“A Commemoration ... A Celebration ... A Cultural Renewal”: Contesting Nationalisms in Commemorations of the Batoche Centenary, 1985

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Abstract

1985 marked the centennial anniversary of the Battle of Batoche, the final and most significant battle of the 1885 Northwest Resistance. This battle saw Métis combatants fighting against the imposition of colonial governance structures on Indigenous lands in Western Canada and struggling for their territorial rights over these lands. One hundred years after the battle, Métis organizations, as well as provincial and federal governments, organized events to celebrate and commemorate this important piece of history. This paper juxtaposes the commemorative initiatives lead by Canadian governments against those of the Métis community to demonstrate how histories of colonial violence complicated and problematized commemorations and demonstrations of historical remembering in the twentieth century.

Résumé

1985 marqua le centième anniversaire de la bataille de Batoche, la dernière et plus importante bataille de la Rébellion du Nord-Ouest de 1885. À Batoche, les combattants métis luttèrent contre l’imposition de structures de gouvernance coloniale sur les territoires autochtones dans l’Ouest du Canada et tentèrent de défendre leurs droits territoriaux. Cent ans après la bataille, les organisations métisses, ainsi que les gouvernements provinciaux et fédéral, ont organisé des événements afin de célébrer et de commémorer cet important événement historique. Cet article compare les initiatives commémoratives menées par les gouvernements canadiens avec celles mises en place par des communautés métisses afin de démontrer comment les histoires de la violence coloniale compliquèrent et problématisèrent les activités commémoratives et les démonstrations de la souvenance au XXe siècle.

In the summer of 1985, New Breed magazine, a periodical produced by the Association of Métis and Non-Status Indians of Saskatchewan (AMNSIS), published an issue commemorating the centenary of the 1885 Battle of
Batoche. This battle was the final conflict of the 1885 Northwest Resistance, fought between the Métis and Canadian forces. Karen LaRocque, a young Métis woman from Saskatchewan, contributed an article discussing the experience of Métis youths in the Batoche centennial commemorations. LaRocque summed up her sentiments regarding the Batoche centenary by stating succinctly, “the Centenary brings us together as a Metis Nation and rekindles in this generation the flame that once burned within our ancestors’ hearts.” In this way, LaRocque spoke to the connection between Batoche’s centenary celebrations and the renewal and growth of Métis nationalism in western Canada recurring theme in New Breed magazine throughout that important year.

Since the magazine’s first publication in 1969, New Breed has focused on encouraging political and cultural awareness among Métis people across Canada, in large part through the dissemination of Métis history. Throughout its years of production, New Breed has included frequent references to the nineteenth-century battles fought between the Métis and the Canadian governments. But 1985 proved to be a particularly significant year for Métis collective memory. Throughout 1985, New Breed commemorated the Battle of Batoche, celebrating it as the event which had established the Métis “as true Aboriginal people of Canada.” Indeed, despite Métis’s long-standing self-definition as Indigenous people, the Canadian government had only formally recognized them as Aboriginal recently, as part of the Constitution Act, 1982. For the Métis, presenting their own histories and commemorations of Batoche was a means to promote political engagement and national activism among their people across Canada, as well as promoting their anti-colonial agenda. Commemorating the centenary provided an occasion to focus on modern Métis political, social, and cultural questions, and reaffirm their nationhood through presentations of their own historical interpretation of the events of 1885.

Métis political and community organizations were not the only groups that were deeply involved in commemorating the Batoche centennial. The Canadian government also invested significant energy and funds in celebrating

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3 Chris Andersen, Métis: Race, Recognition, and the Struggle for Indigenous People (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 127.
this important event. While *New Breed* and other Métis community organizations focused on forwarding an anti-colonial narrative in their commemorative efforts, Canadian governments saw celebrating the centenary as a means to commemorate Batoche as part of a national heritage, one based in territorial expansion, military prowess, and the success of an Anglo-Canadian majority. For the Métis, commemorating the same event was a means to counter these traditional narratives, to present the Métis as a strong and resilient people, and to promote their cause of greater Indigenous self-determination in the twentieth century. Along with the symbolic empowerment involved in changing narrative of Batoche, the Métis took 1985 as an opportunity to attempt to regain land lost following the battle, encourage the development of Métis artists, and promote a sense of unity in Métis politics going forward. Batoche served both as a symbolic and physical space around which these two bodies centred their conflicting narratives of historical and modern relations between Canada and Indigenous people.

