

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

**At the Cultural and Religious Crossroads: Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns in the Canadian**

**Northwest, 1848-1883**

**by**

**Lesley Erickson**

**A THESIS**

**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE**

**DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY**

**CALGARY, ALBERTA**

**JULY, 1997**

**© Lesley Erickson, 1997**



**National Library  
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services**

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques**

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

**The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

**0-612-24582-9**

**Canada**

## **ABSTRACT**

Sara Riel has been overshadowed by the attention paid to her famous brother, Louis. Yet, a study of her life provides great insight into aspects of the western Canadian past. Her experiences as a Métis Grey Nun and missionary were shaped by complex factors of race, gender, class, and religion. This study also contributes to our understanding of women's, specifically the Grey Nuns', contributions to the development of the West. The Grey Nuns staffed the Catholic missions of the West and provided essential social services such as health care and education. By accepting Métis, Mixed-blood and Aboriginal women, like Sara Riel, into their order, they demonstrated an ability to adapt to western society and to overcome racial boundaries. In particular, this study of a Métis woman missionary, sent to serve but also transform Native society, challenges simple models of missionaries as "conquerors," Catholic sisterhoods as auxiliaries, and Natives as victims.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Sarah Carter for her guidance and suggestions. I would also like to thank Dr. Francis and Dr. Joy for taking the time to attend my defence. Carol Boily at the Grey Nuns' Archives, St. Boniface, Sister Fernande Champagne at the Grey Nuns' Archives, Edmonton, and Sister Florence Buors at the Archbishop's Archives in St. Boniface offered invaluable assistance during my research trips. Special thanks are due to Stephanie McMullan who took the time to read my thesis and to provide spur of the moment translations over the telephone. I was fortunate to receive a Province of Alberta Graduate Scholarship that allowed me to concentrate on research and writing. The permission from the Hudson's Bay Company to use their archives is gratefully acknowledged. Finally, I would like to thank my family Lynne, Gary, and Neil Erickson and Roland Longpré for their support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES OR ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
<b>CHAPTERS</b>	
I     AT THE CULTURAL CROSSROADS: HISTORIOGRAPHY PERTAINING TO SARA RIEL’S LIFE.....	15
II    THE INFLUENCE OF CLASS AND GENDER ON SARA AND LOUIS RIEL’S INTERACTIONS WITH THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERGY AT RED RIVER.....	43
III   HIEARCHIES OF RACE AND CLASS AT RED RIVER: SARA RIEL’S STATUS AS A GREY NUN.....	79
IV    “TRUE MISSIONARY OF THE NORTH”: SARA RIEL AND THE GREY NUNS AT ÎLE-À-LA-CROSSE, 1871-1883.....	108
CONCLUSION.....	145
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	153

## LIST OF FIGURES OR ILLUSTRATIONS

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Alexandre-Antonin Taché.....	45
2. Julie Riel, 1885.....	54
3. Jean-Louis Riel, 1850.....	54
4. The Grey Nuns' Convent, 1850s.....	61
5. Grey Nun with Students, Undated.....	83
6. Marguerite Connolly, 1877.....	86
7. Map: Location of parishes where Grey Nuns taught in the Red River area.....	91
8. Joseph Dubuc.....	99
9. Sara Riel's sketch of the Catholic mission at Île-à-la-Crosse, 1874.....	108
10. Map: Sara Riel's Journey to Île-à-la-Crosse, 1871.....	113
11. Sara Riel's painting of Île-à-la-Crosse, 1874.....	119

## INTRODUCTION

*Louis, chase away the sad and troubling thoughts that our last meeting gave birth to. With the Grace of God the darkness of the present will disappear with time. Be confident! Until that time we must do our duty; you as a fervent Christian and me as a Sister of Charity.*

Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 7 September 1868<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in the 1840s a unique development occurred in the Catholic mission field of western Canada. Métis and Mixed-blood women<sup>2</sup> became members of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, popularly known as the Grey Nuns. The Grey Nuns, a French-Canadian Catholic sisterhood, arrived at Red River in 1844 as missionaries to the local Métis and Native populations. Joseph-Norbert Provencher, bishop of St. Boniface, hoped that the Grey Nuns would “civilise” the Métis population at Red River by teaching Métis girls to become exemplary wives and mothers to Catholic, sedentary, and agricultural families. Within two years the Grey Nuns had achieved something more than the goals outlined for them by Provencher—they had accepted the first Mixed-blood woman into their order. In this, they were more successful than the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a male Catholic missionary order dominant in the West, who were specifically instructed to develop an indigenous priesthood for the western missions. Louis Riel, leader of the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 and defender of Métis and French-Canadian rights in the Northwest, was one of the Oblates’ most famous failures. Although the Oblates sent Riel to Montreal in 1858 to study for the priesthood, Riel withdrew in 1865. By contrast, Louis Riel’s sister, Sara, became the first Métis Grey Nun and, in 1871, the first Métis

missionary in the Northwest. This thesis explores how race, ethnicity, gender, and class influenced Sara Riel's experiences and her work as a Grey Nun missionary.

Sara Riel has received little attention from historians. In the 1970s, Mary V. Jordan, secretary of the Winnipeg Labour Council, published To Louis from your sister who loves you, Sara Riel.<sup>3</sup> Because Jordan focuses on Sara's letters to Louis, the two siblings' relationship is the dominant theme of the monograph. Jordan writes little of Sara Riel's experiences with the Grey Nuns or her life as a missionary at Île-à-la-Crosse in northern Saskatchewan. Because Jordan fails to place Sara Riel's life within the context of Métis history and the history of Catholic sisterhoods, she interprets Sara's life as an extension of Louis'. According to Jordan, Sara emulated Louis to such a degree that her experiences can be investigated and interpreted in relation to what was occurring in her brother's life. Sara Riel chose to become a Grey Nun only after Louis forsook the priesthood. She became a missionary in exile only after Louis fled Red River in the aftermath of the Resistance. And, she too felt she had a divine mission to carry out on earth. Jordan concludes that Sara Riel's letters to her brother ultimately reveal the degree to which the two siblings shared a mystical relationship: Sara Riel was Louis' "conscience."<sup>4</sup>

Due to the nature of biography, Louis Riel's biographers likewise treat Sara Riel's life as important only to the degree that it can shed light on her brother's experiences. Historian George F. G. Stanley mentions her in passing only five times.<sup>5</sup> Political scientist Thomas Flanagan, in Louis "David" Riel: Prophet of the New World, briefly analyses the impact that Sara had on Louis' life. Flanagan argues that Sara Riel's

religious vocation inspired and contributed to Louis' sense of his personal mission on earth. Other incidents in Sara's life likewise influenced her brother's psychological development. In the winter of 1872-1873, for instance, Sara Riel suffered from an inflammation of the lungs. Her confessor asked her to pray to the Blessed Marguerite-Marie of Alcoque, a seventeenth-century French nun and apostle of the Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Catholic Church regarded her recovery as a genuine miracle. In gratitude, Sara Riel changed her name to Sister Marguerite-Marie. Flanagan argues that this incident influenced Louis to change his name to "David," enhanced his belief that he came from a special family, and forced him to choose between the priesthood and a mission in the secular world.<sup>6</sup>

Flanagan likewise explores Louis' relationship with Sara as a possible explanation for his wish to reform family relations. As a part of his "new religion," Riel proposed that in special circumstances—such as the death of a father—it would be permissible for the eldest son to marry a sister. Together, the two siblings would be better able to perform their familial duties. Although Riel formulated his new religion while interned at the Longue Point and Beauport asylums from March 1876 to the end of 1877, Flanagan concludes that his attitude towards incestuous marriage derived from the effects of his father's death and his secret passion for Sara. Although he never acted upon his desires, Louis revealed them when, during his 1878 love affair with Eveline Barnabé, he referred to her as "ma soeur." In addition, one of Riel's love poems to Barnabé included an incestuous reference.<sup>7</sup> Although Flanagan acknowledges the special relationship shared between Sara and Louis Riel, his biographical focus on Louis, out of necessity, presents

Sara Riel's achievements and accomplishments as important only to the extent that they influenced the life of a "Great Man."

This thesis approaches Sara Riel's life in the context of Catholic missions and from the perspective of some recent approaches to the history of the West. American historian Peggy Pascoe argues that western historians should seek to redefine the region's history as the study of "western women at the cultural crossroads."<sup>8</sup> Pascoe contends that the "new" western history can and should go beyond simply adding women into existing narratives. Older historical narratives, such as Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, tended to exclude women's experiences. Historians who followed Turner's thesis emphasised the West as a male frontier that was more democratic and egalitarian than the East. Ignoring the fact that the West was neither empty nor free prior to the arrival of white settlers, these historians emphasised the region's historical development as a "frontier" or meeting place between "civilisation" and "savagery." By contrast, Pascoe argues that historians should imagine the "frontier" not as a "geographical-freeway" to the West, but as a cultural crossroads or an inter-cultural dialogue.<sup>9</sup>

Pascoe's interpretive framework also allows for greater insights into western women's history. Until recently, many women's historians had offered examples of white middle-class women's contributions to the development of the West as a means to correct the oversights of Turner's thesis. This approach tended to marginalise the experiences of ethnic women and women of colour whose lives were often shaped as much by race and ethnicity as by gender inequality.<sup>10</sup> By placing women of colour at the centre of historical investigation, Pascoe argues that historians can unveil the

complexities and ambiguities of cultural and gender relations in the West. On one level, historians can approach the lives of Native, African-American, or ethnic women as symbolic of the degree to which class, race, and gender influenced the distribution of power in the West. On another level, by placing women of colour at the centre of historical investigation, the history of the region emerges as an inter-cultural exchange that was defined sometimes by co-operation and sometimes by conflict. The West's history, therefore, is not separate from, but an extension of the larger streams of American and Canadian history.<sup>11</sup>

As a Métis Grey Nun and missionary, Sara Riel stood at the “cultural crossroads.” She made her decision to become a Grey Nun at a pivotal point in Métis history. During Riel's youth, the Métis and Mixed-blood populations at Red River constituted the majority. In the late 1860s and 1870s Louis Riel and other Métis leaders fought to maintain their rights and privileges as Canada annexed the West. Following the Resistance and the passing of the Manitoba Act on 12 May 1870, however, Eastern-Canadian settlers flocked into the region. The Métis and Mixed-blood lost their majority status, and, consequently, their position as a social and political force in the West. As a result of these developments, the Métis were pushed further West where they attempted to pursue their traditional way of life that revolved around the bison economy.

Sara Riel chose a path in life that differed from most Métis'—including her brother, Louis Riel's. Complex factors of class, race,<sup>12</sup> and gender influenced her life decisions. Furthermore, the degree to which these factors influenced Riel's life changed over time. Although Sara Riel identified with Métis society and culture in the early years

of her life, by the time she became a Grey Nun missionary at Île-à-la-Crosse in the 1870s she shared more with French and French-Canadian missionaries. Unlike Louis Riel, Sara Riel advocated “acculturation” to Canadian society and Catholicism as the means for the Métis to adapt to changes in western Canadian society.

Class and gender perceptions likewise influenced Sara Riel’s relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. Although the Riel family experienced financial difficulties following Louis Riel senior’s death in 1864, the Riel family—perhaps due to their relationship with the Church, their degree of acculturation, and their association through marriage to the wealthy French-Canadian Lagimodière family, belonged to the merchant/trading and farming class. For financial and sectarian reasons, the clergy largely catered to the daughters of this class because they perceived them as more “civilised” than the hunting class. Sara Riel attended the Grey Nuns’ boarding school where Métis and Mixed-blood girls gained a middle-class Catholic education.

The Catholic clergy at Red River envisaged their missionary endeavours in gendered terms. Because Bishops Provencher and Taché perceived Métis women to be more “civilised” than Métis men, they sought the services of the Grey Nuns who were to form a first-generation of Métis wives and mothers who would ensure that their families adhered to Catholic and European norms of behaviour. In contrast, the male clergy focussed on Métis boys, like Louis Riel, as potential candidates for an indigenous priesthood. Unlike Sara Riel’s education that contained large doses of religion, domestic science, and the “feminine” arts, Louis’ education was classical and academic.

Despite the goals laid out for them by the Bishops Provencher and Taché, the Grey Nuns, through their example and their curriculum, reinforced the Catholic ideal that a religious vocation was more pleasing to God than marriage and motherhood. Unlike Louis Riel, whose responsibilities as the male head of the Riel family required that he withdraw from the priesthood following his father's death in 1864, Sara Riel became a Grey Nun in 1868. She expressed her vocation as a "calling" from God. Although the Riel family became intimately connected to the emergence of a distinct Métis identity, or "New Nation," at Red River, Sara Riel distanced herself from that development by becoming a Grey Nun missionary who dedicated the remainder of her life to "civilising" the Métis, Chipewyan, and Cree at Île-à-la-Crosse.

As a Grey Nun, Sara Riel developed close relationships with the non-Native Catholic hierarchy, French-Canadian, Anglo-Canadian, and Mixed-blood Grey Nuns, French-Canadian politicians, and the Anglo-Protestant factors of the Hudson's Bay Company. At Île-à-la-Crosse she taught English to the largely Métis student population at the mission and, consequently, contributed to the Catholic clergy's attempts to make their labour appear more relevant and indispensable to the priorities of the Canadian government. Unlike Louis Riel and other Métis families from Red River, Sara Riel responded to the drastic changes occurring in Métis society by transferring her allegiance from the "New Nation" to the Canadian nation.

Sara Riel's status as a Grey Nun required that she place herself above political concerns. Her decision to separate from her family and community, however, was not an easy decision. On 21 September 1870 Sara Riel wrote to her brother Louis advising him

that they should both bury their sorrows in the wound of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.<sup>13</sup> Riel decided to become a missionary at a time when a great deal of Anglo-Canadian hostility was directed at the Riel family following the execution of Thomas Scott, a Protestant Orangeman, by Riel's provisional government. Sara Riel left Red River because her family's problems interfered with her religious vocation and threatened her faith. Riel's status as a Grey Nun required that she place her faith before her family and her religion above her culture. By the time of her death from tuberculosis in 1883, Riel identified more readily with Catholic missionary goals than she did with the plight of the Métis.

Because Sara Riel spent the majority of her life in the context of the Catholic missions in western Canada, first as a student of the Grey Nuns, than as a missionary, a reconstruction of her life can provide some insight into the complexities and ambiguities of Aboriginal and European encounters in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Although complex factors of race, class, and gender influenced Sara Riel's early life, increasingly the nature and intensity of her religious commitment is central to an understanding of her life. While race and gender perceptions influenced Riel's interactions with the Roman Catholic clergy at Red River, as the events of the Resistance unfolded, Sara Riel chose to place her faith before her family and she dedicated her life to the Catholic mission at Île-à-la-Crosse. Responding to the same social and political pressures that many Métis were subject to, Riel sought refuge in her religion while her brother, Louis, became a defender of Métis rights and freedoms. As a missionary and advocate for Métis and Aboriginal "acculturation," Sara Riel stood for everything her brother was fighting against. A study of her life illustrates the need to understand

women's and Métis experience in its complexity. Gender, race, class, and religion shaped individual's interactions with the diverse segments of western Canada's population and they influenced how individuals, like Sara Riel, responded to changing circumstances. Sara Riel's life reveals the degree to which historians should beware of formulating generalisations about Métis and women's experience.

Unlike many Métis and Aboriginal women who interacted with missionaries in the nineteenth century, Sara Riel was a prolific writer. Approximately one hundred and fifty of her letters to family, friends, and Bishop Alexander-Antonin Taché have been preserved and are housed in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and the Archbishop's Archives of St. Boniface. In addition, a small number of Louis Riel's letters to his sister have been collected, edited, and published in The Collected Writings of Louis Riel.<sup>14</sup> Written primarily between the time of her religious vocation and her death in 1883, Sara Riel's letters reveal the nature and intensity of her religious commitment and the conflict she experienced between her faith and her family. Because she wrote the majority of her letters from Île-à-la-Crosse, however, it is difficult to reconstruct her early career as a Grey Nun at Red River. Her letters, furthermore, reveal less about the mission at Île-à-la-Crosse than would be expected. When writing to her mother, Julie Riel, or her other brothers and sisters, she spoke largely of her loneliness, isolation, and dislocation from the Riel family and Métis life at Red River. Her letters to Joseph Dubuc, a French-Canadian friend of the family and Manitoba politician, and Archbishop Taché, however, provide a few more details about her life at Île-à-la-Crosse.

It is possible to recreate some aspects of Sara Riel's experiences from the Grey Nuns' papers and correspondence. Historians of Catholic missions and residential schools have largely overlooked the sisterhood's archives. Housed at St. Boniface and Edmonton, the Grey Nuns' papers include numerous correspondence, community histories, biographies of individual Sisters, and unpublished papers. Most importantly, in 1849 Bishop Bourget of Montreal, at a general chapter meeting, directed that individual Grey Nun communities keep a record of their day-to-day events in chronicle form. Written by a designated member of the community, the Grey Nuns' chronicles provide detailed information on the sisterhood's missionary activities, internal organisation, educational endeavours, and community beliefs. Because the Grey Nuns taught at many of the Oblate missions and residential schools in the West, their chronicles provide details about Aboriginal and Métis students and women that are not often provided in Oblate records. In 1877, furthermore, Mother Deschamps, general-superior of the Grey Nuns, decided that the congregation would circulate letters. Sent to all locations where Grey Nuns laboured, these *circulaires mensuelles* became known as the sisterhood's annals in 1917. Printed and bound, the annals contain valuable information on the Grey Nuns' missions in western Canada.

An examination of Sara Riel's life at Red River and Île-à-la-Crosse also demonstrates the Grey Nuns' integral importance to Catholic missions and the degree to which gender influenced missionary perceptions of Métis and Aboriginal culture. Although the Grey Nuns were bound by racial perceptions to the degree that they sought to "civilise" the Métis, individual Grey Nuns came from diverse socio-economic and

ethnic backgrounds. Their vow of service to the poor ensured that they approached their subjects in a non-sectarian and egalitarian manner. The spirit of their obedience is evident in the degree to which they welcomed Métis and Mixed-blood women into their order. Once these women became Grey Nuns, they pursued distinguished careers and achieved upward social mobility within the order. By 1869-1870 the Grey Nuns, through their membership, had developed intimate ties to the Métis and Mixed-blood élite at Red River. As the events of the Resistance unfolded, they sympathised with Métis cultural and political aspirations. The Grey Nuns constituted a new element at Red River. Their schools and their relationship with the Métis and Mixed-blood élite reinforced and enhanced class divisions that began to emerge at Red River in the 1840s.

An examination of Sara Riel's life at Red River and Île-à-la-Crosse likewise reveals the complex and diverse nature of inter-cultural relations within the Catholic missions. When Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns' experiences are placed at the centre of investigation, neither geographical location emerges as a place where male missionaries "conquered" Aboriginal cultures in the name of Christ. Rather, the Grey Nuns—Métis, Mixed-blood, and Canadian--and Aboriginal women contributed to the development of the Red River and Île-à-la-Crosse missions. While it would be difficult to argue that Métis and Aboriginal encounters with missionaries constituted an equitable cultural exchange, Sara Riel's acceptance into the Grey Nuns' order does reveal that, in certain instances, missionaries—both male and female—could overcome racial boundaries.

## NOTES

Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are the author's own.

<sup>1</sup>Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Riel Papers, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Norbert, 7 September 1868.

<sup>2</sup> Although the term "Métis" today signifies peoples who identify themselves neither as Indian nor White, and who may or may not be registered as Indians, this thesis uses the term as it was used in the nineteenth century. At that time "Métis" referred to the children of Indian and White parentage, but more specifically to the French- and Cree-speaking descendants of Red River. Today, "Aboriginal" or "Native" are inclusive legal terms that refer to Inuit, Métis, and status Indians in Canada. In the context of Sara Riel's life, however, "Native" or "Aboriginal" refers to the Cree and Chipewyan at Île-à-la-Crosse. This thesis also distinguishes between "Métis" and "Mixed-Blood." The latter term refers to those persons at Red River who were the children of Native and Anglo-Celtic Canadians. In contrast to the Métis, they generally spoke English and practised the Protestant faith. The term "mixed-blood" refers to both Métis and Mixed-blood peoples. See J. E. Foster, "The Métis: The People and the Term," Prairie Forum 3 (March 1978): 79-90; Paul Chartrand, "Terms of Division": Problems of 'Outside-Naming' for Aboriginal People in Canada," Journal of Indigenous Studies 2 (Summer 1991): 1-22.

<sup>3</sup>Mary V. Jordan, To Louis From your sister who loves you, Sara Riel (Toronto: Griffin House, 1974). Jordan also published a French edition of this work entitled De ta Soeur, Sara Riel (St. Boniface: Éditions des Plaines, 1980). This work differs from the English version only to the extent that she includes a chapter "Dieu m'abandonnerait-il?" that is based on Sara Riel's letters to Archbishop Taché in the 1870s. These letters were either unknown or unavailable to the author when she published the English version. The letters are housed at the Archbishop's Archives at St. Boniface, Manitoba. In the 1960s, Rossel Vein also studied Sara Riel's correspondence to Louis and published her observations in "La Correspondence de Sara Riel," Écrits de Canada Français 22 (1966): 246-247. Vein, like Jordan, utilises Sara Riel's letters in order to determine what light they can shed on Louis Riel's character. She suggests that Sara Riel entered the convent in order to redeem the Riel family in God's eyes: six months prior to Sara's vows, Louis had discontinued his pursuit of the priesthood. Vein concludes that Sara's letters reveal the naiveté of a young and ignorant girl, whose religious vocation removed her from the realities of life in the second half of the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup>Jordan, To Louis from your sister who loves you, xi. Louis changed his name to Louis "David" Riel on 18 December 1874. Previously, he had had a vision that said "Rise up Louis "David" Riel: You have a mission."

<sup>5</sup>George F. G. Stanley, Louis Riel (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963), 21, 157, 67, 239, 249.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Flanagan, Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World (Halifax: Goodread Biographies, 1983), 6, 35-36.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>8</sup>Peggy Pascoe, "Western Women at the Cultural Crossroads," in Trails: Towards a New Western History, eds. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991). Although Pascoe's essay refers to the writing of American western women's history in particular, her criticisms of the genre's historiography apply to the writing of western women's history in Canada. As chapter two will demonstrate, Canadian historians, particularly of missions, tend to focus on the experiences of non-Aboriginal missionaries. This emphasis results in the marginalisation of Native and non-Native women's experiences.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>10</sup>For an American discussion of these trends see Antonia I. Castañada's, "Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History: The Discourse, Politics, and the Decolonization of History," Pacific Historical Review, Special Edition, 1992: 501-533. For the Canadian variant of the same issue see Daiva K. Stasiulis', "Theorizing Connections: Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Class," in Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada, ed. Peter S. Li (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Ruth Roach Pierson's "Experience, Difference, Dominance, and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History," in Writing Women's History: International Perspectives, eds. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup>Pascoe, "Women at the Cultural Crossroads."

<sup>12</sup>In this thesis "class" refers to inequalities in the distribution of wealth, status, and power that existed at Red River prior to Confederation. In Rupert's Land, the presence of the Hudson's Bay Company's hierarchy, the arrival of missionaries, the growth of the buffalo robe trade, and the development of a sedentary, agricultural, and proto-industrial population at Red River created diverse segments within the mixed-blood population. In the pre-Confederation period, Red River's mixed-blood population consisted of two classes: the farmer/trader/merchant class and the hunting class. Historians disagree, however, as to whether social status derived from an individual's family and social connections, level of acculturation, or their wealth. See Chapter One, pages 16 to 19. While the former shared better relations with the Protestant and Catholic clergy and the

officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, the latter, due to their nomadic lifestyle, maintained some distance socially and culturally from the non-Native population at Red River. "Race" in this thesis refers to socio-cultural categorisations that are shaped by social, political, economic, and ideological inequalities in society. The concept of "race" differentiation is a social construct that has no biological or scientific basis. Kwame Anthony Appiah states: "In a society like ours, where most people take their race to be a significant aspect of their identity, it comes as a shock to many to learn that there is a fairly widespread consensus in the sciences of biology and anthropology that the word "race," at least as it is used in most unscientific discussions, refers to nothing that science should recognize as real." See his essay "Race" in Critical Terms for Literary Study, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 277. To a large degree, labels such as Métis and Mixed-blood refer more to individual's and family's last names or "ethnicity" than they do to any racial distinction. David Lee argues that—if one insists on using European characteristics to label the Métis population—the terms "Roman Catholic" and "Protestant" would more clearly define real divisions in the community. See his article: "The Métis Militant Rebels of 1885," in Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1994), 78-98. While this thesis maintains the categories "Métis" and "Mixed-blood," and groups individuals within those categories into hunting and trading classes, throughout the analysis the degree to which they are artificial constructs emerges when applied to the Grey Nuns' and Sara Riel's experiences.

<sup>13</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Norbert, 21 September 1870.

<sup>14</sup>George F. G. Stanley, ed., The Collected Writings of Louis Riel/Les Écrits Complets de Louis Riel (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1985).

**I****AT THE “CULTURAL CROSSROADS”: HISTORIOGRAPHY PERTAINING TO SARA RIEL’S LIFE**

Sara Riel can be defined alternately as a Métis woman, a Grey Nun, and a missionary. She stood at the “cultural crossroads” where race, class, and gender intersected to define the limits of her experience. Her life eludes simple historical categories; it reflects aspects of Canadian Métis history, religious history, women’s history, gender history, missionary history, and the history of women religious.<sup>1</sup> Although historians have examined each of these topics separately and in combination, few studies equitably incorporate all of them. While Sara Riel’s experiences were unique and singular, they can contribute to a larger understanding of current historiographical debates.

In the field of Métis history, historians have tended to focus upon one aspect of the Métis’ historical experience. While some historians emphasise the importance of race, class, or gender in Métis history, others view Métis history from the perspective of the Canadian government, the clergy, or Métis women. Historian J. R. Miller argues that, until the mid-1970s, Métis history remained at the periphery of historical investigation in Canada. The predominance of economic and political history guaranteed that historians would examine people and events from “the top down.” Unless the Métis influenced the life of a “Great Man,” or, as in the case of Louis Riel, were great men themselves, they were largely ignored. Indeed, since his death in 1885, Louis Riel has

been the subject of numerous academic and popular studies. In the process, he has gained a mythical status.<sup>2</sup>

Academics who did focus on the Métis prior to 1970, tended to treat them within a Eurocentric framework. Historian George F. G. Stanley, for example, interpreted the Red River Resistance of 1869-1870 as a conflict between “civilisation” and “barbarism.” While the former category included the English-Canadian Protestant population at Red River, the latter referred to those Métis, Natives, and French-Canadians who opposed “civilisation’s” progress. Similarly, Marcel Giraud’s ethnographic study of the emergence of mixed-blood communities in western Canada, The Métis in the Canadian West, stereotyped Aboriginal and Métis peoples as less evolved than non-Natives. In Giraud’s monograph, the Métis emerge as objects whose lives and identity were shaped by their contacts with European culture. Both Stanley and Giraud failed to treat the Métis as worthy subjects of study in their own right.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1970s, however, a number of historians have transferred their focus from Louis Riel and the Red River Resistance to the society from which the man and the event emerged. In the process they have expanded their focus beyond the Métis in order to incorporate and explain how the diverse population at Red River responded to the Resistance. They have revealed that, contrary to Giraud and Stanley’s arguments, Red River society had emerged as a complex community of people divided by class, religion, gender, and race prior to the arrival of Anglo-Canadian settlers. A few historians have studied the role of mixed-blood women in this complex scenario, concluding that women both contributed to and were shaped by the segmentation of Red River’s population.

In A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance, 1869-70

historian Frits Pannekoek argues that the Resistance originated in sectarian divisions that cut deep into Red River's past. Based on clerical sources, Pannekoek's study revolves around the thesis that the Métis and Mixed-blood populations at Red River had become hostile and mutually exclusive by mid-century. While the arrival of Protestant clergymen of diverse denominations served to fragment the Mixed-blood population religiously and socio-economically, the Catholic clergy fostered homogeneity among the Métis population who, consequently, acquired a distinct identity based on their religion, language, and culture. Because the Anglican clergy strove to create a "little Britain in the Wilderness," the Mixed-blood population identified with English-Canadian immigrants who began to arrive at Red River in the 1850s. The Mixed-blood population supported the annexation of Rupert's Land by Canada and opposed Métis resistance to its transfer.<sup>4</sup>

Pannekoek asserts that the Grey Nuns played a small role in the creation of racial and religious hostilities in the pre-Confederation period. He argues that the Grey Nuns' educational activities at Red River served to widen the rift between the Métis and Mixed-blood populations. According to Pannekoek, the Grey Nuns objected to allowing "poverty-stricken" and "illiterate" Métis women to become nuns. Based on two letters sent from Red River to the Grey Nuns' motherhouse in Montreal in 1844, Pannekoek contends that the first four Grey Nuns to serve the colony viewed Métis women with disdain. As a consequence of this attitude, the Sisters tended to cater to Mixed-blood girls whose fathers often held high positions in the Hudson's Bay Company hierarchy. Pannekoek draws this conclusion from school registers that suggest that the majority of

the girls who attended the Grey Nuns' boarding school were Mixed-blood. By contrast, Métis girls attended day schools where they received an inferior education, but were allowed to return to their homes at the end of each day. As a consequence of their attitude, the Grey Nuns at Red River received only one Métis vocation in the pre-Confederation period, Sara Riel, as opposed to five Mixed-blood vocations.<sup>5</sup>

Historians Irene Spry and Gerhard Ens disagree with Pannekoek's conclusions. Both Spry and Ens argue that Red River society in the pre-Confederation period had divided along socio-economic, not ethnic or religious lines. Upon studying Métis memoirs, traveller's accounts, and parish records, Spry contends that a number of factors fostered amicable relations between the two populations. The Métis and Mixed-blood at Red River shared blood and culture; they were the descendants of a rich diversity of ancestors. Maternally, Métis and Mixed-blood men and women descended from Cree, Ojibwa, Chipewyan, French-Canadian, and Scottish women. Paternally, their fathers shared French, English, Orcadian, Scots, Irish, Shetland, and Danish backgrounds. Aside from their diverse ethnic and racial heritage, some Mixed-bloods spoke French, some Métis spoke English, and most spoke Cree.<sup>6</sup>

Socially, the populations gathered together on frequent occasions for Christmas celebrations and community gatherings. Mixed-blood and Métis children, furthermore, socialised with each other at school and in the community. Economically, segments of both populations engaged in business together, hunted together, and joined together to fight against the Hudson's Bay Company monopoly. Spry concludes that class divided Red River's population. Well-educated and well-to-do gentry, the officers and retired

officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, the clergy, farmers, and prosperous merchants shared little in common with the unlettered and unpropertied *engagés*, tripmen, hunters, petty traders, and small farmers. When the events of the Resistance unfolded, a fracture erupted between those Métis and Mixed-Bloods who had chosen agricultural settlement and trade over the traditional nomadic way of life.<sup>7</sup>

Historian Gerhard Ens supports and builds upon Spry's argument in his study Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century. By undergoing an in-depth analysis of St. Francis-Xavier and St. Andrews parishes—the former Métis and the latter Mixed-blood—Ens concludes that the Métis identity that emerged at Red River prior to and during the Resistance originated not from biology or religion, but from the economic and social niche that the Métis had carved out for themselves in the fur trade. When the Red River population broke the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly over the fur trade with the Sayer trial in the 1840s, the Métis and Mixed-blood responded by concentrating on the buffalo robe trade. While some families engaged in hunting, others became merchants and traders who practised some farming. By 1860, Red River consisted of two classes: hunters and merchant/traders. During the Resistance, Ens argues that the Métis of the merchant/trader class tended to oppose Riel because they saw the economic benefits of union with Canada. Riel's supporters, predominantly Métis who worked on boat brigades, did not own titles to their land.<sup>8</sup>

Historians of women have contributed to the intricacies of the above debates by demonstrating how gender influenced societal attitudes and behaviour in the pre-Resistance period. While historians Sylvia Van Kirk and Erica Smith have studied the

impact of the arrival of white women at Red River, Diane Payment, a historian with Parks Canada, has analysed the role of women in Métis culture and the effect of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on their lives. Van Kirk concludes that the arrival of British wives of Hudson's Bay Company officers and Protestant clergyman in the 1820s signalled the growth of race and class hostilities that lowered the status of Aboriginal women and their mixed-blood daughters. To compensate, the Hudson's Bay Company elite encouraged their mixed-blood daughters to adhere to middle-class Victorian ideals of true womanhood: domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness.<sup>9</sup>

Historian Erica Smith delineates the impact that the above ideals had upon racial hostilities at Red River. Smith studies the Corbett Trial of 1863 and concludes that the women involved in the trial, Maria Thomas, a Mixed-Blood, and Abigail Corbett, an Anglican minister's wife, came to symbolise the fallen women and the chaste wife in the eyes of the public. As Red River society distanced itself from the fur trade, ideals of women became increasingly polarised: women could be either promiscuous or pure. This dichotomy, however, had race and class connotations. The officials of the Hudson's Bay Company, merchant/traders, and the Protestant clergy viewed Native women as agents of men's ruin, while non-Native women became their salvation. As the events of the Corbett Trial unfolded, the Red River community tended to support Maria Thomas or the Reverend Corbett based upon these generalisations.<sup>10</sup>

Van Kirk and Smith's conclusions apply to Métis women only to a limited degree. The arrival of the Grey Nuns at Red River in 1844 paralleled the arrival of non-Native wives of Hudson's Bay Company officials and clergymen. Ideals of true Catholic

womanhood, however, differed significantly from their Protestant counterparts. Diane Payment is the only historian who has adequately studied the impact of Roman Catholicism on Métis women's lives. Payment argues that the arrival of Roman Catholic missionaries at Red River signalled change for Métis women. Primarily, contradictions existed between Métis values and Christian beliefs; while Christianity extolled patriarchy and the submission of women to the male head of the household, Métis families, prior to the arrival of non-Natives, had tended to be more egalitarian. Women could achieve economic and social status independent of their husbands or fathers; in the context of the fur trade, they acted as interpreters, diplomats, and nurturers. With the arrival of Catholic missionaries, however, Métis women became subject to the pressures and constraints of two divergent cultures.<sup>11</sup>

Payment argues that the Catholic clergy at Red River maintained an ambiguous attitude towards Métis women. On the one hand, priests viewed Métis women as superior to, or more "civilised," than Métis men. It is not clear, however, whether Métis women responded more readily to Catholicism or if the Catholic clergy made a greater effort to draw Métis women, rather than men, into the Church. Beginning in the 1850s, the clergy held up French-Canadian women as role models for Métis women. By the 1860s, those Métis women who belonged to the merchant/trader class had forsaken the *châle* and *couverte*, traditional Métis clothing, for European styles. By 1870, Payment concludes that Métis women were more educated than their male counterparts and more acculturated to Catholic and French-Canadian traditions.

