

**“Most of our country is wild and  
unspoiled”:**

**Advertising Gender, Race, and Empire for  
Western Canada, 1867-1911**

by

Jarett Henderson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

The Department of History  
The University of Manitoba/The University of Winnipeg  
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MASTER'S THESIS/PRACTICUM FINAL REPORT

Master's Thesis entitled:

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## To the Great North West!

To the West, young man! To the great North-West,  
To the land of the free and the home of the blest,  
Where oceans of prairie and forests of pine  
Stretch away far across the boundary line,  
Where the buffalo roams in his beauty and pride,  
There is the place for you and your bride.

To the great North-West where the Red River flows,  
In silence and majesty onward she goes  
Till she reaches the "Key of the great North-West,"  
Where the mighty Assiniboine takes her rest,  
Then quietly onward in unison flow  
To Winnipeg Lake a few leagues below.

To the great North-West, where the soil is deep,  
And the fields are broad that the farmers reap,  
And the lands are free that the farmer tills,  
And the sacks are large that the harvest fills.  
There is wealth in the great North-West, young man,  
Then waste not your allotted span,  
Nor take no sleep, nor slumber, nor rest,  
Till your face is toward the great North-West.

The English, the Scotch, the Irish, the Dane,  
And Russians are pouring in a main,  
The Icelander, too, from regions cold,  
And Canada's sons both strong and bold,  
From every region beneath the sun,  
To the great North-West they run, they run.

For a home, for love, for freedom, for wealth,  
For your peace of mind and body's health,  
For plenty of work and plenty of food,  
For your temporal wealth and future good,  
You can't do better than say "good bye,"  
And go to the West to live and die.

**Nicholas Devereux Ennis,**  
**Important Information for Intending Settlers in Manitoba,**  
**Liverpool: Turner and Dunnett Printers, 1882, 19.**

## Abstract

Immigration handbooks published by British, Canadian, and provincial institutions at the close of the nineteenth century were designed to encourage resettlement and constitute one aspect of the large scale immigration campaigns embarked upon by the federal government to colonize Western Canada. This thesis utilizes these handbooks in order to rethink not only the advertising campaigns of the Canadian government, but also to reconsider the interconnectedness of Canada and Great Britain's imperial pasts. Although they were produced to encourage migration from metropole to colony, immigration handbooks, this thesis argues, became the lens through which Canada's reverse imperial gaze was cast. Because immigration handbooks simultaneously reflected and constituted the imperial world of which they were a part, they provided intending immigrants with information not only about Western Canada, but also about the empire writ large. Moreover, these handbooks suggest how metropolitan ideals, colonial realities and the tensions that arose in-between were understood, maintained, and refracted by the peripheries. Immigration handbooks provided intending immigrants with practical and useful information, while simultaneously carving out the gender and racial ideals that were deemed appropriate for this edge of the British Empire.

## **Acknowledgements**

I have written this part in my head at least a hundred times and each time it has seemed so much easier. My advisor, Adele Perry, has inspired and challenged me more than she will ever know. Adele's knowledge, poise, and dedication to the historical practice, in addition to the genuine concern that she demonstrates for her students in and out of seminar, is refreshing and encouraging. Barry Ferguson and Robin Jarvis Brownlie have provided me with stimulating suggestions, valuable readings, and guidance throughout the thesis writing process. Roisin Cossar has challenged me to think far beyond the edges of empire, immigration, and resettlement to the sexual and gendered spaces of later medieval Europe. Carol Adam, Lisa McKindrey, and Sandra Ferguson have made life in the History Department a joy. Similarly, I had the pleasure of sharing this intellectual space with many energetic and bright as well as revolutionary students. Stacey Alexopoulos is equipped with a great set of ears, a solid, thought provoking mind, and is an excellent friend. Gillian Covernton, with whom I've shared reign of the Fort Garry Lectures and the H.G.S.A., has likely read too many versions of Boy Scouts, Margery Kempe, and Immigration Handbooks for anyone's well-being. My medieval past would not have been as complete without the friendship of Jenn Boychuck who has now become a traveling colonial in Australia. And lastly, Mary Jane McCallum has made this daunting task of writing so much more enjoyable by sharing her office and knowledge with me, and she remains a great friend.

