

TIES UNDONE: A GENDERED AND RACIAL ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF
THE 1885 NORTHWEST REBELLION IN THE SASKATCHEWAN DISTRICT

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by

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ABSTRACT

The Northwest Rebellion, in comparison to other North American civil wars, was short-lived and geographically contained, but for the people who lived through it, the residents of the Saskatchewan district, 1885 was a real and a frightening ordeal. By exploring micro-relations at the individual, family and community levels, and focusing on the connections between residents and ways that they related to each other, a portrait of the region emerges that reveals that Euro-Canadians and Aboriginals were linked to each other in many, and often subtle ways before the uprising. Drawing on personal papers, government and Hudson's Bay Company records, and oral histories, this study shows that race and gender were determining factors in how white, First Nations, Métis and mixed-blood men and women experienced both the conflict itself and its aftermath. Furthermore, its impact on residents' lives and society in the Saskatchewan territory was considerable and the effects long-lasting. Barriers, both physical and social, were created and solidified, and, although groups were still linked by the same family ties that bound them before the spring of 1885, the ways that they viewed each other changed after the rebellion. Mistrust and hostility that had not existed before, or that had been repressed, broke the bonds that connected racial groups, and sometimes families. The new order in Saskatchewan was one in which Euro-Canadians held power, and Aboriginals were second-class citizens barred from mainstream society. The rebellion accelerated white domination of the region, and acted as a catalyst for the racial divisions evident in Saskatchewan in the twentieth century.

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DEDICATION

For my grandfather,
Ford Lindbloom,
whose own passion for history
never fails to inspire me.

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INTRODUCTION

On May 19, 1885, one week after the conclusive Battle of Batoche, the English and Irish nuns who served the primarily Métis inhabitants of the South Branch settlement along the Saskatchewan river returned to their home at St. Laurent after being isolated at Batoche for a month. The trip offered the sisters their first view of the devastation wrought by the three months of conflict and two battles that had played out on South Branch settlers' doorsteps. There was little left after hundreds of Canadian soldiers had swarmed over the area, and the women were astounded by the destruction. The prairies, they found, were "dotted with thousands of flowers but covered with the remains of horses and cows that had been killed by the canon. The numerous houses that formerly bordered the road had disappeared. All that remained of them was a pile of ashes and burned scrap-iron."¹

In the spring of 1885, confrontation erupted in the Canadian Northwest. While most of the actual conflict was confined to the Saskatchewan district, residents across the west reacted to reports of the March 26 clash at Duck Lake between Métis militants and North West Mounted Police (NWMP) and white volunteers with fear and panic. Trains were put on stand-by to carry white women and children east in case of an Indian attack, white residents barricaded themselves inside towns and NWMP forts, and the Canadian military was called in to put down what was perceived to be an Indian and Métis revolt.

Historians of the rebellion have commented at length on the territorial and national repercussions of the rebellion. What many of them have overlooked, however, are those who directly experienced the fear, uncertainty and violence of the conflict, the residents of the Saskatchewan territory. Canadians across the Northwest and Canada in

¹ St. Laurent Annals of 1885, 19 May 1885, in *Journeying Through a Century: Sister Pioneers, 1883-1983*, ed. Shirley Majeau (Edmonton: Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, 1983) 202.

general reacted to the news of the uprising with varying degrees of concern and outrage, but for those in the Saskatchewan district, where the uprising originated and the armed conflicts took place, the rebellion was a real and daily threat. It was also an event that had a more significant and longer lasting impact on the region than is often indicated in the historiography, as many of the resulting social divisions are still evident in Saskatchewan today. This thesis, by building on recent historical studies that link race and gender, and utilizing a wide range of sources including oral histories and personal papers not yet incorporated into rebellion scholarship, will examine the people most directly affected in 1885.² It will establish, firstly, that communities were interconnected before the rebellion, both by economics and family relationships, and these ties were integral to how residents dealt with news of the conflict. Secondly, this study will show that men and women experienced the rebellion differently, and that race and gender were important factors in determining how individuals weathered the uprising. Finally, this thesis will illustrate that the rebellion was a turning point in the history of the Saskatchewan territory. The uprising and its aftermath altered racial and community relations, and, in many ways, inaugurated a period of racial segregation, the effects of which are still evident in contemporary Saskatchewan. By exploring the intersections of race, gender and family in 1885, this thesis will provide a more thorough understanding of individual and group motivations and responses to the rebellion.

The 1885 Northwest Rebellion is one of the most-written about events in Canadian history, but the literature has focused primarily on three areas. The military aspects of the conflict have been central in the historiography, most notably in the memoirs of white soldiers and NWMP officers who participated in the Canadian military effort. Male leaders of various groups, such as Louis Riel, Poundmaker, Big Bear and General Middleton, have also received much attention, especially from academic historians. The balance consists mainly of studies that examine the rebellion in general, and try to determine its roots and causes.

² Studies by authors such as Frits Pannekoek and Irene Spry have demonstrated that class is also a factor in western Canadian Native-Newcomer relations. While class is considered to a limited extent in this thesis, it is not a primary focus.

The majority of the works published on the rebellion in the first fifty years following the conflict were personal accounts and memoirs generally written by white men who were involved in the rebellion as members of either the militia or the NWMP. Most were only in the west for a short time, and many of the memoirs were written years after the event. Reminiscences were also left by Hudson Bay's Company (HBC) employees who had spent more time in the area, like factor William McLean and clerk William Bleasdel Cameron, and often demonstrate a more thorough understanding of life and relations in the Northwest. What all of the authors share, however, is a male, Euro-Canadian perspective of the events of 1885. While certainly valuable and interesting, these narratives can only offer a partial view of the rebellion.

Some women also left accounts of the uprising. Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney produced a book about their experiences almost immediately after their return to central Canada.³ William McLean's daughters Amelia and Elizabeth also published accounts of 1885, as did Effie Storer, Battleford resident and daughter of P.G. Laurie, editor of the *Saskatchewan Herald*.⁴ The women offer a different perspective than the men, but only white women produced written accounts of their experiences, maintaining the Euro-Canadian view of the rebellion.

In 1936, G.F.G. Stanley published the first academic monograph on the rebellion. In *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*, Stanley examines both the 1870 Red River Resistance and the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, and argues that savage and backward peoples (the Métis and Indians) could not cope with the advance of white civilization, leading to the two conflicts and resulting in the total subjection of the non-white residents of the Northwest. From a twenty-first century perspective, *The Birth of Western Canada* may seem racist and close-minded, but

³ For more information on the Gowanlock and Delaney account, see Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997). Theresa (Johnson) Gowanlock was married to John Gowanlock, operator of a grist mill at Frog Lake, in 1884. Theresa (Fulford) Delaney was married to John Delaney, farm instructor at Frog Lake, in 1882. The two women were taken into Big Bear's camp after their husbands were killed at Frog Lake on 2 April 1885. Mrs. Gowanlock was 22, and Mrs. Delaney was 36.

⁴ Kitty (McLean) Yuill and Jessie (Laurie) De Gear left behind unpublished memoirs.

Stanley's work was unprecedented in Canadian academics. He was the first English-Canadian scholar to write in sympathy with the Indians and Métis, and to focus on the racial aspects of the rebellions.⁵ *The Birth of Western Canada* became the foundation for all subsequent works on the 1885 rebellion, and Stanley's view of the march of white civilization became the accepted 'truth' about the rebellion in school books and popular culture until only recently.

The approach of the one hundredth anniversary of the rebellion in 1985, however, prompted scholars to take another look at the conflict. Bob Beal and Rod Macleod's *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (1984) was the first academic work to look at the rebellion as a whole since *The Birth of Western Canada*. Beal and Macleod liken the rebellion to a 'prairie fire', arguing that it was a localized affair that "blazed up quickly and to some degree unexpectedly," and, although intense, was "snuffed out with dramatic suddenness" at the battle of Batoche.⁶ Stanley provides the foundation for their argument. They contend that "the rebellion was essentially an incident in the occupation of the North-West Territories by white settlers and the imposition of their institutions of government on the indigenous population." They downplay the impact of the conflict in the Northwest, explaining that the rebellion left "no real legacy of bitterness in the West," though its impact on national politics was "profound."⁷

Subsequent works departed from Stanley's argument somewhat. Douglas W. Light's *Footprints in the Dust* (1987) is written in an overview format similar to *The Birth of Western Canada* and *Prairie Fire*, but is based in the local history of the

⁵ Thomas Flanagan, "Introduction," in G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936, reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) xii-xiii. Previous scholars had portrayed the conflicts as continuations of English-French tensions in British North America.

⁶ Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984) 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

region.⁸ Light is critical of other authors' approaches to the topic, and attempts to dispel various myths about the rebellion and present a more personal view of the conflict. His roots in the region are reflected in his work, and lend a unique feel to *Footprints*. His inclusion of Métis and Indian accounts of the rebellion is an unorthodox approach; he contends that each group involved in the uprising has a different memory of what happened, and tries to incorporate that variety of viewpoints.⁹ Moreover, he provides a detailed account of the day to day happenings of the rebellion, as well as a more intimate portrait of the 'regular' people who were involved in the rebellion. Light succeeds in providing a grassroots-motivated account of the events of the rebellion, but his daily chronological approach limits analysis or a wider perspective, and, although he is in a unique position to do so, he unfortunately does not present a conclusive argument as to why the rebellion occurred or what its impact was on the residents of the region. Regardless, *Footprints* makes a valuable and distinctive contribution to rebellion historiography.

J.R. Miller devotes a chapter of his study of Native-white relations in Canada, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* (1989), to the rebellion, arguing that the conflict has been the subject of "a great deal of misunderstanding and myth-making."¹⁰ He contends that there was no Indian rebellion in 1885, and that Louis Riel was the "spark" that caused the "mixture of Métis and government to explode." Miller also sets out a model for the history of Indian-white relations in Canada as a whole in *Skyscrapers*, and proposes that contact between Natives and whites in Canada has been characterized by four stages - mutually beneficial contact, alliance, coercion and emergence. He situates the rebellion within the third stage, lasting throughout the nineteenth century and up to World War II,

⁸ Light's roots in the Canadian west are extensive. His paternal grandfather was an early NWMP officer; his father was born in the NWMP barracks at Battleford. His mother was a Gunn, a fur trade family with roots in the west stretching back to at least the 1700s. Light himself grew up in Battleford listening to the stories of both white and Aboriginal participants of the rebellion.

⁹ Douglas W. Light, *Footprints in the Dust* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications, 1987) 6.

¹⁰ J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 170.

in which Euro-Canadians made a concerted effort to force change on Natives. During this phase, Miller asserts, First Nations peoples were regarded as obstacles to economic development that needed to be removed, and Euro-Canadians strove to make Indians irrelevant through land surrender treaties and a “concerted effort to remove the Indian from Canadian society as a distinctive racial and social type.”¹¹

Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser’s *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (1997) offers another view of the conflict, and attempts to prove that the Indians of the Northwest did not rise in rebellion with Louis Riel and the Métis. They demonstrate that most First Nations groups wanted nothing to do with Riel, and, in most cases, did everything they could to avoid trouble. The book is significant because it is the first monograph dedicated to the rebellion that incorporates First Nations’ oral histories, adding an important element to the story and allowing Native perspectives to be incorporated.

These works reflect a progression that has occurred in Canadian historiography in general. The advent of social history and post-modernism has resulted in historians considering other viewpoints, sources and methodologies. For rebellion historiography in particular, it has meant more of a focus on Métis and First Nations versions of their own histories, as well as a shift away from studying the rebellion from the ‘outside’ to attempting to offer a more internal view of the conflict. What none of these works incorporate, however, is an analysis of the impact of gender and race on the experiences of average residents of the Northwest.

Literature that offers a gendered analysis of the rebellion is limited, but that which exists is both important and interesting. One of the first authors to examine women’s experiences was Diane Payment. Her article “‘*La vie en rose?*’: Métis Women at Batoche, 1870 to 1920,” although not published until 1996, stems from research and interviews conducted in the 1970s and 1980s for *The Free People - “Otipemisiwak”, Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930* (1990), a history of Batoche. Payment argues that the Métis settlement at Batoche did not disappear after the rebellion, but continued to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 274-76.

flourish, and contends that women were central figures who held the community together, especially after the rebellion when many Métis men were killed, jailed or fled to the United States. While neither of her publications focus specifically on the rebellion, both offer insight into Métis women's experiences during and after the conflict. Certainly, the most interesting aspect of her work is her inclusion of oral histories from both men and women; the personal testimonies add an important dimension to the community study.

Sarah Carter's *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (1997) is the only monograph to specifically study gender and the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, and deals primarily with representations of femininity in the Canadian West. By focusing on the experiences of two white women, Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, and the discourse surrounding their captivity during the uprising, she examines the way that gender was constructed in the prairie west in 1885. Drawing on newspaper reports, trial transcripts, government records, and memoirs, as well as an extensive and varied body of secondary literature, Carter demonstrates that constructions of race and gender were linked, and argues that "women in the Canadian west were defined differently according to their race, and the specific image of each was mobilized for particular purposes."¹² *Capturing Women*, however, is first and foremost a discourse analysis, and Carter's topic does not lend itself to a more in-depth study of gender relations and gendered experiences in the Canadian west. As she notes in her introduction, her study "focuses on the representations of women more than what women actually did," representations that bear "scant resemblance" to the lives that women actually lived.¹³

Carter's book both draws on and adds to a growing body of literature on the intersections of race and gender in the Canadian west. The two works from which all Canadian students of gender and race draw are Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (1980) and Jennifer

¹² Carter, *Capturing Women*, xvi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Brown's *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (1980). Both Van Kirk and Brown utilize traditional fur trade records to document the ties between white fur traders and Indian and mixed-blood women, as well as women's important contributions to the success of the fur trade, and demonstrate that women's stories can be found in the traditional government and fur trade records by asking different questions of the sources.

More recent works have focused on the intersections of race, gender and colonialism in the Canadian west. In "Invisible Women: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed-Race Daughters in Rural Pioneer British Columbia" (1999), Jean Barman challenges the notion of the "mythic pioneer women who came from elsewhere to face the challenges of a new land."¹⁴ She argues that Indian and mixed-race women were an important element in the 'pioneer' endeavor in British Columbia, although they have rarely been examined as such. Barman also delineates between the experiences of First Nations and mixed-race men and women. By breaking down the implications of mixed-race relationships according to race and gender, Barman demonstrates that gender and race were determining factors in how residents of British Columbia found their place in society.

In another recent study that centers on British Columbia, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (2001), Adele Perry argues that race and gender were critical in shaping the colonial project in early British Columbia. Perry analyses male homosociality and the various constructions of womanhood, and examines the several attempts that were made to recruit white women to the colony. Most importantly, Perry argues that 'whiteness' must be examined as a racial category, as "interrogating whiteness as a race challenges the assumption that whiteness is normal and brownness, blackness, and redness the problematic 'others' in

¹⁴ Jean Barman, "Invisible Women: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed-Race Daughters in Rural Pioneer British Columbia," in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999) 159.

need of explication.”¹⁵ She concludes that “in colonial British Columbia, gender derived its particular shape and significance not from its separateness but from its deep connections to race.” What it meant to be a white woman and what it meant to be a First Nations woman were profoundly different.¹⁶

Myra Rutherdale’s *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* examines race and gender in a different context by focusing on white female missionaries in the Canadian north. She tries to discern why the women went north, what beliefs and ideas they carried with them, what the nature of their interaction with First Nations peoples was, and how they described their experiences to others.¹⁷ Rutherdale argues that, although missionary women were supposed to be models of white Christian womanhood and set an example for resident Aboriginal communities, missionary work gave the women the opportunity to step outside of gender norms, both in the way that they behaved and the roles that they took on. One of the highlights of the book is her examination of missionary women’s preconceived views of First Nations peoples, and especially First Nations women. Rutherdale notes that the missionary women’s beliefs conflicted with and were altered by actual contact with Aboriginal peoples, but at the same time their roles as ‘model’ women served to reinforce some notions of racial and class superiority. Works such as these demonstrate that racial and gender norms were shaped in opposition to ‘otherness’, and to examine one without considering the other fails to produce a complete picture.

This study also draws on a body of work that examines the intersections of race and gender more specifically within the context of war in North America. While this topic has not been addressed for the Canadian west, authors Cecilia Morgan and Janice Potter-MacKinnon have explored the impact of war on women’s lives in eastern Canada.

¹⁵ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁷ Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002) xii.

In *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women*, Potter-MacKinnon argues that Loyalist women who left the United States for the Canadian colony during and after the American revolution “played a significant role in the American Revolution on the northern frontiers.” Their contributions, however, were “minimized and distorted” in the wake of the conflict, and this “revised view” of the past was passed on to subsequent generations.¹⁸ Moreover, she contends that Loyalist women cannot be studied “in isolation” because they lived in a world where men made most of the major decisions, and men were the “main actors” in the conflict. As such, women’s experiences must be studied within a larger context that incorporates both the relationships between men and women and the backgrounds of the Loyalists.¹⁹

Cecilia Morgan uses the political and religious realms to study gender relations in nineteenth-century Upper Canada in *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850*. She contends that “examining the discourses of gender in Upper Canada uncovers not only assumptions about relations between men and women but also helps illuminate links between gender, race, and class in a colonial society. These subjects often were enmeshed and mutually dependent.”²⁰ Part of her study focuses on the discourse surrounding the War of 1812, and Morgan argues that “during and after the War of 1812, patriotism and loyalty were not gender-neutral qualities. Male military activities and images of courageous militia men were central to the public definition of patriotic duty and service.”²¹ The contributions of women did not enter into the patriotic discourse. Instead, qualities such as self-sacrifice, modesty, courage and humanity that might otherwise have been considered feminine traits became the masculine patriotic ideal, while women and their

¹⁸ Janice Potter-MacKinnon, *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993) xiii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰ Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: the Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

children became “symbolic reminders” to men of their duty to serve and protect Upper Canada.²² Morgan asserts, however, that the records indicate that women were more involved in the war than the male-centered discourse indicated, as much of the war was fought on the ‘homefront’.²³ Like Potter-McKinnon, she recognizes that men and women are connected in their daily lives, that the public world of politics and warfare and the private world of the home and family are dependent, and this dependency “confounds” attempts to study them separately.²⁴

Women’s historians are sometimes quick to judge those who do not incorporate women or gender analysis into their work as old-fashioned or sexist, but that is not necessarily fair. Rather, in the case of rebellion historiography, there is a practical reason why women have not been incorporated into the 1885 story. Women were certainly present during the rebellion and were integral to the community experience, but their voices, and especially those of Aboriginal women, are difficult to locate. Traditional sources, like newspapers and government records, provide a window on how others, usually white men, viewed women and their place in society, but women’s own perspectives can be hard to find in such records. Sources relating to women’s opinions on and experiences during the rebellion are scarce. Archival work is always time-consuming, but researching subjects outside of the traditional male elite can be even

²² *Ibid.*, 40-41.

²³ There are also works that examine gender and war in the American context, especially in regards to the American Civil war. Books like Elizabeth D. Leonard’s *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), Jeanie Attie’s *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), and Laura F. Edward’s *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000) scrutinize women’s experiences during the Civil War and their contributions to the war effort. Some also include race as a factor, and offer an analysis of the effects of the war on African American women. In addition, the body of work on Native American women in the United States is better developed than in Canada, although still small. *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) by Theda Perdue examines the lives of Cherokee women, and *Nez Perce Women in Transition, 1877-1990* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1996) by Caroline James looks at that of Nez Perce women. James’ work is particularly relevant, as she dedicates one chapter of her book to specifically detailing Nez Perce women’s involvement in the Nez Perce War of 1877.

²⁴ Morgan, 55.

more challenging.²⁵ Archives are collections of materials that archivists consider to be of historical value, and consequently often reflect traditional beliefs about who and what are important. Records relating to women and other marginalized groups were frequently not preserved, and locating their stories can require creativity and imagination.

Personal papers are useful for finding women's voices. Memoirs, letters and diaries have become treasured sources for historians of women and gender. As literacy is generally required to produce such records, however, women's writings preserved in the archival record are most often the work of white, upper or middle class women. In the Saskatchewan territory in 1885, many First Nations, Métis, mixed-blood and lower-class white women could not read or write, meaning they did not leave behind written records. Beyond their scarcity, personal papers present the researcher with other considerations and limitations. Memoirs, for example, are often written after the event in question, and, in the case of the memoirs utilized in this thesis, were sometimes produced up to fifty years after the rebellion. They were also usually written for commercial publication, often for financial reasons or to gain recognition, and conscious production for a public audience coupled with fading memories seems to have altered some authors' recollections of 1885. Moreover, in the case of rebellion scholarship, the bulk of published memoirs were written by soldiers or others who only spent a relatively short period in the west, and, in many cases, reflect a lack of understanding of the region and resident cultures.

Letters are also an important source of information. A limited number of letters written by women in 1885 exist in the archival record that have so far not been utilized by rebellion scholars.²⁶ They were produced by white women, and are generally

²⁵ Helen M. Buss, "Introduction," in *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*, eds. Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001) 1-2.

²⁶ Specifically, letters and personal papers found in Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Jessie McLean Papers, Hamilton Letters, Patience Caswell Papers, Trounce Family Papers, Barbara Hunter Anderson Papers. The unpublished memoirs of Jessie (Laurie) DeGear (Fort Battleford National Historic Site Archives) have also not been previously utilized.

addressed to family members in Ontario. The letters provide an interesting record of daily events during the rebellion, but must be approached with caution. Morgan reminds researchers that although personal papers, like letters and diaries, are “often treated by women’s and social historians as somehow more real, the unmediated and raw stuff of experience, as opposed to the ‘cooked’ and less real world of discourse and rhetoric,” these sources were not always written as private texts.²⁷ Letters were shared among family members and, in 1885, were often published in central and eastern Canadian newspapers. Authors may have filtered what they wrote in order to reassure family members of their safety in the face of what the country perceived to be an all-out Indian war, or may have exaggerated their own role in the conflict. In either case, the letters may not accurately reflect the authors’ experiences.

Oral histories can be another important tool for locating the stories and perspectives of those who did not leave behind an abundance of written records. In Canadian history, the issue of oral history is central to the debate about how Aboriginal history should be written. Most historians now recognize that there are other legitimate perspectives and interpretations of the past beyond the traditional political narrative, and some have begun to incorporate oral histories and Aboriginal perspectives into their work. Those who use oral records, however, face a daunting task of sorting out the various opinions about what constitutes Aboriginal oral histories, and how and if non-Aboriginal scholars should approach them.²⁸

Historians should not presume that they can tell Native stories without placing any value in how indigenous peoples themselves understand the past. Like any historical subject, a thorough understanding of how Aboriginal people think and act

²⁷ Morgan, 21.

²⁸ Because Native knowledge systems are traditionally oral-based, First Nations advocates contend that the only way to write Native history is to consult the Aboriginal oral history record. Some historians argue that oral sources are less reliable than documents because the oral records change over time, and people’s memories are not foolproof. Advocates of oral history, however, point out that the meanings of documentary sources are neither pure nor unchanging. Others assert that all histories are subjective because whether the record is written or oral, how a historical event is represented is altered by the cultural, social and economic filter of the person transmitting the information.

contributes to a more complete historical record. At the same time, nobody, neither Aboriginal peoples nor historians, 'own' history and neither group has the right to dictate how history should be written. As Native American historian Duane Champagne contends, "to say that only Indians can study Indians goes too far toward excluding [Indian] culture and history from the rest of human history and culture."²⁹

Oral histories, as sources that can provide insight into the experiences of marginalized or non-literate groups, were therefore important for a micro-study of the effects of the rebellion in the Saskatchewan territory. The goal of this thesis is to study a region at the community, family and individual level. In an area where residents came from several racial backgrounds, it is necessary to incorporate each group's view of the rebellion. The best way that this could be done, outside of utilizing available documentary sources, was to conduct oral interviews. Oral sources would both provide a more complete portrait of events and allow groups whose own perspectives on the rebellion had perhaps not yet been incorporated into the mainstream historical record to voice their opinions.

To recruit informants,³⁰ I contacted historical groups, museums, Métis local associations and band councils in what used to be the Saskatchewan district. I explained my thesis and my oral history project, and noted that, if community members were willing to participate, I would provide the local library or band office with a copy of my thesis, and return to the community for an informational meeting on my findings if the community so wished.³¹ The first round of letters and phone calls yielded few contacts, so I tried again a few months later and was approached by three bands, one Métis elder

²⁹ Duane Champagne, "American Indian Studies is for Everyone," in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, ed. Devon Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) 182.

³⁰ Before I began my oral histories, I submitted a research proposal to the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, and received approval for my project 11 March 2002, BSC# 02-366.

³¹ In the case of museums, historical associations, and Métis locals, I asked the contact person to put me in touch with anyone they thought might be both an appropriate and willing subject. In the case of First Nations groups, I asked for band council approval to conduct interviews with band members, and asked the council to put me in touch with informants.

and genealogist, and one descendant of mixed-blood/Métis residents of Bresaylor. I interviewed the Métis elder and Bresaylor descendant. I attended preliminary informational meetings at the three First Nations reserves. One band, Beardy's/Okemasis, gave me permission to proceed, and I subsequently conducted three interviews on the reserve with the help of an interpreter provided to me by the band.³² All interviews were conducted in the informants' homes, with the exception of one participant who lives in another province and chose to fill out a questionnaire rather than be interviewed by phone.³³ Interviews were tape recorded, and after the tapes had been transcribed, informants were provided with a copy of the transcript to approve.

My initial goal was to conduct fifteen to twenty interviews with informants from various communities. In the end, I have information from five³⁴ informants, and did not necessarily find the knowledge that I was seeking.³⁵ The discrepancy in the number of interviews I set out to conduct and the number I actually did stems from several sources. The geographical area covered in my thesis is quite large and encompasses many communities. Therefore, while I approached various groups and individuals, they were spread out and had little contact with each other. As a result, no 'local buzz' ensued to spread the word about my topic and encourage participants to come forward, as would have perhaps happened if my subjects had been from one locale. Rather, I had to rely on the interest and goodwill of my contact persons to assist me in locating informants. Due

³² Another band was willing to participate, but the informants were unable to provide me with information relevant to my topic. The third band decided not to participate.

³³ All interview participants and the interpreter were given gift baskets to thank them for their time and participation. I provided the subject who filled out the questionnaire with historical documents relating to his family history that he had requested.

³⁴ Although I conducted five interviews, only four were utilized in thesis. One interview is not viable as the participant did not return the transcript release form after a transcript of the interview was sent to the informant for approval.

³⁵ From the interviews that I conducted, it seems that stories are mainly passed down through gender lines. The male informants that I interviewed knew little about the experiences of their grandmothers, and they noted that it was men who had passed onto them the information that they were sharing with me. Two out of five of my informants were women, and both identified themselves as Métis. It seemed that the transmission of family stories was not as complete among the female Métis informants as it was among the First Nations men.

to the fiscal restraints of a thesis, I could not pay informants, so they also had to be willing to participate without formal remuneration.

In some cases, my project did not coincide with the communities' own interests, and, in others, there seems to have been a lack of trust in my ability and motives. Informants involved in other oral history projects have indicated that the rebellion is still considered a taboo subject for many Aboriginal people; even more than a century after the event, there is still the fear that naming names will result in retribution. The mistrust and skepticism of a non-Native author's abilities and intentions I encountered is, to a certain extent, understandable; it demonstrates that historians and Aboriginal communities still have a long way to go yet in forming productive relationships. The lack of participation may also stem from other reasons not apparent to myself. Others have certainly been successful in conducting Aboriginal oral histories in Saskatchewan. Personal ties to the community or the use of community-based interviewers seem to facilitate the process, particularly in establishing both a comfort level among informants and confidence in a researcher's abilities, thereby drawing participants more easily.