In the post-Confederation period, Payment's studies of the Métis population at Batoche reveal that women stood at the lowest end of the social scale. They could not achieve economic or social status independently from their husbands. Métis culture now accorded a privileged status only to nuns and elderly women. While women cared for the domestic sphere and their children's education, men served as the "head of the family" to whom all other members had to submit. Payment concludes that Métis women's lives at Batoche, in contrast to the Catholic clergy's promise, were defined by hard work, poverty, sexual discrimination, and racial prejudice.<sup>12</sup>

Payment's studies, like much women's history, suffer because they tend to disconnect women's experience from the larger society. A few historians and sociologists of women in Canada, namely Joy Parr and Mariana Valverde, have shifted their focus from women's history to gender history. These academics, following the lead of Joan W. Scott, an American historian, argue that historians who claim to be writing about gender, more often than not, write about women. By focussing exclusively on women, these scholars tend to isolate women's lives from social relationships. "Gender," as opposed to "sex," refers to the cultural meanings that are associated with perceptions of sexual difference. These meanings underpin inequalities in power and authority in society. Gender history, thus, begins with the premise that the relationships that women share with others serve to "construct" their identity: femininity cannot exist in isolation from masculinity--the two are mutually inclusive. Definitions of manliness and womanliness--i.e. what it means to be a "man" or "woman"--vary according to time, place, and culture; they are shaped by contemporary assumptions about race, class,

ethnicity, and sexuality.<sup>13</sup> Historian Peter Burke argues that if the above argument is true, then historians have much to accomplish: “They need to make explicit what was almost always left implicit at the time, the rules or conventions for being a woman or a man of a particular age-group or social group in a particular region and period.”<sup>14</sup>

Emma Larocque, a Métis academic and writer, has demonstrated how gender history can contribute to a larger understanding of Métis/Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian encounters. Larocque argues that the most important issue facing scholars today is to determine how colonisation, the exploitation and imposition of cultural norms by one society over another, affected women *and* men differently.<sup>15</sup> Michael Harkin and Sergei Kan contend that missionaries’ European perceptions of gender roles—male aggressiveness *versus* female passivity for example—influenced their relationship with Aboriginal populations. Missionaries, for instance, would sometimes direct the majority of their attention to Native women because their past associations with European women had convinced them that women were more “conservative” than men. When missionaries reached North America, therefore, they perceived Aboriginal women as being the “weak link” in the chain of progress. Conversely, differing gender ideals and relations influenced Native acceptance or rejection of Christianity.<sup>16</sup>

Over the past two decades historians of missions in North America have increasingly moved in the direction proposed by Larocque. Two trends are apparent in the historiography. On the one hand, historians now tend to emphasise Aboriginal agency rather than oppression in the mission field. On the other, some missionary historians have begun to study the impact of gender and women’s contributions to

missionary endeavours. These two trends result in a history of missions that resembles an inter-cultural exchange or dialogue rather than the conquering or suppression of one culture by another. The degree to which class, gender, and race influenced the nature of that dialogue is consequently highlighted.

The most dominant trend in the recent writing of Canadian missionary and Native history has been to emphasise Aboriginal agency. Rather than interpreting the Inuit, Métis, and Indian peoples of Canada as victims of oppressive missionary, governmental, and police policies, historians treat them as “active, assertive, contributors to Canadian history.”<sup>17</sup> This new approach disintegrates the assumption, once held by many historians, that the encounter between the two cultures was one-sided. It involves moving beyond the missionary or government’s statement of intentions—i.e. “assimilation” or “civilisation”—in order to determine how, or if, Aboriginal peoples responded to their endeavours. If the story of missions, residential schools, and government suppression of Aboriginal ceremonies is examined from the Native perspective, what often emerges is a tale of resistance, evasion, or co-operation rather than the complete subjugation of one culture by another.<sup>18</sup>

Historians have likewise addressed the marginalisation of non-Native and Native women’s experiences within missionary history. Myra Rutherdale, for example, has studied the role and influence of Anglican women, wives and missionaries, in the Pacific Northwest and Arctic between 1860 and 1945. She argues that missionary historians have tended to unquestionably accept male missionary and imperialistic rhetoric that portrayed the British as “civilised, white, and Christian” while the “others” were

“uncivilised, dark, and heathen.”<sup>19</sup> By focussing on male missionary accounts, these historians overlook the presence and influence of non-Native women in the mission field and they marginalise Aboriginal women’s experiences by portraying them through the eyes of male missionaries. Rutherford, therefore, explores how gender contributed to racist ideologies and perceptions of the Aboriginal population of northern Canada as the “other.” Upon studying missionary writings, Rutherford discovered that male missionaries greeted the arrival of non-Native women in the mission field as the first step towards cultural conquest: white women, in their capacity as role models, would enhance the imposition of middle-class norms.<sup>20</sup>

Although Rutherford’s essay provides valuable insight into the mindset of Anglican missionaries, her analytical framework does not allow for an exploration of how Aboriginal women responded to or perceived non-Native women. A more successful approach has been to view female missionaries as only one component of a larger inter-cultural dialogue. American historian Sarah Deutsch, for instance, has studied relations between Hispanic and Euro-American women in the context of Protestant missions to the largely Catholic village systems of New Mexico between 1900 and 1914. Deutsch argues that female Protestant missionaries adopted and feminised the masculine imperial message. Women, because of their disadvantaged position in relation to men, were more likely to overcome popular and ethnocentric assumptions about Hispanic inferiority: their world-view was less competitive and more nurturing than men’s. Although female Protestant missionaries tried to teach the Hispanic community proper gender roles—as they perceived them—they had to earn their

acceptance by the Hispanic community. Indeed, it was only in their capacity as medical practitioners, a common feature of Hispanic culture, that their efforts came to be valued.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to the increasing volume of studies completed on female Protestant missionaries,<sup>22</sup> however, very little has been written about their Catholic counterparts in western Canada.<sup>23</sup> Outside of a few articles and monographs produced by Grey Nuns and Oblates,<sup>24</sup> the Grey Nuns' contributions to Catholic missions in the West remain untold. Although these few articles provide valuable information of a descriptive nature, their lack of an interpretive framework, their denominational bias, and their chronicle style make it difficult for the reader to place the sisterhoods' history within the larger context of the mission field.

A few historians, however, have addressed the Grey Nuns' role in the larger context of the Oblate missions. Historian Martha McCarthy, for instance, in her dissertation on the Oblate missions to the Athapaskans, or Dene, between 1846 and 1870, places the sisterhood's labour under the heading "auxiliaries to evangelisation." The Grey Nuns, she argues, neither preached the gospel nor attained positions of power and influence in the Catholic hierarchy. Therefore, they cannot be viewed as missionaries: "As women, as educators, as healers, they were on the second stage of evangelisation, associated to the primary stage but not directly concerned with the pure preaching of gospel. They were witnesses and auxiliaries, not leaders."<sup>25</sup> Unlike McCarthy, Raymond J. Huel in his study, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis, an introductory survey of the Oblate missions, integrates the Grey Nuns' activities into his narrative. Yet, he too classifies the Grey Nuns' work as less important than the Oblates' by defining

the Grey Nuns as assistants or auxiliaries to the main work of evangelisation. The Grey Nuns' work created a division of labour based on gender that allowed the Oblates to focus on conversions.<sup>26</sup>

Huel and McCarthy overlook the Grey Nuns' contributions to the Oblate missions because they distinguish between two types or models of missionary activity: evangelisation and "civilisation." Because the Grey Nuns served as nurses and educators at the Oblate missions, their work clearly falls into the second category. Although these models correspond to real differences in missionary approaches, the value judgements that Huel and McCarthy attach to the differences influence their interpretation of the Grey Nuns' work.<sup>27</sup> Both Huel and McCarthy assume that the Grey Nuns' lower status in the Catholic hierarchy limited the range and importance of their activities. The authors assume that because the Grey Nuns performed tasks traditionally associated with women—health care and education—their labour held little value.

Susan C. Peterson, an American historian at the University of North Dakota, however, has begun to address the role of Catholic sisterhoods in the western missions. Peterson argues that Catholic clergymen accepted the presence of Catholic sisterhoods in the West because they embodied Victorian ideals of woman as pious, pure, and domestic. In the eyes of the male hierarchy, nuns symbolised the spirit of self-sacrifice, moral rectitude, and obedience that was absent in Aboriginal culture. While Peterson does not attempt to determine how Native cultures perceived Catholic women religious, she unveils the degree to which the sisterhoods' real experiences differed from the ideal. She concludes that women religious were resourceful, flexible, and pragmatic women who

adapted to difficult—and often horrendous—conditions. The history of Catholic sisterhoods in the missionary field consequently challenges stereotypes that depict women in the West as helpless and demure helpmates.<sup>28</sup>

Although Catholic sisterhoods' contributions to missions in western Canada remain largely unexplored, Eastern Canadian historians have explored how the option of entering a convent and a convent education influenced Catholic women's lives. The mid-nineteenth-century witnessed an explosion of female religious vocations: while there were only 650 nuns in Quebec in 1851, for example, by the end of the century they numbered 6,629.<sup>29</sup> Historians have long been aware that religion could be both a liberating and repressive force in women's lives; therefore, they have sought to determine whether increasing female vocations indicated an increase or decrease in Catholic women's status.<sup>30</sup>

Academics have approached this problem from a number of perspectives. While some scholars choose to analyse women's socio-economic status prior to their entry into the convent, others examine the world of the convent itself. In addition, some historians have approached the topic by studying the effect of convent schools on Catholic girls. Sociologists Bernard Denault and Benoit Levesque argue that the rise of female vocations in the nineteenth century reflected the socio-economic realities of Canadian life. Women who took the veil did so because society had deemed them and their work "redundant." By the 1850s, population trends in Quebec had created a scenario by which rural young women had a lesser economic role and fewer marriage options. Denault and Levesque suggest that those women who became nuns had found only rejection in the marriage

market. Urbanisation, furthermore, resulted in the devaluation of women's labour; unlike women in rural families, urban women contributed less to the economic viability of the family unit—they became consumers rather than producers. As a consequence, women in Quebec—particularly widows and “spinsters”—volunteered their time to relief and charitable organisations. Because the Roman Catholic hierarchy disapproved of lay women's organisations, priests channelled women's charitable works into orthodox religious communities where both the women and their social services would fall under the purview of the hierarchy.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast to Denault and Levesque's emphasis on Catholic women's oppression, women's historians provide an alternative explanation for rising female vocations. They argue that women perceived and chose the convent as an alternative—and often-preferable option—to marriage, motherhood, or “spinsterhood.” The convent, unlike secular society, offered these women numerous channels to pursue career options such as administration, carpentry, nursing, teaching, and mechanics. Convents stood as “an organised expression of women's aspirations.”<sup>32</sup> Micheline Dumont contends that, because women religious engaged in activities denied to Catholic wives and mothers, they were “perhaps feminists without knowing it.”<sup>33</sup>

Marta Danylewycz, using the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame and the Sisters of Miséricorde between 1840 and 1920 as case studies, however, makes a more subtle argument: she identifies what she believes to be a “feminist praxis” among the Sisters. She bases her conclusions on a careful analysis of the socio-economic background of the individual women who entered the two orders. She found that most

women carefully selected the community that they entered: much as students do today with universities. Upon entering the convent, many women chose to enter another sisterhood—or, to re-enter the secular world. A religious vocation, unlike marriage or motherhood, could be reversed. For those who remained in the convent, they experienced opportunities for upward social mobility and career advancement. Women religious were not “redundant,” they were integral to society because their nursing and teaching duties contributed to Quebec’s extensive social security network that lasted until the 1960s.<sup>34</sup>

To a large degree, Taking the Veil reveals the extent to which Catholic sisterhoods often reflected the socio-economic character of society beyond the convent walls. The Congregation of Note Dame, for instance, tended to attract middle- and upper-class women, whereas the sisters of Miséricorde served the needs of the rural farming and working class. The difference between the congregations’ memberships derived from the type of labour in which they engaged. The Congregation of Notre Dame, for instance, was one of Quebec’s oldest religious orders. Founded by Marguerite Bourgeoys in 1653, the congregation’s members dedicated their lives to teaching girls. In contrast, the Sisters of Miséricorde devoted themselves to the care and protection of unwed mothers, an activity that met with hostility from both the Catholic hierarchy and the lay population. Yet, once women entered the convent their internal structures provided women with the opportunity to move beyond the limitations of their socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>35</sup> Danylewycz downplays the subordinate position that Catholic sisterhoods held in the Church hierarchy; despite their subjection to the spiritual and

temporal authority of the chaplain, bishop, and pope, the Congregation of Notre Dame and the Sisters of Miséricorde administered their temporal affairs independently from the male religious hierarchy.

Elizabeth S. Smyth concurs with Danylewycz's conclusion. Upon examining the Sisters of St. Joseph, an American teaching order who became active in Toronto in the 1850s, Smyth concludes that the Sisters capitalised on the underdevelopment of Toronto's education system to promote their own interests. Although Armand François, bishop of Toronto, had invited the sisters from St. Louis to staff an orphanage, the congregation, by their own initiative, began to teach in the city's Roman Catholic parish schools. In 1854, they opened a boarding school that, by 1920, had become an accredited high school that had seen almost 2,500 girls pass through its classrooms. Some of these students, such as Gertrude Lawler, member of the University of Toronto's senate in 1910 and organiser of the Toronto Catholic Women's League, went on to join the vanguard of the suffrage movement. Smyth concludes that the Sisters of St. Joseph, by promoting advanced education for women and acting as role models, channelled their students into the vanguard of the women's movement in Ontario.<sup>36</sup>

When historians have transferred their focus from Catholic sisterhoods to their interaction and effect on their students, however, the question of Catholic sisterhoods' effect on the status of women becomes more complex. Historians Nadia Fahmy-Eid and Anne Gagnon agree that Catholic sisterhoods, through their schools, primarily prepared women for marriage and motherhood. Fahmy-Eid, for instance, argues that the

Ursulines, a teaching order in Quebec, sought to reinforce traditional French attitudes about women's role in society. Upon comparing girls' and boys' education, she concludes that the Ursulines tended to promote male intellectual development and female behavioural development. The girls' curriculum consisted of a large dose of domestic and religious teachings.<sup>37</sup>

Anne Gagnon likewise identifies the curriculum taught at the Pensionnat Assomption, a private Franco-Albertan girls' school, as the locus for the preservation of patriarchy in the Franco-Albertan community. The sisterhood, between 1926 and 1960, provided its students with an inferior education on the grounds that they were preparing girls for wifedom and motherhood: not a career. Gagnon contextualises the academy's curriculum by linking it to the clerico-nationalism that surfaced in Quebec between 1840 and 1960. Throughout this period, the French-Canadian clergy tended to exalt women as wives, mothers, and preservers of religious and cultural traditions. Female devotion, self-sacrifice, and renunciation were central to French-Canadian survival in Canada. At the Pensionnat Assomption, the Soeurs d L' Assomption reinforced the clergy's ideological leanings by teaching domestic science and the history of female heroines of New France—all of whom were remembered for their purity and devotion.<sup>38</sup>

Although the debate as to whether Catholic sisterhoods increased or decreased women's status in society will remain controversial, histories of Catholic sisterhoods demonstrate the diverse nature of female Catholic religious orders and, consequently, the divergent nature of nuns' experiences. While some congregations dedicated their energies to the education of young women, others devoted their time to the care of the

sick, elderly, and poor. Catholic sisterhoods, furthermore, through their memberships, often reflected the aspirations of a particular socio-economic or ethnic group. These considerations must be taken into account when the interactions between women religious and Métis and Aboriginal women in the West are explored. Likewise, in situations such as the Grey Nuns' at Red River, it is necessary to determine how race influenced Métis and Mixed-blood women's careers as Grey Nuns.

Ruth Compton Brouwer suggests that Canadian women's historians risk oversimplification and provide misleading interpretations of women's lives because they tend to "approve of" and write about religious zeal only when it contributed to the formation of a feminist consciousness.<sup>39</sup> This criticism of Canadian women's religious history is particularly relevant when Sara Riel's experiences are examined. Although Riel's status as a Grey Nun allowed her to pursue a successful teaching and missionary career, she never expressed those aspects of her life in anything but religious terms. In this respect, Sara Riel was not unique. Upon studying the writings of women who entered one religious order in Quebec, Barbara J. Cooper discovered that the majority of the Sisters expressed their vocations as true religious callings.<sup>40</sup>

Female spirituality has become a topic increasingly studied by academics. In her study of female Evangelical spirituality in nineteenth-century Canada, for instance, Marguerite Van Die argues that historians must seek to determine how women expressed their faith differently from men. To do so, academics need to look beyond the religious institution and creed in order to make women's response to religion the centre of their investigations. If this task is carried out, historians will find a distinctly alternative and

feminine culture, within, but not separate from, the community of believers. Female religious cultures sustained themselves and found their identity in their shared beliefs.<sup>41</sup>

Trudelle Thomas, in a PhD dissertation completed for the department of English at the University of Cincinnati, has examined this aspect of Catholic sisterhoods. Upon studying the writings of the Ursulines of Brown County, Illinois, Thomas concludes that the Sisters used language to create a community mythology, preserve collective harmony, and pass on a female-centred heroic tradition to their members. The Ursulines' literary style betrayed little of the self-effacement or hesitation that characterised most female literature in the nineteenth-century. The Sisters used the metaphors of motherhood and sisterhood to describe and reinforce their separate status within the Catholic community; they placed particular emphasis on celibacy as a metaphor for and means to achieve personal integrity before God and independence from men.<sup>42</sup>

As a Métis woman, Grey Nun, and missionary, Sara Riel's life contributes to a larger understanding of some of the dominant historiographical trends in Canadian social history. Her life provides an ideal forum to investigate the validity of these historical debates and to apply the various methodologies and approaches followed by historians from diffuse specialisations. Chapter two, for instance, compares Louis and Sara Riel's relationship with the Catholic hierarchy and the Grey Nuns at Red River in order to determine how gender influenced their response to Catholicism. The degree to which gender perceptions influenced the clergy's interactions with the Métis population is likewise studied. Chapter three seeks to determine how class and race considerations influenced the Grey Nuns' willingness to accept Métis and Mixed-blood women into

their order and, in turn, how race and class divisions at Red River determined which Métis and Mixed-blood women would become nuns. Consequently, the chapter contributes to the Ens, Spry, Pannekoek debate as to whether religion, ethnicity, or class divided the Métis and Mixed-blood populations at Red River. The chapter also highlights the degree to which the concepts of “class” and “race” remain artificial constructs—that do not account for specific variations and divergences of individuals, like Sara Riel’s, experiences.<sup>43</sup> Chapter four outlines Sara Riel’s experiences at Île-à-la-Crosse as a means to demonstrate the Grey Nuns’ contributions to the Oblate mission field. Although the Oblates emphasised the Grey Nuns’ status as role models of Catholic womanhood to the Métis, Chipewyan, and Cree at Île-à-la-Crosse, the Grey Nuns performed essential social services at the mission that contributed to the viability of Catholic missionary endeavours. The Grey Nuns’ presence at Île-à-la-Crosse, furthermore, provided interested Métis, Chipewyan, and Cree women with the opportunity to participate in the workings of the Catholic Church.

Because Sara Riel was a student of the Grey Nuns who later entered their order, an examination of her life provides a means to analyse Catholic sisterhoods’ influence on women’s status in society. At their boarding school, the Grey Nuns prepared Sara Riel for life as a wife and mother. The religious atmosphere of the school, the curriculum, and the Grey Nuns’ example, however, reinforced the Catholic ideal that chastity and the religious life was superior to marriage and motherhood. Sara Riel’s letters demonstrate, however, that her faith motivated her to become a Grey Nun. Once she had become a

member of the community, her faith continued to be her motivating force as she pursued a teaching and missionary career in the context of the Grey Nuns' missions.

The parameters of Sara Riel's life subsume the topics of Métis history and the history of Catholic sisterhoods within the larger topic of missionary history. Riel's experiences disintegrate historical assumptions that label missionaries as male, Métis as "primitive," and the Grey Nuns as auxiliaries. As a Métis woman, Grey Nun, and missionary, race, class, and gender influenced Riel's relationship with the diverse and segmented populations at Red River and Île-à-la-Crosse. By placing Sara Riel at the centre of historical investigation one must avoid historiographical approaches that prioritise one culture, gender, or class over another. This approach allows for a multi-textured and inter-cultural history that touches on aspects of women's, mission, gender, political, and religious history.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Women “religious” are canonically divided into nuns and sisters. Nuns are members of traditional communities who took formal and permanent vows of religion. Sisters are members of religious congregations. Their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are canonically considered simple or temporary. Although the Grey Nuns belong to the latter category, the terms “nun” and “Sister” will be used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup>J. R. Miller, “From Riel to the Métis,” Canadian Historical Review 69 (March 1988): 1-20; Douglas Owsram, “The Myth of Louis Riel,” in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Press, 1985), 163-182.

<sup>3</sup>Miller, “From Riel to the Métis.” George F. G. Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961); Marcel Giraud, The Métis in the Canadian West, Vol. II, translated by George Woodcock (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1986). For other historiographical essays on Métis history see Jennifer S. H. Brown’s “People of Myth, People of History: A Look at Recent Writings on the Métis,” Acadiensis 17 (Autumn 1987): 150-163, and D. N. Sprague, “Historiographical Introduction,” in Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup>Frits Pannekoek, A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance, 1869-70 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1991). See also: “The Historiography of the Red River Settlement, 1850-1868,” Prairie Forum 6 (1981): 75-85.

<sup>5</sup>Pannekoek, A Snug Little Flock, 79, 109-110.

<sup>6</sup>Irene Spry, “The Métis and Mixed-bloods of Rupert’s Land before 1870,” in The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America, eds. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba), 98-118.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Gerhard J. Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup>Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, Ltd., 1980).

<sup>10</sup>Erica Smith, “‘Gentlemen, This is no Ordinary Trial’: Sexual Narratives in the Trial of the Reverend Corbett, Red River, 1863,” in Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for

Native History, eds. Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996), 365-366, 375. The Corbett Trial unfolded for nine days in February 1863. Simon and Catherine Thomas accused the Reverend Corbett of having seduced their daughter Maria. When Maria became pregnant, Corbett repeatedly tried to abort the child. Despite the support he received among the Red River élite, Corbett was found guilty.

<sup>11</sup>Diane P. 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), 19-37; “Un Aperçu des Relations entre les Missionnaires Catholiques et les Métisses pendant le Premier Siècle de Contact (1813-1918) dans l’Ouest Canadien,” Études Oblates de l’Ouest/Western Oblate Studies 3 (1994): 139-158.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. See also Payment’s full-length study of Métis culture at Batoche, “The Free People-Otipemisiwak”: Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930, Studies in Archeology, Architecture and History, National Historic Parks and Sites, Parks Service Environment Canada (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1990).

<sup>13</sup>Joy Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice,” Canadian Historical Review 76 (September 1995): 362. See also: Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” American Historical Review 91 (1986): 1053-1075.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Burke, History and Social Theory (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), 52. There are, however, two problems with this approach that must be addressed. Mariana Valverde, for instance, acknowledges that the study of prescribed roles for men and women necessarily places emphasis on those who hold the reins of power—those who shape gender ideologies. Historians of women find this outcome particularly problematic for it leaves no room for women’s individual or collective agency or for their “real” experiences. Ruth Roach Pierson, for instance, argues that historians must distinguish between describing women’s “outside role” and “inside meaning.” The use of indirect channels to give “voice” to women’s experience is acceptable only for the former. In the case of the latter, it involves the appropriation of Native women’s experience that, when performed by non-Native middle-class academics, constitutes a new kind of academic colonisation. Louis and Sara Riel, however, unlike many Métis men and women, left behind numerous sources that delineate the subjective aspects of their experience. One finds in them not so much a story of domination but of circumvention. Although both siblings strove to adhere to Catholicism’s dictates for proper manliness and womanliness, both found ways to adapt those rules to their purposes. See for instance: Mariana Valverde, “Poststructuralist Gender Historians: Are We Those Names?” Labour/Le Travail 25 (Spring 1990): 227-236; and, Ruth Roach Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History,” in Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives eds. Karen

Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 79-106.

<sup>15</sup>Emma LaRocque, "The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar," in Women of the First Nation: Power, Wisdom, Strength, eds. Patricia Chuckryk and Christine Miller (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>16</sup>Michael Harkin and Sergei Kan, "Introduction," in Ethnohistory 43 (Fall 1996), special issue entitled "Native American Women's Responses to Christianity": 563-565. See also Carol Devens, Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992)

<sup>17</sup>J. R. Miller, Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), x.

<sup>18</sup>J. R. Miller, "Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy," Ethnohistory 37 (Fall 1990): 386-415.

<sup>19</sup>Myra Rutherdale, "Revisiting Colonization Through Gender: Anglican Missionary Women in the Pacific Northwest and the Arctic, 1860-1945," BC Studies no. 104 (Winter 1994): 3.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 3-23.

<sup>21</sup>Sarah Deutsch, "Women Missionaries and Cultural Conquest," in Peoples of Color in the American West, ed. Sucheny Clan (Lexington: D. D. Hecks and Co., 1994), 91-107.

<sup>22</sup>See, in particular, Ruth Compton Brouwer's, New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) and Rosemary R. Gagan's, A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup>See Sister Bernarda Lauer, "Russian Germans and the Ursulines of Prelate, Sask., 1919-1934," Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Study Sessions 46 (1979): 83-98; Barbara Hoffman, "Women of God: The Faithful Companions of Jesus," Alberta History (Autumn 1995): 2-12.

<sup>24</sup>Rev. Father P. Duchaussois, o.m.i., The Grey Nuns in the Far North (1867-1917) (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Publishers, 1919); Robert George Barclay, "Grey Nuns Voyage to Red River," The Beaver, outfit 297 (Winter 1966): 15-23;

Elizabeth de Moissac, s.g.m., "Les Soeurs Grises et les événements de 1869-1870," *La Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église Catholique, Sessions D'étude*, (1970): 215-228; Marie Bonin, s.g.m., "The Grey Nuns and the Red River Settlement," *Manitoba History* (Spring 1986): 12-14; Estelle Mitchell, *The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 1844-1984* (Montréal: Éditions du Méridien, 1987).

<sup>25</sup>Martha McCarthy, "The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Athapaskans, 1846-1870: Theory, Structure, and Method," (Ph.D., diss., history, University of Manitoba, 1981), 260. McCarthy's thesis has been recently published. See *From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup>Raymond J. A. Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis: The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Western Canada, 1845-1945* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 260.

<sup>27</sup>Ruth Compton Brouwer outlines these two models of missionary activity and the effect that this approach has on interpreting women's work in "Opening Doors Through Social Service: Aspects of Women's Work in the Canadian Presbyterian Missions in Central India, 1877-1914," in *Prophets, Priests, and Prodigals: Readings in Canadian Religious History, 1608 to Present* eds. Mark G. McGowan and David B. Marshall (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1992), 241-261. Brouwer argues that while it is true that women engaged in social services--labour traditionally associated with women--in the context of the Indian missions, their status as health care givers served to overcome initial hostility towards the Canadian Presbyterian message.

<sup>28</sup>Susan C. Peterson, "'Holy Women' and Housekeepers: Women Teachers on South Dakota Reservations, 1885-1910," *South Dakota History* 13 (Fall 1983): 245-260; "Challenging Stereotypes: The Adaptations of the Sisters of St. Francis to South Dakota Indian Missions, 1885-1910," *Upper Midwest History* 84: 1-9; "Religious Communities of Women in the West: The Presentation Sister's Adaptation to the Northern Plains Frontier," *Journal of the West* 21 (April 1982): 65-70; "Doing 'Women's Work': The Grey Nuns of Fort Totten Indian Reservation, 1874-1900," *North Dakota History* 52 (Spring 1985): 18-25.

<sup>29</sup>Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 17. This explosion of female vocations was not unique to Canada. In the United States, for example, nuns numbered only 1,344 in 1850 but had increased to 40,340 by 1900. See Mary Ewens, o.p., "Women in the Convent," Chapter Two in *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration*, ed. Karen Kennelly, c.s.j. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989).

<sup>30</sup>Janet Wilson James, "Women and Religion: An Introduction," American Quarterly, special Issue: Women and Religion 30 (Winter 1978): 580.

<sup>31</sup>Bernard Denault and Benoit Levesque, Éléments pour une sociologie des communautés religieuses au Québec (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1975).

<sup>32</sup>Danylewycz uses this expression in her groundbreaking study Taking the Veil, 72.

<sup>33</sup>Micheline Dumont-Johnson, "Les communautés religieuses et la condition féminine," in Recherches sociographiques, 19 (janvier-avril, 1978), 102. For a good introduction to Dumont's arguments see her essay, "Une perspective féministe dans l'histoire des congrégations de femmes," La Société canadienne d'histoire de l'Église catholique, Études d'histoire religieuse (1990): 29-35.

<sup>34</sup>Danylewycz, Taking the Veil.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Elizabeth M. Smyth, "The Lessons of Religion and Science: The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and St. Joseph's Academy, Toronto, 1854-1911," (Ph.D., diss., University of Toronto, 1989).

<sup>37</sup>Nadia Fahmy-Eid, "The Education of Girls by the Ursulines of Quebec during the French Regime," in Canadian Women: A Reader, eds. Wendy Mitchinson et al. (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1996), 33-48.

<sup>38</sup>Anne Gagnon, "The Pensionnat Assomption: Religious Nationalism in a Franco-Albertan Boarding School for Girls, 1926-1960," Historical Studies in Education 1 (Spring 1989): 95-117.

<sup>39</sup>Ruth Compton Brouwer, "'Transcending the 'unacknowledged quarantine': Putting Religion into English-Canadian Women's History," Journal of Canadian Studies 27 (Autumn 1992): 47-48.

<sup>40</sup>See Barbara J. Cooper, "The Convent: An Option for Quebecois, 1930-1950," Canadian Women Studies 7 (Winter 1986): 31-34. Cooper found this to be the case in her thesis, "In the Spirit: Entrants to a Religious Community of Women in Quebec, 1930-1939," (M.A. thesis, history, McGill University, 1983). Cooper also argues that it is not clear if women entered the convent to fulfil personal aspirations or if their aspirations grew from their vocation. Historian Elizabeth Rapley likewise emphasises female spirituality in her study of the origins and development of semi-cloistered female

religious orders in seventeenth-century France. She argues that the period following the Council of Trent was a time of advancement for women in the Catholic Church. Female spirituality and mysticism were the motivating force behind women's increased status and the proliferation of female orders in that century. The greatest triumph of these devoted women, or *dévotés*, was society's, both lay and religious, acceptance of the necessity of female education. Elizabeth Rapley, The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1900).

<sup>41</sup>Marguerite Van Die, "A Woman's Awakening': Evangelical Belief and Female Spirituality in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada," in Canadian Women: A Reader, 52-65.

