

farmers rebel when many others actively supported the government? What are the attitudes that allow us to understand the nature of loyalty in Upper Canada? In short, this book does not advance our understanding of the rebellion; students of the period will continue to rely on sources such as G.M. Craig's *Upper Canada: The Formative Years* for their information.

This problem is linked to a second one: for whom is this book intended? While the selection of sources is good, specialists in the field will want to examine the original documents themselves rather than rely on a collection such as this. And it would be difficult to recommend this book to students — does a minor incident like the rebellion in Upper Canada merit wading through 437 pages of documents?

Moreover, books such as this are becoming increasingly anachronistic because of new technology. In the past, it was difficult for researchers to study documents unless they went to the repositories where the originals were located. Archives and libraries can now make primary sources available through microfilm or microfiche, and the possibilities associated with computerization are boundless. University presses which have limited sources of funding might do better to direct their resources towards the publication of scholarly monographs rather than collections of documents such as this.

In conclusion, the introduction does provide a concise political overview of the rebellion and the documents can be useful, but those interested in unravelling the peculiarities of this period would be better directed to Colin Read's own excellent study of the Duncombe rebellion, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada*, or Ronald Stagg's thesis, which is available on microfilm. These extended studies provide more answers and more clearly represent the work of serious scholars whose primary task after all is presenting analyses of historical problems rather than simply collecting the research notes which they utilized for their own work.

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**1885: Métis Rebellion or Government Conspiracy?** DON MCLEAN. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1985. 137 p. ISBN 0-919143-17-2 \$12.95.

The anniversary of the North West Rebellion or, more correctly, the Métis Armed Resistance, resulted in a number of publications on Louis Riel, the Métis, and the military engagements of 1885. After the pro-government, anti-Riel, anti-Métis stance of Thomas Flanagan in *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered* (Saskatoon, 1983), one hoped for an effective response to disprove or at least provide a "nuance" to Flanagan's rather harsh and narrow perspective. Unfortunately, Don McLean's interpretation of the causes of the Rebellion, though very different from Flanagan's, is both unconvincing and amateurish. The approach sets up villains (church and government) *versus* victims (the Métis). Curiously enough, only the North West Mounted Police, in particular the commanding officer of the detachment at Fort Carlton, Major L.N.F. Crozier, "who had a sense of honor and did everything possible to prevent armed conflict," (p. 113) come out unscathed. The study lacks a solid research base; it relies on selective sources and "upon reference and a priori constructions to build the case against the Government." (p. 121) More seriously, perhaps, the book undermines the role and credibility of the Métis and of their political

and spiritual leader, Louis “David” Riel in the “mouvement national.” To suggest that the Métis of the South Saskatchewan River district were duped by J.A. Macdonald, Lawrence Clarke, Father André, Charles Nolin, and other “agents provocateurs” conveys the image of a confused and divided community. Similarly, to link the Liberal Reform (Farmers’) Movement unilaterally to the Métis cause is to make light of political expediency whether Liberal or Conservative. The influence of William Henry Jackson on Riel is undeniable, but Riel, Nolin, Lépine, and Schmidt were fundamentally Conservative or more specifically adherents of the Macdonald-Cartier Liberal-Conservative tradition. The Liberals or “Rouges” made important gains in the district, eventually sweeping the vote, but only after 1885.

Many of the important themes presented by McLean definitely warrant more substantive analysis. For example, with respect to the view that the Hudson’s Bay Company was a colonial agency fostering the dependency and destruction of the Métis at Red River between 1821 and 1869, it is important to show that the Métis were not mere pawns in the hands of a manipulative clique of company traders and legislators. True, some were co-opted as agents across the border while others served on the increasingly inept Council of Assiniboia, but the resistance of Guillaume Sayer, Louis Riel père *and* l’abbé Belcourt testifies to their strength and ability to circumvent and diffuse the authority of the company.

