that he had sent the Metis, as men of their own blood, to give them friendly advice. The Manitoban makes it clear that the presence of McKay, Nolin, Genton, and Leveiller helped persuade the Ojibway to accept the terms. It states that the Metis "were invited in to their council, and after a most exhaustive discussion of the circumstances in which they were placed it was resolved to accept the Governor's terms, with some modifications."<sup>24</sup> After a lengthy discussion between the lieutenant-governor and the Indian spokesmen the agreement was concluded. According to Chief Mawedopenais, "I wish you to understand you owe the treaty much to the Half-breeds."<sup>25</sup> and Morris replied, "I know it. I sent some of them to talk with you, and I am proud that all the Half-breeds from Manitoba who are here, gave their Governor their cordial support."<sup>26</sup> The treaty was then signed, and the signatures of several Metis, James McKay, Charles Nolin, Joseph Nolin, George McPherson, Senior, Pierre Leveiller, and Nicholas Chatelaine appear on it.<sup>27</sup> Once the negotiations had been finalized, James McKay read and explained the treaty. At the end of Morris' dispatch he observed:

Before closing this dispatch, I have much pleasure in bearing testimony to the hearty co-operation and efficient aid the Commissioners received from the Metis who were present at the Angle, and who, with one accord, whether of French or English origin, used their influence which their relationship to the Indians gave them, to impress them with the necessity of their entering into the treaty.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> From the Treaty 3 document, Morris, The Treaties of Canada 325-326.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 51.

Based on the accounts of Morris and the Manitoban, the Metis played a significant role in using their relationship with the Ojibway to bring about Treaty 3, and the private council appears to have been the decisive moment. How the consensus was arrived at is not known, but the Metis had long been familiar to the Ojibway in the area and advocates for the treaty from the first negotiation in 1871.

The importance of trusted and familiar advocates is clear from the comments of Chief Ma-we-do-pe-nais, requesting the position of Indian agent be given to Metis, Charles Nolin,

I begin now to see how I value the proceedings. I have come to this point, and all that are taking part in this treaty and yourself. I would wish to have all your names in writing handed over to us. I would not find it to my convenience to have a stranger here to transact our business between me and you. It is a white man who does not understand our language that is taking it down. I would like a man that understands our language and our ways. We would ask your Excellency as a favor to appoint him [Charles Nolin] for us.<sup>29</sup>

The Indian chiefs believed that knowledge of their language and ways was critical so their views might be accurately represented to the officials. It also indicates the importance of Metis people in the proceedings as people familiar to the Ojibway. It is likely their assurances of the fairness and justice of the treaty terms helped to encourage the Ojibway to agree to cede their lands. The critical issue at the treaty was the additional financial compensation the Ojibway requested. Their original desire for \$10 as an annuity was not conceded, but the gratuity was increased to \$12 from \$10. In order to better understand the process of treaty negotiations, it is necessary to look at all the treaties to determine how the Metis people operated as interpreters and intermediaries on behalf of the Canadian government.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 71.

The private councils are an aspect of negotiations that may be critical to understanding how First Nations deliberated on the proposed treaty terms. The presence of the Metis at councils indicates that Indian leaders respected their opinions. Unfortunately, there is currently only one existing account of what transpired at a private council. Interpreter Peter Erasmus participated at the private councils for Treaty 6, both at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt, but his recollections of those councils must be interpreted critically. His memory of the negotiations seems accurate when verified against Morris' account, though he may perhaps give himself too much credit for shaping events at Treaty 6. Nonetheless, because of Erasmus' presence at the private councils and the contribution of James McKay, the role of the Metis at Treaty 6 corresponds to that of Treaty 3. Treaty 6 is also significant because it is the only treaty to contain the provisions for a medicine chest and government assistance in the event of a famine or pestilence, terms Ottawa felt to be too open ended, and therefore undesirable.

For the negotiation of Treaty 6 in the summer of 1876, Treaty Commissioner W.J. Christie, Secretary A.G. Jackes, and guide Pierre Leveiller accompanied Lieutenant-Governor Morris. James McKay, also a Treaty Commissioner, traveled by Fort Pelly to meet with the Plains and Woods Cree at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt. Once at Fort Carlton, McKay camped four miles from the fort, closer to the Cree camps, in order to circulate among them and gain a better understanding of their position. His presence is recalled in Cree sources. According to Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman, McKay attempted to discreetly gauge the tenor of the Cree reaction to the treaty. Because of his immense size, it was impossible not to notice him. "A huge and ponderous shadow slipped from one meeting to another attempting to assess the mood of the Indians. James McKay, a Scotch Metis and one of the Treaty Commissioners, was not

inconspicuous- no man of some four hundred pounds is, but he was fluent in Cree and missed little.”<sup>30</sup> Again, McKay appears to be using his position for the advantage of the Canadian government by using his native skills, and knowledge of the language and culture of the Cree.

Morris again noted the important contribution of James McKay, remarking “I have to acknowledge the benefit I derived from the services of the Hon. James McKay, camping as he did near the Indian encampment. He had the opportunity of meeting with them constantly, and learning their views which his familiarity with the Indian dialect enabled him to do.”<sup>31</sup> Morris also mentioned other Metis present who assisted the government in securing a treaty. “On this occasion, as on others, I found the Half-breed population, whether of French or English generally using the influence of their relationship to the Indians in support of our effort to come to a satisfactory arrangement with them.”<sup>32</sup> The statements Morris repeats following many of the treaties are ripe with possibilities. It is unlikely he was currying favor with the Red River Metis. They would never have read his dispatches; only officials in Ottawa would have viewed them. At Treaty 6, many of the Metis in attendance may have come from Prince Albert or St. Laurent. Residents at Prince Albert, represented by Rev. John McKay, brother of James

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<sup>30</sup> Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman, John Tootoosis, (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1984) 13. I would like to thank fellow grad student, Erin Millions, for alerting me to this quote.

<sup>31</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada, 195.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 196.

McKay, and interpreter at Treaty 6, had been imploring the lieutenant-governor for a

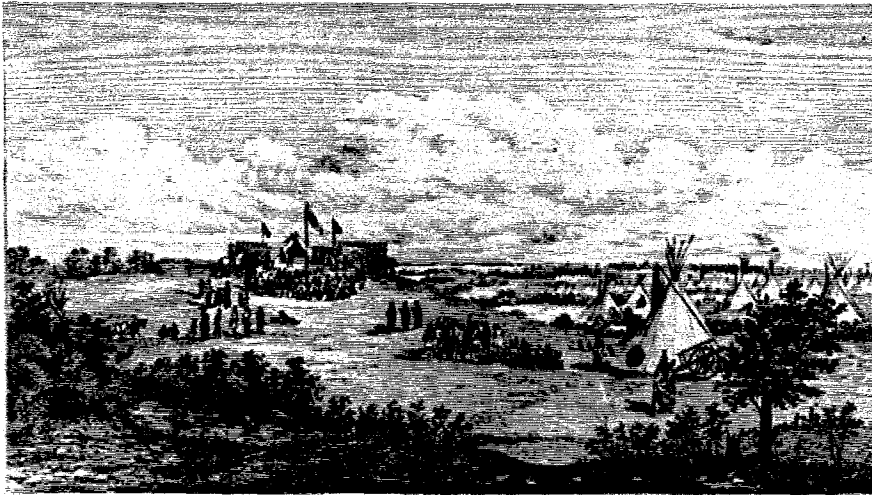


Figure 8. Treaty 6 Negotiations at Fort Carlton. J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* 215.

treaty and law and order from 1871 on. They hoped to settle the outstanding land issues to obtain title to their own lots of land. The St. Laurent Metis may have been primarily buffalo hunters, but as permanent settlers at St. Laurent, they too would be interested in obtaining title to their lands.

Again, the Metis acted as interpreters for Treaty 6, and Morris mentioned, “We also had the advantage of good interpreters, having secured the services of Messrs. Peter Ballenden and John McKay, while the Indians had engaged Mr. Peter Erasmus to discharge the same duty. The latter acted as chief interpreter, being assisted by the others, and is a most efficient interpreter.”<sup>33</sup> Similar to other numbered treaties signed in the 1870’s, Metis were active in the negotiations of Treaty 6 as interpreters and witnesses, using their influence to induce First Nations to accept government terms.

Unlike other treaties, there are two separate accounts of Treaty 6 from participants, the official record of Morris and Jackes, and the recollections of Peter Erasmus. As the primary interpreter brought by Mistawasis and Ahtahkakoop, Erasmus’

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

observations are particularly important and add insight into the process of negotiations absent from other records. The theme of interpreting is a key issue in Treaty 6 and illustrates its importance. The Treaty Commissioners had obtained Rev. John McKay and Peter Ballenden to interpret for them, in addition to Hon. James McKay who was a Treaty Commissioner. When the lieutenant-governor realized the Cree had hired their own interpreter, he thought it unnecessary. Mistawasis responded,

We have our own interpreter, Peter Erasmus, and there he is. Clarke (he pointed directly at Clarke) advised me that Peter Erasmus was a good man to interpret the Cree language. Further than that, he recommended the man as the best interpreter in the whole Saskatchewan valley and plains. Why he did so only he knows. On Clarke's advice, though I have no acquaintance with the man, I went to a great deal of trouble to fetch him here and though I know nothing of his efficiency, I am prepared to use his services. All our chiefs have agreed."<sup>34</sup>

Their additional expense was immediately justified once negotiations began.

As the other interpreters attempted to translate the Governor's speech it was quickly realized that their interpretations were lacking. Peter Ballenden could not speak loudly or clearly enough, and Reverend John McKay knew only Swampy Cree, a dialect the Plains Cree would not understand. Erasmus knew of their inability to properly translate and waited for them to display their inadequacies. The Plains Cree quickly recognized Rev. John McKay couldn't speak their language and were highly insulted: "Mista-wa-sis, after listening for a time, jumped to his feet and said, "We are not Swampy Crees or Saulteaux Indians. We are Plains Crees and demand to be spoken to in our own language."<sup>35</sup> When Peter Ballenden was called in to speak, he was no better. Erasmus recalled, "I was delighted, for I knew this man quite well. He was a good man

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<sup>34</sup> Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Nights 238.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 242.

to interpret a personal talk but I know he would be completely out of his element as an interpreter for such a large meeting, where a man's voice had to carry to reach men furthest from the stand."<sup>36</sup> These two examples indicate the importance of obtaining skilled interpreters. The Plains leaders sought the best possible interpreter in Saskatchewan and recognized the importance of this position.

According to the notes of Dr. Jackes, government secretary for the Treaty 6 negotiations, there were 150 lodges with about 2000 people present at Fort Carlton. Like the Ojibway at the negotiations for Treaty 3, the Cree were divided as to whether to place their trust in the promises made by the commissioners. There was a clear split between the bands who were willing to accept the treaty, and those who felt it did not provide enough to assist them with a transition from a buffalo hunting economy to one based on agriculture. Poundmaker, not yet a chief, emerged as a vocal critic of the government's offers. In one instance during the negotiations he declared that he hoped to obtain greater assistance once settled on reserves to begin farming, and further help as they advanced in making that transition. Like Poundmaker, the Badger also was unsure if the treaty promises would be adequate: "We want to think of our children, we do not want to be too greedy; when we commence to settle down on reserves that we select, it is there we want your aid, when we cannot help ourselves and in the case of troubles seen and unforeseen in the future."<sup>37</sup> These were pressing issues for the Cree, then beginning to experience the decline of the buffalo on the Plains, an animal that had been the mainstay of their existence. As a treaty promise, assistance beginning agriculture was crucial in making the transition to a life confined to a reserve tilling the soil.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Morris, *The Treaties of Canada* 212.



In response to the concerns of Poundmaker and the Badger, Morris commented, “[t]he honorable James McKay also addressed them, saying that their demands would be understood by a white man as asking for daily food, and could not be granted, and explained our objects, speaking with effect in the Cree tongue.”<sup>38</sup> McKay articulated the government’s position:

My friends, I wish to make you a clear explanation of some things that it appears you do not understand. It has been said to you by your governor that we did not come here to barter or trade with you for the land. You have made demands on the Governor, and from the way you have put them a white man would understand that you asked for daily provisions, also supplies for your hunt and for your pleasure excursions. Now my reasons for explaining to you are based on my past experience of treaties, for no sooner will the Governor and Commissioners turn their backs on you than some of you will say this thing and that thing was promised and the promise not fulfilled; that you cannot rely on the Queen’s representative, that even he will not tell the truth, whilst among yourselves are the falsifiers. Now before we rise from here it must be understood, and it must be in writing, all that you are promised by the Governor and Commissioners, and the meaning of every word that comes from us. We have not come here to deceive you, we have not come here to rob you, and we are not here to make peace as we would to hostile Indians, because you are the children of the Great Queen as we are, and there has never been anything but peace between us. What you have not understood clearly we will do our utmost to make perfectly plain to you.<sup>39</sup>

In spite of McKay’s assurances, the Cree still feared for the future. Both Mistawasis and Ahtahkakoop could not understand how treaty promises would be adequate for the future needs of their people. When no agreement could be achieved, the Cree requested that the negotiations cease in order to hold further conferences that afternoon. The following day, day four of the negotiations, Peter Erasmus read a list of additional

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid, 185

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, 211-212

requests of the Cree. Morris noted that this was the turning point of the treaty negotiations.

