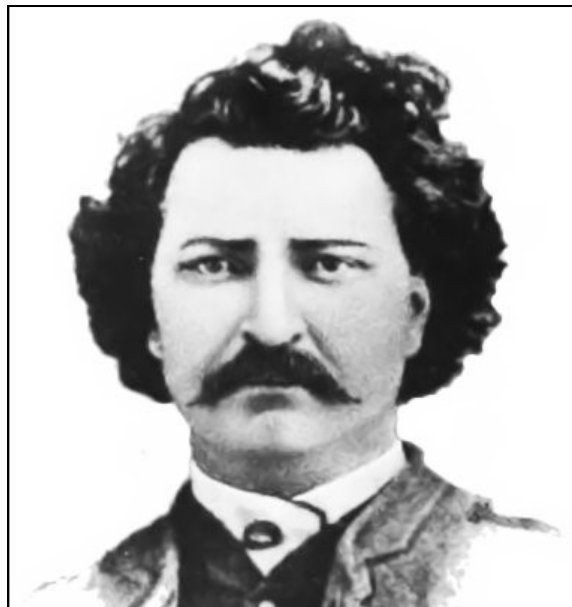


There are those today who want to change the historical record regarding 19th century Metis leader Louis Riel. Peter Goldring, Member of Parliament for Edmonton East says that such historical revisionism is wrong and sets the record straight on Riel and his crimes.

The Truth About Louis Riel

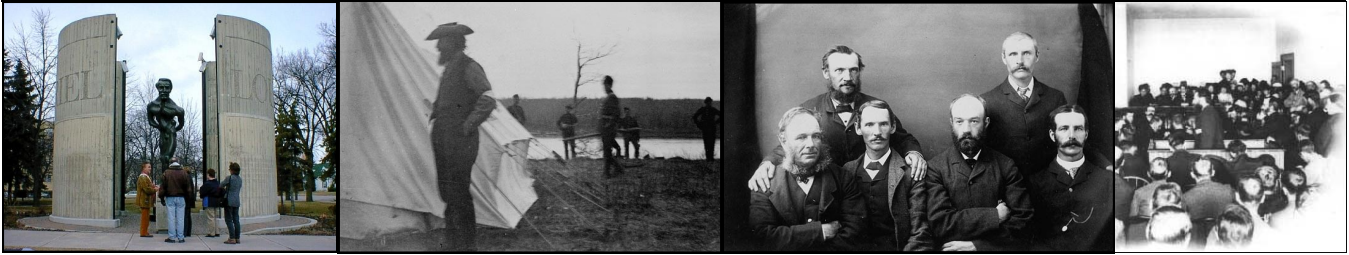
While most Canadians, are generally aware of Louis Riel and the murder of Thomas Scott, few who know, or, even if aware, talk about the tragic loss of 80 Canadian lives during Riel's disagreements with the Canadian governments of 1869 and 1885. Riel twice used violent insurrection and death while challenging British and Canadian authority and Canadian unity. Accordingly, Louis Riel was charged with murder and high treason, tried, convicted and then hung. Criminals of the day were hung for a lot less



Louis Riel was charged with murder and high treason, convicted and hanged for his crimes. Those who want to rehabilitate him more than 100 years later are ignoring the severity of his crimes.

than being accountable for the deaths of 80 people. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Canada's Loyal Opposition Party leader at the time, was opposed to Riel's execution only on the basis that he considered the sentence to be too severe. He did not find fault with the conviction. The crime was regarded with the utmost gravity by all politicians of the day. Sir John A Macdonald, Canada's Prime Minister, refused to interfere with the court imposed death sentence, which was then duly carried out.

The facts of Riel's leadership role in armed insurrection are not in dispute. The fact that this armed insurrection resulted in many deaths is also not in dispute. Riel clearly chose to lead; he also clearly chose to incite uprisings that caused many to die. As the leader of these uprisings, Riel is responsible for each and every death occurring as a consequence of his actions. To now question the integrity of the jurists of over 100 years is



wrong. Riel had the best and brightest lawyers of the day and still, the jury did not acquit. Nearly 125 years later, there are some who wish to "time travel" back in history, to reassess events with the "refined legal enlightenment" of today. The CBC initiative some years ago to "retry" Riel is but one in a series of regrettable steps to refuse to acknowledge the facts our history.

Revisionist "time travel" ignores the reality of human suffering. History is there to be learned, not to be revised or reinterpreted today by persons who do not like the out-

comes of over a century ago. "Time traveling" back to the Riel era and erasing this judgement from our history books as if it were wrong, would in itself be wrong. How can we possibly know what was in the minds of people 100 years ago, to re-judge them today, years after the fact. How can we obtain a true appreciation for those issues, without the sweat of fear and the odor of death that those events caused across the West in that era?