I felt that the interviews I had conducted did not adequately represent the groups that I was studying, and consequently located approximately sixty archived oral interviews relating to the 1885 Northwest Rebellion at the Saskatchewan Archives Board, the Glenbow Archives, and the First Nations University of Canada. Both the grouping of informants and the questions asked in these records reflect other researchers' agendas, but the archived interviews are a largely untapped reserve of valuable knowledge. Specifically, those collected under the Indian History Film Project in the mid-1970s have not previously been incorporated into rebellion historiography.³⁶

While letters, memoirs and oral sources offer important insights into the experiences of those who often left no written records of their own, the foundation for

³⁶ The interviews in the First Nations University of Canada Archives are part of the 1885 Resistance Project, and were gathered by community-based interviewers for Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser's *Loyal Till Death*. Beyond the Indian History Film Project, the balance consists of a couple of solitary interviews collected seemingly to gather recollections about the rebellion before the informants passed away.

this thesis are traditional sources used in western Canadian history for this time period, namely government documents and Hudson's Bay Company records that provide their own challenges. They were produced by white men whose views of events were often colored by contemporary beliefs and colonial prerogatives. HBC factors and some Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) officials often had a more realistic and sympathetic view of events derived from years of experience in the west, but many government officials had little or no direct experience with the region. Their comments and decisions indicate a lack of knowledge about western residents and conflicts, and the documents reflect what white men, and often white men from central Canada, felt was important and necessary to address. Consequently, these records offer insight into how officials viewed the rebellion and the residents of the Northwest, but they present a picture that neither reflects the reality of the situation nor the interests of all who were present in the Northwest in the spring of 1885.

Categories of race in the Saskatchewan territory are integral to this study. As many authors have argued in various disciplines, race is socially constructed, and while it has no intrinsic value, social norms endow race with meaning. In the case of the Saskatchewan territory, the various groups who inhabited the region intermarried frequently and lived in mixed communities, which makes defining racial groups a complicated and sensitive task. Individuals sometimes moved back and forth between legal identities, while others, notably the progeny of mixed-race marriages, make a mockery of any attempts to identify racial categories.

There were, however, at least four groups in the district that Saskatchewan residents themselves seem to have recognized - white, Indian, Métis and what I will call English mixed-blood. Admittedly, these terms are problematic. Métis and English mixed-bloods, for example, were generally referred to as 'half-breeds' in 1885, although sometimes the distinction was made between French and English.³⁷ In this thesis, Métis

³⁷ I do not find half-breed to be an acceptable term, both because it is generally not accepted by Métis groups themselves today, and because it does not accurately describe the constituent groups. The term 'half-breed', however, will sometimes be used in this study in historical context or in excerpts from historical documents.

will be used to refer to French-speaking peoples of the Roman Catholic faith, of mixed European and Indian ancestry. English-speaking peoples of mixed European and Indian ancestry, usually Protestant, will be referred to as 'mixed-blood' or 'English mixed-blood'. The terms Indian, Native and First Nations will be used interchangeably to refer to members of First Nations bands; these people were sometimes legally treaty Indians, and sometimes not. Aboriginal refers to members of all three groups as a body. White members of the community were recognized as just that - white. Ethnic origins - British, French, Belgian - were also important, but Canadians of European ancestry categorized themselves first as white, and secondly according to their ethnic background. The author recognizes that these terms are not necessarily accurate, especially in the case of the terms 'Métis' and 'mixed-blood'. Language and race are certainly not the only determinants of cultural identity. Many 'French' Métis, for example, spoke mainly Cree. I feel, however, that these terms are culturally sensitive and appropriate.

This thesis offers a study of micro-relations at the individual, family and community levels in the Saskatchewan territory, of individual and community experiences and roles during the rebellion, reactions to the outbreak, and the impact and aftermath of the rebellion. By focusing on the intersections of race, gender and family ties, and utilizing a wide range of sources, a more nuanced portrait of the Saskatchewan district emerges. Chapter One provides an overview of the Saskatchewan territory prior to the rebellion, reveals the tensions that existed, and demonstrates that residents were connected to each other by family ties and economics. Chapter 2 looks at the experiences of white settlers during the rebellion. For some Euro-Canadians, the spring of 1885 involved physical hardship, but most suffered only fear and property loss. Reactions to the supposed Indian uprising were grounded more in stereotypical views of 'savage' Indians than in the reality of the situation. Chapter 3 explores how Aboriginal residents of the region dealt with the conflict, and argues that 1885 was just as fearful and trying for Aboriginals as it was for whites. Few Aboriginals supported the rebellion. Most did their best to protect their families and avoid involvement, while others were drawn in unwittingly, becoming accidental rebels. Chapter 4 explores the gendered

dimensions of the rebellion, and demonstrates that individual experiences during the rebellion were influenced by both race and gender. Neither men nor women confined their activities to the roles set out for them, but instead strove to protect their families from harm as best they could. The final chapter examines the post-rebellion situation in the Saskatchewan territory, and shows that the uprising was a catalyst for segregation and racism manifest in the twentieth century. Community links were broken as whites emerged from the conflict with a firm hold on the region, and Aboriginal residents were relegated to the fringes of Saskatchewan society.

CHAPTER 1 - A Community in Transition: The Saskatchewan Territory Before the 1885 Northwest Rebellion

In 1870, the Canadian government bought Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company, giving the federal government dominion over the Northwest. As a result of the 1869-70 Red River Resistance, led by Louis Riel, the 'postage stamp' province of Manitoba was created. The balance of the territory remained, in theory, firmly in the hands of the federal government, but in reality there was little to no government presence in the Canadian Northwest. The area was inhabited by various First Nations and Métis groups, along with some HBC employees, whiskey traders and a few missionaries. In an effort to consolidate its control over the vast territory, the federal government started signing western treaties with Manitoba bands in 1871¹ and the North West Mounted Police were sent to the region in the summer of 1874 with instructions to expel whiskey traders from the area, enforce Canadian law and establish friendly relations with First Nations groups. More missionaries and government officials began to move west, and Treaty 7 was concluded in 1877. A territorial capital was established at Fort Livingstone in 1876, and moved to Battleford in 1877, ensuring a federal administrative structure in the Northwest.

The period between 1877 and 1885 was marked by significant changes in the Northwest. Indians, Métis, mixed-bloods and whites made up the majority of the population, and all were immigrating to the area in greater numbers. Several groups of Native Americans came into Canada in the late 1870s to escape persecution in the

¹ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 138-39.

United States.² At the same time, the exodus from Red River intensified in the late 1870s, and continued into the early 1880s. Whites began to arrive in larger numbers as well, and for various reasons. Most came from Ontario, the British Isles or the United States, and, as more people reached the Saskatchewan district, new settlements sprang up and older establishments grew. The burgeoning government bureaucracy in the Northwest required employees; Métis and mixed-bloods were sometimes hired as farm

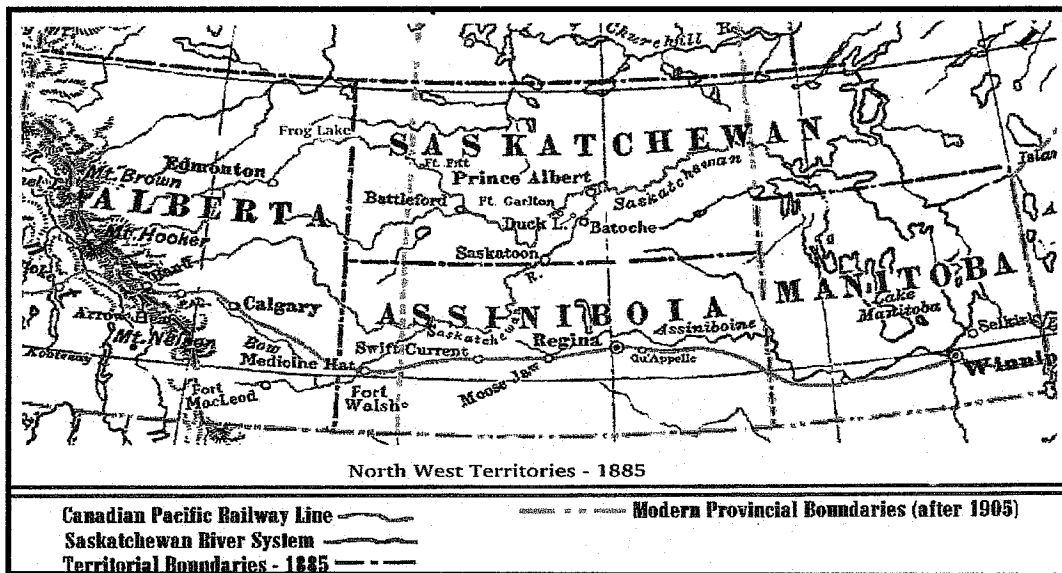


Figure 1.1: Map Showing District Divisions of the Northwest Territories, Important Rebellion Sites and Modern Provincial Boundaries

Map courtesy of Grant Rombough

instructors or interpreters, but most government positions were filled by men from Ontario. Family connections operated in appointments to both church and government positions,³ and, in other cases, jobs were offered as patronage appointments. Appointees were therefore not necessarily qualified for the positions they filled. Other white men came as Mounties, or to establish businesses to serve the growing population. There

² Some, like Chief Whitecap's Dakota, settled in the Northwest permanently, while others, like Sitting Bull's band, stayed only for a short period.

³ Deanna Christensen, *Ahtahkakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People, and Their Vision for Survival, 1816-1896* (Shell Lake, SK: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, 2000) 562.

most often as members of family groups.

By far, however, the largest number of whites came to the Saskatchewan territory to take advantage of the Canadian government's offer of free homesteads. Women were excluded from the land settlement scheme as set out in the 1872 *Dominion Lands Act*. Only men twenty-one years of age or older were able to claim homesteads, and consequently, the ratio of white men to white women who came to the Northwest was disproportional. Some male homesteaders brought their families with them, but many came on their own or with other single men. Mass immigration did not occur as the Canadian government had expected it would, and by 1883, the amount of public lands disposed of by the Department of the Interior was already on the decline.⁴ The prospect of a 'white west' seemed threatened.

Much of the friction in Saskatchewan in the early settlement period stemmed from tension over resources resulting from both the influx of newcomers of all races and changing land-use patterns. Access to resources was important in the development of the region. Land, water, food and animals were essential to all residents, and homesteads, town sites and reserves were chosen based on these elements. A key factor in this process was the shift in Aboriginal economies in the new Northwest. Many First Nations groups on the plains had signed treaties with the Canadian government in hopes of beginning new lifestyles as agriculturalists. But, before they could be successful farmers, Natives first had to settle on reserves, and the federal government often reneged on its promise to allow bands to choose their own reserve locations. Some were left waiting for several years for their reserves to be surveyed. When groups did settle down to plant crops, inadequate assistance from the Department of Indian Affairs forced Native farmers to supplement their agricultural activities with traditional subsistence patterns. They often left their reserves to hunt and gather, giving government officials the impression that Indians were not interested in succeeding as farmers. First Nations

⁴ The total area of public land disposed of by the Department of the Interior declined yearly in the early and mid-1880s after reaching a peak in 2,699,145 acres in 1882. In 1883, the total acreage claimed was 1,831,982 acres, in 1884 1,110,512 acres and in 1885 481,814 acres. *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.8, "Report of the Department of the Interior," xi.

groups also negotiated access to resources by moving to where they could best provide for their families, often to the dismay of DIA employees. These practices and misunderstandings led to frustration and confusion, and only contributed to the unstable condition of the region.

Racism also permeated the Saskatchewan territory. Immigrants to the Northwest brought with them preconceived notions and stereotypes about their neighbours. Sources limit the extent to which Aboriginal views of whites can be evaluated, but Euro-Canadian settlers left behind records that provide insight into their opinions of Aboriginal peoples. They were particularly affected by tales of Indians drawn from literature and newspaper reports. Many white immigrants to the Saskatchewan district came from the United States and Ontario, where usually fabricated stories of Indian savagery and brutality in the United States, as well as in other colonial settings like India and Jamaica, were reported frequently in the press. Some residents, like Thomas Quinn, Indian agent at Frog Lake and witness to the 1862 Sioux uprisings in Minnesota, had direct experience with Indian-white conflict in the United States.⁵ Hatred and racism were often the result, and many immigrants carried these ideas with them to the Northwest. Henry Brock, a soldier with Colonel W.D. Otter during the rebellion, wrote to his mother from Battleford that:

[The Indians] are a bad lot in spite of the missionaries. They say the only thing to do is to get them when they are children, keep them entirely from their relatives and educate them, and then after two or three generations of selection and training you may get a good strain. This process, however, generally kills them, and it is a question if the American plan is not the best - exterminate them in the beginning.⁶

Others chose to hold onto a view of Indians as 'noble savages'. The writings of Fenimore Cooper seem to have played an important role in shaping white views of Native peoples. Rather than brutal and uncivilized, Cooper's noble savages embodied

⁵ Blair Stonechild, and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997) 108.

⁶ Glenbow Archives (GB), Henry Brock Fonds, M136, Henry Brock letter to mother, 29 April 1885.

strength, character, innocence and physical perfection. Some residents were unsettled to find that First Nations in the Saskatchewan territory did not conform to these stereotypes. Alexander Laidlaw, a soldier with the 1885 North West Field Force under General Frederick Middleton, wrote:

When I was a young boy I used to read and admire Fenimore Cooper's Indians, they were my ideal Indian. Now I think the real Indian a Fraud and an Humbug, who looks as if he was totaly [sic] unacquainted with the properties of soap, and seems to glory in his clothes being made out of holes. The dusky maiden has greatly fallen in my estimation, the maiden is dusky, but it is chiefly owing to the accumulation of dirt. Seriously speaking, the poor people are to be pitied, but on the other hand I doubt if they are worth the sympathy that so many well-meaning people extend to them.⁷

Even those who had spent some time in the district, and had contact with real Native peoples held onto such ideals. James Clinkskill, Battleford store owner and Saskatchewan resident since 1882, wrote of Poundmaker's band in 1885 that "looking at the crowd of Indians and contrasting their appearance with that described by Fenimore Cooper, one could see how the race had deteriorated. The only one among them that had a semblance to the ideal was the Chief. He was tall, with the good features of the true Indian type and carried himself with a princely bearing."⁸ Like many whites who came to the region, the men were distressed to find that their 'ideal Indian' in no way reflected reality. None of the men seem to have considered that the First Nations individuals that they encountered were, in fact, the 'real' Indians, and that literary Indians were only invented, and therefore not accurate representations of Aboriginal people. Rather, they chose to cling to the representation rather than acknowledge the authentic.

This inability to let go of ingrained stereotypes on the part of white settlers is even more unseemly in light of the extensive contact between individuals of all races in Saskatchewan territory. This period of intermixing in the early settlement period,

⁷ Alexander Laidlaw, *From the St. Lawrence to the North Saskatchewan: Being some incidents connected with the detachment of 'A' Battery, Regiment Canadian Artillery, who composed part of the North West Field Force in the Rebellion of 1885* (Halifax: s.n., 1885) 17.

⁸ James Clinkskill, *A Prairie Memoir: The Life and Times of James Clinkskill, 1853-1936*, ed. Stan Hanson (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2003) 60.

beyond the fur trade, has all but disappeared from the “collective non-Aboriginal memory” of the western Canadian past.⁹ Connections between Indians, whites, Métis and mixed-bloods in the Saskatchewan district stemmed primarily from two sources - economic activity and family ties. Historians have often treated settlements in the region as racially distinct and segregated from each other. While it is true that some settlements were dominated by specific racial groups, none of the communities in the Saskatchewan territory were homogenous. Residents from different racial groups lived as neighbours and family members in all communities.

Data from the 1881 census provide insight into the degree of racial integration in the Saskatchewan territory. Four communities were chosen for analysis - Frog Lake and Onion Lake, both reserve communities, Fort Pitt, a combined trading and NWMP post, and Battleford, the territorial capital. They are in close proximity to each other, and were chosen in order to provide a sense of community relations. Admittedly, deriving information on race from census data is problematic. First Nations individuals, listed as ‘Indian’, were the only ones designated as members of one of the racial groups utilized in this study, and the ability of census-takers to delineate racial boundaries is suspect.¹⁰ All other individuals listed in the census for these four settlements had to be analyzed based on place and date of birth, parentage, name, occupation and religion. As such, there is a large margin for error, and the information gleaned from these analyses is not intended to be truly accurate, but rather to give a sense of relations and community composition in the Saskatchewan territory.

⁹ Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) 5; see also Jean Barman, “Invisible Women: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed-Race Daughters in Rural Pioneer British Columbia,” in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999) 159-79.

¹⁰ For example, where mothers are designated Indian in the census and no father is listed, children are also always listed as Indian. It is likely that at least some of these children were the offspring of non-Native men.

Table 1.1: Population of the Saskatchewan territory, 1881, According to Race¹¹

Racial Group	% of Population
Indian	37
Mixed-race (including Métis and mixed-blood)	34
White	23
Unknown	6

National Archives of Canada (NAC), 1881 Census, Northwest Territories, RG31, reel C-13285.

The data show that settlements embodied varying degrees of racial integration. Reserves like Frog Lake and Onion Lake, for example, tended to be predominantly First Nations. Trading settlements like Fort Pitt were more diversified, although dominated by Aboriginals, and at Battleford, Indians were a minority, and mixed-blood and Métis peoples were predominant. Battleford, as the territorial capital and site of a NWMP post, had the largest white population of the four communities. Overall, Aboriginals comprised approximately seventy percent of the population of the Saskatchewan territory in 1881. By 1885, these numbers may have differed slightly. The territorial capital was transferred to Regina in 1883, removing many government employees from the town in the process, but, at the same time, more white settlers immigrated to the area.

The economy of the Saskatchewan territory in the early 1880s was based primarily on agriculture, the fur trade and government contracts, and economic activity both linked residents to each other and afforded opportunities for interracial contact. Stores and HBC trading posts served all residents, regardless of race. Not only did owners and customers have dealings with each other, but such establishments functioned as community gathering places, and provided incidental contact with customers of other races. Employment also provided interracial contact, and was generally dictated by gender norms of the day. Farming was the number one occupation; men of all races

¹¹ Métis 18%, Mixed-blood 9.5%, Métis/Indian 3.5%, Mixed-blood/Métis 3%. As there is a more significant margin of error in qualifying individuals as members of these groups, percentage numbers have been added together in Figure 2 to give an overall sense of the mixed-race population of the Saskatchewan territory.

worked as both farmers and farm hands. Those who were not farmers or who supplemented their income with other jobs were employed as government officials, freighters, NWMP, entrepreneurs and HBC factors, clerks and laborers.¹²

Female farmers worked in the fields when necessary, but most women were not employed outside of the home. Those who were filled positions considered appropriate for females, and usually worked as teachers, nannies, cooks or housekeepers. As in other colonial situations, many white families in the region tried to maintain what they considered to be 'civilized society' by conforming to Anglo-Saxon middle-class standards. Better-off white families employed nannies and domestic servants, creating many job opportunities for women, and specifically for Aboriginal women. Northwestern servants were not lower-class white women as they were in Britain and central Canada; white women of any class usually found husbands soon after their arrival in the Saskatchewan district.¹³ Rather, Métis, mixed-blood and Native women cared for white middle-class homes and children in the Northwest. Helen McLean employed both maids and nannies, who her daughter Kitty describes as always being "Indian or half-French."¹⁴ Battleford store owner James Clinkskill and his wife Dora also hired a Métis caregiver when their first child was born.¹⁵ Mary Laurie, wife of P.G. Laurie, had a "half-breed" domestic servant,¹⁶ and Thomas Quinn, whose own wife Owl Sitting was

¹² Chief Little Poplar's brother, Nacootan worked as a laborer at Fort Pitt. Waged work was also sometimes a family affair. Kamustatum and his wife, both members of the Frog Lake Woods Cree, worked for Frog Lake HBC Factor James Simpson and his wife Catherine. The Plaxtons of Prince Albert employed an entire Native family.

¹³ No white women were listed as servants in the 1881 census in the communities studied.

¹⁴ Kitty (McLean) Yuill, "Pioneers and Prisoners in the Canadian North West," unpublished manuscript, 20. Thank you to Dr. Sarah Carter and Dr. Lalange Grauer for providing me with this manuscript. Lalange Grauer, "In the Camp of Big Bear: Narrative Representation of the Frog Lake Uprising, 1885" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1991) 134-36.

¹⁵ Clinkskill, 66.

¹⁶ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Effie Storer papers, S-A186 (II.1) Effie Storer, "The Lauries of Saskatchewan," unpublished manuscript.

Native, employed a First Nations charwoman.¹⁷

Women in the Saskatchewan territory also capitalized in other ways on their domestic skills. The sisters of the Faithful Companions of Jesus ran combined schools and orphanages at St. Laurent and Prince Albert, and farm women sold bread, milk, eggs and other products to earn cash. The wives of Indian agents, farm instructors and Protestant missionaries were expected to train Native women in housekeeping and child rearing skills. Some women provided their services for free, but wives of DIA officials were occasionally paid. Theresa Delaney, for example, received ten dollars per month to cook meals for the other DIA employees at Frog Lake and for instructing the resident First Nations women in household duties.¹⁸ Most often such duties fell to white women, as the positions carried with them a certain degree of authority, but Métis and mixed-blood women, like Margaret McKay, cook and wife of Joseph McKay, the mixed-blood farm instructor at Sweetgrass, were sometimes employed as well.¹⁹ First Nations wives do not seem to have acted in this capacity, as they were likely not believed capable of teaching others domestic skills.

An employment hierarchy, determined by race, seems to have been in place. Whites were rarely (or never) employed by anyone but whites, while Métis, mixed-bloods and Indians were all employed by Euro-Canadians. Information regarding the employment of Métis and mixed-bloods by Natives and vice versa is scarce, although it is possible that First Nations men worked for wealthier mixed-bloods and Métis as hired hands or First Nations women as nannies and housekeepers. White, Métis and mixed-blood men were all employed by the DIA, although Aboriginal men seem to have served more often as lower-ranked farm instructors and interpreters than as agents. Métis and mixed-blood men also worked for the NWMP as scouts and interpreters. This hierarchy

¹⁷ Ida Little Bear, "My Own Story," *Bonneyville Tribune*, 25 April 1958 and 2 May 1958. Ida Little Bear is the daughter of Imasees, and the granddaughter of Big Bear. It seems that the woman she is referring to the mother of her foster father, Peter Thunder.

¹⁸ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3719, f.22649, Lawrence Vankoughnet to John A. Macdonald, 20 July 1885.

¹⁹ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3719, f.22784, Edgar Dewdney to John A. Macdonald, 25 November 1885.

often resulted in conflict. First Nations groups resented having white men control their food rations, and may have also had negative feelings about Euro-Canadian men's sexual relations with Aboriginal women. These tensions sometimes resulted in violence.²⁰ Métis and mixed-blood men also acted in positions that gave them control over Native peoples, and Indians and Métis were often in competition for the same jobs. This only exacerbated existing tensions between Métis and First Nations groups over land usage and the lost buffalo hunt.

The other primary source of interaction between the different groups was sexual contact and family ties. As the ratio of men to women in the west generally, and of white men to white women specifically, was high, many Euro-Canadian men took Aboriginal partners. Sometimes these couples were formally joined, sometimes they were not, but interracial male-female sexual relationships were common and served to integrate racial groups and communities to far greater extent than has previously been recognized. The 1881 census reveals that approximately seventy percent of formal marriages in the region were interracial.²¹ This number includes only marriages as recognized in the census, which indicates that 38.32 percent of the population of the Saskatchewan district, or 7306 individuals, were formally married. This means that approximately 2557 of 3653 marriages were interracial.²² Informal interracial sexual partnerships, which were not recognized by census takers, would have augmented these numbers, perhaps significantly. By 1885, there were more single white men in the region, and the number of marriages between white men and Aboriginal women seems

²⁰ Kaweechatwaymat, son of Lucky Man, was arrested in June 1884 for assaulting Little Pine farm instructor John Craig during an argument over access to rations. Hugh Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984) 127-131. Sand Fly was charged with drawing a knife on Frog Lake farm instructor John Delaney, who had been having a sexual relationship with Sand Fly's wife. Delaney had also been "physically threatened" twice for not distributing rations. Stonechild and Waiser, 109.

²¹ This number is based on an analysis of sixty-six unions, and includes white-Aboriginal, Indian-Métis, Indian-mixed-blood, and Mixed-blood-Métis unions. NAC, 1881 Census, Northwest Territories, RG31, reel C-13285.

²² Thank you to Dr. De Brou for providing me with his statistical analysis of the conjugal condition of Saskatchewan district residents according to the 1881 census, from his own work on census data relating to early Saskatchewan. Source given as NAC, Census of Canada, 1881, pp. 94-95.

to have increased from 1881.

Notably, most white Department of Indian Affairs officials in the Saskatchewan territory were married to Aboriginal women. Thomas Quinn's wife Owl Sitting was Cree,²³ James Payne, farm instructor on the Assiniboine Mosquito reserve, was married to the daughter of Chief Grizzly Bear's Head,²⁴ and Robert Jefferson, farm instructor for the Poundmaker reserve, was married to one of Poundmaker's sisters.²⁵ Other white residents also joined with Aboriginal women. Battleford NWMP bugler Paddy Burke's wife was Métisse, as was Elise Delorme, wife of George Ness, a farmer and magistrate in the Duck Lake/Batoche area.²⁶ Métis from Batoche also married francophones from nearby French settlements like Bellevue.²⁷ There are seemingly no recorded cases in the region of a white woman marrying a Native man.²⁸

Métis, mixed-bloods and Indians also intermarried heavily. Poundmaker himself was the son of a mixed-blood woman and an Assiniboine man.²⁹ Métisse Rose Delorme was the wife of John Pritchard, the mixed-blood interpreter at Frog Lake.³⁰ Patrice Ouellete, a member of the Battleford Rifles during the rebellion, was married to Marguerite Latengrassé, a member of Beardy's band, and Métis Augustine LaFramboise, one of Riel's militia captains during the uprising, married a woman from the Petequaquey

²³ Dempsey, 117; William Bleasdel Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun* (Calgary: Kenway Pub. Co., 1950) 41. Owl Sitting was also known as Jane Quinn.

²⁴ Stonechild and Waiser, 97-98.

²⁵ D'Arcy Jenish, *Indian Fall: The Last Great Days of the Plains Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy* (Toronto: Viking, 1999) 216.

²⁶ Ness was married to Elise Delorme. Douglas Light, *Footprints in the Dust* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications, 1987) 138.

²⁷ Diane Payment, *"The Free People - Otipemisiwak": Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, Parks Service, Environment Canada, 1990) 74.

²⁸ The scarcity of white women likely meant that they could marry above their own station, and marriage to an Aboriginal man would not only have been scandalous, but would have been seen as a drastic decline in a woman's social status.

²⁹ Stonechild and Waiser, 18.

³⁰ Guillaume Charette, ed, *Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of a Prairie Métis*, trans. Ray Ellenwood (Winnipeg : Editions Bois-Brûlés, 1980) 116.

reserve. Gabriel Dumont's first cousin, Vital was a member of the One Arrow band, and at least six other Métis who fought in the rebellion also had Indian wives, and had been paid as treaty Indians at nearby reserves the previous year.³¹ The result of intermarriage was intensive interracial contact, and a region whose residents were connected by far-reaching family ties.

Intermarriage did not, unfortunately, result in social equality in the Saskatchewan district. Race and gender determined what place in the community individuals could occupy. White residents invariably felt superior to Aboriginal residents, and Anglo-Saxons were held in higher regard than other Euro-Canadian groups. Whites were generally wealthier than Aboriginals, although there were certainly well-off Métis and mixed-bloods, and poor whites. Members of all groups, however, formed friendships with each other. Mrs. Dan Finlayson of Battleford took in the sick daughter or granddaughter of a woman named Little Fingers from the Sweetgrass reserve in the winter of 1884-85, resulting in a lasting connection between the two women.³² The McLean sisters, daughters of Fort Pitt HBC factor W.J. McLean, were friends with Saulteaux Indians, and William Cameron, HBC clerk at Frog Lake, had a close relationship with the John Pritchard family.³³

In 1885, settlements in the Saskatchewan territory were not racially homogeneous. Although some communities, like reserves and the South Branch colony, were composed predominantly of one group, integration was pervasive. Separate racial groups in isolated communities did not exist. Rather, residents of the Saskatchewan district were involved with and connected to each other through economic activity, sexual contact and family ties. Intermixing, however, did not subvert racial hierarchies and discrimination. The Saskatchewan territory was a region in transition in 1885, and this process brought with it an increase in tensions in the area. A struggle for access to

³¹ Stonechild and Waiser, 66, 74.