To understand the commemorations of Batoche in 1985, it is necessary to understand the events of one hundred years earlier. The 1885 Resistance was, at its core, a continuation of resistance movements that the Métis had been undertaking in western Canada throughout the century, as they struggled against the imposition of colonial governance structures and their disregard for Indigenous sovereignty over western lands.\(^4\) The Battle of Batoche took place between May 9 and May 12, 1885. This followed a Métis victory at Fish Creek, also known as Tourond’s Coulee, on April 24 of that year.\(^5\) Following that victory, the Métis retreated to Batoche to defend the settlement from a forthcoming Canadian offensive. They held off Northwest Mounted Police forces for three days, but being badly outnumbered and undersupplied, were ultimately forced to surrender to Canadian forces.\(^6\) Following their defeat at Batoche, many Métis were dispersed across western Canada and the northern United States, and Louis Riel, the leader of the insurrection, was hanged on November 16, 1885.\(^7\) After the uprising of 1885, the Métis largely retreated into the background of Canadian political life, though Batoche continued to represent the ongoing struggle of the Métis in North America through a

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\(^5\) Ibid, 138-140.
\(^6\) Ibid, 139.
\(^7\) Ibid, 139; 141-142.
collective memory of the battles fought there. For the Métis, the history of this battle came to represent what Paul L.A.H. Chartrand has called the “spirit of resistance”—Métis people’s dedication to struggle for their autonomy in the face of continued colonial incursions. Batoche was also considered significant to larger Canadian national narrative, however, and in 192 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board declared the settlement at Batoche a national historic site, which is today administered by Parks Canada.

Historical scholarship has recognized the importance of including past events in an understanding of Métis peoplehood, most notably in the work of Chris Andersen. Andersen outlines his use of an “events-based analysis” in discussions of a Métis national identity to “highlight the relational peoplehood-based elements of this history as important antagonistic moments that sharpened relations between … Métis and non-Métis Plains communities.” Unlike other scholars, who have focus on cultural factors or historic ‘Great Men’ when defining Métis peoplehood, Andersen explains that the Métis nation was created and affirmed through periods of conflict. Similarly, Linda Tuhiwai Smith focuses on the process of remembering as a decolonizing tool, noting the importance of remembering painful pasts for constructing Indigenous identities and establishing their relationships with places and experiences. For the Métis, remembering nineteenth-century conflicts served as a recollection of their national identity, and its creation through disputes with colonial bodies.

It is of course, not a uniquely Indigenous experience to frame communal identities in relation to historical events. Jocelyn Létourneau describes the comparable importance of historic memory, especially that rooted in conflict, for Quebecers. He explains that through the memory of past adversity many Quebecers mediate relations of self and “other” within Canada’s national context. He also suggests that there is an aspect of responsibility found in the

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10 Ibid, 110.
11 Ibid.
active processes of memory — his theory focuses on re-acknowledgement and de-acknowledgement, that is, the processes of deciding which histories to recall and commemorate, and which aspects of the past must be liberated from the public memory. Through these processes, Létourneau explains, modern heirs use the history passed from their ancestors to create the most usable past for the community going forward.\textsuperscript{14} Examining \textit{New Breed}'s focus on Métis history, particularly its focus on Batoche in 1985, suggest that these same processes of remembering, and their use in the construction of a collective memory, apply to the Métis as well.

Scholars of collective memory have developed diverse interpretations of the use and meaning of this term. It is therefore important at the outset to clarify the definition being used in this study. For the purposes of this research, Ron Eyerman’s definition, speaking to the Durkheimian tradition of collective memory, proves most useful. Eyerman describes collective memory as “recollections of a shared past which are passed on through ongoing processes of commemoration, officially sanctioned rituals which remember a group through calling upon a common heritage, with a shared past as a central component.”\textsuperscript{15} Within this academic tradition, Maurice Halbwach’s suggests that “the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society,” once again speaking to the active nature of collective memory.\textsuperscript{16} This is, of course, not to suggest that memories of 1885 presented in \textit{New Breed} are somehow fictionalized, or are less than legitimate, but simply emphasizes that they are constructed within specific social, cultural, and political circumstances. In this way, these constructed memories can serve particular, community-oriented ends. As Jill Edy suggests, these shared memories of a common heritage, and the processes of commemoration that accompany them, can allow politically disempowered groups to undermine official agendas.\textsuperscript{17} In this way, community-based constructions of the memory of Batoche could democratize understandings of the past and serve as an anti-colonial tool.