<sup>42</sup>Trudelle Thomas, "Daybooks and Deathbooks—The Writings of the Brown County Ursulines: A Rhetorical and Literary Analysis," (Ph.D., diss., University of Cincinnati, 1987).

<sup>43</sup>See footnote twelve in the introductory chapter.

## II

### **THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND CLASS ON SARA AND LOUIS RIEL'S INTERACTIONS WITH THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CLERGY AT RED RIVER**

Louis and Sara Riel grew to maturity during a traumatic period in Canadian and Métis history. Born in 1844 and 1848, respectively, they witnessed the socio-economic and cultural transformation of western Canadian society. One aspect of that change was the establishment and development of a Roman Catholic presence in the West. Between 1818 and 1840 Catholic priests, due to a lack of personnel and resources, witnessed very little progress in their attempts to “civilize” the Métis and Aboriginal populations. Beginning in the 1840s, however, the arrival of the Grey Nuns and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate provided a strong basis for expansion and consolidation. The Riel family’s position among the social and political Métis élite at Red River affected the two siblings’ development. On the one hand, the Métis merchant/trader and farming class tended to adhere to the Catholic faith more so than the hunting class. The Riel family, therefore, was disposed towards sending their children to Catholic schools. On the other, the Catholic clergy tended to single out Métis children from the “better” families in their attempts to foster the growth of an indigenous clergy in the West. Because Louis and Sara Riel shared identical socio-economic and racial backgrounds, an examination of how their interactions with the Roman Catholic Church differed demonstrates how gender influenced Sara Riel’s experiences.

The Riels’ births coincided with the arrival of the Grey Nuns and the Oblates of Mary Immaculate at Red River. Prior to their establishment, the Catholic presence in the

West had been insignificant. Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk, established Red River in 1811 as a colony for Scottish immigrants. Given the predominance of Roman Catholics Métis, he invited Joseph-Octave Plessis, bishop of Quebec, to establish a permanent mission. In 1818, Plessis sent two priests, Joseph-Norbert Provencher and Sévère Dumoulin, to Red River, thus laying the groundwork for the future establishment of the Church in the West. Provencher, named curé of Kamaouraska, bishop of Juliopolis in 1822, and bishop of St. Boniface in 1845, did not successfully attract secular priests or religious orders to Red River until the 1840s; Catholic clergymen numbered no more than four at one time until the Oblates arrived in 1844.<sup>1</sup>

A number of incidents induced Provencher to launch a two-pronged plan that would extend and consolidate Catholic influence in the West. When Red River gained ecclesiastical independence from the diocese of Quebec in 1844, Provencher could no longer rely on Quebec for resources and personnel. In 1839 furthermore the Hudson's Bay Company had invited Wesleyan Methodist missionaries to the West. Provencher became convinced that the Company favoured the English Protestant presence over the Catholic. In response, he looked to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a French missionary order, to man and defer the cost of expanding further into the West.<sup>2</sup> Bishop Ignace Bourget of Montreal<sup>3</sup> supported Provencher's plan because he believed that the order's expansion in all areas of Canada could only contribute to a spiritual awakening among Catholics. On 25 May 1845 Bishop Mazenod, founder of the Oblate order, sent two priests, one French and the other French-Canadian, to Red River. Pierre Aubert and Alexandre-Antonin Taché<sup>4</sup> arrived at St. Boniface on 25 August 1845.<sup>5</sup>



**Fig. 1: Alexandre-Antonin Taché (1823-1894). While serving as Bishop and Archbishop of St. Boniface between 1853 and 1894, Taché greatly influenced Sara Riel's life. At Red River he acted as her spiritual confessor, a role which he maintained by correspondence until her death. Provincial Archives of Manitoba.**

At the same time that Provencher attempted to expand the Catholic missionary field, he directed his energies towards finding a female congregation that could serve the educational needs of the colony. He expressed this need as early as 13 June 1824 when he wrote to Bishop Plessis and explained that he wished to procure one of the Nolin sisters to teach young females at Red River: "It would please me to have a well-established school before the Protestants. They are speaking of establishing one on a grand scale."<sup>6</sup> The two Métis women, Angélique and Marguerite, had settled with their father Jean-Baptiste Nolin, merchant and agent for the North West Company, at Red River in 1819. On Provencher's urgings they opened a girls' school in January 1829.

They catered to the daughters of French-Cree or French-Ojibwa parents, but also taught a few Mixed-blood girls of Scottish descent. In the 1830s, however, they closed the school because they wished to teach at Baie St. Paul, a Saulteaux mission.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, Provencher had been searching for a “suitable” female religious order since 1822. A Catholic sisterhood, according to Provencher, would quicken the progress of “civilisation” at Red River: “Our inhabitants’ daughters do not need an advanced education. Rather, our principal goal will be to teach them to live well and to become good mothers. This process will raise the country’s civilisation level in accordance with the times. This is drastically needed at Red River.”<sup>8</sup> In 1822 he consulted Bishop Plessis, but both men agreed that the Northwest provided unfavourable living conditions for women. In 1838, for example, the Ursulines of Trois Rivières offered their services. Upon consideration, Provencher concluded that their semi-cloistered status made them unacceptable: his vicariate required a female congregation that could leave their convent in order to engage in duties such as nursing and visiting the poor. Provencher finally consulted Bishop Bourget who suggested the Grey Nuns, a congregation active in his diocese.

Marie Marguerite d’Youville (1701-1771) had founded the community in 1737. Born at Barennes, New France, on 15 October 1701, Mother d’Youville was the eldest daughter of Captain Christophe Lajemonerais of Brittany, France, and Marie-Renée Gaultier, daughter of the governor of Trois Rivières. In addition, she was niece to Pierre de la Veréndrye, explorer of the Northwest, and great-granddaughter of Pierre Boucher commonly referred to as the “father of Canada.” After studying for two years under the

tutelage of the Ursuline order, she married François d'Youville, agent of the governor-general. Canadians and the French alike despised d'Youville because he defrauded Natives and merchants through illegal trade. When d'Youville died in 1730, Marguerite had two sons and heavy debts. In response to her financial situation, she managed a small shop, paid off her debts, and educated her sons who both became priests.<sup>9</sup>

While working in her shop, d'Youville became dedicated to serving the poor. On 31 December 1737 she and three companions, Louise Thaumur, Catherine Cusson, and Catherine Demers, privately professed their dedication to the poor and the sick. They did not, however, intend to form a religious community. One year later, they rented a house where they lived and took care of the destitute. The people of Montreal initially opposed their work because they remembered Marguerite's husband's infamy. They stoned Marguerite and her companions in the streets and the Church refused them Holy Communion. Their community came to be known as *soeur grises* or "drunken sisters" because Montreal residents believed they provided the Aboriginal population with alcohol and that they themselves imbibed.<sup>10</sup>

In 1745, under the spiritual guidance of a Sulpician priest, Louis Normant du Fornadon, d'Youville and her companions made their first formal promises anticipating their rule.<sup>11</sup> They agreed to live together in charity, to practice entire poverty, and to consecrate their time and labour to the care of as many poor persons as they could receive. For this purpose, they agreed to put their individual resources into a fund and wear plain black dresses, uniform only in their simplicity. In the late 1840s the authorities of New France asked d'Youville to administer Montreal's General Hospital.

Louis XV confirmed the appointment in 1753 and authorised the foundation of a female religious congregation. Two years later, the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, or Grey Nuns, designed a habit and chose grey because they had been called *soeur grises* for eighteen years. The General Hospital became their first motherhouse and a centre for their work with the blind, mentally ill, destitute, and aged. The Grey Nuns also provided care for people suffering from contagious diseases and for abandoned children.<sup>12</sup>

The Grey Nuns' community expanded in the 1840s. They erected three independent foundations at St. Hyacinthe, Nicolet, and Ottawa. In September 1843, when Bishop Provencher approached the Grey Nuns to staff his mission at Red River, the community at Montreal consisted of approximately forty women. Mother Forbes-McMullen, superior-general, chose four sisters for Red River--Sister Valade, Sister Coullée, Sister Lagrave, and Sister Lafrance. She asked only that the Grey Nuns receive a gift of money, a convent near their classroom, and that the Sisters receive enough land for a garden and farm. The community chose Sister Valade because of her familiarity with administration, while Marie-Eulalie Lagrave was designated as her assistant. Trained as a nurse, Sister Lagrave had also been in charge of music and choir in Montreal. Sister Anastasie-Gertrude Coullée would become head mistress of the Red River school, while Sister Lafrance would assist her. In honour of their new status as missionaries, the Grey Nuns designed a habit that consisted of a grey robe of homespun material, a "widow's bonnet," a large brown knitted shawl, and a head covering of grey wool with a long green veil. The four Sisters left Montreal on 24 April 1844 and arrived at Red River on 21 June 1844.<sup>13</sup>

Ten years after their arrival at Red River, the Grey Nuns expanded their missionary activities throughout western Canada, the Arctic, and into the United States. In 1851, Bishop Mazenod, superior and founder of the Oblate order, enjoined members of his congregation to establish educational facilities at all principle missions. The schools would provide Native children with the fundamentals of Christianity. Teachers would also prepare their students to live a sedentary and “civilised” lifestyle.<sup>14</sup> When Bishop Taché took formal possession of his Episcopal see in 1858, St. Boniface had four secular clergy and ten Oblates, two of whom were lay brothers.<sup>15</sup> By the mid-1850s the Grey Nuns had opened schools at St. Boniface and St. Francis-Xavier. The Oblates had built residences at St. Anne, Île-à-la-Crosse, Lake Athabaska, and Lac La Biche. The Grey Nuns later became instrumental in founding the missions at Calgary and Edmonton and they taught in Catholic residential and industrial schools throughout the West.

Bishop Taché’s diocese, however, stretched to the Rocky Mountains in the West and to the Arctic Ocean in the North: the diocese covered approximately 1,800,000 square miles. In addition to the lack of personnel for such a vast territory, Taché encountered three other difficulties: the multiplicity of Native languages and cultures in the area, Protestant competition, and the hostility of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Company officers feared that the missionary message of Christianity and “civilisation” would hamper the fur trade by encouraging Native traders to live sedentary lives. In response to these pressures, Taché developed a militant missionary strategy. In order to win the Indian population over to the Catholic side, Oblate missionaries would push as quickly as possible into the Northwest. In 1855 Taché established the Notre-Dame-des-

Victoires mission at Lac La Biche. This mission became a supply-point for the entire North. The Oblates also established well-organised and permanent missions near every Hudson's Bay Company post which, in turn, had been chosen as post sites because of their long-standing use as Aboriginal rendezvous sites. From these posts, itinerant priests would convert the local Native population, while at the mission, Oblate priests and Grey Nuns would exert a deeper influence by providing education, regular Catholic devotions, and an example of the sedentary life.<sup>16</sup>

In September 1856 Taché travelled to Rome where he hoped to obtain permission to appoint a coadjutor for the western missions. On route, he stopped at Marseilles to consult with Bishop Mazenod. Mazenod agreed to allow Taché to acquire the Grey Nuns' services for the permanent mission field. Taché's request resulted from Oblate demand: "All of our missionaries have expressed the desire to see the more advanced of their missions enriched by a Sister of Charity convent."<sup>17</sup> Upon his return from Rome, Taché visited the Grey Nuns' Montreal motherhouse. He and Mother Deschamps, the superior-general of the Grey Nuns, signed an agreement that stated that the order would find Sisters to staff the missions no matter the cost. In return, Bishop Taché would be responsible for the Sisters' spiritual interests and he would help them to observe their rule. Monetarily, Deschamps asked only that the Oblates provide the Grey Nuns with food and clothing.<sup>18</sup> In 1859 the first group of Grey Nun missionaries arrived at Lac St. Anne. A second group travelled to Île-à-la-Crosse one year later.<sup>19</sup>

As a part of their cultural baggage, both the Grey Nuns and the Oblates arrived at Red River and the missions of the Northwest infused with the spirit of ultramontanism

that had swept Europe and had inspired Bishops Plessis and Bourget in Quebec. Ultramontanists tended to exalt the authority of the pope and to centralize his power. They held that the state should be subordinate to the church, particularly in areas such as education and social welfare. In order to draw Catholics closer to the church, they promoted the spread of papally approved devotional practices.<sup>20</sup> In Quebec, ultramontanism fuelled clerical nationalism; Bishops Plessis and Bourget used the reactionary and conservative message of ultramontanism to increase clerical control in the province. They encouraged a return to the devotional practices of the Middle Ages, a return to rural life, preservation of the large family, maintenance of the French language, and they increasingly assumed responsibility for social services in their respective dioceses. They blamed secularisation and liberalism for the social and economic dislocations that followed the 1837-1838 Rebellions.<sup>21</sup>

Popular piety during the ultramontane revival was characterised by devotions and rituals that often involved the use of sacred objects such as rosaries and scapulars.<sup>22</sup> Both the Oblates and the Grey Nuns emphasised devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Devotional practices dedicated to the Sacred Heart focussed attention on the physical heart of Jesus Christ as a symbol of his threefold redemptive love. The heart of Jesus Christ became a symbol of his human and divine love. To demonstrate their devotion, Catholics were to perform acts of interior and exterior faith. The Christian was to imitate Christ by demonstrating redemptive love. More importantly, the true believer should give of him or herself by sharing Christ's sacrifice as a means of atonement.<sup>23</sup>

Saint John Eudes (1601-1680) established the official cult of the Sacred Heart in the seventeenth century and the cult became increasingly popular after Marguerite-Marie of Alocque, a French nun, publicised the revelations that the Lord had made to her at Paray-le-Monial between 1673 and 1675.<sup>24</sup> Mother d'Youville became one of Canada's first proponents of the cult. She asked that her disciples foster the devotion in their own communities and wherever they engaged in missionary work. The Grey Nuns placed special attention on the feasts of the Sacred Heart and made special devotions on the first Friday of each month. P. Duchaussois, an Oblate priest, elaborated: "The Heart of Jesus, represented on the Cross which they wear, sets their own heart on fire with the spirit of self-sacrifice, and most closely unites their life with that of their Divine model, the victim of atoning Love."<sup>25</sup>

Through its emphasis on devotionism, the ultramontane revolution influenced Catholic women's lives in two ways. On the positive side, it fostered a new emotional and romantic spirit among Catholics that appealed to women in particular. Devotions to the Virgin Mary and other female saints renewed women's interest in Catholicism and the saints' example provided a justification for female involvement in the Church. Yet, the clergy envisaged women as wives, mothers, and preservers of religious values and cultural traditions in the home. In 1866, for example, a priest in Quebec, Abbé Laflèche, published Quelques considérations sur les rapports de la société civile avec la religion et la famille. In this treatise he defined women's role in French-Catholic nationalist ideology. He argued that society consisted of three divinely ordained patriarchs that

followed natural principles of authority: pope over king, king over man, and man over woman.<sup>26</sup>

Sara and Louis Riel's family background made them likely candidates upon whom the Oblates and the Grey Nuns could focus their spiritual and "civilising" efforts. Both of their parents, Jean-Louis and Julie (née Lagimodière), had aspired to the religious life and maintained their intense faith until their deaths. Their father, born on 7 June 1817 at Île-à-la-Crosse to Jean-Baptiste Riel, a voyageur for the North West Company, and Marguerite Boucher who was half French-Canadian half Chipewyan, returned to Lower Canada in 1822. There, Jean-Louis Riel learned to read, write, and he apprenticed as a wool carder. At the age of twenty-one he served one term with the Hudson's Bay Company, but decided to enter the Oblate order's noviciate upon his return from the Northwest. His religious vocation lasted only a few months and the reasons for his withdrawal remain unknown. He then returned to the West and settled at Red River in 1844 where he hoped to become a schoolmaster. Unfortunately, his arrival at the colony coincided with the arrival of the Grey Nuns who would immediately take on the responsibility of teaching in the Catholic schools.<sup>27</sup>

Julie Lagimodière also aspired to a religious vocation. Born in 1822 to Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière and Marie-Anne Gaboury, French-Canadians who settled at Red River in 1812, Julie grew up as a Métis. Because the Métis were the majority culture at Red River, French-Canadian families, such as the Lagimodières, integrated with the dominant society and passed its traditions on to their children. When a Winnipeg journalist interviewed Julie Riel in 1885, he described her as, and mistook her for, a

Métis (See Figure 2).<sup>28</sup> Upon settling at Red River, the Lagimodière took their place among the Métis élite. Inter-marriage and the passage of time inculturated the family to the Métis, or majority, lifestyle at Red River. Highly devoted to the Roman Catholic Church, Julie, as well as Bishop Provencher, had high hopes that she would join a sisterhood. Although her parents wished her to accept Jean-Louis Riel's proposal of marriage, she refused to do so until a vision convinced her to follow her parents' wishes. Upon leaving church one day, an old man surrounded in flames cried down from the heavens, "disobedient child!" She married Louis Riel senior on 21 January 1844.<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 2: Julie Riel in 1885. Manitoba Provincial Archives.

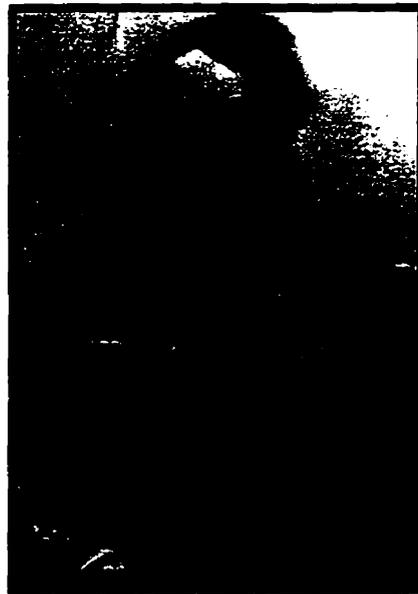


Fig. 3: Jean-Louis Riel in c. 1850. Manitoba Provincial Archives

Both Louis and Sara Riel recalled the intensity of their parents' faith. Near the end of his life, Louis reminisced about his youth in a letter to Archbishop Taché: "My

earliest years were scented with the sweet perfume of faith, for my beloved father permitted no one to speak evil in my presence. Family prayer and the rosary were always before my eyes. They were part of my nature like the air I breathe.”<sup>30</sup> Upon his father’s death in 1864, Louis stated that he would draw courage and strength from his father’s faith.<sup>31</sup> Julie Riel similarly inspired her daughter. In 1882 Sara Riel wrote to her mother: “It is on your lap that I learned to listen to the voice of God. It is you, beloved Mama, who has made me a Sister of Charity. Your motherly voice speaking to me of God made me a true religious and a better missionary.”<sup>32</sup>

The Riel family decorated the interior of their home with numerous religious icons and devotional aids. Rosaries, crosses, figures of Jesus and Mary, images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and portraits of the Virgin and Child dominated the décor. The Riels used these images to teach Catholic doctrines and to foster devotion among their children.<sup>33</sup> The Riel family’s faith differed somewhat from other Métis families. Diane Payment argues that, although religion and the family formed the pillars of Métis society, women generally transmitted faith in the home.<sup>34</sup> Jean-Louis Riel’s intense faith may have been uncharacteristic of Métis men. His religiosity perhaps explains that of his eldest son and daughter.

The Riel family attracted the attention of the Roman Catholic hierarchy because they were members of the Métis social and political élite at Red River.<sup>35</sup> Throughout Sara’s childhood, and until her father’s death, the family lived at the forks of the Red and Seine Rivers on land owned by Julie Riel’s father, Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière. In 1849 the Métis, led at certain stages by Louis Riel senior, broke the Hudson’s Bay Company

monopoly over the fur trade in the Sayer Trial. Following this event, the Métis population at Red River acquired political representation on the Council of Assiniboia. However, it was those Métis élite who shared similar interests with the Hudson's Bay Company who rose to power. Predominantly merchants and traders who sold buffalo hides to American companies, the Métis merchant élite distanced itself from the buffalo hunt which the Roman Catholic hierarchy detested as an impediment to establishing a sedentary and agricultural lifestyle among the Métis at Red River. A number of the merchant class sat on the Council of Assiniboia. They shared above average literacy and writing skills. While the hunting class tended to own their land according to natural law, the merchant/trader class sought leases from the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>36</sup>

The development of a class system among the Métis in the Red River vicinity between 1840 and 1860 divided the Métis population socially and culturally. Among the hunting class, predominantly located at St. Francis-Xavier and Pembina, the Métis engaged in a great deal of drinking and socializing. At St. Boniface, where the Roman Catholic hierarchy enjoyed greater influence, families such as the Riels, Marions, Hamelins, and Lagimodières refrained from excess.<sup>37</sup>

The two classes, furthermore, shared differing views on the importance of education. Bishop Provencher found it difficult to convince the hunting class of the necessity of schooling their children. Until 1859, few children of the hunting class attended the mission schools--in contrast to the sixty boys and twenty girls of the merchant/trader and farming class. Clothing preferences reflected differences between the two classes. While Métis hunters tended to wear bright colours, merchant/traders,

women in particular, were more likely to buy ready-made European clothing which was deemed more “civilised” by the clergy.<sup>38</sup> Louis Goulet’s memoirs reveal that class considerations determined the Métis response to education. In 1868 Goulet’s father wished to move the family to a winter camp. Goulet remembers that he and his siblings did not wish to go until his father threatened to send them to school if they remained at Red River: “That clinched it for us. We’d gladly go right now rather than live like White kids and go to school.”<sup>39</sup>

When Jean-Louis Riel and Julie Lagimodière wed in January 1844, Jean-Louis married into one of the largest farmer/trader families at Red River. Following Mary-Anne and Jean-Baptiste’s marriage, the couple travelled to the Northwest where they lived nomadically until they settled at Red River in 1812. In 1818 Selkirk granted the family land at the juncture of the Red and Seine Rivers. Bishop Provencher arrived that same year and quickly established good relations with the French-Canadian family. Jean-Baptiste prospered as a farmer and, possibly, a trader.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout Sara Riel’s childhood, however, the Jean-Louis Riel family was not so fortunate. Between 1840 and 1864 Louis Riel senior engaged in a number of unsuccessful business ventures while his growing family strained his resources. Immediately following his marriage to Julie, the family engaged in farming and the hunt. By 1847 they owned a house, a stable, twenty-two head of livestock, and three acres of cultivated land. Their financial situation remained above average for French-Canadian and Métis families. By that year, the Riels had had three children but only Louis, born on 22 October 1844, survived. In 1847 Jean-Louis decided to become a miller. Bishop

Provencher ordered a carding machine and Riel agreed to operate it and receive the proceeds. The Hudson's Bay Company, however, retained ownership of the venture.<sup>41</sup>

By 1851, Riel was again farming and the family's finances had become average for Canadian families. One year later, the farm flooded and the Riel family sought refuge at the Cathedral. The following year, Riel again decided to engage in milling. In order to do so, he borrowed one hundred pounds from the Hudson's Bay Company and placed a three-year mortgage on his property. Completed in 1854, the mill did not do well enough to repay the family's debts. By that year, the family had expanded: Sara was born in October 1848, Marie in October 1850, Octavie in 1851 or 1852, Eulalie in September 1853, and Charles in November 1854. The Riel family had average debts. In that same year, Jean-Louis borrowed a further 150 pounds from the Hudson's Bay Company. By 1858 the family's debts were above average and Riel decided to enter into a partnership for a third mill. He travelled to Montreal for the equipment where he met Bishop Taché who advanced him thirty pounds.<sup>42</sup>

When Jean-Louis died in 1864, the family remained in debt. In addition, Julie Riel had given birth to three more children, Joseph, Henriette, and Alexandre, between 1854 and her husband's death. Although Jean-Louis Riel never enjoyed the financial security of his contemporaries, his children attended school and the Roman Catholic hierarchy provided the family with security in time of need. Following Louis Riel senior's death, for instance, Bishop Taché either gave or sold Julie Riel and her eight children land on Red River frontage.<sup>43</sup>

The Roman Catholic clergy at Red River deeply influenced Louis and Sara Riel's education. The treatment they received from the Roman Catholic Church reflected the clergy's expectations for their respective genders. When Louis began school on 1 April 1853 he attended the Grey Nuns' school. Not long after his entry, Taché became the bishop of St. Boniface. He immediately established a boys' school. Taché revealed his rationale—and consequently his attitude towards men and women—in a letter to Bishop Bourget: “The education of boys has been badly neglected among our Catholics at Red River.... The Métis do not like to be governed by women, and this probably explains why their children do not go to school.”<sup>44</sup> When the Christian Brothers, a male order dedicated to teaching young men, arrived at Red River in December 1854, Louis Riel transferred to their school.

Under the Christian Brothers' tutelage, Riel received the foundations of a classical education. Bishop Taché hoped that the Brothers' curriculum and example would encourage Aboriginal and Métis boys to pursue the priesthood. Taché's predecessor, Bishop Provencher, had attempted to foster an indigenous priesthood since 1818. In 1823, for example, Provencher taught two boys, one Métis and one Aboriginal, Latin grammar. Both boys, however, left Provencher's school following one year of study. Five years later, Provencher personally taught François Bruneau, also Métis, but Bruneau, it seems, did not have a true religious vocation—although he did teach in the Bishop's College. Provencher's lack of success contributed to his recruitment of the Oblates for the Northwest missions.<sup>45</sup>

In 1858 Bishop Taché sent three Métis and Mixed-blood boys, including Louis Riel, to Quebec to study for the priesthood. Riel went to the College of Montreal, Daniel McDougall to the College of Nicolet, and Louis Schmidt to the College of Saint-Hyacinthe. Madame Marie-Geneviève-Sophie Masson, a member of a wealthy and influential Quebec family, provided the young men with scholarships. McDougall, suffering from homesickness, soon returned home. Louis Schmidt, the Métis son of a fur trader for the Hudson's Bay Company, returned to Red River in 1860. Although he had done well in his studies, Schmidt suffered from a bronchial infection and his doctors advised him to return to the dry climate at Red River.<sup>46</sup> At the Collège de Montréal, considered the finest seat of learning in Quebec, Sulpician priests taught the college's students Greek, Roman, and French literature and philosophy. For a duration of eight years, students learned Latin, Greek, French, English, mathematics, and theology. At the age of nineteen, Riel entered his first year of philosophy (the equivalent of first-year university) and set his sights on the priesthood.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time that the male hierarchy strove to groom Louis Riel for a leadership position, the Grey Nuns prepared Sara Riel for life as a wife and mother. The Grey Nuns had opened their first school at Red River on 11 July 1844. By 1851 Sister St. Joseph (Anastasie-Gertrude Coullée) taught fifty students of diverse backgrounds—Métis, Mixed-blood, Saulteaux, and Sioux—in the day school. Sisters Curran and Pépin opened a boarding school on 11 September 1853. Unlike in the day school where students learned reading, writing, religion, and domestic science, boarding school students learned English, music, French, and painting. In 1859 Bishop Taché wrote: "It

would be hard to exaggerate the work being done by this community of Grey Nuns. They have a boarding school for young ladies who receive an education quite the equal of that given to middle-class girls in the most advanced countries.”<sup>48</sup> By 1860 the Grey Nuns’ community consisted of approximately twenty-five sisters, elderly women, orphans, and labourers. From the beginning of the Grey Nuns’ endeavours, Bishops Provencher and Taché hoped that the boarding school’s pious and strict atmosphere would foster Native vocations.<sup>49</sup>

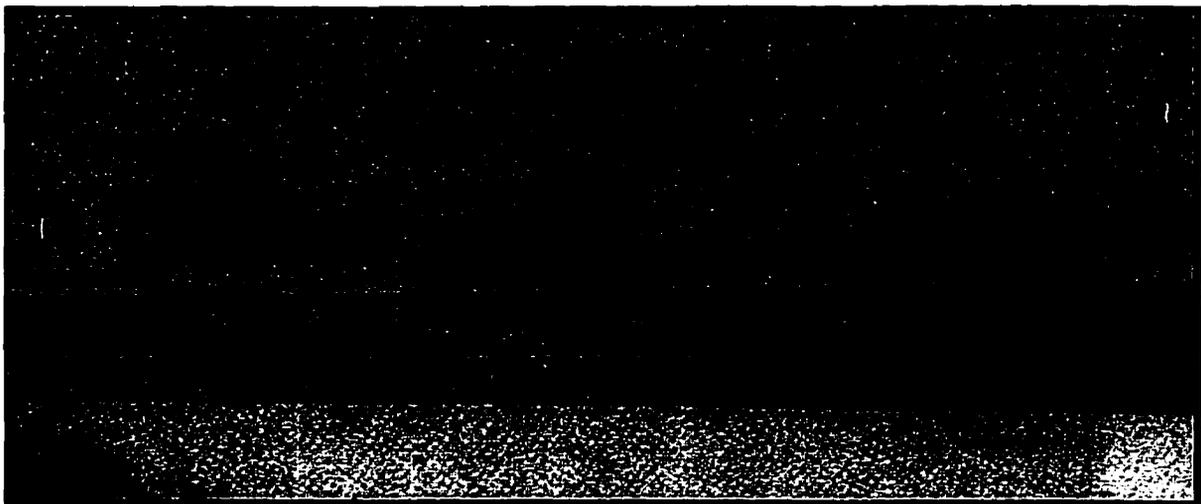


Fig. 4: The Grey Nuns’ convent (to the right) as it appeared when Sara Riel became a student in the late 1850s. The convent was located on the banks of the Red River in St. Boniface. Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

The Grey Nuns shared Bishop Provencher’s belief that the Métis could be “civilised” through education. Joseph Royal, superintendent of education in 1871, visited their convent school. His report took pride of place within the sisterhood’s chronicles: “The [students] are a testimony to their teacher who devotes herself not only to teaching them to read and to write, but also to show them propriety and modesty: virtues that are

so precious and natural in Christian women.”<sup>50</sup> When Sister Charlebois, assistant superior-general of the Grey Nuns at Montreal, visited Red River in 1871 she likewise commented:

Our sisters commenced this mission in 1844, having since that time opened three houses....one at Saint Norbert, another at Saint Vital, and the third at Saint Francis Xavier; this latter, although but six leagues distant from Saint Boniface, is nevertheless no further advanced in civilization than are our far-off missions of Saint Albert and Ile à la Crosse, seeing that the natives, like those of the missions just mentioned, spend the greater part of the year on the prairie hunting buffalo, and accompanied by their children. Now, under the circumstances, if the Sisters had sufficient resources, numbers of children, in the absence of their parents, might be cared for; they would gladly take the entire charge of these little ones, and by this means civilize and instruct them.<sup>51</sup>

When Sara Riel attended the Grey Nuns’ boarding school from approximately 1858 until 1866, however, the Métis at St. Boniface remained among the “uncivilized.”

Despite the fact that few documents remain that outline the Grey Nuns’ curriculum during Sara Riel’s boarding school days, the sisterhood’s chronicles and Sara Riel’s notebooks and letters illustrate its nature and content. In August 1862, for instance, the Grey Nuns conducted the annual public examination of their students. Father Ritchot, curé of St. Norbert, witnessed the ceremony. He noted that the Grey Nuns taught their approximately twenty boarding school students French, English, history, mathematics, painting, and music. In addition, the students learned to spin, knit, and sew and to perform all duties required to maintain a household and to demonstrate domestic economy. The Grey Nuns’ success, he argued, was evident in the orderliness and cleanliness of Métis households run by women who had attended the convent school.<sup>52</sup> Unlike in the day schools where students learned the three four R’s and

performed manual labour, boarding school students concentrated on academic subjects and the “higher arts” such as painting, embroidery, and music.<sup>53</sup>

Riel’s notebooks for the years 1861 to 1863 disclose the religious nature of the Grey Nuns’ curriculum. The notebooks reflect the nature of Catholic girls’ schooling in the period. Consisting of sermons, translation exercises, stories, and geography and history lessons, the notebooks suggest that Sara Riel’s education consisted largely of copying and memorization exercises that explored predominantly religious themes. In nineteenth-century convent schools, teaching Sisters regarded their students’ fervent piety, modesty, and artistic skills as more practical and pleasing to God than academic proficiency. The atmosphere of the convent school often reflected the life of the Sisters. Students followed a similar schedule: girls were kept isolated from the larger society, they adhered to strict dress codes, and the Sisters closely regulated their behaviour.