³² GB, Jessie De Gear Fonds, M314, file 27, scrapbook 8, newspaper clipping.

³³ Cameron apparently campaigned for many years after the rebellion for formal recognition by the Canadian government of the role that John Pritchard played in the rebellion. Carter, *Capturing Women*, 89.

resources was occurring between indigenous populations and newcomers. Racism, in spite of frequent contact with each other, exacerbated the situation, as did the Canadian government's endeavor to impose 'white' civilization, rules and laws on the region, and its failure to fulfill promises to First Nations groups. In spite of these efforts, white control of the territory was not consolidated. Government structures were in place and the NWMP were present to enforce Canadian law, but whites in the territory were still a minority.

There are many theories as to why military conflict broke out in the Northwest in the spring of 1885. The reasons behind the rebellion are not particularly relevant to this study, but discontent was certainly rampant in the Saskatchewan district prior to the spring of 1885. Bob Beal and Rod Macleod point out that, while the outbreak is often attributed to Métis discontent, conflict would not have occurred if Indians and whites had not also been "seriously alienated by a distant and uncaring government."³⁴ First Nations groups had their own agendas to pursue, namely convincing the Canadian government to fulfill the promises it had made or renegotiate the treaties. Other residents of the Saskatchewan territory, the majority of whom were engaged in some form of agriculture, shared many of the same grievances. Métis on the South Branch were unhappy that the government would not recognize their claims to their river lots along the South Saskatchewan River, and Euro-Canadians were dissatisfied with government land policy, lack of political representation and the dispersal of government contracts.³⁵

The ties between these groups were one of the reasons that Louis Riel returned to Canada. In the summer of 1884, a coalition of Métis, mixed-bloods and whites decided to send a delegation to Montana, where Riel was working as a schoolteacher, to request that he return to the Northwest in order to lead the crusade to have residents' grievances addressed. Riel agreed, and after his arrival at Batoche, meetings were held in various

³⁴ Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984) 11-12.

³⁵ For more information on relations and meetings between Northwest residents before the rebellion, see Beal and Macleod, Chapter 6 (124).

communities throughout the winter of 1884-85. Lack of response from the federal government led to frustration. At the same time, the winter was difficult, especially for First Nations peoples on reserves where starvation and disease were rampant,³⁶ and consequently the winter and spring of 1884-85 were marked by tension and anger in the Saskatchewan territory.

On March 19, Métis at Batoche, under the leadership of Louis Riel, formed a provisional government. The rebellion began when NWMP and volunteers from Prince Albert clashed with Métis militants at Duck Lake on March 26. Because the skirmish had occurred on Beardy's reserve, word spread across the Northwest and beyond that the Indians and Métis had risen together against the Canadian government and the white residents of the region. On April 2, driven by both hunger and resentment of Indian agent Thomas Quinn, members of Big Bear's Plains Cree band³⁷ murdered nine men at Frog Lake and took hostages, including an entire band of resident Woods Cree.³⁸ These two events terrified residents of the Saskatchewan territory and the Northwest in general. Euro-Canadians barricaded themselves in towns and forts to protect against Indian attacks, while many Aboriginals fled the region altogether.

Part of the burgeoning Frog Lake camp reached Fort Pitt on April 14, where the NWMP, under the direction of Francis Dickens, son of author Charles Dickens, abandoned the fort, and the civilian residents were taken hostage. Métis under Gabriel Dumont clashed for the first time with General Frederick Middleton and the Canadian

³⁶ Two men from Whitecap's reserve reported in December 1884 that they had only four sacks of flour and some potatoes and turnips to feed a population of one hundred people. NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3703, f.17589, "Indian News from the *Saskatoon Sentinel*," 9 December 1884.

³⁷ By April 2, Big Bear was no longer in charge of his band; war chief Wandering Spirit had taken control. It therefore seems inappropriate to refer to the Plains Cree band as "Big Bear's band" for the period of the rebellion. The author will often refer to the group under the control of the Plains Cree, including hostages, as the Frog Lake camp or the Frog Lake group. It should be noted, however, that the Plains Cree band was only wintering at Frog Lake, and the more permanent residents, the Woods Cree, were captives of the Plains Cree. For more information, see Stonechild and Waiser, Dempsey, and J.R. Miller, *Big Bear (Mistahimusqua)* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1996).

³⁸ Allen Ronaghan argues that there was also a tenth victim, a schoolteacher named Mr. Michaux. Allen Ronaghan, "Who Was The 'Fine Young Man'? The Frog Lake 'Massacre' Revisited," *Saskatchewan History* 47 no.2 (1995) 13-19.

militia at Fish Creek on April 24. Days later, on May 2, Poundmaker and his men defeated government forces when Colonel W.D. Otter attacked the Native camp at Cut Knife Hill. The Battle of Batoche raged soon after, from May 9 to 12, resulting in the defeat of the Métis.³⁹ This effectively ended the rebellion, although the search for rebels continued. Poundmaker and his band subsequently surrendered at Battleford on May 26. Two days later, the Frog Lake camp, by this time numbering close to 1000 members, clashed with Major T.B. Strange at Frenchman Butte, resulting in the Plains Cree and their hostages engaging in a forced march into the northern bush. There they skirmished with Mounties at Loon Lake on June 3. By that time, food was scarce and small groups began to break away from the camp. Big Bear, along with his son Horse Child, surrendered at Fort Carlton on July 2.⁴⁰

The rebellion was a pivotal moment in the history of the Saskatchewan territory. While other historians have focused on the territorial or national implications of the conflict, many have overlooked the experiences of those who lived through the 1885 Northwest Rebellion. For those who were there, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, the uprising was a terrifying event whose repercussions would be felt in the region for decades to follow.

³⁹ There were some Natives present at that Battle of Batoche. It seems that most of them were there against their will.

⁴⁰ For more detailed information on these events, see G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (London: Longmans, Grees & Co., 1936; reprint, with introduction by Thomas Flanagan, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Stonechild and Waiser; Beal and Macleod.

CHAPTER 2 - The Privilege of Race: White Residents' Response to the 1885

Northwest Rebellion

In late March, Dan Finalyson, a farmer from the Battleford area, and his family were alerted that they were in danger by Little Fingers, an elderly woman from the Sweetgrass reserve who had spent part of the winter with them:

Just before the outbreak of the Rebellion, the week before, an old Indian woman came to the farm three days in succession, in great excitement, to warn us that the Indians were coming, but we laughed at her and paid no attention. The Indians did come, and on the very day she had said, burned our buildings and plundered everything...[Her warning] didn't help us to get away, for we paid no attention. We got away, however,...and went to town and stayed there for two and a half months. The Indians, the night after, came down to the house and took everything they wanted and set fire to what was left.¹

Although disturbing rumors had been swirling through the region for weeks, and residents were aware of discontent, white settlers in the Saskatchewan territory panicked at the thought of an Indian uprising and left the region altogether or barricaded themselves in towns and police forts across the territory.² Some white residents found themselves in the line of fire during the rebellion, but most passed the time in relative safety, their misgivings about their Aboriginal neighbours grounded primarily in

¹ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Arlean McPherson Papers, S-A472, Dan Finlayson, speech to Regina Historical Society, 27 March 1933.

² In the southern Assiniboia district, race relations were at a different stage than in the more northern Saskatchewan district. One of the primary factors contributing to the discrepancy was the arrival of the railroad in the south, which facilitated the immigration of white settlers to Assiniboia. Euro-Canadians far outnumbered Aboriginals in Assiniboia, meaning that Aboriginal peoples in the south played a different role in the Assiniboia community than in the Saskatchewan district. The larger ratio of white women in Assiniboia, for example, meant that intermarriage likely played a smaller role than in the Saskatchewan district, resulting in fewer connections between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. As such, in terms of race relations in connection with the rebellion, the two districts must be considered separately. In 1885, the Saskatchewan district likely had more in common in terms of community formation and race relations with the similarly isolated Athabasca district, covering mainly what is now central Alberta, than its "Saskatchewan" neighbour to the south.

stereotypical views of Indians and Métis derived from ‘common knowledge,’ newspaper reports and literature. Regardless of First Nations and Métis intentions or the validity of Euro-Canadians’ concerns, white settlers in the Saskatchewan territory truly felt that they were at war and under siege during the rebellion. Their experiences during the conflict, as well as their views of the event for years to follow, were shaped by their fear for their safety and the measures they took to protect themselves.

Some whites in the region had personal relationships with First Nations individuals, as Little Fingers’ concern for the Finlaysons demonstrates, but kindly views of Aboriginals were not the rule amongst white settlers. Mixed feelings about Native peoples were certainly not unique to the Saskatchewan territory. Ambivalence towards indigenous peoples is characteristic of native-non-native interaction in colonial settings,³ and the situation in the Saskatchewan district followed suit, where white residents certainly held onto a sense of superiority, and sometimes racism. John Rae, Indian agent for the Battleford region, did not like Natives and was afraid of his charges, and Inspector William Morris, in charge of the NWMP fort at Battleford during the rebellion, shared his opinion.⁴ Personal and sometimes intimate contact with First Nations peoples may have changed some notions about Indians, but it was not enough to completely subvert stereotypes and feelings of superiority. John Hines, missionary among Ahtakahkoop’s band since the 1870s, “consistently made reference [in his journals] to ‘his Indians’ and he talked about the ‘poor things’ who were sick and starving,” and he and his wife Emma refused to allow their daughter Henrietta to play

³ Myra Rutherdale argues that the missionary women who went to northern Canada “had preconceived ideas about their superiority rooted in their identities as members of a White Anglo-Saxon middle-class Anglican community.” The women derived a sense of superiority and entitlement from this identity. Their personal writings, Rutherdale contends, reveal that “personal relationships sometimes softened preconceived notions about Aboriginal peoples,” but their correspondence with others is “redolent with these perceptions of otherness.” Contact with First Nations peoples may have undermined images and beliefs rooted in stereotypes, but it did not altogether displace them. Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man’s God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002) 29.

⁴ Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984) 180-81.

with or attend school with the Native children on the reserve.⁵ Experience in the region did not necessarily confer a better understanding of Aboriginals either. Bob Beal and Rod Macleod argue that “even the most seasoned North-West whites did not understand the Indians very well. They believed these people...were savages whose minds could not be expected to make a distinction between soldiers and women and children.”⁶ When faced with what they considered to be a threat, white residents fell back on such images to explain and justify their fears.

Louis Riel’s declaration of a provisional government on March 19 and the skirmish at Duck Lake on March 26 are often taken to be the inaugural events of the rebellion. Even though neither of these episodes involved First Nations participants as principal combatants, the Métis and mixed-blood populations were, for the most part, not the source of white residents’ anxieties. A March 20 editorial in the *Saskatchewan Herald* explained that “the Half-breeds are far from being a bloodthirsty race. On the contrary, they are as easy-going, free-handed and good hearted a race as is to be found anywhere.”⁷ White settlers’ true fears lay in the perceived savage potential of their Native neighbours. Upon his arrival at Prince Albert on March 24, NWMP Commissioner A.G. Irvine observed that “[the] people here seem to be greatly excited over the rebellion; they fear the Indians more than the half-breeds.”⁸ Members of the Saskatoon Temperance Colony, established only two years before, shared these views. Bessie Trounce wrote to her mother in Ontario that “we certainly fear the Indians or Halfbreeds coming here to take our provisions and cattle etc., but believe the Halfbreeds would spare our lives, the Indians we are not so sure about.”⁹ Similarly, Patience

⁵ Deanna Christensen, *Ahtahkakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People, and Their Vision for Survival, 1816-1896* (Shell Lake, SK: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, 2000) 560.

⁶ Beal and Macleod, 163.

⁷ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 20 March 1885.

⁸ University of Saskatchewan Archives, Diary of Lieutenant-Colonel A.G. Irvine, 24 March 1885.

⁹ SAB, Trounce Family Papers, A359.29, Bessie Trounce letter to mother, 12 April 1885.

Caswell recounted that she “never feared the half breeds but we did fear the Indians.”¹⁰

White residents felt more comfortable with, and therefore less fearful of the Métis and mixed-bloods because they were easier for Euro-Canadian residents to identify with than Indians. By 1885, most Métis and mixed-bloods either farmed, freighted or engaged in some other ‘civilized’ business. The Métis were also perceived to be devoutly religious, unlike the ‘heathen’ Indians. Métis and mixed-bloods generally dressed in Euro-Canadian attire, and were integral parts of settlements as translators, business people and employees of the government, the NWMP and the HBC. Mixed-bloods were able to integrate to an even further extent because many spoke English. Essentially, the Métis and mixed-bloods conformed to Euro-Canadian standards of civilization. First Nations peoples, on the other hand, seem to have been considered an unpredictable and mysterious element. While the Métis were certainly not unaffected by racism, stereotypes and popular images of the Métis were neither as abundant nor as violent as those pertaining to First Nations peoples.¹¹

Table 2.1: Population of Saskatchewan and Assiniboia Territories, 1885.¹²

Group	Saskatchewan		Assiniboia	
	Pop. Numbers	% of Population	Pop. Numbers	% of Population
First Nations	6365	58.3	4571	20.7
Métis	2589	24.1	1060	4.8
Euro-Canadian	1892	17.6	16,452	74.5
Total Population	10,746		22,083	

Saskatchewan Archives Board, History of Saskatchewan Project, R-524.II.20.a, “Settlement, 1881-86,” 33-34.

¹⁰ SAB, Patience Caswell Papers, R-E1468, Patience Smith Caswell, “Homesteading Near Saskatoon, 1884-1885.”

¹¹ The Métis tended to be portrayed as lazy or unintelligent rather than violent.

¹² Please note that, in this case, the grouping ‘Métis’ is as defined by the compilers of the History of Saskatchewan Project, and seems to include both Métis and mixed-bloods. Data from the 1885 census can be found in *Census of the Three Provisional Districts of the North-West Territories, 1884-85* (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1886).

White settlers' anxiety may also have stemmed from the fact that they were outnumbered by First Nations in the Saskatchewan territory. Euro-Canadians comprised the majority of the population in the Assiniboia district, or what is now southern Saskatchewan, but in the northern Saskatchewan region, First Nations residents far outnumbered white settlers. In the Battleford area alone there were nine Indian reserves and over two thousand Cree and Assiniboine.¹³ The contingent of NWMP in the country was small, and residents knew that without railroad service to the Saskatchewan district, military or police reinforcements would be slow in reaching the area. These elements all contributed to white settlers' uneasiness. Moreover, many white residents were recent arrivals with little experience or previous contact with Aboriginal peoples. Stonechild and Waiser reason that "many of the settlers, fresh from Ontario, were uneasy about the presence of so many Indians in the area," as they had an "irrational distrust of Indians."¹⁴

White residents' apprehension was compounded by the return of Riel in 1884. Warnings and rumblings of discontent surfaced. Aboriginal women reported to townspeople at Battleford that Natives were gathering in the area,¹⁵ while George Ness received information about unrest on the South Branch from Métis who lived nearby, possibly his wife's relatives.¹⁶ Once the conflict began, inflammatory accounts were rampant, and even local newspapers such as the *Saskatchewan Herald* and the *Regina Leader* printed inaccurate stories.¹⁷ Rumors spread throughout the district, and were then passed on to the rest of Canada through newspaper reports and letters to family and

¹³ Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997) 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁵ Walter Hildebrandt, *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1994) 67.

¹⁶ Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Missionary Oblates Collection, acc. 84.400, item 731, story by George Ness as told to Mrs. Ducharme.

¹⁷ André Lalonde, "The North-West Rebellion and Its Effects on Settlers and Settlement in the Canadian West," *Saskatchewan History* 27 no.3 (1974) 97.

friends. Even those with experience in the region contributed to the uproar by repeating false reports. John McDougall, a long-time missionary in the Northwest, wrote to a friend that:

[The rebellion] has turned out a much more serious affair than anyone here ever expected, and the worst feature of the whole concern is that of the Indians having joined in. They have been committing some terrible crimes, murdering and plundering [sic] saturating the dead bodies with Coal Oil and piling a lot of wood around them then setting all on fire, and dancing round and round, we hear some fearful yarns of how they have been carrying on. One young man that I was acquainted with and who had just been married to a young Ontario girl about three months ago [the Gowanlocks] was shot down by his wife's side and she was taken by the Indians and outraged by over a dozen of them, and traded from one to the other every day until she was about dead. Then they put an end to her misery by cutting her open.¹⁸

Such tales only reinforced the fears of white settlers in the Saskatchewan territory.¹⁹

On March 28 and 29, after news of the skirmish at Duck Lake had spread, white settlers throughout the Northwest panicked. At Broadview, in Assiniboia, trains were kept ready to whisk women and children eastward in the event of an attack.²⁰

Homesteaders at Red Deer fled to Calgary, while Yorkton residents organized a militia and erected a stockade.²¹ Although fear was widespread, many settlers in the 'non-conflict' areas did not abandon their homes but, in the more northern regions where settlers were closer to the outbreak, most white residents fled the territory or took shelter in the nearest fort.

Ironically, many left their homes after, like the Finlaysons, being either warned

¹⁸ This report referred to Theresa Gowanlock and was, of course, not true. PAA, Downes Family Fonds, acc. 71.364, item 19, John McDougall letter to Charlie, 29 April 1885.

¹⁹ For more information about newspaper representations during the conflict, see Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

²⁰ Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) 128.

²¹ André Lalonde, "Colonization Companies and the North-West Rebellion," in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, eds. F. Laurie Barron and James B. Waldram (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986) 60.

by, or in some cases escorted to the forts by Natives who were concerned for the white settlers' safety. John Hines and his family were told to evacuate when reserve residents got word of the battle at Duck Lake. Along with the rest of the Ahtakahkoop band, the family hurriedly gathered some possessions and abandoned their home. When the group stopped for a meal, the family found that, in their rush, they had left behind many indispensable articles, and had neither a fork, knife, plate nor kettle with which to make or eat their food.²² Similarly, George Applegarth, farm instructor on the Red Pheasant reserve, left with his wife, child and reserve schoolteacher Charles Cunningham for Swift Current after being warned away by friends on the reserve. They departed in such a hurry that they were unable to take either money or extra clothes with them.²³ On April 2, Seekaskootch, chief of the Onion Lake reserve, and two other men informed George Mann, the reserve's farm instructor, and his family of the events at Frog Lake, and told them that Big Bear's warriors were nearby and were coming to kill the instructor. The chief urged the Manns to leave for Fort Pitt, and Mann, his wife and three children set off in a horse and wagon on a back road.²⁴ The next day, Seekaskootch brought Charles Quinney, the Anglican missionary at Onion Lake, his wife Elisabeth and their son to the fort as well.²⁵

Other white residents were warned by the NWMP to seek shelter, but faced a nerve-wracking journey to reach a town or fort. James and Dora Clinkskill made their way across the partially-thawed Battle River. In the rush, and because the melting ice

²² John Hines, *The Red Indians of the Plains: Thirty Years' Missionary Experience in the Saskatchewan* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart, Ltd., 1916) 202-03.

²³ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130, W. Herchmer to Edgar Dewdney, telegram, 8 April 1885.

²⁴ "Story Told by Jimmy Chief," in *Fort Pitt History Unfolding, 1829-1985: History of the Hudson Bay Post and the School Districts of White Eagle, Harlan, Frenchman Butte, Rock Bottom, Onion Lake, Fort Pitt* (Frenchman Butte, SK: Frenchman Butte Historical Society, 1985) 101. Jimmy Chief was the grandson of Seekaskootch. Jimmy chief's father, Misehew, was sixteen years old in 1885.

²⁵ Deanna Christensen, "Selected Aspects of Fort Pitt History," in *Fort Pitt History Unfolding*, 42. Seekaskootch, or Cut Arm, was subsequently shot and killed by NWMP at Loon Lake.

would not hold much weight, they were able to bring only a few essentials with them.²⁶ Joseph and Nancy Price, along with their three children, were intercepted by hostile Assiniboines who threatened to kill Mr. Price, an ex-NWMP officer. Nancy (Bailey) Price was a mixed-blood who could speak at least one First Nations language,²⁷ and, according to Effie Storer, “had it not been for Mrs. Price’s knowledge of the Cree language, her husband would have been killed. She pleaded with the Indians on her knees. As it was, the Indians confiscated their horses and wagon and left them to walk the remaining seven miles to the fort.”²⁸ The Prices were confronted a second time as well, with similar results. On their way to the fort, they met George Gopsill and A.J. Prongua and their families, who had also had hostile encounters with Stoney Indians.

The attacks on the Prices, Pronguas and Gopsills reflect a trend in the early days of the rebellion. Some of the murders committed by First Nations men during the rebellion were motivated by personal grievances. Stonechild and Waiser contend that men like James Payne, who had caused the death of his Native wife’s niece, and Barney Tremont, who was a known racist, “had offended Indian sensibilities, and when the opportunity arose, the men were struck down.”²⁹ Indeed, Robert Jefferson was warned by a friendly Indian named Chatsees that he was in danger of falling victim to individuals with “personal grievances” who were looking to “administer the law according to their own ideas.”³⁰ As Price, Prongua and Gopsill were all ex-NWMP

²⁶ James Clinkskill, *A Prairie Memoir: The Life and Times of James Clinkskill, 1853-1936*, ed. Stan Hanson (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2003) 42.

²⁷ Frog Lake Community Club, *Land of Red and White* (Heinsburg, AB: Frog Lake Community Club, 1977) 105.

²⁸ Violet Loscombe, *Pursuit of Peace: Historic Tales of Battleford* (Battleford: Battlefords North West Historical Society, 1986) 124-25; Effie Storer, “Cut Knife Remembered,” in Loscombe, 143-44. Effie (Laurie) Storer, a teenage resident of the Battleford fort during the rebellion, would most likely have been privy to the Price’s tale once they reached the fort.

²⁹ Stonechild and Waiser note that Thomas Quinn and John Delaney also had poor relations with their First Nations neighbours. Carter argues that much of the ill feeling towards government employees stemmed in large part from their “callous and at times brutal treatment” of Aboriginal women. Carter, *Capturing Women*, 182; Stonechild and Waiser, 101.

³⁰ Robert Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan* (Battleford: Canadian North-West Historical Society, 1929) 129.

officers, it is possible that individual Assiniboines wanted to settle personal scores with the men in the chaos of the uprising.

Settlers' responses to the news of the rebellion in Prince Albert were similar to those of their counterparts in Battleford. As soon as news of the Duck Lake incident reached Prince Albert, the police warned all surrounding residents, and both white and Aboriginal families soon poured into the town from homesteads all over the district.³¹ At St. Laurent, several nuns and a priest attempted to flee to Prince Albert on April 14 after receiving word of the deaths at Frog Lake. Even with a Métis guide, however, the group got lost in the dark, and, after breaking a wagon axle, was forced to return to the South Branch where they accepted Riel's offer of protection at Batoche.³² Interestingly enough, the sisters were not sufficiently unsettled by the fight at Duck Lake to abandon their post, even though several of the Métis men killed or wounded in the battle were their students' fathers. Rather, it was only once they heard of the apparent Indian uprising that they chose to leave for Prince Albert.

Once residents reached the forts, they settled in for weeks of tense, crowded conditions. The white settlers' responses to the uprising were not unusual. As John Lutz outlines in his study of white-Native hostilities on the Pacific Northwest coast, white residents' first reaction to a threat from their coastal Indian neighbours was to form a militia and create a barricaded fort.³³ Settlers' responses in the Saskatchewan territory were similar. At Prince Albert and Battleford, all able-bodied men were sworn into home guards, and men took turns at sentry duty.³⁴ The Presbyterian church and

³¹ White and mixed-blood families who had taken refuge at Fort Carlton were also brought to Prince Albert after the undefendable fort was evacuated and accidentally burned. Hudson's Bay Company Archives (HBCA), Private Records, E.9/27, fo.56, Thomas McKay, Fort Carlton declaration, 25 July 1885.

³² St. Laurent Annals, 14 April 1885, in *Journeying Through a Century: Sister Pioneers, 1883-1983*, ed. Shirley Majeau (Edmonton: Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, 1983) 165-171.

³³ John Lutz, "Inventing and Indian War: Canadian Indians and American Settlers in the Pacific West, 1854-1864," *Journal of the West* 38 no.3 (1998) 8.

³⁴ Jim Wallace, *A Trying Time: The North-West Mounted Police in the 1885 Rebellion* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1998) 141.

manse at Prince Albert were settled upon as a central refuge, and were fortified by a nine-foot stockade of wood. The adjoining house, owned by teacher Lucy Baker, was used as a hospital.³⁵ In the case of an attack, the women and children were to retreat to the safety of the barricade. False alarms, one caused by a herd of cattle, occurred several times, and often in the middle of the night. Hundreds of women and children crowded into the house of ten rooms, described as “a vast nursery of noisy children and screaming females.”³⁶ Some of the women had recently given birth and were still quite weak, and many were bereaved widows of the men killed at Duck Lake.

Prince Albert’s population, normally around 700, swelled to 1500 people during the rebellion.³⁷ As all houses in the town were filled to the brim, the town’s regular inhabitants had to deal with strangers living in their homes for the duration of the fifty-three day ‘siege’, while those who came into town from the country had to live as guests in someone else’s house. The wait was tedious. The town was under NWMP rule, and no one was allowed to leave without permission, nor were civilians permitted outdoors after eight p.m. Owing to the poor harvest the year before, most of the population was fed with government rations. Moreover, spring was well under way, and farmers were anxious to seed their crops, but Commissioner Irvine refused to allow the men to return to their farms, maintaining that their services were needed for the defense of the town.³⁸ As the weeks wore on, rations ran short and nerves began to wear as inhabitants waited for news. According to John Donkin, a member of the NWMP, “the days were literally spent in vain wondering as to what was coming next, and nothing arose to break the sluggish stream of existence...We in Prince Albert, at that time, knew absolutely nothing

³⁵ SAB, Campbell Innes Papers, A113(II.b.3), W.J. Carter, unpublished manuscript, 87.

³⁶ John Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin in the far North-West: Recollections of Life in the North-West Mounted Police, Canada, 1884-1888* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1889; reprint, Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1987) 125.

³⁷ A.G. Irvine, “Report of the Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police Force, 1885,” in *Settlers and Rebels: Being the Official Reports to the Parliament of the Royal North-West Mounted Police Force From 1882-85* (Toronto: Coles Publishing Company, 1973) 29.

³⁸ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 8A, Appendix A, Report of A.G. Irvine, Prince Albert, 16 May 1885, p 41-42.

whatever of what was happening in the outer world.”³⁹

At Battleford, the nearly 600 settlers barricaded inside the NWMP fort faced a similarly crowded and stressful situation.⁴⁰ The fort was surrounded by a stockade built of logs, a trench was dug around the inside of the enclosure, and residents tried to build bastions in each corner.⁴¹ The value of these measures is questionable, as James Clinkskill observed that the bastions “were not of much use,” and the stockade wall had large gaps in it.⁴²

Battleford residents’ reaction to the news of the conflict is curious. Although they worked to protect themselves from attack by fleeing to the fort and reinforcing its (poor) defenses, at least two buildings outside the stockade were in use during the conflict, one as a barracks and another as a store.⁴³ In addition, contrary to the statements many Euro-Canadians offered after the rebellion condemning Big Bear and Poundmaker, residents were at least marginally aware of the difficulty the chiefs were having controlling the more excitable elements of their camps. Clinkskill reports that, on March 29, fort residents sent “a trusty Half-breed to Poundmaker’s Reserve to see if there were any signs of excitement amongst the Indians. We knew the dispositions of the chiefs were not so unfriendly towards the Whites but these chiefs had very little control over the band. Should the young men become excited over the news of the defeat of the Police at Carlton [Duck Lake]...nothing would restrain them from going to any extreme.”⁴⁴

Fort records also reveal that there were Native men who went back and forth

³⁹ Donkin, 134.

⁴⁰ SAB, Effie Storer Papers, S-A186.II.1, Effie Storer, “The Lauries of Saskatchewan,” unpublished manuscript.