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This is for them.

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## Introduction

### **“All who desire comfort and prosperity”: Gender, Race, and Imperial Migration Schemes**

On 23 May 1898, Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior, explained to the House of Commons the difficulties that would arise in the preparation of a descriptive handbook of Canada that would be “accurate” and at the same time “satisfy the desire of the inhabitants of various portions of the country.” According to Sifton, it would be much easier to issue handbooks that extolled “praise for every portion of the country.” But difficulties would arise, explained Sifton, “when an attempt is made to describe the country and tell the truth, which is the most necessary element in connection with immigration and an immigration policy.” The Minister of the Interior concluded that “the greatest possible care has been taken in the preparation of this [hand]book” and that he would endeavour, in the future, to “secure accurate information in detail and to correct the text in any portion of the handbook that appears to be incorrect.”<sup>1</sup>

The advertisement of Western Canada as a desirable space for imperial expansion relied upon the construction, publication, and distribution of a significant number of immigration handbooks intent on highlighting the “advantages” and “attractions” to life in the Canadian West. This thesis investigates these handbooks in order to determine how immigration promoters in Canada at the close of the nineteenth century comprehended Western Canada’s position within the British imperial world. Although

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<sup>1</sup> Debates, House of Commons, 1898, 5936-37.

designed to encourage the resettlement of Western Canada, immigration handbooks also served as a lens that focused what I have identified as Canada's reverse imperial gaze.<sup>2</sup> And it is through this reverse imperial gaze that students of colonialism are able to observe how metropolitan ideals, colonial realities, and the tensions that arose in-between were understood, maintained, and refracted by the peripheries.

Clifford Sifton's desire to tell "the truth" was constantly replicated in the opening comments of all immigration handbooks. Such statements greeted the reader and confirmed that, "the information in this pamphlet [was] compiled, in as far as possible, from official sources."<sup>3</sup> Acton Burrows further demonstrated that exaggeration was not only a topic to be avoided by those encouraging immigration, but it was also something that those in the United States whole heartedly partook in. "Where is the best place to go?" inquired Burrows,

The writer of these pages endeavours to answer: not by gushing, exaggerated, Americanized puff of a fancied El Dorado, or by holding out the inducement of a land flowing with milk and honey, but by producing from official and authentic sources evidence of the great fertility of the region which this pamphlet treats; of its

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<sup>2</sup> I use "resettlement" in the same fashion as Cole Harris, The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographic Change, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997. My concept of the term, reverse imperial gaze, has emanated from studies of colonial Australia which have analyzed how colonial Australians understood Britishness and ideas of "home". Andrew Hassam, Through Australian Eyes: Colonial Perceptions of Imperial Britain, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000 and Angela Woollacott, To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture, Province of Manitoba: Information for Intending Emigrant, Ottawa, 1874, 1.

suitability for settlement, and of the positive assurance of prosperity which can be given to those who locate within its borders."<sup>4</sup>

Such remarks served to reassure the intending immigrant that the "advice to colonists" provided within immigration handbooks was both accurate and truthful. Evaluating the accuracy of the "useful and practical hints" that immigration handbooks provided to intending immigrants needs to be considered. In order to ease the transition from the metropole to this outpost of empire, a handbook advertised that "nothing will be stated in this pamphlet which cannot be absolutely relied upon."<sup>5</sup> This thesis is grounded in a close textual reading of almost sixty of these immigration handbooks printed between 1867 and 1911.<sup>6</sup> However, my emphasis on the textual is by no means unproblematic.