One typical example of selective memory, was a *Canadian Lawyer* magazine article on Riel's trial, presumed to have been written

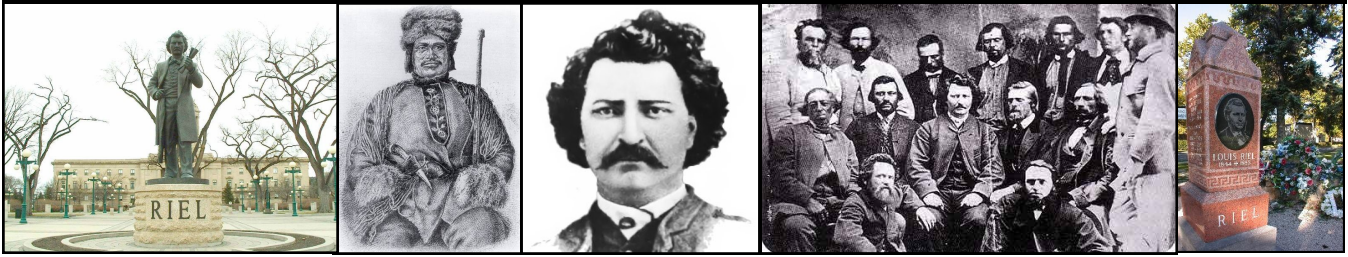
by a discerning member of Canada's legal profession. In the article there was absolutely no mention of anyone having died, although 80 people were dead as a result of Riel's leadership; 80 separate Canadian family tragedies commenced and not even a footnote in the thought process of the magazine article. Given such a selective view, it is understandable that one finds a full-page editorial in the same issue of the magazine, calling for an public apology for Riel's "wrongful conviction". A similarly selective nature to the presentation of facts appears to be evident by the CBC for its "Riel retrial". Métis organizations weren't even consulted during the planning for this

production. The production has been variously described as "ill conceived" and "socially, morally and politically irredeemable".

To "unhang" Riel today is illogical for those who remember the true history of Riel's revolutionary role and who also respect the authority of historical jury decisions. To posthumously "pardon" Riel would amount to a retroactive miscarriage of justice. To apologise to Riel's memory and to anoint Riel as a "Father of Confederation" would be an insult to the memories of those fallen Canadian soldiers and their descendants. These are the



A statue of Louis Riel is on display outside the Manitoba Legislature. Louis Riel Day, held the third Monday in February, is a statutory holiday in Manitoba.



proud Canadian soldiers who fought and died defending Canada against armed insurgents, led by Riel. Riel didn't 'Father' Confederation; he fought those who did. To unhang Louis Riel and to mount a statue to him on Parliament Hill would elevate anarchy and civil disobedience to that of democratic statesmanship.

Such confusion seems to continue, year after year. In 2000, preservation of the Riel "myth" was entrusted to none other than our Governor General of that time, who used her Office in a way that appeared to pre-judge a parliamentary outcome. Speaking with reverent atonement at the foot of a memorial honouring Canadian

soldiers who sacrificed their lives so that the Northwest Rebellion could be put down and Louis Riel be brought to justice, and flanked by an RCMP honour guard wearing Métis sashes, our Governor General assumed the role of Riel apologist. Readily forgotten was the fact that those Canadian soldiers were ordered by the Government of Canada to fight Riel and to bring him to justice. At the time, the Government Bill directing military action against Louis Riel was passed in Parliament and then received Royal Assent by the Queen and her representative in Canada—the Governor General.

So many people today appear to know little of and care less for the sacrifice of those who fought against Riel and saved our country from disintegration, so long ago.

Some facts that likely won't come out in the "Riel retrial", since of course they are not "relevant" are: the veteran soldiers who

fought Riel were awarded medals by a thankful government for their service in defending Canada. The first war medal ever issued by Canada to its war veterans was ribboned in a striped pattern of "red-white-red"--the colours of Canada's flag of today--and was garlanded with maple leaves around the word

"Canada". The medal's ribbon bore a clasp for either the Red River Campaign or the Fenian Raids. The second war medal issued by Canada was specifically for service during the Northwest Rebellion. Both medals awarded demonstrate Canada's gratitude for the sacrifices of those who served their country to bring Riel's rebellions to an end and him to justice.

The events of the past cannot be retroactively altered by anyone. Why should it be any different for Louis Riel? It's a sad state of Canadian historical affairs when so many historically ill-informed persons busy them-



Louis Riel with members of his provisional government in the Northwest, 1885. It was the second time he had set up a government in defiance of Canadian authorities.

selves giving praise to Riel, naming new highways after him and running a CBC special retrial “unhanging program” for Louis Riel, the villain who caused eighty to die, while General Middleton and his veteran Canadian soldiers are insulted, ignored and marginalized. In my view, we have sunk to a level comparable to that of modern Japan, where schoolbooks are sterilized to remove their Second World War shame, in the interest of sanitizing history and glorifying Emperor Hirohito, the benevolent leader who, with a wave of his hand, could have stopped all aggression, but did not. Canadians should be more willing to accept the facts of our history, however difficult and distasteful and to learn from history, not erase it.

Louis Riel should be honoured and respected for those democratic efforts considered to constructively advance the interests of his local community. However, to sanitize his rebellious ways that caused so many deaths of Canadian soldiers and citizens is too much, too far and too revisionist. Canada’s first war veterans fought and died to keep Canada united; Louis Riel most certainly did not.

Update: Once more there is an attempt to re-write history. An NDP Member of Parliament has introduced a Private Members Bill calling for Riel’s treason conviction to be overturned and Riel recognized as a Father of Confederation.

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This brochure series is intended to highlight special issues that Member of Parliament, Peter Goldring, has been involved in. If you wish to comment, please take a moment to fill out the survey below, write or call to the address above.

Your Opinion Matters...

Question #1: Do you think history should be re-written without regard for the facts of the time?

Yes No

Question #2: Do you think Louis Riel’s conviction fro treason should be overturned?

Yes No

Comments: _____

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
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