

Tuesday, May 13th, 2014

Métis Community Leaders
Métis People of BC

Re: Remembering our Métis Ancestors May 9th – 12th

Open letter to Métis people,

I write this article today to spend a moment to remember one of the most significant events for Métis people and arguably all Canadians. I would argue that most Métis do not fully know or understand our history about being Métis or the struggles our ancestors had. For example it was only 129 years ago yesterday when many of our ancestors had to surrender in defeat in Batoche, Saskatchewan on May 12th, 1885.

A small Métis militia of approximately 250 Métis people, with some First Nations and other settlers, stood their ground to protect their lands as Canada was expanding and incoming homesteaders were taking their lands. Despite numerous petitions the Métis people around Batoche, including Fish Creek and Duck Lake decided to organize their own governance to protect their rights and enter into Canada peacefully but based on mutual respect and protection of their lands. This small militia faced approximately 1500 Canadian troops and as the final stages were set on May 9th it was clear that defeat was inevitable by May 12th, 1885.

I often wonder how come so little is known about such important historical facts as this by Canadians. I do recognize there is much more to Métis history and events across Canada but there is no denying this specific event as an integral piece of our Métis identity today. Louis Riel was requested to lead the Métis governance in Batoche but there are so many other stories. Louis Riel's council of the day in 1885 included some of my own direct ancestors and many other family names connected with our people today:

- Baptiste Boyer
- Donald Ross
- Damase Carrier
- Ambroise Jobin
- Norbert Delorme
- Moise Ouelette
- Baptiste Parenteau
- Pierre Henry
- David Tourond
- Oierre Gariepy
- Maxime Lepine
- Albert Monkman
- Baptiste Boucher

This council was supported by Adjutant General Gabriel Dumont and a number of Captains who organized with team men each, based on the traditions of the buffalo hunt.

I often wonder as I witness the debates and challenges about socio-economic issues facing Métis people, debates about who is Métis, etc. if these same people understand our history and the lives lost fighting for Métis rights still not defined or recognized by the Government of Canada 129 years later. I



wonder if these same people appreciate the importance of pushing forward in a just and honorable way, not letting the actions of a few speak for the intent of our ancestors?

Métis people commemorate Louis Riel day each year by recognizing November 16th when Louis Riel was wrongfully hung in Regina on November 16th, 1885 as the leader of the battle in Batoche. However I spend a few moments each May 9th – 12th remembering the loss of Métis lives that fought for their most basic needs of land and recognition of the Métis culture and way of life. The senseless death of Damase Carriere who was dragged to death by Canadian troops on horse May 12th, 1885 after breaking his leg. Or the death of Marcile Gratton on May 12th. She was a ten year old “French Half Breed” girl who innocently ran across the front lines of fire and was shot dead on the doorstep of one of the stores in Batoche. She wanted to be with her mother.

Let us not forget by honouring our ancestors today. Reconciliation has not yet been achieved for Métis people across Canada and these wounds are not old, these events were only 129 year ago.

Many of us are trying to restore and rebuild governance and it is my hope our Métis people will learn their history and culture. It is time that schools across Canada commit to proper historical and cultural education for our Métis and non Métis children. As our country we all need to better understand our true history.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Henry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Keith Henry
President