Members of Catholic teaching orders believed that religious practices, devotions, and Catholic ideals complimented the academic and social aspects of convent education. They decorated their rooms and dormitories with crucifixes, statues, paintings of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Sacred Heart, saints, and biblical scenes. Daily life involved numerous prayers, mass, evening chapel and examination of conscience, sacraments and penance. May devotions to Mary involved colourful pageants, devotions, and numerous prayers. The month of June and the first Friday of every month required devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in order to offer satisfaction and reparation for the sins of humankind.<sup>54</sup>

Through sermons, translation exercises, stories, and lessons in religious history, the Grey Nuns taught Sara Riel how to behave as a Catholic woman. In particular, the Sisters dictated sermons on the nature of the Holy Family. These sermons portrayed Jesus, Mary, and Joseph as models of the perfect European family: son, mother, and father. Joseph, the “head of the family” was the ideal father and breadwinner. He worked as a carpenter to provide Mary and Jesus with the necessities of life.<sup>55</sup> The Catholic Church had begun to emphasise the domesticity of the Holy Family as early as the fifteenth century. European artists depicted the family by the fireside. While Joseph rocked in a chair by the fire, Mary fed the baby Jesus from a bowl of warm milk. Other paintings portrayed Joseph teaching the infant Jesus his first steps. By the eighteenth century, Joseph had become the presiding saint over two hundred convents. In 1884, he became, upon Louis Riel’s recommendation, the patron saint of the Métis.<sup>56</sup>

The Grey Nuns teachings reflected Catholic ideals that held up the Virgin Mary as the ideal woman. Sara Riel’s notebooks include a sermon entitled “La Sainte Famille” that stresses Mary’s domesticity and her virtues: she is chaste, modest, wise, delicate, and young:

Mary was Jesus’ mother and she fulfilled her role as Saint Joseph’s wife to the best of her abilities. She placed Joseph before her own desires and she did nothing to displease him. She was, as always, in her home doing housework when the Lord sent the angel Gabriel to tell her of the mystery of the Incarnation that would soon occur in her house.<sup>57</sup>

This emphasis on Mary as a role model for pious and submissive womanhood underpinned the Catholic devotional revolution of the nineteenth century. Following Pope Pius IX’s proclamation of her Immaculate Conception in 1854, which preserved her

from the physical and moral effects of original sin, Mary became anew an object of veneration. Free from the mundane and physical aspects of motherhood, Mary came to represent an abstraction of feminine perfection: she was pure, tender, and obedient.<sup>58</sup>

Yet, Mary was also the ideal virgin.

Sara Riel's education presented her with the ultimate paradox: the Grey Nuns prepared her for marriage and motherhood, but they sent their students a contradictory message. The Grey Nuns themselves served as role models that were chaste and unmarried. As in Riel's notebooks, they often read biographies of female saints to their students. These saints—Catherine of Sienna, Theresa of Avila, and Margaret Mary Alocque—shared common traits: they were all rich, beautiful, aristocratic, and virginal. In comparison, motherhood and homemaking seemed less than heroic. The Grey Nuns' curriculum ultimately supported canon ten of the Council of Trent's twenty-fourth session: "Virginity and celibacy are better and more blessed than the bond of matrimony."<sup>59</sup>

The Grey Nuns did, however, reinforce Mary's example of proper womanhood with short allegorical stories that appealed to young girls. Riel's notebooks, for example, include a short insert entitled "La Violette." Louise, a young girl, finds red, white, and blue violets in a field. She appreciates their beauty but does not understand why they bloom in different colours. Her mother explains that while blue stands as an emblem of modesty and humility, white symbolises innocence, chastity, and docility. Red, she explains, is not so much a symbol, but reigns in the heart, fostering ardour for all things good and just.<sup>60</sup>

Sara Riel's instructors used more subtle means to promote European gender roles among their students. They encouraged girls to look to Bishop Taché and his mother, Henriette, as mother and father figures. The order shared a particularly close relationship with Henriette Taché who lived in Boucherville, Quebec.<sup>61</sup> In 1861 Henriette Taché wrote to Sister LaFrance, superior of the Grey Nuns at St. Boniface, thanking her for her letter and asking her to "thank your students for me, my small girls, and assure them of my sincere friendship."<sup>62</sup> In a letter from Sara Riel on behalf of the students of the St. Boniface boarding school, Riel related her and her companions' love for Henriette and their admiration for her son, who was like a father to them.<sup>63</sup> In a letter to a friend, Riel spoke further of her veneration of Bishop Taché and the happiness he fostered among the boarding school students:

Monsignor, who deigned to honour our modest exams with his presence, addressed us with a few words of encouragement that filled us with joy. We were happy to hear our first Pastor's voice encouraging us in the practice of goodness and the love of virtue. His Grace extolled the advantages of a Christian education. I realise I am happy to have spent the best years of my life in a house of education, living under the same roof as God.<sup>64</sup>

Riel maintained her admiration for and friendship with Taché until her death in 1883.

The Grey Nuns in particular venerated their foundress, Mother d'Youville, and emphasized faith in Divine Providence. Part of the Grey Nuns' devotion to their foundress included a passionate devotion to the Folly of the Cross, a devotion that entailed imitating Christ's sufferings. On 4 April 1770 Mother d'Youville introduced daily litanies to Divine Providence within all Grey Nun communities. The litanies reinforced the Grey Nuns' belief that Providence was their only salvation, hope, and

refuge; Divine Providence gave courage to the weak, guided pilgrims, and consoled exiles.<sup>65</sup>

When Louis and Sara Riel completed school, nineteenth-century Catholic ideals concerning proper gender roles for men and women continued to govern their lives. Historians interpret Louis Riel's rejection of the priesthood on 8 March 1865 differently. George F. G. Stanley argues that the familial responsibilities that fell to Louis upon his father's death in 1864 left him little choice.<sup>66</sup> Both Flanagan and Maggie Siggins, however, place more weight upon Riel's relationship with Montrealer Marie Geurnon whom, as his poetry reveals, he fell in love with in 1864.<sup>67</sup> Although both arguments have merit, in the context of nineteenth-century Catholic ideals, Stanley's argument is more likely. The Riels' correspondence to each other and to their younger siblings demonstrate that Louis adhered to and was as affected by gender expectations as his sister. In 1877 he wrote to Julie and his younger brothers, advising them to listen to the clergy and their mother's teachings. He addressed Joseph in particular, warning him of the dangers that dissipation could pose for a young man in his twenties. Riel concluded by writing that he hoped Joseph would "conduct himself with a man's seriousness...I am confident that he will be submissive. Submission is the safeguard of the young."<sup>68</sup> As the eldest son, Louis Riel became responsible for the family when his father died. Writing to her sisters in July 1871, Sara refers to him as "our eldest" and as "Papa's replacement."<sup>69</sup> One year later she extolled Louis's role as head of the Riel family.<sup>70</sup>

As the eldest female daughter and as a Grey Nun, Sara Riel may have felt it was her duty to advise her youngest sisters on proper behaviour. Like Louis, she asked that

her sisters be obedient always to their mother and to Louis: “Try to earn the love and respect of all. Always be polite, gracious, reserved, modest, hard-working, and proper.”<sup>71</sup> Given that she wrote this letter on 13 October 1870, her advice may have been her solution to the hostility that the Riel family faced during the Resistance. By 1870, however, Victorian and Catholic ideals of “true womanhood” had proliferated throughout the Métis élite. The editors of Le Métis published an article on 4 October 1873 entitled “Women’s Vocation.” The essay’s author praises women’s role in the community and the family; because men engage in public affairs, women’s place is in the home. Because women share the responsibility for raising children, they are born to instruct. Women rule the domestic sphere and serve as role models to their children. The article concludes that, although Métis women assumed an obscure role, “it is immense.”<sup>72</sup> Louis himself praised and encouraged Sara Riel’s humility: “You already have it, I know. But foster it further because it is this virtue that God wishes you to have the most.”<sup>73</sup>

Once Louis Riel rejected the priesthood, family responsibility and the realities of Red River society in the late 1860s limited his career options. Upon leaving the seminary, he attempted to find a wealthy investor to back him as a free trader. At the same time he appealed to George-Étienne Cartier, a Quebec lawyer and politician, for a job.<sup>74</sup> Although Cartier failed to respond to his request, Riel did receive employment as a law clerk at the office of Laflamme Huntington and Laflamme in Montreal. In the same period, Louis proposed to Marie Guernon, but her parents rejected his offer because he was Métis. Riel decided to return to Red River where his family had fallen on hard

times. After working odd jobs in Chicago and St. Paul, Minnesota, Louis arrived at Red River on 26 July 1868.<sup>75</sup>

Riel understood his familial responsibilities, yet his formal education prepared him little for the career options available at Red River. Without the funds to set himself up as a free trader in the buffalo trade, Riel had few choices. The Hudson's Bay Company offered employment to male children of former employees, however the company increasingly brought in officers from Britain. The Company, by providing Métis men with as few as one hundred to two hundred seasonal contracts and eighty apprenticeships in skilled trades, kept the Métis at the bottom rungs of the work force.<sup>76</sup> Gerhard Ens concludes that when Riel returned to Red River in 1868, he had little to do. He was, Ens quotes one of Riel's contemporaries, a "town loafer."<sup>77</sup>

Riel shared this status with many of his followers during the Resistance: Louis Schmidt, Ambroise Lépine, John Bruce, François Dauphinais, and Pierre Pitras. Louis Schmidt had also been chosen by the clergy to attend a seminary in Quebec. When he returned to Red River he engaged in a variety of odd jobs, mostly for the Roman Catholic Church. When Schmidt, Riel, and the others gathered in front of the courthouse in October 1869 to organize the Resistance, they shared more than anger: they had yet to reach middle-age and none had an established career. Ens argues that economics and a generation gap contributed to the Resistance's origins. Riel's Métis opposition consisted of middle-aged men who had achieved success in trade. Many of these men held positions on the Council of Assiniboia.<sup>78</sup>

By the time Louis arrived at Red River, Sara Riel had joined the Grey Nun order. She entered the congregation's noviciate on 2 September 1865 and became a professed nun on 6 March 1868.<sup>79</sup> It is tempting to argue that Riel became a Grey Nun in response to the Riel family's economic duress following her father's death. In 1865 drought and famine plagued Red River. The Riels had planted no crops for two years. Although they possessed a few head of livestock, they had difficulty procuring bread. Louis and Sara's younger siblings withdrew from school in order to work. In 1868 Marie Riel, then eighteen, taught elementary school at the Grey Nuns' convent at St. Charles. Charles Riel likewise interrupted his education in order to engage in labour.<sup>80</sup> Sara Riel's decision to become a Grey Nun could be interpreted as a means for her to alleviate the Riel family's financial situation by joining a religious community that provided its members with food, clothing, and shelter. Given the Riel family's intense faith and the content of the Grey Nuns' curriculum, however, it is likely that Sara Riel's religious vocation stemmed primarily from her faith, rather than from economic motivations.

Between 1840 and 1868 the Roman Catholic Church consolidated its presence at Red River and in the West. Gender influenced the Catholic hierarchy's interactions with the Métis population. The clergy singled out Métis women as more "civilised" than their husbands and as more likely to influence the formation of sedentary Christian families at Red River. As a consequence of these perceptions, Bishops Provencher and Taché, influenced by ultramontanism, envisaged the purpose of education differently for Métis, Mixed-blood, and Aboriginal men and women. They singled out Métis boys, like Louis Riel, as possible candidates for an indigenous priesthood that would relieve the diocese

from its dependence on French-Canadian priests. In contrast, Bishop Provencher invited the Grey Nuns to Red River in order that they could shape Métis girls into exemplary wives and mothers. Ironically, the Grey Nuns, by their example and through their curriculum, emphasized chastity, humility, and self-sacrifice rather than motherhood as the virtues most pleasing to God. Although Métis men failed to respond to the hierarchy's efforts, a number of Métis and Mixed-blood women, including Sara Riel, experienced religious vocations. A comparison of Sara and Louis Riel's early experiences with the clergy at Red River demonstrates the extent to which gender and class influenced Catholic missionary endeavours. While Louis and Sara Riel's response to the clergy's initiatives cannot speak for the Métis as a group, their interactions with the Roman Catholic Church suggest that class, as much as gender, influenced the Métis' acceptance or rejection of the hierarchy's attempt to "civilize" the population at Red River.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995), 1-49; Raymond Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 11-17. For a more extensive history of the Roman Catholic Church in the West prior to 1844 see the following: Brenda J. Gainer, "The Catholic Missionaries as Agents of Social Change among the Métis and Indians of Red River: 1818-1845," (M.A. thesis, history, Carleton University, 1978); Adrien-Gabriel Morice, Histoire de l'Église catholique dans l'Ouest canadien, 3 vols. (St. Boniface-Montreal: Author and Granger Frères, 1921).

<sup>2</sup>Eugène de Mazenod (1782-1861) established the Oblate order in 1816 as a secular missionary order dedicated to preaching and providing parish retreats to the people of Provence in southern France. The pope approved the order in 1826. Mazenod, named Bishop of Marseilles in 1837, maintained his status as superior of the Oblates until his death in 1861. In 1840, when Bishop Bourget of Montreal arrived in France to procure missionaries for Quebec, the congregation numbered fifty-five. The first Oblates arrived in Canada in 1841 and established their headquarters at Saint-Pierre-Àpître in Montreal.

<sup>3</sup>Ignace Bourget (1799-1855). Educated at the Séminaire de Quebec and the Collège de Nicolet, Bourget became the Bishop of Montreal in 1840. He led the ultramontane faction in Quebec in an attempt to increase clerical influence over society.

<sup>4</sup>Alexandre-Antonin Taché (1823-1894). Taché chose to become an Oblate in 1844 and was immediately sent to Red River where he established close ties to the Riel family. As Bishop and Archbishop of St. Boniface (1853-1894) Taché was Sara Riel's spiritual advisor at Red River and they continued to correspond until her death in 1883.

<sup>5</sup>Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis, 14-17; Robert Choquette, The Oblate Assault on the Northwest (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995), 9-11. With the exception of Fathers Taché, Lacombe, and Gascon, all Oblates who served in western Canada came from France.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in G. Dugas, "Établissement des Soeurs de Charité à la Rivière Rouge," Revue Canadienne (1891): 720.

<sup>7</sup>Donald Chaput, "The 'Misses Nolin' of Red River," The Beaver (Winter 1975): 14-17.

<sup>8</sup>Bishop Provencher to Bishop Signay, 8 August 1841, quoted in Diane Payment, "La vie en rose": Métis Women at Batoche, 1870-1920," in Women of the First Nations:

Power, Wisdom, Strength, eds. Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996), 22.

<sup>9</sup>M. P. Fitts, "Marie Marguerite d'Youville," New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. 14 (New York: McGraw Hill, 1967), 1082.

<sup>10</sup>P. Duchaussois, o.m.i., The Grey Nuns in the Far North (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Publishers, 1919), 13-26; L. R. Cayer and M. P. Fitts, "Grey Nuns," New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. 6, 802.

<sup>11</sup>A "rule" is the code of discipline followed collectively by members of a religious congregation or order.

<sup>12</sup>Duchaussois, Grey Nuns in the Far North, 13-26; Cayer and Fitts, "Grey Nuns," 802.

<sup>13</sup>George Barclay, "Grey Nuns Voyage to Red River," The Beaver, outfit 297 (Winter 1966): 15-18.

<sup>14</sup>Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis, 99.

<sup>15</sup>Secular clergy are priests who live "in the world" as opposed to regular clergy who belong to monastic or religious orders and who are required to withdraw from the world in some manner. Secular clergy usually act as parish priests and obey the direction of their diocesan bishop. Lay brothers are members of the Oblate order who perform domestic and manual labour.

<sup>16</sup>Jean Hamelin, "Alexandre-Antonin Taché," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. 12, 1891-100, 1004-1005. For a more in-depth discussion of Oblate strategies in the Northwest see Choquette's, The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest and Huel's, Proclaiming the Gospel; David Meyer, "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity and Change in a Cree Social Geography," Ethnohistory 42 (Summer 1995): 404-435.

<sup>17</sup>Alexandre-Antonin Taché, Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique (Montréal: Eusèbe Senécal, 1866), 89-90; See also Dom Benoit, Vie de Mgr. Taché, Vol. 1 (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1904), 347.

<sup>18</sup>Duchaussois, Grey Nuns in the Far North, 46.

<sup>19</sup>The Grey Nuns' missionary work in the West extended throughout the three Prairie Provinces and into the Arctic and the United States. They were instrumental in founding the following missions: Lac Ste. Anne (1859); Île-à-la-Crosse (1860); Lac la

Biche (1862); St. Albert (1863); Dunbow (1884); Calgary (1891); Edmonton (1895). In addition to their extensive social service organisation in St. Boniface, the Grey Nuns provided teaching services at the following locations: Fort Totten, North Dakota; Lebret, Saskatchewan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Lestock, Saskatchewan; La Broquerie, Manitoba; Chesterfield Inlet, Pelly Bay, Igloolik, and Rankin Inlet, North West Territories; Sandy Bay Reserve, Manitoba.

<sup>20</sup>Terence Murphy and Gerald Stortz, eds, Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup>Choquette, The Oblate Assault, 2-4.

<sup>22</sup>Murphy and Stortz, Creed and Culture, xi.

<sup>23</sup>C. J. Moell, "Devotion to the Sacred Heart," New Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. 12 (San Francisco: The Catholic University of America, 1967): 818-820.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. Between 1673 and 1675 sister Margaret Mary experienced four visions of Jesus Christ that emphasised devotion towards his heart as a symbol of his love for mankind. When other nuns heard of these visions, they believed her to be delusional. A Jesuit priest, Claud La Colombière, supported her claims. By the time she died in 1690 the controversy had ended.

<sup>25</sup>Duchaussois, Grey Nuns in the Far North, 206.

<sup>26</sup>Martha McCarthy, "The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Athapaskans, 1846-1870: Theory, Structure, and Method," Ph.D., diss., history, University of Manitoba, 1981), 33-45; Anne Gagnon, "The Pensionnat Assomption: Religious Nationalism in a Franco-Albertan Boarding School for Girls, 1926-1960," Historical Studies in Education 1 (Spring 1989): 96-97.

<sup>27</sup>Thomas Flanagan, Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World (Halifax: Goodread Biographies, 1983), 3; Robert Gosman, The Riel and Lagimodière Families in Métis Society, 1840-1860, Report no. 171 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1977), 79-85.

<sup>28</sup>Payment, "'*La vie en rose*,'" 2.

<sup>29</sup>Flanagan, Louis "David" Riel, 3-4.

<sup>30</sup>Louis Riel to A.-A. Taché, 24 July 1885. Quoted and translated in Thomas Flanagan, "Louis Riel's Religious Beliefs: A Letter to Bishop Taché," Saskatchewan History 27 (1974): 15-28.

<sup>31</sup>Louis Riel to the Riel Family, Montreal, 23 February 1864, The Collected Writings of Louis Riel/Les Écrits Complets de Louis Riel (CWLR), ed. George F. G. Stanley (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1985), 1-003.

<sup>32</sup>Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Riel Papers, Sara Riel to Julie Riel, Île-à-la-Crosse, 6 March 1882.

<sup>33</sup>Sarah Carter, "The Woman's Sphere: Domestic Life at Riel House and Dalnavert," Manitoba History 11 (1986): 57.

<sup>34</sup>Diane Payment, "Une Aperçu Des Relations Entre Les Missionnaires Catholique et le Métisses Pendant le Premier Siècle de Contact (1813-1918) Dans l'Ouest Canadien," Études Oblates de l'Ouest 3 (1994): 151.

<sup>35</sup>Robert Gosman, The Riel and Lagimodière Families in Métis Society, 1840-1860, report no. 171 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1975, 1977), 4.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 6-59.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 28, 58-59.

<sup>39</sup>Guillaume Charette, ed., Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of a Prairie Métis, trans., Ray Ellenwood (Winnipeg: Editions Bois-Brûlé, 1976), 59. Born in October 1859 to Moïse Goulet and Marie Beauchamp, Louis Goulet's memoirs provide an excellent source for identifying aspects of Métis thought and belief in the mid-nineteenth century. His father engaged in independent trade while his mother came from a French-Cree background and had been educated by the Grey Nuns.

<sup>40</sup>Gosman, Riel and Lagimodière Families, 97-101. Gosman's conclusions are based on a study of various Métis families at Red River. He uses census data and Hudson's Bay Company financial records to gain a larger understanding of socio-economic divisions among the Métis. Gosman utilises various indicators of wealth and class: the number of Red River carts and livestock owned per family, the number of acres owned and harvested, and each family's debts to the Hudson's Bay Company post.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 88-91.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 88-94; Diane Payment, Riel Family: Home and Lifestyle at St. Vital, 1860-1910, report no. 379 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1980), 8.

<sup>44</sup>Taché to Bourget, 22 May 1851. Quoted and translated in George F. G. Stanley, Louis Riel (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963), 20.

<sup>45</sup>Ronald P. Zimmer, "Early Oblate Attempts for Indian and Metis Priests in Canada," Études Oblates (October-December 1973): 277-278.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 279-280; Stanley, Louis Riel, 21-27.

<sup>47</sup>Maggie Siggins, Riel: A Life of Revolution (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994), 25-29.

<sup>48</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 1844-1984 (Montreal: Éditions du Méridien, 1987), 75.

<sup>49</sup>Grey Nuns' Archives, St. Boniface (GNASB), Elizabeth de Moissac, s.g.m., "The Grey Nuns in Red River: Educational Institutions, 1844-1974," unpublished manuscript, typed, 9; Ibid., chronicles, 31 December 1860.

<sup>50</sup>GNASB, Chroniques, 1871.

<sup>51</sup>Sister Charlebois, Notes and Sketches Collected from a Voyage in the North-West by a Sister of Charity of Montreal for the furtherance of a Charitable Object (Montreal: Callahan, Book and Job Printer, 1875), 7

<sup>52</sup>GNASB, Chroniques, 1 August 1862; PAM, Sara Riel to Octavie, Eulalie, and Henriette Riel, St. Boniface, 13 October 1870 and 29 January 1871. These letters mention the subjects that Sara Riel's sister learned at the Grey Nuns' school.

<sup>53</sup>In 1854 the Grey Nuns of St. Boniface reunited with the Montreal motherhouse. Article VIII of the Act of Union stated that the sisterhood could continue to operate their boarding school until a sisterhood who specialised in teaching established themselves in the colony. The boarding school would "continue to provide young people with a more polished and advanced education than that offered in the elementary schools," GNASB, Acts of Union, General Correspondence, Vol. 2, 205-207.

<sup>54</sup>Aileen Mary Brewer, Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women, 1860-1920 (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1987), 34-83. Brewer bases her conclusions and generalisations upon an examination of the curriculum of four female religious orders: Society of the Sacred Heart, Sisters of Mercy of Chicago, Sisters of Charity of the

Blessed Virgin Mary, Sinsinawa Dominicans. The sisterhoods were diverse in origin—two are French, one American, and one Irish—and they catered to different classes.

<sup>55</sup>PAM, Sara Riel, Notebook, 1861-1863, 274-275. For another example of missionary use of the Holy Family as role models see Laura Peers, “The Guardian of All’: Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary,” in Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History eds. Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Peterborough: Broadview Press), 288.

<sup>56</sup>Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Picador, 1990), 188-189; Flanagan, Louis ‘David’ Riel, 127-128.

<sup>57</sup>PAM, Sara Riel, Notebook, 1861-1863, 274-275.

<sup>58</sup>Marta Danylewycz, Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 39-41.

<sup>59</sup>Brewer, Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women, 92-98; Warner, Alone of All Her Sex, 336-337.

<sup>60</sup>PAM, Sara Riel, Notebook, 276.

<sup>61</sup>Siggins, Riel: A Life of Revolution, 9.

<sup>62</sup>GNASB, Henriette Taché to Sister Hedwidge Lafrance, Chronicles, 1861.

<sup>63</sup>Archbishop’s Archives, St. Boniface (AASB), Taché Papers, Sara Riel to Henriette Taché, 31 December 1863, no. 1465.

<sup>64</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Azoline (?), 12 October 1862, St. Boniface Pensionnat, Notebook.

<sup>65</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 20.

<sup>66</sup>Stanley, Louis Riel, 29-30.

<sup>67</sup>Flanagan, Louis ‘David’ Riel, 17-19; Siggins, Riel: A Life of Revolution, 59-62.

<sup>68</sup>CWLR, Louis Riel to Julie Riel, Beauport, 9 February 1877, 2-133.

<sup>69</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Marie, Octavie, and Eulalie Riel, Île-à-la-Crosse, 19 July 1871.

<sup>70</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 1 August 1872.

<sup>71</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to her sisters, St. Boniface, 13 October 1870.

<sup>72</sup>“Vocation des Femmes,” Le Métis, Vol. 3, no. 19, 4 October 1873, 2-3.

<sup>73</sup>CWLR, Louis Riel to Sara Riel, St. Vital, 1873, 1-163.

<sup>74</sup>George-Étienne Cartier (1814-73). A politician and one of the fathers of Confederation, Cartier studied law and became a lawyer in 1835. He ran as a Liberal reformer in 1842 and served as co-premier of Quebec in 1857-58 and 1858-62.

<sup>75</sup>Stanley, Louis Riel, 30-34.

<sup>76</sup>Gerhard J. Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 73; Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 96-98.

<sup>77</sup>Ens, Homeland to Hinterland, 134.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 72-73, 134-138.

<sup>79</sup>GNASB, Personal Files.

<sup>80</sup>Payment, Riel Family: Home and Lifestyle, 71-72.

### III

#### **HIERARCHIES OF RACE AND CLASS AT RED RIVER: SARA RIEL'S STATUS AS A GREY NUN**

Sara Riel was the only Métis woman who became a Grey Nun in the pre-1869-1870 Resistance period. This chapter seeks to determine how the variables of race and class influenced her religious vocation and, in turn, how these variables influenced the Grey Nuns' decision to accept Métis and Mixed-blood women into their order. The Grey Nuns catered to the Métis and Mixed-blood élite at Red River for financial and sectarian reasons. Members of the élite more readily sent their children to school than members of the hunting class. The extent of ethnic and socio-economic diversity within the Grey Nuns' community and the congregations' spirit of egalitarianism contributed to their acceptance of mixed-blood Sisters. Once Métis and Mixed-blood women entered the Grey Nuns' order, they pursued distinguished administrative, teaching, and missionary careers. They did not, however, become Grey Nuns unless they experienced a true religious calling. Although class considerations influenced the Grey Nuns' relationship with the Métis population, their treatment of élite Métis and Mixed-blood women demonstrates that, in certain instances, the Grey Nuns could overcome racial barriers. By the time of the Resistance, they had established close ties to the Métis élite in the colony; consequently, they sympathised with the Métis cause.

An examination of Sara Riel's relationship with the Grey Nuns and an analysis of the congregation' membership tests the validity of Frits Pannekoek's interpretation of the Grey Nuns' influence in Red River society. In his study, *A Snug Little Flock: The Social*

Origins of the Red River Resistance, 1869-70, Pannekoek argues that the Grey Nuns contributed to ethnic and sectarian divisions and hostilities at Red River by catering to the Mixed-blood population. Consequently, they failed to reconcile the Métis to the establishment. Pannekoek asserts that the French-Canadian Grey Nuns, like the Oblates, were “perhaps willing, but certainly unable to establish intimate relations with their Métis charges.”<sup>1</sup> Because the Grey Nuns regarded the Métis with disdain, according to Pannekoek they taught the poorer Métis at day schools and segregated them from the children of Catholic Mixed-blood families who were the Sisters’ principle charges in their boarding school. In addition, Pannekoek argues that neither Bishop Provencher nor the Grey Nuns were eager to accept Métis women into their order. Only girls of the best families, more European than Cree, entered the convent. Pannekoek concludes that the Grey Nuns, like the Oblates, had little use for the secular Catholic clergy and their principle charges, the Métis hunting class, who lived at Pembina and St. Francis-Xavier.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1840s Taché urged the Grey Nuns to open their boarding school, in addition to their day school, for sectarian and financial reasons. The Grey Nuns at Red River received no financial assistance from the Montreal motherhouse: they relied on the male clergy at Red River for food, clothing, and shelter.<sup>3</sup> In 1848 Taché wrote Bishop Bourget of Montreal: “If the Sisters could conduct an English school they would probably attract more bourgeois children. Their reputation will bring in the rest. With these schools they could survive. The day or regular schools give them less than nothing.”<sup>4</sup> To accomplish his goal, Taché dedicated himself to acquiring the services of an English-speaking nun from the Grey Nuns’ community at Ottawa. He also

encouraged the Grey Nuns to provide their boarding school students with a strict Catholic education that would emphasise the “higher arts” of music, painting, and embroidery. This advanced curriculum, Taché hoped, would attract the attention and respect of the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Catholic officers whom he feared would send their daughters to Protestant schools.<sup>5</sup>

The Grey Nuns’ chronicles affirm the pride that the Grey Nuns experienced upon obtaining daughters of the bourgeois, or Company officers, as students. In 1854 Sister L’Ésperance chronicled the arrival of John Rowand’s three youngest daughters, Sophie, Peggy, and Adelaide, at the boarding school. Rowand was the chief factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company in charge of the Saskatchewan district, which included present day Alberta. Rowand ran the district from Edmonton House. He had married Louise Humphrville according to the custom of the country and the couple remained together, eschewing “Christian” marriage, until Louise’s death in 1849.<sup>6</sup> In 1859 the chronicler speaks again of this incident. She mentions that John Rowand had settled at Red River and entrusted his daughters’ education to the Grey Nuns. Rowand himself went to the convent in order to relearn the essentials of the Catholic faith from the Sisters.<sup>7</sup>

When the Rowand sisters arrived at the Grey Nuns’ boarding school, Sophia was thirty-nine, Margaret twenty-eight, and Adelaide twenty-one. Their father had closely watched their upbringing and he did not approve of his daughters marrying into the Mixed-blood population. The Rowand women, however, wrote to their father from the Grey Nuns’ convent and complained of the boarding school’s atmosphere. In particular, they felt that the manual duties assigned to them bordered on slavery. Upon leaving the

Grey Nuns' school, the women played a prominent role in Red River society. Adelaide, who wished to become a Grey Nun, contracted tuberculosis and died in the Sisters' care. Sophia, the eldest, married J. H. McTavish, a well-respected member of the community who later became a member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. Margaret married James McKay, a Mixed-blood, who served on the Council of Assiniboia, the North-West Territories Council, and the Manitoba Legislature where he served as president of the Executive Council, Speaker of the House, and Minister of Agriculture.<sup>8</sup>

An 1869 entry in the Grey Nuns' chronicles unveils the degree to which the Grey Nuns had adopted the male hierarchy's spirit of sectarian rivalry:

Tomorrow, we will receive an older boarder. The Governor, who leaves for England, could find no one—not even a Protestant—more worthy to look after his wife during his absence than the Sisters. This good woman left her comfortable and spacious home in order to live in the confined apartment designated for her and she is happy. It is an honour for Catholicism: a foot in the nose for the Protestants. In both cases, we rejoice.<sup>9</sup>

William Mactavish, Governor of Assiniboia, had married Mary Sally McDermot, a Mixed-blood daughter of Andrew McDermot, in 1864. McDermot was one of the most successful merchant/traders at Red River.<sup>10</sup> By teaching the daughters of the bourgeois, the Grey Nuns established strong ties to the Hudson's Bay Company élite at Red River.<sup>11</sup>

Although the Grey Nuns shaped their curriculum to allure Catholic Mixed-blood students, they also sustained close ties to the Métis population who they viewed as the principal recipients of their missionary endeavours. As Pannekoek contends, individual Grey Nuns often displayed paternalistic attitudes towards the Métis. Yet, this attitude also extended to their Mixed-blood charges. When Marguerite Connolly, daughter of chief

factor William Connolly, became the St. Boniface community's first novice in 1845, Mother Valade wrote to Mother McMullen in Montreal: "Although she means well, I assure you that it is necessary for us to be patient and constant. It is no small thing to mould persons who have no idea of constraint, obedience, or the other virtues indispensable to the religious life, into nuns."<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 5: A Grey Nun, presumably with Métis or Mixed-blood students who attended the day school. Undated. Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

Mother Valade had earlier expressed the hope that the strict and "civilising" atmosphere of the boarding school would achieve this end.<sup>13</sup> The Grey Nuns in Montreal had chosen Valade as one of the founders of the Red River mission because she was one-quarter Native.<sup>14</sup> Born at Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, Lower Canada, on 26 December 1798, Mother Valade was the eldest daughter of a farmer, François Valade, and Marie-Charlotte Cadotte.<sup>15</sup> The Riel family and other Métis mourned her death in 1861. Pallbearers at her funeral included Louis Riel senior, a Métis, and Jean-Baptiste

Thibault, a secular priest.<sup>16</sup> Sara Riel wrote to Louis: "Today, we can see her no more, the one who gave you the Christian education you now have."<sup>17</sup>

Although Bishops Provencher and Taché hoped that the Grey Nuns would provide their students with an elevated education, many of the Sisters came from humble backgrounds. When Riel made her perpetual vows on 6 March 1868 she became part of a diverse community of women who shared only their faith. In 1869 the congregation at Red River numbered twenty-six Sisters. Although the majority originated from Quebec, four sisters were English-Canadians and four were Métis or Mixed-blood.<sup>18</sup> A few examples can illustrate the diversity of backgrounds among the French-Canadian Sisters. Philomène Boucher grew to adolescence in the rural community of Saint-Remi. At the age of sixteen she quit school in order to apprentice as a seamstress. A priest noticed her piety and encouraged her to pursue a religious vocation. Boucher spoke her perpetual vows on 23 December 1859.<sup>19</sup> Vitaline Royal, by contrast, was born into a well-off family from Repentigny. Educated by the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame, Royal read the Annals of the Propagation of the Faith and felt a strong attraction to the missionary life. She arrived at Red River in 1858, only months after she had spoken her final vows.<sup>20</sup>

The English-Canadian Grey Nuns at Red River likewise exhibited diverse socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. As English teachers they influenced Sara Riel's life to a large degree for they taught her the language skills which would make her a valuable asset to the missionary field. Born on 10 July 1837, Sister Marie-Xavier moved to Aylmer, Upper Canada, with her parents during her youth. She entered the

Grey Nuns' noviciate at Bytown and arrived at St. Boniface as a postulant on 1 September 1853. After she took her final vows on 21 January 1856 she taught at the boarding school and remained there for the next thirty-two years.<sup>21</sup> Sister Mary O'Brien joined her in 1864. Born at Plattsburgh, New York, in 1842, Sister O'Brien had visited Montreal at the age of eighteen and, upon seeing the Grey Nuns' accomplishments, chose to pursue the religious life.<sup>22</sup>

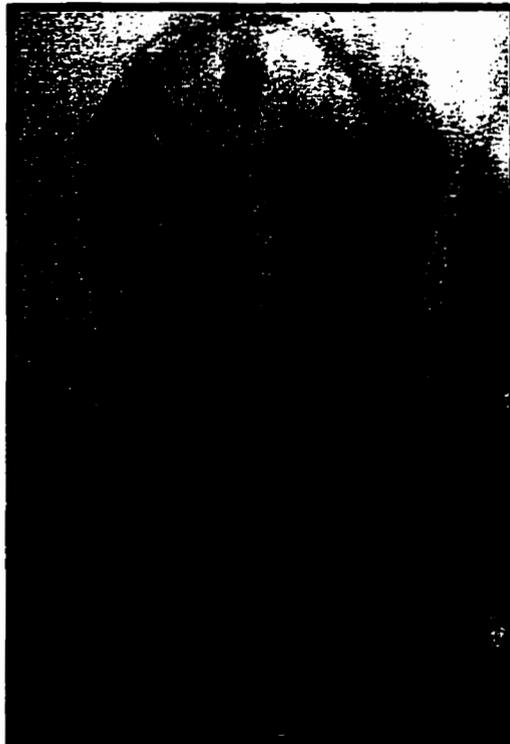
Sources in the Grey Nuns' archives and an examination of the lives of Métis and Mixed-blood Grey Nuns reveal that the congregation's boarding school student population had more diversity than Pannekoek suggests. On 9 August 1877 Marie-Josephine Nebraska, a Sioux student who was to become a Grey Nun in the 1870s, read a welcoming address to the Earl of Dufferin, the Governor-General of Canada, and the Countess of Dufferin. The address included the following statement:

Your Excellencies have before you a unique assembly of young girls. I, who have the honour to address you in the name of my companions, am of the Sioux nation. On my right you have a Saulteaux, on my left a Maskegon...Members from eight other nations share our good fortune, and you see in this haven of peace and charity children from eleven different nationalities.<sup>23</sup>

While Nebraska's address does not disguise the fact that the Grey Nuns' sought to replace Aboriginal culture and religion with European and Catholic norms of dress and behaviour, it does reveal the diversity of the Grey Nuns' boarding school student population.