Immigration handbooks, like all primary documents, are valuable for what they advertised, but they are equally important for what they chose to omit. In his analysis of immigration handbooks **Patrick A. Dunae** suggests that although the information contained within these promotional materials "projected an enticing image of Canada to the outside world," they also

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<sup>4</sup> Acton Burrows, North Western Canada: Its Climate, Soil and Productions with a Sketch of its Natural Features and Social Condition, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1880, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Agriculture, Dominion of Canada: The Province of Manitoba and the North-West Territory, Information for Intending Immigrants, Ottawa, 1879, 3.

<sup>6</sup> All the handbooks used in this thesis are housed at the Dafoe Library at the University of Manitoba. They are reproduced on microfiche and are cataloged by both the C.I.H.M. and PEEL bibliographies.

revealed how Canada perceived both itself and prospective immigrants.<sup>7</sup> Unintentionally, Dunae's study illustrates the obviously fabricated nature of these sources. Alexander Begg, author of such handbooks as the Practical Hand-book and Guide to Manitoba and the North-West and What Farmers Say, serves as an example of this. Dunae attests that "for the most part," Begg's handbook, What Farmer's Say conveyed the "actual" testimony of farmers in the region. This comment persists even after Dunae had uncovered sufficient evidence to suggest that the reality constructed by immigration promoters and then advertised to the world was, to say the least, questionable. The following "unsuitable" reply was omitted by Begg in his production of the handbook.

...Among those omitted was that of a Kentish man who resided near Beulah, Manitoba. In reply to the question, "How do you spend time during winter?" the man wrote: "Trying to keep warm." In answer to a question concerning his overall opinion of the West, he wrote: "Damn fraud".<sup>8</sup>

Descriptions of Western Canada within the pages of immigration handbooks were first and foremost designed to advertise the attractiveness of the region. Comments such as those Alexander Begg encountered which would counter the desired aims of immigration promoters were often omitted from the content of handbooks. Sarah Carter's most recent work on captivity narratives in Western Canada questions the authenticity of testimonies made by female resettlers in the handbook What Women Say of the Canadian

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<sup>7</sup> Patrick A. Dunae, "Promoting the Dominion: Records and the Canadian Immigration Campaign," Archivaria, No. 19 (1984-84), 92-93.

<sup>8</sup> Dunae, "Promoting the Dominion," 86.

North-West. Carter comments that this pamphlet, published by the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886, was aimed at a female readership and gave a very positive impression of life which "was supposedly based on the actual testimonies of women settlers."<sup>9</sup> Identifying the selective nature of immigration handbooks does not make them less valuable primary sources. Problematizing the authenticity of the information and testimonies within immigration handbooks does not decrease their significance, but rather enables students of colonialism the opportunity to assess their influence within the British imperial world of the late nineteenth century.

The immigration handbooks published by official Government of Canada Printers, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, and other independent printing houses in Manitoba, Central Canada, and Great Britain reflected, while simultaneously acting to constitute, the imperial world of which they were a part. It is thereby necessary to clarify that this thesis is not about actual immigrants who resettled in Western Canada. Rather, this thesis examines the ways in which immigration handbooks advertised the imperial character of Western Canada for those in the metropole. Moreover, by critically reading immigration handbooks, students of colonialism are able to discern not only how the character and politics of imperialism framed these rich sources, but also how colonial gender and racial constructs were

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<sup>9</sup> Sarah Carter, Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West, Montreal - Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997, 4.

understood and promoted by Canadians at the close of the nineteenth century.

The Government of Canada, in its attempts to encourage immigration, embarked upon an exhaustive advertising campaign to resettle Western Canada. It is clear that the public face of immigration guides was designed to advertise Western Canada as an outpost of empire beyond comparison. By educating intending immigrants about the resources, opportunities, and progress that awaited, this "practical information" within handbooks was meant to ease the move from metropole to colony. The instructive nature of immigration handbooks was further animated with maps of Canada and the British Empire. These maps greeted readers and were accompanied by histories that aggrandized both the British Empire and Canada's position within it.