⁴¹ Fort Battleford National Historic Site Archives, Jessie (Laurie) DeGear, “The Story of My Life,” unpublished manuscript, 7.

⁴² Clinkskill, 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

between the fort and Indian camps throughout the rebellion, primarily to secure rations at the fort. Moreover, Inspector Morris wrote in the fort journal on April 15 that he thought it “likely that the Indians will not attack Barracks.”⁴⁵ This was certainly the case, although there was ample opportunity to do so. Beyond the weak defenses, there was no well inside the fort, and occupants had to draw their water each day from the Battle River.⁴⁶ Anyone intent on attacking the fort could have easily succeeded. The settlers were indeed vulnerable, but no one, ‘savage’ Indians or otherwise, attempted an assault on the fort. As Beal and Macleod note, “the Battleford whites were besieged not by Indians but by their own fears.”⁴⁷

Nevertheless, residents felt that they were under assault, and reports of the deaths at Frog Lake and the murders of Barney Tremont and James Payne only heightened their fears. Accommodating the large population gathered at the fort, however, kept the inhabitants occupied and focused on the problems at hand. Men and women inhabited separate quarters. The women and children took over the NWMP barracks and the superintendent’s house, while the men and older boys were left to find places to sleep in the stables and other buildings. As in Prince Albert, settlers were not allowed to leave the fort, but at Battleford the whole fort population lived under military command, their lives ruled by bugle calls and schedules.⁴⁸ Much of the inhabitants’ time was spent in idleness waiting for news or an alarm.

There were some distractions to break the monotony. Fort residents spent time looking over the stockade at the fires in the distance (houses were burned almost every

⁴⁵ D.H. Bocking, ed., “Documents in Western History - Battleford During the Rebellion of 1885,” *Saskatchewan History* 38 no.3 (Autumn 1985) 113.

⁴⁶ Wallace, 110.

⁴⁷ Beal and Macleod, 206.

⁴⁸ SAB, Effie Storer papers, A186.IV.2, Effie Storer, “From an Old Diary: Rebellion 1885,” unpublished manuscript.

day), or watching the Indians shoot at the houses and stores that had been abandoned.⁴⁹ There were more pleasant diversions as well. Notably, the close quarters allowed romances to bloom. Many courtships began during the daily gatherings in the fort square, and several Battleford women, including three of the Laurie sisters, ended up marrying Mounties and other men living in the barricade during the rebellion.⁵⁰

For the white residents living at Prince Albert and Battleford, the spring of 1885 was marked by apprehension and fear of an Indian or Métis attack.⁵¹ For other Euro-Canadian men and women in the Saskatchewan district, however, their fears for their and their families' well-being were grounded in a more immediate threat, as some settlers were held prisoner by First Nations groups. White settlers' fears of the savage Indians, were, in Euro-Canadian eyes, confirmed by the murders at Frog Lake on April 2. It appears, however, that the death count would have been higher had it not been for the intervention of men's wives or female acquaintances. The day of the killings, Rose Pritchard barred Wandering Spirit from entering her house. In later years, Rose's daughter Mary reported that her father, John, was certain that Wandering Spirit had intended to shoot him.⁵² Owl Sitting also thwarted an early morning attempt on Thomas Quinn's life by placing herself between her husband and two men who had crawled through their bedroom window.⁵³ William Cameron was spirited away to the Woods Cree camp by two women when the shooting began, one of whom was Catherine

⁴⁹ Fort Battleford National Historic Site Archives, De Gear manuscript, 6; SAB, Women in Canadian History Papers, A123.III.16, Cecilia Whetton, "The Riel Rebellion," unidentified newspaper article.

⁵⁰ Effie, Jessie and Mabel Laurie all married men who they began relationships with in the fort. SAB, Effie Storer papers, S-A136.II.3, Effie Storer, "Queen's Printer," unpublished manuscript.

⁵¹ Hildebrandt, 69.

⁵² C.D. Denney, "In Memory of Mary Rose (Pritchard) Sayers: The Last Witness," *Saskatchewan History* 24 no.2 (Spring 1971) 63.

⁵³ William Bleasdel Cameron, *Blood Red The Sun* (Calgary: Kenway Publishing Co., 1950) 41.

Simpson, wife of Frog Lake HBC factor James Simpson.⁵⁴ Louis Goulet, a Métis present during the massacre, recorded that he saw “Mrs. Simpson going by with Cameron under her arm. She was Gabriel Dumont’s sister, a big, fat woman, as strong as any man. Cameron could hardly keep on his feet, every step was a stagger. I thought he was wounded, but no, it was fear made him that way. Mrs. Simpson had to drag him, or carry him more like it.”⁵⁵

While the reasons and motivations behind the killings at Frog Lake have been examined by other scholars, what is relevant to this study is that many people, white, First Nations, Métis and mixed-blood, were taken captive by the Frog Lake Plains Cree. William Cameron, Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney were the only white survivors of the massacre, and were taken into the Plains Cree camp where they were initially cared for by Woods Cree women. Delaney and Gowanlock were subsequently put in the care of John Pritchard.⁵⁶

The Frog Lake residents, however, were not the only Euro-Canadians taken into the Frog Lake camp.⁵⁷ After receiving word on April 3 of the deaths at Frog Lake, the residents of Fort Pitt were put on a state of alert, and for almost two weeks the inhabitants had a continual watch in place. Amelia, Elizabeth and Kitty McLean, the three eldest daughters of factor W.J. McLean, aged eighteen, sixteen and fourteen respectively, all took their turns in the sentry rotation. Along with their five brothers and

⁵⁴ Dempsey states that the other woman was a Woods Cree, and was the wife of Horse. Hugh Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984) 160. Cameron records that he was living with the Simpsons in the spring of 1885. Cameron, 52.

⁵⁵ Guillaume Charette, ed., *Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of a Prairie Métis*, translated by Ray Ellenwood (Winnipeg: Editions Bois-Brûlés, 1980) 126.

⁵⁶ For an account of the transfer of the two women from the Plains Cree to Pritchard’s custody, see Charette, 128-29, or Carter, *Capturing Women*, 60-61. For more detailed information on ‘the two Therasas’ and their accounts of their experience, see Carter, *Capturing Women*; Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*, ed. Sarah Carter (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1999).

⁵⁷ By the end of April the camp numbered over 1000 people and was comprised of Plains Cree, Woods Cree, Saulteaux, Métis, English mixed-bloods and approximately forty-five Euro-Canadians. Duncan McLean as told to Eric Wells, “The Last Hostage - Part II,” *Weekend Magazine* 18 no.33 (1968) 7.

sisters, the girls had been raised in the Northwest, and could ride, shoot, and speak both Cree and Saulteaux.⁵⁸ When the Frog Lake band appeared at Fort Pitt and demanded the surrender of the NWMP, Mr. McLean went to the Indian camp to meet with the leaders and negotiate the safety of the fort's inhabitants.⁵⁹ Tensions ran high, however, and an elderly woman whose grandchild Mrs. Helen McLean had treated that winter prevented an angry warrior from shooting the factor in the head.⁶⁰ McLean was not allowed to return to his family, and when their father did not reappear, Amelia and Elizabeth walked to the camp to check on their father. According to Elizabeth, the Indians were quite astonished to see the sisters, and asked them if they were afraid. The girls replied that they were not, because they had never been taught to be afraid of Indians.⁶¹

The NWMP, led by Inspector Francis Dickens, left the fort and took a scow down the partially-thawed North Saskatchewan river to Battleford. The other occupants of the fort, at least twenty-eight civilians, were taken into the Indian camp, including the McLean, Manns, Quinneys and five Aboriginal laborers, three of whom were accompanied by their wives and children.⁶² Helen McLean was the last to leave the fort

⁵⁸ Elizabeth McLean, "The Seige of Fort Pitt," *Beaver* outfit 277 (December 1946) 22; Duncan McLean as told to Eric Wells, "The Last Hostage, Part I," *Weekend Magazine*, 18 no. 32 (1968) 1; Amelia Paget, *The People of the Plains*, ed. with introduction by Duncan Campbell Scott (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1909) 5.

⁵⁹ W.J. McLean negotiated the escape of the NWMP and the fate of the fort's occupants. He provides a complete account in HBCA, MS 372(5707), W.J. McLean, "Reminiscences of the Tragic Events at Frog Lake and in the Fort Pitt District with Some of the Experiences of the Writer and his Family during the North West Rebellion of 1885."

⁶⁰ Elizabeth McLean, "The Siege of Fort Pitt," 23. Both Kitty and Duncan recall that Helen McLean was a respected healer among the First Nations groups that the family associated with at various forts.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23. Both Kitty and Elizabeth claim to be the second daughter that went to the camp. Their father refers to the incident in his account, but does not indicate who the second daughter was. Their brother, Duncan, who was eight at the time, names Elizabeth as Amelia's companion. Sarah Carter lists Kitty as the other daughter in *Capturing Women* (66), and notes that Elizabeth was helping her mother attend to a wounded NWMP constable. From the documents, it is unclear who accompanied Amelia to the camp.

⁶² Hugh Dempsey asserts in his biography of Big Bear that the chief argued on behalf of the civilians, insisting that, as many of the fort residents were relatives of the Woods Cree or HBC traders who were friends of the band, they should be evacuated before the fort was attacked. Dempsey, 167.

in order to ensure the safe escape of the NWMP. All of the Fort Pitt evacuees were taken in by Woods Cree.⁶³ After stripping the fort of supplies, the camp moved back to Frog Lake, and remained there for two weeks before beginning several weeks of travel across the Saskatchewan territory and into the northern bush.⁶⁴

Although William McLean negotiated the Fort Pitt residents' entry into the Frog Lake camp, the Pitt group viewed themselves as captives, and left a trail of debris, including torn photographs, bits of paper and twists of wool across the region in hopes that it would aid in their rescue. General Middleton reported to his superiors in Ottawa that, on May 28, two leaves of a children's book were found that bore a message from McLean assuring the troops of his family's safety. The message obviously allayed fears about the white captives' well-being, and especially that of the women, as rumors had spread about the mistreatment of the McLean girls. Middleton wrote that it was "a great relief to have this good news about the women and [this] only shows what infamous lies are concocted in this North-West."⁶⁵

The McLeans rarely seemed to have feared for their lives, although Kitty narrowly escaped a bullet to the head while trying to cross Loon Lake,⁶⁶ but the girls did attract the attention of many of the men in the camp. The notion of the 'fate worse than death,' or of a white woman being raped by a non-white man, was rampant, and many false reports about the various white women suffering sexual assaults circulated in the press and in the Northwest in general. Such accounts were especially prevalent amongst the militia. The idea of either locating and rescuing the white women, or wreaking revenge for their mistreatment spurred the mainly young, single men on in their mission

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁴ The McLeans were with the camp for sixty-two days. Other white captives, such as Theresa Delaney, Theresa Gowlanlock, William Cameron, and the Quinneys were able to escape after the Battle of Frenchman Butte on May 29. D'Arcy Jenish, *Indian Fall: The Last Great Days of the Plains Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy* (Toronto: Viking, 1999) 250.

⁶⁵ Middleton to A.P. Caron, telegram, 6 June 1885, in *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign, 1885*, eds. Desmond Morton and Reginald H. Roy (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1972) 333.

⁶⁶ Kitty (McLean) Yuill, "Pioneers and Prisoners in the Canadian North West," unpublished manuscript, 62.

to subdue the rebellion.⁶⁷ Delaney and Gowlanlock received the most attention in the press, and Gowlanlock, the younger of the two, was reported dead early on.⁶⁸

The McLean women were not subjects of concern to the same extent as the two Therasas. Carter contends that this was perhaps the result of Mrs. McLean, whose great-grandmother was Native, being partially of Indian descent.⁶⁹ In spite of their mixed genealogy, however, the McLeans seem to have been accepted members of the Euro-Canadian community, and certainly viewed themselves as white.⁷⁰ Kitty McLean even claims in her memoirs that Helen (Murray) McLean and her sister, Eliza, were the first white children born in the northern Alaskan interior.⁷¹ It may not, therefore, have been their racial heritage that deflected focus from the McLean women. The McLean family's status as prisoners was ambiguous, as W.J. McLean had opted for the Fort Pitt civilians to enter the camp.⁷² Moreover, as products of the west who had grown up among First Nations peoples, and could shoot, ride and speak Indian languages, the McLean women did not fit the mold of paragons of vulnerability as well as Delaney and Gowanlock, both migrants from Ontario. The two easterners offered more to the public

⁶⁷ Carter, *Capturing Women*, 74.

⁶⁸ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130 PT.1A, letter to Edgar Dewdney, 11 April 1885.

⁶⁹ Other historians have identified the McLean women as white. Ken Coates and W. R. Morrison refer to Helen McLean's mother as white. Helen McLean, however, was the daughter of Alexander Murray, founder of Fort Yukon, and Ann Campbell, daughter of HBC trader Colin Campbell. Ann Campbell's mother, and Helen McLean's grandmother, Elizabeth McGillivray, was the daughter of a Native woman and Scottish trader John McGillivray. Sarah Carter, "Amelia McLean Paget and *The People of the Plains*," in *Good Intentions: Euro-Canadians Working for Justice Against Aboriginal Subordination*, eds. David Nock and Cecilia Haig-Brown (Vancouver: UBC Press, forthcoming). Kenneth Coates and W.R. Morrison, "More than a Matter of Blood: the Federal Government, the Churches and the Mixed-Blood Populations of the Yukon and the Mackenzie River Valley, 1980-1950," in *1885 and After*, 256.

⁷⁰ For these reasons, the McLeans are situated as white in this study. The tension between their mixed-blood background and their self-identification as white offers insight into how racial identities were constructed in the west, and requires attention beyond the confines of this study.

⁷¹ Yuill, "Pioneers and Prisoners," 8. Thank you to Dr. Sarah Carter for her helpful discussion on this topic.

⁷² Carter, *Capturing Women*, 69.

imagination.

No white woman in the Northwest reported suffering the ‘fate worse than death’ during the rebellion, but some of the Euro-Canadian women in the Frog Lake camp were the subjects of unwanted advances. Two men, Nacotan and Naneesoo, were frightened off by a Métis girl named Genevieve when they crept into the tent where the Therasas were sleeping one night. Roused by their voices, the girl came in from an adjoining tent and berated the two men for disturbing the women.⁷³ The McLean girls were also forced to defend themselves. According to Kitty, they all wore butcher knives in their belts for protection,⁷⁴ and, on one occasion, Amelia severely injured the hand of an intruder who tried to grope her by sticking his hand underneath the edge of the tent.⁷⁵ Some of the Aboriginal women of the camp also feared for the girls’ safety, and formed what Elizabeth calls a protective society. According to the camp rumors of the day, if the Native women felt that any of the girls were in danger of being accosted, the McLean in question would be secreted out of the family’s tent and hid by the often elderly women for the duration of the night.⁷⁶ Kitty reports spending at least one night with Mrs. Manoomin, who “made me sleep on the inside, away from the wall of the tent, for fear I should be stolen by some of the Indian men. She kept a big knife by her side.”⁷⁷

The McLeans endured, and on June 19, the McLeans and the Manns, the last of the captive white families, were located by a search party after being aided in their escape by friendly Woods Cree. All returned to Fort Pitt from their ordeal tired, dirty and hungry, but none of the captives had perished and all were relatively healthy. The McLean girls were apparently quite indignant about the affair. John Donkin recounts that when the McLean family came to Prince Albert in July, the McLean girls were taken

⁷³ Cameron, 70.

⁷⁴ SAB, Sylvia Pusch Collection, R-765.1.2, Kitty (McLean) Yuill, “The Crossing of the Big Muskeg of Loon Lake,” speech given in Toronto, April 1935.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth McLean, “Prisoners of the Indians,” 16.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁷⁷ Yuill, “Pioneers and Prisoners,” 59.

to see their former captors, and “here they gave the imprisoned aborigines a good telling off in their own tongue.”⁷⁸

In the end, white residents had little to fear from their Aboriginal neighbours. Anxieties about Indian attacks on forts and settlements proved to be unfounded, and were based mainly on ignorance and stereotypes about Indians that were propagated in newspapers and literature. Euro-Canadian residents’ distress also stemmed from the fact that they were far outnumbered by Aboriginals. Rumors of unrest that circulated before the rebellion, and the murders of Payne, Tremont and the Frog Lake settlers served to reinforce white residents’ fears. Although these deaths were primarily the result of personal conflicts, in at least some cases, First Nations individuals felt that their white acquaintances were in sufficient danger to warn them of impending trouble or escort them to safety. Moreover, as the Assiniboine attacks on the Pices, Gopsills and Pronguas demonstrate, along with the thwarted attempts on William Cameron’s and John Pritchard’s lives, the civilian casualty count may have been higher had it not been for the actions of quick-thinking Métis, mixed-blood and Indian women.

For white residents of the Saskatchewan territory, the spring of 1885 was marked by fear for their and their families’ safety. Most endured the difficulties of cramped quarters and military rule at Battleford and Prince Albert, while others were forced to cope with more immediate physical and emotional hardships when they were taken captive and marched across the Saskatchewan territory. Very few white residents of the region lost their lives as the result of ‘Indian attacks’, and most emerged physically unscathed. Although the rebellion would be remembered as a difficult and trying time by white settlers, their race afforded them privileges that allowed them to emerge from the conflict in a much better condition than their Aboriginal neighbours.

⁷⁸ Donkin, 158.

CHAPTER 3 - Accidental Rebels: Indians, Métis and English Mixed-Bloods during the Rebellion

For the Aboriginal peoples of the Saskatchewan district, most of whom were already leading a marginal existence, the rebellion was disastrous. Considering the abundance of grievances in the spring of 1885, many Aboriginals likely viewed the Canadian government with a certain degree of contempt, but only a relative few were active and vocal in their defiance of the government. Most Métis, mixed-bloods and Indians feared for their well-being and acted to protect their families, although this manifested in different ways for different groups.

Connections between the mixed-bloods, Métis and First Nations in the Saskatchewan territory in 1885 were complex. Relations between the Métis and Indians were especially ambivalent, due in part to disagreements over hunting territories. Big Bear and Gabriel Dumont, for example, had come into conflict over the buffalo hunt at least once.¹ The strain continued in the early settlement period. Although tension between the Métis and Indians was long-standing, most of the South Branch residents were relatively new arrivals to the Northwest, having immigrated from Red River in the early 1880s. They may have had contact with First Nations groups in Manitoba, but relationships between the two reserves and many individuals in the South Branch community were still in their infancy. According to Diane Payment, relations between the Métis on the South Branch and their First Nations neighbours at Beardy's and One Arrow reserves were sometimes strained and sometimes friendly, but there was always underlying friction.² Documents also indicate that at least some Métis and mixed-bloods

¹ For more information on this incident, see Hugh Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984) 54-55.

² Diane Payment, *"The Free People - Otipemisiwak": Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, Parks Service, Environment Canada, 1990) 71.

looked down upon their First Nations cousins as inferior beings. Riel's Exovedate council, for example, wrote to the neighbouring English mixed-bloods that, united, the Métis and mixed-bloods would be able to "control the Indians."³

Economic privilege and debates over access to land also caused problems. The records of the post-rebellion scrip commission reveal that there was a significant dispute between the South Branch residents and the One Arrow band over shared land boundaries.⁴ Moreover, Métis men often served in positions of authority over First Nations groups, sometimes causing hard feelings. In one such case, Michel Dumas, a Métis from the South Branch, served as farm instructor on the One Arrow reserve. When the rebellion broke out, he confiscated all of the reserve cattle and, along with an armed Métis escort, forced reserve occupants to go to Batoche.⁵

Oral records indicate that relations between First Nations and Métis in the Battleford area were sometimes strained as well. Because of the racism that existed towards Indians, elder Lennox Wuttunee explains, the Métis did their best to distance themselves from their Native neighbours and relatives. "Probably the breeds didn't want to be classed in the same category [as Indians]," he recounts, "and they wouldn't admit their Native heritage and tried to mingle with white people and be considered white." When the rebellion broke out, support for the Métis was low; while the Indians sympathized, they "didn't want to get too involved."⁶ At least some mixed-bloods seem to have identified more closely with the white community than with their Aboriginal relatives. Bresaylor residents Elizabeth Sayers and Archibald Spence "both had some Indian blood in their veins," according to a descendant, "but lived and worked as part of

³ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3585, f.1130 Pt.8, Philip Garnot for Exovedate, Letter to English Half Breeds at St. Andrews and St. Catherines, 23 March 1885.

⁴ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 8B, "Detailed Report Upon All Claims to Land and Right to Participate in the North-West Half-Breed Grant," 6.

⁵ Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997) 72.

⁶ First Nations University of Canada Archives (FNUCA), 1885 Resistance Project, Lennox Wuttunee interview, n.p., n.d.

the non-native community of the northwest [sic].”⁷ Whether or not Métis and mixed-bloods were ‘pretending’ to be white is unclear, but the belief that it occurred was likely enough to negatively affect First Nations’ views of their cousins.

In the spring of 1885, the three groups were also distanced from each other by separate political agendas. G.F.G Stanley held that “fundamentally there was little difference between the half-breed and Indian question. Both were aspects of the same general problem.”⁸ His view of the rebellion held sway for many decades, but more recent scholarship has demonstrated that this was not the case at all. Métis on the South Branch wanted recognition of the titles to their river lots, while First Nations leaders like Big Bear were pushing for the fulfillment of treaty promises. The mixed-blood population shared some of the Métis’ complaints, but were also interested in issues similar to the grievances of their white neighbours, such as the change in the railroad route and lack of a market for their agricultural produce.⁹

Métis, mixed-bloods and Natives also had different connections to their land and the Canadian government in 1885. Treaty Indians were bound to the government by both need and legal agreements. Most were settled on reserves by the outbreak of the rebellion, where the rations provided were essential for survival, leaving many Natives dependent on DIA officials. The Métis and mixed-bloods had no such association with Ottawa, and, having made progress on their land at their own expense, may have felt more of an attachment to their settlements.

There were also important ties between the three groups that bound them to each other. Intermarriage was frequent, and the 1885 scrip commissioners found that there

⁷ Questionnaire for author, Joseph Smith [pseudonym], 24 March 2003. The informant chose to remain anonymous, and because he lived in another province, chose to fill out a questionnaire rather than take part in a telephone interview. Mr. Smith received the list of questions that were posed to the other informants.

⁸ G.F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1936; reprint, with introduction by Thomas Flanagan, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) xxv.

⁹ *Prince Albert Times*, 12 June 1885; Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984) 110-11.

were many Métis and mixed-bloods who had taken treaty in the late 1870s and early 1880s and lived as treaty Indians.¹⁰ The three groups may also have been connected by the obstacles they faced as non-white residents of a Canadian territory. They were not subjected to the same degrees of racism or the same stereotypes, and there were social classes within all three groups, but Aboriginal residents were all at a disadvantage in comparison to their white neighbours when it came to access to economic privilege and resources.¹¹ These discrepancies became even more evident with the outbreak of hostilities in the Northwest.

Aboriginal responses to the rebellion were varied. As is often the case in war-time situations, many people were caught in a “web of circumstances beyond their control or even understanding.” Janice Potter-Mackinnon contends that, in the case of the American Revolution, individuals often did not decide to become either a Patriot or a Loyalist, but rather “decided to follow their leaders, stay with their families, [or] help their neighbours.”¹² This was the case for many Aboriginals in the Saskatchewan territory as well. While much has been written about white concerns regarding Indian actions during the rebellion, it is important to recognize that Aboriginal men and women were just as anxious about their and their families’ safety and well-being as their white neighbours. First Nations residents feared Riel’s men, and found the presence of troops and large numbers of NWMP “particularly unsettling.”¹³ The Battleford area bands, for example, gathered on the Poundmaker reserve to protect themselves from whites who, ironically, had barricaded themselves inside the NWMP fort in fear of an Indian attack.¹⁴

¹⁰ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 8E, “Report on the North-West Half-Breed Commission,” 4.

¹¹ Whites were advantaged by their race when it came to access to economic resources. Whiteness conferred class privilege as well, meaning that Euro-Canadians often had access to opportunities that non-whites did not.

¹² Janice Potter-Mackinnon, *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993) xv.

¹³ Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990) 128.

¹⁴ Stonechild and Waiser, 126.

Individuals' first responses were to protect themselves and their families from harm, but the way in which they did so depended on both what their leaders chose to do and where they were situated in relation to the 'conflict zones'.

According to Joseph Dion, grandnephew of Big Bear, most First Nations and Métis chose to remain neutral during the rebellion. Some, like Antoine Ahenakew, nephew of Chief Ahtakahkoop, worked for the police and HBC as scouts and messengers, but most wanted to avoid any involvement at all.¹⁵ Several groups chose to flee their homes in order to avoid the conflict and contact with the Métis and police, but this was difficult to do, as the harvest had been poor, the winter cold and harsh, and game was depleted. Bands who left the security of the meager food rations provided on their reserves faced possible starvation, but many took the chance in order to protect themselves. Some Frog Lake families seized the opportunity to secure supplies while stores were being looted and burned on April 2, and then disappeared until the 'troubles' were over.¹⁶ The Moosomin and Kahpitikkoo bands near Battleford escaped when Poundmaker's men arrived to convince the two groups to join the larger camp. While the warriors were herding Moosomin's and Kahpitikkoo's cattle, the two bands crossed the river and fled to the bush.¹⁷ Thunderchild and members of his band also left for the bush, but were forced to return when they ran short of supplies.¹⁸

Natives in the Prince Albert area likewise left their reserves in order to protect themselves and avoid being dragged into the conflict. According to Edward Spencer, a teacher on the Mistawasis reserve, the band left the reserve in fear of the Métis after

¹⁵ Deanna Christensen, *Ahtahkakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People, and Their Vision for Survival, 1816-1896* (Shell Lake, SK: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, 2000) 524.

¹⁶ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Indian History Film Project, R-1900, Marion Dillon interview, Seekaskootch reserve, 23 July 1973.

¹⁷ Robert Jefferson, *Fifty Years on the Saskatchewan* (Battleford: Canadian North-West Historical Society, 1929) 135; Joseph Dion, *My Tribe The Crees*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979) 106.

¹⁸ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 4, "Report of the Department of Indian Affairs," xl.

receiving word of the Duck Lake fight.¹⁹ Ahtakahkoop found himself in a similar situation. Having rebuffed Riel's requests for support throughout the winter, Ahtakahkoop feared that Riel would take advantage of his victory at Duck Lake and send his men to the reserve. Upon receiving word of the clash, the band packed up in the dead of night and left for Prince Albert.²⁰ The chief's concerns were apparently valid, as members of Beardy's band were forced to abandon their reserve after being threatened by Riel's militants, and subsequently spent the duration of the rebellion "running and hiding all the time."²¹

Many of those who fled to the bush had no communication with others for weeks, and were unaware of the end of the rebellion. This sometimes led to desperate circumstances. When the Stoney Lake band did not return to their homes after ten weeks, a search party was sent out. They were found in a dire situation, starving and in rags. Wanting to protect the goods the government had given them from theft, they had carried their farm implements on their backs through the forests until the equipment could be hidden, and had kept a chest of tools with them the whole time they were in hiding.²² Similarly, soldiers who came across the Beaver River band on June 14 were overcome by the group's destitution. The Indians were "stripped of everything, their clothes in tatters, they gathered around forming an assembly of bizarre costumes. Their tents were worn and rotten. Their appearance and living conditions reflected abject poverty. The officers returned to camp very thoughtful - they were thinking of the thousands of families spread out in the vast plains, whose misery is represented by the

¹⁹ "Edward Spencer," in *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of Prince Albert Settlement's Early Citizens, 1866-1895*, eds. Manon Lamontagne et al. (Prince Albert: Prince Albert Historical Society, 1985) 49-50.

²⁰ Christensen, 499, 506.

²¹ FNUCA, 1885 Resistance Project, Albert Seesequasis interview, Beardy's reserve, n.d. Most One Arrow residents slipped away and either hid along the river or left the area altogether.