Commemorative efforts related to the centennial of this battle, both within the Métis community and within federal and provincial governmental

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 14-16.
circles, engaged in one of the most fundamental questions of this event’s memory — what should it be called? According to Smith, debates over naming practices are based in attempts to retain control over meaning.\textsuperscript{18} In the March 1985 issue of \textit{New Breed}, an article titled “Métis to Regain Lost Spirit” dealt with this question, stating, “We refer to the conflicts as a resistance, not a rebellion, because our ancestors were resisting an oppressive federal force which was intent on destroying our culture and our people for their own insensitive and bigoted means.”\textsuperscript{19} This is in line with Darren Prefontaine’s explanation of the difference between “resistance” and “rebellion.” According to Prefontaine, the term “rebellion” implies that insurgents are acting against a legitimate political authority, and that their oppositional actions are necessarily quashed.\textsuperscript{20} In contrast, he posits that “resistance” has a positive connotation, hinting at justified struggles against the despotic rule.\textsuperscript{21} Since the 1950s, historians have begun to refer to Métis conflicts in the nineteenth century as resistance movements, rather than rebellions, although there is still some controversy regarding the use of these terms.\textsuperscript{22} Albert Braz, for example, accepts that the Red River dispute of 1869-1870 was a resistance, as the Métis were fighting to protect land which the Canadian government had no legal title to. However, he suggests that in the case of 1885, the Canadian government had legitimate claim to the territory in question, and thus the term rebellion should be used.\textsuperscript{23} According to Prefontaine, “Aboriginal resistances are reactions against colonization imposed on Indigenous populations by “Newcomers”,” and in this context Métis action in 1885 was a legitimate and justified response to the government’s failure to address Métis opposition to colonization.\textsuperscript{24} Within the context of these continued debates, the names that different organizations used to refer to 1885 were imbued with meaning.

\textit{New Breed} was not the only media source that recognized the political connotations associated with any names given to the 1885 conflicts. Arlene and Robin Karpan note in their 1985 “Saskatchewan Guide to Historic Sites of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item Smith, \textit{Decolonizing Methodologies}, 262.
\item Ibid, 3.
\item Albert Braz, \textit{The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Culture} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), IX.
\item Ibid.
\item Prefontaine, “1885: Rebellion or Resistance?” 3.
\end{footnotes}
Northwest Rebellion,” created with Government of Saskatchewan support, that:

the term “Rebellion” itself is controversial. Some prefer a term like “resistance” to refer to the actions taken by Métis and Indians to preserve their way of life against the onslaught of settlement and laws imposed by a distant and uncaring government. However, terms like “North West Rebellion” are used in this guide because that is the way the events have been recognized by history, and continue to be recognized by the general public.25

Clearly, the guide produced by the Karpans, even though it recognized and openly participated in the debates regarding the naming of 1885’s events, chose simply to uphold the status quo of these definitions. The authors further suggested here that the version of history reported by Anglo-Canadian academics was the legitimate interpretation of the past. They disregarded the Métis’s interpretation of the event, which cast it as a fight between two legitimate combatants. By noting that the term rebellion has been accepted by both “history” and “the general public,” the Karpans positioned the Euro-Settler Canadian population as both the creators of and the audience for these discussions, casting aside the Métis as active agents in events of the past and as makers of history.

Writing about the politics of naming the conflict in 2002, Parks Canada employee Alan McCullough suggested that while the term “resistance” appeared to represent more neutral power relations relating to the two opposing forces involved in the conflict, connotations of “resistance” as part of larger global activist movements severely limited this purported neutrality.26 However, when the remarks made in New Breed are compared to those made in “Saskatchewan Guide to Historic Sites,” we can see that for the Métis authors of the magazine article, there was no pretence of neutrality — New Breed was purposely making a firmly political statement with their choice of terminology, unequivocally placing the Canadian government in the role of aggressors in 1885.

For both the Métis and government bodies, commemorations of the Battle of Batoche centred on the ability for each group to assert control over the narrative of the battle and its place in Canadian history. Struggles over how

this story is told have always been deeply politicized. Brian S. Osborne summarizes the dominant narrative of Batoche accepted throughout Canada in the early twentieth century, noting that it depicts “an account of a young nation-state overcoming an obstacle to its continental expansion.”27 This narrative established and continually reaffirmed an unequal power balance between the Métis, seen as the obstacle, and the Canadian government, seen as the protagonist in its grand westward expansion. This narrative also allowed English-Canada to present an image of themselves as “Good Christians,” claiming victory over the “uncivilized” groups of the West, establishing Batoche as part of a larger history of British imperialism.28 At the same time, the dominant Anglo-Canadian establishment used this narrative to demonstrate their independence from Britain by enforcing Canadian law and order without British intervention.29 These interpretations, cultivated in the decades following the resistance, have established Batoche as an important component of a national military and political narrative. This narrative largely disregards the Métis as part of this conflict, except as conquered, “uncivilized” obstacles.