A number of the Grey Nuns' Mixed-blood boarding school students chose the religious life. Marguerite Connolly entered their noviciate on 5 April 1845. The daughter of chief factor William Connolly and a Cree woman, Miyo-Nipiy, Marguerite

Connolly also had the distinction of being Mother d'Youville's grandniece. In her youth she had spent some time in Montreal where she studied under the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre Dame. In 1840 she left Montreal with her mother in order to return to the West. While resting at Norway House, she heard that there was a Catholic bishop at Red River and she convinced her mother to make St. Boniface their final destination. While Miyo-Nipiy lived with the Grey Nuns, Marguerite attended their boarding school.<sup>24</sup>



**Fig. 6: Marguerite Connolly in 1877. In 1846, Connolly became the first mixed-blood woman to enter the Grey Nuns' order at Red River. Grey Nuns' Archives, St. Boniface.**

Sisters Marion and Gladu, two Métis women, joined Connolly in the Grey Nuns' noviciate. Both, however, withdrew before speaking their final vows. It was not until 1862 that another Mixed-blood woman, Marie-Jane McDougall, became a postulant. Born at Little Slave Lake on 6 January 1844 to a Protestant Scotsman and a woman of the Salish tribe, McDougall grew up under the Grey Nuns' care. Father Thibault "brought her" to the boarding school in 1853 when McDougall was nine years old.<sup>25</sup> Her personal file and obituary reveal that, to some extent, the Grey Nuns admired and respected her Aboriginal heritage: "At times she would recall her childhood experiences: how her mother taught her to adore the Sun, the Great Spirit that was deserving of homage."<sup>26</sup>

McDougall spoke her perpetual vows on 3 May 1865. Four months later, Annie Goulet entered the order. Goulet's father, Alexiz Goulet had been one of the first Canadians from Upper Canada to settle at Red River. Her mother, Josephite Severette, came from a Native-Scottish background. When Goulet finished primary school she remained at home to help her mother. Bishop Taché soon invited her to attend the Grey Nuns' boarding school. After two years of higher education she entered the noviciate on 23 December 1862.<sup>27</sup>

Sara Riel, then, became the third boarding school graduate to pursue a religious vocation.<sup>28</sup> As postulants in the Grey Nuns' order, Mixed-blood and Métis women rigorously examined their faith and they learned the central tenets of the Grey Nuns' obedience under the guidance of the mistress of the noviciate. The Grey Nuns' Catechisme des Voeux ou des Principales Obligations de l'État Religieux formed the basis of their spiritual examination by teaching the Grey Nuns' rule through a question

and answer format. The Catechism, to some degree, reflects the Grey Nuns' ideal non-sectarian and non-racial philosophy. Consisting of eight lessons, postulants learned that to be a religious meant to dedicate oneself to a life of Christian perfection and practice. Like most female congregations, the Grey Nuns made vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity. Their fourth vow was particular to the order and required the community's members to dedicate themselves to the service of the poor.<sup>29</sup>

The catechism details the advantages that women would receive by dedicating their lives to God. Primarily, they would dedicate themselves to goodness in the world and preserve themselves from life's inconstancies. While poverty would ensure that individual Grey Nuns detached themselves from material possessions, greed, and avarice, chastity would ensure that the community's members would enjoy the beatitudes promised by God to pure hearts; it would also guarantee one a place in heaven. Obedience required complete submission and self-sacrifice to the will of one's superiors and the community's constitutions; it arose from a desire to emulate Christ's life that had been defined by submission. Service to the poor, a work pleasing to God and useful to the Church, would ensure that God would provide consolations and comfort for the pains experienced on earth, pardon for one's sins, and a place in heaven. When caring for the sick, destitute, or poor, Grey Nuns were not to discriminate on the basis of any worldly reason: "A religious, in the exercise of Charity, must consider Our Lord living and suffering in the person of the poor and the sick."<sup>30</sup>

Although Métis and Mixed-blood Grey Nuns left behind few written sources that explain why they became Grey Nuns, Sara Riel's religious vocation is a dominant theme

in her letters. She expressed her religious vocation as a “calling” from God that entailed personal sacrifice. Following her reception into the Grey Nuns’ community, Riel wrote to Mother Slocombe, superior-general of the congregation. She expressed the happiness she had experienced upon becoming a Grey Nun. She placed particular emphasis on the fact that she had received Mother Valade’s cross:

This cross, which this good Mother made me kiss so often during the last days of her sickness, revived my shattered courage. This cross had helped her suffering. I tell myself: the ties that unite me to the heart of our beloved Mistress are the same that tie my heart to God. I want to follow in her footsteps, to renounce myself and live only for God.<sup>31</sup>

Riel continued to embrace the spirit of her religious vocation for the remainder of her life. In 1878 she wrote to her family from Île-à-la-Crosse. She stated that although nearly thirteen years had passed since she “chose God,” she appreciated her decision more than ever: “I appreciate the signal grace that Our Saviour has given me. I would not exchange a single strand of wool from my Saintly-Habit for all the riches in the world.”<sup>32</sup> Riel likewise spoke of her teaching and nursing duties in religious rather than secular terms. Riel noted that: “Every day I appreciate more and more the role that the Lord gave me: to care for, to visit, to console, and to fortify the sick. To pray with them, and to speak to them of God. It does the heart good to elevate and to instruct children. To make them know and love God. More and more I love these ties that attach me to Him.”<sup>33</sup>

Riel’s letter to Louis dated 25 November 1870 unveils the intensity of her faith:

What a retreat does for the heart! You, dear Louis, have experienced it. Is it not uplifting when, in the silence and during meditation, we hear all around us this voice that alone can charm us? My eldest, you have tasted the happiness that one finds in the practice of virtue, in the service of God. We must love and serve the Lord with joy. We must find in

religion the balm of our sorrows, a hand to guide us, a voice to restore us.<sup>34</sup>

In 1877 she told Archbishop Taché that she loved nothing better than to ease her doubts in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In this divine sanctuary, Riel believed she could confide all of her intellectual and rational faculties to her Divine Spouse.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the fact that Sara Riel expressed her religious vocation in terms of her faith, once Métis and Mixed-blood women became nuns they attained a certain status in society that allowed for independent career advancement. Although Bishop Provencher felt that Métis and Mixed-blood Sisters had little hopes of rising to the “first ranks” of the Catholic hierarchy because they were women,<sup>36</sup> Connolly, McDougall, Goulet, and Riel pursued distinguished careers as Grey Nuns. As early as 1845 Taché had demonstrated a willingness to accept Métis and Mixed-blood women into the Grey Nuns’ community. He did, however, express his appreciation of their linguistic skills in condescending language:

The sister’s accomplishments are remarkable. The population has changed noticeably since their arrival. They have five postulants: two came with us and three are Natives of the country. These three small métisses are charming children whose knowledge of Indian languages will allow them to render us essential services in the future.<sup>37</sup>

Sister Flavie Laurent, a Grey Nun who arrived at St. Boniface in 1850, spoke on the nature of job appointments within the congregation: “Each of us was appointed to do that which she was best fitted for.”<sup>38</sup> Because Métis and Mixed-blood Grey Nuns knew multiple languages they demonstrated a marked aptitude for teaching in the Northwest.

The Grey Nuns appointed Sister Connolly to a teaching position before she had spoken her final vows. After she became a member of the congregation she began teaching catechism at the Saulteaux lodges near Red River. She successfully converted Native girls and encouraged the Saulteaux to sing hymns in their native tongue.<sup>39</sup> When Marie-Jane McDougall became a Grey Nun the congregation immediately sent her to teach at their convent school at St. Norbert.<sup>40</sup> In 1869, she and Sister St. Thérèse opened St. Mary's school at Fort Garry. Like the Grey Nuns' boarding school at Red River, St. Mary's school provided girls with an English-speaking education that was designed to counteract Protestant influence.

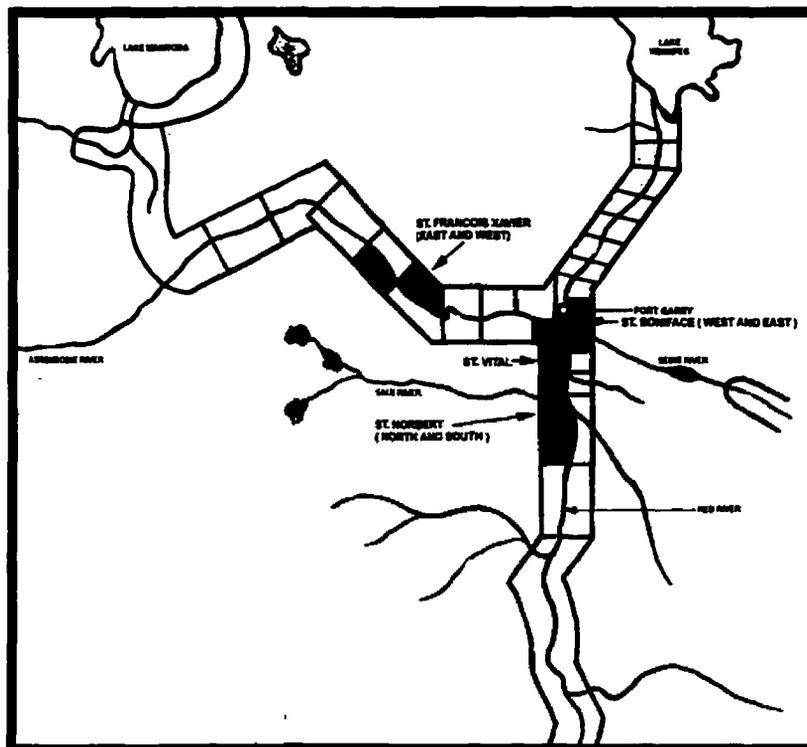


Fig. 7: Location of the parishes where Grey Nuns taught in the Red River area.

In 1874 the Grey Nuns recalled Sister McDougall to Red River where she became the matron of the boarding school students. In 1890 she became superior of the St. Boniface community. She later travelled to and taught at the congregation's schools at St. Anne des Chienés and Qu'Appelle Valley. Prior to her death in 1896, McDougall took charge of the Provencher Academy at St. Boniface.<sup>41</sup> Annie Goulet's career followed a similar path. Following her perpetual vows she travelled to the parish of St. Vital where she taught with Sister Ethier. She too taught at the Oblate's residential school in the Qu'Appelle Valley where her knowledge of Saulteaux and Cree proved to be indispensable.<sup>42</sup>

Sara Riel's proficiency in English, French, and Cree qualified her to teach at the Grey Nuns' St. Norbert mission after she made her perpetual vows. The Grey Nuns also placed her in charge of teaching the students to chant because she had demonstrated a talent for music and playing the harmonium as a student. In 1869, however, her superiors feared for her safety when the events of the Resistance began to unfold. They recalled her to St. Boniface where she took charge of the sacristan and taught classes at the congregation's day school. Before she left for Île-à-la-Crosse, Riel spent brief periods of time teaching at St. Vital and St. Francis-Xavier.<sup>43</sup>

If the Grey Nuns exhibited as much disdain for the Métis population at Red River as Pannekoek suggests, it is not likely that they would have given mixed-blood women positions of greater social prestige than their French-Canadian counterparts. Yet, while most Métis and Mixed-blood Grey Nuns pursued teaching and administrative careers, French-Canadian sisters, such as Sister Laurent, did the community's laundry. The Grey

Nuns placed Sister Withman, Mother Valade's cousin, in charge of sewing the clergy's cassocks and the Sisters' habits.<sup>44</sup> The congregation's chronicler suggested that Sara Riel became upset upon learning that she had to perform manual labour when she returned to Red River in December 1869: "Sara Riel arrived here on the third of December suffering horribly. One supposes that she was upset because she had to do the housework."<sup>45</sup> Yet Sara wrote to Louis on 21 September 1870: "As I told you in my last letter, the annual autumn changes took place today on the 20<sup>th</sup>. My mission to St. Norbert is over. The orders place me in the day school. I must also mend and wash the Community's linen—a job that occupies me continuously without fatiguing me at all."<sup>46</sup>

Although individual Grey Nuns performed some manual labour, beginning 23 December 1846 the congregation accepted *filles données* as regular Sisters within the order. *Filles données* were originally women with little or no formal education who were accepted into the order with limited privileges: they were exempt from daily spiritual readings and office prayers. They, more often than not, performed manual labour for the Grey Nuns and were successively named Marys, Franciscan Sisters, and Marthas. On 23 December 1863, Bishop Bourget admitted thirty-eight women into the Third Order of St. Francis. On Sundays and Feast Days they wore a black dress with a large cape, a modest cap, and a widow's bonnet with a small white collar. At all other times they wore ordinary clothing.<sup>47</sup>

Although it can be argued that the Grey Nuns' arrival at Red River contributed to class divisions and distinctions within the Métis and Mixed-blood population, the argument that they failed to connect with the Métis population cannot be substantiated.

The congregation's chronicles and Sara Riel's letters reveal that as the events of the Resistance unfolded, the Grey Nuns were sympathetic to the Métis cause. Yet, their status as women religious did not allow them to publicly display their sympathies. During the 1885 Rebellion, in which Louis Riel again played a prominent role, Mother Deschamps, general-superior of the Grey Nuns, advised Sisters in the Northwest from Montreal: "We must not mix up in questions of justice, of civil right and wrong. Our Hearts as Sisters of Charity must be inclined to relieve whatever suffering we come across and, if we have any preference or choice of whom to serve, we must be open to the most unfortunate, the ones least favoured."<sup>48</sup>

In 1868, the Canadian government purchased Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company. According to the Rupert's Land Act, the government could take possession of all lands on 1 December 1869. Neither the Canadian nor British governments consulted the Métis, Native, and non-Native populations at Red River. The Métis, lead by Louis Riel, feared that they would lose title to their land as well as their language, religious, and cultural rights if they joined in union with an English-speaking and Protestant majority in Canada. Both English and French-speaking Métis and Mixed-blood delegates from Red River met on 16 November 1869 to formulate a plan for negotiating with the federal government. When Riel and his Métis followers prohibited the governor-designate, William McDougall, from entering the territory, they lost the support of the English-speaking Mixed-bloods and the non-Native population at Red River.<sup>49</sup>

After seizing the Hudson's Bay Company post at Lower Fort Garry and imprisoning a number of Canadian annexationists, Riel and his followers declared a provisional government on 8 December 1869. On 4 March 1870 the provisional government tried, convicted, and executed Thomas Scott, a member of the Canada First movement. As soon as Prime Minister John A. Macdonald heard of the events at Red River, he suspended the transfer of Rupert's Land and asked that the British send a military or "peace" expedition to the Northwest. The British agreed to his request on the condition that the Canadian government negotiate terms with the Métis. The non-Native population at Red River vented its hostility over Scott's execution on the Métis. The "peace mission" led by Garnet Joseph Wolseley likewise sought to avenge Scott's death. Riel fled to the United States to avoid prosecution. Wolseley's soldiers contributed to the mob rule that existed in the colony in 1871 and 1872. French Métis feared being seen on the streets of Fort Garry. Lieutenant-Governor Adams G. Archibald reported to Prime Minister Macdonald in 1871: "Many of them [Métis] actually have been so beaten and outraged that they feel as if they were living in a state of slavery. They say that the bitter hatred of these people is a yoke so intolerable that they would gladly escape it by any sacrifice."<sup>50</sup>

The Métis Resistance at Red River resulted in the Manitoba Act. Provisions set aside 1.4 million acres of land to be distributed among Métis children and those in possession of land as of 15 July 1870. Because the Métis and Mixed-blood accounted for ninety percent of the population, the Métis attained some degree of self-government. Yet, within two decades the Métis witnessed the loss of their political rights and

economic security. Although the Canadian government had promised an amnesty to Louis Riel, delays and confusion followed the Resistance. In February 1872, at Bishop Taché's request, Riel voluntarily went into exile. In February 1875, the government granted amnesties to all Métis involved in the Resistance excepting Riel. They banished Riel from the country for five years.

Pannekoek argues that as the Métis organized under the leadership of Louis Riel to resist the transfer of Rupert's Land, the secular clergy at Red River—Fathers Ritchot, Giroux, Dugas, and Allard—supported Riel's actions and government. When Bishop Taché returned from a visit to Rome, however, he quickly put a stop to the secular clergy's association with the Métis. After Riel fled the country, the Métis turned to the Church for leadership. Taché supported Canada's annexation of the West and persuaded Riel to moderate his position. He believed that an amnesty for Riel and his followers and quick establishment of a Manitoba legislature could mitigate the hostilities that would more than likely occur when the military arrived at the colony. He felt that an amnesty had been promised when he passed through Ottawa on his way to Red River in February 1870. Despite Taché's efforts, Wolseley's troops arrived at Red River before the designated governor, Sir George Adams Archibald. The Métis accused Taché of betraying them. In the months that followed, the Bishop could do nothing to assuage the hatred caused by Thomas Scott's death or Métis discontent.<sup>51</sup>

The Grey Nuns, perhaps in Taché's absence, demonstrated private sympathy for the Métis cause. On 7 September 1868 Sara Riel wrote Louis from St. Norbert. She passed on her superior's best wishes to her brother. Sisters Laurent, O'Brien, and

Connolly also wished him the “perfect accomplishment of all your wishes.”<sup>52</sup> As the political situation at Red River became increasingly tense in the months that followed, the Grey Nuns supported the Métis cause. Sister Mary A. Curran, secretary to Bishop Taché, wrote the motherhouse in 1869: “Louis Riel has been chosen by God to save his country.”<sup>53</sup> Curran interpreted the Resistance as primarily a religious conflict. She wrote to her superiors in Montreal that it was only when the Métis learned that their religion would likely be persecuted that they resolved to rebel: “The Upper Canadians and those involved tried to stop the Métis Catholic effort. They circulated petitions to create opposition. In these circumstances, one has to admire the faith and the steadfastness of many of our poor people.”<sup>54</sup> In the month of October 1869, the Grey Nuns at St. Norbert (where Sara Riel taught), St. Vital, St. Francis-Xavier, and St. Boniface had their students pray and sing around the clock for a Métis success.<sup>55</sup>

Aside from the Grey Nuns’ sympathy for the Métis cause, individual Grey Nuns shared close ties to the Métis community. After Louis fled to the United States Sara Riel wrote to him:

Truthfully, I would believe it to be an insult to God if I doubted for only one second the complete success of our cause. Something tells me you will soon return. Remember, last winter when everything seemed over: it was God’s will that you should be overthrown in order to better your success. Write to me, a word from you would be so good for me.<sup>56</sup>

Annie Goulet was Elzéar Goulet’s sister. Elzéar had been a member of the court martial that had tried Thomas Scott. In September 1870 two members of the Ontario Rifles and a civilian chased Goulet to the Red River. When he attempted to swim across the river his attackers allegedly stoned him to death.<sup>57</sup> Sara Riel travelled to St. Vital to comfort

Sister Goulet. On 25 November 1870 she wrote a cryptic letter to Louis: "I met my Sister Goulet at St. Vital School. I cried with her when she told me how they had judged you, my brother. She wept while reading your letter. All that you said was contrary to what she had heard. It made her cry...I assured her I was sorry that I did not know sooner how she had felt because I could have told her the truth."<sup>58</sup>

Sister Vitaline Royal likewise shared a special connection to the Métis community. Her brother, Joseph Royal, had been Sir George-Étienne Cartier's law clerk. Bishop Taché invited Royal to Red River to give the Métis community political experience and leadership. In May 1871 he collaborated with Joseph Dubuc and founded Le Métis. Royal and Dubuc hoped the newspaper would give the Métis population in the West a voice in political affairs. In 1872 Royal became president of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.<sup>59</sup>

Although Sara Riel and Joseph Dubuc knew each other only for a short time before she left for Île-à-la-Crosse, they developed a special friendship that continued until her death in 1883. Dubuc had been a friend of Louis Riel's during his days at the seminary in Montreal. In 1869 he became a lawyer. Riel wrote to him and asked him to consider a career at St. Boniface. Dubuc arrived in 1870, collaborated with Royal on Le Métis, and in 1871 was elected by acclamation to the Legislative Assembly for the riding of Baie-St. Paul.<sup>60</sup> During Louis' exile, Sara Riel learned of her brother's activities through Dubuc. While stationed at Île-à-la-Crosse, Dubuc acted as her ears and eyes at Red River.



**Fig. 8: Joseph Dubuc. Sara Riel's friend and correspondent from 1870 to 1883. Provincial Archives of Manitoba.**

**Bishop Taché and the Grey Nuns used Sara Riel's connections to the Métis community to ease the conciliation process in the aftermath of the Resistance. Following the passing of the Manitoba Act, the Canadian government appointed Sir Adams George Archibald as the first lieutenant-governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories. Bishop Taché worked closely with Archibald and other French-speaking professionals, including Joseph Dubuc and Joseph Royal, to ease the transfer of Rupert's Land. Through men like Dubuc and Royal, Taché had a voice in government and the ear of the lieutenant-governor.<sup>61</sup>**

**On 25 November 1870, two months after Archibald had arrived at Red River and Elzéar Goulet's body had been found on the banks of the Red River, Archibald, his daughter, and his private secretary visited the Grey Nuns' convent in St. Boniface. Sara**

Riel and Annie Goulet attended. The Grey Nuns placed photographs of Archibald, his wife, and their daughters on the walls of the convent. Their students prepared an address.

Sara Riel related the event to Louis:

Afterwards, everyone began to talk. I found myself close to Miss Archibald. I tried to entertain her as well as I could. I tried to forget the past—I kept silent and thought only of the present. I spoke to Mademoiselle for close to a quarter of an hour. Every time that I looked at his Excellency, I found his eyes on me.<sup>62</sup>

Of the twenty-two Grey Nuns assembled for the event, only the mother-superior, Sister Curran, and Sister Riel spoke with their guests.

The Grey Nuns attempted to reconcile their Métis and Mixed-blood students to the new realities of life at Red River. In February 1871, Sara Riel wrote to Louis explaining an incident that had occurred at the boarding school. Sister Marie-Xavier, mistress of the boarders, had asked her students to pray for a Catholic member of the Wolseley expedition who was dying at the Grey Nuns' hospital. Sara Riel's sister, Octavie, refused to comply. She told Sister Marie-Xavier that although she did not detest the soldiers, it made her sick to hear their names mentioned because they had caused her brother's suffering.<sup>63</sup> Despite the ostracism that members of the Riel family experienced in the early 1870s, the Grey Nuns always maintained close relations with the family. When Sara's sister Marie died in January 1873, Sisters Royal, Goulet, Laurent, and Desnoyers, remained at her side along with Louis.<sup>64</sup>

Sister Ursule Cécile Charlebois, assistant-general of the Grey Nuns of Montreal, inspected the Grey Nuns' convents and educational institutions in western Canada in the early 1870s. At Red River, individual Grey Nuns complained that the male hierarchy

gave them more work than they could possibly accomplish. When Charlebois reported the Grey Nuns' discontent to the Montreal motherhouse she included Métis women's remarks on the status of the Grey Nuns: "Métis women say to our Sisters: 'You are worse off than we poor women are. At least in our homes we do not have to work very hard when our husbands are away on the hunt.'"<sup>65</sup> For Métis women of the hunting class, a religious vocation was neither attainable nor desirable. Frits Pannekoek's assertion that the Grey Nuns failed to connect with the Métis was as much a product of the realities of class divisions at Red River as it was a product of the Grey Nuns' attitudes towards Métis women.

The Grey Nuns' boarding school catered to girls of the Métis and Mixed-blood elite for sectarian and financial reasons. Although it can be argued that the Catholic clergy at Red River, including the Grey Nuns, perceived the Métis as "uncivilised," the socio-economic background of individual Grey Nuns and the spirit of their rule— which sought to treat all people equally—perhaps influenced their decision to recruit Métis and Mixed-blood women who had a true calling into their order. Sara Riel, Annie Goulet, Marie-Jane McDougall, and Marguerite Connolly used their knowledge of Native languages to pursue significant careers within the Grey Nuns' community.

The Grey Nuns, perhaps because they had accepted mixed-blood women into their order, sympathized with Métis political and social aspirations during the Resistance and they made successful efforts to mitigate the racial tensions that followed the passing of the Manitoba Act. The Grey Nuns shared a complex relationship with the population at Red River. Chapter two revealed that their boarding school promoted a greater adherence

to Catholic ideals of womanhood which may have created a larger rift between the merchant/trader and hunting classes at Red River. Yet, by the time of the Resistance, the Grey Nuns had established intimate personal ties with the Métis community. These ties allowed the Grey Nuns, in a limited sense, to act as inter-cultural brokers between the Canadian government and the Métis in the aftermath of the Resistance.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Frits Pannekoek, A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Red River Resistance, 1869-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1991), 106.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 108-110.

<sup>3</sup>Estelle Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 1844-1984 (Montreal: Éditions du Méridien, 1987), 9.

<sup>4</sup>Quoted in Elizabeth de Moissac, "La femme de l'Ouest: Leur rôle dans la histoire," (M.A. thesis, history, University of Ottawa, 1945), 63. Students who attended the day schools paid twenty *sols* and one cord of wood per year.

<sup>5</sup>Grey Nuns' Archives, St. Boniface (GNASB), Elizabeth de Moissac, "The Grey Nuns in Red River: Educational Institutions, 1844-1974," unpublished manuscript, translated by Sister Hedwidge Neuman, typescript, 2-8; Luc Dauphinais, Histoire de Saint-Boniface, Vol. 1 (St. Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1991), 194-195.

<sup>6</sup>GNASB, Chronicles, 1853.

<sup>7</sup>GNASB, Chronicles, July 1859.

<sup>8</sup>J. G. MacGregor, John Rowand: Czar of the Prairies (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 159, 164, 171, 174-175.

<sup>9</sup>GNASB, Chronicles, February 1869.

<sup>10</sup>Sylvia Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980), 232; Brian Gallagher, "A Re-Examination of Race, Class and Society in Red River," Native Studies Review 4 (1988): 31-32.

<sup>11</sup>Dianne Payment, "Un Aperçu des Relations entre les missionnaires Catholiques et les Métisses pendant le Premier Siècle de Contact (1813-1918) Dans L'Ouest Canadien," Études Oblates de l'Ouest 3 (1994): 144.

<sup>12</sup>GNASB, Mother Valade to Mother McMullen, St. Boniface, July 1845, Correspondence, Doc. 17 and 18.

<sup>13</sup>GNASB, Mother Valade to Mother McMullen, St. Boniface, 28 December 1844, Correspondence, Doc. 2.

<sup>14</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 11.

<sup>15</sup>“Elisabeth de Moissac, “Marie-Louis Valade,” Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. IX, 802.

<sup>16</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 75.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted and translated in Mary V. Jordan, To Louis from your sister who loves you, Sara Riel (Toronto: Griffin House, 1974), 8.

<sup>18</sup>GNASB, Chronicles, Vol. 3, 1869-1883.

<sup>19</sup>GNASB, Personal Files.

<sup>20</sup>de Moissac, “The Grey Nuns in Red River: Educational Institutions,” 45.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>22</sup>GNASB, Personal Files.

<sup>23</sup>Quoted in Penny Petrone, ed., First People: First Voices (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 114–115. Marie-Josephine Nebraska (1861-1894) was the first Sioux nun in Canada. She and her mother took refuge with the Grey Nuns in 1864 when the Saulteaux killed her father. She received an education under the Grey Nuns’ tutelage and entered the noviciate in 1884. Three years later she spoke her perpetual vows.

<sup>24</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 37; Van Kirk, Many Tender Ties, 188-189; GNASB, Personal Files.

<sup>25</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 77.

<sup>26</sup>GNASB, Personal Files.

<sup>27</sup>GNASB, Personal Files; de Moissac, “The Grey Nuns in Red River: Educational Institutions,” 10.

<sup>28</sup> Other mixed-blood women became Grey Nuns in Sara Riel’s lifetime. Betsy Gosselin, a Métis, became a member of the congregation on 21 May 1872. Her parents were François Gosselin and Suzanne Lafournaise. Sara Delorme became a Grey Nun on 19 June 1873.

<sup>29</sup>I. J. Tallet, Catechisme des Voeux ou des Principales Obligations de l'État Religieux a l'Usage des Soeurs de la Charite de Montreal Dites Vulgairement "Soeurs Grises" (Montreal: Imprimerie d'Eusèbe Senécal, 1867), 1-49.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>31</sup>GNASB, Correspondence, Sara Riel to Mother Slocombe, St. Boniface Noviciate, 15 March 1868.

<sup>32</sup>Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Riel Papers, Sara Riel to the Riel family, Île-à-la-Crosse, 6 January 1878.

<sup>33</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, Hospital General, St. Boniface, 29 January 1871.

<sup>34</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Boniface, 25 November 1870.

<sup>35</sup>Archbishop's Archives, St. Boniface (AASB), Taché Papers, Sara Riel to A.-A. Taché, Île-à-la-Crosse, 9 January 1877.

<sup>36</sup>Brenda J. Gainer, "The Catholic Missionaries as Agents of Social Change among the Métis and Indians of Red River," (M. A. thesis, history, Carleton University, 1978), 116.

<sup>37</sup>A.-A. Taché to Henriette Taché, St. Boniface, 26 December 1845, quoted in Dom Benoit, Vie de Mgr. Taché, Vol. 1, (Montreal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1904), 95-96.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted and interviewed in W. J. Healey, Women of Red River: Being a Book Written from the Recollections of Women Surviving from the Red River Area (Winnipeg: The Women's Canadian Club, 1923), 111.

<sup>39</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 40, 42-44; GNASB, Chronicles, February 1869.