²² Christensen, 530.

unfortunate few Indian families they had just visited.”²³

Other First Nations bands were not able to flee, and were captured by the Métis or other Indians. The Woods Cree at Frog Lake, for example, were taken hostage by the Plains Cree. According to George Stanley (Mesunekwepan), son of the Frog Lake Woods Cree Chief Oneepowahayo, when he returned to his camp after witnessing the murders on April 2, he found that the women in Big Bear’s band had moved their camp closer to that of the Woods Cree, and had taken his mother with them. The family’s tepee had been set up in the center of the camp and the holy stem set outside the door, indicating that they were prisoners.²⁴ Kitty McLean reports that other groups of Woods Cree were “brought in a few tents at a time” as the Plains Cree came across their wintering camps, “always against their wishes.”²⁵ Fifteen Chipewyan families from Cold Lake, along with their priest, Father Legoff, were also reluctantly escorted to the Frog Lake camp.²⁶ Indian agent Ansdell Macrae later reported that the Chipewyans tried to leave several times, but were prevented from doing so.²⁷

The Métis also gathered many unwilling recruits. Men from the One Arrow reserve had their guns and ammunition confiscated and were compelled to join the militants under threat of physical harm,²⁸ and ten families from the Petequaquey reserve, whose former chief, Alexander Cadieux (or Cayen), was one of Riel’s men, were forced

²³ Charles R. Doust, *Cent-vingt Jours de Service Actif: Récit Historique Très Complet de la Campagne du 65eme au Nord-Ouest* [1886], translation (Wetaskiwin: City of Wetaskiwin, 1982) 71-72.

²⁴ George Stanley, “An Account of the Frog Lake Massacre,” in *The Frog Lake ‘Massacre’: Personal Perspectives on Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Stuart Hughes (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976) 164.

²⁵ Kitty (McLean) Yuill, “Pioneers and Prisoners in the Canadian North West,” unpublished manuscript, 67.

²⁶ Hudson Bay Company Archives (HBCA), MS 372(5707), W.J. McLean, “Reminiscences of the Tragic Events at Frog Lake and in the Fort Pitt District with Some of the Experiences of the Writer and his Family during the North West Rebellion of 1885.”

²⁷ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3710, f.19550-3, Ansdell Macrae to Edgar Dewdney, 23 September 1885.

²⁸ George Mike interview with author, Beardy’s reserve, 6 March 2003.

to go to Batoche.²⁹ Chief Whitecap and his band were also escorted from their reserve near Saskatoon to the South Branch by armed Métis chaperons.³⁰

Other groups were drawn into a more active role in the rebellion out of desperation, circumstance or a desire for revenge. The two Frog Lake bands were entangled by the actions of a few individuals, and the Battleford area Indians were also unwillingly involved. Upon hearing of the Duck Lake battle, and fearing for their safety, the Battleford area Cree, including the bands of Poundmaker, Little Pine and Lucky Man, gathered together for protection and guidance and sent a group of about sixty men and women to Battleford to declare their loyalty to the Queen and ask for rations. Their actions, unfortunately, were misconstrued as hostile, and Indian agent John Rae refused to leave the safety of the NWMP fort to meet with them.³¹ After waiting for several hours with no response from Rae, the women began to take supplies from the stores and homes. The Crees' misunderstood visit to Battleford, combined with the actions of the few Assiniboine who murdered Payne and Tremont, were interpreted by white residents as a full-scale Indian rebellion.

First Nations individuals and groups were not totally innocent of hostile actions. Undoubtedly there were some individuals, most likely young men yearning for the glory days of their fathers, who freely committed hostile acts. There seem to have been men from both One Arrow and Beardy's who joined Riel on their own, but there is reluctance among informants to name these people.³² At least some men took advantage of the chaos created by the rebellion to gain material items and settle personal scores. The capture of some freighters and their goods, as well some Bresaylor Métis and their

²⁹ Stonechild and Waiser, 80-81; Christensen, 501.

³⁰ The group, under an armed Métis escort, were met by settlers at Saskatoon. Gerald Willoughby, an acquaintance of Whitecap, later testified that it was evident that Whitecap did not want to participate in the rebellion and had clearly not left of his own free will. *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.52, *Queen vs White Cap*, p 47.

³¹ For more information on this incident, see Stonechild and Waiser, Chapter 5.

³² George Stephen Sliwa, "Standing the Test of Time: A History of the Beardy's/Okemasis Reserve, 1876-1951," (MA thesis, Trent University, 1993) 85-86. FNUCA, Lennox Wuttunee interview; FNUCA, 1885 Resistance Project, Alice Peeteuce interview, Beardy's reserve, n.d.

priest, Father Louis Cochin, have been attributed to the Poundmaker band, as were the capture and slaughter of many cattle.³³ HBC posts at Waterhen Lake, Lac La Biche and Green Lake were looted by resident Indians,³⁴ and, in at least one case, First Nations neighbours were the target of Aboriginal looters. The Muskeg Lake band, led by the women, looted the Ahtakahkoop reserve after it was abandoned.³⁵

Beyond the murders, however, most of the supposedly illegal acts committed by First Nations individuals can be attributed to self-preservation. Looting and the slaughter of animals provided starving Indians with food and supplies. Neither the Battleford nor the Frog Lake Cree (beyond the nine murders) took action against their white neighbours, and did not engage in military maneuvers until attacked by the Canadian militia at Cut Knife Hill and Frenchman Butte. The role of the hostages is unclear, although in the Frog Lake camp, the white hostages were seemingly held to protect the Cree from harm.

Like their Native cousins, the majority of the Métis and mixed-bloods viewed the rebellion with apprehension and feared conflict with the Indians, police and soldiers, and Riel's men. Concerns about hostile Indians were apparently not unfounded, as mixed-blood Joseph McKay was accosted in his home on the Sweetgrass reserve on March 30. Luckily, his aggressors were disconcerted by his crying children and left the house, allowing the family to escape to Mrs. McKay's brother's home near Bresaylor, and

³³ The Indians' role in the capture of the freight line and the Bresaylor residents is unclear. Father Cochin testified after the rebellion that the warriors who came to capture the Bresaylor residents were led by Métis Norbert Delorme. Some freighters also stated that the group that took them hostage was under Métis command. Cochin reported, however, that the First Nations men in the group who came to Bresaylor threatened some of the Bresaylor residents, telling the settlers that they would either "fight them or kill them" if they deserted. *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.52, *Queen vs. Poundmaker*, testimony of Father Louis Cochin, p 322; *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.52, *Queen vs. Poundmaker*, testimony of Wesley N. Fish, p 315.

³⁴ Douglas Light, *Footprints in the Dust* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications, 1987) 287-88.

³⁵ Christensen, 518.

eventually to Prince Albert.³⁶

Support for Riel was low among the Métis and the mixed-bloods. Some men, often older Métis men who continued to live as hunters and freighters, joined Riel, but most people did not want to be involved. In some cases, families were divided when sons refused to join their fathers in Riel's cause.³⁷ Select individuals took advantage of the situation created by the rebellion,³⁸ but many Métis men, and especially those on the South Branch, were coerced into joining Riel's cause. The sisters at St. Laurent recorded that the fathers of several of their students were forced to take up arms,³⁹ and Riel's council had to impose an order-in-council prohibiting the men from returning to their farms in order to keep them at Batoche.⁴⁰

Like the Indians, Métis families also left their homes to avoid the uprising. Even before the Duck Lake fight, NWMP and volunteers from Prince Albert found "half-breed" homes between Prince Albert and Fort Carlton deserted.⁴¹ Some of the families who left the South Branch arrived at Fort à la Corne, northeast of Prince Albert, barefoot and without food or supplies.⁴² On May 15, soldiers came across a group who had left their homes after being told by Riel that they must join his cause within forty-eight

³⁶ SAB, Ruth Buck Papers, R-20 IV.1, Arthur McKay, "McKay Family Escapes Indians," in *Reminiscences of the Riel Rebellion of 1885 as Told by Old Timer of Prince Albert and District Who Witnessed Those Stirring Days*, pamphlet, n.d, n.p.; Louis Cochin, *The Reminiscences of Louis Cochin*, ed. Campbell Innes (Battleford: Canadian North-West Historical Society, 1927) 30.

³⁷ David Lee, "The Métis Militant Rebels of 1885," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 21 no.3 (1989) 9.

³⁸ Métis men and women near Fort Carlton, for example, looted the fort after the NWMP accidentally set it on fire and abandoned it on March 27. HBCA, Private Records, E.9/27 fo. 64-65, declaration of George Robertson, Fort Carlton, 25 July 1885.

³⁹ St. Laurent Annals, 19 March 1885, in *Journeying Through a Century: Sister Pioneers, 1883-1983*, ed. Shirley Majeau (Edmonton: Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, 1983) 162.

⁴⁰ Public Archives of Canada (PAC), Edgar Dewdney Papers, vol 6, p2385. As cited in Beal and McLeod, 260.

⁴¹ Glenbow Archives (GB), microfilm AC Laurie, William Laurie, "Gleanings from my Memory of Fifty Odd Years Ago," unpublished manuscript, 1924, n.p.

⁴² HBCA, Private Records, E.9/29 fo. 123, Philip Turner, "Fort a La Corne Refugees."

hours. They had no tents, and, after finding Fort à la Corne deserted,⁴³ had been wandering about the area in order to avoid both the Métis and the Indians.⁴⁴ Other reports of abandoned ‘half-breed’ homes across the territory abound in the archival sources. According to Louis Goulet, who came across several such homes in the Loon Lake region, “fear of the rebellion had obviously driven the people out.”⁴⁵

The Bresaylor settlement offers a window on how racial divisions and boundaries operated during the rebellion, and provides insight into the impact the rebellion had at a personal and community level. Bresaylor consisted of intermarried mixed-blood and Métis families who were also connected to the nearby reserves. Poundmaker and members of his band were regular visitors to the settlement before the rebellion, and traded game, fish and berries with residents for tea, tobacco and clothing.⁴⁶ When the rebellion broke out, the community received warnings from both Indian and white acquaintances. A woman named Bright Eyes came to the settlement to tell the Taylor family that the Indians were coming to burn their home,⁴⁷ while a NWMP constable arrived on a “well-lathered horse” to advise residents to take a barge and seek shelter at Battleford.⁴⁸

The news of the danger revealed deep divisions between the French Métis and English mixed-bloods in the seemingly unified community. In a population so heavily

⁴³ Residents of the fort along with Indians and ‘half-breed’ families who had taken refuge there abandoned the fort for Cumberland House on April 15. The trip, normally completed in three days, took twenty-two days on the ice-encrusted river. HBCA, Post Records, B/2.a.9, Fort à la Corne journal, 1885.

⁴⁴ H.P. Dwight to A.P. Caron, 15 May 1885, in *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign, 1885*, eds. Desmond Morton and Reginald H. Roy (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1972) 281.

⁴⁵ Guillaume Charette, ed., *Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of a Prairie Métis*, trans. Ray Ellenwood (Winnipeg: Editions Bois-Brûlés, 1980) 143.

⁴⁶ Joseph Smith questionnaire.

⁴⁷ Bernice McDonough, “Alexander and Mary Taylor,” in *Bresaylor Between the Battle and the North Saskatchewan Rivers: The Bresaylor Settlement, the Hamlet of Bresaylor, Bresaylor School District (3125), Arbor Hill School District (3270), Federal School District (4048), 1882-1992* (Bresaylor, SK: Bresaylor Heritage Museum Association Inc., 1992) 325-26. McDonough is a granddaughter of the Taylors.

⁴⁸ Joseph Smith questionnaire.

intermarried, the divisions between Métis and mixed-blood were not always simple, and sometimes the decision about what to do and who to support tore families apart. “The mixed-bloods of the Saskatchewan river country,” Light explains, “were forced to take sides even though the majority of these families had relatives on both sides. The animosity created was hard to forget and often lasted for years.”⁴⁹ In some cases, family members took different paths. Jean-Baptiste Sayer of Bresaylor was the leader of a group of Indians and Métis who captured a freight line, while his brother, Guillaume, served with the Battleford Rifles.⁵⁰

The mixed-bloods of Bresaylor were, for the most part, well-off, with successful farms and livestock operations. According to Robert Jefferson, they “had no need of and expected no government assistance.”⁵¹ They had already been through one rebellion in Red River, and, although they were aware of the plight of their First Nations neighbours, and many were even sympathetic, they had no interest in becoming involved in the conflict.⁵² Consequently, most of the mixed-bloods sought refuge in Battleford, both for protection from their First Nations neighbours and Riel’s emissaries and perhaps to demonstrate their loyalty.⁵³

While Jefferson is less than kind to the Métis in his memoirs, he does note that the Métis were less experienced farmers than the mixed-bloods, and tended to live more often as hunters. As a result, they were poorer, and he argues that it was their “poverty and their ignorance,” along with their closer ties to the South Branch Métis that led some of them to sympathize with Riel.⁵⁴ Father Cochin recounted that the Métis wanted the protection of the fort, but that agents of Riel’s convinced the French not to move to

⁴⁹ Light, 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵¹ Jefferson, 123.

⁵² Joseph Smith questionnaire.

⁵³ C.D. Denney, “In Memory of Mary Rose (Pritchard) Sayers: The Last Witness,” *Saskatchewan History* 24 no.2 (Spring 1971) 71-72.

⁵⁴ Jefferson, 123.

Battleford. The Métis also feared arrest, but did not want to be directly involved in the rebellion either, and so chose to remain on their farms. It seems, however, that they had a change of heart, and were preparing to evacuate to the fort when men from the Poundmaker camp arrived.⁵⁵ As the Bresaylor residents had neither adequate arms nor ammunition to defend themselves, they were taken prisoner, their homes ransacked, and their livestock confiscated.⁵⁶ Father Cochin and fifteen families remained in the camp until Poundmaker's surrender in May.

Some of the families may have gone on their own to the Indian camp. Joseph Smith, a descendant of the founding families of the settlement, recounts that it was common knowledge that "some of my relatives were thought to have gone willingly with the Indians after the rebellion started, namely the Sayers and Bremners."⁵⁷ Their reasons for doing this are unclear. Some family heads may have joined in the name of the rebellion, but, more likely, they felt that the Natives, and especially Poundmaker, would afford them protection.⁵⁸ In any case, their actions, according to Smith, were resented by others in the community. Interestingly enough, First Nations elders testify that the Bresaylor residents were taken into the camp to protect them, but the Bresaylor histories indicate that residents saw themselves as prisoners.⁵⁹

For those who left for Battleford, their experiences once they reached the fort were not all pleasant. Like the Indians, the mixed-bloods' intentions were

⁵⁵ William Caplette, "Charles Bremner," in *Bresaylor Between the Battle and the North Saskatchewan Rivers*, 78. Stonechild and Waiser argue that, at this point (first week of April), the Poundmaker camp was under the control of emissaries of Riel, who had allied themselves with Assiniboine members of the group. Stonechild and Waiser, 130-34.

⁵⁶ Cochin, 32.

⁵⁷ Joseph Smith questionnaire.

⁵⁸ Poundmaker, who had given Bresaylor residents his personal assurance of safety only two weeks earlier, was dismayed to learn of the raid on the community, but could do nothing to stop it. Stonechild and Waiser, 130-34.

⁵⁹ Tyrone Tootoosis explains that the Bresaylor residents were being "protected by the band." FNUCA, 1885 Resistance project, Tyrone Tootoosis interview, Prince Albert, n.d. Bernice McDonough and William Caplette both refer to the residents as prisoners. *Bresaylor Between the Battle and the North Saskatchewan Rivers*, 78, 326.

misinterpreted, and they discovered that their Métis relatives' fears of arrest were not unfounded. On April 3, Alex Bremner was sent to Battleford by the Bresaylor mixed-bloods to advise the police that the group was on its way to the fort, and to request police protection during the trip. According to the *Saskatchewan Herald*, "the people [Bremner] represented not being very savory, and his stories contradictory," Inspector Morris put him under arrest.⁶⁰ Later, when they arrived at the fort, the entire group of Bresaylor mixed-bloods were detained; the men were jailed and the women and children were forced to camp outside of the fort, a position that afforded them no protection in the event of an attack. Most were released shortly after due to lack of evidence, and the women and children were eventually moved into a tent inside the fort. Several of the men who were arrested went on to serve as civilian volunteers, or as scouts or interpreters for the police and military.⁶¹

Many mixed-bloods and Métis came under fire during the rebellion, either as combatants in the various battles, or as bystanders. The Bresaylor residents in the Poundmaker camp were caught in the battle at Cut Knife Hill. Father Cochin recalled that, during the fight, the Bresaylor families moved out of reach of the shells, and in the opposite direction of the Native families.⁶² Several mixed-bloods and Métis, like the Pritchards, were also among those who were with the Frog Lake camp at Frenchman Butte and Loon Lake. Many Métis men were combatants at Fish Creek on April 23, and others, like the Tourond family, who were forced to abandon their home when Middleton's troops came upon their farm suddenly, came into close contact with the soldiers.

The clash that has come to symbolize the rebellion, however, is the Battle of Batoche. Beginning May 9, a small force of Indians and Métis numbering no more than four hundred held off General Middleton's much larger and better equipped forces for three days until Riel's men capitulated on May 12. The combat caused fear, deprivation

⁶⁰ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 23 April 1885.

⁶¹ Joseph Smith questionnaire; Light, 210.

⁶² Cochin, 34.

and hardship on the South Branch, but the outcome of the battle was disastrous. Riel's defeat is often cited as the most influential legacy of Batoche for the Métis, but few Métis had supported the armed resistance in the first place. Although the military loss was disheartening, many were glad to see the end of the rebellion. The primary and immediate effect on the South Branch residents was the resulting property loss. Even before the battle, Canadian forces ransacked houses and slaughtered Métis animals.⁶³ General Middleton issued an order prohibiting looting, but according to L.R. Ord, a surveyor among the ranks at Batoche, the General "shut down on looting in the most effective manner by taking charge of a good deal of the furs himself."⁶⁴ Alexander Laidlaw, a soldier from Halifax, is representative of many of the young men responsible for the chaos. Although Laidlaw admits that the troops' actions may have seemed like "wanton destruction" to some, he argues that destroying Métis homes was justified because "we were in a comparatively unknown country, and dealing with a foe who were up to every twist and turn, and who, had they managed to outflank and destroy us, would have used these very houses against us as a means of annoyance."⁶⁵

The destruction continued after the Canadians' victory. The defeat, Payment argues, was followed by "general misery." Homes that had not already been burned or shelled during the fight were picked clean. Soldiers seem to have taken whatever they could, regardless of its value. Ord's booty consisted of cutlery and tin dishes, some soap and a bath towel. Many Métis fled, while others clustered around the mission, no doubt seeking both comfort from the priests and nuns and protection from the soldiers.⁶⁶

The Battle of Batoche did not officially end the rebellion, as clashes still

⁶³ Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Jules Le Chevallier Papers, acc. 71.220, item 1892, Journal of R.P. Valentin Vegreville, 8 May 1885.

⁶⁴ L.R. Ord, *Reminiscences of a Bungler by One of the Bunglers* (Toronto: Grip Printing & Publishing Company, 1887) 35.

⁶⁵ Alexander Laidlaw, *From the St. Lawrence to the North Saskatchewan: Being some incidents connected with the detachment of 'A' Battery, Regiment Canadian Artillery, who composed part of the North West Field Force in the Rebellion of 1885* (Halifax: s.n., 1885) 29.

⁶⁶ Archives de l'Archevêché de Saint-Boniface, Taché fonds, Report of Father G. Cloutier, 1886, vol.1, 35.

occurred at Frenchman Butte on May 28 and at Loon Lake on June 3, but news of Riel's defeat offered a sense of victory to both the militia and white residents. After the battles of Frenchman Butte, Cut Knife Hill and Loon Lake, groups began to break away from the Poundmaker and Frog Lake camps. Residents who had been held prisoner made their way to safety, while others who felt they were in danger of being arrested turned themselves in or escaped to the United States. Priests across the region had to feed starving families who had been in hiding for the duration of the rebellion.⁶⁷ Some Natives, Métis and mixed-bloods who had been forced to leave their homes were able to return, but most houses in the region that had been left unoccupied had been looted. The Ahtakahkoop band, for example, returned to their reserve on June 18, only to find that most of their possessions had been stolen and some of their livestock killed.

For the Aboriginal residents of the Saskatchewan territory, the rebellion was just as fearful an experience as it was for their white neighbours. There was no collusion between the Métis and the Indians. In fact, most Natives, mixed-bloods and Métis wanted no part of Riel's plan, but instead tried to protect their families from harm. Some fled to the bush, and, as a result, faced starvation and deprivation. Others, like the Bresaylor mixed-bloods, sought shelter at a town or fort, only to find that they were not trusted by Euro-Canadians, and were arrested or not afforded the same protection as white inhabitants. Many were drawn into the rebellion unwittingly. Some were made prisoners, or forced to participate against their will, while others, in an effort to protect themselves and their families, followed their leaders and became accidental rebels. Only a select few chose to fight against the Canadian government, but some took advantage of the chaos in the Saskatchewan district to settle personal grudges or secure supplies for themselves and their families. For individuals who had already been leading a marginal existence, the rebellion and its after-effects were disastrous.

⁶⁷ PAA, Missionary Oblates Collection, acc. 84.400, item 720, Vegreville to Middleton, telegram, 31 May 1885.

CHAPTER 4 - The Gendered Nature of War: Men and Women During the 1885 Northwest Rebellion

“One of the most significant insights for feminist historians in studying both masculinity and femininity,” Cecilia Morgan contends, “is that women are not the only ones to ‘carry’ gender.”¹ In the study of women’s history over the last twenty years or so, the term ‘gender’ has often been used interchangeably to mean ‘women’, the implication being that women were the only ones to whom gendered studies applied. More recently, scholars have begun to examine men as gendered beings as well, and, as Adele Perry claims, to “conceptualize gender as a dynamic structure that gives shape to the identities and experiences of both men and women.”² When historians of gender turn their attention to men, and especially to heterosexual white men, the idea that the straight white man is ‘normal’, the standard to which all others are compared, and therefore beyond the range of analysis and scrutiny, begins to disintegrate. What becomes clear is that men, like women, are subject to constructions of gender, and both masculinity and femininity are historical concepts that deserve scholars’ attentions. Studying men as gendered persons offers insight into women as gendered persons, but, more importantly, gender can “serve as a window through which other systems of power may be glimpsed.”³

As Sarah Carter, Adele Perry, and Jean Barman have demonstrated, constructions of gender in the Canadian west in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were intimately linked to race. Similar to evaluating men as gendered subjects,

¹ Cecilia Morgan, *Public Women and Virtuous Men: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 13.

² Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 8.

³ Morgan, 7.

examining 'white' as a racial category exposes otherwise unseen connections between gender, race and power, revealing that they are connected and interdependent. In the Canadian north, according to Myra Rutherdale, gender may have been molded by the Victorian and Edwardian ideologies denoting that men and women must occupy separate spheres, but on the missionary frontier gender roles were fluid, and adapted to meet the circumstances that male and female missionaries found themselves in. New spheres were consequently established for both men and women.⁴ In the Saskatchewan district in 1885, a frontier community at war, gender roles were similarly changeable and inextricably tied to race.

Scholars such as these have established that the intersection of race and gender results in many different masculinities and femininities, each dependent on time and place. Examining the ways in which gender and race converge to create and modify power systems is essential to understanding how specific societies operated. Janice Potter-Mackinnon argues that "to understand the women, it is necessary to cast our net widely and examine aspects of the broader society - particularly the relationship between men and women."⁵ In the case of the Saskatchewan territory in 1885, the pre-rebellion history of the region and the rebellion itself are the backdrop for men's and women's experiences during and after the conflict.

One aspect that requires particular consideration in an examination of the ways that men and women experienced the Northwest Rebellion is the gendered construction of military ideology in times of war. "The equation of the military with masculinity and with men," Louise May contends, "appears to be one of the most persistent of gender definitions, cross-culturally and throughout history."⁶ The military and military

⁴ Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002) xiv.

⁵ Janice Potter-Mackinnon, *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993) 5.

⁶ Louise May, "Worthy Warriors and Unruly Amazons: Sino-Western Historical Accounts and Imaginative Images of Women in Battle" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1985) 56. As cited in Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Madeline Verchères and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 24-25.

activities have generally been viewed as exclusively male endeavors. This in itself is significant, as Morgan explains that:

Gender relations have played a vital role in shaping a number of institutions, such as the military, where either the complete exclusion of women or their relegation to positions of subordination has been critically important - some might argue essential - to the formation of hierarchical structures dominated by men. And those narratives used to explain and give meaning to events and processes considered central to 'nation building' are often structured and defined by gender relations.⁷

Men's roles in war and the military are defined in opposition to those of women, and the rhetoric that precludes the recognition of women in the military realm is also used to exclude them from public life. Patriotism, courage and loyalty are considered masculine characteristics, leaving women little room to participate in the discourse of war except as victims or symbols of virtue. In war, men are supposed to be the defenders; they are actors with initiative and will. Women are the defended, the objects that men act upon. Women often acted as helpmates as well, but the binary nature of the discourse does not permit discursive discussion of men and women who do not fit the mold. There is no place for women who acted as nurses or camp followers, or non-military men like missionaries or doctors. Studies like Morgan's and Potter-Mackinnon's demonstrate, however, that neither women nor men adhere strictly to the roles set out for them in wartime situations, and both race and gender are determining factors in how individuals experience military conflict.

In the spring of 1885, Métis, mixed-blood, First Nations and white men all took it as their duty to protect their women and children from harm. Race determined, to a large extent, how men went about this, but manhood in wartime in all groups meant functioning as armed protectors, and men responded as such. Warrior societies took control of Native bands, Métis men at Batoche were conscripted into Riel's forces upon threat of harm to their families, and at Battleford, Prince Albert and other settlements across the Northwest, men who sought refuge in towns and forts formed civilian home

⁷ Morgan, 11.

guards.

The historical sources available facilitate an examination of white men's responses to the rebellion, as most of the records left behind were produced by Euro-Canadian men. They were certainly concerned for the safety of their families. When civilian volunteers accompanied the NWMP to evacuate Fort Carlton, the men insisted that they return to Prince Albert as soon as possible in order to guard their homes and property. According to Commissioner Irvine, "this they considered their sacred duty...in order to prevent an attack by the rebels, the success of which could have had no other meaning than a pillage of the town and settlement, and doubtless a massacre of some of its people."⁸ Such men were privileged by both their race and gender, and, as white male citizens, were able to call upon the Canadian government to aid them in fulfilling their roles as protectors. The robust men of the Saskatchewan territory adopted the language of gender to call attention to their plight and strengthen their petitions. Civilians' pleas to Ottawa are filled with references to the 'poor women and children' who were at risk from an inherent Indian attack. On April 14, General Middleton wrote to his superiors in Ottawa that the NWMP in both Battleford and Prince Albert had sent him messages of distress, referencing "defenseless women and children" and calling for the Canadian militia's assistance. Middleton was skeptical, and commented that he doubted that either town was in any real danger and that both Inspector Morris and Commander Irvine were "scared and unfit." Nevertheless, the general was unwilling to take the chance that white women and children would come under attack, or that any white women would suffer the 'fate worse than death', and subsequently dispatched Colonel Otter to Battleford and his own troops nearer to Prince Albert.⁹

Even the Mounties, the model of masculinity in western Canadian history, could not live up to the roles set out for them. On March 30, upon receiving word of the clash at Duck Lake, Frog Lake residents sent their small police contingent of away. Rather

⁸ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 8a, Pt. II, "NWMP Commissioner's Report," p26.