Immigration handbooks encouraging the resettlement of Western Canada advertised that "bona-fide settlers" (understood as single, white, British males) were required. Wanted: "practical, hardworking, stalwart young men," one handbook proclaimed. Another requested "farm labourers," "tenant farmers," or "stock raisers." And yet another encouraged "tillers of the soil, farmers and stock raisers, mechanics, or any males with pluck or muscle" to immigrate to Western Canada.<sup>10</sup> As male resettlers began to migrate westward, the male population grew disproportionately to the female one.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Spence, Useful and Practical Hints for the Settler on Canadian Prairie Lands and for the Guidance of Intending British Emigrants to Manitoba and the North-West of Canada, 1878; Thomas Spence, Manitoba

In attempts to redress the predominately masculine character of Western Canada, immigration handbooks made token efforts to obtain female resettlers to fill vacancies as domestic servants or wives; ads promised "work as servant girls with a wage of 12 dollars to 25 dollars per month and board" or the possibility of marriage because "women are seldom in the Province [Manitoba] long before they are married to some of the prosperous young fellows already settled."<sup>12</sup> Handbooks were, however, quick to acknowledge that there was "no great opening for women as private governesses or companions, or in what are sometimes described as the lighter callings."<sup>13</sup> Immigration pamphlets not only discouraged the immigration of upper class women, but they also discouraged the migration of upper class men. As Thomas Spence, a handbook author from Manitoba, wrote: "professional men and clerks should not come unless with means to take up land and commence the life of a farmer."<sup>14</sup> When advertising for immigrants,

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and the North-West of the Dominion its Resources and Advantages to the Emigrant and Capitalist as Compared with the Western States of America, Toronto: Hunter, Rose, and Co., 1871; The Colonial Office, Information for Emigrants to the British Colonies, Issued by the Colonial Office, 1880.

<sup>11</sup> Adele Perry, "'Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men': Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality, and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," BC Studies (1995), 27-43; and Cecilia Danysk, "'A Bachelor's Paradise': Homesteaders, Hired Hands, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1880-1930," in Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat Eds., Making Western Canada: Essays on European Colonization and Settlement, Toronto, Garamond Press, 1996, 154-85.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Devereux Ennis, Important Information for Intending Settlers in Manitoba, Liverpool: Turner and Dunnett, 1882, 22.

<sup>13</sup> The Government of Manitoba, Manitoba, Official Information for Investors and Settlers, 1893, 28-9.

<sup>14</sup> Spence, Useful and Practical Hints for the Settler on Canadian Prairie Lands, 8.

handbooks not only acknowledged the types of immigrants that Canada wanted, but they also established parameters that disqualified others. These categories, however, were based upon the quality of one's character and were very ambiguous in nature. Such restrictions were subtly advertised in sections titled, "The Proper Classes to Settle in Canada" or more acutely in sections titled, "Persons Wanted in Canada, And Immigration that is NOT Encouraged."<sup>15</sup>

Often supplementing these discussions of "who should emigrate" were the "advantages and attractions" of life in the Canadian West.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, the agricultural potential of the prairies was the most common feature that immigration handbooks advertised. Handbooks advertised to the metropole that Western Canada contained the "best wheat lands" and "the finest agricultural country in the world;" the North Western Territories were advertised as a place for all "who desire comfort and prosperity." In addition, the healthiness of the climate, the quality of the soil, and the Dominion Lands Act were repeatedly emphasized.<sup>17</sup>

As Serge Courville's recent analysis of French Canadian immigration pamphlets suggests, if there were various ways to present colonization in the

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<sup>15</sup> Original emphasis. Minister of the Interior, Letters from Settlers in Canada: Official and Other Information for Intending Settlers, London: Mc Corquodale & co., 1896, 45-6.

<sup>16</sup> G. H. Wyatt, A Reliable Guide For Settlers, Travellers, And Investors in the City of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the New North-West, Toronto: 1881.

<sup>17</sup> G H Wyatt, A Reliable Guide For Settlers, 1881; Spence, Useful and Practical Hints for the Settler on Canadian Prairie Lands, n.d; Spence, Manitoba and the North-West of the Dominion, 1871; The Colonial Office, Information for Emigrants to the British Colonies, 1880.