The sweeping discussion of the causes and impact of the Red River Resistance (it was not a rebellion) of 1869-70 is likewise an unsatisfactory prelude to 1885. In Riel’s own words, “The troubles of the North-West in 1885 are the continuation of the troubles in 1869 ... They are the result of fifteen years’ war.”<sup>1</sup> The dispossession and dispersal of the Manitoba Métis between 1870 and 1882 has been well documented in a number of articles. To reiterate, as McLean does on pages 25-26, that the Métis left Manitoba for the North-West Territories to pursue the buffalo and “recreate the life of Red River,” reinforces the traditional stereotypes and clichés of the “wandering, ignorant and indolent” Métis. Recent inquiries into Métis communities at Red River and Batoche suggest that the Métis were keenly aware of and responded to economic and social change. Discriminatory government policies and Euro-Canadian immigration definitely contributed to their re-settlement. But it should be emphasized that the prospect of new economic opportunities was foremost in the minds of Métis commercial traders such as Xavier Letendre, Salomon Venne, and Georges Fisher, as well as farmers such as Jean Caron, Joseph Pilon, and Baptiste Boucher when they migrated to the South Saskatchewan district.

On the subject of the role in the clergy in 1885, there is definitely a basis to McLean’s claim of incriminating behaviour and provocative action on the part of Father André. The French Oblats de Marie-Immaculée, missionaries who had experienced religious intolerance and secularizing legislation in their homeland, were naturally supportive of a state which acknowledged church rights and suspicious of any “revolutionary” movements. On the other hand, the Canadian abbé Ritchot fully supported and even directed his “compatriots” Riel and the Métis in 1869-70. Furthermore, according to Métis tradition: “si on avait eu le père Ritchot en 1885, les choses auraient mieux marché avec

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<sup>1</sup> Desmond Morton, *The Queen vs Louis Riel* (Toronto, 1974), p. 352.

les prêtres.”<sup>2</sup> To suggest that the erratic Father André wielded substantial influence with Macdonald in Ottawa, Dewdney in Regina, or Macdowall in Prince Albert is to ignore the fundamental mistrust between the two parties (clergy and government) since 1869-70. The Métis who declared “que nous devons redouter les pères”<sup>3</sup> did not invite the local missionaries to their assemblies of 1884-85. Riel, Dumont, and the leaders of “le petit provisoire de la Saskatchewan” were resentful of the temperamental and scheming Father André and were definitely not controlled nor deceived by him. It is important to note that the fiery missionary was profoundly shaken by the events of 1885. He was the only one to criticize the government publicly for the burning and looting at Batoche, a charge which incurred admonitions from Bishops Taché and Grandin and the resurgence of a drinking problem.

Similarly, the role of the provocative Hudson’s Bay Company factor Lawrence Clarke in the events of 1885 is also overstated. The source for many of McLean’s allegations is N.F. Black’s *History of Saskatchewan* (1913) and circumstantial evidence in the Macdonald and Dewdney Papers. One suspects that like Charles Nolin and Philippe Garnot, mediocre politicians who were frustrated in their efforts to play a central role in the action, Clarke ended up playing one side against the other. The question which again surfaces is the extent of his influence and credibility in the community. The Métis were not dependent on the Hudson’s Bay Company for trade by 1880 and were wary of the intrigues of Lawrence Clarke.<sup>4</sup>

The discussion of Métis self-government under the laws of St. Laurent in 1873 and the subsequent challenge to Métis authority by the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Territorial Government in chapter four is more persuasive. Also, the activities of the Prince Albert Colonization Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway point convincingly to collusion and complete disregard of Métis land rights. It is not true, however, that “large numbers of Métis left St. Laurent after 1875.” (p. 49) Homestead and Lands Branch records show persistent and sustained action on the part of the Métis in perfecting their claims. Furthermore, important migrations from Manitoba in 1878 and 1882 ensured a continued occupation.