⁹ Middleton to A.P. Caron, 14 April 1885, in *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign, 1885*, eds. Desmond Morton and Reginald H. Roy (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1972) 176.

than relying on the NWMP for security and protection, the white population of Frog Lake feared that the police presence would only exacerbate the situation, and felt safer without them in the settlement.¹⁰ The Mounties at Fort Pitt, led by Inspector Francis Dickens, similarly failed to act as manly defenders when they avoided the potentially hostile actions of the Frog Lake Cree by escaping by boat down the North Saskatchewan River, their safe departure ensured by the actions of Helen McLean.¹¹

Moreover, Irvine's and Morris' pleas to Middleton indicate reveal that the men of Battleford and Prince Albert, including the police, who were barricaded against an Indian attack that never came, felt incapable of defending themselves and their families. What would, in later years, be lauded as the courageous and competent civilian home guards were, in reality, collections of poorly-armed and overwhelmingly inexperienced farmers and merchants. Many members of the civilian corps served their time with no arms at all. Battleford residents fled their homes in such a hurry that many men had left their guns behind, and the situation was similar at Prince Albert, where sentries borrowed guns from others who were off-duty.¹²

Aboriginal men were also poorly armed as a result of years of destitution. Several warriors at Cut Knife Hill did not own a gun, but instead equipped themselves with knives and axes.¹³ The Métis were similarly under supplied, and a shortage of ammunition contributed to the loss at Batoche. Aboriginal men's efforts to protect their families were further hindered by their inability to access the same privileges as their white neighbours. Some Aboriginals were able to take refuge in towns or forts, but their safety was not as highly valued as that of the white citizens. Race also precluded non-

¹⁰ Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997) 111.

¹¹ See p. 48 for a more detailed account of this event.

¹² R.K. Allen, a soldier with Middleton, reported when he arrived in Prince Albert on May 19 that there were about 200 police and four companies of volunteers, and only one half of them were armed. Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), R.K. Allan Diary, R-E3255, 19 May 1885; Douglas Light, *Footprints in the Dust* (North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Publications, 1987) 173-74.

¹³ Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe The Crees*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979) 101.

white men from seeking assistance from the police and militia. Most Natives and Métis instead felt that it was necessary to protect their families against the actions of the Canadian forces and NWMP. Those paragons of courage and manhood, the Canadian troops, fulfilled the role of protector and liberator only for white residents of the Saskatchewan territory.

Many men in the region, white and Aboriginal, could not act as protectors because they were taken prisoner. Unable to prevent their captivity in the first place, they did their best to ensure the safety of their families within the camps, but the captives could not function as armed defenders. Some men who were taken prisoner found other ways to fulfill masculine roles, at least from their point of view. W.J. McLean emphasizes his position as mediator in his memoirs, claiming that he protected his family by bringing them into the camp, and then acted in the interests of all of the white prisoners and inhabitants of the district by counseling Big Bear and the Woods Cree to act peaceably.¹⁴ Interestingly, McLean does not figure as a guardian in any of his daughters' accounts. Rather, the girls identify Aboriginal women in the camp as the ones who kept them from harm.

Rhetoric about women's safety abounded during the rebellion, but many husbands disregarded their roles as protectors and left their wives at home by themselves during the rebellion. Race was a factor in determining which women stayed on their own. The fear of a white woman suffering the 'fate worse than death' precluded white women from remaining alone in the conflict areas.¹⁵ Several First Nations, mixed-blood and Métis women, on the other hand, were left to their own devices, and there seems to have been less concern on the part of white men about Aboriginal women's welfare.

¹⁴ Hudson Bay Company Archives (HBCA), MS 372(5707), W.J. McLean, "Reminiscences of the Tragic Events at Frog Lake and in the Fort Pitt District with Some of the Experiences of the Writer and his Family during the North West Rebellion of 1885."

¹⁵ One exception is Saskatoon, where some women stayed on their farms alone or with their children while their husbands left to take advantage of the economic opportunities the rebellion created. Saskatoon residents, however, did not feel as threatened as their counterparts in Prince Albert and Battleford as they were farther removed from the 'hot spots' of the rebellion. Middleton's forces also camped at Clarke's Crossing, only miles from Saskatoon.

Some white husbands left their Métis and Indian wives unaccompanied where no white woman would have been. George Ness's wife, Elise Delorme, remained on their farm with "rebels lurking in the bushes" when Ness fled in order to avoid being arrested by Riel's soldiers.¹⁶ Many Métis women on the South Branch were also forced to fend for themselves when their husbands and fathers were conscripted by Dumont and Riel. Perhaps Euro-Canadian men saw Aboriginal women, who were usually long-time residents of the Northwest, as more competent than white women and better able to deal with the situations and pressures brought about by the rebellion. Aboriginal women's sexual virtue was circumspect, however; they were seen as loose and immoral, and, as such, could not suffer the 'fate worse than death'. While some white men may have left their Aboriginal wives alone because they felt that the women were both safe and capable, others may have viewed their non-white wives or companions as expendable, or not worthy of the same protection as white women.

The rhetoric surrounding men's roles during the rebellion was complicated, and, in many important ways, does not reflect the reality of men's experiences. Men in the Saskatchewan district strove to fill the masculine roles set out for them as courageous defenders of family and home, but in many cases were unable to do so or chose not to. The extent to which men were able to protect and defend their families was often determined by race. White men were able to call upon the Canadian government for assistance, while Aboriginal men were left to their own devices. Many of those who stepped into the role paid the ultimate price, as men always do in war. All groups felt the loss of sons, husbands and fathers who died fighting to protect their families and communities. Following the rebellion, however, Aboriginal men were not recognized in the same way for their war-time activities as white men were. The role of hero was reserved for soldiers, police, and other white males, leaving non-white men to be cast as

¹⁶ Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Missionary Oblates Collection, acc. 84.400, item 731, story by George Ness as told to Mrs. Ducharme.

rebels and criminals.¹⁷

Just as men were not always the champions they were supposed to be, neither were women weak and defenseless. Morgan argues that, during the War of 1812, a war which, like the Northwest Rebellion, was fought on residents' doorsteps, white women and children were held up as symbolic reminders to Upper Canadian men of their duty. Consequently, they were recognized only as the reasons for men's activities rather than as actors themselves.¹⁸ Aboriginal women, on the other hand, were often portrayed as active agents in wartime situations, but the discourse surrounding them was negative and dehumanizing. During both the American Indian wars and the 1885 Rebellion, Indian women were depicted in the press as savages who committed horrible acts and drove their warriors to inhumane behavior. The *Prince Albert Times*, for example, reported in June 1885 that the Sioux women at Batoche had "bargained with Riel for the privilege of killing the women of Prince Albert."¹⁹ Sarah Carter's analysis of representations of femininity in the region leads her to conclude that these depictions of Indian women were "completely fabricated."²⁰ But, while most tales of 'savage' actions were false or exaggerated, some white members of the Indian camps report such activity in their memoirs. Many of the accounts are second-hand, and therefore suspect, but Father Cochin details a scene that he himself observed. The day after Cut Knife Hill, the priest went to the battleground to bury the dead. There he found the body of a white soldier who had been "stripped of his garments and horribly mutilated by the squaws." A deceased First Nations warrior nearby was untouched. Cochin did not witness the act, and therefore could have been mistaken about the perpetrators, but he explains that the

¹⁷ Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) 114. John Pritchard, into whose care Gowanlock and Delaney were placed, was lauded by the two women as their saviour and hero immediately after their release. The press and the women's subsequent publication, however, tarnished this image and left him to be cast as an unsavory halfbreed with few redeeming qualities.

¹⁸ Morgan, 40-41.

¹⁹ *Prince Albert Times*, 12 June 1885.

²⁰ Carter, *Capturing Women*, 8.

women's attentions to the soldier's body were their way of wreaking revenge for their husbands' deaths in combat.²¹

In any case, such images of Indian women, as in other colonial settings, galvanized troops and offered whites a sense of moral superiority, but did not adequately represent First Nations women's experience in war. Caroline James, one of the few authors to consider Native women's involvement in war, explains that, during the American Nez Perce war of 1877, Nez Perce women suffered all of the same "hardships, atrocities and ragged conditions" that the chiefs and warriors did.²² Their gender and race, however, rendered their stories inconsequential. Images of savage, dirty Indian women served white agendas more effectively than tales of courage or hardship, just as depictions of white women as weak, helpless and in need of protection were required to justify masculine wartime stereotypes. None of these images effectively conveyed the realities of women's experiences, but they demonstrate, as Adele Perry illustrates for the case of colonial British Columbia, that "gender derived its particular shape and significance not from its separateness but from its deep connections to race." As in British Columbia, what it meant to be a white woman and what it meant to be an Indian woman in the Saskatchewan territory in 1885 was "profoundly different," and those meanings were structured by society to afford white women privilege and authority.²³

Although war is defined as a male activity, it is women who are called upon to maintain and resurrect communities. One of the Nez Perce women interviewed by James explains:

There were women and children that were also with the group of men that were persecuted [during the war of 1877]. They had to become warriors for that time...I think this is forgotten a lot. People tend to think that the men were the heroes of the war, but to me the women that had to gather up the deceased people, they had to take care of the orphan children. To me, these were the

²¹ Louis Cochin, *The Reminiscences of Louis Cochin*, ed. Campbell Innes (Battleford: Canadian North-West Historical Society, 1927) 35.

²² Caroline James, *Nez Perce Women in Transition, 1877-1990* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1996) 127.

²³ Perry, 198.

strong women; they had to be. They had no choice. That was their job, to be strong for them. They had to recoup, to gather things once again: they had to rebuild their homes, structures. It was hard work. It was the women and their backbones. They had to do this; they had to hold things together. They had to find themselves.²⁴

The women of the Saskatchewan territory were no different. First Nations, Métis, mixed-blood and white women continued in their traditional roles as caretakers, although the conditions they faced during the rebellion sometimes forced them to do this in unconventional ways and in dangerous situations. Women were responsible for feeding their families, and often took on the responsibility of provisioning troops and caring for wounded soldiers as well. Some white women were even able to capitalize on the economic opportunities created by the conflict. They did laundry and provided food to the militia and the HBC stores. Bread, butter, eggs and milk were sold for a profit,²⁵ and even the nuns at Batoche charged Canadian soldiers for tea and bread.²⁶

In the barricades at Battleford and Prince Albert, military life interfered with women's duties and their ability to capitalize on their skills. Thirty women and thirty-two children were billeted in the barracks room at Fort Battleford where Mary Laurie and her children lived for three months.²⁷ Each family was assigned only enough space to spread their blankets on the floor, and the crowded conditions strained everyone's patience. Effie Storer, who was eighteen at the time, recalled that "many of the women were high strung from the strain of conditions," and the children, who she pointed out were ordinary children who cried when they hurt themselves and wanted a drink of

²⁴ James, 132.

²⁵ Many women were likely paid in their husbands' names, but some, like Mrs. Thomas Welsh and Sarah Gray (who may not have had living partners) received payment for their services in their own names. HBCA, Private Records, E.9/21 fo.320 and 323, receipts, 30 May 1885.

²⁶ St. Laurent Annals, 9 May 1885, in *Journeying Through a Century: Sister Pioneers, 1883-1983*, ed. Shirley Majeau (Edmonton: Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus, 1983) 192.

²⁷ SAB, Effie Storer Papers, S-A186.IV.25, Effie Storer, untitled manuscript, n.d., n.p.

water in the middle of the night, had a hard time amusing themselves.²⁸ Mothers were responsible for feeding their children from the government rations that were issued. The male Mountie cooks at both Prince Albert and Battleford were not pleased with having women invade their kitchens, so the women had to work their schedules around those of the men.²⁹ Undoubtedly, the situation in the barricades created a great deal of tension, as, according to Dan Finlayson, “a good deal of talk went around...about the danger, but the greatest danger was with the women - they were always scrapping.”³⁰

Métis, mixed-blood and First Nations women were also responsible for caring for their families, but faced different challenges than white women. Indian women found this responsibility particularly difficult. Many Natives were already starving after relying primarily on government rations for survival through the difficult winter. Lack of food was so common that even the young had developed methods to cope with hunger. When rations ran short in the Frog Lake camp, a Woods Cree girl advised Kitty McLean to “drink [water] until it comes back in your nose and mouth...it will stop the feeling of Hunger.”³¹ First Nations women were therefore forced to resort to desperate measures to secure food for their families. They sometimes instigated looting during the rebellion. At Battleford, they “[tried] to have patience but it wore out quickly as they saw their children starving...Eventually they broke in, taking food, and that’s where it all started from, they were only trying to feed their children.”³² The women saw it as their duty to provide food for their children, and took the opportunity to do so when it was presented to them.

²⁸ SAB, Effie Storer papers, S-A136.II.3, Effie Storer, *Queen’s Printer*, unpublished manuscript, n.d., n.p.; SAB, Effie Storer papers, S-A186.II.1, Effie Storer, *The Lauries of Saskatchewan*, unpublished manuscript, n.d., n.p.

²⁹ SAB, Storer papers, S-A186.IV.25, Storer, untitled manuscript.

³⁰ Violet Loscombe, *Pursuit of Peace: Historic Tales of Battleford* (Battleford: Battlefords North West Historical Society, 1986) 123.

³¹ Kitty (McLean) Yuill, “Pioneers and Prisoners in the Canadian North West,” unpublished manuscript, 72.

³² First Nations University of Canada Archives (FNUCA), 1885 Resistance Project, Ernest Pete interview, Little Pine reserve, February 1994.

First Nations, Métis and mixed-blood women may also have adopted other tactics to feed and clothe themselves and their families, as soldiers' memoirs allude to Aboriginal women possibly working as prostitutes. At Prince Albert, the "half-breed" women and children were housed in an empty store in the town. "This paradise of houris we called 'the Zoo'," John Donkin reveals, "Dusky beauties and wrinkled hags were to be seen, in every stage of *déshabillé* lounging out of the open windows at all hours. I never penetrated the mysterious recesses of this zenana."³³ While he makes no explicit reference to prostitution, his comments reveal that some men did 'penetrate' the 'zenana', and that this was not considered a forthright action. Lieutenant R.S. Cassels of the Northwest Field Force reported that the "winning smile" of one of his colleagues at Battleford had "made a conquest of a too susceptible dusky maiden,"³⁴ but he does not make an explicit reference to prostitution. It is possible that the men's views were influenced by racist stereotypes that depicted Indian and Métis women as 'loose' or 'easy', but by May 16, when Cassels made his entry, the rebellion had essentially ended for residents of the Battleford area. First Nations individuals were beginning to make their way back to their reserves, only to face destitution when they found that their homes had been plundered and often destroyed. It is possible that women in these centers were trading sex for money or supplies in order to feed and clothe themselves and their families.

In the larger Native camps, Aboriginal women, many of them captives themselves, were also responsible for the well-being of prisoners. Rose Pritchard had twelve people in her tent, including her children, Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney. Similarly, Mrs. Louis Patenaude, Catherine Simpson's daughter-in-law, fed William Cameron while he was in the Frog Lake camp.³⁵ Woods Cree women provided

³³ John Donkin, *Trooper and Redskin in the far North-West: Recollections of Life in the North-West Mounted Police, Canada, 1884-1888* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1889; reprint, Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1987) 142-43.

³⁴ Glenbow Archives (GB), Lieutenant R.S. Cassels Diary, M1949, 16 May 1885.

³⁵ William Bleasdell Cameron, *Blood Red the Sun* (Calgary: Kenway Pub. Co., 1950) 115.

the McLean family with both food and moccasins, and, in at least one instance, skinned an ox and cured the meat to feed their families and the prisoners.³⁶ Métis women at Batoche took care of both their own soldiers and white prisoners. As most families had been driven out of their homes, they were forced to do so while living and cooking in tents.³⁷ Madeline Dumont, Marie Letendre and Madame Landry provided meals for Riel and his councillors,³⁸ and women also cooked for the twenty-five men who were imprisoned in the cellar of Xavier Batoche's house. Sometimes women even defied the Métis leaders to care for their sons, fathers and husbands, and hid their men during the battles to feed them whenever possible.³⁹

Women, as caretakers, were also responsible for the sick and wounded during the rebellion. Doctors and a few nurses came west with the Canadian troops, but their services were available primarily to the federal soldiers, and even then there were too few medical staff to care for all of the victims. The balance of the work fell to female residents. Euro-Canadian women like Bessie Trounce took wounded soldiers into their Saskatoon homes, while others worked at the hospital that was established in the town.⁴⁰ At Prince Albert, women set up a hospital in teacher Lucy Baker's house, and cared for the sick women and children as well as the men brought in from the Duck Lake battle.⁴¹

Indian and Métis women were unable to access the services of white doctors and nurses, and were left to care for their own wounded. In some cases they were also responsible for the health of white prisoners. Several of the Woods Cree women took

³⁶ Elizabeth McLean, "Our Captivity Ended," *Beaver* outfit 278 (September 1947) 40.

³⁷ "Thomas Jackson," in *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of Prince Albert Settlement's Early Citizens, 1866-1895*, eds. Manon Lamontagne et al. (Prince Albert: Prince Albert Historical Society, 1985) 155.

³⁸ Archives de l'Archevêché de Saint-Boniface (AASB), Taché fonds, Report of Father G. Cloutier, 1886, vol.2, 74; Nathalie Kermaal, "Les rôles et les souffrances des femmes métisses lors de la Résistance de 1780 et de la Rébellion de 1885," *Prairie Forum* 19 no.2 (1994) 159.

³⁹ Rose Fleury interview with author, Duck Lake, 17 March 2003.

⁴⁰ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 6G, "Report of Deputy Surgeon-General T.G. Roddick," p365.

⁴¹ By June 19, long after the last battle, Lucy Baker had not yet resumed her teaching duties as she was still nursing ailing men in her house. *Prince Albert Times*, 19 June 1885.

the shell-shocked men and women of Frog Lake into their tents after the murders, comforted them and gave them tea and blankets. The Frog Lake First Nations women also provided captives with medical care; Lone Man's wife treated HBC employee Stanley Simpson for an inflamed throat while he was in the camp.⁴² The women at Batoche faced a more dire situation, as they were caught between the two opposing forces. They cared for men wounded at the battle at Fish Creek, and, along with the nuns, nursed both wounded Métis and Canadian soldiers during and after the battle of Batoche.⁴³

Children's well-being was primarily left to women as well, an often difficult burden in the chaos of the rebellion. Many First Nations and Métis women and children found themselves either on the run or hiding in the bush, with few supplies at hand. Some South Branch children were separated from their parents, and hid in the woods until someone was sent to retrieve them. The Letendre (dit Batoche) family serves as an example of the adversity that many faced. Mrs. Letendre was forced to hide in the woods, where her family ate dog meat in order to survive. She was separated from at least one of her children, a daughter who was found three days after the battle some twenty-seven miles from home.⁴⁴

Women also had to deal with death and, that experience particular to women, birth. In the Northwest, where medical care was rudimentary, childbirth was always a perilous and uncertain ordeal, but women who were able to seek shelter in towns or forts did not face the same dangers as those who fled to the bush or who traveled in the Indian camps. Pregnancy was an arduous burden for the women who traversed the territory during the rebellion. Both Dora Clinkskill and Mrs. William Morris passed part of their

⁴² Cameron, 133.

⁴³ PAA, Missionary Oblates collection, acc. 84.400, box 22, item 733, memoire de Phillipe Garnot, février 1886.

⁴⁴ Kermaal, 160-61.

pregnancies in the Battleford barracks,⁴⁵ but Helen McLean, who was eight months pregnant by the time the family returned to Fort Pitt in late June, spent a difficult two months in the Frog Lake camp. As she was forced to walk during most of her journey, she often had a difficult time and collapsed from exhaustion at least once.⁴⁶

Childbirth was not put off by the rebellion. Many of the women who came to Prince Albert after hearing of the fight at Duck Lake had newborns, and were still quite weak, while others delivered during the conflict. Gwen McKay gave birth to a son at the Presbyterian manse in Prince Albert on April 18, and Jane McNevin to a daughter.⁴⁷ Bessie Trounce of Saskatoon fed and took in wounded soldiers both before and after her child was born in mid-May. Such women all had access to at least basic comforts for their confinements, but some were not as lucky. A First Nations woman in the Frog Lake camp gave birth the day of the battle at Frenchman Butte.⁴⁸

These mothers and their children all survived. Janet Clarke, however, a white homesteader from the Prince Albert region, lost a baby during the rebellion, and “lay in bed at death’s door for many weary months.”⁴⁹ Marguerite Riel, wife of Louis Riel, was both pregnant and severely ill during the rebellion; she miscarried in October, and died of tuberculosis and a broken heart in 1886.⁵⁰ At least one woman in the Frog Lake camp gave birth to a stillborn child; the combination of the difficult conditions during the conflict and the starvation bands had faced during the winter were undoubtedly

⁴⁵ Mrs. Morris gave birth to a son in the Battleford barracks in late May, while Dora Clinkskill delivered a daughter on July 7. *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1 June 1885 and 12 July 1885.

⁴⁶ Duncan McLean, “The Last Hostage - Part II,” *Weekend Magazine* 18 no 33 (1968) 8.

⁴⁷ Both women were English mixed-bloods from the Duck Lake area.

⁴⁸ Yuill, 59.

⁴⁹ “McKay, George and Gwen,” in *Their Dreams, Our Memories: A History of Duck Lake and District* (Duck Lake, SK: Duck Lake History Committee, 1988) 506, 653; “Ida Clarke Thompson,” in *The Voice of the People*, 65.

⁵⁰ Diane Payment, “‘La vie en rose’? Métis Women at Batoche, 1870-1920,” in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength*, eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996) 29.

contributing factors.⁵¹ Other mothers bore the death of older children. A fourteen-year-old Métis girl was killed during the battle of Batoche by a Gatling gun shell that struck the house she was in,⁵² and two year old William McDonald of Bresaylor passed away “as a result of the trauma of the journey to the fort” at Battleford.⁵³

Several women died themselves as a result of the rebellion, all of them Aboriginal. Sitting in the Doorway, a crippled elderly woman in the Frog Lake camp, committed suicide by hanging herself when the thick bush at Loon Lake prevented the use of a travois or wagon to transport her.⁵⁴ Bresaylor matriarch Elisabeth Bremner did not survive the ordeal of being forced from her home and taken into Poundmaker’s camp, and was buried along the trail.⁵⁵ One of Big Bear’s wives also died. According to Theresa Gowanlock, she was wrapped in blankets, buried and “sacks of bacon and flour [put] on top so that she could not get out.”⁵⁶ Two Cree women were killed by gunfire at Loon Lake, two Métisse died during the battle of Batoche, and several more women perished of causes related to or aggravated by the “sufferings and deprivations of war.”⁵⁷

Another woman, and possibly a child, were found dead on the Mosquito reserve. R. Lyndmore Wadhurst, a soldier with Colonel Otter, recorded in his diary that

⁵¹ Yuill, 58.

⁵² SAB, R.K. Allan Diary, 15 May 1885; Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: A.H. Hovey, 1886) 296.

⁵³ *Bresaylor Between the Battle and the North Saskatchewan Rivers: The Bresaylor Settlement, the Hamlet of Bresaylor, Bresaylor School District (3125), Arbor Hill School District (3270), Federal School District (4048), 1882-1992* (Bresaylor, SK: Bresaylor Heritage Museum Association Inc., 1992) 226.

⁵⁴ Yuill, 65; Stonechild and Waiser, 188.

⁵⁵ Mrs. Bremner was later re-interred at Bresaylor. *Bresaylor Between the Battle and the North Saskatchewan Rivers*, 79.

⁵⁶ Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear: The Adventures of Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney*, ed. Sarah Carter (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1999) 25.

⁵⁷ Carter, *Capturing Women*, 71; AASB, Cloutier report, vol.2, 27; Payment, “*La vie en rose*,” 30.

the bodies of a young Indian woman and an infant were found in James Payne's house.⁵⁸ Cassels also reports finding the body of an Indian woman on the Mosquito reserve, "dead, with a bullet through her head: she is painted in full war paint and may have been killed in some of the skirmishes near Battleford." It is unclear whether the two reports are about the same woman, as Cassels does not mention a child. It is likely that the woman, or both women, were Aboriginal, as Cassels' account indicates, or else the death(s) would have been highly publicized.

The woman and infant may have been Payne's wife and child, but the April 23 issue of the *Saskatchewan Herald* states that Mrs. Payne delivered a son the day after her husband was shot. The *Herald* later reported on May 4 that the body of an approximately twenty-year-old woman who had been shot through the cheek and the body of a one-year-old child with a fractured skull were found near Payne's body. The article does not indicate that they were Payne's wife and child, and declares that there was "nothing to show why they had been killed."⁵⁹ In any case, at least one woman died, and perhaps two women and a child. Who the woman or women were, who the child was, and the circumstances surrounding the deaths are uncertain.⁶⁰ What is clear, and what all of the deaths demonstrate, is that women were certainly not involved in the war only as rhetorical figures to be held up for men to rally around. Like men, women paid the ultimate price for the rebellion.

In spite of the danger, however, women chose to involve themselves in the conflict in ways that did not fall within the confines of the female caretaker role. During the battle of Batoche, the nuns occupied the Catholic manse, which was situated between the two opposing forces. They were in the direct line of fire, and were confined

⁵⁸ R. Lyndhurst Wadmore, "The 1885 North-West Campaign Diary of R. Lyndhurst Wadmore, Infantry School Corps," ed. David Ross, *Saskatchewan History* 42 no.2 (1989) 63.

⁵⁹ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 4 May 1885. The validity of the earlier *Herald* report is questionable, as Battleford residents were still barricaded in the fort at that time and were dependent on outside reports for news. Information in the latter account, however, was likely received from police or soldiers with Otter's column who witnessed the scene.

⁶⁰ Light, 79; GB, Cassels diary, M1949, 23 April 1885.

to the house during the day to avoid being wounded.⁶¹ In spite of Father Moulin being hit by a stray bullet that entered through a window, the women refused to move to a safer location, even when requested to do so by General Middleton.⁶² It is possible that the sisters, knowing that the manse was protecting the Métis forces, many of whom were the fathers and brothers of their pupils, had strategic reasons for remaining in the building.

Métis and First Nations women acted in different ways. They seem to have stepped outside of gender-defined boundaries during the rebellion more often than mixed-blood or white women, likely because Métis and Indian women found themselves in the line of fire more often than their white or mixed-blood sisters. Métis women especially seem to have exercised power in unexpected ways, influencing military actions and decisions. Several Métisse captured a messenger from Prince Albert and held him hostage, thinking he was a runaway from Batoche.⁶³ Marguerite Caron shamed Riel into sending reinforcements to Fish Creek, where both her husband and two sons were fighting, saying that if he would not send men, she would go to them herself.⁶⁴ Mrs. Louis Marion, along with her young daughter, carried messages from Batoche when they traveled on their own to Prince Albert to join Mr. Marion,⁶⁵ and another 'half-breed' woman provided intelligence to Canadian troops.⁶⁶

Métis women also acted as bulwarks against military action. Before the rebellion broke out, they prayed and lobbied against war. Josephete Lépine warned the leaders, including her husband Maxime, that “vous entreprenez des affaires trop gros, que vous

⁶¹ AASB, Cloutier report, vol.1, 31.

⁶² Middleton to A.P. Caron, 13 May 1885, in *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign*, 273.

⁶³ Letter from Mother Louise Collings to Mother Josephine Petit, 18 April 1885, in *Journeying Through a Century*, 146.

⁶⁴ AASB, Cloutier report, vol.1, 9-10.

⁶⁵ PAA, Missionary Oblates Collection, acc. 84.400, box 22, item 736, Lettre du Pere André à Monseigneur Grandin, 31 March 1885.

⁶⁶ W.D. Perry to A.P. Caron, 31 March 1885, in *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign*, 50.

ne comprenez pas.”⁶⁷ Riel expelled a devout eighteen year-old Métisse from Batoche because he felt the woman was impeding the progress of his new religion by speaking out against him,⁶⁸ and, when Madame Marie Tourond, a widow, mother and a well-off South Branch farmer, did not want her sons to be involved in the insurrection, Riel visited her every day, extolling the virtues of his vision. Eventually she conceded and her sons joined Riel.⁶⁹

First Nations women may have acted in similar ways, but even oral records offer little insight into Indian women’s military roles during the rebellion. Like Métis women at Batoche, however, Native women at Cut Knife Hill melted lead and fashioned bullets for their men.⁷⁰ In the end, Aboriginal women’s power and influence were not recognized by the white victors. When Poundmaker surrendered at Battleford on May 26, Middleton refused to hear from a female elder who wished to speak on behalf of the women and children. When the general commented that women did not address war councils, the grandmother shrewdly pointed out that the Canadians themselves were ruled by a woman, the Queen.⁷¹

Women in the Saskatchewan territory tried to keep their families safe, but those who were forced to flee or were in the line of fire found this difficult. Many had small children to care for, and did their best to remove themselves and their families from danger. Some South Branch women went to the French-Canadian settlement of Bellevue where they had relatives who could take them in.⁷² Others remained in their

⁶⁷ AASB, Cloutier report, 1886, vol.1, 5, 166. As cited in Payment, “‘*La vie en rose*’?”, 26. Diane Payment translates the passage as “You are undertaking things that are too complicated, and that you do not understand.”