During the second half of the twentieth century, Métis organizations set out to change the traditional narrative of this battle, and 1985 was the height of this effort. An article in *New Breed* from March 1985 unapologetically sought to reverse the traditional narrative of Batoche told from the English-Canadian point of view. The article firmly declared, “John A. MacDonald and his orangemen from eastern Canada were the real savages in this conflict,” in a clear attempt to reverse the relations of “civilized” and “uncivilized” established in earlier interpretations.30 The author confirmed his intent to change the perspectives of Batoche’s history through educational components of the centennial, stating that there “will be an attempt to promote a more positive image and create an understanding of our people and culture within the Canadian Mosaic.”31 These corrections to the standard narrative that had dominated Canadian memory of Batoche provide examples of the process Smith calls “reframing,” in which “indigenous people resist being boxed and

29 Ibid, 5-6.
31 Ibid.
labelled according to categories which do not fit.” Reframing the English-Canadian aggressors at Batoche as the “savages” was one way to defy previously established narratives of the conflict. For members of the Métis community, reframing the representation of their history at Batoche was certainly an important component of the commemorative events of 1985. Through education and Métis-centred commemoration, they sought to place themselves in categories which more appropriately represented their experience of the Resistance, depicting the Métis as legitimate combatants in a justified conflict, rather than simply violent, brutish impediments to Canadian expansion.

While McCullough suggests that the changing narrative of 1885 presented at the Batoche National Historic Site since the 1970s favoured the Métis narrative, ignoring the previously dominant interpretation encouraged by the Anglo-Canadian majority, this does not appear to be completely true. David Adam Hutton has shown that while Parks Canada encouraged cooperative interpretation of the narrative at Batoche, the organization’s conservative mandate limited their ability to do so. In public consultations over the Batoche site in 1980, members of the public suggested that the emphasis not be placed on wars, but focus instead on Métis culture and society at Batoche. Although New Breed did not appear to agree completely, as commemorations of the battle were central to their coverage of the centenary, their intentions to celebrate 1985 as not only a commemoration, but also a cultural renewal suggests that the magazine was in line with the community member’s suggestion. In response, Parks Canada rejected the suggestion that the emphasis not be placed on conflict, noting that “a major factor in the early (1920s) commemoration of Batoche was its importance as a battle site in the Northwest Rebellion.” In this way, Parks Canada demonstrated its unwillingness to break from earlier interpretive focuses of the site, even as it worked to increase co-operation with the Métis community in the region. Despite the developing collaboration between the Métis community and Parks Canada in the operation of Batoche, the historic site did not adopt its shared

32 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 256.
33 McCullough, “Parks Canada and the 1885 Rebellion,” 163.
35 New Breed, February 1985, 12.
management strategy until 1998. Therefore, a disconnect clearly existed between the claims to co-operation and the actual actions that Parks Canada undertook to demonstrate these changes.

Perhaps the most significant contributions that Parks Canada made to the 1985 commemoration of Batoche were its restoration and construction projects undertaken in preparation for the centenary. 1985 saw the opening of a new, modern visitor centre at the Batoche National Historic Site. In the April 1985 issue of *New Breed*, an article celebrated the work that Parks Canada was doing to restore the Batoche battle site to its 1885 appearance, and encouraged Métis to participate in tours of the site operated by Parks Canada. Given the huge investment Parks Canada made in the restoration and interpretive projects at Batoche, it is clear that they did not neglect the site leading up to its important centenary. However, the comments in *New Breed* accompanying coverage of Parks Canada’s commemorative efforts show that differences of opinion persisted between the Métis community and federal heritage bodies. For Tim Low, the chair of the Batoche Centenary Corporation (BCC) planning committee, the government’s zeal in celebrating 1985 undermined some aspects of the commemoration that the Métis hoped would be the event’s focus:

Two years ago we were trying to get both levels of government interested in the 1985 celebrations for what it meant to us. They showed little interest then but now they have turned it into a big splash for everyone … instead of focusing on 1985 for what it means to the Metis and Western Canada, which is what we tried to do, they have turned it into something bigger, Heritage Year. By expanding the focus of 1985, they have destroyed the significance of this special year to the Metis Nation.