Much of the rest of the story, however, is very tenuous if not fanciful. To suggest that “Old Tomorrow” would actually provoke a rebellion to save the CPR is contrary to Macdonald’s traditional political strategy and temperament. The charge of dispossession and isolation of the Métis from the economic and political mainstream of the country is much more plausible, but it needs a more thorough documentation and analysis. With

2 Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG9, A6, Mémoires de Louis Goulet. This feeling was also expressed by Joseph Jobin (1884-1979) in an interview with the author in September 1976. Jobin’s grandfather and great uncle were active participants in the Métis resistance of 1885.

3 Archives de l’Archevêché de Saint-Boniface, Journal de l’abbé G. Cloutier, Batoche, 1886, vol. II, p. 5152.

4 According to Louis Schmidt (Archives de l’Archevêché de Saint-Boniface, Compte rendu de Louis Schmidt des événements de 1884-85, pp. 29817-21), Clarke advised Dumont on 18 March that the government was determined to nip the revolt in the bud. The police (NWMP) were coming to arrest Riel and the principal leaders (Nolin and Dumont). Schmidt states that the Métis were determined to protect Riel. Clarke’s inflammatory report only confirmed what their agents had observed: police reinforcements at Carlton (Crozier with fifty men from Battleford), and now Irvine and a detachment were en route to Prince Albert from Regina. Resort to arms was now inevitable. Clarke’s report “mit le feu aux poudres” according to Riel (PAC, Records of Justice Canada, RG 13, B2, pp. 1036-43) but Métis testimonies suggest that the council had been considering armed resistance since early March.

respect to this and other themes, the Riel Papers, the papers of the Société historique Métisse, the Métis testimonies to abbé Cloutier, and other “untapped” sources should shed more light on the little known Métis perspective on the events on 1885.

In conclusion, one suspects there is definitely a case against the government in 1885 but the evidence presented by the author points to a much more complex account.

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**The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History.** DONALD HARMAN AKENSON. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984. xi, 404 p. illus., ISBN 0-7735-0430-3 cl.; 0-7735-0591-1 pa. \$15.95.

**Being Had: Historians, Evidence and the Irish in North America.** DONALD HARMAN AKENSON. Port Credit, Ontario: P.D. Meany, 1985. x, 243 p. ISBN 0-80835-014-7 \$45.00.

It is a not entirely facetious axiom of social history that the more common a phenomenon, the less fully it is documented or studied. So it has been with the role of the Irish in the history of Ontario. Those familiar only with the major political studies of the province before Confederation might well assume that it was largely populated by Scots and some English, with a few annoying Americans around the edges. A reading of Akenson should correct that perception.

If Ontario history, at least until the last decade, has largely been characterized by a study of its dominant political élites, it has also been marked by specialized studies, limited by period and region. It is a major accomplishment of Akenson that he offers a broad synthesis, tracing the Irish for almost a century in the province as a whole, but particularly through a microstudy of Leeds and Lansdowne townships. Because of his book's scope, Akenson's title can be misleading; his book has as much to say about the region it studies as about the Irish.

Akenson begins with a general survey of Irish immigration to Ontario based on British statistics and Canadian manuscript censuses. Given the difficulties and lacunae of his sources, Akenson is often forced to arrive at reasonable approximations between possible extremes. His conclusions are startling. It has been generally assumed that the Irish became a major element in Ontario's population only after the famine migration of the mid-1840s and that the majority coming to Ontario were Roman Catholics from southern Ireland. By Akenson's calculations, the Irish were a quarter of the population of Ontario both before and after the famine years, making them consistently the largest European element in the population. Moreover, the ratio of Protestant to Catholic immigrants was constant at 2:1 both before and after the famine migrations. Migration to Ontario originated in the same areas and the same economic strata after the famine as before. The poor could not afford to migrate; the well-to-do did not need to, leaving the middling classes. Most who came were managers of small farms from north-central Ireland. The Irish tended to settle in rural areas, not urban, with 75 per cent of them or more going to such areas until at least 1871.