<sup>40</sup>Sisters Flavie Laurent and Hedwidge Dandurand founded the Grey Nuns convent at St. Norbert parish on 27 January 1859. The school housed approximately sixty children of both sexes. When Sara Riel taught there in the late 1860s the convent boarded fifteen students and the sisters taught fifty-eight students in their day school. For a more complete history see the following; Anonymous, Couvent de Saint-Norbert (1858-1988) (St. Boniface: n.p., 1958); Mary Guichon, s.g.m., Développement des Oeuvres des Soeurs Grises au Manitoba depuis leur Fondation à Saint Boniface (St. Boniface: Maison Provinciale de Soeur Grises, 1944), 16-18.

<sup>41</sup>GNASB, Personal Files; de Moissac, "The Grey Nuns in Red River: Educational Institutions, 1844-1974," 9, 82.

<sup>42</sup>de Moissac, "The Grey Nuns in Red River," 10.

<sup>43</sup>Irene Drouin, "La Qualité de l'esprit de Sara Riel," La Liberté 72 November 1985; GNASB, Anonymous, "Connaissez-vous Sara Riel, Soeur de Louis Riel?," typescript, revised by Gilberte Guibord, s.g.m. Sisters Lagrave and Lafrance founded a school at St. Francis-Xavier on 5 November 1850. Father Laflèche requested their presence because he feared that the Protestant mission in the parish would attract the local Salteaux and Cree. He also depended on the Grey Nuns to carry out parish duties in his absence. The Grey Nuns' school catered largely to Cree and Salteaux children who were eager to see and listen to the "prayer women."

<sup>44</sup>GNASB, Chronicles, February 1869.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., December 1869.

<sup>46</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Boniface, 21 September 1870.

<sup>47</sup>Mitchell, The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 83.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>49</sup>For complete histories of the Red River Resistance see: Joseph Kinsey Howard, Strange Empire: Louis Riel and the Metis People (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1974); A. S. Morton, "The New Nation, the Métis," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, ser. 2, 33 (1939): 137-45 and A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967); D. N. Sprague, Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988) and with R. P. Frye, The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation: The Development and Dispersal of the Red River Settlement: 1820-1900 (Winnipeg: Pemmican Books, 1983); George F. G. Stanley, The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961) and Louis Riel (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963).

<sup>50</sup>Lieutenant-Governor George Adams Archibald to Macdonald, 1871, quoted in Gerhard J. Ens, Homeland to Hinterland The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 161.

<sup>51</sup>See Pannekoek, A Snug Little Flock, 196-203.

<sup>52</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Norbert, 7 September 1868.

<sup>53</sup>Quoted in Elizabeth de Moissac, "Les Soeurs Grises et les événements de 1869-70," *La Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église Catholique, Sessions D'étude* (1970): 215.

<sup>54</sup>GNASB, *Chronicles*, October 1869.

<sup>55</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Julie Riel, St. Norbert, 18 October 1869; GNASB, Rossel Vien, "Sara Riel, Temoin de son Temps," unpublished paper presented to the St. Boniface Historical Society, 9 February 1968, typescript, 4.

<sup>56</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 21 September 1870.

<sup>57</sup>George F. G. Stanley, *Louis Riel* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963), 160.

<sup>58</sup>Quoted and translated in Jordan, *To Louis from your sister who loves you*, 27.

<sup>59</sup>George F. G. Stanley, ed., *The Collected Writings of Louis Riel* (CWLR), Vol. 1 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1985), 260 (note 4); Maggie Siggins, *Riel: A Life of Revolution* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994), 206-207.

<sup>60</sup>Peter Charlebois, *The Life of Louis Riel* (Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1975), 97.

<sup>61</sup>Jean Hamelin, "Alexandre-Antonin Taché," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 12, 1891-1900, 1008.

<sup>62</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Boniface, 25 November 1870; Jordan, *To Louis from your sister who loves you, Sara Riel*, 20.

<sup>63</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Vital, 21 February 1871.

<sup>64</sup>CWLR, Louis Riel to Sara Riel, St. Vital, January 1873, 1-161.

<sup>65</sup>GNASB, Sister Charlebois to Mother Slocombe, St. Boniface, 31 May 1871.

## IV

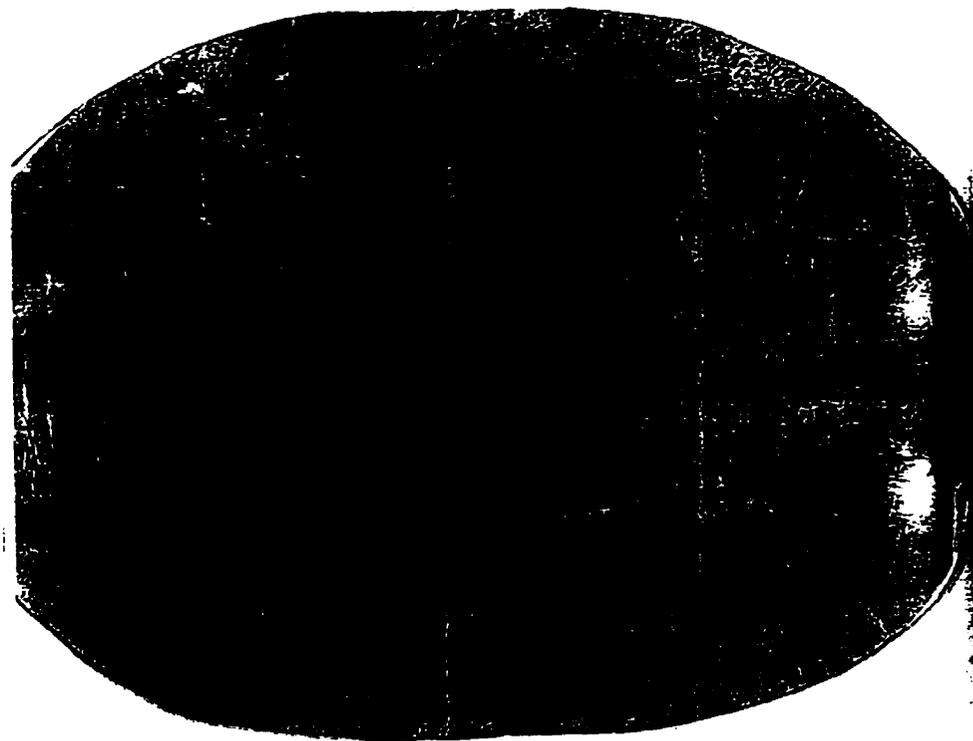
**“TRUE MISSIONARY OF THE NORTH”: SARA RIEL AND THE GREY NUNS  
AT ÎLE-À-LA-CROSSE, 1871-1883**

Fig. 9: Sara Riel's rendering of the mission at Île-à-la-Crosse in 1874. Historical Society of Saint Boniface.

In 1871 Sara Riel volunteered to dedicate her life to the Oblate mission at Île-à-la-Crosse. Made during a traumatic period in the history of the Métis and the Riel family, Riel's decision appears to have been a means for her to preserve her faith and maintain her vows. Although Louis Riel became a defender of Métis and French-Canadian rights and culture, Sara Riel shared the Oblate and Grey Nuns' sincere belief that Catholic spirituality and a Christian sedentary lifestyle were the only means with which Métis and Aboriginal peoples could adapt to changes occurring in the West. Between 1871 and her

death in 1883, Riel lost touch with the trials and tribulations of the Métis and the Riel family; by the late 1870s, the mission at Île-à-la-Crosse and Riel's faith took precedence over her family and her heritage.

Riel's experiences at Île-à-la-Crosse provide a vehicle to examine the Grey Nuns' contributions to the Oblate missionary field. While withstanding harsh conditions and extreme poverty, Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns provided health care services and educational facilities that increased the Catholic mission's viability in the eyes of the Canadian government. Throughout the 1870s the sisterhoods' institutions and personnel expanded—perhaps indicating a general shift in missionary strategy from evangelisation to “civilisation.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the Grey Nuns' contributions, the Oblates continued to perceive the order's labour in terms of gender: they emphasised the Grey Nuns' status as role models for Chipewyan women. While it is unlikely that Métis and Aboriginal men and women viewed the Grey Nuns as examples of perfect Catholic mothers and wives, the Grey Nuns presence in the North did provide Métis, Chipewyan, and Cree women with the opportunity to actively engage in missionary efforts. An examination of the Catholic mission at Île-à-la-Crosse from the perspective of Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns reveals the gendered dimensions of missionary endeavours and the degree to which male missionaries were but one element in a racially, socio-economically, and ethnically diverse mission field.

Sara Riel first referred to becoming a missionary following Louis Riel's escape to the United States in 1870. Anguished by her brother's fate, she wrote to Louis on 21 September 1870 that she would protect her brother by hiding him in the “Wound of His

Sacred Heart....; to love and pray, these are the arms with which we must fight to vanquish the conqueror.”<sup>2</sup> Two months later, Sara cryptically suggested to Louis that she too would like to become an exile and to benefit from that status.<sup>3</sup> Although she had wished for death throughout 1870, by early 1871 Riel’s feelings had changed; her new found happiness revolved around her hopes to become a missionary:

There is a wish in my heart that naturally would be yours too, if you were in my place, which catches me unawares a thousand times—to ask God for something that I leave you to guess.... Time will tell whether my most intimate prayer for the past eight years shall at last be answered.<sup>4</sup>

Mary V. Jordan suggests that Riel’s decision to become a missionary stemmed from her belief that her personal sacrifice would result in Louis being returned to the Métis at Red River.<sup>5</sup> While Jordan’s argument has merit, when Sara Riel’s decision is placed in the context of her status as a Grey Nun and the situation at Red River at the time, her motivation becomes more complex.

The Grey Nuns believed that suffering and sacrifice would guarantee their salvation. In particular, they exalted the life of the missionary, or exile, as the ultimate sacrifice and they drew their inspiration from the life of Christ. In the 1860s, the congregation’s chronicler wrote: “To be a missionary does not necessarily mean that one wants to expatriate herself. Jesus, the missionary ideal, did not leave his homeland....Jesus’ life is an example to the Grey Nun missionary who labours in the immense country of Canada.”<sup>6</sup> Sara Riel likened the Grey Nuns’ missionary activities to that of the Christians of the Early Church; like the first Christians, Grey Nun missionaries lived together as one family united by a common goal.<sup>7</sup> The Riel family similarly

emphasised sacrifice and suffering as the Christian's lot in life. Sara wrote to Louis in November 1870 explaining that his exile had taught her that suffering, work, and renunciation would ensure her a place in heaven.<sup>8</sup> In 1867 Louis had written similar sentiments to Julie Riel and his younger siblings: "If our real suffering can be compared to the heaviness of a yoke, we can console ourselves. God has said: 'Happy are those who have carried the yoke since their youth.'"<sup>9</sup>

Yet, Sara Riel chose to become a missionary at a time when great hostility was directed against the Riel family. Immediately following the Resistance, Euro-Canadian settlers and Wolseley's soldiers sought retribution for Thomas Scott's death. A mob surrounded Julie Riel's house, threatening her and her children at gunpoint in order to obtain information about Louis' whereabouts and activities. Similarly, a dozen soldiers attacked Elzéar Goulet's mother's house.<sup>10</sup> Sara Riel's sisters, Octavie, Eulalie, and Henriette, discontinued their schooling. In September 1870 Sara explained to Louis that although Bishop Taché wanted the girls to return to school, given the climate of the times, she did not insist that they do so.<sup>11</sup>

As the events of the Resistance gained momentum, Sara Riel's superiors feared for her safety and they ordered her to return to the St. Boniface mother-house. Soon after, Riel decided to become a missionary. Evidence suggests that Riel made her decision at the spur of the moment. Sister Charlebois, who would later accompany Riel to Île-à-la-Crosse, wrote to the Montreal motherhouse and explained why she felt Riel should be allowed to fulfil her desire to become a missionary. Charlebois explained that she had replaced Sister Boire with Sister Riel because the latter risked losing her faith if she

remained at Red River. The trials of the Resistance and the Riel family's problems threatened Sara Riel's religious faith and her vocation.<sup>12</sup>

When Bishop Vital-Justin Grandin<sup>13</sup> arrived at Red River in June 1871 to recruit personnel for the northern missions, Sara Riel, with Sister Charlebois' consent, eagerly accepted his invitation. The Métis population—if their newspaper, Le Métis, can speak for the group—euphemistically interpreted Sara's decision as an indication of the Métis' new status in the Canadian nation:

Of the three religious missionaries who arrived from Montreal with Sister Charlebois, only one will continue on the voyage. Sister Riel, sister of Mr. Louis Riel, however, has been designated to accompany her. She is, believe us, the first missionary from the Métis Nation of Red River given to this Great Apostolic work, and one could not find a more dignified person. A kindly heart, keen intelligence, and inexhaustible charity distinguish this new missionary. Her departure is a sacrifice for her family and the entire population, but at the same time it is an honour and a blessing for us.<sup>14</sup>

Sara Riel took pride in her missionary status. In 1871 she wrote her mother and exclaimed: "I find myself more and more happy to have been chosen, me, Sara Riel, as the first Métis missionary in the North."<sup>15</sup>

Riel's entourage left St. Boniface on 19 June by Red River cart and did not reach Île-à-la-Crosse until 25 August 1871. On the day of departure, the Grey Nuns met at St. Boniface to bid farewell to the Sisters who were to leave from Fort Garry. Special friends, Sisters McDougall and Francis-Xavier, accompanied Sara Riel and Sister Charlebois as far as St. Francis-Xavier. Sister Charlebois had authorised one other change to the future personnel for the northern missions. Upon learning of the harsh conditions in the North, she replaced Sister Langelier, who was frail, with a "large Métisse" whom she claimed could perform manual labour like a man.<sup>16</sup> Although

Charlebois attached no name to the “large Métisse,” she was likely Josette Lagimodière, Sara Riel’s cousin who entered into a four-year contract with the Grey Nuns as a *filie engagée*.<sup>17</sup>

Josette and another *filie donnée*, Marceline Sauvé, travelled to Île-à-la-Crosse with Sara Riel. Joseph Dubuc and Joseph Royal likewise accompanied Riel across the river to Fort Garry. The remainder of the group included Sister St. Michael and two *filie données* on their way to Lac La Biche, Father André and his helper who were parting for St. Albert, and a number of Métis labourers and lay people.<sup>18</sup>

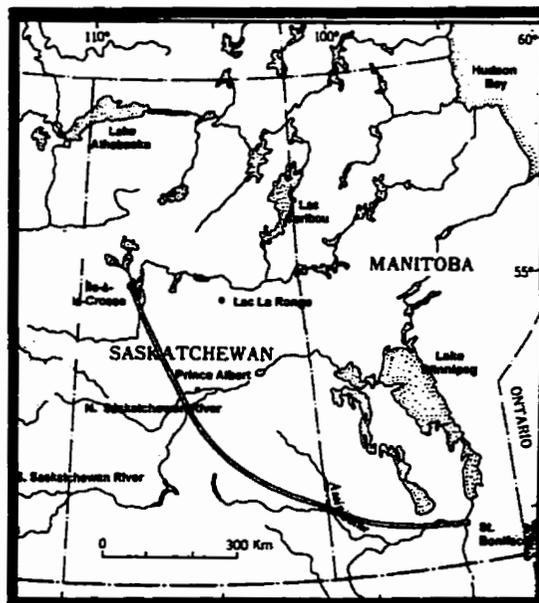


Fig. 10: Location of Île-à-la-Crosse. The map depicts Sara Riel’s sixty-eight day journey from St. Boniface to the mission between 19 June and 25 August 1871.

Riel wrote a number of letters to family and friends while *en route* to Île-à-la-Crosse. On 2 July 1871 she wrote to her family from the banks of the Assiniboine River:

The hardships of this trip are incredible. Imagine, it has rained every day

since our departure. To avoid lying down in the water, we, despite the fatigue and weariness of the day, cut spruce branches for ourselves to serve as bedsteads so that we might get a little rest. The mad mosquitoes supplied us with music every night—an orchestra all day long.<sup>19</sup>

The same letter also contained special advice for Alexandre, her youngest brother. She told him to tell Louis that while she was exiled in the North she would work and pray for Louis and “the cause.”<sup>20</sup>

Located in the subarctic region of present-day Saskatchewan, Île-à-la-Crosse served as a key mission for the Catholic Church in the North. Originally called Sa Key Ta Waow, or “Mouth of the River,” by the local Native population, the area was a rendezvous site for the nearly two thousand Chipewyan and Cree in the vicinity. William Auld and William Linklater of the North West Company established the first trading post in the area in 1799. Six years later, the Hudson’s Bay Company established its own post. Violence ensued between the two companies over trade with the Chipewyan and Cree, but was brought to an end with the merger of the two companies in 1821. In 1843, John Henry Lefroy, a magnetic surveyor, reported to Bishop Provencher that the Chipewyan in the area had asked the Hudson’s Bay Company factor, Roderick McKenzie, for information about Christianity. McKenzie invited Jean-Baptiste Thibault,<sup>21</sup> a secular priest, to preach in the area. In the spring of 1845 Thibault spent two months in the region; approximately five hundred Chipewyan converted to Catholicism. Louis-François Lafèche and Alexandre-Antonin Taché’s arrival at Île-à-la-Crosse in September 1846 resulted in the permanent establishment of a Catholic mission.<sup>22</sup>

The Oblates at Île-à-la-Crosse adapted their missionary strategy to suit the seasonal movements of the Chipewyan and Cree. The Chipewyan, the most numerous of the Athapaskan, or Dene, tribes in northern Canada, numbered from approximately four to five thousand persons whose homeland extended from the taiga-tundra of the Hudson Bay to the Coppermine River. Although the Chipewyan traditionally structured their seasonal cycle and socio-territorial organisation around the migratory pattern of the caribou, the demand for furs in the competitive period of the fur trade forced some bands south into the area around Île-à-la-Crosse. Under the same social and economic pressures, the Wood Cree of the south moved north into the same area.<sup>23</sup>

Aside from annual missions that occurred twice annually for two to three weeks, and itinerant preaching journeys, or “flying missions,” to outlying areas, mission work at Île-à-la-Crosse was confined to the Grey Nuns’ labour and regular Catholic services performed by the resident Oblate priest. The missionaries, therefore, largely directed their services towards Métis families in the service of the Hudson’s Bay Company and Aboriginal converts who lived in the vicinity of the mission. The Métis at Île-à-la-Crosse shared more in common with the local Chipewyan and Cree than they did with the Red River Métis. Closely related to the Aboriginal population of the subarctic, they formed a part of the indigenous kinship and social systems of the area. Most spoke only Aboriginal languages. Socially organized into large extended families, the Métis of the subarctic tended to be geographically mobile.<sup>24</sup>

When the first Grey Nuns, Sisters Agnès (Marie-Rose Caron), Philomène Boucher, and Marie Aimée Pépin arrived at Île-à-la-Crosse in 1860, they became the only

non-Native women in the area.<sup>25</sup> They primarily served the permanent population around the mission. Taché's census of the mission reveals that in 1856--735 persons lived at Île-à-la-Crosse: six non-Native Canadians, five of whom were Protestant; 419 Chipewyan; 230 Cree, 150 of whom were non-Christian; 80 Métis, of which only one was non-Christian.<sup>26</sup> In October 1860 the Grey Nuns opened a hospital under the protection of Saint Bruno. The following month they established a boarding school, École de Ste. Famille, that served the children of the local Métis and those Aboriginal foundlings adopted by the Grey Nuns.

As at Red River, the Oblates perceived the Grey Nuns as primarily agents of "civilization" to Aboriginal women in the North. In particular, the Oblates felt that the Grey Nuns' presence would contribute to a reversal of Chipewyan women's fortunes. Influenced by nineteenth-century European ideals that exalted women as the "gentler sex," Oblate missionaries abhorred the way that Chipewyan men treated women. Oblate P. Ortolon, for example, stated: "This...timidity and superstition does not hinder them [the Chipewyan] from being, like other Indians, atrociously hard on their women, who they treat with excessive vigour and often with barbarity."<sup>27</sup> Bishop Taché, who spent five years at Île-à-la-Crosse, similarly wrote: "I have seen men, so gentle with others, knock their wives senseless and constantly treat them with a harshness derived from barbarism. How often I thanked God that my mother was not born the wife of a Chipewyan!!...If anything could make me dislike them, it would surely be this fault."<sup>28</sup>

Heather Ann Rollason, in a thesis that explores the impact of Samuel Hearne's journal on scholarly perceptions of Chipewyan women, argues that descriptions of

Chipewyan women often reflect more about male European perceptions of women's place in society than they do about the realities of Chipewyan women's experiences. For example, since the Hudson's Bay Company funded Hearne's explorations, it is possible that his attempt to portray the Chipewyan as ideal fur trade labourers caused him to emphasise Chipewyan women's ability to carry heavy loads, their low maintenance, and the expendability of their lives. According to Rollason, depictions of Chipewyan women as "use-things" or commodities reflects general eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions of women that tended to define them "only as they existed in relationship to others."<sup>29</sup>

In respect to the Oblates' observations, considering that the Oblate superior in France regarded the Grey Nuns' presence in the northern missions as controversial, it is possible that Oblate priests emphasised the mistreatment of Chipewyan women in order to justify the presence of female missionaries in the North. According to the Oblates, individual Grey Nuns symbolised the high morality of the Christian woman. The Oblates felt they represented what a sedentary and "civilised" way of life could do for the Aboriginal female.<sup>30</sup> In 1872 Bishop Vital Grandin sent a memo to all Oblate priests in western Canada that outlined the Grey Nuns' role:

The Sisters of Charity have a special mission, a mission that we as men cannot fulfil by ourselves. We know to what degree women are debased, even among our Christians. The history of our mothers and our sisters allows us to understand the woman's mission in the family. One can compare the Christian woman to the Métis and Indian woman, the difference is not much greater than that between the Christian man of France and the Christian man of our missions. Who is it then, that gives to the woman what she needs to be a wife, a Christian mother, an angel of peace in the family? It is the Sister of Charity's most important duty.<sup>31</sup>

Although the Grey Nuns' labour held an exalted position in the Oblates' worldview, Oblate priests tended to view women in general as somewhat less than "angels of peace."

The Oblates' attitude towards women limited their relations with Aboriginal women. The Rules and Regulations of the Oblate order dictated priests' association with women—lay and religious. Aside from the elderly, priests were to refrain from all contact with the female sex—including students. When obliged to speak with women, Oblate priests were to converse where they could be observed by as many people as possible, but not heard if they discussed a private affair, such as a confession.<sup>32</sup> Diane Payment argues that the Oblate regulations followed from the Oblate belief that women were "Jezebels" or "Mary Magdalenes" who should be avoided at all costs.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Oblates idealised the Grey Nuns' labour in the North, their attitude towards women tempered their relations with the sisterhood. Joseph Fabve, Mazenod's successor as superior-general of the Oblate order, advised Taché to define precise rules for relations between priests and Sisters in the mission field. Outside of the confessional, Oblates could not converse with Sisters, individually or alone.<sup>34</sup> It appears, however, that the Grey Nuns similarly perceived men, lay and religious, as potential sources of sin and temptation. Upon visiting Île-à-la-Crosse, Sister Charlebois found it necessary to provide the Grey Nuns with rules to define their relationship with men: "The Sisters will not go alone to their Confessor to deal with affairs of their conscience except during Confession; in all other circumstances, they will always be accompanied by another Sister or by a mature child, with whom they will not be separated for an instant."<sup>35</sup> Sisters were never to be alone with men—except young male students—at any time.

When Riel arrived at Île-à-la-Crosse on 25 August 1871, the mission had a well-established spatial and social organisation. Located on the west shore of Lac Île-à-la-Crosse, the Hudson's Bay Company post served as the winter residence of the officer, or bourgeois, in charge of the English River district. A number of buildings surrounded the post and housed the Company's thirty servants, who were largely Métis. The Catholic mission stood on a point of land alongside the lake and one-mile to the south of the post. The population lived largely on fish from the lake, some moose and reindeer, and venison brought by Native hunters. Birch trees and prairie grass covered islands that dotted the lake and provided the mission with firewood and hay. Spring floods annually surrounded the Catholic mission, occasionally detaching it from the mainland.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 11: The Catholic Mission at Île-à-la-Crosse as sketched by Sara Riel in 1874. Based on this painting, David Karel identifies Sara Riel as the first artist in the European tradition known to be born in the Northwest. Riel possibly received painting lessons from Sister L'Esperance, another known artist.<sup>37</sup> St. Boniface Historical Society.

By 1871 the Grey Nuns' establishment at Île-à-la-Crosse consisted of four sisters—Agnès, Pépin, Dandurand, and Riel—one *filie donnée*, one *filie engagée*, two male orphans, three female orphans, ten male and sixteen female boarding school students.<sup>38</sup> The Oblates included Prosper Légéard, superior, Father Doucet, assistant, and Father Grezeur. The Oblates' organisation also included a number of *engagés*.<sup>39</sup>

The origins of many of the “orphans” in the Grey Nuns' convent and school are unclear. In a letter to Louis dated 6 August 1874, Sara Riel mentions three female orphans in the Grey Nuns' care. Two of the females were actually Chipewyan elders. The third “orphan” was the eleven or twelve year old daughter of Baptiste Sergeant, a Métis who had re-married and returned to Red River. His first wife had given birth to four girls all of whom were deaf-mutes. Two of the girls had rejoined their mother, the other two “lived a miserable life.” Sara Riel planned to search for one of the latter.<sup>40</sup> In 1873 the Grey Nuns' chronicles state that the community had received a twelve-year-old Cree girl named Isabelle Petifer. According to the chronicler, her mother, who feared she was dying, had promised to give her eldest daughter to the Grey Nuns if she recovered. She made her decision in consultation with her husband.<sup>41</sup>

The Grey Nuns at Île-à-la-Crosse immediately accepted Sara Riel into their midst. On 12 January 1872, she wrote to her mother: “I am beginning to believe that our Sisters spoil me—they are very good for me: I am their small beloved sister.”<sup>42</sup> Upon arriving at the mission, Riel became Sister Pépin's assistant in the school. Riel and Sister Pépin had known each other at Red River where the latter founded and taught in the boarding

school. Sister Agnès, superior, nursed and cared for the sacristan, and Sister Dandurand performed various duties, including health care.

Aside from Sister Pépin, Riel's companions came to Île-à-la-Crosse from Quebec where they had had little experience with missionary work. Sister Agnès described her first meeting with the Chipewyan:

I arrived at the last lodge. I raised the pelt that covered the entrance and crawled into the interior. I found myself face to face with twenty-one large Indians, half-dressed, dirty, and wearing fur bracelets. Heart racing...I tried to remain calm as my small interpreter, a girl of nine years, explained the purpose of my visit. Soon, one of them presented his arm ...and I applied the vaccine.<sup>43</sup>

Sister Pépin likewise experienced difficulties teaching at the mission. Ignorant of Aboriginal languages, Pépin had to invent new methods to teach the Métis children of the mission because only a few understood French.<sup>44</sup> Yet, evidence suggests that the Grey Nuns were well respected and loved—at least by the converts—at Île-à-la-Crosse. Writing to Archbishop Taché in 1876, Sara Riel stated that “[t]he Indians love her [Sister Dandurand] and many want her to be a godmother to their children. A thirty-year-old Cree man had this pleasure last autumn.”<sup>45</sup>

On 3 January 1872 Riel wrote Joseph Dubuc, describing the mission's character and poverty. The first floor of the Grey Nuns' convent included a large kitchen with a huge stove, two large fireplaces that smoked incessantly, eight laundry tubs, and an armoire. Riel explained that the Sisters were required to do laundry for two Oblates, two lay brothers, four Sisters, three *filles données*, ten female, and seven male students. The first floor, where Sister Pépin taught, also housed the students' classroom. The second floor contained the *données*' and the Grey Nuns' separate sleeping quarters. The Sisters'

room included a sewing machine, a quilting frame, six chairs, and a box for the sacristan linen. Riel complained that, following wash day, drying linens hung throughout their sleeping quarters causing excruciating humidity for three or four days that contributed to the Sisters' illnesses.<sup>46</sup>

The local economy presented numerous problems for the mission. Sara Riel's letters are riddled with numerous references to long, incessantly cold winters, short hot summers, and frequent floods. In 1873 the mission flooded, the harvest yielded little, and the mission suffered a food shortage.<sup>47</sup> In 1874 the lake produced few fish and, unable to feed their students, the Grey Nuns were required to ask parents to take back their children.<sup>48</sup> The following year, the mission flooded so severely that the Grey Nuns' convent was in danger of being destroyed.<sup>49</sup>

Poor conditions contributed to numerous illnesses among the mission's lay and religious population. One bout with illness, in November 1872, had a particular effect on Sara Riel's life and faith. In December 1872 Riel wrote to her youngest brothers that the Riel family now had, more than ever, a reason to love and to serve God: if it had not been for his intervention, she would have died. In November 1872, she explained, she had become deathly ill. Father Légéard performed the Last Rights. While everyone awaited her imminent death, Légéard demanded that she ask the Blessed Marguerite-Marie of Alocoque for her recovery. In return, Riel promised to re-dedicate herself to God and to exchange the Riel name for that of the saint.<sup>50</sup> Riel chose to interpret her miraculous recovery, and her promise to change her name to Sister Marguerite-Marie, as evidence that God required her to choose between her family and her faith. Upon writing to her

mother and Louis to explain her choice, she exclaimed: "Do not worry! I have never blushed at my name and God knows that it is dear to me. But it was a time of sacrifice, a time to do all I could to prove my gratitude to the Blessed. This name, I hope, will bring me happiness."<sup>51</sup>

Physical hardships at Île-à-la-Crosse were enhanced by the daily monotony of religious devotions and educational instruction at the mission. The resident Oblate priest provided regular parish services and, on Sundays, offered French sermons in the morning and a Cree sermon in the evening. The first Thursday and Friday of each month were dedicated to a mass before the exposed Sacrament and the Sacred Heart of Jesus respectively. During the months dedicated to Joseph and Mary, parishioners made daily benedictions to the Holy Sacrament. During Lent, Stations of the Cross were performed every Friday. Aside from these devotions, daily life at the mission involved frequent sacraments and communion at least once a month.<sup>52</sup>

Riel's letters reflect the isolated nature of life at Île-à-la-Crosse, an isolation that was broken only by the arrival of the mail twice a year, annual missions, meetings with the Hudson's Bay Company officers, and changes to their material existence. Riel relates the anticipation with which the Grey Nuns awaited the bi-annual mail. Her letters also unveil the unhappiness she experienced upon receiving few letters from her family. In 1872 Riel castigated Louis for his silence: "Before finishing, allow me, beloved brother, to tell you how cruel your silence is."<sup>53</sup> Again in 1875, Riel pleaded with her family to send her letters. She asked her sister Octavie to implore Henriette to write because it

made her sick at heart to see the other Grey Nuns receive letters when she received none.<sup>54</sup>

Although Sara Riel clearly defined herself as a Métis, her life at Île-à-la-Crosse dislocated her from the events affecting Métis life at Red River and changes within the Riel family. Between 1871 and 1875 it was difficult for Sara to write to Louis because she did not know where he was. Throughout this period, Riel wrote letters to Archbishop Taché, asking him if her sacrifice had been made in vain. When Louis went into official exile in February 1875, news of the event did not reach the mission until late winter.<sup>55</sup> Although the Grey Nuns attempted to keep the news from reaching Riel's ears, Archbishop Taché informed her by correspondence. Perhaps out of anger and a sense of betrayal, Sara Riel's letters to Taché discontinued for two years.

Louis' troubles continued to disrupt Sara Riel's peace of mind. In late 1876, for example, Riel learned through letters that Louis had been admitted to an asylum. She wrote to Taché and explained how her faith had suffered since learning the news. Yet, she related to Taché that "thanks to the Sacred Heart and the Virgin Mary, my heart became resigned. Yes, I am resigned to the will of God. I accepted the cross that he has presented me...this is not my choice, but it is the Sacred Heart's."<sup>56</sup>

In January 1875 Sara Riel had written to Joseph Dubuc, explaining that "echoes of your troubles reach my ears and inform my heart of the suffering and hardships of those I left behind."<sup>57</sup> Yet, only one year later, Riel's letters reveal the degree to which she had lost touch with events occurring at Red River:

I hear often that Red River has changed; that I would not recognise it. It is good that big tall buildings are being built; that Red River grows

affluent. But, what I ask of God, for my daily sacrifices, for my deprivation, suffering, and separation, is that the hearts of the Métis remain with God. That they all remain fervent Christians and that drunkenness cease. If you only knew how I fear learning that my dear brothers have taken up this terrible passion.<sup>58</sup>

Riel refers again to this fear in a letter to her mother and the Riel family dated 12 February 1877.

