



Crown V Louis Riel



-July 1885-

Background to the Trial

When Louis Riel returned to the Red River Settlement in the autumn of 1869, he was a well-educated world traveller. Upon his return he emerged as an impassioned leader of the Metis taking up the cause to bring them rights to their land and a voice to negotiate terms with the Canadian Government. Toward the end of the resistance movement, Louis Riel made a controversial decision to have a vehemently racist Orangemen by the name of Thomas Scott executed. This decision would have a lasting impact on Riel and Anglophone-Metis relations. Despite the formation of a new province and what seemed like a Metis victory, Riel was forced to flee Canada where he would spend time travelling the North Eastern United States before settling in Montana as a school teacher.

15 years later in 1885, Gabriel Dumont lead a Metis Delegation to Montana to ask Louis Riel to return to Canada and once again take up the Metis cause. Intent on a peaceful resolution to the troubles facing the Metis, Riel once again set up a provisional government and drew up a list of Metis rights. His hopes of peaceful negotiations with the Canadian Government were again ignored and Riel recognized the need to raise arms against the Canadians. All hopes of Metis equal rights were dashed with the Canadian Militia's victory at Batoche and Riel's surrender to General Middleton.

The original trial of Louis Riel in 1885 is arguably the most famous trial in Canadian History. The trial, which took place in July of 1885, lasted only five days and resulted in a guilty verdict. Riel was subsequently executed by hanging, an outcome which has had a lasting impact on French-English relations in Canada. The guilty verdict in the Riel case was seen by many people as a miscarriage of justice. As a result, our class will be conducting a mock re-trial of Louis Riel to see if our class reaches the same conclusion that the jurors reached in 1885, or whether we feel that Riel was wrongly convicted of treason. For the re-trial lawyers will have access to witnesses not available during the original trial. Each student in the class will have a role to play in the mock re-trial and will be expected to research their role thoroughly!