⁶⁸ St. Laurent Annals, 4 May 1885, in *Journeying Through a Century*, 183.

⁶⁹ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.52, *The Queen vs. Joseph Arcand et al.*, p386-87.

⁷⁰ “Thomas Jackson,” in *Voice of the People*, 155; FNUCA, 1885 Resistance Project, Lennox Wuttunee interview, n.p., n.d.

⁷¹ General Sir Fred Middleton, *Suppression of the Rebellion in the North West Territories of Canada, 1885*, ed. G.H. Needler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948) 61.

⁷² SAB, Indian History Film Project, R-A823, Mary Parenteau interview, Wakaw, 19 July 1973.

homes during the day, but, fearful of the police, hid in the bush along with their children at night.⁷³ On Beardy's reserve, women concealed themselves during the day and crept to their homes at night to gather eggs from their chickens.⁷⁴ Women who chose not to flee or were unable to sometimes found themselves too close to the early battles for comfort. Marie Tourond, whose farm was near Fish Creek, abandoned her home when Canadian troops came upon it unexpectedly. Soldiers found breakfast, half-eaten, still on the table; a chest of drawers had been shattered by a shell.⁷⁵ Women and children were present at both Cut Knife Hill and Frenchman Butte, and several women helped dig pits to provide shelter from stray bullets at Frenchman Butte.⁷⁶ Some were unable to stay out of the line of fire. Otter's men shot at tents occupied by Indian women and children at Cut Knife Hill, sending the inhabitants running for cover,⁷⁷ while at Loon Lake, NWMP forces fired on members of the Frog Lake camp as they crossed the muskeg.

These battles were brief, lasting only a few hours, but the Battle of Batoche persisted for three days. During this time, women who had not fled to safer places faced danger and difficult conditions. Canadian soldiers used homes and teepees at Batoche for firing practice as well.⁷⁸ A tent occupied by two Dumas families was riddled with bullets, and Mrs. Daniel Dumas narrowly missed a bullet to the head. The women and their children fled to the woods, only to be shot at again.⁷⁹ Other women dug caves into the riverbank, covered them with brush, and hid there for the duration of the battle, or

⁷³ SAB, Indian History Film Project, R-A824, Annie Parenteau interview, St. Louis, 19 July 1973.

⁷⁴ FNUCA, 1885 Resistance Project, Philomene Gamble interview, Beardy's reserve, n.d.

⁷⁵ Mulvaney, 148-49.

⁷⁶ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.52, *Queen vs. Big Bear's Band*, p.254.

⁷⁷ SAB, Indian History Film Project, R-A507-508, Arthur Favel interview, Poundmaker reserve, 2 July 1974.

⁷⁸ PAA, Missionary Oblates Collection, acc. 84.400, box 22, item 733, Garnot memoire.

⁷⁹ AASB, Cloutier report, vol.1, 16.

huddled under carts.⁸⁰

Once the battle was over, some Métis and Native women and children began to return to Batoche. Fearful of retaliation by Canadian soldiers, but driven by a desire to reunite with children and husbands, women came out of hiding. Many of the refugees had not eaten for days. Soldiers reported that “men, women and children came into Camp and asked for mercy; [the] scene in [the] village of Batoche in evening was heartrending [as] about 200 women and children were huddled together under carts and tents and wept most pitifully.”⁸¹ Some women took their children and left the South Branch for other Métis settlements, where they remained for days while family members struggled to reunite with each other.⁸² The reports that surfaced of the compassion and generosity of the “kindly soldiers” who reassured and fed Métis women and children contrast sharply with the fact that the militia were, at the same time, looting Métis homes and carrying off treasured possessions.⁸³ Many women were left to face the soldiers on their own. Troops took the wedding band right off of Mrs. Maurice Henry’s finger, while Mrs. Baptiste Parenteau was robbed of everything and left with only a shirt.⁸⁴ The women of the settlement, including the nuns, were also left to deal with the bodies of Métis and Indian men who had been killed in battle, some of whom, the Métis maintain, had been mutilated by soldiers.⁸⁵

In the Saskatchewan territory in 1885, as is often the case in war, the rhetoric surrounding appropriate gender roles for men and women did not adequately reflect the experiences of either. The war-time images of men as protectors and women as either victims of war, symbols of virtue or immoral instigators of inhuman acts do not serve to

⁸⁰ AASB, Cloutier report, vol.1, 55; R.C. Laurie, *Reminiscences of Early Days in Battleford and With Middleton’s Column* (Battleford: *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1935) 107-08.

⁸¹ H.P. Dwight to A.P. Caron, 16 May 1885, in *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign*, 287.

⁸² SAB, Indian History Film Project, R-830, Isadore Ledoux interview, Leask, 21 July 1973.

⁸³ Laurie, 107-08.

⁸⁴ AASB, Cloutier report, vol.1, 59.

⁸⁵ AABS, Cloutier report, vol.1, 19, 59.

define Saskatchewan residents' experiences during the rebellion. These depictions also fail to account for the intersections of race and gender that in part influenced men's and women's decisions and experiences. Men were not always able to protect their families, and their ability to do so was, at least in part, determined by race. White men could call on government forces to come to their aid and fulfill the protector role for them, while Aboriginal men were forced to protect their families with limited arms and without the assistance of police or soldiers. Women were expected to act as caretakers, and, like men, their experiences were affected by race. They strove to care for their families and communities, but race often dictated how they went about this, and circumstances sometimes required them to take unconventional paths to do so. Masculinity and femininity during the 1885 Northwest Rebellion were defined in accordance with traditional constructs of roles appropriate for men and women during times of war. Gender and race, however, were intimately connected and played a role in determining individuals' responses. The ways in which Saskatchewan men and women experienced the rebellion undermines the idea that war is a solely masculine pursuit.

CHAPTER 5 - A Region Divided: The Legacy of the 1885 Northwest Rebellion in the Saskatchewan Territory

On an afternoon in November 1885, two women sat on a train westbound for Regina. Mary Laurie and her daughter Effie were returning to the Northwest after spending some time with relatives in Winnipeg, and were ready to resume their lives in Battleford. Across the aisle from them sat a weary-looking Métis woman, who had a small boy and a fussy baby with her. Feeling sorry for the woman, Mary and Effie entertained the two children so that the mother could sleep. When they reached Regina, the Métis lady was escorted from the train. A NWMP constable who boarded the train informed the Lauries that the woman was Marguerite Riel, come to see her husband. “Her errand,” according to Effie, “was to bid him goodbye before his execution, Ours to return to our homes.”¹

Historians have offered differing views on the impact of the rebellion on both the Northwest Territories and Canada as a nation. Bob Beal and Rod Macleod contend that “the rebellion produced no dramatic changes in Western Canada.” The most significant long-term result of the conflict, they argue, occurred in Quebec, where French-English tensions stemming from Riel’s execution altered political alliances.² Stonechild and Waiser take a different approach, concluding that the rebellion offered the Canadian government an opportunity to portray First Nations in the Northwest as rebels in concert

¹ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Cecilia Whetton papers, A123 file I.1.d, Effie Storer as told to Cecilia Whetton, untitled story. This is the only account of this incident in the Storer papers, and it is possible that it is fictional. The account was gathered by journalist Cecilia Whetton for publication as a “Canadianecdote” in *Maclean’s* magazine. The *Saskatchewan Herald*, 14 September 1885, confirms that Effie and Mary Laurie went together to Winnipeg. SAB, Cecilia Whetton papers, A123 file I.1.d, Cecilia Whetton to *Maclean’s* Magazine, 11 March 1951.

² Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984) 341-42.

with the Métis, and thereby punish the Indians by implementing restrictive measures.³ Sarah Carter asserts that 1885 marked a shift in Euro-Canadian attitudes toward Aboriginal people in the West. “Whereas before they were regarded as ‘nuisances’ but relatively harmless, afterwards they were depicted as a distinct threat to the property and lives of the white settlers.”⁴

The Lauries’ encounter with Mrs. Riel illustrates the new order that emerged after the Northwest Rebellion. The effects of the uprising were significant and long-lasting for residents of the Saskatchewan territory, and race was a factor in determining the place that individuals could occupy in post-rebellion Saskatchewan. All groups suffered economically, but the most important repercussions of the conflict were the resulting social divisions and lasting feelings of hostility that altered the ways that groups viewed and interacted with each other. Euro-Canadians were angry with their Indian and Métis neighbours, but emerged from the ordeal with a sense of entitlement, ready to claim the region as their own. Aboriginal residents, on the other hand, found mainly sorrow and misery in the aftermath of the conflict. Their families and communities were fractured by loss and dislocation, and all that awaited them was relegation to the fringes of Saskatchewan society. White residents were the victors, and the Aboriginals were not only the defeated, but from the point of view of many Euro-Canadians, were traitors and criminals as well, and this affected the post-rebellion order in the Saskatchewan district.

Euro-Canadians arose from the rebellion whole and united. Most of the white casualties of the rebellion were young, single men, but, more importantly, were from Manitoba or central or eastern Canada, so their deaths did not have a direct impact on community structures in the Saskatchewan territory. Of the local white men who died, several, like Arthur Dobbs, Paddy Burke, Thomas Quinn and James Payne, were married to Aboriginal women, leaving few white widows for the Euro-Canadian community to

³ Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1997) 238-41.

⁴ Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997) 21.

care for. Only a handful of white residents fled the territory after the rebellion. Although the *Prince Albert Times* commented in June that there were residents who were “straining every effort to get away,” there was no panicked exodus.⁵ Some white settlers, and especially white women, left.⁶ Widows, like the two Therasas, who had no other connection to the region beyond their dead husbands, departed for good. In other cases, farmers who had left for the winter with plans to come back in the spring abandoned their homesteads and did not return. Potential immigrants were also likely scared off by the exaggerated reports of the rebellion.

These emigrants, however, accounted for only a small number of whites in the territory. Some parents sent their children away to school, but most settlers stayed to rebuild their homes or returned to the region after a short holiday.⁷ Mary and Effie Laurie spent two months in Winnipeg, while the Manns resumed their positions at Onion Lake after a brief respite in Toronto. Many young people, like the Laurie girls and the young NWMP officers, who otherwise may have left the Northwest to marry or seek employment, began courtships during the rebellion that tied them to the west.

In addition, many Euro-Canadians were able to capitalize on the economic opportunities the rebellion created. Both men and women offered their products and services to the troops, the HBC and the Canadian government in return for cash. Horse feed and beef were especially in demand, and, at Saskatoon, women fed soldiers and took wounded men into their homes, for which they were later compensated.⁸ Some

⁵ *Prince Albert Times*, 19 June 1885.

⁶ The McLeans moved to Lower Fort Garry, where W.J. McLean took charge of the Lake Winnipeg district for the HBC. Sarah Carter, “Amelia McLean Paget and *The People of the Plains*,” in *Good Intentions: Euro-Canadians Working for Justice Against Aboriginal Subordination*, eds. David Nock and Cecilia Haig-Brown (Vancouver: UBC Press, forthcoming).

⁷ SAB, Jessie McLean papers, R-1028 1.a, Jessie McLean letter to Lillian, 22 December 1885. Jessie, writing from Prince Albert, reports that her father sent three of her younger siblings east, likely to Winnipeg (Jessie McLean was not a member of the W.J. McLean family).

⁸ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 6G, Report of T.G. Roddick, Deputy Surgeon-General, p365; R.C. Laurie, *Reminiscences of Early Days in Battleford and With Middleton’s Column* (Battleford: *Saskatchewan Herald*, 1935) 53.

men also worked as freighters, guides and messengers during the conflict.⁹ After several crop failures resulting from drought or early frost, the extra income these opportunities provided was needed to sustain fragile agricultural enterprises. The economic benefits of the rebellion helped some strengthen their position in the Saskatchewan territory. Government reports indicate that several farmers were in a better financial position in the spring of 1886 than they had been prior to the rebellion.¹⁰ The white settlers who stayed in the Saskatchewan district demonstrated that they were committed to their lives in the Northwest.

Aboriginal residents were not as fortunate. Casualties resulting from the conflict had more of an impact on Métis and First Nations groups, as almost all of the Aboriginal men killed were residents of the area. Their deaths left holes in both families and communities. Those who remained were often driven from their homes by fear of persecution, and others were jailed for their 'rebel' activities. Several men just disappeared, abandoning their women and children.¹¹ Some Aboriginals who left the Saskatchewan district remained in the Northwest. Twelve families from the Whitecap band were reported residing on the Standing Buffalo reserve in Assiniboia in June, much to the "annoyance" of the other reserve inhabitants.¹² Many, however, headed for the United States.¹³ The Métis and Assiniboine seem to have found acceptance in the U.S.,

⁹ Some mixed-blood, Métis and Indian men were also able to take advantage of these employment opportunities, but because of the air of mistrust created by the rebellion, were not able to do so to the same extent as white men.

¹⁰ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 8, no.4, Report of Rufus Stephenson (Inspector of Colonization Societies), p26.

¹¹ Sometimes it was a family decision for the women and children to stay behind. The incidences of men leaving the region without their families seem to be higher among the Métis than the Indians, perhaps because of the conclusive nature of the Battle of Batoche. In addition, Métis women, who were not subject to reserve life or the control of the Canadian government, may have felt that they had more to stay for than First Nations women.

¹² National Archives of Canada (NAC), Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3710, f.19550-3, Edgar Dewdney to John A. Macdonald, telegram, 10 June 1885.

¹³ Immediately following the rebellion, somewhere between one to two hundred Cree, led by Imasees, Little Poplar, and Lucky Man, left for the U.S. One of Lucky Man's followers killed a white man on the way. The number of Canadian Indians south of the border only grew in the wake of the post-

where both groups had relatives who offered them support,¹⁴ but there were no Cree in the United States. When those with Imasees, known as Little Bear in the States, reached Montana, they found that no bands were willing to take them in, and they were forced to wander the state, destitute, looking for work.¹⁵ Some of the refugees returned to Canada, but often found conditions on the reserves little better than what they had left behind and returned to Montana.¹⁶ Oral records show that the ties between First Nations and Métis groups in Saskatchewan and those in the United States continue to this day.¹⁷

Many Aboriginal men who remained in the Saskatchewan district were arrested for rebel activity. After an insurrection initiated and led by the Métis, Indian men bore the brunt of the Canadian justice system. Only one Métis, Louis Riel, was given the death sentence while eight First Nations men were hanged in the largest mass hanging in

rebellion trials and executions. The fear these events instilled, combined with oppressive conditions on reserves, drove First Nations peoples from the Saskatchewan district. Grizzly Bear's Head left his reserve with between sixty to one hundred Assiniboine in the fall of 1885, and, by 1886, two hundred people were missing from the Little Pine band. Hans J. Peterson, "Imasees and His Band: Canadian Refugees after the North-West Rebellion," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 8 no.1 (1978) 27; K.J. Tyler, "The History of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Lean Man Bands, 1878-1920," unpublished interim report, n.d., 5; J.L. Tobias, "A Brief History of Little Pine/Lucky Man Bands, 1870-1910," unpublished interim report, n.d., 27.

¹⁴ The Assiniboine relocated to a reservation near Fort Belknap, Montana, and many of the Métis from the South Branch went to Milk River. While some who left eventually returned, most intermarried into other communities, often in the United States. Rose Fleury interview with author, Duck Lake, 17 March 2003.

¹⁵ Imasees and his followers first went to Fort Belknap, and then spent two years at Fort Assiniboine, where the men did casual work for the military. By January 1887, the local paper reported that the group was in a "destitute condition." NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3722, f.24125, D. Paterson to John McIlree, report on trip to Montana, 3 October 1885; *Fort Benton River Press*, 19 January 1887, as cited in Verne Dusenberry, *The Montana Cree: A Study in Religious Persistence* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962)32-33.

¹⁶ In 1896, Canada and the United States made an agreement to forcibly remove Canadian Indians residing in the U.S. Early evacuees traveled by train, but when the American government ran out of money for the project, 192 Cree were marched to the Canadian border, resulting in four deaths. Most eventually slipped quietly back across the border, where Little Bear joined forces with Chief Rocky Boy and his homeless band of Chippewa, and settled down on a reservation that was created for them in Montana in 1916. Dusenberry, 37.

¹⁷ First Nations University of Canada Archives (FNUCA), 1885 Resistance Project, Irene Fineday interview, Sweetgrass reserve, April 1994; FNUCA, 1885 Resistance Project, Paul Chicken interview, Sweetgrass reserve, 11 June 1993.

Canadian history.¹⁸ In a July 13 memorandum, Assistant Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed commented that “unless severe examples are made of the more prominent participants in the rebellion much difficulty will be experienced in their future management.”¹⁹ First Nations leaders were targeted, and many Native men were given sentences disproportionate to the crimes they had committed.²⁰

Métis men, on the other hand, received on average shorter jail terms than Native men and were released from their sentences sooner. The Métis adopted important defense strategies in their trials. Their simple-mindedness was emphasized, and Lawrence Clarke, HBC factor at Prince Albert, argued during the trials that the Métis were “creatures of circumstances” who were ignorant, unsophisticated, and devoid of “cultivated intellect.”²¹ The lawyers also argued that the defendants had been coerced by Louis Riel into taking up arms. The language of family was invoked, and the rhetoric of the male protector employed to justify the men’s actions. The men explained that,

¹⁸ Race seems to have also played a role in one other trial. William Henry Jackson, also known as Honoré Jaxon, was, like Riel, also charged with treason-felony. Jackson was a Euro-Canadian Methodist, educated at the University of Toronto, who had emigrated to Prince Albert to join his family in 1882. Through the local Farmer’s Union, Jackson met Riel in the summer of 1884, and subsequently went to live at Batoche and act as Riel’s secretary, and converted to Riel’s version of Catholicism. After the clash at Duck Lake, however, the Métis began to mistrust the young white man, and imprisoned him. Jackson was arrested in the wake of the rebellion. Like Riel, Jackson protested that he was not insane, but to his family and most Euro-Canadian residents, including the jurors at his trial, Jackson’s behaviour, including his conversion and his assertion during his trial that he wanted to share Riel’s fate, were evidence that he was unbalanced. He was found not guilty by reason of insanity, and committed to an insane asylum in Manitoba, from which he escaped in November 1885. Jackson returned to the Prince Albert in 1907 and ran in the 1908 federal election as an Independent Liberal. Donald B. Smith, “Rip Van Jaxon: The Return of Riel’s Secretary in 1884-85 to the Canadian West, 1907-09,” in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, eds. F. Laurie Barron and James B. Waldram (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986) 211-213; Beal and McLeod, 306-07.

¹⁹ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130, Hayter Reed, “Memorandum for the Honorable the Indian Commissioner relative to the future management of Indians,” 13 July 1885.

²⁰ Some were tried in Regina, but others faced Judge Charles Rouleau in Battleford. Rouleau, who had fled to Swift Current with his family in March and whose home had been burned in his absence, passed particularly harsh sentences. For a more complete account of the post-rebellion trials, see Stonechild and Waiser, Chapter 10.

²¹ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no. 52, *The Queen vs. Parenteau and Twenty-five Others*, testimony of Lawrence Clarke, p374-75.

fearing that harm would come to their families, they had joined Riel's forces unwillingly. George Ness testified that Joseph Pilon had "tried to avoid being connected with the rebellion of 1885 by hiding and in other divers [sic] ways, and that had it not been for his wife and family of eleven children, would have succeeded in doing so, and would not be in prison today."²² Similarly, Hillyard Mitchell, a store owner at Duck Lake, recounted that Alexander Fisher "said he would leave but wanted to care for his family and property."²³ First Nations men, or their lawyers, were seemingly unable to use similar strategies during their trials. Euro-Canadian jurors, who likely saw Indian men as less civilized than the Métis, might not have accepted Native men in the protector role, and this may have contributed to their harsher sentences.

Unlike incarceration, which was endured primarily by Métis and Indian men, men and women in all groups in the Saskatchewan territory suffered property losses. The Canadian militia was responsible for much of the damage. Whenever troops came across abandoned camps or homesteads, there was a rush to secure loot and trophies, and soldiers took whatever they could.²⁴ For white settlers, property loss was the most immediate consequence of the rebellion, and the destruction in the Battleford area was particularly extensive. When Colonel Otter's forces reached Battleford in late April, the stores and Judge Charles Rouleau's house had been burned, and all other buildings in the town had been looted. Items not deemed valuable or worth carrying away had been destroyed, and most of the farmhouses outside of the town had been burned.²⁵

Euro-Canadian residents were devastated when they were finally able to view

²² *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.52, *The Queen vs. Joseph Pilon*, testimony of George Ness, p404.

²³ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, no.52, *The Queen vs. Alexander P. Fisher*, testimony of Hillyard Mitchell, p406.

²⁴ L.R Ord, *Reminiscences of a Bungle by One of the Bunglers* (Toronto: Grip Printing & Publishing Company, 1887) 49. Middleton was later convicted of stealing thousands of dollars worth of furs from Bresaylor trader Charles Bremner. For more information on this incident, see Daniel German, "The Political Game and the Bounds of Honour: Sir Frederick Middleton and the Bremner Furs," *Saskatchewan History* 45 no.1 (1993) 10-17.

²⁵ *Sessional Papers*, 1886, 8A, Appendix B, Report of NWMP Superintendent W.M. Herchmer, p51.

what was left of their homes.²⁶ On Jane Garson's return to her farm near Prince Albert, "not a thing was to be found; everything was stolen." All of the animals had either been stolen or slaughtered, and the Garson's household effects had suffered a similar fate.²⁷ James and Dora Clinkskill also found their home in shambles. Looters had made off with almost all of recently-married couple's wedding gifts in the early days of the uprising, smashed their china and stole Dora's clothing. Their house was subsequently occupied by soldiers, who appropriated several plates and traded them for butter, and amused themselves by reading the couple's love letters. Although Clinkskill was fully aware that at least part of the damage had been done by the soldiers, his anger was directed at the Indians. The sight of his wasted home made him "pause and vow vengeance on the hideous brutes that had robbed us."²⁸

Aboriginal settlements sustained perhaps even more damage. Batoche, as the site of the main battle, was devastated. Métis houses had been destroyed by shelling, fire and looting, and Aboriginal homes across the territory were robbed by both DIA employees and Canadian soldiers. All of the Métis settlements and Indian reserves thought to have been involved in the conflict were scoured for rebels after the uprising, and search parties took the opportunity to strip residents of anything of value that remained. Agent Ansdell Macrae confiscated a variety of items on his tour of Battleford-area reserves in June, including arms and 'plunder',²⁹ while soldiers returned with "booty" like furs, leather and "Indian ornaments" taken in the name of souvenirs.³⁰ White residents' homes were looted in their absence, but Indians and Métis had to stand

²⁶ Some residents were unable to return to their homes for months, or even a year.

²⁷ "Jane Garson," in *The Voice of the People: Reminiscences of Prince Albert Settlement's Early Citizens, 1866-1895*, eds. Manon Lamontagne et al. (Prince Albert: Prince Albert Historical Society, 1985) 163.

²⁸ James Clinkskill, *A Prairie Memoir: The Life and Times of James Clinkskill, 1853-1936*, ed. Stan Hanson (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2003) 42-43, 57.

²⁹ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130 PT.1A, Ansdell Macrae to John A. Macdonald, letter, 10 June 1885.

³⁰ "Angus McKay," in *The Voice of the People*, 187-88.

by helplessly as they watched their possessions being carried off.³¹

In many cases, Aboriginal women were forced to deal with the looters and the devastation on their own. Most of the Native and Métis men who fled, were jailed, or were killed in battle, had families, and their absences had disastrous consequences. A small South Branch settlement of six families lost five men, leaving five widows and thirty children without breadwinners.³² With few men in the settlements, Aboriginal women, unlike their white counterparts, were left to bear “the brunt of the heavy loads” and resurrect their communities.³³ In many cases, women were forced to survive and rebuild without tools, guns, knives or horses.

Some women received government support, but, for the most part, women had to find their own ways to care for themselves and their children.³⁴ Non-Christian First Nations women whose husbands had disappeared or were jailed could take new mates. Both Big Bear’s wife and Poundmaker’s second wife, Grass Woman, went to live with other men after the two chiefs went to prison.³⁵ Christian women whose husbands were still alive could not remarry, and, along with widows, often sought employment to provide for their families. Some, like Josephite Gervais, taught, while others worked as domestic servants.³⁶

³¹ Norma Sluman and Jean Goodwill, *John Tootoosis* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1984) 76.

³² Charles Pelham Mulvaney, *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (Toronto: A.H. Hovey, 1886) 323.

³³ Ida Little Bear, “My Own Story,” *Bonneyville Tribune*, 9 May 1958.

³⁴ A few widows on the South Branch accepted aid, and Edgar Dewdney left instructions at Battleford for Poundmaker’s family to be “looked after” during the chief’s incarceration. NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130 PT.1A, Edgar Dewdney to John Carney, telegram, 8 September 1885.

³⁵ D’Arcy Jenish, *Indian Fall: The Last Great Days of the Plains Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy* (Toronto: Viking, 1999) 234; Hugh Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984) 196.

³⁶ Diane Payment, “‘La vie en rose’? Métis Women at Batoche, 1870-1920,” in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength*, eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996) 31.

The ways that the federal government dealt with economic losses stemming from the rebellion reflect, in many ways, the new order that emerged in the Saskatchewan territory. White residents were embittered and disheartened by their losses, and directed their anger towards their Aboriginal neighbours. Tensions ran high in the months immediately following the conflict, and suggestions about what to do with the rebel Indians abounded. A June editorial in the *Prince Albert Times* reveals that some of the recommendations were quite drastic, and were seemingly rooted in the desire for revenge:

We must at once dismiss the idea of wholesale shooting or presenting cast-off clothes of smallpox patients to the red man and we presume that those who up till recently regarded some such course as the true one have considerably modified their views since learning that their countrywomen have not, as was believed, been subjected to outrage worse than death.³⁷

This anger and hostility influenced how First Nations groups and the Métis were dealt with by officials after the rebellion. A rebellion losses commission was set up in February 1886, and residents were invited to submit claims for assets lost and services rendered.³⁸ Gender, race and class determined who would be compensated for what. White settlers received the most compensation, as their race and their positions as 'victims' meant that their claims were looked upon favorably. Most white men who filed claims received some money, as did white women.³⁹ Not surprisingly, however, the federal government wanted to keep its costs as low as possible, and therefore, even

³⁷ *Prince Albert Times*, 19 June 1885.

³⁸ Compensation forums and rewards for military service in the wake of military conflict were long-established in Canada, and gender and race were determining factors in the compensation processes that followed the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Euro-Canadians' claims were favored over those of non-whites, and those of men over those of women. For more information, see Janice Potter-Mackinnon, *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Cecilia Morgan, *Public Women and Virtuous Men: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 47, 50; Colin Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Madeline Verchères and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) 120-21.

³⁹ A few women filed for compensation in their own names, but as only a handful of white women were abandoned or widowed as a result of the rebellion, Euro-Canadian women likely left it to their husbands or other male relatives to deal with the commission. White women did, however, file for reimbursement for services rendered, such as providing meals, nursing and doing laundry.

white petitioners, in spite of the privilege their race afforded them, were generally not reimbursed for one hundred percent of their losses. Many also had their claims rejected on the basis that they were either drawing government rations at the time, or had benefitted from the services of Canadian soldiers.⁴⁰

First Nations, Métis and mixed-blood residents' claims were even less successful. Post-rebellion, the DIA labeled Native bands either loyal or disloyal according to officials' opinions of a band's conduct during the conflict. Rebel bands were not considered eligible for compensation. The commissioners, along with Prime Minister and Superintendent of Indian Affairs, John A. Macdonald, decided that loyal Indians' claims should be treated the same as those of white settlers, but, because of the Natives' race and the taint of 'rebel' activity, they received virtually no money. Almost all Métis, and especially those along the South Branch, were branded rebels as well, and many mixed-bloods suffered a similar fate. Most South Branch Métis, as in the trials that followed the rebellion, maintained that they had been coerced into joining Riel's forces, but the commissioners felt that the Métis had contributed to their own losses. The petitions of a few Conservative party loyalists and wealthier Métis were endorsed, but none of the farmers' or freighters' applications were accepted, with the exception of a few of the elderly.⁴¹ Several Métis women filed petitions on their own behalf, using their maiden rather than their married names, perhaps in order to avoid being connected to their 'rebel' husbands.⁴² Some tried to prove on the basis of their dowries that they held individual property separate from the family estate, but their declarations were

⁴⁰ In the case of men who had served in the Battleford Rifles, the commissioners commented that, "as these men and their families depended in great measure upon subsistence furnished by the Government, and were embodied to defend their own homes, it is considered they have been amply repaid already." Henry Halpin's claim for twenty-six dollars for working as a guide was rejected on the basis that he was one of the prisoners that the troops had been sent to release, and that "he ought to be thankful instead of making such a claim." One woman's claim for providing meals was rejected on the basis that she was drawing rations at the time. *Sessional Papers*, 1886, War Claims Commission, Report no.30, p117; *Sessional Papers*, 1886, War Claims Commission, Report no.35, p126; *Sessional Papers*, 1886, War Claims Commission, Report no.34, p122.

⁴¹ Diane Payment, *"The Free People - Otipemisiwak": Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, Parks Service, Environment Canada, 1990) 162-64.

⁴² Payment, "La vie en rose," 30.

rejected. As the wives of rebels, they were labeled as well, and only a few widows had their claims approved.⁴³ Mixed-bloods were dealt with in the same way. Even those like Cornelius Pruden of Bresaylor, who had been taken prisoner, were denied compensation for their property losses.⁴⁴ In the end, Métis, Natives, and mixed-bloods received little to no reimbursement for their extensive property damages.⁴⁵

The social repercussions of the rebellion were just as important for residents of the Saskatchewan territory as the economic impacts. 1885 marked a turning point in the way that social relations were ordered in the region. Residents of the Saskatchewan territory were more divided after the uprising than before it. Links between groups were weakened, and sometimes broken, and social barriers were put in place to maintain the separation. Prior to the rebellion, white settlers only had a tenuous hold on the region. Although there was a sense that the Northwest was destined to become 'civilized', Euro-Canadians were far outnumbered by Aboriginals and were not the dominant group in any of the major settlements (Battleford, Prince Albert or the South Branch). Furthermore, the extent of pre-rebellion racial intermarriage and the acceptance of Aboriginal spouses demonstrates that a distinct sense of white community, at least for white men, had not yet solidified.

After the rebellion, Euro-Canadian settlers' view of their place in society changed. The 'Indian uprising' and fear of attack forced white residents to spend weeks in close contact with each other, strengthening connections to each other and solidifying a white identity.⁴⁶ A feeling of victory over the 'rebels' also surfaced. The militia had,

⁴³ Payment, *The Free People*, 162-64.

⁴⁴ *Bresaylor Between the Battle and the North Saskatchewan Rivers: The Bresaylor Settlement, the Hamlet of Bresaylor, Bresaylor School District (3125), Arbor Hill School District (3270), Federal School District (4048), 1882-1992* (Bresaylor, SK: Bresaylor Heritage Museum Association Inc., 1992) 264.

⁴⁵ Some Métis and mixed-bloods did benefit from the scrip commission that was put in place after the rebellion.

⁴⁶ The situation in the Saskatchewan district was not unique. John Lutz argues that, on the Pacific Northwest coast, a focus on violence ostensibly caused by First Nations peoples served a "useful social function" for whites. A common enemy helped white settlers create a collective identity in a region where "the ethnically diverse settlers themselves had little in common beyond a pale skin." John Lutz,

in the eyes of white Canadians, defeated the rebels, and white settlers did what they could to affirm their conquests and tighten their grasp on authority. Residents celebrated both the Queen's birthday and Dominion Day with soldiers at Battleford and Saskatoon. Temperance colonist Maggie Hamilton wrote to her aunt that they had "played games all day and prizes [were] given *just as we did in Ontario*."⁴⁷ Many white men and women also testified as witnesses at the trials that followed the rebellion.⁴⁸ Euro-Canadians found themselves in a better position after the rebellion than before it; some had profited economically, but more importantly, white residents seized the opportunity to alter the balance of power in the district. The fear of the Indians did not disappear overnight, but a more acute sense of power and entitlement emerged. This new-found confidence, in many cases rooted in hostility towards and resentment of Aboriginals, conferred Euro-Canadians with the power to direct the affairs of not only the region, but of its non-white inhabitants as well. Notably, non-Native residents of the Northwest won representation in the House of Commons and the Senate in the wake of the rebellion, further solidifying their hold over the region.⁴⁹

A change in both practices and attitudes toward Aboriginals is evident in the wake of the uprising, and the policies directed towards First Nations peoples specifically were directly affected by Euro-Canadian residents' anger and frustration. "The petted Indians," P.G. Laurie wrote in the *Saskatchewan Herald* in April 1885, "are the bad ones."⁵⁰ After the rebellion, there was to be no more 'petting', and the DIA stepped in to

"Inventing and Indian War: Canadian Indians and American Settlers in the Pacific West, 1854-1864," *Journal of the West* 38 no.3 (1998) 12.

⁴⁷ My emphasis. The intention to celebrate as white subjects of the Queen is clear in the letters. Mrs. Hamilton specifically points out that their celebration mirrors those in Ontario. Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Hubert Woods Fonds, acc. 80.43, file 6, Hubert Wood letter to Albert Wood, 30 May 1885; SAB, Hamilton letters, A20, Maggie Hamilton letter to Mrs. James Gibson, 13 May 1885 to 21 July 1885.

⁴⁸ Métis and mixed-bloods participated as well, but white witnesses' testimonies held considerable sway.

⁴⁹ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 236.

⁵⁰ *Saskatchewan Herald*, 23 April 1885.

effect the necessary changes. The Canadian government used the uprising and the alleged Indian involvement in the conflict to shift control of the territory firmly into federal hands. Some officials were straightforward in their recommendations on how to deal with the insurgents. Indian agent John Rae advised that, in order to prevent another outbreak, the DIA should deprive Indian bands of their leadership by shooting all chiefs and councillors who had been involved in the rebellion.⁵¹ Rae's counsel was not acted on, but 'disloyal' bands, and eventually the 'loyal' ones as well, were subjected to various forms of punishment and humiliation.⁵²

In order to keep treaty Indians on their reserves, the DIA implemented a pass system under which residents could not leave their reserve without first obtaining a signed pass from the Indian agent. The scheme was initially adopted during the rebellion to prevent Natives from joining the rebels, but remained in place afterwards as well, even though it violated the treaties and the Canadian government did not legally have the power to enforce it. The pass system restricted economic opportunities for First Nations peoples and disrupted traditional relations and patterns of communications between the various bands,⁵³ and clearly served the interests of white settlers and the Canadian government. Confining Natives to their reserves reassured white residents and prospective immigrants that the Canadian west was safe and that the Indians no longer posed a threat.⁵⁴ The permit system, which restricted treaty Indians' ability to both purchase and sell goods and product without the permission of the Indian agent, and

⁵¹ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130 PT.1A, John Rae to Edgar Dewdney, 18 May 1885.

⁵² After the rebellion, bands 'loyal' during the conflict were exempt from the repressive measures applied to the rebels. Mistawasis and Ahtakahkoop were even rewarded with guns and livestock, provided with twine and ammunition for hunting and trapping, and with meat and furs to trade for supplies during the winter of 1885-86. Loyalist stature did not protect Ahtakahkoop and Mistawasis for long, and the two bands soon found themselves subject to the same policies as other reserves in the territory. Deanna Christensen, *Ahtahkakoop: The Epic Account of a Plains Cree Head Chief, His People, and Their Vision for Survival, 1816-1896* (Shell Lake, SK: Ahtahkakoop Publishing, 2000) 530-40.

⁵³ Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990) 150-51.

⁵⁴ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 155.

provisions in the Indian Act prohibiting trespassing on reserves were also enforced with new vigor following the rebellion.⁵⁵ Isolation effectively terminated Indian peoples' participation as integral components of the larger community, and removed them from the general public's consciousness. What white residents could not see they did not concern themselves with, and the DIA was given free rein on reserves, with few observers to critique the conditions that Natives were subjected to.

The DIA also moved to deprive First Nations bands of leadership. Reed's July 13 memorandum recommended that the "tribal system should be abolished so far as rebel Indians are concerned."⁵⁶ Chiefs like Poundmaker and Big Bear were jailed while others left for the United States, and several who remained were stripped of their chieftain status.⁵⁷ Those bands consequently found themselves leaderless, with no way to protest new regulations.⁵⁸ Some secretly appointed their own chiefs, but others faced the difficult years following the rebellion with no formal leadership and no one to speak for them against the conditions imposed by the DIA.⁵⁹

For many First Nations individuals, these schemes were inconsequential, as several bands found themselves without homes to return to after the rebellion. Some, like members of Big Bear's band, had no reserves to go to in the first place. Others had

⁵⁵ These tactics were part of what J.R. Miller describes as a "coercive policy of land acquisition and cultural change" in the nineteenth century, when First Nations peoples were viewed by Euro-Canadians as "[impediments] that had to be cleared away." J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*, 1st ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto: 1989) 273-74. For a more in-depth discussion of the permit system, see Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 156-57.

⁵⁶ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130, Reed memorandum, 13 July 1885.

⁵⁷ Dempsey, 184.

⁵⁸ Beardy's band was not allowed to replace their incarcerated chief, and, as punishment for their participation in the rebellion, they could not elect a new chief until 1936. George Mike interview with author, Beardy's reserve, 6 March 2003.

⁵⁹ SAB, Indian History Film Project, R-830, Isadore Ledoux interview, Leask, 21 July 1973.

their land confiscated and their bands dispersed.⁶⁰ Often, the DIA dealt with homeless First Nations groups by settling them with other bands. Rae reported in July that he had sent stragglers to the Thunderchild First Nation, some of whom were non-treaty while others had no home reserve.⁶¹ He does not indicate that he received the Thunderchild band's permission to do so, and such actions likely upset band dynamics and resulted in crowded conditions.

One tactic that DIA officials found that they could use against both on-reserve and off-reserve Indians was the manipulation of treaty monies. Annuity payments were withheld from rebel bands, sometimes for several years, both as punishment for their alleged involvement in the rebellion and to pay back debts incurred. Some of the losses of DIA employees were reimbursed from annuity money. Mixed-blood farm instructor Joseph McKay received \$300.00 from the Sweetgrass band's annuities in reparation for items that were taken from his home on the reserve.⁶² The funds to resupply bands with farm implements and livestock were also taken out of the payments.⁶³ Reed justified this policy by arguing that the money should be withheld both as punishment for rebel behavior, and because "many Indians in the past have spent their annuity money on articles more or less useless."⁶⁴

Control of annuity payments was devastating for treaty Indians. The government

⁶⁰ The Chacastapasin band members were branded rebels, even though there was little evidence to support this. Most had been off the reserve during the rebellion, but some were hunting in the Carrot River area while others had gone north to settle at Cumberland House. The band was paid annuities in 1886, and one member was even rewarded for his loyalty, but they were disbanded nevertheless and their land sold. Timothy Pynch, "Department of Indian Affairs Policy Regarding Non-settlement of Reserve Lands - The Chacastapasin Surrender," unpublished interim report (1973) 3.

⁶¹ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130 PT.1A, J.M. Rae to Edgar Dewdney, telegram, 17 July 1885.

⁶² NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130 PT.1A, Lawrence Vankoughnet to Edgar Dewdney, letter, 24 October 1885.

⁶³ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3714, f.21088, Edgar Dewdney to Lawrence Vankoughnet, telegram, 22 September 1885.

⁶⁴ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3584, f.1130, Reed memorandum, 13 July 1885.

had learned, even before the rebellion, that the most effective way to control its Native charges was by restricting food distribution, and a work-for-food policy was strictly enforced following the rebellion. Many bands were only provided with half-rations as punishment for their 'rebel' behavior. Some, like Whitecap's band, were able to earn extra income by doing odd jobs, but most were dependent on a combination of hunting, gathering and government rations.⁶⁵ With guns and ammunition scarce on most reserves, hunting was difficult, making the cash that annuities afforded essential for buying food and supplies.⁶⁶ Many Natives found themselves in dire circumstances without annuity payments, and DIA policies resulted in widespread starvation and disease stemming from poor nutrition and deplorable living conditions.⁶⁷

In the months and years following the rebellion, First Nations peoples in the Saskatchewan district found themselves in a desperate condition, but they did not simply resign themselves to being victims, and did what they could to better their lives. The old ladies inspired the younger members of the bands with their tenacity and determination.⁶⁸ Men hunted with bows and arrows, and women's ability to gather and utilize wild plants sustained communities.⁶⁹ Some protested their harsh treatment when they could. In 1887, the Assiniboine in the Battleford area threatened to leave for the United States if conditions on their reserves did not improve.⁷⁰ Many, however, simply chose to leave and seek better lives elsewhere, and others, fed up with DIA policies and the resulting inability to provide for their families, chose to dispense with government

⁶⁵ NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3710, f.19550-4, Edgar Dewdney to Lawrence Vankoughnet, telegram, 9 April 1886.

⁶⁶ 'Rebel' bands had their guns and horses confiscated, and all livestock were branded with a DIA mark, even though most belonged to individuals. Owners could neither sell their animals nor use them off-reserve without permission from the Indian agent or farm instructor. Christensen, 529.

⁶⁷ FNUCA, 1885 Resistance Project, George Mike, Sr. interview, Beardy's reserve, n.d. Mike reports that "camps were wiped out all over the sicknesses were so strong."

⁶⁸ Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe The Crees*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979) 114.

⁶⁹ FNUCA, 1885 Resistance Project, Don Chatsis interview, Prince Albert, n.d.

⁷⁰ Tyler, "Mosquito, Grizzly Bear's Head, and Lean Man Bands," 5.

control of their lives. They manipulated legal categories of identity by renouncing their treaty status, and therefore their identity as Indians under Canadian law, and took Métis scrip.⁷¹

Métis and mixed-bloods had a somewhat easier time after the rebellion, as they were not under the authority of the DIA and therefore not subject to the same regulations as Indians, but the rebellion was devastating for them as well. Rather than being confined to reserves, the 'halfbreeds' were branded traitors, and relegated to the fringes of society. Many were left destitute by the destruction wrought by the rebellion in their settlements,⁷² and, more importantly, relations with the white community, and even with other Aboriginal groups were damaged. Mixed-bloods had generally been looked upon favorably by their white neighbours before the uprising, and some had even been in alliance with Euro-Canadian farmers the previous winter, but the rebellion broke the bond between the mixed-bloods and their white neighbours. Blame and mistrust built into hostility and resentment that, in some communities, still exists.⁷³

Aboriginals' relations with each other were similarly disrupted. The connection between the Métis and Indians on the South Branch, already strained before the conflict, deteriorated in its wake. Many Métis living as treaty Indians were evicted from reserves by the DIA in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion, further separating the two groups. Bresaylor residents had been taken captive, and witnessed their homes being looted and their livestock slaughtered by Métis acquaintances (and, in some cases, relatives) and neighbouring Natives. Riel's hanging also caused hard feelings between the Métis and their mixed-blood cousins, and the exodus that followed the rebellion contributed to the discontent. Aboriginals continued to intermarry after the rebellion, but animosity stemming from such incidents lingered.

⁷¹ For example, in 1886, four members of Ahtakahkoop's band were discharged from Treaty Six and took scrip. Christensen, 559.

⁷² NWMP Inspector A. Cuthbert found in January 1886 that most of the Métis were living on rabbits. NAC, Government Archives Division, Indian Affairs, RG10, v.3585, f.1130 Pt.8, Inspector A. Cuthbert to NWMP Superintendent A.B. Perry, letter, 20 January 1886.

⁷³ William Caplette, in *Bresaylor Between the Battle and the North Saskatchewan Rivers*, 79.

Métis and First Nations groups worked to retain their cultural identities and held on through difficult times to reemerge as influential forces in western Canadian society in the last forty years. Mixed-bloods, on the other hand, do not seem to have preserved the same sense of identity their cousins did. The lack of a language barrier and their more comfortable economic status likely made them more acceptable to whites as neighbours and marriage partners.

The rebellion damaged, and in some cases broke bonds that had connected residents of the Saskatchewan territory before the rebellion. In an area dependent on interracial contact for both economic activities and social ties, the rebellion had important and long-lasting repercussions. Relations between groups were altered. For Euro-Canadian residents, a strengthened sense of a white community emerged during the rebellion, and conceptions of superiority and entitlement evolved. They were the victors, and, although fears of another 'Indian uprising' did not disappear overnight, Euro-Canadians who remained in the region acquired a new-found sense of confidence. Moreover, they directed their anger towards the Aboriginal residents of the region, who they saw as traitors and rebels. In some cases, the rebellion reinforced existing stereotypes and racist attitudes, accelerating processes already in place, but, in others, the uprising altered beliefs and affected relationships. The result was that Euro-Canadians implemented barriers, both physical and social, to create and maintain segregation, and, while Aboriginal residents of the Saskatchewan territory did not disappear after the rebellion, fear of retribution seems to have made many communities turn inwards. While the economic impacts of the conflict were serious, the most important effects of the rebellion were in the ways that relations between groups and the social order in the territory were altered. The hostility resulting from the conflict was a catalyst for the social segregation still evident in Saskatchewan in today.

CONCLUSION

The Northwest Rebellion, in comparison to other North American civil wars, was short-lived and geographically contained, but for the people who lived through it, the residents of the Saskatchewan district, 1885 was a real and a frightening ordeal. By exploring micro-relations at the individual, family and community levels, and focusing on the connections between residents and ways that they related to each other, a portrait of the region emerges that reveals that Euro-Canadians and Aboriginals were linked to each other in many, and often subtle, ways before the uprising. This study shows that race and gender were determining factors in how white, First Nations, Métis and mixed-blood men and women experienced both the conflict itself and its aftermath. Its impact on residents' lives and society in the Saskatchewan district was considerable and the effects long-lasting. Barriers, both physical and social, were created and solidified, and, although groups were still linked by the same family ties that bound them before the spring of 1885, the ways that they viewed each other changed after the rebellion. Mistrust and hostility that had not existed before, or that had been repressed, broke the bonds that connected racial groups, and sometimes families. The new order in the Saskatchewan territory was one in which Euro-Canadians held power, and Aboriginals were second-class citizens barred from mainstream society. The rebellion accelerated white domination of the region, and acted as a catalyst for the racial divisions apparent in Saskatchewan in the twentieth century.

Previous studies have looked at the causes of the conflict, the discourse surrounding it, or the experiences of one racial group, but this thesis utilizes a wide range of sources to examine the intersections of race, gender and family ties and uncover what happened to all people in the Saskatchewan district both during and after the 1885 rebellion. Government records, newspapers and Hudson's Bay Company documents are essential to the study, but several groups of records not previously utilized by rebellion

scholars play an important role as well. Personal memoirs and letters by Saskatchewan women offer some insight into how white women viewed and dealt with the uprising, and oral histories add Aboriginal perspectives. In the case of the interviews conducted by myself and those collected under the Indian History Film Project, they offer viewpoints and information not previously incorporated into histories of the rebellion.

A focus on the rebellion at the local level reveals that the most significant effects of the rebellion occurred in the less-tangible areas of community and personal relations. Although rebellion historiography tends to depict whites, Indians, Métis and mixed-bloods as distinct groups in 1885, this was not the case in the Saskatchewan territory before the uprising. Residents lived in a multi-racial society. They were tied to each other by both economics and sexual relationships, and family ties were essential to community relations. Settlements were not racially homogenous, and communities exhibited varying degrees of racial integration. Interracial connections, however, did not eliminate racism or discrimination. The Saskatchewan district in 1885 was a society in transition. A struggle for resources, along with the attempt to impose white authority and the Canadian government's failure to fulfill the conditions of the treaties, resulted in increased tensions.

Race was a determining factor in how Saskatchewan residents experienced the uprising. Most Euro-Canadians passed the rebellion barricaded in towns or forts, and, while they dealt with a great deal of fear and uncertainty, their position as white Canadian citizens afforded them privileges not available to their Aboriginal neighbours, namely the ability to call on the Canadian government to protect their lives and property. Those whites held prisoner in First Nations camps faced more difficult hardships, both physically and emotionally, but these accounted for only a small percentage of white settlers, and the reality was that Euro-Canadians had little to fear from their Aboriginal neighbours. The panic that ensued at the thought of an Indian uprising was rooted, in spite of racial integration, in misunderstandings and stereotypes of the 'savage' Indian.

The rebellion was just as fearful an event for the First Nations, Métis and mixed-blood residents as it was for Euro-Canadians. Aboriginals, however, as non-whites,

were not afforded the same advantages and protection as whites, and were forced to resort to different and often more hazardous means to protect their families. Only a handful supported the rebellion. A few took advantage of the chaos to settle personal scores or obtain supplies, and some were drawn in unwittingly, becoming accidental rebels, but most did their best to avoid involvement in the conflict.

Gender and race intersected to influence how men and women dealt with the rebellion. The ideology of wartime roles for men and women dictates that men are the protectors, and women are the ones who need protecting. Analysis of men's and women's actions during the rebellion, however, shows that neither men nor women confined their activities to the roles laid out for them. Although men tried, they were not always able to function as armed protectors, and race influenced the extent to which they could do so. Women, as caretakers, were responsible for caring for both men and children, but as a result of the unusual situations that they faced, they were sometimes forced to step outside of their prescribed circle and act in 'unfeminine' ways. Aboriginal women did so more often than white women, as they usually could not seek the protection of a fort or town, and found themselves more often in unsafe situations.

In the end, the rebellion had long-lasting repercussions for residents of the Saskatchewan district. The outcome of the rebellion was much different for whites in the Saskatchewan territory, both because of the way that they experienced the uprising and because of the privileged position their race afforded them. For Aboriginal peoples, many of whom were already leading a marginal existence before the spring of 1885, the rebellion was a turning point. Afterwards, their place in Northwest society changed, and, for many, their living conditions, access to resources and social standing deteriorated.

The most influential changes wrought by the rebellion were subtle, and affected community formation, the social order and the ways that groups viewed each other. Families and communities, and especially those of Aboriginals, were fractured when individuals were killed, jailed or left the region. The fear bred by the rebellion, along with the property losses that Euro-Canadians suffered, resulted in hostility and mistrust

on the part of whites that was directed primarily toward First Nations peoples. The situation in the Assiniboia district, where Euro-Canadians already far outnumbered Aboriginals in 1885, and process of racial segregation was already underway, points to the possibility that the situation was inevitable in the Saskatchewan district as well. The embittered feelings resulting from the rebellion, however, were specific to the uprising, and most certainly contributed to the acceleration of the Euro-Canadian campaign for control of the district. After the defeat of the 'rebels', the region became, at least in white settlers' minds, their own, and Aboriginals were seen as traitors and insurgents. White residents found a new confidence, and this, combined with anger towards those who had ostensibly caused the rebellion, led Euro-Canadians to consolidate their power over the territory. In many cases, the rebellion was used as justification to continue the process of removing Indians from Canadian society and making them irrelevant to the Euro-Canadian majority.¹ After a Métis-led insurrection, First Nations peoples in the Saskatchewan district bore the brunt of white resentment, and treaty Indians were subsequently subjected, under the auspices of the Department of Indian Affairs, to various forms of humiliation and control. For Natives, after the uprising "[being] Indian was like being in a cage...There was no freedom for an Indian."²

The hard feelings that arose from the rebellion damaged relations between white and Aboriginals, sometimes irreparably. The division between white and Indian was not instantaneous. It was a process that took time, and Aboriginals did not disappear completely from Saskatchewan communities. The end of the rebellion and the implementation of the pass system, however, marked the beginning of a period in which First Nations' peoples in western Canada were relegated to the periphery rather than occupying the more central role that they had before the conflict. The rebellion did not create new racial stereotypes, but it did reinforce those that already existed and

¹ J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989) 274.

² First Nations University of Canada Archives, 1885 Resistance Project, Clarence Swimmer interview, Poundmaker reserve, 11 June 1993.

undermined whatever softening in attitudes may have occurred during white residents' time in the Northwest. The separation between Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal became more distinct, both physically after the pass system was implemented, keeping Indians out of view of whites, and socially in the way that Euro-Canadians viewed the place of Aboriginals in 'their' society. Aboriginal men and women no longer commanded respect from the greater community, and were instead relegated to the bottom of the social ladder. The Métis were pushed to the margins of white society, while First Nations men and women were confined to their reserves, and disappeared for many years from white consciousness. Economic ties were re-established to a certain extent in the settlement period, when Aboriginal men and women were hired by settlers as farmhands and domestic servants, but interracial marriage remained taboo and the essential connections those relationships provided were lost.

The findings of this thesis are important because they point to two pivotal issues. First, racial groups before the rebellion were not separate and distinct; intermarriage and racial integration were extensive. And, while this is significant in itself, as this interracial, transitional period in the settlement era has been all but written out of prairie histories, it is critical in the case of the rebellion because, in several ways, these ties affected how people experienced the rebellion and, in some cases, whether or not they survived the conflict. Moreover, the extent of racial intermixing before the rebellion compared to that afterwards is indicative of the impact the rebellion had on social relations in the area.

Secondly, and contrary to what other historians have argued, the rebellion was a pivotal event in the history of the Saskatchewan territory. Its effects were profound and long-lasting, and impacted all groups in the Saskatchewan district. The conflict was a catalyst for some processes already in place, like the move towards white domination of the region, but changed the direction of others, namely racial intermixing. The hostility and resentment that arose from the uprising undermined relationships and ties between Euro-Canadians and Aboriginals. As Joe Dion notes, "a deep rooted feeling of distrust on both sides was the unfortunate result of the clash. Throughout the years this feeling

of distrust has diminished but very little and may never be completely lived down.”³
Although certainly not the only contributor, the social segregation and mistrust stemming from the rebellion are one of the primary factors behind the resulting racial stratification and poor Aboriginal-white relations still evident in Saskatchewan today.

³ Joseph F. Dion, *My Tribe the Crees*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1979) 113.

APPENDIX A: ORAL HISTORY PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Fleury, Rose - b. 1926, interviewed at Duck Lake, SK, 17 March 2003

Mrs. Fleury self-identifies as Métis, and at the time of the interview was a Métis National Elder for the Métis National Women's Council, an Elder of Métis Local no. 10, and Vice-President and Elder of Indigenous Women of the North.

Gardipy, Mary - b. 1906, interviewed at Beardy's/Okemasis reserve, 6 March 2003

Mrs. Gardipy self-identifies as Métis. She married a member of the Beardy's/Okemasis First Nations.

Mike, George - b. 1916, interviewed at Beardy's/Okemasis reserve, 6 March 2003

Mr. Mike self-identifies as First Nations, and has served as chief of Beardy's/Okemasis First Nations.

Mike, Jake - b. 1940, interpreter

Mr. Mike, who is the son of George Mike, served as interpreter for the interviews conducted at Beardy's/Okemasis reserve on 6 March 2003. Mr. Mike has had a long career in the field of education, both as a teacher and a policy administrator for his own band and for other Aboriginal organizations in Saskatchewan.

Smith, Joseph [pseudonym] - Mr. Smith is a descendant of the founding families of the Bresaylor community. His grandparents were alive during the rebellion, and passed on their stories to him. Mr. Smith chose to remain anonymous, and also chose to fill out a questionnaire comprised of the same questions other informants were asked rather than participating in an interview.

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R.K. Allen Fonds
R.S. Cassels Fonds
William Laurie Fonds

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Post Records
Private Records
Western Development Land Records

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Hubert Woods Fonds

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Barbara (Hunter) Anderson Papers
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 R.K. Allen Diary
 Ruth Buck Papers
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