The Riel family perhaps did not write often to Sara Riel because they faced trying economic and social problems. The 1870s were difficult years at Red River. Hunting and trading in buffalo hides slowly declined and came to an abrupt halt with the disappearance of the buffalo by the 1870s. Grasshopper infestations plagued the area from 1870 to 1873. Commercial grain farming in the West was not yet a viable economic alternative and the Métis' long narrow river lots at Red River proved to be unsuitable for large-scale farming. The Canadian government, furthermore, did not begin to issue script for land until 1873. Following the passing of the Manitoba Act, settlers from Ontario flooded into the region. By 1879, only four of the twenty-nine members of the Manitoba legislature were Métis.<sup>59</sup> In response to the disappearance of their political and cultural rights and freedoms, many Métis were pushed to the traditional Métis wintering sites further west where they could continue to pursue their traditional way of life.<sup>60</sup>

Although Sara Riel, like many Métis, experienced dislocation from her family and the Métis homeland, as early as 1872 she became intimately involved in the Grey Nuns' educational endeavours at Île-à-la-Crosse. Perhaps because her work stood for everything that her brother was fighting against, Riel related few details of her career to the Riel family at Red River. The Grey Nuns' chronicles and her letters to Joseph Dubuc and

Archbishop Taché, however, reveal both the expansion of the congregations' educational facilities, Sara Riel's contributions to missionary endeavours, and the Métis' reaction to her efforts.

Conditions in the Grey Nuns' schools improved throughout Sara Riel's life at Île-à-la-Crosse. In 1872, for instance, Riel described the state of the Grey Nuns' school to Joseph Dubuc. She explained that Sister Pépin, as matron of the boarders, slept on a pallet in the classroom while her eighteen female charges slept on the floor. The school's male students spent their nights under the supervision of the Oblate priests. Each morning, the boys arrived at the convent at nine o'clock. Classes continued until noon and lunch followed. At one-thirty in the afternoon students returned to the classroom where they learned religious history and catechism at four o'clock. Male students remained in Sister Riel and Pépin's care until eight o'clock in the evening when they returned to the Oblates' residence. At no time were students allowed to go unsupervised.<sup>61</sup>

In order to alleviate the cramped and unhealthy conditions suffered by the Grey Nuns and their students, the Sisters moved into a new convent in August 1874. The new convent housed the congregation's expanded personnel; the previous year Sisters Senay and Langelier and a *donnée*, Angélique Jetté, had arrived at the mission. While Sister Senay took care of the sacristan, Sister Langelier replaced Sister Pépin who returned to Red River. She taught French and cared for the children.<sup>62</sup> The Grey Nuns' new convent was thirty-seven by forty feet and two stories high. The first floor contained a chapel, a room for their elderly charges, a kitchen, the Oblates' rectory, the *engagées* room, and a

dispensary. The second floor housed the Sisters' community and dormitory, the Oblates' infirmary, the Superior's room, a sewing room, an orphanage, the *filles données*' room, a large corridor and an airy attic. The Oblates moved into the Grey Nuns' old convent and the priests' domicile became the schoolhouse where Sisters Langelier and Riel taught thirty-two students, twenty-two of whom were girls and all were boarders.<sup>63</sup>

Although she lacked textbooks, Riel established an English class. Prosper Légéard, the Oblate superior at Île-à-la-Crosse until his death in 1879, explained to his superior that English instruction had not been possible until Riel's arrival. On the one hand, the mission lacked a Grey Nun proficient enough to teach the language. On the other, the Grey Nuns' superiors in Montreal had not dispensed permission to provide English instruction. Légéard, however, believed that the establishment of an English-language school would enhance the mission's position with the Canadian government and the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company:

While passing through Montreal last winter on his return from the North, the Honourable M. W. Christie visited our Sisters' Mother Superior. He imparted the satisfaction he had experienced while visiting our school, but at the same time he regretted that English was not taught, being that the language is becoming a necessity in this country. Immediately, the Grey Nuns' motherhouse sent an order to commence an English class. This gives our school a greater importance.<sup>64</sup>

Sara Riel's work consequently became integral to the viability and survival of the Catholic mission.

The difficulty that the Grey Nuns faced at Île-à-la-Crosse, however, was not having to convince the local Métis population of the importance of English as a language, but to instil respect for western-style education in general. In 1874 Sara Riel wrote to

Louis and explained her predicament: “You understand the care and solicitude that is required to teach children. Here in the North our people, the Métis, do not appreciate the benefits of instruction....We are required to fight against the indifference and caprice of children as well as against the weakness of their parents.”<sup>65</sup>

The Oblates sought to resolve what they perceived as Métis indifference to education by hosting external exams attended by high-ranking officials of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Prosper L g ard believed that important educated officials who could speak French impressed the M tis. In 1876 Riel hosted an exam attended by William McMurray, chief factor of the English River district. Although she felt exhausted by the preparations that went into the event “everyone had been enchanted because our children bore little resemblance to Indians.”<sup>66</sup> In 1877 L g ard reported that his strategy had succeeded. The Company’s bourgeois, their wives, and their children had attended that year’s annual exam. For the first time, students demonstrated both their French and English skills and terminated the exam with a rendition of “God Save the Queen.” L g ard reported that more than forty boarders planned to attend the Grey Nuns’ school in the upcoming year—not counting those children whom the Grey Nuns had refused.<sup>67</sup>

The Grey Nuns also sought the good will of the Hudson’s Bay Company by establishing personal ties with the chief factor and his family. At the beginning of each new year Sara Riel, along with Sister Agn s and her students, journeyed to the Company’s post to wish the present their best wishes and to allow their students to visit with their parents. In 1874 the Grey Nuns hosted a party for William McMurray’s son who had reached the age of four. Following an English recital, the Grey Nuns offered

McMurray and his wife a locket that contained a lock of their son's hair. The Grey Nuns' chronicler reported that the event signified the first time that their students had addressed anyone in English and that they had acquitted themselves better than expected. The Grey Nuns hoped to express their gratitude to the McMurrays for their goodwill and interest in the mission.<sup>68</sup> Riel explained to Archbishop Taché that, although the McMurray family was Protestant, their children always wanted to spend time at the convent. Good relations with the chief factor--and his wife in particular--resulted in gifts of tea, sugar, bread, and meat for the Grey Nuns.<sup>69</sup>

Evidence, however, suggests that the Métis resented Sara Riel's efforts. In 1875 Riel wrote and explained to Archbishop Taché that the Métis labourers of the Hudson's Bay Company had become enraged with her because she allegedly "forced" their children to speak English. Many parents expressed their desire to remove their children from the Grey Nuns' school. Riel's superiors deemed it expedient to eliminate English from their curriculum until Bishop Grandin came to the mission.<sup>70</sup>

Aside from Riel's letter to Taché, she spoke little about how her English class may have conflicted with Métis attempts to preserve their language and culture. Riel, furthermore, never mentioned her English class in her letters to her family. While only conjecture, the Métis' reaction to Sara Riel's English class may have reflected changes occurring within the Hudson's Bay Company. In 1872 the Company declared that henceforth it would no longer provide Native or Métis hunters with credit. Father Légéard remarked in the same year that he feared Catholic Métis would continue to leave the mission because of ill treatment by the Company.<sup>71</sup> In 1879 Sara Riel wrote to Taché

and informed him that the Catholic Métis at the fort suffered because the bourgeois, Ewen M. McDonald, a Protestant, expressed his hostility towards Catholicism by making Catholics work on Holy days.<sup>72</sup>

Despite these setbacks, in the early 1880s the Grey Nuns again witnessed the expansion of their institution. Between 1875 and 1878 Sisters Gauthier, Mercier, and Nolin arrived to serve at the mission. In 1880 the Grey Nuns' establishment consisted of six Sisters, three *fille données*, three elderly women, five male and thirteen female "orphans," and two foundlings. The boarding school population, however, remained small: seven male and fifteen female students. Sara Riel, however, stated that she taught approximately fifty-four students--many were likely day students. That same year, the Oblates authorized and built a new school for the Grey Nuns. Laurent Le Goff, Oblate superior at the mission, ridiculed its size. Eighty by thirty feet, the polytechnical school earned the derision of the local population who, according to Le Goff, referred to it as a *bêtise* rather than a *bâtisse*.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the construction of a new school, or perhaps because of it, the Grey Nuns actively sought financial aid to alleviate their situation. Riel wrote frequent letters asking for donations to the mission. At one point she received \$20.00 from Sir Charles Tupper whom she had met at Red River during the Resistance. In 1880 she wrote her aunts and uncles at St. Boniface and asked that they part with any spare vegetables and grains.<sup>74</sup> Two years later, Sister Charlebois petitioned Prime Minister Macdonald for financial aid for Fort Providence, Fort Chipewyan, Île-à-la-Crosse, and St. Albert--despite the fact that these missions fell outside of the government's treaty obligations.<sup>75</sup> In July 1882 Chiefs

Samuel Egan and Michael Deneyon petitioned the lieutenant-governor of Manitoba on the Grey Nuns' behalf: "We who live here [at Île-à-la-Crosse] find it harder than those living elsewhere. At present the Sisters of Charity take care of the unfortunates, but they are without money, therefore, our Grand Chief if you will give them money we will be thankful."<sup>76</sup>

The Grey Nuns, however, were not the only women active in the mission field at Île-à-la-Crosse. Marie-Rose Piwapiskus, for instance, taught catechism and Cree syllabus in the Grey Nuns' school. The daughter-in-law of Oppikakiw—a well-known storyteller at the mission—Piwapiskus began to teach following her husband's death.<sup>77</sup> In his 1875 annual report, Father Légéard mentioned Piwapiskus' small Cree school, but suggested that it had achieved little success.<sup>78</sup> Isabelle Bekatta, a Chipewyan orphan raised by the Grey Nuns, also taught at their school.<sup>79</sup> Towards the end of her life, Riel established an organisation to draw her students and older Native and Métis women closer to the Church. In 1880 Bishop Grandin sanctioned her initiative. Called "Notre Dames des Victoires" the lay female organisation was open to women, girls, and young boys.<sup>80</sup>

*Fille données* and *engagées*, such as Sara Riel's cousin Josette Lagimodière, also played important roles at the mission by providing manual labour and other services. Josette wrote to her cousin, Sara's sister Octavie, on 14 January 1875. She told her cousin that she enjoyed the few days when she was ill because she was allowed some freedom from her work. Lagimodière looked after the Grey Nuns' thirty-two students as well as two elderly Native women. She explained that when she attended school with her

students and her interpreter, she spoke Cree, Chipewyan, and French, with varying degrees of success.<sup>81</sup> Following her marriage to Charles Lafleur, a Métis interpreter for the Hudson's Bay Company, Josette travelled with her husband in 1876 to a small Hudson's Bay Company post where they wintered with the Chipewyan.<sup>82</sup>

By focussing on Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns' experiences at Île-à-la-Crosse, the multiple roles that non-Native and Native women played in the mission field begins to emerge. Aside from those Native women who taught and worked with the Grey Nuns, sources reveal that Catholic missionaries found Aboriginal women's skills and knowledge valuable. Near Île-à-la-Crosse at Canoe Lake, for instance, a number of Cree families initiated a mission and then requested a parish priest. The mission, named the Blessed Marguerite-Marie, boasted a school where a Cree widow taught the mission's children catechism, religion, reading, and writing.<sup>83</sup>

Laurent Le Goff, an Oblate priest and Chipewyan linguist who served at Île-à-la-Crosse from 1870 to 1920, similarly relied on the knowledge of "Catherine," a Chipewyan elder, when he wrote his grammar of the Chipewyan language. Catherine lived with her son-in-law, her daughter, and their children fifty miles from the mission. Le Goff wrote:

It was understood between me and the elder that we would not enforce our ideas on each other. We agreed that our time would be exclusively dedicated to finding the truth, the true doctrine...I tried to make her understand what I wanted to say, and because she was very intelligent, she understood quicker and quicker, giving me the word I looked for. If I used a word that shocked or scandalized her, she quickly stopped me and supplied the proper word...It is thus that this good elder taught me, little by little, how to always give my phrases a true Chipewyan turn.<sup>84</sup>

Le Goff's relations with Catherine demonstrate the degree to which some Oblate priests were willing to co-operate with and utilise the skills of Aboriginal men and women.

Sara Riel's attitude towards the Catholic clergy's missionary endeavours at Île-à-la-Crosse, however, remains ambiguous. Riel clearly identified with and participated in the hierarchy's attempt to "civilise" the Native and Métis populations at the mission. In 1876, for instance, she stood as godmother to Louis Jourdain, a recent convert. She wrote home to her family: "This conversion is a conquest for the Sacred Heart of Jesus. What a consolation to see this soul on the right path."<sup>85</sup> In a letter to Louis written in 1880 she wrote specifically on the topic:

Despite the frigid cold, Christmas celebrations this year were splendid because many Indians scorned wind and snow in order to pray around the small cradle of the Infant Jesus. There were nearly 150 communions. My brother, how beautiful it is to see our good Indians in the presence of the Sacred Sacrament. To see their meditation, their piety, their appearance so respectful.<sup>86</sup>

In the same letter she exclaims: "Louis pray for me. Education among our beloved Indian children is more difficult here than elsewhere, you see, we must take their maternal education and replace it with what is missing."<sup>87</sup>

Towards the latter 1870s Riel's letters contain more references to the mission at Île-à-la-Crosse. This trend perhaps indicates the degree to which she had lost touch with the Métis community at Red River and the trials of the Riel family. In January 1877 Sara wrote to Louis of the excitement that surrounded the annual mission:

Louis, it is a day of joy at Île-à-la-Crosse when our beloved Indians arrive in bands at the mission. They announce themselves a half-hour before their arrival with their joyous gunshots...then we see them leaving behind the "des gens des terres" point and coming towards us, fifty to sixty canoes at time, from the "Point de Sable." Ordinarily, we place ourselves,

with our students, in front of the convent to see their arrival and to greet them. I assure you that they chatter a lot—it is an incredible sound. It is during the evening that our dear Chipewyan and Cree have the most fun. They camp below the cross, only forty feet from the convent...It is nearly impossible to sleep before 11 o'clock, they make so much noise.<sup>88</sup>

The Oblates typically hosted the missions in spring and autumn. Prior to the mid-1870s the missions took place in spring, when the Chipewyan and Cree arrived at the mission to trade furs for merchandise, or in the fall, when the Hudson's Bay Company supply barges arrived from York Factory. By 1875, however, the autumn mission became less significant because the Company changed their barge schedule: barges arrived at the post at various intervals in the summer and they came directly from the south rather than through York Factory.<sup>89</sup>

One letter in particular reveals the degree to which Sara Riel's Métis heritage did not necessarily guarantee her a larger understanding of or sympathy for Aboriginal culture. In a letter dated 6 August 1874 Riel referred to the two elderly Chipewyan women cared for by the Grey Nuns. She described the youngest as having never been married because she was "too crazy, half-blind, and a lunatic."<sup>90</sup> The other woman, "second only to Eve in age," was also approaching total blindness. Riel stated that the second woman's children had left her naked on the shore near the mission "in order to force us to take her."<sup>91</sup> Traditionally, because of the Chipewyan's nomadic lifestyle and harsh conditions in the North, individual Chipewyan bands left behind those elderly men and women who could no longer keep up with the group.<sup>92</sup>

Riel's letters, however, also reveal the extent to which she perceived herself and her mission as separate from the other Grey Nuns at Île-à-la-Crosse. In a letter to her

sisters Riel stated: "Say hello to your companions at the boarding school for me. Tell Elise Delorme and Betsy Gosselin [two Métis women who later became Grey Nuns] that I await them in the North. I hope to see them in three years. I hope not to be so alone instructing our small compatriots of the North."<sup>93</sup> Aside from viewing the Métis at the mission as compatriots, Riel envisaged "civilisation" differently than her European and Canadian peers. In 1877 she wrote to Louis of the Cree mission at Canoe Lake. She explained that the families who live there "are a little more civilised. They dress in the French or Canadian fashion, or perhaps it would be better to say 'Métis.'"<sup>94</sup>

The degree to which Sara Riel placed Catholic missionary endeavours before her family is evident in the late 1870s and 1880s when she attempted to use the land she received under the Manitoba Act to fund an orphanage. The incident reveals the degree to which Riel, in the final analysis, placed her faith before her family, her religion above her culture. Riel's superiors, male and female, resisted her efforts to sell the land. Her Montreal superiors concluded that, because individual Sisters could not own personal property, the final judgement should be left to Bishop Taché in consultation with the Grey Nuns at Red River.<sup>95</sup> Both Taché and the Grey Nuns' council felt that the Riel family required the land and its proceeds more than the mission.

Unaware that her family and the Métis had suffered financially, socially, and politically since her departure, Riel wrote to Taché:

I have a greater need for money than my relatives do, because I must care for my orphans and others who are needy. Monsignor, if I had remained at St. Boniface I would naturally feel the needs of my family whom I love with all my heart. But I have suffered at Île-à-la-Crosse for nine and a half years. During this time I have cried upon witnessing the misery of so many small abandoned children. For nine years I have felt the necessity

of having more money. Our work depends upon it. I have always counted on my rights as a Métis child in order to found our orphanage.<sup>96</sup>

Given the opportunity to return to Red River in 1881 for a family reunion, Riel responded: "I will remain at Île-à-la-Crosse because, having chosen between sacrifice and immense joy, my vows and the example of Our Lord tell me: Consummate your sacrifice."<sup>97</sup>

Sara Riel became a missionary as a means to preserve her faith following the aftermath of the Resistance. She decided to dedicate the remainder of her life to the Northwest missions at a time when the Riel family and the Red River Métis were entering a period of economic, social, and political dispossession. Yet in 1871, when Riel travelled to Île-à-la-Crosse, the Métis believed that they had acquired a place for themselves in Canadian society. From 1871 until the late 1870s Riel's religious commitment warred with her sense of familial responsibility and her ties to the Métis community. Her letters to Red River prior to her death in 1883, however, reveal that, as Riel became increasingly dislocated from the Métis community and the Riel family at Red River, her faith and her commitment to the Grey Nuns' mission provided her with the means to reconcile her Métis heritage with her labours among the Métis, Chipewyan and Cree at Île-à-la-Crosse.

Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns were more than auxiliaries to the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. They performed many of the daily education and health care services that sustained the viability of the mission in the eyes of the Canadian government and they sought the favour of the Hudson's Bay Company which, in this time period, still wielded a considerable amount of power over social and economic life in the North. Aside from

the Grey Nuns' and Oblates' daily work among the mission's permanent population, Catholic missionary endeavours at Île-à-la-Crosse were dependent on the Chipewyan and Cree who largely came to the mission to trade with the Hudson's Bay Company.

When the mission at Île-à-la-Crosse is approached from the historical perspective of Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns, the degree to which gender shaped inter-cultural relations is highlighted. As at Red River, European gender ideals shaped the missionaries' perceptions of Aboriginal culture. Convinced that women were the "gentler sex," Oblate priests emphasised the Grey Nuns' status as role models for Chipewyan women who they felt held an under-privileged status in Chipewyan society. Although it is unlikely that Chipewyan men and women perceived the chaste, unmarried, and unwed Grey Nuns as ideal women, the Grey Nuns presence at Île-à-la-Crosse provided female Aboriginal converts with a means to co-operate in the mission's development. Sara Riel and the Grey Nuns' experiences at Île-à-la-Crosse between 1871 and 1883 reveal the complexities and ambiguities of Aboriginal/European contact in the nineteenth century.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Catholic and Protestant missionary endeavours drastically changed. The signing of treaties between the federal government and western Native peoples and the latter's subsequent relocation to reservations required that missionaries shift their focus from itinerant preaching missions to sedentary missions where schools, orphanages, and hospitals became more significant. This generalisation may not apply to Île-à-la-Crosse, however, because treaties were not signed in the area until 1889 and 1906. See John Webster Grant, Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 161.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted and translated in Mary V. Jordan, To Louis from your sister who loves you Sara Riel (Toronto: Griffin House, 1974), 23.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 20-27.

<sup>6</sup>Grey Nuns' Archives, St. Boniface (GNASB), Annals, Vol. 3, 1862-1863, 102.

<sup>7</sup>Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Riel Papers, Sara Riel to Joseph Dubuc, Île-à-la-Crosse, January 1881.

<sup>8</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 25 November 1870.

<sup>9</sup>George F. G. Stanley, ed., The Collected Writings of Louis Riel/Les Écrits Complets de Louis Riel (CWLR), Louis Riel to Julie Riel, St. Paul, 10 August 1867, 1-1007.

<sup>12</sup>Natalie Kermoal, "Les rôles et les souffrances des femmes métisses lors de la Résistance de 1870 et de la Rébellion de 1885," Prairie Forum 19 (Fall 1994): 157-158.

<sup>11</sup> PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, St. Norbert, 21 September 1870.

<sup>12</sup> GNASB, Personal Files; Sister Charlebois to Mother Slocombe, St. Boniface, 9 June 1871.

<sup>13</sup>Vital-Justin Grandin (1829-1902). Born in northern France, Grandin entered the seminary in 1846. In 1851 he became a novice of the Oblate order. Bishop Taché, while visiting France, invited Grandin to join him in the Canadian West. He left for Red

River in June 1854. After spending time at the mission of the Nativity on Lake Athabaska and at Île-à-la-Crosse, he became bishop of Satala and coadjutor of St. Boniface in 1859. In 1867 Bishop Taché divided his diocese into the Vicariate Apostolic of Saskatchewan and the Diocese of St. Boniface—Grandin became Vicar Apostolic of Saskatchewan and bishop of St. Albert. Île-à-la-Crosse became a part of his territorial jurisdiction. For a more complete biography of Vital Grandin see: Brian M. Owens and Claude M. Roberto, eds., The Diaries of Bishop Vital Grandin, 1875-1877, trans., Alan D. Ridge (Edmonton: Historical Society of Alberta, 1989).

<sup>14</sup>“Depart de Mgr. Grandin,” Le Métis, Vol. 1, no. 4, 22 June 1871, 2.

<sup>15</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Julie Riel, Green Lake, 10 August 1871.

<sup>16</sup>GNASB, Sister Charlebois to Mother Slocombe, St. Boniface, 9 June 1871.

<sup>17</sup>Josette Lagimodière was the daughter of Joseph Lagimodière, Sara Riel’s uncle, and Joseph Lupier. She married Charles Lafleur, an interpreter for the Hudson’s Bay Company at Île-à-la-Crosse in June 1873.

<sup>18</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to the Riel family, 2 July 1871, 18 July 1871, 10 August 1871.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted and translated in Jordan, To Louis from Your sister who loves you, 49.

<sup>20</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Alexandre Riel, 2 July 1871.

<sup>21</sup>Father Thibault, a native of Lévis, Lower Canada, had worked at Red River since 1833. He distinguished himself as an itinerant missionary and was fluent in Ojibwa and Cree.

<sup>22</sup>Germain Lesage, Capitale d’une Solitude (Ottawa: Éditions des Études Oblates, 1946), 110; Barbara Benoit, “The Mission at Ile-a-la-Crosse,” The Beaver (Winter 1980): 40-42; Hudson Bay Company Archives (HBCA), mission history; Philip Taft Spalding, “The Métis at Ile-a-la-Crosse,” (Ph.D., diss., University of Washington, 1970), 55-56. Île-à-la-Crosse became known as the “Nursery of Bishops” because four priests who served at the mission went on to become bishops: Laflèche, Taché, Grandin, and Faraud. See P. Duchaussois, Mid Snow and Ice: The Apostles of the North-West (London: Berns, Oates, and Washbourne Ltd., 1923), 91-111.

<sup>23</sup>Martha McCarthy, “The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Athapaskans, 1846-1870: Theory, Structure, and Method,” (Ph.D., diss., University of Manitoba, 1981), 151; Diamond Jenness, The Indians of Canada, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1958), 385-386; James G. E. Smith, “The Chipewyan,” in Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 6, The Subarctic, June Helm, ed.,

(Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1981), 270-275; J. C. Yerbery, "The Post-Contact Chipewyan: Trade Rivalries and Changing Territorial Boundaries," Ethnohistory 23 (Summer 1976): 237-263.

<sup>24</sup>Richard Slobodin, "The Subarctic Metis as Products and Agents of Culture Contact," Arctic Anthropology 2 (1964): 50.

<sup>25</sup>GNASB, Chronicles, 23 July 1859 and 9 July 1860.

<sup>26</sup>This is the only census for the mission in the period under discussion. A fire destroyed the documents for the period. See the following: "Mission Observes Centennial," Star Phoenix, 21 June 1946; P. Duchaussois, Mid Snow and Ice, 111; Spalding, "The Métis of Ile-a-la-Crosse," 107; Adrien-Gabriel Morice, Histoire de l'Église catholique dans l'ouest canadien (1659-1915), Vol. 2, (St. Boniface and Montreal: Author and Granger Frères, 1921), 391.

<sup>27</sup>R. P. Ortolon, Cent ans d'Apostolat dans les deux Hemisphères: Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence, Vol. 2, En Dehors de L'Europe, 1841-1861 (Paris: Library des Annals, 1915), 174.

<sup>28</sup>Alexandre-Antonin Taché, "Letter from Bishop Alexandre Taché to his Mother, Concerning his Life with the Chipewyan Nation," translated and edited by, Gaston Carrière, Prairie Forum 3 (Fall 1978): 141.

<sup>29</sup>Heather Ann Rollason, "Studying Under the Influence: The Impact of Samuel Hearne's Journal on the Scholarly Literature about Chipewyan Women," (M. A. thesis, Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, Trent University, 1994), 143.

<sup>30</sup>P. Duchaussois, The Grey Nuns in the Far North, 59; Joseph-Étienne Champagne, o.m.i., Le Missions Catholiques Dans l'Ouest Canadien, 1818-1875 (Ottawa: Éditions des Études Oblates, 1949), 200-203.

<sup>31</sup>Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Oblate Papers, V. J. Grandin, circular letter, Carp River, 14 April 1872.

<sup>32</sup>Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Règles et Constitutions (Paris: Typographie A. Hennuyer, 1877), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 65.

<sup>33</sup>Diane P. Payment, "Une Aperçu des Relations entre les Missionnaires Catholiques et les Métisses Pendant le Premier Siècle de Contact (1813-1918) dans l'Ouest Canadien," Études Oblates de l'Ouest 3 (1994): 145-146; "La vie en rose': Metis 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), 25.

<sup>34</sup>Raymond J. A. Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>35</sup>Grey Nuns' Archives, Province of Alberta and Saskatchewan, Edmonton (GNAAS), Chronicles, Ste. Famille Convent, Île-à-la-Crosse, 30 August 1871.

<sup>36</sup>Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina (SAB), Thomas Fawcett, "Exploratory Survey of Athabasca and Churchill Rivers," Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1888, Part II., CSP 1889, paper no. 151, 77; HBCA, B/89/b4, Ile-a-la-Crosse, Correspondence. William McMurray, "Remarks regarding the HBC Posts in the Upper English River," Île-à-la-Crosse, 10 January 1873.

<sup>37</sup>David Karel, "Sara Riel," Dictionnaire des Artistes de Langue Française en Amérique de Nord. 694.

<sup>38</sup>GNAAS, Chronicles, Ste. Famille Convent, Île-à-la-Crosse, 1872; "Ile-a-la-Crosse: Historique, 1860-1892," Annals, 1882.

<sup>39</sup>GNAAS, "Ile-a-la-Crosse, Personnel," Ile-a-la-Crosse File, 1860-1892.

<sup>40</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 6 August 1874.

<sup>41</sup>GNAAS, Chronicles, 27 September 1873.

<sup>42</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Julie Riel, 12 January 1872.

<sup>43</sup>GNASB, Annals, Vol. 1, 1862-1863, 2.

<sup>44</sup>GNASB, Personal Files.

<sup>45</sup>Archbishop's Archives, St. Boniface (AASB), Taché Papers, Sara Riel to A.-A. Taché, 20 January 1876, no. 6913.

<sup>46</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Joseph Dubuc, 3 January 1872.

<sup>47</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Riel family, 11 August 1873.

<sup>48</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Eulalie Riel, 10 January 1874.

<sup>49</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Julie Riel, 14 July 1875.

- <sup>50</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Joseph, Charles, and Alexandre Riel, 26 December 1872.
- <sup>51</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Julie and Louis Riel, Île-à-la-Crosse, 1872.
- <sup>52</sup>Prosper L  g  ard to Martinet,   le-  la-Crosse, 10 November 1873, Missions de la Congr  gation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immacul  e (Missions), Vol. 15 (1877): 536.
- <sup>53</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Julie and Louis Riel, 1872.
- <sup>54</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Octavie Riel, 14 January 1875.
- <sup>55</sup>Mary Jordan, De ta soeur, Sara Riel (St. Boniface:   ditions des Plaines, 1980), 131-133.
- <sup>56</sup>AASB, Tach   Papers, Sara Riel to A.-A Tach  ,   le-  la-Crosse, 9 January 1877.
- <sup>57</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Joseph Dubuc, 1875.
- <sup>58</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to the Riel Family, c. January 1876.
- <sup>59</sup>Gerhard J. Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 139-149.
- <sup>60</sup>See in particular Ens, Homeland to Hinterland and Diane Payment, 'The Free People—Otipemisiwak': Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930 (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, Parks Canada, 1990).
- <sup>61</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Joseph Dubuc, Ste. Famille Convent,   le-  la-Crosse, 3 January 1872.
- <sup>62</sup>GNAAS, Chronicles, St. Famille Convent, 26 August 1873.
- <sup>63</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Joseph Dubuc, 14 January 1875.
- <sup>64</sup>L  g  ard to Martinet,   le-  la-Crosse, 10 November 1873, Missions 15 (1877).
- <sup>65</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 6 August 1874.
- <sup>66</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to the Riel Family,   le-  la-Crosse, 24 June 1876.

- <sup>67</sup>Légéard to Martinet, Missions, Vol. 15 (1877): 323.
- <sup>68</sup>GNAAS, Chronicles, Ste. Famille Convent, Île-à-la-Crosse, 17 October 1874.
- <sup>69</sup>AASB, Sara Riel to A.-A. Taché, 20 January 1876.
- <sup>70</sup>AASB, Sara Riel to A.-A. Taché, 17 May 1875.
- <sup>71</sup>Légéard to Martinet, Île-à-la-Crosse, 10 November 1873, Missions 15 (1877): 537.
- <sup>72</sup>AASB, Sara Riel to A. -A. Taché, c. 1879.
- <sup>73</sup>Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel, 69.
- <sup>74</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to her aunts and uncles, 2 August 1880.
- <sup>75</sup>Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel, 112.
- <sup>76</sup>PAM, John Christian Schultz Correspondence, "Petition of the Indians of Île-à-la-Crosse to John Christian Schultz, 28 July 1883," included in a letter and translated by Bishop Vital Grandin.
- <sup>77</sup>Robert Longpré, Ile-a-la-Crosse, 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial (Ile-a-la-Crosse: Ile-a-la-Crosse Bi-Centennial Committee, 1977), 26
- <sup>78</sup>Prosper Légéard to Martinet, Île-à-la-Crosse, 17 January 1875, Missions 13 (1875).
- <sup>79</sup>GNAAS, Chronicles, 17 January 1874.
- <sup>80</sup>AASB, Sara Riel to A.-A. Taché, 12 July 1880.
- <sup>81</sup>PAM, Josette Lagimodière to Octavie Riel, 14 January 1875.
- <sup>82</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to the Riel family, January 1876.
- <sup>83</sup>Prosper Légéard to Martinet, Île-à-la-Crosse, 10 November 1873, Missions.
- <sup>84</sup>Lesage, Capitale d'une Solitude, 123.
- <sup>85</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to the Riel Family, 24 June 1876.

<sup>86</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 4 January 1880.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 16 January 1877.

<sup>89</sup>Huel, Proclaiming the Gospel, 79; Prosper Légéard to Martinet, Île-à-la-Crosse, 10 November 1873, Missions, Vol. 15 (1877): 315-316.

<sup>90</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 6 August 1874.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Alan D. McMillan, Native People and Cultures of Canada, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995), 240.

<sup>93</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Octavie, Eulalie, and Henriette Riel, 19 July 1871.

<sup>94</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Louis Riel, 4 January 1880; Riel makes similar statements in a letter to Joseph Dubuc dated January 1881.

<sup>95</sup>AASB, Sara Riel to A. -A. Taché, 17 November 1879.

<sup>96</sup>AASB, Sara Riel to A. -A. Taché, 17 November 1879 and 26 September 1880.

<sup>97</sup>PAM, Sara Riel to Julie Riel, 6 March 1882.