For Low, although federal heritage organizations and local Métis organizations were working towards the same goal — the commemoration of 1885 — government’s methods for doing so conflicted with the Métis’s goals for the

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event. Although collaboration between the Métis and the federal government was improving compared to earlier commemorations, where Indigenous people were entirely left out, profound differences of opinion about how to celebrate the centenary still abounded.\(^{41}\) For the Métis, Batoche was a focal point of their history; the government’s focus on celebrating Batoche as part of Canada’s national narrative undermined their unique claim to this history as part of an anti-colonial narrative of Indigenous self-determination.

As Parks Canada was involved in restoring parts of the Batoche site to their 1885 appearance, the Métis of Saskatchewan were fighting to obtain lands near this historic settlement. In January 1985, *New Breed* published an article detailing the funding the Batoche Centenary Corporation had requested from various levels of government for commemorative projects that year. The article reported that a submission had been made for $2.9 million in funding for centenary projects including land acquisition, noting that “land purchase was and still is an immediate priority.”\(^{42}\) At the time the article was printed, the BCC had received $4000 in government funding for land purchase, which would be matched by AMNSIS.\(^{43}\) Tim Low later outlined the sought-after land, noting that it consisted of three separate parcels, which together amounted to 280 acres, across the road from the land used for Batoche celebrations in past years.\(^{44}\)

The Métis planned to use the land to establish various services, including a cultural centre, a race track, a campground, and a conference and meeting space.\(^{45}\) The first of the three sections, a 90-acre tract of land for which the Métis had been working to secure title for some time, was obtained in April of 1985.\(^{46}\) While both Parks Canada and Métis community organizations were involved in projects related to the land and physical structures at Batoche, the goals of these projects were much different. For Parks Canada, restoring components of the National Historic Site was done to increase tourism and recognize the historical value of Batoche. For the Métis, obtaining rights to lands near Batoche was a statement of their continued presence on the land.

\(^{41}\) Worsfield, “Enshrined in Golden Memories,” 1.
\(^{42}\) “PC’s upstage Batoche,” *New Breed*, January 1985, 5.
\(^{43}\) Ibid.
\(^{44}\) “Tim Low on Batoche,” *New Breed*, April 1985, 12.
\(^{45}\) Ibid, 13.
— the Métis at Batoche were not stuck in a nineteenth-century past, but continued to be part of the local landscape and community.

The Métis and Canadian governments’ conflicting visions for the Batoche site was further demonstrated during 1980 public consultations related to the future of the site. When a member of the public commented that Batoche was strictly a Métis site, and wondered how Parks Canada could best deal with that fact given that there was nothing in their mandate to address this issue, the organization replied, “Parks Canada appreciates the importance of Batoche to the Métis people, but this site is of national significance and should be made available to all Canadians.”\(^{47}\) This assertion of authority, declaring Batoche a site of national historic significance, rather than simply a site of significance for the Métis, was itself a demonstration of power on behalf of the government body.\(^ {48}\) As Steven Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman have shown in their study of Rodden Island, South Africa, both subaltern and dominant groups share the practice of anchoring their memories in place.\(^ {49}\) In this sense, Batoche remained a geographic space in which the Canadian government situated a national history, even as Métis sought to link their own national history to this very same space.

The BCC made clear the imperative of situating Batoche in a Métis-specific history, rather than the imposed Anglo-Canadian narrative. In a pamphlet the organization produced in 1985, which detailed Métis organizational plans for commemoration at Batoche, the group noted, “The Northwest Resistance is the most important symbol of the Metis nation. For most Canadians, the Northwest ‘Rebellion’ is simply a fascinating part of the history of Western Canada. But for the Metis people it is much more.”\(^ {50}\) New Breed also stressed the importance of spreading the message of Batoche’s significance earlier that year, not only within a settler narrative of the country, but as part of a narrative of Indigenous self-determination. The author of the article “Métis to Regain Lost Spirit” went on that note that one of the foremost goals of the centenary celebrations at Batoche was to “make a significant

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impact on the non-Aboriginal Canadians’ understandings of Aboriginal history and heritage.” Therefore, the centenary celebrations were important not just for Métis to celebrate their own history at Batoche, but to make sure that this history was properly represented to all of Canada.