Erasmus' recollections of James McKay differed significantly from Morris' perception of his kindly assistance. On several occasions Erasmus remarked that McKay had acted less than diplomatically towards him and the Cree. In one case, his arrogance was evident over a translating error:

during a pause in the Governor's speech, the Hon James differed with me over an interpretation of one word. However, his brother supported my interpretation of the matter and no further objections were expressed during the whole of the remaining treaty negotiations. Though that first day I felt high-strung and angry over the treatment I received, I was determined that nothing would prevent me from doing my work with credit to my employers and justice to the Governor's talks.<sup>40</sup>

Another example of McKay's arrogance provided by Erasmus occurred after McKay's speech responding to the Badger's concern for agricultural assistance.

Erasmus felt McKay's reply to Poundmaker's and the Badger's request for assistance and medical aid was unnecessarily harsh:

the Hon James McKay, in a somewhat arrogant tone, admonished them in Cree for their demands. "In my experience you always want more than you were promised in the first place and you are never satisfied with what is given you." He made other biting remarks detrimental to the character of the Indian. In view of my knowledge of what had transpired at their council I thought his speech most unfortunate and very harmful. His attitude insulted the intelligence of his listeners. There was a distinct murmur of disapproval all over the crowd. McKay had hardly taken his seat when The Badger leapt to his feet.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Nights 243.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 251.

If Erasmus was correct, the Cree perceived McKay's unkind words as an insult, and this episode demonstrates McKay felt it his duty to protect the interests of the government rather than be sympathetic to Cree concerns.

Unlike Erasmus' version, Cree oral history frames McKay's image in understanding terms. Speaking directly to the crowd, the Cree felt McKay's respectful words were either based on his sympathy with the Indian people from his Indian blood, or as a canny Scot who recognized the approaching impasse in negotiations. Importantly, McKay again is single-handedly using his ability to overcome an obstacle in treaty negotiations. Goodwill and Sluman evoke the speech of McKay. "I have listened to both sides and I understand how you feel. I can assure you that the promises made here will be kept, but I agree you must thoroughly understand everything before you sign. I will leave the interpreter here with you. Tell him what changes or additions you want in the treaty terms, then he will bring them to us for our consideration."<sup>42</sup> If this is correct, McKay had given the First Nations an opportunity to present their terms with the possibility they might be included. In the case of Treaty 6, two of the most important treaty terms, the famine and medicine chest clause, came at Cree insistence.

McKay's speech explaining the government's position had come following a difficult and tense council that Erasmus had taken part in. Prior to the council, Erasmus commented that he had experienced a change in loyalty to the government's side. Erasmus was present at that private Cree council at the request of Mistawasis and Ahtahkakoop to make any explanations of the earlier talks or his interpretations during the speeches. The two chiefs felt that there were some among the Cree who planned to

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<sup>42</sup> Goodwill and Sluman, John Tootoosis 17.

confuse the people to prevent a treaty. A few of the Cree opposed Erasmus' presence at the Council, but Ahtahkakoop responded:

Mista-wa-sis and I fetched this man here at a great deal of trouble to ourselves because we were told that Peter Erasmus was learned in the language the Governor speaks. You all heard and saw the other men fail to interpret what he tried to say. He, Peter Erasmus, is the people's hired man. He is here to open our eyes and ears to the words that you and I cannot understand. Mista-wa-sis and I have asked him here to keep us right on what was offered in the treaty terms."<sup>43</sup>

Their explanation silenced dissent regarding Erasmus' participation. Ahtahkakoop's defense of Erasmus' participation alludes to the closed nature of private councils. Outsiders must have been generally unwelcome; to be included meant an individual was invited or was required to be present to provide clarification. It is unlikely that an outsider could offer an opinion on the decision to accept the treaty, unless highly regarded by Indian leadership.

Erasmus' recollection of the council meeting highlights the division between the Badger, Poundmaker, and their followers who felt the treaty was inadequate, and Mistawasis and Ahtahtktoop who felt that it was the only chance for their survival. On one occasion Mistawasis implored:

I speak directly to Poundmaker and the Badger and those other who object to signing the treaty. Have you anything better to offer our people? I ask, again, can you suggest anything that will bring these things back for tomorrow and all the tomorrows our people face? I for one think that the Great White Queen Mother has offered us a way of life when the buffalo are no more. Gone they will be before many snows have come to cover our heads or graves if such should be."<sup>44</sup>

The majority of Cree came to accept the position of Mistawasis and Ahtahkakoop, but Poundmaker and the Badger still felt the terms were inadequate. After the majority of

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<sup>43</sup> Erasmus, Buffalo Days and Nights 246.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

discussion had taken place at the meeting, the Cree Chiefs prepared a petition requesting additional terms they felt necessary to include in the treaty. Erasmus assisted with the petition and was responsible for reading it to the treaty commissioners the next day.

Once Treaty 6 negotiations were concluded and some of the Cree's additional requests became incorporated, Mistawasis ensured that the Cree terms had been put in writing in the treaty by asking Erasmus to carefully read the document to make sure they had been included. When he noted that they had been, Mistawasis was satisfied and signed his name.<sup>45</sup> Peter Erasmus had gained an excellent reputation as an interpreter during his employment with Protestant missionaries. In addition, Erasmus had knowledge of both Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal culture; these skills enabled him to act as both translator and broker in the treaty negotiations.

Peter Erasmus had proved to be a proficient interpreter at Fort Carlton, and the Governor requested he proceed to the negotiations at Fort Pitt to interpret. While there, the Cree chiefs Sweet Grass, James Seenum, and Little Hunter called a meeting asking Erasmus to attend. It is at this point that his influence can be most clearly distinguished.

He recollected:

I was questioned at some length about the attitude of the tribes who signed the treaty at Carlton, about details in reference to treaty concessions, and the terms agreed upon. Which by that time I had memorized by heart. I gave them a review of the discussions of the council meeting of the chiefs at Carlton, reporting the objections raised by those who opposed the signing, and spoke of the petition that had been drawn up for the Commissioner, with the points agreed to and those refused. I mentioned Poundmaker's and The Badger's efforts at trying to block or misinterpret the terms of the treaty, at which there were some expressions of disgust about their attitude. Then I wound up my talk by a report of the two speeches made by Mista-wa-

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid,254.

sis and Ah-tuk-a-kup that had swung the whole opinion of the assembly in favor of the signing.<sup>46</sup>

Chief Seenum, attending from Victoria mission where Erasmus had lived, addressed the Fort Pitt chiefs about Erasmus and his credibility. He reassured the assembled chiefs that Erasmus could be trusted using kinship terms; he was married to one of their daughters and was a part of their band.<sup>47</sup> Based on Erasmus' explanation of the Fort Carlton negotiations, the chiefs accepted the treaty without question. Sweet Grass remarked, "I am no wiser than my brothers at Fort Carlton who have accepted the Queen Mother's hand. I will sign for my people."<sup>48</sup> Erasmus' own sympathy with the government and conviction that Mistawasis and Ahtakakoop had chosen the right path likely colored his description of the Fort Carlton negotiations.