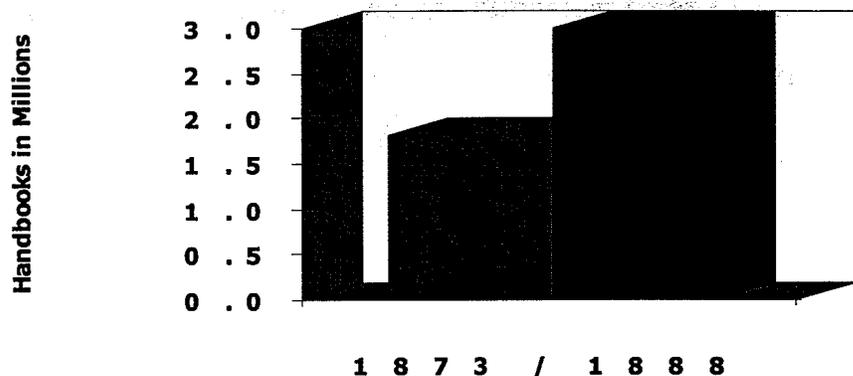
nineteenth century, there was only one conventional "matrix" that content could be arranged around, in relation to time, place, and prospective readership.<sup>18</sup> Courville identifies five themes that run throughout French Canadian immigration handbooks, which also appear in the English handbooks used in this study. First, colonial promotional material emphasised England's mission to bring God and civilization to previously undiscovered, uncivilised, and unsettled areas of the world. Second, handbooks reproduced the English belief that their race had a "manifest destiny" to exploit the riches of the earth and make them available to other nations. Third, virtue and patriotism were advertised as central to processes of immigration and colonisation, and were to be executed only by moral and honourable men. Fourth, handbooks promoted immigration as a method to alleviate poverty, vagrancy, and the religious tensions of the metropole, while remaking British subjects into respectable men in the colonies. And fifth, immigration handbooks justified the taking of the "vacant" lands that the Aboriginals only "passed" over as homes for white immigrants. Such was the stuff of immigration pamphlets.

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<sup>18</sup> Serge Courville, "Part of the British Empire Too: French Canada and Colonization Propaganda," a paper presented at *The British World Conference II*, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, July 2003.

Table I:1  
Number of Immigration Handbooks Published, 1873 & 1888

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Source: Compiled from Reports of the Committee on Immigration and Colonization, Canada House of Commons, Journal, 1873, App. no. 7, 3 and the Report of the Committee on Immigration and Colonization, Canada House of Commons, Journal, 1888, App. no. 5, 77.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century the federal government spent a significant amount of money funding the publication of immigration handbooks. Although all of the handbooks consulted and cited in this thesis are English language texts, similar reproductions existed in French, German, Icelandic, and Dutch. Most of the handbooks examined were between thirty and sixty pages in length, though some were as short as ten or as long as one hundred pages. They utilized a very similar structure and approach in their encouragement of Canadian immigration.

The initial campaigns to encourage the resettlement of Western Canada bore little fruit, but Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and his Conservative government continued to increase the number of immigration handbooks published. In 1873, no fewer than two million handbooks were printed, but by 1888 this number had increased to three million (see Table

I:1). Expenses by the federal government for the printing of immigration handbooks had reached almost \$60,000.00 by 1901. This amount was approaching 20% of the total amount spent to sustain Canada's immigration initiatives.