The cultural components of the celebrations at Batoche were equally important for the Métis community. For the Métis, the Batoche centenary was not simply about commemorating a battle, be it as part of a Canadian or Métis-specific narrative, but also about encouraging Métis cultural production and awareness of Métis cultural practices. In this way, Métis commemorations and events at Batoche are examples of the processes Smith describes as revitalizing and regenerating. The importance of supporting the continued growth of Métis cultural and artistic practices was evident in the September 1985 issue of *New Breed*, which recapped the events of the summer. In an article titled “Back to Batoche Rising Stars,” the magazine celebrated those who had participated in arts and culture competitions at Back to Batoche, stating, “If the Metis people excelled in any area at all this year at Batoche, it would have to be in the area of entertainment.” Indeed, significant numbers of the commemorative events scheduled around 1985’s Back to Batoche Days, the annual Métis community celebration scheduled each July, focused on artistic production and encouraged Métis from across the country to participate.

In February of that year, *New Breed* had announced national poetry and song-writing contests with winners to be declared at Back to Batoche Days. The theme for the event clearly indicated the goal of the Métis organizations in planning and carrying out these cultural commemorative events: “a commemoration (of those who fell in battle) … a celebration (of the continuing strength of the Metis nation) … a cultural renewal.” This theme combined the imperatives of commemorating the battle with the importance of celebrating and encouraging cultural production and awareness among the modern Métis. As stated in an issue of *New Breed* from March 1985, “we hope through the commemoration of 1885, that we will be able to make important strides in developing, encouraging and providing opportunities for Aboriginal artists, writers, actors, musicians and intellectuals whose role in any people’s

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52 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 246-247.
national life is so very important.” In this way, Batoche represented much more than a historic battle, but an opportunity for renewed creativity and engagement from the Métis community. The resurgence of Métis culture and the memory of the Métis defeat at Batoche were intimately intertwined in commemorative efforts. The Canadian forces’ victory at Batoche was not presented as a defeat for the Métis, but as a catalyst for the modern revitalization of the Métis nation.

Alongside the goal of promoting cultural awareness and creative production among the Métis was the important goal of bringing the community together to celebrate their history and culture. In this way, the Back to Batoche celebration which took place in 1985 was an example of the decolonizing practice Smith describes as “connecting.” According to Smith, “Connecting … involves connecting people to their traditional lands through the restoration of specific rituals and practices… Connecting is related to issues of identity and place, to spiritual relationships and community well-being.” The focus on connecting within the Métis community was emphasized in New Breed, allowing the magazine itself to be an agent of this connection.

In April 1985, Tim Low, the chair of the BCC gave an interview to New Breed about the upcoming centenary celebrations. Low noted that “we have been promoting these celebrations as the homecoming of the Metis. We spoke with the Metis National Council, the Native Council of Canada, and anyone else who could help in getting the word out. We want Metis everywhere to come home to Batoche.” Low clearly saw Batoche as a place in which the Métis nation could connect to their lands, their culture, and their history. Low went on to note the role that New Breed played in this process, remarking that “organizations such as the New Breed are helping to ensure that Metis people everywhere hear the invitation to return this summer.” By publishing regular advertisements for and coverage of Back to Batoche events, New Breed provided a platform from which to encourage Métis connection and community involvement in commemorative events.

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56 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 248.
58 Ibid.
Furthermore, as Shannon Avison and Michael Meadows suggest of Aboriginal newspapers in general, the magazine presented an opportunity for the Métis community to establish itself within a media space usually occupied by mainstream, non-Indigenous media.\textsuperscript{59} But \textit{New Breed} did more than simply claim media space — it provided a platform for the entire Métis community to engage in Batoche commemorations, even for those who were unable to attend the events throughout the summer of 1985. The coverage and photographs of the events, published following the completion of Back to Batoche Days, allowed those who had not attended to still bear witness to, and engage with, the commemorative and cultural events that took place that summer. Issues of \textit{New Breed} in the summer of 1985 also included many letters written by both community members and government officials, facilitating public conversation about the meaning and importance of Batoche and Métis history. The magazine allowed a dispersed Métis population to feel a sense of connectivity to the commemorative and political events taking place that summer without necessarily being physically present.

