

**“Men of their own blood”:  
Metis Intermediaries and the Numbered Treaties**  
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*An examination of primary documents from the transfer of 1870 onward demonstrates that certain Metis interpreters present at Treaties 1 through 7 were more than mere translators. Well-versed in Aboriginal languages and cultural traditions, Metis people often acted as intermediaries between the two parties. In drawing upon Metis diplomatic skills and relationships with First Nations, it is clear that officials in the North West recognized the necessity of personal diplomacy and gift-giving for establishing relations with First Nations in advance of settlement and treaties. This article demonstrates that bi-cultural mediators using traditional Indigenous protocols were critical in preventing violent encounters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Their participation ensured that westward expansion proceeded as originally envisioned—peacefully and without undue expense.*

*Un examen des principaux documents à partir du transfert de 1870 démontre que certains interprètes métis présents lors des traités 1 et 7 étaient bien plus que de simples traducteurs. Connaisseurs des langues et des traditions culturelles des Autochtones, les Métis servaient souvent d'intermédiaires entre les deux parties. En utilisant les compétences des Métis en matière de diplomatie et leurs relations avec les Premières nations, il est clair que les agents de la Couronne dans le Nord-Ouest reconnurent la nécessité d'utiliser la diplomatie personnelle et l'offre de cadeaux pour établir des relations avec les Premières nations avant l'établissement et les traités. Cet article démontre que ces médiateurs biculturels qui utilisaient des protocoles autochtones traditionnels ont été indispensables dans la prévention de rencontres violentes entre les peuples autochtones et non autochtones. Leur participation a permis au développement vers l'Ouest de se dérouler comme prévu au départ – de manière pacifique et sans dépenses inutiles.*

Alexander Morris, lieutenant governor of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, described to his superiors in Ottawa the ingenious method he used to overcome the impasses between government negotiators and the Ojibway of the Northwest Angle during Treaty 3 proceedings:

They spent the night in council, and next morning having received a message from Mr. 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 this 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>1</sup>

That evening, both sides softened their positions and came to an agreement when they met the following day. Morris' dispatch to Ottawa, describing the negotiations, suggests that McKay, Nolin, and Leveiller acted beyond their capacity as interpreters by participating in the closed council at Morris' request. Throughout the Morris text there are several indications of a Metis presence at treaty negotiations, although it provides no explanation as to why. Further investigation of additional sources reveals a distinct pattern of Metis involvement in the treaty process and the appearance of the same individuals at numerous signings. The evidence suggests that the role of Metis intermediaries was not restricted to this single example, but was indeed a central element to relations between First Nations and the Dominion government in both the treaty period and before.

James McKay, Pierre Leveiller, and other Metis were not at Treaty 3 negotiations by mere coincidence. They were part of an unofficial government policy that used the skills of the Metis to facilitate relations with First Nations. Historians of treaty-making have generally acknowledged the presence of the Metis at negotiations as interpreters, but a fuller investigation of this matter reveals a more complex role. This group of Metis intermediaries used their knowledge and relationship with First Nations leaders to create a recognizable face by using established diplomatic protocol after the transfer of power from the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada. Both in advance of treaties and at the negotiations, this facet of government policy was critical in establishing peaceful relations between the First Nations and Dominion officials.

In the Rupert's Land fur trade prior to the 1870s, 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 protocols to carry out its trade. Traders

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians* (1880; reprint, Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishing, 1991), 49. Emphasis added.

and First Nations used gift exchange, pipe ceremonies, and intermarriage to cement relationships.<sup>2</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, where 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 treaties for peace and stabilization. Agreements were always balanced in terms of both sides participating equally.<sup>3</sup> The fur trade evolved to incorporate these concepts, and First Nations took this understanding into treaty negotiations. 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 and continued into the treaty-making period.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to kinship through intermarriage or adoption, Indian and Metis people had economic relations through the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company fur trade and as free traders. An example provided by Metis trader Norbert Welsh demonstrates the importance of following protocols in the fur trade and the creation of fictive kinship links. The fur trader from Red River recalled an encounter between himself and Chief Shash-apew while hunting buffalo. The chief warned Welsh that he was not to hunt buffalo in his territory unless he paid a duty on all that he killed. After initially refusing the chief's terms by reasoning that the buffalo were for all who were able to shoot them, Welsh sent the chief some tea, sugar, and tobacco as gifts. Upon receiving the message and gifts, Shash-apew invited Welsh into his tent and asked the trader to call him his uncle. He also thanked him for the tea and sugar and said that they could shoot as many animals as they wanted.<sup>5</sup> While shared language and culture are an additional area of common ground between Indian and Metis people, familiarity with Aboriginal worldviews and protocol enabled Metis people to communicate effectively with Indian people in both economic and diplomatic arenas.