Table I:2  
 Printing Expenses for Immigration Materials: Handbooks, Posters, Etc

Year	Britain/Ireland	Continental	United States	Total
1892	\$13,805.63	\$248.00	\$12,668.19	\$26,721.82
1893	\$19,033.68	\$620.00	\$31,105.45	\$50,759.13
1894	\$15,420.85	\$4,175.20	\$30,297.75	\$49,893.80
1895	\$8,669.02	\$519.05	\$2,508.15	\$11,696.22
1896	\$8,816.86	\$600.00	\$1,844.31	\$11,261.17
1897	\$11,091.00	\$963.45	\$6,352.09	\$18,406.54
1898	\$17,611.56	\$2,220.59	\$28,197.44	\$48,029.59
1899	\$18,679.23	\$2,449.81	\$29,277.35	\$50,406.39
1900	\$26,150.73	\$2,463.05	\$24,988.15	\$53,601.93
1901	\$26,931.21	\$1,934.86	\$30,161.12	\$59,027.19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$116,209.77</b>	<b>\$16,194.01</b>	<b>\$197,400.0</b>	<b>\$398,210.32</b>

Compiled from: Debates, House of Commons, 17 April 1902; 2957-2960

As the large body of literature on Canadian immigration history illustrates, under the guidance of Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier (1896-1911) there was a significant increase in the amount of government expenditures pertaining to immigration. Laurier's campaign to colonize Western Canada and assert federal dominion over the North Western Territories was spear-headed by the intrepid new Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton.<sup>19</sup> Under Sifton's direction and within the first year that the Liberals held office, federal

<sup>19</sup> D.J. Hall, Clifford Sifton: The Young Napoleon, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981; D.J. Hall, Clifford Sifton: A Lonely Eminence, 1901-1929, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986.

expenditures for immigration had increased more than 100% to \$261, 194.90. In 1905 when Sifton stepped down from his post as Minister of the Interior, the annual cost of funding Canada's immigration programme was fast approaching one million dollars, and was becoming an ever increasing concern to Canadians (See Table I:3). "There is no question that the people of the west feel more strongly on than this immigration question," stated Frank Oliver, Sifton's ministerial successor. "And there is nothing that they more earnestly resented than the idea of settling up the country with people who will be a drag on our civilization and progress. We did not go out to that country simply to produce wheat. We went to build up a nation, a civilization, a social system that we could enjoy and be proud of, and transmit to our children"<sup>20</sup>

Table I:3  
Total Federal Expenditure for Immigration – 1 July 1891 to 30 June 1905

Year	Amount
1891-92	\$177,604.82
1892-93	\$180,677.43
1893-94	\$202,235.52
1894-95	\$195,652.97
1895-96	\$120,199.00
1896-97	\$127,428.14
1897-98	\$261,194.90
1898-99	\$255,878.88
1899-1900	\$434,562.61
1900-01	\$444,729.63
1901-02	\$484,841.55
1902-03	\$642,913.74
1903-04	\$744,788.00
1904-05	\$972,356.69

Source: Debates, House of Commons, 1902, 2957; and Debates, House of Commons, 1905.

<sup>20</sup> Debates, House of Commons, 1901, 2939.

Under the British North American (BNA) Act of 1867 immigration was contained in a single section – Section 95. Immigration was to be a shared jurisdiction of both federal and provincial governments, but the federal government maintained paramount in cases of conflict.<sup>21</sup> On 22 June 1869, Canada passed its first separate immigration act, “An Act Respecting Immigration and Immigrants.” Such an Act had become essential, for the Government of Canada had recently purchased the North West Territories from the Hudson's Bay Company for a price tag of 1.5 million dollars. The landscape of Western Canada was thus transformed, and the government was eager to colonize this newly acquired territory.

Land surveyors were sent to the Red River Colony to measure, identify, and chart the lands which would then be advertised in handbooks as “open for settlement.” Ignoring the narrow river lot system used by the Métis, these surveyors imposed a square lot system upon the people and the landscape that asserted both imperial and Canadian authority over the region. Led by Louis Riel, the Métis inhabitants of Red River, upset with the Government of Canada's capture of their lands, resisted this intrusion. The result of this contact, the Red River Resistance of 1869-70, became the catalyst that enabled the initially small, “postage stamp colony” of Red River to enter Confederation as the Province of Manitoba in 1870.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “British North American Act,” Statutes of Canada, 30 & 31 (1867), Section 95.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Ens, Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.