Within government-sponsored commemorative material, the goal of connecting was secondary to the recognition of historic events. Rather than focusing on the knowledge of Métis history within the Métis community, the “Saskatchewan Guide to Historic Sites of the Northwest Rebellion” urged interested parties to “gain a deeper understanding of the North-West Rebellion by researching the subject at libraries and archives.”\textsuperscript{60} Unlike the celebrations promoted by the BCC, which focused on community connectedness and reframing the narrative of the Battle of Batoche, the type of historical tourism the Karpans encouraged in their guide served to reinforce the Euro-Canadian dominant narrative of the event. Throughout most of the twentieth century, most materials published about the Northwest Resistance in this period were produced by Euro-Canadian authors, and portrayed only a standard colonial narrative of the events.\textsuperscript{61} By encouraging visitors to further their knowledge through published materials, the Karpans reinforced the dominance of these published narratives over the Métis interpretations that were being put forth in Métis-centred centenary commemorations.


1985’s Back to Batoche celebration served largely as a means to gather members of the diverse and widespread Métis community at an important historic location for the Métis nation. This gathering of the Métis people included a focus not only on Métis coming together, but also on their political and social engagement as part of the process of connecting. Karen LaRocque provided further insight into what it meant to be a Métis person taking part in the Batoche celebrations when she wrote:

… standing on the land where our struggle began, will unite us and give us the determination to work harder to accomplish the dreams and aspirations of our ancestors. It will strengthen the knowledge and bonds of the Metis people. It will increase our determination to control our own destiny.62

The emotional connections between the past and the present, which encouraged contemporary political engagement, were noted with regards to a memorial service held at the Batoche cemetery: “As the Metis people take those traditional steps to the gravesite of our fallen brothers they will once again, as always feel the sting of eternal years which call on the painful memories of yesterday.”63 The emotional pain of events of the past were depicted as continuing into the present; they encouraged modern Métis to fight to rectify the wrongs done to their ancestors as part of a healing process. Like LaRocque’s statement, these words published in New Breed connected modern Métis identities and political imperatives to a shared past of struggle. They also showed that connections between past Métis activism and contemporary political engagement were solidified by unity, fraternity, and community engagement.

Youth played an integral part in reinforcing Métis connectedness in the commemorative events held at Batoche that year. One of the most celebrated events held in 1985, in conjunction with Back to Batoche days, was the first International Indigenous Youth Conference held between July 22 and 26 of that year.64 Sixty Indigenous youths from around the world came to Batoche for several days to participation in workshops and discussions of Indigenous issues.65 These youths were celebrated as the future of Indigenous peoples, “[continuing] the struggle that your elders have fought so long for.”66 The

66 Ibid, 9.
conference featured contributions from Saskatchewan Métis activists, such as Jim Sinclair and Maria Campbell, though the focus of the event was creating a global Indigenous community in order to address their common colonial experiences.67

Métis youths were seen as particularly important in the events of 1985, with coverage of commemorations noting that “the proud children of this hardy nation are perhaps the greatest single element that has ensured its enduring presence on the North American political, economic, and cultural scenes.”68 They were heralded as central to the “continued survival of a great nation.”69 A group of thirty-eight youth from foster, group, and special care homes who had participated in a canoe brigade that travelled from Fort Edmonton to Batoche for the opening of Back to Batoche also received recognition in New Breed.70 These young canoers were noted for showing “the kind of spirit and honour that has come to be known as the ‘Metis Spirit’.”71 The act of canoeing along a traditional Métis water route through western Canada was a demonstration of a continued link to the past among Métis, and demonstrates attempts to reinforce this shared past among Métis youth. For all of the young Indigenous people who participated in commemorative events, a recognition of their past and of the shared conditions of oppression was important to promoting the continued presence of Indigenous people in the political and social spheres of Canada and nations around the world.

New Breed not only celebrated youth as part of the renewal of Métis national activism, but included all Métis in this process. Furthermore, for both youth and adults, the Métis struggle was presented in relation to a shared Métis past in conflict. AMNSIS president Jim Sinclair firmly situated the present struggle for Métis rights in a continuing historic struggle:

“We shall fail perhaps, but the rights for which we fought will never die.” These prophetic words of Louis Riel still ring true today. Although overwhelming numbers of armed Canadian troops overcame the 1885 Metis defence force, they could not quiet the dream to realize the inherent rights of a land base and self-government which is still in the hearts of the Metis today.72

67 Ibid, 8.
69 Ibid.
71 Ibid, 17.
72 Jim Sinclair, New Breed, July/August 1985, 8.
For Sinclair, the continuing struggle of the Métis for recognition of their Indigenous rights was at once rooted in nineteenth-century conflicts and contemporary efforts for Métis self-determination. In this way, images of the past became part of the process Smith has described among Indigenous people in which they “imagine a future … dream a new dream and set a new vision.”