Cree insistence on provisions in the event of a devastating famine, medical supplies, and agricultural assistance was integrated into the terms for Treaty 6. Because these terms were far greater than any previously incorporated into treaties, Ottawa immediately reacted with displeasure. In a dispatch to Morris, Minister of the Interior David Mills found the Treaty 6 terms to be more onerous than those of earlier treaties "and he regrets especially to find that the Commissioners felt it necessary to include in the treaty, a novel provision, - the Government to come to the assistance of the Indians included in the treaty in the event of their being visited by any pestilence or famine."<sup>49</sup> The Minister believed that this would predispose the Indians to idleness and create dissatisfaction among others with less favorable treaty terms. In spite of their

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 258.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 259.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 260.

<sup>49</sup> Minister of the Interior David Mills to Lieutenant-Governor Morris, file 1423 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection MG12 B1, PAM.

objections, the treaty was ratified rather than cause chaos by refusing to do so. Mills also advised Morris to inform James McKay about the Government's dissatisfaction with the treaty terms.<sup>50</sup>

McKay promptly issued his perspective on the treaty negotiations. He felt the inclusion of the additional terms was justified and that Mills was obviously not acquainted with the situation in the West. McKay explained that there had been a number of obstacles and difficulties to be overcome before successfully concluding the treaty. For one, Treaty 6 was made with five different tribes, the Woods Cree, Plains Cree, Cree of the North, Chippewyan, and Saulteaux; and each group considered it to be the most valuable country. He mentioned, "in fact it appeared at the time of the negotiations that a treaty could not be concluded because of the various demands of each tribe." He explained that the Commissioners deliberated on these issues and because of the distance they had traveled, to abandon the treaty and return next year would mean that the Indians would have had even greater demands. This, McKay felt, in addition to the dangerous consequences which might result if a treaty was not made, "in my opinion such heavy considerations justified the Commissioners in coming to the decision they did." He reminded the Minister that a treaty had been promised the Indians two years earlier, but did not take place. Also, during construction of the North West telegraph line, the Indians had stopped construction because there was no treaty. It was therefore imperative to make a treaty with the Plains tribes for the welfare of the Dominion of Canada, alluding to the threat of violence that could result. He also remarked

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

A Complete terror has seized the Indian mind, with respect to the probable extinction of the Buffalo on the Plains, the animal being at present, the mainstay of their existence. In the event of such an occurrence coming to pass, and the Indians being struck down by such pestilence or other infectious disease such as small pox. To whom then, under such distressing consequences would the poor Indian family apply for relief, but to the government they are under, as the poorer classes of the populations of other counties do in the time of actual need, look for support of their respective governments.<sup>51</sup>

McKay himself believed the inclusion of the additional terms was justified because of the conditions the Cree faced on the Plains. The diminishing buffalo herds were devastating to the Cree, and McKay believed the stipulation of support from the government was a common service governments frequently performed for their poor.

At the negotiations, McKay had explained to the Cree that they could not expect assistance unless there was an actual famine, and they had been content with that point. In the past, the Cree had witnessed rations handed out by the American governments, and they expected the Canadian government to do the same. They had also observed the Sioux chiefs supplied with horses and buggies and assisted in building their houses and partially furnishing them. These factors influenced the Cree position at treaty negotiation. Further, McKay pointed out, if the Indians were to hear that the Government was unsatisfied with the treaty terms they would lose confidence in the government.<sup>52</sup> The novel Cree demands in Treaty 6 that were necessary to obtain an agreement were perceived in Ottawa as onerous and unnecessary. McKay likely felt that these terms were critical to an agreement and to include them would ensure a successful treaty. From the Cree historical account by Goodwill and Sluman, McKay's presence at

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<sup>51</sup> The Hon. James McKay to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris St. James Manitoba, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 1877, file 1442, from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection MG12 B1, PAM.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



the Cree councils and his recommendation they present a petition to the commissioners demonstrates he was fully informed of the divisive issues the success of the treaty hinged on.

McKay's experience at treaty negotiation dates back to the negotiations of Treaty 1 and 2 in 1871 where he had been an important participant. The failure of the government to fulfill all that had been promised directly challenged the Indian trust in his word, a critical aspect of personal diplomacy. The Treaty 1 conference took place between the Lieutenant-Governor Adams Archibald, Indian Commissioner Wemyss Simpson, and the Hon. James McKay, "himself a half-breed intimately acquainted with the Indian tribes, and possessed of much influence over them."<sup>53</sup> Treaty negotiations at the Stone Fort began on July 27, 1871 with the Saulteaux and Swampy Cree in the Province of Manitoba. The discussions leading up to the conclusion of Treaty 1 and 2 were not fully included in Morris' book, though the newspaper The



Figure 9. Treaty 1, The Stone Fort Treaty, 1871. PAM.

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<sup>53</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada, 25.

Manitoban did provide a more in depth account. According to Morris, the principal discussion in the negotiations for Treaty 1 revolved around the size of the proposed reserves. At one point when asked where the reserves were to be located, the chiefs selected an amount of land thought to be too great. Indian Commissioner Simpson scoffed at the amount of land claimed: "I may mention, as an illustration, that in the matter of reserves, the quantity of land demanded for each band amounted to about three townships per Indian, and included the greater part of the settled part of the province."<sup>54</sup> Simpson does not explain how the matter came to be settled.

The Manitoban's coverage of the Treaty 1 negotiations revealed the critical role played by McKay. The paper repeatedly noted that the Indians made unreasonable demands. On the second day's proceedings the Rev. Henry Cochrane acted as the interpreter for Commissioner Simpson and "did nearly all the translating for the treaty,"<sup>55</sup> and Mr. Henry McCorrister appeared on behalf of the Indians. It was during the third day's proceedings when James McKay emerged to take a leading role in the negotiations. Beyond simple translation of the speeches, he explained the Government intentions in Ojibway and attended their private councils.

According to the Manitoban, on the fourth day the First Nations leaders began to voice their unease, primarily through chief Ay-ee-ta-pe-pe-tung. He felt that the government had not yet made them a satisfactory offer, yet some bands were already choosing where they wanted their reserves. He still did not understand the limits of the territory to be ceded, and McKay explained it to him. He wanted a rather large reserve, approximately 160 miles long and 60 miles wide, a size the commissioner refused to

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<sup>54</sup> Wemyss Simpson to Secretary of State for the Provinces, Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 187, Morris, The Treaties of Canada 39.

<sup>55</sup> The Manitoban, Saturday, July 29, 1871.

consider. In response, "Rev. Henry Cochrane and James McKay at the request of the lieutenant-governor and the Commissioner addressed the Indians, showing them that their demands were so preposterous, that if granted they would have scarcely anything to cede and urging them to curtail their demands."<sup>56</sup> At the fifth day's proceedings, Ay-ee-ta-pe-pe-tung could still not see the benefit for his people of signing a treaty and he simply refused to continue with the discussions. He thought he would take the winter to think about it and it appeared as though no agreement would be made. In order to prevent them from leaving, Venerable Archdeacon Cowley and others addressed them. Again James McKay used his capability as a mediator to reach an agreement:

But before closing the day's proceedings, the Portage Chief and his followers left, formally bidding the lieutenant-governor and Commissioners good bye. The other Indians were also thinking of leaving but the Hon. James McKay asked them to stay over one more night and meet with the Commissioner the next day promising that in the interval he (McKay) would try to bring the Commissioners and the Indians closer together.<sup>57</sup>

Again, what transpired during the private council was not included in the account. It is apparent, though, that McKay participated in that council and likely used his influence to bolster the position of the Government among the Ojibway.

On the following day, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, according to the reporter, the Indians met in better humor. D.J. Hall has examined the negotiations of Treaty 1 closely and concluded that for unexplained reasons Ay-ee-ta-pe-pe-tung accepted the Treaty for \$3 per head, as did others that day. Perhaps the persuasion of James McKay influenced Ay-ee-ta-pe-pe-tung and others. It is noteworthy that the governor added a gratuity of \$3 per person, a pair of oxen for each reserve and buggies for the chief to the treaty terms. Because of

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

these concessions, there was satisfaction and all signed the treaty. The Manitoba Post Treaty, Treaty 2, was then signed. Not included in the treaty documents but agreed to by the Commissioners and Indian negotiators were the promises of agricultural implements, animals, clothing, hunting equipment, and other things. These outside treaty promises were later included in Lieutenant-Governor Archibald's dispatch of November 3, 1871.<sup>58</sup> The government's failure to implement the outside promises as part of the treaty created considerable frustration among the First Nations and the impression that they'd been lied to by the Commissioners. It is not clear how McKay managed to overcome the difficulties that had seemed so insurmountable during the earlier discussions. The additional promises of assistance from the Lieutenant-Governor Archibald may have contributed to the Indian acceptance of Treaty 1.

Once the treaty was signed, it became apparent certain provisions had not been carried out. Because of his relationship with the Ojibway and his role in the negotiations, James McKay sent a letter to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald reminding him that the terms of Treaties 1 and 2 had not been fulfilled. To induce Ottawa to include the outside promises as treaty promises, Archibald forwarded the observations of McKay to Ottawa. Among the Saulteaux, there was rampant starvation after a hard winter. The Indians remembered all the things that they had been promised as treaty terms and fully expected to receive the goods. McKay warned Archibald "if we expect our relations with them to be of the kind which it is desirable to maintain we must fulfill our obligations with scrupulous fidelity."<sup>59</sup> He felt that Indian Commissioner Simpson

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<sup>58</sup> D.J. Hall, "A Serene Atmosphere? Treaty 1 Revisited," The Canadian Journal of Native Studies IV:2 (1984): 328.

<sup>59</sup> From Lieutenant-Governor Adams G. Archibald to Department of Indian Affairs Feb, 1872 file 20 Lieutenant-Governor Archibald papers.

was trying to save money at the cost of peace and if they were to maintain peaceful relations, the government must continue the practices of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Besides advocating for fulfillment of treaty terms, James McKay and Alexander Morris together were responsible for negotiating Treaty 5 with bands around Lake Winnipeg. Treaty 5 covered approximately 100,000 square miles of land and was inhabited by Chippewa and Swampy Crees. The government was interested in the area for steam navigation until the railway arrived. The government hoped "all the territory in the vicinity of the lake should be extinguished so that settlers and traders may have undisturbed access to its water, shores, islands, inlets and tributary streams."<sup>60</sup> Morris' description of McKay reflected his belief in McKay's ability to influence the Indian people. "It may be here stated that this remarkable man, the son of an Orkneyman by an Indian mother, has recently died at a comparatively young age. Originally in the service of the HBC, he became a trader on his own account. Thoroughly understanding the Indian character, he possessed large influence over the Indian tribes, which he always used for the benefit and advantage of the Government."<sup>61</sup> While they proceeded around Lake Winnipeg, McKay interpreted the terms for the treaties.

McKay did not lend his services for the negotiation of Treaty 4. Other Metis were present at the negotiations acting as interpreters and intermediaries who had lived in the area around Fort Qu'Appelle. The negotiations for Treaty 4 took place at Qu'Appelle lakes with the Cree and Saulteaux tribes, and extinguished title to approximately 75,000 square miles. The terms granted for Treaty 4 were the same terms as Treaty 3. Again in his book, Morris remarked on the participation of Metis and the

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<sup>60</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada 144.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

employees of the Hudson's Bay Company: "the Half-breed population were, I believe, generally desirous of seeing the treaty concluded and used the influence of their connection with the Indians in its favor."<sup>62</sup> Morris, Minister of the Interior David Laird, and Hudson's Bay Company factor W.J. Christie were selected as Commissioners for Treaty 4 and negotiations commenced September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1874. Charles Pratt acted as the primary interpreter, assisted by William Daniel, an interpreter for Hudson's Bay Company.

The repeated visits by Pascal Breland to the nations who signed Treaty 4 would have created a relationship, mediated by Breland, between them and the new administration prior to the treaty. Although Breland did not have an official role in the treaty negotiations, his name appears on the treaty document.<sup>63</sup> His familiarity with the local people and conditions, and connections with the government through his position on the North West Council, made him an ideal candidate to fill this role. As an advocate of the treaty, Breland was likely active throughout the negotiations among the various groups speaking to Indian leadership in private councils, easing their concerns, and providing explanations about the government and the meaning of the treaty. Charles Pratt, the official interpreter would have also acted in this role providing detailed explanations. The presence of individuals like Breland, who had long association with First Nations, acting as an emissary to them by providing gifts from the government, fit within the understood notions of diplomacy.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 83.

<sup>63</sup> See Table 2, Metis signatories to the numbered treaties.

**Table 2. Metis signatories and interpreters of the Numbered Treaties** <sup>64</sup>

Treaty 1	Treaty 2	Treaty 3	Treaty 4	Treaty 5	Treaty 6		Treaty 7
James McKay	James McKay	James McKay	Charles Pratt	James McKay	<b>Fort Carlton</b>	<b>Fort Pitt</b>	James Bird
	Paul De Laronde	Nicholas Chastellaine	Joseph McKay	William McKay	Peter Erasmus	James McKay	Jerry Potts
		Charles Nolin	William Daniel	Joseph McKay	Peter Ballendine	Peter Erasmus	
		Joseph Nolin	Pascal Breland		Rev. John McKay	John McKay	
		Pierre Leveiller	Pierre Poitras		James McKay	Peter Pambrun	
		George McPherson	Pierre Denomme		Pierre Leveiller	A.K. Kennedy	
			Donald McDonald		Isidore Dumond	Thomas McKay	
			Peter LaPierre		Jean Dumond	James Simpson	
			Joseph Poitras		Peter Hourie	Mary McKay	
			Edward McKay		Francois Gingras		
					W. McKay		
					Xavier Letranger		

Besides acting as interpreters and minor officials, Metis people were present in significant numbers at virtually every treaty. During the Treaty 1 negotiations, Lieutenant-Governor Archibald noted there was "A considerable body of half-breeds and other inhabitants of the country were also present, awaiting with some anxiety to learn what should be announced as the policy of the government."<sup>65</sup> At Treaty 6, Mistawasis asked to speak for the half-breeds, saying they wished to live on the reserves with

<sup>64</sup> Names taken from the texts of treaties found in the appendix of Morris, The Treaties of Canada 299-375.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from A.G. Archibald to the Secretary of State for the Provinces, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 1871 in Morris, The Treaties of Canada 33.

the Cree. They were poor like the Cree and needed help. In Treaty 3, again Indian spokesmen asked that Metis people be included in their treaty. The repeated requests by Indian leadership that Metis people be included in treaties indicate a close relationship between Metis who were directly related to Indian bands and First Nations. While some did enter treaties, their official exclusion from treaty because of their mixed ancestry was based on the reasoning of the Canadian government. The relationship between the Metis and First Nations cannot be explained with any certainty. In these cases, the mixed-bloods were regarded as kin to the First Nations, and welcomed to live as part of their bands on the proposed reserves.

Overall, the Metis were generally capable interpreters; unfortunately there are also instances of mistranslation in the numbered treaties. Because of the number of dialects and groups present at each treaty negotiation, an interpreter familiar with each dialect ideally should have been present. Also, one who is fluent in a particular language cannot necessarily successfully interpret in a diplomatic setting like treaty negotiation. At the negotiations, the interpreter must have knowledge of public speech, which required more than rudimentary understanding of the Aboriginal language. Translation must accurately convey the content, form, and style of the speech. This could prove to be difficult for one unfamiliar with both Indian language and philosophy. In metaphorical and allegorical speech, there were often hidden meanings only to be unearthed by one steeped in the traditions of Indian culture.<sup>66</sup> Without such knowledge, an interpreter could not provide a correct translation. One particularly devastating example of mistranslation occurred when the Reverend John McKay, who was

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<sup>66</sup>Nancy L. Hagedorn, "A Friend To Go Between Them: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-70," *Ethnohistory* 35:1 Winter (1988): 64.



unfamiliar with Plains Cree dialect, failed to properly ascertain the meaning of Big Bear's speech to Morris following the negotiations of Treaty 6 at Fort Pitt. This instance provides an example of the consequences of improper interpretation.

By the 1876 negotiation of Treaty 6, Big Bear already had been labeled a troublemaker in the eyes of the Canadian government. As indicated earlier, Big Bear had rejected the presents brought to him by Reverend George McDougall, preferring to wait for the arrival of the lieutenant-governor to negotiate a treaty. As a result of his refusal to accept McDougall's gifts, Big Bear was labeled uncooperative. From his perspective, Big Bear became suspicious of the government when negotiators did not arrive in 1875 to negotiate treaty with the Cree and Assiniboine at Fort Carlton as promised. Big Bear felt he had been lied to and hence believed the government to be untrustworthy. The other Cree chiefs who had been converted to Christianity maintained their confidence in the government's upright intentions.<sup>67</sup>

At the Fort Pitt negotiations, Big Bear and other groups hunting buffalo on the Plains had not been informed of the treaty discussions and as a result were not present. The primarily Christian Indians accepted the terms as agreed upon at Fort Carlton. By the time Big Bear arrived at Fort Pitt, Peter Erasmus, the translator fluent in Plains Cree, had left for home. Reverend John McKay, familiar only with the Swampy Cree dialect, was left to translate. His deficiency quickly became apparent. Upon arrival Big Bear said, "It is no small matter we were to consult about. I expected the chiefs here would have waited until I arrived."<sup>68</sup> When urged to accept the treaty by the other chiefs, he replied,

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<sup>67</sup> Hugh A. Dempsey, Big Bear: The End of Freedom, (Vancouver/Toronto: Greystone Books, 1984) 62.

<sup>68</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada 239

Stop, stop, my friends, I have never seen the Governor before; I have seen Mr. Christie many times. I heard the Governor was to come and I said I shall see him; when I see him I will make a request that he will save me from what I most dread, that is: the rope to be about my neck (hanging), it was not given to us by the Great Spirit that the red man or white man should shed each other's blood.<sup>69</sup>

Big Bear's intention to create the imagery of a horse that had lost its freedom under the control of the one holding its rope was improperly translated to a fear of capital punishment. The terms in Cree are similar, *ay-saka-pay-kinit* (lead by the neck) and *ay-hah-kotit* (hanged by the neck).<sup>70</sup> This case of mistranslation indicates the importance of having skilled interpreters. Morris, based on the inaccurate translation, believed Big Bear was opposed to capital punishment, reinforcing the chief's image as a firebrand.

Treaty 7 provides additional examples of the importance of skilled and conscientious interpreters. Present at Blackfoot Crossing in 1877 were the Blood Tribe, the Peigan, the Siksika or Blackfoot, Stoney, and Tsuu T'ina. The number of Plains nations speaking different languages would create greater difficulty for gathering interpreters. Metis people were present at Blackfoot Crossing, though generally they did not have a long-standing relationship with the Blackfoot tribes. Other factors also differentiate the negotiations of Treaty 7 from the other numbered treaties, primarily the government view that the Blackfoot were more aggressive, and hence more dangerous.

The initial interpreter was Jerry Potts, of mixed Blood and Scottish ancestry. Though he frequently interpreted for the North West Mounted Police, at the Treaty 7 negotiations Potts could not successfully interpret the speeches because he was

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 240.

<sup>70</sup> Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* 74.

inebriated.<sup>71</sup> The Blackfoot chiefs requested another interpreter be located. To replace Potts, the treaty Commissioners found James “Jimmy Jock” Bird, said by Laird to have been “many years among the Peigans and Blackfoot and is a very intelligent interpreter.”<sup>72</sup> In spite of Laird’s appreciation of his skills, Bird’s reputation among the Blackfoot was less flattering. He was a known whiskey trader and said to have had “limited knowledge of the Blackfoot language.”<sup>73</sup> This statement regarding his ability to translate Blackfoot contradicts the evidence that indicates he had spent most of his life among the Blackfoot and Peigan, living among them and marrying a Peigan woman.<sup>74</sup> Crowfoot and his band obtained the services of Jean L’Heureux<sup>75</sup> as a private interpreter.

Based on their oral history, the tribes who signed Treaty 7 adamantly maintain that either the government failed to adequately explain the true meaning of the treaty or the interpreters were incapable and untrustworthy. The reputation of the interpreters is repeatedly referred to, indicating the importance of personal reputation in the position of interpreter. Both Potts and Bird are remembered in Treaty 7 oral history as heavy drinkers and all around unsavory characters. Blood elders also assert that Bird made a deathbed confession to people in Browning, Montana, saying, “I told a lie.”<sup>76</sup> It initially appears as though his falsification was intentional, but Blood Elder Rosie Red Crow felt

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<sup>71</sup> Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter, and Dorothy First Rider, The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill/Queen’s University Press, 1996) 133.

<sup>72</sup> Morris, The Treaties of Canada 261.

<sup>73</sup> Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council, The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7 20-21.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>75</sup> Jean L’Heureux was born around 1825 somewhere in Quebec and though he was never ordained as a priest, he continued to unofficially minister to the Blackfoot and Plains tribes who seem to have accepted him as a religious figure. Hugh Dempsey, “Jean L’Heureux” in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography, (Toronto/Montreal: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000) on-line [www.biographi.ca](http://www.biographi.ca).

<sup>76</sup> Treaty 7 Elders, The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7 127.

perhaps he himself had been lied to by the treaty commissioners, by saying, "I don't know why he said he was lied to as an interpreter; maybe only after that he understood what happened."<sup>77</sup> Though she considers this possibility, she still maintains that "he was an Indian like us and he lied to us."<sup>78</sup> The issue over which the Blood and other tribes who signed Treaty 7 felt deceived was the land surrender. The Treaty 7 tribes believed the treaty was intended for merely sharing the land with incoming white settlers, not as an extinguishment of their title in exchange for reserves and annuities.

Bird's deathbed confession in 1892 at the age of 107<sup>79</sup> of having lied at the Treaty 7 negotiations is not mentioned in a recent biography. John C. Jackson, author of Jemmy Jock Bird: Marginal Man on the Blackfoot Frontier, a reconstruction of the interpreter's life, carefully notes the complexity of Bird's place as an interpreter to Treaty 7. He was Metis, and at the time the Metis were petitioning the government to secure their land tenure, his daughter Nancy was married to a Blood, Medicine Shield and yet the government hired him. Determining the outlook of the Metis intermediaries is critical to understanding the influence the Metis may have had on the negotiations, yet Jackson fails to resolve this dilemma.<sup>80</sup> The difficulties with the interpretation at Blackfoot Crossing involved the nature of the topic under discussion and because of Bird's advanced age, his voice would not likely carry through the crowd of thousands. He makes no issue of Bird's ability to correctly interpret; he had been an interpreter his whole life and knew the importance of an accurate translation. Jackson does not mention a deathbed confession, and states simply the Bird died at a cabin at Two

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> James Doty, "A Visit to the Blackfoot Camp" ed. Hugh A. Demspey, Alberta Historical Review, Summer (1966) 20.

<sup>80</sup> John C. Jackson, Jemmy Jock Bird: Marginal Man on the Blackfoot Frontier (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003) 147.

Medicine Creek on a Blackfoot Reservation in Montana, tended to by his grandson Tom.<sup>81</sup> The story of the deathbed confession should perhaps not be a consideration when looking to understand the negotiations of Treaty 7. Bird had spent much of his life among the Blackfoot people and had no ties to the government; it is therefore unlikely but not impossible, that he would knowingly lie to ensure the treaty was concluded.

Aside from James Bird, the Manitoba Metis were not an influential presence at the negotiations for Treaty 7. In fact, the Metis buffalo hunters were viewed as competitors of the Blackfoot and other Plains tribes for the last remaining buffalo and hence a threat to their survival. The presence of the North West Mounted Police was perhaps the most significant outside party to the negotiations based on their reputation of removing the whiskey traders who had brought so much damage to the Plains nations, though this role may be exaggerated. The question remains whether the government deliberately misled the Blackfoot or simply failed to provide an adequate explanation of the meaning of the treaty. Because of his many years among the Blackfoot, marriage to a Peigan woman, and experience in treaty interpretation, it seems unlikely that James Bird could not provide a satisfactory translation. The long-standing dissatisfaction among Treaty 7 tribes highlights the importance of qualified messengers and interpreters in the establishment of agreements, but even still the presence of skilled interpreters could not ensure a complete understanding had been reached at the conclusion of negotiations. There are many possibilities for misunderstanding when disparate societies come into contact. Despite these difficulties, interpreters and messengers provided more than translations. By participating in both sides, Metis people can be seen as a third party to the numbered treaties.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 163.

As Aboriginal peoples, Metis and First Nations participated jointly in the social and environmental milieu of the 1870's North West, albeit with their own distinct worldview. From the government perspective, treaties were primarily intended to satisfy the moral and legal requirements set out in the Royal Proclamation to the Indian people who were in possession of the land. Though historical research has not focused on this area, it is clear when examining historical sources documenting the numbered treaties that Metis and First Nations were both present at treaty negotiations. Metis people frequently participated as interpreters and assistants to the government and First Nations because of their ability to operate on the middle ground of diplomatic meetings. The role of interpreter, while often relegated to the footnotes in historical writing, is a fascinating aspect of inter-cultural relations. Their position in-between frequently enabled them to participate in both sides of the talks. This important juncture in history is made even more complex when evidence of Metis influence repeatedly appears. James McKay played a critical role in treaty making. He clearly excelled at overcoming the impasses that would arise during the treaty talks. The limited terms the Treaty Commissioners were authorized to propose were desperately inadequate when considering what Indian people were surrendering. His intervention seemed to induce Indian people to overcome their uncertainty about the treaty promises. Metis participation indicates that much about treaty negotiation remains unknown. These Metis in their various capacities used this opportunity to display their skills at inter-cultural mediation, gaining financial reward and personal prestige in return.

## Conclusion

By 1880, treaty-making had come to a close for a time and First Nations were in the process of adapting to life on reserves. The importance of Metis brokers diminished with the arrival of the North West Mounted Police and Ottawa's firm control over the operation of Indian affairs in the 1880's. Irene Spry's comments on the death of James McKay in 1879 represent the nature of change the West had undergone in the 1870's.

