

LOUIS RIEL A Métis Icon

Louis Riel is the most remarkable person in Métis history. As their iconic leader, he represents all those valiant Métis who fought for basic human rights not only for the Métis but for First Nations and other Canadians.

The dynamic Riel was a natural-born leader whose life profoundly influenced Canadian society and politics, the founding of Manitoba, and the rights of Western Canadians. His impact continues to this day and will continue into the future. Highly intelligent, well-educated and a compelling orator, he was elected to the Parliament of Canada on three separate occasions while he was still in his twenties although due to politics he was never able to take his seat.

His fascinating life combined the heights of success and the depths of defeat, the sacred and the profane. To some he conjoined fame and infamy; to others he was an iconoclast who became an icon. To Riel himself he had a prophetic mission – to lead and champion his people, the Métis, in having their grievances remedied, their rights obtained, and their lives uplifted.

Riel has been called the first prairie populist politician. A plaque accompanying the monumental statue of Louis Riel which stands adjacent to the magnificent Manitoba Legislative Buildings in Winnipeg reads in part as follows:

In 1992, the Parliament of Canada and the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba formally recognized Riel's contribution to the development of the Canadian Confederation and his role, and that of the Métis, as founders of Manitoba.

Many of the demands in the Bill of Rights he championed for the Métis and for Westerners in 1885 came to pass after his unjust execution. Results of his leadership of the Métis include Manitoba becoming a Province of Canada in 1870; the people of what is now Saskatchewan and Alberta winning the right to vote and be elected Members of Parliament in 1886, and responsible government in 1887, and Provincial status in 1905.

Other notable outcomes inspired by Riel's life include the Métis people being specifically recognized in the *Constitution Act of Canada, 1982* and his being looked upon by the Métis as a hero and their greatest symbol.

Riel has been the subject of stage, radio, film, opera, television, documentaries, monuments, and a postage stamp. More books, biographies, and articles have been written about this charismatic Métis icon than any other Canadian in history.

Riel is honored every year in a number of Canadian cities with flag raising ceremonies. These are held at city halls and other public places including his grave site in St. Boniface. Manitoba's statutory Family Holiday in February has been named "Louis Riel Day".

Louis Riel is an inspiration to Métis people. It is as a result of his dedication, leadership, and legacy that the Métis today can be "PROUD TO BE MÉTIS". His fight for basic human rights and democracy in Western Canada is truly memorable.

Is Riel a hero? If a hero is one who forfeits his life as a result of fighting for the rights of his people and others in a just cause, then Louis Riel is a hero not only to the Métis but also to all Canadians who believe in and fight for basic human rights.

LONG LIVE THE MEMORY OF LOUIS RIEL.

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