## CONCLUSION

When Sara Riel died on 26 December 1883 the entire community at Île-à-la-Crosse, despite the excessive cold, attended her funeral. Father Rapet performed the mass, while Father Dauphin accompanied him on the harmonium. The bourgeois of the Hudson's Bay Company, Métis labourers and students, Sisters Langelier, Nolin, and Mercier were present at her burial.<sup>1</sup> On 29 December 1883 Sister Agnès, Sara Riel's superior at Île-à-la-Crosse, wrote to Julie Riel: "Her death was a summary of her life: the passage from a life of misery to a life of happiness."<sup>2</sup> She explained to Julie that the day following Sara's death "people from everywhere came to pray by her body. She was loved and respected as a "Métisse." She used to say, 'show them love, and they will do the same in return.'"<sup>3</sup>

Sara Riel has been remembered largely only as Louis Riel's sister. In the period between her death and the 1970s she received little attention from historians, the Grey Nuns, or the public. As Louis Riel has emerged as a mythical figure in Canadian history,<sup>4</sup> however, scholars like Mary V. Jordan and Thomas Flanagan have focussed some attention on his sister, Sara, to determine what light she can shed on Louis Riel's psychological development. These scholars concluded that the two siblings shared a special relationship that deeply influenced each other's lives. Neither Jordan nor Flanagan, however, recognise Sara Riel as a significant topic for historical investigation outside of her status as Louis Riel's sister.

Upon examination, however, Sara Riel emerges as a historically significant figure. An analysis of her life reveals the degree to which complex factors of race, class,

and gender shaped one Métis woman's life decisions and opportunities. Sara Riel's experiences highlight the degree to which human identities are multiple and fluid—at any given time, one category of race, gender, or class may take precedence over others. For instance, although Sara Riel's Métis heritage influenced her early life at Red River, upon becoming a Grey Nun missionary following the 1869-70 Resistance, she distanced herself from that heritage. Riel's decision to dedicate the remainder of her life to the Oblate mission to the Métis, Cree, and Chipewyan at Île-à-la-Crosse placed her in an ambiguous situation; while her brother, Louis, became a champion of Métis rights and freedoms, Sara advocated Métis "acculturation" to the Canadian and Christian lifestyle. While Sara Riel initially sympathised with the Métis cause, she eventually transferred her allegiance from the "New Nation" to the Canadian nation. By the time that Sara Riel left for Île-à-la-Crosse, she identified more with her French-Canadian companions in the Grey Nuns' order than she did with the Métis. Although her decision to leave Red River and her family's fate caused her much anguish, she increasingly found solace and identity in her faith and status as a Grey Nun missionary. A study of Sara Riel's life illustrates the degree to which historians must seek to understand women's historical experience in all its complexity.

Sara Riel's experiences do not easily fit within historians' generalisations concerning Métis culture, class relations, or missionary endeavours in western Canada. Although historians and the public associate the Riel name with Métis history and culture, Sara Riel's life differed from many Métis. Indeed, towards the latter half of her life, she removed herself completely from the larger stream of Métis experience by

becoming a missionary dedicated to transforming Métis culture. Historian David Lee, who has studied the complex and diverse nature of the Métis communities on the South Saskatchewan River on the eve of the 1885 Rebellion, uses a flexible definition of “Métis” in order to account for this diversity in Métis society. Lee argues that the term “Métis” can encompass wide variations in culture, language, degree of acculturation, and expectations for the future. A “Métis,” therefore, is anyone “who identified himself [or herself] as such and who was considered as such by others, both inside and outside the group.”<sup>5</sup> Lee’s definition is useful for understanding Sara Riel’s experiences; although she clearly identified herself as Métis, towards the end of her life religion, rather than race, provides the key to understanding how Sara Riel perceived herself and others.

American historian Lisa E. Emmerich has studied a similar historical figure, Marguerite LaFlesche Diddock, in *The American West*. Diddock, an Omaha woman who had once castigated Euro-Americans for assaulting her culture, became a field matron for the Office of Indian Affairs from 1896 to 1900. As a part of her office, Diddock sought to hasten Native women’s acculturation to American standards of womanhood and domesticity. Emmerich concludes that although Diddock experienced problems and frustrations that grew out of her dual—Native and Euro-American—role, she exemplified the “new” American Indian who had been shaped by acculturation.<sup>6</sup> In Sara Riel’s case, however, it is not clear as to whether she believed that acculturation was the key to Métis survival or whether the Grey Nuns and Catholic hierarchy required that she distance herself from her Métis heritage and family. Her life does, however, highlight the degree to which Métis experience in the late-nineteenth century cannot be generalised. Further

full-length studies of Métis and Mixed-blood men and women who became missionaries in the West are required to shed light on these issues. A more in-depth study of the Grey Nuns' policies towards their mixed-blood charges would also enhance our understanding of cultural relations and perceptions in the period.

Sara Riel's experiences likewise highlight the degree to which historians have over-generalised the nature of class divisions in the late nineteenth-century Canadian Northwest. Although the Riel family enjoyed some wealth at the time of Louis and Sara Riel's births, by the time that Sara Riel became a Grey Nun in the late 1860s, the Riel family faced destitution. Yet, the family clearly constituted a part of the trader/merchant and farming class at Red River: the Riel family shared closer relations with the Catholic Church than members of the hunting class and female members of the family became the subject of the Grey Nuns' missionary endeavours at Red River. Sara Riel's relationship with the Grey Nuns' perhaps indicates that social status at Red River derived as much from religion, degree of acculturation, and kinship networks, as it did from wealth. While Sara Riel's father became a political leader at Red River in the 1840s, her mother, Julie Lagimodière, shared a close relationship with Catholic hierarchy and her parents were among the wealthiest French-Canadian families at Red River. Sara Riel's position in the Red River community cannot readily be explained within accepted definitions of "class."

By placing Sara Riel at the centre of historical investigation, a small segment of the Catholic mission field in western Canada becomes highlighted. Relations in the mission field—much like Sara Riel's individual experiences—were shaped by complex

factors of race, gender, and class. A comparison of Louis and Sara's education under the auspices of the Roman Catholic clergy reveals the degree to which the Catholic clergy envisaged their missionary endeavours in gendered terms. Because Bishops Provencher and Taché perceived Métis women to be more "civilised" than Métis men, they sought the services of the Grey Nuns who were to teach Métis girls to become exemplary wives and mothers to Christian families. The clergy could conceive of no other option for women outside of marriage, motherhood, or a religious vocation. In contrast, the clergy focussed on Métis boys as potential candidates for an indigenous priesthood.

An examination of Riel's status as a Grey Nun reveals that the Grey Nuns, for sectarian and financial reasons, aligned themselves with the merchant/trading class at Red River. Métis and Mixed-blood girls, such as Sara Riel, who belonged to Red River's social and political élite had the finances and "breeding" required to attend the Grey Nuns boarding school where they learned that a religious vocation was more pleasing to God than marriage and motherhood. The Grey Nuns' recruitment of Métis and Mixed-blood women into their order, however, reflected divisions that had begun to emerge at Red River prior to their arrival. The Métis and Mixed-blood hunting class saw little need to educate their children, especially given that they left the Red River vicinity for extended periods of time. By contrast, those families who belonged to the merchant/trader and farming class tended to lead sedentary lives at Red River where they enjoyed particularly close relations with the clergy.

Although class divisions, sectarian rivalries, and financial need dictated that the Grey Nuns accept only women from the best Métis and Mixed-blood families into their

order, the Grey Nuns did not discriminate according to race within their ranks. The community's members came from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Their vow of service to the poor, furthermore, ensured that they approach their subjects in a non-sectarian and egalitarian manner. The spirit of their obedience was evident in the degree to which Métis and Mixed-blood women like Sara Riel, Suzanne Connolly, Marie-Jane McDougall and Annie Goulet were able to pursue distinguished careers and achieve upward mobility within the Grey Nuns' order. The Grey Nuns' acceptance of these women into their congregation served to enhance their ties with the Métis and Mixed-Blood populations at Red River. By the time that the Red River Resistance occurred, the Grey Nuns sympathised with the Métis cause.

Sara Riel's experiences at Red River and Île-à-la-Crosse reveal the complex and ambiguous nature of Catholic missions in western Canada. Both geographical locations were places where class, race, and gender served to influence the nature of Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian contacts. When Sara Riel's experiences are used as a vehicle for approaching the topic of Catholic missions, neither location emerges as a place where male missionaries, imbued with the spirit of ultramontanism, conquered Aboriginal cultures in the name of Christ. Rather, Métis women like Sara Riel, French- and Anglo-Canadian women like the Grey Nuns, and Aboriginal women like "Catherine" and Marie-Rose Piwapiskus contributed to the development of the missions. Although it would be difficult to argue that the Catholic missions constituted an equitable inter-cultural dialogue, sometimes inter-cultural co-operation, and sometimes resistance, did occur. At the individual level, however, Sara Riel's experiences reveal more questions than

answers concerning how mixed-blood women adapted to the changes inaugurated by missionaries' arrival.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Grey Nun's Archives, St. Boniface (GNASB), Chronicles, 29 December 1883 and Annals, Vol. 3, 1884-1887, 21; Grey Nun's Archives, Province of Alberta and Saskatchewan (GNAAS), Ste. Famille Convent, Île-à-la-Crosse, Chronicles, 26 December 1883.

<sup>2</sup>Sister Agnès to Julie Riel, Île-à-la-Crosse, 29 December 1883, quoted and translated in Mary V. Jordan, To Louis from your sister who loves you, Sara Riel (Toronto: Griffin House, 1974), 101-102.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See Douglas Owram's "The Myth of Louis Riel," in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Press, 1985): 163-182.

<sup>5</sup>David Lee, "The Métis Militant Rebels of 1885," in Readings in Canadian History: Post Confederation, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., 1994), 80. Rather than identifying the Métis by culture or biology, Lee employs Frederick Barth's ascriptive concept of ethnicity to define the group.

<sup>6</sup>Lisa E. Emmerich, "Marguerite LaFlesche Diddock: Office of Indian Affairs Field Matron," Great Plains Quarterly 13 (Summer 1993): 162-171.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **ARCHIVAL SOURCES**

**Archbishop's Archives, St. Boniface, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Taché Papers

**Grey Nuns' Archives, Province of Alberta and Saskatchewan, Edmonton, Alberta**

Chronicles: Ste. Famille Convent, Ile-a-la-Crosse.

Personal Files.

Mission File: Ile-a-la-Crosse.

**Grey Nuns' Archives, St. Boniface, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Annals.

Chronicles: Provincial House, 1858-1871.

Correspondence: Provincial House and Motherhouse.

Personal Files.

Anonymous. "Connaissez-Vous Sara Riel, Soeur de Louis Riel?" Unpublished Manuscript. Typescript. Revised by Gilbert Guibord, s.g.m. 10pp.

de Moissac, Elizabeth, s.g.m. "The Grey Nuns in Red River: Educational Institutions, 1844-1974." Unpublished Manuscript. Translated by S. Hedwige Neuman, s.g.m. Typescript.

Vien, Rossel. "Sara Riel, Temoin de son Temps." Paper presented to the St. Boniface Historical Society. 9 February 1968. Typescript. 32pp.

**Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

B/239/k/4. Minutes of Council. Annual Meetings of Chief Factors and Chief Commissioners, 1874-1883.

B/89/b/4. Île-à-la-Crosse: Correspondence.

**Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba**

Riel Papers

John Christian Schultz Correspondence

Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta

Papers of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina, Saskatchewan

Fawcett, Thomas. "Exploratory Survey of Athabasca and Churchill Rivers." Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1885, Part II, CSP 1889, Paper No. 151. Clippings File.

## NEWSPAPERS

La Liberté

Le Métis

Star Phoenix

## PUBLISHED PRIMARY SOURCES

Charette, Guillaume, ed. Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of Louis Goulet. Translated by Ray Ellenwood. Winnipeg: Éditions Bois-Brûlé, 1980.

[Charlebois, Sister, s.g.m]. Notes and Sketches Collected from a Voyage in the North-West by a Sister of Charity of Montreal for the furtherance of a Charitable Object. Montreal: Callahan, Book and Job Printer, 1875.

Dugas, G. "Établissement des Soeurs de Charité à la Riviere Rouge." Revue Canadienne (1891) and (1890): 719-725 and 20-27.

Flanagan, Thomas, ed. "Louis Riel's Religious Beliefs: A Letter to Bishop Taché." Saskatchewan History 27 (1974): 15-28.

Healey, W. J. Women of Red River: Being a Book Written from the Recollections of Women Surviving from the Red River Area. Winnipeg: The Women's Canadian Club, 1923.

Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Missions de la Congrégation des Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée. Paris: Typographie A. Hennuyer, Vols. 17-19, 1874-1881.

----- . Règles et Constitutions. Paris: Typographie A. Hennuyer, 1977. 2ème ed.

- Owens, Brian M. and Claude M. Roberto, eds. The Diaries of Bishop Vital Grandin, 1875-1877. Translated by Alan D. Ridge. Edmonton: Historical Society of Alberta, 1989.
- Petrone, Penny, ed. First People: First Voices. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.
- Stanley, George F. G., ed. The Collected Writings of Louis Riel/Les Écrits Complets de Louis Riel. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1985.
- Taché, Alexandre Antonin, o.m.i. "Letter from Bishop Alexandre Taché to his Mother, Concerning his Life with the Chipewyan Nation." Translated by Gaston Carrière. Prairie Forum 3 (Fall 1978): 131-156.
- . Vingt années de missions dans le Nord-Ouest de l'Amérique. Montréal: Eusèbe Senecal, 1866.
- Tallet, I. J. Catechisme des Voeux ou des Principales Obligations de l'État Religieux a l'usage des Soeurs de la Charité de Montreal Dites Vulgairement "Soeurs Grises". Montréal: Imprimerie d'Eusèbe Senecal, 1867.

## SECONDARY SOURCES

### Books

- Anonymous. Couvent de Saint-Norbert, 1858-1958. St. Boniface: n.p., 1958.
- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Race." In Critical Terms for Literary Study, eds. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 274-287. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Benoit, Dom. Vie de Mgr. Taché. 2 Vols. Montreal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1904.
- Brewer, Aileen Mary. Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women, 1860-1920. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987.
- Brouwer, Ruth Compton. New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- . "Opening Doors Through Social Service: Aspects of Women's Work in the Canadian Presbyterian Missions in Central India, 1877-1914." In Prophets, Priests,

- and Prodigals: Readings in Canadian Religious History, 1608 to Present, eds. Mark G. McGowan and David B. Marshall, 241-261. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1992.
- Burke, Peter. History and Social Theory. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Champagne, Joseph-Etienne, o.m.i. Les Missions Catholiques dans l'Ouest Canadien, 1818-1875. Ottawa: Éditions des Études Oblates, 1949.
- Charlebois, Peter. The Life of Louis Riel. Toronto: New Canada Publications, 1975.
- Choquette, Robert. The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995.
- Danylewycz, Marta. Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood, and Spinsterhood in Quebec. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987.
- Dauphinais, Luc. Histoire de Saint-Boniface, Vol. 1. St. Boniface: Les Éditions du Blé, 1991.
- Denault, Bernard and Benoit Levesque. Éléments pour une sociologie des communautés religieuses au Québec. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1975.
- Deutsch, Sara. "Women Missionaries and Cultural Conquest." In Peoples of Color in the American West, ed. Sucheny Clan, 91-107. Lexington: D. D. Hecks and Co., 1994.
- Devens, Carol. Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630-1900. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.
- Duchaussois, P., o.m.i. Grey Nuns in the Far North, 1867-1917. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Publishers, 1919.
- . Mid Snow and Ice: The Apostles of the North-West. London: Berns, Oates and Washbourne, Ltd., 1923.
- Emmerich, Lisa E. "Marguerite LaFlesche Diddock: Office of Indian Affairs Field Matron." Great Plains Quarterly 13 (Summer 1993): 162-171.
- Ens, Gerhard J. Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.

- Ewens, Mary. "Women in the Convent." Chapter two in American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration, ed. Karen Kennelly. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1989.
- Fahmy-Eid, Nadia. "The Education of Girls by the Ursulines of Quebec during the French Regime." In Canadian Women: A Reader, eds. Wendy Mitchinson et al., 33-48. Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1996.
- Flanagan, Thomas. Louis "David" Riel: Prophet of the New World. Halifax: Goodread Biographies, 1983.
- Gagan, Rosemary R. A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries and the Orient, 1881-1925. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992.
- Grant, John Webster. Moon of Wintertime: Missionaries and the Indians of Canada in Encounter since 1534. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.
- Frye, R. P. The Genealogy of the First Metis Nation: The Development and Dispersal of the Red River Settlement, 1820-1900. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988.
- Giraud, Marcel. The Métis in the Canadian West, Vol. II. Translated by George Woodcock. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1986.
- Gosman, Robert. The Riel and Lagimodière Families in Métis Society, 1840-1860. Ottawa: Parks Canada, manuscript no. 171, 1977.
- Guichon, Mary, s.g.m. Developpement des Oeuvres des Soeurs Grises au Manitoba depuis leur Fondation à Saint Boniface. St. Boniface: Maison Provinciale de Soeur Grises, 1944.
- Helm, June, ed. The Subarctic, Vol. 6 in The Handbook of North American Indians. Washington: Smithsonian, 1981.
- Howard, Joseph Kinsey. Strange Empire: Louis Riel and the Métis People. Toronto: James, Lewis and Samuel, 1974.
- Huel, Raymond J. A. Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis: The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate in Western Canada, 1845-1945. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996.
- Jeness, Diamond. The Indians of Canada. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin 65, Anthropological Series No. 15, 1958.

- Jordan, Mary V. De ta soeur, Sara Riel. St.. Boniface: Éditions des Plaines, 1980.
- .To Louis from your sister who loves you, Sara Riel. Toronto: Griffin House, 1974.
- LaRocque, Emma. "The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar." In Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, Strength, eds. Patricia Chuckryk and Christine Miller, et al., 11-18. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996.
- Lee, David. "The Métis Militant Rebels of 1885." In Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, 78-98. Toronto: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1994.
- Lesage, Germain. Capitale d'une Solitude. Ottawa: Éditions des Études Oblates, 1946.
- Longpré, Robert. Ile-a-la-Crosse, 1776-1976: Sakitawak Bi-Centennial. Ile-a-la-Crosse: Ile-a-la-Crosse Bi-Centennial Committee, 1977.
- MacGregor, J. G. John Rowand: Czar of the Prairies. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978.
- McCarthy, Martha. From the Great River to the Ends of the Earth: The Oblate Missions to the Dene, 1847-1921. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995.
- McMillan, Alan D. Native Peoples and Cultures of Canada. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1994.
- Miller, J. R. Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.
- Mitchell, Estelle. The Grey Nuns of Montreal and the Red River Settlement, 1844-1984. Montreal: Editions du Méridien, 1987.
- Morice, Adrien-Gabriel. Histoire de l'Église Catholique dans l'Ouest canadien. 3 Vols. St. Boniface and Montreal: Author and Granger Frères, 1921.
- Morton, A. S. A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1933.
- Morton, W. L. Manitoba: A History. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967.
- Murphy, T. and G. Stortz, eds. Creed and Culture: The Place of English-Speaking

- Catholics in Canadian Society, 1750-1930. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993.
- Ortolon, R. P., o.m.i. Cent ans d'Apostolat dans les deux Hemisphères: Les Oblats de Marie Immaculée durant le premier siècle de leur existence, Vol. 2, En Dehors de l'Europe. Paris: Librairie des Annals, 1915.
- Owram, Douglas. "The Myth of Louis Riel." In The Prairie West: Historical Readings, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, 163-182. Edmonton: Pica Press, 1985.
- Pannekoek, Frits. A Snug Little Flock: The Social Origins of the Riel Resistance of 1869-70. Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1991.
- Pascoe, Peggy. "Western Women at the Cultural Crossroads." In Trails: Toward a New Western History, eds. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, 40-58. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991.
- Payment, Diane Paulette. "The Free People—Otipemisiwak": Batoche, Saskatchewan, 1870-1930. Studies in Archeology, Architecture, and History, National Historic Parks and Sites, Parks Service, Environment Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1990.
- . "'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, 19-38. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996.
- . Riel Family: Home and Lifestyle at St. Vital, 1860-1910, report no. 379. Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1980.
- Peers, Laura. "'The Guardian of All': Jesuit Missionary and Salish Perceptions of the Virgin Mary." In Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History, eds. Jennifer S. H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, 284-303. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996.
- Pierson, Ruth Roach. "Experience, Difference, Dominance, and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History." In Writing Women's History: International Perspectives, eds. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendell, 79-106. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Rapley, Elizabeth. The Dévotes: Women and Church in Seventeenth-Century France. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990.
- Siggins, Maggie. Riel: A Life of Revolution. Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994.

- Smith, Erica. "Gentlemen, This is no Ordinary Trial': Sexual Narratives in the Trial of the Reverend Corbett, Red River, 1863." In Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History, 364-380.
- Sprague, D. N. Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1988.
- Spry, Irene. "The Métis and Mixed-bloods of Rupert's Land before 1870." In The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America, eds. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, 95-118. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1985.
- Stanley, George F. G. The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961.
- . Louis Riel. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1963.
- Stasiulis, Daiva K. "Theorizing Connections: Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Class." In Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada, ed. Peter S. Li, 269-305. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Van Die, Marguerite. "'A Woman's Awakening': Evangelical Belief and Female Spirituality in Mid-Nineteenth Century Canada." In Canadian Women: A Reader, 49-67.
- Van Kirk, Sylvia. Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870. Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing Ltd., 1980.
- Warner, Marina. Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary. London: Picador, 1990.

### **Periodical Articles**

- Barclay, George. "Grey Nuns Voyage to Red River." Beaver, outfit 297 (Winter 1966): 15-23.
- Benoit, Barbara. "The Mission at Ile-a-la-Crosse." Beaver (Winter 1980): 40-50.
- Bonin, Marie, s.g.m. "The Grey Nuns and the Red River Settlement." Manitoba History (Spring 1986): 12-14.
- Brouwer, Ruth Compton. "Transcending the 'unacknowledged quarantine': Putting

- Religion into English-Canadian Women's History." Journal of Canadian Studies 27 (Autumn 1992): 47-61.
- Brown, Jennifer S. H. "People of Myth, People of History: A Look at Recent Writings on the Métis." Acadiensis 17 (Autumn 1987): 150-163.
- Castañeda, Antonia I. "Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History: The Discourse, Politics, and Decolonization of History." Pacific Historical Review (1992): 501-533.
- Carter, Sarah. "The Woman's Sphere: Domestic Life at Riel House and Dalnavert." Manitoba History 11 (1986): 55-61.
- Chaput, Donald. "The 'Misses Nolin' of Red River." Beaver (Winter 1975): 14-17.
- Cooper, Barbara J. "The Convent: An Option for Quebecois, 1930-1950." Canadian Women Studies 7 (Winter 1986): 31-34.
- Chartrand, Paul. "Terms of Division: Problems of 'Outside Naming' for Aboriginal People in Canada." Journal of Indigenous Studies 2 (Summer 1991): 1-22.
- de Moissac, Elizabeth, s.g.m. "Les Soeurs Grises et les événements de 1869-1870." La Société Canadienne d'Histoire de l'Église Catholique, Sessions d'Étude (1970): 215-228.
- Denault, Bernard and Benoit Lévesque. Éléments pour une sociologie des communautés Religieuses au Québec. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1975.
- Dumont-Johnson, Micheline. "Les communautés religieuses et la condition féminine." Recherches sociographiques, 19 (janvier-avril, 1978): 29-43.
- . "Une perspective féministe dans l'histoire des congrégations de femmes," La Société canadienne d'histoire de l'Église catholique, Études d'histoire religieuse (1990): 29-35.
- Foster, J. E. "The Métis: The People and the Term." Prairie Forum 3 (March 1978): 79-90.
- Gagnon, Anne. "The Pensionnat Assomption: Religious Nationalism in a Franco-Albertan Boarding School for Girls, 1926-1960." Historical Studies in Education 1 (Spring 1989): 95-117.
- Gallagher, Brian. "A Re-Examination of Race, Class, and Society at Red River," Native Studies Review 4 (1988): 25-66.

- Harkin, Michael and Sergei Kan. "Introduction." Ethnohistory, special issue Native American Women's Responses to Christianity 43 (Fall 1996): 563-565.
- Hoffman, Barbara. "Women of God: The Faithful Companions of Jesus." Alberta History (Autumn 1995): 2-12.
- Kermoal, Natalie. "Les rôles et les souffrances des femmes métisses lors de la Résistance de 1870 et de la Rébellion de 1885." Prairie Forum 19 (Fall 1994): 153-168.
- James, Janet Wilson. "Women and Religion: An Introduction." American Quarterly, special issue Women and Religion 30 (Winter 1978): 579-581.
- Lauer, Sister Bernarda. "Russian Germans and the Ursulines of Prelate, Sask., 1919-1934." Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions 46 (1929): 83-98.
- Meyer, David. "Saskatchewan River Rendezvous Centers and Trading Posts: Continuity and Change in a Cree Social Geography." Ethnohistory 42 (Summer 1995): 404-435.
- Miller, J. R. "From Riel to the Métis." Canadian Historical Review 69 (March 1988): 1-20.
- . "Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy." Ethnohistory 37 (Fall 1990): 386-415.
- Morton, A. S. "The New Nation, the Métis." Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, ser. 2, 33 (1939): 137-45.
- Pannekoek, Frits. "The Historiography of the Red River Settlement, 1850-1868." Prairie Forum, Vol. 6, no. 1 (1981): 75-85.
- Parr, Joy. "Gender History and Historical Practice." Canadian Historical Review 76 (September 1995): 1053-1075.
- Payment, Diane. "Une Aperçu des Relations entre les Missionnaires Catholiques et les Métisses Pendant le Premier Siècle de Contact (1813-1918) dans l'Ouest Canadien." Études Oblates de l'Ouest 3 (1994): 139-158.
- Peterson, Susan. "Challenging Stereotypes: The Adaptations of the Sisters of St. Francis to South Dakota Indian Missions, 1885-1910." Upper Midwest History no. 84: 1-9.

- . "Doing 'Women's Work': The Grey Nuns of Fort Totten Indian Reservation, 1874-1900." North Dakota History 52 (Spring 1985): 18-25.
- . "'Holy Women' and Housekeepers: Women Teachers on South Dakota Reservations, 1885-1910." South Dakota History 13 (Fall 1983): 245-260.
- . "Religious Communities of Women in the West: The Presentation Sister's Adaptations to the Northern Plains Frontier." Journal of the West 21 (April 1982): 65-70.
- Rutherford, Myra. "Revisiting Colonization through Gender: Anglican Missionary Women in the Pacific Northwest and the Arctic, 1860-1945." BC Studies no. 104 (Winter 1994): 3-23.
- Scott, Joan W. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." American Historical Review, 91 (1986): 1053-1075.
- Slobodin, Richard. "The Subarctic Metis as Products and Agents of Culture Contact." Arctic Anthropology 2 (1964): 50-55.
- Valverde, Mariana. "Poststructuralist Gender Historians: Are We Those Names?" Labour/Le Travail 25 (Spring 1990): 227-236.
- Vein, Rossel. "La Correspondance de Sara Riel." Écrits de Canada Français 22 (1966): 243-276.
- Yerbery, J. C. "The Post-Contact Chipewyan Trade Rivalries and Changing Territorial Boundaries." Ethnohistory 23 (Summer 1976): 237-263.
- Zimmer, Ronald P. "Early Oblate Attempts for Indian and Métis Priests in Canada." Études Oblates 32 (Oct.-Dec., 1973): 276-291.

## **THESES AND DISSERTATIONS**

- Cooper, Barbara J. "In the Spirit: Entrants to a Religious Community of Women in Quebec, 1930-1939." M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1983.
- de Moissac, Elizabeth, s.g.m. "La femme de l'Ouest: Leur rôle dans le histoire." M.A. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1945.
- Gainer, Brenda J. "The Catholic Missionaries as Agents of Social Change among the Métis and Indians of Red River: 1818-1845." M.A. thesis, History, Carleton

University, 1978.

McCarthy, Martha. "The Missions of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate to the Athapaskans, 1846-1870: Theory, Structure, and Method." Ph.D., diss., history, University of Manitoba, 1981.

Rollason, Heather Ann. "Studying Under the Influence: The Impact of Samuel Hearne's Journal on the Scholarly Literature about Chipewyan Women." M. A. thesis, Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, Trent University, 1994.

Smyth, Elizabeth M. "The Lessons of Religion and Science: The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and St. Joseph's Academy, Toronto, 1854-1911. Ph.D. diss., Education, University of Toronto, 1989.

Spalding, Philip Taft. "The Métis of Ile-a-la-Crosse." Ph.D., diss., Anthropology, University of Washington, 1970.

Thomas, Trudelle. "Daybooks and Deathbooks—The Writings of the Brown County Ursulines: A Rhetorical and Literary Analysis." Ph.D., diss., English, University of Cincinnati, 1987.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHIC AIDS AND DICTIONARIES**

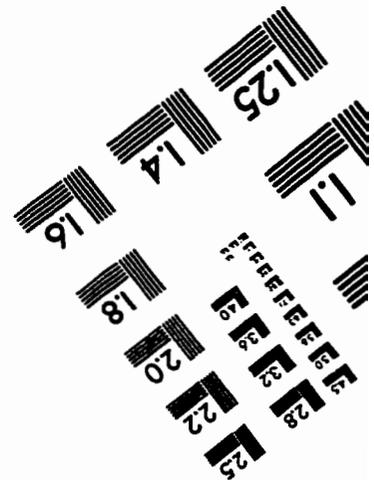
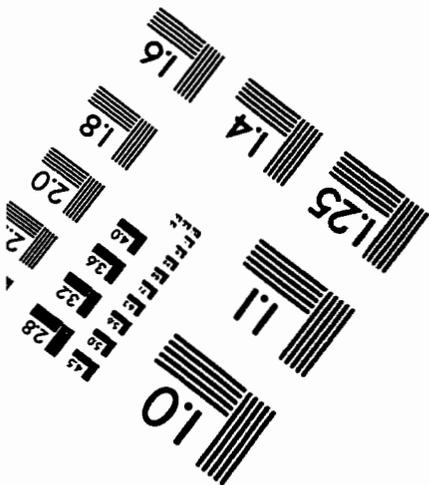
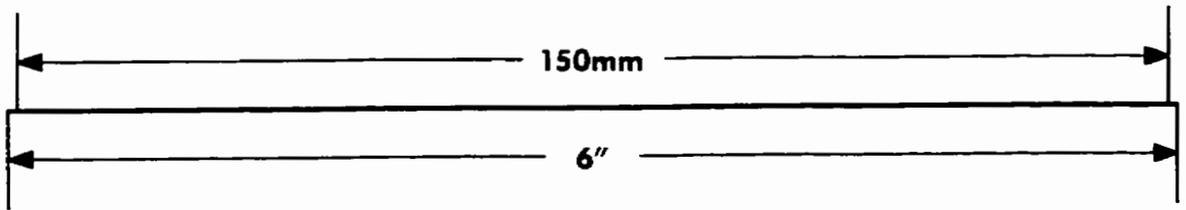
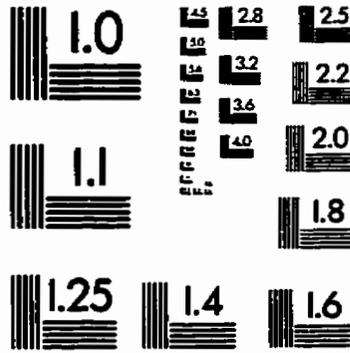
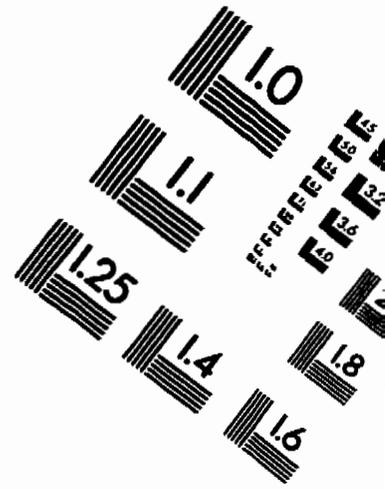
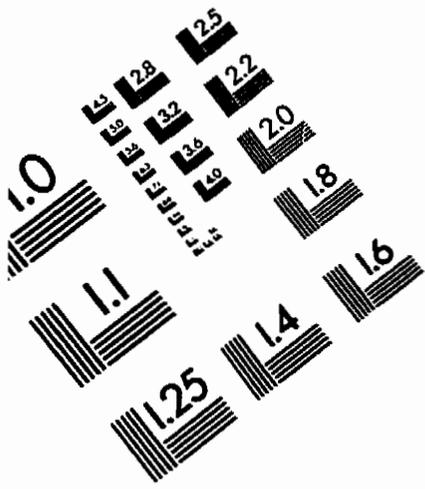
Carrière, Gaston. Dictionnaire biographique des Oblates de Marie Immaculée au Canada, 3 Vols. Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1976-79.

Halpenny, Gracess G., ed. Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Vol. 9 and 10. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976.

Karel, David. "Sara Riel." Dictionnaire des Artistes de Langue Française en Amérique de Nord, 694.

New Catholic Encyclopedia. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



**APPLIED IMAGE, Inc**  
1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, NY 14609 USA  
Phone: 716/482-0300  
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved