Reviews

"The Free People — Otipemisiwak": Batoche, Saskatchewan 1870-1930, by Diane Payment. Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites, 1990. Pp 366.

Every student of Canadian history knows that the Battle of Batoche, Saskatchewan, was the turning point in the North-West Rebellion of 1885. Less well known is the fact that the Métis defeat did not result in the destruction of their community. As Diane Payment points out, "most of the Métis who entered lands in the post-1885 period still occupied them in 1910." This was true even though in 1886 the majority accepted scrip that could be redeemed for money, rather than land scrip. Under prevailing conditions, money scrip made more economic sense, particularly as the Métis had other means of acquiring land — they could take out homesteads, for instance. Métis concern about their lands has been a constant throughout their history.

In this work, Payment continues to develop her long-standing interest in the Métis of Batoche. The community originated during buffalo-hunting days; today its battlefield, forty-four kilometres southwest of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, is a national historic site, a major tourist attraction. During the heyday of the fur trade, the people of Batoche, on the one hand, were heavily involved as buffalo hunters, freighters and labourers for the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), usually under contract; on the other, as free traders, they were a thorn in the Company's side. Isolated as they and the Northwest in general were from the centre of colonial authority, Métis communities developed as independent, self-governing entities, a process which the HBC as well as the new confederation of Canada viewed with distrust and even alarm.

Payment is at her best when describing Métis society as it was at the time of the Rebellion and what happened to it afterward. The richness of her detail lends texture and depth to her depictions of the lives and attitudes of the Métis; theirs was a vigorous society firmly rooted in the land. Neither Amerindian nor white, they were not fully accepted by either; officials, in particular, became steadily more suspicious, refused to accord colonial status to the region where Métis predominated, and were dilatory about settling their land claims. As the Métis faced a changing way of life brought about by the disappearance of the buffalo herds, diminution of the fur trade, and growing numbers of white settlers, their struggle became one of survival as a distinct people.

The roots of the Métis problem go back much further than Payment indicates. Métissage, of course, was not unique to the Northwest; as the standing joke has it, it began nine months after the landing of the first European ship on the Atlantic coast. But mixed bloods did not emerge as a distinct group in either the Maritimes or central Canada. Depending upon cultural conformity, an individual of mixed ancestry was considered to be

either French-Indian or Indian-French. It was only in the Northwest, far from centres of colonial authority, that the mixed bloods had the freedom to develop a sense of separate identity. In the United States, where white settlement, once it breached the barrier of the coastal mountain ranges, developed much faster and on a much larger scale than in Canada, a separate Métis identity never had a chance to emerge. In the American Midwest, a common term in the nineteenth century used to refer to mixed bloods living Amerindian style was "Canadian Cree." Similarly in Latin America, it is cultural conformity rather than biological makeup that is the determining factor, and there is no cultural space for *mestizos* as a separate group. In the Americas, the western Canadian experience is unique.

Payment's grasp of detail, so sure when she is dealing with the Métis, is shakier when she ventures into other fields. When she writes that treaties and land surrenders began in central Canada in 1764, she is overlooking what happened in the Maritimes before that; and when she says that "Huron villages or reserves" were established between 1680 and 1750, she is forgetting about the mission village of Sillery, established outside Quebec City for Amerindians in 1637, and the Abenaki villages established on the South Shore in the 1660s and 1670s. Perhaps more important, for the history student, is the lack of an index.

Such oversights apart, this work makes a substantial contribution to the history of Canada's Métis.

Olive Patricia Dickason
Department of History
University of Alberta

Metis Lands in Manitoba, by Thomas Flanagan. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1991. Pp. 245.

This publication by Professor Flanagan is the last in a series of books and articles critical of the concept of aboriginal rights as they apply to the Métis. Flanagan was a policy strategist for the Reform Party and there is a strong undercurrent of the party's ideology in the book, more specifically in the support of principles of "rule of law" and assimilation into Anglo-Canadian society.

Flanagan's study is a response to the work of D.N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869-1885* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988), for the Manitoba Métis Federation in support of land claims pursuant to the Manitoba Act of 1870. The case of *Dumont vs. Attorney General of Canada and Manitoba* is pending before the courts. In 1990, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that it should be heard on its own merits, but the federal Department of Justice has been attempting to roadblock the Métis case. In this light, it hired Thomas Flanagan to review and evaluate the existing historical data. Flanagan has been assisted by Gerhard Ens and other academics whose work has brought out evidence against Métis land claims in Manitoba.