2 Arthur Ray, Jim Miller, and Frank Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 31.

3 Jean Friesen, "Magnificent Gifts: Treaties of Canada with the Indians 1869–76," in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, series 5, vol. 1 (1986), 43–45.

4 Sharon Venne, "Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective," in *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.

5 Mary Weekes, *The Last Buffalo Hunter* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1994), 51–52.

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. The term Metis in modern Sioux is “*iyéska* ‘interpreter,’ reflect[ing] the historical social position of mixed peoples.”<sup>6</sup> While Metis people had their own distinct culture and national aspirations, the interpreters generally understood a highly divergent variety of Aboriginal cultures. 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 prior to treaties. The North West in the 1870s afforded a unique advantage not possessed in other cultural frontiers, namely 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 so when the Dominion sought to enter treaty talks, local men like James McKay, Peter Erasmus, Pascal Breland, and others were more than capable of acting in these capacities.

Looking at the lives of the Metis who participated in treaty negotiations in the years prior to the transfer reveals a socio-cultural niche characterized by establishment of a peaceful relationship between First Nations and outsiders. Distinct from Indian people, Metis prided themselves on the number of languages and dialects that they could speak, something that allowed them to communicate with both Euro-Canadians and Aboriginal groups.<sup>7</sup> The identities of these interpreters were in some part characterized by their capacity to broker relations between cultures. This facet of Metis identity evolved over a long period in the Rupert’s Land fur trade. As Jacqueline Peterson points out, the role of intermediary or cultural broker on the borders of the Great Lakes fur trade was a central factor in the emergence of a Metis identity.<sup>8</sup> By adapting to opportunities in the

6 Diane Paulette Payment, “Plains Metis,” in *Plains*, Smithsonian Institution Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 13, ed. Raymond J. DeMaillie (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 2001), 676.

7 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.” 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.

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

fur trade, individuals who could mediate between Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal societies generally gained prestige, power, and, often, wealth. While the position in between could be lucrative, it could also prove precarious when such services were no longer deemed necessary.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1870s, James McKay had emerged as a significant figure in both the North West and Red River. McKay interpreted Treaties 1, 2, 3, and 5, and acted as a commissioner for Treaty 6. Despite being from humble origins, he became a highly regarded politician and wealthy businessman. He was born in 1828 at Fort Edmonton to Margaret Gladu, a French Metisse, and James McKay, a native of Scotland.<sup>10</sup> In 1840, McKay retired from Company service and moved his family to the Scottish parish of Kildonan in the Red River Settlement.<sup>11</sup> In Red River, the younger McKay obtained his education in both the European context at the Anglican Church school of St. John's and Aboriginal 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 shaped the course of his life. These differing cultural milieus likely 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 placed him within the Anglo-speaking category of "half-breed" or "country-born," his maternal French Metis antecedents require a more nuanced approach to understanding his Metis identity. As Jennifer S.H. Brown points out, fur trade daughters tended to remain in the West, contributing to a rapidly growing population of mixed offspring. The influence of women's roles in Metis emergence remains little understood, but perhaps a distinctive identity may be traced to Metis mothers.<sup>12</sup> James McKay eventually acquired linguistic fluency in French, English, Cree, Ojibway, and Sioux, and his facility with

9 Both Heather Devine and Gerhard Ens note the difficulty in maintaining status derived from brokering relations. Gerhard Ens, "Metis Ethnicity, Personal Identity and the Development of Capitalism in the Western Interior: The Case of Johnny Grant," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, eds. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard Ens, and R.C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 173 and Heather Devine, "Les Desjarlais: The Development and Dispersion of a Proto-Métis Hunting Band, 1785-1870" in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, 150-151.