His death

marked the end of an era, the end of the restless individualism of the native entrepreneurs of Rupert's Land. Those who had achieved wealth, status, and influence had done so on the basis of their own ambition, courage, initiative, energy, and shrewd intelligence and also of their prowess in the chase, on the trail and in boat brigades, and their intimate knowledge of the plains and the people of the plains. Now strangers were arriving in increasing numbers.<sup>1</sup>

The Metis interpreters and diplomats who played such a critical role in forging a relationship between First Nations and the Canadian administration had used familiar diplomatic and cultural practices. As traders in the fur trade era, Breland, McKay, Leveiller, Erasmus, and others regularly intermingled with First Nations on common terrain.

One aspect of Metis identity evident in the actions of interpreters for the treaties was a role as intermediary between Native and non-Native residents in Rupert's Land.

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<sup>1</sup> Irene Spry, "The 'Private Adventurers' of Rupert's Land." Ed. John E. Foster, The Developing West: Essays on the Canadian West in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983) 62-63.

Their common characteristics were an adherence to First Nations diplomatic and cultural forms. These traits included generosity, personal diplomacy, highly developed rhetorical ability, linguistic ability, and physical hardihood. The period directly prior to treaty-making was critical to the success of later treaties. Because of the delay in initiating treaties in the West, the entry of non-Natives into unceded territory could have precipitated dangerous confrontation if Metis diplomats had not issued warnings and distributed presents well in advance. Violence would have greatly hindered the signing of treaties, delaying commercial development and settlement, and would have also cost the government a great deal of money. The importance of the Metis was then twofold, first in the prevention of violence prior to the treaties by acting as diplomats distributing gifts from the government and then at the actual negotiations where they then took on the role as intermediary and interpreter.

The biographical chapter of this thesis is intended to demonstrate that the Metis interpreters at the numbered treaties had frequently acted as intermediaries in the fur trade or between First Nations and missionaries. This position in-between is a common occurrence for bi-cultural individuals as personality studies by Stonequist and McFee point out. Metis identity embraces this ability to act as a cultural broker, and Jacqueline Peterson points out in "Many Roads to Red River: Metis genesis in the Great Lakes region 1680-1815" that this position was directly tied to the fur trade occupation of the Metis in the Great Lakes region who eventually moved west to Red River.<sup>2</sup> While this explains in some part the tendency to occupy the role of interpreter, it fails to explain why these Metis in particular were motivated to act on behalf of the government.

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<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Peterson, "Many roads to Red River: Métis genesis in the Great Lakes region, 1680-1815" eds Jennifer S.H. Brown and Jacqueline Peterson, Being and Becoming Metis in North America (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1985) 34,64.



One theme that becomes clear in the official documents is the opposition between officials in the North West and those in Ottawa in determining the best way to approach First Nations in order to obtain title to their lands. Eastern officials did not trust the Metis to carry out their wishes, while Morris and Archibald saw the advantages of using their skills. Handsome financial remuneration can partially explain why these Metis embraced these positions. The situation required men, as no women were included, who could provide translations at the negotiations. As Irene Spry points out, James McKay and Breland were entrepreneurs who actively sought economic and political opportunities, both prior to and following the transfer. The government postings and contracts both men received certainly would have played a part in encouraging them to align themselves with the Canadian government. It is also important to mention that James McKay is never associated with the Metis of Red River in any of the documentation; whereas Breland had a large Metis following.

Personal prestige and self-preservation cannot be gauged, but may have contributed to the decision of the Metis to act on behalf of the government. In Red River Metis lands were not protected and the arrival of settlers from Ontario hostile to the Metis after the Resistance in 1869-70 created an atmosphere of intolerance and fear. Metis with status and wealth on the eve of the transfer would be anxious to preserve their position, using whatever means at their disposal. The need for people with the ability to reach out the First Nations was essential for the peaceful maintenance of Canadian control. The Metis were ideal candidates for this position.

Once at treaty negotiations, these same Metis used their trusted position among Indian groups to advance the terms offered by the government. Morris' repeated assertions of Metis assistance and influence could be explained by this critical

relationship, not by their racial antecedents. First Nations were expected to give up their most cherished possession, their land, in exchange for the sweet promises of outsiders. The Metis, familiar and proficient in Indian languages, provided a recognizable presence to Indian leaders who were accustomed to inter-personal diplomacy. The government exploited the trusted position of the Metis to secure treaties. This policy was effective, and in turn the Metis were rewarded financially and personally. Though they may have believed the treaties would be beneficial for First Nations, the decision by these Metis to act for the government can best be explained as a concerted attempt to secure a place in the new West.

## Appendix A

The question remains of the benefits obtained by Metis from their position as interpreters for the government. Aside from the personal satisfaction or prestige gained through such work, there were other ways to profit. James McKay transported supplies for the annual treaty payments in 1875 for Treaty 4, and Pascal Breland, while not directly engaged as an interpreter during Treaty 4, later assisted with the payment of annuities and notifying Indians of the upcoming payments, also providing assistance during the conferences.<sup>3</sup> Pierre Leveiller was paid handsomely for his part as leader of the Metis expedition to accompany the North West Mounted Police. Wages of Leveiller and his five men were \$5,040. In addition, presents for distribution totaled \$1,782.57, rifles for Leveiller and men, \$92.00 and legal expenses were \$9.00<sup>4</sup> Breland was paid \$990.00 for his Services as Special Messenger in 1875 and in 1876 as special commissioner for Treaty 4 a sum of \$720.<sup>5</sup> James McKay received \$500.00 for services rendered.<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Chastellaine received as his interpreter's salary, \$375.00<sup>7</sup> in 1873 and from his trips to the Saskatchewan Indians, Pascal Breland \$1032.50.<sup>8</sup> Also paid to Pascal Breland for services of himself and one man, two carts, four horses and

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<sup>3</sup> Report of Commissioners Christie and Dickieson to Hon. Minister of the Interior October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1875 Annual report of the Department of the Interior for the year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1875, reproduced with permission of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from the National Library of Canada's Website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>)

<sup>4</sup> Annual Report for Dept of Interior 1875 Part 1 pg 74 from Annual report of the Department of the Interior for the year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1875, reproduced with permission of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from the National Library of Canada's Website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>)

<sup>5</sup> Annual Report for the Department of the Interior year ending 1876 pg 74 Annual report of the Department of the Interior for the year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1876, reproduced with permission of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from the National Library of Canada's Website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Annual report for year end 1874 part 2, pg 91, Annual report of the Department of the Interior for the year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1874, reproduced with permission of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada from the National Library of Canada's Website (<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

provisions for July 13<sup>th</sup> to Sept at \$10/day for a total of \$720.<sup>9</sup> McKay also received the contract to supply two teams with provisions from Fort Garry to the North West Angle for disposal among the emigrants.

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<sup>9</sup> Department of the Interior, Jan 31 1876 file 1200 form Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection MG12 B1, PAM.

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