Roberta Kelly, the chairperson of the BCC, focused on this process of envisioning in her submission to the July/August commemorative issue of New Breed, saying, “Our history and our present struggles are similar. We need to come together to renew and rebuild old ties. Let 1985 be a time of commemoration, renewal and a celebration of the possibilities of the future.”

Invoking the shared Métis past, then, more than simply constituting part of a commemorative celebration, contributed to the continued growth and reaffirmation of a strong and engaged Métis nation.

Picturing this shared Métis past in New Breed also took place through the emphasis placed on historic individuals. While the magazine suggested that those submitting entries to the song and poetry contests in 1985 “focus on the Métis people — past and present — as well as their leaders,” a strong focus was still put on portraying the grand figures of the Métis resistance, most notably Louis Riel. This is not surprising given that November 16, 1985 was also the hundredth anniversary of Riel’s execution. The covers of the May/June and November issues of the magazine both featured historic images of Louis Riel. Accompanying his photo on the cover of the November issue were the words, “Never To Be Forgotten.”

Printed on the back cover of this issue was a quote from Riel, spoken on the day of his execution: “I Pardon All My Enemies For The Love of The Good God.” Riel provided a powerful image of a strong Métis leader, who could at once present a symbol of historic resistance and provide a role model for continuing political efforts. Although the Métis stressed the importance of larger concepts like community cohesion and cultural awareness, the powerful image of Riel as a strong proponent of Métis sovereignty and self-determination could not be ignored within the magazine.

73 Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, 254.
74 Roberta Kelly, New Breed, July/August 1985, 7.
76 Cover, New Breed, November 1985, 1.
77 New Breed, November 1985, 34.
Among the Métis community present at the 1980 Batoche public consultations, the question of the federal government granting a pardon to Riel continued to figure prominently in discussions of 1885. However, Parks Canada refused to respond to this question, noting that Riel’s pardon was outside their organization’s mandate. That the public continued to petition for Riel’s pardon in 1985 suggests that he still figured prominently in the collective memory of 1885. Seeking redress for his treatment following the Resistance was one way to rectify the historical record, which placed blame for the violence of 1885 on the Métis.

In other ways, Riel was a controversial figure. Large-scale Métis support of Riel complicated the traditional narrative that pervaded English Canada. While the narrative surrounding Riel put forth by the Canadian government purported to present an unbiased interpretation of the battle, focusing on collaboration with the Métis community, the public’s requests for Riel’s pardon in Parks Canada’s consultations show that federal government did not share the same goals as the Métis in regard to changing the narrative surrounding Riel’s execution. While the Métis sought to celebrate Riel as a hero of the historic Métis nation, the Canadian government continued to refuse to recognize him as such. Riel’s controversial status in 1985 showed the continued disagreement between Canadian governments and the Métis concerning who was at fault for the resistance.

Métis community organizations, such as New Breed magazine and the Batoche Centenary Corporation, took the 1985 centenary celebrations as an occasion not just to commemorate the events of 1885, but also as a means by which to encourage the growth of Métis community cohesion, cultural production, and political engagement. Although government bodies and Métis organizations worked together on many aspects of the 1985 centenary, the historical interpretations presented by these groups in commemorative materials remained in conflict. Métis organizations actively sought to reframe the existing colonial narrative of the battle, which government organizations continued to promote through their centennial celebrations. Through their commemorative efforts, Canadian governments perpetuated these previously established narratives of European superiority and reaffirmed the pre-eminence of settler histories over Indigenous interpretations of the past.

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78 Parks Canada, “Public Comments on Themes and Objectives,” 6.
For the Métis community, undertaking various commemorative events in 1985 was part of a process of decolonization — reclaiming their voices in the historic narrative about their own ancestors. Commemorations of the centennial also presented an occasion for them to undertake more tangible changes to their place within Canadian society; acquisition of lost territories, greater attention for Métis artists, and a formal pardon for the Resistance’s leader, Louis Riel, were also part of their agenda in 1985. Although *New Breed* was only one small part of Métis commemorative efforts, it played a significant role in presenting Métis perspectives on the commemoration and the history of Batoche. It created a space for a diverse and widespread Métis community to symbolically gather at Batoche, even for those who were not physically present at the celebrations. Through interpretations of the Battle of Batoche, cultural programs, and community engagement, the Métis community in Saskatchewan presented their own unique commemorative landscape in 1985, which focused on remembering the past as a way to look to the future. Through this lens, commemorations sought to promote Métis self-determination and social well-being, and engage Métis people in the continuing political and social problems that faced the community.
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