10 For information on the Gladu family, see D.N. Sprague and R.P. Frye, *The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation: The Development and Dispersion of the Red River Settlement, 1820-1900* (1983; Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2000).

11 Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Search File: McKay, James (a).

12 Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Woman as Centre and Symbol in the Emergence of Metis Communities," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 3, no. 1 (1983): 42.

languages and ability to move freely within a range of cultural milieus came to serve him well when he became an aide to Canadian officials in treaty negotiations.

The increasing presence of European travelers and scientists in the West prior to the 1870s demonstrated the changes occurring at the international level regarding the future of Rupert’s Land. McKay had gained a reputation as a skilled guide during his employment with the HBC, making him a natural candidate to assist travelers. The Earl of Southesk, in the North West in 1859 to hunt big game, offered a romantic 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 [252 lbs.] 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.

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>13</sup>

In 1859, McKay married Margaret Rowand, daughter of Chief Factor John Rowand, who brought both capital and connections to the marriage. The magnificence of Deer Lodge, the McKay home, indicates that by 1859

13 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.

James McKay had become an incredibly wealthy man. His marriage into the prestigious Rowand family secured his place among the Rupert's Land fur trade elite. McKay was in no way typical of Metis in this period. For example, he owned an imported thoroughbred stallion, and in 1858 he was a vice president of the Temperance Committee.<sup>14</sup> McKay's activities in the critical years leading up to 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 and exploited a niche where his skills—knowledge of the landscape and the people, combined with the ability to mediate between each—were in high demand.

McKay's positive relationship with new Canadian officials, combined with his ability to act as an intermediary between them and the Native inhabitants of Rupert's Land, placed him in an advantageous position following the transfer. Like McKay, other prominent Metis who participated in Indian affairs or treaty-making usually did not oppose Canadian annexation. French Metis leader Pascal Breland became a significant participant in Indian affairs as a government diplomat to the Plains First Nations and Sioux. He was born 15 June 1811 in the Saskatchewan River Valley to free trader Pierre Du Boishu, dit Berland, and Louise (Josephite) Belley.<sup>15</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, thereby increasing his wealth and prestige. By marrying Marie Grant, the daughter of Cuthbert Grant, who had traded freely with the Company's sanction in spite of the 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, and by 1878 had amassed almost 154 hectares in St. Francois Xavier.<sup>16</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>17</sup>

14 Jemima Ross, Colony Gardens to Alex Ross, Toronto, 12 March 1858, Provincial Archives of Manitoba [PAM], file # 227 from the Alexander Ross Papers MG2 C14.

15 Lynne Champagne, "Pascal Breland," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, CD-ROM version (Montreal/Toronto: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000).

16 Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, "Pascal Breland," Historic Resources Branch, 1984, 2.

17 Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 86.

Breland, appointed in 1851 as magistrate for White Horse Plains and 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 with the inhabitants. Once back in Red River, Breland used his authority among the French Metis of St. Francois Xavier to oppose Riel’s leadership, resulting in a dispersion of many families into the wintering grounds further west.<sup>18</sup> Breland and McKay, both wealthy and prominent businessmen, objected to Riel’s confiscation of property. Historian Gerhard Ens suggests that “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>19</sup> Breland’s position, untarnished by involvement in the Resistance, helped to ensure his position in the newly forming society. The position of the wealthy Metis merchants on the eve of Confederation differed markedly from those Metis who participated in other aspects of the fur trade or practiced subsistence agriculture.

Metis involvement in facilitating relations between newcomers and First Nations reduced, in many cases, the possibility of violence, largely because of their willingness to respect First Nations diplomatic forms. There are many little known examples of Metis brokers acting on behalf of the government prior to treaties by offering gifts to First Nations leaders, as well as proclamations of the Queen’s good intentions. These diplomatic missions to Indian groups came about primarily after First Nations repeatedly implored the government for some indication of its intentions. Most often, non-Natives who attempted to enter into unceded territory discovered that, unless proper protocols were followed, their presence was not welcome. Gift-giving and clear explanations remained the primary diplomatic tools that Metis used to prevent confrontations between outsiders and First Nations.

Metis knowledge of First Nations diplomacy came as a result of living as co-inhabitants in the North West in related yet distinct communities, sharing land and family ties. As bicultural natives of Rupert’s Land, Metis people had honed their 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

18 Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, “Pascal Breland.”

19 Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland*, 130.



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. 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.

The acquisition of Rupert's Land by the Dominion added millions of acres of land and, by 1871, 43,000 people.<sup>20</sup> It was also home to varied cultural and linguistic groups of Aboriginal people: Swampy, Woods, and Plains Cree; Saulteaux, also known as Ojibway; Assiniboine; Metis; members of the Blackfoot Confederacy; and the refugee Sioux from the United States. These First Nations in the West were indeed aware that a drastic change had taken place. Early responses by First Nations through petitions sent to the lieutenant-governor indicate that many sought a formal relationship with the new power and hoped to be informed of the intentions of the new government regarding their lands.<sup>21</sup>

A petition sent on behalf of the residents at Victoria Mission requested an emissary not acquainted with the Company or missionaries to explain the government's intentions to the Plains Cree:

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>22</sup>

20 Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (1987; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), Appendix Table 4.

21 There are many examples of petitions sent to Lieutenant-Governor Adams G. Archibald. Reverend Henry Bird Steinhauer, on behalf of the Cree at Whitefish Mission, stated, "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." Reverend Henry Bird Steinhauer to A.G. Archibald, 9 Jan 1871, from Adams G. Archibald Papers, reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3, PAM.

22 Petition signed by Richard Hardisty and Rev. George McDougall to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald, 10 Jan 1871, in PAM, Adams G. Archibald Papers, reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3.

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

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. Plains Cree chiefs had also visited him “to ascertain whether their lands had been sold or not and what was the intention of the Canadian government in relation to them.”<sup>23</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>24</sup> A critical part of their message was a need for a personal visit from the lieutenant-governor or someone else in his place.

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, “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>25</sup> As First Nations implored the government to come and meet with them, Ottawa had other priorities.

Authorities failed to address the concerns of First Nations in the North West and Manitoba, leading directly to dissatisfaction, and responded only when the threat of violence was imminent. 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. An early experience along the Dawson route among the groups who would later sign Treaty 3 in 1873 provides 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 the safe passage of troops before a treaty had been signed.

23 Chief Factor Christie Edmonton House, Saskatchewan District, 26 April 1871, to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald Reel 2, file 272 from Adams G. Archibald Papers, Reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3.

24 “Message from Cree Chiefs to Lieutenant-Governor Archibald,” in Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 170.

25 *The Weekly Manitoban and Herald of Rupert’s Land and the North West*, 1 July 1871.

Canadian troops moving through the Dawson route from Fort William to Fort Garry in order to put down the Red River Resistance intended to travel through unceded Saulteaux lands. Officials in Ottawa feared that Red River Metis planned to convince the Saulteaux to refuse the troops passage, and so enlisted the aid of two Hudson's Bay Company employees, Robert Pether from Fort Francis, and Nicholas Chastellaine. Dawson described Chastellaine as "a half-breed ... who is highly esteemed by the tribe ... [and] who has on previous occasions rendered valuable service in dealing with them."<sup>26</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 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>27</sup> By then, however, 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 not to know their true intentions.

Dawson instructed Pether to circulate among the Saulteaux, and mentioned that it would help to have Chastellaine constantly among them to distribute tobacco and other articles "to act with becoming generosity."<sup>28</sup> In this same period, Ottawa appointed Wemyss Simpson to the position of Indian Commissioner in the North West, where he would be 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>29</sup>

Simpson voiced his suspicion about Chastellaine's suitability to that position: "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>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Memorandum S.J. Dawson to Ottawa, 17 Dec 1869, file 1, reel 1 in Adams G. Archibald Papers, reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Dawson to Pether, 6 Jan 1870, file 1, reel 1 in Adams G. Archibald Papers, reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Howe to Wymess Simpson 19 May 1870, file 1, reel 1. Adams G. Archibald Papers, reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3.

<sup>30</sup> Wemyss Simpson to Joseph Howe Sault Ste. Marie 19 Aug 1870, file 1, reel 1, Adams G. Archibald Papers, reel 1 MG12 A1 M1-M3.

Simpson’s concerns regarding Chastellaine’s suitability were a common sentiment among government officials. Nevertheless, the troops passed freely though the Saulteaux territory. In the years that followed, the government made several attempts to conclude Treaty 3, and again required the intervention of the Metis to assist in the process.

Officials in Ottawa had created the position of Indian Commissioner in Manitoba and the North West to negotiate and administer treaties and maintain contact with the various tribes. The first Indian commissioner, Wemyss Simpson, proved to be an unfortunate choice. In a dispatch to Ottawa, Lieutenant-Governor Archibald complained that Simpson was frequently absent from Manitoba and treaty terms had not been fulfilled. He hoped that the Department of the Interior would send a better representative, stating, “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>31</sup> Despite his substandard conduct, officials commissioned Simpson to meet with Blackfoot in the summer of 1872 to allay increasing tensions, but he never arrived.

One example of Indian Commissioner Simpson’s failure to act in accordance with Indian notions of diplomacy demonstrates the importance of personal relations to First Nations leaders. 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 insulted the Sioux and treated them poorly. 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>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Letter from Archibald to Joseph Howe, 17 Feb 1872, file 26, Correspondence and Papers of A.G. Archibald MG12 A1, reel M2.

<sup>32</sup> *The Manitoban*, 29 March 1873.

The paper also noted that Pascal Breland had been sent among the Sioux, and “whose single presence among them just now is better than any army”<sup>33</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. With their assistance, the government maintained control over the encounters and manipulated interactions between the groups.

The arrival of the Boundary Commission illustrates several recurring themes of Native-newcomer relations in this period. First, beyond the limits of Treaty 1 and 2, no treaties had yet been undertaken. The presence of Sioux refugees fleeing the American military and 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 informed Lieutenant-Governor Morris of the likelihood of violence taking place as the Boundary Commission arrived in unceded territory.

Morris believed that the means to prevent an outbreak of violence included the participation of skilled Metis residents to communicate with Indian people who were loyal to the Dominion government. In several dispatches to Ottawa, Morris advocated a greater Metis role in the conduct of Indian affairs in the West. One example of Morris’ strategy followed shortly after the Boundary Commission incident. Morris stated:

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 businessman, 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

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

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>34</sup>

Morris was not the only official who saw the advantages of conducting Indian affairs using Metis as front men because they were 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. Like Morris, they recognized the benefits of employing the Metis as intermediaries to First Nations. Incursions into unceded territories, combined with a lack of visible government and slow pace of treaty-making, would eliminate the possibility of further treaties unless the government took more decisive action. Besides a military force, Smith and Cunningham proposed an Indian commission. This would be unlike the one envisioned by the government, with the lieutenant-governor at the head, but rather

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>35</sup>

Prime Minister Macdonald’s plan for an Indian Commission included 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,

34 Lieutenant-Governor Morris, 13 Dec 1873, “Annual Report of the Indian Branch of the Department of the Minister of the Interior for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1873,” 12, <<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>> (12 Aug 2003).

35 Robert Cunningham, M.P. and Hon. Donald A. Smith, M.P., *Speeches on the Indian Difficulties in the North-West* (Ottawa: Free Press, 1873), 8–9.

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>36</sup>

Macdonald dismissed the suggestion to include the Metis, and believed that 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 that it should be directed by a board consisting of the governor, provincial land commissioner, and the Indian commissioner.<sup>37</sup>

There is an obvious disagreement between those familiar with local conditions, like Archibald, Morris, and Smith, and the authorities in Ottawa who hoped to maintain a tight control over the development of the North West. Morris continued advocating for greater Metis participation in Indian affairs despite Ottawa’s indifference to his proposals. He received several requests directly from Indian people who strongly desired treaties in the West, and he usually passed on this information to Ottawa

Morris again offered a proposal for better operation of Indian affairs. He thought that Indian matters should be conducted in the North West Territories and Manitoba, and carried out by two branches, one responsible for negotiating treaties and the second for implementing them. Because of his experience as a negotiator, Morris recommended that treaty negotiations 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

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>37</sup> From The Dominion Parliament, House of Commons, Ottawa, 31 March 1873, *The Manitoban*, 10 May 1873.

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. . . . 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>38</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’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. There is a pervasive fear of violence in the documents of this period. Reports by residents in the West 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 the vicinity of Fort Ellice. Metis people had also been moving west. Contributing to the tension, the Hudson’s Bay Company had passed an order to end the granting of credit to Native hunters and trappers.<sup>39</sup> On several occasions, both lieutenant-governors, Archibald and Morris, had enlisted the aid of Pascal Breland, who wintered near Fort Qu’Appelle and was familiar to and trusted by local inhabitants, to visit the First Nations groups.

Breland’s first official visit to the area took place in 1872 when then Lieutenant-Governor Adams G. Archibald instructed Breland to learn the wishes of the area’s First Nations, explain the government’s intentions, and offer assurances, but also to let them know that the treaty would not be made that year. In the meantime, they should not interfere with the white settlers, nor come to Red River.<sup>40</sup> Shortly after Breland’s visit, dissatisfied

38 Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to the Minister of the Interior, 24 Jan 1874, file 94, Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140, reel 7.

39 Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 440.

40 Dispatch from Lieutenant-Governor Archibald to Pascal Breland, 22 Feb 1872, file 585, the Adams G. Archibald Papers, reel 2 MG12 A1 M1-M3.



Metis who had suffered poor treatment in Red River by the government attempted to unite with the Sioux against settlers in Red River. The Cree, Assiniboine, and Saukteaux received tobacco from the Sioux in hopes of enlisting their support. Although they refused, tensions remained.<sup>41</sup>

Again, following the incident with Sioux Chief Little Knife, Lieutenant-Governor Morris dispatched Breland to the Cree and Assiniboine at Fort Ellice to assure them of a coming treaty, hoping that 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>42</sup> To ease fears in Ottawa, Morris described him as “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>43</sup> It is unclear why Morris described Breland as a native of Quebec, for it was common knowledge that Breland was Metis. 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>44</sup> In the copy of Pascal Breland’s report from Wood Mountain, he stated that he had met with the Sioux and Metis and explained his mission as one of peace. The Sioux replied that they had always been friends with the English and showed him their medals.<sup>45</sup>

Breland’s mission to the Sioux succeeded in bringing a degree of peace, but he reported the need for a military presence in the area. The Cree, Saukteaux, 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, and 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>46</sup> Response from Ottawa quickly overruled the idea of signing treaties west of Manitoba because

41 Cowie, *The Company of Adventurers*, 444.

42 Letter from Morris, Fort Garry, 21 March 1873, “Annual Report on Indian Affairs, year ending 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1873,” 17, <<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>> (12 Aug 2003).

43 Letter from Alexander Morris to Secretary of State for the Provinces, 11 March 1873, from LAC, RG10 Black Series, vol. 3571 reel C 10101, file 109.

44 22 March 1873, Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140, reel 7.

45 Copy of the Report from Pascal Breland’s trip to Wood Mountain, file 27. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140, reel 7.

46 Letter to Campbell from Lieutenant-Governor Morris, 35, July 1873, file 35. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140, reel 7.

there was “no use in making treaty so far in advance of our requiring the land.” If anything, Morris was authorized to send Indian Commissioner Provencher to Qu’Appelle with gifts and a speech. He was not, however, to promise a treaty that year or the next. The Ministry of the Interior felt that it “should be our own officers, no object in bringing non-officials into it.”<sup>47</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 incapable of carrying out Ottawa’s plans. 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 that May.

In August 1873, the Ministry of the Interior gave Morris permission to send an official to visit the Indian tribes that summer, offering gifts and informing them 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>48</sup> The minister also suggested that if no members of the Indian board were available that season, Morris could select either McKay or Breland to carry out its directives.<sup>49</sup> Again, Morris dispatched Breland to report to the Cree, Chippewa, and the Assiniboine inhabitants. He was to bring them a message from the North West Council and determine the perpetrators of the Cypress Hills Massacre. 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 Sioux. Likewise, the information provided by Breland assisted the government when they began planning for treaty-making and settlement.

When Breland arrived in early winter 1873, the First Nations did not cheerfully greet his messages and gifts. At Vermillion Hills, where he read the letter from Morris to the assembled Indians, “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

47 Letter from Campbell to Morris, 5 Aug 1873, file 38 Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 reel 7.

48 S.H. Meredith, Deputy to the Minister of the Interior to Morris, 22 Aug 1873, file 42 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1.

49 Telegram from A. Campbell to Morris, 28 Aug 1873, File 429 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1.

rights, but after considerable explanation I was [able] to convince them and dispel their mistrust.”<sup>50</sup> The chief, Ka-ki-chi-war, accepted the gifts as gifts only, not as an agreement, signaling that 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>51</sup> While gifts were accepted in the short term, Indian people hoped formal treaty negotiations would soon take place.

During the period that 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 in which they listed their objections to the presence of a surveyor in their territories. They were dismayed because no treaty had been undertaken, and so the land, therefore, still belonged to them. As such, they were unable to understand why their land was being surveyed.<sup>52</sup> The First Nations 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>53</sup> To prevent further escalation, Campbell adopted the plan suggested by Morris to give chiefs salaries or gifts, although he would wait for Breland’s report before making a final decision about a treaty.<sup>54</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 that was 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 one method to communicate with First Nations and monitor the situation

50 Copy of Pascal Breland’s Report, 18 Nov 1873, from RG10 Files Black Series, vol. 3604, reel C101004, file 2543.

51 Ibid.

52 From Fort Ellice to Morris, 11 October 1873, file 530 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1.

53 Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to Campbell, 23 October 1873, file 69. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140, reel 7.

54 Campbell to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, 28 October 1873, file 71. Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140, reel 7

in the West was to use local Metis. From the government’s perspective, dispatching Metis emissaries with gifts and proclamations could avert violence that would otherwise compromise settlement and future treaties. The arrival of the Boundary Survey and the North-West Mounted Police in advance of treaties could have precipitated a serious confrontation. By adopting a policy of alerting First Nations about the purpose of those parties and offering gifts, while simultaneously promising future treaties, both groups passed though unharmed.

Metis Peter Whiteford (or Whitford) also alerted officials to the threat posed to the police and Boundary Survey on the part of the Sioux. Pierre Leveiller introduced Whiteford, a cousin of James McKay, to Morris. Whiteford stated that the Sioux were prepared to stop the survey because they believed that the English (Canadians) and Americans were acting in concert. 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 would also be welcomed if their coming were known.”<sup>55</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>56</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>57</sup>

Minister of the Interior David Laird promptly gave Morris permission to do so.<sup>58</sup> Morris assembled a contingent of Metis to accompany both the police and the survey, and sent out emissaries to alert other groups to the purpose of each party. Morris selected Pierre Leveiller to lead the Metis traveling in advance of the police. His reputation as a well-traveled guide and skilled interpreter made him a good candidate for the position. The message to Leveiller was explicit:

55 Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris to the Minister of the Interior, 24 May 1874, file 114 from Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140, reel 7.

56 Ibid.

57 File 116 and file 117 to Minister of Justice Dorion, 29 May 1874, and to Alexander Mackenzie, 5 June 1874, Alexander Morris, Ketcheson Collection MG 12 B2 M140 Reel 7.

58 David Laird, Minister of the Interior to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, 9 June 1874, file 763 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1.

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 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>59</sup>

Leveiller also took with him gifts to distribute as tokens of the Boundary Survey's good intentions.

Other First Nations in the interior also knew in advance of the arrival of a mounted red-coated contingent. Morris recruited Hudson's Bay Company officials to arrange for messengers to be sent out. Messengers' instructions were simple. 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, messengers were to inform the Indians that the Boundary Survey was passing through to mark a line between British and American territories, and that they were to be regarded 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>60</sup> Providing simple information as to the origins and purpose of the two expeditions would, on one hand, clarify any questions that Indian people had, but the messages also included a promise to undertake treaties to ease any fears about that issue.

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59 To Pierre Leveiller from William I. Urquhart, Sec. of the North West Council, 3 July 1874, file 789 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1.

60 Hardisty Fonds, Confidential Letter from James A. Grahame to Richard Hardisty, from Fort Garry, 8 August 1874, including a letter from Alexander Morris Fort Garry, 19 June 1874.

Residents who had feared that the entrance of North-West Mounted Police 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>61</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.

The popular mind in Manitoba perceived the Blackfoot and Cree who inhabited the Western prairies 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 prevented confrontation. Because treaties had not yet been undertaken, *The Manitoban* commented, “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 Governor Archibald to meet them at Fort Edmonton has not even been kept.”<sup>62</sup> The failure to initiate treaties with the Cree and Blackfoot meant that survey parties and the arrival of the North-West Mounted Police would not be welcome if these groups did not have prior warning of their peaceful intentions.

Morris selected William McKay of Fort Pitt to visit the Plains Cree with the same directives regarding the peaceful nature of the police and the Boundary Survey. He was also to explain to the Indians the Queen’s intention to deal fairly with them. To further ensure the goodwill of the Cree, McKay distributed gifts among them in the amount of \$500.

During his travels, McKay visited approximately 259 tents from a total of six bands. He reported, “After explaining the above to them all, I

61 “Report of the Department of the Interior for year ended 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1874,” 3, <<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca>> (12 Aug 2003).

62 *The Manitoban*, 25 Oct 1873.

gave each party a present on behalf of the representatives of the Queen. ... They all received the presents in a friendly manner and were thankful for what they got with the exception of two families belonging to Big Bear's band, who objected to receiving the present stating it was given to them as a bribe to facilitate a future treaty." 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 that 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>63</sup> The following year, Rev. George McDougall and the Rev. John McKay again visited the Cree with gifts. 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>64</sup> By this point, Cree patience was wearing thin.

By McDougall's second visit in 1875, a united band of Cree and Assiniboine refused any government gifts until a treaty date was set, and denied entry to any party running lines or a survey.<sup>65</sup> While some chiefs received McDougall's message 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>66</sup> McDougall dismissed Big Bear's insightful comment, arguing that he was not Cree, but *Saulteaux*, and that other bands viewed the *Saulteaux* as mischief-makers. Plains Cree insistence on meeting with the government to sign treaties became clear when, that same year, they turned back the geological survey and those constructing a telegraph line.<sup>67</sup>

Highlighting the importance of these Metis emissaries in intercultural negotiations requires a refocusing of attention from the terms and meaning

63 Report from Rev John McDougall to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, nd., Morleyville Mission, Bow River from Hardisty Papers, M477, series X, file 96.

64 Extracts from George McDougall, 13 Sept 1875, South Branch, file 1109 from Alexander Morris Papers, Lieutenant-Governor Collection, MG12 B1.

65 Rev. George McDougall to Lieutenant-Governor Alexander Morris, 23 October 1875, in Morris, *The Treaties of Canada*, 173.

66 *Ibid.*, 174.

67 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), 209.

of treaties onto the process of diplomacy. 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, they served to counteract the negative messages being promulgated by disgruntled Indians or Metis who had experienced the government’s failure to uphold its promises. The reasons the Metis assisted the government are complex and varied. Individually, each person had private motives that remain obscure. Looking at each interpreter’s biography has helped to make clear that, generally, each had a personal history of acting in intermediary capacities. These services also brought the Metis intermediaries an opportunity to secure financial remuneration. 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.

These examples have also brought to light a little known aspect of treaty-making. Not only were the Metis intermediaries central players in the process of treaty-making, but treaty-making itself should be seen as a part of a larger process of establishing a foundation for the later treaty relationship. Metis involvement as intermediaries who promoted the kindness and beneficence of the Crown by distributing gifts on the Queen’s behalf challenges commonly held notions of how the Metis perceived the government. But it also makes sense when considered as an extension of the fur trade ethos. Men like Pascal Breland and James KcKay had based their livelihoods on maintaining good relations with First Nations leaders in order to trade furs, and were also entwined in cultural and kin relations with Indian bands. Canada’s relatively peaceful expansion into the North West can be explained, in part, by the presence of Metis intermediaries whose treatment of First Nations concerns reflected their understanding of Aboriginal cultures and a people looking to adapt to changing circumstances.



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